

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, 2014 – September 30, 2016
Authorized Representative Name:	Amy Klein
Authorized Representative Phone:	518-274-8685
Authorized Representative Email:	amy@capitalroots.org
Recipient Organization Name:	Capital Roots (formerly Capital District Community Gardens)
Project Title as Stated on Grant Agreement:	The Urban Grow Center Food Hub
Grant Agreement Number: <i>(e.g. 14-LFPPX-XX-XXXX)</i>	14-LFPPX-NY-0135
Year Grant was Awarded:	2014
Project City/State:	Troy, NY
Total Awarded Budget:	\$100,000

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

- Same Authorized Representative listed above (check if applicable).
- Different individual: Name: _____; Email: _____; Phone: _____

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1. State the goals/objectives of your project as outlined in the grant narrative and/or approved by LFPP staff. If the goals/objectives from the narrative have changed from the grant narrative, please highlight those changes (e.g. “new objective”, “new contact”, “new consultant”, etc.). You may add additional goals/objectives if necessary. For each item below, qualitatively discuss the progress made and indicate the impact on the community, if any.

- i. **Goal/Objective 1: Strengthen regional food economy by lowering barriers limiting farmer’s access to local retail and institutional markets**

- a. Progress Made: Capital Roots, formerly Capital District Community Gardens operates a range of programs in a four county area in Upstate New York, connecting urban residents with fresh, local food and healthier lifestyles. USDA funding helped Capital Roots develop its food hub at the Urban Grow Center in North Central Troy, making Capital Roots better able to reach urban institutions and individuals with fresh foods and source more of those foods from local farms. The new hub, which opened in December of 2014 has allowed Capital Roots to handle direct shipments, palletized material, and dramatically improved produce handling and storage systems. The new hub has allowed us to continue increasing the quantity and percentage of local foods we distribute through all of our programs and transformed our ability to connect institutional customers with local farm products. Overall distribution has gone from 300,000 pounds to an estimated final 2016 total of 470,000, with the annual percentage of local increasing from 28% to 54%. We expect to meet annual distribution of 1,000,000 pounds in 2018. Improved storage and farmer collaboration has extended the quantity, quality and availability of local produce, while limiting loss to spoilage. Farmers continue expanding their season to meet growing market demand that our services are creating. Beyond serving our mobile markets and corner store program, the Urban Grow Center’s food hub and its online marketplace, the Virtual Veggie Mobile (VVM), were designed to increase regional access for local food, by giving local farmers a useful mechanism to reach diverse consumers and find different price points for the produce they grow. Starting with a handful of suppliers and customers in 2014, VVM now supports 50 farms, 350 individual customers in the food deserts of Albany, Schenectady and Troy and more than 100 institutional customers. Individual customers are served at three drop off sites, in collaboration with local Community Action Programs. Institutional customers have been recruited from organizations that serve our same low-income, food insecure demographic. They range from large soup kitchens to small daycares that without our services would otherwise lack access to local and/or affordable produce for their clients. Creating farm to institution links is crucial to expanding the regional food economy and would have been impossible without the Grow Center’s food hub. VVM’s work with Community Action Agencies has led to supplying local apples to their Headstart programs. Capital Roots success in connecting farmers to new markets over an extended season builds its legitimacy with farmers, farm organizations and the public, improving our ability to create the networks, relationships and systems necessary to keep scaling up the region’s farm to institution marketplace. Grow Center success drives bigger picture projects of Capital Roots, including a food assessment and farm to school work, which would be impossible without multiple stakeholder support.

- b. Impact on the Community: Overall, food hub sales continue to increase: We have seen an overall increase of 57% of fresh food being distributed from our food hub to inner-city low-income families through our various food access programs. In

addition, we have increased our local procurement from 28% to 54%. This means that more people are eating healthier food and more small farms are able to sell the produce to these new markets that we are making available to them.

ii. **Goal/Objective 2: Increase distribution of local foods in low-income urban neighborhoods**

a. Progress Made: We started 2015 with 30 institutional urban customers, had 45 at the time of our first report and ended 2015 with 80. We now have more than 100 institutional customers, including child cares, service agencies and food pantries, as well as our three drop-off locations in food deserts, which provide individuals with convenient access to the products of local farms. Not only have we increased our institutional customer base, but average order size continues to increase. 2016 VVM sales are projected to be more than one and a half times those of 2015 and we anticipate an almost 60% increase in overall food hub sales throughout our programming. It appears local will increase to 54% of that sales total, up from 52% in 2015 and just 28% before the grant period began. With support from the Capital District Childcare Coordinating Council, we continue to attend provider meetings and are helping smaller daycares be capable of meeting Federal feeding requirements. As these requirements have come online we have experienced an increased demand for cut fruit and vegetables. How exactly to meet this demand, while supporting local farms, and simultaneously meeting price point and food safety demands has proven difficult with our existing operations, but we have plans on the horizon to ameliorate that. Our Squash Hunger, food rescue program numbers continued to exceed expectations. In 2015 we rescued 80,000 pounds of food and distributed to emergency feeding programs around the region. This was a dramatic increase from the 57,000 pounds we distributed before the food hub and was a reflection of the hub's improved storage facilities that allowed produce to be kept until our volunteer corps had a chance to redistribute it. Due to weather damage of the local apple crop there were no apple gleanings in 2016, which accounted for 20,000 pounds of Squash Hunger's 2015 total. Despite that, we will end 2016 having rescued and distributed 85,000 pounds of produce to emergency feeding programs thanks to an increase in other gleanings and donations. Squash Hunger's success has actually impacted our institutional sales, as some pantry partners are meeting the majority of their produce needs through Squash Hunger donations. At the peak season of Squash Hunger, in October, we have seen a decrease in institutional sales. This relationship may, however buffer some loss of sales at other times, when local food prices are significantly higher in relationship to those from the global food system. The coolers purchased through our USDA grant remain a major factor in the increasing amount of food rescued, as well as the increase of pantries served. Because we have the ability to hold more food, in better condition for a longer period, we are able to accept larger donations and have the time to distribute it more widely. We have taken to keeping cull from our own programs refrigerated as well, further reducing loss. Refrigeration keeps more of this food that is unsuitable for sale, but fine for cooking and consumption, stable until it can be delivered to local soup kitchens. Although total distribution continues to climb the food waste numbers in our food hub continue to shrink, with 3,000 fewer pounds lost in 2016 than 2015. Cull from the food hub not suitable for Squash Hunger is combined with kitchen scraps from food preparation and employee meals for composting at the Produce Project farm.

- b. Impact on Community: The food hub has increased availability of local foods throughout the year for low income consumers as well as increased access through new purchase locations and modalities of sale. New market stops and stores, as well as food served by our institutional partners has put more local food into more local diets. Our three drop-off locations in area food deserts give folks another mode and opportunity to purchase affordable fruits and vegetables. We serve 20 Healthy Corner Stores today versus 14 in 2014, including the very successful produce stand at the Urban Grow Center, which serves the surrounding food desert neighborhood. As affordable housing is being completed in our immediate neighborhood the produce stand gets more and more regular customers. Indeed this success has caused operational strain in our office as we have had to adjust to this growing customer base. The improved efficiency and storage capabilities of our new food hub dramatically increased distribution of emergency food to shelters, etc., through our Squash Hunger program in 2015 and despite a loss of the local apple crop which eliminated 20,000 pounds of gleanings, 2016 numbers will be slightly higher than 2015's record 80,000 pounds. Improved storage has helped us to continue reducing food waste, so that despite a doubling of overall distribution, our waste has nearly been cut in half, from 13,544 pounds in 2014 to 7,800 pounds through October of 2016. The growing amount and variety of local farm purchases that Capital Roots makes, and its development of new customers and markets

- iii. **Goal/Objective 3: A food hub that builds program synergy supports Capital Roots and new community opportunities**
 - a. Progress Made: The overwhelming success of the Urban Grow Center and its food hub has transformed Capital Roots. With a workplace that enhances and supports our efforts instead of impeding them our staff has been better able to collaborate with partners, engage volunteers and improve and expand our programming at every level. Volunteer hours have doubled in most programs, both the quantity and quality of interns has increased, and while fundraising is significantly up, it is also easier, requiring less staff time. Our increased purchasing power with local farms, combined with vocal advocacy for them, has allowed the organization to develop strong working relationships with farmers and the groups that represent them. This trust on the personal and institutional level is critical as we continue to expand our produce collection and distribution channels. More and more we are depending on farmers to cooperate and combine shipping, and use concentrated drop off points to improve the logistics of farm pickups. As we become more involved in supplying institutional customers the need for GAP certification increases, so we are working with farmers and advocacy groups to support farmers as they navigate this process. We are still engaged with Brian Norder in the finalization of our food safety plan. Following an unannounced inspection by New York State Agriculture and Markets of our produce market and food hub, which we passed with flying colors, and compliments from the inspector on the hubs' layout, cleanliness and overall operations; we became a licensed food production facility. This classification was not expected, and we are awaiting additional guidance/information on the rules and expectations associated with this license. When this is received and reviewed, we will adjust and work on finalizing the food safety plan with Mr. Norder, to ensure we are meeting the expectations outlined by New York State. The first phase of the Grow Center and its food hub have transformed the organization, by changing work habits, making room

for the public to be more easily integrated into our daily activities and raising our public profile. The increased public understanding and value of our work makes everything easier, from accessing more and better qualified interns, to more effective fundraising. Most importantly, it eases communication and opens doors to new partnerships. The success of our food distribution programs and their economic value to our community has also allowed us to form relationships that are less one-sided, which changes the perceived value of us as partners. Inside our organization we continue to build synergy between programs. For example: our Squash Hunger Coordinator, overheard a phone call between a food hub staffer and a food pantry volunteer; the volunteer wanted to personally purchase a case of apples for delivery to her pantry. Liz saw the possibility of adding this as a new aspect of the Squash Hunger program. So this year we will begin to solicit on our VVM site and across all of our program platforms, donations to cover the purchase of a case of produce for an emergency food provider. In this way, a person can donate 25 or 30 dollars and make a concrete act of generosity, while also removing several steps from the process of moving food from the donor to the folks it serves. The purchase will route through VVM and be delivered directly to the pantry or shelter, without waiting in a bin to be picked up by our volunteer network. Another program changed by the food hub is the Produce Project. This job training program for urban youth operates a year-round farm in city of Troy. Last year the farm and the food hub began working more effectively together, finding the processes and products that worked best to meet the needs of both. Over the winter, coordination on planning has allowed the Produce Project farmer to create a crop plan focused on meeting food hub needs. By assigning a portion of her production directly to the hub she has created a tiered system of crops. Crops that are no longer of overarching economic importance will be made the responsibility of individual youth. This has allowed a reformulation of curriculum for our summer program, and more room for ownership by the students, as they move beyond general skills knowledge, to a place where they are operating as experts in a particular food crop. She and the educator have developed a learning packet and training system to introduce this element to the program this summer. The office and operating space of the new building has improved synergy and efficiency of all of our programs, creating time for more planning and improved cooperation leading to less duplication of trips and shared delivery. The continuing expansion of local food sales bodes well for our future, and our goal of tripling our local food distribution.

- b. Impact on Community: The Grow Center's improved facilities have allowed us to expand partnerships with Albany, Rensselaer and Schenectady Counties' Community Action Programs, opening up drop-off sites for VVM, as well as initiating planning for local apple deliveries for their Head Start programs. This expansion would have been impossible in our former facility. We are now supplying four Head Start programs through Rensselaer County's Commission on Economic Opportunity. We are also finalizing deliveries to the Head Start programs through Unity House in Troy (including their domestic violence shelter) and in Albany through the Albany Community Action Program. The Albany County Head Starts will be registered with VVM shortly. Added efficiencies and space for programming make us a better partner for community groups, who can now take better advantage of our services and even meet at our offices.

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: One full-time and creation of a management position
 - ii. Number of jobs retained: two
 - iii. Number of indirect jobs created: unknown
 - iv. Number of markets expanded: We have seen expansion of our institutional markets, our corner stores as well as individual sales on the VVM and mobile markets. Overall our sales of local foods show a 64% increase from this time last year.
 - v. Number of new markets established: A VVM drop-off market site for Schenectady came online in April of 2016, adding to those already operating in Albany and Troy. We have entirely revamped our mobile market schedule, which has allowed us to add some evening stops and new communities. Two new healthy stores have been added to our network since January 2016, with five more to be added in the coming months. Overall our sales of local foods show a 64% increase.
 - vi. Market sales increased by \$29,155 and increased by 10%.
 - vii. Number of farmers/producers that have benefited from the project: 44
 - a. Percent Increase: 550%

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. The three VVM drop off sites have provided us with new individual customers in our targeted populations. The site in Albany seems especially effective in reaching the growing Hispanic demographic in the City. Our largest expansion of institutional sales has been with soup kitchens and emergency food providers in the neighborhoods we serve. We continue to reach new day care providers, but their purchases are much smaller than the soup kitchens. Our new mobile market schedule, with evening hours, will hopefully make us more available to working consumers who are food insecure and will increase our presence in Schenectady and Rensselaer counties.

4. Discuss your community partnerships.

i. **Who are your community partners?**

We have a network of partners across our four County service area on both the supply and demand side. Farm groups include: the American Farmland Trust, the Agricultural Stewardship Association and the Farm Bureau. Urban partners include numerous religious, secular and government agencies. For the purposes of this grant, Community Action Program's support has been essential. CEO serving Rensselaer County and ACAP serving Albany County have been critical partners. The Schenectady County Action Program has become our latest drop off site for virtual Veggie Mobile and the work expanding this relationship should continue to bear fruit in the future. The Capital District Childcare Coordinating Council also has been a very important partner.

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

Farm groups have helped spread the word among their members about VVM and are a resource for us when we are searching for particular products. They are also effective in connecting us with gleaning opportunities for Squash Hunger. We cooperate in advocating for local farm initiatives and support each other in efforts to improve the local farm economy. This February's New Year New Market event, in cooperation with

the Agricultural Stewardship Association, is a good example of the usefulness of these relationships. The groups that help us on the demand side do it several ways. First they are customers, purchasing food for their programming. They also host drop-offs and ordering for individuals making VVM orders. They help us identify potential Healthy store and mobile market locations, and in the case of CDCCC, encourage their providers to use our produce distribution services as a way to meet USDA feeding requirements.

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

These partners are all on board to help us deliver more local food into area schools and Head Start programs. This has the potential to transform our local food system and have a lasting impact on our local food economy

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

We used a cooling contractor to install the two walk-in coolers for the food hub. We have also been working with Brian Norder, a certified food safety consultant to work with us on developing a Food Safety Plan for the hub.

6. Have you publicized any results yet?*

We have been mostly focused on creating results and improving our programming. There has been significant media attention surrounding the organization and the opening of the Urban Grow Center since December 2014, but we have not made particular program advancement the point of any publicity. The USDA's role as a funder of the food hub has been noted in press releases and articles. Updates on program progress are often featured on our social media accounts where we consistently feature new farm producers who join our network.

- i. **If yes, how did you publicize the results?** Facebook, Twitter, Youtube
- ii. **To whom did you publicize the results?** General public
- iii. **How many stakeholders (i.e. people, entities) did you reach?** Unknown

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

Feedback has been mostly anecdotal, picked up through conversations with producers and customers. Reorganizing food hub staff has created new opportunities for information gathering and fine tuning of existing systems so that we will have a finer breakdown on quantities and types of foods going to our different programs. We will use this data to create differentiation in product lines between programs. In addition, in the fall of 2016 we hired a part-time Outreach Assistant to work specifically on the Virtual Veggie Mobile program. A bi-lingual speaker, one of her tasks will be to solicit input on the on-line marketplace to make it more user-friendly.

- i. **If so, how did you collect the information?** We ask customers during their online registry for the VVM several questions, including: "What is most important to you when buying food?"
- ii. **What feedback was relayed (specific comments)?** Answers to the question on the VVM registry indicate 45% of customers think locally grown food is most important to them, while 30% say price is the most important factor, 20% attribute growing practices and the other 5% choose other. A Virtual Veggie Mobile testimonial was posted on our Facebook page and You tube channel, which includes some facts about the program as

well as its enthusiastic support by users: Jessica DeJesus says: “Being someone from the community, when somebody says they are bringing in a new kind of program, or something that is going to benefit us, you always have a little bit of skepticism. But as soon as I opened my first bag of food I was sold. I was in love. The produce, the vegetables, the fruit are phenomenal!”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CTYduyZGJew>

8. Budget Summary:

- i. As part of the LFPP closeout procedures, you are required to submit the SF-425 (Final Federal Financial Report). Check here if you have completed the SF-425 and are submitting it with this report:
- ii. **Did the project generate any income? Yes**
If yes, how much was generated and how was it used to further the objectives of the award? A total of \$139,494 in program revenue from the Virtual Veggie Mobile was generated during this period. These funds were used to buy product and support program expenses not supported by this grant.

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).**
Since this project crossed over many areas for us – building construction, program development and operations, we learned many lessons that we are carrying into our future work. Working with the cooler contractor was a new experience for us and provided the organization with important information on the operation of these essential pieces of equipment in our food hub. The work we have done, and are doing with consultant Brian Norder on food safety is going to be instrumental as we look to become a GAP certified Food Hub. And lastly, in developing this program (the Virtual Veggie Mobile), we have continuously made modifications to improve customer delivery and producer access.
- ii. **If goals or outcome measures were not achieved, identify and share the lessons learned to help others expedite problem-solving:** N/A
- 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:**
This was the first federal grant that Capital Roots has received and administer. Having years of experience administering NYS grants helped us but it is important to understand all the paperwork needed to comply with the grant.

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.**

Capital Roots will continue to expand the offerings we are providing to the community from local producers. As mentioned above, we have recently hired an Outreach Assistant who is focused on the Virtual Veggie Mobile program and efforts to get even more people engaged on a regular basis buying through this option. In 2017 we will be piloting a small cut-fruit/vegetable program to determine the demands for particular products and costs associated with this new operation. This information will be critical as Capital Roots develops the second phase of the Urban Grow Center in 2017 which will include a large commercial grade kitchen. Our food hub staff will continue working with Brian Norder to follow up on our market inspection and finalize a food safety plan that fits current and future needs. With assistance from farm advocates we will continue to encourage farmers of the value of GAP, letting them know of our future plans to open up larger institutional markets for them. We anticipate continued overall expansion of sales and food rescue opportunities as we move into the future.

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?

Capital Roots is in the midst of a two-year Regional Food System Assessment which is evaluating consumption, production, processing and distribution throughout our 11-County foodshed. This assessment is being done in cooperation with a Steering Committee of farm advocates, social service agencies, funders and research partners. We anticipate publishing results at the end of 2018.