

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

The final performance report summarizes the outcome of your FMPP award objectives. As stated in the FMPP Terms and Conditions, you will not be eligible for future FMPP or Local Food Promotion Program grant funding unless all close-out procedures are completed, including satisfactory submission of this final performance report.

This final report will be made available to the public once it is approved by FMPP staff. Write the report in a way that promotes your project's accomplishments, as this document will serve as not only a learning tool, but a promotional tool to support local and regional food programs. Particularly, recipients are expected to provide both qualitative and quantitative results to convey the activities and accomplishments of the work.

The report is limited to 10 pages and is due **within 90 days** of the project's performance period end date, or sooner if the project is complete. Provide answers to each question, or answer "not applicable" where necessary. It is recommended that you email or fax your completed performance report to FMPP staff to avoid delays:

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

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

<b>Report Date Range:</b> <i>(e.g. September 30, 20XX-September 29, 20XX)</i>	September 30, 2015 -September 30, 2017
<b>Authorized Representative Name:</b>	Gregory B. Traywick
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<b>Recipient Organization Name:</b>	Foothills Farmers' Market
<b>Project Title as Stated on Grant Agreement :</b>	Enhancing Direct Sales and Enhancing Food Access in Rural Cleveland County, NC
<b>Grant Agreement Number:</b> <i>(e.g. 14-FMPPX-XX-XXXX)</i>	15-FM PP- NC0042
<b>Year Grant was Awarded:</b>	2016
<b>Project City/State:</b>	Shelby/North Carolina
<b>Total Awarded Budget:</b>	\$99,904

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: \_\_\_\_\_; Email: \_\_\_\_\_; Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

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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. For each item below, qualitatively discuss the progress made and indicate the impact on the community, if any.

i. Goal/Objective 1: **Marketing & Outreach to SNAP-Eligible Customers-To** identify and eliminate the psychosocial and economic barriers preventing the financially needy from participating in our markets and unite them with the local food system through targeted outreach, support services, and locally-funded incentives.

a. Progress Made: Through conversations with low-income citizens and the various organizations that serve them, our SNAP/EBT Outreach Coordinators identified three (3) major barriers preventing the financially needy from participating in our markets: a) lack of awareness that the market would accept SNAP/EBT benefits; b) perception that price was a barrier, and; c) belief that they would be stigmatized by vendors, management, or customers while shopping. Outreach Coordinators worked to overcome these barriers by helping the market build *trusting relationships* within the local community. These relationships were forged through weekly face-to-face interactions with limited resource audiences at public housing sites, soup kitchens, commodity food distribution sites, and low-income community gardens. Outreach Coordinators also created linkages and form collaborations with those who administer support services to the financially needy, including public health, behavioral health, social services, public schools , academic support programs, child care, housing assistance, faith-based organizations, youth-serving agencies, and a kinship care support groups. They led the market's non-profit board in aligning its mission and services to be inclusive of needs of low-income shoppers and in integrating those belief/systems changes into the market's policies and procedures and daily operations. All vendors selling eligible food items were required to accept SNAP/EBT tokens, and were incentivized to do so by virtue of the market's ability to compensate vendors for all tokens redeemed at the end of each market day. Outreach Coordinators were present on market days to process SNAP/EBT transactions and administer related support services, providing a friendly, recognizable face to help ease any apprehension that patrons might have.

b. Impact on Community: As a result of these changes, low-income shoppers patronized the market more frequently, with their combined purchases (\$5,556) during the 2016 and 2017 market seasons representing 7% of all card services transactions (debit cards contributed an additional \$73,279 in sales). Limited income shoppers also qualified a locally-funded market bucks program, using \$2,260 in those dollars to increase their food purchasing power. Sixty-four (64) documented low-income households patronized the market, with 20% establishing themselves as regular customers (making multiple market visits). One elderly EBT shopper walked to the market from his subsidized housing unit a total of 58 times. Several children from low-income households participated regularly in the Power of Produce Kid's Club, thereby qualifying for an additional \$2 token each week to spend on fresh fruits & vegetables. Several community organizations demonstrated their support of the market by purchasing gift

certificates to incentivize their low-income clients to visit the market, with redemption rates exceeding 85%. SNAP/EBT purchases spiked during the spring and summer months when produce was plentiful and prices were comparatively low. Many vendors demonstrated their support by offering value packs or discounts to EBT shoppers. In relative terms, the SNAP/EBT revenue (sales) generated by outreach efforts was small in comparison to personnel cost. The Outreach Coordinators contributed significantly to community awareness, established long-term relationships and collaborations in the local community, and aided in day-to-day decision-making and market management, however. They also benefited community awareness and involvement and processed a substantial volume of debit card swipes as part of their role. As such, the Foothills Farmers' Market board has elected to allocate budget to fund one Outreach Coordinator during the 2018 market season, and is looking for long-term strategies to finance the position.

- ii. **Goal/Objective 2: Customer Growth & Retention** - To strengthen the social fabric of our community and cultivate ownership for our markets by rewarding customer loyalty, expanding customer participation through a proven children's agriculture program, and engaging the public in the local food movement through farm-to-fork events and a documentary food film series.
  - a. **Progress Made:** The market used an automated technology-based service to send subscribers reminder text messages at the beginning of each market day. These messages, tailored by the manager, provided a listing of farm-raised items being offered for sale that day and details about market day entertainment, demonstrations, and learning opportunities. Customers who checked in at the market by replying to the text with a special code word were automatically qualified for customer loyalty rewards, earned by virtue of the number and frequency of shopping visits. We successfully implemented the Power of Produce (POP) Kid's Club, using local funds to reward participants with \$2 shopping tokens that empowered them to select and purchase fruits & vegetables and food-bearing plants. In lieu of organizing ticketed farm-to-fork events (which some citizens find cost -prohibitive), the market sponsored quarterly community potluck meals held at the market pavilion. Participants were encouraged to bring a dish containing at least one local food product, but only if it was feasible and affordable for them to do so. The market also supported *Seeds to Silverware*, an annual farm-to-fork fundraising event to benefit Uptown Shelby Association. In addition to promoting the event, market vendors helped participating chefs source local ingredients, and volunteers lent hands-on service and assistance. Due to time constraints, other opportunities and more pressing issues, we did not pursue the documentary food film series.
  - b. **Impact on Community:** By the end of 2016, 191 customers had subscribed to the text messaging application; that number has increased to 303 currently. During peak season, the market averaged 20-25 reply text check-ins each week. Only twenty (20) customers claimed their customer loyalty rewards, suggesting that this recognition is not universally valued. Of subscribers responding to survey, 44% said they relied on the messages one or more times to gain information about the market, and 29% indicated they relied on the program to get info every week. Of the responders, only a handful subscribed said they do it for the prizes. Most commented that they valued the reminder and liked

knowing what products are available and what activities & events are occurring so they can make decisions about plans for the day. From the manager's perspective, the service is valuable but expensive. As such, it might be worth investigating a free or lower cost reminder service after our membership runs out. The POP Kid's Club was tremendously successful, yielding 6,318 teaching contacts (participants) over the two-year project period. The program provided a platform for hosting a number of market tours by public school classrooms, school groups, day care facilities, faith-based and community-oriented youth service organizations, etc. Local cost-share provided \$12,636 in shopping tokens, increasing vendor sales by that amount. POP Kid's Club provided meaningful ways for community volunteers to contribute to market operations (by organizing and leading learning activities), helped attract additional young families as regular market patrons, and increased the purchasing power of limited resource families with young children. The program also empowered youth to make their own food-buying decisions, thereby cultivating the next generation of farmers' market customers. Community potluck meals were extremely successful, attracting an average attendance of 25-30 people each time. There was a noticeable degree of socio-economic diversity represented at these functions, demonstrating the market's progress in integrating the total community into the local food movement. End of season surveys revealed the following impacts: **2016** - 56% of vendors reported growth in the customer base as compared to the prior year; 78% reported an increase in sales; average annual sales per vendor rose by \$1,407 (12% increase); card services processed an additional \$12,784 in electronic sales transactions over prior year. **2017**- 80% of vendors indicated they saw an increase in customer traffic compared with the previous year, and 80% indicated an increase in sales compared with 2016.

- iii. **Goal/Objective 3: Market Promotion, Relocation & Development-** To implement an aggressive market promotion and public awareness campaign focused on heightening market visibility and successfully relocating two well-established market sites, while firmly establishing our newest market location.
  - a. **Progress Made:** The market was promoted heavily in the local community in an effort to sustain sales growth and attract new foot traffic to all locations. Marketing strategies included newspaper advertisements, billboards, seasonal rack cards, weekly customer newsletters, road signage, presentations to civic clubs and other groups, presence at community events, and appearances on local cable television shows. A 30-minute "Cleveland County Kitchen" television segment featured a local food product each month and the vendor & farm that produced it. That product was also used in a cooking segment led by a local chef. The owner of the marketing firm designated as contractor in our project proposal became seriously ill over a prolonged period of time, and was unable to fulfill the obligations of her contract to deliver a "comprehensive, multi-faceted marketing and promotions campaign. As such, we developed many of these material in-house and did not spend the budget approved for this activity.
  - b. **Impact on Community :** As a result of these efforts, foot traffic to the new location (covered pavilion) for our main market in Uptown Shelby increased noticeably as evidenced by random customer counts and feedback from

vendors, staff and volunteers. Our health department satellite market transitioned successfully to the new consolidated health & human services campus, garnering enough vendor participation and product supply to meet the demand created by 300+ county employees stationed there. In addition, this market attracted modest shopping activity from clientele visiting the campus for public health, behavioral health, social services, and other benefits. Relocation of the Kings Mountain satellite was largely unsuccessful. At the City's insistence, the market was relocated to a public park that had low visibility and limited protection from the hot sun during summer months. Also held in conjunction with an ongoing series of events that focused on music and social interaction, we failed to attract customers attending with the primary intention of buying food. City of Kings Mountain wants to continue this market under their direct management and leadership, however, and we will support them in doing so.

iv. **Goal/Objective 4: Market Growth & Community Engagement-To** help farmers capitalize on a growing demand for local foods expressed by local business and industry, municipal government, and small institutional kitchens.

a. **Progress Made:** The market assisted Eaton Corporation in sourcing local foods for its industry food service, which serves meals to 400 employees. The company chef made twice weekly shopping trips to the market to procure fresh ingredients, and vendors also made direct sales and deliveries to the industry kitchen. This activity generated \$280 average in weekly spending on local foods, contributing \$29,120 in additional farmer income over the project period. One hundred sixty (160) Eaton Employees participated in the market's Holiday food box program, receiving an assortment of seasonally available local foods at the end of each year and generating \$2,600 in additional sales for market vendors. A new partnership was established with Newgrass Brewing Company, a new microbrewery & restaurant in Uptown Shelby. Newgrass provided indoor space to accommodate our highly successful 2016 and 2017 winter markets (December through March) and sourced a significant amount of local foods from market vendors. At last check, four vendors were featured on their menu board, being acknowledged for providing cheese, beef, pork, lamb, trout, and leafy greens. Newgrass averaged spending \$1,700 each month on local meat and produce, providing vendors with an additional \$40,800 in direct sales over the course of the project. The market encouraged Cleveland County government to source local foods for its employee, health and benefits fair, which served 750+ employees each year. We also manned a booth to introduce employees to seasonally available foods (in the form of free samples) and to provide information about market locations, hours of operation, etc.

b. **Impact on Community:** As a result of these efforts, market growers established new connections and formed successful business relationships with visionary leaders in the food service industry (those who seek to capitalize on the local food movement). Direct sales increased accordingly, and we anticipate this momentum to continue. By providing support to local governments, we heightened visibility of market operations and food-based business that source ingredients locally, recruited new customers, and motivated county leaders to incorporate more local foods into meal served at meetings and community functions.

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, 2015). Include further explanation if necessary.
  - i. Number of direct jobs created: 2 (part-time market employees)
  - ii. Number of jobs retained: 1 (market manager)
  - iii. Number of indirect jobs created: n/a
  - iv. Number of markets expanded: 3
  - v. Number of new markets established: 0
  - vi. Market sales increased by \$134,181 (annual/sustainable) and increased by 14%.
  - vii. Number of farmers/producers that have benefited from the project: 75
    - a. Percent Increase: 5% (market success has supported start-up of two small-scale farming operations)
  
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? Yes. Work performed by Outreach Coordinators (previously described) helped improve access to local foods for low-income citizens in food dessert communities adjoining our Shelby and Kings Mountain markets and to recruit them as customers . Market staff and volunteers patronized Newgrass Brewing Company, developing relationships with business owners and management. These interactions helped both parties establish familiarity and trust, and provided opportunity to communicate shared vision and identify strategies for collaboration. One new restaurant (Ni Fen Bistro) and one local caterer (Dressing on the Side) were also recruited as recurring customers, generating approximately \$5,400 in additional sales during the project period. Ongoing dialog and collaboration with Eaton Corporation's leadership team helped sustain and grow their industry's local food purchases and increase the number of employees participating in the Holiday Local Food Box project.
  
4. Discuss your community partnerships.
  - i. Who are your community partners? Notable community partners include NC Cooperative Extension, Community Catalyst Project, Cleveland County Extension & Community Association, Healthcare Foundation of Cleveland County , Extension Master Gardener Volunteers, Cleveland County, City of Shelby, Uptown Shelby Association, Cleveland County Health Department, Cleveland County Schools, Boys & Girls Clubs of Cleveland County , Eaton Corporation, Newgrass Brewery, Community Math Academy, Cleveland Community College , Gale S. Elmore CPA, individual volunteers, local chefs, and approximately fifteen (15) local businesses that serve a market sponsors.
  - ii. How have they contributed to the overall results of the FMPP project? These community partners have supported the FMPP project in a myriad of ways:
    - guiding the market in successfully implementing the scope of work and evaluating/reporting the impact of the project
    - planning and implementing market day demonstrations and teaching activities
    - planning and implementing hands-on POP Kid's Club learning activities
    - promoting the market and its scope of work in the local community and throughout the region
    - providing opportunities for market representatives to share our knowledge and experience by presenting at conferences and workshops

- facilitating connections with new target audiences, including low-income families and at-risk youth
  - providing cost-share funding for personnel
  - providing funds for \$2 POP Kid's Club shopping tokens
  - incurring the maintenance and utility cost for operating the market pavilion
  - engaging the market in highly-visible community events and activities
  - directing expenditures, requesting reimbursements and maintaining documentation
  - identifying and supporting opportunities for increased direct sales of local foods
  - producing/disseminating collateral marketing and promotional items
  - integrating relevant aspects of the project into other community awareness activities
  - representing the market at community festivals and events
  - administering surveys and conducting customer counts
  - supplementing operational costs
  - nominating the market for recognition and awards
  - offsetting the costs of providing SNAP/EBT card services
- iii. How will they continue to contribute to your project's future activities, beyond the performance period of this FMPP grant? With the exception of the very few items that are no longer relevant after the grant is successfully closed out, community partners will continue to support the market and its project as listed above.

5. Are you using contractors to conduct the work? If so, how did their work contribute to the results of the FMPP project? No contractors were used.
6. Have you publicized any results yet?\* No. The analysis included in this final progress report will be incorporated into the organization's 2017 Annual Report, and will be shared among market stakeholders, including board members, vendors, community partners and other interested parties.
- i. If yes, how did you publicize the results?
  - ii. To whom did you publicize the results?
111. 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).

7. Have you collected any feedback from your community and additional stakeholders about your work? Yes, on numerous occasions.
- i. If so, how did you collect the information? Surveys and direct observation.
  - ii. What feedback was relayed (specific comments)?
    - Foothills Farmers' Market was recognized with "Best Outdoor Space Improvement" award of merit by the North Carolina Main Street Center in 2017.
    - The Shelby City Manager remarked that Foothills Farmers' Market has produced "a noticeable and welcomed stimulus on the retail activity, appearance, and community pride in the Uptown Shelby business hub" during a public meeting. His endorsement was echoed by the Mayor and City Council.
    - The market and its programs were spotlighted in "Our State" magazine and in a "County Perspectives" magazine produced to illustrate quality of life in the local community.

- Extension Master Gardener Volunteers received the 2017 Fed Blackley Service Award in part for their contributions to community improvement through market day demonstrations and POP Kid's Club activities.
- The Healthcare Foundation of Cleveland County acknowledge the value of POP Kid's Club by providing \$11,500 to finance \$2 shopping tokens over a 2-year period.
- 83% of customers surveyed rated the farmers' market shopping experience as "Excellent".
- Market growers (vendors) are considered primary stakeholders. Those who responded to an end of season survey offered the following comments relative to the project:
  - o "POP Program is awesome "
  - o "POP Club was a tremendous success."
  - o "Most of our old customers returned, and we had a large number of new customers, many of them newcomers to the area."
  - o "Cooking and other demos were great to bring people in."
  - o "Compared to other markets, this is our favorite."
  - o "Cooking demos, kid's cooking school, field trips, and music all worked well this season."
  - o "We saw more traffic including customers, local chefs, even a large international corporation for the second year in a row, providing a huge outlet for our farmers."
  - o "It was a great season. I feel all the events were successful, each drawing in different buyers."

8. Budget Summary:

- i. As part of the FMPP closeout procedures, you are required to submit the SF-425 (Final Federal Financial Report). Check here if you have completed the SF-425 and are submitting it with this report:  IZ
- 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?

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).
  - Designated personnel (outreach coordinators) can have a significant impact on a market's ability to reach low-income audiences, but in our experience, the dollars invested in performing the work far exceed the amount of added sales generated from SNAP/EBT purchases. The intrinsic value of these outreach services will also include the community benefits derived from enhanced food access, improved health outcomes, communal sense of socio-economic inclusion and equity, etc., and should be considered accordingly. Because of their visible presence and engagement in the local community, Outreach Coordinators can also be invaluable in building partnerships with market stakeholders. In our experience, the Outreach Coordinators provided key linkages to business and industry, restaurants and caterers. Without this connectivity, our efforts to channel local food to these institutions would have been much less successful. Markets may want to engage

public health and human service organizations, non-profits, the faith community, and other stakeholders in financing and designing/delivering/evaluating farmers' market services directed to low-income audiences.

- Markets should consider the availability of staff when deciding to pursue programs and activities beyond daily market operations (operating a successful market is a multi-faceted and time-consuming task). For example, our proposal included plans to purchase and equip a tag-along trailer that would function as a mobile market and also be used to promote the market at community festivals and other public gatherings. We encountered several obstacles in implementing this activity, including securing a suitable truck to pull it, deciding who would be authorized to use it, how it would be adequately insured, where would it be stored, etc. Eventually, we discovered that it would be easier/safer/cheaper to encourage vendors to work together to support pop-up markets in underserved communities, and for the organization to take advantages of accommodations (booth space, display tables, etc.) offered by festival organizers for market promotions. Near the end of the project period, we identified a viable use for the trailer (mobile market to serve a food desert neighborhood targeted to receive a broad range of community services) and developed the partnerships needed to make it work. Unfortunately, it was too late in the funding cycle to generate meaningful impact data to support the expense.
  - Customers value frequent and timely reminders about the market, and these do influence personal/family decisions to attend. Markets should look for affordable ways to provide this service.
  - Being rewarded for their loyalty appears to provide little incentive to market patrons. Frequent customers continue to shop because they recognize the benefits of eating locally, are committed to good health and nutrition, enjoy the food-buying experience, and/or seek to establish and sustain meaningful connections with others engaged in the local food system. These incentives should be clearly communicated in marketing and promotions activities.
  - Once the local food movement begins to gain momentum in a community, there are likely ways to partner effectively with progressive leaders of business and industry. Markets should capitalize on these to increase direct sales opportunities, heighten community awareness, increase market visibility, and build effective community linkages. Institutional kitchens lacking experience in sourcing local ingredients from farmers are often willing to try it if provided encouragement, guidance, support, and assistance from market management.
  - It is well worth the time and investment required to implement the Power of Produce (POP) Kid's Club at farmers' markets, especially if volunteers are available to provide support. There are ample information resources available to aid the process.
- ii. If goals or outcome measures were not achieved, identify and share the lessons learned to help others expedite problem-solving: see above
- 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: see above

10. 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. Foothills Farmers' Market board of directors has allocated budget to retain the services of one (1) part-time Outreach Coordinator for the coming 2018 season, and will look for long-term cost-share partnerships to continue this work. We have relinquished control of the Kings Mountain satellite market to the leaders of that city, who have secured funding for a market building and have developed a plan relative to its management and operations. As such, we relieve ourselves of some financial obligation, while remaining available/willing to offer guidance and assistance as the work to get their new market established. With the necessary equipment, operational procedures and support systems in place, we will continue to offer card services (SNAP/EBT and debit cards) and the POP Kid's Club. Cleveland County has continued to provide salary for a part-time manager. Having effectively demonstrated the value our main market provides to Uptown Shelby, the City Manager recently voiced the possibility of entertaining a budget request to support the market's personnel costs. A designated portion of the market's budget (derived from operational income and community support) will be used to continue cost-effective marketing and promotions activities demonstrated to be effective in sustaining/expanding the customer base and increasing sales. We will also look for cost-effective ways to help farmers capitalize on a growing demand for local foods expressed by local business and industry, municipal government, and small institutional kitchens.
- 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? We have secured the *pro bona* services of a qualified local professional to assist the board in long-range strategic planning, refining market policies and procedures, establishing fiscally sustainable operations, and strengthening board development. These objectives will be discussed during a planned board retreat slated for January 23, 2018, and will implemented throughout the coming year. Our goal is to continue activities which increase direct sales for the region's farmers while improving access to local foods among all segments of the population.