

**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; Fax: 202-690-4152

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

Report Date Range: <i>(e.g. September 30, 20XX-September 29, 20XX)</i>	September 30, 2014 – September 29, 2016
Authorized Representative Name:	Bonnie Prigge
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Recipient Organization Name:	Meramec Regional Planning Commission
Project Title as Stated on Grant Agreement:	Meramec Agritourism/Agribusiness Marketing
Grant Agreement Number: <i>(e.g. 14-FMPPX-XX-XXXX)</i>	14-FMPPX-MO-0098
Year Grant was Awarded:	2014
Project City/State:	St. James, Missouri
Total Awarded Budget:	\$71,936

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).

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.

Different individual: Name: _____; Email: _____; Phone:

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: Survey agriculture-related entities to gather information on suppliers, customers and current associations. Create consortium of these entities to work together to market/use each other's products/services.

- a. Progress Made:

With 2014 FMPP grant funds, the Meramec Regional Planning Commission began the Show-Me Local: Naturally Meramec movement in the eight-county region, including Crawford, Dent, Gasconade, Maries, Osage, Phelps, Pulaski and Washington counties. The movement is driven by the Naturally Meramec Consortium, a group of agriculture, tourism and culinary businesses that meet bi-monthly to discuss methods to collectively market and use each other's products and services, increasing sales and jobs for all. Meeting discussions have included Marketing; Business Plans; Barriers; Websites and Social Media; Tourism in the State of Missouri; Agriculture in the State of Missouri; Finance; Speed-Dating and other topics of interest. The consortium, now 56 members, has completed one Speed-Dating event, bringing buyers and sellers together en masse to discuss potential partnerships and just completed its website. The consortium also sponsored a *Hospitality and Customer Service* training; and discussions with the Missouri Division of Tourism, the Missouri Department of Agriculture and the Missouri Association of Councils of Government to examine the possibility of taking the effort state-wide. To form the consortium, meetings were held in each of the region's eight counties. Attendees were surveyed to determine the needs of agriculture, culinary and tourism-based businesses in the region. Additionally, surveys were completed by each entity seeking membership in the organization. The survey information has been used to establish agendas for the bi-monthly meetings and the activities of staff in meeting the needs of the businesses, as well as establishing baselines for goal evaluation.

- b. Impact on Community: The effect of the Show-Me Local: Naturally Meramec effort is beginning to be evident. Meeting attendees and members began networking immediately and sharing contact information in order to promote each other and use each other's products/services. Results reports indicate establishment of new markets.

- ii. Goal/Objective 2: Market consortium entities to consumers via website/brochure.

a. Progress Made: In lieu of a brochure, staff felt it more productive to promote the Show-Me Local: Naturally Meramec effort through a Facebook page in addition to the website. The website www.naturallymeramec.org features a map that highlights the businesses and links to their websites, along with events taking place across the region. Various trails are also included, guiding regional visitors to wineries, breweries, farms, ranches, apiaries, restaurants, etc. The website also allows members to communicate with each other, promoting networking among them. Additionally, agriculture, tourism and culinary businesses across the region can submit an application for membership in the organization via the website. This will be critical when membership fees are charged, allowing for sustainability of the organization. Training on customer service, hospitality and marketing and business planning has been offered and well-attended.

b. Impact on Community: The website is providing excellent exposure for all agriculture, tourism and culinary businesses in the region. Many of these businesses need help in marketing and the website gives them opportunity to reach additional markets. Caledon Virtual, Columbia, MO, creators of the website, is currently implementing a social media marketing strategy that includes Meramec Monday, Vendor Highlights, Building Membership Posts, Who We Are Features, and week-long holiday campaigns. These efforts will drive people to the website and, therefore, individual businesses in the region.

iii. Goal/Objective 3: Grow agritourism/agribusiness entities in the region through increased customers, training and marketing efforts.

a. Progress Made: It has been difficult to get businesses to complete results forms. However, of those who have completed them, three businesses have reported very positive results from the Naturally Meramec effort. Two of these report increased sales of 20% due to their involvement in Naturally Meramec. One reports an increase of 15%. Anecdotal information received from other members show increased markets and sales. Speed-Date Event results show that at least 17 promising contacts were made that may potentially results in additional sales to attendees.

b. Impact on Community: As the businesses continue to have exposure on the website and at special events and collective marketing efforts, overall impact will be evident in the growth of the businesses. The three businesses that reported sales increases were all fledgling businesses and are thrilled with the Show-Me Local: Naturally Meramec Consortium and its work. The organization is bringing about a culture of local promotion and product/service use that has not existed to such a large extent in the region.

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

- i. Number of direct jobs created: Approx. 2 Two businesses hired a total of 4 employees during the grant timeframe. These two businesses reported 20 percent and 15 percent growth in sales. Although all four new jobs cannot be attributed to Naturally Meramec alone, it is believed that at least two of these jobs are a result of the project. Although other businesses have not seen direct job growth, many believe this effort will ultimately result in increased jobs.
 - ii. Number of jobs retained: 7:
Six of the 55 consortium members responded to a results survey. Those businesses who responded employ 21 people. Although not all of those employed can be attributed to the Naturally Meramec project alone, two businesses report a 20 percent increase in sales and one reports a 15 percent increase. These businesses employ a total of 7 persons. Our best estimate of jobs retained is 7.
 - iii. Number of indirect jobs created:
 - iv. Number of markets expanded:
 - v. Number of new markets established: 51
Businesses that participated in the Speed-Date Event and those completing a survey indicate an increase of 51 new markets as a direct result of the Naturally Meramec project.
 - vi. Market sales increased by \$** and increased by .4%.
** Members do not report dollar amounts. However, of those who submitted results reports, two show an increase of 20 percent in sales and another shows an increase of 15 percent. Please note that these are reported results only. We have a great deal more anecdotal information that participating members have seen growth in sales. Staff also believe that results from the project are just beginning to come in.
 - vii. Number of farmers/producers that have benefited from the project: 30
Approximately 170 farm/ranch operations were invited to participate in the project via direct mail or newspaper notices. Of those, some 30 participated in county or regional meetings and training offered. There are currently 12 farm/ranch operations who are members of the consortium.
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? The overall purpose of the Naturally Meramec project is to increase the customer base for agriculture, tourism and culinary businesses in the region. By doing so, this will increase access to healthy and affordable food for families of all levels of income. Low income, low access pockets exist in every county in the region, so any increase in markets by the agriculture businesses should improve access. Businesses that reported growth are located in Phelps, Gasconade, and Crawford counties.
4. Discuss your community partnerships.
 - i. Who are your community partners? There are currently 56 member/businesses of the consortium, all considered partners. The membership also includes the University of Missouri Extension; the Pulaski County Tourism Bureau and Visitor Center; Cuba Visitor Center, Healthy Dent County; Osage County Agritourism Council; Owensville Chamber of Commerce; Slow Food, St. James; Steelville

Arts Council, Sustainable Ozarks Partnership; and the Washington County Partnership.

- ii. How have they contributed to the overall results of the FMPP project? The University of Missouri Extension has provided training to consortium members; the visitor centers, chambers and partnership help to promote the activities of the organization and bring community business needs to the group. The Sustainable Ozarks Partnership provides us with a liaison who attends the meetings and keeps the consortium members apprised of the agritourism/agribusiness activities of Pulaski County and Fort Leonard Wood. The Washington County Partnership liaison provides a link to agritourism/agribusiness activities in the county.
- iii. How will they continue to contribute to your project's future activities, beyond the performance period of this FMPP grant? Since this is a regional effort, taking place in a region that has an excellent history of working together through the Meramec Regional Planning Commission and agriculture businesses are such an important economic sector, keeping partners engaged in an effort that delivers on marketing, training and assisting agriculture, culinary and tourism-based businesses is nearly assured. Counties and cities across the region are very excited about the project and are assisting in many ways to promote the effort. Additional contributions from partners will be bringing business needs to the table for discussion and possible resolution.

5. Are you using contractors to conduct the work? If so, how did their work contribute to the results of the FMPP project?

The Meramec Regional Planning Commission completed procurement and selected Caledon Virtual, Columbia, MO to design and build the Show-Me Local: Naturally Meramec website. Witness Web Design designed the Show-Me Local: Naturally Meramec logo. Both of these companies were excellent to work with and produced high-quality products. Their efforts may be viewed at www.naturallymeramec.org. Caledon Virtual is also conducting a social media strategy that includes weekly postings, social platform community management and web traffic posts to establish constant website traffic from social media.

6. Have you publicized any results yet?* Yes

- i. If yes, how did you publicize the results? In consortium-forming stages, meeting information was published in newspapers in each of the eight counties in the region and the Naturally Meramec Facebook page. Meeting results were also posted. Speed-Date Event and Hospitality and Customer Service training were also publicized in the region's newspapers and placed on MRPC's website and the Naturally Meramec Facebook page. Additionally, over 600 agriculture/culinary/tourism businesses across the region were notified via email and/or mail of county meetings.
- ii. To whom did you publicize the results? Citizens in all eight counties in the region.
- iii. How many stakeholders (i.e. people, entities) did you reach? 600 were reached via email and/or mail. Hundreds were reached via the local newspapers.

*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

- i. If so, how did you collect the information? Members are directly surveyed to determine needs and results. Additionally, the Meramec Regional Planning Commission is kept apprised of the progress of the project via staff reports to the full board and to the MRPC Planning Committee. Feedback is obtained verbally at those meetings.
- ii. What feedback was relayed (specific comments)?
 1. *"I am so fortunate to be a part of a wonderful group of business mentors."*
 2. *"Learning so much about the members and the richness of what is available. It's exciting to share struggles and successes with the team."*
 3. *"Increased awareness of additional local suppliers."*
 4. *"We have established 6-8 good contacts/suppliers through the consortium. Our sales have increased 15% due to direct sales with the members or through their recommendations to their family/friends."*

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:
- 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).

It was recognized early-on that the agriculture, culinary and tourism entities across the Meramec Region were in great need of a vehicle with which they could work together. Attendance and discussion held at the county and regional meetings indicate that many have been looking for this type of organization. Many of these businesses are small and most do not have the resources or expertise to market themselves effectively. They are, for the most part, hard-working, creative, civic-minded individuals that needed some assistance in growing their businesses. Both large and small businesses are represented at the table, each learning from the other. There is no other such organization in the region and members are excited about the possibilities.

Working with Caledon Virtual and Witness Web Design on the Show-Me Local: Naturally Meramec website has also been a very positive experience. We believe the website looks amazing and the functionality enables visitors to locate and get

information about some 600 businesses in the region. Also, members of the consortium can have additional exposure for their business on the site, with a link to their website and/or Facebook page. The site also has a "members only" feature that enables members to learn from each other and have ongoing communication.

The Speed-Date event, held in July, was a very successful event. Some 24 producers and sellers gathered on one evening and met "speed-date" style to form partnerships and discuss contracts. Surveys completed by participants indicate 17 new potential partnerships.

Our original intent was to meet twice in each of our eight counties. However, it took more time than expected to locate the best venue, lock it in and notify all the entities in the county for each meeting. This gave our project a slower start than anticipated. Following the first round of meetings, we decided to bring the group together as a regional effort and communicate the activities of the consortium via Facebook. We have also found that personal visits or phone visits gets better results for membership because the businesses have an opportunity to ask questions and find out exactly what the consortium is for. Although this process is slower, it is more effective in the long run. Now that the website and a Facebook blitz are in process, the word is traveling much faster and the consortium is growing daily. Additionally, as businesses see the potential for marketing with a website that is high-quality, they are now calling us to join the consortium. As a result of the slow start, we have not been able to document the sales and jobs growth to the extent that we projected. It has also been extremely difficult to get businesses to respond to the results reports that we provide them. Many of them have reported increased sales, but have not documented it with official reports.

Lessons learned from the Speed-Date event include:

- Directly contact additional buyers. Although the event was considered a success, it would have been more so if more buyers had been represented.
 - Sellers should have more pricing information available at the event.
 - Hold the event early in the year, and not during summer or harvest season.
 - Do not charge buyers to attend.
 - Publish "testimonials" from the event.
 - Advertise more broadly in order to gain more attendance.
- ii. If goals or outcome measures were not achieved, identify and share the lessons learned to help others expedite problem-solving:
- We suggest building in some extra time for setting up meetings in such a large region. With eight counties to work with, progress can be slowed out of the gate.
 - We suggest getting a Facebook page set up very quickly in order to communicate with members and the public and developing a strategy to get people to "like" the page. Also, a fully developed website to market the program and the consortium should be completed early on. Developing website specifications and procuring a contractor take considerable time as

does site development. We did not complete ours early enough in the project so it is just now showing impact.

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:

- One of the most important elements of this project is direct contact with the businesses. We found that most businesses we spoke with were extremely excited that such an organization now exists. One method of spreading the word was for staff to stop at key businesses as they were traveling in a particular county and discuss Naturally Meramec with the business owners/staff. MRPC staff also gathered information about that business to put on the Facebook/website to make others aware. This takes a great deal of work on the part of the administrator, but the payoff is great.

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.

The Show-Me Local: Naturally Meramec project is gaining a great deal of attention and momentum. This is critical time for the project because many hours have been spent in meetings, calling and planning for the consortium. The region is committed to continuing the Naturally Meramec project. Staff are currently working on funding applications to allow for one additional year of "value-building" for the organization. By the end of next year, it is anticipated that businesses will be more than willing to pay a membership fee to be part of this collective marketing effort.

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?

Future activities that have already been identified by the consortium may include:

Objective 1: Facilitate an Entrepreneur Workshop Series: This series will be directed by quality trainers to assist new or existing agriculture/tourism/culinary businesses owners. Potential trainers include Dr. Sean Siebert and representatives from the University of Missouri Extension, Missouri S & T Technology Transfer and Economic Development, among others.

Objective 2: "Taste of (County)" Food Experience: Local foods events will be held in each of the counties. These events will feature local producers who will feature their products, entertainers and agriculture-related entities.

Objective 3: Regional Trails: Trails will be established that feature businesses according to interest or geographic proximity. These trails will be featured on the Naturally Meramec website at www.naturallymeramec.org. Trails will be marketed as day or 2-day trips to the region.

Objective 4: Collective Marketing: Research will be conducted on best marketing venues for the region and marketing materials will be produced and distributed to those venues. Advertisements will be placed in periodicals in the St. Louis, Springfield, Columbia and Kansas City areas.

Objective 5: Speed-Date Events: The consortium held one “speed-date” event in July, in which producers and potential buyers met for several hours in a single evening to discuss potential partnerships/contracts. The event was a success and the consortium would like to build on the momentum, and continue holding these events on a quarterly basis over the next several years.

Objective 6: Product Placement: Several local markets, including a locally owned convenience store chain, have expressed an interest in featuring products of the consortium producers. Barriers to the placement of these products on store shelves include transportation and distribution of the product. It is anticipated that a food hub will be needed. If funding is obtained, staff will complete a feasibility study to determine if food hub(s) can benefit the producers in getting their product to the new markets. Additionally, MRPC staff will contact local schools, Fort Leonard Wood and other institutions to determine the possibility of product sales to those entities.

Objective 7: Branding: Another element of product placement will be to establish branding of local products as such. Local store owners expect proper shelving and branding of products for display. Staff will design and build display units for local products. To market the local products collectively, staff have created the brand Show-Me Local: Naturally Meramec. This brand will be used on marketing material for the consortium members, along with their own brand.

Objective 8: Ongoing marketing of businesses via the website and Facebook page. Maintaining the website content, featuring businesses, posting events and conducting campaigns will be key in keeping members and the public informed on the activities of Show Me Local: Naturally Meramec.

Objective 9: Investigate and, if feasible, initiate a Passport Program for consortium members. For a fee, members can be part of a program that drives customers to the business to shop. Shoppers may win rewards based upon the number of visits/purchases they make to participating businesses.