

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>	September 30, 2015 – December 31, 2017
Authorized Representative Name:	Kathleen O'Connor-Masse
Authorized Representative Phone:	(928) 420-4723
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Recipient Organization Name:	YCGrown, the Yavapai County Farmers & Ranchers Cooperative
Project Title as Stated on Grant Agreement:	YCGrown CSA Expansion Project
Grant Agreement Number: <i>(e.g. 14-LFPPX-XX-XXXX)</i>	15-LFPP-AZ-0050
Year Grant was Awarded:	2015
Project City/State:	Chino Valley, AZ
Total Awarded Budget:	\$91,200 grant + \$32,996 match = \$124,196

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).
- Different individual: Name: _____; Email: _____; Phone: _____

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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.

As we stated in our last report, the ultimate goals and objectives of the project remain the expansion of local food production and consumption in Yavapai County, Arizona, through the expansion of YCGrown’s CSA program. Through the course of this grant, we have experimented with a number of approaches to driving membership, which are discussed below.

- i. Goal/Objective 1: Increase year-round availability of the Co-op’s CSA by creating and launching a Fall/Winter/Spring CSA program beginning in fall, 2015.

Progress Made:

We created and continue to offer a Fall/Winter/Spring CSA program. We also added more protein choices and delivery schedules for them, as well as bread shares. The winter share program has been popular, attracting new shareholders who aren’t our customers in summer because they grow their own vegetables then or shop at the farmers market. Now that we are in the third year of this experiment, we’ve found that fall sign-ups are not as popular, perhaps due to the holidays and the change in variety. However, signups pick up after the first of the year, and increase as the weather warms a bit.

Progress has continued in the area of converting smaller size/frequency CSA shares to larger shares or more frequent delivery. Doing so benefits the member’s health, the farmer’s ability to deliver a predictable amount on a predictable schedule, and the Co-op’s expense ratio. Through surveys and data analysis, we have identified our most frequent customers as older women, single or partnered, purchasing a half share. Yavapai County continues to attract retirees, many from California who appreciate fresh, local food. Since there is a limit to the amount of produce a single person or couple will consume, we now plan to target 50+ housing developments, mobile home parks and Senior Centers to educate and attract these communities.

Impact on Community:

The available supply of local food in Yavapai County, AZ increased each year because of the increased number of CSA subscriptions available year round through YCGrown’s CSA, and the flexibility of share sizes. At least 299 additional seasonal shares were purchased in the winter and spring months since we began the program. In addition, several of the Co-op’s farm members were severely hurt by multiple weather events this year. The beauty of a Co-op was emphasized not only by coming together as a community to help our members, but in being able to continue to supply our shareholders with back-up products and other members’ products.

- ii. Goal/Objective 2: Increase ongoing marketing efforts commencing in October, 2015, to expand Fall/Winter/Spring 2015/2016 and Summer 2016 CSA membership from 60 to 200, utilizing both traditional and online marketing vehicles, as well as in-person meetings and presentations.

Progress Made:

We used grant funds and matching funds to purchase expanded access to traditional media (local newspaper and specialty publications); public speaking (hospital, health department, restaurant and college lectures and presentations); and additional advertising (business cards, rack cards, slide decks and meeting displays). We also increased our online and social media presence. We now have regularly updated web pages with shopping cart software, a Facebook page, and an Instagram feed. Please see <http://www.ycgrown.com> for examples.

Impact on Community:

Using grant and matching funds, we have established YCGrown as a major figure in the Yavapai County farm community, the Slow Food Movement, and the agriculture program at Yavapai College.

We exceeded our goal of attracting 200 members, having enrolled more than 550 seasonal shares. However, we've found that membership fluctuates from season to season, for reasons we're still researching. We will be conducting a member satisfaction survey this summer to help us determine what members want and how we can better retain them.

We also know now that full shares are much better for the farmer and the Co-op (see above), so we will begin outreach to families and larger groups. Private entities are not able to visit schools for promotion purposes, so we are investigating other vehicles. Our efforts in healthcare yielded some good results, including positive press, but we find that these programs require constant management and refreshing due to lack of available hospital personnel who are committed to the programs. These initiatives also require ongoing grant support, which makes them largely unsustainable. While we were successful in growing the Co-op's shareholder enrollment, we know that there is a lot more work to do to educate and attract local consumers.

- iii. Goal/Objective 3: Improve and expand the Co-op's infrastructure to support expanded subscriptions and producer participation through the expansion of the Co-op's receiving, storage and aggregating equipment, improved transportation, commencing in October, 2015 and continuing through January, 2016.

Progress Made:

With the grant funds and match, we were able to purchase and install two commercial-size, walk-in refrigerators, a used but functional commercial sink/wash station, plus tables, racks, and reusable home delivery boxes. These have been a godsend in the Arizona summer! With the final installment of the grant, we have begun installing commercial freezers, purchased racks, shelving and RPCs (Reusable Plastic Containers), as well as additional home delivery containers. All of these contribute to easier handling and storage, while responding to customers' desire for home delivery.

Impact on Community:

Quite simply, we could not have achieved our goals, or positioned the Co-op for future success without the grant funds that enabled the purchase of this equipment. We lost access to the loaned commercial kitchen equipment earlier this year, so being able to replace what was lost and especially, having all equipment in one location is very helpful. In particular, in the last month, we expanded the Co-op's protein offering, especially beef and poultry from local ranches. The new space and equipment, made possible by the grant and matching funds, have been essential to the positive results we've achieved.

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, 2015). Include further explanation if necessary.

- i. Number of direct jobs created: 1 FTE
- ii. Number of jobs retained: 3 FTEs
- iii. Number of indirect jobs created: 1 FTE
- iv. Number of markets expanded: 3
- v. Number of new markets established: 4
- vi. Market sales increased by ~\$15,000 and increased by 40% season over season when advertising and outreach were at their peak.
- vii. Number of farmers/producers who have benefited from the project: The number of summer growers increased to 15 from the beginning of the project and is holding steady. The number of winter growers has increased to eight.
- viii. Percent Increase: 300%

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?

After the end of our grant funding for scholarships to SNAP beneficiaries, we redirected our efforts to community-oriented organizations in hopes of having the same impact. Because of those efforts, we have established a relationship with Slow Food International, a grassroots organization building a link between producer and consumer. Also, we have connected with Sedona Wish List, connecting service organizations to community. Our work with both groups has resulted in an increase in membership. These are new efforts, and will require additional outreach on a consistent basis to these groups if progress is to continue. We also conducted outreach for low-income/low access populations, including SNAP beneficiaries and others referred by the local hospital. However, as committed as we are to these potential customers, money is always an issue, and funding for both SNAP and grants is iffy. We have seen a net decline in SNAP users without grant funding to help them pay for their shares.

4. Discuss your community partnerships.

- i. Who are your community partners?
- ii. How have they contributed to the overall results of the LFPP project?
- iii. How will they continue to contribute to your project's future activities, beyond the performance period of this LFPP grant?

Yavapai Regional Medical Center (YRMC) - We continue to work with the director of the Family Resource Center. We hope to implement the Double Up Bucks Food Program with families from his caseload, but this program has required training that hasn't yet occurred.

Slow Food International – Working with this organization is allowing us to educate our community through outreach programs that Slow Food organizes, including those in elementary schools and other institutions (where we usually can't get in because we are "selling" something).

These organizations are well known in this community. Having them as partners allows us to expand our reach into many of the same communities who would appreciate what we do, for food and health reasons. We will continue to work with them as much as their commitment and collaboration will allow. In particular, the Slow Food group is growing, as is our presence within it.

5. Did you use contractors to conduct the work? If so, how did their work contribute to the results of the LFPP project?

We used contract labor for special installation projects of the equipment noted above. We also have a cooperative relationship with Yavapai College that sponsors an intern every season. This labor has helped us in many ways, notably with produce sorting, washing and packing for delivery.

6. Have you publicized any results yet?*
- i. If yes, how did you publicize the results?
- ii. To whom did you publicize the results?
- iii. How many stakeholders (i.e. people, entities) did you reach?

*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).

We have not published results yet, as our final project funds haven't been received or expended as of this writing. The results from the Cornucopia Community Advocates grant were noted in previous reports, but that grant expired and all funds were utilized for low-income/low access customers. CCA continues to support YCGrown and its mission of reaching low-income/low-access members of the community with fresh, locally grown food, and will likely offer funding in the future if they are able to do so.

7. Have you collected any feedback from your community and additional stakeholders about your work?
- i. If so, how did you collect the information?
- ii. What feedback was relayed (specific comments)?

We regularly receive feedback from stakeholders, customers and others in the food community, and nearly all of it is positive. We were especially pleased to support the creation of a new food hub serving Maricopa County in Arizona (Phoenix and the Valley of the Sun), by providing documents and direction to the team creating the hub. Cindy Gentry, its founder, routinely cites YCGrown as a seminal influence in the creation of their food hub, Sun Produce Co-op. See their Facebook page—note that many of their key growers are winter growers for YCGrown, since our seasons are opposite of each other: <https://www.facebook.com/sunproducecoop>

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?
 - a. If yes, how much was generated and how was it used to further the objectives of the award?

This project has not generated any net income. All net proceeds have been retained for continuing operations and reinvestment into advertising and promotion.

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).
- ii. If goals or outcome measures were not achieved, identify and share the lessons learned to help others expedite problem-solving:

- 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:

Lessons learned included the following:

- Work with your partners early and often. The collective ideas and wisdom will help you when things aren't going well. In particular, develop relationships with agricultural concerns in your area, including colleges and universities, other food hubs, local food or farming interest groups, etc. Educational concerns are a great place to expand your message to the community through guest lectures, and also provide a potential source of interns and volunteers. Our relationship with the local college has been invaluable in helping students and the community understand community agriculture, and all of our interns have come from student classes.
- Develop a plan, execute it and measure your results in a way that is meaningful – if you don't, or don't do so in a timely manner, you can't make well-informed, timely decisions.
- Be looking for additional employees (paid, volunteers, interns) as you find them. To illustrate, we found that tight financial management of the Co-op is essential, but our current managers are not experienced in that area; to ensure the Co-op is always on firm financial footing, we have looked outside for volunteer assistance. Should we expand or experience a change in management, we would require that person to be proficient in bookkeeping, at a minimum, and now ask prospective employees about their experience in that area.
- If you're running a cooperative, continually evaluate the quantity and quality of the products the member farms can provide. Faced with weather disasters, we encountered shortages and dips in quality, which our customers were not happy about. Better messaging about the risks inherent in agriculture would have helped, as would having additional growers located in unaffected areas. This year, we will redouble our efforts to have more growers so that weather impacts aren't noticeable. We also intend to expand our efforts into local restaurants, whose seasonal demand coincides with our seasonal supply. There has been a lot more interest in that sector of late, which we think will help us offset any losses in shares.
- Be certain to consider everything a project needs, especially sources of labor and contributions that you can use for items not covered by the grant.
- While we achieved most of the goals we set out to achieve, we've found that member retention is a continuing struggle for our CSA and others with whom we've spoken. Although customers like the service, they may grow tired of it; constant refreshing of the offering is essential. Our long-time members are very loyal, but newer members need a lot of attention and education to convert them to long-term status.
- Continuing visibility at community events is important and is encouraged. We have found that our current management model doesn't allow for enough of this activity, so we are re-evaluating our promotion efforts to expand our reach through in-person activities at farmers markets, hospital fairs, etc.

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.

- 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?

We continue to develop, expand, manage and promote YCGrown's CSA. As farmers, we're passionate about fresh, local food and want to share the important reasons underlying that passion with the wider community. We have positively impacted nearly 600 shareholders/families, 25 farms and ranches within Yavapai and Maricopa counties in Arizona, and several local restaurants. In addition, we are often called for advice from farmers and ranchers in other counties (e.g., Maricopa, Pinal) who want to replicate our model, and we continue to share our time and experience with others trying to bring local food benefits to their communities.

The USDA AMS grant funds have been and will continue to be essential to this effort. Without the grant, we could not have expanded, plain and simple. We would not have been able to sort, wash and pack the items on a small scale, let alone expand, without the equipment already provided. Our main goal is expanding to a manageable number of shares (no more than 300 in a season), and continuing our educational efforts. Farming doesn't generate huge revenue, but it is foundational to a community. YCGrown's footing is A LOT stronger as a result of this grant, and we are profoundly grateful.