



AGMRC FINAL REPORT

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PRESENTED BY: AGMRC

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AGMRC FINAL REPORT

MISSION AND GOALS

The mission of AgMRC is to provide independent producers and processors with critical information needed to build successful value-added agricultural enterprises through the www.agmrc.org electronic resource information website. Resources and events provided through the efforts of AgMRC are also intended to support independent producers and processors that are submitting Value-Added Producer Grants (VAPG). AgMRC strives to serve a national value-added agriculture audience through its web platform and relationship with other land-grant universities and other technical assistance providers from across the country.

AgMRC team members worked with internal and external partners to achieve the historical overarching goals of AgMRC which are to:

- Maintain an electronic, web-based library with powerful search capabilities to make value-added market, economic and business information and other resources available to producers nationwide.
- Provide value-added business and economic analysis tools, including information on business principles, legal, financial and logistical issues.
- Link producers with electronically available information and resources on major value-added commodities and niche markets.
- Provide resources that support producers in their efforts to prepare and participate in Value-Added Producer Grants.

PARTNERS AND STAKEHOLDERS

UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS:

Under the leadership of Ron Rainey, Economist. Rainey worked with all segments of the food system including growers, processors, and wholesale/retail companies within Arkansas and throughout the Southeast region. He utilized his partnership with the SE Farm Management Committee to work with numerous land-grant and 1890s school including the territories of Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands, to conduct outreach and capacity trainings to strengthen value-added business planning, feasibility studies and grant applications with an emphasis on engagement in VAPG programs and using AgMRC and associated resources to improve business start-ups..

AgMRC Subcontract	States Reached through Partnership	Key Objectives
University of Arkansas	Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands	Focus on Feasibility Trainings; Business Development Trainings for VAPG Applicants and Value-added Entrepreneurs.

Ron Rainey led a team that included a graphic designer, summer communications intern and communication's faculty to develop a value added success story template and several infographics to promote the VAPG program. Ron developed success stories from across the Southern region. The

success stories include an infographic to highlight value added activity and details USDA VAPG definitions. The stories promote Southern Risk Management Education Center and AgMRC and includes a quote from the grantee. A “VAPG Success Story” landing page is featured on the SRMEC website <https://srmec.uaex.edu/News/vapg-success-stories.aspx>. Social media strategies will promote the program’s successes across the region.

The University of Arkansas held the 19th Annual National Value Added Agriculture Conference in Little Rock, Arkansas, November 14th-16th, 2017. Of particular interest was the opportunity to talk about the Focus on Feasibility workshops to generate some interest for the 2018 workshops.

Rainey held a workshop in 2018 for the Focus on Feasibility and had 40 participants. These workshops were meant to train-the-trainers to improve Value Added Producer Grant applications throughout the SE region.

UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT:

The University of Vermont, in conjunction with Oregon State University, provided tools and resources to support agritourism and value-added agriculture enterprises.

AgMRC Subcontract	States Reached through Partnership	Key Objectives
University of Vermont	Oregon State University; Regional training in New England states and Pacific Northwest states.	Best management practices checklists for agritourism operations; best management workshops for agritourism operators; presentations at national conferences on agritourism to share the best management practices nationally

1. Best practices guides

A variety of new materials have been created and integrated into existing resource hubs, including the Vermont Agritourism Collaborative website at <https://www.uvm.edu/extension/vtagritourism> and Oregon State University Extension website at <https://extension.oregonstate.edu/marion/agritourism-tourism-marion-county>. The acknowledgement of AgMRC support for the new website materials is at <https://www.uvm.edu/extension/vtagritourism/about> and on all materials.

Publications and videos on best practices for agritourism and value-added enterprises posted at <https://www.uvm.edu/extension/vtagritourism/agritourism-guides> include:

Agritourism Best Practices Publications

[2019 Best Practices in Agritourism](#) (PDF)

[How to Develop a Farm Stand](#) (PDF)

[How to Develop a Farm Stay \(PDF\)](#)
[How to Develop a Farm Tour \(PDF\)](#)
[How to Develop a Pick-Your-Own Business \(PDF\)](#)
[How to Host a Farm Dinner \(PDF\)](#)
[How to Host a Summer Camp \(PDF\)](#)
[How to Host Weddings \(PDF\)](#)

Best Practices Video Series

[Couture's Maple Shop/B&B, Westfield, VT](#)
[Hollister Hill Farm & Bed and Breakfast, Marshfield, VT](#)
[Isham Family Farm, Williston, VT](#)
[Four Springs Farm, Royalton, VT](#)
[Scott Farm Orchard, Dummerston, VT](#)

Value Added Producer Grant (VAPG) Profiles

[African Alliance of Rhode Island \(PDF\)](#)
[Avena Botanicals \(PDF\)](#)
[Big Picture Farm \(PDF\)](#)
[Boothby's Orchard & Farm Winery \(PDF\)](#)
[Fuzzy Udder Creamery \(PDF\)](#)
[Gothberg Farms \(PDF\)](#)
[TMK Creamery \(PDF\)](#)
[When Pigs Fly Farm \(PDF\)](#)

Publications on best practices for agritourism and value-added enterprises posted at <https://extension.oregonstate.edu/marion/agritourism-tourism-marion-county> include:

Questions Planners may Anticipate Regarding the Agritourism Industry's Farm Direct Sales and other Farm-Based Activities

<https://extension.oregonstate.edu/sites/default/files/documents/9271/agtourfactsheetplannersquestionsagtouractivities2019v4.pdf>

How to Create an Inventory of Agritourism Operations in an Area, County or Multi-County Region

<https://extension.oregonstate.edu/sites/default/files/documents/9271/agtourfactsheethowtocreateinventoryagritourismfinal-copy.pdf>

How Instagram Stories Can Help Direct Traffic to Your Agritourism Operation

<https://extension.oregonstate.edu/sites/default/files/documents/9271/agtourfactsheetinstagramfinal.pdf>

Selling Farm Produce by Count, Volume or Weight

<https://extension.oregonstate.edu/sites/default/files/documents/9271/selling-farm-produce-volume-final2.pdf>

Agritourism Limited Liability Signs Provide Partial Protection for Agritourism Operators

<https://oregonstate.app.box.com/s/6avux8g7r7v8oa60qgbxjehz81735sp5>

Case Study: How Oregon State University Programming Supports the Development of Agritourism Activities (Including Farm-Direct Sales) in Oregon

<https://oregonstate.app.box.com/s/u7kgwnxvhqv67tmjncxg5jwqwvdcejwt>

Case Study: On-farm Agritourism Activities in Marion County, Oregon from 2017 to 2018.

<https://oregonstate.app.box.com/s/lkur2ylxejx5rd7wmvni4yux4op8zch5>

2. Workshops on agritourism and value-added enterprises

During the grant period, we conducted 24 workshops on agritourism and value-added enterprises to share best practices and the VAPG program with producers and agricultural service providers. The workshops reached 615 participants in the Northeast and Pacific Northwest, including farmers, agricultural service providers, and others working with agritourism and value-added enterprises. Below is a list of workshops.

How to Enhance Your Agritourism Offerings with Farm-to-Table Programming, August 29, 2019, Caldwell, Idaho. 15 tourism and community development professionals attended.

How a Dairy Farm Creates and Presents Educational Experiences for Visitors, August 20, 2019, TMK Creamery, Canby, Oregon. 20 agritourism operators attended.

Agritourism—Best Practices, Impacts and Trends; Central Oregon Planners Network Meeting, June 26, 2019. Madras, Oregon. 25 attendees including city and county staff, planners, elected officials and planning commissioners.

Vermont Farm to Plate Agritourism Task Force Meeting, June 25, 2019, Philo Ridge Farm, Charlotte, Vermont. 20 attendees.

Live the Farm, May 2, 2019, Wilsonville Rotary Club, Wilsonville Oregon. 28 attendees.

Live the Farm, April 19, 2019, Canby Rotary Club, Canby, Oregon. Attended by 47 including several farmers.

Agritourism 101 Training, April 19, 2019, Marion Polk Food Share Youth Farm, Chemeketa Community College, Salem, Oregon. 11 farmers attended.

Agri-Eco Tourism Conference, March 14, 2019, Salem, Oregon. 48 producers and tourism industry representatives attended.

County Planners Network in Corvallis, Oregon, February 8, 2019. 38 county planners attended this training.

Farm Image and Public Relations, December 28, 2018, Oregon State University Extension Service, Marion County, Oregon. 11 participants.

ABCs of Farm-Based Education, October 21-23, 2018, Shelburne Farms, Vermont. 22 participants. Participants came from Delaware, New Jersey, New York, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Vermont, California and Galway, Ireland.

Farm-Based Education Network Fall Learning Journey, September 16 - 18, 2018, New York City; 9 participants. Tours were coordinated, hosted, and marketed by project partner, the Farm-Based Education Network. The tours were attended by 9 individuals, who came from the greater New York Area.

Food Safety for Farms Open to Visitors. August 9, 2018, Cedar Circle Farm, Thetford, Vermont. 21 participants.

Getting Your Farm Ready for Visitors Training, August 2018, Salem, Oregon. 5 farmers attended.

The Three T's of Agritourism – Tours, Talks and Tastings, June 28, 2018, Park Hill Orchard, Easthampton, Massachusetts. Organized with CISA (Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture). 17 participants.

Agritourism networking and demonstration training event on an agritourism operation in Gervais, Oregon, June 6, 2018. 10 farmers attended.

Bringing Visitors to Your Farm, May 29, 2018, Glendale Ridge Vineyard and Winery, Southamptn, Massachusetts. Organized with CISA (Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture). 19 participants.

Agritourism Operator Network on-site technical tours, April 2018, 23 attended the network meeting at Wooden Shoe Tulip Farm and 12 attended the network meeting at Bauman's Farm and Garden.

Vermont Farm Based Education Workshop: Building Farmer & Educator Connections, April 17, 2018, Snow Farm Vineyard, South Hero, Vermont. Organized with South Hero Land Trust, Healthy Roots Collaborative & Shelburne Farms. 38 participants.

Engaging Visitors: Tours, Camps & On-Farm Events, February 28, 2018, Golden Well Farm & Apiaries, New Haven, Vermont. Organized with Addison County Re-localization Network (ACORN). 17 participants.

Agritourism Conference 2018: A training for agritourism operators and professionals, January 24, 2018, The Oregon Garden, Silverton, Oregon, to teach agritourism best practices and provide tools to agritourism farmers, value-added producers and tourism professionals. 80 attended from across Oregon and Washington.

Dairy Tours & Overnight Farm Stays, December 6, 2017, Liberty Hill Farm, Rochester, Vermont. 24 participants.

Engaging Farm Visitors: Tours, Camps & Animals, November 2, 2017, Shelburne Farms, Shelburne, Vermont. 34 participants.

Feasibility Studies for Value Added Producer Grant (VAPG) Applications, October 25, 2017, Norwich Inn, Norwich, Vermont. 21 participants.

3. Presentations at professional conferences

During the grant period, we presented at eight professional conferences to share the best practices materials and VAPG program with colleagues including agricultural service providers and researchers. Below is a list of presentations.

Meeting of the Agricultural & Applied Economics Association, Atlanta, Georgia, July 21-23, 2019.

Critical success factors for agritourism on small and medium farms: a multistate lens. Quella, L., Chase, L., Conner, D., Wang, W., Leff, P., Stewart, M., Singh-Knights, D., Reynolds, T., & Messer, C. Peer reviewed presentation.

Agriculture, Food, & Human Values Society and Association for the Study of Food and Society Joint Annual Conference, Anchorage, Alaska, June 26-29, 2019. **Critical Success Factors for Agritourism and Direct Sales on Small and Medium Farms.** Conner, D., L. Quella, L.C. Chase, G. Feenstra, P. Leff, C. Messer, D. Singh-Knights, and M. Stewart, W. Wang. Peer reviewed presentation.

1st World Congress on Agritourism, Eurac Research, Bolzano, Italy, November 7-9, 2018. **Developing a Conceptual Framework for Agritourism in the U.S.A.** Chase, L.C. and M. Stewart. Peer reviewed poster. This opportunity to share tools and resources for agritourism and value-added enterprises with an international audience, and also to learn from other countries, was not supported by AgMRC funding since the conference took place outside the U.S., but we did share AgMRC resources with participants, as many of these resources are applicable for farmers and service providers in other countries.

Slow Living Summit, Brattleboro, Vermont, May 31, 2018. **Organic Entrepreneurs: Finding Ingredients for Success and Avoiding Recipes for Disaster,** Chase, L.C., G. Cox, J. Franklin, C. Tomlinson, and P. Ackerman-Leist. Invited presentation.

North American Farmers' Direct Marketing Association Conference. Los Angeles, California, February 6, 2018. **Operation Education: Your Farm as a Classroom,** Simon-Nobes, V. and S. Marchand. Invited presentation.

Vermont Fresh Network Annual Meeting, Norwich, Vermont, January 22, 2018. **Marketing Beyond Vermont,** Chase, L.C. Invited presentation.

Vermont Maple Conference, Brattleboro, Vermont, January 20, 2018. **Welcoming the Public to your Sugarhouse,** Chase, L.C., S. Cook, and P. Cooper-Ellis. Invited presentation.

International Society of Travel and Tourism Educators (ISTTE) 2017 Conference, Charleston, South Carolina, October 15-17, 2017. **Agritourism: Connecting Communities, Places and People.** Walk, M. and L.C. Chase. Peer reviewed presentation.

4. Technical assistance

During the grant period, we provided direct technical assistance through farm visits and one-on-one consultations to support farmers with agritourism and value-added enterprises, including farms applying for Value-Added Producer Grants. We worked with 64 farms in the Northeast and 71 farms in the Pacific Northwest, totaling 135 farms supported with direct technical assistance during the grant period.

COMMUNITY FOOD SYSTEM NETWORK IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY:

The focus of this project and collaboration with AgMRC is to develop a training that offers local food practitioners a process that assists in community development around food systems. It will highlight

both a success process and integrate appropriate tools to assist food entrepreneurs in their endeavors to develop their business and manage risk. This proposal includes collaboration with 8-10 Universities across the nation for train-the-trainer implementation, as well as collaboration with the North American Food Systems Network to develop a transferable Local Food Leader program and online module. These will offer national best practices, tools, and programming. These two programs will be merged into a three-day intensive training as a pilot with incorporated training that promotes VAPG and AgMRC programming and associated resources. The training will help local leaders provide direct assistance to local producers and processors starting or growing their business or applying for VAPG funding.

AgMRC Subcontract	States Reached through Partnership	Key Objectives
Community Food System Network, Iowa State University	Arkansas, California, Colorado, Kentucky, Michigan, North Carolina, Ohio, Rhode Island, South Carolina and Texas	Focus on Feasibility Trainings; Business Development Trainings for VAPG Applicants and local leaders providing technical assistance to producers and processors

The [Community Food Systems Program](#) (CFSP) received funds from the [Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#) to develop and pilot two national certification programs: Local Food Leader certification, and Community Food Systems certification. Additionally, they have created a Mapping 101 certification as well. [Pilot program evaluation report](#).

- **Mapping 101:** a curriculum that includes unique input models to garner feedback, comprehensive reports utilizing qualitative and quantitative information, and resources to find necessary data for decision making on multiple scales from business development, organizational work and community food systems assessments. This certification is appropriate for individuals interested in understanding how to create maps for decision making and building new skills in QGIS for data and map development.

[Mapping 101 Certification Syllabus](#)

https://youtu.be/n_XI3PrdbtI

- **Local Food Leader:** a foundational practice certification that build capacity for individual engagement within the food system. The certification develops individual skills including: building trust, facilitation, knowledge of the food system, evaluation techniques, leadership, plan of work development and professional development plans. [Here is a two-page overview](#) of the goals and curriculum of the Local Food Leader certification.

[Local Food Leader Online Module Syllabus](#)

<https://youtu.be/XZFpHXqORBQ>

<https://youtu.be/Lc05rvA29EY>

- **Community Food Systems:** a process based certification that increases capacity for food system practitioners to work in and develop food systems. It teaches a needed framework for food systems development that walks through a three year process that started in Iowa in 2014. This certification is unique because it both focuses on collective decision making and strategic planning methods, as well as unique opportunities to tie in technical assistance such as economic impact analysis, feasibility studies, and design thinking. This is relevant because food systems are dynamic and unique. This certification will equip participants in various different skill sets and facilitation methods, as well as team building; participants will develop different strategies for decision-making, and will have the ability to bring projects from thinking to project implementation for reaching systems based goals. [Here is a four-page overview](#) of goals and curriculum of the Community Food Systems certification.

[Community Food Systems Assessor Certification Syllabus](#)

[Community Food Systems Design Thinking Certification Syllabus](#)

[Community Food Systems Economic Impact Certification Syllabus](#)

[Community Food Systems Facilitator Certification Syllabus](#)

[Community Food Systems Feasibility Certification Syllabus](#)

[Community Food Systems Full Certification Syllabus](#)

<https://youtu.be/VoAT6QqB5Kc>

<https://youtu.be/6aupPBBAIL4>

<https://youtu.be/cJloDj6u8lw>

MODEL FARM:

Model Farm is a subsidiary of the Iowa State Daily University Newspaper, designed to help Communications/Marketing students get real world experience on projects. The Model Farm Team, under the supervision of Tony Thrush, have recently developed a standardized template for VAPG recipient videos. They also developed a set of demo videos and are now set to launch a national campaign to showcase successful VAPG recipients from around the country. This particular group is posed to do this project based on an affiliation they have with 33 other colleges and universities around the country. Model Farm will serve as the management team and coordinate communications with videographers at these colleges and also the do all final edits of the video to ensure a consistent high quality video. Each of these videos will address three key points: a) showcase their VAPG business, b) explain how VAPG program helped their business, c) encouragement to use VAPG programs and resources such as AgMRC and associated resources.

AgMRC Subcontract	States Reached through Partnership	Key Objectives
Model Farm	Arkansas, California, Colorado, Kentucky, Michigan, North Carolina, Ohio, Rhode Island,	VAPG recipient video case studies

	South Carolina and Texas plus others	
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Under the Model Farm subcontract, AgMRC created 67 new videos of VAPG recipients. These videos have been viewed over 500 times each, creating awareness of the VAPG program.

Value Added Producer Grant: Serenity Acres Farm

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Fair Share Farm

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Leffel Roots

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Country Blossom Farm

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Blue Heron Orchard

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Earth Dance Organic Farm School

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Honey Ice Cream

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Thompson Farms

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Little Vine Vineyards & Winery

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Yaupon Tea + Apothecary

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: B.J. Reece Orchards

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Meadowlark Organics

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Autumn Moon Farm

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Square Meal Feeds

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Hamthropology

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Carlos Creek Winery

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Big Door Vineyards

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: McCune Farm to Market

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Buckner Family Farm

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Stumpy's Spirits Distillery

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Muscadine Products Corporations

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Horse Creek Winery

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Sno Pac Foods

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Midwest Hop Producers

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Hildebrand Farms Dairy

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Honestly Cranberry

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: White Oak Pastures

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Love Food Farm

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Working Cows Dairy

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Collective Harvest

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Oliver Oil Co LLC

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Northeast Georgia Locally Grown

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Farmer's Daughter Vineyards

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Together Farms

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Hickory Hill Milk

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Cannon River Winery and Vineyard

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Chapel Hill Creamery

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Dan & Debbies Creamery

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Darby Springs Farm

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Holy Field Winery

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Fireside Winery

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Redhead Creamery

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Shepherd's Way Farms

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Shared Ground Farmers' Cooperative

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Sacred Blossom Farm

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Red Tail Beef Ranch

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Midwest Elderberry Cooperative

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Living Greens Farm

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Rowe Ridge Vineyard & Winery

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Gary's Berries

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Vox Vineyard

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: White Tail Run Winery

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Green Dirt Farm

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Wisconsin Food Hub Cooperative

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Three Brothers Farm

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Sassy Cow Creamery

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Robinette Farms

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Gretta's Goats

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: The Cider Farm

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Wisconsin Hop Exchange

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Heartland Nuts N' More

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Pennoch Winery

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Doe's and Diva's Dairy

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Lakehouse Farms

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Jokir's Wild

[Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#)

Value Added Producer Grant: Hansen's Farm Fresh Dairy

Value Added Producer Grant: North Iowa Fresh

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA:

University of Minnesota (UMN) under the leadership of Mike Boland. Boland has been a long-term strategic partner and will continue that partnership with an emphasis on content development, business structure and evaluation. UMN has conducted two impact analysis studies of past VAPG recipients (2001 to 2005; 2001 to 2012). In the fall of 2017, UMN will update these studies to include 2001 to the most recent data. The goal of these studies are to classify each VAPG grant into one of the nine steps of business development. These include: creation of idea, formation of idea into written form, formation of an organizational structure for the idea, hiring of employee(s) for the idea, conducting equity drive to raise capital for the idea, formation of physical structure for the idea, creation of the idea into a product or service, creation of the idea into a distributable product or service, and finally, whether the product or service was sold two years after the grant was received. Both studies found that the dollar amount of the grant size had significant impacts on a VAPG recipient being successful or reaching step nine of the nine-step business process. In addition, UMN is seeking to determine what step in the business development current VAPG recipients are currently in and creating similar variables as used in previous studies. Because many of these new VAPG grants are producers, the team hopes to determine the number of jobs created in the final step of business development.

AgMRC Subcontract	States Reached through Partnership	Key Objectives
University of Minnesota	Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota	National VAPG metrics on business success.

The University of Minnesota created a paper series entitled “Overview of the USDA VAPG Program From 2001 to 2017.” The three studies utilized these sets of data to classify each VAPG as one of the nine steps of business development: (1) creation of an idea, (2) formation of the idea into written form, (3) formation of an organizational structure for the idea, (4) hiring of employee(s) for the idea, (5) conducting an equity drive to raise capital for the idea, (6) formation of a physical structure for the idea, (7) creation of the idea into a product or service, (8) creation of the idea into a distributable product or service, and (9) selling the product or service within two years after receiving the grant. The studies analyzed what factors appeared to contribute to grant recipients’ achievement of a higher stage of business development.

[Overview of the USDA VAPG Program from 2001 to 2017](#)

Minnesota worked with VAPG recipients and business development members in Minnesota. Business planning meetings were conducted in 2017-19 in California, Idaho, Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota and Washington State.

GLOBAL FOOD AG NETWORK (GFAN):

GFAN, under the leadership of Rich and Darlene Knipe. AgMRC and MarketMaker have embarked on a resource sharing initiative that will support both missions and provide relevant tools and resources to help producers and processors develop their business and marketing plans.

GFAN proposal outlines a collaborative effort between the Ag Marketing Resource Center (AgMRC), the National Food MarketMaker Program and the Iowa State University Community Design Lab. Its purpose is to expand the tools and resources that will aid VAPG producers with business plans, feasibility studies and the grant application process. In addition, it will expand the audience for AgMRC's educational resources. The four major components to the enhanced tools are:

- 1) Build Exportable Maps and Reports- Develop a series of maps and customizable marketing studies that provide Value Added Producer Grant (VAPG) applicants with market intelligence that can easily be incorporated into feasibility studies and business plans that support the VAPG application process,
- 2) Integrate Educational Content from AgMRC site into MarketMaker Platform- Develop additional MarketMaker search tools targeting the AgMRC site educational content, building on the progress made in the most recent round of funding,
- 3) Enhance MarketMaker Advanced Mapping Tools- Expand the secondary data sources from USDA that can be incorporated into the MarketMaker interactive mapping platform. Develop a more intuitive interface that will make the resource more user friendly to the non-technical user. Develop new functionality that will allow VAPG grant applicants to identify market trends.
- 4) Build Metrics and Impacts- develop tracking tools that will allow AgMRC and MarketMaker staff to collect data that can be used for evaluation purposes and ultimately the long term economic impact the resources being developed.

AgMRC Subcontract	States Reached through Partnership	Key Objectives
Global Food Ag Network, LLC	Alabama, Arkansas, Colorado, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Nebraska, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas, Virginia, Wyoming	Mapping tools and metrics for impact measuring. Emphasis on resources for VAPG applicants.

Goal 1- Exportable Maps and Reports

Build Exportable Maps and Reports- Develop a series of maps and customizable marketing studies that provide Value Added Producer Grant (VAPG) applicants with market intelligence that can easily be incorporated into feasibility studies and business plans that support the VAPG application process.

When the MarketMaker team developed the new interactive mapping tool (see goal 3) they also developed a new add in feature that allows a user to build and export maps and tables of related data as jpgs. or pdfs. In the past these maps were only available on a “view only” basis. Now the maps and data reports can be easily incorporated into grant proposals, feasibility studies and business/ strategic plans.

Additionally, the recently updated secondary data sources are shared with the Iowa State team that is developing report generating tools for specific products.

AgMRC and MarketMaker's Report Generator and Data Mapping Tools

- Identify target markets with food preference and demographic data
- Generate exportable reports and maps for business plans, grant proposals, and marketing plans.
- Create customized maps down to the census tract level
- Map your own regions of interest
- Map local food infrastructure
- Map food sheds by income or food preference

AgMRC agricultural marketing RESEARCH CENTER
MARKET MAKER™ Linking Agricultural and Seafood Markets

Goal 2- AgMRC/ MarketMaker Data and Content Integration

Integrate Educational Content from AgMRC site into MarketMaker Platform- Develop additional MarketMaker search tools targeting the AgMRC site educational content, building on the progress made in the first round of funding,

- 1) AgMRC and MarketMaker feature each others websites on our respective websites including 21 state specific MarketMaker websites.



- 2) Food Searcher Tool on the AgMRC Site is powered by MarketMaker and draws from the MarketMaker database.

Goal 3- Improved Interactive Mapping Tool

Enhance MarketMaker Advanced Mapping Tools- Expand the secondary data sources from USDA that can be incorporated into the MarketMaker interactive mapping platform. Develop a more intuitive interface that will make the resource more user friendly to the non-technical user. Develop new functionality that will allow VAPG grant applicants to identify market trends.

The new interactive mapping tool was completed in Sept. It was uploaded to the live MarketMaker server October 7, 2019. It includes the following features:

Features of New Mapping Tool

Customizable Regions of Interest that allow the user to design their own geographic boundaries for searches. Regions can be built in increments of state, county or census tract boundaries.

The ability to conduct searches and queries that map and list only those results that fall within the region of interest.

Census and Consumer Preference Data Reports that can be summarized by Customized Regions of Interest

Time series maps that allow the user to visual data shifts and trends over time.

Printable and Exportable Maps and related data tables

The capacity to add in additional secondary data sources as is determined to be relevant.

Customized and Regions of Interest that Can be Queried

Search Markets

Location: Business Type SEARCH CLEAR

States: 27 results VIEW LIST

Counties:

Narrow Your Search:

CLEAR ALL FILTERS

Business Type:

Products:

Producer Verified Attributes:

Affiliations:

- East Greater Des Moines (1)
- Homestead Harvest (2)
- Iowa Valley Resource Conservation and Development Council (2)
- Practical Farmers of Iowa (2)
- Prairie Bounty of Illinois (12)

Certifications:

Product Forms:

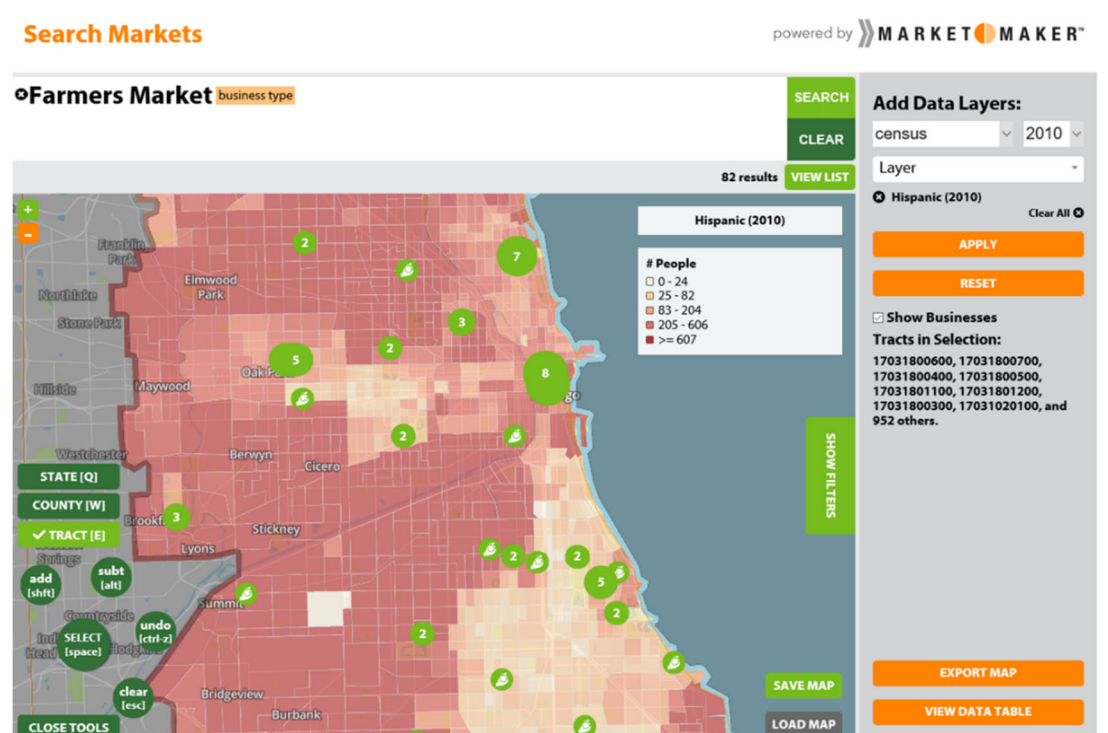
oFarmer/Rancher: Herbs Business Type SEARCH CLEAR

Sort by: 27 results VIEW LIST

1	Earth Biscuit Farm, Tipton, Iowa
2	Organic Greens, Kalona, Iowa
3	Gorman Farm Fresh Produce, Monee, Illinois
4	Craver's Little Red Barn, Taylor Ridge, Illinois
5	VanDerGriend's Farm Stand, Lansing, Illinois
6	Kellers Farmstand Inc., Oswego, Illinois
7	Larson's Country Market, Inc., Leland, Illinois
8	Lange's Farm, Elwood, Illinois
9	Squier Squash & Donnelly Farms, North English, Iowa
10	Walnut Acres Family Farm, Walnut, Illinois
11	The Homestead, Pleasant Hill, Iowa

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Map Data Points Over Heat Maps of Secondary Data



Note: It is also possible to incorporate data sources that are for single users only. This unique data can also be sequestered and protected so that only the user has the ability to access and apply that data. Customized dash boards can also be created to give a user more ability to manage his own data set within the interactive mapping platform.

Goal 4 Build Metrics and Impacts-

Develop tracking tools that will allow AgMRC and MarketMaker staff to collect data that can be used for evaluation purposes and ultimately the long term economic impact of the resources being developed.

A Data dashboard was developed to track the following activities:



- 1) New Registrations
- 2) Recently Updated Business Profiles
- 3) Search Activity
 - a. Profile Views over Time
 - b. Product Searches over Time (Food Searcher, What's in Season, ILFMA site, etc.)
 - c. Aggregated searches by affiliation, attribute, certification, product form, method of sale, and text searches over time.
- 4) Buy/ Sell Forum Activity
 - a. Most Recent Ads Posted over Time
 - b. Most Viewed Ads Over Time
- 5) User Account Activity over time (both admin and business accounts)
- 6) Stale Profile Sort
- 7) Archived Profile Download and sort

Here is a sample of the impact data pulled from the new Data Dashboard:

1)Food Searcher- The current 26 products produced over 190,000 product searches between the launch in July 2018 and end of this project, September 30, 2019.

Most searched Food Searcher products include:

- Watermelon: 385 searches per week
- Strawberries: 369 searches per week
- Lettuce: 336 searches per week
- Cherries: 215 searches per week
- Potatoes: 198 searches per week

- 3) Profile Views- There were 31,313 farms and businesses whose profiles were visited for a total of 281,568 profile views (some profiles were visited multiple times)

- 4) **Connecting Farmers to Markets** – 1,095 MarketMaker entities received 1,521 on-line business connections facilitated through the AgMRC and MarketMaker collaboration in the 15 months after the July 17, 2018 launch of the admin tools.

Screenshot of the New Data Dashboard

Business Activity

Newest Business Registrations (09/01/2019 - 09/30/2019 • 1 to 10 of 59 entries)

Name	Edit	Email	Registration Date	State	County
Ironstonshire	Edit	Market@ironstonshire.com	09/30/2019	Colorado	Montrose
Antedotum	Edit	cmarconi@supertuscancapital.com	09/30/2019	Colorado	Pitkin
T & R catering	Edit	Email Not Provided	09/29/2019	Virginia	Richmond City
Cory Bench Vineyard and Farm	Edit	corybenchvf@gmail.com	09/28/2019	Colorado	Delta
The Colorado Peach Company	Edit	info@coloradopeachcompany.com	09/27/2019	Colorado	Larimer
Turquoise Tiers	Edit	Contact@tjstaste.com	09/27/2019	Colorado	Park
Hambden Custom Harvesting	Edit	keith@flyingwstudio.com	09/26/2019	Ohio	Vinton
Drew Ryan	Edit	info@drewryanwines.com	09/26/2019	Michigan	Oakland

Recently Updated Businesses (09/01/2019 - 09/30/2019 • 1 to 10 of 509 entries)

Date	Website	What Was Edited	Who Edited It	Role	Business
Sep 30, 2019 08:08PM	https://admin.foodmarketmaker.com	Administrator Updated Profile	rknipe@illinois.edu	Administrator	Blue Moon Farm
Sep 30, 2019 08:06PM	https://admin.foodmarketmaker.com	Administrator Updated Profile	rknipe@illinois.edu	Administrator	Blue Moon Farm
Sep 30, 2019 07:38PM	https://admin.foodmarketmaker.com	Administrator Updated Profile	rknipe@illinois.edu	Administrator	Williams Orchard
Sep 30, 2019 07:36PM	https://admin.foodmarketmaker.com	Administrator Updated Profile	rknipe@illinois.edu	Administrator	Williams Orchard
Sep 30, 2019 07:29PM	https://admin.foodmarketmaker.com	Administrator Updated Profile	rknipe@illinois.edu	Administrator	Williams & Sons Orchard
Sep 30, 2019 07:25PM	https://admin.foodmarketmaker.com	Administrator Updated Profile	rknipe@illinois.edu	Administrator	Willhoite's Orchard
Sep 30, 2019 07:20PM	https://admin.foodmarketmaker.com	Administrator Updated Profile	rknipe@illinois.edu	Administrator	Willow Orchards
Sep 30, 2019 07:13PM	https://admin.foodmarketmaker.com	Administrator Updated Profile	rknipe@illinois.edu	Administrator	Wild Rose Farm

Outreach and Engagement

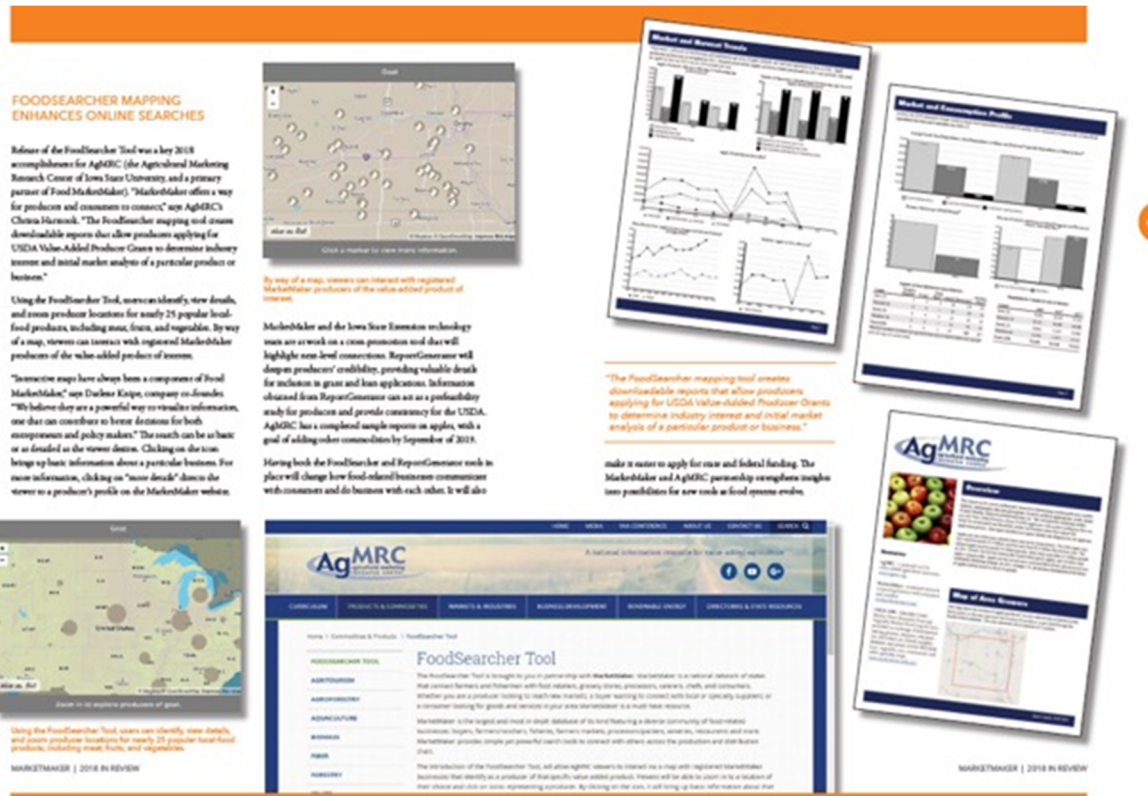
- 1) **Conferences and Trade shows**- The MarketMaker team exhibited at 20 regional and national trade shows and conferences where the MarketMaker team demonstrated the AgMRC Food Searcher tool, and distributed AgMRC materials to attendees.



- 2) **MarketMaker Newsletters**- MarketMaker issues a bi-monthly newsletter the routinely features AgMRC generated information and links back to the AgMRC including feature stories on VAPG grant recipients. The newsletter will also be used to disseminate information related to the VAPG producer grant once the RFP is made available. The MarketMaker Newsletter distribution list has grown to nearly 11,000 farmers, food related businesses, NGOs and stakeholders.



- 3) **MarketMaker Annual Report**- Each year MarketMaker produces a Year in Review that summarizes signature projects and collaborations. Copies are distributed at conferences through out the year in addition and to legislators, government officials and NGO's., In 2018 the Year in review dedicated a 2-page spread to the AgMRC/ MarketMaker collaboration to create report generator tools.



Other-

One of the biggest challenges in platforms that feature farmer and business profiles is to keep information current. MarketMaker launched a campaign with partners to reach out to users to update their profiles. Profiles that up to date improve the integrity of both the MarketMaker and Food Searcher data base.

Profiles updated in 15 month since the campaign was launched: 6,259 (540% increase over previous 15 months.)

IOWA GRAIN QUALITY INITIATIVE:

Iowa Grain Quality Initiative under the leadership of Dr. Charles Hurlburt. AgMRC and the Iowa Grain Quality Initiative have combined resources to leverage the impact of the AgMRC Renewable Newsletter. This partnership will provide AgMRC the opportunity to continue to have industry professionals provide the leadership and input into the content of the newsletter while extending the reach of the readers. The content in this newsletter will support past and future VAPG grant recipients working with renewable and sustainable projects. This arrangement forged in 2016 has resulted in

increased readership and is used as a national industry resource by energy specialists throughout the U.S. and across the globe.

AgMRC Subcontract	States Reached through Partnership	Key Objectives
Iowa Grain Quality Initiative	Nationally	AgMRC Renewable Energy Newsletter promotion and distribution

The Renewable Energy Monthly Report is produced as a partnership between the Agricultural Marketing Center, the Iowa Grain Quality Initiative, and is authored by Decision Innovation Solutions. The newsletter contains pricing, profitability and supply/demand tools used for analysis of ethanol, biodiesel and distiller's grains and is sent out on a monthly basis. The report was published monthly in 2017 and 2018. Each issue included two-three articles, a feature and price/profitability models.

FOCUS ON FEASIBILITY AND QUALITY BUSINESS PLANS:

One of the most common inquiries that AgMRC receives is national requests for help in find qualified individuals to conduct feasibility studies. VAPG applicants often can't find anyone to manage the study; or they can't find anyone that they can afford. The number of inquiries clearly indicates a need to support service providers in developing the skills needed to meet the requirements of USDA-RD VAPG applications.

AgMRC Subcontract	States Reached through Partnership	Key Objectives
AgMRC – Iowa State University	Hosted by partners in Arkansas, Minnesota and Vermont with an emphasis on neighboring states.	Focus on Feasibility trainings in three locations; VAPG video modules; self-check tools; sample audit questions for VAPG applicants.

Focus on Feasibility workshops to train independent consultants on strategies to conduct a rigorous audit for VAPG grant applications was developed. Workshops were held in Little Rock, Arkansas, Burlington, Vermont, and Crookston, Minnesota with 40 attendees each from multiple states. The workshops allowed service providers to learn the process of an audit for a feasibility study of a value-added business. The end goal was to train consultants to evaluate VAPG applicants at a higher level, thus supporting quality applications to the VAPG program. Content of the workshops walked service providers through each section of a feasibility study, according to USDA 4279-B guidelines. This process fit under the categories of:

- Economic Impact
- Markets
- Financials
- Management
- Technical

WEBSITE AND CONTENT DEVELOPMENT:

Updates, new and revised content for the AgMRC website and maintenance will be handled primarily by Iowa State University Extension.

Information on the website was updated and enhanced for ease in finding current information, easily accessible to all. Accessibility was upgraded, commodity profiles were updated and a new database commodity pricing project was created, all to create updated, relevant information for producers applying for a VAPG grant.

Commodities and products profiles are updated based on client inquiries to AgMRC Match participants and AgMRC office staff. We continued our streamlining of commodity pages on our website and eliminated commodity pages that were not being utilized according to our analytics. The curriculum section was updated, and the business development section underwent an entire overhaul to be updated, streamlined and reorganized.

The homepage of the website received a facelift during this grant period. The website now more prominently features the VAPG recipient videos, and the tabs more clearly reflect AgMRC resources and materials. The homepage also now includes a COVID-19 Resources module with useful materials to assist in navigating the challenges due to COVID-19.

CONTENT - SOCIAL, INTERACTIVE AND MASS MEDIA

AgMRC staff will work closely with the primary programmers and server hosts to continually improve the user experience. Updates to functionality and accessibility require regular and continual attention.

All AgMRC partners will work to incorporate the latest technology applicable to clients. These may include short videos, newsletters, blog articles and on-line surveys. AgMRC staff will work closely with the contributing writers to monitor and maintain the high level of quality information currently available in the commodities, business development, markets and industry and the directories sections. Staff will also continue to expand media offerings, including downloadable audio files and interviews for radio. National radio campaigns will make sure that AgMRC is promoted on a national level. Short newsletter paragraphs for national and trade publications, newsletters and journals to promote the Value Added Producer Grant Program and the AgMRC website will all be crucial to the outreach efforts.

AgMRC has expanded its public outreach by creating a page on Facebook. During the average year, the AgMRC Facebook page averages 75 posts, which were seen by 9,500 people.

CASE STUDIES

Staff will continue to build on the library of case studies featuring current and past recipients of VAAP producer grants. These case studies will be featured on the dedicated Value Added Producer Grants page and on the homepage of AgMRC. The case studies will be initiated by AgMRC staff or partners. Social media continues to be a push for AgMRC staff, with new information promoted on the page weekly to promote interaction on a national level.

Video case studies were included from Model Farm on 67 VAPG recipients. Written case studies were included on

- Little Vine Vineyards and Winery
- VAPG Helps Taylor Fish Farm Enter Larger Markets
- USDA Grant Ignites Major Growth for Colorado's Jumpin' Good Goat Dairy
- San Xavier Co-op Farm's Milling Facility Gets Boost from USDA Grant
- Local Economy Benefits from Champoeg Farm in Willamette Valley
- Valley Fig Growers Successfully Launch California Fig Spread Products
- USDA Funding Helps Sun-Maid's Technology
- Pacific Coast Producers See Boost in Product Marketing

EMERGING TOPICS

AgMRC staff will monitor the results of the Value Added Agriculture Producer Grant applications to identify new trends or areas of interest and add additional content material as needed.

AgMRC staff will identify "contributing writers" to monitor and maintain emerging issues and current events impacting value-added producers and processors. Emerging Issues and topics will be resolved with existing partners or short term "Professional Service Agreements will be developed to meet user needs in a timely fashion.

Enterprise Budgets

Enterprise budgets were added specifically to track the revenue distribution of various marketing channels. Staff worked directly with growers involved in the various crops to track all costs and develop enterprise budgets based off marketing streams.

- Asparagus (<https://www.agmrc.org/commodities-products/vegetables/asparagus>)
- Basil (<https://www.agmrc.org/commodities-products/specialty-crops/herbs/culinary-herbs-profile>)
- Butterhead Lettuce (<https://www.agmrc.org/commodities-products/vegetables/lettuce>)
- Carrots (<https://www.agmrc.org/commodities-products/vegetables/carrots>)
- Green Beans (<https://www.agmrc.org/commodities-products/vegetables/azuki-beans>)
- High Tunnel Tomatoes (<https://www.agmrc.org/commodities-products/vegetables/tomatoes>)
- Mixed Greens (<https://www.agmrc.org/commodities-products/vegetables/lettuce>)
- Peppers (<https://www.agmrc.org/commodities-products/vegetables/bell-and-chili-peppers>)
- Scallions (<https://www.agmrc.org/commodities-products/vegetables/onions>)

Farm to School Procurement

Staff developed a Farm to School Summer Meal Site Campaign Toolkit in response to schools requesting information on how to procure local food from farmers. This toolkit covers best practices and recommendations for a successful campaign. An expanded toolkit is planned following the 2020 summer meal campaign, which featured an added challenge of COVID-19.

https://www.agmrc.org/media/cms/Farm_to_Summer_Meal_Site_Campaign_T_DF3157E06B6C2.pdf

Scaling Up Processing

This Scaling Specialty Crop Processing brought together a team of ISU Extension and Outreach professionals from the units of Farm, Food, and Enterprise Development (FFED), Food Safety and Consumer Production, and Community and Economic Development (CED). This team utilized a process that included surveys, interviews and pilot projects to understand food business needs. The primary categories that arose from this project include areas of visioning and pre-feasibility, food safety, business development, and layout and logistics of processing space. An online assessment survey was created in February of 2019 and sent to potential partners to gather detailed information about the food based businesses throughout the summer of 2019. The survey was open until July of 2019, and resulted in 10 survey responses and 14 site visits and interviews. These interviews and site visits were conducted with a variety of food based businesses including: shared-use kitchens, farms, food hubs, farmstands, processors, grocers, restaurants, community and event centers, and entrepreneurs looking to start-up their own processing food business. The interview and site visits included on-site observation and evaluation with food producers and businesses. Site visit questions were designed to learn more about the businesses daily schedules as well as their future goals. Additionally, there were discussions on barriers to scaling processing and needs in reaching their goals for the future of food processing. Site visit inventories and interviews led to understanding of:

- Existing conditions and site categories
- Understanding of common needs amongst food producers and businesses
- Identification of basic processing equipment and interior needs as well as layout and logistics
- Desire for business skills and scaling-up opportunities from financial perspectives
- Identification of food safety considerations, regulations and licensing.

Following the interview and surveys, a pilot selection matrix was utilized to determine 3 pilot projects suited for scaling project needs. Selection criteria included readiness, identification by the interviewee their desire to scale-up or add value-added produce processing to their business, and different categories of business operations. In early August 2019, scopes of work were developed for three pilot partners, with business categories of community center, retail, and aggregator. Throughout early August and end of the Scaling Specialty Crop team met and consulted with each partner regarding food safety, layout and logistics, and business development. The pilot projects informed the [Scaling-Up Processing Toolkit](#).

Agritourism

Agritourism best practices checklists were developed by staff at Iowa State University.

- [Agritourism Bio-security Checklist](#)
- [Agritourism Emergency Preparedness Checklist](#)
- [Agritourism Food Safety Checklist](#)
- [Agritourism Negligence Mitigation Suggestions](#)
- [Agritourism Pesticide Safety Checklist](#)
- [Agritourism Play Area Checklist](#)

Commodity Reports

These reports can be used as preliminary research in determining current production, market analysis, demographics and price points. Reports can be accessed from any of the commodity pages listed below and are also aggregated on a server:

<https://indicators.extension.iastate.edu/projects/CommodityReport/>. Reports are now finalized for the following commodities:

- Apples
- Cheese
- Grapes
- Pork
- Potatoes
- Strawberries
- Tomatoes

SUPPORT VAPG APPLICANT AND SERVICE PROVIDER TRAINING

On-line and electronic surveys will be conducted to assist USDA staff in development of additional resources for VAPG applicants. Surveys will also be used to get feedback on the evaluation protocol.

AgMRC staff will collaborate with USDA-RD staff to develop tools and resources to help promote and improve the participation in the VAPG grant program. AgMRC staff created a highlight video on the VAPG program at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qOxeMCluE_w. This video alone has been viewed over 200 times since its completion in February 2020. Mike Boland also created a video on the VAPG program.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fv61rZbLjFg&index=14&list=PLpV1zKP6JumaZAK1Pg1TTgMecjaj3z5el&t=0s> This video has been viewed over 300 times since its creation.

Staff helped to facilitate and promote a VAPG applicant training with staff from USDA Rural Development in Iowa to potential applicants.

EVALUATION

As special emphasis will be placed on increasing evaluations, surveys and user feedback for the purpose of improving the Value Added Producer Grant program and the AgMRC user experience.

Google Analytics

You can't improve what you can't measure. AgMRC implemented Google Analytics in late May 29, 2014 for that reason. We measured vital signs of the site (e.g., number of visits, referring sites, keywords searched) to improve your traffic. We worked to implement search engine optimization (SEO) best practices to meet demand (visitors' searches) with unique content. We continued to monitor, improve and measure our content through Google Analytics.

AgMRC averages 4,000 visits per day. On an annual basis, staff respond to 4,000 emails and phone calls. An average of 50 presentations are given annually. Statistics are kept and reported each quarter in

terms of what commodities and products are most highly researched, how many visits each section does receive, and what visitors are looking for.

Embedded Survey

To take our measurements from quantitative, using Google Analytics, to qualitative, we've implemented an embedded survey module on the website. We created custom user surveys and implemented them to collect results from our users. This allows us to see if users can quickly find the needed information, find more demographics on who is utilizing the site and improve our performance and content from the results.

Results for the survey on finding information were excellent – users were able to find information quickly and easily. Surveys were also created to ask about new information needed. Results were mixed on that front, with most indicating nothing else was needed.

Reviewer Survey

To assist USDA Rural Development in their continual efforts to improve the VAPG program, AgMRC staff created a survey for VAPG reviewers to complete upon completion of the VAPG application reviews/scoring. The information provided from the initial survey was beneficial to USDA Rural Development. AgMRC staff will continue to revise and implement this survey after each VAPG round.

AgMRC staff did not receive any reviewer emails/phone numbers from USDA Rural Development staff to conduct a survey during this round of AgMRC funding.

VAPG Recipients

UMN will continue to randomly survey past VAPG recipients to quantify some aspects of the Value Added Producer Grant program and its impacts.

Specific VAPG recipients were interviewed as part of Dr. Mike Boland's work at the University of Minnesota and included in his final paper on the program at [Overview of the USDA VAPG Program from 2001 to 2017](#).

What have been the most challenging or unexpected aspects of this project?

It is always challenging to lose good personnel, but during this project, we lost multiple good individuals due to retirements and job transfers. Key individuals leaving in accounting and the project director created challenges not anticipated previously.

What advice would you give to other organizations planning a similar project? You should include strengths and limitations of the program. If you had the opportunity, what would you have done differently?

The reporting requirements for this project are difficult and require a tremendous amount of time dedicated to that fact alone, taking from other project tasks and deliverables. If we could have done so, it would have been ideal to dedicate one individual solely to reporting and accounting to ensure the reporting changes from USDA were met. One strength of this program has been the ability to tell the

stories of VAPG recipients and the impact that the program has had on their rural business. This grant program has had tremendous impacts on value-added agriculture across the country and telling those stories is important.

If an innovative approach was used successfully, you should describe the approach in detail so that other organizations might consider replication in their areas.

As a society, we continue to move forward with technology advancements, and that requires websites to continue to advance, too. The video case studies have been an incredibly important component of this project and one that helps to tell the story of the VAPG program well. Refining the website continually is also a necessary expense to remain optimized for search engines, accessible to all and user-friendly.

How many ag producers were assisted?

Our estimates include 46,253 producers served through direct assistance in phone calls, emails, workshops and presentations, newsletter subscription, social media interactions and video views. Additionally, the website averages an estimated 1.5 million visits per year of producers and service providers working directly with producers.