

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

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

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

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

LFPP Phone: 202-720-2731; Email: USDALFPPQuestions@ams.usda.gov; Fax: 202-720-0300

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

Report Date Range: <i>(e.g. September 30, 20XX-September 29, 20XX)</i>	September 30, 2015-September 30, 2017
Authorized Representative Name:	Mary Walsh
Authorized Representative Phone:	864-255-3385
Authorized Representative Email:	swamprabbitcafe@gmail.com
Recipient Organization Name:	Swamp Rabbit Café and Grocery
Project Title as Stated on Grant Agreement:	Swamp Rabbit Café and Grocery Expansion Project: Increasing capacity to buy, store, process, and sell local foods in Upstate South Carolina
Grant Agreement Number: <i>(e.g. 14-LFPPX-XX-XXXX)</i>	15LFPPSC0115
Year Grant was Awarded:	2015
Project City/State:	Greenville, SC
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: Increase storage and distribution capacity of local and regional products by 50% through the purchase of a walk-in freezer/cooler.
 - a. Progress Made: Our new refrigerated storage space was completed in July 2016. This increased our storage and distribution capacity by over 50%.
 - b. Impact on Community:

Since the completion of the tasks for this goal (July 2016), our direct-to-consumer produce sales in the grocery have increased roughly 40% compared to the same period last year, representing a monetary increase of roughly \$68,000. Our produce box sales, which we equate with what we called “winter CSA” for our goals, increased 497%, from \$1,044 to \$6,243.

Our wholesale sales have remained steady, mostly in part due to a decrease in wholesale prepared foods orders after losing a couple of larger accounts. However we have recently added several new produce-heavy wholesale accounts and expect this number to start climbing back up.

We have met and surpassed our goal to increase the amount of local and regional products we sell to retail and wholesale customers by 50%, representing a \$70,000 increase. One interesting but unanticipated side effect of our expansion was the indirect wholesale business we have gotten. We can easily measure the sales we get via direct, advanced orders placed by wholesale customers, but we have several small restaurants that now shop our store several days a week to pick up items for their menus. These are restaurants that want to serve local food but may only need small quantities of produce, like 4 bunches of kale or 3# of tomatoes, and we offer them a wholesale discount to further encourage them to buy local. Our improved signage helps our customers know exactly what farm items are coming from.

The amount of produce we *buy* has increased significantly from 2015 to 2017 – we have been able to buy 50% *more* produce, representing an increase of more than \$100,000. The increase in the amount of produce we’re able to buy from farmers is attributable to the walk-in cooler, which has allowed us to sell more direct-to-consumer and to process more produce in our kitchen.

One last anecdotal impact of this grant is the much greater ease that our farmers can deliver. We now have the space to more easily receive and store items, and this greatly reduces the amount of time a farmer must take to delivery and check in items.

We now have created a new job, assistant grocery manager, to handle this increase in volume, and for the duration of this project we have added a total of 5 additional grocery porter staff.
 - ii. Goal/Objective 2: Increase the capacity to process local and regional products by 100% through the addition of a streamlined processing and baking kitchen.
 - a. Progress Made: We completed the work to streamline our kitchen and have a growing program to process local foods.

- vii. Number of farmers/producers that have benefited from the project: 200+
 - a. Percent Increase: 14%

Sadly this increase in the number of farmers we source from is not as high as we would have liked, and this is partly because each year a number of our farmers go out of business. So while we are continuously adding new farms, we are also losing some.

- 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?

We increased our customer base via our media platforms stated above, but also through community donations, events, and partnerships. We have been regularly sending out press releases and we feel we have made a name for ourselves in our community as the place to go for local food. We have also been able to reach out to area businesses to expand our wholesale program. We have been able to reach out to additional low income / local access populations through these media channels as well as through partnerships with area churches, non-profits, schools, and community organizations.

- 4. Discuss your community partnerships.
 - i. Who are your community partners?

Our partners include the following: Mill Village Farms, Gateway House, Loaves and Fishes, Project Host Soup Kitchen, GrowFood Carolina, Edible Upcountry, and the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association (CFSA).
 - ii. How have they contributed to the overall results of the LFPP project?

These organizations have provided a lot of support for us. Mill Village Farms has not only sold us produce but we have also hired several of their trained youth to work in our business. We regularly donate produce to Gateway House, Loaves and Fishes, and Project Host, three organizations that are all trying to teach more healthful and conscious eating as part of their respective missions. We have consulted a lot with GrowFood Carolina on setting up our wholesale business. We have worked with Edible Upcountry to help us in our marketing efforts. Finally, CFSA continues to provide us with support for times when we have questions or problems, like when we need to find more egg farmers. All of these collaborations have helped us reach more people with our message to eat more local and fresh foods, and to create more jobs.
 - iii. How will they continue to contribute to your project's future activities, beyond the performance period of this LFPP grant?

We expect and hope that all of these collaborations will continue to grow.

- 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 contractors to help us improve our online ordering system and to assist with setting up our inventory tracking. This has helped with sales, as the ease with which customers have been able to order online has increased our sales, and it has helped with our efficiency, allowing us to buy smarter.

- 6. Have you publicized any results yet? Yes.
 - i. If yes, how did you publicize the results?

We continuously publicize our results via social media, emailed newsletters, our website, and press releases.

- ii. To whom did you publicize the results?
We have publicized our results to the general public.
- iii. How many stakeholders (i.e. people, entities) did you reach?
We know that we are reaching 51,000 people via social media and email marketing. Through the press we have received, the number of people we are reaching is less certain, but we have had several news articles about our efforts to increase our local food buying in the last two years. At the end of 2017 we plan to add another press release sharing the impact of our local food program on the local economy. Some examples below:
<https://upstatebusinessjournal.com/inside-the-local-food-revolution-with-the-founders-of-swamp-rabbit-cafe/>
<http://www.greenvilleonline.com/story/news/2015/10/16/swamp-rabbit-cafe-and-grocery-expand/74073274/>
<http://www.greenvilleonline.com/story/news/local/2014/12/30/swamp-rabbit-cafe-owners-build-foundation-local-food/21052139/>

*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?
We collect feedback via online resources (Yelp, Google, and TripAdvisor), through written comment cards, through our electronic receipts (customers have the option to leave feedback), and through direct contact with both farmers and customers in the store.
 - ii. What feedback was relayed (specific comments)?
Farmers have been overwhelmingly positive about the expansion as it has increased their sales significantly and has provided some of them with security. We have growing agreements with several farmers and they have included our anticipated purchases as part of their crop planning. We feel that this is one of our most successful achievements. Customers have also been overwhelmingly positive about our expansion, relaying that the selection and ease of shopping has improved, as well as the wait time in lines since we now have two dedicated grocery register stations. Our one consistent negative comment is our pricing, and we feel that this will always be a challenge that we need to overcome. We need to try very hard to strike the correct balance of paying farmers a fair price for their goods, but not so much so that we are unable to sell their items. As a specific example, we bought broccoli from a new farmer for \$4/lb. Even with a small markup, we were unable to sell the broccoli for even \$5/lb – consumers, even those who regularly support local food, are not ready to pay that price. So we need to work with farmers on items like these and decide whether we just shouldn't sell some items until we can educate consumers to buy them.
- 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: X

- ii. Did the project generate any income?
 - a. If yes, how much was generated and how was it used to further the objectives of the award?

The project generated at least an additional \$180,000 of sales. All of this was put directly back into the expansion to help pay for the construction work not covered in this grant, as well as for other improvements, equipment, and staffing that were needed to help grow and improve our local food business.

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).

Working with so many farmers, we feel that we are learning new lessons every day.

We have learned lessons on pricing – we are becoming better at knowing when a price is too high or too low. We bought hundreds of dollars worth of broccoli at \$4/lb to help a new farmer, but were simply unable to sell it at a reasonable price for consumers and lost a lot of money. On the other hand, we were able to connect with a new farmer and pay him double what he was previously getting for his collard greens. Despite paying double, we were still able to move most of his greens to consumers.

Contract growing – as can be expected, in year one much of our contract growing didn't work out. We had contracted approximately two thousand pounds of potatoes from one farmer, only to have his entire crop not produce a sellable product. We had helped invest in bags and logistics for this, and hadn't set up any back up sources, and so this was a loss for us and the farmer and we learned to be more cautious with first-time contact growers. On the other hand, in year two of this grant we successfully implemented contract growing with several farmers.

Construction – we have learned to always be prepared for delays and for improvising when it comes to construction projects. As our building was old and required many innovative problem solving, we had to constantly shift plans and timelines in order to get our expansion completed.

Accounting – we made many improvements to our bookkeeping abilities over the past two years. We have exponentially more small vendors than a conventional business, and our vendors are often small farmers living paycheck to paycheck, so we are constantly writing checks and needing to keep track of things. In the last two years we grew to a point that we finally needed assistance with our bookkeeping, so we hired a bookkeeper and this has made our tracking a lot better. We also now have much better data to help us grow the business and make smarter decisions.

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

If the recipient is running a small business with a small administrative staff, we would warn that it is very difficult to track all of the farmers and cost of goods. Getting organized from the beginning is key, especially for those buying so many products from so many small sources.

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 continue to operate and improve our grocery, kitchen, and wholesale businesses. We now have a solid foundation of farmers, customers, and staff, and growing over the last two years took a lot of energy, so now that we have reached a more stable place we are excited to see where we can be more efficient and how we can continue to increase the amount of goods we're buying from our farmers. We have improved our marketing communications and expect to add more staff hours towards marketing to new wholesale clients and to new populations that we have not reached yet. We still feel that there is a large local population that does care about local farmers, but hasn't been motivated to try shopping local. We will continue to pursue those potential customers and more.

We do expect our sales to continue to increase as we become more and more established as a trustworthy source of good food in our community.

- 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?

For future activities we have many on our wish list that we hope to pursue in the near future:

We are still trying to find the best solution for a POS system that can handle our unique type of business. There are simply not many businesses buying bunches of collards from more than 10 area farmers at differing standards and prices (eg some are organic, some are conventional, etc), and so there appears to be no perfect system to handle what we need to know. We are trying to find the balance between getting the best data possible without spending so much time collecting it that its value is negligible.

We also hope to find more ways to teach the public to cook more seasonally. We still have many items that grow very well in our region that consumers simply will not buy, including things like radishes and kohlrabi. We do feel that we made great improvements in selling certain vegetables that were previously difficult to sell, like eggplant.

Collecting data remains a big challenge for us and so we will also be focusing on ways to better capture and use data. We use three different platforms to collect our data – Square POS, Quickbooks accounting, and 7shifts for employee management. We hope to streamline our data collection process.

We couldn't do this ourselves but we would love to be able to release a report on the impact local food has on our economy, just from our store. If we had time we would seek out help with this because we feel it could relay a strong and compelling message to the public on why they should go the extra mile to eat food grown by a local farmer.