



 *A case study*

The Common Market's Food Access Fund

How our community partner, East Park Revitalization Alliance, increased access to healthy, affordable farm foods



Background: The Common Market

The Common Market is a nonprofit, wholesale food distributor that connects communities with good food from local, family farms in an effort to improve food security, farm viability, and community and ecological health. We envision a nation composed of vibrant regional food systems where interdependent urban and rural communities thrive through relationships that build the health and wealth of all people. The Common Market works with a wide range of partners with a focus on low-income and vulnerable populations whose constituents are most at risk for diet-related illness.

The Food Access Fund

In 2015, The Common Market established a “Food Access Fund,” which awards a 25 percent discount on food purchases to community organizations that work directly with vulnerable populations. Organizations that qualify for the Food Access Fund are mission driven and committed to alleviating barriers to food access within low-income communities. Food Access Fund recipients utilize the discount to nourish a variety of community-based programs, including farm stands; after-school meals for youth; meals and snacks at early childhood education centers; and community supported agriculture (CSA) or Food Bag programs, which allow participants to bring home a selection of produce for free or at a reduced cost.

The Food Access Fund allows partner organizations to leverage their existing budgets to expand their communities’ access to fresh, locally-grown foods. Our partnerships create opportunities for urban programs to use their dollars to support local farms, further strengthening the connection between rural and urban communities and their local economies.

In its first two years, the Food Access Fund has served 23 community organizations and stimulated \$79,118 of food purchased, representing 123,359 pounds of fresh, healthy, local food going directly to communities that need it most.



THE CHALLENGE

Healthy food access

The Common Market was founded by a pair of residents motivated by the lack of healthy food options in their North Philadelphia community of Strawberry Mansion. This particular community has a median household income of \$17,969 and, according to a 2016 American Communities Survey, 48.6% of its community lives below the poverty line. Additionally, the 2016 Philadelphia Department of Public Health Community Health Assessment indicates that Strawberry Mansion continues to have the highest levels of asthma, diabetes and obesity and the highest hospitalization rates for heart disease in the city.

THE APPROACH

A community partnership

The Common Market's Food Access Fund helps to grow the capacity of a number of organizations throughout the Mid-Atlantic, including the North Philadelphia-based East Park Revitalization Alliance (EPRA), which strives to create healthy food access in Strawberry Mansion.

EPRA cultivates community gardens in formerly vacant lots as a part of its environmental improvement and health promotion strategy. They sell the produce they harvest at their popular, community-based weekly farm stand. EPRA supplements Strawberry Mansion-grown produce with food purchased from The Common Market, allowing them to expand their impact and serve approximately 100 neighbors each week.

Because EPRA can purchase sustainable, local food at a discount via the Food Access Fund, greater variety is accessible and affordable for patrons of the farm stand. Additionally, utilizing products from The Common

“[Patrons] appreciate the access to fresh and affordable produce right in the heart of their neighborhood.”

-Suku John, EPRA Executive Director



Market allows EPRA's farm stand season to extend. They can open their stand earlier in the spring, and remain open through Thanksgiving, ensuring Strawberry Mansion residents have access to fresh food more of the year.

“The quality of the produce and the pricing is what makes this market work... I want to stress that the variety of [The Common Market] produce and the fresh fruit is greatly appreciated by neighborhood folks,” says Suku John, EPRA's executive director.

Community members also say that they love the convenience of the market, including its location, which is within walking distance for most patrons. “Folks really look forward to the farm stand returning each spring,” says John, “[They] appreciate the access to fresh and affordable produce right in the heart of their neighborhood.”

THE IMPACT

Healthier communities

The potential of the Food Access Fund to catalyze new impactful partnerships and programs is vast. The funding supports community food access equal to four times the value of the discount granted. For example, \$25,000 of funding yields \$100,000 of good food procurement in communities where it is needed most.

As The Common Market continues to grow nationwide, we hope to extend the Food Access Fund to each of our regions and bring more locally-grown and sustainable food to our communities.

👉 *If you are interested in learning more about the Food Access Fund, or would like to become a partner organization, please email sales@thecommonmarket.org*



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