

FMPP Final Performance Report

Report Date Range: <i>(e.g. September 30, 20XX-September 29, 20XX)</i>	October 1, 2014 – March 31, 2017
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Recipient Organization Name:	The Highland Center
Project Title as Stated on Grant Agreement:	Four County Foods: Building a Regional Farmers' Market System
Grant Agreement Number: <i>(e.g. 14-FMPPX-XX-XXXX)</i>	14-FMPPX-VA-0164
Year Grant was Awarded:	2014
Project City/State:	Monterey, VA
Total Awarded Budget:	\$97,810

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).

1. [State the goals/objectives of your project as outlined in the grant narrative and/or approved by FMPP staff. For each item below, qualitatively discuss the progress made and indicate the impact on the community, if any.](#)

Four County Foods will strengthen Farmers' Markets in the Alleghany Highland Region, increase the availability and accessibility of local foods during the regular market season, promote off-season direct consumer-to-producer sales through the Faces of Farmers Website, and encourage young market vendors.

Goal 1 - Build on the success of three current Farmers' Markets and grow an emerging Farmers' Market in our four-county agricultural area with enhanced training, promotion and amenities.

An FMPP working committee was built consisting of managers of all four participating markets and the Highland Center Local Foods Coordinator. Over the 2.5 years of the grant period, the group met seven times. Locations varied so that each market could host meetings which enabled other market managers to see their venue and have a better understanding of the communities they serve. Topics for meetings included review of grant goals; each market's update, highlights, new ideas, and progress toward goals; remaining grant budget review; and tracking and reporting requirements.

Marketing and Vendor Recruitment plans were developed by each market, and updated annually. These proved valuable because they required managers and market board members to be proactive in planning the upcoming season.

Many **workshops** were held on a variety of topics, from herb production to high tunnel construction to how to display produce and attract customers. Workshops provided helpful information to vendors, and helped connect individuals with similar interest so they may learn from one another. Market managers benefited and “learned the ropes” by attending manager workshops.

Customer and Vendor feedback was gathered at each market through surveys to gauge satisfaction and generate ideas for improvement. All markets had very positive comments on their surveys.

Purchase of amenities and promotional items were critical for all markets and provided necessities that ensured success. The Pendleton Market Manager said it well “The FMPP grant purchased essential amenities for our young farmers market. Having these amenities helps us draw new vendors because they do not have to have cost prohibitive/bulky to transport items like certified scales, tables, chairs and tents.” And from the Pocahontas Market Manager “The promotional items we were able to purchase through the grant has done a great job in spreading the word about our market, and also made possible the creation of our new eye catching logo, which we used on all of our new promotional items.”

The impact on the community by accomplishing this goal has been to provide farmers’ markets that are reliable, well organized, creative and responsive to local needs.

Goal 2 - Expand access to local foods for all residents, with increased participation from underserved children, seniors and families.

SNAP workshops were held and technical assistance given so that Highland Farmers Market and Bath Farmers Market were able to successfully implement SNAP programs, complete with matching dollars. **Credit and debit transactions** using tokens are available to help eliminate stigma associated with SNAP tokens. SNAP marketing advanced in the last six months for these two markets. Coordination is underway with Social Services and Department of Health to promote using SNAP benefits at farmers’ markets. Virginia Fresh Match, a new organization to promote matching SNAP dollars, is working with the Highland Farmers’ Market. Additionally, a SNAP rack card was produced with Virginia Fresh Match assistance and artwork.

The Pocahontas market had previously accepted SNAP benefits but was unable to due to difficulties recruiting a reliable volunteer the final year of the grant to run the SNAP machine every week. However, Pocahontas has expanded access to local foods with **increased participation from seniors**. Over the winter 2016/2017 managers debated whether Pocahontas markets should expand or contract. There was overwhelming support for a 3rd market in Greenbank so they have formally re-established it. The new location will be at the Greenbank Senior Center parking lot, providing direct and convenient access to senior shoppers. At the Pendleton Market, continued lack of internet service has made the SNAP program not possible.

With the addition of Bath and Highland markets in 2016, the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program, which provides “checks” to qualified seniors to be spent on vegetables, fruit and cut herbs at the farmers markets, is now available at all four markets, resulting in good progress toward expanding access to local foods to seniors.

Youth has been encouraged to attend and participate in farmers' markets in a variety of ways, described below in Goal 4.

The **Donate A Dollar** program ran into several difficulties, and was not able to launch. The program relied on vendors donating meat and produce to local schools to entice the schools to make further purchases. Coordination between vendors and approvals at the school level proved to be logistically difficult, and did not get underway.

All markets now have a **lending library**, with books and DVDs relating to local foods topics, including gardening, healthy eating, and benefits of local food systems.

For each of the communities where the markets are located, having access to fresh produce has been very beneficial. Three of the four participating counties are classified as Low Income and Low Access by the USDA Food Access Research Atlas. The farmers markets provide a much needed source for residents to obtain local fresh produce. Significant progress was especially made in advancing local food access to seniors.

Goal 3 - Use regional Farmers' Markets as a jumping off point for producer-to-consumer activities, with increased participation in off-season sales and other direct marketing opportunities.

Faces of Farmers (www.faces-of-farmers.org) continues to be a valuable resource to connect consumers to producers in our region. The website covers five counties in Virginia and West Virginia and currently features 33 farms. A "Farm of the Month" feature is posted on the Highland Center's Facebook page, as well as on the Faces of Farmers website. The "Where to Get the Goods" directory is now in place, and the Faces of Farmers video is posted on YouTube as well as on the website.

Print, and more recently online advertising such as Facebook, is being used to promote Faces of Farmers. Discussions are taking place for the next generation of the site, with ideas such as ways for farmers to weekly post their product availability, and for customers to even place online orders.

Progress of **direct producer-to-consumer year-round sales** is an exciting trend that is taking off. Several vendors from all markets have grown their businesses and are succeeding in this area. The farmers' markets have provided a venue to make a profit, while experimenting with different products and growing techniques to allow the farmers to scale up for these other endeavors. Several sell directly to restaurants, stores, wholesale, and bed & breakfasts, as well as to consumers. Some have started Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) ventures.

One of the long-time vendors at both the Bath and Highland markets has ventured out to form a company called Highland Harvest (<https://highlandharvest.farm>). The vendor specializes in grass-fed beef, pastured pork, and lamb, and through their new company will be taking orders up front and delivering to customers. They are also recruiting other farmers to join their product line-up. This is an ideal example of how the farmers' markets provided a jumping off point for producer to consumer sales. By attending the farmers markets for several years, this vendor built up a regular customer base that has allowed them to grow into a year-round local meat provider.

Highland Farmers' Market provided a **new off-season, direct marketing opportunity** in early March, 2017, by hosting a Winter Meat Market. This indoor venue supported several local meat vendors. Customers laden with coolers poured in. Sales were very good, and both vendors and customers



thought it a great success. Winter meat markets are planned to be an ongoing event.

Alleghany Meats, a local USDA slaughterhouse, sold their clients' meat at the Winter Meat Market. This was their first venture into retail sales. Their positive experience was the impetus for them to initiate retail sales at their business location, providing a convenient direct to consumer outlet Monday through Friday for local meat sales.

The community has benefited by more and convenient ways to purchase produce and meat. Faces of Farmers puts locals and visitors in touch with farmers. With all the progress and opportunities that have arisen, a system and network of local food availability is taking shape across our Alleghany Highland region.

Goal 4 - Increase youth involvement and entrepreneurship; encourage young farmers and potential vendors and offer market intern opportunities.

Youth and young adult engagement, especially **the Scholarship program**, proved very successful. Many high quality students worked at all four farmers' markets, providing reliable staffing and teaching students lifelong values of local foods. We had more students than anticipated, but were able to provide some scholarship funds to each student. Most students have now attended their first year of college or trade school in agricultural and business related fields.

To attract children and their parents to the Farmers' Markets, planned activities were held, such as starting seeds, making pressed flower pictures, or making beneficial insect mobiles. At two markets, volunteers who are teachers, had activities every week. When planned activities weren't possible, having games and activities purchased through the grant helped keep customers at the market for longer, and gave the market a child friendly, social feel. Each market purchased a supply of Farmers Friends fruit and veggie cards to be used to attract youth to the markets, learn health benefits of vegetables and fruit, and the importance of local food.

To recruit youth vendors, Highland Market held a Young Farmers Day, and children from the school garden attended with their produce. In addition, Highland held a Children's Market each year. Grade school children in grades K – 5, about 180, walked over to a special early afternoon market. Vendors shared a little about their business, and the kids were able to shop.

At Pocahontas Market, two young people are vendors on a regular basis with parents who are committed to helping make it happen. One is only 7 years old. She has experience because when she was a day care kid in Linwood, she participated with the group selling produce from the daycare garden. The other child is 12 and his family has a plot in the community garden.



Vendors were encouraged to bring their children, some of whom had participated in producing products and were active in selling at their table.

This was a great way to get kids interested in local foods and farmers’ markets, and many of the youth are quite enthusiastic young vendors.

2. Quantify the overall impact of the project on the intended beneficiaries, if applicable, from the baseline date (the start of the award performance period, September 30, 2014). Include further explanation if necessary.

	<i>Bath</i> ¹	<i>Highland</i>	<i>Pendleton</i>	<i>Pocahontas</i> ²
Total sales	2014 - \$38,414 2015 - \$45,295 2016 - \$18,564	2014 - \$35,203 2015 - \$36,012 2016 - \$35,304	2014 - \$8,060 2015 - \$5,244 2016 - \$5,162	2014 - \$53,631 (3 locations) 2015 - \$59,396 (3 locations) 2016 - \$38,808 (2 locations)
Customers Per Day	2014 – 150 2015 – 301 2016 - 459	2014 – 158 2015 – 167 2016 - 159	2014 - 50 2015 – 100 2016 - 90	2014 – 87 (average among 3 locations) 2015 -87 (average among 3 locations) 2016 - 84 (average among 2 locations)
Number of vendors (existing and new)	2014 - 24 2015 -28/12 2016 – 13/10	2014 - 31 2015 -27/2 2016 – 30/7	2014 - 17 2015 -15/2 2016 – 12/7	2014 - 42 2015 – 41/13 2016 – 27/5
Sales per vendor (Avg)	2014 - \$1,670 2015 - \$1,617 2016 - \$843	2014 - \$1,135 2015 - \$1,334 2016 – \$1,358	2014 - \$474 2015 - \$349 2016 - \$430	2014 - \$1,340 2015 - \$1,448 2016 - \$1,531
Number/Sales Credit Debit Transactions	2014 – N/A 2015 - 49/\$1,963 2016 – 13/\$650	2014 - 54/\$1,545 2015 - 34/\$1,380 2016 – 51/\$1060	N/A	N/A

¹ In 2016, Bath had only 4 markets, one each month July – October, instead of their usual 18 weekly markets

² Pocahontas market consisted of only 2 locations in 2016, instead of their usual 3 locations.

	<i>Bath</i>	<i>Highland</i>	<i>Pendleton</i>	<i>Pocahontas</i>
Number/Sales SNAP Transactions	2014 – N/A 2015 - 9/\$368 2016 – 5/\$580	2014 – 16/\$720 2015 - 9/\$306 2016 - 11/\$300	2014 – N/A 2015 -N/A 2016 – N/A	2014 - 10/\$216 2015 -11/\$152 2016 - \$0
Number/Sales Senior/WIC checks Transactions	2016 – \$115	2016 –\$485	2016 -\$289	2016 -\$616
Hours from Scholarship Recipients/Market Interns	2015 -310 2016 - 40	2015 – 25 2016 - 95	2015 - N/A 2016 - 50	2015 - 57 2016 –N/A
Checkouts from lending library	2015 – 5 2016 - 2	2015 - N/A 2016 – none, but library being assembled	2015 - N/A 2016 - none, but library being assembled	2015 - N/A 2016 –none, but library being assembled
Customer satisfaction	2015 – High, 28 Surveys Returned 2016 – Did not survey	2015 – High, 21 Surveys Returned 2016 – Did not survey	2015 – High, 16 Surveys Returned 2016 – High, 13 surveys returned	2015 – High, 36 surveys returned 2016 – High, 19 surveys returned
Number of demonstrations and other enrichment activities	2014 - 8 2015 – 9 2016 - 4	2014 - 9 2015 -16 2016 -16	2014 - 0 2015 – 0 2016 -9	2014 - 5 2015 – 9 2016 – 5

Beneficiaries

Market Managers - When the grant began, market managers had varying experience from none at all to a few years. During the grant period, changes in management occurred at all markets. Grant funding provided the opportunity for manager training and networking. The managers now have a good knowledge of day-to-day operational needs, marketing, and other critical know-how to more effectively and efficiently run their respective markets. This training was important to learn procedures to implement market organization, entity establishment, and record keeping/data collection.

Vendors, Farmers, and Small Businesses - The increased market awareness made possible by expanded and consistent advertisement and signage benefited all markets, but other factors led to varying sales results. Sales remained steady at Highland Market, with a slight increase in number of vendors.

At Bath Market, after an 18% increase in total season sales from 2014 to 2015, sales dropped by 59% in 2016. This is because the total number of market days went from 18 to only 4. A lack of produce vendors led the managers to make the decision to reduce the number of markets. However, total sales at each Bath Market day increased from \$2516 in 2015 to \$4641 in 2016, an increase of 84% each market day.

Pendleton Market showed a decline in total season sales from 2014 to 2015 that remained constant into 2016. Market managers report a very specific reason for this: Beginning in 2015, a wholesale produce truck began setting up right down the street from Pendleton Farmers' Market. Customers were drawn away from the farmers' market to this truck, even though the produce sold was not local or produced by the seller. Pendleton did see an increase in new vendors from 2 to 7, which bodes well for the future of the market.

Pocahontas Market saw an 11% increase in total season sales in 2015. However, with the decision to reduce the number of locations from 3 to 2 in 2016, sales correspondingly fell by 35%. The market has since reorganized and recruited new volunteers, and in 2017 will reinstate the third market location.

At all markets, vendors and farmers are becoming successful small businesses by finding new markets through direct sales to customers, restaurants, and through CSAs. The farmers' markets and workshops funded by the grant provided experience and ways to connection to consumers for vendors to move forward with differing sales models.

Customers – The number of customers per market day remained nearly steady at three markets, with only a slight down turn. Highland had a 5% decrease, Pendleton a 10% decrease, and Pocahontas a 3% decrease in customers. However, anecdotal information that more consumers are buying directly from farmers and vendors may belie the actual number of customers and sales. Sales outside the farmers market are not documented, but we do know that many of our produce and meat vendors have developed other direct sales venues. Sales to local restaurants are increasing in two counties.

Bath Market showed a dramatic increase in number of customers per day in 2016 over the previous two years. The reduced frequency of the markets from once per week to once per month resulted in customers looking forward to the market as a special community event. Market managers at Bath learned from the reduced season that loyal customers missed the weekly markets, and became more dedicated supporters of the farmers' market.

Children, Seniors, Low-Income Individuals & Families - As discussed in the narrative for Goal 2 above, progress was made in all these categories. Demonstration and enrichment activities, which include children's activities, occurred at every one of Bath's markets in 2016, a 100% increase over activities at only half their markets in previous years. Highland Market stayed the same with 16 activities in 2015 and 2016, which is a 78% increase over 2014, and means an activity occurred at nearly all 18 markets. Pendleton went from 0 activities to 9 in 2016, most of which were children's activities. Pocahontas saw a reduction from 9 activities to 5 due to their operating in only two locations in 2016.

SNAP sales at Bath Market increased by 58%, and at Highland Market fell by 2%. Pocahontas Market was not able to provide SNAP sales in 2016 due to lack of volunteer staff, but did run successful SNAP programs in 2014 and 2015. Pendleton Market, in an internet dead zone, is unable to provide SNAP benefits.

Low income individuals and families still aren't big shoppers at the farmers' markets. This appears to be a common problem throughout Virginia and probably beyond. Market managers and this grant

administrators have attended workshops that focus on this issue to seek solutions. Reasons for little participation from low income individuals include perception that food at farmers' markets is more expensive; no experience shopping at farmers' markets which leads to discomfort; and the desire to buy everything needed at one large store. A new organization, Virginia Fresh Match, is working to promote increased SNAP sales at farmers markets and to ensure availability of matching SNAP dollars at every market. Highland Market joined the Virginia Fresh Match working group.

All market managers covered under this grant support SNAP sales and matching dollars and continue to work on removing obstacles for low income shoppers. The Highland Farmers' Market is working on a new concept in 2017, in bringing a pop-up market to low income shoppers. Vendors would be recruited to set up at a local church parking lot during monthly food bank pick-up times. The food bank provides mostly canned and boxed food, so the addition of fresh produce and meat at this location would provide additional choices. Regular food bank customers would experience the comfort and convenience of a familiar location, while becoming acquainted with farmers market type produce stands. SNAP tokens with matching dollars would be available, so shoppers can experience first-hand how beneficial it is to double their money at a farmers' market. In addition with the help of Social Services, the Market plans to communicate average pricing on some food items at the market each week to SNAP users to demonstrate that with double SNAP how cost-effective shopping at the farmers' market really can be.

Bath Market and Highland Market started a new program in 2016, the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program, which provides "checks" to qualified seniors. The checks may be spent on vegetables, fruit and cut herbs. Use of checks was substantial at Highland Market with \$485 spent, and well used at Bath's four markets with \$115 spent. The two markets in West Virginia continued to participate in the senior check program as they did in 2015 and 2014. Sales data was collected in 2016, and both markets had significant use of senior checks, with Pendleton Market vendors receiving \$289 in senior checks, and Pocahontas vendors receiving \$616 in checks. A considerable amount of healthy food was provided free to seniors through this program, and meant additional sales for vendors. By adding the two Virginia markets this year, good progress was made on this goal to expand access to local foods to seniors.

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?

New youth populations include 11 high school students who interned at the markets and now are huge supporters of farmers' markets. 180 elementary school students attended the Highland Market in 2015 and 2016, and Girl Scouts attended Bath Market in 2015. In addition, Pocahontas market has an ongoing relationship with the Linwood Daycare, whose kids grow, sell, and learn at the market. Low income/low access populations continue to be recruited, as discussed in 2. above.

4. Discuss your community partnerships.

Pocahontas Market - Grow Appalachia and the associated community garden program provided their extra produce to sell at the market and will continue to do so as individuals gain knowledge and experience. The Linwood Daycare has been a partner for several years. The market provides a convenient venue for the kids to sell some of their garden bounty and various crafts. The new mayor of

Marlinton has been very supportive of that site and is working with partners in the community toward getting a pavilion in that town.

Pendleton Market - The Treasure Mountain Festival organization provides a space for the market and storage free of charge. This is expected to continue.

Bath Market – Bath Community Hospital staffed a “Food for Thought” tent, which had information and demonstrations on healthy living. The Hospital also provided funding for matching SNAP dollars. In 2017, Bath Community Hospital is assuming management of the market, and has new ideas to tie their wellness programs in with the market. Natural Retreats, a real estate and resort company, hosts the market free of charge at their Natural Retreats Park, and donates funding to have live music at the market. The county tourism department annually contributes funds to cover operating expenses. Local citizens have donated supplies, including an enclosed trailer for storing market supplies.

Highland Market – The Highland Center, the non-profit who oversees this grant, provides grant administration for all four markets, and use of their pavilion for Highland Market. The Highland Inn provides weekly food demonstrations staffed by their hospitality and culinary interns. Allegheny Mountain Institute, an educational non-profit organization with the mission to cultivate healthy communities through food and education, maintains raised bed at the market pavilion and does demonstrations at the market. Allegheny Mountain Strings performs music at two or three markets per season. Valley Program for Aging Services encourages senior attendance at the market, and sets up an information table twice per season at the market. The Highland Evangelical Association provides funds to match SNAP tokens. All these partnerships are expected to continue.

5. [Are you using contractors to conduct the work? If so, how did their work contribute to the results of the FMPP project?](#) No, n/a.

6. [Have you publicized any results yet?](#)

Preseason market articles appeared in local newspapers each year. Facebook and websites exist for all markets. Highland Market produced a new rack card.

7. [Have you collected any feedback from your community and additional stakeholders about your work?](#)

To collect feedback, surveys were completed by customers and by vendors. Results were very positive on the whole across all four markets. Data collected helped managers better understand their customer demographics, such as how far they traveled to reach the market, how often they shopped, and how satisfied they were with various aspects of the market, from friendliness of vendors to cleanliness. Vendor surveys helped managers better understand vendor needs, and provided suggestions for making the market better.

8. [Budget Summary:](#)

- a. [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:](#)
- b. [Did the project generate any income?](#)

Yes, each market charged vendors a fee to participate. Some markets charged a flat rate, such as \$10 per market, or a season rate such as \$75 per season. Some markets charged a percentage of vendor sales, for example 10% of sales. In addition, donations were received from individuals, counties, and local businesses. Most notable, Bath Market set up Friends of the Market initiative that collected \$775 over the course of the grant, and received funding from the county Department of Tourism and the private Natural Retreats. These funds are important for market viability, and help with advertising, insurance, and amenity purchases.

9. Lessons Learned:

Reaching out to other organizations and **forming partnerships** is very beneficial to the market. Partner groups open doors and opportunities for a more vibrant and creative market. The same can be said for reaching out to youth of all ages. This was clearly demonstrated by the partnership with Linwood Daycare having kids participate in the market, and then graduate to becoming youth gardeners and vendors, as well as by the very successful scholarship/intern program. The markets benefited by the energy brought by youth, and intergenerational interactions.

The project was very fortunate that the principals and collaborators of the Working Committee all have **a passion and belief in local foods**. Their involvement was founded upon much more than just meeting the numerical goals – they knew that, ultimately, success of the project meant strengthening the local food system, which is beneficial for the entire region. The market managers obviously wanted to grow their markets – but in doing so, they realized they were creating more opportunities for producers – both established ones and future ones, spurred by the success of their neighbors. This, in turn, brought a greater range of products and choices to the consumer, which in turn brings more consumers - and the cycle repeats, for the betterment of all.

The desire for local food availability continues to be a growing trend, but it is evolving and changing, too. Where once farmers' markets were the primary source to obtain or sell local foods, now direct producer to consumer sales are becoming more popular, whether through CSA's, store fronts, restaurants, or online sales. Farmers' market managers need to be flexible and look at the bigger picture of using the market and their relationships to expand connections between producers to consumers. Making local foods available to all is really the goal, with many ways and models to accomplish it.

10. Future Work:

The working group of market managers from the four markets is planned to continue. Sharing ideas and working together created an enthusiasm that served to keep each market strong. The Highland Center remains dedicated to advancing local foods by assisting market managers, connecting producers to consumers with ongoing management and upgrades to the Faces of Farmers website, providing commercial kitchens for rent and business counseling to food-based businesses, and continuing to work with restaurants and markets to carry local produce and meat.