

## Local Food Promotion Program (LFPP) Final Performance Report

The final performance report summarizes the outcome of your LFPP award objectives. As stated in the LFPP Terms and Conditions, you will not be eligible for future LFPP or Farmers Market 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 LFPP 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 your assigned grant specialist to avoid delays:

LFPP Phone: 202-720-2731; Email: [USDALFPPQuestions@ams.usda.gov](mailto:USDALFPPQuestions@ams.usda.gov); Fax: 202-720-0300

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

<b>Report Date Range:</b> <i>(e.g. September 30, 20XX-September 29, 20XX)</i>	September 30, 2014 – September 30, 2016
<b>Authorized Representative Name:</b>	Daniel Nguyen
<b>Authorized Representative Phone:</b>	(504)255-9170
<b>Authorized Representative Email:</b>	<a href="mailto:danielnguyen@mqvncdc.org">danielnguyen@mqvncdc.org</a>
<b>Recipient Organization Name:</b>	MQVN Community Development Corporation
<b>Project Title as Stated on Grant Agreement:</b>	Health is Wealth Food Hub
<b>Grant Agreement Number:</b> <i>(e.g. 14-LFPPX-XX-XXXX)</i>	14-LFPPX-LA-0069
<b>Year Grant was Awarded:</b>	2014
<b>Project City/State:</b>	New Orleans, Louisiana
<b>Total Awarded Budget:</b>	\$75,300

LFPP 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: \_\_\_\_\_

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.

1. State the goals/objectives of your project as outlined in the grant narrative and/or approved by LFPP 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.

**Goal:** *Improve or Expand Food Enterprise*

- i. **Objective 1:** Improve enterprise agricultural and handling practices
  - a. **Progress Made: First Quarter:** 1 GAP/GHP training with 5 member farmers; 1 GAP/GHP training with VEGGI Farmers' Cooperative administrative staff; Construction of vegetable processing and packaging facility; **Quarter 2:** 2 GAP/GHP meetings with 8 member farmers; Creation of bilingual quality control and safe handling practices banner; **Quarter 3:** 2 GAP/GHP meetings with member farmers; 2 GAP/GHP meetings with VEGGI Farmers' Cooperative administrative staff; Additional modifications to vegetable processing building; On-site bilingual signage created; **Last Quarter:** 3 formal GAP/GHP meetings with member farmers; Development of Correction Action Plan to deal with violations of GAP/GHP;
  - b. **Impact on Community:** The grant made an impact on the pre-harvest and post-harvest handling practices of the member farmers. First, the project was able to off-set the cost of constructing a collective processing and storage facility. This reduced barrier to entry for member farmers who do not have financial capability to access such facilities. In addition, the program provided GAP/GHP materials in the native languages of the member growers, thus making the curriculum more accessible. This in turn ensured that minority and limited-english proficient member growers also had the opportunity to learn more about GAP/GHP and become more aware of GAP/GHP protocol. In using the cooperative model, the program sought to have the growers self-enforce and self-adopt GAP/GHP protocol. This was done through series of cooperative meetings to debate the merits and implementation strategies of certain GAP/GHP protocol. The cooperative administrative staff was careful to simultaneously build capacity of member growers to understand the logic behind GAP/GHP, not just for producers, but also for consumers. In addition, the cooperative sought to have member growers self-enforce the protocol to better understand shortcomings and protocol difficulties. Though this methodology took longer than expected, the steps and progress made were more thoroughly understood by member growers. In addition, this also reduced administrative costs associated with enforcement. While the cooperative still has not achieved GAP/GHP certification, overall practices have improved and have made growers safer and consumers safer.
- ii. **Objective 2:** Improve direct-consumer marketing
  - a. **Progress Made: Quarter 1:** Creation of draft of Health is Wealth curriculum; 92 members outreached regarding Health is Wealth and Healthy Cooking/Eating curriculum; 17 community members interested in participating in Health is Wealth curriculum; Weekly presence at 1 farmers market and 1 CSA distribution network ; Creation of VEGGI Farmers' Cooperative Quarterly Newsletter; **Quarter 2:** 1 strategic planning retreat for Health is Wealth curriculum

integration into community food projects; Had 5 community meetings regarding Health is Wealth and healthy lifestyle topics; Interviewed 13 interested community members; Expanded to additional CSA network; Began distribution of newsletter; Expanded to niche-market processed goods **Quarter 3:** Established an online database of customers; Set up regular online communications and updates with customers – weekly updates on social media regarding CSA presence and produce availability; Partnered with local neighborhood improvement association to improve marketing efforts; Commitment from 3 local businesses to post CSA flyers; Newsletter now has over 150 subscribers and improvement association reach has over 100 subscribed families; **Last Quarter:** Approximately 84 hours of technical assistance provided to member farmers regarding direct consumer marketing (include customer feedback, price point adjustments, current season demands, packaging, production issues); Continued weekly updates to consumers regarding availability as well as recipe ideas; Continued quarterly publication with reach to now over 200 families; ended Health is Wealth Curriculum cohort with over 21 engaged community members throughout duration of 1.5 year cohort

**b. Impact on Community:** Improved direct consumer marketing utilized an approach of changing producer-consumer relations. This was done primarily through Health is Wealth curriculum as well as Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) distribution. While the goal included improved direct consumer marketing to increase margins and returns for farmers, the auxiliary impacts that are equally important relied heavily on the producer-consumer education pipeline that was built. Through Health is Wealth, VEGGI and MQVN CDC was able to deeply engage a select cohort of community members in great depth regarding food history, politics, and linkages to public health issues. This was a way for producers and consumers to utilize food as an avenue to address larger community issues, such as blight, public health, and food access. This contextualized the social impact of the farmers' cooperative and helped further legitimize the presence of the cooperative in the community. This was also a way for the cooperative to change consumption patterns of at-risk community members (at-risk of diabetes, hypertension, obesity). This in turn increased community demand for the produce grown by the cooperative. Community members also become more involved on the farm and even helped host a community-wide farm event that sought to raise awareness about the activities of the farm and put it in the context of larger community issues, such as public health and food access. The Community Supported Agriculture model was successful in reaching a larger network of families that didn't reside in the immediate vicinity of the cooperative. Through the CSA, the cooperative was able to deliver produce straight to the consumer and build better producer-consumer relations. Improved relations is indicated through customer subscription of CSA boxes as well as subscription to the cooperative's newsletter. The cooperative was able to use the newsletter to keep consumers connected to activities on the farm and gain customer feedback. In a way, this served as a line of communication between consumer and producer and both parties were able to communicate about demands, wants, and difficulties and hardships. Both cooperative members and CSA subscribers have described the

CSA as something that has made a positive impact on producer-consumer relations.

iii. **Objective 3: Enhance Cooperative Production Capacity and Efficiency**

**a. Progress Made: Quarter 1:** Co-created budget for purchase, repair, and maintenance of cooperative tools and supplies associated with production, storage, harvest, and post-harvest handling of produce and other cooperative products **Quarter 2:** 4 meetings with national and local FSA, NRCS, and USDA offices to talk about EQIP and other incentive programs to help member farmers (especially minority farmers) access capital and other expansion services/programs **Quarter 3:** Member farmers begin maintaining tool inventory; **Last Quarter:** Members begin collective tools and supplies purchases, such as collective tiller and mulcher; member farmers purchase collective compost; members continue to manage tool inventory and supply inventory (including distribution)

**b. Impact on Community:** Member farmers gained access to valuable leadership and capacity building opportunities as well as cooperative infrastructure. Specifically, there are many barriers to entry for individual farmers – especially low-income, minority farmers, such as tools, equipment, and growing supplies. By using a cooperative model, MQVN CDC and VEGGI Farmers’ Cooperative was able to effectively minimize barrier to entry by collectivizing certain large assets, such as a tiller. The cooperative tool inventory not only spread out large costs that would have limited production capacity of individual farmers, but it also increased overall collective assets and capital, allowing farmers to attain tools, equipment, and infrastructure necessary to increase production capacity. Farmers who previously could not afford a tiller, for example, now had access to a collective tiller through the cooperative. In addition, collective management infrastructure had to be created to help facilitate transparent management and acquisition of collective assets. This was crucial as this built capacity of member growers to function in a collective and take on leadership roles in group settings. Tasks included helping build member capacity to facilitate meetings, accounting and bookkeeping, and purchase procurements. These skills ultimately also translated to improving individual practices. Ultimately, the impact of such production capacity activities and purchasing of collective assets helped member growers become stronger as a collective, which improves things such as production coordination and ultimately increases livelihood sustainability.

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, 20\_\_). Include further explanation if necessary.**

- i. **Number of direct jobs created: 1**
- ii. **Number of jobs retained: 16**
- iii. **Number of indirect jobs created: N/A**
- iv. **Number of markets expanded: 2**
- v. **Number of new markets established: 1**
- vi. **Average Market sales increased by \$494.12 per month and increased by 54.7%.**
- vii. **Number of farmers/producers that have benefited from the project: 12**

**a. Percent Increase: 9%**

Average market sales increases were calculated from project start date to project end date. Trends and impacts were relatively larger in during the beginning of the project period and began to plateau by year 2. A plausible explanation includes an identified production bottleneck. As much of the grant activities focused on increase in marketing and post-harvest efforts, efforts to expand production were not proportional. Internally, it has been determined that increase in production is required to fully take advantage of improved and increased marketing and market-building capacity.

**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?**

Throughout the duration of the grant period, the we were able to expand our customer base significantly. Specifically, we expanded to the following groups:

*1. Community members*

During this grant we were able to expand our outreach and customer base to include residents of Village de l'Est and the Lower 9<sup>th</sup> Ward, both of which are USDA-identified food deserts. Our reach also includes other areas that are not food deserts, such as Broadmoor. This outreach includes targeting low-income food insecure populations. Outreach methods included attending community meetings (neighborhood association meetings, nonprofit meetings, parent-teacher meetings at schools) holding open house events at the farm to invite community members to become involved on the farm, and holding after school programs for students to learn more about food. Another strategy that was also effective was multi-lingual outreach (Spanish, Vietnamese, and English) as much of the communities we worked in had significant limited-english proficient populations. Direct consumer sales generally took the form of community supported agriculture, as well as direct farm sales (though less popular). We were able to subsidize cost of produce of lower income community members by asking for support from more affluent communities. An important component of outreach to such a diverse population required us to host regular community meetings to determine what kinds of produce that community members are interested in to ensure in part that a significant portion of the produce that we were cultivating met the needs of community members.

*2. Markets*

We were able to expand our presence throughout the grant period to include two farmers markets as well as a local community market. Strategies included working with local communities and market board of directors to insert more growers and assess consumer demand to better meet local demand and remain responsive to local consumer demands. A specific example includes meeting with the board of director of Crescent City Farmers Market to assess the growing need for tofu and salad greens – we are now the sole purveyors of tofu and one of the largest (top two) of salad greens at two weekly markets.

*3. Restaurants*

Restaurant relationships are foundational in that restaurants are willing to pay a higher premium price for produce and thus can subsidize cost of subsidizing cost for lower income consumers. In addition, restaurants have been helpful in marketing our produce by advertising our cooperative on their respective menus.

**4. Discuss your community partnerships.**

**i. Who are your community partners?**

- ii. **How have they contributed to the overall results of the LFPP project?**
- iii. **How will they continue to contribute to your project's future activities, beyond the performance period of this LFPP grant?**

Our community partners throughout the duration of the project were as follows:

- *Kids Rethink New Orleans Schools*

Kids Rethink New Orleans Schools assisted us in outreaching to different communities, such as the Lower 9<sup>th</sup> Ward. They were crucial in helping us build relationships to different schools, such as Edgar P. Harney Academy of Excellence, that allowed us to outreach to students and their families about healthier eating and ultimately, the importance of eating fresh produce. This work in part resulted in a curriculum around community food access that aimed to change the behavior and outlook of low-income students to healthy eating. Many of these students and their families eventually helped organized a Day of Action in 2015 that gathered over 200 community members at VEGGI Farmers' Cooperative to talk about food access and the benefits of urban farming in our communities. They have also been playing a role in advertising our community supported agriculture boxes to their network of local supporters. They will continue playing a role by continuing to connect us to young people and students and facilitating using VEGGI Farmers' Cooperative as an educational site for students on urban agriculture and healthy eating.

- *Supporting Urban Agriculture (SUA)*

SUA helped provide technical assistance in establishing a CSA network for VEGGI Farmers' Cooperative. SUA continues to help market our CSA box through their networks. Their customer base is primarily located in the lower 9<sup>th</sup> ward. They have also played a role in helping VEGGI Farmers Cooperative build collective capital in helping procure tools and equipment. The relationship will extend beyond the grant in continuing to build the CSA distribution network with a focus on increasing accessibility to low-income consumers.

- *Lower 9<sup>th</sup> Ward Village*

The Lower 9<sup>th</sup> Ward Village played an instrumental role in helping us establish local community markets in the Lower 9<sup>th</sup> Ward and Village de l'Est. They were instrumental in community outreach and establishing a strong community support for markets and projects. Their role will not continue past the grant since their founder has since passed and the organization has since dissolved.

**5. Did you use contractors to conduct the work? If so, how did their work contribute to the results of the LFPP project?**

We did not use contractors to conduct the work associated with the grant program.

**6. Have you publicized any results yet?\***

- i. **If yes, how did you publicize the results?**
- ii. **To whom did you publicize the results?**
- iii. **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).**

We have not yet publicized the results of this grant but potentially may distribute the results with close partners who are also looking to develop and improve marketing strategies for community-based

farming operations.

- 7. Have you collected any feedback from your community and additional stakeholders about your work?**
  - i. If so, how did you collect the information?**
  - ii. What feedback was relayed (specific comments)?**

We have collected feedback from both farmers and consumers through informal means such as farmers meetings, interactions with consumers at farmers markets, and CSA membership meetings. These were informal mechanisms that allowed us to determine the efficacies of marketing efforts from both a consumer and producer standpoint. From a producer standpoint, the feedback that was relayed was mostly positive, stating that they are overall pleased with the direction of marketing efforts and with new means of distribution, such as through Community Supported Agriculture networks. They expressed concern more around GAP/GHP training and other capacity projects and were more reticent in adopting new handling and post-harvest handling practices. Legal ramifications often had to be used to emphasize the importance of working towards GAP/GHP certification and better post-handling practices.

From a consumer standpoint, the feedback was mostly positive. Consumer feedback allowed us to greatly improve our marketing strategies. Suggestions from consumers included providing recipe ideas that help consumers with ideas of how to use produce that can be purchased either from farmers markets or consumer supported agriculture boxes.

- 8. Budget Summary:**
  - i. As part of the LFPP 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?**
    - a. If yes, how much was generated and how was it used to further the objectives of the award?**

The project itself did not generate any income, but rather focused on enhancing income generation potential of member farmers.

- 9. Lessons Learned:**
  - i. Summarize any lessons learned. Draw from 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).**
  - ii. If goals or outcome measures were not achieved, identify and share the lessons learned to help others expedite problem-solving:**
  - 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:**

Lessons learned from the grant period include:

- *Data sharing with stakeholders*

MQVN Community Development Corporation (MQVN CDC) and VEGGI Farmers' Cooperative (VEGGI) both adhere to a community-driven model of work and thus strive to involve communities and stakeholders (in this case, farmers) in program development, implementation, and evaluation. One lesson learned that was extremely valuable was to be as transparent as possible with sales data. Often times, what we found was that speculating and deliberating on different marketing strategies didn't pique the interest of farmers compared to the resulting increase in economic return that coincided with implementation of different marketing strategies. Often times, seeing the economic return of certain strategies helped to promote auxiliary strategies and work such as GAP/GHP practices and CSA's that allowed us to build stronger relationship with communities.

- *Connecting consumers directly with farmers*

One strategy that we found extremely effective was to connect consumers and communities directly with farmers and farms. We found that there exists a barrier between communities and farmers that makes it difficult for the needs of both sides to be met. In connecting the two parties, it was possible to work towards consensus. Farmers would be able to understand consumer standpoint on food safety and thus the importance of trying to adhere and adopt GAP/GHP practices. In return, consumers began to understand the hardships of farming and the role that weather plays in crop fluctuations and to be more understanding of pricing and the importance of sourcing produce locally.

- *Need to build production capacity on-par with marketing*

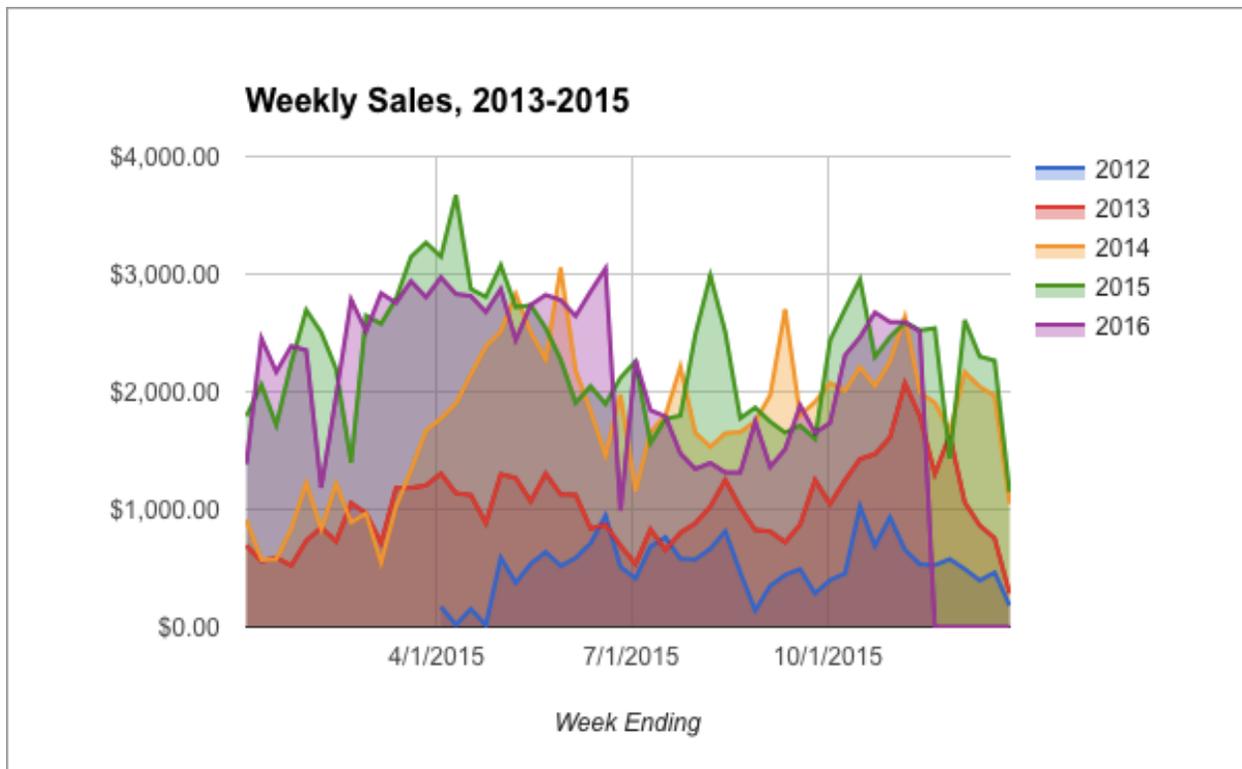
While marketing proved to be successful, eventually VEGGI hit a bottleneck with production. It is clear from these efforts that while post-harvest and marketing efforts are essential to assisting with farm development and capacity building, that a holistic approach, including production, is often needed to make sure that bottlenecks don't hinder growth.

- *Capacity building*

One of the greatest difficulties throughout this grant period was GAP/GHP adoption since many farmers still aren't adopting practices. Additional capacity on both an administrative and farmer level is needed to help regulate and push for uniform adoption of GAP/GHP policies. In the case of future projects, VEGGI and MQVN will focus more on building better accountability structures that include discipline corrective action plans to ensure that farmers respect cooperative policies. In addition, more effort will be placed on building farmer capacity to self-govern so that less administrative capacity would have to be spent on enforcing cooperative policies.

- *Patience with farmer behavioral change*

One of the things that we underestimated was the time and effort it would take to change farmer capacity and behaviors around even concrete things such as adopting GAP/GHP practices or cooperatively managing tool banks. In the beginning, these efforts require extensive administrative capacity to manage growers to lay the foundation for behavioral change and that farmer self-governance isn't realistic in the span of one or two years.



Overall, however, we found that on a per farmer basis, our marketing efforts to consumers and communities resulted in a clear increase in sales. While it is still to be determined whether this is merely correlation, the graph shows a clear increase in sales starting in 2014 with the implementation of direct consumer marketing programs.

#### 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.**
- 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 will continue to work on this project by:

- 1) Continuing to expand our direct consumer marketing through the expansion of our CSA networks and presence at local farmers markets. In addition, we will also continue to work with local community organizations to outreach to communities to expand educational efforts on the importance of healthy eating and sourcing produce locally. These relationships will extend to working with local school and organizations to build relationships with students to volunteer on farms. We strive to increase our CSA subscriptions by at least 25% over the next year and would like to continue to experience a growth rate in sales of at least 10% per year.

- 2) Continue to work on GAP/GHP adoption by continuing to enforce GAP/GHP policies internally and eventually applying for GAP/GHP certification. We would like to have 100% farmer participation in uniform adoption of post-harvest practices in the next two years.
- 3) We would like to continue to expand our production capacity by either adding more growers (with a goal of at least two more farmers in the next two years) and by expanding cooperative assets. Currently, cooperative assets are limited to supplies and equipment, but VEGGI would like to strive to expand cooperative assets to include a cooperative processing facility in the next three years to expand processing capacity to increase financial stability and marketability of products.

We would like to pursue additional projects on expanding and building farmer leadership and capacity to play a more meaningful role in organizational governance and adoption of policies such as GAP/GHP. We would like to explore consumer-farmer relationships further by analyzing how consumer-farmer relationships could reach consensus in creating new niche markets that are mutually beneficial that ensure stable income for farmers and stable food supply for families – especially low-income and food insecure families.