



Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program (FMLFPP) 2014 Grant Program Evaluation

Final Report

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Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program (FMLFPP) 2014 Grant Program Evaluation

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Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program 2014 Grant Program Evaluation

Executive Summary

The Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program (FMLFPP), administered by USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), funds projects across the United States, the U.S. territories, and the District of Columbia to increase access to and consumption of local foods while also developing and expanding market opportunities through training and technical assistance. FMLFPP projects support various aspects of the local food market, including: direct producer-to-consumer marketing, promotion, and training; intermediary supply functions such as aggregation, storage, and distribution; and business planning activities such as feasibility studies, economic impact analyses and consumer research.

In 2014¹, FMLFPP awarded 376 grants valued at over \$27 million. As a process to document the FMLFPP's impact on local and regional agricultural systems, the AMS entered into an agreement with the Office of Educational Innovation and Evaluation at Kansas State University (KSU) to conduct a program evaluation of the 2014 grant projects. The evaluation had 3 primary objectives: 1) Describe successful outcomes and evidence supporting this attribution; 2) Illustrate the impact on the local food industry's capacity regionally and nationally; and 3) Identify barriers that prevent the Program from addressing its primary purpose.

The program evaluation incorporates quantitative and qualitative data gathered from the final performance reports (100 randomly selected reports manually reviewed, all 355 reports reviewed by qualitative data software) and survey responses from 245 project managers (69% response rate). Performance reports provide a snapshot of impact upon the end of project funding and a comprehensive overview of activities FMLFPP supports, while a follow-up survey to project managers provides a better understanding of the long-term, sustained impact of projects. This report provides findings from review of the final performance reports as well as survey responses.

Objective 1 – Successful Outcomes

For purposes of this summary report, we group outcome findings into three categories: 1) **Domestic Market Development**, 2) **Agricultural Business Development**, and 3) **Training in Agricultural Careers**. **Domestic market development** refers to a project's success in creating and enhancing domestic marketing channels associated with increased business opportunities for agricultural entrepreneurs and improved food access for consumers. **Agricultural business development** refers to a project's ability to build the capacity of farmers, ranchers, or agricultural businesses to develop or expand their operations. **Training in agricultural careers** refers to how projects contributed to the development of the agricultural workforce, particularly in the direct and intermediated marketing sector. Overall, FMLFPP projects

¹ All years referred to in this report are the federal fiscal year, which starts on October 1st and ends on September 30th.

benefited 19,423 producers through market channel development, promotional campaigns that helped grow local customer bases, and technical assistance offerings to improve the agricultural workforce. Most projects (80%) reported continuing with work on project-related goals after the grant funding period.

Domestic Market Development

FMLFPP projects developed domestic markets by supporting marketing activities such as cooking demonstrations, engaging a variety of cultural groups and deploying multi-channel integrated promotional efforts. Additionally, these projects supported intermediary market development and expansion through branding, sales materials, and establishing relationships with institutional and wholesale buyers. Some highlights of FMLFPP's achievements in developing domestic local food markets include:

- 69% of project managers reported long-term increases in their customer base, serving almost 3.5 million consumers
- 90% of project managers established or maintained partnerships in their local communities to develop and expand market opportunities
- 86% of project managers reported increasing access of local or regional foods to consumers and local food systems through activities such as:
 - Increasing access to facilities expanding farmer and vendor capacity for production, such as incubator kitchens, warehouses or delivery mechanisms (44.6% of all projects)
 - Improving operations by developing business and/or strategic plans (47.6% of all projects)
 - Implementing Market Match programs through partnerships with local agencies, health organizations, SNAP, etc. (71.9% of FMPP)
- 66% of project managers reported diversified food product offerings
- 68% of project managers reported increased production or availability of value-added items such as chopped/prepared vegetables, salsas, pickles, etc.

Agricultural Business Development

FMLFPP projects supported agricultural business development by investing in business tools/apparatuses and market research studies. Examples of business tools and apparatuses included software to manage logistics, inventory, and traceability; refrigeration (coolers, freezers, refrigerated transportation); and specialized processing equipment enabled producers to scale up, improve product quality, increase operating efficiencies and expand their product offerings. Additionally, market research helped local food businesses and producers understand

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Image provided in FMPP Final Performance Report

the market and make informed business decisions. The following statistics highlight FMLFPP's achievements in developing agricultural businesses.

- 45% of project managers reported assisting a total of 989 new and beginning producers enter local or regional food markets; 700, or 71%, were reported as being from a socially disadvantaged group (generally defined as an economically or socially marginalized group)
- 64% of project managers² reported an increase in the number of agricultural producers selling in their markets
- 69% of project managers² reported increased sales
- 81% of Local Foods Planning and Implementation project managers encouraged start-up businesses or incubated new businesses
- 50% of Local Foods Planning and Implementation project managers supported creating efficiencies for existing businesses
- Of the project managers who responded, 60% of project managers conducted business-related trainings (e.g., finance and business licensure), reaching 7,926 individuals

The economic impact of FMLFPP can be characterized by examining how the program created new economic opportunities and sales. As an initial step to report an economic measure for the projects, the evaluation team used Meter's³ suggested economic multiplier of 1.3 to estimate overall economic impact. This measurement estimates the number of times a dollar earned cycles in a local community before it leaves. Meter suggests that local food systems create a connected economy, encouraging locals to trade with each other, building local commerce and business ownership. At the end of the grant performance period, results showed an estimated return on investment of \$2.67 for each program dollar awarded.

Training in Agricultural Careers

FMLFPP projects trained producers, intermediaries, vendors, and consumers on various topics intended to increase local food access and consumption. For example, social media marketing was provided for producers and vendors, and customers were educated on the seasonality and availability of local foods. Also, food safety training lead some businesses to certification, which can increase consumer confidence and in foods sold through those market channels gain access to allow entry into institutional and wholesale markets. The following statistics highlight FMLFPP's achievements to provide training in agricultural careers.

- Of the project managers who responded, 49% conducted education activities related to food processing (e.g. recipe trials, value-added processing), reaching 6,880 entrepreneurs.
- Of the project managers who responded, 57% conducted food safety related trainings, reaching 7,059 individuals. These individuals were trained on food safety certifications including GAP, GHP, and organic, as well as prevention, detection, control, and intervention food safety practices.

² LFPP Implementation and FMPP projects only

³ Meter, K.M. (2010). Metrics from the Field. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development* 1(2), p.9-12

Objective 2 – Regional and National Impact

FMLFPP provided seed funding for many organizations to grow their local and regional food economies. Project managers and grant recipients reported that funding helped them to build capacity, develop by increasing partnerships, operational plans, and securing resources and additional funding to sustain projects. Most projects (90%) reported establishing or maintaining partnerships as part of their work. Nearly 60% of project managers reported forming partnerships with government agencies and foundations or philanthropic organizations, 51% with chefs/culinary institutes, 45% with pre-k-12 schools, 44% with city and regional planning groups, and 41% with food banks/food pantries.

Other FMLFPP impacts include:

- 27% of FMPP project managers reported increased access and/or awareness of local food availability
- 43% of LFPP project managers reported increased access and outreach to targeted populations and increased consumption of local foods
- 34% of project managers noted increased production and/or operational capacity
- 29% of LFPP project managers reported opening or expanding markets or food hubs that subsequently impact job development and producer income

Project managers reported additional funds and resources received as a result of their 2014 FMLFPP grant to continue efforts in their local communities. Grant Recipients secured an additional \$20 million from other sources to support on-going operations.

Objective 3 – Barriers to Achieving FMLFPP’s Primary Purpose

The data gathered as part of the evaluation of the 2014 FMLFPP is promising and shows program impact. While the grant recipients did experience some challenges, such as difficulty with weather or environmental conditions and personnel or organizational issues, many of these are outside of the control of the FMLFPP. In an effort to best meet the program’s overarching purpose, the following considerations are provided.

- Examining results over a longer timeframe can provide a broader perspective of the outcomes. It can take time to see and document the impact of relationships, partnerships and infrastructure improvements in a community.
- Continued focus on program requirements for serving areas of concentrated poverty and making awards to new grant recipients may expand the reach of the program to more communities across the country.
- There is no one definition of success. Grant recipients are addressing local needs, which can make it difficult to aggregate results to show impact. However, the program could provide grantees additional assistance in planning for and collecting data to best demonstrate impact and progress.

Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program 2014 Grant Program Evaluation

Introduction

The Farmers Market and Local Foods Promotion Program funds projects across the United States, the U.S. territories and the District of Columbia to increase access to and consumption of local foods. As part of this overarching goal, the program also supports training and technical assistance for direct-to-consumer outlets and local food businesses with the intent of developing or expanding market opportunities and intermediary functions such as aggregation, storage and distribution in the local food supply chain. Administered by USDA Agricultural Marketing Service, the program awarded 376 projects totaling more than \$27 million in 2014⁴.

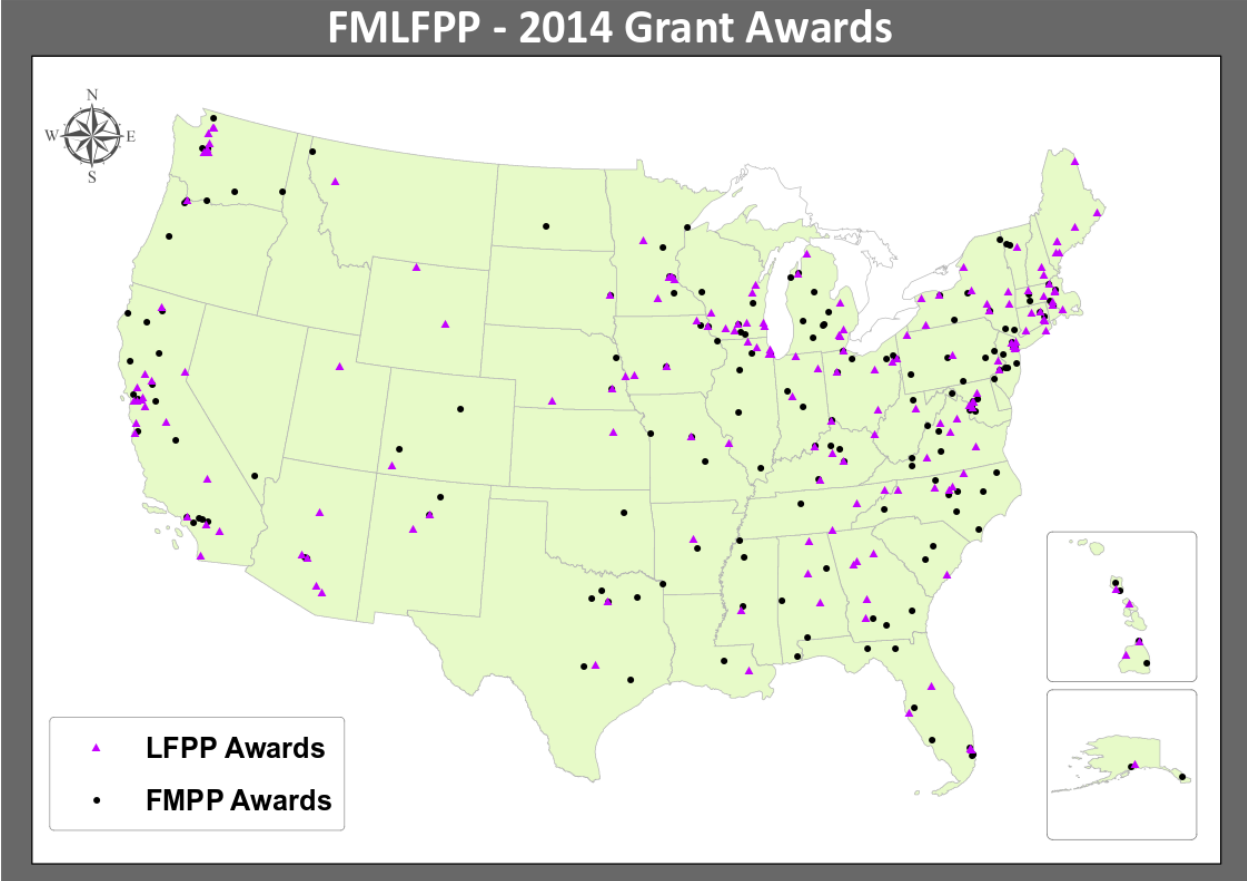
Non-profit organizations and local governments across the country developed and implemented projects. Given local or regional needs and priorities, projects focused on specific activities such as promotion/outreach and marketing, training and technical assistance or capacity building. Nearly half (47%) of projects reported implementing activities that addressed more than one of these areas.

AMS established a cooperative agreement with the Office of Educational Innovation and Evaluation at Kansas State University (KSU) to conduct a program evaluation of the 2014 grant projects. The evaluation had 3 primary objectives: 1) Describe successful outcomes and evidence supporting this attribution; 2) Illustrate the impact on the local food industry's capacity regionally and nationally; and 3) Identify barriers that prevent the Program from addressing its primary purpose. The program evaluation incorporates quantitative and qualitative data gathered from the final performance reports (100 randomly selected reports manually reviewed, 355 reports reviewed by qualitative data software) and survey responses from 245 project managers (69% response rate). Final Performance Reports identified project impact immediately after grant project completion. A follow-up survey conducted by KSU in February, 2018, to project managers compiled projects' long-term impacts.

This report provides comprehensive findings from the review of the 2014 projects' Final Performance Reports as well as the survey responses. The findings summarize the impact of projects' challenges, and lessons learned by program managers and AMS staff. Supporting data and documentation are available in the appendices as noted.

The FMLFPP consists of two sub-programs, the Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP) and the Local Food Promotion Program (LFPP). The 2014 FMLFPP projects were awarded in 49 states and the District of Columbia. See Appendix A for a list of awards by state and region, along with additional maps.

⁴ All years referred to in this report are the federal fiscal year, which starts on October 1st and ends on September 30th.



The distribution of the 2014 FMPP and LFPP awards varied across regions. As noted in Table 1 below, regions 2 (23%), 1 (19%) and 6 (18%) had the largest number of grant recipients. Rural areas of the country received fewer FMLFPP awards.

Table 1. 2014 FMLFPP Awards

	Region 1	Region 2	Region 3	Region 4	Region 5	Region 6	Region 7
	Arizona California Colorado Hawaii Nevada New Mexico Utah	Connecticut Delaware Maine Maryland Massachusetts New Hampshire New Jersey New York Pennsylvania Rhode Island Vermont	Alaska Idaho Montana Oregon Washington Wyoming	Iowa Kansas Minnesota Missouri Nebraska North Dakota South Dakota	Alabama Arkansas Louisiana Mississippi Oklahoma Texas	Florida Georgia Kentucky North Carolina South Carolina Tennessee Virginia West Virginia	Illinois Indiana Michigan Ohio Wisconsin

	Region 1	Region 2	Region 3	Region 4	Region 5	Region 6	Region 7
FMPP	36 20%	35 19%	12 7%	15 8%	17 9%	35 19%	33 18%
LFPP Planning	11 16%	18 26%	6 9%	5 7%	3 4%	14 20%	12 17%
LFPP Implement	24 19%	34 27%	8 7%	13 11%	5 4%	20 16%	20 16%
Total	71 19%	87 23%	26 7%	33 9%	25 7%	69 18%	65 17%

Program Requirements

The 2014 Farm Bill 7 USC §3005 established two requirements for the presiding administration- that priority should be given to applications that: serve communities located in areas of concentrated poverty with limited access to fresh locally or regionally grown foods; and have not received benefits from the program in the recent past.

About 60% of FMPP and 71% of LFPP projects were implemented in areas of concentrated poverty with limited access to supermarkets (defined by USDA ERS as a low income/low food access tract). These projects represent 68% of the FMLFPP funding for 2014, which met the program requirement that at least 10% of the overall funding will go to projects that benefit communities in these areas.

A review of the 2014 FMLFPP grant recipients showed that 51 (14%) of these organizations had received an FMPP award between 2010 and 2012. Of these, however, 19 were LFPP awards in 2014, which could indicate a significant change in their goals and activities.

Approximately 80 (21%) of the 2014 grant recipients received FMLFPP funding between 2015 and 2017. This includes 19 LFPP Planning awards that later received LFPP Implementation or FMPP funding. Another 13 LFPP Implementation awards received subsequent Planning funds, which may also indicate a change in their focus or activities to address local needs.

For a complete list of all FMLFPP awards from 2012 – 2017, please see Appendix C.

Farmers Market Promotion Program

In 2014, USDA AMS awarded 183 grants worth \$14.4 million to organizations seeking to develop new direct market opportunities for the **Farmers Markets Promotion Program**. FMPP projects work with farm and ranch operations that serve local markets. This work includes development, improvement, and expansion of market opportunities in domestic farmers markets, roadside stands, community-supported agriculture programs (CSAs), agritourism activities, and other direct producer-to-consumer market venues. The scope of FMPP projects varied, from training for members of a statewide farmers market association to increasing the capacity of a single community farmers market. Funding levels for FMPP projects ranged from \$16,000 to \$100,000 for the 24-month grant period. Although no matching funds were required, FMPP projects reported they received over \$5 million in other income to support their operations.

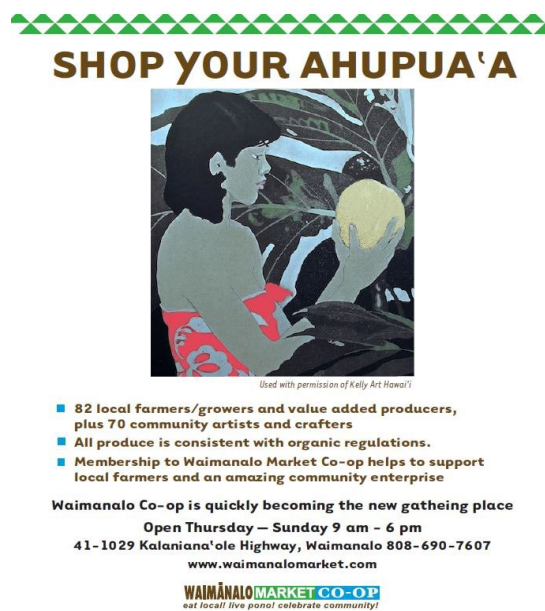
Local Food Promotion Program (LFPP)

In 2014, Congress, through the Farm Bill, initiated the **Local Food Promotion Program** (LFPP) that supports the development of local and regional food businesses and intermediary supply chain activities. The program awarded its first **Planning grants** worth approximately \$1.5 million to 69 organizations that planned to establish or expand local and regional food business enterprises. **Implementation grants** totaling over \$11 million were awarded to 124 organizations. These projects established or expanded local and regional food businesses including food hubs and intermediary services such as aggregation, storage, and distribution.

In 2014, **LFPP Planning Grants** were up to 12-month awards that ranged from \$5,000 to \$25,000 and required a 25% cash or in-kind match. Planning projects sought to understand the viability of local foods, study the feasibility of shared-use kitchens, learn the best practices of successful Food Hubs, analyze local supply and demand, build partnerships, and execute other planning strategies.

LFPP **Implementation Grants** establish new local and regional food business enterprises, or improve or expand existing operations. These 24-month grants range from \$25,000 - \$100,000 and require 25% matching funds. Implementation project activities range from improving data analytics to establishing local or regional foods hubs or businesses that aggregate and distribute locally produced food.

The following table shows the breakdown of the awards by program.



SHOP YOUR AHUPUA'A

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- 82 local farmers/growers and value added producers, plus 70 community artists and crafters
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Table 2. 2014 FMLFPP Awards

FMLFPP Awards	TOTAL	FMPP	LFPP – Planning	LFPP – Implementation
Total Number of Awards/Grantees	376	183	69	124
Total Value of Awards	\$27,275,616	\$14,400,000	\$1,610,967	\$11,264,649
Total Funds Distributed	\$25,843,156	\$13,731,588	\$1,504,627	\$10,606,941
Total Unused Funds	\$1,432,460	\$668,412	\$106,340	\$657,708

Organizations Awarded Grants

FMLFPP funding is awarded to a variety of organization types. Primarily, these are non-profit organizations or local governments, but also include agricultural businesses or cooperatives, economic development offices, tribal governments and higher education institutions. Survey results showed that approximately two-thirds of the awards went to non-profit organizations.

The survey asked project managers to identify attributes of their organizations, such as whether they had a paid project manager or a Board of Directors. Nearly three-fourths of the organizations had a Board of Directors. LFPP projects

reported a slightly higher percentage of organizations with a structure for partnerships and collaboration compared to FMPP projects. Nearly 60% of the LFPP project managers also reported their organizations had a written business or strategic plan. More than half of all projects reported they had a paid project manager and that their organization had some form of ongoing evaluation or improvement process. These types of structures or resources could contribute to the successful implementation of FMLFPP.

Nearly half (45%) of LFPP awards went to organizations that had been in operation for less than ten years. FMPP grant organizations tended to have more experience, with nearly 60% (58%) being established before 1999. Length of operation and experience may contribute to how a project is implemented, but given the focus on networking and making connections with other

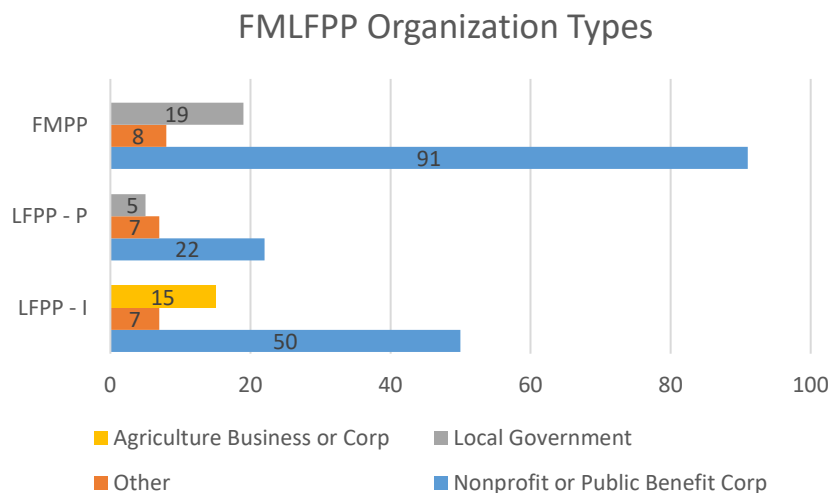


Figure 1. Most Common Grant Recipient Organization Types

groups, the ability to establish partnerships and collaborations is also important for organizations.

Project managers reported a variety of core focus or mission areas for their organizations. More than half of the managers reported an agricultural focus, while others had missions relating to economic development (50%) or health (39%).

Organizations also varied by size and budget. About half of all project organizations had less than 10 employees. While there were some larger organizations such as local governments, universities or food banks, most operated with a relatively small staff.

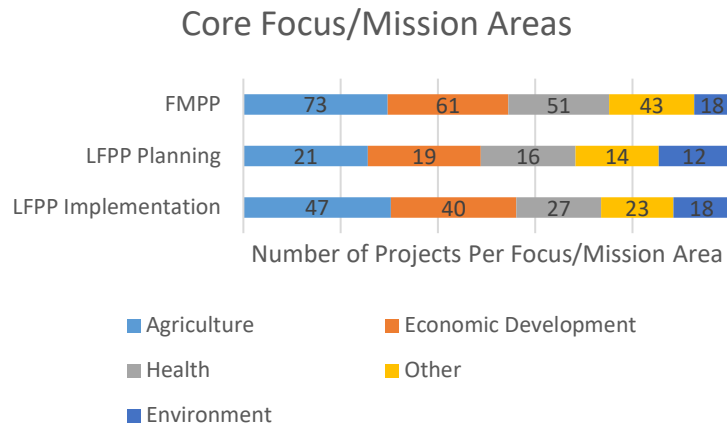


Figure 2. FMLFPP Organizations' Core Focus/Mission

Methodology and Limitations

This multi-phase evaluation was designed to summarize the impact of FMLFPP projects, successes and challenges, and lessons learned by project managers and AMS staff. A complete description of the methodology used throughout the evaluation is included in Appendix E. To guide the review and analysis process, the team at KSU worked with the USDA AMS Grants Division to refine evaluation questions relating to each of the three primary objectives.

Table 3. FMLFPP Evaluation Objectives

Primary Objective	Evaluation Questions
1. Describe successful outcomes and evidence supporting this attribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What impact did 2014 FMLFPP grant programs have on local food producers and consumers? • What is the economic impact of the FMLFPP grants?
2. Illustrate the impact on the local food industry's capacity regionally and nationally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the successes of the FMLFPP projects and what challenges did they experience? • How have FMLFPP outcomes sparked a larger change, building capacity in the businesses and communities beyond the funding cycle?
3. Identify barriers that prevent the FMLFPP from addressing its primary purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the program doing well? What are potential areas for improvement?

As an initial step in the evaluation, the KSU team reviewed the Standardized 2016 FMLFPP Outcome Measures and Indicators for a structure to report the performance and impact of the program on a national scale. As these measures were not defined in 2014, the Division is interested to learn what extent these data may have been reported by grantees. The evaluation team aligned the 2016 metrics to the evaluation questions and identified other potential measures to use in the analysis of the FMLFPP (see Appendix D).

Once alignment was established, the KSU evaluation team began a two-step document review of final performance reports to compile data relevant to the metrics. One hundred seventy seven of the 183 FMPP reports and 178 of the 193 LFPP reports were available and included in this evaluation. Within the LFPP, the team categorized reports as either Planning (64) or Implementation (114). In order to accurately answer the evaluation questions, the evaluation team held a focus group with AMS staff and also administered an online survey in February, 2018, for project managers. The survey closed in March 2018 with an overall response rate of 69% (see Appendix F).The following table shows the number of responses by program.

Table 4. FMLFPP Survey Response Rate

<i>FMLFPP Project Manager Survey</i>	<i>FMPP</i>	<i>LFPP Planning</i>	<i>LFPP Implementation</i>
Surveys emailed to project managers	173	64	108
Surveys returned	129	39	77
Response rate	75%	61%	71%

Limitations

Given the scope of the evaluation, the KSU team experienced several limitations during the study. In some cases the grant recipients did not follow the final performance report template or changed the format. This impacted the document review in that some grant recipients removed questions asking for specific metrics. Similarly, there are no standard definitions provided for reporting so data was reported inconsistently. For example, change in sales data were reported in various ways across projects such as by the project time period, a one-year market cycle, or even by daily or weekly totals. With such irregularities in reporting, it was difficult to clearly link data from the reports to the 2016 Outcome Measures.

In an effort to address this limitation, the evaluation team conducted an online survey with all available grant recipients. Although the 2014 awards are relatively recent, it was not possible to reach all grant recipients. In some cases, key personnel on the projects were no longer involved or contact information had changed. As a result, approximately 20 projects were not included in the survey. Further, participation in data collection efforts was voluntary, which may have had a limiting effect on responses to the survey.

The remainder of this report provides the findings from the evaluation of the 2014 FMLFPP projects, along with observations and recommendations for the Division’s consideration to improve program results. As appropriate, data sources are identified to distinguish findings

from the document review of the final performance reports or survey results. Data obtained from final performance reports are referenced as grant recipients throughout the remainder of this report. Similarly, data from the survey is referenced as obtained from project managers.

Evaluation Findings

Objective 1: Successful Outcomes

FMLFPP outcomes were first assessed through evidence found in the final performance reports. These reports provided a snapshot of impact upon the close of the 2014 FMLFPP grant performance period. Generally, projects focused on market development, marketing and promotion, and training and outreach. Grant recipients reported that these activities:

- Built relationships between consumers, vendors, and farmers
- Built communities between vendors working toward creating a “collaborative market” that limits competition within and between local farmers and vendors by increasing communication and identifying niches for all producers and vendors to fill
- Educated the public on the benefits of purchasing local foods and how they can benefit the local economy
- Facilitated market research and feasibility studies
- Facilitated the construction and restoration of facilities such as commercial kitchens
- Identified land for agricultural repurposing:
 - Developed a hydroponic urban farm on a vacant lot
 - Identified resources to expand co-farming and incubator farming operations primarily for refugee, immigrant, and other farmers of color
 - Received EPA Brownfields grants to support the clean-up and repurposing of contaminated land for agricultural use
- Developed new marketing strategies to increase winter and year-round sales
- Developed new value-added products including meat, refrigerated items, pantry items, cheese, jellies, applesauce, frozen fruits and vegetables, tomato sauce, dehydrated fruits, fruit leather, and certified organic products
- Developed financing mechanisms for farmers
- Funded scholarships for ServSafe certification courses

Success Story and Lessons Learned

“We were planning value-added processing for farmers' excess crops. We learned that because of inconsistent supply, the best market for value-added products from these excess crops would be shelf stable products that could be aggregated as the ingredients become available. – Region 5

The final performance reports provided descriptions of different types of activities and outcomes, but it was often difficult to quantify the scope or reach of these. The survey

responses provided a more comprehensive picture of the impacts on consumers and producers, as well as other outcomes in the communities where projects were implemented.

Consumer Access and Market Development

Projects either established or improved the following types of market development:

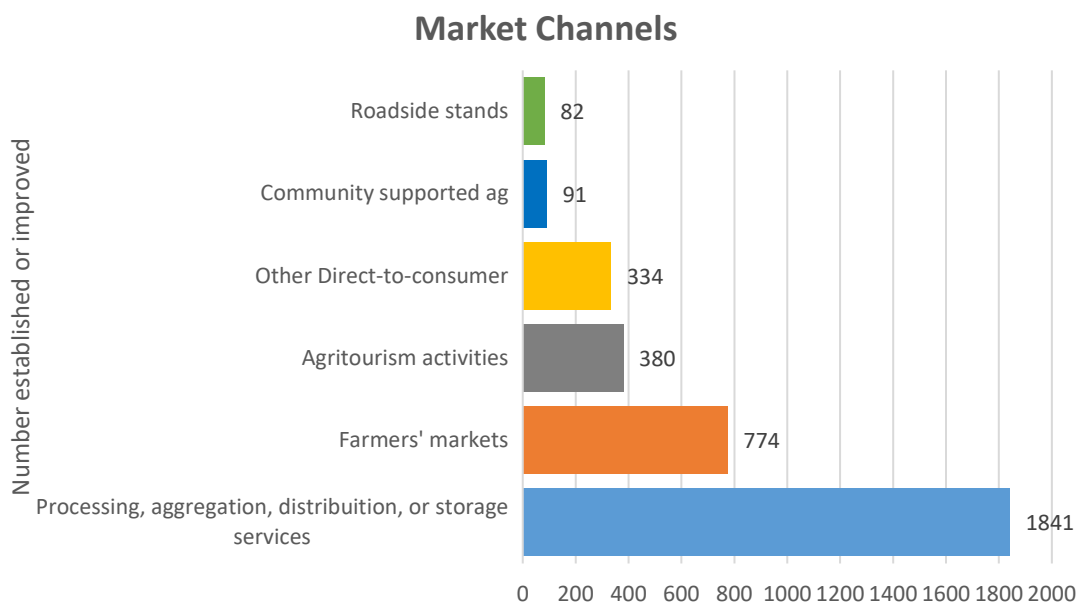


Figure 3. Newly Established or Improved Market Channels

Altogether, as shown in Figure 3, projects established or improved 3,502 market channels or access points impacting local and regional food systems across the country, with the majority focusing on supporting the development of local and regional food businesses and intermediary supply chain activities or farmers markets.

FMLFPP projects focused on several goals to increase access and consumption of local foods, and develop or expand market opportunities. Projects frequently addressed multiple goals within the funding period.

Table 5. 2014 FMLFPP Project Goals and Percentage of Projects that Addressed Each Goal

Project goal	FMPP	LFPP Implementation	LFPP Planning
Marketing, consumer outreach and promotional activities	88%	74%	n/a
Training, education and technical assistance	42%	46%	n/a
Capacity building or market research	39%	n/a	21%
Non-construction infrastructure upgrades	n/a	39%	n/a
Business planning	n/a	n/a	34%
Feasibility studies	29%	n/a	76%

Success Story and Lessons Learned

“[We] changed the product offering in order to promote more sustainability and scalability. We have shifted from traditional CSA shares to Meal Kit Delivery. This approach provides a complete experience for the end consumer.”

– Region 2

Overall, most FMPP and LFPP implementation projects (at least 70%) focused on marketing, consumer outreach, and promotional activities. Most LFPP planning projects (at least 75%) focused on conducting feasibility studies. Note that some LFPP projects were not focused on direct to consumer sales or marketing, but instead developed technology-based tools (e.g., data analytics, online sales tracking, supply chain tracking, and marketing) for constituents or the local/regional foods business sector.

Planning projects also sought to understand the viability of local foods, study the feasibility of shared-use kitchens, learn the best practices of successful Food Hubs, analyze local supply and demand, build partnerships, and execute other planning strategies.

Projects had a broad reach to both consumers and producers. Project managers reported that projects directly reached nearly 3.5 million people through education, training, and technical assistance or through other direct-to-consumer activities. Table 6 below shows the breakdown by program.

Table 6. Consumers and Producers Reached through 2014 FMLFPP Projects

	<i>FMPP</i>	<i>LFPP Planning</i>	<i>LFPP Implementation</i>	<i>Total</i>
Total number of consumers, farm and ranch operations, or wholesale buyers reached	2,562,762	26,328	866,429	3,455,519

LFPP project managers also reported engaging other groups in their communities who prepare food for public consumption such as restaurants, hospitals and institutional and workplace kitchens. The document review of the final performance reports showed that the FMPP projects also worked with many of these types of organizations, but the survey did not collect similar quantifiable data.

Entities Reached by 2014 LFPP Projects

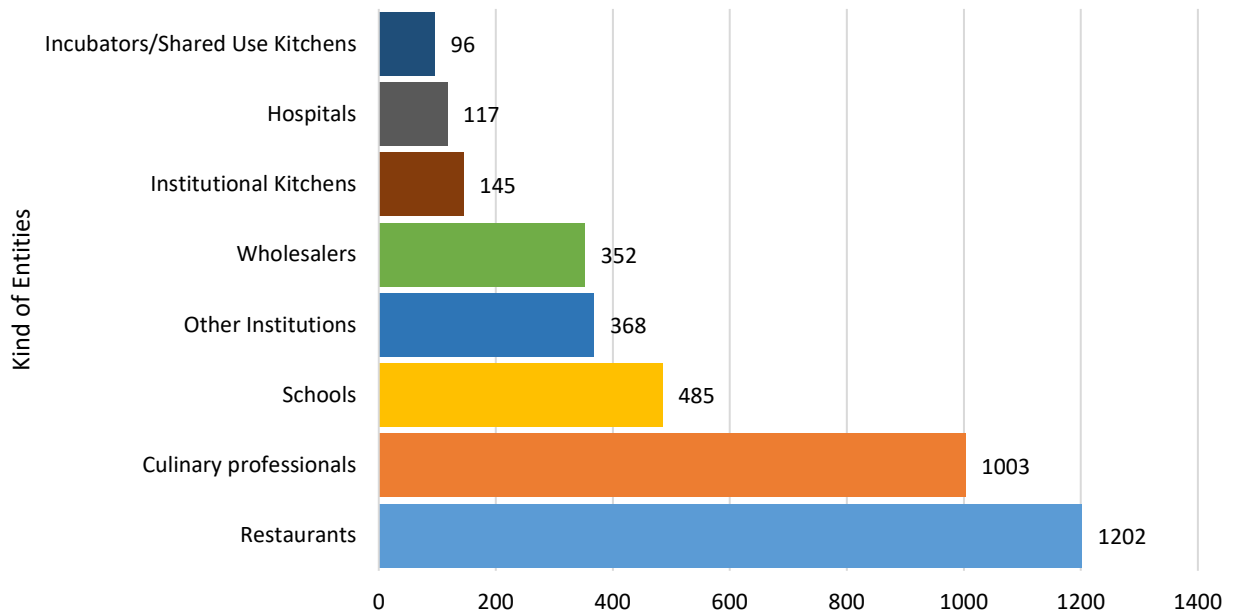


Figure 4. Organizations Reached by 2014 LFPP Projects

As a result of engaging consumers, producers and other stakeholders, projects impacted both **consumer access** and **market development** in local and regional communities across the country.

Most FMLFPP projects (86%) reported an increase in consumer access to local or regional food since the 2014 grant period. Additionally, 66% of the projects diversified food product offerings through the grant activities. Sixty-five percent of projects increased consumer access by offering a greater variety of products, such as meats, eggs and dairy. Sixty-three percent of projects through increased production or availability of value-added goods such as salsa, chopped or prepared vegetables, jams or jellies and pickles.

Approximately 45% of projects expanded the number of days or weeks they operated, such as adding a mid-week Farmers Market or expanding production or operational capacity.



Image provided in FMPP Final Performance Report

Table 7. LFPP Strategies for Expanding Operations

	LFPP Implementation
Increased number of weeks in operation	54%
Increased number of days in operation during the week	53%
Offered delivery options	64%

FMPP grant recipients specifically reported a variety of market development strategies used in their projects. These included facilitating cooking demonstrations, educating communities on the benefits of local and regional foods, partnering with programs to serve low-income consumers, and offering youth activities at the markets. Other market development strategies are shown in the following table.

Table 8. FMPP Market Development Activities

Activities reported by grant recipients	Number of recipients reporting activity	Percent
Cooking demonstrations	88	77%
Educate the public on the benefits of purchasing local foods	84	74%
SNAP/EBT, WIC, Market Match programs for low-income customers (e.g., Affordable Produce Box, Double Up Food Bucks, Produce Plus checks, or other similar programs)	82	72%
Activities for children and/or entertainment (e.g., music)	76	67%
Develop/provide recipe cards/menu plans	69	61%
Add or change physical location of markets	51	45%
Internships/summer learning program for young adults	47	41%
Advertise in languages other than English	43	38%
Farmers Market tours	32	28%

Nearly two-thirds of FMPP grant recipients reported that they have increased the number of vendors accepting SNAP/EBT. Nearly half of the projects reported that more of their vendors are now participating in market incentive programs such as Market Match, Double Up Food Bucks or other similar programs. Due to the differences in the programs, LFPP project managers reported types of economic development strategies they used. These are described in more detail in the section on economic impact.



Image provided in FMPP Final Performance Report

Connecting Rural Producers to Urban Markets

FMLFPP awards were made in 49 states and the District of Columbia, in both rural and urban communities. Approximately 70% of the project managers reported that their projects connected rural producers with urban markets “somewhat” or “to a great extent.” This evaluation did not collect specific data on how projects operating urban markets work with rural producers. Additional exploration of this issue may be helpful to better understand the rural-urban connection.

Marketing, Promotion and Outreach

Nearly 80% of the FMLFPP projects engaged in marketing, promotion or outreach activities. These included building new websites/social media presence, establishing branding, developing sales materials, and establishing relationships with wholesale and institutional buyers.

As a result of these activities, projects reported that nearly 350,000 individuals learned about buying, selling, accessing or producing local and regional foods. Projects also indicated that a similar number of individuals reported their intention to buy, sell, access or produce local and regional foods. Finally, projects reported that nearly 400,000 people bought, sold, or consumed local and regional foods.



Image provided in FMLFPP Final Performance Report

Success Story and Lessons Learned

“In developing the social media strategies and training videos for producers we as an organization gained a lot of knowledge and increased our visibility on those platforms as well.” – Region2

Training and Technical Assistance

FMLFPP projects also provided training, education and technical assistance to farmers, producers and other community stakeholders across the country.

Although the Program did not explicitly identify food safety as a priority area in 2014, 92 FMPP projects and 102 LFPP projects provided education and training on topics such as the prevention, detection, control and intervention food safety practices to more than 3,800 people. Of these, more than 3,600 people reported increasing their knowledge or skills in food safety.

Projects also provided a variety of training relating to food safety certification, including production-related training, such as Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and Good Handling Practices (GHP). Other training sessions focused on food handling to increase consumer confidence about producer and local food business food safety practices. For example, some projects facilitated ServSafe certification, which teaches safe handling practices to foodservice employees. As many states require this type of certification for food handlers, this type of training is particularly important for LFPP projects that focused on developing food production businesses, especially those looking to enter institutional and wholesale markets.

Altogether, project managers reported that more than 3,400 people attended training related to food safety certifications. The data collected for this evaluation did not capture the numbers of certifications awarded. However, this has been added as a standardized outcome measures for FMLFPP, so these data should be available from current and future projects as applicable.

Training and technical assistance relating to business development are reported under the following section, page 22.

Economic Impact

The economic impact of FMLFPP can be characterized by several metrics, including how the program created new economic opportunities and sales. As an initial step to report an

Success Story and Lessons Learned

[Our] project assisted nontraditional, historically marginalized entrepreneurs through the creation of applicable and culturally appropriate materials; [holding] evening and weekend classes to accommodate working schedules and family obligations; and providing individual mentoring and technical assistance. [We] adapted to the specific needs of participants and ultimately offered a single-language course in either English or Spanish. The services provided through this project enabled participants to move beyond simple awareness of licensure towards mastery of key concepts and procedures for keeping food for public consumption safe. [Only] those with capital can readily access this basic but vital information; however, with this grant, we increased low-income entrepreneurs' access to these principles. – Region2

economic measure for the projects, the evaluation team used Meter’s⁵ suggested economic multiplier of 1.3 to estimate overall economic impact. This measurement estimates the number of times a dollar earned cycles in a local community before it leaves. Meter suggests that local food systems create a connected economy, encouraging locals to trade with each other thereby building local commerce and business ownership.

Using the ‘Increase in Sales’ metric obtained through a systematic review of all available FMPP and LFPP final performance reports, each program’s total increased sales was multiplied by 1.3 to demonstrate economic impact in their communities. While the local multiplier may not provide a comprehensive measure of Return on Investment (ROI), it can still provide a helpful general estimate.

Table 9. Estimated Economic Impact

Estimated Economic Impact and Return on Investment of 2014 FMLFPP Grants				
2014 FMLFPP Grantees reporting sales data	Funding Awarded*	Change in Sales**	Estimated Economic Impact	Estimated Return on Investment
FMPP & LFPP (N=191)	\$14,844,807	\$30,494,547	\$39,642,911	2.67
*Funding values shown only for projects reporting the change in sales metric in the Final Performance Report				
**A few grantees reported negative sales; these values were included as 0 for ROI analyses				

In final performance reports, a challenge for many of the projects was collecting change in sales data. Some farmers/producers did not have a reliable system to track sales or were reluctant to share their sales data with the project. Projects also relied on vendor self-reporting of sales, which may not provide an accurate accounting, and some projects did not require their vendors to report sales.

Most of the project managers (80%) reported continuing after the grant funding period, with the survey data showing increased sales (68%) and customers (79%). More than half (59%) of planning project managers reported that sales data were not calculated or not applicable. However, 35% of planning project managers reported an increase in their organization’s gross sales and 56% reported an increase in their customer base.

A majority (70%) of FMPP project managers reported that average vendor sales and average visitor count increased. Approximately 64% of FMPP and LFPP Implementation project managers reported an increase in the number of agricultural producers selling in their markets.

In addition to providing information about sales, projects reported other economic outcomes.

⁵ Meter, K.M. (2010). Metrics from the Field. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development* 1(2), p.9-12

Economic Development Strategies

LFPP project managers reported using a variety of economic development strategies that could impact local communities. The most frequent strategy reported by both Planning and Implementation projects was increasing the share of local products sold in pre-existing markets (70%). LFPP projects also focused on helping existing organizations become more efficient (50%) and incubating small businesses (44%).

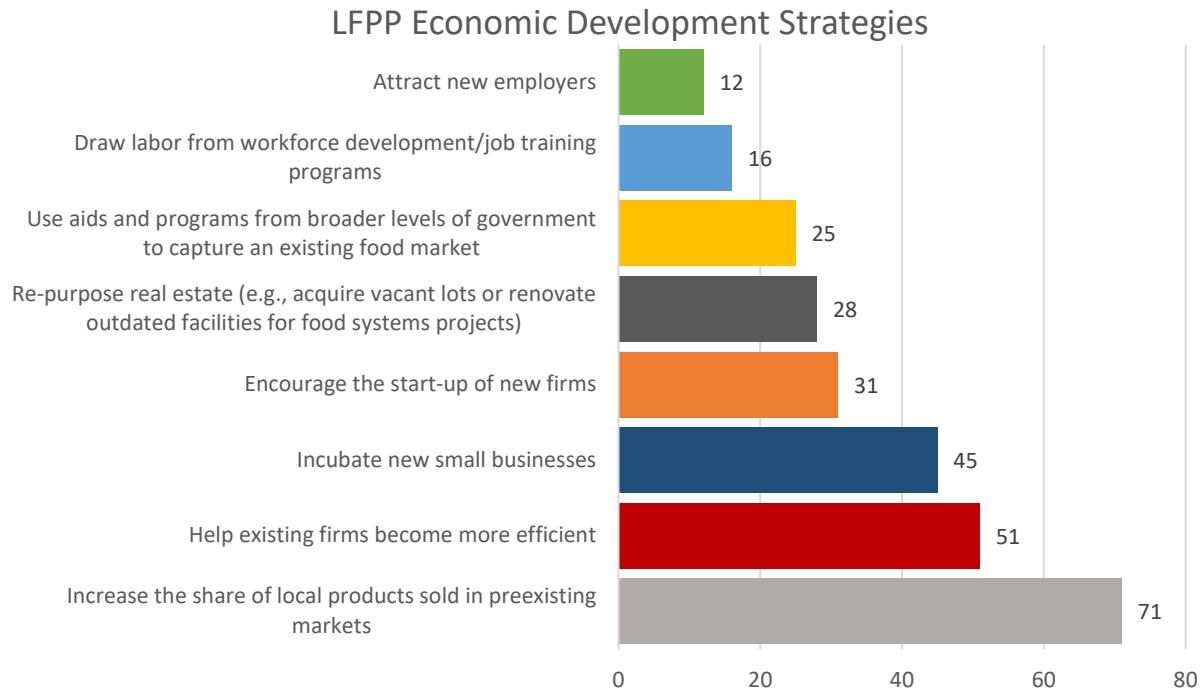


Figure 5. LFPP Economic Development Strategies

“We are proud to have the only Farm Trail in the state of Virginia. Visitors think having one website where you can access all of the agritourism sites in the Shenandoah Valley is very convenient and “pretty cool.” We heard this consistently when speaking with people at events, festivals, and farmers markets. We have been told by a visiting site selector consultant that Fields of Gold is an economic development differentiator for our region.” – Region 6



Dancing performances by local students attracted large audiences to the Farmers Market

Image provided in LFPP Final Performance Report

Some LFPP Implementation projects (39%) also undertook non-construction infrastructure improvements such as: increasing access to large equipment (e.g., refrigeration, washing equipment, and packaging equipment); implementing software solutions such as Point of Sale or inventory management; customer management, and food traceability; improving physical space; or establishing an infrastructure for transportation. Grant recipients conducted regional data analytics and software development projects such as inventory management, mapping tools that connect local producers with existing local food resources, and data analytics for meat producers, which increases capacity for future market development opportunities.

Non-Construction Infrastructure Upgrades Services

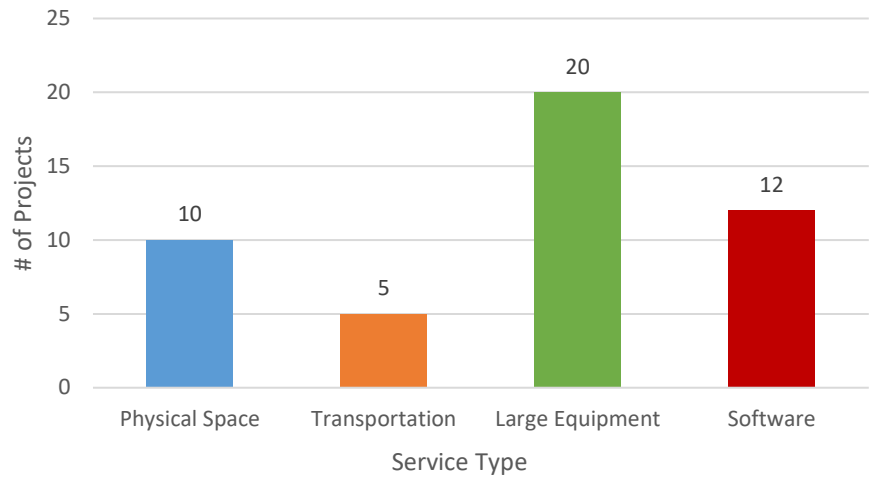


Figure 6. LFPP Non-Construction Infrastructure Upgrades

LFPP Planning project managers (43%) reported determining how to best utilize existing land or facilities for their local food system, a strategy often delivered in tandem with incubating new business. For example, projects conducted market research and/or strategic planning to identify local producer needs. This planning process justified next steps to identify infrastructure for cold storage, kitchens to undertake value-added processing, and food hub facilities for aggregation, storage, and distribution.



Mairs Market Building before construction



Mairs Market Building transformed into the Owens Valley Growers Cooperative Café and Store.

Image provided in LFPP Final Performance Report

Agricultural Business Training and Technical Assistance

Projects also provided financial and business-related training and technical assistance to local food businesses and producers. Nearly 8,000 growers, producers, processors, aggregators and distributors attended training sessions to learn about accessing and managing financial resources, business and

operations licensure, business planning, and other relevant topics. As part of this training, grant recipients worked with producers and processors to create more than 200 business plans for local organizations. Project managers also reported that they developed 121 strategic plans. This includes a mix of those done by Planning projects and those done by Farmers Market and Implementation projects as technical assistance or training to producers.

FMLFPP projects also provided training to more than 6,000 people on topics related to food processing. Training sessions about value-added processing taught producers how to make other types of finished products from their raw produce. Examples include making salsa out of tomatoes, pesto out of basil, and packaging vegetables for easy preparation and cooking.

Projects conducted trainings that led to entrepreneurial and career opportunities for participants. The evaluation found that FMLFPP assisted 989 beginning farmers enter local or regional food production. According to 71% of project managers, most beginning farmers were socially disadvantaged, generally defined as economically or socially marginalized. Although FMLFPP was not specifically designed to focus on workforce development, project managers reported creating 675 new careers. In aggregate, grant recipients reported that more than 6,500 jobs were created or maintained in local communities.



Food Business Workshops

Mark your calendars for our upcoming workshops for farmers and food producers at the Allen Market Place. Contact Egypt at 517-999-3923 or exchange@allenneighborhoodcenter.org for questions or to RSVP.

For more information, visit www.allenmarketplace.org

friday
JAN
16

Growing Your Internet Presence

1:00pm – 3:00pm, at the Allen Market Place
Websites and social media have the potential to have a huge marketing impact for your business. Learn options for website creation and get design tips for creating an effective website, as well as advice on how to best use social media to your advantage. Workshop led by Sam Rose of Halocene Systems, LLC and Veronica Gracia-Wing of Piper & Gold Public Relations.

friday
JAN
30

Effective Crop Planning: How to Plan for Your Target Markets

1:00pm – 3:00pm, at the Allen Market Place
Crop planning is a vital component of farm success. Learn to grow your bottom line through effective planning and efficient use of space. We'll discuss how to identify crop needs and create seeding, transplanting, and harvest schedules to meet the needs of your markets and ensure you have a steady supply of high-quality product. Workshop led by Dan Filius of MSU Student Organic Farm.

friday
FEB
13

Developing a Farm Safety Plan

1:00pm – 3:00pm, at the Allen Market Place
Join us as farm food safety expert Phil Tocco, of MSU Extension, explains food safety concerns for farmers. Learn how to identify potential hazards and complete a meaningful food safety plan.

friday
FEB
20

How to Use Local Orbit

1:00pm – 3:00pm, at the Allen Market Place
Interested in buying or selling through the Allen Market Place Exchange, but intimidated by our online sales system? Already on the Exchange and interested in learning how to best make it work for your business? Join us to learn the ins and outs of the Local Orbit platform.

friday
FEB
27

Who Licenses Your Food Business?

1:00pm – 3:00pm, at the Allen Market Place
Licensing of ready to eat and packaged food products can be tricky! You need to know how your product is categorized, who to get licensing from, and what steps you need to take. Here to help are Amy Thomas from the Ingham County Health Department and Ken Settimo from the Michigan Department of Agriculture & Rural Development.

friday
MAR
6

Diversify Your Revenue Streams: Exciting Business Ideas for Small Farms

1:00pm – 3:00pm, at the Allen Market Place
Looking for ways to strengthen your farm business and grow sales? Ever consider adding cut-flowers or a u-pick operation to your farm? Or turning some of your fresh farm produce into a value-added product? Come learn from experienced local farmers how these business ideas have worked for them. Workshop led by Denae Friedheim of Foodshed Farm and Anne Rauscher of Swallowtail Farm.

friday
MAR
20

Crop Storage & Post-Harvest Handling

1:00pm – 3:00pm, at the Allen Market Place
Keep your crops at peak quality and freshness: learn recommended best practices for post-harvest handling and crop storage techniques for common Michigan horticultural crops. Explore different storage options to meet the needs of your farm. Workshop led by Ellen Murphy of the MSU Student Organic Farm

Image provided in FMPP Final Performance Report

Objective 2 – Regional and National Impact

To look at FMLFPP’s impact on the local food industry’s capacity, both regionally and nationally, the evaluation examined the successes, unanticipated outcomes and lessons learned from the 2014 projects.

Successes

FMLFPP project managers shared what they considered to be their biggest successes. Similar to the challenges reported, there were some common themes particularly across the FMPP and LFPP Implementation projects.

FMPP Respondant Reported Successes

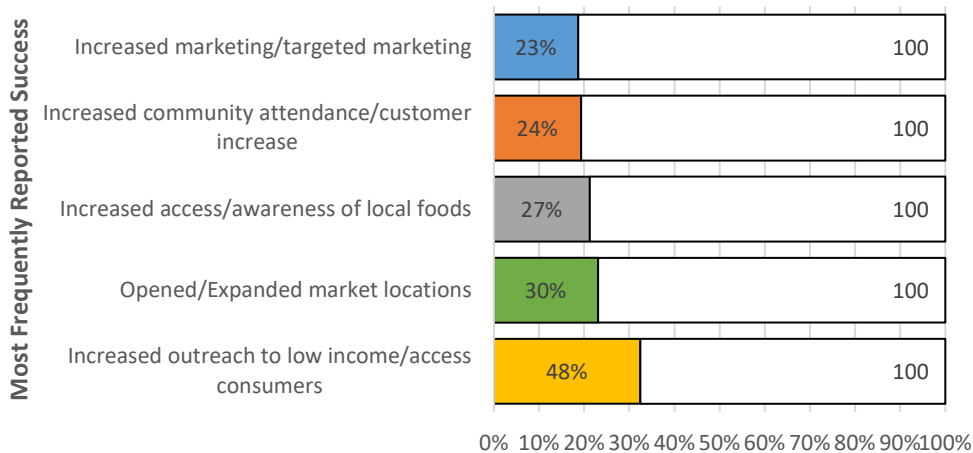


Figure 7. FMPP Successes

LFPP Respondant Reported Successes

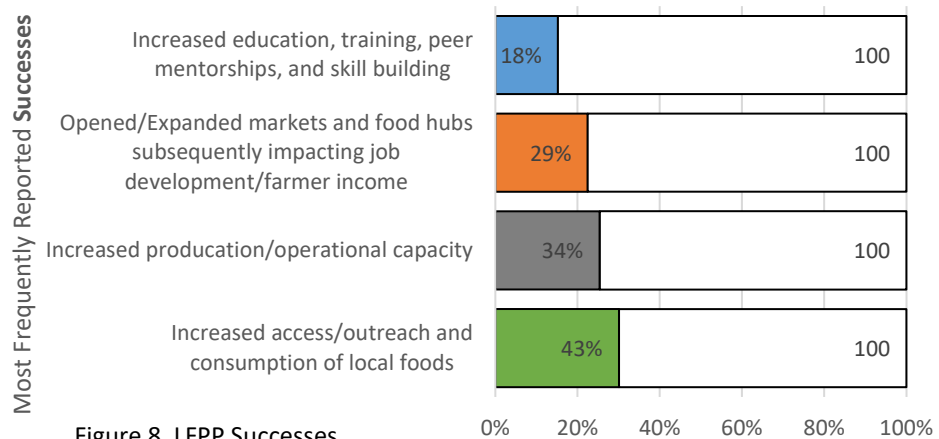


Figure 8. LFPP Successes

More than 25% of project managers reported that building relationships and establishing connections with new partner organizations and community resources was their greatest success.

Unanticipated Outcomes and Lessons Learned

Project managers also reported unanticipated outcomes and lessons learned. LFPP Planning (27%) and Implementation (34%) project managers frequently shared that they were surprised at the difficulty they experienced in collaborating and building partnerships, while at the same time realizing how important those relationships are to the projects. FMPP project managers (9%) also reported they were not expecting the challenges of working with partners, including producers, vendors, and staff. More positively, 25% of FMPP project managers did not anticipate the level of success they saw from their programs. For example, several project managers talked about how their markets became community destinations for families to gather to enjoy local food and entertainment.

Another project manager shared a news article from NPR⁶ about one of their farmers who built brick pizza ovens on their property to bake and sell organic pizza using their produce and locally made meats and cheeses. During the growing season, the farm is also a destination for local residents and others in the region.

Project managers also shared lessons learned relating to building partnerships. Nearly half (47%) of the FMPP and LFPP Implementation project managers and one-third of the planning project managers reported the need to establish strong partnerships. Twenty-four percent of project managers emphasized the importance of hiring and training the right staff for the project. FMPP project managers mentioned hiring paid staff and sustaining dedicated volunteers, as well as providing quality training for staff, producers, and other stakeholders as challenges. FMPP and LFPP Implementation project managers also said that better data collection and recordkeeping, and an increased focus on marketing and social media would be targeted improvement areas. To better serve producers and consumers, FMPP project managers (15%) also identified the need to change locations or dates, times, or seasons in operation.



John Ivanko/Courtesy of Stoney Acres Farm

Success Story and Lessons Learned

“Our consignment table was a huge success, it was a great opportunity for producers that were too small or busy to have their own booth at the farmer’s market.” – Region 1

⁶ <https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2015/08/19/427432403/family-farms-turn-to-pizza-to-connect-with-new-customers>

Additional lessons learned by grant recipients included:

- “Make sure there is a **strong support network** (ideally the people who write the grant would maintain involvement and sit on this committee) for the objectives of the grant, and create a grant committee to oversee the work of the grant and support the various tasks, including hiring of grant employees.”
- “**Network, network, network!** We have learned that the most valuable part of any educational event we organize for market farmers is the networking that takes place outside the formal presentations. We have gradually shifted our approach toward events that are explicitly FOR networking, e.g. the three Farmers & Chefs networking events we held last winter.”
- “Getting vendors to participate is a challenge, need to develop relationships with these people; beneficial to work with **healthcare partners.**”
- “What worked really well for us is a strong established **network of partners** with similar large-scale vision but particular skills, and their own resources and networks.”
- “**Working with statewide and regional partners presented a challenge because community project needs vary.** In the beginning, we had a hard time communicating the goals of the project to smaller hubs who were more isolated and felt that they were not big enough to participate in the corridor work...the experience of the partners and the ability to know what the smaller communities needed in order to grow their markets was invaluable to this project.”
- “A very big lesson from this grant--- the **staff** that did not work out during the LFPP grant came to us from the non-profit world. We are a company with a social mission, but we stand very firmly in the distribution world, which can be rough and challenging. In our eyes the non-profit world creates valuable demand for local foods, and we deliver on that demand with distributor tools. Our most successful hires have come from the world of supply chain. A very valuable lesson!”

Grant recipients also shared lessons learned about offering delivery options. While less than 20% of FMPP projects offered delivery options, 64% of LFPP Implementation projects focused on expanding delivery options as a strategy to increase consumer access. FMPP project recipients described offering delivery to homebound individuals, senior citizens, or low-income communities, often through the CSA box or buying-club models. Delivery options often require significant resources, so lessons learned from these include: 1) Create a central pick-up location (e.g., library, larger employers, housing authority); 2) Have mobile food truck to meet customers on lunch break; and 3) Partner with local U.S. Post Office to deliver local produce, value-added and pantry products. Several FMPP projects combined online ordering with delivery options, with one project piloting online order and delivery service processes to expand this option to SNAP/EBT customers.

Project and Program Growth

FMLFPP provided seed funding for many organizations to grow their local and regional food economies. Project managers and grant recipients reported that funding helped them to build capacity, develop partnerships, operational plans, and secure resources and additional funding to sustain projects. Most projects (90%) reported establishing or maintaining partnerships as part of their work. Nearly 60% of project managers reported forming partnerships with government agencies and foundations or philanthropic organizations, 51% with chefs/culinary institutes, 45% with pre-k-12 schools, 44% with city and regional planning groups, and 41% with food banks/food pantries.

LFPP Planning projects most often said that government program/agency partnerships were most critical to realizing goals (39%). FMPP and LFPP Implementation projects (33% and 34%, respectively) most frequently reported that partnerships with foundations/philanthropy organizations were most important to project success. Approximately 30% of project managers reported that healthcare organizations were the most important contributors to project success. Healthcare partners assisted with marketing efforts to targeted consumers and provided resources such as market match programs or transportation.

Finally, project managers reported additional funds and resources received as a result of their 2014 FMLFPP grant to continue efforts in their local communities. As shown in the following table, projects secured an additional \$20 million from other sources.

Table 10. Funds/Resources Received as a Result of the 2014 FMLFPP Grants

Funding Source	FMPP	LFPP I	LFPP P	Total
Government funding	\$2,178,324	\$3,184,500	\$809,549	\$6,172,373
Foundation grants	\$1,144,101	\$3,391,000	\$745,920	\$5,281,021
In-kind support	\$610,001	\$727,863	\$303,600	\$1,641,464
Donations	\$604,301	\$781,500	\$32,750	\$1,418,551
Income from other programs	\$419,911	\$945,700	\$122,000	\$1,487,611
Bank loans	\$145,000	\$728,000	\$660,000	\$1,533,000
Membership/subscription fees	\$115,860	\$147,300	\$73,000	\$336,160
EBT equipment/resources	\$64,753	\$3,701	\$11,000	\$79,454
Infrastructure provided by a government entity	\$62,000	\$486,000	\$4,750	\$552,750
Private investors	\$800	\$231,000	\$6,500	\$238,300
Organization/founder's own capital	n/a	n/a	\$426,932	\$426,932

Many FMLFPP projects continue to build their capacity to meet community needs. When projects reported at the end of their grant that they were unable to meet goals, it was often due to the short time-frame of the grant and planned partnerships that did not fulfill agreed-upon work. By 2018, the majority of projects (88%) reported that most or all of their partners had followed through with agreed-upon project activities. This demonstrates the capacity that projects developed to achieve long-term results, which is difficult to track within a one- or two-

year funding period. It was clear that partnerships, networks, and community support are critical elements to project success. It takes time to develop these relationships and it can be challenging to recognize important turning points and even successes in the midst of a project. As noted above, capturing longer term results can be helpful to better demonstrate impact.

Objective 3 – Barriers to Achieving FMLFPPs Primary Purposes

While the FMLFPP has achieved many successes as noted through the evaluation, project managers and grant recipients have experienced some challenges. Addressing some of these may remove barriers to achieving the overarching program’s primary purpose.

Challenges

More than half (55%) of FMLFPP project managers responding to the survey indicated that their top challenge was creating interest, buy-in, and participation in their communities. Nearly half (48%) of LFPP project managers reported that access to capital was a barrier, while about 40% of FMPP project managers indicated that engaging the community was a challenge.

A theme found in final performance reports was that grant recipients recognize the importance of connecting local food distribution with wholesalers, e.g., restaurants and large grocery chains, but faced challenges such as lack of commitment from buyers or having sufficient products to meet wholesaler requirements. Other challenges included helping farmers plan their growing season and pricing to meet wholesaler needs or increasing interest in wholesaling among producers.

One LFPP project focused solely on traceability and labeling for wholesale markets as a method to increase access for local producers. Another opened a retail site that allowed wholesalers to see the range of local food products offered, meet producers, and determine how local foods could be incorporated into restaurant menus. Training was provided to help farmers meet safety or product requirements for wholesale markets. LFPP grant recipients often recognized this challenge and indicated that future efforts would address assisting producers work with wholesalers.

Challenges in Collecting Data

A specific challenge noted by about 20% of the project managers was the difficulty in collecting data from consumers, vendors, producers, and other community stakeholders as part of evaluating or documenting project progress and outcomes. More than one-third of the FMPP project managers, in particular, reported difficulty with evaluating their projects.

FMPP project managers collected some data on producers (75%), sales (73%), customers (69%), food vendors (56%) and training participants (38%). These projects most often reported using sign-in sheets or other check-in methods at events to track food vendors and producers (34%) and training participants (57%). They also used vendor applications/agreements (29%) and surveys with vendors (22%), producers (24%), and customers (39%) to collect information. FMPP projects also used clickers (30%) and head counts (25%) to track numbers of customers.

Sales were often tracked through EBT Terminal Reports (35%), credit/debit card sales records (29%), and/or vendor self-reported sales (18%).

Nearly all LFPP Planning project managers (97%) reported that they collected project-level data. Most gathered information on producers (68%) and customers (63%), and a little over half collected data on vendors (53%). Most used surveys or questionnaires (42%), or interviews (36%) to gather this information. Less than half (42%) collected sales data and 16% reported that they did not collect project-related data. All LFPP Implementation project managers reported collecting some data on producers (77%), sales (76%), customers (69%), or vendors (43%). More than half (55%) of project managers reported using software solutions (e.g., FoodConnex, Point of Sale, Quickbooks) to track project-related data; 38% used surveys.

Most Planning project managers (61%) reported receiving assistance with data collection from contractors (70%) or project partner volunteers (60%). In contrast, most Implementation project managers (78%) did not receive assistance with project data collection. When they did receive assistance, it was mostly from project partners or other volunteers (17%) or paid staff (14%). Similar to Implementation, most FMPP project managers (70%) did not receive assistance collecting project-related data; of those that did, most often it was through groups such as AmeriCorps, market managers, interns, or other partners or volunteers.

Partnership between FMLFPP and Recipient Organizations

USDA AMS Grants Management Specialists assigned to FMLFPP interact with grant applicants and funded projects to provide administrative guidance. They also provide informational resources to projects, link grantees to others with similar goals, and work to strengthen the FMLFPP peer network. Project managers reported that AMS staff provided general grant administration assistance, such as how to complete reports and submit invoices and that they were friendly, responsive, professional, providing encouragement in addition to resources such as food hub guides or making connections to local Extension Agents or Farm Service Agency offices. Managers consistently reported that they could benefit most from additional support with networking to make connections to similar projects and communities of practice (see Appendix G). To address program growth, AMS staff have implemented changes such as increasing the length and budget amount of the funding cycle and providing resources such as more one-on-one communication to support implementation and reporting efforts. AMS has also held quarterly conference calls and conducted site visits. This support can be valuable, particularly for organizations that may not have worked with a federal program before.

Based on data from the 2014 FMLFPP evaluation, the following observations and recommendations are provided.

Observations

- LFPP grant recipients found success with value-added products/processing, and undertook strategies such as recipes trials and shared-use kitchens to explore potential.

As a result, this increased income to local and regional food producers, created new job opportunities, and opened new direct-to-consumer markets while reducing food waste.

- Partnerships with healthcare partners were often noted as important to achieving project goals, especially goals to increase access to local and regional foods in underserved communities, with 116 LFPP and 125 FMPP projects referencing partnerships within the health sector. Some projects also utilized partners in faith-based communities to increase local and regional food access in low-income communities; 19 projects focused efforts on gleaning to increase access to local food.
- While all projects had a goal of increasing access to local and regional foods, there was a wide variety of products and strategies used. Projects focused on meats including lamb, beef, pork, chicken, turkey, duck, fish and rabbit; dairy products such as fresh milk, butter, and cheese; fruits from apples to blueberries and vegetables from beets to green beans; as well as fresh-pressed juices and beer. Unique strategies pursued to gain market share included studying the feasibility of mobile slaughtering, recipe trials for value-added processing, increasing delivery options and CSAs, and working with chefs, restaurants, and other culinary professionals to educate local communities on how to prepare local foods. Sharing these different strategies among the projects is important while also recognizing that no one approach works for everyone. For example, one project shared they were going to move their market to an indoor location to address weather issues. Another project described how moving indoors reduced their visibility, and subsequently, number of consumers.
- One FMPP project reported collaboration as part of the EPA's 2015 Local Food, Local Places initiative, and four LFPP projects reported either EPA as a government stakeholder, leveraging projects with other community EPA grants, considering applying for EPA funding as a next step in business development. Local food systems projects designed as part of an overall community development or neighborhood revitalization strategy may be a viable long-term strategy for increasing access to local and regional foods.
- Some projects discussed the need to start as a non-profit group to access important financial resources and partnerships that support local and regional foods, then transition to a for-profit model. Given the heavy reliance on government and foundation funders, organizations considering changing business models may want to conduct feasibility studies to ensure this is a good strategy.

Recommendations

- *Strategies that focus on culturally relevant food practices may increase access to and consumption of local and regional foods.* Thirteen projects worked with a tribal group, 30 projects reported working with immigrant and/or refugee (e.g., Hmong) communities, and 55 projects reported working with Spanish-speaking populations to develop training and outreach materials to both create economic opportunities for these populations as well as

encourage consumption of local and regional foods that appeal to their cultures and traditions.

- *Continued focus on program requirements for serving areas of concentrated poverty and making awards to new grant recipients may expand the reach of the program.* The FMLFPP regulations require prioritizing funding for projects that benefit communities located in areas of concentrated poverty with limited access to fresh locally or regionally grown foods; and have not received benefits from the program in the recent past. In 2014, 68% of project funding went to communities located in areas of concentrated poverty, which meets the regulatory requirements. For priority being given to new grant recipients, results showed that 14% of grant recipients had previously benefitted from program funding between 2010 and 2012; while 21% received funding from the program between 2015 and 2017. However, 15 of these awards were LFPP planning projects that then received LFPP Implementation or FMPP funding. This would indicate a need for AMS to increase funding for new grant recipients.
- *Facilitating connections to other USDA could leverage resources to expand the impact of the program.* Seven (4%) FMPP and eleven LFPP (6%) projects reported partnering with USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service to provide producer workshops and trainings on varied topics such as marketing, accessing farm credit, or working with other government agencies. One LFPP Planning project reported an unanticipated project outcome was to become a NRCS training site. Additionally, six (4%) FMPP and nine (5%) LFPP projects reported partnering with USDA's Farm Service Agency or providing FSA information to producers. Connecting projects and producers to existing federal and state government resources could increase impact and producer success.
- *Encouraging the development of peer networks and connecting with other grant recipients may build capacity across the program.* Projects emphasized the importance of marketing and social media, data collection, or developing plans for local and regional food projects. To meet this need, the program could connect grant recipients with training and education opportunities in developing partnerships or staffing structures, as well as facilitating a strong network of grantees who share strategies and solutions (e.g., many projects had successful marketing/social media strategies).
- *Continued focus on reporting and data collection strategies may provide more comprehensive evidence of program impacts and outcomes.* Valid and reliable data collection is a critical component in being able to report outcomes and impact. The 2014 FMLFPP projects did collect data from various stakeholder groups; however, additional training and assistance with this process could help the program better document the overall impact of the FMLFPP. The document review of final performance reports provided the evaluation team an opportunity to better understand FMLFPP reporting needs, current processes, and inconsistencies in how projects interpreted and completed these reports. Appendix G provides specific recommendations relating to technical assistance, performance report template content, timelines and reporting tools.