

**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 your assigned grant specialist 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, 2015-February 22, 2017
Authorized Representative Name:	Lynn Thurston
Authorized Representative Phone:	207-684-2172
Authorized Representative Email:	hope@tdstelme.net
Recipient Organization Name:	Blue Sky Produce
Project Title as Stated on Grant Agreement:	Wild Blueberry Shipping Hub
Grant Agreement Number: <i>(e.g. 14-LFPPX-XX-XXXX)</i>	15LFPPME0135
Year Grant was Awarded:	2015
Project City/State:	Pittsfield, ME
Total Awarded Budget:	\$51,630.00

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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:

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.

- i. Goal/Objective 1: Develop a shipping depot where fresh wild blueberries and other food products will be received, stored and shipped.
 - a. Progress Made : The building we originally had in mind when applying for the grant fell through. After searching for several months but not finding anything suitable or affordable, we decided to build a warehouse. Blue Sky Produce provided the funds for the land and building construction. The money from the grant helped purchase the cooler. This was approved by the USDA grant administrators. The 30 x 50 warehouse was completed on schedule and the 24’ x 32 cooler was installed just before the wild blueberry season started. It was close but we did it!
 - b. Impact on Community: In our search for the ideal location for the cooler, we chose Pittsfield, ME. There was small lot in their Industrial Park that was reasonably priced with access to 3 phase power. The location is only ½ mile from I-95 (the major highway in Maine). It is about half way between where the wild blueberries are harvested and the markets we distribute to. Having access to 3 phase power substantially lowers the energy costs. After researching the costs of a pre-fabricated buildings vs custom “stick built”, we decided to go with a “stick built” structure. The community has been very receptive and supportive. Several manufacturing jobs have been lost in recent years and it was encouraging to see a new business in town. The town manager helped us navigate the way forward as we obtained the necessary permits, purchased the land and pushed things along, so we could be up and running in time for the harvest. There are several other food producers in the area and some are grateful to have a place to store their products.
- ii. Goal/Objective 2: Offer opportunities to expand the market for their product.
 - a. Progress Made: We shipped almost **twice** the number of cases of fresh wild blueberries this year as compared to last year. This was largely due to having a cooler large enough to handle the increased volume and it was logistically located where pickups and deliveries could be made efficiently and on time. Mother Nature also cooperated and gave us dry weather to harvest the berries. So it was fortunate that we had a facility large enough to handle them.
 - b. Impact on Community: I hired 3 drivers for the season and hired all local contractors to build the facility. Most of the berries we handled were shipped 100-200 miles away. The local markets were supplied by a

grower that has been harvesting wild blueberries for years. Our intent is not to compete with local growers but to open markets that were too far away for individual growers to distribute to efficiently.

- iii. Goal/Objective 3: Provide a storage facility that can be used by other food producers, distributors and community organizations
 - a. Progress Made: Before construction began, I contacted several food producers in the area and got a sense of how much the cooler would be used for products other than wild blueberries. They were all small farms but were enthusiastic about having a place to possibly store their root vegetables for the winter. It would offer them needed infrastructure to expand their production. After the wild blueberry season was over, I visited several more farms in the area and spread the word at farmers markets about the availability of the cooler for storage and cross docking. I also sent emails to 143 growers on the “Get Real Maine” website that might be interested. (I didn’t contact maple syrup, tree farms or fiber farms). A few have expressed an interest and need for this year. Some are glad to know it’s available and can expand their production plans for future years. I have also written and sent press releases to 9 newspapers about the facility and its availability for other food entities. I have also reached out to the Good Shepherd Food Bank; Maine’s Farm to School Program, Maine’s Healthy Coalition, MOFGA (Maine Organic Farmer and Grower Association), Maine Farm Bureau, Maine’s Strategic Food Panning Board, Maine Federation of Farmers Markets (headquarters are also in Pittsfield) and Maine Farmland Trust and the Somerset Economic Development Council
 - b. Impact on Community: That is still evolving. It will take time for people to figure out how they can best benefit from this facility. We had a meeting with the Sebeco Valley Healthy Coalition, the Somerset Economic Council and interested food producers in November. I had 3 growers that expressed an interest in using it. However, because of the drought in Maine last summer, the yields of were low on the crops they were planning on storing (carrots, turnips, beets and winter squash). Currently, a local apple producer has rented the entire facility to store his apples.
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: 5
 - ii. Number of jobs retained: 1
 - iii. Number of indirect jobs created: about 100
 - iv. Number of markets expanded: 4
 - v. Number of new markets established: 4

- vi. Market sales increased by \$172,000 and increased by 49%.
- vii. Number of farmers/producers that have benefited from the project: 10
 - a. Percent Increase: 30%

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.? YES

If so, how? We sold berries to a retail chain that has stores in low income areas. This made them available to people who never had access to them before. I went on a sales trip at the end of the season and had good responses from several retail outlets in CT, NY, NJ and PA. These would be new accounts in geographical areas that never had access to fresh wild blueberries before.

4. Discuss your community partnerships.

- i. Who are your community partners? Maine Federation of Farmers Markets, Maine Organic Growers Organization, Wild Blueberry Commission, Farm to School programs, Healthy Sebasticook Valley Healthy Coalition, Town of Pittsfield and the Somerset County Economic Council.
- ii. How have they contributed to the overall results of the LFPP project? They are helping spread the word that the facility exists to their members and fellow collaborators.
- iii. How will they continue to contribute to your project's future activities, beyond the performance period of this LFPP grant?
They will use their management and networking resources to help build an efficient system for consolidating and distributing local food to school and food pantries. Local food producers will use the cooler to store and as a distribution point for their products.

Did you use contractors to conduct the work? YES. If so, how did their work contribute to the results of the LFPP project? Since we couldn't find a suitable building in a good location, we hired a local, general contractor to build the warehouse. He hired local companies to do the site work, the cement work and the electrical work. Blue Sky Produce paid all expenses associated with the building. We used the grant money to help buy and install the cooler. We hired American Wholesale Refrigeration to install the cooler and hired Central Maine Refrigeration to install the refrigeration equipment. This project would not have been completed without their help and expertise.

5. Have you publicized any results yet?* Yes

- i. If yes, how did you publicize the results? I wrote a press release
To whom did you publicize the results? I sent the press release to 9 newspapers, several agricultural organizations (MOFGA, Maine Farm Bureau, Wild Blueberry Association, Maine Dept. of Ag) local food organizations (Good Shepherd Food Bank), Healthy Food Coalitions and individual emails to food producers
- ii.

How many stakeholders (i.e. people, entities) did you reach? I estimate I have reached out to about 175 stakeholders thus far. I will continue to reach out to local and regional stakeholders.

*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).

6. Have you collected any feedback from your community and additional stakeholders about your work? Yes
 - i. If so, how did you collect the information? We had a meeting with the wild blueberry growers in October and a meeting in Pittsfield with other food producers and food organizations.
 - ii. What feedback was relayed (specific comments)? The 10 wild blueberry growers I work with are happy and relieved to have a facility to store and distribute their berries from. In my efforts to reaching out to other growers and food organizations, I have talked to 4 growers that are interested in using the cooler for storing their crops for the upcoming season. Because of the drought last summer, their yields were down and they didn't need the extra storage this winter. I have talked to 3 other wild blueberry growers that are interested in help distributing their berries.

7. 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? Yes
If yes, how much was generated and how was it used to further the objectives of the award? The sales for the wild blueberries was \$360,000. The net profit was about \$35,000. I also receive \$100/month rent from an apple grower that is currently using it to store his apples.

8. Lessons Learned:
 - i. Summarize any lessons learned. Draw from 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).
I learned that before applying for a grant, have a solid plan in place on where to put the equipment. I thought I had that figured out but the original place wasn't big enough, didn't have a loading dock, and was too far away from the market for a driver to make a round trip in a day. After I realized it wouldn't work, I really had to scramble to come up with a solution. Renting or buying an existing

building was my first choice. However, I couldn't find one that was affordable, with 3 phase power, a loading dock and convenient access.

The buildings that had these attributes were too large for our needs and unaffordable.

I learned to double the estimated cost of a building to get an actual cost! It doesn't usually pay to "cut corners" One way or the other, one has to pay for what one wants.

Show appreciation to all those involved-whether they are employees, subcontractors or town officials.

I learned what a "Contractors Lien "is. If I'm ever involved in another building project, I will be sure to protect myself from being sued by a subcontractor that the general contractor didn't pay.

Ask LOTS of questions...and then ask some more.

If people aren't asked to help, they probably won't! But if they are asked nicely, they probably will –if they can. Fortunately, I had lots of wild blueberries to give to people who helped in different ways.

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

I believe the goals were achieved with this project.

- 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:

Keep good records!

Don't wait to the last minute to apply for funds or write the reports. Writing the reports took more time to do than I had planned on.

I thought dealing with the USDA would be more impersonal. I was happy to learn that information was fairly easy to get. I didn't feel like I was "just another number"

9. 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.

I will continue to reach out and connect to more wild blueberry growers that want to sell their fresh berries and provide marketing and distribution for them. My goal is to keep expanding the market as more fresh berries become available and to be able to sell as many as the growers want to provide me. Expanding the market in a sustainable way will involve educating people about what wild blueberries are and their benefits. Currently, I am getting a short video made that is geared toward retail store produce managers and consumers. This summer, I will focus on breaking into the markets in CT, NY, NJ and PA. Some of

the distributors also deliver MD, DC and VA. It is a great product and a big country. As the supply increases, we will keep expanding the area we can ship to. Selling berries to the fresh market is much more profitable than selling to the processors. It will enable the growers to keep their farm and hire more people during the season. Selling to processors doesn't provide many jobs because everything is done by machine. I will need to hire more drivers as the market expands and people to help with sales and in the warehouse. Eventually, more growers and food producers will use the warehouse. I will continue to spread the word that it is available. Other food organizations might also find it important to their programs as they evolve.

- 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?

This cooler solves a big problem we had with marketing and distributing the fresh berries. However, less than 1 % of wild blueberries are sold fresh. The rest are frozen. The limiting factors for packing fresh berries are the weather (must be dry) and the extra labor involved (not everybody wants to deal with employees—or has a hard time finding workers). If the growers had a large walk in freezer, they would have more options for marketing their berries. After freezing, they can be used for making wine, juice, concentrates, syrups, jams, etc. They could also develop a retail market because their berries are much better quality than a typical IQF berry from the processors. This is a result of doing more by hand (less damage to the berries) and being able to freeze them faster. The processors have so much volume that they have to wait much longer before they can freeze them So, I think a freezer that was available to small growers would help them immensely.

Personally, I don't want to take on the project. I have my hands full with the fresh berries but there may be some ambitious person that does!