

Report Date Range: <i>(e.g. September 30, 20XX-September 29, 20XX)</i>	10/1/14 – 9/30/16
Authorized Representative Name:	Samuel Gearhart
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Recipient Organization Name:	Sustainable Connections
Project Title as Stated on Grant Agreement:	Eat Local First Campaign: Expanding access to and direct sales of local agricultural products in NW Washington through education, connections, and market development.
Grant Agreement Number: <i>(e.g. 14-FMPPX-XX-XXXX)</i>	14-FMPPX-WA-0172
Year Grant was Awarded:	2014
Project City/State:	Bellingham, WA
Total Awarded Budget:	\$87,643

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

X Same Authorized Representative listed above (check if applicable).

Different individual: Name: _____; Email: _____; Phone: _____

- 1. State the goals/objectives of your project as outlined in the grant narrative and/or approved by FMPP 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: Develop and expand producer-to-consumer marketing of local products**

a. Progress Made:

Object/Activity 1: Expand Eat Local First campaign outreach, branding, and promotion

Sustainable Connections worked closely with Bellingham Farmers Market producers and vendors to maximize the marketing benefits and educational signage of the Eat Local First campaign. The Eat Local First Campaign now has 82 restaurant and retail participants and 40+ local farm participants, tracking 40% of their food purchased locally. As the campaign has expanded, we have found that we have to work with businesses whose baseline of local sourcing is a bit lower than those businesses that first joined. Sustainable Connections has found value in working more with new retailers to help their percentage of local purchasing grow from where they started.

In 2016, Bellingham Farmers Market created a 3 year local purchasing plan to encourage our concessionaires to source their ingredients locally. We provided training and resources to all prepared food vendors. The plan began in 2015 by inviting food vendors to participate in Eat Local Month with 1 menu item that features local products and then continued in 2016 by requiring all food vendors to feature a local product on their menu for all of September (Eat Local Month). Signs were provided to all food vendors so that they could highlight their local menu items and we sent out promotions on social media to encourage customers to seek local menu options.

Object/Activity 2: Regionally promote Whatcom County culinary agritourism opportunities

In 2014, 2015, and 2016 Sustainable Connections released the annual *Whatcom Food & Farm Finder*, distributing 30,000 total copies to 400+ locations in Whatcom and seven surrounding counties. Online interactive maps were created for both publications. Each year on the opening day of the Bellingham Farmers Market, Sustainable Connections hosted a release of the new *Farm Finder*, as part of the festivities and promotions for the event.

SC also distributed 55,000 Eat Local Month and Farm Tour guides to 150+ locations each year.

Object/Activity 3: Promote Bellingham Farmers Market

The Bellingham Farmers Market continued to create focused "Still Going Strong" messaging to highlight the once-a-month winter market. Since this market was intermittent, we found that social media was the most effective way to remind consumers. We used Facebook and web banners on various community sites to promote the Market. Facebook was especially effective because vendors and community members were easily able to share the message to their community. We found that putting our money and energy into heavy promotion the week

leading up to the Market was more effective than running ads all month. Sales for the Winter Market increased 34% from 2014 to 2016.

b. Impact on Community:

In an early 2016 survey, 100% of the restaurants and retailers and 92% of producers Sustainable Connections works with, reported the Eat Local First Campaign helping to increase the sales of local food. One business said, "As our business slowly continues to grow, we acknowledge the role that SC plays with the Eat Local First Campaign. I know growth is a continuation of many factors, however the constant reminder that local is important is one of the most important factors."

Businesses who list in the *Whatcom Food & Farm Finder* and *Culinary Agritourism Map* have found value in being a part of the guide. One business said: "The Farm Finder map gets us new customers every year. We really appreciate the business we get from it."

Regional distributors of the *Culinary Agritourism Map* have had trouble keeping them stocked, as they are a popular rack item in the 350+ locations throughout Seattle and lower B.C. areas in which they are stocked.

Emphasizing Bellingham Farmers Market's Winter Market has increased consumer awareness that it IS possible to eat local all year long and has generated enough support that the 17 farmers that sell at the Winter Market now plan their growing season to incorporate more options for late season.

Extending selling season helps farmers sell storage crops to consumers that they would have normally had to sell wholesale or donate at the end of the regular selling season. Customers are recognizing which local ingredients are accessible during the shoulder seasons.

ii. Goal/Objective 2: **Increase local access to and consumption of local agricultural products**

a. Progress Made:

Object/Activity 1: Conduct seasonal product demonstrations, public events, and promotions

Every second Saturday from April through November Sustainable Connections hosted Demo Days at the Market highlighting and demoing how to use in season produce items. We also provided tips and recipes for the use of products and recommended farmers from whom consumers could purchase the highlighted items. These were extremely successful

and well received events. During each four-hour demo, staff engaged with 150+ customers (1200 customers/year), and saw many viewers buy the ingredients to go along with recipe cards we provided. Many of the customers for the demos were also EBT recipients who were coming to the market to participate in the Fresh Bucks matching program.

The Bellingham Farmers Market hosted 25 total chefs for the “Chef in the Market” series. This series is a demonstration that showcases seasonal products, provides recipes and samples to customers to inspire them to use local ingredients. In addition, local chefs that prioritize local purchasing in their menu offerings are highlighted and promoted to consumers. In 2016, the NW Washington Chefs Collective took ownership of the Chefs demos, and highlighted chef and producer partnerships throughout the demos.

Every September, Sustainable Connections hosted September Eat Local Month and the Whatcom County Farm Tour. The Farm Tour featured 12 farmers each year, and saw an average of 1,200 visitors each year. Participating farms reported an increase in sales for the day. September Eat Local Month continues to grow in business participation, with 20+ restaurants participating in 2015 and 2016 and 15+ local food events throughout the month.

From October-December 2014-2016, the Bellingham Farmers Market promoted “Eat Local for the Holidays,” which included creating menus, recipes and shopping lists that used all local ingredients. These were shared with customers through our website, social media and at the Market. Farms and producers were given recipe cards to share with customers at the point of purchase. The emphasis was to provide recipes that incorporated ingredients available at the Market, encouraging customers to think of the Market as a “one-stop shop.” Sales of farm product increased by 4% during the months of November and December from 2014 to 2016. Sustainable Connections also promoted Eat Local for the Holidays through social media, email newsletter and website channels, including an “Eat Local for the Holidays” pledge for consumers.

Object/Activity 2: Promote Eat Local First in schools & Harvest of the Month

The relationship between Sustainable Connections and Whatcom Farm-to-School has grown immensely over the grant period, with a new formalized partnership in 2016. Sustainable Connections has worked to expand the Harvest of the Month program in schools into a monthly community-wide campaign, creating fresh new materials and online promotional toolkits to share. There are 65 businesses and organizations currently participating in the monthly campaign and the program is slated for growth in 2017. The feedback from the community and participating businesses has been very positive.

Object/Activity 3: Promote 'Fresh Bucks' market-matching program EBT

Our collaboration with our local community action agency, The Opportunity Council, has been helpful in enabling us to target low-income shoppers that were unaware that EBT was available at area farmers markets. We created placards that were placed on all Whatcom Transportation Authority buses and flyers that were distributed throughout the County describing EBT and the Fresh Bucks matching program. The Fresh Bucks matching program proved to be a great incentive to get low-income shoppers to purchase local, fresh food.

In 2016 we were able to offer EBT and Fresh Bucks at our Wednesday Market, providing one more opportunity for low-income shoppers to access fresh produce at a Farmers Market.

EBT sales increased 8% from 2014 to 2016 and \$21,746 in Fresh Bucks match was distributed in 2016.

Object/Activity 4: Bellingham Farmers Market season extension

While the Winter Market is still heavily influenced by weather (freezing crops, etc), it continues to grow each season in both gross farm sales and in farmer participation. We have added 3 new farm participation from 2014 to 2016. More consumers are incorporating a monthly trip to the Market in their food budget.

b. Impact on Community

With the success of the demos, chefs in the markets, EBT matching program, season extension and Harvest of the Month work, SC and the BFM have established many new robust avenues for more education and key opportunities to encourage access to and more consumption of local farm products. The Demos Days have been a hit, with many community partners and larger businesses with Wellness Fairs requesting that we come do a Demo there. In 2017, SC has plans to expand the Demos to at least 4 locations a month from May through September. s

Goal/Objective 3: Develop new direct market opportunities

a. Progress Made:

Object/Activity 1: Coordinate Food & Farming Business Development Group and Chefs Collective

Sustainable Connections hosted nine business development happy hours per year for key partner organizations working with food and farming

businesses. Topics ranged from exploring new research on key investment opportunities in local agriculture systems from EcoTrust, to hearing presentations and providing feedback from a number of close partners like NW Agriculture Business Center, the Community Food Co-op, Whatcom Farm-to-School, and a new business start-up starting a Food Commons at the build out of the Bellingham waterfront.

The NW WA Chefs Collective continues to grow. Over the grant period, Sustainable Connections hosted 7 Farmer Chef Meet-ups, 30 Chefs Steering Committee meetings, 3 Chef Farm Tours, a 200+ person educational farm brunch event, a Chef Market Mob (bringing chefs to tour the farmers market to meet vendors). In 2017 we have planned quarterly Chefs Breakfast series, and 2 Farmer Chef Meet-ups to talk through forward contracts and connect.

Object/Activity 2: Assist producer in development of Grower Contracts; connect producers and food buyers with Cloud Mountain Farm Center food hub

Sustainable Connections continues to promote forward contracts through program events, individual consultation meetings, on our website, and assists wholesale buyers and farmers in best utilizing this resource.

As mentioned in previous reporting, SC let go of compiling the Farmer Fresh Sheets as it was less effective than expected (see more in lessons learned). Instead in 2016, SC put together a Wholesale Producers directory, a comprehensive resource to provide to wholesale buyers to better be acquainted with the seasonality, types of products and farmer contacts they need to up their local food purchasing with ease.

SC connected 20+ farmers with the Puget Sound Food Hub over the course of the grant period. It's been a positive change to see many farmers who were initially wary of the model, now thriving because of new sales made through it.

Object/Activity 3: Coordinate annual Farm-to-Table Trade Meeting

SC coordinated the Farm-to-Table Trade Meeting each February through the grant period. The event has grown 37% in that time, with 180+ attendees in 2016. Survey results have shown the event has gone from resulting in \$150,000 in new sales for local producers to \$500,000 from 2014 to 2016.

Object/Activity 4: Evaluate project success, report & share results

Sustainable Connections conducts an annual survey of their Food & Farming members, a post Farm Tour and Eat Local Month participant survey, a Farm-to-Table Trade Meeting survey and Chef Farm Tour survey.

Results are overwhelmingly positive. 100% of wholesale buyers and 92% of farmers we work with reported the Eat Local First Campaign valuable in terms of increasing sales of local food. 100% of Trade Meeting attendees surveyed found the event valuable, and the Farm Tour and Eat Local Month was found to boost sales for participating businesses.

b. Impact on Community:

One key opportunity that has come out of the Business Development group is the idea for formation of a Regional Food & Farm Business Atlas. This atlas would place key information for food & farming businesses all in one place -- such as technical assistance services, financing, distribution, processing facilities and more. Sustainable Connections is currently exploring funding opportunities for this project and will work with the Business Development group as a planning support group to move it forward.

The Chefs Collective has been important in engaging new chefs and restaurateurs into the local purchasing community.

The Farm-to-Table Trade Meeting has started an exciting new partnership with Bellingham Technical College and their Culinary Arts Program connecting budding chefs with the NW WA Chefs Collective, and preparing locally sourced meals side-by-side with our communities' most well-known chefs.

2. Quantify the overall impact of the project on the intended beneficiaries, if applicable, from the baseline date (the start of the award performance period, September 30, 20__). Include further explanation if necessary.

- i. Number of direct jobs created: 173
- ii. Number of jobs retained: 1545
- iii. Number of indirect jobs created: 16
- iv. Number of markets expanded: 45 new participating businesses in the Eat Local First campaign, both buyers pledging to increase their food budgets by at least 10% each year, and producers utilizing the campaign in their marketing, signage and product labels.
- v. Number of new markets established: There were 25 forward contracts that were reported during the grant period, and the Farm-to-Table Trade Meeting reporting \$500,000 in new sales each year.
- vi. Market sales increased by \$52,870 and increased by 3%.
- vii. Number of farmers/producers that have benefited from the project: 85+ farmers directly

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. Through the Fresh Bucks program, the market has seen a surge of new, low income, shoppers now incorporating local purchasing into their lifestyles.

Additionally, there have definitely been new businesses reached. The Eat Local First campaign, with its wide community recognition and weight in the community has been an important factor in businesses joining on, purchasing more local food and telling the story of the local producers they support.

4. Discuss your community partnerships.

i. Who are your community partners?

Our community partners are local farmers, local media, Whatcom Farm-to-Schools, the Food Co-op, Whatcom Health Department, Opportunity Council, NW Agriculture Business Center, Puget Sound Food Hub, Cloud Mountain Farm Center, Whatcom Community Foundation, and the chefs and food buyers of the NW Washington Chefs Collaborative.

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

We have collaborated with the Bellingham Food Co-op, Whatcom County Health Department and the Opportunity Council on the Fresh Bucks program this year. We collaborated with Whatcom Farm-to-School on launching the community-wide Harvest of the Month program, collaborated with local farmers, food buyers and chefs on promotions for Demo Days, Eat Local First marketing, and Forward Contracts. The Whatcom Community Foundation has been a supporter of the Business Development Happy Hours and our work overall.

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

The above will continue. We will work to strengthen each other's efforts as community partners.

5. Are you using contractors to conduct the work? If so, how did their work contribute to the results of the FMPP project?

No

6. Have you publicized any results yet?*

i. If yes, how did you publicize the results?

We consistently send press releases for events and happenings such as the Winter Farmers Market, Farm Tour outcomes, the Farm-to-Table Trae Meeting. We also share outcomes with Sustainable Connections and

Farmers Market members, and success stories at the Whatcom Food Network bi-annual forums.

ii. To whom did you publicize the results?

Local media, online newsletters and social media, local food and farming businesses, market vendors, and partner food-system organizations.

iii. How many stakeholders (i.e. people, entities) did you reach?

Likely 25,000+

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

Yes. See Goal 3, Objective 4.

i. If so, how did you collect the information?

We collected surveys through a mix on Survey Monkey, Constant Contact and paper surveys.

ii. What feedback was relayed (specific comments)?

See Goal 3, Objective 4, and here are a couple glowing comments we received:

“I think the [Eat Local First] campaign is terrific. There is definitely brand recognition, and it gets people interested in local food.”

“I think the best thing about SC’s Food & Farming program is its consistency. I also think that it excels in connecting producers with consumers. I find the Trade Meeting very beneficial and the workplace meet and greets helpful.”

“We have had many successful connections resulting from our relationship with Sustainable Connections.”

8. Budget Summary:

i. As part of the FMPP 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?

No

a. If yes, how much was generated and how was it used to further the objectives of the award?

9. Lessons Learned:

i. Summarize any lessons learned. They should draw on positive experiences (e.g. good ideas that improved project efficiency or saved money) and negative experiences (e.g. what did not go well and what needs to be changed).

SC initially set out to compile weekly grower fresh sheets and send to wholesale buyers. We found that 1) often farmers didn't send us their information in time, and 2) it seemed to duplicate efforts of what many farmers were doing. The thought was that if all the information was in one place it might be easier for a wholesale buyer to navigate, but the timing of a weekly mailing didn't pan out. As mentioned above, SC is trying an annual Wholesale Producers Directory to collect that info just once a year and create a valuable resource for wholesale buyers.

We learned the consistency of having Demo Days on the second Saturdays of each month was important in building an audience for the event. We also found success in linking the demos with the Harvest of the Month items, and what was happening within the rest of the community.

It's important to "pre-load" farmer involvement, i.e. get what is needed from their end in the off-season. As much as we want to support and engage farmers, we can't rely on them to do parts of the work -- it's important to be cognizant that we're supporting them, and involving them when is convenient has been a good lesson learned.

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:

We found it valuable to convene community partners and meet on a regular basis to check in and revise our shared goals. We will be doing that more moving forward as well.

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.

All partners have agreed to continue this work as a permanent piece of their work plan. We will continue to evolve and improve programs. We see continuing growth for local consumers and local producers with a rise of low-income shoppers, new relationships and continued rise in business participation.

