

**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>	Final Report- October 1, 2015 - September 29,2017
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<b>Recipient Organization Name:</b>	Alternative Energy Resources Organization (AERO)
<b>Project Title as Stated on Grant Agreement:</b>	Marketing Montana: Connecting Producers to Consumers Online and Through Agritourism
<b>Grant Agreement Number:</b>	15-FMPP-MT-0076
<b>Year Grant was Awarded:</b>	2015
<b>Project City/State:</b>	Helena, MT
<b>Total Awarded Budget:</b>	\$100,000

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: Jennifer Battles; Email: [jbattles@aeromt.org](mailto:jbattles@aeromt.org); Phone: 406-443-7272

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1. 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.

i. **Goal/Objective 1: Develop an even more efficient and comprehensive way to manage, access, and update Abundant Montana Directory listings in 2016**

*a. Progress Made:* A major goal of this project was to create a secure, web-based system to update, edit and add data to the [Abundant Montana Directory](#) (Abundant), a directory of Montana’s sustainable producers; farmers’ markets; processors and distributors; businesses and agritourism opportunities. By creating a user-friendly, secure online system to update and an “Export Tool” to allow anyone to create a map to display these types of data on their website, there would be one set of data or a “sole source” for all to use and maintain more centrally.

As a first step, AERO staff reached out to Montana organizations that had developed their own online systems to collect and display listing types that were also in Abundant. The National Center of Applied Technology (NCAT), with its’ Farm to School and Farm to Institution programs, had created their own system to house and display data on schools and institutions that were buying local and the producers that were selling to them. By adding schools and institutions as a new listing type and web form and added additional fields to the Farm/Ranch web form where “Sell to Institution or School” could be a sales type. With these additions, producers who provide food to a school or institution will no longer have to enter data on two separate systems. The Montana Department of Agriculture (DOA) staff annually updates a Farmers’ Market spreadsheet by contacting Farmer’s Market managers. To encourage use of Abundant web forms by DOA, fields were added to the Abundant Farmers’ Market web form that captured markets hours, multi-market days, market offerings and payment methods. DOA staff presented at Farmers’ Market Manager Trainings, educating market managers on how to enter and edit their market information in Abundant. AERO worked with other organizations to expand payment methods including SNAP, WIC and Senior Coupons. The following additional fields or offerings were also added based on feedback: permaculture; practices including predator friendly, pesticide free; opportunities at each farmers’ market; seeds as a products; additional agritourism opportunities and developed a more detailed CSA description.

One new staff member and an increase in hours for two existing staff members occurred in August 2016. Considerable time was spent developing the new Abundant database structure; old data were reformatted and imported into the Wordpress “plug-in”, GeoDirectory that was utilized for the database, web forms, site administration and notifications.

Existing Abundant listing owners were contacted in December 2016, to update their information using the new password protected web forms. A successful “soft roll-out” with staff and members occurred so listing owners ran into minimal problems in their updates.

Further encouragement to listing owners to update was done through email, personal phone calls and offering a free 6-month membership to AERO for updating a listing. Other non-profit organizations were contacted to send out information about the new Abundant online web forms for new listings. Social media, newsletters and the AERO website were also used.

*b. Impact on Community:* This project has provided a huge step forward in creating a single set of data for Montana’s local food economies, producers, farmers’ markets, business and

agritourism opportunities. It has increased accuracy and consistency to our consumers and travelers. Producers and businesses, farmers' market managers, and schools and institutions will only have to be contacted once and enter their data only once through a password protected system and updates occurring seasonally can easily be made. AERO staff can easily modify if necessary without additional contractor charges.

**2. Goal/Objective 2: Develop a variety of ways to report, share, access, and display Abundant listings beginning in 2016.**

*a. Progress Made:* An Abundant Montana Report Builder went online in January, 2017 and allows for any query generated to be viewed and printed using the **'PRINT VIEW'** button [on Abundant](#). The information in the report include contact information, products available, an image, and dates and locations for Farmers' Markets' listings. These reports can be saved as a pdf and printed or emailed for later use.

AERO recognized that there were other organizations, agencies and non-profits that were displaying information on their websites on sustainable producers, products or the businesses interested in those products. AERO staff initiated contact with all of these potential partners in late 2016/early 2017 to explain the [Partner Map and Data Export Tool](#) and explore the idea of sharing data by entering and updating listings through the Abundant web forms, ultimately creating one source of these types of data. The "carrot" to potential partners was that once all data were updated to the same database, partners could customize the data they wish to display, create a live link to the Abundant data, build an "iFrame" to display the map and eliminate the need to maintain their own mapping service. With AERO's [Partner Map and Data Export Tool](#), DOA no longer needs to create their own map but can import the [Montana's Farmers' Markets](#) Map to their website which will eliminate redundancy and increase staff efficiency. The DOA also exports Farmers' Market information to the Department of Commerce, populating their Visit Montana website. For NCAT, who has a complex query system on their website, the Export tool has been expanded to export a "CSV" text file that is then loaded into an existing mapping service.

The Export Tool was also discussed with Nourish the Flathead, Edward Ragland at the USDA who is responsible for the [Local Food Directories](#), and the Northern Plains Resource Council, who all collect data about local food producers. In addition to organizations, individual listing owners can also create a map of their location. AERO will market this tool through its website, and future presentations. It is expected by the end of 2018, all organizations that either update or manage listings will be using the Abundant Montana web forms and data will be centralized.

*b. Impact on Community:* The ability to share the updating and displaying of information in one place by all users is a goal that many data managers strive for. For AERO to have created a system that allows listings to be updated by a listing owner and then create a map or spreadsheet of listings of interest to display on their own website provides efficiency to the listing owner and accuracy and consistency to consumers and travelers of Montana. This is a significant time and cost saving measure to all, and for our producers, the need to only be contacted once and/or enter their data only once.

**3. Goal/Objective 3: Develop a calendar system for public entry of events for Farmers' Markets, on-farm or food-related events, farms hosting workdays, and on-farm sales by product in 2016.**

a. *Progress Made:* The calendar web form created through GeoDirectory was completed in early 2016 and allows for a listing owner to easily enter upcoming agritourism events, businesses to let their customers and travelers know about retail activities and Farmer Market's managers to alert their customers of special events. Listing owners and listing managers were alerted to this new feature during the initial update process in December, 2016. Listing owners were contacted multiple times about the calendar opportunity but the adoption rate has been low. AERO staff has added calendar listings when opportunities arise and promoted the system via emails, Facebook and other social media. The event calendar is competing with Facebook and other social media platforms that listing owners and businesses are more accustomed to using. If future funding arises, AERO will investigate linking to other existing calendar systems and social media event postings to harvest calendar data.

b. *Impact on Community:* The impact of the event calendar has been low due to the slow adoption rate of the system. This is part of the marketing campaign and AERO will continue to promote the calendar system through the campaign and marketing materials developed.

**4. Objective 4: Develop a marketing campaign to appeal to producers, consumers, and implement beginning in 2016.**

a. *Progress Made:* Significant marketing and promotion of the Abundant Montana Directory occurred beginning in the fall of 2016 and continued throughout the duration of the grant. Abundant has been demonstrated and presented at numerous meetings and conferences including: Montana Organic Association (booth), Montana Farmers' Union Women (presentation); the Cooperative Summit: Agricultural Track (booth), Free the Seeds (Marketing Presentation and booth), Family Farmed Organization (booth), Local Food Day at Capitol (booth and demonstration), the Crossroads Center/Golden Triangle Food Hub Advisory Group (presentation) Farm to School Steering Committee (Marketing presentation), Montana Farmers' Union Annual Convention (booth), Governor's Food and Agriculture Summit (booth) and the AERO Annual Expo in Butte in October 2017.

In January, 2017, AERO staff developed outreach materials describing and promoting the new features of Abundant and mailed as well as emailed these materials to businesses, other non-profits with a sustainable agricultural mission, state agencies, extension agents and tourism regions and requested they share



this information with their networks through their own newsletters, emails, websites, and other communication mechanisms. Follow-up phone calls were also conducted to these various groups. Abundant was also promoted through social media; the AERO website; our quarterly newsletter, the *Sun Times*; blog

updates; and AERO e-mails and e-news. Personal phone calls were also made to all producers currently listed in Abundant.



[The Marketing Plan](#) for Abundant was begun in April 2017 and completed in July by AERO's Outreach Director. The Plan including action steps for ongoing promotion of the website, [digital marketing materials](#) and cost estimates for additional printed materials as funds become available. An Abundant logo was developed by a graphic designer and was developed [in a variety of formats](#). The promotional materials that were selected for printing included 2,500 Abundant stickers and a table banner (Figure 1.) for use at conferences, expos, trade shows, and other opportunities to reach producers and consumers.

Surveys were developed and sent to producers in January and July 2017 to gain feedback Abundant. The results of these surveys demonstrated that users felt the most valuable services the Directory offered were its ability to raise awareness of sustainable local food systems, the importance of buying local and assisting in their product marketing. A link to the full survey can be found [here](#).

In addition, a [User Experience Survey](#) was developed to better understand how the Abundant website was perceived and used. Interviews were conducted with business listing owners and non-profit partners. Several noteworthy pieces of feedback for the public website included: allowing certain types of listings to be featured on Abundant such as CSA's, Agritourism, and Farmers' Markets and including practices such as "permaculture" and "predator friendly."

Abundant website analytics showed a significant increase in use since the new system was completed and promoted beginning in January, 2017. Monthly use nearly tripled to over 1,000 sessions/month and has held steady with peaks occurring after media releases and promotional events. (Full report will be attached to report)

*b. Impact on Community:* Marketing and feedback has increased the usability and use of Abundant, a unique, statewide resource providing a "one-stop-shop" of sustainable producers, businesses and distributors, non-profits and agritourism. It is convenient, accurate, mobile responsive and easy to use. The feedback gained by AERO staff from current users, partners in the private and public sector and producers through surveys and personal interviews, have been evaluated and incorporated into updates for the site, resulting in increased use. Montana is one of the few states in the country where all of these types of data can be found in a single consolidated, publicly accessible location. The availability of marketing materials online, AERO's internal and ongoing marketing plan and the printed materials created will continue to increase use of Abundant as well as encourage listing owners to keep their information up-to-date as they have a new and effective marketing tool available.

**5. Objective 5: Collaborate with partner organizations and agencies interested in promoting and developing agritourism in Montana by 2016.**

*a. Progress Made:* State, private, non-profit and local entities interested in the development and promotion of agritourism in Montana were contacted by AERO staff in the Spring of 2016 and a Agritourism Working Group was created. The goals of the group were to collectively address agritourism questions, assess resources and organizational priorities. Members of the Working Group included the Montana Department of Agriculture, Montana Department of Commerce – Office of Tourism, Montana State University Extension, Montana Governor's Office, Montana Farmers' Union, and the Food and Ag Development Centers.

Information collected from producers in Montana regarding capacity, current products, and potential interest in agritourism activities were added to Abundant. AERO staff conducted outreach specific to agritourism opportunities. Outreach has occurred with Mt Department of Agriculture and Commerce to ensure that Farmers' Market data will be developed with a collaborative approaches for data update and sharing.

In order to enhance and expand the agritourism experience in Montana, [3 Agritourism Routes](#) were created. Two "Eat Local Park to Park Tour Routes" of local food opportunities between Glacier and Yellowstone National Parks were created using Montana Office of Tourism routes: [The Big Hole to Bitterroot Tour](#) and [The Small Town Tour](#). In July of 2017, with the participation of five Montana farms, as well as Timeless Natural Food, and Lentil Underground author Liz Carlisle, AERO put on a two-day farm tour that traveled hundreds of miles across Montana's golden triangle agricultural region to visit and tour five of the farms described in Carlisle's award-winning book about lentil growers and sustainable farming in Montana. The [Touring the Lentil Underground](#) was filled to capacity, and engaged participants from all over the state in learning more about sustainable production and the farmers engaged in this type of work. AERO also received a small grant for the tour through Western SARE PDP.

In addition to the work on agritourism AERO was conducting, [HB342](#), an act that added Agritourism to the list of Montana recreational activities which participants assume the liability for the inherent risks of those activities, was passed during the 2017 Legislative Session. The intent of the law is to make insurance more affordable for agritourism activities, reducing liability exposure to producers and potentially bringing their insurance premiums down when providing agritourism activities.

*b. Impact on Community:* Montana is in the beginning stages of defining, understanding and expanding agritourism for our producers, consumers and travelers. AERO has helped to coordinate partners statewide about agritourism in Montana and gain understanding of resources that need to be developed to enable producers to add agritourism to their operations. With expressed interest in supporting agritourism from the Department of Agriculture, Department of Commerce and other organizations, the future impacts on the agricultural communities around the state are limitless. The [Agritourism Portion](#) of the Abundant site provides the first comprehensive set of agritourism information including a map of all current agritourism opportunities, the Agritourism Manual the routes and other resources.

## **6. Objective 6: Develop Montana Agritourism Resource Manual and put online by 2016**

*a. Progress Made:* AERO staff conducted significant research for the Agritourism Resource Manual including program evaluation from: Oregon, Oklahoma, North Carolina, Vermont, California, Tennessee, Minnesota, New Jersey, Maine, Kentucky, and New York. Other resources included Montana State University Extension, the Community Food and Agriculture Coalition, the National Center for Appropriate Technology, Maarten Fischer (developed Agritourism curriculum for Flathead Community College, Kalispell) and producers involved in agritourism. Through the Agritourism Working Group, a list of over fifty producers that are currently engaged in some kind of agritourism activity was compiled. Calls were made to these producers, collecting information on what activities they currently offer, what information they would like to see included in the manual, why they participate in agritourism, what challenges they've faced in the agritourism industry, advice they'd give to new producers looking to offer

agritourism, current marketing strategies, how agritourism relates to their bottom line and how seasonal the nature of the agritourism opportunities are in their region. Photos and compelling agritourism stories were also collected from producers and highlighted in the manual. The results of this research led to AERO developing the first [Montana Agritourism Resource Manual](#). The manual can be downloaded [here](#).

*b. Impact on Community:* Agritourism is starting to be understood in Montana due to the clarifications during the 2017 Montana Legislative session with regard to a definition of producer liability; the coordination between agencies and non-profits interested in expanding agritourism in Montana and the new Agritourism Resource Manual developed. These 3 events are a win-win for all: our producers, our consumers and our travelers and will help lead the way to more agritourism opportunities in Montana.

1. 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, 2015). Include further explanation if necessary.
  - i. Number of direct jobs created: 0
  - ii. Number of jobs retained: 0
  - iii. Number of indirect jobs created: There is a potential that additional jobs will be created as Abundant directs additional traffic to producers, creating more demand for products and services. The Agritourism Manual may increase jobs if farms begin to expand their agritourism opportunities and require additional event staff.
  - iv. Number of markets expanded: AREO contacted the Mt Department of Agriculture and they did not have information on market expansions.
  - v. Number of new markets established: 10 (Montana Department of Agriculture)
  - vi. Market sales increased by \$insert dollars and increased by insert percentage%. The ability to determine an increase in sales from use of Abundant would require follow-up surveys in 2018 to quantify any results and determine if new customers were created by using Abundant.
  - vii. Number of farmers/producers that have benefited from the project: There were **96** producers listed in Abundant in May, 2016. Currently, there are **174** or a 81% increase. This project greatly expanded the listings in Abundant due to the ability of staff to contact listing owners directly. The table below displays each listing type and the growth for each sector.

Abundant Listing Type	May 2016	Today
Farm & Ranch (Producer)	96	174
Farmers' Market	71	76
Eat, Drink, Shop	19	49
Organization	16	45
Processor/Distributor	1	37
<b>Total</b>	<b>203</b>	<b>381</b>

2. 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? A Hutterite Colony Tour was featured in the Agritourism Manual. Farmers' market featuring ethnic groups were posted on AERO's Facebook page. "Eat, Shop, Local" was expanded to include breweries, wineries and distilleries and Community Gardens were added as a listing type and featured early summer on the site.
  
3. Discuss your community partnerships.
  - i. *Who are your community partners?* AERO has a large network of community partners in the sustainable agriculture field, at the state and community level. National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT); Nourish the Flathead; Montana Farmers' Union; Montana Organic Association; Farm to School; Community Food & Agriculture Coalition (CFAC); Montana Department of Agriculture (DOA); MSU Extension; Montana Department of Commerce; Mission Mountain Food Enterprise Center, Western Montana Growers Coop, Northern Plains Resource Council and many statewide food and agriculture businesses and retailers.
  - ii. *How have they contributed to the overall results of the FMPP project?* Our community partners have contributed in a variety of ways to this project by sharing our online outreach information, putting up posters and handbills, allow us to table at nonprofit and state government events & providing advertising opportunities. The Montana DOA lists Abundant Montana Directory on its website as a resource for food infrastructure and agritourism. CFAC, the Montana DOA, and the Montana Office of Tourism have all invested funds and staff time into the Abundant Montana Directory. NCAT and Montana DOA, two large sources of data for Abundant, have partnered by using the Abundant web form to enter data and the Abundant Export Tool to provide data via their websites. Through a subcontract with the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT), AERO recently completed a new [Farmers' Market Manual](#), which will be an additional tool for cities and towns to increase access to local foods by creating new and expand existing farmers' markets.
  - iii. *How will they continue to contribute to your project's future activities, beyond the performance period of this FMPP grant?* Our community partners provide outreach about the Abundant Montana Directory on their websites and to their users. They also continue to invest staff time and we anticipate future grant funding toward the promotion of the Abundant. Marketing of Abundant by our partners will be key in our success. Continued expansion of the "sole source" concept of data sharing will provide added efficiencies. The Montana DOA has recently convened an agritourism working group, pulling together state agency partners and AERO in a policy and outreach discussion on agritourism in Montana. AERO convened conversations with Montana Office of Tourism and the Montana Department of Agriculture and has worked very closely with them on their marketing campaigns for "Montana Grown" and Montana Made products in order to collaborate and provide clarity for Montana consumers and food and agriculture businesses.
  
4. *Are you using contractors to conduct the work? If so, how did their work contribute to the results of the FMPP project?* AERO hired a web developer to revamp how data are stored and entered into Abundant using GeoDirectory. They supported AERO in transitioning to this new approach and provided training for AERO staff to update web forms and manage the system on their own. A GIS developer was contracted to incorporate the new data structure into the existing public

website, create the export tool, report builder and other enhancements to the site.

5. Have you publicized any results yet?\* YES
- i. *If yes, how did you publicize the results?* The new update features of Abundant and the Agritourism Manual has been extensively publized by AERO through our e-news and our quarterly newsletter, the Sun Times and through partner’s websites, newsletters and events. An [Abundant Holiday Tour](#) featuring listings offering holiday products, was added to the site in November.
  - ii. *To whom did you publicize the results?* AERO members and supporters, partners, state and federal agencies, other non-profits and the general public.
  - iii. *How many stakeholders (i.e. people, entities) did you reach?* AERO did not track the number of stakeholders that were contacted. They would include all of the organizations, producers, businesses and members of the public and would likely be in the thousands.

\*Send any publicity information (brochures, announcements, newsletters, etc.) electronically along with this report. Much of the marketing materials can be found [here](#).

6. *Have you collected any feedback from your community and additional stakeholders about your work?* Yes, feedback has been very positive from our listing owners as well as the public using the Abundant Directory. Specific survey results were noted under Objective 4.
- i. *If so, how did you collect the information?* This feedback has come through staff direct contacts, listing owner suggestions, partner outreach, state agency partnerships, and surveys and tracking website statistics.
  - ii. *What feedback was relayed (specific comments)?* Specific feedback was listed under Objective 4 and links to the surveys can be found there.

7. 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?* NO

8. If yes, how much was generated and how was it used to further the objectives of the award?

9. Lessons Learned:

- i. *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 advantages of GeoDirectory, the Wordpress plug-in used to create the Abundant database and forms, was its ease of use by AERO staff to modify and create new forms; its built in search engine and notification system, the ease in assigning administrative roles and its cost. The disadvantage of GeoDirectory that are contractors were not aware of was its negative interaction with the AERO website, which continues due to lack of funding to remedy the problems. Considerable staff time is needed to help users adapt and learn a new system. Partnerships are essential to success when adopting a new system and continual marketing is necessary to increase and maintain adoption of a new system.

- ii. *If goals or outcome measures were not achieved, identify and share the lessons learned to help others expedite problem-solving:* The Report Builder (Objective 2), an Interactive Experience (Objective 2) and listing level statistics (Objective 4) were not fully realized due to technical roadblocks and challenges when these features had to be incorporated into the existing public Abundant website. With contractors and technical solutions being selected after the project narrative was written, certain aspects of the web enhancements were either more difficult than originally designed and/or not possible within the current technology.

10. *Describe any lessons learned in the administration of the project that might be helpful for others who would want to implement a similar project:* It is critical that one person is in charge of all the advances, reimbursements and worksheets. There is a learning curve to doing these correctly and having personnel consistency is essential for effectively administering the grant.  
*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.*

AERO's Abundant Montana Directory has been in existence for nearly 20 years and there is a strong commitment by the organization to continue its use and increase its' effectiveness. AERO will continue to maintain the current system, seek additional funding for identified enhancements, explore a subscription program for data access and sharing and look for opportunities and partners to market and promote Abundant. Increased access to local food is the ultimate goal of the Abundant Montana Directory through the creation of a centralized online directory of sustainable agriculture, local food, and agritourism resources for our consumers and travelers.

11. *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?*

Every objective of this project has future components but many can only be accomplished by securing additional funding for staff and contractors.

Objective 1: Move the username and password system to a Facebook login. Listing owners were somewhat frustrated with having to remember another username and password.

Objective 2: Continue to promote the use of the Export Tool so consumers can find the same data no matter what website they are using, producers only have to enter their data once and locations and the associated data for a location can easily be found.

Objective 3: Assess the use of the Abundant calendar system and explore options to either increase its use, harvest events from other sites or use another system that allows for calendar events to be exported to the Abundant calendar.

Objective 4: Secure funds for additional printed marketing materials.

Objective 5: Continue to work with partners to increase agritourism opportunities in the state. Use the export tool to create maps on the AERO website to display various producers or businesses seasonally and agritourism events. Work with partners to seek increase the marketing of agritourism and other necessary legislation to ensure producers can safely offer agritourism events on their property.

Objective 6: Secure funds to print the Agritourism manual, hold workshops around the state on the contents of the Manual and assist producers in developing agritourism events. Use Abundant as the promotional vehicle for all agritourism events.



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## **News Release**

### **AERO Releases Montana's First Guide to Developing Agritourism Industry**

AERO has just released *Developing Montana's Agritourism: A Resource Manual*, the first of its kind in the state, to help Montana's farmers, ranchers, and producers explore agritourism as a product offering and economic opportunity. The manual connects agriculturalists with information on how to start their own agritourism business by providing guidelines for building a business and marketing plan, compiling important contacts and resources, discussing risk management, and sharing existing agritourism success stories around the state. Ultimately, the manual aims to empower small businesses and engage Montanans and visitors alike in exploring local agriculture.

During the 2017 Legislative Session, Montana defined agritourism as a form of commercial enterprise linking agricultural production with tourism in order to attract visitors to a farm, ranch, or other agricultural business for entertainment or education. House Bill 342 officially added agritourism to the list of Montana Recreational Activities, opening up opportunities to develop the industry. AERO's Agritourism Manual works to fill the knowledge gap at a crucial time, providing resources for the budding industry in Montana. As Ben Thomas, Director of the Montana Department of Agriculture notes: "Montana's two biggest industries are agriculture and tourism. Combining them to create meaningful agricultural experiences for tourists and producers alike is a valuable way for agricultural businesses to diversify their revenue. The Montana Department of Agriculture applauds AERO's leadership in creating this agritourism resource manual for Montana farmers and ranchers."

Alan Merrill, President of the Montana Farmers Union, agrees: "There is huge potential for Montana farmers and ranchers to utilize agritourism as a way to add revenue to their operation and to educate the public on all agriculture has to offer our great state. We appreciate the effort it took to put together this manual and feel it will be a very valuable resource for producers, consumers and those wanting to learn more about agriculture."

The manual was developed by AERO staff with the support of the USDA Farmers Market Promotion Program, and the Agritourism Working Group, consisting of the Montana Department of Agriculture, Department of Commerce, MSU Extension, Governor's Office of Economic Development, Food and Ag Development Center Network, and the Montana Farmers Union. The manual is available for online viewing or downloading at [www.aeromt.org/agritourism](http://www.aeromt.org/agritourism) and AERO encourages your feedback, comments, success stories, and other responses to the manual's content! Please contact program manager Kaleena Miller at [kmiller@aeromt.org](mailto:kmiller@aeromt.org) to join the conversation about agritourism in Montana!

*The mission of AERO is to empower communities to nurture and promote a more sustainable Montana. We envision a future where all Montanans have access to clean energy, healthy food, sustainable agriculture, and a network that provides leadership, resources, and advocacy. To learn more about AERO's programs and projects supporting a sustainable future for Montana, visit [www.aeromt.org](http://www.aeromt.org)*



**Leading the Way to a Sustainable Montana**

PO Box 1558

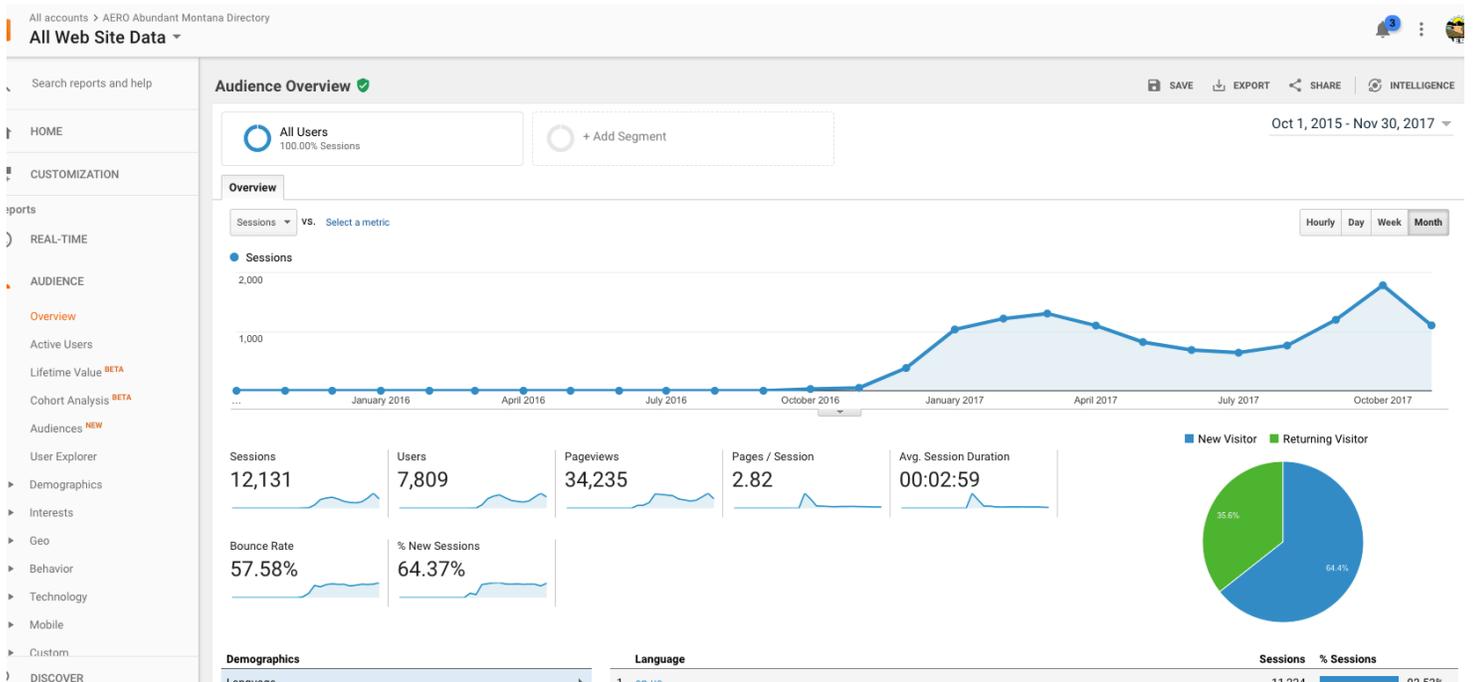
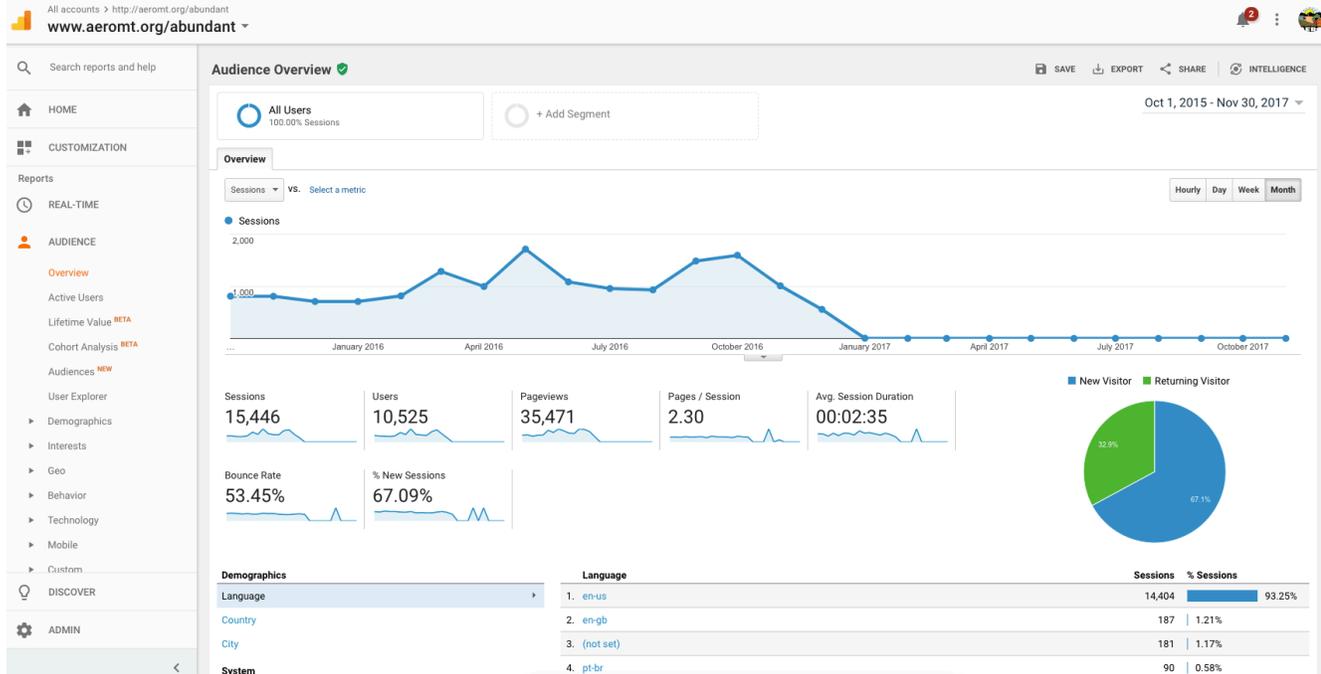
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# Web Analytics – Abundant Montana Directory 2016-2017



Month	Sessions	Reason for Increase	Month	Sessions	Reason for Increase
October, 2016	29		May, 2017	823	
November, 2016	49		June, 2017	689	
December, 2016	384		July, 2017	643	
January, 2017	1,036	Released email to listings	August, 2017	764	
February, 2017	1,220		September, 2017	1,199	Expo Letter

March, 2017	1,305		October, 2017	1,783	Expo
April, 2017	1,102		November, 2017	1,105	Holiday Listings