Local Food Promotion Program (LFPP)
Final Performance Report

Report Date Range: *(e.g. September 30, 2015-September 29, 2016)*	September 30, 2015- September 29, 2016
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Recipient Organization Name:	Southwest Louisiana Area Health Education Center
Project Title as Stated on Grant Agreement:	Building Community Food Systems in Southwest Louisiana
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Year Grant was Awarded:	2015
Project City/State:	Lafayette, Louisiana
Total Awarded Budget:	$24, 990

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: _______________

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.

Goal: Generate local knowledge and business resources, to promote regional food enterprises and reveal viable market opportunities.

Objective 1: Identify baseline of current market capacity and production capacity of local food in the Acadiana region

Progress Made and Impact on Community: Surveys have been completed by farmers, processors, distributers and buyers. These questions were designed to examine capacity for demand, distribution, processing and production; identify barriers; provide context for needs of the community and to support the business; and to review processing capacity, as well as current economic viability and future growth. Respondents included 21 farmers, 8 buyers (primarily restaurants) and 3 processors/distributors. We feel the representation of local produce farmers is quite good and included a majority of the farms in our core area of Acadiana, surrounding the city of Lafayette. While 3 processors/distributors is not a large sample size, we did not find there to be very many of these businesses in the region, perhaps 10-20 (depending on if some of the value-added processors who sell exclusively at farmers markets are counted here or as a "buyer"). The 8 buyers surveyed were mostly restaurants, but included a few grocery/cafe establishments. This is only a very small subset of potential buyers in our region; according to the USDA ERS Food Environment Atlas (2012 data), our 9 parish region has 800+ full service restaurants and nearly 200 grocery stores, plus numerous more institutional food servers such as hospital or school cafeterias. We targeted our survey to those few enterprises we know to be particularly interested in local food, but even a small amount of additional local food purchasing from this deep pool of demand would be a huge positive impact on the local food economy.
Although Building Community Food Systems in Southwest Louisiana is a planning project used to assess the current food system in Southwest Louisiana, the impact of the survey was immense

in that all factors of the food supply chain were given a voice to address their concerns as well as gave the coalition a better understanding of the needs and better allows us to focus our work in improving the community food system.

Objective 2: Analyze existing local food supply chain (aggregating, storing, processing, distributing) for new or expanded business opportunities

Progress Made and Impact on Community: Our surveys showed that nearly 60% of our respondents farms do not exceed 5 acres (see chart, "% respondents farm this acreage"), and earned up to but typically substantially less than $10,000 annually (see chart, "Average income by farm size"). This suggests the farms may benefit from increasing in size, although the 1/3rd of our respondents farming 6-20 acres still made an average of only $15,000/year. The largest farms, 21-100 acres in size, appear to be financially viable. It is important to note that these results need additional validation due to low sample size and the coarse estimations asked of respondents. Nonetheless, these numbers show it is very difficult for farmers in our area, particularly with small-farm operations, to earn a living. For context, though, according to the 2014 LSU Ag Summary Data, vegetable farms throughout the state grew on 8,246 acres and earned $76 million, which averages to $9,000/acre. Farmers in our area are earning $500-$2,000/acre, which indicates there is tremendous opportunity for income growth. Two factors emerged from our research which may shed a little light on opportunities to grow farm profits. Only 6% of our farmer respondents sell to restaurants. A similar dynamic exists with other institutional buyers, only 8% of respondents sell to grocery stores. Additionally, 40% of farmers in our area are not harvesting during the 6 month Fall to Spring period. Both these results indicate opportunities lost. Commercial buyers such as restaurants and grocery stores can provide a strong and steady demand for produce, and can become a long-term business relationship between farmer and buyer. Louisiana's climate produces a relatively mild winter framed by good Fall and Spring growing conditions. Many farmers can and do grow during these seasons, and many consider it the preferred growing time, lacking the weed and insect pressures of summer.

Survey Questions

Farmer survey questions:

1. What is the name of your farm and where is it located?
2. What are the primary crops produced on your farm?
3. What percentage of your harvest is sold at farmers market/direct sales; grocery stores; restaurants/institutions; distributors?
4. What on-farm processing to you do, post-harvest? (washing, bundling, grading/sorting, bagging, etc.)
5. How do you get your product from farm to buyer?
6. What certifications do you or your farm have?
7. What certifications would you like to have?
8. How many acres to you have under production in an average year?
9. How many additional acres could you put under production, if you decided to?
10. Why have you not already increased your production acreage to the maximum you have available?
11. Relatively speaking, how big is your harvest each month, in an average year?
12. After harvesting your crop, do you have long-term or short-term storage available on you farm? Off farm? Please describe: capacity and type of storage.
13. What is the average annual income from your farm? Does this sustain your farm & family?
14. What do you need, to increase your capacity to grow and sell?

Buyer survey questions:

1. What is the name of your business and where is it located?
2. What are the primary activities of your business?

3. Have your customers expressed interest in buying local fruits/vegetables from you?
4. Do you currently meet your customer's demands for local food?
5. How much do you spend on buying local food annually?
6. What, if any, additional dollars would you be willing to spend on local food annually?
7. Why have you not already increased the amount of locally food you buy?
8. What local fruits or vegetables are you currently buying?
9. What additional local fruits or vegetables would you like to buy?
10. What are the barriers to you buying more local foods?
11. What significant local, state or federal requirements or certifications do you follow?
12. How important are farmer/farm certifications to your purchasing decisions?
13. What pre-purchase processing do you expect to be done?
14. What long-term or short-term storage do you have for fresh or processed fruits/vegetables (fresh and value added products)?
15. What post -purchase processing of local foods is performed on-site?

Distributer/Producer survey questions:
1. What is the name of your business and where is it located?
2. What are the primary activities of your business?
3. Have your customers expressed interest in buying local fruits/vegetables from you?
4. Do you currently meet your customer's demands for local food?
5. How much do you spend on buying local food annually?
6. What, if any, additional dollars would you be willing to spend on local food annually?
7. Why have you not already increased the amount of locally food you buy?
8. What are the barriers to you processing or distributing more local foods?
9. What local fruits or vegetables are you currently buying?
10. What additional local fruits or vegetables would you like to buy?
11. What are the fruit/vegetable distribution options you offer? (pick-up and/or deliver)
12. What are the fruit/vegetable processing options you offer?
13. What are the packaging options you offer?
14. What significant local, state or federal requirements or certifications do you follow?
15. What pre-purchase processing do you expect to be done?
16. What long-term or short-term storage do you have for fresh or processed fruits/vegetables (fresh and value added products)?

Objective 3: Assess viability and possible business models of a food hub.

Progress Made and Impact on Community: the 11 buyers we surveyed, 9 indicated that access to local food was a barrier to increased purchases Access challenges include knowing who/where to buy from, time-consuming delivery and inconvenience, finding supply of preferred produce, and quantity of available supply. Several buyers encouraged a network or collaboration among local growers to reduce redundancy in their products, so that they are able to purchase from more farmers in the area. Others indicated that it is not financially viable to buy (or to buy very much) locally because it is more expensive. Reliability is a concern as well; unpredictable supply limits what buyers can purchase and is often known only on a week to week basis. This in turn limits overall purchases of local food, because corporate buyers must otherwise order from their distributors a week or more in advance. Seasonal menus are therefore very difficult to maintain. Conversely, farmers found it difficult to sell directly to restaurants because of the investment of time to develop a relationship and communications with each restaurant and the delivery times required, all of which takes them away from the work in their fields (and may not be strength of the farmer).

Among our respondents, certifications were minimally acquired and minimally in demand. Most farmers feel the Certified Organic process is difficult to achieve and time consuming to maintain, which reflects the fact that none of the farmers we interviewed are certified. Several, however, do minimize or eliminate the use of non-organic practices. Of these farmers a few have considered pursuing an alternative, Certified Naturally Grown, but to date none have followed through. GAP (Good Agricultural Practices) certification is important in the near future due to recent USDA policy changes, and several farmers suggested they would need training and/or financial support to meet and maintain these national food safety standards. Overall, farmers relied on their direct relationships with their customers to educate them on their farming practices and assure them of the safety or sustainability of their produce. From the buyer perspective, certifications were not a concern. They too placed more importance on direct relationships and buying local than on national certifications, although at least one respondent is already a Certified Green Restaurant and is a proponent of the system and its value.

Expanding supply seems viable in light of the demand expressed from buyers, but there are several real and perceived barriers. When asked what limits the expansion of their farm and sales, 7 of the 21 farmer respondents indicated lack of demand, 8 said finding or paying for labor was a limiting factor and 9 said they were not interested in expansion (see table below). Many of the farmers were not interested in expanding capacity because of their age or health, or because they deemed growing a hobby, rather than a regular source of income. Labor was one of the critical factors, either the cost was too high, or skilled workers were not available. However, financial reasons appear to rule the roost - most respondents indicating labor as a limiting factor also indicated they could not afford the labor required to expand, those mentioning lack of demand indicate they would lose money due to low sales, and a few mentioned lack of financing to pay for expensive expansion costs (for equipment, inputs or farm infrastructure).

Brand development and marketing for direct, retail and wholesale distribution are a necessary component of bringing produce to market, but most farmers lack the knowledge, skills and time to develop these strategies in-house. A food aggregation and distribution service may address some of these needs but more effort may be needed to reach a more regional, or even statewide, customer base. In Vermilion/Iberia parishes, the development of the "Delcambre Direct" smartphone application (and subsequent other local port offshoots) provide shrimpers and fishermen a way to announce their catch before they reach the port with their fresh harvest, ensuring maximum potential sales. A similar system may work for local farmers, if a farmer/producer network can be effectively established and nurtured.

Considering the above feedback of the survey of farmers, buyers, processors, and distributors a food hub in the Acadiana area of Southwest Louisiana is a viable solution to positively impacting and building the local community food system.

2. <u>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, 2016). Include further explanation if necessary</u>.

<u>Number of direct jobs created, retained, expanded : Number of New Markets Established:</u>
Although the purpose of the Building Community Food Systems in Southwest Louisiana project is to assess the local food system activity in Southwest Louisiana can be fueled by the development of new food system infrastructure for regionally produced food. The intermediary local food supply chain activities of aggregating, storing, processing and distribution together compose a very wide range of possible business enterprises. The possibilities range from bicycle delivery services, to locally sourced and made pickles, to custom cold storage facilities, to commissary services for food trucks and other mobile restaurants, in addition to the traditional food hub activities of connecting specialty and wholesale crops from farms to restaurants,

groceries and institutional kitchens. With all of these possibilities there could be at least 75 to 100 jobs created.

Regionalizing food systems help to decrease the environmental impact of food production, increase the prosperity of farmers, bolster communities' food security and creates a positive economic impact for the food supply chain. Healthy regional food systems are critical to the future of our rural and urban communities and a food hub has been proven in other communities to be an investment in building a stronger, safer, and more resilient food system. With the severe decline in the number of farms and farmland in Louisiana and increasing consolidation in the food system as a whole, there is now a strong consumer demand for locally and sustainably produced food. Acadiana consumers are asking to be served locally grown food, and this planning grant will help our community develop new businesses that will meet those demands.

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?
   The purpose of this project is a feasibility study of the local food system in Southwest Louisiana. Expanding a customer base was not a focus of the project. Not applicable at this planning phase of the project. Additionally the data collected through surveying did not include demographic information.

4. Discuss your community partnerships.

Lafayette Consolidated Govt., Lafayette City Planners Office , Lafayette Convention and Visitor's, Lafayette Economic Development Authority , Downtown Development Association, Chambers of Commerce , Produce Farmers, Cattle Farmers , Lafayette Parish School System, University of Louisiana –UL, LSU Agriculture , Restaurant Owners, Chefs, Local Food Businesses , Louisiana Culinary Enterprise Assoc., Farmers Market Managers and not-for-profit representatives. Each of these entities is individually working on improving the health of people living in Southwest Louisiana; each with an interest in developing a stronger local food system to improve economy and health. They have come together to form the Acadiana Food Alliance to address these issues as a cohesive group all working towards a common goal.

How have they contributed to the overall results of the LFPP project?

Partners have provided input into the development of the surveys, have been surveyed themselves, and have been active with surveying others. The Acadiana Food Alliance (AFA), located in Lafayette, Louisiana, is a strong coalition comprised of representatives of parish government, school systems, restaurant owners, economic development, post-secondary education, chefs, restaurant managers, farmers and cattle ranchers. In February, 2014 the Acadiana Food Alliance began when small farmers, community leaders, local officials, non-profit organizations, restaurateurs and food industry professionals came together to map, understand and strengthen the area food economy. This convergence of efforts, particularly the participation of local government and economic development agencies, represents a watershed moment for the development of a place-based food economy in the greater Acadiana area.

The strength of the Acadiana Food Alliance and potential for growth in our region was validated by the award of **Local Foods, Local Places Technical Assistance** from the US EPA (in partnership with USDA, US HUD, & US DOT). Our community came together in March, 2015 with the technical assistance team to plan and prioritize the development of our local food system, documented in our Strategic Implementation Action Plan. We decided upon five goals that were most important and achievable, one of which closely aligns with this study:

Goal 5: Establish Acadiana as Louisiana's Local Food Storage & Distribution Hub
In our Strategic Implementation Action Plan, the Acadiana Food Alliance set additional goals that will be supported by the successful development of intermediate food enterprises. Goal Three supports the establishment of farm-to-school programs, and their success will partially depend on the ability to get farm produce to the schools in large enough quantities to be useful. Both aggregating and processing will be required, but currently neither is available. Goal Four aims to support new farmers, to increase the production capacity for local food in the region. These new farmers need viable outlets for their product, to give them the confidence and financial security to launch a farm business.

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

Partners will assist in disseminating the findings report and will assist in grant writing for the implementation grant for the next round. Additionally this assessment will be used to drive the work of the coalition moving forward as it meets the identified coalition goals. The coalition is currently working with a private partner who is currently developing a food hub and will feature both, incubator and commissary kitchens. This facility is still in development, but expects to be operational by January 2017. The FDA-certified incubator kitchen will be available on an hourly basis for the production and packaging of wholesale items. It has attached to it a fulfillment center that allows for storage of products, raw materials and equipment. The food hub also offers brand development, marketing, packaging and labeling assistance, and order fulfillment. The commissary kitchen is designed for caterers, food trucks and virtual kitchens. This service is especially important for food trucks, required by state law to have a registered commissary space. The food hub offers this service in addition to secure parking, water fill and dump, warehouse and refrigerated space for storage as well as a direct conduit to locally produced ingredients.

5. Did you use contractors to conduct the work? If so, how did their work contribute to the results of the LFPP project?
   SWLAHEC worked with three contractors. Each contractor was instrumental in developing and conducting the feasibility study based on research, needs assessments and surveys directed to farmers, processors, distributers and buyers. They were able to use their contacts to reach survey takers and have gotten a good response. Additionally, the contractors were able to analyze the data and develop recommendations based on the assessments, research, and needs of the survey takers.

6. Have you publicized any results yet?*
   i. If yes, how did you publicize the results? The final report has been written and has been sent out to the members of the Acadiana Food Alliance
   ii. To whom did you publicize the results? Please see list above of community partners.
   iii. How many stakeholders (i.e. people, entities) did you reach? At this point the research findings have only been distributed to the Acadiana Food Alliance coalition members.

   *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).

7. <u>Have you collected any feedback from your community and additional stakeholders about your work?</u> We have collected feedback through the interactions with farmers, producers, and distributers and buyers.
    i. <u>If so, how did you collect the information?</u> Through surveys and additional commentary with survey takers.
    ii. <u>What feedback was relayed (specific comments)?</u>
    Farmers revealed that in its current state, farming is barely lucrative and most of it is for hobby and small side profits as in 60% of our respondents farms do not exceed 5 acres and earned up to but typically substantially less than $10,000 annually. Nearly 1/3rd of our respondents are farming 6-20 acres and said that they still made an average of only $15,000/year. Farmers in our area say that they are averaging earnings of $500-$2,000/acre, which indicates there is tremendous opportunity for income growth with improvements. Farmers indicated that they need financial assistance with purchasing materials required to become GAP certified. Additionally, farmers said that they would be very interested in participating in GAP trainings.

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? <u>NA</u>
        a. If yes, how much was generated and how was it used to further the objectives of the award? <u>NA</u>
9. Lessons Learned:

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).

Our community is poised and ready to support the local food economy, but faces several challenges to effectively meet the demand for fresh local produce on a regular basis. Although currently the “Farm to Table” concept is popular in Acadiana and we see regular locally-sourced, chef prepared meals presented as special events, only a few restaurants advertise as farm-to-table establishments. In reality, these establishments offer only about 10-30% locally-sourced ingredients, although one restaurant boasts its menu is almost 90% regionally or locally sourced. Greater supply with more regular consistency throughout the growing season would allow restaurants and other buyers to increase their locally-sourced menu options.

As hinted above, we found that demand far outstrips the supply of local produce in our region, but at the same time our farmers struggle with high financial risk and low profits. Some of this difference may be due to perception and lack of communication. When farmers view the financial reality of preparing a new field, putting extra crop in the ground and growing it to harvest, they may tend to regard the risk as too high. Additionally, agreements between farmers and buyers (restaurants in particular) have in the past been through impromptu sales at the back door or perhaps hand-shake deals for larger sales of produce. Several of the farmers we spoke with had suffered losses from miscommunication or deals that fell through after the crop was harvested. It’s important to note, however, that most buyers we spoke to identified lack of supply as the primary reason they do not currently purchase more local produce, providing a countervailing view and pointing to the importance of clear communication and formalized agreements.

Farm incomes need to be boosted for farming to be viable. Most of the farmers we surveyed operated small or very small produce farms of less than 5 acres. Moreover, when asked about expansion, many replied that labor costs are too high to grow the size of their farming operation (even when land was already available) and a similar number indicated that lack of demand or earning potential held them back. Farming in south Louisiana is financially challenging for the farmers we spoke with, whose income per acre is much lower compared to the state average for vegetables, and whole-farm income is such that most farmers must have additional income/employment. This indicates a double challenge, to increase overall sales and do so either with enough efficiency to maintain outside employment or with a big enough boost to become the primary income.

Our survey results indicate farmers and buyers both struggle with the distribution aspect of our local food system, some of it logistical and some informational. Buyers (restaurants, retailers, processors) in particular reported that the time spent purchasing and coordinating individually with farmers becomes a barrier to increased purchases. Other issues of access were raised as well, such as lack of knowledge of who to buy from or what is available, inconvenience, lack of produce diversity and simple lack of volume. Currently most local farmers sell directly at farmers markets, which are time-consuming and requires lengthy time away from the farm and its daily maintenance. However, the few farmers who reported selling to buyers outside of farmers markets indicate the time requirements of both regular and irregular delivery schedules, and coordinating with buyers, is a significant burden to their business.

Based on the 2012 USDA Agriculture Census, our 9-parish region constitutes 6.7% of the state's population, just over 4% of its small farms (49 acres or smaller), and an impressive 23% of CSAs offered throughout the state. These numbers suggest that the Acadiana region is moving towards more local food production, however, our survey results demonstrate that this growth cannot meet demand without new farmers and producers. According to the US Food Market Estimator (Published by the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University), the region could potentially produce 37% of the state's annual vegetable production needs and currently, Acadiana consumes about 6.5% of the state's vegetable production. Clearly, there is room for growth.

<u>If goals or outcome measures were not achieved, identify and share the lessons learned to help others expedite problem-solving:</u>
<u>Describe any lessons learned in the administration of the project that might be helpful for others who would want to implement a similar project:</u>

<u>Future Work: 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.</u>
We identified four needs through our survey, to support a healthy, efficient and flourishing local food system in our Acadiana area.

1. Aggregation service to provide single point of sales
2. Increased farm acreage and continuous production
3. Grower-buyer liaison and contract negotiation
4. Support for certification process and requirements

Aggregation
A single point of distribution to retail and wholesale buyers would decrease the time/effort/cost to buyers as well as decrease farmers expenses on distribution and sales, and decrease complexity for all parties. An aggregation service could thereby facilitate better reliability of product, increased supply and increased demand. For chefs and restaurants, it could make menu planning simplified by offering diversity of produce at a single point of purchase.

An added benefit could be provided to farmers if such an enterprise offered storage or enhanced processing and preparation of produce for market (ie, washing, bagging, sorting, value adding), although these services could be offered separately as well.

Production
Increasing farm incomes is a tremendous need in Acadiana, which could be achieved through increased production and extending that production throughout the year. Supply appears to be much less than demand in our region, and is currently very asymmetrical through the year. All the buyers we interviewed indicated they would buy more locally sourced produce if it was available. Collectively our respondents estimated they would spend as much as $300,000/year on local food purchases, which represents only a subsample of the potential buyers in Acadiana. Currently, the supply of fresh, local produce is concentrated in the summer months, which indicates that farmland is underutilized. We recommend production should be extended throughout the year, and overall acreage increased. By extending the season, farmers may be able to double their income/acre, making farming more profitable. This, however, would still meet only a fraction of this demand (we estimate the need for 100 additional acres, farmed year-round, just to meet this known demand) and therefore we encourage both more acres to be put under production, and new farmers to go into business.

Grower-Buyer Liaisons
Increasing farmer's sales and increasing the quantity of local foods available through restaurants and other businesses requires several intermediate steps. These relationships may need to be facilitated through a liaison or some type of network or organization. We recommend two specific actions, development and use of contracts between farmers and buyers, and communication among farmers and with buyers to reduce excessive or redundant production (relative to local demand). Contracts will set clear expectations for both farmers and buyers, provide stable supply and demand, and should result in increased sales and supply. Communication among farmers could produce a network of support and reduce the potential for overwhelming the market. For example, when one farmer has a contract to provide tomatoes, but suffers a temporary crop failure, a partner farm may be able to step up and fill the gap until the crop has recovered. Or, if a restaurant has contracts for a particular crop supply, again let us use tomatoes as the example, then other farmers looking to sell to the restaurant will know they should grow a different crop, perhaps zucchini or okra.

Certifications
Although overwhelmingly our respondents (buyers and farmers) indicated that certifications were not important to their operations, rather than indicating an absence of need, this points to the contrary, a need for support. Aside from legally required health codes, several types of optional certifications may be appropriate, starting with food safety. GAP (Good Agricultural Practices) certification is typically required for farms with large wholesale contracts or for food manufacturing and is increasingly the national standard for food safety. Audits are expensive ($90+/hour) and complex, requiring extensive documentation and detailed procedures to be in place on the farm. Even when not required, following the GAP practices is beneficial and recommended, to ensure

healthy produce and minimize risk of foodborne illness. Small farmers in our region may need support to pay for the audit costs and to complete the planning and potential farm modifications required to meet the standards. Two additional types of certifications were mentioned by some of our survey respondents, of the marketing and consumer confidence type. Both the farmers and buyers we surveyed tend to support Organic practices, but neither groups feel the national Organic Certification is practical, due to high costs and low customer demand. Certified Naturally Grown is one alternative mentioned, and there are other similar certification options available as well, that provide assurance to consumers that farms are protecting the environment through their farming practices. Food businesses could benefit as well, through options such as the Green Restaurant Certification (one of our respondents already participates), or one of the Louisiana state, “Certified Louisiana”, “Certified Cajun”, or “Certified Creole” labels (indicating the product was sourced/produced in the state).

Of the aforementioned recommendations, the Acadiana Food Alliance plans to approach two issues that are most pressing and support a local organization on the third. The Acadiana Food Alliance has plans to develop a communication program between buyers and sellers. Much like a virtual food hub, the AFA is dedicating a section of its website to connect farmers and buyers. These resources will allow for buyers to post what product they are looking to purchase and the farmer to react to that buyer. The opposite is also proposed that farmers can market their product to potential buyers. Subsequently, this connection will develop relationships and increase the value of the local supply chain and increase the farmer business. The second way that the AFA plans to develop programming based on the survey results of this project is to use member skills and connections to develop standard contracts that has language to protect the farmer but can be adapted to meet the needs of both farmers and buyers. The Acadiana Food Alliance has plans to begin this process in early 2017. Additionally, A food hub is currently in development in Lafayette and will feature both incubator and commissary kitchens. This facility is still in development, but expects to be operational by Spring 2017. The FDA-certified incubator kitchen will be available on an hourly basis for the production and packaging of wholesale items. It has attached to it a fulfillment center that allows for storage of products, raw materials and equipment. The food hub also offers brand development, marketing, packaging and labeling assistance, and order fulfillment. The commissary kitchen is designed for caterers, food trucks and virtual kitchens. This service is especially important for food trucks, required by state law to have a registered commissary space. The food hub offers this service in addition to secure parking, water fill and dump, warehouse and refrigerated space for storage as well as a direct conduit to locally produced ingredients. The Acadiana Food Alliance will support these efforts by offering services of the some of the expert members during the development of the food hub and promotion of the food hub and its services.

<u>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?</u>

Not at this time