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## Introduction and Study Methods

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The Community Food Projects Competitive Grant Program [CFP] was started in 1996 with the aim of fighting food insecurity through the development of community food projects that promote the self-sufficiency of low-income communities. Since 1996 this program has awarded approximately \$85 million to organizations nationally [Community Food Projects, 2015].

### The primary goals of CFP are to:

- Meet the food needs of low-income individuals through food distribution, community outreach to assist in participation in Federally assisted nutrition programs, or improving access to food as part of a comprehensive service;
- Increase the self-reliance of communities in providing for the food needs of the communities;
- Promote comprehensive responses to local food access, farm, and nutrition issues; and
- Meet specific state, local or neighborhood food and agricultural needs including needs relating to:
  - Equipment necessary for the efficient operation of a project;
  - Planning for long-term solutions; or
  - The creation of innovative marketing activities that mutually benefit agricultural producers and low-income consumers [Community Food Projects Competitive Grant Program, 2015].

In order to determine the collective impact of this grant program on an annual basis, the Community Food Security Coalition and the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture developed the Community Food Projects Indicators of Success. This method focuses on outcomes based reporting and was conducted annually from 2005 – 2011. In 2014, the New Entry Sustainable Farming Project [New Entry] became the Training and Technical Assistance provider for CFP grantees, and began conducting the survey. The data for this survey is collected online, and includes both an organizational component for the recipient of the grant as well as a beneficiary component for communities served to gain an understanding of the impact on the projects' beneficiaries. 34 of 50 [68%] of projects active in FY 2015 completed the survey, which includes planning and implementation grants.

## Whole Measures

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The Whole Measures for Community Food Systems was developed as a values-based planning and evaluation tool for community food security projects. It was jointly developed by the Community Food Security Coalition and the Center for Popular Research, Education and Policy and it was based off work from the Center for Whole Communities. The tool strives to take a holistic approach to evaluating community food security, so that practitioners and community members can get a systems level understanding of the unique challenges of their community and how their projects impact their lives. The tool is broken down into 6 major categories [Jeanette Abi-Nader, 2009]:

- Healthy People
- Strong Communities

- Thriving Local Economies
- Vibrant Farms and Gardens
- Sustainable Ecosystems
- Justice and Fairness

The Indicators of Success was developed to incorporate these 6 components of Whole Measures for Community Food System to evaluate the collective impact of CFPs. These are not discrete topic areas, but rather ones that are synergistically entwined. They are important indicators individually, but collectively, they demonstrate the real value of Community Food Projects.

## Overview

There were 50 active grantees in FY 2015 representing 30 different states. 34 of 50 (68%) active grantees in FY 2015 responded to the survey coming from 21 different states. 137 beneficiaries from 7 different projects (representing 7 states: DE, GA, MS, NY, OH, OR and UT) responded to the beneficiary survey.

The top 5 activities, both by percent of projects participating and overall percent of time spent, are represented below. There is a table in the appendix with the full breakdown of activities.

Top 5 Activities	% of Projects	% Growth since 2010
Food access and outreach	78%	26.01%
Nutrition and health education	72%	75.30%
Capacity building within your community	66%	N/A
Promoting Local Food Purchases	66%	39.63%
Job skills training	63%	115.52%

Top 5 Activities	Overall % of time
Food access and outreach	8.12%
Capacity building within your community	7.60%
Farmers' Market	6.67%
Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program	6.12%
Urban Agriculture	5.49%

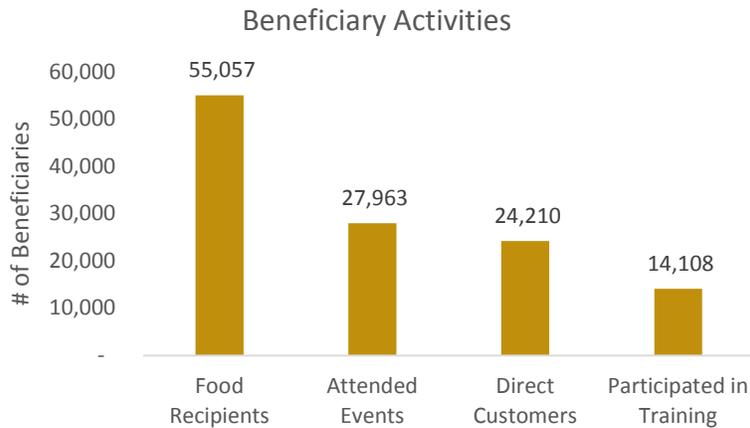
## Healthy People

*“Eating more vegetables and fresh fruit helps me reduce junk food and control my diabetes better. I was introduced to foods I had never eaten before and liked them! The financial savings allowed me to have much more healthy food than I could have afforded otherwise.”*

*-CFP Beneficiary, FY 2015*

Supporting healthy people is at the core of the Community Food Projects grant program. People benefit in a variety of ways, both directly and indirectly, from the work of CFPs nationally. In FY 2015, overall, 186,000 people benefited directly from these projects, and an estimated over 2 million

benefited indirectly. The primary ways that people benefited were as food recipients, as customers, attending events or participating in trainings.



The tables below show the diversity of the populations that these CFPs worked with directly during FY 2015, both as a percent of projects working with the population, and the total number of people from that population.

Beneficiaries	% of Projects	# of Direct Beneficiaries
Black or African American	65%	6,225
Hispanic or Latino	53%	3,668
Bi-racial or multi-racial	50%	1,859
Asian or Pacific Islander	32%	293
Native American/Eskimo/Aleut	18%	250

Beneficiaries	% of Projects	# of Direct Beneficiaries
People with low income	91%	152,079
Youth	76%	34,798
Women	76%	5,540
Farmers	76%	959
Seniors	71%	4,327
Vendors/Business Owners	56%	359
General Public	53%	24,211
Immigrants	50%	2,478
Veterans	26%	104
Promise zone	18%	157
Other	12%	443
StrikeForce	9%	1,748
Head start	9%	530

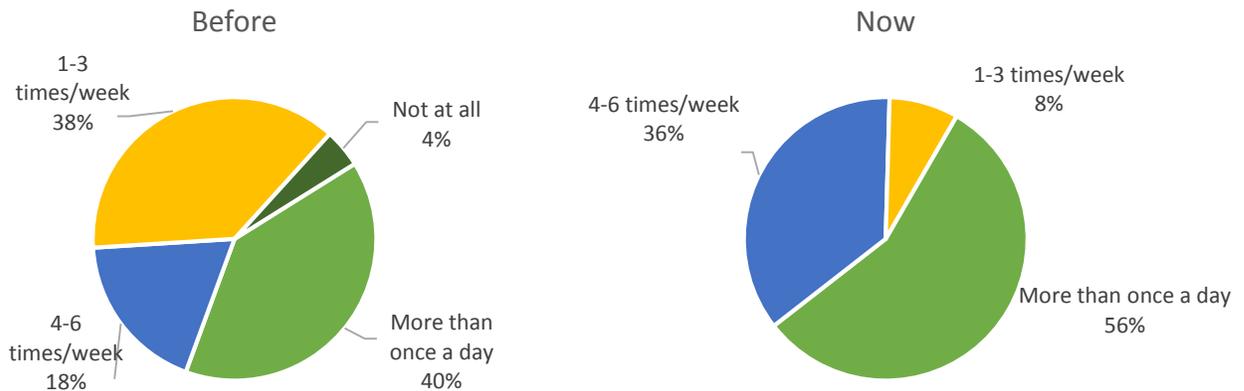
Outreach to increase participation in federal assistance programs is one of the stated goals of CFP. By facilitating the use of these benefits through community based projects, recipients are not only able to increase their ability to meet their food needs, but in many cases, they are able to do so with fresh

food that was grown or purchased through their local community food system. 53% of projects reported that they were able to facilitate an increase in the use of federal benefits in FY 2015. Of the remaining projects, only one indicated that use decreased, and the rest stated that it was either their first year working with federal benefits, or they didn't know how use had changed. For many projects facilitating use meant accepting the benefits at their farmers markets, or points of sale, and for some projects, this included helping people enroll in benefits. The table below represents the percentage of projects facilitating the use of federal benefits and the number of people impacted.

Facilitating Federal Benefits	% of Projects	# of Beneficiaries
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)	68%	8064
Women, Infants and Children (WIC)	41%	652
Farmers' Market Nutrition Program	29%	133
Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program	26%	69
Other Federal benefits	6%	

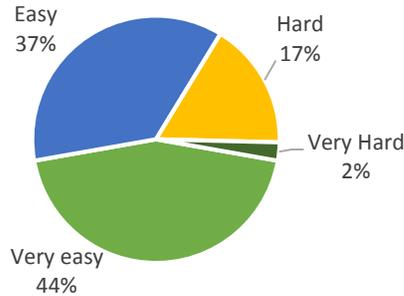
Increasing access to healthy food and knowledge around healthy eating are two fundamental components of the Community Food Project grant program. Food access and outreach and nutrition and health education are the top two activities (by percent of projects working on them) and food access and outreach is the top activity in terms of overall time spent. To help educate their beneficiaries, CFPs had cooking classes, provided samples of healthy food, created recipes and had market signage in multiple languages. The charts below represent responses from CFP beneficiaries when asked how frequently they ate fruits and vegetables before being part of their CFP and now.

**Weekly Fruits and Vegetables**



While this represents a small percentage of the overall number of people who were impacted by these CFPs, it clearly shows that these respondents (114 total respondents) have significantly increased their intake of fruits and vegetables. Respondents reporting they ate fruits and vegetables 4-6 times/week increased 95% and more than once a day increased by 42%. An incredibly important component in increasing intake of fruits and vegetables is being able to access the fresh food. The chart below represents beneficiary responses to their ease of access to fresh food.

## Ease of Access to Fresh Food



Over 92% of respondents said the CFP they participate in has made it easier for them to access fresh food. For those still struggling to access fresh food, price and distance to a grocery store were commonly cited reasons. A few people mentioned that it is easier when they have their CSA through the CFP, but it is more challenging when the CSA season is over. Over 94% said they are able to find foods that fit their cultural diet.

*“My family was able to participate as one of the “Community Supported” families. This meant that a full share was only \$10 for us. I wasn’t sure how my husband or son would react to changing to a “rabbit diet”. However, we were able to incorporate into our diets many more vegetables and fruits than we would normally eat. It significantly reduced our grocery budget. Best of all, it lowered my husband’s blood sugar levels and his cholesterol dropped 20 points just over the duration of the summer CSA. All of us, including my husband and son, loved this program. We received many times the value of what we paid for and never ate better!”*

-CFP Beneficiary, FY 2015

## Strong Communities

*“We have witnessed enormous social and emotional growth in the farmers’ confidence in their abilities and relationships with staff and other farmers. The formulation of the marketing collective and farmer leadership positions brought progress towards building self-sufficiency within farmers. We have seen farmers step into and take over staff roles, such as running farmers’ markets; we have seen them build true entrepreneurial systems, such as preserving and selling their own heirloom seeds. Farmers have been empowered and welcomed into leadership roles in the local food system as well... They have been integral to community engagement efforts such as building up customer bases at farmers’ markets, working with volunteers, and educating CSA members. “*

-CFP Grantee, FY 2015

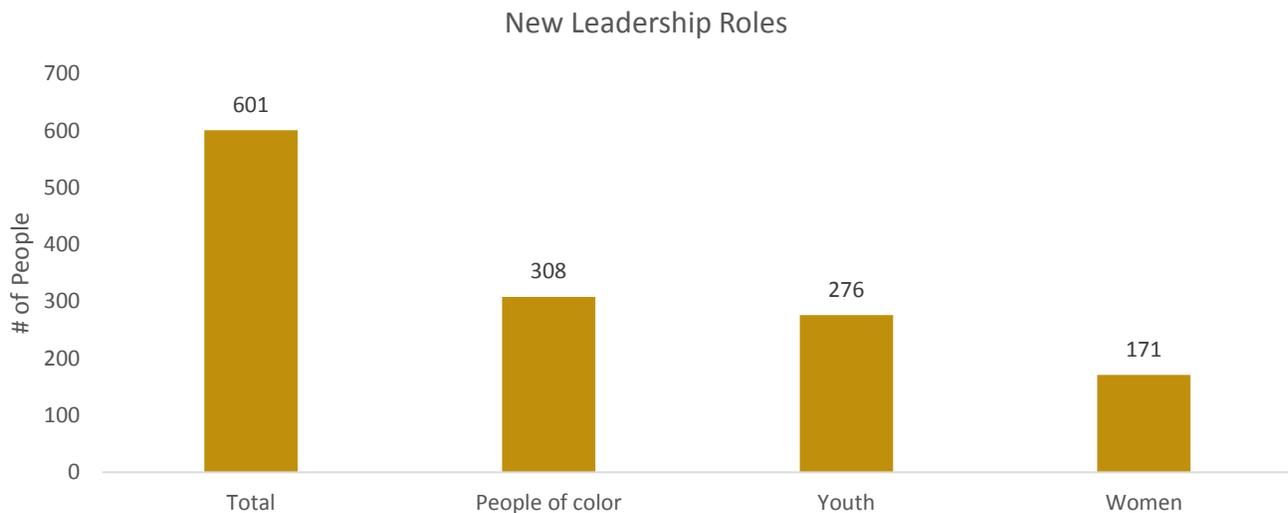
“Community Food Projects are intended to bring together stakeholders from the distinct parts of the food system and to foster understanding of national food security trends and how they might improve local food systems.” [National Institute of Food and Agriculture, 2015]

Building strong communities is at the core of Community Food Projects. This includes not only organizational partnerships, but also stronger local food policies and empowered community leaders. The table below identifies the percent of projects working on various capacity building activities in their communities and the overall percent of time devoted to these activities. Over 66% participated

in capacity building in general, and that took various forms, from strengthening relationships within the community to training farmers and youth leaders to help increase their confidence.

Capacity Building Activities	% of Projects	Overall % of time
Capacity building within your community	66%	7.60%
Training and Technical Assistance	53%	4.33%
Food Policy Council/Network	19%	2.12%
Community Food Assessment	19%	0.78%

In FY 2015, the 34 CFP projects that participated in the survey reported 867 organizational partnerships, with 165 of those representing new partnerships. These partners strengthened the projects in a variety of ways, such as participating in project planning, helping with food distribution and program outreach and offering joint programming. Additionally, they had 9,492 volunteers for a total of 94,445 volunteer hours. These volunteer opportunities and partnerships leverage resources available to community food projects, strengthen relationships and help create stronger communities. In addition to forming new partnerships and getting volunteers involved, CFPs created new leadership opportunities in their communities. Of the 601 new leadership roles created in FY 2015, over half of those were filled by people of color, and just under half engaged youth.



Community Food Assessments and Food Policy Councils are two additional ways that CFPs develop strong communities. In FY 2015, at least 4 Community Food Assessments were completed covering an area with approximately 1.9 million residents. Additionally, these CFPS formed 7 food policy councils who worked on 3 new food policies. These 7 food policy councils represented 269 organizations and had over 700 individuals working on them.

*“The community at large has become more aware of the dynamics of local food systems, has become more mindful of gaps in the food system and ways to address those gaps locally, as well as the importance of community and school gardens in changing eating behaviors and stabilizing communities.”*

*-CFP Grantee, FY 2015*

## Thriving Local Economies

*"This project has impacted me to a most positive and life changing degree. Without these programs we would be left far behind struggling to find resources and technical support. This program has given us an opportunity to start and grow our business that we hope will continue to have a positive impact on both our community as well as our own lives. We hope to also give back in sponsoring young urban farmer's that would like to learn from our own experience and continue the future of local farming."*

*-CFP Beneficiary, FY 2015*

A key element of creating self-reliant communities is helping to create flourishing local economies. In FY 2015, these CFPs impacted their local economies through job creation, creation of new markets and by helping prepare business plans. Each of these activities will create lasting impacts in their communities and build more resilient communities moving forward.

Economic Impact	
Direct jobs created	148
Jobs retained	95
Indirect jobs created	88
Markets expanded	27
New markets established	17
Market sales increase	\$ 615,567
Micro-enterprise opportunities supported	148
Farmers' markets started	11
Farms started or build on	64
CSAs started	2
CSAs operated	35
Projects that prepared business plans	11
Business plans prepared	57

29 of 34 CFPs reported working on at least one of the economic impact activities in the table below, and many spent time working on more than one.

Economic Impact Activities	% of Projects	Overall % of time
Promoting Local Food Purchases	66%	5.06%
Job skills training	63%	4.86%
Farmers' Market	59%	6.67%
Entrepreneurial food and agricultural activity	56%	3.57%
Local food distribution	53%	4.18%
Community Supported Agriculture [CSA]	41%	6.12%
Micro-enterprise/Entrepreneur skill training	38%	1.81%
Farm to School	38%	1.61%
Food hub	34%	4.29%
Farmer/Grower Cooperative	19%	1.91%
Incubator farm	19%	1.59%
Community or Incubator kitchen	9%	0.13%

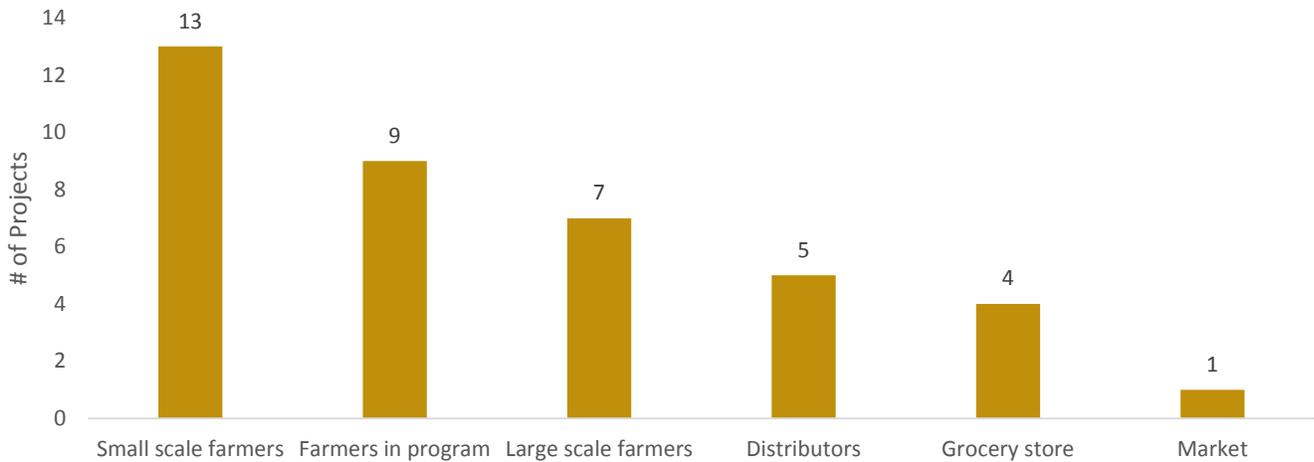
The most overall time was spent on Farmers’ Markets. In FY 2015, 19 projects operated a total of 77 Farmers’ Market locations, which included approximately 20 mobile markets. These markets mostly operated one day/week, for an average of 21 weeks/year, with an average weekly attendance of approximately 300.

*“The influx of urban growers spurred the opening of additional farmer’s markets, which was good for all concerned. This community of like-minded, supportive growers continues to develop and evolve, especially with the unfailing support of this program.” – CFP Beneficiary, FY 2015*

These 34 CFPs worked with 959 farmers in FY 2015. A third of them [320] are able to live off the farm income as their primary income. While a much lower percentage of beneficiaries said they are able to live off their farm income [4 of 36, or 11%], 34 of 50 [68%] beneficiaries involved in running a business [farm or otherwise] said they feel prepared to do so.

In addition to helping individuals gain the skills needed to get a job and supporting the development of businesses, CFPs had an impact in terms of the food they bought, sold and distributed throughout FY 2015. 17 projects [50%] purchased over 3.4 million pounds of food, or close to \$2.8 million. Most CFPs purchased food from multiple sources, and all but 2 of the 17 purchased either from farmers participating in their program, or small scale farmers.

Sources for Purchasing Food



24 projects sold just over 2.1 million pounds of food in their communities for a value of \$5.8 million. 23 projects distributed over 19.71 million pounds of food, with an overlap of 1.7 million pounds between food sold and distributed. One project distributed over 15 million pounds, which accounts for most of the food distributed. The remaining projects distributed an average of 164,000 pounds in FY 2015.

Customers	Sales	% of Projects	# of Customers	Sales/customers
Direct to consumer	\$ 896,644	68%	43,604	\$21
Schools	\$ 753,887	9%	96	\$7,853
Retail	\$ 501,149	32%	456	\$1,099
Restaurants	\$ 367,140	32%	486	\$755
Hospitals	\$ 202,331	12%	32	\$6,323
Healthy Corner Store	\$ 5,335	15%	5	\$1,067

*“I learned that connectivity is essential for successful businesses to establish, grow and survive in an ever changing market. Working to create your own niche market and yet appeal to the mass market is an ongoing work in progress. Competition is tough and you have to be prepared to always improve, change and never stop learning your craft.”*

*-CFP Beneficiary, FY 2015*

### Vibrant Farms and Gardens

*“Throughout this project, special attention has been given to maintaining farmers’ connection to their cultures, prior lifestyles, and preferred foods. Farmers have been vocal in stating that beyond growing and selling healthy food, they are involved with this program as a way to preserve their tradition as farmers, find purpose and connection to land in a new place, and to teach their children and grandchildren how to farm.”*

*-CFP Grantee, FY 2015*

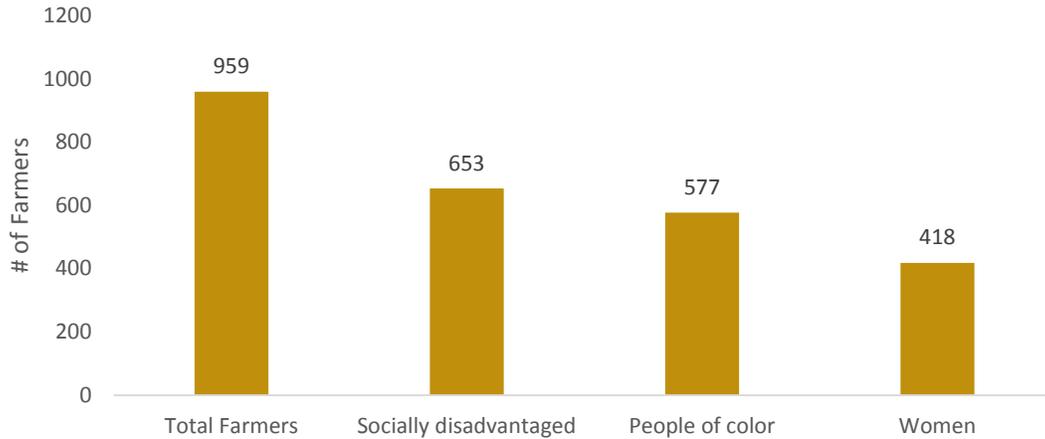
In FY 2015, 23 CFPs grew 409,398 pounds of food on 232 acres of land. 17 of the 23 projects growing food did so in an urban setting, which accounts for 304,366 of the pounds grown on 209 acres. All projects grew vegetables, 10 projects grew berries or had orchards and 4 raised animals (either sheep, goat, pigs, cattle or poultry).

These projects had various land tenure situations from owning, to leasing to informal agreements. The table below shows the different land tenure situations. There is some overlap between numbers of projects since some projects had more than one type of land tenure arrangement. Collectively in FY 2015, these projects worked with over 200 different owners, although one project worked with 140 owners, so this number is a bit misleading. The remaining projects worked with an average of 4 different land owners.

Land Tenure	# of Projects
Short-term lease	7
Own	6
Long-term lease	6
Donated land	5
Informal agreement	3
Other	3

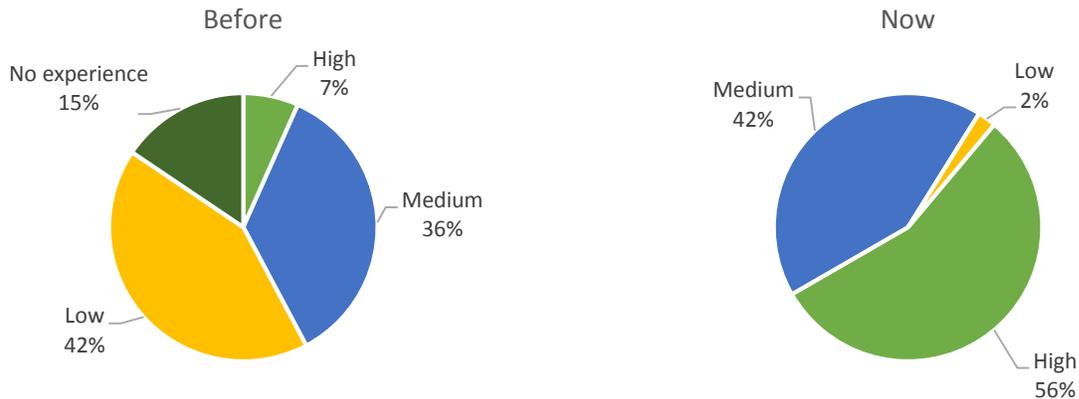
26 projects worked with farmers in some capacity, for a total of 959 farmer participants. This work ranged from training, to facilitating market access, to purchasing food from the farmers. Nine of those projects had the farmers they were working with grow food for use in their other programming. CFPs in FY 2015 helped start or develop 64 farms, 11 of which were new farms. Additionally, these projects organized 93 farm tours in FY 2015 with a total attendance of 6,425.

### Farmer Demographics



95% of farmers [912] working with these CFPs received some form of training. These trainings varied by program, but topics ranged from production skills through post-harvest handling and market training. This training had a very positive impact on the project beneficiaries. The charts below represent project beneficiary's farming experience before participating in their CFP, and now. The respondents (total of 45) clearly indicated an increased level of farm and garden experience as a result of participating in their CFP. Before participating in their CFP, just 19 [42%] beneficiaries indicated a medium or high level of experience, but now 44 [98%] indicate a medium or high level of experience.

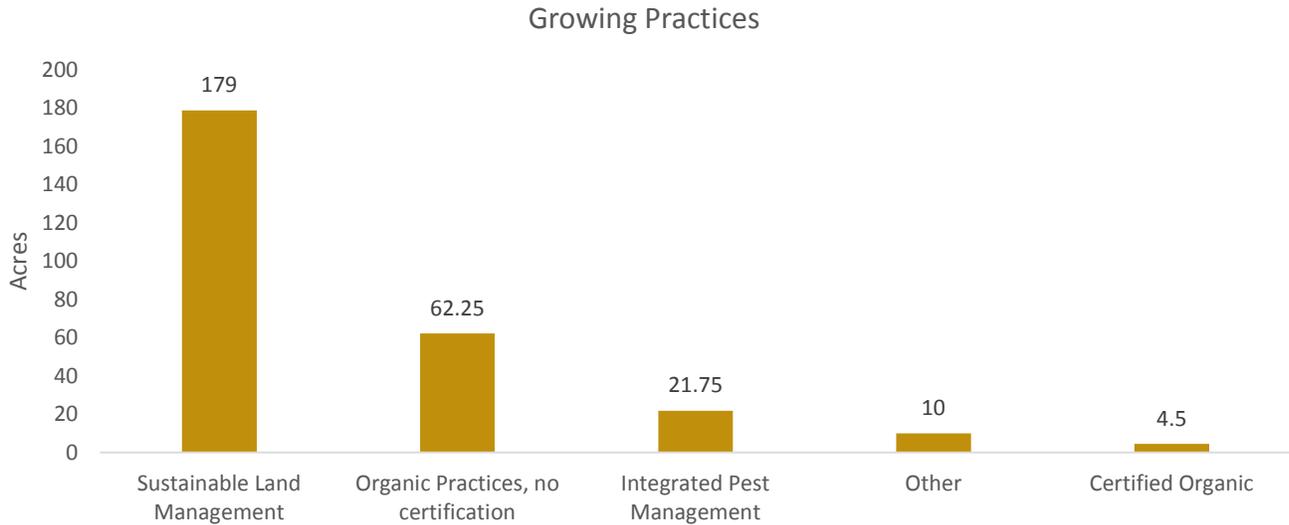
### Farming Experience



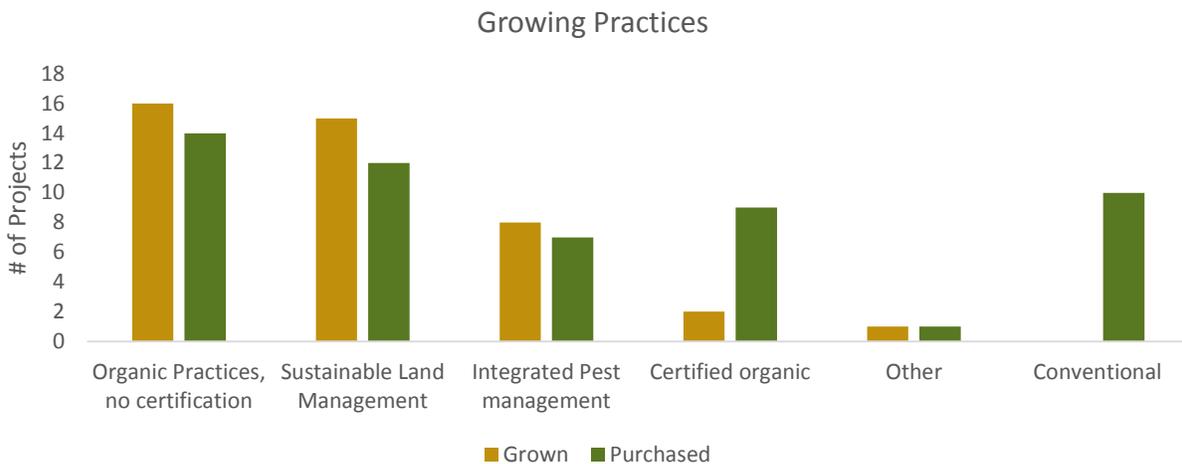
76% of projects participated in at least one of the farm and garden activities in the table below. Over half the projects facilitated community gardens, for a total of 181 gardens, with 2,851 plots and 4,305 different gardeners. This is an impact that will last long-term, since not only are people able to provide food for themselves and their families in the short-term, but they gain valuable gardening skills so that they are able to continue to provide for their families into the future.



CFPs grew, purchased or gleaned 4.1 million pounds of food in FY 2015. 68% of projects grew food, 12% gleaned food and 50% purchased food. The chart below shows acres devoted to different growing practice for the 23 projects that grew food. Some projects had land that fit into more than one category, so there is some overlap between these categories. The chart below accounts for a total of 232 acres.



91% of projects growing food used sustainable land management techniques or organic practices (though not all certified), and 94% of project purchasing food did so from sources that used sustainable land management techniques or organic practices (not all certified).



*“We are very attentive to soil health and maintain it by utilizing cover crops and a twice yearly compost application. We hand weed our plants and use integrative pest management to manage good and bad bugs on the farm. We plant native flowers to attract native pollinators as well. We use Certified Naturally Grown (CNG) standards.”*

*-CFP Grantee, FY 2015*

## Justice and Fairness

*“Our teen internship program offers young people the opportunity to: learn culinary skills from dietetic professionals, utilize sustainable agriculture practices through hands-on field work at our Seeds of Hope farm site, and advocate for increased access to healthy, affordable foods among low-income populations at our farmers market stands. The teens who complete our program walk away with the technical skills and self-confidence they need to break cycles of hunger, poverty, inequality, and oppression.”*

*-CFP Grantee, FY 2015*

Building more self-reliant, resilient communities requires fostering justice and fairness throughout the community. By working with diverse populations and increasing the diversity of leadership roles, communities are able to benefit in the long-term by being stronger and more resilient. These CFPs have fostered justice and fairness by creating leadership opportunities for people of color and women and developing partnerships with business owners and community partners of color. They have expanded to new markets to reach more diverse populations and offered training materials in multiple languages. They are working to understand the diverse needs of those they are working to serve so that they are able to have a lasting impact on their communities.

	# of people
Leadership Roles	
People of Color	308
Women	171
Farmers	
People of Color	577
Women	418
Community partners of color	1402
Business owners of color	186

*“Thank you for caring about humanity. Kudos to everyone involved.”*

*- CFP Beneficiary, FY 2015*

## Conclusion

The Community Food Projects Competitive Grant Program allows organizations across the country to impact tens of thousands of lives each year through increased access to fresh food, education and resources on farming to healthy eating and cooking, and increased food security. Since these projects are deeply rooted in the communities they serve, they continue to impact lives after the initial funding is concluded through increased resiliency and self-sufficiency. In both the short and long-term, these projects are making a difference and contributing to a future where our communities are more connected to their food sources, are more confident about their ability to access food and are more equipped to provide healthier food for themselves and their families.

## Appendix

Activities	2015	2014	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007	2006	2005
Food access and outreach	<b>78%</b>	65%	42%	62%	33%	24%	22%	36%	
Nutrition and health education	<b>72%</b>	62%	44%	41%					
Capacity Building in community	<b>66%</b>								
Promoting local food purchases	<b>66%</b>	65%	30%	47%	42%	32%	41%	50%	46%
Job skills training	<b>63%</b>	58%	42%	29%	33%	13%	17%	32%	17%
Farmers' markets	<b>59%</b>	42%	40%	35%	30%	24%	30%	38%	33%
Entrepreneurial food and agricultural activity	<b>56%</b>	54%	49%	50%	33%	32%	39%	34%	42%
Community garden	<b>53%</b>	54%	42%	44%	48%	32%	24%	30%	21%
Local food distribution	<b>53%</b>	50%	33%	47%					
Training and capacity building	<b>53%</b>	46%	53%	47%	30%	21%	20%	32%	33%
Youth/School gardening or agriculture project	<b>53%</b>	46%	47%	50%	48%	53%	37%	48%	33%
Urban agriculture	<b>50%</b>	50%	35%	29%	21%				
Composting	<b>47%</b>								
Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program	<b>41%</b>	38%	14%	12%	21%	11%	17%	28%	17%
Farm-to-Cafeteria project	<b>38%</b>	15%	26%	9%	15%	13%	20%	38%	25%
Micro-enterprise/Entrepreneur skill training	<b>38%</b>	58%	35%	38%	12%	16%	17%	32%	29%
Food Hub	<b>34%</b>								
Restoration of traditional foods/agriculture	<b>28%</b>	31%	16%	18%	15%	8%	4%	18%	21%
Emergency food collection and distribution	<b>22%</b>	0%	14%	6%	9%	16%	15%	26%	
Immigrant/Migrant farm project	<b>22%</b>	15%	9%	9%	3%	8%	7%	14%	12%
Community Food Assessment	<b>19%</b>	15%	19%	15%	21%	21%	24%	32%	33%
Farm/Grower cooperative	<b>19%</b>	8%	12%	12%	9%	24%	20%	26%	12%
Food Policy Council/Network	<b>19%</b>	12%	26%	15%	21%	18%	17%	36%	33%
Incubator Farm	<b>19%</b>								
Planning grants	<b>13%</b>	0%	14%	3%	9%	18%	15%		
Community or incubator kitchen	<b>9%</b>	19%	9%	9%	15%	16%	11%	20%	25%
Other	<b>9%</b>	8%	12%	21%					
Food-buying cooperative	<b>0%</b>	8%	5%	0%	3%	3%	7%	10%	8%

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## Choctaw Fresh Produce Case Study



*“Choctaw Fresh Produce is helping link the Choctaw Tribe to our agricultural roots”.*

*- Gilbert Thompson, MBCI Natural Resources Director*

### Overview

[Choctaw Fresh Produce](#) is a certified-organic produce business owned by the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians. The Mississippi Choctaw Reservation is scattered across 5 counties and includes 8 separate tribal communities. Each community is unique, and many are rural and remote. As such, 5 mini farms have been developed by Choctaw Fresh Produce to serve the distinct community needs in each area. The organization’s mission is to supply as much healthy, fresh produce to the Choctaw community as possible in a financially self-sustainable manner. The Certified Organic produce grown on their five mini farms is sold in local grocery stores, farmers markets, and through their Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program. Since starting in 2012, the aim of the farming operation was to improve the health of the Choctaw community while generating economic activity. Community Food Project funds allowed the tribe to improve their growing operation, which has increased production capacity and opened up new opportunities for sales, outreach, and education.

### Community Food Project

In 2015, the tribe utilized the funds to 1) install 3 high tunnels measuring 30' x 96' each; 2) install an irrigation system to supply water to the high tunnels; 3) hire a consultant to prepare the farm for compliance with Good Agricultural Practices (GAP); and 4) install a greenhouse to grow certified-organic transplants. The produce grown on the farms was sold through a CSA program, at farmers markets, to restaurants, to local schools, and 281 pounds of surplus was donated to the Choctaw Elderly Program. Their programming also involved job training for disadvantaged farmers, farm tours for school children, and curriculum collaboration with local teachers.

### Impact

*“Diabetes and obesity are major problems in our community, so getting the kids involved early and helping them make the connection between food and health is very important.”*

*- John Hendrix, Choctaw Fresh Produce General Manager*

The installation of high tunnels has allowed the Choctaw Fresh Produce team to expand production while maintaining organic status, increasing the efficiency of harvesting, washing, and packing, thus maintaining product freshness even as the operation grows in scale.

Three of the five farms are located in close proximity to community schools and daycare centers. Over time, this proximity evolved into greater interaction between students and teachers and the commercial farming operations near them. Teachers have brought their students to the farm to learn about high tunnels, irrigation systems, and to try fresh food right out of the field. For example, in 2015, 5 student tours brought 283 Choctaw students to the farm to learn about their local food system and eat a meal using fresh produce grown right on the farm. During these interactions, students have the opportunity to learn how to grow food efficiently at a scale much larger than a typical school garden would allow. Providing students the opportunity to eat Certified Organic food right from the source is helping to increase healthy eating patterns throughout the community.

Partnerships have allowed for expanded impacts throughout the community, as well as benefits back to the farm. In 2015, multiple CSA subscriptions were provided to Choctaw Diabetes Prevention Program and Choctaw Social Services Program, as part of a pilot program to find creative ways to get more fresh, local produce into low-income tribal households. Choctaw Fresh Produce partnered with the Mississippi Cooperative Extension Service to provide technical support, soil tests and disease identification, and the National Resource Conservation Service provided erosion control assistance, which can benefit the farm and community long-term. On-farm trainings have also been conducted to inform more than 250 rural, disadvantaged farmers about high-tunnel production methods and sustainable irrigation practices. Through such collaborations, Choctaw Fresh Produce is improving their community on all levels by reviving tribal self-sufficiency from within.



## YMCA of Greater Grand Rapids Case Study



### Overview

In 2002, the [YMCA of Greater Grand Rapids](#) began a long journey into addressing childhood obesity in their community. They started hosting physical activity programming and quickly expanded into nutrition education, through SNAP Ed after school programs and Cooking Matters workshops with families. As participants started incorporating the healthy habits promoted by these programs, they found that their food environments posed challenges to implementing these practices in their daily lives. To address the need for more affordable and accessible sources of healthy food, the YMCA created the Veggie Van, a mobile market that offers fresh and locally grown produce at high-priority locations throughout the community. Now, the Veggie Van serves 20 locations including senior centers, schools, and low-income housing communities. At each location, the market helps strengthen the relationship between local growers and urban consumers and increases healthy food access.

### Community Food Project

As a natural extension of their previous efforts, the YMCA's team forged relationships with local convenience stores in some of Grand Rapids' most vulnerable communities to launch a Healthy Corner Store Initiative with the help of Community Food Projects (CFP) grant through the USDA. In the first year of the project, the team partnered with three corner stores to reduce the barriers to including fresh, high-quality produce in their offerings. Their team aided with marketing to reform public perception of corner store produce, and provided support for in-store merchandising to ensure customer engagement. Since then, partnerships have grown to include seven corner stores, and now the Veggie Van serves as a delivery vehicle for corner stores experiencing challenges finding a distributor for small orders of produce. The financial support from CFP has also helped the team form

partnerships with New City Urban Farm, which employs at-risk youth to engage in leadership and professional development programming, and Hope Farms, a business incubator for refugee farmers.

### Impact

The Veggie Van Mobile Market and Healthy Corner Store Initiatives have increased access to locally grown produce for 42,000 vulnerable urban residents, and increased capacity for refugee and at-risk youth growers in the Grand Rapids community. By ensuring that fresh food is affordable, available, and easily purchased with SNAP and WIC benefits, these programs have laid the foundation for self-reliance among residents seeking healthy options in their neighborhoods. The Veggie Van has increased the Grand Rapids food system's capacity to aggregate and distribute produce to vulnerable urban neighborhoods. This has meant that more than 17,298 customers were able purchase fruits and vegetables in their neighborhoods, where they otherwise may have not had access. The seamless nature with which these programs fit into the YMCA's mission ensure that these impacts will endure and grow.

