



USDA AMS Local and Regional Foods Division Agreement Summary

December 2024

AMS' Local and Regional Foods Division (LRFD) works to improve market access for producers and develop new markets through its three main roles as a researcher, convener, and technical assistance provider. In USDA's vision, local food producers, markets, and communities have easy access to ideas, innovations, and research to grow and sustain a productive business. This information ensures that opportunities for U.S. food producers are readily available and communities are equipped to successfully grow and sell regionally produced foods, while also supporting increased access to locally produced foods. LRFD accomplishes much of its work through cooperative and interagency agreements. For more information on LRFD's work, [visit our webpage](#).

Fiscal Year 2024 Cooperative Agreements

2024 Local Food Economics Data Visualization Challenge

Partners: Agriculture and Applied Economics Association

The Local Food Economics Data Visualization Challenge is intended for graduate students in agricultural and applied economics to learn about USDA's work with local and regional food systems, practice coding and data visualization skills, build their network, and connect with mentors. Students will develop a novel data visualization and analysis that responds to competition prompts using relevant local foods data, including the AMS Local Food Data Warehouse and Food and Agriculture Mapper and Explorer (FAME) tools.

2024 National Farmers Market Manager Survey: Phase 2

Partner: Michigan State University

Through this project, the cooperator will conduct the 2024 National Farmers Market Management Survey to update the farmers market (FM) survey conducted in 2019. Survey changes will follow recommendations gleaned from FM sector stakeholder listening sessions and in-depth interviews to better understand market management experiences and increase the usability of data for national stakeholders. This study will generate many insights about the FM across the US and estimate the number of farmers markets in 2024.

Maintenance and Data Update for USDA Local Food Directories

Partner: Michigan State University

The project maintains the USDA Local Food Directories website for individual managers, large market organizations, and consumers. Data will be updated using web scraping listings for farmers markets, agritourism businesses, on-farm markets, CSAs, and Food Hubs.

Continuing Agreements Started in Previous Fiscal Years

Local Sourcing Innovation in Independent and Locally-Owned Groceries

Partner: Kansas State University

This agreement will explore what lessons can be learned from innovative local sourcing models that could help locally-owned, independent, and rural groceries become better integrated into local and regional supply chains. The project is aimed at improving understanding of which sourcing models work, and where, to achieve integrated, resilient local and regional supply chains.

Strengthening Institutional Procurement: Lessons from LFPA

Partners: Michigan State University

This agreement considers the broader impacts of USDA AMS' Local Food Purchasing Agreement (LFPA) program on the existing networks of regional market channels, including:

- Equitable access to regional market channels;
- Small farm participation in commodity procurement; and,
- The degree to which LFPA has afforded (even small) capital improvements, food safety certifications, improved logistics, or other investments that may contribute to lasting fortification of regional procurement channels.

Many Hats - All the Roles Food Hub Operators Must Play

Partners: Michigan State University and University of Vermont

This agreement aims to better understand the roles food hub operators must fill and provide guidance on how to fill such roles effectively. Project objectives include:

- Understanding the current state of resources aimed at practitioners and verifying the most up to date information on the state of the sector and barriers faced by food hubs;
- Developing technical assistance resources for operators, with a focus on ensuring resources are widely available and useful to practitioners; and,
- Supporting food hub operators in successfully running hubs and developing stable, resilient operations that facilitate access to markets for local and regional producers.

Taking a Regional Approach to Strengthening Food Systems through Food Policy Councils

Partners: The Ohio State University, Colorado State University, and Johns Hopkins University

This agreement aims to better understand regional approaches to strengthening food systems through food policy councils. The project will develop resources to support food system practitioners working across geographies not circumscribed within a single government (municipal, county, state) jurisdiction, requiring coordination across multiple sectors and/or governments. Resources and information will explore opportunities for regional food policy councils to build capacity and leverage expertise as supply chain matchmakers to support development of food hubs and other regional food businesses. The cooperator established a Community of Practice for regional FPCs, partnering with 11 regional FPCs to identify characteristics of this work and then develop resources to aid these and similar groups.

Wholesale Capacity Building in Local Food Partnership Program (LFPP) Grants

Partner(s): University of Kentucky Research Foundation

This agreement investigates and analyzes the impact of the USDA's Local Food Promotion Program (USDA LFPP) in supporting producers who desire to scale up their operations and successfully enter wholesale markets involving a commercial aggregator and distributor assisting sales to groceries, restaurants, and institutional markets. The USDA LFPP aims to promote local and regional food systems, enhance access to fresh and healthy food, and stimulate economic opportunities for farmers and producers. As part of the research, the cooperators interviewed 25 LFPP grant recipients and learned about the ways that LFPP impacted the recipient's operation.

USDA AMS Grant Applicant Technical Assistance with Underserved Community Focus

Partners: University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES) and Florida A&M University (FAMU)

USDA AMS Grant Programs are designed to support the economic development of communities and commodities by funding projects that enhance the marketability and competitiveness of U.S. agricultural products. To properly achieve this mission, it is imperative to consider the accessibility of AMS grant programs to all U.S. agricultural farmers, ranchers, fishers, and businesses. Moreover, it is important to understand the history and context of relations between USDA and black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) populations which has led to a lack of trust between these communities and the agency. To address this, FAMU, UMES, and AMS will 1) thoroughly evaluate barriers to AMS grant opportunities for BIPOC and other underserved communities, 2) invest in rebuilding confidence between these communities and the USDA to overcome historic tensions and mistrust, and 3) take action to rectify inequalities in program access through targeted outreach, training and technical assistance.

Agritourism: Understanding Producer Benefits, Challenges and Needs throughout the US

Partner: University of Vermont

This agreement will improve the understanding of the scale and scope of agritourism in the US by populating the National Agritourism Directory, presenting farmers and ranchers a national marketing outlet for agritourism offerings that will allow interested consumers to find tourism options in a centralized location. AMS will also collect information on the number of agrotourism farms and types of activities offered to conduct its own nationwide agrotourism research.

Increasing Access to Wholesale Markets: Meeting Technical Assistance Needs for Black, Hispanic, and Tribal Producers

Partners: Virginia Polytechnical Institute, Illinois Institute of Technology

This project will employ a mixed methods study to understand the distinct needs of Black, Hispanic and Tribal producers around access and entry into wholesale markets, and the core competencies of curriculum and preferred modes of delivery to meet these distinct needs. The project plans to deliver this data and resources to regional technical assistance providers, including the Regional Food Business Centers (RFBCs), that will support them in understanding and meeting those distinct needs. The project's findings will examine the current state of technical assistance resources for wholesale marketing, and the distinct resource needs of socially disadvantaged farmers who want to sell through wholesale markets.

Assessing the Impact of Partnerships to Improve Local and Regional Food Systems: An Evaluation of the RFSP Grant Program

Partners: Washington State University

This agreement evaluates the success of Regional Food Systems Partnerships (RFSP) funding in sustaining and enhancing the local and regional food system through building partnerships. The evaluation focuses on the direct and indirect impacts of RFSP on the stakeholders and partners involved in local and regional food systems; the impacts of the project on the grant recipient and its community; and how grant management and other funding sources influence RFSP success. The cooperator uses the Ripple Effect Mapping (REM) method to understand the RFSP impacts on local and regional food systems.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

December 2024