

Community Farm Kitchen of Ann Arbor, MI received \$28,603 to assist a larger number of small local farmers/producers to sell more food products directly to local consumers via an innovative distribution channel, by purchasing commercial kitchen equipment for the farmers to use.

[Final Report FY 10](#)

December 27, 2011

Recipient Name: Community Farm Kitchen LLC

Title of Project: Development of innovative farm-to-consumer distribution channels by Community Farm Kitchen, a women-owned business

Grant Number: MI – 012 – 2010 – G – 1161

Location: Ann Arbor, Michigan

Project Summary

Community Farm Kitchen is a prepared food program, working directly with local farmers and producers to create seasonal, ready-to-go meals which are sold directly to consumers. As stated in our original grant proposal, the goal of this grant project is to increase Community Farm Kitchen's capacity and efficiency for receiving, preparing, processing, and storing locally produced fruits, vegetables, and meats for the local consumer market. We've been using the grant funds to outfit our new commercial kitchen with all of the necessary equipment, vastly increasing our capacity to store, cook, and prepare these amazing local foods.

Project Approach

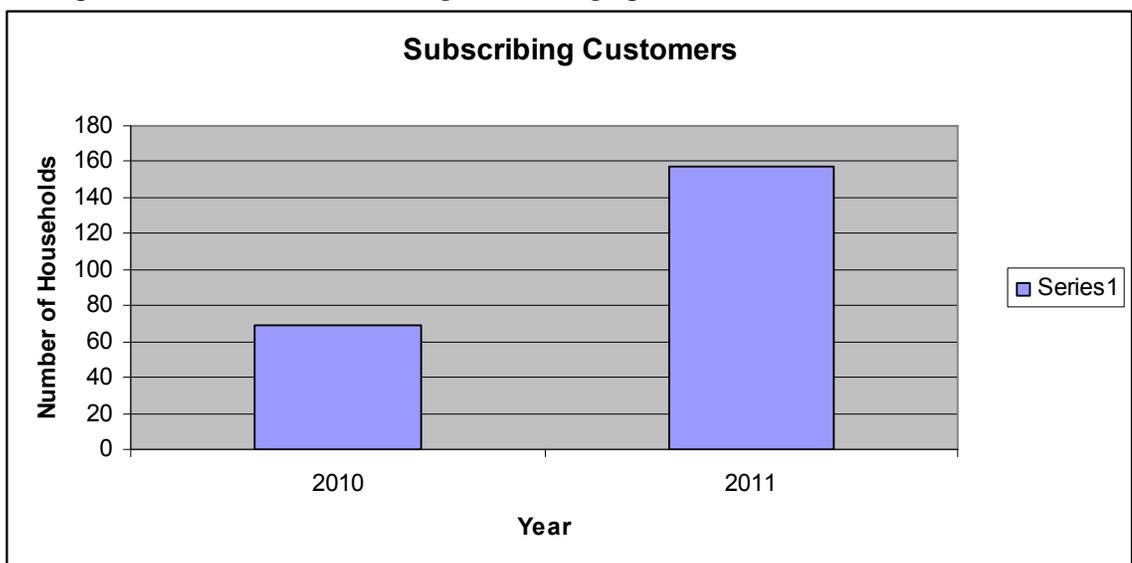
We used grant funds to upgrade kitchen facility's food production capacity by purchasing the following equipment as part of a larger expansion and development of our kitchen facility:

- commercial grade walk-in refrigerator
- commercial grade walk-in freezer
- gas range and oven
- Two convection ovens
- Three Stainless steel prep tables
- Ventilation hood
- Two stainless steel sinks for vegetable prep
- Robot Coupe Immersion blender

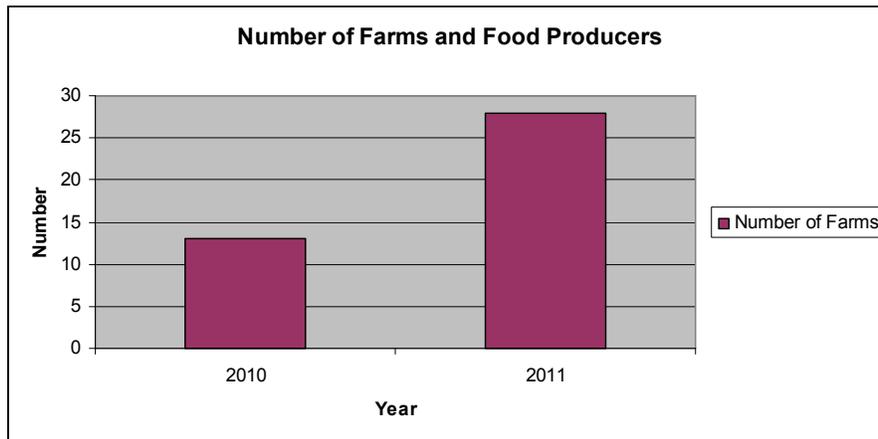
Goals and Outcomes Achieved

From our original grant proposal, our goals were

1. **Increase subscription (CSA) customer base by 100%.** We have actually exceeded this goal! In September 2010 we served 69 subscribing households. In September 2011, we are serving 157. See graph:



2. **CFK will work directly or indirectly with an additional 10 local farms.** Again, we exceeded this goal. We have increased from working directly with 13 farms, food artisans, and other producers in 2010 to working directly with 28 in 2011. Additionally, we're working indirectly with even more farms in our food network by sourcing from local distributors. In 2010 we were only working with one such distributor, Locavorious. This year, in addition to working with Locavorious, we're also sourcing through Frog Holler Produce, Eat Local Eat Natural, and Sparrow Market, all of whom source from (even more) local farmers. We estimate we're actually sourcing from closer to 40 local farmers when you consider our indirect sourcing through distributors.



3. **CFK will develop 2 new standard year-round products.** We are still developing our standard product line. We are still selling our four kinds of granola and a broader range of standard products are currently under development. Plans include our popular quiches, baked mac and cheese, meatloaf, veggie burgers, and more.
4. **CFK will sell standard products through new farm-to-consumer distribution channels.** Since we have not developed our standard products, we are not selling them through restaurants. However, we are involved in an increased number of farm-to-consumer distribution channels. Our innovative, rotating menu of ready-to-go meals are now available to walk-in customers at our storefront four days per week as well as at four local Farmers Markets.

New Distribution Channel	Days/Months available
CFK's own Storefront, Ypsilanti	Year-round, 4+ days/week
Ann Arbor Farmer's Market	Year-round Saturdays, April – Dec Wednesdays
Ypsi Downtown Farmer's Market	Tuesdays, May – Oct, three in winter
Lunasa Market, Ann Arbor	Year-round, every other week
CFK's online store on our website	All the time!
Local festivals/events, i.e., Ypsilanti Heritage Festival, Depot Town Harvest Celebration, World Food Day, etc.	Irregular schedule, we did 6 events this year
Snacks for a daycare	Did a 2.5 month pilot program
Catering	Irregular schedule, we did 8 events this year

5. **Increase educational/promotional activities from 10 in 2009 to 30 in 2011.**

Educational activities continue to be a huge part of what we do here at Community Farm Kitchen. It can be hard to quantify these types of events, so here's an overview.

Social Media and online outreach We continue to use social media to reach a broader audience. Our Facebook page has 471 fans and our twitter feed is has 177 followers. Additionally, we send out a weekly email with our menu to 540 people. We also continue to post informative blog posts on our blog every week. Finally, we are using Real Time Farms (www.realtimefarms.com) to promote the connections between our food and the farmers who grew it. In June we did a "30 Days of..." series on facebook, posting a "behind-the-scenes" photo from the kitchen daily.

Festivals and Events As mentioned in section 4 above, CFK had a presence at a fairly large number of local festivals and events in 2011. We had a booth with information and often food available at the Ypsilanti Heritage Festival, Depot Town Harvest Celebration, World Food Day, the Local Food Summit, the Homegrown Festival, reaching thousands of people. We spoke on a panel at the Local Food Summit to a crowded seminar on the challenges of small-scale food processing, as well as offering a tour of our new facility to two dozen summit attendees. We were a stop on the Tour de Fresh tour and the Depot Town Grub Crawl. Each event reached over 150 participants.

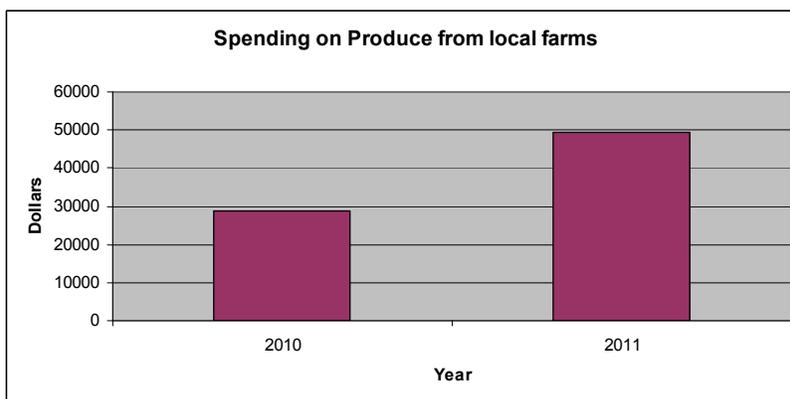
Classes and Interviews with Students We had two class visits to the kitchen in the 2011-12 school year. We also gave interviews to two Eastern Michigan undergrad students and three graduate students on local foods and entrepreneurship as part of their various research projects. We spoke to undergraduates at the University of Michigan as part of a local foods luncheon.

Media CFK was featured in five articles in local print media this year.

Beneficiaries

Local Farmers

As noted in the Goals Achieved section above, we were able to increase our involvement with local farmers greatly as a result of receiving this grant. We've gone from working directly with 13 local farms to working directly with 28, in addition to many more farms we source from indirectly. In financial terms, we increased spending to local vegetable farmers from \$28940 in 2010 to \$49341.67 in 2011.



Many of our farm partners have thanked us repeatedly for our business, which provides them with a reliable source of income, as well as a place to sell surplus stock when they have a bountiful harvest. We also benefit because our farmers can grow specific produce and meat that we need specifically for our use.

Local Farmers Markets

Our presence at the Ann Arbor Farmers Market and Ypsilanti Downtown market attracts additional shoppers to the market, especially with our CSA pick up. Customers are more likely to visit the market and spend money with other vendors when they know they have to come to our stall for their CSA.

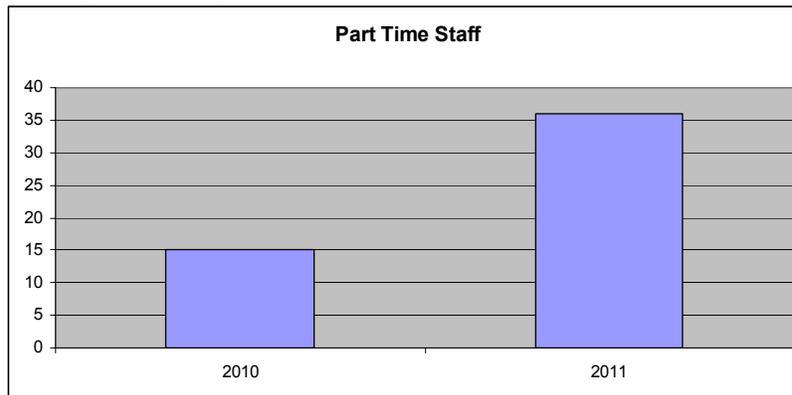
Here are some quotations from our CSA subscribers:

“I am glad you have pick up at the Ann Arbor market. I always find myself buying from other farmers when I come to get my CSA bag.” – Lisa Young

“I haven’t been a regular at the Ann Arbor Farmers Market for many years. Frankly, I thought the parking was a big problem. However, in coming to get my share from you I discovered that the parking isn’t as bad as I thought and I was able to enjoy the market. I plan on continuing to come to the market regularly now!” – Pat Baker

Jobs and Employment

Thanks to expanding to our new kitchen, we have been able to employ more people. We provide part-time employment to students and others with multiple jobs, including many farmers and farm apprentices who balance time on the farm with time in the kitchen. Many of our staff site CFK as their “Favorite job”, thanks to a pleasant, team-based work environment, and of course, plenty of good food. Due to the seasonal nature of the work and the fact that many of our staff have multiple commitments and cannot work a lot of hours, our staff numbers are higher than many similar-sized business. Nonetheless, thanks to the grant, we’ve had work for 36 part-time staff and two full-time in 2011, up from 15 part-time and two full-time in 2010.



Lessons Learned

Unforeseen Benefits

When we originally wrote our grant proposal in the spring of 2010 we thought we would be renovating our then-current kitchen space to bring it up to code. We ended up tackling a slightly different project: converting a local bakery with a storefront into a production kitchen to make and sell ready-to-go meals. This was a much more expensive project than the original grant proposal accounted for and we had to take out loans to complete the project. However, our new space is incredible and has led to some exciting new possibilities that we didn’t imagine when we first wrote our proposal.

- Selling our food retail, directly to customers, outside of the CSA model, both from the storefront and at multiple local farmers' markets.
- Being able to offer items for preorder through our online store
- Renting our kitchen to other local food entrepreneurs
- Offering catering for events
- Piloting day care snacks program

Challenges

The biggest challenge arising out of this grant has been financial. Thanks to the grant money, we were able to expand our business enormously. However, as often happens with such expansion projects, we have been struggling to match sales growth with the growth in expenses. We found our personnel time and energy was primarily taken up with the move to the new kitchen and we failed to work to expand our market at the same time. Now, at the end of 2011 and looking into 2012 I think we are finally poised to expand to the level our new kitchen provides for and to return the business to a solid financial footing. My recommendation to others in a similar position would be:

- Build marketing and outreach into your budget
- Assign staff and management time and energy to developing markets at the same time as you develop your infrastructure
- Building a kitchen is more expensive than you think—allow for unexpected expenses!
- Make sure your own budget can cover items not covered by grant money.

Other Lessons

We used a professional kitchen design company to help put our new kitchen together. Since the staff and management at CFK are not experienced with kitchen design, the help of the designers was invaluable. It was expensive, but saved us time, energy, and helped prevent costly errors. I recommend budgeting for and using such a company to others with similar projects.

Additional Information

Below is a page of pictures which illustrate how useful we find our new kitchen space and equipment.

Much more information, more pictures, etc. can be found on our website, www.harvest-kitchen.com

Read about the impact of this project on our company on our blog: www.harvest-kitchen.com/blog

Check out our online store: www.harvest-kitchen.com/store

Our first slideshow, submitted with our six-month report is still online here: <https://picasaweb.google.com/104875452636257068246/FMPPPProgress#>

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Additional Information – Life in our new kitchen



Before: CFK's old facility, Feb 2011



After: CFK's new facility, Dec 2011



Making borscht with the new immersion blender, June 2011



Plenty of room to cook on our two 6-burner stoves!



CFK at the Ann Arbor Farmers Market



Washing veggies in our FIVE veggie-prep sinks



We love our new kitchen!