North Coast Opportunities, Inc., of Ukiah, CA, received $97,629 to pay for training in season extension, producer-to-consumer marketing, and value-added production; to purchase 2 hoop houses and value-added production supplies, including kitchen rental, and to provide training to a farmers market manager.

Final Report FY 10

Final Performance Report

Recipient Name: North Coast Opportunities
Title of Project: MCGROW
Date: November 16, 2012
Grant Number: AK-389-2010-G-1128
Location (City/State): Ukiah, CA

Project Summary:

Mendocino County is a rural, agricultural county. We have 8 certified farmers markets in our county and a handful of uncertified markets spread out across a large, unique landscape with highly varied communities. Our county is coastal and touristy in parts and isolated and tribal in others. We have a low population density of only about 25 people per square mile and a high poverty rate with about 63 percent of children in the county participating in the free/reduced-price meal program. A constant throughout, however, is the presence of small farms and ranches. The goal of the MCGROW project was to 1) increase the production of local foods, 2) increase the demand for locally produced foods and 3) strengthen the capacity of the farmers market managers. By increasing the supply of and demand for locally produced foods and improving the markets in which they are sold we can contribute to the health, economic vitality and food security of Mendocino County. We did this by partnering with our local farmers, businesses, non-profits, schools, cooperative extension agents, and community members to provide training and resources at both coastal and inland locations. We offered a variety of trainings for farmers on increasing production and sales and for market managers on improving their markets. We also developed a wide variety of educational and promotional materials and activities to market our farmers markets to our local citizens. Many of these materials are attached, but not all as some (such as banners and posters) were too large.

Project Approach:

The intention of the MCGROW project was to increase demand for and availability of locally produced foods, marketed directly to consumers. This would be accomplished by increasing the production capacity of new and existing farmers, by increasing access to local foods through strengthened farmers markets, and by increasing the demand for local foods through community promotion and outreach.

Throughout the grant period we stuck to our core objectives of supporting Mendocino County farmers and farmers markets. We worked closely with the Mendocino County Farmers Market Association (MCFARM), which operates all 8 certified farmers markets in the county, to make sure the work conducted was relevant to the market managers and vendors. Capacity building was a core goal for these two audiences- we provided numerous trainings for both market managers and vendors ranging in focus from conflict resolution to season extension. In addition, we focused on increasing market

demand through our “Marketing the Market” promotions- lawn signs, flyers, brochures and more that promoted our local farmers markets and the benefits of eating local. We also worked to make the markets a more lively, fun and informative place to visit by conducting cooking demos at each of the markets.

Towards the end of the grant period (Fall 2012), we realized that there is serious need for the networking opportunities we have been providing and a desire to continue the marketing efforts that extends beyond the FMPP funding period. To that effect, we are continuing with two major activities that deviate from our timeline as originally proposed. The first is a Farmers Convergence that will be held in February 2013. This event will provide local producers a chance to share ideas and network. We feel that the foundation laid during the MCGROW grant needs to be built upon as we continue to strengthen our farming community. A strong farming community is critical to growing new farmers in our region. The same holds true for our efforts to increase awareness of and demand for locally produced foods. We will continue the marketing efforts started under the MCGROW grant into the future with a “Go Local” marketing campaign that will highlight our locally produced foods.

One of the challenges encountered during the project was getting farmers to attend our trainings. Our county is large, rural and very spread out. To get from one end to the other can take nearly 4 hours on curvy, two-lane roads depending on where you are located. In addition, traditional marketing channels aren’t as effective here. We have limited access to high speed internet in our county and many farmers do not utilize email or visit websites. Often it requires a direct invitation to get a farmer to attend a training, which is difficult to do with a limited staff and resources. In short, it is difficult to get the word out about our trainings and even harder to get people to spend the time, effort and gas money required to attend.

The goal of the MCGROW project was to 1) increase the production of local foods, 2) increase the demand for locally produced foods and 3) strengthen the capacity of the farmers market managers.

Project goals were accomplished through a range of trainings and support for new and existing farmers: professional development for market managers; and producer-to-consumer marketing, community promotion and education.

1) *Increase the production of local foods:* Aspiring, beginning and experienced farmers were provided a variety of opportunities to skill share and attend training workshops in marketing, value-added production, season extension and working with MCFARM.

   Workshops conducted included: Build-A-Hoop House (2), Hoop House Production (2), Food Safety Certification, Value-Added Production, Long-Term Food Storage, Business Planning and Farm Financing.

2) *Increase demand for locally produced foods:* A number of strategies were implemented to reach out to the Mendocino County community to education them about the benefits of shopping at

local farmers markets and supporting local farmers. These strategies included: Cooking demos at all farmers' markets with accompanying recipe cards during both the 2011 and 2012 seasons (plus purchase of cooking demo set-up supplies); a Meet Me At the Market yard sign promotion project that created 40 yard signs for each market town, distributed to farmers market customers by the farmers market managers and vendors to increase awareness of the farmers market community; Benefits of Eating Local posters and brochures (in English and in Spanish) which were distributed county-wide; a "C'mon Home To Eat" campaign that included posters, decals for stores and restaurants, a website, and banners; education regarding use of EBT and SNAP benefits at participating markets.

3) *Strengthen the capacity of the farmers market managers:* Eight MCFARM market managers and support staff attended a variety of workshops to increase their ability to successfully manage and promote Mendocino County farmers markets, including: Record Keeping and Reporting, Managing Market Finances, Marketing and Promotions, Leadership and Conflict Resolution along with Communication Skill Building. Workshops were three to six hours in length.

Beneficiaries:

McGROW beneficiaries included farmers, local food entrepreneurs, farmers market managers, school and community farms, and consumers.

Aspiring, beginning and experienced farmers benefited as they were provided opportunities to network and skill share and attended workshops. The gained stronger skills in extended season production, processing, food safety, storage, business and crop planning, farm financing and value added production.

Local entrepreneurs benefited from business planning training, food safety certification, and new skills in food processing techniques, direct marketing, and value added production.

Farmers market managers benefited from increases in sales, variety, vendors, and consumer interest. They also gained skills that increased their capacity as market managers.

School and community farms, such as Brookside Farm in Willits and Noyo Food Forest in Fort Bragg benefitted from serving as training sites for hands-on training that increased their capacity to produce food throughout the year and market to local schools.

Consumers benefited with increased knowledge and access to healthy foods, learning the benefit of a healthy diet and shopping for seasonal foods at local farmers markets, increased community involvement by attending and meeting their neighbors at the markets, and learning new preparation methods.

Lessons Learned:

We've learned what's desired and what's appropriate in our community. Many of the farms are like a big market-size gardens (rather than a small commercial farms) and many of the ideas generated in the grant proposal needed to be modified to be effective tools for the real size of the farms and farmers in our county. We learned that it takes a considerable amount of time to get information out to our local farmers and encourage them to let loose of their "independent spirits" and take on new knowledge and ideas. We learned that working with local vendors for design and printing needs is not always effective in terms of turn-around time or quality of work produced. We learned that many of our farmers take on farming as a second business and they don't necessarily think of it as a business per se, often more as a hobby or lifestyle. We learned that the market managers in each location have vastly different needs, yet the need to promote local foods and local farms is critical to the economic success of the markets and the local farmers.

Additional Information:

Attached are examples of some of our marketing materials, such as:

1. lawn signs
2. Eat Local brochure- Spanish
3. Eat Local posters- English
4. C'mon Home to Eat pennant, decals and posters

As well as some of the materials from our workshops:

5. April 23 Marketing Workshop Agenda
6. Marketing & Promotions Worksheet
7. Finance and Biz Planning Workshop Flyer
8. Finance and Biz Planning Workshop Agenda
9. Season Extension Workshop Flyer