

## 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, 2015 – September 29, 2016
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<b>Recipient Organization Name:</b>	Southern Maine Planning and Development Commission
<b>Project Title as Stated on Grant Agreement:</b>	Initiative to Explore the Feasibility of a York County Food Hub
<b>Grant Agreement Number:</b> <i>(e.g. 14-LFPPX-XX-XXXX)</i>	15LFPPME0017
<b>Year Grant was Awarded:</b>	2015
<b>Project City/State:</b>	Maine (York County and southern Oxford County)
<b>Total Awarded Budget:</b>	25,000

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.
  - Objective 1: Obtain detailed information on what York County/Southern Oxford County farms are producing, how much is being produced and how much land is actively farmed.
    - a. Progress Made: Farms were surveyed for product and farmland information – over 300 were sent out with a return rate of 20%. A food scan (a snapshot of farming based on various indicators such as economic and environmental) using the University of Minnesota Food Industry Center model was prepared for York County using the 2012 Agricultural census data as well as data from a variety of other sources. The survey provided key information regarding the produce being grown, how much is not being sold or used currently, how much land is actively farmed, each farm’s access to more land to farm, what services farmers were looking for assistance with and what barriers prevented them from growing their farming business. The food scan provided general information about York County farming as a whole for comparison to the survey results.
    - b. Impact on Community: If community can mean the farmers of York and southern Oxford Counties, a document which describes the farm survey results in detail was given to the York County Farmers’ Network (YCFN) and the York County Cooperative Extension office in July. The survey results provide information about farming in York County that YCFN did not previously have. This information is not only valuable for the food hub feasibility study but can also help with future grant applications and aid individual farms’ future decision-making in regards to market expansion.
  - Objective 2: Learn what problems and obstacles farmers are facing that may prevent expansion of their businesses
    - a. Progress Made: Farms were surveyed for what prevents them from expanding their business and what they perceived are their greatest needs in order to sell more product in retail and wholesale markets (more on that later in this report). The top four barriers that emerged from the survey were funding for capital improvements, time constraints, operational costs and the cost of labor. These are not uncommon challenges to the growth of any kind of business and are barriers that a food hub could address. For instance, a food hub could offer services that take some of the burden of marketing, customer delivery and temperature-controlled storing of produce off the individual farmers. Farmers also described their challenges during several meetings that were held to talk about the food hub study. Owners of several farms were met with individually for more far-ranging conversations. The Cooperative Extension Director for York County and the former chair of the York County Farmers’ Network also shared a lot of information through their long experience with farming and farmers in York County.

- b. Impact on Community: The farms and farmers will benefit from this information beyond what the study reveals concerning a food hub. Even though circumstances may not be completely conducive for the establishment of a food hub in York County at this particular time, farms and farmers will know their collective challenges and marketing constraints, understand that connections could be made to expand markets and can work to overcome the obstacles if they choose to. SMPDC will present the study findings to the YCFN at the fall meeting in November.
- Objective 3: Obtain information on what markets are available to farmers (commercial and institutional) and what market needs are not being met (e.g. would local restaurants buy more locally grown greens if delivery was assured?)
    - a. Progress Made: Surveys were out to two types of buyers (institutional and grocery stores) and several restaurants were approached. Institutional buyers were categorized as hospitals, long term care facilities or schools. A select group of 21 institutions located in York County were solicited. Six institutions responded (some represented more than one location and all three categories mentioned above were represented). A major regional grocery store also responded – small independent stores were also asked to respond but despite phone calls, none did. All the buyers who responded to the survey wished to purchase more local foods and they shared obstacles in common to being able to do so. These common obstacles were: 1) the cost of produce and 2) delivery and scheduling logistics, including reliability. A food hub could smooth and improve delivery and scheduling with both institutions and grocery stores by acting similarly to the distributors and food vendors they currently use with regular deliveries, scheduling and good communication.
    - b. Impact on Community: The information gleaned from the buyer’s surveys and from conversations with restaurants shows much demand for local food. Nearly all the buyers surveyed reported that they have indicated in their contracts with vendors and distributors that they prefer local food whenever possible. However, a high percentage (over 85%) of the farmers do not sell to distributors currently. There are missed connections between the institutions, grocery stores, restaurants and the farmers which also means unused/unsold produce and consumers who prefer local food on their plate but cannot easily obtain it. This is not a problem unique to York County – food hubs across the country sprang up from just these types of circumstances. Maine does have fragmented infrastructure and food system gaps which coupled with its northern location, and rural nature can make it challenging to connect local farms with markets.
  - Objective 4: Develop list of top priority shared facility needs (e.g. cold storage, distribution center, commercial kitchen etc.) based on local products available, existing facilities and marketing potential
    - a. Progress Made: The most desired food hub services chosen by responding farmers ended up being closely grouped in terms of the number of farmers choosing them as one of their top five choices. No single service appeared as an overwhelming priority for a majority of the farmers who responded. Storage was first in terms of importance, just barely coming out on top.

Next were basic processing, retail/direct market access, and wholesale market access, which were all ranked as equally important. These were followed by marketing/branding, access to information pertinent to farming, distribution and value-added processing. As shown in the survey, farms in York and southern Oxford County produce a wide array of fruits, vegetables and meat. The 2014 Maine Consumer Survey (conducted by the University of Southern Maine's Muskie School of Public Service) found that while consumers in Maine want to buy local food, finding it poses a challenge. Although almost 80% of those surveyed would purchase local food, "lack of access" was cited as a reason for not doing so (24%), followed by "inconvenient" (20%). The York County-based buyers' surveys showed that all the institutions and the major grocery store who responded want to buy more local food. There appears to be both unmet demand and market potential for local food. Research showed that there are no general processors of fruits and vegetables in York County (only one exists in any of the adjacent counties and it processes beans), while the survey showed that some farms process their own products for sale on a small scale. Many of the institutions and the grocery store reported they want to buy local processed food. There are no USDA-certified meat processors in southern Maine at all. One farm indicated that they had facilities and buildings that could support larger-scale storage, aggregation and distribution, possibly value-added processing and were interested in becoming a food hub.

b. Impact on Community: These results are important to those farmers who have interest in any kind of cooperative effort with other York or southern Oxford County farmers, whether or not that effort is a food hub. The survey also indicated that 56% of responding farms had some product/produce that went unsold and unused which corresponds with some farmers' identification of value-added processing being a need. This could generate some interest in founding a small processing facility or a cooperative commercial kitchen – especially if a particular community decided to support such an effort.

- Objective 5: Match farms/farmers and products/produce with markets and shared facilities through analysis and obtain buy-in from the farmers

a. Progress Made: As noted previously, the farmers' surveys indicated that access to additional retail and wholesale markets were desired. The institutions' surveys indicated that they all want to buy more local food, all but one indicated that they would be willing to pay more for local food and all indicated that they would like to purchase local apples, cucumbers and blueberries. These top priority products were followed by local tomatoes, bell peppers, summer squash/zucchini, carrots and potatoes. According to the survey, the vegetables are grown by and available from many farms while the fruit is available from selected farms. The major grocery store, a regional Northeastern chain, indicated that they are interested in purchasing everything on the list of over 40 local products except for sweet corn. Conversations with restaurants also showed great interest in local food.

Meetings held to update the farmers on the study's progress and findings became sparsely attended as the growing season progressed. Farmers were also facing severe drought conditions in York County which kept many of them working even longer hours as they struggled to keep their crops alive. Water supply is something Maine generally doesn't have a problem with but this year precipitation was scarce and wells were getting low.

The farm noted earlier that would like to be a food hub, has temperature-controlled storage to share, does equipment-sharing with a nearby dairy farmer, has a commercial kitchen and an under-utilized barn. Unfortunately, this farm's owners did not attend any of the meetings. Many of the dozen or so farmers who attended the July 2016 meeting, during which they learned of the demand and markets for their produce, are satisfied with their operations but know of other, usually younger, farmers who want to grow their business. Many of these other farmers took the survey during the winter but were not attending the meetings in spring and summer.

b. Impact on Community: Because this was a planning grant, it is difficult to know the impact for certain, but increased prosperity for farmers as members of their community can only be positive and raising the profile of locally-grown food in southern Maine could have reverberations throughout all York and southern Oxford County communities.

- Objective 6: Bring the York County Farmers Network (YCFN) and local food-related support organizations together to develop potential strategies for overcoming obstacles uncovered in Objective 2 and to discuss logistics and economics.

a. Progress Made: Because it seemed that York County and southern Oxford County farmers supported the idea of this study to examine if a food hub could work but were unclear on what they wished to do next, inviting the local food-related support organizations would not have been productive. Instead SMPDC intends to do three things this fall: 1) make the report available to the YCFN that summarizes the study and includes survey results; 2) make this same report available to local food-related support organizations; and 3) present the study to the YCFN at their annual fall meeting in November and initiate a discussion on results and what direction the YCFN wishes to take.

b. Impact on Community: Making the study available will be valuable in that its information can be shared and used by these groups and the YCFN for future marketing expansion efforts in whatever form they take. Buyers, including distributors, may also have an interest in the results, and so might those interested in processing local products.

- Objective 7: Analyze data gathered from Objectives 1-6 and determine best location in terms of community/town for food hub

a. Progress Made: No location was chosen since it is uncertain what the farmers will do with the study's information. The farm that showed an interest in and had some capacity to be a food hub is located on a state highway near one of the largest communities in York County. This community's Director of Planning and Development has expressed interest in supporting a food hub.

b. Impact on Community: Any of York County's communities would benefit from proximity to a food hub, in visible ways if the hub included a retail market. Wholesale operations would be valuable in less obvious ways by providing the community with better access to fresh local food as local restaurants and small independent grocery stores may be attracted and purchase from the food hub.

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.

Not applicable since this was a planning grant.

- Number of direct jobs created N/A
- Number of jobs retained: N/A
- Number of indirect jobs created: N/A
- Number of markets expanded: N/A
- Number of new markets established: N/A
- Market sales increased by \$insert dollars and increased by insert percentage%. N/A
- Number of farmers/producers that have benefited from the project: N/A
  - a. Percent Increase:

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?  
Not applicable.

4. Discuss your community partnerships.

- Who are your community partners? The York County Farmers' Network through the York County Farmers' Network Steering Committee and the York County Cooperative Extension
- How have they contributed to the overall results of the LFPP project? The YCFN Steering Committee helped shape the farmers' survey, spent time testing the survey, asked fellow farmers to take the survey, attended meetings, gave advice, asked hard questions and were generous with feedback. The York County Cooperative Extension Director attended meetings, gave advice and feedback. It is difficult to imagine the project at all without having the YCFN as a partner.

- How will they continue to contribute to your project’s future activities, beyond the performance period of this LFPP grant? As mentioned before, the YCFN will receive the report and SMPDC will be making a presentation to the farmers at their November meeting. In the report, SMPDC states its interest in continuing to support discussion on the study’s findings and lays out the path ahead (decision points) to continue towards a food hub or some kind of marketing effort. SMPDC will initiate discussion with the farmers at the November meeting to determine what the next steps might be. It is, of course, possible that there will not be support for any kind of collective effort. If that is the case, individual farms may still want to pursue marketing expansion and the report will help them do it.
5. Did you use contractors to conduct the work? If so, how did their work contribute to the results of the LFPP project?  
 Yes, SMPDC employed two contractors – the first had actually worked at a food hub in California a few years ago but she accepted a full-time job offer a few months into the project. Her knowledge of food systems and farms was quite valuable and we were sorry to lose her. She helped us craft the farmers’ and the institutions’ survey. Our second contractor was a part-time town planner with interest in local food who did a lot of research and survey result analysis for us.
6. Have you publicized any results yet?\*
- If yes, how did you publicize the results? Copies of the farmers’ survey results were given to the YCFN in July. The study report and all survey results will be posted on the YCFN website ([www.ycfn.org](http://www.ycfn.org)) in the near future and on the SMPDC website ([www.smpdc.org](http://www.smpdc.org)) early in November.
  - To whom did you publicize the results? YCFN
  - How many stakeholders (i.e. people, entities) did you reach? Not applicable
- \*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? Not yet but hope to do so after the study report is made available and after the November farmers meeting. One larger community has expressed interest in supporting a food hub or some type of cooperative farm effort so they will be looking the report over as well.
- If so, how did you collect the information? Not applicable
  - What feedback was relayed (specific comments)? Not applicable
8. Budget Summary:
- 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:
  - Did the project generate any income? NO
    - a. If yes, how much was generated and how was it used to further the objectives of the award?

## 9. Lessons Learned:

- i. Summarize any lessons learned. 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).
  - Using Survey Monkey made designing the survey and running simple analyses easy. Having the YCFN members contact list with email addresses was invaluable as we sent out email with links to the survey and could simply send out a gentle reminder email periodically.
  - We all thought that mailing paper surveys with prepaid return envelopes to those 100 or so farmers who did not have an email address on file would boost our survey response numbers but that was not the case. The number of mailed surveys returned was quite small by comparison and most of these were not farmers who sold food or goods that could be easily sold through a food hub. The effort was not worth the meager results.
  - We may have overextended a bit in the scope of this project (trying to survey farmers and several types of buyers). We would have liked to reach out to more buyers in person, especially restaurants. Restaurants are not really reachable by survey and required more time than we had available to speak with them in depth.
- 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:

Because the surveys took time to get back and then analyze the results of, the growing season was peaking by the time we had enough information about both the farmers and the buyers to discuss. This meant that attendance was sparse at the meeting in July to discuss the opportunities and challenges and many of the farmers who were most interested in expanding their markets were not at the meeting.

## 10. Future Work:

- 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.

SMPDC will present the study to the YCFN farmers in November and signal that we are interested in assisting them in continued efforts to expand their markets. Farms in York County tend to be small and in order to sell to wholesale buyers, produce will need to be aggregated. The large grocery store has a local food program that is a major feature of their stores across New England and could potentially buy a lot of produce.

A few farms in York County sell to this grocery store currently but they require certifications like GAP and GHP and soon FSMA. An important aspect of any food hub, farmers' cooperative or marketing program that York County farmers decide to pursue will need to include assistance to small farmers with these certifications.

- 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?

During the November presentation, SMPDC will offer to meet with interested farmers over the winter to discuss the basic concepts of a food hub. SMPDC will include the farm that wants to be a food hub in any such discussions.

If those discussion occur, they will include the following topics:

- Virtual food hub (what might it be and how could it work)
- Physical food hub (examples from across the country, what could work in York County)
- What services should be offered (as guided by the study results)
- Development of a business plan

If the discussions proceed to the point of talking seriously about a business plan in a timeframe that would allow applying for the LFPP Implementation grant, SMPDC would assist the YCFN in applying for the grant.