

“That’s My Farmer!”

A Handbook on Starting a Grassroots Farmers’ Market Coupon Program



Fall 2008

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



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Appendices are also available for download at www.emoregon.org.

There is no such thing as ‘my’ bread. All bread is ours and is given to me, to others through me and to me through others. For not only bread, but all things necessary for sustenance in this life are given on loan to us with others, and because of others and for others and to others through us.
—Meister Eckhart

Purpose of Our Project

The program serves four major purposes:

1. Offers marketing assistance to limited-resource farmers;
2. Urges middle-class members of faith communities to buy locally grown food;
3. Invites low-income families to visit farmers' markets and farm stands.
4. Raises awareness of local agriculture while providing congregation members an avenue for putting values into action.

For a long time, Corvallis had no food stamp access at the farmers' market, and thus no easy way for low-income residents to access fresh local produce. Simultaneously, members of faith communities wanted to put their faith into action by making food choices that were good for the community. The "That's My Farmer" coupon program is designed to fulfill both of these needs at once, in addition to supporting the small and mid-size farmers whose success is crucial to a strong local food system. The program raises awareness in the faith community about the importance of supporting local farmers and building justice and equity in the food system. "That's My Farmer" 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' participation in farmers' markets and farm stands and increases consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables. Finally, it offers new economic opportunities to small farmers by expanding their customer base.



A Brief History

Nearly a decade ago, The Reverend John Pitney and his congregation, First United Methodist Church (FUMC) of Eugene, Oregon, began celebrating local, family-scale farming in their community. The idea emerged after attending one of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon's (EMO) and Interfaith Network for Earth Concerns', "A Place at the Table" conferences. FUMC called its gathering and celebration of local food "That's My Farmer" after a folk song John wrote about Community Supported Agriculture (CSA). The refrain goes like this:

*Oh, that's my farmer!
Don't I have good taste?
We're taking back our food system!
It needs a human face.
I just can't wait till Tuesday
To see what's in our box.
Community Supported Agriculture really rocks!
Harvest bad? Harvest brisk?
We share the bounty, share the risk.
Cheap food gone berserk,
We pay directly, to those who do the work!*

Over time, more than 15 Eugene faith communities joined the cause. Families gather each spring to meet local farmers, sing John's songs about the virtues of local food and subscribe to the area's 13 CSA farms. (Community Supported Agriculture farms are subscription farms, for which customers pay a one-time share fee at the start of the season and receive a share of produce from the farm each week.) They distribute an annual publication called "Action Guide for Faith Communities" and sell coupons to households that prefer not to join a CSA. Extra donations fund CSA shares for low-income households each season.

In 2004, 50 miles north of Eugene in the smaller city of Corvallis, members of St. Mary's Catholic Church were inspired and began promoting Benton County's two CSA farms within their congregation. Prompted by feedback that CSA shares were overwhelming to many people and sometimes culturally inappropriate, organizers shifted their approach and instead opted to sell coupons to be redeemed at the downtown farmer's market in 2005. A community food security workshop held that year, organized by EMO's Interfaith Network for Earth Concerns, further strengthened the church's commitment to find ways to improve access to local foods.

That year, the "That's My Farmer" coupon project in Corvallis became the focus of a USDA Community Food Projects Grant secured by EMO. With the support of a project coordinator and volunteers, St. Mary's and EMO expanded the fledgling coupon program to other faith communities and farms in 2006, keeping a critical eye on successes and challenges of the project in hopes of sharing their experiences with other communities throughout the region and beyond.

By 2008, nine faith communities and 13 farms were part of the coupon program in Corvallis. Ten percent of proceeds from coupon sales were set aside to sponsor coupons for low-income families, distributed via local emergency food providers. Since everyone uses the same coupon—low income or otherwise—it promotes dignity in accessing food. Organizers deliberately kept the program small to foster direct relationships between congregations and farmers. Of the 13 farms, four are owned and operated by women and three are CSA farms; the farms range in size from two to 50 acres.

Over the course of the 2007 growing season, members of the eight congregations purchased over \$14,000 worth of coupons; \$2,000 in funds were made available to purchase coupons for low-income families. EMO also began a “That’s My Farmer” coupon program at the First Presbyterian Church in Portland based on the Corvallis pilot. See Appendix H for further information.

This toolkit is the result of three years of conversations, interviews, data collection and analysis of the “That’s My Farmer” coupon program in Corvallis, Oregon. We hope you find it informative and inspiring as you develop similar projects in your own communities.



How It Works: Coupon Design, Distribution and Accounting

Design:

We designed our coupon booklets to fit inside wallets and to be attractive and colorful in order to avoid duplication. Each booklet is bilingual in English and Spanish and contains six \$3 coupons. The inside front cover lists the names, hours and contact information of participating farms, farm stands and local farmers' markets. The inside back cover is a receipt for charitable contribution, as each booklet represents a \$2 tax deductible donation.

Distribution:

Booklets are made available for sale before or after services at all participating congregations. Volunteers decide on a sales schedule for the season; some congregations choose to sell each week and some once a month or at special events.

Accounting:

Included in the cost of each booklet is a 10 percent donation toward the sponsorship of coupons for low-income families. In addition, some individuals directly donate to the coupon distribution program. The free coupons are distributed through: two local food banks, the Federal Parent Enhancement Program, cooking classes run by Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon and a social justice coordinator at one congregation.

The bonds between people that give them a sense of community are not forged only at the table, but throughout the whole process of putting food there. Meaningful feeling is built up from small relationships—such as the one with the baker; you go down to the bakery and say hello and buy your bread. Repeated contact makes people become sympathetic to one another's situations and lives. The bonds that are formed create an atmosphere of caring and sharing.

—Alice Waters, owner of Chez Panisse
in a letter to President Clinton after his speech
on community-building in San Francisco, 1996



Coupon Program Tasks and Responsibilities

In this section we have attempted to condense the coupon program into six main task areas. Each program will take on its own character, but this task list can be used as a general guide. Let the creativity of your community guide you through the specifics of this process!

Recruitment:

- ✓ Decide how many faith communities and farmers to recruit for your program.
- ✓ Recruit faith communities and liaisons to sell coupons and educate the community.
- ✓ Recruit farmers to accept coupons and participate in educational programs.

Coupons:

- ✓ Decide how many coupon booklets to print.
- ✓ Decide how to fund the printing expense (example: ask each congregation for a small donation).
- ✓ Design and print the coupons.
- ✓ Assemble coupon booklets with volunteers.

Record-Keeping:

- ✓ Choose a centralized system for financial transactions:
 - Congregations submit money from coupon sales (10 percent plus any additional direct donations go into donation account).
 - Farmers submit redeemed coupons for reimbursement.
 - Coupons to be given away for free are “purchased” by moving money in donation account to general account for farmer reimbursement.

Education and Outreach:

- ✓ Brainstorm ideas for educational programs involving faith communities, farmers and low-income families (speaking events, farm tours, harvesting help, etc.).
- ✓ Encourage both faith communities and farmers to participate in educational programs.
- ✓ Provide opportunities to learn how food and spiritual or religious values connect (food pantry, low-income program, care of the earth, etc.)

10 Percent Donation:

- ✓ Choose a means of giving away coupons.
- ✓ Find ways to ensure a high redemption rate (examples: more information for food bank volunteers, giving away coupons to families who’ve participated in similar programs, giving to a group of people that have an ongoing connection with one another, giving to participants of a cooking class).

Communication and Evaluation:

- ✓ Hold frequent discussions about how the program is going and evaluate feedback from program participants: farmers, congregational liaisons, core volunteers, food banks, low-income coupon recipients, etc.

Tips for Success

Program Development and Administration

- Increase leadership capacity at each congregation to reduce volunteer burn-out.
- Recruit farmers who sell a variety of products.
- Sell coupons at market to increase public access to and awareness of coupons.
- Hand out flyers and provide talking points for bulletins or pulpit announcements.
- Hold regular face-to-face meetings with farmers and congregational liaisons (every six weeks works well).

Connecting Farmers and Congregations

- Involve members of a youth group in a “mission” or “service” trip to work at a local farm and perhaps donating harvest to a food bank.
- Include farms that are just getting started or are small, as well as larger, more established farms.
- Visit the farms in the program and offer farm tours to members of congregations to foster farmer-consumer link.
- Ask farmers to provide a sample of farm fresh foods and a cooking demonstration.
- Do a write-up of each farm to distribute to congregations (example follows).
- Invite farmers to attend faith community meals or picnics.
- Promote the program during special services (example: Lenten Season).
- Invite guest speakers to talk about community food security.
- Provide opportunities for farmers and congregational members to share their stories around food and farms; asking the farmer, “What motivates you to farm?” can set off a rich discussion.

Reaching out to Low-Income Populations

- Offer a bilingual handout providing market times and locations and instructions on how to redeem the coupons.
- Keep instructions short and simple to accommodate those with literacy challenges.
- Arrange a field trip to a farmers’ market, led by a participating faith group.
- Weigh the pros and cons of the coupon program versus delivering produce directly from the farmer’s market to food banks to maximize access for people who need food.
- Remember low-income folks are diverse—empower them to get their own needs met. Involve them in the process.

Farmer Profile: Bina Schulte of Bina's Patchwork Garden

At all hours of the day and night, Bina Schulte's blue Volkswagen van with a rainbow weaving along the side can be seen driving back and forth across Corvallis to her two Patchwork Garden plots: one north and one south of town. Bina is famous for her garlic braids, has tons of potatoes this year, beans of all colors (including some varieties from her native Germany), onions that make fabulous strings, and lots of zucchinis and summer squashes.

Bina started the Patchwork Garden in early 2000. She first came to Corvallis in 1984, on a friend's recommendation, and ended up farming for many years at Sunbow Farm. Bina holds a degree in animal husbandry and used to work as a groom in Germany. She misses working with animals but since she rents land now, her situation isn't stable enough to keep them. Veggies are better, she says, because you can re-negotiate every year.

Bina Schulte runs a one-woman operation by choice. She puts in long hours and applies her organizational talents and a good memory to bring her customers what they want. She always welcomes help but likes that her operation is small enough that she doesn't depend on anyone else. It doesn't have to be bigger to be better, she reminds us. And she's not really alone—she has a network of friends and collaborators who let her pick their fruit trees, make bread in their kitchens and keep buying her delicious food.

Bina is new this year to "That's My Farmer." She's been doing a farm stand twice a month at the Church of the Good Samaritan and is very interested in teaching youth groups about growing food. Come on out to the garden!



Reflections from Participants

"We love the coupon program! We definitely want to continue with it next year."

—A member farmer

"I'm thrilled with this program. I'm so happy that we're doing it."

—Member of a faith community

"I think it has given me a way to express my beliefs in a tangible way...the importance of creation and the environment; connecting my belief in the importance of the environment to living out my support for local farmers who care for the land—the antithesis of agribusiness. I appreciate the opportunity to walk my talk in that respect."

—Member of a faith community

"What we are doing here is required by our faith, not optional. For us, it's where it all started—supporting local farmers and reaching out to others in need."

—Member of a faith community

"Low-income families who had never been to the Farmers' Market were worried that it was just a bunch of yuppies down there. They went and had fun and came back and reported they were treated like anybody else. We are giving them the opportunity to be a part of the community."

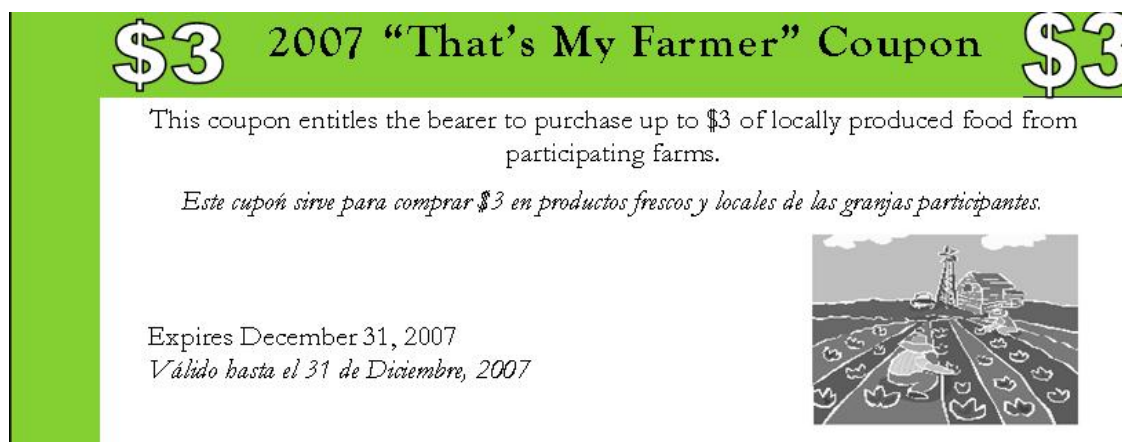
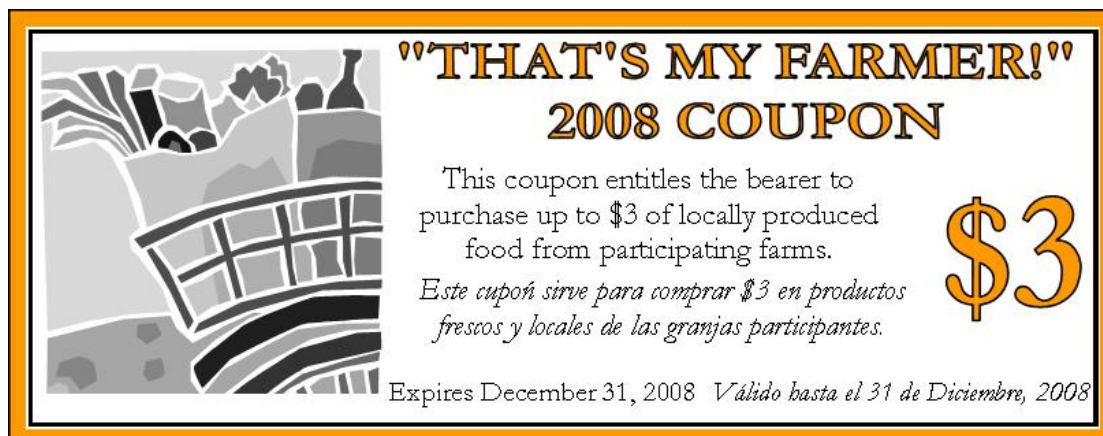
—Food Bank volunteer

"The farmers were very friendly when I asked questions about the vegetables at the market...When we went to the farm stand, my kids had more opportunity to learn about where their food comes from—now they make connections between the food they are eating and how much work it is to produce it."

—Low-income user of coupon booklet



Appendix A: Sample Coupons



Appendix B: Sample Signs

“That’s My Farmer!” Coupons Accepted Here

Support local farmers
and low-income families.



Our farm is one of fourteen local farms that are participating
in this program. Get involved!

“That’s My Farmer” is a collaborative project of Corvallis faith communities
and Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon’s Interfaith Food & Farms Partnership.



“That’s My Farmer!” Coupons For Sale Here

Support local farmers
and low-income families.



Our faith community is one of nine congregations in Corvallis that are participating in this program. Get involved!

“That’s My Farmer” is a collaborative project of Corvallis faith communities and Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon’s Interfaith Food & Farms Partnership.



Appendix C: Sample Letters

Food-Related Activities and Events: Ideas for Faith Communities Interfaith Food and Farms Partnership, 2008

Please choose at least two of the following possible activities or events that your community would be interested in organizing and hosting. If you have a new idea please feel free to pencil that in or contact Anna.

- ☐ Organize a field trip to a farm. Take work gloves and boots and do a few hours of work; break for a picnic and discussion with the farmer.
- ☐ Invite one or more farmers to your congregation to set up a farm stand and sell produce.
- ☐ Invite one or more farmers to a service or special event to speak.
- ☐ Get kids involved! Have your youth group buy produce wholesale from a farmer and sell it after services; donate proceeds to a local food bank, or ask if they can act as a work crew for a farmer for a few hours, in exchange for produce.
- ☐ Incorporate lessons about building a local food system and increasing food access for low-income families into a sermon, class or dialogue.
- ☐ Organize a series of classes or discussions based on *Simply in Season*, *Just Eating*, or a book of your choice that deals with local food and food security.
- ☐ Start a community garden.
- ☐ Take up a collection for locally grown food; use funds to purchase produce directly from the farmer and then donate the produce to a local emergency food program such as Stone Soup.
- ☐ Offer classes on cooking or preserving locally grown food.
- ☐ Publish profiles and photos of local farmers in your bulletins or newsletters.
- ☐ Take photos, write stories and share tales of what you do throughout the year with each other, myself, the farmers and your community.

Sent to Farmers in 2008:

Faith communities are extremely interested in connecting directly with the local farms on the other end of the coupon. Please fill out the following form and mail it in by March 3 so that we can include you as a 2008 participant. Tell us what you would be willing to do to help raise awareness about local family-scale agriculture in our community. Thank you!

Name _____

Farm Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Other Phone _____

E-mail _____

As a farmer, I am willing to work in partnership with local faith communities. Here are my areas of interest (choose at least two):

- ☐ I would like to host field trips at my farm. I would give visitors a tour, talk about my experience as a farmer and answer questions.
- ☐ I am interested in setting up a farm stand to sell produce/flowers at a Corvallis congregation on a weekly/monthly/seasonal basis (please circle all that apply).
- ☐ I would like to be invited to speak to congregations or study groups about sustainable agriculture, farming, food, etc. I have a special interest in talking about:

_____.

I am comfortable talking to small/large groups (please circle your preference).

- ☐ I would enjoy working with a youth group. I would consider selling product wholesale to youth and then guiding them in selling it after services; they could donate proceeds to a local food bank or similar cause.
- ☐ I could provide guidance to a faith community that is starting a community garden.
- ☐ I would like to donate product to a low-income cooking club once/twice/regularly (please circle all that apply) throughout the year.
- ☐ I would like to work with a faith community to connect with emergency food providers in Benton County.
- ☐ I could offer a cooking demonstration or teach a class using locally produced food.
- ☐ I have other ideas about what skills, interests and educational opportunities I can offer to this project:

Appendix D: Sample Covenant

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon

Interfaith Food and Farms Partnership

“That’s My Farmer”

Covenant

As faith communities of Corvallis, it is our intention to help each other

- Invest in local farms as a matter of faith.
- Organize three local food-related events and activities over the coming year.
- Publicize and sell “That’s My Farmer” Coupons, redeemable at our participating local farms and send one check each month to St. Mary’s Catholic Church, Attn: Liv Gifford.
- Identify one to two representatives who will communicate regularly with project partners and attend monthly meetings throughout the growing season.
- Host one interfaith meeting for all project participants.
- Contribute \$100-\$200 for coupon printing expenses (please make checks out to St. Mary’s Catholic Church).
- Work for a food system that is economically just, socially participatory and ecologically sustainable.

In so doing, we will:

- Share materials and offer support to others as we develop this work.
- Do more than we could alone to support local farms and get healthful food to the hungry.
- Educate ourselves about the sources of our food and the impact on local land, people and economies.
- Have fun, enjoy the bounty of the earth and make new friends!

Signed by Our Faith Community as Members of the Interfaith Food and Farms Partnership:

Signature:

Date:

Congregation:

Adapted from the 2006 *Organizing Packet for Eugene Faith Communities*.

Appendix E: Sample Spreadsheet

That's My Farmer Coupons 2008

Sales by Congregation

Total \$: 1,449

Coupons: 340

Central Christian 285			Faith Presbyterian 644			Jewish Community 530		
Date	\$Sales	\$ Extra	Date	\$ Sales	\$ Extra	Dates	\$ Sales	\$ Extra
5.23.08	100		5.8.08	220	4	6.1.08	160	100
6.18.08	180	5	8.20.08	400	20	8.24.08	240	20

Appendix F: Sample Factsheet

For distribution in faith communities:



“That’s My Farmer” Coupons Local food for hungry neighbors

You pay \$20 for \$18 worth of coupons. YOUR BONUS ... The extra \$2 pays for coupons given out through food banks & other food security programs.

Coupons are redeemable at 12 farm booths at Corvallis Farmers Markets on Saturday and Wednesday and at individual farm stands (names and addresses inside booklet).

Using ‘That’s My Farmer’ coupons:

- Provides you with fresh, wholesome, locally produced food April through December;
- Strengthens the local economy;
- Helps needy families to purchase good food at farmers’ markets;
- Reduces dependence on fossil fuels used for transportation;
- Helps develop eating habits that are healthy for you and the planet; and
- Encourages local farmers to keep growing!

“That’s My Farmer” is a cooperative project of 13 farms and nine Corvallis faith communities, coordinated by Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon.

Appendix G: Sample Directions for Coupons

How to use “That’s My Farmer” coupons:

Welcome to the “That’s My Farmer!” Coupon Project

We want to help you buy fresh foods from local farmers!

- Your coupon booklet contains **\$18 worth of coupons**.
- Spend like cash with **participating farmers only** at markets or farm stands by December 31.
- **Participating farms are listed on the inside of the coupon booklet** with their contact information.
- Support small farmers! **Enjoy fresh produce!**

Bienvenidos al “Es mi Granjero!” Proyecto de Cupón

Queremos ayudarles comprar comida fresca de granjeros locales.

- Su follete del cupón contiene **\$18 valor de cupones**.
- Usalos como dinero **solo con granjeros participante** en mercados o las granjas antes que Dec. 31.
- Las granjas participantes y su contacte **informacion esta en la interior de su follete**.
- Apoya granjeros pequeños! **Disfruta producto fresco!**

Appendix H: First Presbyterian's Mini Coupon Program

“That’s My Farmer” Coupon Program at First Presbyterian Church in Portland

The First Presbyterian Church in downtown Portland holds a farmer’s table from 11:15 to 11:30 a.m. after services on most Sundays during the summer. Produce is sold during the fellowship hour either outside on the courtyard or in the fellowship hall when it is rainy outside. In both locations, people pass by the table on the way to coffee and refreshments. This arrangement makes the table highly visible and garners high participation. Since it started in 2007, the table has been served by the Her family of farmers, whose elders came to the United States as refugees from Thailand. At first, they were joined by another family farm, but it worked better for both farmers and the congregation to have a relationship with just one farm. From the start, the congregation wanted to include a component that would make the table accessible to low-income neighbors, especially those served next door by First Presbyterian’s Julia West House and the Alder Street low-income housing facility.

Using the Corvallis “That’s My Farmer” program as a model, members of the Interfaith Food and Farms Partnership and First Presbyterian created coupon booklets with \$18 worth of coupons to be sold for \$20, with the extra \$2 to be used to buy booklets for low-income neighbors. Booklets can be purchased well before the season begins to encourage participation, as well as every week the farmers sell produce. One volunteer sits at a table near the farmers and sells the booklets. She or he has a cash box, a sign advertising the coupons and a sheet to record sales.

The farmers take as payment from customers either cash or coupons (the coupons are printed in \$3 increments). At the end of the fellowship hour, when the farmers have finished selling their flowers and produce, the person who has been selling coupons counts out the coupons that the farmers received for payment and exchanges them for cash. The farmers take the cash and the church volunteer takes the coupons. The volunteer records the number of coupons received, making special note of the coupons that were given to low-income neighbors (their books are marked with a small star on the back of each coupon to compare the amount of coupons given away versus the amount of coupons that are redeemed for produce).

What support is needed from the church to carry out the program? At First Presbyterian, the church accountant takes some time to organize the books and hold the cash box from week to week. It is also important that the church publicize the program. Brief articles are published nearly every week in the church bulletin and in the weekly electronic version of the church newsletter. On a less frequent basis, articles are written for the church newsletter itself and announcements are made by a pastor from the pulpit. It is always helpful to have a number of volunteers on board, to help with both the farmer’s table and the coupon sales from week to week.

In 2008, 64 coupon booklets were sold with 11 of these purchased outright to give to people with low incomes. A total of 23 coupon booklets for were given to 11 people in need. Of

these, 96, or 70 percent, were redeemed. In contrast, very few coupons were redeemed in 2007 by low-income neighbors because not much energy was spent on reaching out. For the 2008 season, the project focused on building relationships with the guests of Julia West House and Alder Street House. Cooking classes were held before the growing season for people who had only a hot plate or microwave with which to cook and who used emergency food boxes. Using more fruits and vegetables was emphasized. Eleven people who completed the program were eligible and received coupon booklets, depending on their need. Each participant received coupon booklets through the growing season, depending on availability, to redeem at the Farmer's Table.

Another important lesson from the first year of operation was to give farmers the day off when it was known that many church members would be away for a retreat or that a congregational meeting was to be held immediately after church. Respecting the time and energy of everyone is vital to success.