

**FARMERS' MARKET AND LOCAL FOOD PROMOTION PROGRAM  
(FMLFPP)**

**Final Performance Report**

The final performance report summarizes the outcome and activities of your FMLFPP award objectives. Failure to submit acceptable closeout reports for an existing grant within 90 calendar days following the grant end date may result in exclusion from future AMS grant opportunities.

This final report will be made available to the public once it is approved by FMLFPP 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 **due within 90 days of the project's performance period end date** (as noted in box 15 of your grant agreement (AMS-33), or sooner if the project is complete. The report must be typed single-spaced in 11-point font, not to exceed fifteen (15) 8.5 x 11 pages (excluding existing Final Performance Report form content). For example, if the Final Performance Report form is six (6) pages before you begin entering your project information into the form, your report may be up to 21 pages (6 pages + 15 pages).

Provide answers to **each question** and all applicable outcome and indicators as it applies to your project. If you are unable to provide a response explain why. It is preferred that you email your completed performance report to your assigned FMLFPP Grants Management Specialist to avoid delays. In case of any extraordinary reason a faxed report can be accepted; please notify your assigned Grants Management Specialist to inform about your submission.

<b>Report Date Range:</b> <i>(e.g. October 1, 2016 -September 30, 2017)</i>	October 1, 2016-September 30, 2017
<b>Date Report Submitted</b>	December 30, 2017
<b>Grant Agreement Number:</b> <i>(e.g. 14-LFPPX-XX-XXXX)</i>	16-LFPP-KY-0023
<b>Recipient Organization Name:</b>	High South Foods, LLC
<b>Project Title as Stated on Grant Agreement:</b>	Kentucky Regional Food Aggregation Study and Business Development
<b>Authorized Representative Name:</b>	Lilias Pettit-Scott
<b>Authorized Representative Phone:</b>	(415) 595-5809
<b>Authorized Representative Email:</b>	highsouthfoods@gmail.com
<b>Year Grant was Awarded:</b>	2016
<b>Amount of Award:</b>	\$46,657.50 award with \$17,167.50 match

FMLFPP 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: \_\_\_\_\_

- Executive Summary—In 200 words or less, describe the project's need, purpose, goals, and quantifiable outcomes:

*Kentucky and Southern Indiana's small food producers lack a reliable path to access wholesale markets within the established regional food distribution system. High South Foods LLC assisted in the improvement of local food business enterprises by conducting a feasibility study that identified the region's capacity to support an aggregation business that would create a channel for small food producers to enter the regional food distribution system. To accomplish this goal, High South Foods started the Kentuckiana Food Aggregation Project to build a stakeholder network, conduct a literature review and feasibility study, and disseminate results. The feasibility study collected information from 145 producers and 44 produce buyers to assess the needs and capacity of the food system. To inform the study, producers were recruited to participate on an advisory board and a literature review of 14 regional and national studies on local food distribution was conducted. An aggregation business was not deemed feasible and a needs assessment was created to direct next steps in strengthening existing services to build small farmer capacity. High South Foods disseminated results to the stakeholder network of over 200 people and created a document detailing their process to support replicability in other regions.*

According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, an agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number. The valid OMB control number for this information collection is 0581- 0287. The time required to complete this information collection is estimated to average 4 hours per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable sex, marital status, or familial status, parental status religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program (not all prohibited bases apply to all programs). Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (800) 795-3272 (voice) or (202) 720-6382 (TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

2. Please provide the approved project's objectives:

Objectives		Completed	
		Yes	No*
1	<i>By March 2017, complete a feasibility study of a local food aggregator to connect farmers and institutions in Kentucky and Southern Indiana</i>	X	
2	<i>Establish a network of food producers, purchasers, and partners from regional nonprofit and government organizations</i>	X	
3	<i>Create a comprehensive business plan to launch a regional aggregation business to serve Kentucky and Southern Indiana</i>		X
4	<i>Disseminate results of feasibility study, literature review, and business plan</i>	X	
5			
6			
7			

\*If no is selected for any of the listed objectives, you must expand upon this in the challenges section.

3. List your accomplishments for the project's performance period and indicate how these accomplishments assisted in the fulfillment of your project's objectives. Please include additional objectives approved by FMLFPP during the grant performance period, and highlight the impact that activities had on the project's beneficiaries.

Accomplishments	Relevance to Objective, Outcome, and/or Indicator
	Example: Activities developed are related with our 3 <sup>rd</sup> Objective, Outcome 1, and indicator 2b.
Established a network of over 200 food producers, purchasers, and non-profit and government partners	Activities developed are related with our 2 <sup>nd</sup> Objective.
Completed a literature review of 14 regional food economy studies and national food hub reports	Activities developed are related with our 1 <sup>st</sup> and 4 <sup>th</sup> Objectives, Outcome 5, and indicator 3.
Assembled an Advisory Board of local food producers to guide the direction of the study	Activities developed are related with our 2 <sup>nd</sup> Objective and Outcome 6.
Held 3 Advisory Board Meetings	Activities developed are related with our 2 <sup>nd</sup> Objective, Outcome 1, indicator 1b, Outcome 5, Outcome 6.
Hosted 1 Network Gathering with over 35 producers, buyers, and local food advocates attending	Activities developed are related with our 2 <sup>nd</sup> Objective, 4 <sup>th</sup> Objective, Outcome 1, indicator 1a, indicator 2a, Outcome 5, and Outcome 6.
Conducted a feasibility study to identify if a local food aggregator connecting farmers and institutions would be financially sound in Kentucky and Southern Indiana.	Activities developed are related with our 1 <sup>st</sup> Objective, Outcome 1, indicators 1a, 1b, 2a, 2b, and Outcome 6, indicator 1.
Collected data from 145 regional producers about their sales and needs to increase sales to wholesale buyers	Activities developed are related with our 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> Objectives, Outcome 1, indicators 1a, 1b, and Outcome 6, indicators 1 and 2.
Interviewed 44 regional buyers and collected data about current local food purchasing, plans for increasing local purchasing in the future, and barriers to accessing local food.	Activities developed are related with our 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> Objectives, Outcome 1, indicators 1a, 1b, 2a, 2b, Outcome 5, indicators 1, 2, and 3.

Completed a replicability document outlining the feasibility study process to assist other regions in conducting similar studies on their local food economies.	Activities developed are related with our 4th Objective.
In lieu of a business plan (because it was deemed infeasible in the current food economy), a needs assessment was developed to provide recommendations for next steps in order for a business to be sustainable without continued external funding.	Activities developed are related with our 3rd Objective, and Outcome 3, indicator 3.

4. Please list any challenges experienced during the project’s period of performance. Provide the corrective actions taken to address these issues.

<b>Challenges (Issues)</b>	<b>Corrective Actions and/or Project Changes (s)</b>
No completed business plan	The business models we tested in our feasibility study proved to unfeasible in our current food economy. We shifted to creating a needs analysis with recommendations on how to incorporate services to fulfill producer needs into existing businesses. Since our project began, a local food distributor located close to our study region expanded to serve our region. We are now meeting with that distributor to help them meet the need of the producers identified in our study.
3 advisory board meetings instead of 6	Due to the schedules of our farmer-led advisory board we were only able to meet about every other month vs. monthly. We sent them updates on the project during the months we were unable to meet.
Needed more time to connect to producers and survey responses	Our initial timeline proved too short to connect to the amount of producers we needed. We extended our collection period by 2 month in order to reach more producers. We also added an incentive to our online surveys for a gift card drawing if they completed the survey.
14% increase in knowledge and awareness of aggregation and distribution activities in our region	Our goal was to increase knowledge by 60% but the only place we were able to accurately measure an increase of knowledge was through our pre- and post-surveys administered to our advisory board. We showed a 14% increase in knowledge of aggregation and distribution services within that group. We believe we will hit the 60% increase once our stakeholders, including producers and buyers, review the findings of our study. We do not have a way to monitor that knowledge increase.

5. Quantify the overall progress on the outcomes and indicators of your project. Include further explanation if necessary.

Outcome 1: To Increase Consumption of and Access to Locally and Regionally Produced Agricultural Products.

Indicator	Description	Number
<b>1.</b>	<b>Total number of consumers, farm and ranch operations, or wholesale buyers reached</b>	<b>151</b>
<b>1.a.</b>	The number that gained knowledge on how to buy or sell local/regional food OR aggregate, store, produce, and/or distribute local/regional food	
<b>1.b.</b>	The number that reported an intention to buy or sell local/regional food OR aggregate, store, produce, and/or distribute local/regional food	150
<b>1.c.</b>	The number that reported buying, selling, consuming more or supporting the consumption of local/regional food that they aggregate, store, produce, and/or distribute	150
<b>2.</b>	<b>Total number of individuals (culinary professionals, institutional kitchens, entrepreneurs such as kitchen incubators/shared-use kitchens, etc.) reached</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>2.a.</b>	The number that gained knowledge on how to access, produce, prepare, and/or preserve locally and regionally produced agricultural products	36
<b>2.b.</b>	The number that reported an intention to access, produce, prepare, and/or preserve locally and regionally produced agricultural products	36
<b>2.c.</b>	The number that reported supplementing their diets with locally and regionally produced agricultural products that they produced, prepared, preserved, and/or obtained	

**Outcome 2: Increase Customers and sales of local and regional agricultural products.**

Indicator	Description	Number
<b>1.</b>	<b>Sales increased as a result of marketing and/or promotion activities during the project performance period.</b>	
	Original Sales Amount (in dollars)	
	Resulted Sales Amount (in dollars)	
	Percent Change $((n_{\text{final}} - n_{\text{initial}}) / n_{\text{initial}}) * 100 = \% \text{ change}$	
<b>2.</b>	<b>Customer counts increased during the project performance period.</b>	
	Original Customer Count	
	Resulted Customer Count	
	Percent Change $((n_{\text{final}} - n_{\text{initial}}) / n_{\text{initial}}) * 100 = \% \text{ change}$	

**Outcome 3: Develop new market opportunities for farm and ranch operations serving local markets.**

Indicator	Description	Number
<b>1.</b>	<b>Number of new and/or existing delivery systems/access points of those reached that expanded and/or improved offerings of</b>	

<b>1.a</b>	Farmers markets	
<b>1.b.</b>	Roadside stands	
<b>1.c.</b>	Community supported agriculture programs	
<b>1.d.</b>	Agritourism activities	
<b>1.e.</b>	Other direct producer-to-consumer market opportunities	
<b>1.f.</b>	Local and regional Food Business Enterprises that process, aggregate, distribute, or store locally and regionally produced agricultural products	

Indicator	Description	Number
<b>2.</b>	<b>Number of local and regional farmers and ranchers, processors, aggregators, and/or distributors that reported</b>	
<b>2.a.</b>	An increase in revenue expressed in dollars	
<b>2.b.</b>	A gained knowledge about new market opportunities through technical assistance and education programs	
<b>3.</b>	<b>Number of</b>	
<b>3.a</b>	New rural/urban careers created (Difference between "jobs" and "careers": jobs are net gain of paid employment; new businesses created or adopted can indicate new careers)	
<b>3.b.</b>	Jobs maintained/created	
<b>3.c.</b>	New beginning farmers who went into local/regional food production	
<b>3.d.</b>	Socially disadvantaged farmers who went into local/regional food production	
<b>3.e.</b>	Business plans developed	0

**Outcome 4: Improve the food safety of locally and regionally produced agricultural products.**  
*Only applicable to projects focused on food safety!*

Indicator	Description	Number
<b>1.</b>	Number of individuals who learned about prevention, detection, control, and intervention food safety practices	
<b>2.</b>	Number of those individuals who reported increasing their food safety skills and knowledge	
<b>3.</b>	Number of growers or producers who obtained on-farm food safety certifications (such as Good Agricultural Practices or Good Handling Practices)	

Outcome 5: Quantify the overall progress on this outcome indicator based on relevant project activities not covered above.

*This indicator must reflect the project narrative's required additional outcome indicator.*

**Outcome 5: Increase knowledge of wholesale food aggregation and distribution activities in Kentucky and Southern Indiana**

Indicator	Description	Number
<b>1.</b>	Percentage of distributors working within the project region are identified	100%
<b>2.</b>	Percentage of all wholesale aggregation points throughout the project region are identified	100%
<b>3.</b>	Percentage of increase in knowledge and awareness of aggregation and distribution activities	14%

**Outcome 6: Increase understanding of small to mid-size producer capacity throughout the state of Kentucky and Southern Indiana**

Indicator	Description	Number
1.	Percentage of all regional small to mid-size farmers production outputs are identified and shared	80%
2.	Percentage of network stakeholders confirm market needs are in line with feasibility study outcomes	100%

**Outcome 7: Increase economic investment in local food aggregation**

Indicator	Description	Number
1.	Number of regional aggregation businesses created	0

6. Discuss your community partnerships (include applicant staff and external partners).
  - i. Who were your community partners?
  - ii. How did they contribute to the overall results of the FMLFPP project?
  - iii. How will they continue to contribute to your project’s future activities, beyond the performance period of this FMLFPP grant?
  - iv. What feedback have the partners provided (specific comments) about the results of the project?

*The community partnerships leveraged were invaluable to this project. Partners engaged and the contributions they made through this process were:*

- **Regional farmers:** Served on project Advisory Board—reviewing survey instruments, sharing surveying opportunity with other farmers, offering insight at the producer level, and guiding critical project decisions
- **Kentucky Center for Agricultural and Rural Development (KCARD):** Conducted data collection and analysis, author of feasibility study
- **Wildflower Consulting:** Evaluated project process and impact, assisted in design of informational material about project
- **The University of Kentucky, Bluegrass Farm to Table, Community Ventures, Louisville Farm to Table:** Shared producer and buy contacts, insight into past and current market trends in Louisville and Lexington, consulted on content of public meeting to share feasibility study findings, reviewed
- **Louisville Metro Government:** Provided data, early access to study on regional producer opinions, and meeting space
- **Community Farm Alliance:** Facilitated connections to regional producers
- **Kentucky State Extension Office:** Shared producer surveys with contacts
- **The Table:** Provided meeting space for project team and Advisory Board meetings

*Moving forward, regional producers from the project Advisory Board and partners from the University of Kentucky, Bluegrass Farm to Table, Community Ventures, and Louisville Farm to Table will assist in guiding next steps of sharing lessons learned from the feasibility study and making connections between buyers and small-scale producers. In light of the feasibility study’s conclusions that a business with the*

*desired parameters is not sustainable, we aim to leverage and strengthen partnerships formed through this project and share data and lessons learned with the existing regional entities working to connect producers with wholesale opportunities.*

*Feedback from Partners during evaluation interviews:*

- *If a food hub cannot sustain itself without grants, it's going to fail*
- *I consider myself a connector so I would love to play that role.*
- *From the production side, a lot of farmers don't want to give up their high end wholesale price.*
- *Most of them are small farmers. Andre Barbour resurrected Fresh Stops by working sub-wholesale with Karyn, and made it profitable. No one wanted to work with her because they didn't want to give up their price per unit cost.*
- *Are these growers willing to take the next step in scaling up?*
- *There's a group in Chicago – FarmLogix – that has used technology to solve the problem. The aggregator is not a building, but instead a database. They work with a broadline distributor.*

7. How do you plan to publicize the results?

- i. To whom (i.e. people, entities) do you plan to publicize the project results?
- ii. When do you plan to publicize the results?

*\*If you have publicized the results, please 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).*

*Results will be shared publicly on the project website that is slated to launch no later than March 2018. A communications plan is also in development to disseminate the findings of the feasibility study regionally and with members of our national network. While the feasibility study did not yield the desired outcome of leading to a viable business plan, other aspects of the project including a document outlining the needs of small-scale producers in the region to access larger buyers, the literature review of regional studies conducted in the last 10 years, formation of the producer-led advisory board, buyer and producer data, and white paper on ways to replicate the process have added value to our region and will be shared for future endeavors.*

*The content for all of the documents has been created and the layout and design is being finalized. We will send the final versions along once we receive them from our consultants.*

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

*Yes, throughout the process we collected feedback from our advisory board and other stakeholders.*

- i. If so, how did you collect the information?
  - a. **Data Collection Tool:** *Once we had a draft of our surveys for producers and buyers we sent them along to our advisory board via email to get their feedback about the questions and the information we were gathering. They provided responses on language and content as well as the methods in which we would collect the data, i.e. phone interviews, in-person interviews, emails and mailings.*
  - b. **Stakeholder Meeting:** *Once KCARD analyzed the data gathered from our surveys we presented the results to the stakeholders in a public meeting. Attendees completed comment cards throughout the meeting.*
  - c. **Feasibility Study Results:** *Once KCARD presented the four business models along with the profit and loss statements, we presented them to our advisory board. We asked them to look over the*

models and provide their preference on which business model they believed would work the best in our region. With their feedback, we chose to pursue the service-based business model.

d. **Evaluation Interviews:** Wildflower conducted interviews with the advisory board and key stakeholders after the feasibility study was completed in order to gather feedback on the process and the outcomes.

- ii. What feedback was relayed (specific comments)?

**Data Collection Tool:**

1. GENERAL FEEDBACK:

- a. This survey is asking what the producers want, but they don't know what they want. They want you to tell them what to grow in order to sell into a new market.
- b. Have a survey that's more relatable to the very small producers
- c. Stay along the red lines- on the transportation corridor- and those farms will be the easiest to connect at the beginning along the highways
- d. Look at a satellite photo and check which counties have the majority of cropland and focus on having conversations with those farmers.

2. PRODUCER SURVEY:

- a. Don't understand that their producers want to get paid more for the local produce
- b. "Fair pricing" is a debatable term- maybe change to "transparent pricing"
- c. What is your growth potential? If the markets are out there, would you be able to increase production to meet demand?

**Stakeholder Meeting Response Cards:**

1. What questions do you have after hearing the feasibility study findings?

- a. Large "local" region! We want to be a part of this but wonder how to be included when we are such a rural county (Harrison Co., Indiana)
- b. What is the % of purchase from local farms as a part of total purchasing for both schools and restaurants?
- c. How can this be changed to make a meaningful impact for producers?
- d. What internal and/or process barriers need to be altered to purchase more local food more consistently?
- e. Could a food co-op be a 4th solution to the issue you are trying to solve? (or part of the solution?)"

2. Recommendations for further analysis:

- a. Identifying points of interest for farmers to bring product to or how to create a better way to combine efforts
- b. A center where product can be received unwashed. For some the wash water is hard to meet. And if we could deliver twice a week, for example. Keep us informed
- c. What about the need (is there a need?) for commercial kitchens to provide existing producers w/ ways to create V-ADD products to support and expand existing relationships between producers and buyers?  
Great work overall/thus far--> keep it up!! :)
- d. Are the farms/producers making a profit?
- e. If the small farms aren't sustainable, will the food hub provide enough additional income to help w/ profitability?
- f. If farms aren't financially sustainable it's hard to imagine a food hub would be.

3. Other comments and questions:

- a. Barnraising, FoodPort, KDA KY Proud  
KY Farm Impact  
Missing: Hemp Dawgs- a simplest/easiest opinions  
\*a marketing vehicle\*

*Beat production dead horse/demand dead horse*

*\*Find somebody to sell things*

*\*[marketing/selling]\**

*Hire marketing guru*

*KDA- Find somebody to sell local products*

4. *Would you like to be involved in next steps?*

a. *I work specifically in Harrison County, IN but if there is a way to get our county involved, that would be great.*

b. *Working in Harrison Co. Indiana or Floyd Co.*

#### **Feasibility Study Business Model Feedback**

1. *#4: Service based model:*

a. *Allows us to focus on growing the cooperation among farmers and technical/marketing assistance side of things first until reaching a critical mass of producers.*

b. *Revisit the discussion about a formalized aggregation entity then if infrastructure becomes necessary at that point*

c. *Some concern about the markup and ensuring the farmers would pay for the service*

2. *#1: Centralized Food Hub:*

a. *Need to ensure that the farmers are willing, educated, and at the right scale*

b. *Model that allows most producer ownership/management/decision making*

3. *#2: Multi-Stakeholder and Distribution Partner*

a. *High likelihood of not finding a distribution partner and risky to develop an MOU that they would stick to after seeing the cost-to-profit ratio.*

4. *#3: Sub Aggregation*

a. *Very bleak in futures' outlook because if farmers were great managers in the first place they'd have an aggregation model in place currently, not to mention the creation and failure of several farmer co-ops*

#### **Evaluation Interviews**

1. *If a food hub cannot sustain itself without grants, it's going to fail*

2. *I consider myself a connector so I would love to play that role.*

3. *From the production side, a lot of farmers don't want to give up their high end wholesale price.*

4. *Most of them are small farmers. Andre Barbour resurrected Fresh Stops by working sub-wholesale with Karyn, and made it profitable. No one wanted to work with her because they didn't want to give up their price per unit cost.*

5. *Are these growers willing to take the next step in scaling up?*

6. *There's a group in Chicago – FarmLogix – that has used technology to solve the problem. The aggregator is not a building, but instead a database. They work with a broadline distributor.*

7. *If there were a way to have an investment from growers up front to fund the staff ground work and then maintaining the organization though a percentage of sales made this could be a workable hybrid business. I realize this might be contrary to previous recommendation so to recap.*

*A business should be low overhead. No building. 1-2 staff to start and maybe 1 driver and rented truck. Business should make sales connection but in doing so provide the services 1-4 that were listed. Services 1&2 are basically making the sale anyway (or every thing but).*

9. **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: Yes

ii. Did the project generate any income? Yes No

a. If yes, \$\_\_\_\_\_generated and how was it used to further the objectives of this project?

- iii. In the table below include the total amount of **federal funds spent** during the grant performance period (**Do not** include matching or in-kind contributions):

Categories	Amount Approved in Budget	Actual Federal Expenditures (Federal Funds ONLY)
Personnel:	\$18,720	\$18,720
Fringe:		
Contractual:	\$25,937.50	\$25,937.50
Equipment:		
Travel:		
Supplies:	\$1,000	\$1,000
Other:	\$1,000	\$1,000
Indirect Costs:		
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>\$46,657.50</b>	<b>\$46,657.50</b>

- iv. **ONLY for LFPP recipients:** Provide the amount of matching funds/in-kind contributions used during the grant performance period.

Categories	Match Approved in Budget	Actual Match Expenditures
Personnel:	\$10,080	\$14,479.60
Fringe:		
Contractual:	\$4,687.50	\$4,592.50
Equipment:		
Travel:		
Supplies:		
Other:	\$2,400	\$2,400
Indirect Costs:		
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>\$17,167.50</b>	<b>\$21,472.10</b>

10. Lessons Learned:

- i. Summarize any lessons learned. They should draw on positive experiences (e.g. good ideas that improved project efficiency or saved money) and negative experiences (e.g. what did not go well and what needs to be changed).
- ii. If goals or outcome measures were not achieved, identify and share the lessons learned to help others expedite problem-solving:
- 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:
- iv. Discuss if and how the result of this project can be adapted to other regions, communities, and/or agricultural systems.

*While an entire replicability document—one of the project’s deliverables—has been created to guide future efforts, below are several high-level lessons learned throughout this project:*

**Importance of face-to-face connection with partners:** *Ultimately, project partners found that meeting in-person drove results much faster than mailings or phone calls. Conversations with buyers were largely conducted over the phone—follow-up meetings in-person (had there been time) may have further solidified relationships.*

**Timing is critical:** *Seasonality and availability of producers were a factor in this project. We began data collection in January and concluded in May. We tried to begin collecting data from producers in*

*December and quickly learned that no one was able to engage during the holidays. The producers were first and were really only accessible during the months of January and February. Once March hit, we were unable to reach many of them. Ideally we would have had an additional month before they headed back out to the fields in order to engage more producers.*

**Context matters:** *Due to several relatively recent developments within the local food system—such as past closures of cooperatives and the cancellation of the FoodPort—we found a wide range of perspectives around the work we set out to do and the needs of our region. Our project team found it extremely beneficial to first conduct a review of the existing literature around the Louisville and Kentucky regional food systems. This work provided the partners with an in depth understanding of what others have studied in our region, established credibility with partners, and guided our data collection.*

**Sound project management practices are essential:** *Several golden rules of project management helped us in our process—thorough documentation and record-keeping, exploring and defining the problem we aimed to solve, refining our understanding of issues in light of collected data, identifying and flexibly responding to risk, and meeting regularly to ensure project progress.*

**Project design of decision-making body (advisory board) made up of producers was beneficial:** *This built-in process for reviewing outcomes and making decisions allowed the project to continue to support its main value of strengthening the local food economy in ways that benefit small producers.*

**Staffing:** *We budgeted 10 hours per week for each High South partner. Ideally, we would have stuck to the 10 hours per week and increased to 20 hours per week for at least two partners during the data gathering period in January and February. Had hours been increased—allowing for more face-to-face interaction—we believe we would have reached more producers in this project and deepened the relationships that were formed.*

**Survey Design:** *While we were happy with the overall survey instrument design, a breakdown of products by acreage, i.e. vegetables, beef, pork, poultry, etc. would have been useful and perhaps more actionable.*

#### 11. Future Work:

- i. How will you continue the work of this project beyond this grant? In other words, how will you implement 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 future work of the Kentuckiana Food Aggregation Project includes building the stakeholder network, collaborating with professionals, distributors, and existing service providers to incorporate suggestions and producer needs identified through the study into their work, and to develop a timeline and strategy to coordinate services to support producers in scaling up their farm businesses to a level where they can meet wholesale quantity and quality requirements. Through strengthening the producer network, there is opportunity for regional collaboration and aggregation between producers to support each other in scaling up and meeting wholesale quantity, storage, and packing requirements. The effect of the collaboration efforts across the entire stakeholder network will strengthen trust between producers, buyers, and advocates to allow for greater opportunities to increase direct farm impact and increase sales of locally produced food in the Kentuckiana region.*

*The following are the guiding questions that led the feasibility study process and will continue to guide the future work of meeting the needs of producers and identifying buyers and distribution systems that prioritize local food access:*

- *What can be done to meet the needs of the producers?*
- *What model is financially sustainable with the least amount of external funding support?*
- *What is the gap between producers and current buyers, including those buyers who have recently entered into the regional market?*

*The following suggestions from the feasibility study will be prioritized in future work and next steps:*

- *Focus on producers who are on the cusp of forming distributional relationships.*
- *Focus on activities related to coordination, payment, marketing and promotion.*
- *Work with existing partners in the region.*
- *Develop value proposition around a reputation for trustworthiness and good communication, as a producer-oriented service business.*

*The following resources and partnerships are needed to follow recommendations from feasibility study and needs assessment:*

*Resources:*

*We identified a need for support organizations working to provide marketing, technical assistance and procurement services to producers in the study to increase their capacity to provide more one-on-one assistance to producers. Producers are saying they need certain services while these organizations are saying they provide those services. With the support of the network, we will identify ways to prioritize working with producers throughout the process to enter a new market, in addition to providing the initial training requiring an increase in staff.*

*Partnerships:*

*The support organizations working to connect producers to buyers need to work with the technical assistance landbank universities in partnership to guide producers and provide follow up assistance as they grow their 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?*

*We are now working to share the data we collected on producer needs and buyer capacity with the farmer support organizations and local food distributors in the region. Our new goal is to assist them to incorporate additional services or different services that enable producers to become more market ready and to reach the buyers that have the capacity and desire to purchase more products from local producers.*

*Recommended next steps include:*

- *Organize a post-study network gathering to reopen the conversation about next steps to the food system stakeholder network*
- *Meet with regional food distribution and local food wholesale support professionals to share Kentuckiana Food Aggregation Project feasibility study results and needs assessment recommendations. Discuss strategies to strengthen current producer support programs*

*offered by service providers and coordinate efforts to improve the regional food system and decrease siloed and redundant efforts.*

- *Analyze what gaps still exist that are making the business scenarios infeasible and develop strategies to build producer capacity and buyer/distributor systems to meet the needs of all stakeholders, increase direct farm impact, and increase sales and market options.*
- *Develop an evaluation system to track and measure change in producer production (quantity, consistency, packing and storage capabilities), sales of locally produced food, and improvement of distribution and buying systems specific to increasing local food purchasing in Kentucky and Southern Indiana.*