

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; Fax: 202-720-0300

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

Report Date Range: <i>(e.g. September 30, 20XX-September 29, 20XX)</i>	October 1 2014 – September 30 2016
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Recipient Organization Name:	Engaged Community Offshoots
Project Title as Stated on Grant Agreement:	Growing the Local Food Market in Prince George's County, Md.
Grant Agreement Number: <i>(e.g. 14-LFPPX-XX-XXXX)</i>	14-LFPPX-MD-0080
Year Grant was Awarded:	2014
Project City/State:	Bladensburg, MD
Total Awarded Budget:	\$100,000

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: _____

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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.

- i. **Goal/Objective 1:** Expand Eat Local Farm Share program

- a. **Progress Made:**

ECO City Farms' *Eat Local Farm Share* was conceived, developed, promoted and delivered as a multi-farm CSA program. It was designed to expand upon ECO's CSA program, providing an enhanced share of produce not just at our urban farm in Prince George's County, but from other area farmers as well. As such, the CSA could offer a wider variety of items, such as mushrooms and apples, which ECO does not grow. And even more importantly, it would benefit and support the sustainability of new small farmers in our area through the introduction and consistent sales of their produce via ECO. The CSA operated every season during the project period, providing local produce and eggs from a number of different area new farmers using sustainable practices, and primarily served residents of Prince George's County, Md.

The goals of this project were twofold: by matching under-served consumers with under-served farmers, ECO made (1) additional fresh, locally grown food to low-income residents of food desert areas, while (2) providing supplemental income to area underserved small sustainable farmers.

A key strategy was to keep the *Eat Local Farm Share* at an introductory and affordable, cost, while keeping ECO's expenses low enough to affordably manage the share. The average price of the weekly share was \$12. An item was generally a head, bunch, a pound or pint of fruit or vegetables.

A second strategy was to offer special manageable payment options for low-income residents. Low-income shareholders were given flexible ways to pay for the CSA. There were options to pay by the week instead of providing the full upfront payment ahead of season the way CSA's typically function. Moreover, low-income shareholders could use SNAP, WIC and Maryland Double Dollars (a matching money program) toward their payment, along with cash, check or cards. Low-income customers were also able to pay differing amounts each week toward their balance, when using their WIC Fruit and Vegetable checks, because these checks were issued at times that did not always correspond to dates when payments were due.

The *Eat Local Farm Share* was widely promoted at community events and on social media to target residents of Prince George's County, Md. There were three pickup locations: one was on Thursdays at a year-round local farmers market in nearby Riverdale. A second was at the incubator Port Towns farmers market on Saturdays (see about market, below). A third pick-up location was established in Washington, DC in partnership with a church with a large, popular and diverse congregation from across the area. In 2016, ECO also created an add-on pastured egg share in partnership with a local chicken farmer.

The *Eat Local Farm Share* ran most of the year, with the exception of December 2015 to March 2016, when area farm produce was too scarce due to adverse weather. The average number of shareholders in the spring/summer seasons was 32 and in fall/winter the number fell to 20, due to more limited produce.

b. Impact on Community:

The *Eat Local Farm Share* served a total of 139 shareholders during the full project period and fed 339 people, primarily Prince George's County households. A survey of members conducted in August 2016 indicated that all the shareholders were very pleased with their shares in terms of the quality, quantity, and price of the produce. They also indicated high satisfaction with ECO's customer service. Analysis of member zip codes shows that 27% of the shareholders lived in USDA-designated food desert areas of the county. Informally, shareholders reported that they liked the diversity of produce available in the share, and were supportive of purchasing from local farmers. Even more significant, however, was their enthusiasm and engagement with the food they received – delighted about how fresh and/or tasty the items were, and/or the positive family feedback when incorporated it into a family meal.

ECO engaged shareholders through a weekly emailed newsletter in which we provided recipes and information on the nutritional properties of the food made available to them that week, as well as news about ECO City Farms and partner farmers. For example: we published recipes and photos from a low-income shareholder who explained how she prepared the produce she received that week in several dishes.

The *Eat Local Farm Share* worked with eight different local, small "sustainable" farmers to partner with to purchase their produce for shares. We did this to provide an additional side income for these small farmers. This assured that they were able to reliably sell their produce beyond what they managed to market elsewhere, through farmers markets, direct sales or share programs. This allowed ECO's *Eat Local Farm Share* to be nimble and take advantage of the times when the farmers had additional or excess unsold produce throughout the season. Our purchasing strategy allowed ECO to more effectively manage the flow and availability of produce to fill our shares weekly, and provided these eight farmers with supplemental income for produce that might not otherwise have been sold.

ECO worked with each partner farmer to find the best way to pick up their produce. We made ourselves available to accommodate their delivery schedules, met them at area farmers markets or designated sites half way between our two farms as a means of reducing the burden for delivering the sale. While the dollar value of purchases from farmers was certainly modest, it provided them with supplemental income with little additional effort and helped to promote local farmers to a new community.

ii. Goal/Objective 2: Farmers Market Local Food Education and Promotion

a. Progress Made:

ECO learned through experience that fresh food requires promotion. It is not sufficient to make fresh, local food accessible to residents in our food desert areas. It is also necessary to inform potential customers about and demonstrate how to use seasonal produce to complete the connection from farm to table.

Surveys conducted by ECO of area residents in 2013 indicated that that lack of knowledge about the preparation and cooking of seasonal produce was a barrier to purchasing and consuming them. We therefore set as a strategy for this project to feature food preparation and cooking demonstrations at our incubator market in order to help market visitors become more comfortable with the ease and variety of ways to prepare unfamiliar produce.

At ECO's incubator market in summer 2015 and 2016, we featured a series of food preparation demonstrations which engaged market customers and showcased the produce available at the market. The sessions were conducted a number of times over a two-hour period, and focused on ingredients available that week at the market. Chefs chopped, seasoned and cooked small tasting batches of each recipe and supplied the written recipe along with information on its nutritional benefits. They focused the affordability and availability of the produce, and how easy it was to prepare it. They worked to be appropriate to the mix of Latino, African and African American food of the customers as well as their pocketbooks. The food demonstrators also emphasized that locally grown food is tastier, fresher and more nutritious than that which was harvested thousands of miles away and sat on a market shelf. In order to reach a primarily Latino customer-base the market, the sessions were conducted in English and Spanish and recipe cards were bilingual in English and Spanish.

Sessions were held by ECO staff, interns from the Maryland University of Integrated Health, volunteers, and staff of the University of Maryland Food Supplement Nutrition Education program.

b. Impact on Community:

During the project period, 13 different food cooking demonstration sessions were held at the incubator market reaching 268 participants. These sessions served to strengthen customer appreciation of the taste and nutritional benefits of locally grown food, and enhanced their knowledge about how to create tasty dishes with these ingredients. These sessions also provided a safe space for market visitors to ask questions about produce in their native language. Most significantly, the cooking demonstrations introduced people to vegetables they were not otherwise familiar with. Using cost effective recipes which fit into their budget and was culturally appropriate to their taste palates made them more likely bring them home to try.

The free sessions, with information and food samples, also worked towards creating stronger bonds and positive experiences with customers. It helped to promote fresh food and the market itself, thereby contributing to the market's intention of creating safe community-centered resource and meeting place for local food and comradery.

iii. Goal/Objective 3: Food Business Incubator Farm Market

a. Progress Made:

In summer 2015, ECO developed a small startup farmers market for locally grown produce and culturally appropriate and healthy prepared food to the Bladensburg community and the three additional Port Towns with which we work. Our goals were to: connect local and new farmers and new food businesses to underserved residents; to

provide a safe start-up space for new food businesses to practice selling to consumers; and to create a community-centered marketplace for locally fresh food close to where potential customers live.

In its first season in 2015, we located the market in a multi-family food desert neighborhood adjacent to a subsidized apartment complex, a senior center and two elementary schools, where the majority of residents are low income. We worked with Crossroads Community Food Network to enlist vendors from their microenterprise training program, which trained largely new immigrant entrepreneurs interested in starting food based businesses. The market included seven vendors: two were produce farmers, three were prepared food, and two were crafts/ health products. We promoted the market throughout the area with flyers and signs. The market ran from July 11 to September 26, 2015. It had a small total turnout of 668 visitors. After operating the market, we determined that the location was not ideal for a market, as it buried in a neighborhood, rather than on a busy road that would attract passing traffic. Indeed potential customers from outside the immediate neighborhood stated that the market was hard to find, and for a variety of known and unknown reasons, the hope we had for nearby apartment residents to come to the market did not come to fruition.

During winter 2016, we began a search for a new location, meeting with a range of partners and experts who agreed that we had to relocate the market more centrally. With the help of the Town of Edmonston, a partner Port Town adjacent to the town of Bladensburg) we secured the parking lot of a well-established local pizzeria, more centrally located on a busy thoroughfare. We kept the day and time (Saturdays, 10-2). We again partnered with Crossroads to recruit starting up local food business vendors and farmers, and to recruit returning vendors from the previous year.

Five vendors agreed to sell at the market's new location: three farmers, one prepared foods vendor and a baker. Throughout the season, some of these vendors dropped out as they were not appropriate to the clientele and were not successful. However, by the seasons' end, we found that the three most consistent vendors—two farmers and the prepared food business—were both well suited and appropriate to the needs of our consistent customer-base. However, for new and potential customers, we faced the challenge of an impression that the market did not have wide variety of produce or vendors.

To support local farmers and boost the amount and diversity of products available at the market, we innovated using the partner farmers concept. We specifically sought out local, small and startup farmers with products we could sell for them at the market as partner farmers. As anchor of the market, ECO sold these products from partner farmers at the market on consignment. Products included eggs, flowers and mushrooms. This allowed our farmers to reach a greater number of customers without them having to commit staff or time to vending. Customers were made aware of the farmers and farms that raised or grew the produce. This arrangement worked well and also allowed the market, which had an average five vendors onsite, to provide greater variety of products to the customers.

Eventually four partner farmers participated through consignment sales with ECO and another vendor at the market. Partner farmers were accepted on a case by case basis, after reviewing the quality and farming methods associated with the produce. This structure was set up in developing the market rules before the season to encourage multi-farm participation at the market. These allowed existing produce vendors to sell up to 50% of their produce from a partner farmer as long as that partner farmer had completed an application and we knew who they were and how they farmed. This allowed Montoyas Farm at our market to sell fruit items from a partner orchard farmer. While this practice runs contrary to many producer-only rules at markets, the provision added local produce to the market, helped additional local farmers sell their products, while providing a better selection to our customers. We found that our structure provided sufficient control over the quality of the produce brought to the market. It also strengthened our capacity to recruit and retain vendors at a startup market in a low income area, which traditionally has problems in both retention and recruitment. We expect to continue this practice as long as we need to, in order to keep a good variety of local foods available to our market customers with limited access to healthy, locally grown fruits and vegetables.

The market also benefitted substantially from our partnership with the local WIC office. A WIC staffer distributed Maryland Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) checks at the market to area WIC clients. This book of checks valued at \$20 in \$5 increments could only be spent on fruits and vegetables. The distribution of these checks at the market brought a consistent and diverse group of WIC clients to the market and introduced them to our farmers. By the seasons' end, the majority of market attendees were repeat WIC clients.

The incubator market's second season ran from June 4 to September 24, attracted 2,290 visitors, with total sales of more than \$15,467. This is a modest start, but a significant improvement over the 2015 experience. It provides a strong base which we intend to build upon in 2017 and beyond. ECO has secured funding to continue the market's operation and will work with our established partnerships and relationships with vendors and expand this community resource to bring more underserved local farmers together with underserved local residents.

b. Impact on Community: 2,290 local residents visited the incubator market in the second season, an increase of 359% over the first season. Over the course of the season, we were able to provide fresh, locally grown produce to a population that either lives in or adjacent to food desert areas. The customer survey we conducted late in the second season showed that 65% of market visitors reported that the market helped them procure fresh produce they would not have gotten otherwise. Despite the small size and scope of the market at this time, it has significant community support of elected officials, local employees and residents. 100% of market visitors reported that it was "important" or "very important" to them to have a farmers market in their community.

The market had a direct impact on the low-income residents in the community. By the end of the season, the vast majority of the customers to the market were WIC clients, who conducted 429 transactions taking advantage of the matching dollars market money. The FMNP checks distributed by the WIC office provided thousands of dollars of

funding to clients to buy locally grown produce sold at the market. More importantly, these families discovered, took advantage of and in many cases, returned to, a new affordable fresh food resource in their community.

For the vendor farmers, food sellers and partner farmers, the market generated \$15,467 during its second season. Two farmers participated as on site vendors, and four participated as partner farmers with consigned items. The market provided these farmers with a secondary source of income, supplemental to other markets in the area at which they were already vending. The farmers already accepted WIC checks, so the FMNP checks distributed by the WIC office provided thousands of dollars of produce sales. The majority of WIC clients spent their entire booklet at the market, sometimes on a single day. One of the farmer vendors was a Spanish speaking Latino, who hired an additional Latino/Spanish speaking farmer to sell at the market. In so doing, they filled a market need and significantly enhanced customer sales to the majority Latino market visitors.

The market has the full support of the four Port Towns mayors, council members, businesses and non-profit leaders, who consider a vibrant community-based market in the area to be a very positive addition to the place they call home. Many of them regularly shopped at, promoted and contributed to the market in many ways, and are committed to making this market a permanent fixture in the community.

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: 3
- ii. Number of jobs retained: 2
- iii. Number of indirect jobs created: 5 (contributed to at least 16 part-time jobs for farmers by purchasing their produce and 1 part time for person selling for a farmer. But the % value of the contribution is difficult to calculate).
- iv. Number of markets expanded:
- v. Number of new markets established: 1
- vi. Market sales increased by \$15,467 and increased by n/a % (% increase is n/a because market started in 2014 with \$0 sales).
- vii. Number of farmers/producers that have benefited from the project: 16 (CSA + market)
 - a. Percent Increase: 433% (Previous to 9/30/14, we only worked with 3 farmers for the CSA)

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?

Our aim was to enhance our reach of the diversity of populations that live in our area. The project focused on the diverse, primarily Latino, African and African-American low income and low food access residents of Prince George's County and the similar profile individuals involved in starting a food businesses in the area. This is the population that frequented the market.

CSA: As noted in Lessons Learned in #9 below, ECO was not fully successful in reaching our goal of attracting a significant number of diverse low-income customers to the CSA that was specifically designed for this purpose. For many of the potential target customers, the CSA is a

new way of purchasing food, which many low-income consumers find counter-intuitive, as they pay up front for something they do not yet receive. Frugal new immigrants are also not very receptive to this concept. Through questions on the CSA registration form, we learned that of the 139 shared sold, we fed 339 people in families primarily in Prince George's County. Of these, 73% of were female. 74% identified as White; 14% as African-American; 5% Asian; and 2% Latino. 5% identified as a senior aged 65+. While many were working and/or lower middle class, few were actually on SNAP, WIC or other assistance program. Approximately 27% lived in USDA-designated food desert areas of the county. We are still working on designing a program that makes better sense to our target clientele, and are seeking the input of community members to help discover and translate to one another the win-win advantages to farmers and customers of the CSA.

Incubator Market: Particularly thanks to the partnership with the local WIC office in the 2016 season, the market attracted 2,290 visitors, the majority of whom were on WIC, who made 429 transactions. Although ethnicity was not specifically tracked, staff observations suggest that the vast majority (approximately 65%) of the market customers were Latino, and about 25% were African American. For vendors, five of the seven vendors in 2015 were Latino, one was Asian American. Three of the five total vendors in 2016 were Latino, one African American.

4. Discuss your community partnerships.

i. Who are your community partners?

ECO engaged a wide range of community partners for this project. They included Prince George's County WIC office, the Prince George's County Extension, Crossroads Community Food Network, the Towns of Bladensburg and Edmonston, the Port Towns Community Health Partnership, the Port Towns Elementary School, the Prince George's County Food Equity Council, the Maryland-National Capital Area Park and Planning Commission, University of Maryland Food Supplement Nutrition Education program, the Maryland Farmers Market Association and Three Brothers' Italian Restaurant.

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

Crossroads Community Food Network assisted us in recruiting vendors, promoting the market and providing ECO staff with best practices on operation of the market. We worked with Crossroads to provide the graduates of their local food-based microenterprise training program with slots at our market to incubate their businesses and get them started. Three Brothers Italian Restaurant partnered with us to provide the location of the market for summer 2016. The Port Towns Community Health Partnership and Towns of Edmonston and Bladensburg provided promotion and publicity for the *Eat Local Farm Share/* CSA and the incubator market. The Town of Bladensburg provided logistical support of the market. The Maryland Farmers Market Association and the local Prince George's County Extension Office of Marketing provided advice and information on logistics and regulations for starting a market. The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission provided space for the first season incubator market and assisted us with the search for a new location for the second season.

The Port Towns Elementary School provided access for us to promote the market to parents of children at the school for 2015 and a parking lot for market visitors and vendors. The Prince George's County Food Equity Council provided advocacy support for this market and heightened community awareness of the need for projects that provide greater local

food access in food desert areas. The Maryland Farmers Market Association guided us as we worked establish and relocate the market and provided Maryland Market Money, a double dollar program for low income customers to match up to \$5 per visit in additional market money.

We also formed partnerships with the local WIC office to distribute FMNP checks at the market which had tremendous impact on bringing low income customers to the market. We worked with the Port Towns Community Health Partnership to recruit local agencies and nonprofits to table at the market to educate customers about community resources and programs.

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

We expect continued similar support for the CSA, nutrition education programming and farmers market in the future. We will continue to work with Crossroads extensively for recruiting new food businesses and farmers who need a first location to the market. We will continue to rely on our other partnerships for promotion and communication to our community for the market to build a customer base, as well as recruiting local farmers who are in need of additional markets. We look forward to working with the county WIC office in greater measure next season to have them at the market to distribute WIC FMNP checks and promote the CSA to their clients.

5. **Did you use contractors to conduct the work? If so, how did their work contribute to the results of the LFPP project?** As needed, our matching funds were employed to hire professional chefs and educators to provide education at major events and markets. We used one of these professional food educators to conduct several of our food preparation and cooking demonstrations at the incubator market during the 2015 season.

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

i. **If yes, how did you publicize the results?**

We promoted the incubator market and its goals, as well as the CSA and the low income food benefits available for use at both. We created brochures and signs and distributed them to area residents and at outreach opportunities. We also created an end of market year report.

ii. **To whom did you publicize the results?**

We communicated the results of the market to our community partners, during and after the summer seasons. We promoted the market's activities and results on our Facebook pages and our organizational website.

iii. **How many stakeholders (i.e. people, entities) did you reach?**

We reached approximately 15-20 community partners, and 1,500 area individuals through our Facebook page.

*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?** We conducted a survey of CSA members in late summer 2016 about their opinion of the

CSA and what it provided. We used the feedback to finalize our CSA plans for the coming year. We also collected feedback and information from visitors to the incubator market through a dot survey.

i. If so, how did you collect the information?

The CSA was conducted using survey monkey online; the incubator market visitor survey was done with a dot survey, asking visitors to place dot stickers on flip charts in answer areas.

ii. What feedback was relayed (specific comments)?

The CSA survey asked questions about the quality, quantity and types of the produce offered, the customer service, newsletter, and pickup locations. Answers revealed that the members were very happy with and had few comments concerning improvements. Comments included, "Thanks for being there and doing really great work in the community,"; "This was my first CSA and overall I enjoyed it."

The market survey asked four quick questions to visitors: how they heard about the market, how many times they had visited, had it helped them obtain fresh produce and how important it was to have a market in their community. The results showed that the majority of customers heard about the market from their local WIC office, area signs or driving by. 35% of customers had been to the market 6 or more times, and 65% reported that it helped them obtain fresh produce they would not otherwise have been able to obtain weekly. 100% reported that it was either important or very important to have a farmers market in their community.

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?

\$7469.20 was generated and was used to purchase produce that was not funded by this grant.

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).

Positive experiences:

The model of a multi farm CSA resulted in a higher quality of share. By pulling together produce from multiple farms for a multi-farm CSA that focused on working with very small farmers. This improved the quality and variety of items in the CSA bag and was very well received by members as reported through a survey and also verbal feedback.

A partnership with a local WIC Office is key to attracting and reaching low income customers at a farmers market. There is no doubt that we would not have had the impact on this specific population group in our community nor financial sales impact to

our farmer vendors if we had not partnered with WIC to have FMNP checks distributed at the market.

Our partner farmer program has been a successful way to supplement and enrich the variety of locally grown foods at a new market that may have difficulties attracting farm vendors. ECO recruited additional partner farmers to consign sales of their products via ECO in order to diversify the market's offerings. Mushrooms, flowers, eggs and fruit were all sold this way via partner farmers. By allowing each farmer vendor to sell up to 50% of their produce from another, pre-screened partner farmer, it provided a diversity of income to the farmer and allowed them to share produce sales. For the partner farmer, it enabled them to test the market and sell produce without having to be present. For the customer, it helped the market diversify its produce and be more viable. We will continue this strategy until the market has a sufficient variety of onsite vendors to fill product niches.

We had one new prepared new food vendor at the incubator market that was finally able to take a first step toward her dream of selling food locally. Yum Buns was run by an area Asian-American resident, who dreamt of eventually owning and operating a food truck business. Vending at the market during 2015 was the first step towards this goal. She learned how to prepare and price items, secure appropriate permits, procure equipment, operate under strict food safety requirements, and produce and sell weekly during the entire season. Her product was well received at the market.

Conducting food cooking demonstration sessions at the incubator market was a successful component of building community and improving family skills. Market visitors were interested in sampling new ways season and prepare market produce. Attending impromptu cooking demonstrations on-site at the market and learning about the featured produce of the week was a good way to capture the attention of and engage market visitors. As many of the shoppers were Latino, we found that teaching in Spanish as well as English and handing out bilingual recipe cards was very key to its success. We also partnered with additional nonprofits that conducted demos and nutrition sessions at the market.

Negative experiences/challenges:

Produce issues with farmers, especially in winter, did affect the CSA. Though the multi farm model helps guard against produce unavailability issues, it is not infallible. We were not able to offer a winter season share the second season due to the lack of produce available by our farmers. In response, we adjusted our communications materials and recruited new members again in spring.

CSA share sales were slower than predicted, and interest in shares in Prince George's County remains low. ECO was not fully successful in reaching our goal of in membership sales. There was significantly greater interest in our share from DC residents, but less from those living in in Prince George's County our initial eligibility requirement and the focus for this CSA. As a result, we offered the share at a bit higher rates to DC residents during summer 2016 in partnership with a church, which got off to a modest start, with 8 memberships. We remain primarily committed to providing fresh food to Prince

George's County residents and it will continue to be our focus of the CSA. However, the market for CSA shares is more competitive in our area than in past years.

Difficulties remained in recruiting nonwhite CSA members: The majority of our *Eat Local Farm Share/* CSA members were working and middle class white residents and we did not have the same percentage of African-Americans or Latinos as is represented in the general population of Prince George's County. We continued to reach out to a diversity of residents at events, local group meetings and through other channels, but the concept is new and not particularly attractive to the majority of residents. To date ECO has not been able change the mix of residents attracted to farm shares.

We experienced difficulty in attracting lower income residents as CSA customers, despite outreach efforts, flexible weekly payment plans and WIC/SNAP payment options. We continued to promote discounted rates and flexible payment plans for the CSA, but only attracted two members of the CSA interested in paying with food assistance dollars. Understandably, low income residents may be hesitant to commit to a fixed weekly food expense when they face consistent food budget shortages and scarcity, causing them to make different food buying decisions.

Recruiting new and emerging food entrepreneurs for the incubator market was difficult. Despite the fact that worked closely with Crossroads Community Food Network of 'still in training' food entrepreneurs and Union Kitchen with new 'already in business' entrepreneurs, and communicated the availability of the market at very low registration rates, it was still difficult to attract food vendors to an untested low income market, especially in a region with many affluent customers and alternative markets. For those that are already in business, our market was not a predictable enough steady stream of paying customers. For those 'still in training', the transition to selling was for some, one they were not ready to make.

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

There are hard to overcome barriers for low income families to buying into the CSA concept if they did not already have a local food ethic or are familiar with the benefits of local foods. Low income residents would not or could not commit precious food benefits and dollars ahead of time for something unfamiliar or uncertain in any way. Their weekly food budget was too precarious and WIC/SNAP hardly covered their food needs, so they are very cautious about how they spent their money. It was easier to convince low income residents to purchase local produce at the incubator market, which seemed to be the better first step to begin familiarizing residents with local food that is fresher, tastes better, is more nutritious and can be very affordable.

We had tremendous competition from free food giveaways that are prevalent in our community. Free food distributors, such as Capital Area Food Bank, are very active in distributing free produce through partners in our target neighborhoods. Though these efforts are extremely valid responses to a real need, they present a real challenge for growing the local food economy here, especially for poor and low income consumers. The expectation that produce will be free is a challenge experienced by our urban farm

and for the incubator market. It undermines the value of the local farmers' efforts and economic need to get a decent price for their produce. And, for some residents in our focus area, any price at all for produce is too high. Customers contrast the costs of the *Eat Local Farm Share* and prices at the incubator market for produce with what they would pay at a grocery store. Though we counter this in promotional material with arguments as to why local is better, fresher and more nutritious, and, at \$12/week for the share, can be comparable in pricing, it still faces this comparison. This absence of a viable market for produce drives far too many local farmers to nearby DC, where many of their customers don't question the price of their produce. These factors significantly impacted our ability to recruit local farmers for the incubator market, even beginning farmers just starting out.

For many middle-income county residents we interacted with, there was also hesitancy to invest in food ahead of time. Through interactions we found that those who did not have an ethic of local food, healthy food or a familiarity of our organization, were not interested in pre-purchasing food through a CSA. Even our regular farmers market customers who joined did not always renew their membership the following season, based on their practices in purchasing food – some wanted the freedom to just buy from our market table and those of other market vendors.

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:**

Budget more for in person outreach when working with low income communities: We over budgeted in supplies for this project, thinking we would do a lot of advertising. But we found to reach our low income residents we needed to do a lot more face to face outreach, attend community events and print simple flyers and forms. That face to face required personnel time, which was a lot higher than we anticipated. If anyone is working with low income groups, would recommend building in a lot of outreach time.

Collect demographic information if you can: ECO's CSA sign up/registration form asked members to report what ethnic/racial groups they identified with (they could answer more than one), whether they identified as a senior citizen 65+ or a recent immigrant, and also how many people lived in their household, besides themselves. This provided us with information that, along with their zip codes, allowed us to report key demographics about who we were reaching. We used the actual number of people in households to understand just how many people the shares were feeding weekly. This information was optional to provide, but a majority of members provided it.

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.**

We plan to continue our CSA with flexible, weekly payments and SNAP/WIC options for low income customers. Because our mission is to grow and otherwise make fresh food

available to our immediate neighbors in Prince George's County, Md., we will continue to look for ways to meet the fresh produce needs of low income residents in ways that overcome their food budget barriers, yet still adequately compensate local farmers for their produce.

We secured a grant to nurture and grow the farmers market and will work with the town of Edmonston this season to transfer the operation of it to them in 2018 with our continued technical support and vending at the market. We also plan continue to provide nutrition education and food demonstrations at the market and elsewhere to encourage area residents to consider fresh, local food as options for daily meals for their families.

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 are interested in other models that successfully reach low income communities with food programs that adequately compensate local farmers. We are also interested in working with trusted organizations and institutions for distributing and preparing food and/or educating about food.