

Marin Farmers Market Association

Acterra Award for Sustainability Environmental and Sustainability Education

Program Summary

The Marin Farmers Market Association has been committed to public education about the value of locally grown, fresh, delicious and nutritious food and small, local, sustainable farms for the last 23 years. We believe that a direct connection with sustainable farmers and the products they grow rebuilds a healthy relationship with our individual sense of well-being as well as develops a value for stewarding the earth. There is no place more people in the Bay Area can be exposed to a small, sustainable farmer who grew their food near by, using fewer fossil fuels in the growing and transportation process, than at our delightful seven Marin Farmers Markets. These weekly opportunities to interact with local farmers are invaluable. Our markets reach on average 7,000-10,000 Bay Area shoppers per week, provide an average of \$300 - \$600 in income per small, sustainable producer, and impact thousands of Marin County students who attend our market tours and community events. For the last 4 years, we have offered tours to school groups to come to the market to meet a farmer, learn about sustainable farming practices and to taste a sweet delicious Satsuma mandarin picked fresh that morning.

In the 23 years the Marin Farmers Market has been promoting local sustainable agriculture, we have helped change a generation of eaters to prefer the unpackaged, fresh, minimally transported, delicious and sustainably grown products we offer. As a non-profit mutual benefit corporation, with a board of member farmers, producers and artisans, we are also an organization that promotes democratic decision making and local ownership. The mission of the Marin Farmers Market is to create a place to educate, connect and support local communities and agriculture. The goals of the Marin Farmers Market are:

- SUPPORT regional sustainable producers, by providing them with direct access to consumers.
- EDUCATE the public to the nutritional and economic benefits of buying locally and sustainably grown food directly from farmers.
- UNITE farmers and communities.

Environmental and Sustainability Education

Our **Environmental and Sustainability Education** efforts primarily target the Bay Area community at large and local customers. Farmers markets have also helped farmers come a long way with adopting increasingly sustainable practices as well. Through the social exchanges at the farmers markets between and among farmers, great ideas are shared. Farmers at the market see how other farmers display their organic certification, for example, and they are influenced. Farmers learn from each other about their growing and marketing strategies. They buy and barter; they support and encourage. Our member farmers are becoming increasingly educated at the markets.

Our Marin Farmers Market Public Educational Programs include the following:

- Educational Ad Campaign
- Farmers Market Tours for School Groups

- Education at the Farmers Market
- Outreach and Education directed at local businesses, schools and hospitals

1. Leadership

The Marin Farmers Market is an environmental non-profit mutual benefit corporation that supports sustainable farms and farmers. After 23 years leading Marin County in supporting sustainable agriculture, we are proud of our impact. We have led the way in reducing Marin's ecological footprint, long before this concept was around, by making food available from our region to our community. Buying local is now recognized as an important way for people to, with their dollars, vote on behalf of the environment.

With much enthusiasm, the Marin Farmers Market has been an innovator in launching a new type of marketing for farmers markets. Our witty, eye-catching, playful and punchy Educational Ad Campaign started about 1.5 years ago and is on a roll. These cutting edge ads have taken the Marin Farmers Market beyond simply promoting shopping at the markets into a new strategy for impacting broader public education about sustainable food systems. Our ad campaign exceeds traditional marketing and complements our education efforts at the market, which include a new brochure, maps and handouts.

Our ads tell stories. They introduce a human face to farmers and their families. They connect customers more intimately with farmers, ranchers and fisher people, and to the land. They make the people and the techniques for growing food sustainably real. Our ads have appeared in the Marin IJ, the Pacific Sun, the East Bay Times, San Francisco Chronicle. We know that they have directly impacted shoppers at the market and their purchases, but more importantly, they have provided the public with a new level of understanding about the people who grow and raise food locally. We know this because new shoppers at the market have reported seeing the ads and shop in a more informed way because of them. Although we have not yet measured the total impact, the readerships of the publications we are working with include a grand total of 187,000 readers.

Prior to our ad campaign, we only had the captive audience of shoppers at the markets to be able to provide education about sustainable farms. With the innovation of our Educational Ad Campaign, we now reach tens of thousands more people with our educational messages.

We are excited to continue our educational outreach to schools for whom we provide tours of the farmers market on Thursdays. It is with great pride that we play a role in educating the next generation about healthy, sustainable food.

In the last year, the Marin Farmers Market worked to educate the staff of Kaiser and offered a coupon incentive to come and shop, during their lunch break, at the Marin Farmers Market. This has been an ongoing success and a number of Kaiser staff members make it a point to spend every Thursday lunch time at the farmers market by taking advantage of the Kaiser shuttle that we together arranged to bring people to the market. In partnership with Kaiser, we also put together staff appreciation salad gift bags from the Marin Farmers Market in the last year.

We are even more excited by the pilot project that has occurred over a six-month period in which Marin General Hospital staff learned and became inspired about purchasing from the Marin Farmers Market for their cafeteria program. Through this inpatient and outpatient food service

program, people have benefited from both healthy, fresh and sustainably grown foods, all the while learning through educational materials and signs about what it is that they are eating and why. In a six month period of time, \$30,000 worth of produce was purchased through the Marin Farmers market and thousands of patients and staff learned about sustainably grown food.

To our knowledge, no other farmers market has formed a food purchasing and educational program with local hospitals in our community to educate both patients and staff about the value of eating healthy, fresh and local. Although some hospitals have worked with farmers markets to have a farmers market at the hospital, we know of no other program like ours where food has been delivered for use in the cafeteria.

2. Significant Environmental Benefits

The Marin Farmers Market addresses the environmental and social impacts of food and farming, both in the services we provide and in the educational programs that support the markets we organize. One of our primary goals - to support the economic viability of local sustainable producers - is achieved in the most direct sense when we bring customers to the farmers markets and we educate them to make conscious choices to purchase from farmers in the market. The way new customers come to the market and become loyal customers is through outreach, marketing and education.

- Through our markets, we have been able to support more than 205 sustainable farmers.
- We have reached 187,000 people in the Bay Area through our educational ad campaigns which have largely focused on sustainable farming – see ad examples.
- We have directly educated thousands of Marin students
- We have ensured that hundreds of thousands of pounds of sustainably grown products are purchased by local consumers each year.

The Marin Farmers Market has emphasized local and sustainable agriculture for the last 23 years. This means that we prioritize supporting small, local sustainable and transitional farms over large organic farms in Mexico, for example. Our efforts aim to preserve the viability of our farms closest to home, support our local economy, and encourage more sustainable practices by first and foremost keeping small sustainable family farms alive. If we do not keep our small local farmers to begin with, we will become increasingly reliant on sources of food farther away, thus reducing our ability to be a sustainable community.

Sustainability encompasses the three E's - Environment, Economy, and Equity. The Marin Farmers Market embodies these three principals in a very real and tangible way through the work that we do. We don't simply provide a service, but create venues for the exchange of sustainably grown goods - food - which are 100% necessary for our survival.

Simply put, locally grown food travels fewer miles. And locally sustainably grown food uses fewer fossil fuels – thus dramatically reducing the ecological foot print of our community. The average food item on a store shelf travels 1800 to 2100 miles from the farm to the consumers table. The average item at the farmers market travels 50-150 miles and often much less. What's more, store products often include wasteful packaging, which require fossil fuels to produce, and require additional energy to package, hold in storage, redistribute and market. The Marin Farmers Market is as direct as it gets.

Our farmers get 100 % of the dollar spent at the market to help support their sustainable farm. We often measure our success by the dollars in the pockets of our farmer members. Ultimately, this is what will keep our small sustainable farmers in business. The Marin Farmers Market is able to facilitate a small producer making between \$300 and \$600 per farmers market. If a farmer attends two markets, for example, this could mean \$2,400 -\$4,000 per month for two days a week of work.

When we educate customers about what this means for the farmer, their local economy, for the environment and for their community, we are having a tremendous impact on the future of sustainable agriculture in our region. The Marin Farmers Market is the answer to the dilemma- “Should I buy organic from Chile or local and sustainable, even if it is not certified organic yet?” We answer that question by encouraging people to buy local organic products, local transitional products, and local products as often as possible to directly benefit our regional farmers. Investing in small local farms is an investment in the future of all sustainable farming.

3. Potential Model for Business Community

Just last year, the Marin Farmers Market became a Marin Certified Green Business. This was not a big leap for us since we already practiced many green practices in our office and operations. We are very proud of our Green Business Certification which recognized our leadership in implementing recycling systems, using non-toxic cleaning products, installing energy efficient lighting, maintaining energy efficient thermostat regulation, using natural lighting, using all high percentage recycled content products, recycling at the markets, and educating the public about sustainability concepts.

This program has generated a lot of buy-in on the part of the staff because it has meant that we are continuing to hold ourselves to a standard that we all feel good about. As employees, we are working here because we share a commitment to the environment. In addition, our customers, who are very thoughtful and deliberate, have also appreciated our past and ongoing efforts to be a model for sustainable business practices. When we are asked about our recycling practices, our customers are pleased with the answers they get.

We believe that our model is transferable. While what we have done with both our education programs and our operations is very doable. However, it does take leadership, initiative and creativity to make it happen. The Marin Farmers Market serves as a model for other farmers markets in a number of ways. Not all farmers markets are committed to the broader concepts of environmental sustainability. Therefore, we are able to model integrating support for our farmers with other environmental concerns that may not seem the common focus of farmers markets.

Our main environmental concern is the preservation of small sustainable farms. However, the Marin Farmers Market impacts transportation and fuel issues by limiting the distance both our customers and our farmers travel to exchange the most fresh and responsibly grown food available in the Bay Area.

We are very willing to share our information with others. The ways that we have gone above and beyond a typical farmers market organization to embrace sustainable practices throughout our business is something we are very proud of. We would be happy to share anything we have learned with other farmers markets.

4. Demonstrating Program Commitment

Our Board of Directors is made up of producers in the Marin Farmers Market. Any new policy is adopted by this highly invested and involved board, together with the leadership of the Executive Director. All board members had to be in support of the idea for the Marin Farmers market to apply to be a Certified Green Business. In addition, our board members have been extremely supportive of all of our educational efforts.

One example of our policies and procedures that reinforce our commitment to being a green business is that we have a thermostat policy where we turn down the thermostat to a certain level each night. We also open windows rather than turn on air conditioning. We have installed window coverings to shield the sun light from heating the rooms at peak times of the day. All of our recycling bins in our offices are strategically located, brightly colored and labeled. Each new staff member is educated, as part of our training, on the proper procedures related to our sustainability efforts.

Executive Director Brigitte Moran is extremely committed to continuing to further our commitment to sustainability at every opportunity. We are currently going the next step to bring biodegradable utensils and bags to the vendors in our markets, for example. We also have plans to use biodiesel and integrate composting into our markets. These are all currently being worked on. We will continue to use the markets and our ads as a venue to educate people about both sustainable farming and our sustainable practices.

5. Collaborative Effort

In order to carry out most any successful and lasting program that reaches beyond typical business practices, team work is required. Not only has the entire staff been involved in our educational efforts and greening practices, but we have partnered with other organizations and businesses. The Marin Farmers Market works with Marin Sanitary who recycles the recyclables at the Marin Farmers Markets. We partner with local farmers and producers in our markets to switch to biodegradable utensils bags. In addition, once we are composting, the compost will be taken by one of our farmers and turned back into natural fertilizer on the farm.

Key partnership with Marin General and Kaiser Hospital over the last year have allowed us to reach out to their staff and patients to provide them with food from the farmers markets and education about sustainable food and farms. Together with the leadership in these two hospitals, we are working together to connect health care with sustainable local farming. Physicians for Social Responsibility have been key in deepening our relationships with and educational programs with these two hospitals. They have provided research, presentations and other materials for these efforts.

Of equal importance are our internal partnerships within our organization. Our market managers, maintenance staff, administrative management and board are all working together to buy sustainable products, recycle, reduce paper use, minimize unnecessary energy consumption and more. We are very pleased with how simple yet very positive our efforts have been.