

MOUNTAINwise

The Transylvania Farmer's Market: A Case Study

A Farmer's Market That's So Much More

You can do more than buy fresh, healthy food grown within 100 miles of the Transylvania Farmer's Market in downtown Brevard, North Carolina. You can meet the farmers who grew or raised the food that's for sale. You can spend time with your Transylvania County neighbors and their families, or watch a cooking demonstration. You can even get free business planning support from the local community college, if you are a Certified Vendor. Every Saturday morning from April to December, anywhere between 300 - 600 people attend the Market.

Market events draw even bigger crowds. During the Annual Farm Fair, there are contests for best jam, best beard, and spitting watermelon seeds; there's also face-painting for the kids, live music, an agricultural equipment simulator, and lots of food for sale. Nearly 2,000 people attended in 2014.

The City of Brevard has been pleased to be home to the Transylvania Farmer's Market for many years. When Brevard adopted the Farmland Protection Act on February 20, 2012, the goals for the city and for the Market fell into alignment. The financial support has meant rapid growth for the Market, and more options for eating healthy in Transylvania.

A City Committed to the Health of its People

Farming is tradition in Western North Carolina, where residents have always been good at living off the land. Benefits of the Transylvania Farmer's Market are multi-fold:

- More access to local, healthy, fresh food for individuals and families
- Increased economic opportunities for the farmers, artisans, and other vendors who sell at the Market
- Greater kinship and community-building amongst the residents of Transylvania County

The City of Brevard has played a major role in the success of the Market. Three years ago, the Market reorganized and reformed; a one-time grant of \$17,000 from the City of Brevard breathed new life into the Market.

The City didn't stop there. The Market is of such import to the area that the City has included it as a line item in its annual budget. This ongoing financial support pays for a Market manager, advertising, marketing, events, live music, and more.

Perhaps more significantly, the Brevard Planning Department has identified the Market as a specific recommendation that supports healthy eating, agricultural sustainability, and more. The department included the Market in the city's comprehensive plan, included the Market in their comprehensive plan, which outlines public policy related to community development as related to land use, recreation, housing, etc.

This explicit endorsement, backed by financial resources, is a clear indicator of the City's support of the local foods movement and the energy and vibrancy it brings to the area.

A Strong Economy and a Close Community

Healthy food and fun are important to a community, but the Market has real economic value as well.

Strong community ties beyond those with the local government are key. Numerous local businesses sponsor the Market financially in return for promotion or participation in Market events.

But equally important are the other critical partnerships that provide in-kind support and donations.

- **Cooperative Extension**, a center for ongoing learning, provides cooking and educational demonstrations, supports farmers and vendors seeking certification, and acts as a physical drop-off location for vendors to give things to the Market.
- The local **Chamber of Commerce** supports and amplifies the Market's marketing activities wherever possible including networking events.
- **Blue Ridge Community College** provides free business planning and business classes to Market vendors.
- **Local schools and nonprofits** help with kids' days and special events.

These partnerships facilitate the operations of the Market, but have also created an informal business incubator for the community.

Meeting the Needs of Its Community

Many of the folks in Transylvania County live below the poverty line, and often they rely on Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits to afford food. The Market is exploring the feasibility of accepting SNAP through a survey conducted by the County Health Department. If the need is there, the Market will need to allocate human resources to run the program and do the bookkeeping.

An Investment in Food is an Investment in the Future

The City of Brevard chose to strengthen the infrastructure of the Transylvania Farmer's Market, which has had far-reaching positive effects on the community. Who knew locally grown food could do so much more than just taste delicious? The Market is doing a lot to make its community physically, spiritually, and economically healthier.