

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

Report Date Range:	October 1, 2014 – September 29, 2016
Authorized Representative Name:	Andrew W. Smiley
Authorized Representative Phone:	512-220-1080
Authorized Representative Email:	andrew@sustainablefoodcenter.org
Recipient Organization Name:	Sustainable Food Center
Project Title as Stated on Grant Agreement:	Buy Fresh Buy Local Central Texas Marketing Campaign
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Total Awarded Budget:	\$100,000

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- Same Authorized Representative listed above (check if applicable).
- Different individual: Name: _____; Email: _____; Phone: _____

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1. Goals and Objectives

Goals #1 and 2: To increase awareness and consumption of locally produced agricultural products in Central Texas; To increase sales for local farmers by improving connections between consumers and farmers in Central Texas with a Buy Fresh Buy Local campaign.

- Form stakeholder committee with broad representation
- Develop marketing campaign strategy using the Buy Fresh Buy Local platform
- Implement BFBL marketing campaign
- Run the Digital Marketing Advertising to prompt people to use website, raise awareness

Progress:

SFC formed a committee of stakeholders that included agricultural producers, farmers' market managers, agricultural extension representatives, local food advocates, marketing professionals, and others. This steering committee met several times to provide guidance and insights into a campaign to promote awareness and consumption of agricultural products that are grown and raised in Central Texas. The campaign was developed to utilize digital media on mobile devices for marketing of locally produced foods, and to test the impact and efficacy of mobile marketing of local food. The committee initially addressed the topics of general branding, which resulted in the creation of a chapter of the Buy Fresh Buy Local networks, facilitated by Food Routes. The committee agreed about the value of the support available through the Food Routes Network (FRN), which included chapter development assistance, graphic design templates, and a compilation of many years of marketing research.

Following the decision to build the local food promotions campaign as the Buy Fresh Buy Local Food Central Texas chapter, the committee addressed the topics of graphics design, membership requirements and recruitment, web presence, printed materials, mobile advertising, and evaluations planning associated with the campaign.

The Buy Fresh Buy Local (BFBL) label and logo templates allow for customization so that the images depict items most representative of the region in which they are used. The Buy Fresh Buy Local Central Texas (BFBL CenTex) steering committee, working with Social Impact Studios through the Food Routes Network, recommended inclusion of tomatoes, peppers, longhorn cattle, peaches, watermelon, and other items familiar to Central Texas, and further suggested the addition of a Texas star to the graphics. Social Impact Studios completed the design of the BFBL CenTex label, which resembles an historic wooden vegetable crate tag, as well as a simpler logo. A complete design kit was also created, and contained templates for stickers, buy local guides, and point of sale materials, plus fonts needed for producing additional written communications.

The BFBL CenTex stakeholder committee also established criteria for participation in the campaign among farms and markets. They defined the geographic range as within 150 miles of the Texas state capitol building in Austin. The committee also established membership requirements for farmers' markets, on-farm stands, CSA farms, and farmers, which would ensure that markets and farmers are engaged in local food sales rather than reselling products from other areas. Prospective members who applied and met the basic criteria for membership would be listed on the BFBL CenTex website and in printed membership directories, and would also receive an assortment of printed collateral materials. Members were also asked to provide information relevant to evaluations (employees, sales, etc.) although since it was not made a requirement at the outset, many farmers and farmers' markets did not provide that detailed information.

SFC staff worked with Studio Pryor, a designer and developer local to Austin to create the BFBL CenTex website. This element of the campaign was critical, since the ensuing advertising efforts would steer potential customers towards it for information about purchasing agricultural products from farmers' markets, farm stands, and CSA farms. The website provides locations and operations times of these sales outlets through an interactive map supported by a detailed listing of each member. The website is optimized for mobile devices.

SFC staff worked with Studio Pryor to develop printed promotional materials, as well, for distribution to members. This included postcards, magnets, posters, bumper stickers, and a member guide listing all farm and market members. Each member received a packet of all these items for them to share with target customers through their marketing outlets and other networks. The printed collateral, which featured images and branding consistent with the website, directed customers to the BFBL CenTex website, where they could find details about places to purchase local agricultural products.

The core of this campaign was the digital advertising effort. A significant portion of the available funding was used for purchased digital-format advertising. The ads would appear on mobile devices accessing applications within certain "geo-fences" surrounding BFBL CenTex member farms and markets, directing the device user to the BFBL CenTex website where additional information would be available. As this is a relatively new field for advertising, and expertise in this medium was not available within SFC staff, the development of campaign details was informed primarily by Susan Seale of Mindful Marketing. This advertising and marketing firm has provided reliable guidance previously for traditional media efforts, and Ms. Seale was familiar with the local foods message.

In order to identify the intended audience, the committee conducted basic market research and customer profiling, reviewed general target audience profile information available through Food Routes Network, and requested a brief literature review to be conducted by a University of Texas marketing professor. These research efforts provided a sketch of the target audience psychographics and demographics, including shoppers who are:

- motivated by quality and value
- enjoy cooking and gardening
- have an interest in healthy foods, fitness, and environmental issues
- female between the ages of 30 – 65
- college educated
- middle to upper income

With input from the committee and professional guidance from Mindful Marketing, SFC approved a plan that accounted for the limited resources available for this type of advertising, the geographic reach represented by the diverse membership, the profile of the target audience, and the timeframe of peak harvest seasons when farmers have the most volume and variety.

The campaign was divided into a 6-week fall period (October 19 – November 25, 2015) and a 6-week spring period (April 18 – May 29, 2016). The fall campaign "geo-targeted" ads to devices within a 5-mile radius around 13 selected markets and farm stands spanning the entire BFBL CenTex region, running on mobile device browsers and applications on Wednesdays through Sundays. Based on a comparison of impressions (numbers reached) to website clicks (the intended action) it was determined that the spring campaign should have a more specific focus. The popular web-based music app, Pandora, allows

advertisers to target more precise audiences based on the music choices of listeners. Therefore we were advised to purchase advertising on the Pandora app within just four geographic areas (still capturing the majority of member markets) and targeting female listeners of country, indie, pop music who are female and within the appropriate age range (determined by music choices).

Impact:

The BFBL CenTex committee engaged a broad range of stakeholders, created the foundation for a meaningful local food branding and advertising campaign, produced useful outreach tools, captured valuable market research, and gained significant insights and lessons about an emerging form of advertising. Considering many variables and external influences in the shifting local food marketing landscape, and with access to limited sales and job-creation data, it may not be evident that the campaign generated increased customer connections and local food purchases, as anticipated. However, the other impacts mentioned above provide evidence of a very worthwhile project.

The steering committee ultimately comprised 17 members, and the membership represented 48 markets and farms. All contributed to the development of marketing materials, including design and content, which will be useful going forward. While the efficacy of the mobile marketing cannot be proven, the brand and collateral templates will continue to be used in future outreach efforts, possibly focusing more on conventional and less costly strategies such as distribution of flyers and stickers, and low-cost connections through social media.

Additionally, by gathering information that describes the target market shopper, members can apply this information to engage in either conventional or emerging media with greater precision. In the time since this demographic and psychographic information was collected, SFC has already conducted additional research based on the initial findings. This separate but related data validated the original target audience profile, and further refined the persona of the target shopper, in order to inform future advertising and outreach.

SFC staff and other members also developed experience in deciphering data related to digital advertising, and gained further experience in using the data to guide decision making. The fall 2015 campaign using visual-only ads produced 3.26 million impressions, which is the number of times the BFBL CenTex ad appeared on a mobile device. The click-through rate (CTR) describes the intended action of the viewer to click the ad that navigates to the BFBL CenTex website. The fall 2015 CTR was 1.06%, meaning that the ads resulted in 33,000 unique visits to the website (although other analytics provided a much lower number). The spring 2016 campaign on Pandora online radio utilized a combination of audio and visual ads. The 3.1million total impressions accounts for visual and audio impressions separately even though they were presented simultaneously (the visual ad appeared while the audio commercial played). The total number of clicks was 5,300, but to calculate an accurate CTR, the clicks are divided by 1.55 million impressions, yielding a CTR of 0.34% - a much lower figure compared to the fall 2015 campaign but providing the audible message which could result in later action by the listener.

Further data and analysis is necessary to track the actions of the audience once they take the first step of clicking on the website. SFC studied the bounce rate, described as the number of visits in which the user left the website from the first page they visited, or the landing page. A lower bounce rate indicates that the user actually browsed through a website, and thus received more information from the site. During the fall 2015 campaign, the home page of the website was used as the landing page, and the bounce rate was 84%. The spring 2016 campaign yielded a comparable bounce rate of nearly 80%. These rates are unfortunately higher than average, when compared with general standards of the online

advertising industry. It appears that the impact of the online advertising campaign was minimal and could not be tracked to any significant increase in customer traffic or sales among members.

Goal #3: To provide meaningful evaluation and updates to the program to ensure sustainability.

- Create baseline research plan and compare with mid- and post-campaign evaluation
- Provide information to USDA and other groups involved in BFBL

Progress Made:

Initial efforts to gather comprehensive sales and jobs data from all BFBL CenTex member farms and markets was not feasible. Many farmers objected to providing details about their private business information, while most farmers' markets do not have the capacity or a system in place to capture sales figures from their participating farmers. As stated in previous reports, SFC will rely primarily on sales and job data from four selected markets for which that data is available, and will incorporate information from two participating farm stands which have that information at hand. SFC also conducted follow-up interviews with as many members as possible, to assess perceived impact.

Impact:

An improved system of recording and analyzing market sales data at four farmers' markets resulted from the need to maximize the precision of the information being recorded. SFC created a set of spreadsheets using Microsoft Excel that are used to enter and assess weekly sales estimates provided by the farmers at each market. As a result of the follow-up interviews, information was provided which will help strengthen the BFBL CenTex effort in the future. All members surveyed agreed that the branding graphics were appealing, that the printed materials were useful and a majority agreed that the website was a useful tool. However, when asked if the campaign had any effect on sales or customer traffic, members either said no or that they didn't know. A better means of capturing accurate information about customer traffic will be necessary for any future advertising campaigns.

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, 2016). Include further explanation if necessary.

Data provided is from 4 farmers markets and 2 farm stands, and does not represent all members. As stated above, many members were unable or unwilling to provide data.

- Number of direct jobs created: 4 (unable to attribute directly to project)
- Number of jobs retained: N/A
- Number of indirect jobs created: N/A
- Number of markets expanded: 2
- Number of new markets established: 0
- Market sales **decreased** by \$315,000 and **decreased** by 6%*
- Number of farmers/producers that have benefited from the project: estimated 125
 - Percent Increase: 100% (all new members; total represents number of individual farmers enrolled as members of BFBL CenTex plus number of farmers represented at member markets)

*Decreased sales at specific markets does not necessarily indicate lower sales for farmers overall. There are an increasing number of sales outlets for farmers in Central Texas, such as aggregators, retailers, and restaurants, plus a rapidly increasing number of outlets for consumers to purchase.

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?

While this project cannot be directly linked to new customers at farmers' markets, CSA's, or farm stands, the project did reach new members with at least an introductory message. As described above, the number of impressions made was considerable, and the click through rate (CTR) indicated some positive response to the message despite a high bounce rate. The primary population reached through this project was a typical potential market shopper, although the graphics and images were also helpful in communicating with lower-income populations, as they provided a common visual element in the promotion of food access programs, such as doubling SNAP benefits, at some markets.

4. Discuss your community partnerships.

i. Who are your community partners?

Members of the steering committee included farmers' market organizers, farmers, representatives from the City of Austin and City of Elgin, and Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Service. BFBL CenTex chapter members included farmers and market operators.

ii. How have they contributed to the overall results of the FMPP project?

Steering committee participants provided guidance regarding the design of graphics, the target audience, the strategy, and the evaluations of the project. Chapter members supported the distribution of printed materials and provided farm and market details for inclusion on the website and printed materials.

iii. How will they continue to contribute to your project's future activities, beyond the performance period of this FMPP grant?

Both the steering committee and members of the BFBL CenTex chapter will be asked to contribute to the future goals and function of the chapter, and how future funds and other resources should be acquired and expended.

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

Through the connection with Food Routes, Social Impact Studios provided the customized BFBL CenTex logo, label, and design kit. SFC contracted with Studio Pryor to develop the BFBL CenTex website and printed materials, as well as the visual ads for the mobile marketing campaign. Mindful Marketing was not on contract, but did support the project by advising the placement of mobile advertising.

6. Have you publicized any results yet?*

Results of the project have not been widely publicized, however members of the steering committee received regular updates on membership, printed materials, and website.

Materials used in the promotional campaign, including cards, magnets, posters, and local food guides plus screen captures of the mobile marketing, will be attached to this report.

7. Have you collected any feedback from your community and additional stakeholders about your work?

BFBL CenTex chapter members provided input on various aspects of the project, but we have not collected feedback from the broader community.

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? N/A

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).

Broad representation on the project’s stakeholder committee provided a wide range of perspectives. The variety of interests represented on the committee led to some expansions in the scope of the project, both in geographic range and type of markets included. Future efforts will require our ensuring that any actions based on broad input also corresponds with available resources of a commitment of additional resources.

The connection to BFBL through Food Routes was beneficial. It provided access to ready-made branding and basic marketing information. However, some of the market research and campaign planning information was outdated and there was limited technical support.

SFC staff and others gained extremely valuable experience with mobile marketing and tracking impact of electronic communications. Digital ads can be costly and the skills and knowledge needed to plan, implement, and assess mobile campaigns is specialized and highly technical.

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

As stated above, it is vital to consider resources when planning outreach, and to ensure that all stakeholders understand what is available and to plan accordingly. For example, determining whether ample funding for advertising is available or if a better option to mobilize partners to engage in grassroots or community-based outreach is an important decision-making point.

It is also important to note that the local food landscape in Central Texas, and specifically in the Austin area, is experiencing significant changes. Formerly, farmers’ markets and CSA schemes were the primary source for consumers seeking locally produced foods. As more farmers’ markets are established – there are now 17 markets in the Austin area – those markets are vying for many of the same “local-loyal” customers, thus diluting and dispersing the customer base. As the number of markets has increased, so has the number of alternative sales outlets that may overcome the limited choice and lack of convenience exhibited in farmers markets. These include home-delivery options, aggregated local food subscription services, conventional retailers which advertise local foods and farm-to-table restaurants, and among these outlets, some exhibit varying validity to the locally-sourced claim. While the goal of this project was to attract new customers to direct markets with a “Buy Fresh Buy Local” message, these multiple other options for local purchasing are in place to satisfy consumers who would potentially respond but who had not previously overcome the challenges of farm direct markets.

- 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:

As with any collective interaction, group facilitation skills among project leaders are necessary, to ensure that topics of discussion are relevant to the intended ends. Additionally, being realistic about evaluation metrics and what can be accomplished with the time, resources, people, and available data will lead to a project with more clearly defined measures of success.

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.

One of the most beneficial outcomes of this project, as stated earlier, is the suite of marketing tools created. The graphic images, website, and print collateral templates will be useful in future efforts to promote locally grown foods at direct market outlets. The reach of mobile marketing is impressive, and with the new experience gained in that area, SFC and other partners may be able to incorporate those tactics into future advertising strategies. And, the profile of the potential market shopper will also be useful for future promotions and advertising. These outcomes will be used to leverage funding at local and state levels for future activities that can create positive sales and customer participation outcomes.

- 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?

Several aspects of this project require further research through future activities. While mobile marketing has broad reach, it will be necessary to gain a better understanding of how people consume and respond to digital messaging of this sort. A comparison between digital and traditional, community based outreach would also inform an appropriate use of resources going forward. And, finally, determining what message will increase customer awareness and create the anticipated response will help improve the effectiveness of future advertising campaigns.