

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>	9/30/2014 to 02/22/2016	
Authorized Representative Name:	Susan Wilger	
Authorized Representative Phone:	575-313-4720	
Authorized Representative Email:	swilger@swchi.org	
Recipient Organization Name:	National Center for Frontier Communities	
Project Title as Stated on Grant Agreement:	Gila Region "Comida Buena" Hub - a food hub serving southwest New Mexico local food growers, markets, residents and communities.	
Grant Agreement Number: <i>(e.g. 14-LFPPX-XX-XXXX)</i>	14-LFPPX-NM-0121	
Year Grant was Awarded:	2014	

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Project City/State:	Silver City, NM	
Total Awarded Budget:	\$33,333.00 (\$25,000 funded and \$8,333 match)	

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: Benjamin Rasmussen; Email: brasmussen@swchi.org;
 Phone: (575)534-0101 ext. 2102

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:** Meet monthly with members of the Southwest NM Regional Food Policy Council (the Council) who will serve as advisors to the project. Council members will provide feedback on the project methods and products and assist in engaging key stakeholders at the county level.

a. **Progress Made:** The SWNM Food Policy Council has met every month since the beginning of this grant, providing valuable input, guidance and perspective into the feasibility process. Several of the members are small farmers and have provided contact information and unique insight that those working outside of food production would not have.

In addition to providing invaluable feedback on the methods and data used in the feasibility study, regular meetings with the council helped etch out some of the area specific recommendations that the study lays forth. For example: it was found that a food hub is not feasible with current market conditions, however with certain groundwork and outreach efforts, a food hub could be feasible in a 1-3-year time frame. Through repeated conversations, a vision for a regional “food resource hub” was outlined that includes education and outreach as a central component and was seen as the most appropriate option for the region at this time to educate policy makers, food producers and potential buyers.

b. **Impact on Community:** Through the process of collecting interviews and participating in food policy meetings many stakeholders in the communities are now aware of the idea of a food hub and have voiced their concerns and desire for more local produce. There is a need for more dialogue and collaboration among growers and buyers to achieve the shared goal of having more local produce purchased in the area.

Additionally, through repetitious conversations surrounding the food hub idea and “what it would take” to really make an impact on our grower environment in Southwest New Mexico, the food policy council has made strides forward in identifying what exactly would be the most beneficial implementation in our region and how to go about realizing the goal of a more vibrant local food scene.

- ii. **Goal/Objective 2:** Gather relevant, secondary data sources and additional information from growers and purchasers most likely to benefit from food hub services. This pre-feasibility activity will help sharpen the focus of the feasibility study.

Progress Made: The Southwest Region of New Mexico depends on agricultural activity for much of its economic base. The growers of food crops range from large to small and are spread over the entirety of our 17,000 mi/sq. which makes

for any kind of cohesive action, vision or plan a logistical as well as a cultural challenge.

Gathering data sources from growers, buyers, other stakeholders as well as from secondary sources such as food hub studies, census reports and other feasibility studies from around the nation has given the food policy council as well as our organization a much better understanding of the food environment and ways to alleviate and help our situation.

While we found that a food hub was not feasible with the current conditions of the market and grower base, the information collected and connections that were made throughout the study will benefit future food related projects of all sorts now and in the future.

For example, one recommendation for the region that was determined through the feasibility study was to form an active “human food hub” to create and disseminate informational products for area farmers, buyers and local policy makers to help them understand the actual economic contribution an increased local food scene can provide. Talking with farmers who have been selling produce locally for years has given us some effective strategies that we may not have otherwise thought of.

Impact on Community: The community most involved with this project were those involved on various levels of local food production and procurement. Due to our vast geographic and cultural expanse, gathering input from the various stakeholders is often a logistical difficulty and for the most part has not seen ongoing collaboration. The conversations that were had with local growers has helped them to see other possibilities for market entry and has helped them to become interested in the work that the food policy council is doing.

For example, one grower near Deming after finding out about the New Mexico Grown program in schools, was inspired to make arrangements with the local food service director to find out how much he could sell to them and estimated that he could put at least a full extra acre into production, an acre that has sat fallow due to the fact he didn't know where he could sell the extra produce.

Another example is a large grower in Columbus, who has years of experience with local food markets and runs a large, national operation. While he is not able to commit to the regional food policy council as he travels a lot, he has joined another council in Deming to provide local input and support and has offered his assistance in creating educational materials.

Overall, while there is not a food hub being built in the next year, the realization that the lack of access to accurate knowledge of what is going on in the local market is one of the major limiting factors in our regional food system. Identifying where these gaps are and making connections with those who can contribute to positive change

iii. **Goal/Objective 3: Complete a feasibility study** to determine the conditions under which a regional food hub can be developed and sustained. The study will include market feasibility (supply vs. demand, current purchasing practices, market channels, pricing, market competitive analysis, safety and quality requirements); operational feasibility (what infrastructure is needed for aggregation and distribution such as storage, transportation, equipment, management/coordination, etc.); and financial feasibility (projected sources and uses of funds, recommended food hub business model, financial assumptions, and Return on Investment/payback). The study will focus specifically on locally grown fruit, vegetables and nuts, since the preliminary assessments indicate high local demand for these products.

a. **Progress Made:** The feasibility study is complete. The full report, complete with conclusions and recommendations, is included as an appendix to this report. The study compiled secondary data along with primary data consisting of survey results from 58 farmers and purchasers. An in depth market analysis determined the amount of local food currently produced and sold within the four county region and other markets located within 300 miles. The feasibility report documents current supply along with the desires, preferences and priorities of local markets to purchase locally grown food. Additionally, the report looks at various food hub functions, structures and business models and associated costs for each.

Impact on Community: Though slowly, several key relationships have been established with larger farmers in the area including two commitments to contribute to a potential food hub. Historically, there has been a lack of communication between Luna and Grant county farmers due to feelings of competition and exclusion. Through the interview process, some level of mediation has occurred between the project manager and farmers representing the two counties and a working relationship has been achieved.

iv. **Goal/Objective 4:** Distribute the feasibility results to local and state stakeholders to increase the knowledge of the community about conditions necessary for a sustainable food hub venture in southwestern New Mexico and resulting economic and health benefits.

a. **Progress Made:** The feasibility report has been uploaded to our website and Facebook page and is available for download by all. Additionally, presentations are scheduled for March and April at county commissioner meetings, health council meetings, the Growing Food Connections group of Luna county of and a local radio station. Dissemination will also take place on a wider list serve run by Johns-Hopkins University's Good Food Network and at the state level food and ag policy council. Additionally, a press release will be sent out by the end of February to local newspapers. This plan will help maximize not only the number of local stakeholders that hear about the food hub findings, but also the number of interested stake holders in the state and nation.

Having a document that details the market research necessary for many food businesses will serve as an important first step for a number of potential food businesses that could potentially thrive in the area. The feasibility study

documents that there is considerable room for local food growth in the region for years to come and will act as a guide to realize a food hub business and improve food connections.

Impact on Community: For many decision makers at state and national levels, having a sound, documented assessment that demonstrates the economic and health benefits of increased local food along with the necessary investments and groundwork necessary for success is a first step towards planning and implementation of a food hub or other food business.

While the region is generally behind the rest of the nation in local food interest, production and sales, it is important to bring the conversation to elected officials, city and county offices, institutions, growers, buyers and the community. One of the major recommendations is for additional education and outreach within the region. A next step is to look for low-cost and no cost ways to disseminate the results of the feasibility study and to harness additional local support. Our organization will use the report to seek additional funding to implement some of the recommendations from the report

Moreover, the fact that there is a trend of diet related illnesses affecting the regional population of youth as well as increasing concern over food security can be tied to lack of ready access to healthy food and lack of food culture in the region.

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: 0
 - ii. Number of jobs retained: 0
 - iii. Number of indirect jobs created: 0
 - iv. Number of markets expanded: 0
 - v. Number of new markets established: 0
 - vi. Market sales increased by \$0 and increased by 0%.
 - vii. Number of farmers/producers that have benefited from the project:
 - a. Percent Increase:
Not applicable: this project is a feasibility study for a regional food hub but the study itself is not intended to stimulate the local economy.
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?
Not applicable. Customer base has not been expanded because the food hub has not been established.
4. Discuss your community partnerships.
 - i. **Who are your community partners?** Southwest New Mexico Food Policy Council, Grant County Food Policy Council, Grant, Luna and Hidalgo County Extension, Silver City

- 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
 - 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. 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 major lessons learned was that planning meeting logistics with farmers in our region during the height of the growing season is incredibly difficult. Three separate attempts were made to have farmer meetings and they were all cancelled due to schedule changes on the farmer's behalf or in-field emergencies. This echoes a larger challenge in the area of creating a unified agricultural stance or voice due to the vast geographic expanse and cultural differences.

Several farmers interviewed who were not seen by community members as individuals who would be interested in local foods were very interested in the project and requested follow up information. What this showed us is that many farmers, including ones that were not on our radar are interested in different aspects of a food hub or a more cooperative food system in the region. Moreover, many of these farmers, regardless of size, shared similar notions of regional food trends and hope they can be a part of more positive trends in the future.

Additionally, this study revealed that community support is essential to establishing a sustainable food hub. This is especially critical in rural and frontier communities where markets are limited and success is often dependent on relationships and the value of local farmers, health and local economy.
 - ii. **If goals or outcome measures were not achieved, identify and share the lessons learned to help others expedite problem-solving:**

All goals and measures were achieved throughout this process. However, creating a well-planned outreach strategy when dealing with a large group of spread out farmers and markets would have been incredibly helpful and time saving.

If attempting to have a large amount of farmer input, plan to reach farmers outside of the growing and harvesting season.
 - 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:**

Some of our biggest allies with this project were not the usual suspects in local foods. We received a lot of leads and encouragement from several individuals who represented big agricultural lending groups and processing plants. They were also able

to provide shrewd business advice when it comes to creating a food based business in the region.

Additionally, many growers in our region are essentially off the radar of our farmers' markets, cooperative grocers and extension agents because their primary clients are outside of the four-county region. To find these growers it is helpful to ask economic development agents at the county level, as they have often worked with growers that most others do not know about.

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.**

From the onset of this project, we tried to view our efforts as not only applicable to the realization of a regional food hub, but towards the general benefit of any regional food business or food planning project that takes place in the near future. Our organization is dedicated to creating a much more localized food environment and is in communication with or works with several other organizations with the same goals in mind.

The process of the feasibility study opened up a larger conversation about the economics of food businesses in our region and provided some foundational language and data to further build on. However, according to the *New Mexico 2015 State of the Workforce Report: A Report Highlighting New Mexico's Current and Future Workforce* it is predicted that New Mexico will lose 5.7% of agricultural jobs between 2012 and 2020, with the southwest region of the state projected to lose 7.2% of agricultural jobs. Outreach and education about the potential of agriculture as an economic force should include regional planning organizations, such as the County of Governments as well as city and county planners, if they exist.

Several farmers have inquired about potential markets, backhauling services to metropolitan areas and other ways to expand. While the feasibility study will ultimately prove to be a cornerstone in developing a more vibrant food economy in the future, in the meantime it will help individual farmers find new markets.

- 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?**

The most pertinent next step we identified was the need to help make our region a more fertile environment for new food businesses to grow. A large part of that is working with the existing markets to ensure farmers can sell their produce in the region.

We have identified the need to form a funded "human food hub" that can create and disseminate educational materials for those in the business of purchasing foods for

institutions, restaurants or retail markets. Likewise, the group would reach out to local farmers to ensure there is enough product and diversity of product to meet demand. This may include educating growers on the benefits of producing human food in lieu of cover crops grown to feed animals. This group would create a foundation of community support to help create a more welcoming environment for local foods. Additionally, this group would be able to provide growers with information about different markets and how to meet the requirements of buyers. Having USDA funding dedicated to building local food economies and future growers would be beneficial to local communities.

Another, more long term need for the region is a more entrenched, robust youth agriculture education and activity plan. Agriculture need not be a foreign concept to anyone who eats food and can act as a catalyst for social change, entrepreneurship, youth leadership and physical activity. If we want to improve the region, we have to take a longer term approach to our solutions.