



USDA AMS Local and Regional Foods Division Agreement Summary

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 2023 Cooperative Agreements

Local Sourcing Innovation in Independent and Locally-Owned Groceries

Partner: Kansas State University

This agreement explores lessons 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.

Lessons Learned through Local Food Promotion Program Investments

Partner: University of Kentucky Research Foundation

This agreement investigates and analyzes the impact of the USDA's Local Food Promotion Program (LFPP) in supporting producers who desire to scale up their operations and successfully enter wholesale markets involving a commercial aggregator or distributor assisting sales to groceries, restaurants, and institutional markets.

Strengthening Institutional Procurement: Lessons from Local Food Purchase Assistance Program

Partners: Michigan State University, Tuskegee University, Indigenous Food and Agriculture Initiative

This agreement considers the broader impacts of USDA AMS' Local Food Purchase Assistance (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 capital improvements, food safety certifications, improved logistics, or other investments that may contribute to lasting fortification of regional procurement channels.

2024 National Farmers Market Manager Survey: Phase 1

Partner: Michigan State University

This project will use mixed methods to enhance the National Farmers Market Manager Survey. The research team will update the 2019 survey questionnaire and develop a 2024 survey questionnaire with feedback from farmers market stakeholder groups and develop a list of farmers markets in operation in 2024 which will serve as the list frame and basis for a farmers market population estimate.

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

Partner: University of Vermont Extension

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. Information on the number of agrotourism farms and types of activities offered will be collected.

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 the distinct needs of this population.

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 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.

Continuing Agreements Started in Previous Fiscal Years

Empowering Local and Regional Protein Processing in the Upper Midwest

Partner: Agricultural Utilization Research Institute (AURI)

This project will help ensure a viable small and local protein processing industry through various support mechanisms. Using the upper Midwest as a learning laboratory, the project will develop resources and training to increase the competitiveness of small and mid-sized meat processing plants across the country.

Local Food Directories Platform Update

Partner: Michigan State University

AMS launched the new Local Food Directories platform in March 2022. This is the first redesign since the inaugural launch of the Farmers Market Directory in 2010. The platform now includes an Agritourism Directory. The improved website includes better security, batch update capability (a frequent request from stakeholders), updated programming language, and a more user-friendly design. With these improvements, the USDA Local Food Directories will better serve the local and regional food systems sector, allowing organizations to easily market their products and consumers to easily find local foods through a variety of market channels. Local Food Directories allow producers/managers to advertise all the direct-to-customer marketing channels that they engage on one platform saving data entry time and allowing customers to search and locate all the direct-marketing venues in a geographic area of interest with one search.

Local and Regional Food Systems Recovery and Resilience

Partners: Colorado State University, University of Kentucky, University of Maine

This project is building on the innovation and success found in the Local and Regional Food Systems (LRFS) Response to COVID-19 project. The project focuses on translating lessons learned from local food systems stakeholders during the pandemic into a specific, long-term collaborative strategy for fostering recovery, and equitable approaches to LRFS resilience. Notable activities include:

- Harmonized data, metrics collection, analysis, and member training opportunities across Community of Practice Coordinating Organizations (COPCOs) to support the effective implementation and evaluation of sector-level activities, Federal programs and initiatives, and cross-sectoral analysis of LRFS.
- Timely cross sector research and analysis to support the efforts of policy makers, program developers, funders, and other key LRFS stakeholders.
- A “Resiliency Playbook” will contain a set of recommendations based on experiences from LRFS practitioners during the COVID-19 pandemic to support policy makers, funders, and LRFS leaders. To create a more inclusive resource with utility beyond a health-related crisis, the Playbook will also focus on strategies enacted in response to climate change disruptions (e.g. wildfires, tornadoes, etc.) and look at distinct impacts on non-contiguous states.
- Continuing education and professional development for network weavers, LRFS project and grant administrators and evaluators, and others.

For more information, visit the [Local and Regional Food Systems Response to COVID-19 Resource Hub](#).

USDA AMS Grant Applicant Technical Assistance with Underserved Community Focus

Partners: University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES)

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. In order 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.

While the project is in progress, many resources are available on the [UMES project website](#).

Realizing the Promise of Urban Agriculture through New Educational Resources and Approaches

Partner: Cornell University and Rooted, WI

The [Promise of Urban Agriculture \(PUA\)](#), a recent publication supported through a USDA AMS cooperative agreement, draws on the evolution of 14 urban farms and insights from over 150 policy-makers, urban planners, funders, and nonprofit and community organizers engaged in local food systems and urban farming. The initial work to uncover the policies, resources, and future research and development needed to support the successful development of commercial urban farms. Through a collaboration between researchers, practitioners, and planners, this project is turning the PUA recommendations into meaningful and practical training and educational resources.

The project team has developed a Course for Growers and a Course for Planners including multiple modules to support these two stakeholder groups. The curricula will be available in spring 2024.

Wholesale Produce Markets: On-Site Infrastructure Assessment

Partner: Cornell University (and internal support from the AMS Transportation Economics Division)

Through a survey of market managers and selected case studies, this agreement investigates the state of on-site infrastructure at wholesale produce markets. The project will identify infrastructure and transportation needs, suggest areas for future investment, and create tools for market managers to support market modernization and growth.

Many Hats - All the Roles Food Hub Operators Must Play

Partners: Michigan State University, 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.

Analyzing the Diversity and Impacts of Farmers Markets Managed by Organizations

Partners: Emory University

This agreement seeks to understand how external management structures for farmers markets affect producers' experiences and shape local food systems. Key objectives of the project include:

- Documenting the varied organizational structures managing farmers markets across the country;

- Identifying the range of activities these organizations undertake in support of their producers;
- Exploring organizations' definitions of success related to the farmers markets they manage and the work that they undertake; and,
- Evaluating the benefits and disadvantages of farmer participation in farmers markets managed by organizations from the perspectives of staff and vendors (vendor sample drawn from the southeast).

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.

Evaluation and Development of a Data Standard for Regional Food Systems

Partners: The Wolfe's Neck Farm Foundation, Inc.

This agreement will establish a standard for produce pack sizes and naming conventions across the local foods sector. The project will review existing guidance to understand the advantages and disadvantages of the current standards for local and regional producers; establish a steering committee to understand what is needed from a data standard; develop a voluntary consensus standard; and disseminate and encourage adoption of the standard.

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