

## 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 LFPP staff to avoid delays:

LFPP Phone: 202-720-2731; Email: [USDALFPPQuestions@ams.usda.gov](mailto: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.

<b>Report Date Range:</b> <i>(e.g. September 30, 20XX-September 29, 20XX)</i>	October 1, 2014 – May 31, 2015
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<b>Recipient Organization Name:</b>	Lower Phalen Creek Project
<b>Project Title as Stated on Grant Agreement:</b>	Urban Oasis: Local Food Business Planning Grant
<b>Grant Agreement Number:</b> <i>(e.g. 14-LFPPX-XX-XXXX)</i>	14-LFPPX-MN-0097
<b>Year Grant was Awarded:</b>	2014
<b>Project City/State:</b>	St. Paul, Minnesota
<b>Total Awarded Budget:</b>	\$33,600 (Federal: \$24,850)

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.**

- i. **Goal/Objective A:** Solicit and respond to input from the low-income, low-access community served by Urban Oasis about how the new local food business can meet its needs.

- a. **Progress Made:** We conducted more than 20 interviews with farmers, community partners, potential customers, and other key stakeholders in our community to gather feedback about the new Urban Oasis food business lines. We determined early on that while our overall mission is to support the low-income, low-access community in which we are based, the food businesses we launched in this first year (catering services and one value-added food product) were targeted to a higher-end customer base in order to ensure financial sustainability. Due to this clarification about who these first business lines would serve, we changed our plan from the open community meetings we originally proposed for feedback to using targeted interviews with key informant groups, including farmers. Our community programs around healthy eating and food access continued to be designed by and for the low-income neighborhood we serve.

- b. **Impact on Community:** We heard from many of the stakeholders we interviewed that it was important to them to see local food businesses thrive in the low-income, low-access neighborhood where we are based, known as the East Side of St. Paul. Successful businesses build the wealth of the neighborhood and encourage economic development by bringing in new interest and investment in the neighborhood. As a locally-owned business buying food from local farmers, Urban Oasis keeps more of the food dollars in the local community, which benefits everyone. Additionally, our marketing efforts raise awareness about the importance of supporting local farmers and encourage consumers to buy more locally-grown foods from farmers markets and other retailers.

- ii. **Goal/Objective B:** Conduct thorough market research on potential competitors and models for best practices in the Twin Cities and nationwide.

- a. **Progress Made:** Our Marketing & Communications Director, Jacquelyn Fletcher, completed full market studies for both the catering and value-added product businesses. She compiled profiles of key competitors in both markets, and with this information we were able to determine where we could best fit into an open niche. Fresh condiments made from locally-sourced ingredients was the top opportunity for our value-added business so this is the first product we chose to pursue. For the catering options, while we found others in the community with some similar components to our model, the market research pointed to increasing demand both for catering services and for locally-grown foods. The research supported continued opportunities to further expand the market for local farmers by buying more of their product for catering services. Urban Oasis also has a unique marketing advantage as a result of our community-based mission and outreach activities, which raise our profile and connect consumers to the positive impact we have on the community.

- b. **Impact on Community:** By clarifying exactly what services already exist and communicating with our potential competitors, we were able to distinguish Urban Oasis from other local food businesses and target unmet needs in the community. This strategy encourages further growth and expansion in the market for locally-grown produce and

expands sales options for farmers. It also keeps more revenue in the community rather than it going to large national corporations not based in the Twin Cities.

**iii. Goal/Objective C:** Identify and connect with potential customers, such as childcare centers, to determine interest in the catering and value-added products.

**a. Progress Made:** As mentioned in Objective A above, we conducted numerous in-depth interviews with potential customers about our planned business lines to gather feedback, and the market research activities also provided significant information about the interest in both catering and value-added products locally. We created a list of childcare centers in our immediate geographic area and connected with a number of the food service directors to assess interest in catering services, and were able to determine that we are not yet prepared to serve this market as we had originally thought, due to the high levels of regulations on ingredients and the need for ready-to-serve meals.

**b. Impact on Community:** By conducting thorough research and assessment of customer needs prior to launching our food businesses, we were able to ensure our products would not be duplicating things that already existed, and would provide a valuable service to the community.

**iv. Goal/Objective D:** Identify and connect with local farmers interested in selling to the business.

**a. Progress Made:** Throughout the planning period we worked very closely with local farmers on developing our products and have established strong relationships with organizations serving multiple farmers from socially-disadvantaged backgrounds, as well as farmer co-operatives (see partner list below). These farmers provided valuable input into the development of both catering and value-added product lines, and were generally very supportive and interested in working with us. The feedback they provided was that our businesses were creating new markets for them to sell their produce, and our interest in purchasing “seconds” from them was also a very rare opportunity for them to sell more of their product.

**b. Impact on Community:** The development of our local food businesses is actively creating new markets for small, local farmers using sustainable growing methods, which encourages the continued development of a locally-based food system in the Twin Cities and broader Midwest. By working collaboratively with the farmers to develop our purchasing and delivery systems, we are building a business model that supports the farmers’ success through both increased revenue and manageable time commitments for delivery and other logistics. Additionally, our commitment to working with small-scale, underserved farmers helps provide equal opportunities for farmers facing additional obstacles to success.

**v. Goal/Objective E:** Create a financially-sustainable business plan that includes livable-wage jobs for the local community, appropriately priced product/service lines, and fair prices for farmers.

**a. Progress Made:** Business plans for both catering and value-added products were completed, informed by the market research and other activities outlined above. We determined that the first value-added product we would launch would be our line of three fresh condiments made from locally-sourced ingredients, as this product was the first one to be developed and had the most promising immediate market. Fair prices for local farmers were determined in conversation with our farm partners, and research was conducted on

pricing of craft condiments to determine appropriate price points for the product. Business plans were shared with a key group of potential investors/supporters.

**b. Impact on Community:** Our business plans are based on sustainable and fair economic models that support the farmers and provide livable-wage jobs to community members as the businesses grow. As a community-based organization our commitment to these values is strong, and the overall goal of our businesses is to generate revenue that will support a strengthened local food system and increase access to healthy foods for people of all income levels.

**vi. Goal/Objective F:** Develop and test catering menus and value-added products with potential customers.

**a. Progress Made:** We hosted two tasting events for the catering business, to which we invited a diverse cross-section of our professional contacts, supporters, and other potential customers to try out our new catering menus. Both events had excellent attendance – 30 people attended the first event in January 2015, and 45 people attended the second event in February 2015. We received very positive feedback from the attendees at both events, and have already had two referrals for catering events through these events. We tested our fresh condiment line at an open community “Food Fest” and also received very positive feedback for these products.

**b. Impact on Community:** The events increased community awareness of our new local food business lines, and provided important feedback for the development of our menus and products.

**vii. Goal/Objective G:** Secure contracts with producers and consumers for launch of business.

**a. Progress Made:** By the end of the grant period, we had secured contracts with 4 different farm businesses, 3 of which represent 10 or more farmers each: Shared Ground Farmers’ Co-op, Hmong American Farmers Association (HAFA), and Minnesota Food Association/Big River Farms (BRF). All three of these farms focus on vegetables. The fourth farm is Happy Acre, which provides some animal protein and berries. The contracts secured by the end of this grant period, for the 2015 farm season, include 1,400 lbs of roma tomatoes, 1,400 lbs of bell peppers, 360 lbs of rhubarb, and 700 lbs of yellow onions. We plan to purchase additional produce from these farmers this season based on what they have available and the catering needs this summer. The main contract secured with a consumer is the agreement we have with the new CHS Field, an outdoor baseball stadium for a popular minor league team, the St. Paul Saints. The stadium just opened this season. The food service provider the stadium works with, Professional Sports Catering/Levy Restaurant, has agreed to purchase and feature our fresh condiments in the stadium all season, which is an excellent opportunity for Urban Oasis to gain exposure to a large potential customer base for our future shelf-stable condiment line. It also will give us an important chance to gather customer feedback on our product. For the catering business, clients contact us on as-needed basis, so while we have not secured any long-term contracts, we did cater 8 events for 7 different clients by the end of the grant period.

**b. Impact on Community:** The three producer contracts secured with multi-farmer co-ops or groups all have a mission of supporting underserved farmers from diverse backgrounds, and two of the organizations, HAFA and BRF, provide valuable training programs to these farmers. By purchasing from their farmers, Urban Oasis is helping to support the next generation of immigrant and underserved farmers succeed. The contract with CHS Field will expose a new customer base to the use of locally-grown produce in

familiar products (condiments), thus potentially increasing the demand for these products in the future, which will further support the farmers. The catering events reached 480 people, which also greatly expanded awareness of the availability of locally-grown foods for consumers.

**viii. Goal/Objective H:** Share the results of planning project with target audience, stakeholders, and the broader community.

**a. Progress Made:** As the project was just completed last month, we have not yet had much opportunity to publicize the results of the complete planning process. However, we have shared on our progress with developing and launching the food business lines with our stakeholders throughout the year (see #6 below), and plan to continue these communication efforts throughout the development of our businesses.

**b. Impact on Community:** Many community members in the East Side neighborhood where Urban Oasis is based, as well as throughout the broader Twin Cities area, are aware of the new local food businesses launched by Urban Oasis and the opportunities they provide to farmers and consumers.

**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, 2014). Include further explanation if necessary.**

**i. Number of direct jobs created:** 12 - The Urban Oasis food businesses created new jobs for the individuals involved in planning, launching, marketing, and creating the value-added products and catering services. These jobs started out as part-time contract positions during the planning period, and some have increased to full-time already, such as the Food Operations Director position. Other positions created include: Catering - Heart of the House/Kitchen Manager, Sous Chef, Prep Cook, Service Staff, Food Operations Administrative Assistant; Condiments – Prep Cook (almost FT this summer), Front of the House Manager; as well as marketing and sales for both businesses.

**ii. Number of jobs retained:** All of the new positions listed above will eventually become regular employees paid a livable wage, some of which will be full-time salaried positions with benefits.

**iii. Number of indirect jobs created:** 35 - This project supported the livelihood of over 30 individual farmers through the purchase of locally-grown produce for the businesses. It also indirectly supported the need for 5 other jobs at Urban Oasis, including the administrative and financial management team and organization leadership.

**iv. Number of markets expanded:** 1 – The launch of the catering business expanded this market for local farmers through our commitment to buying as much local produce as possible.

**v. Number of new markets established:** 2 – The condiment line created a totally new market for local farmers, and the contract with CHS Field to sell these condiments further supported the establishment of this market. Urban Oasis’s commitment to purchasing “seconds” from farmers (imperfect produce that they cannot sell to retailers) created another new market for local farmers.

**vi. Market sales increased by \$3,341.36 and increased by 100%.** This number represents the catering revenues generated before the end of the grant period, all of which is new business. While the agreement to sell the condiments was in place by the end of the planning period, we had not yet made any actual sales of product.

**vii. Number of farmers/producers that have benefited from the project: 30**

**a. Percent Increase: 100%**

**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?**

Since this project was a planning grant for two new business lines, all of the outreach we did to potential customers could be considered “new/expanded”. In addition to the excellent opportunity we now have to reach a totally new customer base through the sale of our condiments at the St. Paul Saints’ baseball stadium, we also are able to reach new customer groups through our community partners (listed below). Our community programming also allows us to interact closely with a variety of populations, many of whom represent diverse ethnic groups and residents of low-income/low-access areas.

For instance, we launched our Healthy Meal-Making Program this year, which is a 10-week curriculum designed to increase the comfort level of low-income individuals with purchasing and preparing fresh, whole foods. In the weekly classes we not only are able to raise awareness of the Urban Oasis brand, but also learn a lot about the shopping patterns and food needs of those populations. Additionally, our community partners have started to approach us with new opportunities and needs as well, such as the request we received from the Twin Cities Mobile Market for a line of healthy frozen soups that could be sold to the low-income populations they reach in our neighborhood. This product line is still under development, but could potentially help us expand our customer base to new groups in the coming year.

**4. Discuss your community partnerships.**

**i. Who are your community partners?**

- Latino Economic Development Center (LEDC)
- Minnesota Food Association/Big River Farms
- Shared Ground Farmers’ Co-operative
- Hmong American Farmers Association
- Family Values for Life
- Mississippi Market Natural Foods Co-op
- Professional Sports Catering, owned by Levy Restaurant Inc.
- Urban Roots
- Twin Cities Mobile Market
- St. Paul Public Schools Community Education
- Asian Economic Development Center

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

Urban Oasis would not be successful in any of its efforts if it weren’t for these incredibly valuable partnerships! As a community-based organization with a goal of strengthening the local food system, we view our role as one part of a supportive network of organizations, individuals, businesses and farms that have a shared goal of providing healthy food for everyone in our community. We aim to fill in gaps in the current system and to meet unmet

needs in the low-income, low-access neighborhood in which we are based, and to increase chances of success for local farmers by providing strong market opportunities and access to new consumers. Our efforts in developing the Urban Oasis initiative have been collaborative from the very beginning and will continue that way.

Specific examples of how partners contributed to the success of this project include: the farms not only committed to providing local produce, but have also provided valuable input into the development of our systems and understanding of farmer needs; LEDC has held the lease to the kitchen space and managed its overall setup, and also provides technical assistance to farmers; Family Values for Life has connected us with residents of our community and been a catering client; and Mississippi Market and Minnesota Food Association have partnered with us to provide local produce to participants in our Healthy Meal Making Program, a project that received USDA funding this year from the new Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentives (FINI) program.

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

All of these partners will continue to play a key role in the development of the Urban Oasis food businesses, either by producing food for inclusion in our catering menus and condiments, or by assisting us in furthering our mission of building a healthy, sustainable, local food system accessible for all people in our community. The plans outlined for the coming year in number 10 below give more detail on the partner roles in future activities.

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

All of the Urban Oasis staff were initially hired as contractors, so there has been significant contribution by contractors to the success of this project. These positions will eventually be transitioned to regular employees once Urban Oasis acquires its independent legal status as a nonprofit organization.

**6. Have you publicized any results yet?\***

We have shared news about the development and launch of our food businesses over the course of the planning period, and continue to update our stakeholders about our progress.

**i. If yes, how did you publicize the results?**

Many of our accomplishments are shared through our monthly newsletter, which is also published and archived on our website. Executive Director Tracy Sides also regularly speaks at community events about the growth of our local food system, where she shares the progress and achievements of the Urban Oasis food businesses.

**ii. To whom did you publicize the results?**

Results have been shared with current donors, customers, grant funders, farmers, community partner organizations, community newspapers, and other interested individual supporters.

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

Our mailing list reaches 850 people.

**\*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).** Archived newsletters can be found at <http://www.urbanoasismn.org/about/>. Brochures for the catering business and condiments ,

as well as, a press release about the condiment deal at the stadium are attached.

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

**i. If so, how did you collect the information?**

We are always gathering feedback about our products and services from our many community partners, farmers, customers, and other stakeholders in the community via discussions, meetings, events and interviews. We have also collected much valuable and important feedback from the staff that participated in implementing this project, which contributed to many of the important decisions about the direction the business would take. So far this process has been informal to make it as easy and comfortable as possible for diverse groups of people to share their impressions with us. The feedback has been valuable and definitely influenced the course of our business development during the planning period. In the coming year we plan to implement more formal evaluation tools to be able to record and analyze feedback, such as customer satisfaction surveys and more formal interviews.

**ii. What feedback was relayed (specific comments)?**

- Customer feedback from the 8 catering events has been extremely positive. Attendees were very happy with the quality of the food, the menu choices, and the service. "You make healthy taste good" was a comment from one our attendees.

- Farmers have shared that they really value the opportunity to sell their seconds, as there are few other markets for that product.

- We received the following feedback in an email from a consumer after the first game at the downtown Saint Paul ballpark: "So last night a business partner of mine and my son ventured out in the cold for the exhibition game at CHS field. There were many things that impressed us very much, I'm sure you've already been out to the field yourself so I don't need to ramble on about all the great things they are doing right. The strange thing is, with all that was incredible about the new field, the one thing I keep thinking about was the insane condiments I had on my sausage.

I loaded up my "Brett Favre" sausage with all 3 condiments your company had provided (ketchup, sweet relish, honey mustard) and what I experienced was nothing short of perfection. I apologize if I sound like I'm being a little overly complementary, but I am a huge foodie and I have honestly never had such insanely incredible toppings in a restaurant let alone a ballpark."

**8. Budget Summary:**

**i. As part of the LFPP closeout procedures, you are required to submit the SF-425 (Final Federal Financial Report). Check here if you have completed the SF-425 and are submitting it with this report:**

**ii. Did the project generate any income?**

**a. If yes, how much was generated and how was it used to further the objectives of the award?** The 8 catering events completed prior to the end of the grant period generated \$3,341.36 of income, all of which was reinvested in the business to purchase fresh produce from local farmers and other needed supplies and ingredients.

**9. 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).**

- Our biggest lesson learned was that it is important to limit your scope at the start of a new venture, and narrow down your activities to a few key things in your strongest areas of competence. At the start of the project we had many ideas about directions we could take the local food business, and started out by looking into a lot of different options. While this was a valuable process it was also very time consuming.
- Having an organizational structure where decision-making roles are clearly defined is absolutely necessary to successfully managing a large project with many different activities. Our entire team was new to this project as it was a start-up, and new to working together as well, so it took some time to learn what each person's skills were and how best to distribute the work. A collaborative approach is good, but ultimately there must be someone responsible for making tough decisions.
- You need to plan very early with local farmers in order to be able to count on the produce supply you need. Our food businesses weren't ready to be launched until late spring, and many of the farmers we were working with had already laid out their production and plot plans for the season. We also learned that it was difficult for us to put solid contracts in place with the farmers at the start of the season, because it is our first year in business and we are not sure what kind of demand we will have, particularly for the catering services.
- Working with government regulatory offices is very time consuming. As the manager of the shared kitchen space we use for our business, our staff oversaw much of the process for getting MN Department of Health approval for the kitchen space, which required extensive documentation and many details that we hadn't initially predicted.

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

We were able to achieve most of the goals and outcome measures we set in the original proposal. Because this was a planning grant, most of our goals were related to the process of developing the business. We did set a few specific outcome measures, most of which we met, except for the following:

Securing 5 new contracts with institutional consumers – We were able to secure one major contract with the Professional Sports Catering company, as mentioned above, but did not meet our goal of 5. We did also supply catering services for 7 different vendors at 8 events prior to the end of the grant period. The lesson learned was that we underestimated how long it would take us to develop our products and menus, and to market the new businesses. We also learned that institutional customers have many complex requirements as well as a need for larger volume, and we do not yet have the capacity to meet 5 of these contracts at once! We still plan to continue outreach in this market sector.

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

As this was a planning grant, almost all of the key lessons learned (above) relate to administration of the project. Our best advice for others is to keep it simple, focus on one or two things at a time, and allow for more time on all of the start-up activities than you think you need!

## 10. Future Work:

- i. How will you continue the work of this project beyond the performance period? In other words, how will you parlay the results of your project's work to benefit future community goals and initiatives? Include information about community impact and outreach, anticipated increases in markets and/or sales, estimated number of jobs retained/created, and any other information you'd like to share about the future of your project.**

In order to seamlessly continue the development of our local food businesses, Urban Oasis recently applied for an LFPP Implementation grant for the grant period starting September 30, 2015. We are also seeking other sources of grant funding and new business contracts to support the continued growth of the businesses.

Our goals for next year are to:

- 1) Build markets for small-scale local farmers from historically underserved groups by expanding both local food businesses (catering and value-added products).
- 2) Maintain an average of 70% of locally-sourced food products for catering and value-added products year-round.
- 3) Increase sales for catering and value-added products by 250% by expanding consumer base served.
- 4) Create new markets for local farmers by launching additional value-added product lines such as soups and shelf-stable condiments which make use of farmer "seconds."
- 5) Build local supply chain infrastructure by offering training and equipment for flash-freezing and processing to small farmers to extend season for locally-grown produce.
- 6) Use innovative strategies to reduce costs for local foods and increase consumer base in low-income communities.

Our farmer partners have informed us that one of their top needs in order to access new markets is for small-scale processing, such as flash freezing, which is affordable for the volume they produce and can extend their growing season and market options. Urban Oasis's catering and value-added product lines also needed access to this service in order to increase the percentage of locally-sourced food in our products, as Minnesota has a short growing season. We therefore plan to purchase equipment and infrastructure to do flash-freezing on a small scale, as this additional capacity will support the entire local food supply chain and will benefit multiple producers, increasing access to locally-produced fruits and vegetables on a year-round basis. In order to ensure local farmers and small food business entrepreneurs are able to take full advantage of this new opportunity, we also plan to partner with the Latino Economic Development Center to offer training and technical assistance in how to use flash freezing to further a small food business.

- 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?**

The planning grant option is a very valuable service for local food businesses that are starting up, so we strongly recommend you continue to offer this program! As a result of this funding, we were able to take the time needed to do careful planning, assess our market, develop needed relationships and infrastructure, and test our products, and are now starting to see the benefits of those efforts. We also learned a lot from the planning process that will save valuable time and resources later on, which will be important to ensuring our long-term success.