



New York State Department of Agriculture & Markets

**SPECIALTY CROP BLOCK GRANT PROGRAM –
YEAR 1 PROGRESS REPORT**

*Expanding Market Competitiveness for Specialty Crop Producers at
SUNY (State University of New York) Colleges*

Contract Number: C011481
Contractor: American Farmland
Trust
Reporting Period: Year 1
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Project Summary

American Farmland Trust’s (AFT) *Expanding Market Competitiveness for Specialty Crop Producers at State University of New York Colleges (Farm to SUNY)* project—supported with the \$99,427 Specialty Crop Block Grant received from the New York State Department of Ag and Markets—kicked off on December 4, 2013 at the University at Albany. The primary goal of Farm to SUNY is to increase sales of New York State grown and processed vegetables and fruits by four SUNY universities, SUNY New Paltz, SUNY Oneonta, SUNY Oswego, and University of Albany by 25% over the two-year life of the grant. Secondary goals include:

1. Determining the profitability of institutional sales for participating farmers.
2. Increasing student awareness of and engagement with local foods and farmers.
3. Sharing project findings with at least 50 farmers through industry events and networking.
4. Establishing a process to expand Farm to SUNY into all 29 SUNY campuses that have dining services onsite.

Project team member organizations include: AFT, the four participating campus teams, Sodexo, SUNY Office of Sustainability, Cornell Cooperative Extension, and Hudson Valley Agribusiness Development Corporation (HVADC).

At the December 2013 launch meeting the team revisited the project objectives, clarified opportunities and constraints, and agreed on project management and communications strategies for the work ahead. The meeting resulted in:

- The formation of a formal “Marketing Team” comprised of the four Sustainability Directors at each campus, SUNY Sustainability staff, AFT staff, and Sodexo Marketing professionals.
- A starter list of priority fresh and minimally-processed vegetables and fruit.

Supply Analysis

In March 2014, the team released a survey targeting farmers currently serving wholesale markets. The survey was meant to 1) Identify farmers interested in selling into the college marketplace through the existing network of distributors; 2) Clarify farmers’ capacity to meet institutional requirements; and 3) Document availability of local produce items. The survey was completed in June 2014. Twenty-six (26) producers expressed interest, while 18 completed the full survey. Respondents provided detailed information about product availability, shipping and distribution methods, and food safety planning/GAP certification. The key findings were that 17 out of 18 respondent farmers use distributors to deliver wholesale products, which is critical to the project. Some already work with distributors supplying the participating campuses (Mento Produce (5), C’s Farms (3), and Red Barn (2)). Eighteen (18) farmer respondents have existing food safety plans and 12 are GAP certified, also critical to serving institutional markets.



Figure 1: Launch Meeting, Success Brainstorm

Table 1: Top Produce Items by Weight from Farmer Survey Findings

| Produce Item | Total Pounds |
|--------------|--------------|
| Sweet Corn | 58,165,582 |
| Cabbage | 22,966,450 |

| | |
|----------------|------------|
| Yellow Onions | 13,195,000 |
| Apples | 10,556,112 |
| Bell Peppers | 4,807,928 |
| Leafy Greens | 4,597,840 |
| Other Potatoes | 3,728,000 |
| Summer Squash | 3,265,757 |
| Green Beans | 1,959,372 |
| Romaine | 1,620,000 |
| Eggplant | 1,085,548 |
| Yukon Potatoes | 1,000,000 |
| Winter Squash | 934,000 |

Demand Study

Collecting complete demand data has been the most challenging aspect of the process. Each campus team collected produce purchasing data from July 2012 through June 2014 (the prior school year). The quality and breadth of data provided depended greatly on the participation of each campus’s distributors. The team determined that the demand analysis should include purchases of all produce items, fresh and minimally processed, that are available from New York farmers. Tracking included both items currently being purchased from sources outside New York State and those already be sourced locally. AFT staff provided each campus with a list of produce items that meet this criteria. We developed a template for demand data collection with the following data requirements: *produce item, description, quantity, unit, total cost, unit cost, distributor/supplier, processor, farm source name, and farm location*. Campus food service and chefs did not already have historical data on local purchasing that traced products back to the farm. We needed each campus’s distributors to actively participate in the data collection. Distributors include: C’s Farm Market, Oswego; Carioto Produce & Seafood, Green Island; Mento Produce, Syracuse; Red Barn, Highland; Sysco, Albany; and Fresh Point, Hartford, CT.

We received local purchasing data from all the primary fresh produce vendors, C’s Farm Market, Carioto Produce, Mento Produce, and Red Barn. We received data frozen produce purchases from Purdy & Sons to University at Albany and some fresh cut and frozen purchase data from Sysco to SUNY Oneonta. We are missing Sysco data from Albany, New Paltz and Oswego; Fresh Point data from New Paltz; and non-local product purchases from Red Barn for New Paltz.

Findings:

- Campuses are purchasing little to no local fresh cut produce.
- All of the schools are already procuring some fresh, unprocessed produce locally.
- Two of the four schools were already purchasing local frozen corn, peas, green beans, carrots and mixed vegetables processed by Winter Sun Farms, Kingston or Bondeulle Group, Brockport (packaged by Holli-Pac, Holly and distributed by Purdy & Sons, Sherburne).
- Three of the four campuses purchase marinara and pizza sauce developed specifically for SUNY through the SUNY Commits initiative. The sauces are processed by Winter Sun Farms and Tassleberry Farm, Westmoreland (for Purdy & Sons).

The baseline data was not consistent or complete enough to roll-up into baseline totals and come up with a percentage of local produce currently purchased. It did provide sufficient information to identify some “hot products” (see Table 2) that are being purchased from outside New York that could be purchased regionally in season. It also informed our plans for tracking sales going forward.

Target Products and Matchmaking

The Farm to SUNY Supply Team includes AFT staff, Christina Grace and Glenda Neff; Marty Broccoli, Cornell Cooperative Extension; and Mary Ann Johnson, HVADC. This team provides technical

assistance to campus food service directors and partner distributors. The campus food service director is ultimately responsible for determining which six vegetable and/or fruit products their team will focus on and purchase 25% more of year over year to meet the primary goal of the project. At least two of the products they select must be minimally processed. The products are influenced by the SUNY campus' current supply chain of distributors, processors, and farmers.

As of August 2014, each school has been responsible for tracking all local produce purchases. Data is currently being collected directly from distributors. Some of our food service directors have opted to review the most recent purchasing data and back into some of the target product choices based on where they see the greatest increase in purchasing. This is in addition to targeting the new minimally-processed items being developed specifically for this project. The team is working closely with distributors and processors to finalize farm and processor sources for minimally processed potatoes, onions, and green beans, as well as fresh watermelon and mesclun salad mix.

Table 2: Target “Hot” Produce Products and Potential Sources

| Fresh Unprocessed | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Apples (Widely available) | Through existing suppliers. |
| Potatoes (Widely available) | Through existing suppliers. |
| Onions (Widely available) | Through existing suppliers. |
| Romaine Heads (Widely available) | North Country Growers Cooperative is connecting with existing distributors and Food Service buyers. Also, has met with Capital City Produce, a small processor, to explore limited fresh cut. |
| Watermelon | Working to identify farm sources for existing suppliers. |
| Mesclun Salad Mixed | Working to identify farm sources for existing suppliers. |
| Fresh Cut | |
| Potatoes - 25# Peeled | Minimal supply is available through Capital City Produce. Working with Baldor Specialty Foods to scale up processing. Baldor currently processes peeled potatoes from other regions and through the project, will test processing New York varieties. |
| Potatoes - diced | Minimal supply is available through Capital City Produce. Working with Baldor Specialty Foods to scale up processing. Baldor currently processes diced potatoes from other regions and through the project, will test processing New York varieties. |
| Yellow Onions - sliced | Minimal supply is available through Capital City Produce. Working with Baldor Specialty Foods to scale up processing. Baldor currently processes sliced onions from other regions and through the project, will test processing New York varieties. |
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| Winter Squash - cubed | Available through Baldor Specialty Foods, Capital City Produce and Martins Farms. |
| Snipped Green Beans | Fingers Lakes Fresh is considering options for processing. |
| Kale - chopped | Considering opportunities through Capital City Produce using product from North Country Growers Cooperative. |
| Broccoli Florets | Supply of broccoli is limited, but the project is in high demand. Considering limited production through Capital City Produce. |

| Frozen | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Corn on the Cob | Winter Sun Farms is testing a new product. Albany and New Paltz have tested and approved it. Oneonta is testing it the week of December 1, 2014. Next step is to clarify minimum demand requirements with Winter Sun. The project team will be responsible for aggregating demand from the larger network of SUNY schools and other college and university campuses to meet these requirements. |
| Fajita Mix | Existing product from Winter Sun Farms. |
| Broccoli Florets | Limited quantity is available through Winter Sun Farms. Working to identifying other sources. |
| Roasted Root Vegetable Mix | This product was tested by Winter Sun Farms for the Poughkeepsie Farm to School project and was a hit with K-12 students. It is not currently in production, but the SUNY campuses are interested. |

Marketing

By April 2014, the Marketing team had put forward core components of a Farm to SUNY campaign and secured commitment from the Food Service Directors and SUNY Sustainability to move ahead. The campaign included:

- Student tagline campaign resulting in the slogan, “Nothing but the Best, Local, and Fresh.”
- Development of a shared logo.
- Local Food of the Month where each month a vegetable or fruit is included in a variety of menu items and widely promoted through signage, samplings, and special events. The campaign featured/is featuring:
 - August: Watermelon
 - September: Corn
 - October: Apples
 - November: Winter Squash
 - December: Winter Squash (due to short month)
 - January: Pizza sauce
 - February: Onions
 - March: Potatoes
 - April: Maple Syrup
 - May: Spring Greens



Figure 2: National Kale Day, University at Albany

- National Kale Day – On October 1, 2014, each school served New York kale in a variety of recipes. Kale Day was championed by the sustainability directors. There was skepticism from the food service directors, but the campaign was a success and kale is being served more regularly at the four schools.



Figure 3: Campus Crunch at SUNY New Paltz

- National Food Day / Campus Crunch – On October 24th, each campus held National Food Day events including:
 - Campus Crunch – At all four schools, students bit into local apples at the same time in celebration of Food Day and as an extension of the Big Apple Crunch run by GrowNYC in New York City. The University at Albany team coordinated a website and outreach to other schools resulting in 18 schools in New York State joining in the campus crunch.

- University of Albany Harvest Event
- SUNY New Paltz Food Day Carnival, apple taste test, and October 23rd farm to table dinner.
- SUNY Oneonta apple menu items in three dining halls, student tabling, and looping Farm to SUNY presentation on dining hall display screens.
- SUNY Oswego tabling and special Food Day menu items.



Figure 4: Student Speaker at University at Albany with Apple Farmer, Peter Ten Eyck, Indian Ladder Farms.

- Farm to SUNY presentations at key SUNY, college sustainability, and regional food event to extend the work to other universities and colleges. The project components and results have been shared at:
 - 2014 SUNY Auxiliary Services Conference, April 16, 2014
 - Hudson Valley Farm to Institution Summit, October 16, 2014
 - Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group Conference (NESAWG), November 11, 2014

The team is scheduled to share findings at:

- 2015 SUNY Auxiliary Services Conference, January 7-9, 2015
- Empire State Vegetable and Fruit Growers Expo, January 20-22, 2015

Work Plan Status

The following table describes the progress AFT has made in achieving the tasks, activities, and outcomes listed in the original *Work Plan*.

Table 1: Work Plan

| Task/Project Activity | Projected Timeline | Outcomes and Continuing Work |
|---|--|---|
| <p>Task 1: Supply Assessment – Collect data on grower, processor, and distributor product capacity and expansion opportunities.</p> <p>Activities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop research tools/survey 2. Conduct phone and electronic surveys 3. Conduct four to six meetings or site visits with food processors | March 2014 | The data gathering and analysis for the supply assessment was started in April 2014. Primary interviews and surveys have been completed and were analyzed by June 2014. The collection of supply data will be ongoing through April 2015. |
| <p>Task 2: College Demand Assessment – Gather baseline data on purchasing and needs assessment for a specified list of available products.</p> <p>Activities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop assessment tool (list of required data items) 2. Meetings and phone calls with food service and other college staff 3. Data analysis | March 2014 | The demand analysis was completed at each campus by April 30, 2014. The team continues to fill gaps as we hone the final product list of specialty crops to be targeted for increased sales to SUNY colleges. |
| <p>Task 3: Matchmaking - Connect college food service staff and distributors with local vegetable processors and vegetable groups.</p> <p>Activities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Convene site team regularly via phone and in-person; 2. Conduct product tests. | June 2015 | Facilitating connections between growers, distributors, and colleges is in progress and ongoing. We are testing the project’s first minimally processed product, frozen cut corn on the cob. |
| <p>Task 4: Consumer Outreach/Campus Campaigns</p> <p>Activities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hire student interns 2. Work with SUNY students at each campus to design social media messages and Pride of New York promotional materials for events 3. Launch student marketing plans 4. Develop a video to promote Farm to SUNY students, farmers, and other key stakeholders. | <p>April 2014 August 2014</p> <p>Sept. 2014 May 2015</p> | <p>Sustainability directors completed the hiring of student interns in September 2014. Student outreach/promotion plans and key milestones for the fall were finalized in October 2014. Planned student outreach activities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Kale Day • Local Food of the Month Campaign (kicked off August 2014) • ”Campus Crunch” Apple Event on National Food Day. <p>The video is in production.</p> |
| <p>Task 5: College Convening</p> <p>Activities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Kick off - Convening of four colleges (Target location, Oneonta) 2. <i>SUNY Annual Sustainability Conference</i> – College partners share project progress/best practices with their fellow SUNY colleges | Dec. 2014 Sept. 2015 | <p>Will hold kick-off meeting on 12/4/14 and presented at 2014 SUNY Annual Sustainability Summit on 9/30/14.</p> <p>Will present project findings to date at the 2015 <i>SUNY Auxiliary Services Annual meeting</i> and <i>Empire State Producers</i></p> |

| | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|--|
| | | <i>Expo</i> in January 2015 to reach farmers and food service directors. |
| Task 6: Measurement/Evaluation – Tracking Activities: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Design evaluation tools 2. Track procurement change 3. Track changes in student perception. | March 2014 June 2015 June 2015 | Designed/approved a local purchasing tracking tool/spreadsheet in August 2014. Designed/approved the student survey (pre-assessment). Completed in August 2014. Kicked off tracking of purchases in August 2014. Kicked off student survey process in September 2014. Tracking/evaluation will be ongoing through the project. |

Problems and Delays

The Work Plan activities that have experienced delays are:

- Hire student interns - The major project delay involved contracting between the State of New York and AFT which ultimately delayed contracting between AFT and the four SUNY Campuses. As a result, student intern hiring was delayed from February/March 2014 to September 2014.
- Complete the pre-assessment student survey – The survey is an activity organized by the student interns, and thus was delayed. Interns conducted the student survey throughout October and are now compiling the findings, due to be reported back to the team by December 31, 2014.
- Identify up to six target products, including at least two minimally processed specialty crop items - Campus teams are honing their target product list based on 1) our ability to identify sources for minimally processed items; and 2) analyzing purchases since August 2014 to identify where the largest increases have been, most likely connected to the Local Food of the Month campaign. The four campuses are working to increase local purchases of produce across a larger set of products. While we would like to see the target lists completed by December 31, 2015, we are confident that we will see 25% increases in purchasing of six products, at each campus.
- Develop the post-assessment farmer interview - The farmer evaluation survey will be completed by January 31, 2015 and will be used through September 2015.
- Develop the student post-assessment survey - Post-assessment student survey will be developed by January 1, 2015 and will take the pre-assessment into consideration.

Future Project Plans

The key activities over the next 3-4 months include:

- Securing sourcing for target minimally processed produce, especially target fresh-cut items.
- Working with food service directors and distributors to capture and analyze data on local produce purchases from August 2014 to the present date.
- Complete the spring joint marketing calendar and track campus local product campaign activities with a focus on the Local Food of the Month efforts.
- Designing the farmer evaluation survey.

Funding Expended to Date

See enclosed report describing \$31,341.83 expended between October 1, 2013 and September 30, 2014. Please note that the project start date was delayed due to difficulties in executing a project funding contract with the State of New York, which impacted the project schedule and associated contract expenditures.