

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 15, 2015 – September 29, 2015
Authorized Representative Name:	James Hafferman
Authorized Representative Phone:	802-334-2044
Authorized Representative Email:	jhafferman@gmfts.org
Recipient Organization Name:	Green Mountain Farm-to-School (GMFTS)
Project Title as Stated on Grant Agreement:	Scaling up Rural Food Hubs: Growing Demand Through Marketing Development
Grant Agreement Number: <i>(e.g. 14-LFPPX-XX-XXXX)</i>	\$15-LFPP-VT-0112
Year Grant was Awarded:	2015
Project City/State:	Newport, VT
Total Awarded Budget:	\$99,990

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 GMFTS’ food hub’s customer base

- a. Progress Made: Overall, our food hub, Green Mountain Farm Direct (GMFD) has increased its customer base, expanded existing customer sales and developed new ways to market the food hub. Specifically, we increased our customer base by investing in new marketing materials to promote the food hub including a new weekly e-newsletter format, a sales packet featuring products and producers, posters featuring producers, and recipe cards featuring local food recipes. We also invested in sales and marketing training for our staff. By working with a sales training expert, Prairie Ventures, LLC, we thoroughly analyzed our sales patterns and identified specific opportunities to focus on and identified key products that appeal to specific customer types and marketed the producers who can meet those needs through on-on-one customer meetings and broad marketing techniques.

- b. Impact on Community: Sales have increased to customers, year over year which has increased access to healthy, local food and increased sales for farmers and producers across our region.

- ii. Goal/Objective 2: Provide technical assistance to institutional buyers

- a. Progress Made: Through this project, we created a technical assistance toolkit with the goal to provide GMFTS (and other rural food hubs) with a strategy, plan and training modules to work with institutional buyers to better tell their story and give food service staff the knowledge and skills they need to source and prepare local foods. The toolkit entitled “ Mission Driven Food Hub Guide: Growing your food hub through sales and marketing” includes best practices on customer outreach, local food promotion, developing marketing plans, developing and tracking sales projections and working with producers to increase their access to markets not otherwise reached. GMFTS contracted with Food Connects (FC), a nonprofit organization in southern Vermont, to lead the research, development and testing of the toolkit due to their expertise in working with institutional buyers and developing similar training and marketing materials.

- b. Impact on Community: The toolkit, rich with information, worksheets and training modules will help food hubs increase sales and buyers market their local food purchasing.

- iii. Goal/Objective 3: Develop and disseminate best practices for rural food hubs.

- a. Progress Made: GMFTS worked with FC and David Conner of the University of Vermont to evaluate and analyze rural food hub efforts to better understand

and articulate lessons-learned and best practices. GMFTS and FC collaborated on the production of Rural Food Hubs: Best Practices Guide The toolkit entitled “Mission Driven Food Hub Guide: Growing your food hub through sales and marketing.” This guide also includes multiple training modules and case studies which detail different food hub experiences.

We presented on our marketing strategies at the New England Sustainable Agriculture Working Group conference, as well as tabled at the VT State Farm to School Conference. At each event we provided resources and marketing materials used for our food hub, our top products and producers.

David Conner conducted two surveys to better understand how the food hubs marketing efforts improved local food supply chain and what extent selling to wholesale food markets impacted participating farms viability. Both a producer survey and a customer surveys were administered with 13 producers and 46 customers completing the survey respectively. In December 2017, an article was published in the Journal of Hunger and Environmental Nutrition. To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19320248.2017.1378602>. The study found that food hubs make small but meaningful contributions to farm viability and that farms agree that food hubs promoting their farms and products helps them to access markets.

b. Impact on Community: With the studies completed and the findings published, and the toolkit and guide completed, the information will serve as resources detailing the role that rural food hubs can play in expanding markets and increasing access to local food.

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, 2015- September 30, 2017_). Include further explanation if necessary.
 - i. Number of direct jobs created: 2
 - ii. Number of jobs retained: 3
 - iii. Number of indirect jobs created: 12
 - iv. Number of markets expanded: 36
 - v. Number of new markets established: 17
 - vi. Market sales increased by \$762,612 and increased by 40.2%.
 - vii. Number of farmers/producers that have benefited from the project: 30
 - a. Percent Increase: 0

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?

Seventeen new customers started to order through our food hub during this grant. Thirty-six of the food hub’s total accounts are growing. Two newer customers are grocers that are in low access areas serving low income Vermonters in the area of Vermont with some of the highest rates of poverty in the state. We have worked extensively with both of these retail establishments in marketing local food and highlighting the producers that supply the food with

farmer posters, monthly taste tests and shelf tag signage. Their purchasing continues to steadily increase.

4. Discuss your community partnerships.
 - i. Who are your community partners?
 - ii. How have they contributed to the overall results of the LFPP project?
 - iii. How will they continue to contribute to your project's future activities, beyond the performance period of this LFPP grant?

The community partners we worked with during this grant include FC which helped to produce the toolkit and the University of Vermont, which conducted the surveys of both producers and customers and published the study. FC contributed significantly to the development of the toolkit. We also partnered with the St. Johnsbury Academy, which hosted the annual Farm Direct Trade Show two years in a row. The trade show brought together more than 20 producers to meet current and potential customers, learn about current market and potential that GMFD is experiencing and seeing and also served as a venue for GMFD to hear back from producers about their experience working with the food hub.

Each of these partnerships plays a unique role in our ability to help food hubs expand markets for farms and producers and enables us to understand what the producers and customers need and want so that we are better able to serve them.

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

We worked with two contractors for the project to develop the food hub toolkit and conduct project evaluation, FC and University of Vermont respectively. The training toolkits are part of the food hub toolkit and are interactive training worksheets and modules will be essential tools for food hubs to train food service staff to incorporate more local food into their meal programs. The evaluation and subsequent publications document the success of our food hub and its impact on the community and areas that we can be of most use to our producers.

6. Have you publicized any results yet?*
- i. If yes, how did you publicize the results?
- ii. To whom did you publicize the results?
- iii. How many stakeholders (i.e. people, entities) did you reach?

*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).

The results of this project was synthesized into a scholarly article, case studies and a guide detailing best practices for local food promotion for rural food hubs. GMFTS presented on food hub best practices at 3 statewide, regional and national conferences. We also presented on our marketing strategies at the New England Sustainable

Agriculture Working Group conference, as well as tabled at the VT State Farm to School Conference.

We will continue to present the case studies and best practices guide to relevant audiences and conferences going forward. With the completed study only recently being published, GMFTS will begin promoting the study and the toolkit through the Farm-to-Plate network, via email to our stakeholders and to a broader network of food hubs through list serves and websites including the Wallace Center and the USDA. Both the Technical Assistance Toolkit and the Best Practices Guide for Rural Food Hubs will be made available for download on our website so that other organizations can access the project outcomes beyond the performance period of the grant.

7. Have you collected any feedback from your community and additional stakeholders about your work?
 - i. If so, how did you collect the information?
 - ii. What feedback was relayed (specific comments)?

From December 2016 - February 2017 GMFD hired a contractor to work as the Farm Direct Customer Service Associate. The main responsibilities for this position were to serve as a contact for current GMFD customers and producers in the field, assist with establishing new customer relationships and distribute marketing materials and product information. Through these efforts GMFD was able to identify areas of improvement for marketing and promotion of local food in retail establishments (smaller shelf tags for farmer promotions) and product labeling.

GMFD staff are in regular dialogue with its producers. Our food hub coordinator, assistant director and executive director have held meetings together or separate with all of the producers we are currently working with during this reporting period. Part of our objective is to maintain open and productive relationships and to hear from them their challenges working with our food hub while we share with them new opportunities that we see coming. Generally, our producers are pleased with the relationship and each values it for reasons specific to them. There are always areas for potential improvement, but GMFD has worked hard to improve processes and we are hearing from customers and producers that they are seeing a difference in how we work and it is resulting in stronger sales.

Additionally, the study conducted by the University of Vermont provides insight to the perceptions the producers have of the food hub, its value to them and areas for improvement which we will incorporate into our business strategy.

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?

a. If yes, how much was generated and how was it used to further the objectives of the award? No income was generated.

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).

This project provided critical funding at the best possible time to help expand and improve GMFTS' local food business enterprise, GMFD, and provided the critical investment necessary to scale-up sales for our food hub. The upfront investment in marketing, training, and shared learning was essential to our ability to expand markets and only validated the information that we are sharing in the guide as being essential components of a successful food hub. Additionally, we found it extremely useful to partner closely with another food hub, FC, and share and learn from them. Through the collaboration we were able to gain insight into different approaches and techniques and additionally seek out additional insight through the peer review process of the food hub guide.

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

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.

By documenting our best practices, organizing the research and producing the toolkit, GMFTS and its partners have created a myriad of resources that can be used by food hubs, producers and customers across the nation. Additionally, we will continue to implement many of the strategies that we outline in the guide in our own food hub management and strategy going forward. Already this year, by using the information garnered in the surveys, we have been able to tailor our approach to sales, prospective customers and producers and we are seeing a steady increase in sales. We are seeing even greater sales from current customers and by providing stronger service and products, are looking at customer expansion.

- 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?

GMFTS will continue to update and refine the toolkit and best practices guide as time goes on so that the tool can remain relevant and up-to-date. In the meantime, we will

consider opportunities to work with UVM in the future to test results of our survey to a larger sample size.