

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, 2015- September 29, 2016
Authorized Representative Name:	Heidi Garvin
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Recipient Organization Name:	Central Plains Foundation, Inc. dba GROW Nebraska
Project Title as Stated on Grant Agreement:	Local Food Local Success
Grant Agreement Number: <i>(e.g. 14-LFPPX-XX-XXXX)</i>	14-LFPPX-NE-0115
Year Grant was Awarded:	2014
Project City/State:	Holbrook, NE
Total Awarded Budget:	\$99,919.00

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: Janell Anderson Ehrke, CEO; Email: janell@grownebraska.org; Phone: 308-962-6767

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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.

GROW Nebraska is a dynamic, non-profit, entrepreneurial service organization that helps small business owners and entrepreneurs build and expand their businesses. GROW Nebraska’s mission is to create sustainable economic development by supporting small businesses through technical assistance; promotion; market access through physical retail stores and Internet eCommerce sites; and education through workshops, one-on-one technical assistance and conferences. The phenomenal growth of the goal-oriented and membership-driven organization is a testimony to its effectiveness and its value to Nebraska businesses (462% membership increase since 1998; retention rate of 83%).

GROW Nebraska has a membership of 400 small businesses, 73 of those are food-related businesses. This program works exclusively with the food-related businesses.

i. **Goal/Objective 1: Teach participants to brand their products.**

- a. Progress Made: This program offers direct assistance in branding products and educational opportunities for members to learn methods for branding their products effectively.
 - Direct assistance: GROW Nebraska is featured three times each month on the Nebraska Television Network. In each 5-minute segment, GROW Nebraska features one member to publicize their business and brand their products. GROW Nebraska also features businesses (telling their story) on the GROW Nebraska blog, organization website and buy Nebraska website.
 - Educational opportunities: The annual MarkeTECH Conference had two breakout sessions for food companies that taught business owners to brand their product and market it effectively. The State Fair Marketing Boot Camp and an average of three workshops and phone seminars per year teach the art of powerful branding and marketing of the business and its products. Workshop participants also learned how to use social media to market their products in innovative ways. Program participants are encouraged to contact GROW Nebraska staff and mentors for one-on-one consultations at any time. GROW Nebraska workshops average 20 food-related businesses in attendance and one-on-one consultations average 60 per year.
- b. Impact: Food business owners learned cutting edge methods to brand their products and were given free promotion on three Internet sites, GROW Nebraska social media sites, and free air-time on local television to brand and promote their businesses and products. NTV (local television) viewership covers most of central and western Nebraska and the northern third of Kansas. This gives business owners a regional coverage through the television station ...this is the only station that gives local news coverage so it is the one most watched in this huge area of Nebraska and Kansas. One-on-one consultations covered all aspects of marketing, product readiness, business building and branding not only the products, but the business, too.

ii. **Goal/Objective 2: Teach participants to market and distribute their food and value-added products to new regional markets.**

- a. Progress Made: The *Local Food Local Success* program helped food-related businesses with every aspect of getting their products and foods into local and regional markets and move into wholesale and

global markets. Once a business was accepted into the program, GROW Nebraska staff identified the stage of development the business was in then held an initial mentoring session to make sure the participant understood and followed all food labeling and insurance requirements and was in compliance with all regulations concerning handling and processing requirements. Next, participants were provided with information on local farmer's markets in their area and information on resources they might find helpful including Rural Enterprise Assistance Project and the Buy Fresh Buy Local program.

All participants went through a product evaluation. Their products were set up for market testing in the Kearney and Grand Island stores where customers were asked to sample and give feedback. GROW Nebraska staff compiled the results and discussed it with participants so that they could improve their product, and receive confirmation that they had a great product and that people wanted a local source.

After the initial consultations, participants were able to access the following services:

- All participants' products were placed in the Kearney and Grand Island stores along with their business cards so wholesalers could contact them directly. The stores were key to the success of this program and are like a year-round farmer's market. Other opportunities for participants to showcase their local food products included the Nebraska State Capitol Showcase and the Nebraska State Fair GROW Nebraska store. At the Nebraska State Capitol Showcase, food products were introduced and sampled to Nebraska State Senators, State Capitol staff and the public - 7 food businesses participated. The Nebraska State Fair store is a remarkable opportunity since businesses are exposed to over 50,000 people, most from the state of Nebraska. The State Fair exposure provides a branding opportunity and the opportunity to get products in the homes of thousands of local people. 24 food businesses participated in 2015, and 19 food businesses participated in 2016.
- GROW Nebraska has offered 25 workshops (averaging 20 participants per workshop) teaching business owners how to harness the latest technology, reach new customers, increase awareness of their business and products, generate sales, build and expand their business, and network with other service providers and business owners. GROW Nebraska helps participants get on social media sites to market their products. The newly created GROW Nebraska Facebook newsletter got 233 views and Hilger's Farm Facebook page received 1,408 views and 16 likes/shares.
- One-on-one assistance from GROW Nebraska helps program participants prepare their products for distribution and includes learning to become compliant with FDA requirements, packaging regulations, choosing and using distributors, inventory management, market testing, using UPC codes, shelf life, cost analysis, understanding and using sales reports, creating Food Safety Plans and even recalling products.
- Product Evaluation: The biggest product evaluation and market test of the year is held at the State Fair store the last week of August and first week of September. An average 70,000 people attend the fair and the GROW Nebraska store is in the highest traffic area. This is combined with a Boot Camp Marketing workshop held at the fair. The Boot Camp averages 20 food-related attendees.
- GROW Nebraska purchases UPC codes and sells them to participants at reduced prices. This allows the participants to test new markets without a prohibitive cost risk.
- Nebraska Cooperative Development Center (NCDC) is working with nine small-town grocery stores and the Nebraska Food Cooperative, a long time NCDC client, to help food entrepreneurs have access to new markets. NCDC is also working with Lone Tree Foods LLC, an aggregator of locally produced foods that enter the wholesale market.
 - NCDC has assisted with the change of ownership with 2 small-town stores that were headed towards closing. These two stores will employ 4 FTE persons and 2 part-time

positions. The economic impact of sales of the two stores will exceed \$500,000. A small portion of the sales will include locally produced foods from local growers.

- NCDC has consulted with 3 small town stores to provided marketing assistance. One store was a new business in a town where the store had closed nearly a year previously. The other two stores were in operation but wanted to expand their sales.
- NCDC staff attended the National Rural Grocery Store Summit in Wichita, KS. Information gathered at the summit has been shared with several small-town stores in Nebraska.
- NCDC staff person Jim Crandall wrote an article on the importance of small-town grocery stores which was published in Cornhusker Economics, a weekly e-publication of the Department of Agriculture Economics at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The article was re-published in several Nebraska newspapers, and received inquiries for more information and assistance from 3 states and from South Africa.
- Several local food producers and GROW members market through the Nebraska Food Coop, an online farmers market. NCDC is working with NFC to improve their efficiencies and expand their market area. NCDC has helped with the westward expansion of the NFC distribution network.
- NCDC and Buy Fresh Buy Local are involved in a program to assess the feasibility of re-purposing the Pershing Auditorium as a local food hub. If realized, this venue would provide market access to local food producers for both a retail and wholesale market. The Pershing steering committee developed a business plan for the continuation of the project. The team applied for a Value Added Producer Grant and NCDC/BFBLN will be working with the performance of that grant plan of work.
- Buy Fresh Buy Local Nebraska produced four videos featuring local food businesses. These videos were funded in part by a specialty crop block grant and their impact is wide ranging. The individual businesses use the videos on their own website/Facebook page to promote their business. The videos featured a mushroom grower, a hydroponic greenhouse, a farm to plate restaurant, and an aquaculture hydroponic greenhouse. As of the end of September 2016 the videos have been viewed 1,299 times!
- NCDC helped gain some concessions on price from the UNL Food Processing Center for GROW Nebraska clients to attend the Recipe to Reality workshop.

b. Impact: 1) GROW is working with the Omaha Farmer's Market to keep them open year-round starting in 2017, 2) Five small-town stores have been impacted -two were saved from closing and three were able to expand their services, 3) NCDC and Buy Fresh Buy Local are creating a new food hub in the state's second largest city, and 3) The Omaha World Herald reported that "...Stores, including Hy-Vee and Whole Foods, carry so many of these products that a shopper could now go weeks eating exclusively Nebraska-made food even without stopping at a specialty store."

iii. Goal/Objective 3: **Teach and assist participants to build their wholesale business.**

a. Progress Made:

- The 2015 GROW Nebraska MarkeTECH Conference had two breakout workshops that taught producers and processors to market to wholesale markets. The breakout sessions dedicated completely to food related businesses had speakers who were producers successfully selling to wholesale markets, and representatives from companies who buy local produce, and distributors who can help with warehousing and trucking, and the Nebraska Cooperative Development Center that guides food producers and processors through all aspects of developing products, marketing, and delivery of products.
- One-on-one assistance from GROW Nebraska helps program participants prepare their products for distribution and includes learning to become compliant with FDA requirements, packaging regulations, choosing and using distributors, inventory management, market testing, using UPC codes, shelf life,

cost analysis, understanding and using sales reports, creating Food Safety Plans and even recalling products.

- Product Evaluation: The biggest product evaluation and market test of the year is held at the State Fair store the last week of August and first week of September. An average 70,000 people attend the fair and the GROW Nebraska store is in the highest traffic area. This is combined with a Boot Camp Marketing workshop held at the fair. The Boot Camp averages 20 food-related attendees.
- GROW Nebraska purchases UPC codes and sells them to participants at reduced prices. This allows the participants to test new markets without a prohibitive cost risk.

b. Impact: This program assists food producers and processors move their products to wholesale distribution with a minimum of cost and set-backs. The experience of the GROW Nebraska and NCDC staff is invaluable when small business owners take on this new, and sometimes overwhelming, project. GROW Nebraska and NCDC take the business owner through all the steps of preparation necessary to get products ready for wholesale marketing and then helps the business owner to locate suitable markets and distributors. Getting local producers into wholesale markets creates jobs and brings local products into local and regional markets and beyond. 29 GROW Nebraska members are moving into wholesale markets now.

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: 89 fulltime and part time positions: Our member survey indicated 35% of respondents increased staff hours or added staff last year.
- ii. Number of jobs retained: 151
- iii. Number of indirect jobs created: 17
- iv. Number of markets expanded: 14
- v. Number of new markets established: 6
- vi. Market sales at GROW Nebraska retail training centers increased by \$42,350.00 and increased by 31%.

GROW eCommerce 'foods only' increased from \$181,000 Oct-Mar 2014 to \$217,551.80 Mar-Oct 2016, an increase of 83%.

- vii. Number of farmers/producers that have benefited from the project: 73 GROW Nebraska members and 130 in the NCDC programs.

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?

- Several local food producers and GROW Nebraska members market through the Nebraska Food Coop, an online farmers market. NCDC is working to expand their market area and the westward expansion of the NFC distribution network. This will move the accessibility into new low income/low access areas.
- NCDC and Buy Fresh Buy Local are involved in a program to assess the feasibility of re-purposing the Pershing Auditorium as a local food hub. If realized, this venue would provide market access to local food producers for both a retail and wholesale market and for consumers in Nebraska's second largest city.
- Buy Fresh Buy Local Nebraska produced four videos featuring local food businesses. The individual businesses use the videos on their own website/Facebook page to promote their business. As of the end of September 2016, the videos have been viewed 1,299 times!

4. Discuss your community partnerships.
 - i. Who are your community partners? For this project, GROW Nebraska has worked with Local Farmer's Markets, the Nebraska Department of Agriculture, the Nebraska Department of Tourism, Local Chambers of Commerce, FFA Chapters, Rural Enterprise Assistance Project, and the Nebraska Department of Economic Development.
 - ii. How have they contributed to the overall results of the LFPP project? These organizations and agencies have assisted GROW Nebraska and NCDC to expand markets and assist participants with business-related challenges/needs that were outside the services offered by GROW Nebraska and NCDC. Three FFA chapters are including participants' products in their local fruit sales campaigns. The Rural Enterprise Assistance Project and the Nebraska Department of Economic Development assisted with trainings and identifying promotional opportunities.
 - iii. How will they continue to contribute to your project's future activities, beyond the performance period of this LFPP grant? They will continue to assist in expanding local and regional food markets and working with GROW Nebraska small businesses.

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

Omalinda Enterprises handled the Third Thursday Phone Conference seminars. The conferences included workshops on a wide range of topics including business building, product branding, marketing, business expansion, dealing with money (record keeping, borrowing money, taxes, etc.), and other aspects of running a business. The conferences always had a question and answer time and allowed participants to access experts and network with other business owners. Omalinda Enterprises held 24 phone seminars during the grant period that averaged 20 participants per call.

Due to the geographic distribution of participants, the phone conference training has been the most effective way to introduce topics and skills which are followed up on by one-on-one assistance or in regional workshops. Participants appreciate the phone conferences because they don't have to take an entire day off from their business to drive to, attend and drive home from a workshop. They do not feel like they wasted an entire work day to get the information they need.

NCDC and its affiliate organization, Buy Fresh Buy Local, were an integral part of the program. Those organizations helped create new markets including grocery stores, online markets and farmer's markets, and helped participants access those markets and distribute their food and value-added products to those new markets. Many of their contributions are listed on pages 3 and 4 of this document under Goal/Objective 2.

Have you publicized any results yet?*

- iv. If yes, how did you publicize the results? GROW NE publicized LFPP events and participants in the monthly newsletters, the GROW NE blog, Facebook page and the GROW NE website. Related articles on LFPP grant participants have been in the Omaha World Herald and a local newspaper. GROW NE is also featured 3 times in 5 minute segments each month on the NTV television station.
- v. To whom did you publicize the results? GROW members, stakeholders (Board Members and partners) Buy Fresh Buy Local and NCDC members and stakeholders, Facebook followers.
- vi. How many stakeholders (i.e. people, entities) did you reach? The Omaha World Herald is available all over the state and has a daily circulation of 125,470 plus its website boasts 14 million page views per month. Local newspaper around 20,000 in circulation. NTV reaches most

of central and western Nebraska and the northern third of Kansas; there were 30 LFPP Facebook posts April-Sept 2016 they reached anywhere from 90 to 9,856 viewers, the GROW Nebraska newsletter goes to 5,000 addresses.

*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).

6. Have you collected any feedback from your community and additional stakeholders about your work?

vii. If so, how did you collect the information? Through interviews and comments received while giving one-on-one consultations and surveys collected at workshops and the annual MarkeTech Conference.

viii. What feedback was relayed (specific comments)?

"For me, coming into the business, MarkeTech has definitely been the best thing we have utilized from GROW Nebraska so far. From all the sessions to the networking, I learned so much. And GROW connected us to Roy Noren, who we use for all our labeling now, to improve all of our labels. We were able to move from an outside packaging plant to doing our own packaging. MarkeTech was absolutely amazing. And then, this past year, we didn't have time to have our own booth at the State Fair, but GROW Nebraska handled that for us. That was very beneficial. We were still able to get our product out there and sell, even though we couldn't be there ourselves.

Another thing I really like are the T3 trainings (phone conferences). I've participated in several, and they're so beneficial. I always like learning and not getting stuck. It keeps us thinking about different ways to do things and to get better. There are so many different topics and some of these things we didn't think about, like shipping options.

When my dad, Alan, got to go on NTV, that was amazing. That was great exposure, and when we shared that on social, that got the most likes, shared over 30 times, and very significant reach... several thousand." - Sierra Forrest, Director of Marketing and Sales for Sonpower Industries (Simply Sunflower)

"GROW Nebraska showed me how to wholesale my products through their training workshops. We have participated in coop ads and have gone to wholesale markets due to their encouragement. This helped to **take us from a few stores to close to 500 stores in three years.**" -Shepherd's Dairy 4 Ewe

"Since I've joined, just the promotion I've gotten has been incredible. I don't think my business would be near the size it is today if I had not joined GROW Nebraska. Not only the online marketing and exposure, so many people have contacted me and wanted to buy my product and have learned about me by looking through the GROW Nebraska online directory. For interviews and news articles, a lot of newspapers say 'we ran across your story through GROW Nebraska.' It's just that whole snowball effect of marketing. GROW Nebraska has really helped me with that." - Neal Ely, Ely Farms

"Rafter 7S is a member of GROW Nebraska because they help small business get exposure that otherwise would not be easily achieved." - Sherri Siefer, Rafter 7s

Other written comments have been brief..." great program... now in 70 stores...great partnership... helped us into a new retail venture...enjoying the increase in income...helped us into a wholesale market."

We have not received any negative comments on the program.

7. Budget Summary:

- ix. 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:
- x. Did the project generate any income? Yes, from the sale of UPC codes.
 - a. If yes, how much was generated and how was it used to further the objectives of the award?

The proceeds from the sale of UPC codes is put in a restricted fund and is used for purchasing more UPC codes to resell to members and to pay the \$250.00 renewal fee charged annually to keep the codes active. Any money collected for workshop or conference fees is placed in a specified account where its use is restricted to paying for future workshops and conferences.

8. 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). One of the most effective aspects of this program was having a food mentor who worked one-on-one with participants on all aspects of the program from preparing products for marketing to moving into new markets. One thing that might have been beneficial would be to add more networking opportunities. We will add this to the program as we continue.
- ii. If goals or outcome measures were not achieved, identify and share the lessons learned to help others expedite problem-solving: We feel that all the outcome measures were achieved and the program was very successful.
- 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: We had very helpful and professional grant administrators at USDA AMS to work with and we appreciated that. The most helpful thing we did was to hold a brief weekly meeting of those working on the grant to discuss progress and share successes and needs. GROW Nebraska had a great network and reputation already established, which helped the program gain participants and markets. It would be more difficult for a new organization to achieve success with a project like this. Having a mentor to work one-on-one with participants is critical to the success of the program. The program also had a UPC initiative in place which allowed producers to quickly get products into local grocery stores.

9. Future Work:

- xi. 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. GROW Nebraska will continue to work with local food producers and our partners to improve farmer's markets statewide, assist food-related businesses to expand their volume and reach, bring more food outlets into low access areas and create a climate of consumer preference for local food. Nebraska is rich with entrepreneurs who want to create and distribute food products. This program will help them grow their businesses and retain and create jobs in Nebraska. 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?

Our first recommendation is to expand upon the definitions of local markets and focus heavily on ensuring that the impact is enough to affect the livelihood of the business. Thanks to recommendations from the Department of Agriculture, GROW Nebraska has a variety of programs that focus on gaining sales in both individual items and in cases and pallets. Volume must be high enough that these businesses see a real difference in their bottom line, or else the program will not be sustainable.

To further increase sustainability, GROW Nebraska recommends that the grant term be increased to 3-5 years of funding. Relationships with new sellers and the creation of the program infrastructure take time to develop. A longer term would produce improved results.