

Local Food Promotion Program (LFPP) Final Performance Report

The final performance report summarizes the outcome of your LFPP award objectives. As stated in the LFPP Terms and Conditions, you will not be eligible for future LFPP or Farmers Market Promotion Program grant funding unless all close-out procedures are completed, including satisfactory submission of this final performance report.

This final report will be made available to the public once it is approved by LFPP staff. Write the report in a way that promotes your project's accomplishments, as this document will serve as not only a learning tool, but a promotional tool to support local and regional food programs. Particularly, recipients are expected to provide both qualitative and quantitative results to convey the activities and accomplishments of the work.

The report is limited to 10 pages and is due **within 90 days** of the project's performance period end date, or sooner if the project is complete. Provide answers to each question, or answer "not applicable" where necessary. It is recommended that you email or fax your completed performance report to your assigned grant specialist to avoid delays:

LFPP Phone: 202-720-2731; Email: USDALFPPQuestions@ams.usda.gov; Fax: 202-720-0300

Should you need to mail your documents via hard copy, contact LFPP staff to obtain mailing instructions.

Report Date Range: <i>(e.g. September 30, 20XX-September 29, 20XX)</i>	Oct 1, 2015 – Sept 29, 2017
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Recipient Organization Name:	University of Arkansas
Project Title as Stated on Grant Agreement:	Building the Capacity of the Northwest Arkansas Food System: A planning grant
Grant Agreement Number: <i>(e.g. 14-LFPPX-XX-XXXX)</i>	15LFPPAR0009
Year Grant was Awarded:	2015
Project City/State:	Arkansas
Total Awarded Budget:	\$25,000

LFPP staff may contact you to follow up for long-term success stories. Who may we contact?

- Same Authorized Representative listed above (check if applicable).
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1. State the goals/objectives of your project as outlined in the grant narrative and/or approved by LFPP staff. If the goals/objectives from the narrative have changed from the grant narrative, please highlight those changes (e.g. “new objective”, “new contact”, “new consultant”, etc.). You may add additional goals/objectives if necessary. For each item below, qualitatively discuss the progress made and indicate the impact on the community, if any.
 - i. Goal/Objective 1: Identify and address challenges and benefits to an aggregation-distribution system through an advisory board of local experts and key stakeholders.
 - a. Progress Made: We learned many lessons through project activities that will contribute to further advancing the NWA food system. These activities included four meetings with the project advisory board along with many project leaders meetings, a survey and interview of institutional buyers, and a pilot aggregation-distribution project among the Fayetteville Farmers Market (FFM) ‘co-op’ to the Fayetteville Public Schools (details in next goal). The survey of institutional buyers assessed nutrition and food service directors of NWA schools, hospitals, nursing homes and day cares interest and barriers to purchasing locally grown foods and barriers. Sixty-eight institutions were contacted; seven did not have a food service program, and 29 response were received for a 48% response rate. Results indicated that that 36% of respondents were already purchasing locally grown foods. Of those who were not already making local food purchases, 56% were interested in doing so and 28% were possibly interested. If locally grown produce was offered from existing produce distributors, 74% of responses were willing to purchase locally grown foods. One of the biggest obstacles cited to making locally grown purchases is the limited options for ordering and delivering (81%). 56% felt it took too much time to manage local food purchases and 54% felt local foods was too expensive. Interestingly, 85-90% of responses indicated they have kitchens equipped, skilled staff and menus established to work with raw produce. Seasonal availability and size variability were not cited as significant barriers to local food purchases. Overall, results of this survey indicated that there is potential for developing new institutional markets for a group of growers/organization/etc. that has ordering and delivery systems in place. Additionally, based on follow up interviews with food service directors, the organization would need to provide the institution with a single invoice and have the financial capacity and accounting to pay the growers.

The Advisory board meetings reveal two opportunities for aggregation and distribution, however neither opportunity was well suited for the growers in this project. One opportunities was with a small, local produce distributor but prices offered to the growers were lower than what they were willing to accept. The other opportunity was with an organic farmer co-op based in central AR, but most of the growers in the project were not interested in organic production.
 - b. Impact on Community: Information has been learned and shared to advance the NWA food system. Two aggregation and distribution opportunities were revealed and although neither of these opportunities have worked for the growers at this time, they are aware of them and may return to those options in the future. The institutional survey identified barriers that must be addressed to establish these new markets. Now that these barriers are better understood, efforts can be made to address these challenges.

- ii. Goal/Objective 2: Identify and address challenges for growers to enter institutional markets with a pilot aggregation-distribution arrangement between the Fayetteville Farmers Market Co-op and Fayetteville Public Schools.
 - a. Progress Made: A subset of growers in the Fayetteville Farmers Market called the 'Fayetteville Farmers Market co-op' were primarily, though not limited to, Hmong growers and none had participated in the bidding process for the FPS in the past. The FFM co-op worked together to identify crops they could collectively bid to grow for the Fayetteville Public Schools (FPS) Farm to School program in 2015-2016. Through the collective bidding process, a wider variety of products were ordered and delivered from more Hmong growers than in past. Many lessons were learned in the project pilot. Early communication barriers especially for growers learning the FPS ordering and delivery process hindered early orders. Although Hmong National Development was involved with the project (paid), they lacked personnel to significantly contribute to the project. Growers also faced production challenges for growing for the FPS. All of the growers in the project are regular farmers market vendors. Production management for farmers markets is significantly different than for producing a crop for advanced ordering/delivery. When a farmer is unable to bring a crop to the farmers market, he/she simply fills their table with other crops but with institutional markets and a formal ordering process they need to know how much of a crop they can harvest and deliver on a specific date. This was a new experience for most of these growers. Additionally, two of the crops that they won the bid were okra and green beans. Both of these crops develop very quickly from bud to fruit and growers had a difficult time predicting when their crop would be ready for harvest and thus missed the appropriate time to 'offer' their crop. A 9-10 day window from offering to delivering a crop to the school requires intimate observation, time and management skills for these types of heat loving, rapidly developing crops. For this project that is a small part of what the growers do, we underestimated the influence of family labor, water and storage available for larger orders, as well as size of vehicle needed to transport large orders. Another challenge for growers that are working with schools is that orders are lowest when produce is most abundant. Other institutional markets such as hospitals and nursing homes would be less likely to have these fluctuations and we also expect that the window from 'offering' a crop to delivery to be shorter than the FPS 9 to 10 day window. In late 2016, HND evaluated growers in phone interviews to determine grower satisfaction in the project. Five of the ten growers were interested in continuing with the project but others cited farm changes, low pricing, and difficulty with harvest projections as reasons for not continuing.

For various reasons, a bid was not placed for regular FPS deliveries; however growers participated in bulk processing orders. In the summer of 2017, growers delivered 920 lbs of produce to the school for processing into 1328 lbs of ratatouille. Because the processing orders are not used in immediate school menu items, the ordering process is more flexibility because it will become a stored product for later use.
 - b. Impact on Community: One primary goal of this objective was to cultivate a leader within the Hmong community that would serve as an organizer among the other growers. One grower, May Lee, became comfortable with the

systems established in 2016 (weighing, invoicing, deliveries) and confident with her abilities to work with the other growers. In 2017, she worked to collect and deliver orders to FPS and for special events that featured locally grown foods. Other growers learned the system but were not as comfortable and confident. Most of these growers have decided to not participate in the formal bidding process for regular F2S orders but will participate in bulk processing orders.

- iii. Goal/Objective 3: Address institutional needs in local foods education and foodservice staff support
 - a. Progress Made: Kitchen managers and staff at FPS were trained on prepping, storing and processing locally grown produce. More than 9 recipes that highlight locally grown produce were developed following the USDA meal pattern for school lunches. The Harvest of the Month program and student taste tests highlighted and increased awareness of locally grown (Harvest of the Month) produce. Upper elementary and middle school students were involved with analyzing results of the taste test voting and helped to develop new recipes. The FPS child nutrition director spoke at several conferences to grower audiences as well as school administrator audiences about farm to school.
 - b. Impact on Community: FPS kitchen staff increased their confidence and skills in handling, processing and cooking with locally grown foods. School children eating local foods grown by the Co-op and are able to identify NWA growers highlighted in the Harvest of the Month posters. Parents have become more informed about local items being served on the menu through the FPS Child Nutrition Department Instagram account, @whatsforlunchfayetteville. The FPS child nutrition director spoke at several school conferences about their F2S program. As a result, three other school districts in NWA are considering developing a Farm to school program. The FPS Farm to School program is also providing educational opportunities for students. Students and teachers engaged in taste tests of local food recipes integrated the process of analyzing taste test results into math classes; and students and teachers in one school will develop a lesson and recipe featuring local foods.

- iv. Goal/Objective 4: Determine the feasibility of an aggregation-distribution system for NWA through activities and results of above objectives and input of the Advisory Committee.
 - a. Progress Made: The Advisory board meet three times, an assessment of institutional interest in local food purchases and barriers was conducted, a pilot of the FFM Co-op to the FPS to test institutional markets for a group of growers was conducted, limitations and successes were identified. Project results revealed that there is considerable interest among institutional markets for locally grown products, however aggregation and distribution of products at a price viable for growers remains a limitation.
 - b. Impact on Community: Growers are starting to recognize market opportunities outside of farmers markets. At this time, it seems they are willing and interested in exploring these markets if it does not require significant changes or shifts in their production and management.

2. Quantify the overall impact of the project on the intended beneficiaries, if applicable, from the baseline date (the start of the award performance period, September 30, 2017). Include further explanation if necessary.
 - i. Number of direct jobs created: na
 - ii. Number of jobs retained: jobs supported 9
 - iii. Number of indirect jobs created: na
 - iv. Number of markets expanded: 3 new markets were expanded into including the Fayetteville Public School district, Roots Festival (a 5 day music and local food festival held August 23-27 in 2017), and ingredients purchased by Brightwater Culinary Arts Program. Two additional markets were explored – a local hospital and a grocer. The grocer was especially interested but late summer weather conditions limited supply and reduced the willingness of growers to offer wholesale pricing to these two potential new markets.
 - v. Number of new markets established: 10
 - vi. Market sales to new markets during the project increased to a total of \$2993 to Fayetteville Public Schools orders alone. Reporting from Roots and Brightwater purchases will be available in January, but sales to these 2 markets from the growers in this project are estimated to total at least an additional \$2500.
 - vii. Number of farmers/producers that have benefited from the project: 11
 - a. Percent Increase: na

3. Did you expand your customer base by reaching new populations such as new ethnic groups, additional low income/low access populations, new businesses, etc.? If so, how?

New customers/markets were established with the formal partnership between the Fayetteville Public School and the Fayetteville Farmers' Market co-op. Most of the FFM co-op are Hmong farmers who have not participated in the farm to school program in the past because of language barriers and uncertainties associated with testing new markets. Through this project the Hmong farmers in the coop were able to test this new market with less risk because of the technical assistance that was provided.

4. Discuss your community partnerships.
 - i. Who are your community partners? Our community partners were the Fayetteville Farmers' Market (FFM), the Fayetteville Public School (FPS) and Hmong National Development.
 - ii. How have they contributed to the overall results of the LFPP project? Our project partners were critical to the activities and success of the project. The FFM worked closely with the FFM co-op with communication, orders and deliveries. The FPS made FFM co-op purchases, tested the ordering and delivery system with the co-op and developed new USDA approved recipes that highlighted local foods. They also trained their staff in culinary skills to better utilize the locally grown foods. The Hmong National Development assisted the project with some product deliveries, grower evaluations and grower communications.
 - iii. How will they continue to contribute to your project's future activities, beyond the performance period of this LFPP grant? All project partners have worked together in the past and will continue to work together in the future to help grow the Northwest Arkansas food system. Specifically, the FFM co-op grower will likely not submit bid for regular school orders but they will work with the school on bulk processing orders in the summer. Bulk orders work better within their system and only takes place during the

summer when extra produce is abundant.

5. Did you use contractors to conduct the work? If so, how did their work contribute to the results of the LFPP project? Two subcontractors, the Fayetteville Farmers Market (FFM) and Fayetteville Public Schools (FPS), were important project partners, (discussed above). The FFM was primarily responsible for managing the FFM Co-op activities including communication with Hmong growers, training growers on delivery preparation, and coordinating the delivery of product. The FPS was responsible for Farm to School activities including procurement from local growers, menuing local food items, training food service staff on preparation and sharing results with key personnel at other school districts in the state.

6. Have you publicized any results yet?* Yes

- i. If yes, how did you publicize the results? Results have been shared through formal presentation and in small group conversations with growers at the 2017 AR-OK Horticulture Industries Show (Fayetteville AR), the scientific community at the 2017 American Society of Horticultural Sciences annual conference and with school administration and nutrition directors through local and regional conferences and meetings (2016-2017).
- ii. To whom did you publicize the results? In addition to sharing the results with the advisory board, results were publicized to growers in Northwest Arkansas, school administrators and child nutrition directors in Arkansas and nationally to horticulture scientists at the American Society of Horticultural Sciences (ASHS) annual conference. Results of this project will also be presented at the 2018 Southern SSAWG regional conference, which attracts more than 1000 farmers and information providers.
- iii. How many stakeholders (i.e. people, entities) did you reach? Approximately 120 stakeholders were reached through this project.

*Send any publicity information (brochures, announcements, newsletters, etc.) electronically along with this report. Non-electronic promotional items should be digitally photographed and emailed with this report (do not send the actual item).

- ASHS poster Friedrich, H., C. Rom, T. Maurer, A. Mrachek and L. Halsey. 2017. Building Capacity of the Northwest Arkansas Food System, HortScience 52(9):S426; and the abstract is found [here](#).

7. Have you collected any feedback from your community and additional stakeholders about your work?

- i. If so, how did you collect the information? Information was collected from the Advisory Board as well as growers through phone interviews conducted by Hmong National Development.
- ii. What feedback was relayed (specific comments)? The manager of the Little Rock based produce co-op addressed our issue of growers not being able to predict when a crop would be ready for harvest. He said that this is a problem for them also with some crops and that they do regular field check-ins and they also source from back-up co-op growers for a particular crop/order when needed because the main grower's crop was not ready. It was observed by the Advisory Board that the most successful growers in this project were growers that were not doing farmers markets in multiple towns in NWA each day of the week. We felt this was an important observation and a reminder that not all markets are suited for every farmer. It was suggested that by assigning interns to work along with the farmers on the crops they won the school bid would alleviate some of the management pressures of testing a new market and could also

help determine the real costs associated with producing that crop. A comment from the Hmong National Development stated that although project results have not been as successful as we would have liked, increasing the ability of one Hmong growers to participate in Farm to School markets with confidence was a significant accomplishment. A comment from one of the Advisory Board members suggested that we continue meeting as a group to stimulate new projects and collaborations to further develop and support the NWA Food System.

a. Feedback from growers indicated that for about half of the growers, the market did not work well for them but the remaining 5 were interested in continuing.

8. Budget Summary:

- i. As part of the LFPP closeout procedures, you are required to submit the SF-425 (Final Federal Financial Report). Check here if you have completed the SF-425 and are submitting it with this report:
- ii. Did the project generate any income? No project income was generated.
 - a. If yes, how much was generated and how was it used to further the objectives of the award?

9. Lessons Learned:

- i. Summarize any lessons learned. Draw from positive experiences (e.g. good ideas that improved project efficiency or saved money) and negative experiences (e.g. what did not go well and what needs to be changed).
 - a. We underestimated the differences in management of growing for a farmers market versus growing for a market with a predetermined ordering/delivery date. With farmers' markets, the farmer can determine what to take to the market up to the market day, whereas with an institutional market like schools, the flexibility is greatly limited in order for school to have the ability to lean on back up options for products that farmers may not be able to provide.
 - b. We recognize that management practices may need to be shifted to participate in institutional or aggregated markets and that may require additional training.
 - c. We did not rely on other growers to fill bid orders if the main grower was not able to offer/deliver that item. We probably should have looked into this option further
 - d. One Hmong grower from the group developed the skills to better estimate her ability to fill orders, and improved her skills in communications, labeling and delivering group orders to the school district with her own truck. If email communications and insurance barriers can be overcome, this grower may be interested in working directly with the school district in the future.
 - e. Because of the long offering/ordering/delivery window required by the school, crops like okra and green beans were not good crops to choose because they grow so rapidly in the summer heat, making them difficult to predict when they would be ready. Additionally, we provided seed for many of the crops in year 1 thinking that it would lower barriers for growers. However, most of the growers felt that the growth habit was too different from what they were used to and they were less comfortable at predicting harvest as they would have been growing their own seeds.
 - f. Due to changing priorities and responsibilities for the FFM managers involved with the project, the FFM board of directors was less willing to provide as much manager support for the project in year 2. Thus technical support that was

provided to help growers submit a bid for regular school deliveries in year 1 did not happen in year 2. Though market staff attempted to engage the ag staff member from a local Hmong organization to provide support for the bid process, that staff member was unable to complete the technical assistance for the bid.

- g. Organizational personnel changes and issues that could not have been foreseen created some challenges for the project. The Child Nutrition Director at FPS left shortly after the project was awarded, leaving the assistant director (who was the main project partner for FPS) in charge of the school lunch program, with no assistant to support her increased work load. As a result, the schools ability to be flexible with orders and deliveries was decreased slightly. The Hmong National Development was expected to be more involved in the project but because of staff shortages on their end, their role was smaller.
 - h. The owner of a local produce distributor was on the Advisory Board and expressed interest in buying some of the FFM Co-op produce, however growers felt that the prices offered were too low. Although it did not work out in this project, it may be something that materializes in the future.
 - i. FFM provided two key assets in addition to their important role in communicating with the growers. The FFM was able to extend their product liability insurance to the co-op and they provided financial services to pay the growers, which allowed the school district to work with a single invoicing system.
- ii. If goals or outcome measures were not achieved, identify and share the lessons learned to help others expedite problem-solving:
 - a. We achieved our goals for the project however we would have liked some additional outcomes that would have strengthened the project. We would have liked to have seen a grower(s) more interested in taking a leadership position to lead the offering/delivery process – perhaps an unrealistic expectation. A grower was slowly identified later in year 2 but still required assistance and guidance.
 - iii. Describe any lessons learned in the administration of the project that might be helpful for others who would want to implement a similar project:
 - a. Regular meetings and communication with project partners was critical to the success of the project.

10.

Future Work:

- i. How will you continue the work of this project beyond the performance period? In other words, how will you parlay the results of your project's work to benefit future community goals and initiatives? Include information about community impact and outreach, anticipated increases in markets and/or sales, estimated number of jobs retained/created, and any other information you'd like to share about the future of your project.
 - a. UA, FPS and FFM will continue to partner to support each other's goals to further develop the food system of Northwest Arkansas. Hmong National Development continues to play an important role when working with Hmong growers. We will continue to strategize to determine how NWA growers may access other institutional markets. In late summer 2017, we contacted a local grocer to explore opportunities for featuring FFM co-op produce in the store.

Although deliveries did not work out in 2017, we will look into this opportunity in 2018. Additionally, we will continue to look deeper into working with a single hospital to pilot local food purchases. The development of a new multi-grower marketing business, of which at least one Hmong grower is a member, may play an important role in exploring this new market.

- ii. Do you have any recommendations for future activities and, if applicable, an outline of next steps or additional research that might advance the project goals?
 - a. There is the potential to work with a new multi-farm online ordering and delivering operation of which at least one Hmong grower is a member, to explore hospital markets. They are not currently not doing wholesale markets but we are talking with the owner/operator to explore opportunities to develop this market. After interviews and conversations with nutrition directors at hospitals, some of the key issues that need to be addressed is growers or the organization needs to have product liability insurance (FFM has provided in the past) and the organization needs to be able to provide financial services for paying growers.