

Market Shares: Innovative Catalyst for Change, Impact and Mobilization

For New Orleans Farmers Markets

Would you buy market shares in New Orleans and the surrounding region devastated by Hurricane Katrina? Perhaps not, unless the market shares offered presented a new investment strategy with potential to rebuild community and produce strong returns on investment.

The Market Shares Initiative is doing just that as part of their investment strategy. It's a powerful tool created by Marketumbrella.org, a non-profit economic development project of Loyola University in New Orleans. By reinvesting a portion of the wealth created by the Crescent City Farmers Market, Marketumbrella.org is able to meet the human, developmental and business needs of their own market community.

In the aftermath of Katrina, systemic economic and social issues were revealed, deeply rooted in the cultural and historical fabric of New Orleans. But, this catastrophic event also brought about a new focus on transformational change and the creation of new solutions for New Orleans and Gulf Coast communities. As a catalyst for change, impact and mobilization, Market Shares are a simple approach creating multiple entry points for economic revitalization.

Market Shares 101

Market Shares are a new, investment tool that grew out of a philanthropic concept called giving circles, a form of philanthropy where individuals pool their funds and resources to collectively impact community economic development or other social ventures. A market- and community-based innovation, Market Shares draw upon a more capitalistic, top-down understanding of wealth and ownership. But, they engender a more inclusive strategy that embraces fuller participation in the creation of an economic and social community agenda in a post-Katrina world.

Market Shares offer a pool of resources built with three, interwoven funding strategies. First, vendors cash their extra cash crop wooden tokens for U.S. Currency. The cash crop tokens are used as an alternative currency resource that can be bought and redeemed at the farmers market. A 10 percent transaction fee goes to the market shares pool.

Second, shoppers who purchase cash crops using their debit or credit cards incur a \$1.50 surcharge. Fifty-percent of the surcharge are earmarked for administering the food stamp portion of the cash crop program. The remaining \$1 goes into the Market Share account.

And third, the strategy focuses on monetary donations made at the market or online by individuals and organizations in the region.

Through a community engagement process, Market Share members vote online monthly for the proposals that will receive grant funds of up to \$500. Grant recipients provide a brief report on how the money was spent so community investors can see the impact of their contribution.

Guiding Principles

At the heart of the Market Shares Initiative are the guiding principles that shape the use, impact and investment in community members, and further drive the reinvestment in community.

Market Shares:

- Must be invested in food initiatives that serve as stewards of the earth and its resources by replenishing the soil for future crops;
- Are collective, strategic investments reflecting the health, productivity and enrichment of community life;
- Focus on self-development resources that demonstrate that everyone can be a philanthropist;
- Support specific needs and opportunities for members -- both food producers and consumers;
- Create means for funding local entrepreneurial activities, which can become the engines for creating communities by design.

Community Impact

The Market Shares Initiative provides a new model for rural communities and farmer's markets in New Orleans and across the Gulf Coast Region to explore alternative resource strategies that build upon existing community assets.

It also provides the basis for understanding how rural communities and communities of color can have a seat at the philanthropic table, address their community needs strategically and create a legacy for generations to come.

As a bridging strategy, the Market Shares Initiative also empowers market communities to embrace their rural and urban interdependence, bridge cultural and geographic differences, and create lasting impact at the local, regional, and international economies.

To learn more about the Market Shares Initiative visit www.marketumbrella.org.