

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
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Recipient Organization Name:	Natural Capital Investment Fund (NCIF)
Project Title as Stated on Grant Agreement:	The West Virginia Local Food Corridor
Grant Agreement Number: <i>(e.g. 14-LFPPX-XX-XXXX)</i>	15-LFPP-WV-0127
Year Grant was Awarded:	2015
Project City/State:	Shepherdstown, WV
Total Awarded Budget:	\$132,020.00

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: Convene and support a peer exchange network between processing centers and food hubs in Ohio, West Virginia, and Southwest Virginia.**

a. **Progress Made:**

Through this LFPP project and other leveraged resources, seven peer exchange events were organized that directly contributed to the network and capacity building necessary to prototype a Corridor concept and route and achieve the other objectives of this project. In sum, the peer exchange events convened over 350 participants in the network over the course of the project.

The first peer exchange events and related partnership coordination work helped to ***build relationships, build the capacity of our processing centers and food hubs with regard to distribution and wholesale, and identify opportunities and needs*** to help hone the focus of remaining peer exchange events.

The first event was held at ACEnet Food Ventures Center and Business Incubator in Ohio and highlighted the processing infrastructure, needs, and potential among Ohio value added producers. This event also engaged partners in identifying opportunity and needs within the Corridor. The second site visit was held at the Kanawha Institute of Social Research and Action’s (KISRA) facility in Charleston WV and focused on building understanding about necessary capacity, certifications, and logistics infrastructure for wholesale distribution. Specifically, Appalachian Sustainable Development (ASD) discussed the steps to be able to ship product wholesale and KISRA shared about the GAP certification process. During the first period of the project, four USDA Family Farmed “Wholesale Success” workshops were held in WV – two through this LFPP grant in partnership with Unlimited Future Inc. (UFI), and two in partnership with Heart and Hand Inc. through a Mountain Association for Community Economic Development/Central Appalachian Network (MACED/CAN) 2015 Rural Community Development Initiative (RCDI) grant.

During the second period, the Corridor team ***honed the focus of the peer exchange events to specifically support the capacity of partners to be ready to sell into the Corridor markets***. Specifically, partners determined that winter squash markets through ASD’s Appalachian Harvest Food Hub were the most promising end market through which to spur short-term Corridor activity while developing auxiliary markets and routes. Therefore, subsequent peer exchange events focused on supporting this goal, while also building networks that could expand opportunities in the future.

Refresh Appalachia (RA) and Preston Growers Cooperative (PGC) were producer groups who committed to grow and sell squash to Appalachian Harvest as part of the Corridor efforts, but they did not have GAP certification. In an effort to support this critical need of the Corridor market development, project partners focused the next two site visits around building network support and capacity to assist these and other producers to obtain GAP certification. The third peer exchange event of this project was held in Charleston and took the form of a GAP training focused on food safety plan development in partnership with RA, UFI, and with leveraged funding from the Greater Kanawha Valley Foundation (TGKVF). Other VC2 funding was leveraged to hire a renowned trainer, Wythe Morris, who has worked extensively with ASD to assist producers in obtaining GAP certification to sell through Appalachian Harvest. A fourth site visit was then organized at the Refresh Appalachia site to conduct a Mock GAP audit, with the support of UFI and TGKVF. This Mock Audit process was also replicated in northern WV

with the PGC, using leveraged funds from VC2 and in collaboration with the WVU Extension Service and WV Department of Agriculture (WVDA), to support those growers to sell to Appalachian Harvest as well.

In the third period of this project, site visits focused on building connectivity among participants to facilitate additional **market connections for wholesale-ready businesses and facilitate possible coordination of distribution routes** with Corridor partners.

A fifth site visit organized in WV's Greenbrier Valley brought together local partners and Corridor partners to explore opportunities to increase distribution capacity in the region and connect to the prototype distribution route of the Corridor project. The gathering, organized by NCIF/VC2 staff in partnership with local partner the Greenbrier Valley Economic Development Corporation (GVEDC), brought together 38 stakeholders. Monroe Farm Market, Alderson Community Food Hub, and Sprouting Farms, a new farm incubator project, outlined the vision for their "Greenbrier Valley Aggregation and Distribution" collaboration by which they hoped to scale up supply for wholesale markets. ASD and ACEnet also presented on their respective Corridor work. The site visit concluded with a tour of the Monroe Farm Market processing and aggregation facility in Greenville.

During this period of the grant, project partners shifted the focus of the project slightly due to emerging opportunities and new partnerships. During the first phase of the grant, PGC had emerged as a strong participant in the prototype route development. The group grew squash for sales to ASD, shifting the focus of the Corridor somewhat further northward than had originally been anticipated. This also opened up new opportunities for market connections and relationships to develop in the northern region of WV and into the surrounding region that would not only make the southern corridor (OH-WV-SWVA) stronger, but also leverage those learnings to develop additional market potential along this northern stretch or "corridor" in the I-68 / I-70 region of WV, PA, MD, and VA. Also during this period, ASD was awarded an Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) POWER grant to further build out their Corridor work and collaboration with ACEnet on the project. Given these two developments, peer learning activities in the latter part of this project were focused on tying in the northern region to build new partnerships, tie-in distribution and market development opportunities to the Corridor project and ASD, and leverage learnings and replicable aspects of the project.

A sixth peer exchange event took the form of a regional gathering convened to explore distribution work and collaboration in the region around Interstate 68, involving northcentral WV, western MD, and Southwest PA. NCIF/VC2 partnered with Heart and Hand Inc., the WVFFC Aggregation and Distribution Working Group, and the Garrett County (western MD) Economic Development Office to hold this peer exchange gathering, funded by Heart and Hand Inc. The gathering convened 35 regional partners, including Economic Development Authority officials, farmers, farm cooperatives, food processing centers, and representatives from all three state Departments of Agriculture (MD, PA, WV). Presentations and break-out groups facilitated sharing and networking among entrepreneurs and distributors. A follow-up webinar was also held in which ASD provided further information about backhauling opportunities along the Corridor. After this gathering, participating mid-sized producers requested support in accessing new market opportunities.

To build out the Corridor and respond to this request, a seventh related peer exchange event was organized. NCIF/VC2 collaborated with the WVFFC and their Aggregation and Distribution Working Group and Heart and Hand Inc. to organize a Buyer-Producer Mixer in Martinsburg WV. The location was chosen due to the intersection of the main highways I-70 and I-81 and the proximity to the producers requesting this support. The event was attended by 55 participants: including 11 wholesale

buyers and 19 farm or food businesses. ASD offered information on connecting to Appalachian Harvest and Corridor markets, and ACEnet showcased their value added products catalog developed to feature and promote these products to Corridor market partners.

b. Impact on Community:

Key impacts of these peer exchange events:

1) Increased capacity of food hub partners to play a role in regional distribution and preparation of growers for wholesale markets.

Participants in the WVFFC Aggregation and Distribution working group learned from ACEnet and ASD about pallet and truck packing and GAP certification. Since the start of this project, several of these food hubs have begun working with ASD and selling to other wholesale outlets.

2) Increased understanding of the barriers to Corridor development and prioritization of highest impact/probability opportunity. By traveling to different sites and networking, partners improved their understanding of the available infrastructure, distance of rural hubs from interstates, and viability of rural transportation. This has helped develop solutions to barriers and identified best opportunities.

3) Increased number of wholesale-ready GAP certified farmers and increased capacity of partners to support wholesale readiness. As a result of the GAP training peer exchange events and associated WVDA, WVU Extension, and ASD support, RA and PGC growers passed their GAP audits in September allowing them to sell their squash to ASD and launch the “prototype Corridor”. This marked the doubling of GAP-certified producers in WV from 7 to 14. WVDA and WVU Extension have adopted Wythe Morris, of Agcon Consulting’s approach to provide “train-the-trainer” support to their new Food Safety Task Force, which will no doubt result in more GAP-certified and wholesale-ready farms. Therefore, this project contributed to a broader collaborative pilot effort for GAP and wholesale-readiness.

4) Connections to markets and sales opportunities.

The peer exchange visits and ASD’s associated support work helped build supply relationships with Refresh Appalachia, Preston Growers Co-op, and Greenbrier Valley co-op and producer partners. They also facilitated market connections for value added producers and integration into the ACEnet-led value added producer catalog. The events in the Northern Corridor region enabled producers to make new market connections with ASD and ACEnet as well as other buyers such as the Veterans’ Medical Hospital and regional distributors. These events also facilitated possible distribution partnerships between ASD and distributors who are running trucks along similar routes and could collaborate on distribution or backhauling to reduce costs and increase efficiency. All of these connections will help build out the Corridor markets and increase producer income.

5) Leveraging Corridor learning to expedite wholesale market advances in the northern Corridor region.

Attendees at our last peer exchange events found lessons learned from the Corridor project to be helpful, in particular Appalachian Harvest’s backhauling work and cost calculator. The Buyer-Grower Mixer in the Northern Region resulted in new market connections and a reinvigoration of local-food organizing in the region. It also increased awareness among mid-scale producers of opportunities to coordinate distribution and further organizing amongst themselves to reach new markets.

ii. Goal/Objective 2: Provide value chain coordination between intermediaries developing local food value chains such as the Value Chain Cluster Initiative (VC2) sub-regions with urban and rural wholesale market partners in Charleston, Beckley, Parkersburg, and Huntington.

a) Progress Made:

1) Value chain coordination and targeted networking and TA support to launch the prototype route
Value chain coordination was a critical part of this project and to building the foundation upon which the Corridor could be built beyond this grant project. Our approach was to identify and pursue the highest impact / best probability opportunities to build a prototype route. This involved identifying key

partnerships, available capacity and infrastructure, and support needs. This was accomplished by developing a database of partners, collaborating with the WVFFC Aggregation and Distribution working group to survey hubs and identify needs, and meeting with partners to plan via phone and meetings.

During this planning, we determined that it made the most sense to focus on building out fresh produce supply to supply Appalachian Harvest markets because they already had a market pipeline in place and a support model that could be expanded to involve more growers. The other market channel selected for focus was value added products out of Ohio. Project partners decided to develop a product catalog to help promote these products to buyers and open market doors; ACENet and UFI took the lead on this.

Once target market channels were selected, partners worked to build out the value chain to develop supply into these channels. This involved aligning partners and providing necessary support and technical assistance to enable them to successfully enter the value chain and prototype Corridor.

For example, during the first period of this project, Refresh Appalachia and Preston Growers Co-op expressed interest in growing squash for sale through the Corridor. To support them in this goal, subsequent peer exchange visits were organized to build capacity and provide one-on-one support to enable them and other growers to obtain GAP certification, in collaboration with WVU Extension and WVDA. ASD worked with WVU Extension to provide close support to growers during production to enable them to produce a quality product. ASD also leveraged ARC POWER funding to provide grading training and support to producers to enable their best success in selling the squash, in tandem with follow-up support from WVU Extension. The prototype Corridor was launched in 2016/early 2017 in the form of coordinated distribution of winter squash (described in Objective 3).

2) Building connections for longer-term value chain development

Project partners also sought to apply lessons learned from the first phase of the project to build new partnerships, potential market connections, and distribution capacity in the northern area of WV that could benefit the Corridor development. NCIF/VC2 facilitated networking among partners playing a role in local aggregation and processing in the southwest PA and western MD and possible collaborations with the Corridor partners were explored. Through other funding sources, NCIF/VC2 staff was able to leverage lessons learned from the Corridor work to support partners seeking to develop a “WV/MD Food Loop”. Through their ARC POWER grant, ACENet, UFI, and ASD applied lessons learned to build the Central Appalachian Corridor.

b. Impact on Community:

1) Value chain coordination, networking, and TA support to launch the Corridor prototype route

The efforts made to coordinate partner roles and associated support towards an end market goal was critical to lining up all aspects of the value chain to actually launch a prototype distribution route. A collaborative approach involving multiple leveraged resources, of which this LFPP grant was only one, was critical.

The collaborative effort has impact far beyond helping the involved producers growing for the Corridor to obtain GAP certification. The experience with this ad-hoc ‘pilot project’ helped inform and strengthen the nascent WVDA Food Safety Task Force that will play a critical long-term support role for growers to obtain their certification in West Virginia.

The value chain coordination with northern partners and the Buyer Grower Mixer event served to make connections that will be the foundation of further market development. This will help leverage efforts

and lead to sales in the future. Several connections made with distributors through these efforts will lead to additional markets for seconds (possibly through Republic Food Enterprise Center in SW PA) and through distributors like Wendling's Food Service. Other partners have drawn on lessons learned from Appalachian Harvest and their cost calculator to inform their proposed distribution projects, illustrating the impact of partnership development and leveraging efforts.

The largest achievement of this project was to build relationships that will lead to longer-term and higher-impact value chain development within the Corridor and for other wholesale markets. The dividends of that in terms of jobs and sales will be seen down the road, but the foundation is laid.

iii. Goal/Objective 3: Prototype a regional distribution system that moves Ohio value-added products to retail demand channels in WV & Southwest WV and specialty crop and meat agricultural products throughout WV, Ohio and SW VA.

a. Progress Made:

Coordination for prototype development was conducted via work described in Objective 2. Partners were able to put together a prototype route to distribute winter squash in fall 2016 using partner hub storage facilities, KISRA's and ASD's trucks, and possible backhauling options. Partners used ASD's cost calculator to analyze distribution viability and plan the route accordingly.

Fresh produce market channel: Efforts were leveraged to support hubs and producers to successfully grow squash for the Corridor project. ASD provided leadership to coordinate delivery logistics for the winter squash from Refresh Appalachia and Preston Growers Cooperative, partnering with Crook Brothers distributor who backhauled the squash to the Appalachian Harvest facility in Duffield, VA. In the initial run of the prototype route, four farmers sold squash through the "Corridor", resulting in \$2,500 of sales. Remaining value-chain challenges to address in this market channel include increasing the volume of product and efficiencies of distribution, and also developing markets for seconds grade produce in order to reduce waste. This will be carried forward with the ASD-ACEnet ARC POWER project.

Value added product market channel: This market channel proved to be more difficult to develop than the fresh produce channel. With the fresh produce channel, there was already unlimited pull of demand from the Appalachian Harvest market; with that market the task was to develop supply. To develop the value-added product market channel, we had to address both the supply and demand simultaneously. ACEnet and UFI developed the value added product catalog which they used in outreach efforts to small hub markets and wholesale buyers. ACEnet's value chain Coordinator identified 45 wholesale markets for value added products and engaged 20 producers to participate in the Corridor project. About \$500 worth of value added product was moved as a result of this coordination and many more potential sales were aligned. As a result of the Buyer-Grower Mixer, \$2,300 in value-added product orders were placed.

b. Impact on Community:

The sales created by the launch of the Corridor prototype route is the most tangible impact of this project and associated leveraged investments, but it is the tip of the iceberg. Through the capacity building and networking activities of this LFPP grant, and the additional investments and collaboration of ASD and our state WVDA and WVU Extension partners, an important wholesale-readiness network and support system is being cultivated that is critical to further growth of these value chains and the Corridor markets. Refresh Appalachia, Sprouting Farms, and Preston Growers Group have all built their capacity to achieve GAP certification and sell to wholesale markets. This is critical not only in terms of their own ability to sell to these markets and impact many producers, but they are now also positioned to support other hubs and producers to achieve wholesale readiness as well. The stage has been set and

those who follow will “have it much easier”. New growers are expressing interest in participating, after seeing the success of the growers that have achieved GAP certification and high volume sales through the Corridor. This increased volume will not only lead to increased sales among producers but will also make the route more financially viable, enabling more addition of more products and stops at smaller retail stores along the route. The planning and prototyping groundwork laid by this LFPP project will expedite and positively impact future Corridor development work that will continue through the recently awarded ARC POWER grant to ASD.

iv. Goal/Objective 4: Utilize shared WealthWorks metrics to measure individual, intellectual, social, natural, built, financial and political forms of capital.

a. Progress Made:

Wealthworks measures were piloted and established during the initial ACEnet site visit. Feedback was gathered and revisions were made on what measures were most meaningful and helpful in terms of tracking impact. Leveraging other VC2 funding with LFPP goals and partnerships, a WealthWorks Forum in WV convened over 40 economic developers, project partners, and stakeholders to learn from Central Appalachia Network (CAN) and develop common wealth creation and impact tracking strategies. In 2017, NCIF/VC2 and WVFFC spearheaded a pilot project in WV to align metrics and increase network capacity to measure impact using the Wealthworks framework.

b. Impact on Community:

By improving their ability to measure and collect impact data, hubs, cooperatives, and incubator farms will be able to track progress and improve programming, and also better communicate their work to stakeholders. Corridor partners will be able to measure progress towards common goals.

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). Include further explanation if necessary.

- i. Number of direct jobs created:** 1 job processing GAP-certified produce
- ii. Number of jobs retained:** 61 including 2 hub-level coordination, farmers, producers
- iii. Number of indirect jobs created:** 16 – 14 farmer, 2 distribution/coordination related
- iv. Number of markets expanded:** 10 hubs with new market outlets or supply sources, 4 distributors engaged for sales/distribution, 22 sales connections between farmers and wholesale buyers, 5 WV retail markets carrying WV value-added products and 15 in pipeline.
- v. Number of new markets established:** 3 – 2 in Ohio and 1 in Fayette County, WV.
- vi. Market sales increase.** The greatest impact of this project was to develop market connections that will result in future sales. New sales directly created from the Corridor prototype launch were \$2,500 to WV farmers in winter squash sales and approximately \$2,800 in Ohio and WV value added products. Ohio partners report an average 15% increase in sales among Ohio producers engaged in this project since project beginning. WV producers engaged in the project estimated a \$168,000 increase over baseline in overall sales since beginning of project (baseline \$48,000; overall sales projected for 2017 \$216,000).
- vii. Number of farmers/producers that have benefited from the project:** 200 farmers and value-added producers benefited from the market connections and education provided through the project, ~25 of whom sold through the prototype route.

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?

Work with Refresh Appalachia and Mid Ohio Valley Edibles (MOVE) reached lower income rural producer bases. KISRA’s efforts offer second-chance employment to previously incarcerated men in

urban Charleston. By connecting these organizations with market partners along the corridor, this project affords new opportunities to these populations. As a result of being introduced to the Corridor project, MOVE is now selling its farmers' products to both Refresh Appalachia and The Wild Ramp local food market, utilizing KISRA's food hub and trucking facilities to move product from rural to urban markets in central and southern WV.

4. Discuss your community partnerships.

- i. **Who are your community partners?** Core partners on this project included ASD, ACEnet, NCIF/VC2, UFI, and WVFFC. Additional community partners included: Heart and Hand Inc, Potomac Highlands Food and Farm Initiative, Refresh Appalachia, Preston Growers Co-op, Sprouting Farms, Greenbrier Valley EDC, Alderson Community Food Hub, Monroe Farm Market, WVU Extension, WVDA, KISRA, Ohio and WV Food Hub Network, Greater Kanawha Valley Foundation Value Chain Project, Garrett County Economic Development, Garrett Growers Cooperative, Republic Food Enterprise Center, PA Department of Agriculture, and Greene Co PA EDA.
 - ii. **How have they contributed to the overall results of the LFPP project?** These hubs have been important contributors to the shared learning and participation to enter wholesale markets afforded through the Corridor. State agency partners are critical support partners. All partners have supported value chain development by leveraging resources to reduce all partners' and beneficiaries' risk.
 - iii. **How will they continue to contribute to your project's future activities, beyond the performance period of this LFPP grant?** By expanding their roles and through more intentional coordination and collaborative support networks. ASD, ACEnet, and UFI will continue Corridor development work through their ARC POWER grant, building on the foundation and lessons learned of this LFPP project and their other work. WVFFC and other partners will share the learnings of the Corridor project with their aggregation and distribution network. The partnerships will contribute to ongoing collaborative work in distribution, as is evidenced by the growth of the Central Appalachian Food Corridor ARC Power project between UFI, ASD, and ACEnet, and the emerging WV/MD Food Loop and related I-68 distribution connections being made.
5. **Did you use contractors to conduct the work? If so, how did their work contribute to the results of the LFPP project?**
Yes, the role of ASD, ACEnet, UFI, and WVFFC and their Aggregation and Distribution working group chair were all critical to the project success.
6. **Have you publicized any results yet?***
- i. **If yes, how did you publicize the results?** Drafts of survey templates from this project have been shared with partner organizations. ASD also shared their cost calculator with partners for their use. A directory from the Buyer-Grower mixer was published and circulated. The value added product catalog has been circulated to partners in draft stage and was published through the ASD ARC POWER project. Stories identifying the increase in GAP certifications and the launch of the WV Food Safety Task Force were published on project partner websites. Lessons learned and results of the prototype distribution route were shared at 2017 peer exchange and mixer gatherings.
 - ii. **To whom did you publicize the results?** Partners and general public.
 - iii. **How many stakeholders (i.e. people, entities) did you reach?** Estimated 15 partner organizations for targeted distribution; 100 entities for the mixer directory and associated press; lessons learned:~300 (via public forums and at meetings ~ 50).

***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 collected feedback about the effectiveness of our events through post-event evaluations and one-on-one phone calls and emails for follow-up.

ii. What feedback was relayed (specific comments)?

From attendees at GAP-focused events: One person said "This was probably the best training, thus far, that I have received. The word audit is intimidating enough, but the training was very thorough and gave me the confidence to actually feel like I can pass an audit." Another person who acquired certification said, "Impact on the farms is huge. The opportunities that will open up due to having GAP certification among the farms participating in the Co-Op are numerous."

Of the northern region events: "great new market connections; new distribution contacts".

Producer comments after the Buyer-Grower mixer: One said "I can't believe all the people that missed this opportunity. Every farmer in the region could have benefited from being here. Everybody could have learned something." Another said: "We never thought of pursuing this kind of forum. It's a good fit for us." Another said, "there has been a good deal of energy/excitement created by these convenings in the Eastern Panhandle" and noted that a few buyers "reignited their commitment to local sourcing".

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?

We charged a registration for a few of the peer exchange events, which were used to cover food and venue costs (total: \$1,289 over course of project).

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).

Choosing a market channel with strong demand/pull is important. By building out from Appalachian Harvest's support model to fill their winter squash market demand and integrating value chain partners and pieces from there, we were able to reduce all partners' risk and learn together. Early efforts to integrate multiple products and small-scale distribution hubs stagnated because there were too many moving parts. Finding a core to build out from was important.

Starting small with those who wanted to participate helps prove concept and engage others. Working with Refresh Appalachia and Preston Growers Cooperative enabled a small group of producers and support partners to learn together and pave the way for others to integrate after initial troubleshooting.

Partnerships and leveraging resources are critical to value chain work. ASD's investment in this project beyond this LFPP grant and the investment and collaboration of partners such as the WVDA, WVU Extension, and Heart and Hand was critical to building the support model that facilitated the learning

and outcomes of this grant and will pave the way for future work. The outcomes towards the Corridor cannot be attributed to this LFPP grant alone or any one entity's contribution.

Partnership role definition and planning is important. Time taken to define roles was well spent and focusing more on this would have improved early project coordination and expectations.

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

The level of partnership development and coordination needed to build a support network for this type of project is extensive. The number of jobs created through this project cannot be quantified at this time because those are longer-term impacts. The sales generated are the very beginning. This type of project is long-term and attention to value chain partnership building is a critical first step. Developing value chains requires tackling multiple issues all at one time – developing supply, building markets/demand, and enhancing the capacity of producers to meet market requirements. This resulted in delays in getting the prototype 'launched' as projected on our original timeline.

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 cannot underscore the importance of the peer exchange component of this type of value-chain building project because this is all based in relationships. When we were able to gather people together, we were able to establish connections that were difficult to establish over phone or email introductions.

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.

The Corridor work is being further built out by ASD, ACEnet, and UFI through their ARC POWER grant. NCIF/VC2 is leveraging learning from this project to work with partners on regional distribution in the "northern leg" of the Corridor, specifically with partners in WV, MD, and PA to coordinate distribution. NCIF, ACEnet, and ASD will continue to collaborate through a newly-awarded ARC POWER grant to the Central Appalachia Network (CAN) which will allow us to focus on support that will bolster supply capacity in collaboration with Extension and WVDA partners. Through this work, we estimate that at least 6 other hubs or producer groups will be integrated to Corridor markets or similarly prepared to sell into other wholesale markets.

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?

It has been challenging to figure out how to integrate small-scale, low volume production into the Corridor wholesale markets. While rural hubs play a key role in this, coordinating viable distribution routes among them is a challenge due to logistics, low volume, and the level of coordination needed. A next step would be to explore how technology such as the Farm Fare app can assist in this coordination. Another recommendation is to pursue working with existing distributors, which ASD is exploring further. A key recommendation is that all of us need to be thinking about value chain building as regional work. Producers are facing the same challenges across state lines and market channels are not contained by state lines. Therefore, strategies to address issues like GAP certification and market development and transportation need to be regional and involve partnerships beyond stateliness with other state agencies as well as non-profits. The beginning progress we made towards this in this project underscored its importance to us in all work going forward.