

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; 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>	September 30, 2014 – September 30, 2015
Authorized Representative Name:	Gail Wadsworth
Authorized Representative Phone:	530-756-6555 x17
Authorized Representative Email:	gwadsworth@circinc.org
Recipient Organization Name:	California Institute for Rural Studies
Project Title as Stated on Grant Agreement:	Filling in the Gaps in the Merced County Food System
Grant Agreement Number: <i>(e.g. 14-LFPPX-XX-XXXX)</i>	14-LFPPX-CA-0013
Year Grant was Awarded:	2014
Project City/State:	Davis, CA
Total Awarded Budget:	25,000

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: _____

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

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.

Plan for (and determine the feasibility of) economic development opportunities for Merced County small-to-medium scale farmers by building support for a local food system that leads to innovative marketing, distribution and sales for locally-produced agricultural products specifically targeted at some of the region's least accessible communities.

- i. Goal/Objective 1: Identify barriers to accessing local markets, businesses and schools for small to medium scale farmers.
 - a. Progress Made: 100% Complete
 - b. Impact on Community/ Results: Farmers Markets don't pay off due to low volume sales and small revenue. Additionally, growers felt that customers in the region lacked sophistication. Because of a lack of consumer education about local foods, there is less consumption.
The lack of GAP certification is a barrier to farmers accessing wider markets.
There is a perception that farms are not “food safe.”
Marketing efforts are difficult, they take time and farmers focus on production
Farmers want a higher price, buyers want a low price
Distribution is difficult
Farmers lack understanding of the local market and the market at large.
Packing is a problem.
There is no market for seconds and produce goes to waste.
Broadline distributors are a mixed bag. They offer a lower price point & identity loss, but distribution helps and payment is guaranteed.
- ii. Goal/Objective 2: Identify gaps in the local food system for small to medium scale Merced farmers.
 - a. Progress Made: 100% complete
 - b. Impact on Community/ Results:
Farmers’ perceptions of gaps--
No buying co-ops
No source identification/labeling
No marketing & regional identification
No clear understanding of how to leverage local food
No yearly local food grower/ local buyer event
Buyers’ perceptions of gaps—
Farmers don’t have proper packaging/boxes
There is no on-farm certification to assure buyers of food safety and institutional buyers have legal issues/mandates for food safety.
There is minimal insurance & the risk factors for direct purchasing from groups are an issue.
Regulations vary, depending on each school, institution.

Buyers find they need to be in continuous communication with famers and this is a problem. There is no easy way to communicate.

Buyers and growers don't understand each other/speak a 'different' language.

The volume and availability of products from local farmers changes frequently.

Buyers have a little capacity for storage

Buyers feel they must pick up produce from farms, there is no viable distribution system.

Southeast Asian farmers 'don't have business acumen'

Price point from farmers is too high.

- iii. Goal/Objective 3: Work with growers to create priorities for economic development in local markets.

- a. Progress Made: 100% complete

- b. Impact on Community/ Results:

- Priorities were clearly articulated throughout this process. Although they changed over the course of our work, at the end, a clear set of choices were stated and ranked. See appendices page in this report.

- iv. Goal/Objective 4: Increase the capacity of small to medium scale and limited resource farmers to work together in order to sell locally grown produce to wholesale and institutional markets.

- a. Progress Made: 20%

- b. Impact on Community/ Results: Our work focused on a participatory process of decision making. Overall, an initial sense of competition among growers eventually gave way to a wish to work together for the benefit of all. By the end of the project, all participants valued the concept of working together to develop a market for Merced products. However, it was clear, throughout our work, that farmers were exceptionally diverse in how they currently access markets. So, one solution for all was not feasible. There were some goals that all growers agreed upon and are willing to work together to achieve.

- 1. GAP Certification training for produce

- 2. Outreach to local Hmong growers

- However, we felt that the response to our meetings was too small. We will develop a plan based on our results in order to garner more support and participation in the future. Of the farmers who participated, all wanted to learn how to access restaurants rather than schools or hospitals.

- v. Goal/Objective 5: Determine the feasibility of a local fresh produce storage hub in Merced County to support small to medium size farmers.

- a. Progress Made: 60%

- b. Impact on Community/ Results: Upon review of all the facilities currently available, it was determined that none would be available to small to medium scale growers. There are several facilities that are available but beyond the capacity of this group to access. It was also determined that these growers were less interested in developing a food hub than in working together for marketing and education.

- vi. Goal/Objective 6: Determine the feasibility of a local commercial kitchen to benefit Merced County farms.
 - a. Progress Made: 0%
 - b. Impact on Community/ Results: We did not receive feedback from farmers that a commercial kitchen was a goal. In fact, most growers thought that the added work involved in value added products was beyond their capacity at this time.
- vii. Goal/Objective 7: Determine the feasibility of a processing and/or freezing facility specifically for small to medium scale Merced County growers.
 - a. Progress Made/ Results: 100%
 - b. Impact on Community/ Results: Upon review of all the facilities currently in existence, it was determined that none would be available to small to medium scale growers. There are several facilities that are currently closed down and may be available but beyond the capacity of this group to access. It was also determined that these growers were less interested in developing a food hub than in working together for marketing and education.
- viii. Goal/Objective 8: Determine feasibility of small scale facility for vacuum packing and/or drying.
 - a. Progress Made/ Results: 100%
 - b. Impact on Community: Upon review of all the facilities currently in existence, it was determined that none would be available to small to medium scale growers. There are several facilities that are currently closed down and may be available but beyond the capacity of this group to access. It was also determined that these growers were less interested in developing a food hub than in working together for marketing and education.
- ix. Goal/Objective 9: Identify ability of growers to source packaging and labeling materials
 - a. Progress Made/ Results: 0%
 - b. Impact on Community: This did not seem to be a concern of farmers. It was more of a concern to institutional buyers. However, we did provide farmers with several options for labeling materials for local sales. While they were interested in the current availability, they determined they would rather develop a label for themselves. Although packaging was perceived to be an issue for institutional buyers, growers themselves did not seem to be concerned about access. However, working together to develop marketing plans may alleviate any current problems growers face with packaging and labelling.
- x. Goal/Objective 10: Seek information on group source trucking to markets and distributors outside Merced County but within a 100 mile radius.
 - a. Progress Made/ Results: 100%
 - b. Impact on Community: This was determined to be too much of a challenge for these growers. Some of the growers do not have delivery trucks themselves, others have trucks that are full to capacity. Farmers decided early on that the development of local markets was more important to them than aggregation and group trucking. Additionally, several growers sell to wholesalers who provide the trucks themselves, alleviating the grower of the need for additional trucking.
- xi. Goal/Objective 11: Determine feasibility of marketing to local swap meet vendors

- a. Progress Made/Results: 100%
 - b. Impact on Community/ Results: Only one grower wanted to access this market. While public health representatives found this to be an important step for consumers, farmers were not willing to consider this as a viable outlet. However, additional work will be done to determine the possibility of creating an alternative market for unsold produce using swap meets.
 - xii. Goal/Objective 12: Measure interest in creation of locally identified label or "Buy Fresh, Buy Local" marketing campaign in partnership with local growers and businesses.
 - a. Progress Made: 100%
 - b. Impact on Community/ Results: There is interest in working on local identity. Participants stated that the first step in this would be educating the local community about the value of buying locally and the farms that sell direct to consumers. Rather than spending time on creating an identity label for Merced, growers would rather work together to educate buyers. Additionally, when asked what kind of wholesale buyers they would like to market to locally, the overwhelming majority 83% stated they would like to sell to restaurants rather than schools and hospitals. Additionally, a majority stated that they would like to work together to develop marketing materials, just not a label.
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, 20__). Include further explanation if necessary. **This was a planning project and so this question does not apply.**
- i. Number of direct jobs created:
 - ii. Number of jobs retained:
 - iii. Number of indirect jobs created:
 - iv. Number of markets expanded:
 - v. Number of new markets established:
 - vi. Market sales increased by \$insert dollars and increased by insert percentage%.
 - vii. Number of farmers/producers that have benefited from the project:
 - a. Percent Increase:
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? **N/A**
4. Discuss your community partnerships.
- i. Who are your community partners? Merced County Farm Bureau, University of California Cooperative Extension, Hmong Farmers, Riverdance Farm, Anderson Almonds, Community Alliance with Family Farmers
 - ii. How have they contributed to the overall results of the LFPP project? These partners contributed in multiple ways. The Farm Bureau and Coop Extension donated meeting space and did outreach to their contacts and members for this project. The Hmong Farmers, Riverdance Farms and Anderson Almonds participated in meetings and did outreach to farmers for this project. CAFF provided information on Buy Fresh, Buy Local in California. All of these partners contributed to the project by providing feedback on our work and information for the study. Coop Extension helped identify existing processing facilities and provided information on each.

- iii. How will they continue to contribute to your project's future activities, beyond the performance period of this LFPP grant? We hope that all of our partners continue to engage with CIRS to develop a plan for next steps. We expect that to include a plan for marketing as a group, investigation of creating a new coop or joining an existing one, a plan for educating the local community about local farms that sell direct to consumers. In addition, we will be developing a handbook for marketing direct to restaurants. Our partners are essential to the success of the project which is proceeding for their benefit.
5. Are you using contractors to conduct the work? If so, how did their work contribute to the results of the LFPP project? Yes, we contracted with a meeting facilitator. While being experienced with meeting facilitation. She was very capable of facilitating the meetings. In the future, CIRS will facilitate meetings with these farmers using CIRS staff.
6. Have you publicized any results yet?* **No**
- i. If yes, how did you publicize the results?
 - ii. To whom did you publicize the results?
 - iii. How many stakeholders (i.e. people, entities) did you reach?
- *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? **No**
- i. If so, how did you collect the information?
 - ii. What feedback was relayed (specific comments)?
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? **No**
 - a. If yes, how much was generated and how was it used to further the objectives of the award?
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).

The farmers who were engaged from the beginning of the project remained engaged throughout. This gave us a good base of farmers to clarify both needs and wants for the future. In addition, we were able to engage more farmers outside of meetings through one-on-one conversations. We also found that it was not necessary to entice growers with a meal every time we had a meeting. The crucial factor for involvement was time. It is best to manage projects that require meetings with farmers so that meetings are held during slow periods of the year. We also found that outreach for the meetings was most effective when personal calls were made rather than general outreach through the media or posted flyers. Additionally, it is important not to underestimate the value of word of mouth. Encouraging growers to invite friends was very effective in raising attendance at meetings.

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

It was challenging to engage farmers during the growing season. In California, that's nine months a year so we would have small groups at various times of the season, depending on what crop needs were ongoing. We addressed this issue by having one-on-one phone and in-person conversations with growers at their convenience. This strategy worked very well and we were able to engage more farmers in this manner. However, the value of farmers working as a team was diminished. As a result, our conversations with farmers were less effective at determining a path for the future. At the end of the project, we asked all farmers to participate in an online survey. From that request, we only received eight responses. So, the conclusion from this is to capitalize on in-person and on the phone time by asking very specific questions.

- 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:

Throughout this project, we explored various methods of outreach to farmers. We found that the most effective method was directly calling all participants. This was quite time consuming but it was most effective. We were able to attract new participants solely through word of mouth. Despite the fact that there were news articles in local papers and industry news letters, it was apparent that growers were most comfortable learning from and participating with trusted colleagues. Although we have a strong network in Merced County, we are not well known by all growers. Understanding trust issues and addressing them has been a valuable lesson for us.

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.

There were several clear messages received from the community of growers engaged in this process. As we proceed with partners we will:

1. Write up a report with our conclusions, including maps we created for the project.
 2. Create a marketing plan for Merced County small to medium scale growers
 3. Create materials for community education about Merced County farms
 4. Develop a handbook for selling directly to restaurants.
- ii. Do you have any recommendations for future activities and, if applicable, an outline of next steps or additional research that might advance the project goals? We also determined that the growers in Merced County would like workshops on developing GAP for food safety, specifically for produce. This type of education is outside the CIRS range of expertise.

Appendices

Ranked Choices for Next Steps:

1. Educate local residents about local products
2. Gain GAP certification for produce
3. Work with other growers to market products
 - a. Form a coop
 - b. Form a marketing group with paying members
4. Work on other marketing materials before developing label
5. Work on our own local Merced brand
6. Develop skills for marketing to restaurants

Label materials explored



