

**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>	October 1, 2014 – September 30, 2016
<b>Authorized Representative Name:</b>	Karen Aikman
<b>Authorized Representative Phone:</b>	312- 833-9338
<b>Authorized Representative Email:</b>	karen@homegrowncow.com
<b>Recipient Organization Name:</b>	Home Grown Cow
<b>Project Title as Stated on Grant Agreement:</b>	Home Grown Cow Online Farmers' Market Promotion and Expansion Project
<b>Grant Agreement Number:</b> <i>(e.g. 14-FMPPX-XX-XXXX)</i>	14-FMPPX-0176
<b>Year Grant was Awarded:</b>	2014
<b>Project City/State:</b>	Evansville, WI
<b>Total Awarded Budget:</b>	\$88,630

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: John Aikman; Email: [john@homegrowncow.com](mailto:john@homegrowncow.com); Phone: 312-833-9338

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.

- State the goals/objectives of your project as outlined in the grant narrative and/or approved by FMPP 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.
  - i. Goal/Objective 1: Increase the number of farmers using our farmers’ market that sell directly to consumers from 332 (currently) to 1,328 by the end of the grant period (09/29/2016).
    - a. Progress Made:
      - Added 220 new farmers
    - b. Impact on Community:
      - Despite being below our goal, these grant funds nonetheless served to increase the farmer participation rate in this farmer’s market by over 66%. AND combined with the alarming rate at which the number of American farms is contracting, we find this an acceptable result.
  - ii. Goal/Objective 2: Increase the number of consumers who have subscribed as Home Grown Cow “Eaters” on our web site from 1,884 (currently) to 7,536.
    - a. Progress Made:
      - Added 1401 “Eaters”
    - b. Impact on Community:
      - This grant produced a 74.3% increase in engaged customers for the farms that participate in our marketplace. Which is significantly more valuable than simply increased web traffic. This 74% increase in engaged consumers resulted in a 130% increase in sales direct to farmers.
  - iii. Goal/Objective 3: Develop an outreach program to educate consumers and farmers on the importance of robust, locally and regionally produced agriculture, their communities and economies 24 “how-to” videos, 48 featured blog articles, 48 newsletters (24 Eater, 24 Farmer).
    - a. Progress Made:
 

Our outreach program to reach communities using blog articles and newsletters was implemented, however the videos were not produced due to human resource constraints
    - b. Impact on Community:
      - 1. We believe the positive messaging this Grant provided served to increase awareness of the benefits of using a farmers’ market as a supplier as well as a consumer. We don’t know how to measure this impact.
- 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. Number of direct jobs created: 0
  - ii. Number of jobs retained: 0
  - iii. Number of indirect jobs created: unknown

- iv. Number of markets expanded: unknown
  - v. Number of new markets established: unknown
  - vi. Market sales increased by \$30,884 (from \$23,613 to \$54,497) and increased by 130%.
  - vii. Number of farmers/producers that have benefited from the project:
    - a. 220
    - b. Percent Increase: 66%
- 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?
    - i. Possibly, but we are unable to measure this.
  - Discuss your community partnerships. N/A
    - i. Who are your community partners?
    - ii. How have they contributed to the overall results 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?
  - Are you using contractors to conduct the work? If so, how did their work contribute to the results of the FMPP project?
    - i. Yes, we use the planned contracted web marketing in the form of third-party online advertising platforms as planned, and these were largely responsible for the revenue generated for the farms and the success of the program.
  - 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).
  - Have you collected any feedback from your community and additional stakeholders about your work? YES
    - i. If so, how did you collect the information?
      - a. Voluntary feedback via email from farmers and customers
    - ii. What feedback was relayed (specific comments)?
      - 1. Lack of customer service/inability to reach a live person.
      - 2. Home Grown Cow fee (15% of price charged) too high.
      - 3. Too much effort to keep price lists updated.
      - 4. Lack of support with packaging.
  - Budget Summary: No Changes
    - 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? NO

a. If yes, how much was generated and how was it used to further the objectives of the award? - No it is not that kind of project.

- 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).
    - POSITIVES:
      - Bloggers
        1. We found increased web traffic in the days after a blog post would publish.
          - a. We found this traffic to be more engaged with the site and traffic generated via paid ads.
      - Google AdWords
        1. Google has a program that with a specific 'spend' level they will dedicate a specialist to assist with an ad campaign build. This was hugely valuable as the lessons in ad design and the resulting ads can be reproduced and used anywhere.
      - FaceBook Ads
        1. Add excitement to an ad campaign because they give immediate feedback in terms of data showing "likes", "shares", and "comments". They are easy to put together and administer.
    - NEGATIVES: Promotion alone is not enough investment to support the market.
      - This project was very disheartening for us as entrepreneurs. It became evident that a much higher capital investment than we have is necessary to support the business model.
      - Unexpectedly low rates of farmer engagement
        - Many farmers ignore their orders.
        - Many farmers fail to keep their inventory up-to-date and have to reject orders due to lack of availability or outdated pricing.
        - 21% of orders in the reporting period were rejected by the farmer, not just ignored.
        - We believe that part of the reason behind this is that the service is free, which was intended to be a big advantage for farmers, but also removes the incentive for them to stay on top of their pricing and listings, since there is no down-side for not doing so.
        - Additional resources in the form of a customer service department would be needed to manually follow-up with farmers on their orders and hand-hold them through the order and inventory processes. There would be additional cost associated with this.
      - Bloggers want to try the service for free
        - This would be fine if the product were ours, but in order to provide bloggers with product, we had to purchase it from a

farm, then pay shipping to the blogger, and often pay for the review. This grant does not allow funds to be used to purchase product, so it was a challenge to minimize costs.

- Google Ad-Words
  - We didn't find the traffic generated from the Google program to be useful. Analytics showed the traffic was not engaged in the site. If funds are limited for advertising and need to generate sales, we would not recommend Ad-words, unless you need assistance building an e-commerce campaign.
- Facebook
  - Much like Google Ad-Words, we found Facebook ads did not directly lead to sales. We understand how they help with Brand awareness, and they offer an excellent way to A/B test for engagement, but for sales, it is hard to beat the "word of mouth" style endorsement of a trusted blogger.
- Google and the Technical side of this project
  - Because some funds were used to "improve" our URL structure, we will address the issues we found with Google search and SEO, and Site interactions. They quickly become financially crippling.
  - It is useful to understand that web traffic resulting from "Organic" search is highly valuable because it produces people who are likely looking to buy, and it's easy to think of it as "free". In fact all things considered, it's very expensive.
    - We understand the need for Google to monitor the Internet to keep it useful and free of scam sites etc, but it seems the preferred method is for Google to protect its algorithms as proprietary and secret and they changed during the term of this grant which sent our traffic plummeting, which in turn renders your site as irrelevant and places you down the list of search results until you can adjust to the new search priorities.
    - Changes to the search algorithms are not forewarned and require monitoring and traffic analysis.
      - Once discovered, they require time and education in understanding what adjustments are necessary to conform to the new search parameters.
  - IT issues and problems
    - Code breaks for no understandable reason
    - SEO key words become stale
    - Google wants to see dynamic websites that are ever changing and evolving
    - Other sites we interact with such as mapping and shipping tools change which breaks the links to our site

- If goals or outcome measures were not achieved, identify and share the lessons learned to help others expedite problem-solving:
  - We did not anticipate how much assistance our farmers demand despite the service being free for them. Our business model assumed farmers would take a more active role in promoting themselves and their individual HGC webstore.
    - We found many farmers actually work against our service by helping consumers navigate around us to save the 15% commission we charge the consumer to order through our site.
    - We believe having dedicated account managers to assist farmers would alleviate the problem of farmer engagement.
  - We did not anticipate all of the issues we would encounter from the Internet and Google.
    - It is clear that with an independent site, you need to have a dedicated IT person just to monitor the site daily/weekly for all of the complications, let alone fix them.
  
- Describe any lessons learned in the administration of the project that might be helpful for others who would want to implement a similar project:
  - See above
  
- 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.
 

While the term of this grant saw what felt like a number of painful set-backs and disappointments for the market as a business, the actual Grant funded project of promoting the market was a success! The grant funds allowed us to grow our engaged consumer base by 75% and our direct-to-farmer sales by 130%. We are extremely proud to have accomplished those results given the challenges we faced.

Should we find funding to assist with some of the more administrative aspects of running this business, we believe a better promotional approach to growing this market lies outside of traditional advertising methods.

It makes little sense to drive sales to farms who can't/won't fulfil them. It seems to us a good next step would be a greater level of community involvement by aligning with rural organizations that could offer the farmers the assistance they need, potentially as an added value to their already existing services. We envision such organizations to include rural business development groups,

University extensions, rural Chambers of Commerce, local high school marketing programs, FFA style organizations, and the like.

We believe we have established a consumer demand for farm-direct sales, but it is our experience the farms are not ready to meet the demand.

- 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?
  - a. See above