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Farmers Market to expand services with grant money

• *Homer Farmers Market expands education, services and outreach to communities with USDA grant money*

By Nichole Smith

Homer Tribune

Since 1999 the Homer Farmers Market has been a staple of both the Homer community and Kachemak Bay area by providing consumers with the opportunity to buy locally grown and sourced produce and products as well as contributing to the economic growth and development of the community. With the recently awarded USDA grant of \$81,345 by the Agricultural Marketing Service’s Farmer’s Market Promotion Program, the Homer Farmers Market plans to continue that success and will provide additional educational training, marketing, and outreach to the growers, farmers and community it serves.

With the additional funds, the market will not only be able to continue to promote local food, but also provide training to vendors and growers that will garner new ideas on growing techniques, business-planning and business skills. The market is also hopeful that, with the new opportunities for staff and vendors to learn new skills and learn from one another, it will also bring in new growers and vendors to share ideas and contribute to the mission of the Farmers Market to “aid in the development of a sustainable local agricultural community for the benefit of the greater community of the Kachemak Bay area.”

One of the ways the grant will help the Farmers Market is through maintaining vital positions within the market. Until last summer, funding was provided by state grants to employ an EBT coordinator. This position is responsible for swiping debit and credit cards in exchange for market coins and also swipes SNAP/QUEST cards for coins, which allows lower income households to have access to healthy local foods. With the cuts to budget last summer, the market took on the role of funding the EBT coordinator. However, the USDA funding will now be able to take on the task of funding that necessary role at the market.

Marketing and advertising efforts are planned to expand with the additional grant funding through the USDA Promotion efforts through the media to reach surrounding communities of Seldovia, Ninilchik and Anchor Point. The expanded advertising efforts are also intended to increase awareness of the market and to low-income communities.

Through expanded advertising and additional programs, community events, and nutritional education the Homer Farmers Market is hoping to increase more attendees to the market and supporting the area growers and vendors by buying local. Additionally the Farmers Market has no plans to expand beyond the Ocean Drive location of the market. The Farmers Market also plans on increasing their cooking, food prep/preservation and food demonstrations at the market to a weekly event.

The grant will not cover or pay for any tents, insurance, accounting, employee wages or infrastructure; those expenses will continue to be covered by the Farmers Market through memberships and vendor fees.

Task committees and are still being put together to assist with the coordination and implement the many plans for the Farmers Market. The Market also received funding to assist in bringing 10 market managers or board members to a statewide Farmers Market conference in Homer in early 2017.

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