

Excerpts from RRRC's Farmer's Market Promotion Program Grant Application

Executive Summary

Partnering with Culpeper Renaissance, Madison Farmers Market and Piedmont Environmental Council (PEC), the Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission (RRRC) proposes to utilize the FMPP grant to promote locally grown food and agritourism in Virginia's Northern Piedmont. The majority of the funds would be spent developing and conducting a local foods marketing campaign, including a regional brand, eye-catching imagery and cohesive messaging that will resonate with local consumers' values. Funds would also support targeted marketing efforts at the Madison and Culpeper Farmers Markets, as well as continued publication of PEC's Buy Fresh-Buy Local guide.

The second aspect of the proposed project specifically targets agritourism promotion through further development of RRRC's Tween Rivers Trail. Many of the trail sites are small business owners with little to no marketing budget or experience. Expansion of this regional agritourism trail combined with quarterly training and networking workshops focused on marketing will help address these issues.

The third aspect promotes direct-to-consumer local food markets within the region by building sourcing channels. In 2014, PEC launched the online tool, Farmer-Chef Express to facilitate connections between buyers and sellers, including institutional buyers. Grant funds would be used to hold two farmer-buyer "speed-dating" events, and a regional food expo.

Objectives

- Objective 1: Increase consumer awareness of the benefits of the region's locally grown foods via a regional marketing campaign
- Objective 2: Increase visitation and revenue for the Culpeper Farmers Market
- Objective 3: Increase visitation and revenue for the Madison Farmers Market
- Objective 4: Increase awareness of the Tween Rivers Trail and visitation of Tween Rivers Trail sites
- Objective 5: Provide marketing training and networking opportunities to farmer/agribusinesses and local food buyers

Objective 1: Increase consumer awareness of the benefits of the region's locally grown foods via a regional marketing campaign

RRRC will spend the majority of the requested funds developing and conducting a local foods marketing campaign for the region, including creation of a regional brand (tentatively Virginia Piedmont Grown) with logo. The campaign would first focus on consumers within the region, then expand advertising to nearby metro areas. A graphic designer will be contracted to develop the logo and major marketing materials. The newly established Rappahannock-Rapidan Food Policy Council will advise this effort.

Promotional materials would use eye-catching imagery and cohesive messaging that will resonate with local consumers' values and increase their awareness of the benefits of purchasing the region's locally grown food. RRRC will conduct consumer surveys to supplement information collected during the development of the 2015 Farm and Food Plan, and more recent stakeholder interviews, when selecting appropriate content. Promotional channels will include advertising in the Buy Fresh – Buy Local Guides (at no cost), local newspapers, local radio stations, Edible DC and similar regional magazines, local movie theater screens, social media, partner websites and events, local festivals, a mass mailing of postcards to area residents. RRRC will utilize every opportunity to coordinate with grant partners in order to cross-promote and maximize grant funds.

PEC will also utilize the requested grant funds for annual development, printing and mailing of PEC's Northern Piedmont Buy Fresh Buy Local guide. This 12-page guide lists, at no cost, 220 local farm and food businesses in Madison, Culpeper, Orange, Rappahannock and Fauquier counties. Guides are direct mailed to over 74,000 households within the region with the intent of connecting families with local food sources in their area.

Success of the campaign would be gauged through consumer surveys conducted near the end of the grant period. Survey questions would measure consumer awareness of the regional brand and the benefits of the region's locally grown food, as well as increase/decrease in purchasing of the region's locally grown food.

- Buy Fresh Buy Local guide development: January-April 2017, mailing date of mid/late April.
 - BFBL partner survey sent in order to collect information on grant metrics: January 2017
 - Results of initial regional food campaign consumer surveys: spring 2017
 - Develop regional brand and logo: spring 2017
 - Develop major regional marketing materials for regional foods campaign: summer 2017
 - Conduct local foods campaign within region: fall 2017-fall 2018
 - BFBL partner survey sent in order to collect information on grant metrics: January 2018
 - Buy Fresh Buy Local guide development: January-April 2018, mailing date of mid/late April
 - Expand local foods campaign to include nearby metro areas: fall 2018-summer 2019
 - Buy Fresh Buy Local guide development: January-April 2019, mailing date of mid/late April
 - BFBL partner survey sent in order to collect information on grant metrics: January 2019
 - Conduct consumer surveys to measure success of regional foods campaign: summer 2019
- Note: Regional local food campaign advertising will predominantly occur during the growing season (spring, summer, fall)