

FARMERS' MARKET AND LOCAL FOOD PROMOTION PROGRAM (FMLFPP)
Final Performance Report

The final performance report summarizes the outcome and activities of your FMLFPP award objectives. Failure to submit acceptable closeout reports for an existing grant within 90 calendar days following the grant end date may result in exclusion from future AMS grant opportunities.

This final report will be made available to the public once it is approved by FMLFPP 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 **due within 90 days of the project's performance period end date** (as noted in box 15 of your grant agreement (AMS-33), or sooner if the project is complete. The report must be typed single-spaced in 11-point font, not to exceed fifteen (15) 8.5 x 11 pages (excluding existing Final Performance Report form content). For example, if the Final Performance Report form is six (6) pages before you begin entering your project information into the form, your report may be up to 21 pages (6 pages + 15 pages).

Provide answers to **each question** and all applicable outcome and indicators as it applies to your project. If you are unable to provide a response explain why. It is preferred that you email your completed performance report to your assigned FMLFPP Grants Management Specialist to avoid delays. In case of any extraordinary reason a faxed report can be accepted; please notify your assigned Grants Management Specialist to inform about your submission.

Report Date Range: <i>(e.g. October 1, 2016 -September 30, 2017)</i>	September 30, 2017 to March 31, 2019
Date Report Submitted	June 29, 2019
Grant Agreement Number: <i>(e.g. 14-LFPPX-XX-XXXX)</i>	AM170100XXXXG161
Recipient Organization Name:	Central Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission (CARPDC)
Project Title as Stated on Grant Agreement:	Central Alabama Region's Local Food Economy Development Plan: Food Hub Feasibility Study and Business Plan
Authorized Representative Name:	Pamela Trammell and Greg Clark
Authorized Representative Phone:	334-262-4300
Authorized Representative Email:	ptrammell@carpdc.com and gclark@carpdc.com
Year Grant was Awarded:	2017
Amount of Award:	\$66,442.00 Matching Funds from CARPDC \$22,147.33

FMLFPP 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: Pamela Trammell Email: ptrammell@carpdc.com _____; Phone: 334-262-4300

1. Executive Summary—In 200 words or less, describe the project's need, purpose, goals, and quantifiable outcomes:

This was a LFPP Planning Grant for the purpose of assessing Central Alabama's regional local food economy and develop a plan on increasing consumption and access to locally grown products and develop new market opportunities for farmers through a food hub opportunity. Goals focused on achieving this purpose by developing, improving, expanding, and providing outreach, training, and technical assistance to, or assisting in the development, improvement and expansion of local and regional food business enterprises that process, distribute, aggregate, or store locally or regionally produced food products. A strong central focus was the conducting a food hub feasibility study and, if the need was there, develop a business plan. There were outreach opportunities, training, technical assistance, partnership building, networking and surveying. The study looked at understanding the local food market; surveyed local farmers, potential food hub buyers, wholesale buyers, and stakeholders/partners. The retail

market for locally sourced foods was assessed as well as food safety and funding. The major conclusion is that it would not be economically feasible to operate a food hub in Central Alabama at this time without building more in-depth engagement, increasing agricultural production at small farms, increase education and awareness through networking and information exchange opportunities.

According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, an agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number. The valid OMB control number for this information collection is 0581-0287. The time required to complete this information collection is estimated to average 4 hours per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable sex, marital status, or familial status, parental status religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program (not all prohibited bases apply to all programs). Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotope, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (800) 795-3272 (voice) or (202) 720-6382 (TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

2. Please provide the approved project's objectives:

Objectives		Completed	
		Yes	No
1	Identify general regional demographics and food consumption	X	
2	Identify types of produce buyers demand	X	
3	Identify number and characteristics of fruit and vegetable farmers interested in selling to the food hub: quantity and type of produce	X	
4	Identify the number of acres of fruit or vegetable production growers could supply/add by 2020	X	
5	Assess grower interest in a food hub business structure vs. other models including cooperative	X	
6	Provide education to supply-side partners on difference operating models such as aggregation; basic packing services, value-added services, private labeling, shipping, etc.	X	
7	Determine the scale of facility (Hub/Cooperative) needed based on the size of the market	X	
8	Determine the breakeven operation of the Hub/Cooperative	X	
9	Determine requirements for supply and demand side including liability, GAP training and other cortication's or licenses required including a budget	X	
10	Determine an ideal location for the Hub/Cooperative <i>*through assessment, the study concluded that at this time the details of developing a food hub took less precedent than the building stronger engagement with famers and stakeholders; increasing agricultural production for small produce farmers; and extending additional outreach and educational/awareness opportunities. This assessment lead to no specific plan being developed though the concepts were topics of discussion.</i>		X
11	Determine the management and staffing needs including skill set and budget <i>*through assessment, the study concluded that at this time the details of developing a food hub took less precedent than the building stronger engagement with famers and stakeholders; increasing agricultural production for small produce farmers; and extending additional outreach and educational/awareness opportunities. This assessment lead to no specific plan being developed though the concepts were topics of discussion.</i>		X
12	Develop complete business plan for the Hub/Cooperative <i>*through assessment, the study concluded that at this time the details of developing a food hub took less precedent than the building stronger engagement with famers and stakeholders; increasing agricultural production for small produce farmers; and extending additional outreach and educational/awareness opportunities. This assessment lead to no specific plan being developed though the concepts were topics of discussion..</i>		X
13	Develop potential sources and uses of funds required to operate the Hub/Cooperative	X	

**If no is selected for any of the listed objectives, you must expand upon this in the challenges section.*

3. List your accomplishments for the project’s performance period and indicate how these accomplishments assisted in the fulfillment of your project’s objectives. Please include additional objectives approved by FMLFPP during the grant performance period, and highlight the impact that activities had on the project’s beneficiaries.

Accomplishments	Relevance to Objective, Outcome, and/or Indicator
Assessment of the Local Food Market	Objectives 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, Outcome 1, Indicator 1.a. and 1.c.; Outcome 5, Indicator 5.a.
Survey of Local Farmers	Objectives 2, 3,4,5, 7, 8 and 9, Outcome 1.a., 1.c., Outcome 3, Indicator 3.h., Outcome 5, Indicator 5.a., 5.b., Outcome 6, Indicator 6.a., 6.b, 6.,c..
Survey of Potential Food Hub Buyers	Objectives 2, 7, 8, 9, Outcome 1, 1.a, a, c., Outcome 3, 3.h.; Outcome 5, Indicator 5.a., 5.b., Outcome 6, Indicator 6.a., 6.b., 6.c.
Stakeholder/Partner Surveys	Objectives 2, 7, 8, 9, Outcome 1, 1.a, a, c., Outcome 3, 3.h.; Outcome 5, Indicator 5.a., 5.b., Outcome 6, Indicator 6.a., 6.b., 6.c.
Assessed/Identified Potential Wholesale Buyers for Locally Sourced Food in Central Alabama	Objectives 2, 5, 7, 8, 9,10, 11, 12, Outcome 1, 1.a, a, c., Outcome 3, 3.h.; Outcome 5, Indicator 5.a., 5.b., Outcome 6, Indicator 6.a., 6.b., 6.c.
Food Safety	Objective 9, Outcome 1, 1.a, a, c., Outcome 3, 3.h.; Outcome 5, Indicator 5.a., 5.b., Outcome 6, Indicator 6.a., 6.b., 6.c.
Funding Sources	Objective 13, Outcome 5, Indicator 5.c; Outcome 6, Indicator 6.a., 6.b., 6.c.
Assessment of Viability of Establishing a Food Hub at this Time in Central Alabama	Objectives1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9,10, 11, 12, 13 Outcome 1, 1.a, a, c., Outcome 3, 3.h.; Outcome 5, Indicator 5.a., 5.b., 5.c., Outcome 6, Indicator 6.a., 6.b., 6.c.
Created Food Initiative Goal within the Central Alabama Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies (CEDS) Plan	Objectives 2, 7, 8, 9, Outcome 1, 1.a, a, c., Outcome 3, 3.h.; Outcome 5, Indicator 5.a., 5.b., Outcome 6, Indicator 6.a., 6.b., 6.c.
Continued the Healthy Foods, Healthy Economics Summit through its Third Year Utilized for Education, Awareness, Partnership Building and Collaboration with all Stakeholders recognized by the LFPP Project. Central focus for three years has been food hub education and assessment of food insecurities, access, and solutions.	Objectives1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9,10, 11, 12, 13 Outcome 1, 1.a, a, c., Outcome 3, 3.h.; Outcome 5, Indicator 5.a., 5.b., 5.c., Outcome 6, Indicator 6.a., 6.b., 6.c.

4. Please list any challenges experienced during the project's period of performance. Provide the corrective actions taken to address these issues.

Challenges (Issues)	Corrective Actions and/or Project Changes (s)
Outreach to Farmers/Producers	Expanded outreach to additional counties; used phone surveys in addition to face-to-face; used their conferences to outreach and provide TA, and educational opportunities.
Time	All stakeholders are busy with their work. Used various mediums to reach stakeholders. And, time management coinciding with Grant Conditions had to be managed better
Produce to meet Demand	Central Alabama consists of small produce Farmers which are maxed out with commitments to their existing retail markets and commitments to farmer markets. Need more acreage for Increased production. Met with Alabama Agriculture Commission to discuss issues. Working toward solutions.
Outreach, Education and Awareness	All stakeholders, but especially farmers located rural Alabama, which impacted internet access, Cell phone service, etc. to reach farmers. Utilized traveling to meet face to face, attending Agriculture related conferences where they Would be in attendance, and using the mail Service.
Consultants and Travel	Consultant chosen for the Project was in-state Leaving travel, hotels, mileage money on the Table and when it was addressed to use in other Areas it was too late in the project. Stakeholders Were not enticed by the offering of \$25 mileage Checks. It was difficult to obtain a PR firm for Marketing, but marketing stakeholders worked With the project. This left additional project Money on the table and the solution was Too late to implement.

5. Quantify the overall progress on the outcomes and indicators of your project. Include further explanation if necessary.

Outcome 1: To Increase Consumption of and Access to Locally and Regionally Produced Agricultural Products.

Indicator	Description	Number
1.	Total number of consumers, farm and ranch operations, or wholesale buyers reached	
1.a.	The number that gained knowledge on how to buy or sell local/regional food OR aggregate, store, produce, and/or distribute local/regional food	555
1.b.	The number that reported an intention to buy or sell local/regional food OR aggregate, store, produce, and/or distribute local/regional food	
1.c.	The number that reported buying, selling, consuming more or supporting the consumption of local/regional food that they aggregate, store, produce, and/or distribute	200
2.	Total number of individuals (culinary professionals, institutional kitchens, entrepreneurs such as kitchen incubators/shared-use kitchens, etc.) reached	
2.a.	The number that gained knowledge on how to access, produce, prepare, and/or preserve locally and regionally produced agricultural products	
2.b.	The number that reported an intention to access, produce, prepare, and/or preserve locally and regionally produced agricultural products	
2.c.	The number that reported supplementing their diets with locally and regionally produced agricultural products that they produced, prepared, preserved, and/or obtained	

Outcome 2: Increase Customers and sales of local and regional agricultural products. *Not applicable to this project.*

Indicator	Description	Number
1.	Sales increased as a result of marketing and/or promotion activities during the project performance period.	
	Original Sales Amount (in dollars)	
	Resulted Sales Amount (in dollars)	
	Percent Change $((n \text{ final} - n \text{ initial}) / n \text{ initial}) * 100 = \% \text{ change}$	
2.	Customer counts increased during the project performance period.	
	Original Customer Count	
	Resulted Customer Count	
	Percent Change $((n \text{ final} - n \text{ initial}) / n \text{ initial}) * 100 = \% \text{ change}$	

Outcome 3: Develop new market opportunities for farm and ranch operations serving local markets. *Not applicable to this project.*

Indicator	Description	Number
1.	Number of new and/or existing delivery systems/access points of those reached that expanded and/or improved offerings of	
1.a.	Farmers markets	
1.b.	Roadside stands	
1.c.	Community supported agriculture programs	
1.d.	Agritourism activities	
1.e.	Other direct producer-to-consumer market opportunities	
1.f.	Local and regional Food Business Enterprises that process, aggregate, distribute, or store locally and regionally produced agricultural products	

Indicator	Description	Number
2.	Number of local and regional farmers and ranchers, processors, aggregators, and/or distributors that reported	
2.a.	An increase in revenue expressed in dollars	
2.b.	A gained knowledge about new market opportunities through technical assistance and education programs	67
3.	Number of	
3.a.	New rural/urban careers created (Difference between "jobs" and "careers": jobs are net gain of paid employment; new businesses created or adopted can indicate new careers)	
3.b.	Jobs maintained/created	
3.c.	New beginning farmers who went into local/regional food production	
3.d.	Socially disadvantaged famers who went into local/regional food production	
3.e.	Business plans developed	

Outcome 4: Improve the food safety of locally and regionally produced agricultural products. *Only applicable to projects focused on food safety! Not applicable to this project.*

Indicator	Description	Number
1.	Number of individuals who learned about prevention, detection, control, and intervention food safety practices	
2.	Number of those individuals who reported increasing their food safety skills and knowledge	
3.	Number of growers or producers who obtained on-farm food safety certifications (such as Good Agricultural Practices or Good Handling Practices)	

Outcome 5: Quantify the overall progress on this outcome indicator based on relevant project activities not covered above.

This indicator must reflect the project narrative's required additional outcome indicator.

Nationwide, the number of farmer's markets, CSAs, and food hubs have experienced good growth in recent years. The state of Alabama has what appears to be good geographical coverage of both farmer's markets (average of 2.2 per county) and CSAs (average of 1.2 per county). Nevertheless, the state has 246 identified food deserts while the Central Alabama market area has 51. The state has only one food hub (The Farm Food Collaborative) located in North Alabama. While farmer's markets and CSAs sell fresh locally grown produce principally to end use consumers, food hubs, depending on the individual business model, may sell to either end use consumers, to wholesale type buyers, or to both. Nationwide, 28% of all food hubs sell only to wholesale buyers, 39% sell principally to the end use consumer, and 33% are hybrids meaning they sell to both end use consumers and to wholesale buyers.

The market area for a potential food hub in Central Alabama has been defined to include the fifteen counties located within a 60-mile radius of Autauga County, located near the geographical center of Central Alabama. With the exception of the urbanized portion of Montgomery County, the proposed market area for a food hub in Central Alabama is principally a rural area. One in five of the market area's 622,000 residents are living at or below the poverty level, while one in three (31.3%) children in the area live in poverty. The average household income for the area in 2017 was \$61,300 which is \$3,000 less than the state's average household income.

In 2017, households in the Central Alabama market area spent approximately \$1.6 billion on food. Of this amount, an estimated \$170 million was spent on fruits and vegetables, of which close to two-thirds, or \$112 million was spent on fresh fruits and vegetables. Estimates show that 44% of the fruit consumed by U.S. households and 16% of the vegetables consumed by U.S. households are imported from other countries. The state of Alabama, including the Central Alabama food hub market area, contains numerous identified food deserts, which certainly builds a case for making more fresh produce available for local residents. The current study focuses on a food hub serving the needs of wholesale buyers. However, getting more locally grown produce into schools, hospitals, grocery stores, convenience stores, and nursing homes has the potential to help increase fruit and vegetable consumption among all residents.

In 2017, the 6,400 farms in the Central Alabama market area raised and produced agricultural products with a total market value of approximately \$819.6 million. Approximately 18% of the market value of all agricultural products produced in the area were crops, versus livestock sales which represented about 82% of the total farm output. The total market value of crop sales reported for the fifteen county market area of \$142.4 million is somewhat understated since one of the smaller county's crop sales were not reported.

However, using total market proportions, we estimate the missing data to be \$8.0 million. This would bring the total estimated market value of crop products in the targeted area to \$150.8 million. From these numbers, we estimate that the market value of fruit and vegetable crops as a percent of total crops in the area is about 8.5%. Direct sales of farm products to consumers in the market area in 2017 were approximately \$1.5 million. With the total market value of fruits and vegetables sold by farmers in the area equaling \$12.8 million, we estimate that direct sales of fruits and vegetables by farmers to consumers is about 12% of total production of fresh produce. In 2017, households in the defined fifteen county market area spent an estimated \$112 million on fresh fruits and vegetables. However, farmers in the region produced fruits and vegetables that year with a market value of just \$12.8 million. This means that local consumers are purchasing 89% of their fresh fruits and vegetables that were produced outside the region.

As part of this assessment study, a telephone survey was conducted with forty-six local area farmers. Twenty-nine (63%) of those surveyed currently grow and sell vegetables to buyers while twenty-eight farmers (61%) grow and sell fruits to buyers. Some farmers grow and sell both vegetables and fruits. The dominate distribution channels used by local farmers who grow and sell fruits and vegetables are on-farm sales, farmer's markets, and CSAs. A few direct sales to wholesale type customers were mentioned by the farmers and included restaurants (n=4), grocery stores (n=4), and schools (n=2). A majority (62%) of the farmers reported that their income from farming in 2018 was less than \$25,000. Farmers noted that their greatest difficulties in expanding sales and profits was connecting to buyers (n=12), followed by increasing production (n=7), advertising and marketing (n=7), and reducing spoilage (n=6). One-half of the farmers surveyed reported they have been growing and selling local produce for more than ten years while thirteen farmers have been in the produce business for less than six years.

Close to eight out of ten (78%) of the farmers surveyed are using 50 acres or less to grow their produce. One objective of this study was to estimate the potential increase in acreage expansion by the farmers if a food hub opened in the market area and offered them a "fair price" for their produce. Farmers provided a low-end acreage estimate and a high-end estimate. The average low-end estimate was 29 acres while the average high-end estimate was 32 acres. One interpretation of these data is that there may be a moderate amount of elasticity in the farmers' motivation or interest to expand the amount of acreage they will devote to growing and selling fruits and vegetables.

Farmers who expressed some level of interest in selling their produce through a food hub want to expand their sales to consumers and to wholesale buyers. They also expressed strong interest in using selected services offered by a food hub. Further, close to two-thirds of those interested in selling produce through a food hub stated they could expand production if they had help from a food hub with processing, marketing, etc.

The services farmers were most interested in receiving from a food hub included getting connected to new local buyers, receiving education in key business skills, and in food processing. Those who expressed interest in selling through a food hub stated they would be more likely to sell through a food hub if the growers could have some ownership in the facility and if the food hub could pick up produce from their farm. Others would have more interest in selling through a food hub if the hub had facilities to process and/or to add value to their produce. Most of those interested in selling through a food hub said they would be willing to participate in preseason crop planning with a food hub. A good majority (69%) of those farmers interested in selling through a food hub stated they were familiar with some ways to extend the growing season for farm products, and a big majority stated they would invest in season extension if product demand were identified.

Based on the survey of potential food hub customers from the Central Alabama area, seven out of twenty-one indicated that they are currently purchasing some locally sourced produce. Most of the wholesale food buyers surveyed would like to see their purchases of locally sourced food increase in the future. Buyers noted that the main barriers preventing them from purchasing more locally grown food were lack of produce availability (especially noted was the lack of availability in sufficient quantities) and company/corporate policy or guidelines preventing companies from buying locally sourced produce. A major regional educational campaign targeting growers, buyers, and partners/stakeholders is necessary prior to moving forward. Nine of the twenty-one wholesale food buyers indicated that it had been difficult for them to make arrangements to purchase locally sourced food products. The main reasons buyers stated that it has been difficult for them to make arrangements to purchase locally sourced food included: not having access/availability, not enough time to find product sourcing, and regulations set up by “corporate”.

It should be stressed that currently it is very cumbersome for larger wholesale food buyers to purchase local produce in Central Alabama. And while a food hub can make things less cumbersome, there is initial concern over whether or not the region’s small produce farmers will be able to meet the quantities demanded by large scale buyers. The potential supply issue, coupled with the perceived lack of engagement of key stakeholders, would represent somewhat serious challenges if the Central Alabama food hub were operating today. As noted earlier, sixteen of the twenty-one wholesale food buyers surveyed indicated they are not familiar with a food hub. And on the supply side, close to one-half of the local growers indicated they are unfamiliar with food hubs. The surveys did, however, identify some positive attitudes towards the proposed food hub.

When the twenty-one wholesale food buyers were asked to indicate their level of interest in doing business with a food hub, eight of them said they were either extremely interested or very interested. Further, fifteen out of twenty-one buyers stated they would be willing to work out a plan with a food hub that would help their organization purchase more locally grown food. Finally, eighteen of twenty-one buyers surveyed agreed that having a food hub in their area would increase the opportunity for them to buy more locally grown food.

The idea for a food hub to serve produce farmers and consumers in Central Alabama originated from three “Healthy Foods, Healthy Economics” summits held in 2016, 2017, and 2018. These summits were coordinated by Pamela Trammell with the Central Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission (CARPDC). One of the objectives of the food summits was to focus on a vision to increase fresh food access for Alabamians. Another complementary objective focused on increasing the effectiveness of local food systems and finding ways for local produce farmers to gain access to expanded markets for their fresh fruits and vegetables. Shortly after the 2016 food summit, Ms. Trammell announced that CARPDC was writing a grant to study the feasibility of a food hub in Central Alabama.

In addition to stakeholders attending the three summits, twelve additional stakeholders/partners were interviewed for this feasibility assessment. A big majority of those surveyed indicated that their agency promotes the consumption of locally grown food and that they collaborate to promote the consumption of locally grown food. Ten of the twelve stakeholder/partner agencies stated that they are currently partnering with another agency to help deal with the issue of food insecurity. When compared to the survey of growers and wholesale buyers, the stakeholder/partner participants seemed to be more familiar with food hubs. Stakeholders noted that the barriers preventing local residents from buying more locally grown food included lack of access, cost, and transportation. The stakeholders/partners believe that the biggest barrier preventing local schools from serving more locally grown food include availability (volume available), purchasing policies of schools, as well as existing distribution channels.

Several in-depth personal interviews were conducted with other important stakeholders/partners. One of these interviews was conducted with individuals who operate the Farm Food Collaborative Food Hub in Huntsville (see *Appendix D*). This food hub is the only one in Alabama and our interview with Ms. Martin-Lane and her staff brought out the fact that operating a food hub in Alabama is very challenging. And, without partnering opportunities and a continuous inflow of grant money, gifts, and donations, sustainability would be doubtful. The Huntsville Farm Food Collaborative is fortunate to have directors and workers who truly know how to run a lean and flexible organization.

The major conclusion reached from this assessment is that it would not be economically feasible to operate a food hub in Central Alabama at this time. The following discussion analyzes the reasons for this conclusion and proposes recommendations for improving the prospect that a food hub can be successful in the area.

A big majority (89%) of fresh fruits and vegetables consumed by residents of the Central Alabama market area are grown in California, Florida, Mexico, and beyond. One of the issues affecting the supply of locally sourced produce in the area is undoubtedly related to the relatively large proportion of small farms in Central Alabama. Based on the produce farmers surveyed, 78% grow produce on 50 acres or less and 62% reported income in 2018 of less than \$25,000. When all types of farms are considered, the average sales per farm is somewhat high at \$128,035. The area has 20 farmer's markets and 18 CSAs who are selling local foods at retail to end-users. And, among the farmers surveyed, most indicated they are selling their local produce through on-farm sales. The survey of wholesale and institutional food buyers revealed that only about one out of three are currently buying locally raised fruits and vegetables. There are barriers to overcome for area farmers selling local food to these buyers. However, wholesale and institutional food buyers likely represent the greatest potential to increase the proportion of locally sourced food consumed in the market area.

Small farms individually are usually unable to supply the quantity of fresh food items demanded by the larger wholesale and institutional food buyers. However, aggregators can assist the small area farmers by collecting quantities of fresh food items from several producers enabling them to collectively supply the volumes requested by wholesale and institutional food buyers. One of the more important functions of a food hub is aggregation. And, there is little doubt that key stakeholders in the Central Alabama market can potentially benefit from other services provided by a food hub. However, before a food hub in Central Alabama can have a reasonable chance of becoming a sustainable economic entity, there must be indications that there is a buy-in among key stakeholders. There must be evidence of community engagement particularly among farmers and wholesale food buyers.

There are indicators from both the survey of farmers and the survey of wholesale and institutional food buyers that food hubs and the role they play in the marketing of agricultural food products are not well known. Close to one-half of the produce farmers surveyed were not familiar with food hubs. The wholesale and institutional food buyers were even less familiar with food hubs (16 out of 21 not familiar). Further, just seven of the twenty-one food buyers surveyed have purchased locally raised food items. However, there are some positive findings from the surveys. First, a majority of farmers expressed a willingness to expand acreage devoted to raising fruits and vegetables and indicated they would cooperate with suggested ways to increase local output in other ways. While the wholesale buyers were generally not familiar with food hubs, they nevertheless expressed favorable opinions toward doing business with them.

Before a decision is made to move forward and establish a food hub in Central Alabama, there needs to be good indication of strong community and stakeholder engagement with the idea. Planners will get one shot at establishing a viable regional food hub in Central Alabama and the chances of making the right decision will be significantly enhanced when its assured that the community is truly engaged with the decision to move forward. An in-depth interview with Carey Martin-Lane, director of the Huntsville food hub (Farm Food Collaborative) is included in this report (see *Appendix D*). Ms. Martin-Lane discusses in her interview that it is a battle every day to keep things going and as she notes, after eight years of operation, “we are not currently securing enough grant funds to cover operating costs not covered by program revenue.” One of our recommendations discussed below is for establishing a web-based capacity to promote and monitor the site’s activity and exchange of ideas pertaining to food hubs as one way to assess progress on the level of community and stakeholder engagement.

6. Discuss your community partnerships (include applicant staff and external partners).
 - i. Who were your community partners?

Our Community Partners listed in our Grant Application and who participated were: Montgomery County Commission, City of Prattville, Central Alabama Electric Co-Operative, Harvest Tyme Farm, E.A.T. South Farm, Central Alabama Economic Development District, and Central Alabama Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Plan (CEDs) Partners. Changes from what was listed in the application: Harvest Tyme Farm sold their farm to Auburn University and Cornell University for experimental use.

New partners: The Hunger Institute, Auburn University (School of Agriculture and Social Economics, The Food Institute), Opelika Farmers Market and Greenhouses, The River Region United Way, The Alabama Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association, The Alabama Agri-Business Council, Town of Autaugaville, City of Millbrook, Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries, and Sweet Creek Farms.

Additional partners: The Wellness Coalition, the Alabama Department of Public Health, VOICES for Alabama’s Children, Alabama Extension Service, Alabama Department of Economics and Community Affairs, The Alabama Healthy Financing Initiative, various Legislators, farmers (listed in the report), other agencies (listed in the report) that are actively working with food access, various Mayors, Commissioners from around Central Alabama, and Regional Councils similar to Central Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission (CARPDC). Staff involved included a Community Development Specialist who administered the project, and two Senior Planners.

- ii. How did they contribute to the overall results of the FMLFPP project?

Various ways they contributed included: surveys, attending the action meetings, conference calls, Food Summit, agriculture related conferences, providing feedback, providing meeting space, presenting at meetings, committing to the food initiative issues, soaking in the educational information, working with policy and funding issues that impact food initiative activities at the state level, etc. The ways to involve stakeholders is endless and should not be held to a “we’ve always done it this way” perspective.

- iii. How will they continue to contribute to your project's future activities, beyond the performance period of this FMLFPP grant?

Most of the stakeholders are participating in action groups which will continue and have assignments to work on. A Roadmap to Food Initiative Sustainability is begin written and will be further developed and implemented upon completion. The Healthy Foods, Healthy Economics Summit will continue. Activities to help build more in-depth engagement will be discussed and implemented. Farmer outreach will continue. There are expectations of increasing partners and networking.

- iv. What feedback have the partners provided (specific comments) about the results of the project?

Have not shared the Project Results yet. Will be doing so at a July meeting.

7. How do you plan to publicize the results?

- i. To whom (i.e. people, entities) do you plan to publicize the project results?

The results of this Project and Feasibility Study will be presented at various meetings of the stakeholders involved in the Central Alabama Food Initiatives; at CEDS meetings; at the 2019 Alabama Association of Regional Commissions Annual Conference, 2019 Alabama Planning Association Conference; 2019 Alabama Fruit and Vegetable Farmers Conference, the action groups established from the Healthy Foods, Healthy Economics Summit, at the 2020 Food Summit, through various publications produced by stakeholders and state agencies, etc. It will be printed and disseminated to various stakeholders, state agencies, and non-profits working with food accessibility programs in Central Alabama. We will utilize this Project and study in planning other initiatives and writing other grants. This work will not halt now that the grant has ended. These are crucial issues for Alabama as a State and Central Alabama specifically.

- ii. When do you plan to publicize the results?

Beginning in late July 2019.

*If you have publicized the results, please 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).

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

Not yet.

- i. If so, how did you collect the information? n/a
- ii. What feedback was relayed (specific comments)? n/a

9. 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: Yes
- ii. Did the project generate any income? Yes No
 - a. If yes, \$ _____ generated and how was it used to further the objectives of this project?
- iii. In the table below include the total amount of **federal funds spent** during the grant performance period (**Do not** include matching or in-kind contributions) (*These figures include total grant period and final request*):

Categories	Amount Approved in Budget	Actual Federal Expenditures (Federal Funds ONLY)
Personnel:		
Fringe:		
Contractual:	\$44,500.00	\$32,500.00
Equipment:		
Travel:	\$8,750	\$00.00
Supplies:	\$900.00	\$391.02
Other:		
Indirect Costs:	\$12,292.00	\$12,292.00
TOTAL:	\$66,442.00	\$45,183.02

- iv. **ONLY for LFPP recipients:** Provide the amount of matching funds/in-kind contributions used during the grant performance period.

Categories	Match Approved in Budget	Actual Match Expenditures
Personnel:	\$22,147.33	\$22,147.33
Fringe:		
Contractual:		
Equipment:		
Travel:		
Supplies:		
Other:		
Indirect Costs:		
TOTAL:	\$22,147.33	\$22,147.33

10. Lessons Learned:

- i. Summarize any lessons learned. They should draw on 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).

We learned, even before this project started, that stakeholders had a general awareness of food insecurities and food access issues but these were not priorities in Central Alabama. Food hubs were not a recognizable solution due to lack of awareness. Outreach, education and building partners has been a huge undertaking, but well worth the work to build engagement, awareness and collaborate toward solutions.

We learned that outreach strategies had to come face to face with rural Alabama and internet (by email) and cell phone service rarely worked. Flyers/communication was mailed or we traveled to the farms to meet with farmers and their families. Attending farmers markets was a viable outreach activity due to having a large number of farmers gathered in one place. Attending the state agricultural meetings and conferences were a tool toward communication as well. We used exhibits and participated in presenting to the attendees.

The agency lesson was recognizing the staff time it takes to work on food initiatives without adding additional staff to the existing staffing plan. It has taken an increased amount of juggling projects to dedicate time, monitor consultant and the work being achieved, participate in meetings, calls, conferences, write, review, etc.

We learned that there is desire and commitment to continue this work even though at this moment a food hub is not going to be established. The Stakeholders are committed to further outreach, education, partnership engagement, and discovering workable solutions to address the food insecurities and food access for Central Alabama. The establishing of a food hub will not be taken off the table. Additional viable projects will be reviewed, such as a Mobile Market. Currently a feasibility study is being conducted for this purpose.

The Local Food Assessment brought forth realities of the small farmers who concentrate on fruit and vegetable production. The economic impact of their current retail market and farmers markets stretched thin their available produce. The Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries is working with the stakeholders of the project to address acreage increases for growing larger crops as well as how extending seasonal produce into year round crops can increase the economic footprint.

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

A specific business plan, identification of location for a food hub, budget and staff management were not developed. These topics were weaved into outreach, education and partnership building. The Third Annual Healthy Foods, Healthy Economics Summit (September 2018) focused on every aspect of establishing, financing, and the management of staff and produce regarding food hubs. Additional focus also featured presentations, demonstrations, and experience opportunities regarding other avenues of addressing food access and food insecurities. This opportunity will continue as it has shown to impact stakeholders and their future participation in food initiative projects and advocacy.

- ii. Describe any lessons learned in the administration of the project that might be helpful for others who would want to implement a similar project:

Do not hesitate to call/email all your questions (even those you do not think are important) to your Project Officer for further guidance and direction. Learn about the TA Centers and Webinars and how they can help. I don't think the webinars were geared toward the LFPP planning grants, but ask for possible topic inclusions so that planning issues can be addressed.

Be clear on management of deadlines, reports and how to do the financial paperwork. Implement appropriate staff management and time management.

- iii. Discuss if and how the result of this project can be adapted to other regions, communities, and/or agricultural systems.

Though every region and community is unique, the methods used in their project are adaptable to any planning related project. Food initiative related stakeholders are not difficult to find or solicit to participate. Keep communication brief, on point, current and fresh. Offer resource links to websites, webinars, etc. Engage often. Give assignments to stakeholders so that they have invested interests. Interact with other States and their groups working on food initiatives. Listen, learn, and collaborate.

11. Future Work:

- i. ***How will you continue the work of this project beyond this grant? In other words, how will you implement 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. – not applicable to LFPP Planning Grant.)

We will follow-up on the recommendations of the study utilizing stakeholder working groups. The most important recommendation leading to the potential establishment of a food hub in Central Alabama is to first ***build engagement*** in the concept of a food center/food hub. The best way to build engagement is through education programs, creating networking opportunities, aggregation assistance to help small farmers, and developing a mechanism to identify individual and/or groups who want to play a role in promoting, organizing, owning, and/or managing a food hub in Central Alabama.

✓ **Aggregation**

Small farmers especially, can benefit from an initial aggregation effort. The target for this effort includes farmers trying to access wholesale and institutional markets. As previously noted, schools in the area are underperforming when it comes to using locally sourced food in their lunch programs. One small producer may not be able to meet volume specifications but through aggregation of products with other farmers, all can benefit. The good thing about aggregation activities is not only are they key functions of a food hub, they are also visible activities allowing both producers and buyers to observe some initial benefits of establishing a food hub.

✓ **Education Programs**

A sizeable proportion of both producers and wholesale food buyers who were surveyed for this study were not familiar with food hubs.

Programs need to be implemented that create awareness, interest, and benefits of having a food hub located in the area. Likewise, strong consumer awareness programs should be implemented in the market area as well.

✓ **Networking and Information Exchange**

We recommend the development of a web-based capacity to promote the exchange of ideas and opportunities pertaining to the proposed food hub. Producers, buyers, and others could use the site to discuss general farming issues, access to labor, training, equipment sharing, shared processing and storage opportunities. By monitoring the discussions pertaining to food hubs, planners will be able to assess engagement intensity and identify individuals and/or groups who have expressed interest in playing a role in promoting, organizing, owning, and/or managing the facility.

- 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 are concluding a Mobile Market Feasibility Study, which may lead to options to address food access and food insecurities while we are working on the recommendations from the LFPP Project Study. The 2020 Healthy Foods, Healthy Economics Summit is being planned and will focus on outreach, education and partnership building around food initiatives and issues. The working action groups will continue to address current food related issues. Once The Roadmap to Food Initiative Sustainability is complete, steps will be taken for implementation. Organizing working leadership and collaborations will be a strong focus as well.