

**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>Today's Date:</b>	12/16/2016
<b>Authorized Representative Name:</b>	Emily Bidgood
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<b>Recipient Organization Name:</b>	Appalachian RC&D Council
<b>Project Title as Stated on Grant Agreement:</b>	Implementing a collaborative food business enterprise in the heart of Appalachia
<b>Grant Agreement Number:</b> <i>(e.g. 14-LFPPX-XX-XXXX)</i>	14-LFPPX-TN-0157
<b>Year Grant was Awarded:</b>	2014
<b>Project City/State:</b>	Johnson City, TN
<b>Total Awarded Budget:</b>	\$98,717

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.

*Goal/Objective 1: Increase the supply of locally grown product sold through the collaborative.*

a. **Progress Made:** This objective has three activities intended to meet this goal. First is to educate producers about services available through the collaborative enterprise, second to increase the collaborative’s capacity to aggregate and distribute product, and finally to survey producers about their expected production for 2015 and what barriers they perceive to accessing services and markets so that we can in turn adapt our education and aggregation programs to address these barriers.

**Producer education and trainings:** Over the project period, the collaborative held 23 trainings and workshops for farmers on issues critical for selling through the collaborative. The goals of these workshops were to help farmers expand their operations through new enterprises and season extension and to become GAP certified so they can sell through Appalachian Sustainable Development’s wholesale distributor, Appalachian Harvest. The Appalachian RC&D Council and Jonesborough Locally Grown worked on a regional beginning farmer training program, the Field School, that created an overview of agriculture in northeast TN for 30 students. The subjects of these trainings were determined based on feedback from producer surveys. Eight networking events for farmers were also held, three Buyer/Producer Mixers and five Friends of Ag Breakfasts. The Buyer/Producer Mixers were opportunities for farmers to meet with about a dozen local and regional buyers, including Rooted in Appalachia and Appalachian Harvest. The Friends of Ag Breakfasts included a networking and educational component, but were discontinued once the Field School began in November 2015.

**Aggregation and Distribution:** The Rooted in Appalachia delivery service faced a number of obstacles throughout the grant period and deliveries were ceased at the end of the project period due to lack of profitability and a truck mechanical failure too expensive to repair. The Collaborative tried a number of strategies to boost the overall number of customers and producers, but was not able to cover the delivery’s operational costs (gas, truck repair, Driver Coordinator’s salary) by project’s end. A rival private business sector delivery company also focusing on local products was founded during the project period—the company used our same online LocalOrbit database, open source, and accessed Rooted’s customer and grower database and began contacting Rooted’s customers to make competitive offers. The market in the Tri-Cities TN/VA region is likely not sufficient to support two companies competing for both restaurant customers and growers.

During the project period, 43 restaurants and 49 growers were contacted and had accounts on Local Orbit created. During the best months of the first year, about 15 growers participated regular and 6-8 restaurants would order at least once a month. During the second year, only 7-10 growers updated and 2-4 restaurants ordered at least monthly. Rooted ran for the full first year and grossed \$15,971.23. Due to staff changes, Rooted was halted over the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of the grant (Oct ’15 – March ’16), but a new Sales and Delivery Coordinator was hired and the service resumed for the final quarter period. Sales in this time only totaled \$5,671.48, a 50% reduction in earnings compared to the same period in

the first year. In September 2016, the delivery truck had a transmission failure and this combined with the poor sales led to project partners deciding to halt the service permanently.

Project partners tried a different niche for Rooted's truck, acting as a pop-up farmers market for a large corporate business (8,000 employee), Eastman Chemical, during summer 2015. We also met a few times with institutional buyers, like a regional hospital system. These actions could not lead to a scenario where operational costs could be met through sales or long term sponsorship.

While this *aggregation* part of our grant will not continue after the project period, it is encouraging for project partners to have confirmation that more local food is getting distributed, purchased and consumed in our region from the beginning of the grant, to now. A total of \$4,330,474.60 of local products was sold through the collaborative's individual sales outlets (Appalachian Harvest wholesale distribution, Boone Street Market grocery and Rooted in Appalachia restaurant distribution). Between project years one and two, sales of local products increased almost 13%, though sales through Rooted decreased 50% in this period.- A deeper discussion of issues encountered by Rooted will be discussed below in the appropriate section.

**Producer Surveys:** A total of 45 surveys of producers were conducted over the course of 2015. During January 2016, the collaborative conducted small focus group sessions with 12 producers at the Boone Street Market to collect qualitative data on the services and solicit feedback. Discussions with individual producers selling to Rooted were also held. Farmers mentioned that the biggest barrier to participation was the service fee. Rooted's fees were reduced to 10% in an attempt to boost participation in the Rooted delivery service.

**Impact on Community:** Collectively, the collaborative sold \$4,330,474.60 of local product either directly to consumers, to restaurants and grocers, or through wholesale channels. Approximately 80% of these funds went back to our region's producers, around \$3.46 million. By the end of the second project year, the collaborative was serving 147 farmers and ranchers through Rooted, Boone Street Market and Appalachian Harvest.

As a result of our trainings, at least two producers who attended our workshops received reimbursement from the NRCS EQIP program to install high tunnels on their property. Our region has a climate conducive to year round production, but only a limited number of our farmers actually do so. 301 farmers received training on GAP certification (needed in order to sell through Appalachian Harvest) with at least 75 farmers actually obtaining certification. Our farmer training program, the Field School, is entering its second year of operation with 31 new students and funding from a variety of local and state sources.

The Boone Street Market is still operating in the black, with sales that are gradually reaching a point of self-sufficiency. Sales in project year 2 were \$261,343.89, an increase of 16.3% from year 1. The store still relies on subsidies from the Town of Jonesborough and Americorps for staffing needs, but hopes that within 3 years, sales will grow to the point where they can pay one full time and one part time staff member without the subsidies. At the current rate of growth, the store will reach the point of self-sufficiency (approximately \$360,000) in the 3 year time period.

While the Rooted delivery service has been discontinued, project partners are still working to use the Rooted in Appalachia brand to designate local products. Through LFPP funds and other funding sources, we've printed branded produce bags, labels, and decals and are

encouraging local producers, restaurants and grocers to use the brand to help customers identify local products. More on this below.

2. **Goal/Objective 2:** *Increase consumer demand for products sold through the collaborative.*

a. **Progress Made:** We established two main activities to meet our goal of increasing consumer demand for, and dollars spent at, markets that sell local product. The first activity was to create new streams of communication to the public about what establishments are supporting local through the collaborative enterprise. The second activity was to communicate food and farm opportunities, distribute informational materials, and demonstrate to the public that local agricultural product is diverse, affordable, accessible and worth supporting.

**New Communication Streams:**

*Newsletter:* Seven editions of the Local Food Newsletter were released, with about 125 subscribers reached. Subscribers were enrolled while tabling at festivals and events across the Tri-Cities region.

*Newspaper recipes:* 5 video recipes were recorded with the Johnson City Press, a partnership established by outreach from a local reporter to discuss local food over the 2015/16 winter.

*Television appearances:* 8 appearances on Daytime Tri-Cities were arranged, a local morning television show that reaches thousands of viewers across the region.

Appearances were mainly cooking demos with chefs from the Boone Street Market and local restaurants.

*Festivals:* Five local festivals were attended with local food guides and other information distributed about how consumers can access local food in the region.

**Partnering on Local Food & Farm Activities:**

In an attempt to demonstrate to consumers that local agriculture is diverse, affordable, accessible and worth supporting, the collaborative either directly organized or promoted through our networks the following opportunities:

*100 Mile Dinners:* The Boone Street Market implemented the 100 Mile Dinner series, with 15 dinners held so far with an average attendance of 35-50 each. The dinners consistently sell out and over 600 individuals have been served.

*Taste of Appalachia:* Eleven Taste of Appalachia events were held in 6 cities across the region. Four of the events were live cooking demonstrations with chefs at local farmers markets and seven were events held onsite at restaurants or grocery stores. Attendance at the events ranged from 20 to 200 people. Approximately 1,000 consumers at the farmers markets and onsite were able to experience local food directly. Taste of Appalachia events ranged in price from being completely free to the most expensive, a formal farm to table dinner costing \$75. The events were meant to allow a range of consumers to try everything from pizza and burgers to gourmet meals, all made with primarily local ingredients.

*Wholesale Guide and Local Food Guide:* An edition of the Local Food Wholesale Guide was printed and distributed to 250 regional businesses. Two editions of the Local Food Guide were put out by Appalachian Sustainable Development and 20,000 copies were distributed to consumers and businesses.

*CSA Fairs:* Two CSA Fairs were held in the region to promote 11 local farms offering the service. Approximately 150 people total attended the events, resulting in about 20 new customers for the CSAs.

b. **Impact on Community:** People were able to experience local food at a variety of events and received media communications on where to buy local products from a variety of sources. Beyond the events the collaborative organized, there were almost two dozen “farm to table” events held in the region, that we are aware of. Local governments have made significant investments in local food infrastructure during this period, including a new \$1.5 million dollar covered pavilion for the Johnson City Farmers Market and a 4,000 square foot community commercial kitchen in Unicoi, TN that is currently under construction. While the efforts of the collaborative are not be the sole source of this flourishing of the local food movement in the region, it has certainly been a strong component of it. Sales at the Boone Street Market are rising, and anecdotally, we hear from our partners that sales at farmers markets, CSA memberships, and local restaurants serving local food are also up.

3. 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: 2
  - ii. Number of jobs retained: 1
  - iii. Number of indirect jobs created: 0
  - iv. Number of markets expanded: 1
  - v. Number of new markets established: 0
  - vi. Total Market sales increased by \$263,556.14 and increased by 12.9% from Year 1 to Year 2. Boone Street Market sales increased by \$36,583.89 or 16.3%; Appalachian Harvest sales increased \$263,556.14 or 12.9%; and Rooted in Appalachia sales decreased \$5,821.04 or 50%.
  - vii. Number of farmers/producers that have benefited from the project: 147 producers
    - a. Percent Increase: 20.5% increase from Year 1 to Year 2. Note: this is different than previous reports. Due to a miscommunication, Boone Street Market was reporting total vendors, which included value added products and not farmers/ranchers exclusively.
4. 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?

As part of our strategy to increase the customer base for Rooted, we explored several new market opportunities. A mobile pop-up farmers market was created in partnership with Eastman Chemical in Kingsport. This market ran 6 Thursdays from July 16 to August 27, 2016 to connect Eastman employees with healthy eating options right as they were leaving work (4-7pm). Despite heavy promotion through internal communication channels, the market did not see enough customers to break even at the end of each market day. Fortunately, the collaborative did not suffer any financial losses, as Eastman’s Wellness Program paid the difference, and the Wellness Coordinator directed that the market would only go through August.

Eastman management has voiced interest in getting healthier food options, including local fruits and vegetables, into its employee cafeterias. Progress was not made on this during the project period, due to existing food service contracts with other providers. There is potential to include a local food purchasing requirement in future contract negotiations.

During the summer of 2016, Rooted began to service local CSAs by delivering product from other farmers to them or providing a convenient location for distribution to their customers.

Low income populations were given greater access to the Boone Street Market through funding from Wholesome Wave and Appalachian Sustainable Development, which offers Double Dollars for SNAP recipients. So far \$4,820 has been redeemed at the market and the program will run through 2017.

5. Discuss your community partnerships.

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

This grant is currently run in partnership with Appalachian Sustainable Development (ASD) and Jonesborough Locally Grown (JLG). ASD operates Rooted in Appalachia, a local product distribution service for restaurants and Appalachian Harvest, a food processing hub for wholesale distribution to large markets. Jonesborough Locally Grown runs the Jonesborough Farmers Market and the recently opened Boone Street Market, a year round local-only store.

During the project period, partnerships were also established with a range of private businesses in the region. The first was with Eastman Chemical in the summer of 2015. Rooted set up a pop-up farmers market at the company's Kingsport, TN location. The market was ultimately unsuccessful, but the company remains committed to improving access to local food for its employees.

The Taste of Appalachia events were a partnership with 7 local restaurants and grocery stores. All of the businesses were either customers of Rooted or known purchasers of local products through some other source. In exchange for hosting an onsite event and an optional Farmers Market cooking demo, these businesses received promotion through our communication channels and traditional media.

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

ASD has helped us connect with area producers and buyers, through their sponsorship of the Appalachian Farmers Market Association and the Rooted in Appalachia program. They are also connecting us with a marketing consultant who will help us get our message out to area residents and hopefully change buying behaviors to purchase more local products. The Boone Street Market serves as a ready location to direct interested consumers to purchase local goods. Since the market opened in October 2014, they have consistently exceeded their monthly sales goals, showing a strong consumer demand for local products.

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

All project partners remain committed to promoting a clear message about the value of local food in our region. Project partners have become more closely tied during this period as well, with collaboration on a number of current and planned projects in the works. Despite the state line, our region is very economically and social tied together, and it only makes sense that as non-profits dedicated to local food and farm issues, that we continue to work together for the benefit of our local farms and markets.

A regional conference of ~100 rep from various sectors of the Local Food System is planned for January 9<sup>th</sup> that will include new and existing partner organizations to discuss how to continue growing the local food movement so that it benefits farmers, consumers and

larger buyers.

6. Did you use contractors to conduct the work? If so, how did their work contribute to the results of the LFPP project? N/A
7. Have you publicized any results yet?\*

  - i. If yes, how did you publicize the results? Results of our efforts at the Boone Street Market were presented at the Real Food Real Local Conference in Athens, Ohio in July of 2016.
  - ii. To whom did you publicize the results? Attendees at the conference were mostly other non-profit organizations and government agencies who are working on similar local food system projects across Appalachia and the east coast.
  - iii. How many stakeholders (i.e. people, entities) did you reach? There were approximately 50 attendees at the conference.

\*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).

8. 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 it through surveys, a focus group, and one-on-one conversations with buyers and producers. We sometimes receive emails from participants letting us know in detail how much they appreciated our work.

Both Rooted in Appalachia and Boone Street Market have received negative feedback on their fees. Fees are used to cover operational costs and neither organization is currently breaking even. This means that a reduction in the current fee amount is not possible. For BSM, they made it so that a yearly fee of \$50 for vendors could be divided into smaller monthly payments. BSM has a steady customer base that vendors want to access, so they ultimately are willing to pay the market fee. Rooted lowered its fees in the summer of 2016 from 20% to 10% in an attempt to attract new growers to the system. One new producer did sign up to sell through the system as a result of the lower fee.
  - ii. What feedback was relayed (specific comments)?

**From local farmer and restaurant owner, Jamie Dove:** "With every [ARC&D] event we can find time to make it to, we have gotten so much out of it. Just knowing you aren't the only ones toiling away at these issues is a reward in itself. After the Friends of Ag breakfast, one of the people who was there, has 50 acres right up the street from us, out of the flood zone, and not only let us pick a plot to expand our grow this season for no cost, but wants us to start an egg operation on his property...[You] have already given us more than we could have hoped for. The networking of really good people in all this is invaluable, and inspiring."

**From a Field School participant:** "Thank you very much. I am so appreciative-- truly is an enriching experience and has provided me with much vision as we plan out our farm."

**From a producer at a focus group,** "I like the consignment factor, like to set my own prices. If people don't like it, they don't buy it. I've checked in on myself, so I'm only dropping off what I will sell. I get more of a profit off of this system than other retail stores."

**On our Greene County High Tunnel workshop** we received this email from Mary Beth Owens, a market gardener, "Our recent visit to White's Mountain Meadow farm was enlightening. It was easy to see how their high tunnels boost production and prolong the growing season. Their companion planting and growing methods really illustrated how much you can produce in even a little space with smart farming.."

9. 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.
  - a. If yes, how much was generated and how was it used to further the objectives of the award? N/A

10. 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).

Despite setbacks to the delivery service, there were many successful components of our project. We learned that there is still an unmet need for trainings for beginning and existing farmers on a variety of topics. The producer surveys conducted through this project led to a new beginning farmer training program launched in November 2015 with 25 students and a second year began in late 2016 with 31 new students. As a result of attending trainings hosted by the collaborative, 2 farmers installed new high tunnels and 75 received GAP certification. Local farmers continue to invest in their businesses and expand their capacities to provide local products regionally. We perceive that there is still a need for farmer training, both for beginners and existing producers. We plan to offer more peer to peer learning opportunities, beginning and advanced topic workshops, and more workshops on marketing and value added products.

On the consumer side, we believe our communication and outreach initiatives were very successful. The newsletter, newspaper, television and local food event opportunities were well received and/or well attended. Most of our Taste of Appalachia business partners expressed gratitude for participating in the series of events. The ToA farm to table dinners sold out and the grocery stores said that there was a definite boost of sales the day of the event and then a boost in sales of featured products over the following few weeks.

While local food is strongly supported in the area, there is still the risk of "local-washing," where non-local products are passed off for local. We learned that there is still a need for a local food "brand" that is recognized and trusted by consumers. To this end, project partners will work to parse out the Rooted brand from the delivery service. With the help of a Food Production, Distribution and Marketing Working Group established with funds from a USDA RCDI grant, we printed branded produce bags, stickers and decals for use by producers, restaurants and grocers. Regardless of how local product arrives on plates and shelves, it's important that customers feel like they can trust the marketing message.

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

The Rooted delivery service provided us with a number of lessons learned. We encountered issues with competition, customer retention, pricing and producer recruitment. First, a rival

delivery service started up and began competing for both restaurant customers and farmer suppliers. We believe he gained access to our list of restaurants and farmers through Local Orbit and made contact with them. There simply isn't enough of a customer base for two delivery services to thrive, and Rooted's sales suffered as a result. We don't know the financial situation of this new business, but we have gleaned information about the services he offers to customers through conversations with producers and restaurants. While he is purchasing product from local farmers, he also offers items from large regional wholesale hubs in Asheville and Atlanta, meaning he offers a much wider range of product than Rooted could, given its nonprofit mission to serve farmers in its service area and maintain transparency.

We conducted surveys on our restaurant buyers, which turned out to be unreliable. When asked what they were interested in buying locally, restaurants often described a great variety and quantity of items. When it came time to put in orders, they either wouldn't use the service at all or purchased much smaller quantities than were described in the surveys. Restaurant buyers wanted unique varieties and most of the farmers wanted to grow traditional standards that they knew would also sell well at the farmers market. We were unable to tell growers what the exact demand was because the demand was so fickle.

The goal of Rooted was to help small scale farmers earn extra income selling to larger buyers so that they could reinvest into their businesses and grow them. Appalachian Harvest has the capacity to purchase acres' worth of produce from farmers, but smaller farmers need help growing to the size operations that can supply this. However, these were not the farmers that regularly sold to Rooted. Most of the actual sellers were hobbyists, people growing less than a quarter acre, who had the time to fiddle with a somewhat complex online system. Larger scale farmers didn't have time to learn the new system or add a new routine into their already very busy schedules. The hobbyists were undercutting the larger scale farmers on their prices, because they didn't always factor in the actual value of their product and labor.

Larger farms would use the system initially, and then go around the hub to sell directly to restaurants once a relationship was established. This could have been because Local Orbit was cumbersome to use or an effort to avoid the fee charged by Rooted for the delivery service. The fee was halved in 2016, but this only attracted one new grower into the system. In 2016, we attempted to counter this issue by becoming less transparent with producers about who was buying their product through our system. However, by this point, there wasn't enough supply coming through to make this work. There was too much variety in type, quantity, quality, growing practices to amalgamate things under one price. There were never just tomatoes, there were 20 kinds of tomatoes and pricing couldn't be set. It's possible that a larger sales volume (i.e. more restaurant buyers) would have made the go around less likely, as the value of a delivery service would have been more obvious, but this chicken-and-egg scenario was never adequately solved.

It was calculated that Rooted needed minimum orders of \$500 per city per week to make delivery worth it and this rate was not met, especially in the second year when the service faced competition and restaurant customers declined from 6 to 2.

- 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:

11. 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.

One very positive outcome is that project partners are more regularly working together on a variety of projects across the region. Concurrent to the LFPP grant, we were partners on a USDA RCDI award that sought to better connect actors within the region food system. Five working groups were created, including a Production and Marketing Working Group (PMWG), which was co-chaired by the LFPP Program Coordinator and Tamara McNaughton, ASD's Sustainable Agriculture Program Manager. While both the LFPP and RCDI grant funds have finished, efforts to continue the work of all five working groups moves forward. On January 9th, a day long meeting will be held to connect approximately 100 attendees from agriculture, nutrition, health, and economic development sectors in the region will discuss opportunities around healthy food, public health, and healthy economies. Through the PMWG, we intend to continue Rooted branding efforts with materials and outreach to corporate partners in the region.

Farmer training efforts will continue, as will agriculture workforce development in general. Project partners, ARCD and ASD have applied for funding through the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program to combine their farmer training efforts into one regional program and to share ideas and opportunities more closely.

As funding is available, marketing efforts will continue for both the Boone Street Market and local restaurants and grocers who wish to participate. ASD has funding through 2017 for a FMPP program that uses the Rooted truck and branding materials on a road show that visits farmers markets in the region.

- 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?

Our recommendations are for the project partners to concentrate on regional local food marketing to consumer and providing collaborative and market-focused training for farmers. Individual partner sales outlets (Appalachian Harvest; Boone Street Market) will continue.