

**Local Food Promotion Program (LFPP)  
Final Performance Report**

The final performance report summarizes the outcome of your LFPP award objectives. As stated in the LFPP Terms and Conditions, you will not be eligible for future LFPP or Farmers Market Promotion Program grant funding unless all close-out procedures are completed, including satisfactory submission of this final performance report.

This final report will be made available to the public once it is approved by LFPP staff. Write the report in a way that promotes your project's accomplishments, as this document will serve as not only a learning tool, but a promotional tool to support local and regional food programs. Particularly, recipients are expected to provide both qualitative and quantitative results to convey the activities and accomplishments of the work.

The report is limited to 10 pages and is due **within 90 days** of the project's performance period end date, or sooner if the project is complete. Provide answers to each question, or answer "not applicable" where necessary. It is recommended that you email or fax your completed performance report to your assigned grant specialist to avoid delays:

LFPP Phone: 202-720-2731; Email: [USDALFPPQuestions@ams.usda.gov](mailto:USDALFPPQuestions@ams.usda.gov); Fax: 202-720-0300

Should you need to mail your documents via hard copy, contact LFPP staff to obtain mailing instructions.

<b>Report Date Range:</b> <i>(e.g. September 30, 20XX-September 29, 20XX)</i>	September, 30, 2014-September 29, 2016
<b>Authorized Representative Name:</b>	Mukhtar Idhow
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<b>Recipient Organization Name:</b>	Organization for Refugee & Immigrant Success
<b>Project Title as Stated on Grant Agreement:</b>	Expanding Local Market Opportunities for Refugee Producers in NH
<b>Grant Agreement Number:</b> <i>(e.g. 14-LFPPX-XX-XXXX)</i>	14-LFPPX-NH-0117
<b>Year Grant was Awarded:</b>	2014
<b>Project City/State:</b>	Manchester, NH
<b>Total Awarded Budget:</b>	\$88,585

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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:

\_\_\_\_\_

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: Support 8-10 refugee farmers with development of a producer cooperative that will operate independently of ORIS’ Fresh Start Farms.

- a. Progress Made:

Nine refugee farmers have received guidance and support throughout the process of forming and formally incorporating their own independent agriculture cooperative. ORIS collaborated to deliver a series of workshops annually related to small business development, cooperative development, legal framework, accounting, human resources and other priorities identified by the participants. Specifically, preceding and during the 2015 growing season ORIS delivered 6 cooperative development workshops, facilitated formation of the steering committee, provided TA with democratic Board officer elections and drafting bylaws, coordinated with the NH Bar Association to provide legal support, submitted the New American Farmers Cooperative incorporation documents and obtained approval from the NH Attorney General, and obtained the tax identification number (EIN). Preceding and during the 2016 growing season, ORIS delivered 3 more participatory workshops to the 9 refugee farmer members of the New American Farmers Cooperative. Topics focused on how individual business plans fit into the cooperative business plan and budget, how to develop systems that equitably distribute land-use costs and production resources, and skills for management tasks that were not yet being completed independently. ORIS also provided TA at the annual Board meeting with the process of officially nominating and electing the Board of Directors and adopting the by-laws, provided TA at follow-up Board and member meetings to approve the budget, approve the farm plot allocation, and review/vote on applications of other farmers interested in joining the co-op. The co-op voted to use St. Mary’s credit union as their bank, has set up a bank account there, and actively used it throughout the 2016 market season. Interpretation services in Mai-mai and Nepali, the primary languages of co-op members, were made available during all workshops and technical assistance when appropriate.

- b. Impact on Community:

The New American Farmers Cooperative members gained access to valuable leadership and professional development opportunities and acquired essential training on communication, organization and business skills. In the path to independence, by operating as a cooperative instead of individual farm businesses, the co-op members increase their assets, purchasing power, profitability, and growing capacities. Thus, the development of the cooperative directly supports the sustainability and viability of the farmers’ enterprises, in which they have invested numerous resources and effort, and the ability to successfully achieve their goals, success, and increased self-sufficiency in the long-term. The co-op members’ families also benefit through increased household financial and food security. Moreover, the community at large has benefited, and will continue to benefit, from increased access to culturally-appropriate, fresh,

nutritious, locally-produced food, while building a stronger and more inclusive local food system.

- ii. Goal/Objective 2: Increase producers' capacity to serve local markets through outreach and marketing.

- a. Progress Made:

ORIS increased marketing efficacy of Fresh Start Farms branding through promotion and outreach each year, including: developing and distributing CSA brochures and flyers, maintaining website and social media platforms, sending electronic newsletters, and conducting community outreach to new and returning customers. In addition to increasing marketing efforts, the new American farmers gained valuable marketing skills and experience. For instance, in spring of 2016 ORIS staff conducted a community presentation with a New American Farmers Cooperative member at a local church group. Also, in winter of 2015 ORIS staff and farmers met with representatives from the NH Farm to School program and Bow, Concord and Manchester school districts to discuss potential produce attainment options. In 2015, farmers made sales to a number of new restaurant accounts in the greater Manchester region. In 2016, wholesale availability and price lists were sent to all of these as well as additional local restaurants, retailers and institutions. While farmers did not sell their produce through these new wholesale avenues during the 2016 season, important and meaningful connections have been established with interested purchasers to be taken advantage of in the future.

The New American Farmers Cooperative has received support with the development of their own brand and marketing materials. A local artist designed a logo with feedback gathered from the farmers and created a new brochure, promoting new brand recognition. ORIS provided TA with establishing a co-op Facebook page. Throughout this project, ORIS staff sent out newsletters to current CSA members and posted updates on the Fresh Start Farms website and social media pages explaining the establishment of the co-op and new branding and inviting customers to register.

Each year, ORIS also provided TA to farmers with production planning, harvesting, packaging and delivery; invoiced customers and facilitated payments to producers; and coordinated delivery and pick-up of Fresh Start Farms CSA shares, including at SNAP/EBT accessible delivery sites.

- b. Impact on Community:

During the 2015 growing season, expanded market channels led to increased sales and more viable businesses. This was an especially crucial year as the New American Farmers Cooperative was emerging. ORIS and the co-op farmers continued to build relationships with CSA customers, local restaurants, schools, institutions, and businesses, and other community members, which are vital for the emerging co-op's profitability, sustainability and continued success into the future.

In addition, the ability for low-income community members to purchase incentivized CSA shares with their SNAP benefits and the Granite State Market Match program increased accessibility and affordability of fresh, locally-produced foods in low-income neighborhoods and contributed to additional dollars spent within the local economy.

- iii. Goal/Objective 3: Increase capacity of producers to meet increasing food safety requirements.

- a. Progress Made:

- ORIS purchased supplies and facilitated infrastructure improvements of post-harvest handling and storage at the farm site in Dunbarton, beginning in year 1 and concluding in year 2. ORIS conducted a workshop on GAP/Food Safety requirements and provided TA with creating and implementing recordkeeping systems. These recordkeeping systems were designed with farmers in a participatory workshop in order to be appropriate for their lifestyles and most effective for producers with limited literacy.

- b. Impact on Community:

- Producers have made significant progress towards meeting the requirements for GAP certification and FSMA, which will increase the capacity to sell to local institutions and businesses that require such. Consumers of all existing markets also have benefited, and will continue to benefit, from increased food safety and internal controls. These improvements also increased farmers' efficiency while preparing for CSA, wholesale, and other market outlets.

- 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, 20\_\_). Include further explanation if necessary.

- i. Number of direct jobs created: N/A
        - ii. Number of jobs retained: 31 (farmers retain self-employment through farming)
        - iii. Number of indirect jobs created: N/A
        - iv. Number of markets expanded: 0 (while 6 wholesale accounts expanded in 2015 market season, they did not continue in 2016 market season, so overall did not expand).
        - v. Number of new markets established: 90 (41 new CSA customers in 2015; 41 additional new CSA customers total in 2016 to end of project period; 6 SNAP/EBT accessible CSA pick-up sites throughout Manchester and Salem, NH; 2 new farm stand/CSA delivery sites established in Goffstown, NH and at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Hospital Manchester)
        - vi. Market sales increased by \$7,000 and increased by 14%. (Based on \$50,000 benchmark from the baseline date, by the end of the project Fresh Start Farms/co-op sales reached \$57,000. However, it is worth noting that during 2015 sales reached \$73,000, which is a \$23,000 increase and increase by 46%).
        - vii. Number of farmers/producers that have benefited from the project: 31
          - a. Percent Increase: 52% (20 farmers participating in baseline year)

- 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?

- Yes, ORIS promoted SNAP/EBT accessible markets and CSA pick-up sites to additional low-income and low-access populations. Much of this customer base represented the Bhutanese community, as well as other refugee and immigrant populations. This was achieved primarily through social media outreach and distributing flyers to local social service agencies and community organizations serving target populations, such as to the NH Food Bank, Manchester

Community Health Center, and Manchester Health Department. Additionally, informational presentations were delivered to organizations such as the Bhutanese Community of New Hampshire and Catholic Medical Center, which served as both a new employee-based CSA as well as a provider to a number of low-income and new American customers.

The CSA program also reached new customers each year. This was accomplished through increased marketing and outreach, including active social media campaigns, posting flyers and distributing brochures throughout the greater Manchester and Seacoast regions, and setting up employee sign-up tables at local hospitals and health fairs.

4. Discuss your community partnerships.

i. Who are your community partners?

Cooperative Development Institute; NH Farm to School; Manchester Community Health Center; Catholic Medical Center; Dartmouth Hitchcock Hospital; NH Food Bank; NRCS; Cooperative Extension; Bhutanese Community of NH

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

**Cooperative Development Institute** offered support and TA to ORIS and 9 co-op farmers with facilitating workshops, Board meeting procedures, drafting co-op lease documents, articles of incorporation and bylaws, and offering overall organizational development expertise.

**NH Farm to School** coordinated introductions and meetings between ORIS/co-op farmers and cafeteria directs from local school districts to discuss procurement and delivery options.

**Manchester Community Health Center** was a SNAP/EBT accessible CSA pick-up site and farm stand. They also promoted the farmers' businesses to their patients, which largely represented low-income, limited resource populations.

**Catholic Medical Center** and **Dartmouth Hitchcock Hospital** both promoted the CSA and nearby farm stands to their employees, contributing to expanded market bases for the farmers. Promotional materials were also delivered to staff to distribute to patients.

**The NH Food Bank** was, and continues to be, essential for the success of the Granite State Market Match (GSMM) program. They are the State Lead for the NH Nutrition Incentive Network and are integral to Network fundraising efforts, streamlining promotion and outreach efforts for SNAP/EBT and GSMM accessible markets, and more. As many of the co-op farmers' community members and customer use SNAP benefits, the success of the GSMM program contributed to increased revenue for the farmers.

**NRCS** and other USDA representatives provided farm management support, advice and resources at the growing site in Dunbarton, NH; representatives came out to the farm in fall of 2015 for a tour and potluck lunch with farmers, where we disseminated the initial project results.

**UNH Cooperative Extension** provided training and TA on food safety, FSMA and GAP requirements. They also offered assistance and training with recordkeeping, highlighting the role of recordkeeping in satisfying GAP/FSMA requirements.

**The Bhutanese Community of NH (BCNH)** promoted our SNAP/EBT and GSMM accessible markets, which feature specialty ethnic crops important and familiar to the Bhutanese population, to their clients. ORIS also delivered a presentation to BCNH staff explaining CSA opportunities.

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

The majority of this project's partnerships are long-term and sustaining relationships that will continue to collaborate with ORIS and the farmers in implementing innovative and effective work in the community. For example, while the Cooperative Development Institute (CDI) was crucial in the process of formally establishing and incorporating the New American Farmers Cooperative, the co-op still requires additional specialized training and support with communication, governance, financial management and other advanced organizational and business development skills. The Cooperative Development Institute plans to continue offering some level of technical assistance in these areas. In addition, while this was the first group of farmers in ORIS's incubator training program that transitioned to an independent cooperative, ORIS will continue to serve new and beginning refugee/immigrant farmers. When these participants reach more advanced levels of business self-sufficiency, if they desire to develop a co-op, CDI could provide similar TA with the process. One group of refugee farmers being served in the Concord area has already expressed an interest in functioning as a co-op.

Further, many of the other partnerships (including the hospitals/health-centers, NH Farm to School, and BCNH) were key factors in building relationships with new customer bases. These relationships will be vital for the continued profitability, success and sustainability of the emerging co-op and farmers' businesses.

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

ORIS used a third-party contractor, George Wright, to conduct the project's evaluation.

6. Have you publicized any results yet?\* Yes.

- i. If yes, how did you publicize the results?

The result of the establishment of the New American Farmers Cooperative was publicized through a new brochure (\*see attached PDFs), Facebook page, site posts, and electronic newsletters.

<https://www.facebook.com/freshstartfarmsnh/> (A number of posts highlighting the result of the formation of the co-op)

<https://www.facebook.com/NewAmericanFarmersCoop/> (New American Farmers Cooperative Facebook page)

The result of the development of non-construction improvements for post-harvest handling (essential for increasing capacity to meet food safety requirements) was posted on social media sites. <https://www.facebook.com/freshstartfarmsnh/> (see post on July 27<sup>th</sup>, 2016).

- ii. To whom did you publicize the results?

Brochures were distributed at businesses, community organizations, and to community members throughout the greater Manchester and Seacoast NH regions.

Results on social media sites were publicized to all Facebook page fans and visitors.

Results through newsletters were sent out to all CSA members and other individuals who have signed up to receive the newsletter.

iii. How many stakeholders (i.e. people, entities) did you reach?

Given Fresh Start Farms 507 page followers; 200 email newsletter recipients; and people receiving the 500 printed brochures is well over; and other visitors to the Facebook posts and websites, we estimate we reached over 1,200 stakeholders.

\*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?

After the 2015 market season, ORIS staff conducted a survey with Community Supported Agriculture members and farmers' market attendants via survey monkey, distributed via email newsletter and links on Facebook and website pages.

In fall of 2016, a UNH Master's student designed and implemented a survey to all past and present CSA members from 2014-2016. The Qualtrics survey was distributed via email, and a link was posted on the Facebook pages.

ii. What feedback was relayed (specific comments)?

In 2015, significant feedback includes: 93% of respondents stated excellent or good quality of produce; 87% stated excellent or good variety of produce; 98% said excellent or good customer service; 97% said they share provided the amount of food or more than the amount of food they expected; 69% said excellent convenience of pick-up options; and 69% said they will definitely or probably sign up next year (13% undecided, 18% probably not)

While the 2016 results are still being analyzed, significant results and specific comments include:

- The top reasons CSA members chose to join the Fresh Start Farms/New American Farmers Cooperative CSA are 1) "Supporting Local Farmers Is Important to Me" 2) "Supporting Refugees is Important to me" and 3) "To provide healthy, nutritious food for myself and/or my family"
  - "Other" specified reasons included that it was offered through their place of employment.
- 51% of respondents learned about the CSA through the internet.

- 27% of respondents learned about the CSA through “other” specified reasons. 61% of “other” reasons were that they were promoted through an employer, including Catholic Medical Center and Dartmouth Hitchcock Hospitals. 23% of “other” reasons were that they were promoted through their church group.
- 99% of respondents said quality of produce was excellent or good.
- 81% of respondents said variety of produce was excellent or good.
- 100% of respondents said taste of produce was excellent or good.
- 95% of respondents said freshness of produce was excellent or good.
- 87% of respondents said promptness and reliability of CSA delivery was excellent or good.
- 64% of respondents said opportunities to stay informed about what was happening on the farm were excellent or good. 29% reported fair.
- 26% of respondents said opportunities to learn about the cultures and lives of the New American Farmers were excellent or good. 54% reported fair, and 20% reported poor.
- 62% of respondents rated the social/community atmosphere of the CSA as excellent or good. 34% reported fair.
- 22% of respondents preferred a CSA box with pre-selected produce, 40% would prefer to choose and pack their own share, and 38% do not have a strong preference either way.

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? No (While participant farmers generated income, totally ~\$130,000 during the two year project, the Organization for Refugee & Immigrant Success did not generate any income)
  - a. If yes, how much was generated and how was it used to further the objectives of the award?

9. Lessons Learned:

- i. Summarize any lessons learned. Draw from positive experiences (e.g. good ideas that improved project efficiency or saved money) and negative experiences (e.g. what did not go well and what needs to be changed).

\* While supporting new American farmers in cooperative development, it is *critical* to make sure that the entire process is as participatory and inclusive as possible. While this might take longer and will require levels of patience, the results will be more sustainable and effective in achieving true self-sufficiency. Key challenges in the co-op arose primarily when co-op expectations, agreements, policies, functions, purposes and governance practices were not fully understood and/or followed by all members. While some degree of conflict is expected in

group formation, having additional trainings for co-op members on communication, leadership, dialogue facilitation, and conflict mediation could have been immensely beneficial. Finally, it is crucial to take the time to check-in with participants and ensure throughout the process that all members have a level of “buy-in” and sense of ownership of the policies and agreements being put into place.

Highly effective interpreters in multilingual groups are also essential. When working with specialized populations, for instance with multilingual/multicultural group dynamics, it is not unusual to expect that a transition from an incubator training program to an independently functioning cooperative could take over two years to complete successfully.

\* When supporting and assisting beginning new American entrepreneurs, it was essential to understand each individual’s varying commitments, lifestyles, self-defined goals, priorities, and so on. It was important to consider each participant with a “whole person” approach and understand that these factors cannot be viewed as separate from the success of their business. For instance, at times it seemed that participants were making poor business decisions, despite having access to training and opportunities. Yet, these decisions were often made due to household needs, financial necessity, or other legitimate factors. This is to say, the success of the business is highly dependent on also identifying and reducing barriers in all areas of participants’ lives.

\*As mentioned, the projected sales by the end of the project were not reached. This was due in part to the fact that CSA memberships and wholesale accounts decreased in the 2016 season. It is vital to continually conduct market research and development in order to ensure that farmers are accessing strong markets in an ever changing environment. Innovative and consistent market and outreach strategies are essential.

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

All three objectives of the project were overall achieved. However, the agricultural cooperative did not reach their 2016 projected sales of 100 CSA members or selling to 5 institutions at ~\$200/week. In 2015, this measure was almost reached at over 90 CSA members, but in 2016 CSA memberships dropped to 60. As expanded upon in question 10, additional market research is necessary in order to fully understand the reasons for the lack of CSA member retention from year to year. CSA surveys suggest that customers are overall very satisfied with the quality, variety, and value of the shares. Therefore, one alternative possibility is that community members are obtaining their local produce through other emerging avenues, or they prefer to choose their produce rather than the Fresh Start Farms and Co-op’s pre-selected CSA box model. Finally, it is possible that prior to and during the 2016 market season less time was able to be spent on Objective 2 (outreach and marketing) than in the previous year due to urgent co-op development tasks taking priority and more time being spent on Object 1 (supporting refugee producers with development of the co-op). Additionally, 2016 was a difficult season due to weather challenges for farmers across the region, contributing to a less abundant harvest.

- 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:

\*Building the partnership with Cooperative Development Institute to offer their expertise in organizational development and TA with drafting documents was highly valuable and ensured the process was completed accurately and effectively. The process of submitting necessary documentation to the NH Attorney General for approval was more lengthy than expected. Legal support from CDI lawyers also served as a liaison to ensure the process was completed correctly and as timely as possible.

\*When offering support to the cooperative, it is crucial from the beginning to make sure there are clear financial systems in place, reporting and record keeping, and documentation of payments.

\*Public schools in New Hampshire have particular food purchasing and bidding requirements, yet these policies can vary depending on the size of the school and the amount of produce purchased. If a farm business or cooperative desires to begin selling to schools, it is worth noting that large school districts have extensive paperwork that should be completed in advance. It might be more conducive in many ways for small-farm businesses to approach and develop contracts with smaller local school districts. For instance, some districts expressed an interest in receiving CSA-style produce (pre-selected by farmers each week depending on seasonality), while not to exceed a \$3,000 cap for the year.

#### 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 be investing in an employee solely focused on CSA management to increase quality control, sales, management and outreach. The co-op will begin to handle its own finances. We will expand sales outlets to 8 farm stands next year while reducing the farmers' travel footprint to ease delivery burdens. This employee will also focus on special events that create a sense of community within the CSA customers. We will also develop a Farmer Certification Program for winter 2016-17, as requested by the farmers, which includes a round of workshops, hands on training and business classes that will further develop their sense of self-sufficiency as well as hone in on their business instincts and skills.

- 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?

Refugee producers have made great strides in developing and formally establishing the New American Farmers Cooperative and have increased their capacity. They have excellent agricultural experience and are exceptionally committed to their small-farm businesses. However, beginning farmers with refugee and immigrant backgrounds are a specialized population and will require additional resources to achieve the same level of success as other beginner farmers in the region. Given the co-op members' level of business and organizational understanding as newcomers, I recommend that they could greatly benefit from building upon the skills obtained in this LFPP through additional training on specialized topics related to governance, communication, financial management, business skills, and other identified priority areas in order to more effectively and efficiently manage the cooperative.

In addition, while CSA memberships increased to over 90 memberships in 2015 and valuable wholesale relationships were established, during the 2016 market season CSA memberships decreased and these wholesale channels were not pursued. In order for the co-op to achieve its projections and financial goals, it is essential for the farmers to access secure and consistently lucrative market channels. There is a lack of market research and knowledge around why this important customer base is decreasing and inconsistent. Therefore, I recommend that a crucial future activity is to undergo thorough market research to investigate, identify and develop markets that the co-op farmers can access self-sufficiently, successfully, sustainably and profitably.

Finally, given the initial results of the 2016 survey with CSA members, it is evident that the areas that could be strengthened are improving opportunities for CSA customers to learn about the lives and cultures of the New American Farmers. Therefore, I recommend future activities to include mutual-learning opportunities between the farmers and the CSA members, where the CSA members are educated about the lives, challenges and strengths of newcomers and how essential CSA memberships are to the project, and the farmers will learn about their customers' needs and continue developing the skills for success.