

Farm to Congregation

A Handbook on Starting a Congregational Farm Stand



Farmer Me Thao at the NE Neighborhood Farm Stand, Redeemer Lutheran Church

Fall 2007

**Based on a Project of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon
Linking Farmers, Faith Communities, and People with Low
Incomes**

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A Brief History and Description

In the spring of 2007, the Interfaith Food and Farms Partnership of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) partnered with five Portland-area congregations that expressed interest in hosting farm stands during the summer months. Two of the congregations had participated in a pilot farm stand project in 2006 and three were new to the project. The weekly farm stands took place after Sunday services and offered new market opportunities primarily for local immigrant farmers.

In January and March, informational meetings were held with prospective congregational partners. In May, the participating congregations began planning for the farm stands with the support of a project coordinator from EMO. Congregations met with participating farmers, worked out logistics, gathered volunteers, and created the publicity needed to implement the farm stands.

One church hosted a Mother's Day farm stand on May 13th offering locally grown flowers. All congregations began hosting regularly scheduled farm stands in June, offering locally grown vegetables and flowers.



Farmer Der Herr at First Presbyterian's Farmers' Table

“This is a ministry. We’re supporting farmers so that they are able to make a living...buying locally affects the sustainability of our community.” –Congregation member at First United Methodist Church, Portland

Purpose of Our Project

The congregational farm stand project has 3 major goals:

1. Provide new markets for immigrant refugee farmers
2. Raise awareness about local food and community food security within faith communities, and encourage faith communities to directly support locally grown food
3. Increase access to fresh, local food by low-income people

The congregational farm stand project is designed to raise awareness in the faith community about the importance of supporting local farmers and building justice and equity in the food system. It builds relationships between faith communities and farmers, giving producers and consumers an opportunity to understand each other’s circumstances. The program also facilitates low-income residents’ access to locally produced food and increases consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables. Finally, it offers new economic opportunities to small farmers by expanding the customer base.

How It Works: Five Models

Congregational farm stands may vary in configuration, based on the size and needs of the participating congregations. Below are brief descriptions of each of the five farm stands supported by the Interfaith Food and Farms Partnership in 2007. These represent five models of how a farm stand project can potentially be implemented.

Small Congregation- Neighborhood Supported Farm Stand

Redeemer Lutheran Church, a small congregation in Northeast Portland, decided that they might not be able to support a farmer on their own and so created the Northeast Neighborhood Farm Stand, inviting the neighborhood to participate. Members of Redeemer Lutheran Church canvassed the neighborhood with flyers about the weekly farm stand and added a large notice to their reader board. The farm stand was set up very visibly in front of the church on a busy neighborhood street, across from a large park. This farm stand was run by a Hmong family who farm in Corbett OR. It was open from 10:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m. every Sunday.

“Our connection to the earth and with the people who work so hard to produce our food are key connections with our faith”- Congregation member, First Presbyterian Church, Portland

Large Congregation- Church Supported “Farmers’ Table” and Coupon Project

First Presbyterian Church, a large congregation in downtown Portland, hosted a weekly *Farmers’ Table* in conjunction with coffee hour, after services. The Farmers’ Table took place either in the large outdoor plaza, or inside depending on weather. The Farmers’ Table began in June with a Hmong farming family from North Salem who sold vegetables and flowers. In July, the Farmers’ Table also welcomed the addition of certified organic vegetables from a Meskitian Turkish farmer who is part of Mercy Corps Northwest’s Refugee New Agriculture Project. In July the congregation also implemented a coupon project. \$18 worth of coupons were sold for \$20, with the \$2 profit from each book used to purchase coupon books for homeless guests at a drop-in center affiliated with the church. Coupons could be redeemed at the farmers’ table. This farm stand took place from 11:15 a.m. -12:30 p.m. weekly.

Small Congregation- Community Supported Farmers’ Market

Micah’s Village, a small new congregation in Clackamas, decided to start a small farmers’ market in partnership with Windance Farms. The congregation met in a Grange hall at the corner of a large, busy intersection and decided that while it could probably not support one or two farmers, it could attract community members with a small market.

Farmer Peter Tumelo of Windance Farms organized vendors and began the “Village Market” in June. The Grange parking lot accommodated approximately 8-10 vendors who sold locally produced vegetables, flowers, and art. The Village Market took place each Sunday from 10:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.



Hmong Flower Farmers at the Village Market

“I’m really happy to see something like this in our community. It’s good for local businesses and families.” – Customer at the Village Market

Large Congregation- Church Supported “Farmers’ Table

First United Methodist Church, a large congregation in Southwest Portland, hosted a weekly Farmers’ Table. The Farmers’ Table took place outside under a covered breezeway in conjunction with coffee hour, after services. A Hmong farmer opened the farmers’ table in June with local strawberries and flower bouquets. A Meskitian Turkish farmer who is part of Mercy Corps Northwest’s Refugee New Agriculture Project joined her in July. This farmer offered certified organic vegetables for sale. Flowers were offered every other week, while vegetables were for sale weekly from 11:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

Large Congregation- Church Supported Flower Stand and CSA (Community Supported Agriculture)

St. Philip Neri Catholic Church supported a flower stand for the second season in 2007. The flower stand took place two Sundays a month from 9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. Thirty families from this congregation also partnered with local Bumblebee Farm through CSA memberships. (In a CSA, congregation members pay a set amount to the farmer in the spring and receive a box of produce each week throughout the season or a credit at the

farm stand). CSA members picked up their weekly vegetable shares from farmers after services weekly.



CSA pickup at St. Philip Neri Catholic Church

“The CSA is great. It’s great to see the farmers, I know the produce is healthy, and it’s a great way to spend part of an afternoon.” –CSA member at St. Philip Neri

Tasks and Responsibilities: Participant Roles



Farmer Kao Lor at the NE Neighborhood Farm Stand, Redeemer Lutheran Church

The following table outlines the major participants in the farm to congregation project and the roles they played in its implementation.

Participant	Roles and Responsibilities
Farmers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bring and sell produce each week • bring signage for prices and growing methods (and canopy if needed) • share story with congregation • keep record of sales
Congregational Liaisons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • work with congregational leaders and committees to make decisions about the farm stand • recruit and coordinate volunteers • communicate with farmers about logistics • publicize farm stand within the congregation • coordinate educational opportunities related to the farm stand, encourage cultural sensitivity, flexibility and patience.

<p>Congregational Volunteers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • set up and take down tables • greet farmers and assist as needed • help coordinate publicity and educational events • help with evaluation of farm stand (surveys, observations, interviews)
<p>IFFP Project Coordinator</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • coordinate meetings between farmers and congregational liaisons • distribute and collect memorandums of understandings signed by all parties • maintain ongoing communication with farmers about logistics and produce • create publicity materials (flyers, signs, banners, bulletin announcements) • create educational materials for use by the congregations • write press releases • coordinate evaluation efforts • provide <i>liability insurance</i> for the farm stands through EMO's umbrella policy



Farmer Bayram Gulaliyev at First Presbyterian's Farmers' Table

Connecting Farms to Faith: Resources

How to start a congregational farm stand: A suggested step-by-step guide and timeline

Suggested Steps	Suggested Timeline*
1. Conduct a survey to gauge congregational interest in an after-services Sunday farm stand and/or possible CSA arrangement. See example survey in appendix.	November/December
2. Decide whether or not your congregation could support a farmer. Depending on the farmer, they may expect to make a certain amount of money per Sunday. Smaller congregations may not be able to support a farmer on their own, but could work to build partnerships with nearby congregations for this purpose. In our experience, this will take more time and advance planning as well as ongoing publicity at the non-host locations.	November/December
3. Identify primary group/committee within your congregation or bring together a team who will support the development of a farm stand. Determine roles. Determine specific goals for the farm stand. Decide whether or not your farm stand will be open to the neighborhood/local community.	November/December
4. Identify an interested local farmer- contact the Interfaith Food and Farms Partnership of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon	January
5. Arrange a meeting with the organizing team and farmer—communicate goals, decide on exact location of farm stand, equipment needed (i.e. tables, canopy, signs), time for the farm stand, start and end dates. Discuss produce and congregational needs/interests based on the survey. Create memorandum of understanding in writing so that each party knows what to expect. See example in Appendix A. Determine how the success of the farm stand will be evaluated.	January
6. Publicize the farm stand and start to educate the congregation about the purpose of the farm stand and its connection to faith. Write bulletin announcements, newsletter articles, and create flyers. Ask the farmer to	February/March-May

<p> speak to the congregation or at a committee meeting. Arrange a group visit to the farmer's land. </p>	
<p> 7. Decide how the farm stand can contribute to community food security and provide access to local food for those with less buying power. (See examples in <i>Addressing Community Food Security</i> section of this toolkit) Can the farm stand be incorporated into existing congregational programs such as food donations? </p>	<p>February, March</p>
<p> 8. Assign a liaison to work with the farmer and to communicate regularly about what produce they will be bringing and to address other needs or concerns </p>	<p>March</p>
<p> 9. If advertising to the neighborhood, create flyers to give out in advance and sign boards/banners to put up on the day of the farm stand (See Appendix D for example) </p>	<p>March-April</p>
<p> 10. Start Farm Stand </p>	<p>May/June</p>
<p> 11. Maintain ongoing evaluation, publicity, education and communication with farmer </p>	<p>May-October</p>

This timeline will vary depending on location/growing season. This is not necessarily a linear process.

Education: Educating the congregation about the importance of supporting local farmers and buying locally

Starting a congregational farm stand will probably be most successful if accompanied by opportunities for the congregation to learn about the importance of supporting local farmers and buying food locally. The following is a list of potential educational opportunities for congregations:

- Write a newsletter article or bulletin announcement about the benefits of locally grown food, or write a profile of the participating farmer(s). (See appendix E, F, G & H for examples)
- Arrange a farm visit -meet farmers, ask questions, do some weeding, reflect on land use, local food production and sustainable agriculture
- Organize a cooking class/demo with farm stand produce. Reflect on the experience
- Invite participating farmers to speak in church or at a special event
- Invite other guest speakers from the community to address issues such as land use, sustainable agriculture, community food security etc.
- Start a book discussion group (i.e. read and discuss *The Omnivore's Dilemma* by Michael Pollan or *Hope's Edge* by Francis Morre Lappe and Anna Lappe)

- Host a week-long eat local challenge- participants agree to eat only food produced within 100 miles of where they live. Potlucks during the week allow participants to support each other and exchange ideas and information
- Host a local food potluck and ask participants to bring dishes made with only local food
- Collect favorite recipes that utilize seasonal produce. Make recipes available at the farm stand

“I truly deeply believe that buying fresh and local is the solution to all the problems in the world. It affects government, the way we think, the way we feel.”- CSA Member at St. Philip Neri

Addressing community food security:

An important goal of a congregational farm stand project is addressing community food security. Following is a list of ways to address community food security through a congregational farm stand:

What is Community Food Security?

Community food security is a condition in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice. --Mike Hamm and Anne Bellows

- Use congregational funds or donations to purchase fresh produce at the farm stand to donate to a local food pantry.
- Encourage farmers to sign up with the state to accept WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) coupons and Senior Farmers’ Market Nutrition coupons. Advertise this to the local community.
- Create a coupon project in which coupons are sold to church members to be redeemed at the farm stand. A percentage of the coupon book sales can be used to purchase coupons for *distribution* to low-income neighbors to be redeemed at the farm stand.
- Create cooking classes that provide opportunities to learn to cook with local produce.

- Pick five issues related to community food security and develop flyers for distribution at the farm stand (importance of buying local food, hunger-obesity paradox, impact of corporate farming practices, etc.)
- Develop a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) in which congregation members buy membership shares from participating farmers at the beginning of the season and then receive fresh produce weekly. A percentage of each share can be used to purchase scholarship CSA shares for low-income members of the congregation and/or local community.

Tips for a Successful Season

1. Start planning early- Getting organized and making decisions as a congregation takes time
2. Identify and begin working with a farmer as early as possible so that the farmer can incorporate your congregation's needs and interests when she/he orders seeds and makes plans for the coming season
3. Plan and implement a variety of ways to educate the congregation about the goals of the farm stand project and to garner ongoing support. Ideally, this can start long before the farm stand begins
4. Designate time and money for publicity and signage. Getting started takes some extra resources for making signs/banners, flyers, surveys etc.
5. Connect the farm stand project to existing projects/activities within the congregation (use funds for hunger relief to buy produce for a food pantry, buy produce/flowers for congregational events, hold farm stand during social hour)
6. Communicate consistently with farmers throughout the season- check in on a weekly basis to ask about sales, needs, produce availability
7. Build relationships with farmers- ask farmers to speak at an event, interview farmers and publish their story, visit farmers' land, share a meal

“The farm stand allows us to show respect for local farmers’ livelihoods, and for the sustainability of the environment.” – Congregation member at Redeemer Lutheran

Description of Farm Stand Evaluation Tools:

We used a number of evaluation tools to gauge congregational interest in the farm stand project, to discover the current resources of congregations, and to determine the impact of the farm stands on farmers and congregation members. Included in the Appendix is a Congregational Dot Survey, a quick and easy way to find out to what extent congregation members would support a congregational farm stand. Also included is a Congregational Leadership Survey, which may help congregational leaders to think about the resources and food security projects that may already exist within the congregation and how these resources could be connected to a farm stand project. The Congregational Tracking form can be used to keep track of the publicity and educational events used to promote the farm stand project. It is also a way to track volunteers who help with the project. The Farmer Tracking Sheet can be used by farmers to show whether or not the farm stand is a

significant source of income, and whether or not sales increase throughout the season. The Participant Interview Questionnaire can be used to gauge the impact of the farm stand on participants' buying habits, as well as their understanding of connections between local food and faith. All of these tools can be modified, or used as springboards for creating other evaluation tools or activities as needed.