

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.

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| Report Date Range: <i>(e.g. September 30, 20XX-September 29, 20XX)</i> | 9/30/14 – 9/29/16 |
| Authorized Representative Name: | Aaron Blyth |
| Authorized Representative Phone: | 651.621.2771 |
| Authorized Representative Email: | aaron@sharedgroundcoop.com |
| Recipient Organization Name: | Stone's Throw Ag Coop (changed to Shared Ground Farmers' Coop in 2015) |
| Project Title as Stated on Grant Agreement: | Local Market Expansion for Immigrant Farmers |
| Grant Agreement Number: <i>(e.g. 14-LFPPX-XX-XXXX)</i> | 14-LFPP-MN-0101 |
| Year Grant was Awarded: | 2014 |
| Project City/State: | Saint Paul, MN |
| Total Awarded Budget: | \$99,000 |

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.

Project goal: Expand locally produced vegetable and meat sales in the Twin Cities area, relying primarily on increased production by low-income immigrant farmers in Minnesota.

- i. **Goal/Objective 1:** The new position of Operations Manager will be created through the approval of this grant, and two job positions will be retained: Marketing Manager and Delivery Driver. Indirect seasonal positions will be created at each of the member farms with an estimated 10 positions created.

a. Progress Made:

- 2.5 FTE positions have been retained year round – includes a 0.75 FTE General/Operations Manager, 1 FTE Marketing and Sales Manager, and 0.75 FTE Warehouse and Delivery Coordinator
- Five (5) part - time seasonal warehouse and delivery positions have been created
- The five (5) member owners have expanded their sales and have hired more than ten (10) seasonal employees to help with production expansion.

Shared Ground Farmers’ Cooperative (Shared Ground) has been able to hire and retain highly skilled staff by combining an ever increasing sales volume with LFPP grant money. Shared Ground is now able to allocate increased sales income to cover all of its operating costs, including but not limited to: warehouse and office space, trucking costs, utilities, marketing costs, and seasonal warehouse employees. Through continued partnership with the Latino Economic Development Program, Shared Ground has secured subsidized leases for its 4,000 square-foot warehouse, 24 X 24 foot walk-in cooler, and office space, which allowed Shared Ground to direct more resources into staffing and business development.

b. Impact on Community:

The ability for Shared Ground to retain and create vital employment positions has meant that Shared Ground has been able to support the growth of over seventeen (17) nontraditional, historically marginalized farms, with more than thirty-five (35) individuals. These farms have expanded their sales into local markets at a higher price point, bringing in and keeping more dollars within their local economies. Marginalized farmers who sell to Shared Ground receive on average \$1.00 more per pound for their produce than in the markets available to them outside of the Shared Ground. Shared Ground partnered with the Minnesota Food Association (MFA), the Hmong American Farmers Association (HAFA), and the Latino Economic Development Center (LEDC) to source markets for farmer participants within these organizations. These organizations have worked for many years to support the development of Hmong, Latino, and other immigrant and minority farm businesses. The farms in these programs are based outside of the Minneapolis/St. Paul area and have had trouble accessing

enough markets, which has been a major limiting factor to the growth of participants' farm businesses. Shared Ground has partnered with these organizations to conduct over five workshops per year on topics including available markets, achieving wholesale standards, Food Safety best practices, Organic Certification, and crop planning. These partnerships have allowed for Shared Ground to source produce from four (4) new Latino farms in LEDC's programs, seven (7) new immigrant-owned farms from MFA's program, and over four (4) Hmong farms from HAFA's program. By supporting the sales of farms from partnering organizations, Shared Ground has helped create more demand for farm training as prospective farmers see the success of the farms that are able to sell through Shared Ground. This pipeline for farmers to go from farm training organizations such as MFA, HAFA, and LEDC directly into selling to Shared Ground has created a critical link in the local food supply chain for nontraditional, historically marginalized farms.

In addition, the ability to attract and retain culturally competent staff has allowed Shared Ground to operate more effectively. Culturally competent staff is able to better understand the barriers and challenges historically marginalized farmers face, and what features might make for increased success. Staff created systems to receive produce at non-traditional hours including evenings and weekends allowing farmers with fulltime off-farm jobs to continue to sell to Shared Ground. Two key staff members are fluent in Spanish, which improves trust and communication with Shared Ground's Latino member owners. Staff conducted over forty-five (45) farm visits in the two-year grant period, helping individual farms with vital crop planning, key questions in regards to best crops to grow, and best practices for post-harvest handling. Lastly, Shared Ground has been critical in creating a network among Anglo, Latino, Hmong, Karen, and other immigrant farmers to do farmer-to-farmer training. Staff has been involved in creating countless opportunities for both member farms and non-member farms to come together and learn from each other. In 2016, La Familia Farm was able to work in close partnership with Stones Throw Urban Farm to successfully begin growing a very high quality salad mix that Shared Ground was able to buy, creating over \$5,000 in additional sales for La Familia in 2016. The impact of Shared Ground's recent work on the larger community is that it has been effective at building a stronger local economy by supporting local farms, and it has strengthened community resilience by bringing together people across cultural divides to work together.

ii. Goal/Objective 2: Total sales of the farm members of the Cooperative will increase by an average of at least 50% by the end of the 2016 Grant Period and will increase number of non-member farmers

a. Progress Made:

- The 5 farm members of Shared Ground have increased their sales per year to the Cooperative from roughly \$100,000 in 2014 (The Coop has limited records from 2014) to \$155,600 in 2016. **This is an increase of 55.6 %**
- Shared Ground has added **23** new farms to its purchasing network and was able to purchase over \$250,000 worth of produce from these farms over the two-year grant period
- In 2014 Shared Ground purchased only from the 5 member farms (representing 13 farmers) in 2016 we purchased from **28** farms (representing over 65 farmers).

- Of the 28 farms that Shared Ground purchased from in 2016, **17** farms sold over **\$1,000** to Shared Ground and of those 17 farms, **9** farms sold well over **\$20,000** each.

The five (5) member farms of Shared Ground were all able to stabilize and grow their farm's overall production in the last 2 years. Each farm's ability to increase their sales by 50% was informed by the size that each farm started at, how much they desired to increase their production, as well as the effect of unforeseen events like bad weather and storms on their production for the year. As Shared Ground has matured, it is clear that the growth of each farm's sales to Shared Ground is largely dependent on the individual farms own desires and/or abilities. Shared Ground has consistently prioritized the member farms' produce when making pre-season contracts and with weekly purchasing during the growing season.

However, as Shared Ground grew its own sales it became clear that Shared Ground needed to grow its purchasing from other local and Immigrant farmers in order to fulfill the demand of our markets while delivering a consistent and reliable supply of fresh locally produced produce to our markets. This expansion of Shared Ground's farmer network has only strengthened Shared Ground's ability to have an impact on the local food supply chain.

b. Impact on Community:

By increasing its purchasing power, Shared Ground has been able to significantly impact the growth of both its member and non-member farms. Shared Ground member farms have become leaders in their communities and mentors to many prospective farmers. By establishing solid markets through Shared Ground, member farm Agua Gorda was able to secure a loan from the Latino Economic Development Loan Fund to purchase a fifty (50) acre farm in their community. This purchase has allowed them to invest in vital infrastructure such as greenhouses, tractors, and irrigation systems. As well as infrastructure investment, Agua Gorda was able to hire five (5) Latino employees from their community for the 2016 growing season while simultaneously serving as mentors to these employees. Two (2) of these employees are now starting their own farms in 2017 and will be selling to Shared Ground. La Familia's success has inspired two (2) other Latino farms in its area to start selling to Shared Ground and to grow their business. Shared Ground member farms have participated in farmer training sessions to over one hundred (100) marginalized farmers in conjunction with HAFA, The Good Acre, LEDC, and MFA, as well as presented annually at the Immigrant and Minority Farmers' Conference held in St. Paul every January. Member farmers Javier Garcia and Rodrigo Cala have travelled to Florida and Washington in partnership with LEDC and Latino organizations in these states to conduct farm training and explain the business model of Shared Ground Farmers Cooperative. The University of Minnesota has become aware of the success of Shared Ground farmers and is now partnering with 3 of our member farms to conduct on-farm research on cover-cropping and hopes to leverage this partnership to work more closely with other Latino farmers in Minnesota.

With the success of each member farmer, Shared Ground has seen its influence in Minnesota's Immigrant farming community grow and we have been able to grow our farmer network. In January 2017, Shared Ground has plans to bring on another six (6) member farmers into Shared Ground as full owners. Of these six (6) farms, four (4) are Latino-owned farms and two (2) are Karen-owned farms (Karen is an Indigenous group originally from Myanmar). In April of 2015, Shared Ground member farmers voted to only allow Latino and other Immigrant

farmers to become full members of Shared Ground. The reason for this decision was to ensure that the control of the Cooperative remains in the hands of nontraditional, marginalized farmers. However, the member farmers have also prioritized working closely with over six (6) allied Anglo farmers who have established farms that help the Cooperative ensure a consistent supply of high-quality local produce. This unique relationship between Anglo farmers and marginalized farmers has been looked at by many partnering organizations as an innovative model for keeping the power of an organization within the hands of a marginalized group while creating strong Anglo partnerships. The Land Stewardship Project (LSP) recently asked Shared Ground to conduct a workshop to over 20 of LSP's member farmers on how best to support marginalized farmers in Minnesota. By growing the leadership potential of Shared Ground farmers and supporting the growth of their farm's sales, Shared Ground has been vital to the emergence of Latino and other marginalized farmers as strong business leaders in their communities. Thanks to this leadership other immigrants have a viable model to replicate for successful farm ownership.

iii. **Goal/Objective 3: Expand Markets**

a. **Progress Made:**

- Overall Cooperative Sales grew from roughly **\$125,000 in 2014 to \$320,000 in 2016, an increase of 156%**
- CSA sales went from **\$80,000 in 2014 to \$95,000 in 2016, an increase of 18.75%. We increased membership from 120 members to 170 members.**
- Wholesale sales went from **\$45,000 in 2014 to \$195,000 in 2016, an increase of 333%.**
- We increased the number of wholesale customers from roughly **20 solid customers in 2014 to 35 customers in 2016.**
- We expanded our sales to Grocery Cooperatives from **\$0.00 in 2014 to \$85,200 in 2016.**

b. **Impact on Community:**

The expansion of Shared Ground's markets in the last three (3) years has made an impact in many areas of the local food system. Our CSA has increased the awareness of Shared Ground's one hundred and seventy (170) CSA members on many of the issues facing our Latino member farms in Minnesota by highlighting many of these problems in weekly newsletters throughout our 18-week season. Over forty (40) CSA members have participated in three (3) workshops and on-farm events conducted to inform members about member farmers. In 2016, a core group of twelve (12) CSA members led by a member farmer and a staff member from Shared Ground participated in a Showing Up for Racial Justice workshop centered on how to best support the work of Latino farmers in Minnesota. As immigration in the United States continues to be highlighted in the media, CSA members have proven to be a key ally in helping to support Shared Ground farms.

Minneapolis and St. Paul having a thriving restaurant culture and many of these restaurants source from local farmers. In partnering with award-winning restaurants such as The Bachelor Farmer, Lucia's, and Heartland, Shared Ground has helped to inform these

restaurants on how best to work with both small and marginalized farmers. Shared Ground has conducted over fifty (50) interviews with area restaurants and has provided key insights into erasing the barriers for restaurants who want to source from a more diverse group of farmers. In April 2016 Shared Ground partnered with LEDC and the Birchwood Café to facilitate a meeting of over eight (8) local restaurant chefs and fourteen (14) marginalized farmers with the goal of educating both groups on the opportunities to work together. Shared Ground plays a critical role in allowing already overworked restaurant chefs access to small and diverse farmers without the time investment needed to manage many small relationships.

Shared Ground has strong partnerships with the Seward Cooperative Grocery and Linden Hills Cooperative Grocery. The membership of these groceries has demanded that their stores diversify their supply chain. Working closely with the produce buyers at both groceries Shared Ground has been able to significantly increase their purchasing from marginalized farms. Shared Ground farmers have done know-your-farmer events at each store on an annual basis. The Wedge Cooperative helped Shared Ground finance four Board of Directors capacity building workshops in the winter of 2015. These workshops allowed Shared Ground farmers to receive key training in financial management, Board responsibilities, and Cooperative Governance. These trainings have proven vital in allowing the member farms of Shared Ground to take control of the management of not just Shared Ground but of their individual farm businesses as well.

- iv. 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, 20__). Include further explanation if necessary.
 - a. Number of direct jobs created: **2.75 FTE**
 - b. Number of jobs retained: **2.75 FTE**
 - c. Number of indirect jobs created: Shared Ground was able to support the businesses of over 65 farmers (28 farms), many of these farms grew their businesses because of sales to Shared Ground, thus hiring more employees. Conservatively, Shared Ground indirectly helped to create 10 jobs.
 - d. Number of markets expanded: 20 Restaurants and 1 school contract
 - e. Number of new markets established: 5 new restaurant accounts, 4 wholesalers, 5 Grocery Cooperatives, and 1 Food Hub.
 - f. Market sales increased by \$195,000 and increased 156%.
 - g. Number of farmers/producers that have benefited from the project:
We now actively purchase from 28 Farms representing over 65 farmers.
 - i. Percent Increase: 400%
- v. 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?

Shared Ground has expanded its customer base largely by working within a strong customer service model for restaurants and chefs who are looking to source from more small and diverse farms but have not had the staff time or expertise to do so on their own. This is also true of cooperative groceries and other wholesale markets. Shared Ground's stated mission is to make small farming a profitable business for Immigrant and Minority farmers. Because of this mission focus Shared Ground pursues markets that can pay the highest price. The markets that we continue to access are largely middle to upper middle class markets that serve a predominately white population. However, we have partnered with both the Food Group and Second Harvest Heartland to direct over 10,000 lbs of high-quality produce to local food-shelves

while receiving a small amount of money from these organizations to cover our delivery costs. Through the continued growth of Coop sales we are also finding that as the Latino and Immigrant farmers in our network develop their farms they are able to increase their informal sales within their own communities. These sales are significant but hard to quantify. Not only are they selling their produce but they are giving large amount of produce to their families, increasing the amount of fresh produce available to them.

- vi. Discuss your community partnerships.
 - a. Who are your community partners?

Shared Ground works with many partners, our strongest non-profit partners are The Latino Economic Development Center (LEDC), Hmong American Farmer Association (HAFA), The Minnesota Food Association (MFA), The Good Acre, and the Land Stewardship Project. We also work closely with the chefs at The Bachelor Farmer, Lucia's, Heartland, Spoon and Stable, and Town Talk Diner. The Cooperative Grocery stores in Minneapolis and St. Paul have been key allies as well. Seward Coop, Linden Hills Coop, The Wedge Coop, and Mississippi Market have all been important.

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

Latino Economic Development Center (LEDC)– LEDC was instrumental in the envisioning work that went into creating Shared Ground Farmers' Cooperative. They have continued to house Shared Ground in the Eastside Enterprise Center in St. Paul and offer a subsidized rate for both warehouse and office space. LEDC has also helped secure initial funding for Shared Ground in the form of grants. LEDC has an extensive Latino farmer-training program and Shared Ground and the LEDC work together to both provide needed training and guidance to their farmers while also funneling them into Shared Ground to help market their products. All of these activities will continue into the foreseeable future.

Hmong American Farmer Association – HAFA has provided some produce to our markets thru its network of Hmong farmers. More importantly Shared Ground and HAFA have collaborated on trucking of our product, trainings, and general operating ideas. HAFA is a wonderful intellectual partner for Shared Ground and has provided many key insights into how we continue to view our collective work. All of this work will continue into the future. Currently Shared Ground and HAFA are involved in a process of understanding how to best continue to work together and do even more collaboration.

Minnesota Food Association (MFA) – MFA has an Immigrant Farmer Training Program and many of the new farmers to the Shared Ground network have come through MFA's program. MFA produces some of the most skilled farmers in our network. In 2017, MFA and Shared Ground are in talks to have Shared Ground take over the wholesale marketing for MFA.

The Good Acre – The Good Acre does similar distribution work as Shared Ground through a non-profit model. The Good Acre continues to prioritize purchasing product

from Shared Ground. We are also working collaboratively to try and access larger institutional markets.

The Land Stewardship Project (LSP) – LSP has done a lot of work in recent years on racial justice in the Minnesota Farming community. Shared Ground has begun to collaborate more in recent months on helping to give workshops to white farmers within the LSP farmer network on what barriers farmers of color face in the food system of Minnesota. We fully expect to continue this work into the future and expand it.

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

All of these partnerships are long term relationships that continue to bear fruit. We expect to keep working with all these organizations for a long time to come.

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

Shared Ground did not use any contractors for the work we did under this Grant.

- viii. Have you publicized any results yet?*

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

Shared Ground has not formally publicized any results to the broader community. However, Shared Ground maintains a newsletter for many of its customers to keep them updated on our work, the successes of our farmers, their struggles, and ongoing developments within our Cooperative. Shared Ground also has a website with farmer stories and descriptions of our ongoing work.

- b. To whom did you publicize the results?

Only to our Community Supported Agriculture members and some of our clients in the restaurant and grocery industry.

- c. How many stakeholders (i.e. people, entities) did you reach? **250 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).

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

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

Shared Ground conducts a yearly survey with its Community Supported Agriculture members and has end-of-the-season meetings with both farmers and customers within the industry.

- b. What feedback was relayed (specific comments)?

2015 CSA member – “I love reading about the farmers in the newsletters, their experiences, and how the farmers interact/collaborate. I am so proud to be supporting a collective of farms from such a diverse background. And as an added bonus, the vegetables are incredible!”

Northern Fire Pizza – “Shared Ground Farmers’ Cooperative responsibly grows some of the best produce in the region. They are leaders and innovators in the industry.”

Cala Farms – “Shared Ground is vital to my farm and to the growth of Latino farms in our region in general. Without the market power of Shared Ground Immigrant farmers would not be able to as easily grow their businesses. It is hard to grow vegetables in Minnesota but it is even harder to sell them. Shared Ground helps a lot with the sales.”

- x. 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: XX
 - b. Did the project generate any income?
 - i. If yes, how much was generated and how was it used to further the objectives of the award?

The project generated over \$600,000 in income over the course of the two (2) year grant period. Over \$540,000 of that income was generated through produce sales and roughly \$420,000 of that sales income went directly back to the farmers who produced the product. Shared Ground also had income from contract work done for partnering non-profits and through vehicle rental and delivery fees.

- xi. Lessons Learned:
 - i. Summarize any lessons learned. Draw from positive experiences (e.g. good ideas that improved project efficiency or saved money) and negative experiences (e.g. what did not go well and what needs to be changed).
 1. It is important to recognize how much growth potential each farm has at their disposal. It is very easy to overestimate how much a farmer can grow their operation in any one year. The Coop has learned a lot about the need to realistically assess each farm’s potential and to contract with them accordingly.
 2. While there is a large untouched amount of product available from Immigrant and marginalized farmers in Minnesota, our experience has taught Shared Ground that it is difficult to ensure a steady enough supply from these farmers to keep both current and potential markets satisfied. Shared Ground experienced a lot of shortage of product after working very hard to secure a market. In many ways it is Shared Ground’s biggest limitation. One way Shared Ground is bridging the supply gap is by working with more established farms to ensure product availability. This has been a relationship model that has proven to work to increase sales. Established farms are able to open new markets and keep them happy as Shared Ground continues to grow.

These farms allow the space for our marginalized farmers to continue to sell the product and grow at a more sustainable pace.

3. The marketplace is very interested in finding a way to support small local farmers from diverse backgrounds but many restaurants and groceries do not have the resources to dedicate to the building of the necessary relationships needed to actually source a significant part of their product from these small farmers.
4. As Shared Ground grows it is finding that “local food” and Organic are not enough of a value-add to open markets. The local Twin Cities market is flooded with wonderful farmers and farms. Shared Ground’s specific niche is to help source supply-chain diversity for customers.
5. There is a lot of training that needs to happen for new farms and especially new immigrant and marginalized farmers to be able to get to the quality standard needed for high paying markets. Training is also needed in packing standards and food safety. Partnering with existing training programs has proven vital to the growth of Shared Ground.

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

Shared Ground was able to increase both overall purchases from farmers and overall sales in accordance to our goals laid out in our grant application. In most respects Shared Ground has exceeded expectations. Shared Ground’s initial vision assumed that all five (5) of the original farms would increase sales by 50% or more. This has proven difficult. Each farm has their own unique circumstances and their ability to grow has been informed by those circumstances. If Shared Ground were to rely solely on the production of original member-owners it would not be able to grow sales. It has taken a network of over twenty (20) farms to continue to grow sales and keep markets satisfied with our quality, quantity, and consistency of availability.

- 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:

The administrative cost of Shared Ground has been a struggle to provide for solely on the sales of produce. Shared Ground is inherently a seasonal business but needs to employ staff year-round in order to maintain and grow relationships with both farmers and markets. The year-round cost of keeping good staff is burdensome. Shared Ground continues for ways to increase income in the off months of the season in order to alleviate some of the cost of year-round staffing. Some ideas that have been successful include doing contract work for other area non-profits and renting delivery vehicles to other entities in the off-season.

The logistics of communicating between twenty-five (25) farms and over thirty-five (35) customers on a twice weekly basis is a significant and complex activity. Shared Ground has developed systems for tracking purchases and sales that are vital to the functioning of the cooperative. However, the ability to communicate with so many people is a burden that Shared

Ground is unsure whether it can scale to a size that is economically sustainable.

xii. 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.

Shared Ground has built a very strong foundation in which to continue its work. Shared Ground's mission is to grow market share for Immigrant and Minority farmers in the Twin Cities area. Over the course of the grant period Shared Ground has seen a significant growth in markets and has developed deep ties with the Immigrant farming community in Minnesota. Currently, Shared Ground is seeing a large increase in markets that are actively seeking us out for produce. Shared Ground's capacity to connect with new Immigrant farmers has increased each year of its existence and the production capacity of farmers already in Shared Ground's network continues to grow at a steady pace.

In 2017, Shared Ground plans on increasing sales to \$450,000 and to add six (6) new farms to its ownership structure. This growth will come from an increase in our Community Agriculture Program, new restaurants, new grocery stores, and a continued increase of sales to key markets. The purchases from Shared Ground's farmer network will increase accordingly. Shared Ground has started early discussions with key partnering organizations such as The Good Acre, HAFA, and MFA to deepen relationships and have discussed merger ideas that may be possible by 2018.

Shared Ground is extremely dedicated to its farmers and helping to ensure their success in a very difficult environment. As Shared Ground continues to grow and look for ways to add sales it is also cognizant of creating more ways to engage members and non-members in capacity trainings for business management, accounting, and cooperative governance.

- 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?

Shared Ground does not have a production model that allows sales and income generation on a year-round basis. This is a significant barrier to Shared Ground's future growth and economic sustainability. Many of Shared Ground member farms are looking at pushing their ability to produce and store product but it will only take us so far.

Shared Ground has begun working with our partner organization the Latino Economic Development Center (LEDC) to connect with other Latino growers around the country who may be able to supply Shared Ground with product in the winter months when farmers in Minnesota are not able to produce. The LEDC has made connections with grower groups in Florida, California, and Washington State. Shared Ground has begun initial conversations with these groups to judge if there is enough interest and potential production to move this idea forward. Shared Ground is also working closely with markets here in the Twin Cities to assess the demand for the produce in the off-season.