

**Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP)  
Final Performance Report**

The final performance report summarizes the outcome of your FMPP award objectives. As stated in the FMPP Terms and Conditions, you will not be eligible for future FMPP or Local Food 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 FMPP 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 FMPP staff to avoid delays:

FMPP Phone: 202-690-4152; Email: [USDAFMPPQuestions@ams.usda.gov](mailto:USDAFMPPQuestions@ams.usda.gov); Fax: 202-690-4152

Should you need to mail your documents via hard copy, contact FMPP staff to obtain mailing instructions.

<b>Report Date Range:</b> <i>(e.g. September 30, 20XX-September 29, 20XX)</i>	September 30, 2014 through December, 31, 2016
<b>Authorized Representative Name:</b>	David Johnson
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<b>Authorized Representative Email:</b>	David.Johnson@rescue.org
<b>Recipient Organization Name:</b>	International Rescue Committee
<b>Project Title as Stated on Grant Agreement:</b>	Intercultural Market Promotion Mechanisms Project
<b>Grant Agreement Number:</b> <i>(e.g. 14-FMPPX-XX-XXXX)</i>	14-FMPPX-NY-0125
<b>Year Grant was Awarded:</b>	2014
<b>Project City/State:</b>	San Diego, California
<b>Total Awarded Budget:</b>	\$82,566

FMPP 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: Anchi Mei Email: [anchi.mei@rescue.org](mailto:anchi.mei@rescue.org) Phone: 619-641-7510 ext. 234

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1. **State the goals/objectives of your project as outlined in the grant narrative and/or approved by FMPP staff.**

### **Strategy 1: Farmers Learn About and Invest in Customers**

#### **Activity 1: Increasing capacity to understand and better serve consumers - Producers Investing in Customers (PIC) funds for Downtown El Cajon Farmer's Market (DECFM) farmers**

**Progress Made:** The IRC supported six market gardeners (community gardeners who sell their produce at farmers' markets) at the IRC-managed Fresh Farm Community Farm with PIC funds to improve their farm business. Consumer surveys, and both formal and informal personal interactions, consistently referred to a need for more varieties of vegetables and a higher volume of produce offerings. Therefore, IRC decided that supporting market gardeners in maximizing production on their garden plots would best respond to consumer demands. In order to make the PIC funds accessible for participating farmers, IRC considered time spent training and the social commitment of farmers vending at the farmers' market as an in-kind match component of the funding.

As part of the application process clients were required to: 1) complete and sign a paper application; 2) apply for a Certified Producers Certificate (CPC) which allows them to sell at local farmers' markets; 3) complete a Combined Financial Assessment (CFA) which allows IRC to assess their current financial state; 4) attend an IRC finance workshop; and 5) commit to sell at the El Cajon Farmers' Market for at least one month. After discussion with farmers, and in recognition of the fact that since farmers were all growing in the same community garden, they faced the same challenges of increasing production on limited land while reducing input (water) costs to improve profits, the IRC concluded that a PIC "product" package rather than individual business loans would be the best approach. The PIC product package included a drip kit, a drip timer, a soil moisture and PH gauge, a raised cold frame mini greenhouse, and a garden hose splitter. All PIC recipients participated in a training session on how to install and use all of the materials. IRC will provide ongoing assistance to these individuals regarding maintenance as needed. IRC hopes that these farmer plots will serve as a model of how to install and maintain a drip system, and reap the benefits of a small greenhouse, encouraging other plot owners to follow suit.

**Impact on Community:** Activity 1 has had a significant impact on the El Cajon Farmers' Market. While California's drought, San Diego water restrictions, and increasing numbers of heat waves have negatively impacted farmers and farmer's markets, the key support of PIC funds enabled market gardeners to become a mainstay of farmer's market's produce vendors over recent years. The six farmers who gained PIC funds and IRC training support (detailed below in Activity 2) have become the backbone of produce sales for ECFM through even its most challenging seasons. Furthermore, investments in specific community gardeners has increased water conservation awareness across the garden while increasing productivity and reducing water costs.

#### **Activity 2: Trainings for Beginning Farmers**

**Progress Made:** The IRC provided technical assistance to 50 existing and new market gardeners throughout the project term. IRC conducted several New Farmer Training Program cohorts, which consisted of production classes, business classes, farmer's market tours, and supported sales at IRC-supported farmers' markets. Additionally, the project supported IRC staff in conducting water conservation trainings, which led El Cajon gardeners to self-enact a watering ban during the hottest part

of the day as a way to minimize loss of water through evaporation, and has led to a 20% decrease in water costs.

IRC also provided technical assistance to market gardeners from the El Cajon Fresh Farm in renewing their sales permits so that they could continue selling at the El Cajon Farmers' Market. Support provided took the form of one-on-one consultations during the farmers' market, office assistance with paperwork completion, scheduling inspections, and making sure that payments were being submitted properly.

**Impact on Community:** As mentioned in Activity 1, the market gardeners that vend at ECFM are critical to our farmers' market's ability to offer produce during the slower winter months when other San Diego farmers tend to scale back. The Project's support of these trainings has provided the double benefit of helping these farmers – who are also low-income residents of El Cajon – as well as farmers' market shoppers, many of whom are CalFresh beneficiaries. Fresh Farm market gardeners generated approximately \$20,000 in additional household income, benefiting over 10 extremely low-income households.

## **Strategy 2: Customers Learn About and Invest in Farmers**

### **Activity 3: The Market SEEd Program - Seeing Where Your Food Comes From**

**Progress Made:** There was tremendous support and demand for SEEd tours, and IRC easily met its goal of conducting 10 tours. Though demand for tours was much higher, IRC was unable to exceed its goal due to staffing constraints. Both the ability to schedule tours according to group timing needs and the SEEd tour brochure, which provided tangible, informative takeaways, were key factors in the success of this activity. The SEEd Tours were able to engage a new population and communicate the importance of farmers' markets and community gardens. Tour participants were excited to see a community garden firsthand and learn about market gardeners who sold produce at the El Cajon Farmers' Market. Attendees were incentivized to attend the market by providing them a coupon for a multi-ethnic cookbook which could be redeemed at the market.

**Impact on Community:** Activity 3 was a success in terms of demand and tour participant satisfaction. However, it is not evident that SEEd tours have had long-term impact on market sales. Nevertheless, IRC believes there is still benefit in utilizing SEEd tours to increase market sales, which will be explained in Section 10 Future Work. The brochure that was created will continue to be a resource for the department and community, and was designed to be easily shareable on social media platforms.

### **Activity 4: Fresh Fund (a double-value coupon program incentivizing shoppers to use CalFresh benefits at the market)**

**Progress Made:** The Fresh Fund Program continued throughout the term of this Project and has been further bolstered by the support of the Ecology Center's FINI grant, of which IRC is a sub-grantee. IRC has been able to offer a \$5 Fresh Fund match for CalFresh participants at the El Cajon Farmers' Market—providing an opportunity for low-income individuals to have greater access to healthy and local fruits and vegetables.

**Impact on Community:** During the project term, IRC's Fresh Fund team made approximately 5,000 CalFresh transactions, generated over \$25,000 in EBT sales, served approximately 1,000 low-income households, and distributed over \$50,000 in Fresh Fund matches for specialty crop purchases.

### **Activity 5: Opportunity Shares (a market-based CSA with EBT option)**

**Progress Made:** As mentioned in previous reports, the IRC re-assessed the feasibility of this activity given the current low customer demand for a market-based CSA. Instead, the IRC is focusing on developing more outreach and market programming partnerships with organizations and businesses. As we better understand new groups of market clientele, IRC will assess and brainstorm creative and time-efficient market purchasing arrangements to better address customer needs.

**Impact on Community:** The Opportunity Shares activity was an idea that was not implemented due to the lack of both supply and demand for it. EBT-accessible CSA programs have been gaining traction at EBT-accessible farmers' markets, however the IRC did not pursue this idea due to lack of customer demand. IRC staff created a short form to gauge potential market customers' interest in signing up for a pilot CSA, and there was far too little demand to justify the staff time to operate it during market hours. Additionally, the lack of consistent large-scale produce farmers added another constraint to implementing this activity.

## **Strategy 3: Customers and Vendors Embrace Cultural Diversity**

### **Activity 6: Collaboration Celebration Calendar**

**Progress Made:** The IRC pursued organizational collaborations throughout the project term to help increase the number of market activities and the use of the venue for community outreach, and to serve as a new customer recruitment tool. Throughout the project term, the IRC worked with the following organizations to host market events and activities:

- Iraqi Center for Dialogue
- Kurdish Human Rights Watch
- El Cajon WIC office
- HomeStart
- El Cajon Collaborative
- Leah's Pantry
- East County Family Resource Center
- Family Health Center of San Diego
- El Cajon Public Library
- Operation Samahan
- County of San Diego's East Region Live Well Leadership Team's Healthy Eating Workgroup

IRC staff have also done a significant amount of marketing and outreach about the market which may result in additional partnerships. Outreach sites include: health clinics, community based organizations, adult school sites, senior centers, churches, food distribution sites and restaurants.

Within this activity, the IRC proposed a market-focused steering committee. Rather than create a new committee and add another meeting to a small group of El Cajon organizations, the IRC asked the County of San Diego's East Region Live Well Leadership Team's Healthy Eating Workgroup to fold the El Cajon Farmers' Market into its annual strategic action plan. The County has created unique ECFM posters and helped plan several events each year, including a Food Day event each October.

To solicit greater community feedback, the IRC used Facebook and market surveys as another form of a steering committee. Using a Facebook “poll” also enabled IRC to collect feedback from people who did not attend the market, providing a more comprehensive perspective. IRC received 45 surveys in English and 27 surveys in Arabic (conducted with Arabic translation). Overwhelmingly across both languages respondents were weekly market shoppers who attended because of the good prices (51% of respondents) and variety of produce (53% of respondents), with secondary factors being that they receive Fresh Fund, IRC’s market match program (36% of respondents) as well as the aspect of social engagement (31% of respondents). The other overwhelming trend was that, despite coming to the market for produce price and variety, people want to see more produce vendors (54% of respondents). Many were very specific about the kinds of produce they would like to see more of at the market, namely oranges, greens such as chard and kale, onions and melons. Respondents also indicated that they would like to see more hot and packaged food vendors (51% of respondents). Specifically, respondents mentioned having a variety of ethnic foods, including Middle Eastern cuisine (Iraqi food was mentioned by 6 people), Mexican, Asian, BBQ, baked goods, additional honey vendors, and health foods such as smoothies and gluten free food options. Finally, 36% of respondents would like to see more activities at the market. Respondents expressed the largest interest in expanded activities for children, but also mentioned music, dancing, and exercise.

The Facebook poll had 37 respondents. Similar to the in-person survey, participants stated that they would like to see more fresh vegetable and fruit vendors (81% of respondents), as well as more hot food vendors (60% of respondents) and packaged food vendors (49% of respondents). People specifically mentioned wanting to see a coffee vendor, additional bread options, dairy products like cheese, health foods, and condiments like olive oil and spreads. Forty percent of respondents expressed an interest in seeing more non-food items such as clothing, essential oils, flowers and crafts made available, and 43% of respondents would like to have more activities at the market (participants later commented on music as being something that would draw them in).

**Impact on Community:** These Collaboration Celebration Calendar activities have had limited impact on market sales and some positive impact on the broader community. IRC saw that nonprofit staff had limited time to dedicate to supporting ECFM market events, and that over time staff turnover made maintain personal relationships challenging. While there were several successful market special events with strong collaborative partners that saw a boost in market attendance, the additional market attendees did not translate to vendor sales.

Facebook has been an unexpected new draw that will be used more going forward. It is a cost-effective and easy way to reach new people, particularly as IRC staff have learned ways to promote the market more effectively, e.g. have market customers tag the ECFM Facebook page to reach more people and using the paid sales features. IRC has just begun to seriously utilize Facebook as a marketing device and the impacts have yet to be determined.

### **Activity 7: Intercultural Cooking Demonstrations**

**Progress Made:** IRC and Leah’s Pantry offered 12 cooking demonstrations of recipes from the intercultural cookbook “From Iraq to the Golden State: Recipes Inspired by Iraqi Community Farmers” that was produced as part of this Project. IRC has distributed the cookbook as a prize for Fresh Fund participants, market event raffles, SEEd tour participants and as a market outreach tool.

**Impact on Community:** Market shoppers really like the cookbook, as it offers a unique way to understand the cultural background of the ECFM's refugee vendors while also providing information about local fruits and vegetables. The production of the cookbook was the focus of staff time during the project term, and IRC believes there is still more untapped potential in using the cookbook as a marketing device at future events and promotional campaigns.

**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.**

- i. Number of direct jobs created: 6
- ii. Number of jobs retained: 30
- iii. Number of indirect jobs created: not available
- iv. Number of markets expanded: 1
- v. Number of new markets established: 0
- vi. Market sales increased by \$0 and increased by 0%.

Throughout the project term, the ECFM has experienced highs and lows. The farmers' market industry is fairly volatile, and over the past decade San Diego County has experienced a surge in the number of farmers' markets without a surge of new farmers that has resulted in several new farmers' markets closing down within a year or two of opening. The community is still a car-oriented suburb, and the market's main shoppers are low-income Fresh Fund participants. Therefore, the loss of a single large farmer has a significant impact on the perception of the size of the market. Additionally, because San Diego County is spread out and there are many farmers' markets to choose from, farmers have the power to decide whether or not to come to ECFM. Overall, the IRC is pleased to be able to operate the farmers' market in El Cajon without a significant loss, and is invested in piloting and pursuing strategies that can lead to greater success in coming years.

- vii. Number of farmers/producers that have benefited from the project: 10
  - a. Percent Increase: Approximately 50% increase in sales for market gardeners

**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?**

The El Cajon Farmers' Market has been able to serve newly-arrived refugees over the project term and continues to increasing access to fresh food for low-income populations. Due to the increasingly politicized climate around refugee issues, the IRC has chosen not to publicize a strong refugee component to the market, particularly since the broader community in El Cajon is relatively conservative. Nevertheless, its connection with the IRC as well as its location in a low-income neighborhood ensures steady access to and for these populations.

**4. Discuss your community partnerships.**

- i. **Who are your community partners?** IRC works with many community partners to promote the market and Fresh Fund, and to expand programming at the market. These partners include the following organizations: HomeStart, the Family Resource Center of El Cajon, Project Samahan, Traveling Stories, El Cajon Collaborative, Mezzah Restaurant, the El Cajon Library, Kaiser Permanente and County of San Diego, WIC

- ii. **How have they contributed to the overall results of the FMPP project?** CalFresh outreach, community booth and prize giveaways, educational booths, childhood literacy activities, general market promotion, sharing 3-compartment sinks and bathrooms for the market's health permit, promotion of garden and market tours (SEEd tours), and WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Incentives have all contributed to the success of the FMPP project.
- iii. **How will they continue to contribute to your project's future activities, beyond the performance period of this FMPP grant?** These partners will continue to be good friends of the ECFM, and will offer their time and resources to the ECFM even after the grant period ends.

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

IRC contracted with Leah's Pantry for the development of the farmers' market cookbook. Leah's Pantry was professional in their staff, expertise and implementation. The cookbook developed was of excellent quality and has been popular with market patrons. Furthermore, the cookbook recipes were developed with the consultation of several refugee market gardeners from El Cajon, which further increased the sense of pride and community involvement of those growers.

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

IRC has not publicized any project results yet, although the El Cajon Farmers' Market's support of refugee market gardeners through the provision of additional household income will be included in IRC's 2016 annual report.

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

IRC conducted 109 customer satisfaction surveys by the end of the project term. Overall, shoppers are satisfied with the benefits of the market, however there is still a significant desire to include more produce vendors.

On an institutional level, the IRC has several organizational partners, including the County of San Diego's Health and Human Services Agency, the East County Family Resource Center, the El Cajon Collaborative, and the City of El Cajon, that are supportive of our efforts to continue operating a farmers' market and provide EBT-access in a low-income area that lacks a full-service grocery store.

**8. Budget Summary:**

- i. **As part of the FMPP 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?**

## 9. Lessons Learned:

**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 Project's many activities provided IRC with insights into and lessons about the range of possible marketing activities, and how to provide lasting benefit to and impact on the success of a farmers' market. Within this project, vendor-focused activities have proven the most essential to market success. Activities 1 and 2 helped IRC's market gardeners increase their productivity and thus offer more product at the ECFM. Given the volatile nature of farmers' markets, the stability of our refugee market vendors has been critical to our ability to keep operating and providing produce to our customers.

In contrast, it seems that special events had limited impact on customer sales. While a good strategy for recruiting back vendors, it is not a sustainable or high-return strategy given the input of staff time required.

Lastly, several organizational partnerships, in particularly the WIC FMNP program and Salvation Army's Senior Voucher Program, were extremely beneficial to our market sales. It remains a true win-win for these organizational partners to utilize the market as a way to meet the food security needs of their beneficiaries.

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

Testing customer demand and conducting pilots are a resource-efficient way of implementing project activities. IRC's customer surveys for a CSA pilot prevented the waste of staff time planning a full-scale CSA, and instead allowed us to understand the low community demand for such a service. This enabled IRC to direct its efforts to other program activities. It is important for organizations to design fast, small, affordable pilots before implementing a full program.

**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 IRC's food and farming team has seen firsthand the value of long-term strategic planning with regards to project administration. While farmers' market programming is subject to the vagaries of weather fluctuations, vendor fluctuations, volunteer commitments, nonprofit partner commitments, and unpredictable market competition, these variables make it even more essential to plan ahead. In recent years the IRC's farmers' market staff has started each fiscal year with a rigorous project risk analysis and mitigation planning session, and actively ensured that daily workplans are structured by a 12-month strategic action plan. This type of detailed planning is a resource-efficient way to ensure that when the inevitable surprises and challenges of operating a year-round farmers' market arise, the team is ready to continue on undaunted and prepared.

## 10. Future Work:

**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.**

The FMPP grant has provided IRC with funding instrumental to the operation of the El Cajon Farmers' Market during the most challenging period of any farmers' market – its first few years. USDA funding provided IRC with the staff time to pursue different activities and evaluate impacts on El Cajon residents in order to identify the best pathways to success. This was done in a region with one of the highest rates of poverty in the entire County, where the challenge of creating a successful El Cajon Farmers' Market was always and will always be a complex venture.

The IRC is grateful that the FMPP Project allowed the program time, resources, and staffing to pilot and test multiple strategies. While some strategies worked better than others, the missing component is that all strategies were attempted in isolation. IRC's future work at the El Cajon Farmers' Market (and possibly across all Food and Farming projects) will weave these strategies together simultaneously for greater impact. The lessons learned during this project informed the following strategic insights:

- Cultivate community and organizational partnerships that provide enjoyable customer-oriented activities at the farmers' market
- Prioritize staff time and develop creative, innovative, and effective strategies to recruit more fruit and produce vendors
- Expand the use of Facebook as customer recruitment and "steering committee" tool
- Develop community garden tours and tour brochures as a marketing strategy for gaining new customers for the ECFM
  - Target El Cajon community members first for the tours so they will be more likely to support the ECFM
  - Promote tours online
  - Consider a digital brochure to share with groups after their tour (connect to marketing)
  - Conduct more tours in spring and summer (and take off winter months) – tours do not have to follow the same year round schedule
  - Making tour times accommodating for group needs will facilitate more tours
- Continue training and support of refugee market gardeners to cultivate a stable source of vendors for the market

As the ECFM moves into its fifth year of operation, the IRC hopes that the market can recruit 3-4 more local fruit and vegetable vendors over the coming year, as well as develop out the remaining portion of the market into a healthy physical activity space for children, social gathering and integration space for new immigrants, and an innovative "temporary brick and mortar marketplace" for online vendors (clothes, bags, jewelry, etc.). A more active and vibrant marketplace will continue to benefit the local refugee and senior communities by providing a larger social gathering space, particularly important for maintaining mental health for seniors and social integration for new refugee populations.

**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 IRC is currently developing a 2020 Vision Plan for the El Cajon Farmers' Market that will delineate the vision articulated above. However, the work of a farmers' market is hardly linear and IRC will continue operating with our 12-month strategic plan that is always ready to seize new opportunities.