

2017 Specialty Crop Block Grant -- Final Performance Report



Project Title Growing Food Networks: Connecting Farmers & Buyers

Project Impact and Findings

From November 2017 to September 2018, Kenai Soil & Water Conservation District organized a series of eight events designed to help small-scale market farmers -- all specialty crop producers -- develop working relationships with prospective markets and customers, scale up production and increase sales. The "Growing Networks: Connecting Farmers and Buyers" project included two Farmers & Chefs networking events, a full-day Farmers Market Meet-Up, a Visitors Value Local Food presentation and networking event, three Chef at the Market cooking demonstrations and a bus tour of three local farms. A total of 52 small businesses participated in or directly benefited from these events, including 26 established and start-up farm businesses. Total participants numbered over 375.

Beneficiaries

26+ specialty crop farmers

Activities Performed Objectives:

#	Objective	Completed?	
		Yes	No*
1	Organize and host two Farmers & Chefs networking events	X	
2	Organize and host one Farmers Market Meet-Up event	X	
3	Organize and host one event to network farmers and visitor industry businesses	X	
4	Organize and host three Chef at the Market events	X	
5	Organize and host bus tour of farms	X	

**If no is selected for any of the listed objectives, you must expand upon this in the challenges and lessons learned sections.*

Accomplishments:

Accomplishment	Relevance to Objective, Outcome, and/or Indicator
Located and distributed food-safety resources: 1-page high priority produce safety checklist; Alaska DNR Fact Sheet: Food Safety on the Farm; flyer for www.onfarmfoodsafety.org .	Impact is to increase # of knowledgeable farmers being proactive, so that food safety does not become a barrier to growth. Outcomes 1 & 6.

Hosted all 8 interlocking and mutually reinforcing events as planned!	Impact is a significantly stronger network of crosscutting relationships between farmers, farmers markets, chefs, restaurants, caterers, food trucks, small retailers, visitor industry and Chambers of Commerce, which leads to growth and increased sales. Outcomes 1, 3 and 8.
Got excellent newspaper and/or radio coverage for every event.	Impact is increased exposure for specialty crop farmers, farmers markets, and the novel concept of agritourism, all of which help fuel growth and increased sales. Outcomes 1, 3 and 8.

Challenges and Developments:

If you experienced any challenges during the project’s period of performance, provide a listing of them below. Also, provide the corrective actions you took to address these issues. If you did not attain the approved outcome(s) and indicator(s), provide an explanation in the Corrective Actions column.

Challenge	Corrective Actions
I underestimated hours necessary to organize these events by at least 24%.	Kenai Soil & Water Conservation District paid for the additional hours needed out of other funds.

Lessons Learned:

- 1) Speed-dating worked very well for connecting with Farmers & Chefs.
- 2) Inviting experienced farmers market vendors to share what they’ve learned with new and potential farmers market vendors at the Farmers Market Meet-Up was effective.
- 3) Taking every opportunity to remind small farmers that they are allies and that their competition is at the big box stores was effective. We are building a culture of cooperation and mutual assistance.
- 4) Visitor industry businesses are challenging to reach: owners are often gone during the winter and busy in the spring. Perhaps fall or early spring is a better time to reach them than Apr. 19.

Continuation and Dissemination of Results (if applicable)

Kenai Soil & Water Conservation District will continue efforts to build networks between farmers and customers as time and resources allow. As a result of this project, we expect that two Central Peninsula farmers markets will organize Chef at the Market events for themselves starting in 2019. Both will have use of the poster template and graphic design work done under this grant. We also expect that the Harvest Moon Farm Tour (aka, “Small Farm Showcase bus tour” in the grant proposal) will continue on an annual basis now that a team of partners has come together and the concept has proven feasible. Farm tour partners include Kenai Local Food Connection (promotion and co-branding with Harvest Moon Local Food Week), Alaska Farm Tours (ticket sales platform and promotion) and Janice Chumley (tour guide). Again, graphic design done for this grant will be made available for future events.

Outcomes and Indicators/ Sub-indicators

Provide the results of the project outcome(s) and indicator(s) as approved in your State Plan and project proposal. The results of the outcome(s) and indicator(s) will be used to evaluate the performance of the SCBGP on a national level.

Outcome Measures

Select the Outcome Measure(s) that were approved for your project.

- Outcome 1:** Enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops through increased sales
- Outcome 2:** Enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops through increased consumption
- Outcome 3:** Enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops through increased access
- Outcome 4:** Enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops through greater capacity of sustainable practices of specialty crop production resulting in increased yield, reduced inputs, increased efficiency, increased economic return, and/or conservation of resources
- Outcome 5:** Enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops through more sustainable, diverse, and resilient specialty crop systems
- Outcome 6:** Enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops through increasing the number of viable technologies to improve food safety
- Outcome 7:** Enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops through increased understanding of the ecology of threats to food safety from microbial and chemical sources
- Outcome 8:** Enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops through enhancing or improving the economy as a result of specialty crop development

Outcome Indicators

Outcome 1, Indicator 1

Sales and change in sales (target 10% increase) as result of marketing and/or promotion activities: **7 farms reported total sales of \$62,088 in 2018, up from \$53,677 in 2017, an increase of 16%**

Outcome 3, Indicator 2.a.

Of the total number of individuals (culinary professionals, wholesale buyers, consumers) reached (target = 100, **actual = 378**), the number that gained knowledge on how to access/prepare specialty crops: **378**

Outcome 3, Indicator 2.b.

Of the total number of individuals (culinary professionals, wholesale buyers, consumers) reached (target = 100, **actual=378**), the number that reported an intention to access/prepare specialty crops: **121**

Outcome 6, Indicator 3.

Number of individuals who learn about prevention, detection, control and intervention food safety practices (**total = 80**) and number of those individuals who increase their food safety skills and knowledge: **73**

Outcome 8, Indicator 4.

Number of small businesses maintained: **20** small farms, 25 other small businesses

Outcome 8, Indicator 6.

Number of new beginning farmers who went into specialty crop production: **6**

Data Collection

We estimated the number of customers participating at Chef at the Market events but did not survey them about their intentions. For the remaining five events, we collected data and exact participation numbers via sign-up sheets and written surveys. To collect sales data for 2017 and 2018, we distributed a simple questionnaire by email, followed by phone and/or email reminder to each farm.

Federal Project Expenditures to Date Expenditures:

Provide the most current approved budget for the categories applicable to your project, as well as the actual federal expenditures.

Cost Category	Amount Approved in Budget	Actual Federal Expenditures (Federal Funds ONLY)
Personnel	9,375	9,375.00
Fringe Benefits	1,875	1,875.00
Travel	0	0.00
Equipment	0	0.00
Supplies	1,000	853.03
Contractual	1,350	1,455.17
Other	200	241.80
Direct Costs Sub-Total	13,800	13,800.00
Indirect Costs	1,104	1,104.00
Total Federal Costs	14,904	14,904.00

Program Income:

Provide the amount approved in the budget as well as the actual amount earned.

Source/Nature (i.e., registration fees)	Amount Approved in Budget	Actual Amount Earned
Farm tour ticket sales	0	1,146
Total Program Income Earned	0	1,146

Additional Information:

Media coverage of this project included: <https://www.peninsulaclarion.com/news/farmers-look-to-attract-tourists/> <http://kdll.drupal.publicbroadcasting.net/post/opportunities-agritourism-growing-kenai/> <https://www.peninsulaclarion.com/news/peninsula-chefs-are-the-spotlight-of-the-chef-at-the-market-series/> <https://www.peninsulaclarion.com/news/first-of-its-kind-farm-tour-kicks-off-harvest-moon-local-food-week/> <https://www.peninsulaclarion.com/news/local-groups-prep-for-market-season/>

Photos:



Chef at the Market events, 2018



Brian Olson, Alaska
Berries



Martha Merry, Lancashire
Farms



Ridgeway Farms

Harvest Moon Farm Tour – Sept. 8, 2018