

**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>	October 1, 2015-September 30, 2017
Authorized Representative Name:	Steven Fischer
Authorized Representative Phone:	508-799-9139
Authorized Representative Email:	Director@recworchester.org
Recipient Organization Name:	Regional Environmental Council
Project Title as Stated on Grant Agreement:	Expanding Entrepreneurial Opportunities, Farmers Market Access, and Profitability in Worcester Food Deserts and Low Income Neighborhoods
Grant Agreement Number: <i>(e.g. 14-LFPPX-XX-XXXX)</i>	15LFPPMA0093
Year Grant was Awarded:	2015
Project City/State:	Worcester, MA
Total Awarded Budget:	\$100,000

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

- Same Authorized Representative listed above (check if applicable).
- 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.

a. Goal/Objective 1: Increase customer base of farmers markets through marketing, promotion, education campaigns specifically targeting both low-income customers and citywide customers.

i. Progress Made:

- In the 2017 season, combined sales totaled \$166,106 for all markets managed by the Regional Environmental Council and supported by this LFPP grant (compared with \$135,681 in 2016 and \$121,754 in 2015 season) representing a 36% increase in total sales over the grant period.
- In 2017, we served 9,580 unique customers, an increase of 1,350 unique customers or 16% over the 2 year grant period, up from 8,230 unique customers in 2015. Sales and survey data also suggest we made significant increases to our percentage of repeat customers.
- We have made significant headway in increasing market access to low income customers made evident by \$114,666 SNAP/WIC/Senior Coupon sales across all markets in 2017 representing 69% of all sales. Sales to low income customers through the SNAP/WIC/Senior Coupon programs grew 82% over the grant period from \$71,425 in 2016 and \$63,035 in 2015.

ii. Impact on Community: Sales and customer count growth observed over the grant period show a dramatic increase in low income community members reached through improved marketing, improved product offerings, successful partnership with the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance Healthy Incentives Program and through word of mouth recommendations. Activities undertaken that contributed to this growth included:

- Targeted outreach at mobile market sites including attending community meetings, flyering and signage in 6 languages, site specific marketing strategies created with host site staff, incentives distributed at mobile market sites for participation in the market (example - coupons for \$5 off your first purchase were funded by a housing site and distributed for “graduates” of their healthy eating program.)
- Strategic partnerships deepened and institutionalized change with city-wide coalitions like the Worcester Food Policy Council and the City of Worcester Division of Public Health to co-market. Example – increasing the participation in the REC’s Mobile Farmers Market was an identified strategy in the 2016 City of Worcester Community Health Improvement Plan.
- REC strategically partnered with the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance in the planning and implementation of the USDA FINI funded Massachusetts Healthy Incentives Program (HIP). REC staff served on the statewide steering committee as well as retailer subcommittee for this new program and as a result, we were able to be an early retail participant of the program at all of our market sites in 2017. Under the new HIP program all SNAP recipients are eligible to receive an additional \$40-\$80 monthly (depending on household size) to purchase fruits and vegetables at registered farmers’ markets, CSAs, farm stands and mobile markets. REC was able to adapt our point of sale systems, marketing and strategic partnership management through the support of LFPP in order to maximize the benefit of this program for REC markets/participating farmers and low income customers.

• Goal/Objective 2: Increase sales and financial sustainability of Mobile Market through marketing and product diversification

i. Progress Made:

- Total REC Mobile Farmers Market sales in 2017 totaled \$76,966, up from \$46,260 in 2016 and \$35,340 in 2015; a 118% increase in sales over the grant period.
 - In addition to fresh fruits, vegetables, and herbs, the REC Mobile Farmers Market has diversified our offerings to include local jam, honey, bread, hot sauce, eggs, cheese, and a variety of meats, and locally roasted/processed coffee and tea. Customer feedback indicates these new offerings create an incentive to utilize the Mobile Market as a “one stop” shopping experience.
 - Activities that led to this progress included improving the efficiency of our purchasing and inventory management systems by utilizing the Worcester Regional Food Hub (a initiative to aggregate and distribute/market local farm products on a wholesale basis from more than 30 area farms begun in 2015 and co-led by the REC and the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce) as our prime source of locally sourced products for the Mobile Market. This enabled us to increase our product availability, reduce staff time to coordinate ordering and pick-ups of farm produce, and to improve the maintenance, labeling and rotation of produce in our cold storage. We were also able to improve inventory management including diversity and quality of product through improvements to our cold and regular storage and by establishing relationships with new area farm vendors via the Worcester Regional Food Hub. We also increased the size of our walk-in cooler space and developed new shelving systems for empty boxes, tables and other supplies utilizing funds leveraged through private foundations. We also improved market display by purchasing new crates for displaying produce and new signage materials to improve dissemination of information and marketing to customers (pricing, sandwich boards, banners, etc.). Activities related to selecting mobile market sites and targeted marketing and outreach are described elsewhere in this report.
- ii. Impact on Community: We are optimistic that the diversity of healthy, local products offered via the REC Mobile Farmers Market will attract increased customers and improve sales over time.
- Customers have expressed to staff verbally and through surveys that they buy goods at our markets in part due to our competitive prices. In selecting the variety of products, we have sought relevance to as many different prevalent local cultural communities as possible including offering specific varieties of whole foods based on sub-Saharan African, Southeast Asian and Caribbean cuisines requested by our customers.
 - We have endeavored to deepen relationships with host site coordinators at each of 16 weekly Mobile Farmers Market sites we visit during the regular season (June-October), and we are continuing to work closely with coordinators at the 4 current sites of our Winter Mobile Market (November-May).
- c. Goal/Objective 3: Increase reach and impact of the Mobile Market through a year round pilot
- i. Progress Made:
- We piloted our Winter Mobile Market in the 2015-2016 season with 2 stops for 9 weeks, doubled this in 2016-2017 with 4 stops for 20 weeks and in 2017-2018 we will be increasing this again beginning the Winter Market Season with 4 stops from Nov-March 2017, and increasing to 8 stops from April-May, offering markets for a total of 28 weeks between November 2017 and May 2018.
 - The above referenced increase in Winter Mobile Market stops was made as a direct response to customer demand and requests made by host sites to continue the market in the “off season.”

We received direct feedback from customers through surveys administered weekly at markets each fall as to what products they would like us to offer in the off season and how likely they would be willing to shop at an off season market. We used an application process with our peak season site hosts to select 4 of 16 that would receive off season stops. We will be following a similar process in early 2018 to identify 4 additional sites for the April-May markets.

- In the 2015-2016 season our 4 Winter Mobile Market stops included 1 at the City of Worcester's Senior Center, 2 at senior low income housing facilities, and 1 at a community health center. We have been able to tailor our product offerings to meet the requests of specific customer groups at each site. We have found that our relationship with the main point of contact for each host site is our most important connection to successful grassroots marketing at the sites. For example, at the community health center stop we have worked closely with the WIC program coordinator to co-market our Mobile Market with WIC program participants, at the 2 senior housing sites we work closely with the resident coordinator staff and at the senior center we coordinate our programming to complement the Southeast Asian community senior group that meets during our stop time and we work closely with the coordinator of that program.

ii. Impact on Community:

- The Winter Mobile Market has been utilized by a consistent and growing customer base making repeat, weekly visits to the Market. By doubling the number of participating market sites (over the grant period), we increased the number of customers to whom we provided healthy, local foods. A steady customer base in "off-season" months helps support local farmers with additional income and reduces the challenges faced by both consumers and producers when relying on seasonal markets.

d. Goal/Objective 4: Build capacity of the YouthGROW value added hot sauce product line.

i. Progress Made:

- In 2016, the REC piloted an incubator kitchen as part of our Worcester Regional Food Hub initiative (a collaborative project co-led by the REC and the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce), and our YouthGROW Hot Sauce project became a regular tenant of this new commercial kitchen. As a result, the Hot Sauce project has benefitted from:
 - Access to a larger, better equipped space with support and training through the Food Hub;
 - New equipment, including an automated bottler and labeler, purchased with funds from the MA Dept of Agricultural Resources;
 - Changes to the production process to make a triple-standard batch, which allowed youth to make 282 bottles in a single session, almost tripling the amount of hot sauce previously produced in a single session;
- *Drop It Like It's Hot Sauce*™ (the youth-created brand for this product) now has the opportunity to increase sales through REC Community Farmers Markets and website sales. Going forward, we will also be exploring opportunities to sell this product wholesale via the Worcester Regional Food Hub's aggregation project, which sells wholesale local food and farm products to area institutional food service providers.
- In order to achieve this expansion it was necessary to assess equipment needs and availability, resulting in the acquisition of a new bottler and labeler (purchased with leveraged state funding as mentioned above). We negotiated space and usage at the Worcester Regional Food Hub kitchen for the equipment and then scheduled training of appropriate staff on appropriate use and care of the new equipment. Once staff was trained we created a schedule of production and storage of

product. We are excited to now have our new stock available online (for local purchase only) and at tabling events throughout the year as well as a regular supply at our weekly farmers' markets and mobile market.

ii. Impact on Community:

- 34 low-income Worcester youth between the ages of 14 and 17 learned about social entrepreneurship through involvement in the hot sauce project. We also now have information about the hot sauce on our organization's website and have promoted it through social media. Changes we've made to our production processes and marketing as a consequence of this grant have positioned us well to increase sales in the near future in support of the YouthGROW program (youth development and employment via urban agriculture).
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.
 - a. Number of direct jobs created: 4
 - b. Number of jobs retained: 7
 - c. Number of indirect jobs created: 0
 - d. Number of markets expanded: 16 mobile market stops and 2 stationary markets
 - e. Number of new markets established: 4 new winter mobile market stops
 - f. Market sales increased by \$44,352 and by 36%.
 - g. Number of farmers/producers that have benefited from the project: 30
 - i. Percent Increase: 88%
 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?
 - Over the course of the grant period we saw a dramatic increase in our sales and customer base with the most dramatic increase in low income/low access populations as can be evidenced in our sales. As was referenced above we had \$114,666 SNAP/WIC/Senior Coupon sales across all markets in 2017 representing 69% of all sales. Sales to low income/low access customers through the SNAP/WIC/Senior Coupon programs grew 81% over the grant period from \$63,035 in 2015.
 - Specific strategies to reach specific ethnic and cultural groups were designed to build on existing relationships with Community Based Organizations, Cultural Groups, and other community assets. We also targeted assessed community needs as identified in the City of Worcester's Community Health Assessment (CHA). For example, we established and strengthened our relationship with the Southeast Asian group of the Worcester Senior Center in order to expand the mobile market stop at the senior center and serve the Southeast Asian senior community more effectively by hosting focus groups to listen to their needs and respond to them by providing new varieties of culturally appropriate produce at that mobile market stop. We also prioritized support of a stop in a low income housing complex with a predominately Latino tenant community in response to data showing the need to support healthy food access as a critical health intervention in Worcester's Community Health Assessment. We worked in partnership with Worcester

Housing Authority staff and tenant leaders to understand the kinds of products tenants at that site were seeking and worked with our farmer-partners and the Worcester Regional Food Hub to identify local sources for those products.

4. Discuss your community partnerships.

a. Who are your community partners?

- Many local organizations and businesses support REC Community Farmers Markets with sponsorship, funding, community outreach/marketing support, logistical support, and as host sites for the Mobile Market. These numerous partners include, but are not limited to: Worcester Division of Public Health, Worcester County Food Bank, Greater Worcester Community Foundation, Harvard Pilgrim Health Care Foundation, Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce, Worcester Community Action Council, Worcester Senior Center, Worcester Regional Transit Authority, Family Health Center of Worcester, Seven Hills Foundation, Edward M. Kennedy Community Health Center, Worcester Housing Authority, YWCA of Central MA, Coes Pond Village apartments, Seabury Heights Apartments, Webster Square Towers, Elm Park Towers, Lincoln Village Apartments, Green Hill Towers, Plumley Village Apartments, Lincoln Park Towers, Worcester Division of Parks & Recreation, City of Worcester City Manager's Office, Main South Community Development Corporation (CDC), Worcester Community Housing Resources, Worcester Youth Center, Southeast Asian Coalition of Central MA, CENTRO, Project Bread, UMass Memorial Medical Center, Guild of St. Agnes, MA Department of Agricultural Resources, the Worcester Regional Food Hub, the Health Foundation of Central MA, United Way of Central MA, Worcester Community Housing Resources, Worcester Family Partnership, and Clark University. We will continue to work closely with the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance in the ongoing development of the Healthy Incentives Program

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

- Partners have contributed to the success of the markets in various ways throughout the project, including funding/sponsorship, community outreach/marketing support, logistical support, and as host sites for the Mobile Market. Community partners play a crucial role in reaching the diverse constituents that they work with to provide information and encourage use of the markets, institutional partners have helped market the farmers' markets in their own materials and have provided critical funding. Cultural groups have given us critical advice and support to reach diverse underserved communities throughout the city. Specific examples of collaboration include the following: The Main South Community Development Corporation included the REC's University Park Farm Stand (formerly known as the Main South Farmers Market) in their monthly event calendars and co-programmed in the space with various community activities during the 2016 and 2017 season (e.g., Worcester Family Partnership weekly family literacy activity and play group, Zumba, live music, kids drumming lessons, yoga, dance, etc.). Our University Park Market and our Beaver Brook Market were both summer feeding sites through the USDA's summer feeding program administered by the Worcester Public Schools, bringing additional underserved community members to the markets. Worcester Community Housing Resources used their own resources to generate and distribute coupons to residents in area affordable housing sites to promote our markets.

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

- We plan to foster partnerships that we have established and developed throughout the grant period to help expand markets in the future and to help us continue to ensure our markets are relevant and addressing diverse community needs appropriately and effectively. Community partners will continue to provide ongoing feedback to help us improve our programs, increase the number of customers we serve, and reach more diverse populations. Sponsoring Mobile Market sites and other local funders will continue to contribute to the financial outcomes of the REC Community Farmers Market program. Please see the future plans section below for additional detail.

5. Did you use contractors to conduct the work? If so, how did their work contribute to the results of the LFPP project? No contractors were used

6. Have you publicized any results yet? * Yes

a. If yes, how did you publicize the results?

- Results are published annually on our website and shared with stakeholders at our annual meeting in the form of an annual Program Report and the organization's Annual Report.

b. To whom did you publicize the results?

- The reports are used internally for program and strategic planning as well as for distribution to the REC's Board of Directors, current and potential funders and community partners/stakeholders, and are made available to the general public on our website and at our Annual Meeting.

c. How many stakeholders (i.e. people, entities) did you reach?

- Over 200 organizational members are invited to our Annual Meeting, where copies of reports are shared. An additional 100 funders and stakeholders receive the Program Report and/or Annual Report via mail.

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

a. If so, how did you collect the information?

- Customer feedback is collected at various times throughout the season via 10 question surveys distributed during market hours at all sites. We also collect surveys at all markets on a weekly basis in September and October. Oftentimes customers offer anecdotal input during conversations with market staff even if they opt out of completing a survey. This is most common with returning customers at the Mobile Market sites and traditional farmers' market sites.
- Feedback from community partners who host our markets is also collected via surveys, but tailored specifically for insights related to location, hours, and relevance of products offered. We also conduct an annual survey of Mobile Market site hosts and vendors to collect feedback at the end of each season.

b. What feedback was relayed (specific comments)?

Customer feedback ranged from the practical to the personal. Two examples of such feedback are as follows, one delivered via our Facebook page and one offered directly to program staff at market:

“Thank you for the awesome produce and variety and helpful staff! Loved shopping at Elm Street Towers location today!”

“This program (Mobile Market) is very good- this is why we say, God bless America! You come, get fresh food every month. It’s beautiful.”

8. Budget Summary:

- a. 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:
 - b. Did the project generate any income? Yes
 - i. If yes, how much was generated and how was it used to further the objectives of the award?
- Income in 2015 and 2016 was restricted to sponsorships \$12,000 in 2015 and \$7,000 in 2016. In 2017 \$7,500 was raised in sponsorship plus an additional \$17,426 in net revenue from mobile market sales (net revenue from sales in 2015 and 2016 was negligible). In 2015 and 2016 income was used towards the SNAP match (related directly to the objectives of the award). In 2017 with the addition of the Massachusetts HIP program (as described above) the SNAP match was no longer necessary and so income was used towards marketing and market operation staff, also directly connected to the objectives of the award.

9. Lessons Learned:

- a. 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).
- There were a great many lessons learned throughout the grant period. Positive experiences included the return seen from the investments in partner relationships including mobile market host sites and institutional partners. We found that the time spent in clear expectations, a communications plan and shared visioning was well worth the investment and we saw direct correlation between time spent on such activities and success of any given mobile market site.
 - Another positive experience was the value that we found in being flexible and adaptable to a changing environment. In 2017, the Massachusetts HIP program changed the statewide atmosphere for farmers’ markets, increasing the demand among low income SNAP customers who were looking for markets where they could earn their new benefit. We needed to adapt our markets in order to take advantage of this increased demand and we found that our ability to forward plan and flexibly respond to this new opportunity directly attributed to our success in utilizing this new opportunity to meet the increased demand and improve sales outcomes for participating farmers.
 - A continued challenge in any food security program is the need to understand and address a complex web of barriers that historically underserved and marginalized populations face in accessing healthy food. We found (and knew when starting the project) that making

produce affordable is not always sufficient to overcome these barriers. Addressing the complexities of years of social isolation, distrust and cultural incompetence in resources and institutions is at the heart of the work to create a truly equitable food system.

- b. If goals or outcome measures were not achieved, identify and share the lessons learned to help others expedite problem-solving:
 - All goals and outcome measures were achieved
- c. Describe any lessons learned in the administration of the project that might be helpful for others who would want to implement a similar project:
 - There were important lessons learned in terms of record keeping for evaluation and reporting purposes. Adapting as a non-profit organization with a history of programs to more market-based approaches requires a different kind of attention to organizing and managing sales, inventory and other data. In order to be successful in both growing and improving your market-based approach as well as being accountable to funders who need access to such data, we would recommend securing appropriate support and ensuring staff have adequate skill and/or access to training in this area and that the organization has systems and tools in place to manage this type of data collection.

10. Future Work:

- a. 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.
 - We are fortunate that through the success of the markets throughout the grant period we have been able to build support and generate income in order to plan to sustain and grow the markets for the foreseeable future. We are currently researching options for market expansion in order to serve more people including: additional mobile market stops both in Worcester and nearby communities in Central Massachusetts with systemic barriers to healthy food access, a seamless year-round schedule of 16 mobile market stops in Worcester, and adding one or more mobile market vehicles to our fleet.
 - With funding from the MA Dept. of Agricultural Resources, we are currently pursuing a new project in collaboration with the Division of Public Health and the Southeast Asian Coalition of Central MA to develop a line of prepared food utilizing local urban agriculture to be sold on the Mobile Market and at the standing markets. The goals of this project include attracting a culturally diverse customer base to the market, offering a healthy prepared food option as an alternative to fast food to our customers, income generation for low income Southeast Asian food entrepreneurs and to serve as a pilot for other potential cultural groups interested in food entrepreneurship.
- b. 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?
 - An additional unexpected challenge that we faced this year was in relation to a lack of cultural competency from some farmers/vendors at one of our traditional markets. Some of

the vendors at one of our traditional farmers' markets had been vending at farmers' market for many years and were accustomed to a more homogeneous customer base at the markets (white and middle/upper middle income). With the introduction of the new Massachusetts HIP program, we saw the make up the customer base change dramatically. As a consequence, there was an uptick in tensions and conflict at this market, sometimes with racist and/or xenophobic overtones, and our market managers were faced with the challenge of mediating these conflicts while simultaneously managing the logistics of a busy market. We have provided some training for our market managers and we are in the process of seeking outside assistance to develop further training and protocols for market staff and volunteers (and potentially for vendors) in both cultural competency and conflict mediation/resolution to help ensure a supportive market culture and experience for all of our customers and vendors. We also anticipate a need to refine our vendor expectation agreements to clarify mutual expectations of curtesy and respect between customers, vendors, and market managers. Any assistance from USDA in this area would be appreciated.

- We also would be interested in learning more about other models and best practices for developing value added products that serve as employment and educational/training opportunities for youth and that show the potential to be profitable.