

Hillsdale Winter Harvest Farmers Market

Aaron Bolster (Oregon – Farmer/Rancher Grant)

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Project Coordinator:

Aaron Bolster
Deep Roots Farm
299 NW Independence Hwy.
Albany, OR 97321
(541) 917-8944
deeproot@peak.org

Technical Advisor:

Larry Lev
Associate Professor and Extension Economist
Department of Ag and Natural Resources
Oregon State University
213 Ballard Extension Hall
(541) 737-1417
larry.lev@oregonstate.edu

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Cooperators:

Hillsdale Farmers Market
Eamon Molloy, Market Manager
Portland, Oregon
(503) 467-6555
www.hillsdalefarmersmarket.com

Oregon Farmers Marketing Association
Eamon Molloy, President
Portland, Oregon
(503) 525-1035

Ayers Creek Farm
Anthony and Carol Boutard
Gaston, Oregon
(503) 985-0177
aboutard@orennet.org

Situation:

The Hillsdale Farmers Market, located in the Greater Portland Metropolitan area, has achieved a history of success, thanks to:

- An effective and involved board of directors
- A competent market manager
- Hundreds of committed volunteers
- Positive vendor relations

With this structure in place, the market pondered whether it could continue operating through the winter months:

- Would the weather cooperate?
- Would customers come in bad weather?
- Could the market draw from the Greater Portland Metropolitan Area?
- Would farmers, ranchers and other vendors be able to provide enough produce of the right type to attract and retain customers?
- Could the market effectively promote itself?



Pumpkins and squash are popular items at the winter market.



Hillsdale Winter Harvest Farmer Market.

Objectives:

- Create and promote a winter farmers market
- Enhance the economic viability of farming in the Willamette Valley
- Sustain producers and their laborers year round
- Decrease the number of food miles traveled from farm to table during the winter
- Increase consumer options for local produce during the winter
- Educate consumers about buying, storing and using produce during the winter
- Educate farmers and market managers about products that can be grown and marketed during the winter



Brassica crops grown at Earthshine Farm.



These beets and carrots were grown at Deep Roots Farm.

Actions:

The Hillsdale Farmers Market conducted nine open-air, twice-monthly markets from early November 2004 to March 2005 (one market was cancelled because of an ice storm that immobilized transportation in the area).

The project team produced and disseminated educational materials to inform customers about the market and to help them adopt the produce grown and marketed in the maritime climate of the Willamette Valley of Oregon.



Hydroponic tomatoes were produced at Salmon Creek Farm. At right, handouts discuss winter crop use.



Results:

Local producers proved capable of producing and marketing a stunning array of seasonal products, greatly increasing consumer access to fresh, local farm products during the winter months.

Crowds of more than 2,000 customers routinely attended. Indeed, one market had the third highest attendance of any market ever. Consumers attended the market no matter what the weather, although sunny days always brought more.

A Rapid Market Assessment conducted March 13, 2005, by Oregon State University showed that more than 80% of the winter market visitors lived within 5 miles of the market, a result similar to that of a summer survey.



The Jackson Band performed at the holiday market.



Impacts and Benefits:

The project exceeded expectations with these impacts and benefits:

- Fifty vendors, including 30 farmers and ranchers, participated.
- Several farmer vendors experienced their largest sales of any markets at any time during the year.
- At least six farms were enabled to employ farm labor year round.
- Having the winter market fostered new growing methods, increased the types of produce grown and provided an experimental market for new products.
- The market increased consumer access to fresh produce in the winter.
- Of 14 market vendors completing a survey, eight said sales exceeded expectations and six said sales met their expectations.
- All vendors surveyed planned to attend the next year's winter market, and four said they planned to expand their offerings.
- Many producers' success with the "off-season market" has prompted them to experiment with season-extending techniques like high and low tunnels, row covers, new crops that can withstand cooler temperatures and storage techniques for harvested crops (dry beans, apples, squash, potatoes, etc.) for sale all winter long.

"Every market consistently exceeded my expectations," said one surveyed vendor. "My farm needs to produce more quantity and variety to meet the increased demand from this market. This winter market is showing farmers that we need to grow more winter crops."