

Transforming Washington Communities

Grant County Community Transformation Grant Success Story

The Larson Farmers Market:

When Grant County Health District received the Community Transformation Grant, they knew they wanted to target the Larson neighborhood to increase access to healthy food. Over the three-year grant period, the Health District explored different approaches and collaborated with partners. The result was the Moses Lake Farmers Market at Larson (the Market) opened for business June 25, 2014.

Larson is a neighborhood in Grant County near Moses Lake. It is a densely populated, low-income, unincorporated, and politically underrepresented area that does not have safe walking access to any stores selling healthy food.

Larson includes 4,730 people of which:

- 33 percent are Hispanic.
- 45 percent are 24 years old or younger.
- 60 percent of the homes are rentals.
- The neighborhood has the largest Public Housing Authority presence in Grant County.

The Health District began with a door-to-door survey to identify the current food purchasing and eating habits of residents. The survey also measured interest in access to healthy food. It showed 59 percent of the households used at least one source of food assistance and most of these used multiple sources. These sources include the local food bank, Supplemental Nutrition Program (SNAP), and Women, Infants and Children (WIC).

Survey results revealed that residents do not use or trust the corner stores in their neighborhood and preferred places like local fruit stands, when possible. Fruit stands and produce vendors are a large part of the culture in Grant County and are trusted by both the Hispanic and non-Hispanic populations. While residents responded favorably to the idea of a farmers market, at the time of the survey the closest farmers market was in Moses Lake, a distance too far to walk.

Health District staff and community leaders met to discuss Larson's options for accessing healthy and affordable foods. They then shared the survey results with officials in Moses Lake including the local board of health, organizations, healthcare providers, the local food bank, with farmers and gleaning programs, and other entities. The idea of the Market took time to develop, but took off quickly once the right partners were in place.

To the delight of Health District staff, the Market vendors were supportive of a weekday farmer's market in the Larson neighborhood. The Grant County Housing Authority allowed the use of a local park for the Market on Wednesday evenings.

Health District staff had an even bigger vision than creating another farmers market. They wanted to start a Market Match Program allowing residents on EBT to receive a matching dollar amount to increase their ability to purchase healthy foods for their families. Health District staff wrote a grant application for the Paul Lauzier Foundation and received \$8,000 for the Market Match Program and associated costs.

Before the Market was even open, the word about the Moses Lake Farmers Market at Larson grew. For example,

- The local radio station matched time on purchased radio ads.
- Local businesses pushed timelines to ensure all of the marketing materials and supplies would be ready for opening day.
- Money and community support started coming as local healthcare organizations felt compelled to be a part of this community chronic disease prevention work.
- A large local clinic, the local federally qualified health center, and the local hospital district all donated funds to the Market Match Program.

The Market opened Monday June 25, 2014, as the Moses Lake Farmer's Market at Larson. As of August 1, 2014, the Grant County Market Match Program received a total of \$15,500 and the Market Match Program is receiving ongoing support from the local hospital district at \$2,500 per year. The Market Match Program will increase the amount of fresh produce that about 28,000 residents in Grant County can purchase with their EBT dollars.

As the first season winds down, plans to increase the reach of the Market Match Program are in motion and include implementation at local produce vendors, other farmers markets, and other fresh produce retailers throughout the county.