

FY 2014

\$94,448 to North Coast Opportunities, Ukiah, CA, to improve farmers' markets in Mendocino and Lake Counties, CA, through educational outreach and EBT training.

**Final Report**

Farmers Market Promotion Program  
Final Performance Report  
For the Period of October 1, 2014 –30-Sep-16

Date: 1/27/2017  
Recipient Name: North Coast Opportunities, Inc.  
Project Title: Farmers Markets for All (FM4All) Project  
Grant Number: 14-FMPPX-CA-0025  
Project Location: Ukiah, CA  
Year of Grant Award: 2014  
Amount Awarded: \$94,448  
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**Program Summary:**

Provide a brief summary regarding the goals and objectives, activities performed, beneficiaries, collaborators, and your most impressive (result) measurement.

The goals of the grant: 1) Increase the number of shoppers at Lake and Mendocino County Farmers Markets by putting into place a promotion and marketing campaign. 2) Increasing EBT sales and market match purchases by building farmer capacity to implement these programs. The philosophy that we take to achieve these goals was two fold: 1) Use the funding available to promote our various markets via external sources such radio, social media, newspaper, blog posts, direct mail, etc. 2) Was to both empower our farmers to build their own audiences via social media and other sources (ie regular newspaper articles) so that they could communicate directly to their audiences once the grant funding was finished. We wanted to provide training and an infrastructure that could be used over the long term. Related to the second piece we also worked to develop relationships with external referral partners so that they would be able to direct their clientele to the markets, specifically to EBT Match Program. These referral partners include organizations such as Head Start, Senior Centers, and Family Resource Centers. There were many successes along with lessons learned. One of the highlights was toward the end of the grant when we deployed direct mailers to low-income areas promoting the Market Match Program. Specifically, the during the 3rd week of the month (generally a slower EBT use week) the Ukiah Market generally saw around \$200 in EBT usage. Instead it went to \$414. More impressively 12 of the 21 users were 1st timers a large percentage of which had young kids, one older lady who said it was what she needed to start going after her health problems (who pre shopped for a pile of veggies, had the vendor hold it for her, then came and got exactly as many tokens as she needed to pay for the veggies). That was a fun short term highlight. For the long term, we're proud to have built the infrastructure for a long term branding effort under "Grown Local - Mendocino County" and "Grown Local - Lake County." This shared branding is something that farmers, farmers markets, and local retailers and restaurants use to increase the awareness and sales of locally produced food. There's a shared logo that all members of the program can use for marketing and promotion. We've also

established a website and blog to share news, updates, and stories from the local food system: <http://GrownLocalMendoLake.com> and a corresponding social media presence: <http://Facebook.com/GrownLocalMendoLake> which allowed us to introduce farmers, share stories, highlight where to buy, and in general be a platform for communication that will leave long beyond the grant funding. We also worked closely with individual farmers and market managers to improve their effectiveness in using social media to grow and sell to their audiences. We're transitioning the branding to an entity that can build upon this infrastructure. We've collaborated with the Mendo Lake Food Hub to identify partners, possibly a farmer cooperative, to keep the program going.

### **Goals and Objectives:**

Describe the general goals and objectives (scope) of the project: Indicate the need for the grant project prior to the implementation of grant activities.

The goals of the grant: 1) Increase the number of shoppers at Lake and Mendocino County Farmers Markets by putting into place a promotion and marketing campaign. 2) Increasing EBT sales and market match purchases by building farmer capacity to implement these programs. The need for the grant is reflected in the fact that less than 2% of food purchases in the two counties is spent on food produced in the region.

### **Activities:**

Describe the activities used to achieve the goals and objectives. This should include measurement of any baseline data. Include significant contribution/roles(s) of project partners.

A variety of activities were deployed to achieve the grant goals and objectives. 1) During the grant period numerous farmer trainings were provided around sales and marketing. Much of this information was new to our farmers but once they understood some basic fundamentals of building their own audiences they were able to generate success and sales. Specifically, farmers were trained around how to use social media by sharing regular updates, pictures, videos, stories from their farm. This effort led to farmers building an engaged audience that cared about the work of the farm and farmer which then allowed the farmer to promote when they were going to be at farmers' market with the date, time, and location. They learned that by simply posting about their activities that they were able to effectively tell their story and engage with their audience - and by posting a day or two ahead of market day promoting themselves they were able to build a regular group of customers. 2) We purchased new signage for many of the markets covered under the grant. A-frames and the like. Specifically we were able to standardize the look of many of the market managers tables via a consistent across markets table cloth. This allowed us to create general promotional collateral that directed EBT customers to look for the managers table (via a picture of the table cloth) to redeem their EBT. We found that this helped eliminate a fear that many EBT customers had about how the EBT process worked and how to engage in the program. 3) We created a series of videos that we shared online and in person to educate the community about the EBT program. The most successful video was produced in both English and Spanish and was an exact "how-to" process of finding the managers table, how to swipe their EBT card, and how to use their tokens. Again these videos helped remove some of the fear of how the program worked which empowered more people to use the program effectively. 3) We collaborated with our local Farm to School programs to build upon their successful "Harvest of the Month" program and expand to it to the larger community. This program effectively educates the community about the value

of eating seasonally. And that certain foods when purchased in season were not only fresher and tastier but also cost effective. We promoted the crop of the month each month via newspaper articles, blog posts, social media, and in-person. 4) Ian Fitzpatrick presented to various community groups such as Head Start parents, senior groups, and new EBT sign-ups to outline the match program. 5) The direct mailer program we developed also proved to be valuable. We were able to create a very specific flyer that targeted low income groups and then via USPS we were able to mail them directly to low income targeted areas. 6) We developed numerous radio ads to run on local airwaves. We created flyers, posters, and other external materials that were distributed at markets, via our referral centers, and posted around our local communities. 7) We effectively used targeted Facebook advertising to build the presence of each of the markets' pages and promoted specific posts to drive attendance at their respective markets. 8) Via partners at NCO, we partnered in establishing the Power of Produce or POP Club at 3 of the Mendocino County markets. This program is for children 4 - 12 and includes a booth at the market, a weekly activity (often times featuring the Harvest of the Month), and \$4 "green bucks" which are tokens the kids can use to spend at the market. This was a very successful program and will continue post grant.

### **Beneficiaries:**

Describe and provide the actual numbers for both the direct and indirect beneficiaries of grant activities. As appropriate, include demographic composition of market vendors, customers and the surrounding market area (income level, ethnicity, age, etc.). Describe how specific groups benefitted from the grant, including any potential economic impact. Provide data supporting these conclusions. Ideally, this should include feedback from vendors and consumers, as well as any available quantitative data.

Mendocino County has a median household income of just \$42,980 and Lake County has a median household income of just \$35,578. When compared the national median income of \$53,889 it's clear that our two counties struggle when it comes to making ends meet. There's a very specific challenge in our area about promoting the value of fresh, local, healthy food when the reality is that cheap and fast food is prevalent. There was a challenge in not only educating the community about the value of fresh fruits and vegetables but also combating the myth that food from farmers market is too expensive (this is where our efforts around promoting Harvest of the Month and eating seasonally stemmed from). Roughly 20% of residents in both counties are in poverty. 2) Because of our efforts we were able to begin the process of educating the community about the value of eating fresh, local food and that the cost isn't as high as many think - especially when they become aware of the Market Match program. An example quote from a customer, Connie Suarez: "The market match program at the farmers' market has helped me make sure that I have enough food to feed my family. CalFresh only goes so far. The match allows me to breathe a little easier. And I love serving my family fresh fruits and vegetables." 3) Ian was able to facilitate bringing the Willits farmers market to a downtown location for the communities annual "Hometown Festival." The market set up in a parking lot downtown which allowed many residents who didn't usually shop at the market to be exposed to our farming community. Market manager Michael Foley reported that the event certainly generated new customers for the day of the event, AND those new customers came to market the following weeks when the market was back at its usual location.

Lessons Learned:

Discuss the lessons that were learned from completing the project. Lessons learned may have influenced the direction of the project, helped improve the process, and/or optimized the results. Sharing these experiences may be quite helpful to those seeking to learn from your experiences and to achieve similar results.

There were many lessons learned from this experience that I believe will be valuable to others in the future. There were a lot of things that we did right, and there certainly are things I wish I could do differently. Two things stand out: 1) Understanding the values that drive our individual community to make buying decisions. Meaning because our area does have such a low income level simply blasting out radio and newspaper ads and expecting them to respond is a false expectation. Our area, and every area of the country has its own unique attributes, but in our area there has been a separation in the community. It's not quite a rift but in general there's already a crowd of people that "get" why local food is important and they support the farmers market with diehard passion. However, there's another element of the community that views market goers as "hippies" and they don't want to be viewed in the same light. It was a frustrating challenge to deal with over the grant period. The reality is that our conservative and liberal friends want the same things: fresh food, fair prices, community resilience, and a fun safe place to take their families shopping. So our communication to each of these audiences had to be specific to that audience. This is where targeted Facebook advertising was effective. But more than that I found that the most effective communication was 1-on-1 with people or in small group presentations. And because I'm only one person I found a lot of value in creating leverage with our referral centers and coaching them to have effective conversations with their constituents about the market in general and about market match specifically. Word of mouth will always trump any other form of promotion or marketing, and empowering influencers to speak directly with their contacts is a key piece of the puzzle. 2) From day 1 on the job I was asked to think about how best to work in a way that creates systems that can be used over the long term once the grant funding is gone. In order to create a sustainable and resilient food system it's clear that we can't rely on federal funding over the long term. With that in mind, and by collaborating with the Mendo Lake Food Hub, we were able to establish a shared brand under "Grown Local." This branding effort can now be carried on post grant either through a private organization or via a farmer cooperative. We've established a lot of key materials including a brand style guide, graphics, photography, videos, website, social media, and other materials that farmers, market managers, and other businesses can utilize in a long term effort to localize our economy by beginning with an effort to localize our local food system. We identified that roughly 2% of the money spent on food across the two counties was spent on food produced within the two counties. A shift to 15% of food dollars spent being spent on local food would retain tens of millions of dollars in the local economy. Naturally that won't happen overnight or over a two year grant. We've developed an entire program with revenue streams that for the right enterprise (my vote is a farmer cooperative) can continue to manage and grow for many years to come. The process of promoting local food consumption, primarily driven by shopping at local farmers' markets, is really an educational challenge. It's not only educating residents about the existence of the markets, but it's very much about promoting the value of shopping at them. Creating a shared brand that each of our food producers uses along with market managers and the general business community is an effective way to create leverage and exposure. "A rising tide raises all boats" type of theme. The shared branding also creates a sense of connection and belonging for our farmers. They feel connected to each other and are a part of the same community so they can share resources, best practices, and encouragement. You can see posts on the Grown Local Mendo Lake Facebook page that reflect this kind of connection. Farming can be a lonely,

and unprofitable, venture for many. Often times it's a labor of love - so by creating shared branding we can eliminate some of that disconnection while increasing sales which can making farming more profitable and attractive to future generations.