

## 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>	October 1, 2015 – September 30, 2016
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<b>Recipient Organization Name:</b>	Sprout Urban Farms Inc.
<b>Project Title as Stated on Grant Agreement:</b>	Sprout Food Hub and Value Added Enhancement Project
<b>Grant Agreement Number:</b> <i>(e.g. 14-LFPPX-XX-XXXX)</i>	15-LFPP-MI-0022
<b>Year Grant was Awarded:</b>	2015
<b>Project City/State:</b>	Battle Creek, Michigan
<b>Total Awarded Budget:</b>	90,900

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: Improving value added and food preservation capabilities with installation of additional preserving and packaging tools and supplies.

a. Progress Made: Sprout staff researched implementing value added production enhancements at our packaging facility by attending the Make It In Michigan conference for food producers hosted by Michigan State University Product Center, and gathering licensing information for wholesale food production in Michigan, including licensure requirements, operating codes and standards from the Health Department and Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

We have been packaging our own herbs and produce, and have purchased packaging supplies that enhance our ability to sell regionally aggregated produce to institutional kitchens, including local school districts and the hospital. A new objective as mentioned in our Interim Report and based on our learning, became focusing our efforts for this goal on supporting, promoting, and purchasing from the producers in the Food Hub network, rather than equipping and certifying our packaging facility as a commercial production kitchen. Sprout Food Hub is purchasing kale chips, prepared mustard, juice, locally roasted coffee beans, fresh and dried herbs, meat, and cold brew coffee concentrate from local producers to resell through our markets and CSA subscriptions. We have a reciprocal relationship with one producer who buys produce from Sprout Food Hub to make fresh juices, which we then sell, and offer at markets and in our CSA boxes.

Sprout has identified new entrepreneurs, educated them on the local food economy, connected them to the Center for Entrepreneurship (Sprout’s BC Vision partner in small business development), and promoted their businesses through various networks including web promotion, inclusion in CSA and markets offerings, and recommendation and nomination to a local “Business Boot Camp” and a “Start up Pitch Fest” event. All the winners at the “Pitch Fest” were food-related emerging businesses. Sprout has also promoted the upcoming Making it in Michigan conference through social media, reaching at least 350 followers.

b. Impact on Community: Value-added products totaling \$6,400 were purchased from 10 producers for resale through the Food Hub CSA and markets over the year, comprising nearly 10% of total Food Hub purchases. New and emerging producers became regular sources for the Food Hub including more than 20 new growers and value-added producers.

An additional outcome of this project which will increase and benefit value-added product sales is the planned continuance of the Sprout Box memberships

through the off-season with weekly boxes containing regionally aggregated value-added products as fresh produce becomes less available. To date, 38 subscribers have committed to continue through the winter months with this service, and planning and marketing are in process.

Sprout has continued its support of emerging new and diverse farmers, including Farmer's on the Move, a regional Hispanic farmers' cooperative, and Burmese farmers, who produced flowers for the network this season. A high-potential collaboration with two young farmers in the Washington Heights neighborhood evolved over the year, and they have launched their own enterprise renting land from Sprout. They have become suppliers to the Food Hub and attended farmers markets representing their own business, Sunlight Gardens.

A "Sprouting New Farm and Food Enterprise" event was held this fall, which brought 20 interested participants together to discuss needs of emerging members of the Food Hub network, and what Sprout staff and established farmers and entrepreneurs can offer to support these new entrepreneurs. We also highlighted local producers who provided the ingredients for a meal at this event. Additional meetings will be held soon to continue this partnership.

A new collaboration between Sprout and a neighboring city is currently developing which would result in Sprout Food Hub's full-time access to an established commercial kitchen. Through this potential collaboration, an existing farmers market site that includes a large commercial kitchen, display and market space, would be utilized and managed by Sprout Food Hub. The potential for increasing value-added food entrepreneurship will be considerable if this opportunity comes to fruition, which we are hopeful it may.

ii. Goal/Objective 2: Increasing support for CSA subscriptions through outreach and collaboration with local businesses and organizations.

a. Progress Made: Sprout staff worked with local organizations to facilitate CSA subscription programs in the workplaces. Successful collaborations with four organizations include Bronson Battle Creek Hospital, Personal and Professional Wellness, Michigan Department of Human Services, and Kellogg Community College, for a total of 40 area employees participating this first season.

A major focus for this reporting period included development of the online marketing and ordering system for the CSA program. We used some of our supplies monies to expand our web presence and improve our CSA online ordering process. Sprout has, in conjunction with a local tech developer, created an online shopping system for The Sprout Box CSA that allows customers to purchase weekly (rather than pay for the entire season up front), customized boxes with automatic billing to their bank account. The system also allows SNAP benefit recipients to reserve weekly CSA boxes and pay at pickup. Currently, we are working to refine and research potential replication of this innovatively flexible ordering system, and addressing changes to be implemented for the planned year-round Sprout Box.

In addition to 40 workplace CSA subscribers, 30 additional Sprout Box customers participated this first season. Related work includes an increase in the number of wholesale accounts for totals including three local school districts, 19 restaurants and value-added producers, four institutional buyers, and eight mobile market sites. While restaurants have proven to be somewhat difficult customers to maintain, as they are accustomed to ordering from large-scale commercial vendors, the net effect of new wholesale accounts this past year is positive.

b. Impact on Community: The CSA project has proven to have strong potential for increasing sales for our network of producers. Nearly one quarter of total Food Hub sales this season were in Sprout Box sales (\$22,015), with goods aggregated from 48 farmers and producers. To date, 38 Sprout Box subscribers have committed to continue with a year-round CSA currently in planning by Sprout staff. Additional value-added products will be sourced from regional producers to supplement weekly shares as produce becomes less readily available through the fall and winter months.

Forty employees of organizations participated in workplace CSA's, indicating mostly satisfaction with their Sprout Box experience. Staff corrected a few errors with packing and delivery, and only a few workplace subscribers were lost throughout the season. Around half of these members will continue with the off-season Sprout Box containing regionally-sourced produce and products.

The small scale growers Sprout Food Hub partners with are receiving support to increase markets for their products through crop recommendations and assistance in package labeling, online marketing, and published farmer profiles. Sprout Box sales and increased marketing through this project have increased total purchases of products from Food Hub growers and producers by 225% over last season, over \$90,000. Specific examples of support to farmers include:

- Trent & Ruthie Thompson (Green Gardens Farm) – Sprout has been including Green Gardens produce in Sprout Box offerings and taking their produce to the Battle Creek Farmers Market because it was not financially viable for them to do so, yet they still wanted to be able to serve their long-standing clientele based in Battle Creek.
- Anthony Cinzori – Sprout Food Hub formed a new relationship that has allowed him to get back into Battle Creek markets without having to participate in the Battle Creek Farmers Markets, where he was not successful enough to warrant participation. Sprout Food Hub purchased between \$400-\$1000 worth of produce each week for several months this season.
- Maliesha Pulano – Sprout helped Maliesha obtain a standing, weekly wholesale order of her concentrate into Bronson Battle Creek Hospital Café. This is an increase to her of \$160 per month. Sprout has also been selling 1-2 cases per month of her product through the Food Hub, creating a total in purchase of Mamaleelus of roughly \$250 each month. Sprout also designed a promotional poster for her to help with promotion at Bronson Battle Creek Hospital Café.

iii. Goal/Objective 3: Increasing awareness of Sprout Food Hub and Bright Star Farm Market and Packaging facility through street and building signage.

a. Progress Made: A-frame signs and yard signs have been purchased and are being used in and around the neighborhood and at the Market location, and permanent signs are purchased to be installed at two major corners of the Farm Market location. Sprout worked with the city to determine best sizes and approaches for permanent signage. We purchased a series of small A-frame and "Burma Shave" signage to direct nearby customers to the Farm Market. We also cleared old shrubs and debris around the market building where a local artist donating their services will paint a mural.

b. Impact on Community: Traffic to the Farm Market has increased through the small signs placed strategically through the neighborhood and at the Farm. Additionally, through our outreach to businesses and organizations, we have been able to direct new customers to the Market, especially since it's open when others are not, and it is a Sprout Box pickup site.

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, 2015).
- i. Number of direct jobs created: 0
  - ii. Number of jobs retained: 5 Sprout Food Hub staff retained.
  - iii. Number of indirect jobs created: Sprout Food Hub purchases from regional farmers and producers totaled \$93,000 for this period.
  - iv. Number of markets expanded: 2 - Wholesale/institutional buyers have expanded/improved. Larger scale buyers including school districts and hospitals have replaced some smaller restaurants as regular Food Hub buyers. Retail buyers have also increased through CSA program marketing and referrals.
  - v. Number of new markets established: Online CSA system "Sprout Box," 4 workplace CSA programs, 2 school mobile market sites
  - vi. Market sales increased by \$53,000 and increased by 220%.
  - vii. Number of farmers/producers that have benefited from the project: 48
    - a. Percent Increase: 200%
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?

The Food Hub's wholesale customers evolved over this year away from smaller restaurants to larger institutional customers, including three school districts, two hospitals, and several larger, weekly buyer restaurants. Additionally, our workplace CSA program is established in four local institutions, with participants continuing through the winter months for our emerging winter Sprout Box. Mobile Markets have also evolved this year away from those that are least attended into the best attended, including downtown business sites, preschool/elementary school markets, and the city farmers market, increasing efficiency of use of staff and resources.

Marketing and signage created through this project have attracted neighborhood customers to Sprout Farm Stand; increased marketing through signage for Double Up Food Bucks and SNAP participation has attracted some new customers to the market stand and other markets,

including the CSA program, which had five SNAP participants this first season. Next growing season, 25 SNAP recipients will have Sprout Box scholarships to sponsor their participation in the CSA program for one to two years, through a recently awarded grant to Sprout.

4. Discuss your community partnerships.

i. Who are your community partners?

Some of our most engaged partners include Bronson Battle Creek Hospital, Kellogg Community College, Lakeview School District, Sprout network of farmers and producers, emerging food entrepreneurs, and funders including United Way of Battle Creek/Kalamazoo, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

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

Our institutional partners have contributed as strong partners in our CSA workplace program launched this past year. Four workplace Sprout Box sites are in place and will be ongoing through the winter months. Several of these sites are also either wholesale buyers or mobile market sites, including the Hospital, Lakeview Schools, and Kellogg Community College. Our network of growers, producers and entrepreneurs is strong in mutually supporting and promoting one another. Value added producers are buying produce from the Food Hub, restaurants are supplying Sprout with vegetable waste for our compost operation, and farmers and food entrepreneurs are participating in promotional events and knowledge sharing exchanges. The local United Way and W.K. Kellogg Foundation continue to partner with Sprout Urban Farms, assisting with our school programming and work to increase healthy food access in our community, including mobile markets and increased access for low-income families.

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

The existing workplace CSA partnerships are set to continue through the winter and into next growing season. Additional promotion and referrals to the Sprout Box CSA will help to increase the workplace sites for the program, as well as subscriptions at-large throughout the community. Institutional drop off sites for CSA subscribers is most efficient for use of Sprout staff time and resources, and we are working to increase the number of such sites.

Sprout sponsored events that network established and new farmers together will continue, as well as those that promote farmers in the community. Sprout continues to seek support from local and national funders for our work to increase production of and access to healthy food throughout our community.

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

We used a local web tech development company to create and improve our Sprout Box CSA online subscription program. The innovative system allows customers to customize their weekly box, allows for weekly bank deduction of charges (rather than whole season payment up front), and allows SNAP food benefit recipients to order and reserve a weekly share for payment at pickup. Our system may become a model that we can share and/or market to other food hubs. We are working on refining the system and considering the implications of that option. Additional contractual work was for permanent sign at the Sprout Farm Stand. Two copper and

wood signs were constructed for placement at the crossroads nearest the Farm Stand.

6. Have you publicized any results yet?\*
  - i. If yes, how did you publicize the results? Promotion of Sprout Box CSA, Farm and Market Stand through Facebook ads, posts, Sprout website, participation and presentation at regional and statewide conferences and meetings,
  - ii. To whom did you publicize the results? Online followers; local large institutions including community college, human services organizations, and foundations; statewide food hub conference, community events, individual and group farmer/producer meetings; print and media articles.
  - iii. How many stakeholders (i.e. people, entities) did you reach?  
2875 Facebook followers; 50 growers, producers, food entrepreneurs; 20 local organizations and institutions; 5 local, regional and state conferences.
7. Have you collected any feedback from your community and additional stakeholders about your work?
  - i. If so, how did you collect the information? Farmers and educators were interviewed by evaluation consultant; comments and reviews were collected from Sprout Box CSA subscribers.
  - ii. What feedback was relayed (specific comments)?

**Educators**

Juli Tripicchio, the environmental science teacher at Lakeview High School, stated that Sprout has been an excellent educational resource. Juli has taken field trips to Sprout's farm and market. She also teaches a composting unit and stresses the importance of fresh, naturally grown food in all of her classes. She stated that Jeremy has been a guest speaker in her classes a number of times, and he also helped Juli secure a grant for the school garden and get it set up.

Juli stated, "The hands-on learning has been great. Students learn about something in class and then have the chance to put it in practice. Students learn a lot more this way. Students don't sign up for this class because they're dying to do some gardening, but once they start they get very excited."

Regarding student interest in eating more local foods, Juli said that students in her class do comment on how much better local produce tastes than what they get at the store: "They're intrigued by that and talk about it." For the broader student population, the composting pilot test in the cafeteria raised a lot of awareness because so many students saw it in action.

Lela Squire, formerly a teacher at the Calhoun Area Career Center and now working in food science in the private sector, taught food science to 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year students with the help of Sprout. Lela's students were often placed in co-op experiences at Bright Star Farm, and all of her students were involved with planting, harvesting, selling at market, and delivering. Because of Sprout's help, Lela was able to give them experience growing plants in the greenhouse that ended up in community gardens. Their greenhouse also generated market greens for Malia's and other restaurants in Battle Creek.

Lela stated, "Sprout is awesome to work with. They are a great group of people." Lela was also enthusiastic about the amount of student learning that took place in addition to providing food for people in neighborhoods. She emphasized, "Many of my students

had never eaten fresh foods, only highly processed food. In fact, they never even thought of 'green things' as food! My kids were also super excited about working in soil and growing things. It was almost like they began treating their plants like babies. It really teaches young people about responsibility to have to care for a living thing."

### **Farmers**

Olivia Jayakar and Devon Wilson credit Sprout with the success of their new farm. Olivia stated "Sprout has helped us greatly by buying from our farm. They are our main wholesale buyer, and we try to sell them something every week. We can't sell everything at market so it's really nice to have them to sell 20lbs of tomatoes, a bushel of kale, etc. that would otherwise just go bad. They've definitely helped us to have this job sustain us for the summer without having to get another job. Sprout has connected us to new markets by allowing us to have our product at multiple markets like Springfield, Battle Creek, Fresh on Wheels, and the Kendall Street Farm Stand) without us actually having to spend the time to be there. We only actually go to the markets in Kalamazoo, and by selling to Sprout our product is still available in Battle Creek."

Olivia also emphasized that increasing food access to vulnerable populations is one of their main goals in entering farming: "That is one of the reasons we love the location of the farm on Kendall Street, being as it is in one of the many food deserts around our city. We also participate in the Double Up Food Bucks and Project Fresh at the markets in Kalamazoo."

Dennis Wilcox stated that Sprout purchases an average of \$100 of produce per week from his farm during the growing season. Dennis believes that Sprout's name recognition has been a major benefit for increasing the visibility of his farm: "Just by selling our products locally at farmers markets and to restaurants, they have spread the word of our products and let the quality speak for itself. Sprout needs to continue to function as a food hub, keep alive, keep relevant."

### **CSA (Sprout Box) Subscribers**

"Nothing better in my opinion. I have enjoyed the choices throughout the season and have not been unhappy with product. Thanks to the staff too - always look forward to seeing their smiling, friendly happy faces on Wednesday."

"We've enjoyed the program and want to do it again next season. I'm hesitant to stay on without more information on what a winter program might entail."

"I thought this was a great service. Manny is awesome! Always friendly and knowledgeable. Brennan too!"

"I have loved doing the Sprout Box, but with our crazy busy schedule, I find myself giving away more of the vegetables than what I am actually able to use. During the summer, it was perfect! I love the friendliness of everyone, how accommodating and helpful everyone has been from the program to the behind the scenes people for processing payment! Thank you for offering this amazing program!"

"I absolutely love my sprout box but I am cutting back my work hours and I cannot afford it for the next little while. I just have to get adjust and re-figure my budget."

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
- iii. If yes, how much was generated and how was it used to further the objectives of the award? Revenue from Sprout Box CSA sales totaled \$22,015. All income has been spent to purchase more produce from Food Hub growers. Total Sprout Food Hub purchases were \$93,000.

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).

This project showed that the Sprout Box CSA has very strong potential both in interest from residents and in its efficiency as a delivery method, and in securing ongoing, weekly support from customers. Employers are excited to host the program at their institutions, and employees have enjoyed the season. Our innovative ordering and subscription service has opened the program to some who may not have previously been able to afford a CSA subscription by allowing weekly payments rather than the entire season upfront, and our customizable weekly "box" allows customers to select only those items they like and will use. The delivery of preordered weekly shares to identified pickup sites has proven to be a much more efficient model than the weekly market sites on average. Although we are continuing many of our market sites, we have eliminated a few that were poorly attended, and have increased our donations to the local Food Bank and Haven homeless shelter. Mobile markets inherently mean a loss of produce, and while they continue to serve a meaningful purpose in improving access in some areas of our city, the business of running the Food Hub is better served by increasing CSA subscriptions with workplace/institutional support.

- ii. If goals or outcome measures were not achieved, identify and share the lessons learned to help others expedite problem-solving:  
After some research and assessing of staff resources, we altered our goal of the Food Hub beginning to produce more packaged, value-added products, and instead supported a number of new and existing value-added producers in the Sprout network. We provided technical assistance and promoted the producers through our markets and CSA share offerings.

We experienced a few issues in regard to cold storage, including our market display cooler needing repair and the realization that we needed more walk in cooler storage for the volume of produce we are anticipating moving as the CSA program and other market opportunities increase. We converted a large refrigerated truck into an onsite walk-in cooler and purchased a used 12 x 12 cooler that we will rehab. Additional cold storage space may become available in the next few months, as well, at an established farmers market site in an adjoining city.

- 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:

Customer service and commitment to the cause of promoting regional producers have served Sprout well in our administration of this project. Sprout staff have been extremely receptive and responsive to input from farmers, customers, and institutions. Our network of growers and producers encourage others to partner with us as they continue to be our partners in promoting regionally produced food, due in part to our listening and responding to the changing issues that affect their participation and livelihoods. Institutional buyers see that we are a reliable, safe, and fair source in their efforts to increase access to healthy, local food in their businesses and organizations.

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?

Sprout Food Hub will continue the work of this project around increasing institutional buyers and CSA subscribers for the Food Hub network. The CSA is continuing with many of the original subscribers with a winter Sprout Box, and outreach will attract more subscribers as the next growing season approaches.

Sprout Food Hub has been awarded an upcoming grant from our local United Way to support Sprout Box scholarships for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP) recipients during the next spring/summer season. The funding includes assistance to supplement weekly Sprout Box shares and delivery for 25 participants of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Assistance program – WIC, and will utilize Double Up Food Bucks to stretch participants SNAP food budgets over the 21-week season, cover delivery fees, and offer scholarships for the following season.

Sprout anticipates increased number of CSA subscribers, institutional buyers, and increased efficiency on our part to more cost-effectively manage the Food Hub. We additionally are working with the Kresge Foundation to identify and support new food entrepreneurs in our community, and have applied for a SARE grant to help us assist new and emerging growers and producers through technical assistance and marketing research. We continue to champion the farmers in our region, and work to increase access to healthy food for our entire community.