

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 LFPP staff 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>	FINAL REPORT: September 30, 2014 – May 31, 2017
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Recipient Organization Name:	Nebraska Farmers Union
Project Title as Stated on Grant Agreement:	Cultivating Producers: Increasing capacity of local food producers through food safety training, wholesale business development, and on farm efficiency
Grant Agreement Number: <i>(e.g. 14-LFPPX-XX-XXXX)</i>	14-LFPP-NE-0113
Year Grant was Awarded:	2014
Project City/State:	Lincoln, Nebraska
Total Awarded Budget:	\$89,979

LFPP staff may contact you to follow up for long-term success stories. Who may we contact?

Same individual

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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. Objective 1: Five different training sessions in four different locations in Nebraska. The originally slated training sessions were completed in 2016, but changes in the FSMA rules justified an updated, more intense food safety training class.

a. Progress Made:

- Five trainings completed
 - Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) Level 1 - 57 Participants
 - Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) Level 2 – 53 Participants
 - Holistic Financial Management with Ralph Tate – 26 Participants
 - Understanding Human Resources, Insurance, Forward Contracts, & Buyers with Jessica Jones– 33 Participants
 - Wholesale Success with Atina Diffley – 62 Participants
- Added four additional trainings with speakers
 - Food Safety Modernization Act with Atina Diffley – 54 Participants
 - The Lean Farmer with Ben Hartman – 29 Participants
 - The Market Gardener with Jean-Martin Fortier – 44 Participants
 - Four Season Tools with Greg Garbos – 9 Participants

b. Impact on Community: Nebraska Farmers Union assisted over one hundred sixty individual farmers, ranchers and beginning farmers from Nebraska, Iowa and Kansas through specialized training sessions focused on developing the business and production skills necessary to increase sales, market access, and net income. The trainings were provided at a low cost and were replicated in four locations across the state to increase participation. The replication of the initial series of trainings reduced the farmers’ travel time away from the farm which increased the participation rates of rural producers. Our farmer trainings on food safety issues improved the safety of our local food supply while helping local specialty crop producers to make better financial decisions through the financial management trainings. It also increased food producer awareness of potential local foods friendly markets while providing in-depth training on wholesale success to help producers ramp up their production capacity. Each trainee was given materials, in the case of some, presenter books they have published to create, document and ensure food safety plans that would be developed and used on their farms. The producers trained represent a significant amount of producers that are supplying local food to our community, and our community will continue to have increased safety in our food supply because of them. These trainings focused on small to medium specialty crop producers to increase their skills so they can take full advantage of future economic and growth opportunities for their businesses. These targeted trainings helped our local food and specialty crop producers continue to grow and thrive as they meet the increasing consumer demand for locally grown foods. The goal of our workshops also increased the economic viability and sustainability of the participants by providing them with the tools necessary to reach new profitable markets including schools, restaurants, grocery stores and other wholesale markets while also improving the amount and quality of locally produced foods.

ii. Objective 2: Evaluation of individual session by participants

a. **Progress Made:** We asked each participant of our trainings to fill out a survey at the end of the training session. To highlight a few of the trainings, beginning with GAP 1, there was a vast increase in knowledge from before to after the trainings on consumer food safety issues (from 11 to 44 knowledgeable to very knowledgeable), safe food production practices (from 18 to 45 knowledgeable to very knowledgeable) and GAP knowledge (from 8 to 47 knowledgeable to very knowledgeable). Forty six participants planned to develop a food safety plan after attending the training. Participants who completed the GAP course and a farm food safety plan received a certificate from Nebraska Farmers Union and Nebraska Extensions. After the Holistic Financial Management training, 23 out of 25 participants said they increased their understanding 20 out of 25 would change their financial management practices as a result of the training. The most successful and well-attended was Atina Diffley's Whole Success training in 2015. Evaluation results were unanimous that the presentation and workshop was very helpful and that a better understanding of risk management was gained. Of the more recent, second-batch of trainings, Jean-Martin Fortier's The Market Gardener was very successful with a unanimous response that 42 farmers planned to implement the information they received into their operations and 40 felt that they could be competitive in the marketplace.

b. **Impact on Community:** Based on the evaluations, we can see that food safety and compliance with FDA regulations is a big concern of local food producers. With positive feedback and plans to implement safety and financial, our community will see increased production and profits of safe local foods in the coming years.

iii. Objective 3: Complete Farm Evaluation

a. **Progress Made:** We created a detailed survey that was distributed to the participants of the trainings. We received a total of twelve responses to our follow up survey. It is very unlikely that producers will return further surveys at this time as these trainings were over two years ago. The follow-up survey results show that the most pressing issues for producers are cost and availability of land, availability of labor, and capital. Nearly every producer response included one or more of these issues, or alluded to their concern about not making a significant profit or being able to make a living wage in local food production.

b. **Impact on Community:** Through our evaluations and analysis, we can provide information to schools, food coops and policy groups. This data can be used to increase the funding, access and success of future specialty crops producers. Connecting the producers to consumers will increase access to local healthy foods in our state. We have already addressed several markets that can be expanded including Farm to School, Farm to Store, The Nebraska Food Cooperative and Lone Tree Foods. We are also slowly seeing more urban farming ventures in our state. The results of our surveys have been shared with local policy makers that have paved the way to modify and reduce outdated and restrictive regulations. This in turn has allowed for more local food in our schools, businesses and homes. Through our evaluations we can provide information to schools, food coops and policy groups. This data can be used to increase

the funding, access and success of future specialty crops producers. Moving a small producer to middle producer status helps them become more competitive and profitable by using a functional value chain to connect them to markets.

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:** None
- ii. Number of jobs retained:** None
- iii. Number of indirect jobs created:** Unknown
- iv. Number of markets expanded:** The feedback we have received indicates that the existing marketing channels have grown, and volume is up from that growth rather than the creation of new markets. Our two sets of trainings in four locations reached 164 producers and new farmers to grow specialty crops. These newly trained producers will be able to sell products through new markets that Nebraska Farmers Union has helped develop, like Farm To Fitness, and existing wholesale buyer groups such as Lone Tree Foods.
- v. Number of new markets established:** While we think producers were able to gain access to some new and underserved markets for their products, we do not have specific data to document new market developments. We do not know where that information exists. Thanks to the efforts of GAP's trainings and food safety plans, we had several producers that could be targeted specifically for these underserved markets.
- vi. Market sales increased by:** Unknown
- vii. Number of farmers/producers that have benefited from the project:** 92 from the first round of trainings, and 99 from the second round of trainings.

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 primary focus was on identifying new marketing channels. The participants in our training series were introduced to wholesale buyers and several have indicated that they are expanding their sales into new wholesale markets. Part of our training series put the farmers in front of local wholesale buyers/sellers. The intention of this is to increase the amount of local foods entering into wholesale contracts. These buyers service the majority of Nebraska, which includes low income and low access areas.

4. Discuss your community partnerships.

We used the expertise of our partners for the workshops themselves when appropriate, and their networks to get the word out to specialty crop producers and the local food community to increase participation.

i. Who are your community partners?

University of Nebraska Extensions
Southeast Community College (SCC)
Community Crops
Lone Tree Foods
Midwest Regional Agency, LLP
Nebraska Food Coop
Nebraska Sustainable Agricultural Society (NSAS)

Buy Fresh Buy Local (BFBL)
Prairie Plate
Center for Rural Affairs

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

The training workshops came together and were carried out thanks to the invaluable work of our community partners, especially University of Nebraska Extensions. They provided organizational development including discussion of meeting spaces for the workshops, the contents of the agenda and how long it would take to get through all the necessary information. They provided all the speakers for the two GAP workshops, helped with the preparation of presentation materials including power point presentations and a flash drive of all materials, and helped design the GAP workshop completion certificates. Most of the Lincoln workshops, including both Atina Diffley lectures, were held at Southeast Community College. SCC also provided the catering for most of the events and tech support, including the livestream feed for participants in Scottsbluff, Nebraska. Prairie Plate catered the first Atina Diffley lecture using locally-sourced organic food. Lone Tree Foods and Nebraska Food Coop provided knowledge of markets and delivery systems. Nebraska Sustainable Agricultural Society, Center for Rural Affairs and Buy Fresh Buy Local promoted the training sessions. Midwest Regional Agency, LLP, a Farmers Union owned regional insurance agency, works with food producers to help them understand the coverage that is necessary for them to enter wholesale markets. New producers are being trained through Beginning Farmers Training programs from Community CROPS and University of Nebraska Extensions.

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

Our continued partnership with Nebraska Extensions and Community Crops will carry on the development of and education for new farmers and specialty crop producers. We will continue to refer and steer producers towards Lone Tree Foods and Nebraska Food Coop for markets and distribution. And Midwest Regional Agency, LLP will continue to service the insurance needs of food producers. We plan to continue our community partnership with most of the aforementioned groups by attending their meetings and events, for example NSAS's annual Healthy Farms Conference, to see how we as an organization can help their members and customers, and vice versa.

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

Yes. We contracted with Atina Diffley for FSMA trainings to come to Nebraska for two separate trainings as well as with Nebraska Extensions to develop more courses for our local producers. We worked with other instructors that have been teaching the curriculum to help implement the training provided. We have relied on them to provide input on the training necessary to achieve the desired results for the participants.

6. Have you publicized any results yet?* Yes

i. If yes, how did you publicize the results? The completion of the workshops was publicized in a press release after both series of workshops finished in 2015 and 2017, and on the second Atina Diffley workshop in 2016. It was also used as a handout at events where Farmers Union had a display table, and was available to the general public. The results were also reported on NeFU President Hansen’s “Irons in the Fire” radio program that is aired twice a week on four radio stations across the state.

ii. To whom did you publicize the results? The press release was distributed to state media including university press, state and rural radio stations, local television stations, daily and weekly newspapers around Nebraska, and agricultural press. The press release was also sent to some 200 members via email and also posted on Farmers Union’s website, and Facebook page and group. Partner organizations also shared the press release with their members and supporters.

iii. How many stakeholders (i.e. people, entities) did you reach? The exact number reached is unknown, but the announcement of the trainings and their results were well publicized. The “Irons in the Fire” radio program alone is heard on the three stations of the Nebraska Radio Network which is the largest farmer owned radio network in the nation, and one of the three radio stations on that network, KRVN is the largest ag radio station in the nation based on the Arbitron ratings. In addition to covering Nebraska, the Nebraska Rural Radio Network also reaches across the borders of Iowa, South Dakota, Wyoming, Colorado, and Kansas. Regional ag publications picked up and used the stories.

*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? Yes

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

We previously collected information from participants in the form of surveys. Feedback has also been obtained through periodic discussions with Community Crops and Nebraska of Nebraska Extension about the workshops, what producer needs exist and how we can address them. A follow-up survey was sent to participants of the GAP workshops and twelve responses were received. The results from these evaluations directly resulted in the topics that were addressed in the second round of workshops as well as improvement of instruction and program curriculum.

ii. What feedback was relayed (specific comments)?

- “Lots of info in both of those [GAP] classes”
- “We learned how to keep our product safe, how to expand our wholesale markets and the benefits that come with that. ”
- “I would like to expand into more varieties of fish and more sustainable growing systems.”
- Operation need: “hire employees, manage employees, marketing”
- Operation need: “organizing finances... to pay ourselves regularly and also hire labor with confidence.”

- Operation need: “expand into high tunnels”
- Operation need: “time and focus to look at enterprises and how we want to move forward...”
- What did you learn and will implement: “hoop houses and available loans”
- Would like to see workshops on: “soil management, high tunnel management, green house management”
- Would like to see workshops on: “farm-scale permaculture postharvest handling detailed production clinics on specific crops with outside experts”
- It was relayed that Atina Diffley’s workshop was most relevant and informative, which led to a second workshop.

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? Yes**
 - If yes, how much was generated and how was it used to further the objectives of the award?** We charged \$20-25 per person to attend most of the training sessions. This money was used to offset the cost of food and beverages provided during the training sessions. The total cost of food provided for the trainings exceeded the money received. This was previously reported on financial reports.

9. Lessons Learned:

- Summarize any lessons learned. They should draw on 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 take away lessons learned is that the consumer demand for locally grown specialty crops continues to generate new and profitable marketing opportunities. Nebraska Farmers Union, through the generous support of USDA AMS LFPP, was able to get farmers trained and certified to provide those safe, nutritious, economically beneficial local foods. The workshops met a wide range of specialty crop producer needs, including basic business practices, food safety, human relations, finances, insurance, market development and production approaches. The workshops also helped food producers to get a more comprehensive understanding of the market needs of their customers. A key to the success of the trainings was the strong partnership with Nebraska Extensions. As stated earlier (4. ii.), they encouraged and supported the trainings through advice, suggestions, expertise, planning and staff time. Nebraska is rich with specialty crop producers getting off the ground who would like assistance on the business side of farming as well as food safety. These trainings greatly lowered the chances of a food borne illness or poorly considered business practices. For a local food initiative to be successful, though, we need to significantly increase the number of production capacity of our local producers as well as the intricate support system needed. In the lessons imparted through Atina Diffley’s workshops, producers were able to save money while staying focused on their product and food safety through concepts she introduced in class to transition into efficient business practices. Making our farmers profitable is the way to increase the local foods market and we will continue to do that through advocacy efforts and community partnerships. There is a definite need for more community infrastructure to support small farmers including transportation and cold storage to reach customers that are located furthest from the farmers.

It is imperative to implement the feedback from producers on what trainings and workshops benefit them so we can keep them returning for further trainings. We listened to the participants and focused the second series of trainings on farm efficiencies that will directly impact the profitability of the farms and they were very well-attended as a result. While initially receiving regular feedback from participants and producers, over time, we struggled to keep the feedback flowing. We could have had better communication with producers in the interim between trainings.

We learned that farmers are struggling with writing farm safety plans. Even as presenters simplified the process and necessary information, it is still a big stumbling block for many farmers. On top of that, even with farmers that understand safety issues, it becomes a matter of prioritizing the needed changes and finding the money needed to implement them.

For future events, we need to have better preparation on technical matters. In our case this led to missed opportunities for video production. It would be helpful to have more communication with IT personnel at venues and have solid plans for in-house video editing from staff or outsourcing options ready.

The one workshop that had low attendance was the Four Season Tools training with Greg Garbos. Participants will pay \$20-25 for a one day training but not \$50 for two days. It turned out to be very difficult to get two days away from home and work to attend back-to-back days of training.

There is only so much to learn by workshops in a classroom and it is great to have hands-on training out in the field or a training area such as a university facility.

Specialty crop producers are not “one size fits all” operations. Some participants wanted specific attention to their own business and its particular issues.

The results of our surveys have been shared with local policy makers, which have helped to pave the way to easing outdated and overly restrictive regulations. This in turn has allowed for more local food in our schools, businesses and homes.

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

The goals and outcomes of the grant project have been met. The trainings were carried out, well-attended, and participants devised food safety plans.

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:

Staying organized helps every step in the process of this grant. It is extremely important to keep all documentation of the project’s paperwork together in chronological order in separate and accurate folders. In the process of keeping documents structured, it makes the reimbursement and reporting process much more timely and efficient. If you want

to get the very best presenters, you have to plan far ahead to get them on your schedule as they are very busy and hard to get .

10. Future Work:

- a. 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.**

This concludes our two-year grant activities; however Nebraska Farmers Union plans to continue our relationships with the specialty crop producers and partner organizations that this project has developed. We continue to support and educate producers and our members on these issues through our programming and our ability to supply agricultural and food safety practices, programs, grants, and material that is useful for our members and producers. Nebraska Farmers Union is uniquely positioned to continue this work and facilitate this effort because of our longstanding involvement in beginning farmer efforts and programs and conventional farmer members looking to diversify and explore new production and marketing options, specialty crop producer members, and new market development history. Nebraska Farmers Union has experience and expertise in developing Farmers Markets, CSA's, our Farm to Fitness program linking meat producers with health clubs, and our work in the development of farmer owned direct marketing cooperatives. Nebraska Farmers Union has a positive working relationship with USDA, and has a broad base of organizational agricultural and consumer partners that has helped us administer and utilize this grant.

- b. 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?**

One future issue that should be addressed is how producers comply with FSMA water requirements. As far as GAP trainings are concerned, there will not need to be future trainings as there has been a recent transition to a standardized national curriculum through the Produce Safety Alliance that producers will now go through for certification.

It has been a pleasure and honor for Nebraska Farmers Union to be able to work with specialty crop producers, our community partners and with the United States Department of Agriculture Agricultural Marketing Service and the staff associated with the Local Food Promotion Program. As always, when public policy efforts are shared at the federal, state, and local levels, progress is made.