Our Story

In autumn 2009, the idea of establishing a farmers’ market near Penn State Hershey Medical Center was borne out of a serendipitous conversation between Danny George, a faculty member at Penn State College of Medicine, and Wade Edris, a scientist in a College of Medicine research lab.

Upon joining the College of Medicine in October 2009, Danny immediately saw the potential for a farmers’ market in this region, with its rich agricultural heritage and a medical center nestled among the acres of farmland. Wade, having grown up locally on a farm, shared the vision. Upon meeting, it was clear to the co-founders that they shared a conviction that the mission of academic medical centers is not merely to treat disease, but to support wellness and sustainability in local communities.

Danny and Wade began sharing their vision with Medical Center and College leadership and the surrounding community. Support was overwhelming, and soon Penn State Hershey Medical Center and College of Medicine, the Hershey Center for Applied Research (HCAR), the Hershey Trust Company, and Hershey Entertainment and Resorts (HERCo), had all backed the concept and formed a Steering Committee to bring the Farmers Market in Hershey (FMIH) into existence on June 3, 2010. Thanks to generous funding from the Association of Faculty and Friends, Karen Green was hired as the first manager and played a crucial role in the market’s planning, launch, and ongoing growth.

Now, the FMIH is open seasonally from May to October on farmland left to the Hershey Trust by Milton S. Hershey, whose cows once grazed in the fields. Each Thursday afternoon, customers visit to peruse a wide selection of locally produced fruits and vegetables, dairy products, meats and baked goods, and other specialty items such as herbs and spices, canned/preserved goods, flowers, cider, wine and honey. We all share in supporting local and regional agriculture: our vendors represent eight surrounding counties, and at least eighty percent of our products are organic, naturally produced and/or vendor-produced and originate within a 30-mile radius of the market; the remaining 20% extends market variety further to include soaps, crafts, jewelry and other non-food items. Each week, the market features innovative wellness programming in the form of cooking classes, free health screenings, health education, and musical acts from the community.
The FMIH is an unincorporated Pennsylvania association and operates seasonally with a revenue- and cost-neutral business model. It is currently directed by Danny George and managed by Michelle Wohlfarth; Wade Edris and Kathy Graham are organizational consultants.

**Our Mission**

We will make a significant contribution to the long-term health of the region and model how a farmers’ market can serve community wellness and sustainability in multi-faceted ways. Specifically, our vision is:

1. To increase community accessibility to healthy, locally grown foods;
2. To support local farmers engaged in sustainable practices by creating a sustainable venue for the sale of their goods;
3. To establish opportunities for community wellness partnerships, such as health screenings, public education about prevention, and study of health interventions;
4. To build a community space for interaction among employees and students of the Medical Center and College of Medicine as well as people from surrounding neighborhoods and towns; and
5. To pay homage to the agricultural heritage of the land surrounding the Medical Center and College of Medicine.

**2012 Recap**

*Overall market performance*

In its second season, the FMIH averaged 245 customers per week. Total market attendance was approximately 5,889 customers. Gross sales from the market totaled over $140,000. The market was voted as the 3rd “favorite” small farmers market in the nation as part of the America’s Favorite Farmers Market, and was featured in a national conference presentation at the American Public Health Association annual conference in San Francisco, CA. The market’s preventive health programming was awarded a national “Spirit of Excellence” award from the magazine *Modern Healthcare* and granted $5,000 to fund the market’s prevention produce community outreach program.

Feedback from vendors, customers, colleagues at the Medical Center and the 2,400 “fans” on the FMIH Facebook group remains strong, continuing to confirm the founders’ intuition that the market would meet a need in this community and provide a venue for people who are increasingly mindful of the link between nutrition, health, and wellness, and reflective about the need for modern communities to live in more sustainable ways on a local level. Market leadership will continue to implement new ideas to grow the customer base during these difficult economic times.
Preventive health programming

A key distinguishing attribute for the FMIH continues to be the proximity of experts at PSHMC in areas such as medicine, nursing, public health, nutrition, and mental health, which enable the market to serve as a credible community venue for preventive health promotion. Throughout the season, three tents at the market were reserved for weekly outreach, and PSHMC nurses Judy Dillon and Kathy Morrison, along with Donna Kephart, director of the Center for Nutrition and Activity Promotion, took a leadership role in enlisting colleagues to lead wellness programming each week.

A total of 142 medical center volunteers comprised of staff nurses, nursing faculty, nursing graduate and undergraduate students, clinical nutritionists, nutrition students, medical students, pharmacists, child life experts, and medical advocates appeared at the market, providing over 400 free “Know Your Numbers” screenings. These screenings consisted of measures of blood pressure and heart rate check, basal metabolic index calculation, vision, skin cancer risk, osteoporosis, and discussions of knowledge of blood sugar and cholesterol levels, exercise activity, and tobacco use – to shoppers as well as targeted dialogue about the prevention of chronic disease. On the occasions where customers were identified as high-risk, volunteers were able to refer customers to their primary care doctor, as well as provide dietary advice that could be instantly acted upon in the market. In multiple instances, customers were observed visiting the booth weekly to monitor their numbers. In addition to serving an important public health mission in a region with high prevalence of chronic disease and low relative intake of fruits and vegetables, preventive health programming provided a platform for students to get real-world practice with "patients" and hone their clinical skills while working inter-professionally.

Volunteers also directly engaged 172 children on health education focus topics. Additionally, free children’s programming was provided by Erica Campbell, and Crystal Huff, who also installed a small children’s garden within the market. FMIH leadership also used the Preventive Health booth to promote featured fruits and vegetables of the week, including recipe card distribution to provide shoppers with a suggested usage for featured weekly produce.

Community partners

A “Community” booth featured programming from 26 local non-medical specialists who sought to contribute to the market’s vision of furthering wellness in the region. Community programming included free workshops on holistic health, Reiki massage demonstrations, Yoga and tai chi workshops, acupuncture information, aromatherapy, and a variety of other integrative medicine approaches, as well as informational offerings from local fitness centers, health coaches, businesses, and environmental action groups. In addition to the programming at the three booths, guest chefs from HERco restaurants and certified organic chefs from the community held several free classes on preparation of healthy meals that involved organic ingredients from the market.
Musicians

Local musicians from the community also performed at the FMIH most weeks, adding a rich aesthetic dimension to the market culture. All connections with musicians were made through word of mouth, via person-to-person networking, or through the social networking (Facebook) page. It is hoped that the FMIH can secure grants to compensate musicians for their performances during future seasons, as is commonly done at other markets. Overall, 12 musicians provided over 50 hours of free entertainment in 2012. The market also helped launch the “HCAR Farmers Market Summer Concert Series”, a free event that brought in over a dozen professional musicians to the market from 6-8pm.

Charitable partnerships

- The FMIH is registered with the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and we intend to sign up with additional assistance programs, such as the senior citizen supplemental nutrition programs in 2012. Our biggest challenge is our physical distance from underserved communities and the transportation necessary to make our offerings more widely available.

- The FMIH partnered with the Food As Medicine group from Penn State College of Medicine, Penn National Racetrack, and the Dauphin County Medical Spouse Association to purchase a significant amount of fresh produce from our vendors each week and deliver it as a donation to workers at the racetrack stables in packages that include bi-lingual messages about health and prevention. Produce was also delivered to vulnerable elders in the community.

- The market and its customers have offered ongoing supported for Mike Macchioni’s charity Gemma's Angels, which purchases and distributes fresh produce to local homeless shelters and halfway homes: Harrisburg Uptown Soup Kitchen, St.; Francis Soup Kitchen, Our Daily Bread Soup Kitchen, Hershey Food Bank, Palmyra Caring Cupboard, Manna Food Bank, Shalom House, Evergreen House, Interfaith Shelter. Dr. George has also had preliminary discussions with other area entrepreneurs and non-profit leaders about setting up a mobile farmers market that would drive to Harrisburg and rural underserved areas each week with produce from our market. There has also been preliminary discussion about a Food Hub and regional co-op.

- The Broad Street Market in Harrisburg has implemented a health screening program modeled after the programming at the FMIH, and Dr. George and Mrs. Dillon are serving as volunteer consultants on this project.

- Dr. George and several medical students are attempting to set up a prescription produce program that would partner the market with several doctors at Penn State Medical Center who work with underserved patients. This program would fund the clinical writing of “prescriptions” for fruits and vegetables that would be redeemable at the FMIH.
• The FMIH is playing a central role in a community garden project being led by the Hershey Company and Medical Center. This garden will launch in September 2013. Eventually, we would like to bring some of these products (which will not conflict with any current offerings) to the FMIH to attract more public attention to our market with our innovative programming.

Marketing

Special events

During the 2012 season, the following special events were held during usual market days and times:

• Opening day (May)
• Desserts for Dad (June)
• Summer solstice festival (June)
• Red, White, and Blueberry Day (July)
• Farmers Market Appreciation Week (August)
• Fruit Photo Contest (August)
• Apple Festival (September)
• Gourmet Grandparents with Highmark (October)
• Fall Festival (October)

Social media

We maintained a Facebook group page (www.facebook.com/farmersmarketinhershey), a Twitter account (www.twitter.com/marketinhershey), and published a weekly newsletter. These free interfaces connected the market with thousands of persons from the community who could be reached through simple status updates and email blasts, all of which placed a minimum time burden on market leadership. Because of the viral networking effect of Facebook, the group page has accumulated 2,400 fans over the course of three seasons and serves as an influential means of two-way communication with customers, both by promoting market events and programs and receiving customer feedback. Further, the FMIH is registered in various farmers’ market directories, and on Google Places and on the customer social review site Yelp!

Conventional marketing approaches

Print and radio ads were purchased to promote the market. Signs made at Penn State Hershey Medical Center were placed on Bullfrog Valley Rd and were made for placement on Rt. 322. Weekly advertisements appeared on the digital sandwich boards at all Hershey facilities, including the Lodge, the Hotel, and in other places of employment. Press releases for special events were composed by the market director and sent out to media contacts via the Penn State strategic services department. T-shirts and buttons
featuring the FMIH logo were created and distributed, particularly to doctors and nurses who could promote the market to patients within the medical center. Market volunteers attended multiple events at the Milton Hershey School, Giant Center, Bethesda Mission, Penn State College of Medicine campus, Hershey Nursery, and elsewhere to promote the market in person.

Marketing at the medical center

With the opening of a new hospital cafeteria in December 2011, FMIH leadership is attempting to facilitate the setup of a “local produce salad bar” that would create opportunities for our vendors to provide offerings in the cafeteria. This would not only financially benefit our vendors, but would also increase the visibility of the market within the medical center.

Children’s programming

Volunteers Erica Campbell, Julie Styskin, and Crystal Huff continued to grow the market’s programming for children, which involved such activities as jump-roping, hopscotch, arts and crafts, bowling, and other creative offerings. The development of a U-Gro daycare center near the market provides ample reason to continue growing programming that appeals to children and parents. Mrs. Styskin will assume leadership of a permanent childrens’ activity tent in 2013.

Steering Committee

A steering committee was created to provide ongoing leadership on significant market decisions. Members of this committee included:

- Dennis Burd, Regional businessman
- Donna Fair, Cocoa Beanery Manager
- Danny George, Penn State College of Medicine
- Jennifer Henry, Hershey Entertainment and Resorts
- Michelle Wohlfarth, Farmers Market in Hershey manager
- Jack Atchason, HCAR
- Caitlin Orr, HCAR

America’s favorite farmers market competition

The Farmers Market in Hershey was voted as the 3rd of 20 leading farmers markets across the nation vying for the title of America’s Favorite Farmers Market in the small market category. In this year’s contest more than 90,000 farmers market shoppers voted for more than 1,700 participating farmers markets in American Farmland Trust’s third annual contest. The Farmers Market in Hershey received over 400 votes from supportive shoppers. Here is what one voter for the market had to say about why it should be named one of America’s Favorite Farmers Markets:
"Organic, local, community-minded - these are several key attributes of the Farmers Market in Hershey. They actively engage farmers & producers, local businesses, local health centers & individuals - conventional and alternative, and non-profit organizations to come together for the common goal of bringing healthy awareness to consumers. It is truly a community experience. I love it!"

**Vendors**

**Produce**
- Schaeffer’s Farms (conventional)
- Shady Acres Farm (organic)
- Jade Family Farm (organic)
- Brogue Hydroponic
- K Schlegel Fruit Farm

**Meats**
- Sunnyside Farm
- Starr Route Farms
- Shady Acres
- Sugar Hill Farms
- Wild for Salmon

**Dairy**
- Green Acres Farms (organic)
- Keswick Creamery (organic)

**Baked goods**
- Short and Sweet
- Stoudt Wonderful Good Market
- Amaranth Gluten Free (left mid-way through)

**Flowers/Plants**
- Kilgore Hydroponic

**Other**
- Cassel Vineyards-wines
- In a Jam by Maryann – pepper jelly
- Freshapeel - hummus
- Countrytrail Soy Candles
- Torchbearer Sauces-specialty hot sauces
- Golden Age Alpacas
- Half Fast Farms, Dye Hards-goatsmilk soaps, tie-dyes
- Hopscotch Art - paintings
Vision for the Future

After a successful three seasons, the FMIH intends to continue growing its customer base and expanding its community wellness programming. Below is a general overview of future goals for various market domains:

*Market goals*

- Obtain grant support for Director and Manager and for preventive health, children’s programming, and support of musicians
- Launch market website
- Upgrade the weekly newsletter
- Integrate better with HCAR summer concert series
- Improve upon average attendance numbers and gross sales
- Develop partnerships with medical center cafeteria and community garden

*Wellness goals*

- Reach out more effectively to the employee and patient base at PSHMC
- Reach out more effectively to departments at PSHMC devoted to nutrition, childhood obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, etc
- Initiate prescription produce program at PSHMC and support the community garden project
- Encourage PSHMC employees to walk/bike to the market using campus footpath
- Expand on local chef demonstrations (“5-minute dinner preparation”)
- Increase offerings for children’s’ programming

*Community goals*

- Register with Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) and other federal and state assistance programs as able
- Continue building partnerships to increase participation of the community, including underserved individuals and families
- In the spirit of the farm-to-school movement, we hope to have our farmers source produce for local school cafeterias, and are working to establish these connections
- Partner vendors with area restaurants to source foods
- Work towards the establishment of a Farm Fresh menu at PSHMC in which cafeteria services will become a purchaser of FMIH produce and integrate
A program called Stanford Hospitals and Clinics Farm Fresh has created an inpatient menu option that uses exclusively organic ingredients from local sources. The philosophy undergirding this program is that healthy food is an important part of the healing process for patients from all backgrounds, and that locally sourced products can help serve a medical center’s larger mission of health promotion.