

Farmers Market Promotion Program

Final Performance Report

For the Period of Oct. 1, 2012 – March 30, 2015

Date: 6/11/2015
Recipient Name: Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County
Project Title: Bringing Back the Meat Locker: A Pilot Project in Two Communities in Central NY, a Food Desert Project
Grant Number: 12-25-G-1613
Project Location: Ithaca, NY
Amount Awarded: \$ 81,083
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Goals and Objectives:

Below is a list of objectives as mentioned in the Expected Outcomes section of our proposal.

A) 40-50 livestock farmers from nine counties make their livestock products available for sale and storage through the Meat Lockers in two cities. 36 customers stored meat and other local foods from over twenty farms in the Downtown Ithaca Meat Locker by the end of this reporting period. 2 are on our waiting list. As on March 31, 2016, there were 51 farms with active accounts on www.meatsuite.com (*Please note, since 3/31/14 we have de-activated many accounts because they were over 1 year old and need to be updated. We expect the numbers to rise once again.*) In addition to Meat Suite listed farms, seven farms sold livestock products at the holiday farmers' market held at the Ithaca Meat Locker in Dec. 2014. The Corning Meat Locker has not yet been built and thus we have no data to report on livestock product sales and storage in Corning. However, the Corning Locker is actually moving forward and the Ithaca site has reached our outcomes by itself.

B) Approximately 8-10 local vegetable farms and other local food producers begin to sell at the Meat Locker locations during Meat Locker pick-up hours. This includes CSAs that distribute shares at that location. We timed our Open Hours to coincide with the Full Plate Collective's local CSA drop-off. The Full Plate is a multi-farm CSA, mainly supported by 3 vegetable producers. In addition to the vegetable farms, 4-6 additional farms distribute and sell at the Ithaca Meat Locker site during the summertime, primarily as "add-on" shares to the Full Plate. We collaborated with 14 farms on a highly successful Holiday Farmers' Market held at the Ithaca Meat Locker site in Dec. 2014. Participating farmers reported that their gross sales far exceeded their expectations though we do not have their actual gross sales figures.

C) 80 Meat Locker storage units are rented by consumers purchasing local meats in bulk, of these, the majority are first time bulk meat buyers. 58 Ithaca Meat Locker storage units have been rented to 36 users and that number has increased since the grant period ended. This far exceeds our target for Ithaca and leaves the Ithaca Locker full. Of these 36 users, 9 are first-time local meat buyers, and 13 are first time local

bulk meat buyers. These numbers are very close to our original target. Because the Corning Meat Locker was not open as of the grant period close, we have no data to report.

Activities:

- 1) **Opened the Downtown Ithaca Meat Locker and provided rentable freezer storage.** The Ithaca Meat Locker opened on April 14, 2014 and has provided freezer storage for over 36 customers since then. At the time of writing, we have started a waiting list due to the Ithaca Locker being full. In early 2014, we purchased the freezer unit, a security system, fire suppression system, and locker supplies (large and small bins, shelving, tags, scale, inventory management materials such as binders), and arranged a power failure plan with a regional food distributor. Through continuous outreach and publicity, we filled the locker to capacity in approximately 14 months. We chose weekly open hours, and also allowed customers to pick up and drop off meat by appointment. We created a record-keeping system on paper and kept digital records as well. We also created a simple online payment platform. The Meat Locker Manager was responsible for ensuring the locker's smooth operation, overseeing open hours, and maintaining regular communication with members and interested community members.
- 2) **Operated the Meat Suite website and hosted farmer profiles.** MeatSuite.com went live in March 2012 and included 51 farms at its peak. We hear mixed reports from farmers about sales that are initiated through the site. Some farms report that they have had great success and others say that no customer has ever contacted them via Meat Suite. We attribute the variation to the relative farm locations, product pricing, and overall quality of the farmer-created profiles.
- 3) **Conducted education programs and publicity.** We have conducted extensive publicity and educational programming over the course of this project. Activities included: a hog butchering demonstration, a charcuterie tasting event, collaborations with local restaurants for promotional dinner deals, extensive social media promotions on Facebook, Twitter, Local Food Lab, and distribution of our animal silhouette pins, t-shirts, and stickers. Our project and events have been featured by: NPR's The Salt, IthaCan blog, Ithaca Journal, Ithaca Week, Buzzsaw Magazine, Mother Nature Network, Tompkins Weekly, Courier Journal, Democrat and Chronicle, Journal News, PressConnects, Silobreaker, the Elmira Star-Gazette, Edible Fingerlakes, What's Good Ithaca, Sustainable Tompkins, Ithaca's Food Web, Hot Potato Press, Katie Mattner, Ithaca Voice, Cortland Area Tribune, On Pasture, The Neighborhood, *The New Livestock Farmer: The Business of Raising and Selling Ethical Meat*, Living Ithaca, Pawprint, Will Stewart, National Young Farmers Coalition, Western Organization of Resource Councils, Nom Nom Paleo, and Black Sheep Inn.
- 4) **Conducted outreach and consumer education on buying local meat.** On February, 19, 2014, we held a Launch Party to raise awareness of the project. We held "How to Buy Local Meat" Classes on December 5, 2013, and another that took place a few days after this grant ended. We included a chicken butchering demonstration at the December 2013 class. The "How to Buy" classes cover livestock production including breeds and feeds, certifications and claim words (i.e. "natural"), the contents of a typical quarter of carcass, distribution of cuts, yields, and pricing. We conducted educational tabling at numerous events through the life of the grant, including the GrassRoots Big Splash Sustainability Fair, Cooperative Extension Compost Fair, three annual Corning Local Food Fests, Nutritional Wellness Center, Thanksgiving Farmers' Market, Full Plate Farm Collective CSA pick-up, Food Justice Fair, CSA fairs, and many others. We co-hosted one CSA and Meat Fair in October 2014. The MeatSuite website also features educational material on weights, pricing, claims, terms, and definitions, and those pages received approximately 11% of the site's unique pageviews.

Accomplishments:

- 1) **Number of livestock marketed through the Meat Locker, by species.**

- a. As of the end of the grant period, there were nine types of meat stored at the Ithaca Meat Locker, with an average of 80.77 pounds of meat per user. Nine users were first-time local meat buyers, and thirteen were first-time local bulk meat buyers. 20 livestock farms were represented in Ithaca Meat Locker customer bins as of March 31.

2) **Number of new freezer trade customers reported by participating farms.** 19 Meat Locker customers reported that they were first-time local meat buyers or first-time local bulk meat buyers. Our survey of MeatSuite farmers had significant nonresponse bias: only 15 out of 50 producers responded. These 15 farms reported a total of 8 sales via Meat Suite. We do not know how many customers our promotional materials reached, nor do we know how Meat Suite may have influenced local consumers. Anecdotally, we have heard that this project has led to bulk meat sales throughout the region, but it is not easily quantifiable if it is not stored at the locker.

3) **Number of consumers that attend the “How to Buy Local Meat” classes.**

Approximately 25 consumers attended our How To Buy Local Meat classes.

Number of hits on the Meat Suite website

- a. Between 11/1/2014 and 3/31/2015, MeatSuite.com received 11,812 page views, 8,593 of which were unique. 78.25% of the 3,361 sessions were new; the average new user session visited for 1:47 minutes, and the average returning user session was 3:13. New visitors viewed an average of 3.2 pages per session; returning users viewed an average of 4.64 pages per session. 25.3% of sessions were over one minute long. 36.97% of page views were of the “Farms” page, and 7.89% were of “Weights and Pricing.”

Below is a chart we have included on previous grant reports, updated to reflect our most recent activities:

Metric	As of 9/30/13	As of 4/1/14	As of 10/31/2014	As of 3/31/2015
# Meat Suite Farms	31	42	43	51
# Meat Suite page views	2,648	27,508	37,652	49,464
Avg. visit time (minutes)	3:15	3:48	3:17	2:06
Unique visits	417	3,810	8,439	17,032
Facebook page likes	241	391	431	601
Active Ithaca locker renters	n/a	45 (on waiting list)	44	36

Beneficiaries:

a) Number of jobs created and retained: The project provided almost 20% of the funding for the full-time Agriculture Marketing Specialist and created and funded one 0.5 FTE position for the Meat Locker Manager, a position which continues to be funded by a new grant. The grant also provided partial funding for the involvement of CCE agents in two neighboring counties to aid our efforts.

b) Number of markets expanded and/or new markets established: This project had definitely worked to expand the overall market for locally raised meat sold in bulk quantities. We have a meat locker user intake survey that indicates that approximately 21% of users are first time local meat buyers and approximately 45% are first time bulk buyers; however, we feel it is also safe to assume that all Meat Locker renters represent an expansion in the market for local, bulk meat. Even if not first time buyers, we assume that all Meat Locker renters (except for the farmers) lacked sufficient storage at home to make bulk meat purchases. Therefore, the Meat Locker allowed them to make their purchases. It is also possible that non-first-time buyers may have

bought in bulk in other places and that their current situations were preventing them until the Locker became available.

The FLMP is more than just the Meat Locker, and we have anecdotal evidence that our other efforts, including the Meat Suite and our free classes have expanded the market for local bulk meat. We conducted a survey of Meat Suite farms in March 2014 and received 15 anonymous responses. Those responses indicated sales of local meat which did not go to the Locker.

In addition to our Meat Locker, Meat Suite, and free class efforts to expand the local meat market, we also held a two specific farmer's markets during this period. The first was the "Meat Fair" which was an opportunity for the public to come and meet farmers while farmers also vended meat. The second was our Christmas Farmers' Market featuring 14 farmer vendors and 1 local coffee roaster at the Ithaca Locker site in December 2014; we hope that this will become an annual event. As a result of its success, we are planning a July 4th market and at least three other holiday markets for 2015.

c) Dollar amount and percentage change in market sales: At the time of writing this report, the Ithaca Meat Locker held approximately 2,252 of local beef, pork, chicken, and lamb, which represent approximately \$10,123.2 of local meat, based on the average of prices posted on meatsuite.com. We do not have data to reflect a change from before this project, since we created an all-new marketplace.

d) Farmer and producer beneficiaries: Farmers that have and continue to benefit from this project are in 5 categories. There are: 1) those that are listed on the Meat Suite, 2) those that have participated in our events and markets, 3) those that have sold product to Meat Locker users, and 4) those that we don't know about. Of course, there is cross-over between the groups.

The Meat Suite website had 51 farms listed as on 3/31/15. Meat Suite farms have had mixed results and include farms that have made sales as a result of the site where the meat was not stored at the Locker and therefore the sale was not reported to us.

There are also farms that have participated as vendors at our Meat Fair, Local Food Fests, and Holiday events. Those farms include: Autumn's Harvest, Bandwagon Brewpub, Barrows Farm, Blue Heron Farm, Bluebird Trail Farm, Buried Treasures Farm, Capricorn Hill Farm, Cayuta Sun Farm, Clover Road Farm, Dancing Turtle Farm, Deep Root Vineyard, Deer Run, Early Morning Farm, Ever Green Farm, The Flower Lady, Full Plate Farm Collective, Gilson Farms Retail Meats, Good Life Farm, Hazlitt 1852 Vineyards, Heaven Scent Farm, Heritage Pastures, Hog Wild, John's Chickens/Sara's Pigs (Stierly Farm), Just a Few Acres, Kingbird Farm, Knapp Farm, Leo's Honey House, Maple Valley Farm & Farm Market, Muddy Fingers Farm, My Little Farm, Nistock Farms, Northland Sheep Dairy, Ort Family Farm, Painter's Meats/Hillsprings Farm, Peace Weavers Organic Farm, Petteys Farm, The Piggery, Plowbreak Farm, Porkchop Valley Farm, Roaming Root Farm, Rootwork Herbs, Reisinger's Apple Country LLC, Sapsquatch Maple Syrup, Shelterbelt Farm, Shtayburne Farm, Sno Farm, Spring Flight Farm, Sunset View Creamery, Sweet Mother Nature, Under the Tree, Vanillen Dairy, Whittaker Farm, Windsong Farm, Wolfree Farm.

The Downtown Ithaca Meat Locker held meat from 20 local farms by project end. Those farms that sold to Meat Locker customers include Meat Suite listed farms but also farms that are not closely involved with the project, including Sabol's Farm, Snow Farm, The Piggery, and Roaming Root Farm.

Farmers have also participated in our events which have now been mentioned and quantified several times in this report. The final group of farmers are those that we simply do not know about. This project has promoted local meat sales for nearly three years in 9 counties and beyond. We have a campaign with bright, recognizable branding and have distributed over 1,500 informational postcards as well as other literature. We have reached thousands of consumers through our tabling and special events and classes. Our websites meatsuite.com and fingerlakesmeatproject.com have received respectable "traffic." Finally, an amusing measure of success, around Ithaca, "the Meat Locker" has become a household name. We have heard anecdotes about farms making sales

as a result of our general campaign and even discovered that farms we didn't know existed are aware of our program and benefiting. Farms like High Point Farm also advertise our services to their potential customers.

Lessons Learned:

This project involved a great deal of innovation and stepping out to develop a totally different marketing channel. We underestimated how difficult it would be to pioneer our way through the project. We were met with unexpected costs. The funding issue and initial difficulty with our insurance company led to delays on the Ithaca Meat Locker. Another thing that was unexpected, but welcomed was with our massive public relations effort we received a significant amount of public attention both locally and nationally.

While we have filled the Ithaca Meat Locker, there are other goals that we still need to address after the grant period has ended. These include a higher degree of outreach to low-income consumers and turning over ownership of the Meat Locker facilities to a cooperative. I am glad to report that both of those components of the project are underway even though the funding period has ended.

The Corning Locker proved to be much more difficult to implement than we had planned. Our key partners at Cornell Cooperative Extension of Steuben County struggled to find a location in Corning, which delayed progress on the Corning Meat Locker for over a year. We adjusted our management strategy to address this issue, but were unsuccessful. As of this writing, a lease has been signed in Corning and the freezer has been purchased, so the Corning Meat Locker will eventually open for business. Despite the delay in Corning, we have built up public anticipation for the Locker with our events, press coverage, and postcards.

The Ithaca Meat Locker received a great deal of local and national publicity. This project tested a brand new model for direct-to-consumer distribution of local meat. For this reason the project has been reported all over the country. Requests continue to come in from all over the country for help in setting up a Meat Locker. The Niche Meat Processors Assistance Network (NMPAN) has requested that we write a guide that teaches other groups how to set up their own Meat Lockers. We will partner with NMPAN and work on a guide in the coming year. Matt LeRoux has also been invited to speak about the locker at various conferences including the Oregon State U. Small Farms Conference. The Meat Locker was also highlighted in a new book, *The New Livestock Farmer* by Rebecca Thistlewaite.

If we had to do it over: If we had to repeat the project, we would hire the Meat Locker Manager at the outset of the project and secure a higher level of funding before starting. Because this project was not fully funded, we were unable to progress according to our planned schedule.

What specific advice do you have for others taking on a similar project work? We would recommend that others form strong relationships with local stakeholders, business owners, and farmers. This project relied heavily upon collaboration with community members. We would also advise others to keep detailed records.

The Meat Locker component is the one that receives the most attention. Other NY counties are considering setting up their own lockers as a result of our success. When talking to any group that wants to operate a locker like ours, I stress the need for a large scale publicity effort which utilizes events and social media. The Ithaca Locker had become a household name before it ever opened due to our events and Facebook presence and we believe this played a vital role in our success. The same applies to the Meat Suite, consumers need to know it exists and have a clear understanding of what it offers in order to seek it out and use it as intended. We are concerned that if another

location attempts to open a Locker, or adopt Meat Suite, they won't see the same results purely due to a lack of sufficient public relations and promotion.

Overall, this project has been very rewarding and we are always impressed when we hear from consumers and farmers that the project has had the impact on them that we intended. Local meat sales, in bulk, have definitely grown in our region and we think that time, and the opening of the Corning location, will see bulk sales continue to grow.