

**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 – March 31, 2017
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Recipient Organization Name:	Illinois Stewardship Alliance
Project Title as Stated on Grant Agreement:	Formation of an Association of CSA Farms Serving the Greater Chicago Area
Grant Agreement Number: <i>(e.g. 14-FMPPX-XX-XXXX)</i>	14-FMPPX-IL-0066
Year Grant was Awarded:	2014
Project City/State:	Springfield/Chicago, Illinois
Total Awarded Budget:	\$86,648

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.

[Band of Farmers: The Chicagoland CSA Coalition](#) (hereafter “Band of Farmers” or “the coalition”) began in earnest during the grant period. Starting with the germ of an idea in January 2014 with discussions among a few farmers and others, the grant enabled Band of Farmers to go “live.” The budding coalition took things slowly, not going public or even recruiting farmer-members until much of the groundwork was laid (fiscal sponsorship, organizational documents, website development, membership parameters and application, communications with farmers, etc). When we opened our doors for farmer-members to join the coalition in March 2015, we quickly had 19 farms become members. That number grew steadily and the coalition now has 54 farmer-members and 17 supporting members (non-CSA farms, businesses, and organizations).

- i. Goal/Objective 1: (1) to increase the supply and direct producer-to-consumer sales of local farm products by developing the organizational capacity of the *Band of Farmers* CSA association
 - a. Progress Made:
 - Created the staff position of project coordinator which was filled on a part-time basis by Robin Schirmer, a non-farmer who had volunteered with the coalition from January 2014 through September 2014. This project coordinator position was funded by this grant from October 2014 through September 2016. Since that time, the farmer-led governing board has taken on her tasks.
 - Created and finalized a website, www.bandoffarmers.org, using a member-management website template which enabled prospective farmer-members to use an application to create the farm’s public profile.
 - The project coordinator annually (2014-2016) updated and verified a 4-page black & white Chicagoland CSA Guide originally published in 2009 listing all known CSA farms serving the Chicagoland area regardless of coalition membership; using this information, she continuously reached out to non-coalition member CSA farms to recruit them to join the coalition. Annual update of this guide also provided the useful (and somewhat alarming) information that there was nearly 20% turnover in CSA farms from year to year--farmers leaving farming, moving from the area, discontinuing CSAs, or discontinuing service to the greater Chicagoland area; at the same time, about the same number of new CSA farms was uncovered each year, keeping the number of CSA farms serving the Chicagoland area steady at between 80 and 90 farms for the past several years--up from 30 farms in 2009.
 - Adopted an application that causes prospective farmer-members to transparently indicate to the public their growing/production methods as well as logistics and specifics of their unique CSA program.
 - Finalized organizational documents (e.g., bylaws) for the Band of Farmers project within the framework of a fiscal sponsorship agreement with Illinois Stewardship Alliance.
 - Held an inaugural Annual Meeting in March 2016, attended by approximately 20 coalition members, at which the start-up steering committee turned over leadership to an elected Governing Board in compliance with the project’s bylaws.

- Developed a plan at this Annual Meeting to create a Band of Farmers cookbook and a full-color, long format CSA guide along the lines of the regional REAP Farm Fresh Atlas found all over Wisconsin and the FairShare CSA Coalition's CSA Guide.
- Responded to email and phone inquiries about CSAs; in particular, acted as a clearinghouse for prospective pickup locations, some of which came through our partnership with Faith in Place, an interreligious organization that works with congregations to help them achieve their green and land stewardship missions.
- Outreach to new CSA farmers and other non-member CSA farmers at appropriate intervals (and keeping them on the email list for consumer newsletters) has helped grow the number of Band of Farmers' CSA farmer-members to 54. That number doesn't reflect the dozen or so one-time members that have discontinued farming, discontinued offering CSAs (or serving the Chicagoland area) and therefore have not renewed.
- The number of [Supporting Members](#) (non-CSA farms, businesses, organizations) has grown to 17. Efforts to actively recruit Supporting Members began in earnest during Year 2 of the grant and there remains considerable capacity. Several of these supporters and media partners were offered in-kind membership based on their promotional and other collaborative efforts.
- The Governing Board elected at the March 2016 Annual Meeting operated on a more cohesive basis, with regular scheduled monthly meetings and an executive committee made up of four officers which met more frequently.
- Created a Band of Farmers cookbook featuring farm information, photos, and recipes from 18 coalition members. This project was spearheaded over many months by two farmer-members of the coalition. The cookbook was published in early 2017 and can be used by farmer-members as a joining incentive for the coming season, or sold as an add-on to CSA members or at farmers markets where allowed.
- Published a full-color, 24-page [Chicagoland CSA Guide](#), which, though primarily a consumer outreach tool, also prompted more CSA farms to become members of the coalition in order to be included in the Guide--at no charge over and above their modest membership fee (ranging from \$35-\$95), and encouraged several new Supporting Members both to join the coalition and to advertise in the Guide. The Guide was produced in partnership with [Natural Awakenings Chicago](#) (NA), a monthly wellness magazine. Approximately 35,000 copies of the guide were inserted into the March 2017 food issue of NA and distributed to over 1,100 locations; an additional 15,000 stand-alone copies were distributed to coalition members for further distribution throughout the greater Chicagoland area and throughout the marketing season.

- Impact on Community:

Since its earliest incarnation in January 2014, the coalition's efforts to highlight the benefits of local foods and the CSA model have benefited all small-scale farms in the Upper Midwest, and specifically the 100+ CSA farms that have served the greater Chicago area over that time (this number includes the dozens of farms that have stopped offering CSAs in Chicagoland for whatever reason). Farming is difficult and time-consuming work; and by its nature as a direct-to-consumer effort, CSA requires a high level of marketing by the farm. Having a coalition--particularly one with dedicated staff--educating the public about the benefits of obtaining fresh, local, nutrient-dense

foods via CSA “plows the ground” and makes it more receptive to the seeds planted by individual farms. This groundwork inures to the benefit not only of coalition members, but also non-member CSA farms.

- ii. Goal/Objective 2: to increase consumption of local farm products by educating consumers about CSAs to access fresh, local vegetables directly from farmers.

Progress Made:

- The project coordinator and/or farmers tabled at over 60 events of varying size and attendance, from corporate lunch-hour wellness fairs to indoor winter farmers markets to annual community green fairs and Earth Day events to very large events such as Farm Aid 30 held in Chicago in 2015. A few of the annual events included:
 - In partnership with [FamilyFarmed](#), the coalition annually created a “CSA Pavilion” at the [Good Food Festival](#) in March, a local-foods event that attracts over 5,000 people. In 2015, 15 CSA farms participated; in 2016, that number was 16.
 - In partnership with [KYF \(Know Your Food\) Chicago](#), beginning in 2016, took over coordination of a popular Northwest Suburban CSA Fair, then in its 6th year. Seventeen coalition members (plus another 3 non-members) participated, and approximately 150 consumers attended.
 - Began in March 2013--and the seed of the idea for Band of Farmers--the coalition continued the tradition of an annual Farmer Talent Show to draw attention to CSAs and the farmers that provide them. Typically, 10 to 15 farmers, most of them coalition members, are represented on stage; many others are in the audience of up to 100.
- Updated the website continually to add content useful to consumers, including:
 - [FAQs](#) (Frequently Asked Questions)
 - [Factors to Consider](#) When Choosing a CSA
 - [Create a Pickup Site](#) Where You Live or Work
 - [On Being a Good CSA Member](#)
 - [Pickup Site Map](#) (reached from the website > Find a CSA > Delivery Areas)
This Map is a key tool for consumers to locate a CSA that delivers near their home, office, or faith community. It also acts as a tool for CSA farms to identify areas unserved or underserved by CSA deliveries.
- Used the large, flatscreen All-In-One computer purchased with grant funds at tabling events to project the [Pickup Site Map](#) to consumers to help them identify those CSA farms that serve their communities.
- Tabling at over 60 events spread out over a broad geographic area provided an opportunity both to speak one-on-one with consumers and to generate an email list, now over 950 strong; using this list, we have sent one or two e-newsletters per month to draw attention to events, website features, supporting members, and seasonal CSA offerings.
- Many of the events were reaching a self-selected group of people interested in local foods or other “green” initiatives (farmers markets, Earth Day events, etc.), which offered a likelihood of a predisposition toward healthy foods and environmental stewardship. Still, much of the consumer outreach was a “first-touch” opportunity for someone to hear about CSAs; receiving

an e-newsletter within a few weeks created a second touch, and so on. (Based on the oft-repeated 7-touch rule of marketing, a prospective customer needs to see or hear 7--or more--exposures to an offering before internalizing and acting on the opportunity.)

- There still exists considerable capacity for consumer education about CSAs, and continued efforts by the coalition are needed to reach more of the public. It is hoped that dissemination of the Chicagoland CSA Guide throughout the greater Chicagoland area will help to “normalize” the concept of CSA and provide yet another touch for those considering membership in a CSA.
- Illinois lags behind other Midwest states in support of local foods and CSAs and is uniquely in need of continued efforts to bring attention to the offerings of small-scale farmers. This very unscientific estimate makes plain the need:
 - In 2015, 53 CSA farmer-members of FairShare CSA Coalition served the Madison WI metro area with population of approximately 500,000 and served 15,573 households
 - In 2016, 54 CSA farmer-members of Band of Farmers served the 6-county Chicago metro area with population of approximately 9,000,000 and served 7,306 households (see chart above)
- Even allowing for obvious differences in the two metro areas (WI has a historical agri-culture vs. Chicago area’s urban/suburban culture, number of new farmers in Band of Farmers vs. FairShare’s requirement of CSA experience, FairShare began as consumer-driven vs. Band of Farmers is farmer-driven, etc.), the disparity in numbers is striking and speaks to the need for a robust CSA coalition to grow the interest in and knowledge of local foods and CSAs throughout Chicagoland.

c. Impact on Community

CSA members from the coalition’s membership rose from 6,168 CSA households to 7,306.

- iii. Goal/Objective 3: to make CSAs more accessible to underserved communities in the greater Chicago area.

a. Progress Made:

- Created CSA pickup locations in three low-income communities:
 - Maywood, IL (60153)
 - South Shore neighborhood of Chicago, IL (60649)
 - Woodlawn neighborhood of Chicago, IL (60637)
- These communities were not among those identified as prospective locations in the grant application. In consultation with Faith in Place, we encountered an issue with access to the predominantly African-American, low-income congregations they work with: the lack of African-American farmers offering CSAs; the African-American congregation members understandably would prefer for “their” farmer to be African-American. There are two known CSA farms operated and managed by African-Americans that serve the Chicagoland area and despite consistent and targeted efforts to recruit them into the Band of Farmers, they have not joined--not for lack of interest, but citing the lack of capacity, equipment, and labor to scale up to deliver to additional venues.
- At least 5 coalition members have become authorized to accept SNAP, and another 4 farms have inquired about the process. Efforts to enlist CSA farms to become licensed to receive

SNAP benefits has been slow, due in part to confusion about the process, beginning with the application (which offers the choice of applying as a Farmers Market or as a Retail Food Store) and requires a farmer to attempt to fit a square peg into a round hole--and that's assuming that the farmer isn't turned away by the admonition, "If you are not a Retail Food Store or Farmers Market, please do not complete the online application."

- Additionally, the logistics of using SNAP for CSA membership still faces obstacles. Despite the interest and support of the USDA and Congress (via the most recent Farm Bill) in providing SNAP benefits for CSA membership, two current restrictions make the use of SNAP for CSAs cumbersome at best, unworkable at worst, particularly in a large urban community:
- The requirement that the SNAP recipient be present with his/her EBT card at each payment opportunity.
- The ability to receive SNAP payment up to 14 days in advance of the receipt of food.
- While the second of these can be worked around with a well-conceived membership agreement between the CSA farm and the SNAP consumer, the combination of these two restrictions becomes unworkable for those marketing to an urban area for these reasons:
- CSA membership traditionally operates on a full upfront payment basis predicated on farmers knowing their membership numbers before the season begins so they can purchase seed and plant accordingly. Nevertheless, in an effort to help consumers manage a large, upfront payment, many CSA farms arrange for installment payments--often still requiring payment in full before deliveries begin. No doubt, most CSA farms would welcome the opportunity to make their CSA offerings available to low-income consumers if they can balance their needed certainty with the realities of programs like SNAP.
- CSA farms operate in many ways, including on-farm pickup, pickup at a farmers market, drop-off/pickup at a designated location (a home, cafe, yoga studio, etc.) over a period of several hours, and direct home delivery. The coalition's CSA farms that serve the greater Chicago area come from four states (IL, WI, MI, IN), many from up to 3 hours' drive away. When they deliver on a given day they are usually making multiple stops at delivery/pickup sites over the course of a very long day. In most instances, there is not an opportunity to stay at the site for an hour or more to swipe SNAP payments with their EBT equipment--nor are they likely to have multiple EBT card readers to "deputize" someone at each site to accept the payments on their behalf.
- A Massachusetts pilot program alleviates both of the listed concerns by authorizing the appropriate state agency to auto-deduct the pre-arranged payment on a monthly basis from the SNAP consumer's account. The consumer and farmer enter into a CSA membership agreement and safeguards are built into the agreement in the event of insufficient funds in the SNAP account or the need of the SNAP CSA member to cancel membership. A program like that in Illinois or nationwide would greatly increase the ability of CSA farmers to provide low-income consumers with fresh, nutrient-dense foods.

b. Impact on Community:

Three new pick-up locations created new access to local food for low-income communities and the number of farmers authorized to accept SNAP also increased.

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 jobs retained: 72 (approximate number of individuals employed on CSA farmer members)

- ii. Number of Chicagoland households enrolled in CSAs increased from 6,168 to 7,306
 - iii. Number of new markets identified: 19 prospective pick up locations
 - iv. Number of farmers/producers that have benefited from the project: 54 (or more as non-members have benefited from CSA education/promotion).
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, as this was one goal of the project. See above on page 5, objective 3.

4. Discuss your community partnerships.
- Through our CSA Coalition, we partnered with a variety of community partners. Staff from other non-profit organizations including Familyfarmed.org (based in Chicago) and Angelic Organics Learning Center (based in Caledonia) served as members of our administrative committee and contributed to developing the operating procedures, membership guidelines, fiscal sponsorship agreement and other operational aspects. Additionally, Familyfarmed.org hosted the annual Good Food Festival in Chicago which is a well-attended annual event where we hosted a CSA Expo reaching thousands of prospective consumers. We partnered with other groups on CSA Fairs including Know Your Food Chicago which enabled CSAs to enroll new members. These activities will continue beyond the project period.
5. Are you using contractors to conduct the work? If so, how did their work contribute to the results of the FMPP project?

We used a graphic designer to create the print directories that were distributed both in print and online which allowed us to create professional, visually appealing materials that we wouldn't have been able to do with the limitations of our staff capacity.

6. Have you publicized any results yet?*
- The primary format for communicating about our efforts to the general public was through a regular newsletter. 31 newsletters were sent by the end of the project period with a total of 951 consumers receiving the newsletter.
7. Have you collected any feedback from your community and additional stakeholders about your work?
- We have done a survey of our members asking about number of CSA members, their experience with SNAP program and other relevant info. We used Google to create the survey and sent out via email with follow up phone calls to increase participation. We learned that there was a downward trend in number of CSA shares, especially from larger farms and will further explore this in the future.
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? Enrolling members of the coalition paid membership dues that varied dependent on the size of the CSA. We collected a total of \$7,302 in

membership dues which were reinvested into the organization through printing directories, designing and printing a cookbook and paying for additional event fees.

9. Lessons Learned:

Which strategies worked (well/did not work well) during the project? One-on-one conversations at events--both with CSA-aware consumers and with "first touch" consumers--allowed the coalition to put a positive face on CSAs, and the consumer-facing computer showing the [pickup site map](#) enhanced consumers' ability to hone in on a CSA that served their communities. That said, some such events are deemed not cost-effective due to low attendance. Having over two years grown an email list to near 1,000 consumers, it is felt that limiting tabling to a half-dozen or so larger events and other methods going forward will help keep that momentum going.

Despite the efforts of the coalition from March 2015 to the present, an informal survey of member CSA farms showed in many instances a downward trend in the number of shares or households served. This was most evident in the larger, more mature CSA farms (e.g., those serving 200 or more households for several years; at least three of this level of CSA farm in the coalition have discontinued farming or CSA in the past two years). Some factors in play include:

- The influx of well capitalized non-farm and/or non-local competitors such as aggregated produce boxes (e.g., Door to Door Organics) and dinner/recipe boxes (e.g., Blue Apron), most of which offer home delivery, and the ability to purchase "organic" produce at more mainstream grocery outlets.
- Some farmers hit by heavy rains and tornados in 2015 have not recovered from the loss of members due to missed deliveries as a result of flooded fields and demolished equipment.
- Some farmers have intentionally scaled back their CSA size as they recognize the need to pursue off-farm jobs.
- Real or perceived competition from the growing number of new CSA farms (the 20% increase in numbers annually).
- CSAs getting a "bad rap" from missed deliveries due to weather or technical difficulties, bad actors among CSA farmers that fail to live up to expectations coupled with failure to communicate with members, and the perception of high cost. Just as good and bad CSA farms are evident here, so are good and bad CSA members; while keeping up with growing consumer expectations, it is important that CSA farms and Band of Farmers continue to educate their members and prospective members about the tenets of Community Supported Agriculture and its purpose in bringing eaters into a closer connection to their food and how it is produced. Those merely seeking a box of vegetables and the lowest price may never be good CSA members. See *On Being a Good CSA Member* and the *Band of Farmers' Pledge* from the coalition's website.
- The work of this or any coalition of CSA farms is a long game. Akin to farming itself, it requires building the soil, plowing the ground, planting seeds...and hoping for an eventual return on those efforts. Band of Farmers will not usually be able to quantify its success. E.g., a consumer who encounters a CSA farmer at a farmers market and chooses to become a member of that farm's CSA may have learned about CSA from the building, plowing, and planting that preceded that choice, but if asked how she heard about this CSA will likely--and honestly--reply, "at the farmers market."

What unanticipated challenges were encountered?

- Farmer-members' lack of responsiveness and understandable time limitations to undertake coalition activities
- The limitations of SNAP for CSAs despite USDA/farm bill intentions (as discussed above)
- Limitations on access to low-income markets due to dearth of African-American CSA farmers
- The fluidity of the CSA market as even established CSA farms either stop farming or turn to other marketing methods

What unexpected positive results occurred? We are particularly proud of the [Pickup Site Map](#) which when kept updated and deployed creatively enables consumers to see where CSAs operate near them, and enables farmers and those considering adding pickup sites identify gaps in CSA coverage.

"If I could do it over, I would..." Look for and create more opportunities for farmers to collaborate, rather than compete, such as field days, potlucks, multi-farm consumer events. This is a "wish list" item and wasn't a primary concern under the grant goal of developing operational capacity, but would help the coalition members be more cohesive as a group.

What specific advice do you have for others taking on a similar project work?

- Once conceived, take your time going live; lay the groundwork.
- Utilize at the outset and ongoing dedicated, non-farmer staff; enables greater responsiveness to inquiries, maintains consistency, will ultimately allow time and capacity for additional programming.
- Engage consumers in the coalition from the outset--as members, board members, stakeholders. Ours is a "farmer-led" model, and farmers do need to be at the heart of a coalition's efforts. Consider looking at and speaking with staff and members of [FairShare CSA Coalition](#) and [Portland Area CSA Coalition](#), both over 25 years in existence, to see what worked (and didn't work) for them. FairShare in particular was "eater-led" at its inception, so consumers (eaters) have always had a seat at the table and might be best able to address how to educate others like themselves.

10. Future Work:

The CSA Coalition activities are continuing beyond the project period with the leadership of an administrative board consisting of 5 farmers and 3 non-farmers who work for organizations that support farming/agriculture. The administrative board have taken on the duties of marketing, event coordination, membership services and more to operate the coalition with the goal of expanding CSAs in the Chicagoland area. Due to changing marketplaces, further research on consumer habits, food purchasing trends and best practices for CSAs would be helpful for our CSA members to meet changing consumer needs.