

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>	September 30, 2014-September 30, 2016
Authorized Representative Name:	Kristin Varnum
Authorized Representative Phone:	207-338-6575
Authorized Representative Email:	info@mainefarmlandtrust.org
Recipient Organization Name:	Maine Farmland Trust
Project Title as Stated on Grant Agreement:	Building Capacity and Markets for Rural Maine through Smart Food Hub Growth
Grant Agreement Number: <i>(e.g. 14-LFPPX-XX-XXXX)</i>	14-LFPPX-ME-0090
Year Grant was Awarded:	2014
Project City/State:	Unity, Maine
Total Awarded Budget:	\$99,999

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: **Business Planning**

- a. Progress Made: **Maine Farmland Trust began a program in 2015 entitled, “Farming for Wholesale”. The program delivers training to experienced Maine farmers who want to grow their profits from wholesaling. In addition to the workshops, LFPP funds were used to provide approximately 325 hours of technical assistance to ten farms throughout Maine. The technical assistance assisted farms in increasing financial literacy through the creation of enterprise budgets, which allowed them to identify and implement solutions to increase efficiency and sales.**

- b. Impact on Community: **“Farming for Wholesale”—Building off the successes of a statewide workshop series in 2015 that served 81 farmers, the program combines three daylong workshops with ongoing, one-on-one technical assistance. There are two tracks, 101 and 201, depending on a farm’s goals and experience. Farms participating in *Farming for Wholesale 101* spent three days as a group learning from experts, peer farmers, and each other about crop profitability, marketing, distribution, pricing, financial management, recordkeeping, and financing. A total of 23 farmers attended the 101 workshop series, from 17 farms (5 farms are participating in *Farming for Wholesale 201* but attended the workshops as well). After the workshops, the farms identified goals related to their wholesale operations and were paired with a team of service providers who could help them work towards that goal. The program covers 10-15 hours of technical assistance in addition to the workshops, and upon completion of the program, farms will receive a \$1,000 seed grant. The seed grant and other services not covered by the LFPP budget were funded through private foundation grants.**

***Farming for Wholesale 201* is a more individualized and in-depth program for farms that are poised to lead the way for Maine farms in wholesale markets. There are 10 farms participating on this track in 2016. In addition to the opportunity to attend the workshops, the program offers 20-40 hours of technical assistance over 1-2 years with a team of service providers, again matched to meet the farm’s goals. Funds from this grant will be used to provide technical assistance. This track is a competitive application, and at the end, there will be an opportunity for participating farms to apply for an implementation grant.**

Maine Farmland Trust will be offering these workshops again in 2017.

- ii. Goal/Objective 2: **Season Extension**

- a. Progress Made: **Technical assistance (TA) in season extension was provided by Clara Coleman with support from MFT staff. In all, 10 farms received these**

services. Each farm had an initial consult with Clara and/or MFT staff. That was then followed up with a site visit to further assess season extension opportunities on the farm. And finally, Clara would provide recommendations for the farm so that they could meet their season extension goals. One key lesson learned was that many of the farms required the purchase of hoop houses and other infrastructure to meet their goals, but many of the farms lacked financing opportunities to do just that. This has led MFT to begin to develop financing mechanisms that could be available in the future to support infrastructure improvements for farmers using season extension.

b. Impact on Community: In addition to direct TA, two workshops were conducted on the topic of season extension. One was a hands-on event at Point Lookout Farm where there exists a small year-round vegetable growing operation using movable hoop houses (also known as high tunnels). In addition to learning about the principles and practices related to season extension, participants were able to work together to physically move a large hoop house onto a new plot of land that was prepared to grow winter crops. This is a successfully proven technique that Clara Coleman's dad, Eliot Coleman helped to pioneer. 15 farmers attended this event.

The second workshop provided farmers with details on production techniques for season extension and included information about financials and profitability for farms using season extension. This event took place at the Unity Food Hub and was attended by 30 farmers. In addition to Clara's participation in leading the workshop, Jed Beach showcased an Excel spreadsheet based tool he developed for determining profitability of any given season extension operation considering a diversity of variables.

- iii. **Goal/Objective 3: Provide vegetable washing and packing equipment for area farms**
- a. **Progress Made:** Our proposal included funds to purchase washing and packing equipment to augment an existing root washer. The goal was to make this equipment available for use to farms in the greater Unity area. However, the core group of farms that originally expressed interest in using the equipment determined it was not logistically feasible. Based on the lack of interest, we decided not to purchase this equipment as it would not be fully utilized. We have, however, utilized the root washer in partnership with Veggies For All. Veggies For All is a food bank farm that donates all crops to the area food pantry.
- b. **Impact on Community:** Veggies For All relies on dozens of volunteers to manage its food bank farm. At times these volunteers aren't plentiful. The washing and packing equipment has made Veggies For All less reliant on volunteer labor to get the crop handled for distribution to food pantries.
- iv. **Goal/Objective 4: Marketing and distribution of Maine farm products**
- a. **Progress Made:** We have purchased nearly \$390,000 of product from approximately 60 producers and distributed this product through a variety of marketing outlets through the period of the grant. Funding from the LFPP

grant allowed us to purchase much needed equipment and supplies to receive, store and distribute product to consumers, such as pallets and bags.

b. Impact on Community: We have 200 individual retail customers that receive product on a weekly basis. We distribute to these customers at both public drop sites as well as worksites. Thanks to the USDA FINI program, we are able to offer vegetables and fruit at a 50% discount to customers paying with SNAP. Approximately 1/3 of our customers pay using SNAP. Product is also distributed to wholesale customers, which include a mid-size distributor, food co-ops, schools and colleges.

v. Goal/Objective 5: Outreach/Food Hub Center Development

a. Progress Made: While MFT has had aspirations of starting a formal food hub assistance center with a broad public presence as a way to not only support developing and fledgling food hub efforts, but to also assist and showcase all food hubs in Maine –we did end up changing our approach. In collaboration with others, most notably the non-profit organization, Cultivating Community, we helped to organize a gathering of Maine food hubs to determine what efforts could best serve the food hub community in Maine. While many of the stakeholders at this gathering (primarily well-established food hubs) like the idea of doing more together as a community such as having a central website representing all of the exciting stuff going on with food hubs in Maine, it was determined that this was not critically needed at this time. Instead, the more useful effort would be to continue to build relationships among this community and to inform other start-up food hubs about the real opportunities and challenges involved in starting and operating a food hub in Maine. It is felt that this will help to alleviate the failure rate of start-up food hubs while also minimizing competition among food hubs and hopefully leading to more collaboration.

b. Impact on Community: Based on the feedback from the conference, we focused on using our business related TA services to support those that have interest in starting a food hub. This led to us providing some basic level counseling and TA to a few efforts in communities where there is real consideration for starting a food hub. These include joint effort in the Fryberg, ME and North Conway, NH region; a food hub feasibility effort in York County; Lakeside Family Farm in Penobscot County, various entities in Washington County; another in the Rockland area, as well as most recently in Dover-Foxcroft where they are interested in developing a hub that is centered on community food assistance to low-income populations. We were also able to provide substantive feasibility work in the Bangor region where we were contracted by a community-based consortium of a variety of stakeholders who wanted us to help them determine the true overall and unmet demand for local foods at wholesale markets in the region. The goal of the study was to determine whether or not it is worth exploring the development of a food hub in the region. The results of the study did identify unmet demand in the market, but not enough to warrant a new food hub. So instead, we are continuing to work with stakeholders to identify other ways to help farmers

meet this demand. All in all, we've been able to play a key role in helping entrepreneurs and communities to better find their way when it comes to determining feasibility for a new 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, 2014). Include further explanation if necessary.
 - i. Number of direct jobs created: **4**
 - ii. Number of jobs retained: **1**
 - iii. Number of indirect jobs created: **2**
 - iv. Number of markets expanded: **1**
 - v. Number of new markets established: **21**
 - vi. Market sales increased by **\$388,904** and increased by **1,719%**.
 - vii. Number of farmers/producers that have benefited from the project: **60**
 - a. Percent Increase: **140%**

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?

We were able to serve more low income customers by offering nutrition incentives as one of dozens of markets offering Maine Harvest Bucks. These incentives are funded through the USDA Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive grant program, which enabled us to offer a 50% discount on vegetables and fruits purchased with SNAP. This has been a popular offering and we are able to reach customers in both central and southern Maine.

4. Discuss your community partnerships.
 - i. Who are your community partners?

Unity Barn Raisers located in Unity, Maine
 - ii. How have they contributed to the overall results of the LFPP project?

They assist in outreach activities to promote the Unity Food Hub and coordinate and needed volunteers.
 - iii. How will they continue to contribute to your project's future activities, beyond the performance period of this LFPP grant?

Going forward, Maine Farmland Trust has contracted with Unity Barn Raisers to actively provide outreach to SNAP recipients in order to make them aware of available reduced cost product at the Unity Food Hub.

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

Yes, Clara Coleman has a provided education and technical assistance on four season farming and Jed Beach provided wholesale marketing and business training as well as technical assistance. Both of these individuals have a great deal of expertise in their respective fields and have, and will continue, to assist the farms that partner with the Unity Food Hub and those farms that will partner with Unity Food Hub in the future. Farms have reached out to us to express how pleased they have been working with both Clara and Jed. Not only are Clara and Jed knowledgeable, but they also are able to effectively communicate their message to farmers.

We also contracted with a Rachel Bouvier to create a survey that we sent to our partner farms. The purpose of this survey was to receive feedback from our farms on how we have impacted their operations, what we are doing well and areas that need improvement. We plan on sending this survey out every year in order to evaluate the impact of the Unity Food Hub over a period of years. This survey was extremely helpful in allowing us to better understand our impact and how we can continue to improve our partnership with Maine farms.

6. Have you publicized any results yet? * **We have not publicized specific results; however, we do publicize our work.**
- i. If yes, how did you publicize the results?
We publicize our work through both the Maine Farmland Trust and Unity Food Hub websites as well as social media. We have also created a flier advertising the Maine Farm Share and our work has also been featured in newspaper articles. In addition we publish a weekly newsletter entitled "Harvest Notes" on our website for share customers that describe the product they are receiving and offer tips on how to prepare the items. This can be found on our website: www.unityfoodhub.com. We also created a poster to advertise the Maine Farm Share (attached).
 - ii. To whom did you publicize the results?
The general public and customers.
 - iii. How many stakeholders (i.e. people, entities) did you reach?
It would be difficult to estimate an exact number given the broad reach of the outlets that were used. However, it would be safe to say that the information reached thousands of people.

*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?
- i. If so, how did you collect the information?
We do collect feedback directly from retail customers and farmers. We also received in-depth feedback from the farmer survey.
 - ii. What feedback was relayed (specific comments)?

"Since I've started to get the greens share, which I can afford due to the FINI incentive, my insulin dosage has gone down."—Share Customer

"Just wanted to tell you how happy I am that I joined the farm share program. This is a beautiful assortment of veggies, and what a deal for \$12.50! Sending out a big thank you to you & everyone involved in the program for making it possible for low-income folks such as myself to eat healthier, tasty veggies."—Share Customer

"I love the Harvest Notes and information that you send about the farms supplying the share. This share is marrying convenience and education about farms perfectly! Thanks for all you do!"—Share Customer

“In my experience the level of communication between Unity Food Hub and growers is incredibly helpful and far exceeds any other wholesale buyer we work with. We feel like you are step in step with us through the season and really considering our farm's experience throughout.”—Farmer

“I'm deeply appreciative of how much UFH acts as a partner as opposed to just a purchaser. This makes a big difference in where we decide to focus our farm's growth.”—Farmer

“Your experience with the market and willingness to share this information throughout the season is helpful to my farm business. It makes me feel like part of a larger effort to grow the local food movement.”—Farmer

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? **Yes.**
 - a. If yes, how much was generated and how was it used to further the objectives of the award? **\$411,531 was generated through product sales and was used to purchase food from farms and general operations.**

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).

The biggest lesson learned was the importance of adaptability. As with any start-up, the plan does not always equal reality. It's important to constantly analyze operations and make needed adjustments. This helps create better efficiency and long-term success of the operation. An example would be packing the Maine Farm share. We are constantly analyzing and adapting our pack line by adjusting procedures and incorporating technology and equipment to create a higher level of efficiency. Another import aspect of our success thus far is maintaining transparency and open communication with both our suppliers and customers. This builds trust and creates an environment for a long-term relationship.
- ii. If goals or outcome measures were not achieved, identify and share the lessons learned to help others expedite problem-solving:

Purchasing washing and packing equipment and making it available to farms was one of the project's objectives. This goal was not achieved as the original interest from farms did not materialize. It was decided to not spend the money and purchase the equipment since there was no longer the demand. The further outreach with farms was important as it meant that we didn't jump to simply purchase the equipment and not have it utilized.
- 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:

It's important to constantly evaluate your progress and to ensure that your original plan still aligns with the reality on the ground. It's better to make an adjustment

rather than moving forward with goals that may no longer align with the actual needs.

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 will continue our work to expand and create marketing outlets in Maine and New England for Maine farmers and producers. We also will continue our outreach efforts to all populations and ensure that everyone can have access to Maine's bounty. As UFH grows there will continue to be the need for additional staff with the goal of hiring two full-time equivalent positions next year. Overall, we have built a solid foundation over the last two years and are excited for the future.

- 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?

There is a need for central aggregation storages. These storages would allow multiple farms to store product in a central geographic area. Central aggregation sites would reduce travel time for both producers and buyers. Buyers would be able to purchase product from multiple producers and would only have to pick-up product from a few key locations rather than going from farm to farm. It would also allow producers to sell to multiple buyers without having to make multiple deliveries.