

Specialty Crop to Summer Markets Project

Project Summary

Alaska Grown specialty crops have a fast but furious season in Alaska during the short summer months. To enhance the competitiveness of Alaska Grown specialty crops with such a limited window, the Division requested program funds to increase visibility and access to summer markets with a focus on retail, University / Hospital, and farmer's markets. Our first state-wide Farm to Hospital/University Mini-Grant opportunity launched this summer which is perfect timing to compliment this project. Additionally, this project assisted with educational resource development, outreach events, and promoting specialty crop producers at farmer's markets and retail outlets. The goals of the project were: 1) to increase the communication of specialty crop producers who are part of our Alaska Grown marketing program, 2) to assist with market visibility in social media, retail and farmers market sectors, and 3) to create educational resources for cafeterias using Alaska Grown specialty crops.

Project Approach

To assist with the market visibility in the farmer's market sector, the Division created a promotion called Meet Me at the Market. The interns contacted all of the markets in the state while updating the publicly available market contact information. They asked questions to gauge interest, suitability, and need.

While all 44 farmers markets in the state were sent notification of the promotion, only 22 responded to questions. The Division compared answers, looking for level of need for increased visibility and ease of participation. A smaller group of markets was then contacted again with a revised version of the promotion to confirm their continued interest and narrow down the list to the final participating markets. Ultimately, 13 markets around the state were chosen to participate. Through the promotion, 50 to 100 Alaska Seafood/Alaska Grown bags were given to each participating market, as well as a survey about market purchasing. Each bag was pre-stuffed with an Alaska Grown infographic, a "Kid's Club" flyer, and a copy of the first issue of *Edible Alaska*. The markets were instructed to hand out the bags to people who mentioned hearing the promotion, once they filled out the brief survey outlining what they purchased and how they knew about the market.

The Division partnered with Alaska Public Media's "Kid's Club" program to run radio advertisements, and print advertisements were run both on Alaska Public Media's webpage and in the *Edible Alaska* magazine. Instructions for the finalized promotion were sent out to the participating markets. The interns attended selected markets across the state in June to get a pre-promotion count of people attending. Promotion materials were mailed or delivered to participating markets in the last week of June.

The Meet Me at the Market promotion ran for the entire month of July. The interns contacted and spoke to market managers in the middle of the month to gauge progress and answer any questions. The markets were instructed to end the promotion at the start of August, and advertisements were removed from circulation. The interns performed post-promotion market counts and follow-up questions to the

participating markets in late August. Market surveys were sent back to the division to be evaluated, although not all were received. Outside of the promotion, the Division created a publicly available online map detailing the location and contact information for all of the farmers markets in the state.

To assist with the market visibility in the retail sector, the Division delivered marketing supplies to all retail store in the state known to carry Alaska Grown produce. When marketing supplies were delivered, the interns talked to all the produce managers, asking what particular Alaska Grown produce did they carry, were there any issue of quality, and did they have any advice for producers attempting to enter the market. The consensus from the produce managers was that there were no issues with the quality of incoming produce, but that any advice on how to expand the market for Alaska Grown produce would have to come from higher up with the companies. No advisory board was created. The interns also reached out to retail locations not currently known to be selling Alaska Grown produce. Any retail locations that were buying produce from local farmers were added to our list and given marketing supplies. Those that were not currently selling local produce were encouraged to contact our marketing director. The interns also began work on a publicly available online map of all the greenhouses in the state. The map is still in progress.

To assist with the market visibility in the university/hospital sector, the Division developed a Farm to University/Hospital Mini Grant funding opportunity. Early in August, all the hospitals and universities in the state were notified that the Division of Agriculture would be accepting mini-grant proposals for up to \$5,000 for projects that incorporated local specialty crops. Only one application was received by the deadline and was subsequently approved.

Goals & Outcomes Achieved

Visibility:

- Map of farmers markets posted on social media once; 12,871 views on the post, 1,596 views on the map itself
- Posts on social media about specialty crops – 30 posts; 300,000+ views
- Posts on social media about Meet Me at the Market – 4 posts, 17,859 views (3 were just banner posts)
- Alaska Public Media had three :30 second radio message spots that aired weekly, Monday through Friday. They estimate that there were 509,400 gross impressions/ears listening, with a net reach/actual listener of 55,800. On average, a listener heard the Meet Me at the Market promotion spot about nine times. The promotion was also featured on the station website and was featured five times in the weekly e-blast newsletter that goes out to over 12,000 subscribers.
- *Edible Alaska* contained a half-page advertisement for the Meet Me at the Market promotion in the 10,000 copies of it's very first issue.
- Number of store visits: 56 initial visits, 40 follow-up visits
- Pre and post survey developed for MMM promotion, all markets were reached out to for participation
- Map created and made available of all locations of farmers markets; map of retail locations and greenhouses/nurseries also created for office use but could easily be made public

- Due to input from produce managers we did not pursue an advisory board or post survey results. Instead we worked on corporate contacts and processes for getting new growers into the retail market.
- From the surveys that were sent back to us, we found that most people hear about the local farmers market either through the internet (primarily Facebook) or through local word of mouth and road signs. The surveys also found that almost all customers at the markets are purchasing vegetables, fruits, or jams and jellies.

Market	Location	Market Hours	Time	Type	Date	Visit	Weather	# of Vendors	People Count
Southside Community Farmers Market	Fairbanks	4 - 7 pm	5 - 6 pm	Outdoors	6/14/2016	1st	Rainy, a little cold	4 specialty crop, and 1 information booth	31
					8/23/2016	2nd	Cloudy, warm evening	7 specialty crop, and 1 information booth	67
Tanana Valley Farmers Market	Fairbanks	11 am - 4 pm	12 - 1 pm	Outdoors	6/15/2016	1st	Beautiful, sunny, warm day	51 total vendors, 23 specialty crop	423
					8/24/2016	2nd	Beautiful, sunny, warm day	67 total vendors, 25 specialty crop	600
Farmers Fresh Market	Soldotna	3 - 6 pm	3 - 4 pm	Outdoors	6/21/2016	1st	Beautiful, sunny, warm day	12 vendors, all specialty crop	121
					8/24/2016* (received from market)	2nd	Cloudy, warm evening	14 vendors, all specialty crop	134
Colony Farmers Market	Palmer	12 - 7 pm	4 - 5 pm	Indoors	6/27/2016	1st	Rainy, a little cold	27 total vendors, 10 specialty crop	97
					8/1/2016	2nd	Gray day, a little cold	20 total vendors, 13 specialty crop	99
Muldoon Farmers Market	Anchorage	9:30 am - 2:30 pm	11 am - 12 pm	Outdoors	7/2/2016	1st	Beautiful, sunny, warm day	30 total vendors, 11 specialty crop	127
					8/13/2016	2nd	Grey day, not too cold	29 total vendors, 9 specialty crop	191

Beneficiaries

With thirteen markets signed up in the Meet Me at the Market promotion we estimated 93 (~70%) to be specialty crop vendors. 1,100 customers benefited through receiving the promotional bag, magazine, and kids club bookmark. Market managers indicated that the promotional bags we gave out increased customer loyalty and hence return rate. We expect the remaining 30 markets that did not participate were also beneficiaries to a lesser degree since the advertising was about visiting farmer's markets in general. We also estimate that our retail specialty crop sales were positively impacted with increased attention to Alaska Grown specialty crops during the month of July.

Lessons Learned

- We had to shift the procedure of the promotion after our first round of contacting farmer's markets. In the original procedure, customers at the market would only receive a bag if they went to a market manager's booth, showed the items they had purchased, and provided a password that would be in the different ads. The market manager would then be asked to keep a record of the types of items people purchased. Additionally, Alaska Public Media had planned to give out coupons to children that signed up for their Kid's Club program, and we had planned for markets to give out a single item for the coupon,

such as a single carrot or radish. After discussing this procedure with potential participating markets, we revised this procedure to make it much simpler for the markets. We created a two-question survey that the customer would fill out when they received a bag, and Alaska Public Media removed the Kid's Club coupon. Instead, we provided each market with a stack of Alaska Grown temporary tattoos to be passed out to children, and Alaska Public Media put flyers for the Kid's Club program in each of the bags. We also informed the markets that if people were not asking after the bags, the market could pass out a few every day, so long as they had enough to last the length of the promotion in case someone asked.

- The promotion also difficulty getting feedback from all the markets at various times during the promotion. Of the 44 markets contacted, both to get their updated information and to ask them about participating in our promotion, only half of the markets responded before the deadline to participate. At the end of the promotion, the participating markets were asked to mail their completed surveys to the Division, but we only received three surveys from the thirteen markets.
- The suggestion for improvement that we heard most from the participating markets was to get more local advertising, as a state-wide ad is difficult to obtain. While Alaska Public Media is available on different stations all throughout the state, not everyone listens to it.
- Ultimately, we have learned that the Division of Agriculture must play a larger role if we are to run such a promotion again. Market counts and surveys should be run by Division employees to ensure that we actively reach the consumer base and receive as much useful information as possible.

Additional Information:

	Did you see an increase in customers?	On a scale of 1 – 10, how successful do you think the promotion was? Why?	What improvements could be made?	Would you participate again?
Alaska Pacific University Farmers Market	Yes, saw an increase	7; able to promote by giving things; not a lot of people had heard the ads	Longer period of time for promotion, as they still have bags to be handed out	Yes, absolutely
Central Kenai Peninsula Farmers Market	A big increase when the tours came in	9, Very successful; people loved the bags, brought them back to the next market; people saw the bags around town and searched for them	Advertise through newspaper	Definitely
Colony Farmers Market	No, numbers stayed about the same	2; no one had heard of the promotion; however, the bags were great for solidifying loyalty	Better ad program; local radio stations	Yes, with improvements
Eagle River Farmers Market	No, steady as usual	8, Pretty successful; people excited about bags; spread through word of mouth, no one mentioned the promotion	Survey was great, but possibly ask where others might like to hear about updates; promote on Facebook	Yes, people loved the bags
Farmers Fresh Market	Yes	7; bags helped to increase loyalty, but very few people had heard of the promotion	Better figure out where to advertise	Yes

Glennallen Wednesday Market	No, numbers stayed about the same	4; local people already knew about the market, tourists didn't hear the advertising; people really liked the bags	No suggestions	Yes
Highway's End Farmers Market	Yes, a little	7; people were curious when they saw the bags	Find more local advertising	Yes
Muldoon Farmers Market	No, and less than last year too	9, Wildly successful; people found the bags over Facebook and seeing people with them, no radio or tv	The promotion worked as is; keep the bags	Absolutely
Nenana Farmers Market	Have not completed promotion			
Southside Community Market	Yes, saw an increase	8, Everyone loves the bags, but no one had heard about the promotion	Coordinate better with the markets for local boosting	Totally
Tanana Valley Farmers Market	Yes	7; the bags were popular, but very few people had heard of the promotion	Need to figure out where to advertise	Yes
Willow Farmers Market	Yes, saw an increase, although number of vendors also increased	6; the bags were very popular among the customers	No suggestions	Yes
Wrangell Farmers Market	No, but they try to schedule their markets to coincide with tour boats and festivals	8, No one had heard of the promotion, but people loved the bags; not even the word of mouth influenced the next market, though	Use Facebook more actively; local radio and newspaper; more promotion by local market	Yes, board is still interested