



Global Food Initiative

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Summary of Objectives & Activities for the UC GFI 2015-2017 Project *Nurturing Local Food Hubs to Connect Small Farms to Campuses to Develop Healthy and Sustainable Eating Options for K-to-University*

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In 2015, UC SAREP was awarded funding from the University of California Global Food Initiative (GFI) to convene a shared learning network for Northern California food hubs to provide technical assistance and guide regional planning. This pilot project committed to convening a network of food hubs to engage in a set of activities designed to build their capacity to engage UC and other buyers. The project would result in a final report assessing key challenges and opportunities for advancing food hubs' efforts to supply local foods to institutional buyers, including schools and universities, specifically addressing actions food hubs can take to help UC procure more food from small, local farms.

Proposed activities for the project were the following:

- Conduct a preliminary assessment of needs, challenges and successes of the 6 participating food hubs
- Convene a 1.5 day gathering of at least 6 food hubs to surface shared needs and opportunities
- Organize at least 2 meetings with 6 food hubs and institutional buyers, focusing on UC food service

- Host one technical assistance training—topics to be determined (work with UC Davis partners such as Graduate School of Management or the Postharvest Technology Center and UCCE partners with needed expertise)
- Prepare final report and action plan based on lessons learned from the assessment, convening, meetings with buyers and key opportunities for nurturing the development and success of CA food hubs with an emphasis on the role they can play to supply UC dining services.
- Work with UC and ANR Communications to share results with other emerging food hubs and UC Dining Services.

This document summarizes the activities carried out from October 2016 – March 2017 as a result of this project, made possible through GFI support. We structured the activities outlined in our original proposal to achieve five project objectives:

1. Provide technical assistance to food hubs to increase capacity for supplying institutional customers
2. Pilot a collaborative learning network and strengthen relationships between food hubs
3. Develop an understanding of California hub characteristics, needs and impacts
4. Develop an understanding of potential buyer needs and interest
5. Share information about our project

The majority of our program activities were focused on developing the pilot Food Hub Network and organizing technical assistance and shared learning opportunities for and with the hubs. We prioritized these activities for two reasons 1) from preliminary conversations with UC buyers, we discovered that the food hubs in our group did not yet have the production or business capacity to initiate successful sales relationships with UC buyers and 2) we identified other organizations active in making farm to institution connections and we wanted to find ways to compliment the work of these organizations first, rather than duplicate it.

Summary of Project Activities in Chronological Order

1. Preliminary Food Hub Needs Assessment (January 2016)
2. Network Convening (March 2016)
3. LFPP Proposal (March – May 2016)
4. Presentation at the National Food Hub Conference (April 2016)
5. Monthly conference calls (July 2016 – March 2017)
6. Conversations with UC buyers (October 2016 – February 2017)
7. Business Improvement Session (February 2017)
8. Food Hub Network Models webinar (March 2017)
9. Follow-up Impact Assessment (March 2017)
10. Food Hub Best Practices Video (March 2017)
11. “Lessons Learned” Report (March 2017)

The outcomes of this project demonstrated that 1) there is interest on the part of California food hubs in a Food Hub Network and participating in organized technical assistance and shared learning experiences, however some barriers to engagement exist; and 2) there is interest on the part of UC buyers in sourcing produce from local farms, however more information is needed about how food hubs could successfully fill this gap. For a more complete description of project outcomes, please see *“Lessons Learned from a CA Food Hub Network Pilot: Role of UC in Nurturing Success for Food Hubs in California.”*

Objective #1:

Provide Technical Assistance to Food Hubs to Increase Capacity for Supplying Institutional Customers

Food hubs gained insights from trainings and discussions we organized over the course of the project.

1. Learned from experienced practitioners about working successfully with institutions

- a. At the March 2016 Kick-off Convening, Lucy Norris from Ag Innovations, gave a talk called “Leveraging Internal Initiatives in Institutions”, about her experience working with the Puget Sound Food Hub and building successful sales relationships with hospital cafeterias.
- b. At the February 2017 Business Improvement Session, Sona Desai, former food hub manager at the Intervale Food Hub, gave a talk about balancing supply and demand. The Intervale Food Hub achieved \$50,000 in sales to Sodexo at the University of Vermont in 2015-2016.
- c. In February, 2017, organized field trips to visit two established food hubs with success in selling to UC campuses: Veritable Vegetable has a sales relationship with UC Berkeley and Coke Farm sells to Daylight Foods (distributor used by UC campuses).

2. Explored cross-hub sales as a strategy for increasing supply to better serve institutional markets

- a. At the first convening in March 2016, buying and selling product between hubs emerged as an area of interest. UC SAREP followed up on this in several ways. First, UC SAREP facilitated a collaborative USDA grant proposal to the Local Foods Promotion Program (LFPP) to develop cross-hub transactional sales. The proposal was to pursue coordinated inventory management and marketing activities in order to make more sales to larger, institutional buyers who require greater diversity and a reliable supply of products. Although this proposal was not funded, it served to develop the conversation and build relationships between the hubs. As a result of the proposal process, the group further defined their priorities in working together and solidified common ground for future activities.

- b. Second, UC SAREP invited Dan Hobbs from the Rocky Mountain Farmers Union to speak to the food hubs on one of our monthly conference calls about the successes and challenges of the Colorado Food Hub Network in transacting with each other.
- c. Two of the hubs piloted a small amount of buying and selling from each other during the 2016 season. Two additional hubs were involved in conversations around the potential for buying and selling from each other.

3. Provided food safety training to the food hubs

- a. Dr. Erin DiCaprio, Assistant Cooperative Extension Specialist in Community Food Safety at the UC Davis Department of Food Science and Technology, gave a training on the Preventive Controls Rule, the part of the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) that applies to many food hubs. The session went over setting up food safety plans and examples of control points and monitoring forms.
- b. UC SAREP compiled and shared resources on food safety via a Food Hub Network shared drive and made hubs aware of other training opportunities to learn about food safety.
- c. UC SAREP submitted a proposal and was awarded funding from CDFA for a project to provide food safety trainings to specialty crop farmers that sell to our group of food hubs.

Objective #2:

Pilot a Collaborative Learning Network and Strengthen Relationships between Food Hubs

1. Hosted 2 in-person gatherings

- a. In March 2016, UC SAREP hosted an initial Convening of the seven food hubs involved in the project (6 in Northern CA; 1 in Southern CA) in Esparto, CA. The convening involved a tour of one of the participating food hubs, a discussion about food hub needs and challenges, and opportunities for collaborative learning and engagement between the hubs.
- b. In February 2017, UC SAREP organized a Food Hub Business Improvement Session that involved a one-day field trip to visit two established food hubs in San Francisco and San Juan Bautista (Veritable Vegetable and Coke Farm) and a full day of technical assistance workshops on compliance with the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) and on strategies for balancing supply and demand.

2. Hosted monthly conference calls

Several of the food hubs in our group were already in regular conversation with each other via monthly conference calls which were being hosted North Coast Opportunities, Inc. (NCO), a Community Action Agency non-profit that serves Lake and Mendocino Counties, as well as parts

of Humboldt, Sonoma, Del Norte, and Solano Counties, and which runs a food hub as one of its programs. When the NCO staff person who had been facilitating the monthly calls relinquished her role, UC SAREP stepped in as call facilitator starting July 2016. We introduced a new format, focusing each call on a particular topic (selected with input from the group), began providing resources related to the topic and set up file sharing on Google drive where the hubs could access notes from past calls.

A summary of topics for the food hub network monthly calls is below.

Month	Call Topic
July	Introduction to new call organizer (UC SAREP) and discussion of format
Aug	Approaches to Crop Planning with Farmer/Suppliers
Sept	Pricing Strategies
Oct	Food Safety
Nov	Delivery Logistics
Dec	Examples of Hub Organizational Structures
Jan	It's a New Year! General Updates from Participating Hubs
Feb	Colorado Food Hub Network: Approach to Collaborative Sales (guest presenter Dan Hobbs from the Rocky Mountain Farmers Union)
March	Food Hub Network Models: What We Can Learn & Where We Are Going (guests presenters from New Venture Advisors)

3. Organized and hosted an expert-led webinar and discussion on Food Hub Network models

In order to gauge hubs' interest in continuing a Food Hub Network, UC SAREP hosted a webinar titled *Food Hub Network Models: What We Can Learn & Where Are We Going*. The webinar invited two outside experts, Kathy Nyquist and Saloni Doshi from New Venture Advisors (food business consultants with experience in over 50 food systems and food enterprise development projects across the U.S.) to give an overview of different food hub network models from around the country and discuss the pros/cons/different characteristics of each model. The presenters highlighted useful decision points for developing a Network strategy and identity, and raised questions for the hubs to consider in helping to determine where the California Food Hub Network should go.

The webinar was attended by 17 participants representing 13 California food hubs. We opened up participation beyond our initial group of seven hubs because we wanted to hear from the larger body of food hubs in California about their ideas for a Network. The webinar was successful in 1) offering our group insight into ways that food hubs in different states are engaging and networking with each other and 2) providing a framework for thinking about ways that hubs can interact with each other (possible network formations) and 3) spurring thinking and conversation for a more in-depth, in-person Network strategy session to collectively identifying the direction for our California Food Hub Network.

Objective #3:

Develop an Understanding of California Hub Characteristics, Needs and Impacts

1. Preliminary Needs Assessment

In January 2016, the UC SAREP project team sent out a 33-question internet questionnaire to the seven participating California food hubs. The questionnaire collected information about food hub finances, structure, operations, markets, customers, suppliers, strengths and challenges. It was designed as an information tool for the hubs, and the results cannot be generalized more broadly. The intent was not to do research on hubs, but to provide a useful context and initial benchmarking within which the Food Hub Learning Network could make strategic and collaborative decisions.

2. Follow-up Assessment

In March 2017, at the close of our 18 month project term, we sent out a second assessment. The 46-question internet survey was sent to the same seven California food hubs, and allowed us to gather updated information about each of the hubs, as well as the impact of the UC SAREP network project for them. In aggregate, this assessment enabled us to 1) better describe the impact of food hubs on local producers and regional food systems, 2) describe the impact of our program's activities on this group of food hubs, 3) update our understanding of the technical assistance needs for CA food hubs and how a UC-led food hub network might continue address those needs. More detail about these outcomes is included in *"Lessons Learned from a CA Food Hub Network Pilot: Role of UC in Nurturing Success for Food Hubs in California."*

Objective #4:

Develop an Understanding of Potential Buyer Needs and Interest

UC SAREP initiated conversations with food procurement staff at UC Davis and UC Berkeley in order to better understand possible entry points for food hubs to sell to UC campuses. We first spoke with the Sustainability Manager and Sustainability Coordinator at UC Davis Dining Services. Then, due to the transition from Sodexo management to self-operation, we later spoke with the Director and Associate Director of Hospitality and Dining Services at UC Davis. We met with Raoul Adamchak, Market Garden Coordinator at the UC Davis Student Farm, to learn about the UC Davis Student Farm's experience selling to Sodexo at UC Davis. We also met with the Executive Director and the Environmental Initiatives Coordinator at Cal Dining.

These discussions led to informational conversations with Eric Pollack, Food and Hospitality Commodity Manager at UCOP, Tim Galarneau, chair of the UC Food Service Working Group, and Paul Jennings, Vice President at Daylight Foods. At the end of this project, we made a connection with the executive chef at UC Davis Medical Center who is interested in local sourcing.

UC SAREP developed relationships with two other organizations doing significant work in the farm to institution space – Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF) and Yolo County Department of Agriculture – and initiated conversations with them about their work connecting food hubs to institutional buyers. Our conversation with CAFF led to their Procurement Specialist giving a presentation to the food hubs on selling to institutions on the April monthly call.

**Objective #5:
Share Information about Our Project**

1. Presentation at the National Food Hub Conference in Atlanta, April 2016

UC SAREP joined two other land grant universities (Michigan State University and Iowa State University) in presenting on our work on supporting food hub viability as part of sustainable food system development.

2. Food Hub video

UC SAREP produced a video “*Food Hubs: Valuable Players in a Sustainable Food System*” with footage from our tour of established, successful food hubs, Veritable Vegetable and Coke Farm, and interviews with some of this project’s food hub managers. The video highlights some best practices and challenges of running a food hub. It will be featured on the ASI website and we will work with Global Foods Initiative to explore wide viewership.

3. “Lessons Learned” report

UC SAREP produced a report, *Lessons Learned from a CA Food Hub Network Pilot: Role of UC in Nurturing Success for Food Hubs in California*, summarizing what we learned about 1) fostering a successful food hub network and 2) what is needed for food hubs to work successfully with institutional buyers.

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