

LACE:
Local Agricultural Community Exchange
Evaluation Report, FY I

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Introduction

The Center for Rural Studies (CRS) at the University of Vermont (UVM) is the third-party evaluator of the *Local Agriculture Community Exchange (LACE) project: A community revitalization project*, as a subcontractor of Central Vermont Community Action Council (CVCAC) for the three year grant period. The evaluation report presents the findings of data collected during the first fiscal year, from October 1, 2007 to September 31, 2008.

The evaluation of the LACE project focuses on both process and outcome methods. The overall evaluation focuses on the effectiveness and efficiency of the program's development and interventions, such as improvements to the LACE space and the presence of CVCAC staff on-site at the LACE location to provide services for entrepreneurs. The evaluation also examines strategies to recruit, assess, and retain vendors, quality of services provided including training and technical assistance, and client outcomes such as increased sales, earned income and job creation. These outcomes are anticipated to result from connecting local producers and entrepreneurs to a viable market. The outcome evaluation provides an assessment of project results as measured by collected data that define the net effects of the interventions applied in the project. The outcome evaluation will produce and interpret findings related to whether the interventions produced desirable changes and their potential for being replicated, answering the question of whether or not the program worked.

The process evaluation component is an ongoing examination of the implementation of the LACE investment and project, including collaboration among project partners. The results of the process component are intended to be a management tool to facilitate continuous project improvement. In documenting project development, the process evaluation also serves to help staff identify challenges or barriers, strategies to resolve them and provide recommendations for future implementation. The process and outcome evaluations will utilize both qualitative and quantitative methods, such as telephone and intercept surveys, focus groups, in-depth interviews, and review of database information.

Evaluation and Project Implications

The evaluation of LACE has several program implications. First, the evaluation serves to document the impact LACE has on various stakeholders involved in the project and facilitate the understanding of how to better serve these stakeholders. Serving the needs of the area's micro and small businesses, LACE features local produce and products for sale in the Farm Fresh Market and Cafe and the artisan Gallery. Training and counseling through CVCAC's micro business development program is also available to vendors in areas such as sales techniques, marketing, pricing, production, business operations, and business plan development.

The Gallery vendor liaison is a CVCAC business counselor who works on site at LACE to provide business assistance to artist and crafters who sell products in the Gallery at LACE. This liaison has helped to improve inventory management, pricing and marketing for the Gallery and other LACE offerings and services. By having Gallery vendors become "members" and pay a small rental fee for selling their products there, the Gallery provides income to the overall operation. Additionally, farmers and other producers with products sold in the Farm Fresh Market and Cafe at LACE access resource partners for technical assistance and business

counseling. An anticipated result of all of these strategies, which will be measured in the next fiscal year through micro business owner surveys and focus groups, will result in increased sales and employment through business expansions as well as new business start-ups.

The kitchen space at LACE is also in the process of undergoing expansion to enable home-based producers to expand their production and increase sales. Several micro business owners in the Barre area, such as Pakistani Foods, are eagerly awaiting the completion of the kitchen so they may expand their production and product offering. Business counseling and technical assistance will be available through the recently hired Kitchen vendor liaison and classes will be available in ServSafe certification to those using the kitchen facility in the next fiscal year.

A goal of LACE is to fill a vacant storefront with a much needed grocery store in the heart of Barre City's downtown area. Until LACE was established, many of central Vermont's poor, seniors, and disabled persons, who are concentrated in this community, had limited access to local, fresh and nutrition foods because of a lack of transportation. To begin to understand public perception of LACE, the evaluators started by surveying customers to gather their feedback on LACE and the impact it has on the community. Intercept surveys were conducted in August 2008 with customers at LACE over the course of one week and different times to capture variation in customers. A total of 125 customers completed the survey.

Almost a quarter (22%, 27) of respondents to the survey live in the downtown Barre area, defined as those who travelled less than one mile to get to LACE. In addition, 39% (9) of customers surveyed fit LACE's target market of being low-income and from downtown Barre. On the other hand, 78% (94) of respondents travelled to Barre from an outlying area that is one or more miles away from LACE, of which 34% (26) are low-income. These findings suggest that LACE's customer base is much wider than residents living in the downtown area. In fact, results show that customers who travelled a distance to get to LACE (30%, 28) are significantly more likely to be first time shoppers at LACE compared to 7% (2) of Barre residents ($p \leq .05$). While Barre residents were more likely to be frequent shoppers at all three areas within LACE. This finding suggests that some Barre residents are taking advantage of LACE's downtown proximity and offerings on a fairly regular basis.

A higher proportion of shoppers from outside of the Barre area also feel that LACE is very helpful (77%, 63) in drawing more people to shop in downtown Barre, which they demonstrate by being the majority of customers surveyed. These results speak positively to the marketing and promotional efforts that have gained the attention of shoppers outside the Barre area; regardless of whether or not these customers have other grocery store venues, they chose to travel to shop at LACE. This finding could also be related to an influx of tourists during the summer months.

Overall, shoppers surveyed at LACE have a very positive perception of the impact LACE has on the Barre community. Almost all of the respondents (98%), and all but one of Barre residents (98%), feel LACE is somewhat to very helpful in providing a grocery store in downtown Barre. The majority (92%) also feel that LACE provides Barre residents with reasonably priced products. Eighty four percent of all people surveyed and, more specifically, 100% of Barre residents feel LACE is very helpful in improving the overall image of Barre.

For more information about this study or to request additional copies of this report, please contact Michele Cranwell Schmidt, Evaluation Coordinator, at (802) 656-0256 or Mschmidt@uvm.edu.

Evaluation Research Questions

CRS research strategies evaluate the effectiveness of the LACE project towards the overall project goals and objectives by answering the following research questions. The questions listed under the Vendor heading are not addressed in this report because of the start-up period of the first fiscal year. However, these questions will be reported on in the next two fiscal year reports.

- What services and resources are used to effectively develop LACE to its full potential? What are the lessons learned in the process to develop LACE, including storefront opening, Farm Fresh Market and Café, the Gallery and shared kitchen space?
- How do project staff and partners identify and recruit vendors to sell product in the space? What are the strategies staff use to coordinate and manage working with vendors, such as inventory control and pricing?
- What are the roles and responsibilities of key staff, including counselors from CVCAC's Micro Business Development Program (MBDP), the vendor liaisons and the LACE executive director? How do these roles change over the course of the grant?
- What are the strengths and challenges faced in this grant, specifically with the construction and development of the LACE space and with the partnership between CVCAC and LACE organizations?
- What is the customer perception of LACE, satisfaction with products and prices, and the extent LACE meets stated goals and the needs of downtown Barre citizens?

Vendor Questions:

- What types of services do vendors use and to what extent? How is on-site CVCAC staff utilized and what impact do their services have on vendors' business?
- How many vendors start or expand businesses, including full and part time work, because of services used and access to a downtown, centralized market?
- How many jobs are created through the development of the LACE building and infrastructure? Do vendors' businesses create jobs for others, specifically other low-income individuals? If so, what is the average wage rate and do the businesses provide medical and health benefits?

- What are vendors' sources of income? Does the vendor experience any changes in income and/or income sources? Does the vendor's reliance on public assistance change?
- What is the annual gross revenue and to extent, annual expenditures of vendors' businesses?
- What are vendors' gains in human, social, and financial capital? How are these gains, if any, impacted by CVCAC services and/or the use of shared space?
- What impact does the implementation of the LACE project and market have on the downtown Barre City area, including revitalizing the downtown area through a multiplier effect, connecting local producers to a viable market, and improving the access and security disadvantaged citizens have to fresh and nutritious food?
- What kind of support do project Partners provide towards vendors' businesses?
- How will this project be sustainable beyond the funds of the grant?

Methodology

The process and outcome evaluation utilizes both qualitative and quantitative evaluation methods. Following the models of Weiss (1998), Patton (2002), previous work completed by the authors (Cranwell & Kolodinsky, 2003a, 2003b; Schmidt & Kolodinsky, 2006; Schmidt, Kolodinsky, Flint & Whitney, 2006) and other researchers in the field (Clark & Kays, 1995, 1999; Klein, Alisultanov & Blair, 2003; Rugg, 2002) mixed methods were employed to collect process data through focus groups with project partners and interviews with key staff and outcome data from customers who were shopping at LACE during a weeklong intercept survey. A key future evaluation activity will be to gather follow-up data from Gallery and Kitchen vendors through telephone surveys and focus groups.

Client intake data

Intake data was collected from vendors, by the Gallery vendor liaison, to generate baseline data including wage, income, health care, childcare, reliance on public assistance, and assets.

Staff focus groups and interviews

An annual staff focus group was held at the LACE location in May 2008 with key project personnel from LACE and CVCAC. A total of eight people participated who play a variety of unique roles within the project. The discussion concentrated on: project management and LACE infrastructure, working with and providing support for Gallery and Market vendors, community impact and collaboration (Appendix A) (Glesne, 1999; Patton, 2002). In addition, in-depth interviews were held in person and on the telephone with the LACE Executive Director and the Gallery Vendor Liaison in May and June 2008 to gather specific information regarding their roles, project implementation and anecdotal outcomes. The information collected provides qualitative data on project process, best practices, and lessons learned for improving the project over the next two years. These key informants, in addition to others who were not interviewed in

the first year [such as Mary Niebling, Project Director at CVCAC, Crystal Zevon, public relations and outreach specialist at LACE, and Ela Chapin, LACE Board Chair], will be interviewed in the second and third fiscal years to follow-up on project process.

Customer survey

The customer survey was conducted inside of the LACE space for five days over a one week period in August 2008 (Appendix B). Two CRS staff conducted the survey during different time frames throughout the week to maximize the variation of customer responses. Survey time frames were determined by the LACE ED and public relations manager based on their experience of when the store is the busiest with different clientele (see Table 1). A total of 175 people were approached and 125 completed the survey for a response rate of 71%.

Fliers and signs were displayed around the store at various locations informing customers about the survey, inviting them to participate and indicating the dates and times when surveyors would be at LACE. During the actual surveying time, CRS staff approached customers at an opportune moment, such as when they were waiting in line to pay for their groceries or for food from the Café, or sitting in the eat-in area. Based on wording from an introductory script, surveyors introduced themselves and described the purpose and the sponsor of the survey. Once introduced, the surveyor would either hand the customer the survey (on a clip board with a pen) or, if they seemed reticent, inform them that the survey team was located in the seating area and that they could stop back to complete the survey at another time. Surveyors made a point to not approach people who appeared to be busy, conversing, or in a hurry. The number of contacts and completed surveys was recorded on a daily basis and is presented in Table 1. Once people filled out the survey they were offered to complete and submit a raffle ticket for a gift basket of local products from the LACE Gallery and were given a voucher for a free cookie or cup of coffee from the LACE Café, to be used the day of the survey.

Table 1. Number of LACE customers approached for the intercept survey on the given days and time frames

| Day | Time | Number approached |
|---------------------|-------------|--------------------------|
| 8/26/08 (Tuesday) | 12-3pm | 51 |
| 8/27/08 (Wednesday) | 3-6pm | 29 |
| 8/28/08 (Thursday) | 4-7pm | 22 |
| 8/30/08 (Friday) | 12-3pm | 38 |
| 8/31/08 (Saturday) | 10-1pm | 35 |

(n=175)

Findings

The following report summarizes the findings of the LACE project evaluation for the first fiscal year. This report begins with an overview the project's implementation, as documented through partner focus groups and interviews with key staff. This section is followed by a description of Gallery vendor characteristics to present a profile of clients served by the LACE project to date. Finally, results from the customer intercept survey are presented to understand the impact the LACE Market, Café and Gallery has had on the local community. Finally, conclusions from the evaluation results and recommendations for program improvement are presented.

Project Implementation

To document project implementation a staff focus group was held at the LACE location in May 2008 with key project personnel from LACE and CVCAC. A total of eight people who play a variety of unique roles within the project participated in the session (see box). The discussion concentrated on: project management and LACE infrastructure development, working with and providing support for Gallery and Market vendors, community impact and collaboration (Appendix A). In addition, in-depth interviews were held in person and on the telephone with the LACE executive director (ED) and the Gallery vendor liaison in May and June 2008 to gather specific information regarding their roles, project implementation and anecdotal outcomes. The information collected provides qualitative data from the two LACE liaisons on project process, best practices, and lessons learned for continuing the project over the next two years. Additional data will be collected over the next two years with the Kitchen liaison, CVCAC Project Director, LACE public relations and outreach specialist, and LACE Board Chair, to get a more in-depth and well-rounded perspective on project process as the grant and LACE become further established.

Roles of persons interviewed to document project implementation: project director and grant writer, grant manager; executive director of LACE and manager and vendor liaison for the Market and Café; public relations, outreach and events planner of LACE; LACE Board chairperson; Gallery vendor liaison; MBDP business counselors and intake specialist.

Development of LACE Infrastructure and Roles of Vendor Liaisons

Subordinate grant objectives addressed: (1) To partner with the Local Agricultural Community Exchange (LACE)—a private sector supported community revitalization project—in reinvigorating economic activity in a distressed central Vermont community, Barre City; (2) To renovate retail space within the LACE facility (a farm fresh market and community café) to accommodate up to 103 vendor spaces that will showcase value-added agricultural products, crafts and other products created for sale by newly formed micro business enterprises; and (3) to renovate commercial kitchen space within the LACE facility to accommodate small scale commercial processing production runs for home-based producer-businesses.

LACE grant activities, highlighted as follows, have worked towards meeting these goals. The infrastructure changes at LACE serves to also address barriers to success that newly formed microenterprises face. These barriers include lack of low-cost processing facilities to safely and efficiently process local foods and value-added products for retail and lack of affordable retail space in a high traffic area for low-income microentrepreneurs. As a result of combining the business expertise of CVCAC’s MBDP and the expertise, social capital, passion and commitment of LACE, several improvements were realized within the Market, Café, Gallery and Kitchen operations.

Farm Fresh Market and Café

A key component of the LACE grant is the Farm Fresh Market and Café, managed and operated by Ariel Zevon, ED, and Crystal Zevon. The Market and Café opened for business in June 2007, prior to the receipt of the grant award. The presence of the Market and Café allowed for local shoppers to learn about LACE and begin incorporating Market products and offerings into their every day routines, prior to the changes brought on by the grant funding.

Role of the ED, manager and vendor liaison

The Market and Café manager and vendor liaison (who is also the ED of LACE), Ariel Zevon, noted that she spends between 80 and 90 hours a week to make sure that operations run smoothly. Her job ranges from ordering products from vendors and suppliers, preparing food for the Café, and managing the overall day to day operation including supervising employees and Reach-Up volunteers. Having an already established Market and Café at LACE when the Gallery was slated to open fostered a smooth transition for the construction and opening of the Gallery. Ariel Zevon noted that the construction and addition of the Gallery did not disrupt “business as usual” within the Market and Café space. Even though the Gallery and Market/Café are separate entities, there is a cooperative spirit between the two, as they are both part of a larger structure and help fulfill the mission of LACE. The Market/Café and Gallery vendor liaisons equally noted that the two areas, with different market bases, mutually benefit the other by increasing foot traffic from a variety of customers and exposing them to all food and retail offerings of LACE.

Challenges addressed

A challenge identified by grant staff that affects the entire LACE operation is related to the physical condition of the building at the project onset. When LACE first occupied the current space on Main Street in Barre, staff were not aware of the energy efficiency issues of the

building, such as being cold during the winter because of a dysfunctional heating system, lack of insulation and holes in the building envelope. To address this issue, Project Director Mary Niebling arranged for both an “energy walk through” and a “full energy audit” to be conducted in the future to understand what changes need to be made to improve the energy efficiency of the building, which will help LACE save money on heating and cooling costs and be more environmentally responsible.

The Gallery

The Gallery space at LACE was constructed during the first fiscal year of the grant after the Market and Café portion of LACE was in operation. Initially, the LACE building was one large open space; however, post interior remodeling, customers now pass through an arched doorway to enter into the separate Gallery space filled with artisan products. Ariel noted that before the Gallery was finalized, artist and craft vendors placed products for sale in the Market space. Once the Gallery space was finalized, these products were transferred to the Gallery space and the vendors now work with Kym Maynard, the Gallery vendor liaison and business counselor from MBDP. Kym indicated that a successful outcome of the Gallery is that “it gives vendors a cohesive place to showcase their work.” Fifty-two vendors have completed intake forms and showcase their work at LACE, accounting for about 50% of the maximum space for 103 vendors in the Gallery.

Role of the vendor liaison

The Gallery vendor liaison is a CVCAC, MBDP business counselor who works on site at LACE to provide business assistance to artist and crafters who sell products in the Gallery at LACE. Kym describes her role as “complicated,” as she manages the Gallery, including working with the contractors who remodeled the Gallery space, contracts with vendors and manages inventory control, designs the aesthetics of the space and product layout, supervises Gallery volunteers, and works to mitigate security issues such as theft of Gallery items.

“The Gallery gives vendors a cohesive place to showcase their work, get their business off the ground and sell their product.”

Systematic improvements to Gallery operation

One of Kym’s initial accomplishments was to overhaul inventory management, pricing and marketing of Gallery products and other LACE offerings and services. Kym and other business counselors at MBDP established a standard set of policies and procedures for inventory management and sales of Gallery items. Vendors are now “members” of the Gallery at LACE and pay a rental fee to place their products in a booth. Kym noted that payment of rent is affordable and flexible as vendors have until the 15th of the month to pay their rent. If they do not pay their rent by that time, they will get a reminder phone call. Many vendors with less cash flow, such as Senior citizens who live off a fixed income, are not charged a rental fee for the first six months to test out their product in the Gallery before committing to paying rent. Also, some vendors work in the Gallery in lieu of paying rent. The Gallery is minimally staffed because of limited funds to pay people and this option allows for more coverage, especially in the evening, and meets the needs of lower income vendors. This nominal rental fee provides a consistent revenue stream for LACE, in addition to a 15% commission on product sales. Kym anticipates

that eventually this revenue will help pay for Gallery activities and supplies, but at the time of this interview, all of the revenue were reinvested back into LACE as a whole. In addition to vendor rental agreements, inventory is now tracked in a more systematic way. Each vendor has a distinct number that corresponds to all of their inventory and items sold. On a regular basis, Kym or a Gallery volunteer will review the sales log and make payment to vendors who sold products, minus a 15% commission fee. This system is both computerized and maintained in paper records.

Ariel Zevon noted that Kym's revamped system has benefitted LACE overall. Prior to having an up-to-date inventory list, Ariel noted, "Gallery vendors would come to the register and ask for money from sales of their products." Kym agreed saying, "Vendors would ask for cash for sales of their products and we had no way of checking their inventory and if sales were actually made. We realized that we overpaid people, so we now have inventory check points." Sales reports and inventory control provide LACE with a systematic way to track inventory and sales so vendors are paid accurately and fairly and LACE does not lose out on sales commission or by overpaying people.

In addition to inventory management, Kym also developed a vendor intake form to gather baseline data of vendors to compare with data collected during annual follow-up surveys over time. Kym states that "many vendors see their work as a 'hobby' and this formality gave them a reason to see Cecile [Johnston, intake specialist at CVCAC]. This meeting gives them a chance to understand what it means to be an entrepreneur, their rights and responsibilities, and services available to them as members of the LACE Gallery.

Challenges addressed

Organizing and improving inventory management has helped LACE; however this change was a challenge for some vendors and was met with resistance by those who were used to the more casual way of doing business with LACE. Kym noted that two vendors pulled out of the Gallery because they did not like working within the parameters of the new system. Regardless, many vendors remained at LACE and many new ones added their products under this new management system. Regarding the use of the vendor intake form, new vendors could easily complete this form during their orientation session. However, vendors who already had product in the Gallery were harder to track down for them to complete this form.

Community, shared-use kitchen

At the time of this report, the kitchen space at LACE was under construction to expand the existing space and add commercial grade appliances and equipment so that home-based producers may use this space to make products, expand their production, test out product sales in the Market and/or Café, and eventually increase their sales. Several micro business owners in the Barre area, such as Pakistani Foods, eagerly await the completion of the kitchen so they may use this kitchen rather than share the current Café kitchen. Business counseling and technical assistance will be available through the recently hired Kitchen vendor liaison. Ariel Zevon noted that this new person has a chef background as well as micro business management and marketing experience, so he has a nice variety of skills to suit the needs of clients. Business and technical assistance for food producers, such as ServSafe certification, will be available once the kitchen is finalized. LACE will also hold cooking classes for business owners and community

members alike and will use the kitchen for preserving food to use in the Market and Café beyond the growing season.

Challenges overcome

The kitchen renovation turned out to be a bigger project than originally anticipated. Staff noted a few challenges met during the kitchen renovation process. Miscommunication between CVCAC and LACE staff led to the development of multiple kitchen floor plans and conflicting opinions on the best use of the space. Several people felt that had communication been more forthright, the kitchen could have been ready for use in the beginning of July. Finalizing the kitchen in a timely manner is important for LACE, as both Café cooks and food based business owners desired to use the kitchen more heavily in mid to late summer, at the peak and end of the growing season in Vermont.

Another issue that compromised the completion of the kitchen space was that the original kitchen vendor liaison hired for the grant left this position shortly after being hired. Staff were counting on this person to act as the liaison between LACE and CVCAC and facilitate the kitchen renovation process, in addition to working with food based business owners. In the interim, Brian Norder, director of the Vermont Food Venture Center that has a commercial grade community kitchen on site, was contracted to assist with finalizing the kitchen design. A lesson learned from this experience, as indicated by a key staff person, is that “there can’t be a lack of communication for any length of time and that all staff working on a project need to check in on a weekly basis.” Those most affected by this issue noted that the miscommunication issue has been resolved and that future issues may be thwarted by the presence of the new kitchen vendor liaison who, similar to Kym Maynard, is a CVCAC business counselor working on site at LACE. This person will help coordinate communication between the two organizations.

The delayed completion of the kitchen space caused some other ripples to occur; local food based businesses could not easily be accommodated in using LACE’s kitchen in lieu of the shared kitchen space because of daily Café food preparation. Many local producers wanted to use the current kitchen space to develop their products while waiting for the shared use kitchen to be available. These food producers were offered to use the kitchen during specific hours, such as in the evening or early morning, so as not to conflict with the food preparation for the Café. Several producers found this time frame inconvenient and expressed frustration with LACE or would drop by unexpectedly to use the kitchen. Also, people who agreed to use the kitchen during allotted hours would sometimes not show up for the time they asked to use the kitchen space, which inconvenienced those who lock up the building. To preserve the operations of the Café, the LACE Board of Directors instituted a policy that the Café staff have priority for use of the kitchen space.

Business Assistance Services Provided

Vendors at LACE are the cornerstone of the project; the primary objective of this partnership is to create 68 new jobs for low-income individuals through business development and expansion. Supporting this goal, the collaborative provides training and technical assistance to vendors and newly formed microenterprises in areas such as sales techniques, marketing, pricing, production, business operations and business plan development. LACE also serves to facilitate the creation of networks of the farmers, producers, vendors, and other business owners connected with LACE through which they can more efficiently purchase needed supplies, market their products, and produce goods.

Baseline data on the impact of services to vendors and their businesses will be collected during the follow-up telephone survey in the winter of 2009. However, discussions with LACE and MBDP staff shed light on the recruitment of vendors, types of services they use, and resources to which they are referred.

Recruitment of vendors to the Gallery

Kym Maynard commented that the majority of Gallery vendors have found LACE through social networking, including: word-of-mouth from current vendors, customers who already have a product that could be sold at LACE and through her connections as an artist in the community. Newspaper articles featuring LACE and the Gallery have also inadvertently advertised to vendors about opportunities available to them; however the Gallery has done little direct advertising to recruit vendors. Overall Kym notes, “there is no shortage of clients,” in describing the high level of interest vendors have shown to be a part of the Gallery space. Kym and Cecile Johnston, MBDP intake specialist, along with other MBDP business counselors provide new vendors with an intake/orientation, either individually or as a group, to provide vendors with a packet of information on renting space, LACE commission on sales, contracting with vendors, payment schedule, and all other policies/procedures for Gallery vendors at LACE. This orientation also reviews the mission of LACE and the role the grant plays within LACE. Vendors also complete their intake form to collect basic demographic data and establish their record in a computer database on in paper files.

Barriers to success faced by vendors

While discussing the services the grant and LACE provide vendors, staff talked about common barriers that vendors face. Many vendors do not have strong marketing and organizational skills when they come to LACE and, in general, lack financial resources and cash flow. Vendors also face a common fear about selling their products in a storefront location, because they are uncertain if they will not be able to produce enough product quantity to fulfill orders. Vendors also have a hard time pricing their product, especially artesian based vendors. It is challenging for them to place a value on their work that incorporates their time, effort and materials yet is reasonably priced to a “blue-collar” market in Barre. These and other barriers clients face will be addressed through training and technical assistance services from MBDP business counselors over the next two years. Follow-up surveys with vendors will gauge how well their needs are met by these services.

Services provided to vendors

Gallery vendors are introduced to LACE and MBDP services in two ways: some clients initially work with MBDP and then decide to sell their products at LACE, while others approach LACE to sell their products and then work with MBDP for assistance.

Training and technical assistance provided

MBDP individual technical assistance, classes, seminars and workshops are open to all Gallery vendors who are income eligible. The MBDP newsletter and fliers that advertise upcoming classes are given to all vendors on a regular basis to keep them informed of services available to them; when vendors have questions or seek assistance, they can talk to Kym or go to any MBDP business counselor directly to receive services. In addition to traditional services, Kym noted that in FY 2008-2009 she plans on offering on-site, shortened versions of MBDP courses with information targeted to Gallery vendors. Once the kitchen space is available for use, the kitchen liaison, LACE staff and other food vendors will provide business owners and community members with training and technical assistance for food based businesses. This training will support the value-added processing needs of farmers who are affiliated with LACE, such as those who sell produce in the Market or ingredients used in Café food.

Skills gained

Kym provided individualized assistance for vendors and thus observed many changes in people and their businesses as a result. Vendors have developed marketing, pricing, display and sales skills. Showcasing products at the Gallery has required vendors to think about the visual appeal of their product, which encourages a customer to buy it. The Gallery also provides a place for vendors to learn about the seasonality of sales without experiencing a financial loss that other business owners face who are not supported by a larger venue. Vendors have also gained confidence in themselves and their work because they are selling their products at the Gallery. Vendors also benefit from networking with other vendors; Gallery members have built a strong sense of community that is non-threatening and provides a place for people to get feedback on ideas and hear positive and constructive criticism from their peers about their ideas and products.

Marketing and visibility

Vendors also benefit from the free marketing and publicity they gain from working with large and well known organizations in Barre. A local newspaper, *The Times Argus*, features LACE a periodic basis. And, by this association, vendors benefit by locating within LACE and might not otherwise get this publicity if they did not sell their products in a larger venue that already has recognition in the community. Gallery vendors will also have opportunities to hold demonstrations and community classes at LACE as a way to showcase their work and skills. Several Gallery vendors have also formed a committee to determine marketing related events that will benefit the entire Gallery.

Referrals to resources

MBDP business counselors referred Gallery vendors to a variety of resources. Business-focused resources include: Vermont Women's Business Center, Small Business Development Center, tax assistance programs, and Vermont Secretary of State for business registration. Food based businesses are referred to Vermont Health Department for food safety and licensing and

Vermont Food Venture Center for product development. Referrals are also made for social services, such as other Community Action services, health care and other state programs.

Project Partnership

A strong partnership between LACE and CVCAC is imperative to meeting the grant goals of vendor training and technical assistance, job creation through business development and expansion, the creation of sustainable networks among entrepreneurs, and reinvigorating economic activity in a distressed central Vermont community, Barre City.

The partnership between CVCAC and LACE posed many opportunities as well as challenges during project development and growth in the first fiscal year.

Challenges overcome

Challenges addressed during the first year, revolving around the project partnership including communication, trust and adaptation, resolving conflicts of interest and overcoming the public's initial negative perception of LACE.

Communication

One aspect of the partnership between CVCAC and LACE that proved challenging in the beginning of the collaboration was communication among staff and finding time to meet and make decisions face to face. Both organizations have a host of staff who are doing their best to communicate while managing other aspects of their jobs. However, coordinating schedules, different personalities and work styles, and making decisions that honor either a consensus or compromise was a struggle at grant onset. Ariel, as the ED of LACE, and Mary Niebling, as the project director with CVCAC, realized that they needed to communicate on a regular basis so that pieces of the project do not “fall through the cracks” or go unaddressed. Communication between the two busy women, who have many other responsibilities, is facilitated by the vendor liaisons who work for CVCAC but are on-site at LACE and primarily serve LACE vendors. An important foundation for communication was to set up clear contracts and expectations at the grant onset on each person's roles and responsibilities. As discussed in a previous section, a noteworthy area of contention faced this past year was finalizing the kitchen floor plan. LACE staff and MBDP business counselors had different views the layout of the kitchen and the urgency in completing construction. Although, staff commented that in the end everyone had shared intentions and their goals are the same. Once issues facing the kitchen renovation project were communicated, the project worked more smoothly.

It is important that this partnership respects the autonomy of LACE, expertise from both organizations, the goals and outcomes proposed in the grant, and the administrative process of approving projects that are financed by grant funds.

Trust and adaptation

Another challenge that has been part of the “growing pains” of the first year and has worked out over time is building a mutual level of trust and equality of ownership towards the project and grant goals; it is important that this partnership respects the autonomy of LACE, expertise from both organizations, the goals and outcomes proposed in the grant, and the administrative process of approving projects within the grant (such as the kitchen) that are financed by grant funds. Ariel

explained, “This grant is the first time LACE is working closely with another organization and the grant is administered through that organization. It took a bit of time to figure out how to meet project goals, within a timeline, while waiting for approval. It is frustrating to have to wait for things to get through. However, once we learned how things work under the grant, we have been more prepared to adapt to that.”

Conflict of interest

One area that has posed a conflict of interest during this first year is the role of the MBDP business counselor as advocates for entrepreneurs yet working in the interest of LACE and grant goals. For example, a business owner inquired about selling products at LACE but they did not end up doing so and their business subsequently closed. The entrepreneur was frustrated at the process of working with LACE and discussed these grievances about LACE with their MBDP business counselor. Their business counselor took on the role of entrepreneur advocate, as they normally do, which was a point of conflict that resulted in “sour feelings” because LACE and CVCAC are grant partners. This situation was brought to light through communication and addressed by working to understand each other’s expectations of meeting the needs of entrepreneurs and LACE concomitantly.

Overcoming misguided public perceptions

In addition to generating mutual trust between the two partners, several LACE and CVCAC staff commented that LACE faced a tough challenge of opening what is traditionally stereotyped as a high end, expensive niche market and gaining the buy-in, acceptance and respect of Barre citizens to the great intentions of the concept. Ariel stated, “People hear the term ‘organic’ and they think of expensive food, tree huggers, and hippies. Barre is a closed community that does not easily welcome change or something that is perceived as outside of the norm there.” Initial media coverage of LACE did not accurately portray LACE’s relationship with CVCAC and the role of the grant funding; staff felt that LACE was misquoted often in newspaper articles and information was deleted or taken out of context, depicting a negative image of LACE. This less than positive media coverage left many local people “suspicious” about the concept of LACE. Many community members were initially resentful of the grant money LACE received as well as money raised through several benefit concerts by a Zevon family friend, renowned musician Jackson Browne. One staff member commented, “Everyone here is looking for a handout and they were wondering why they were not getting some of the money, even though all funds were invested into LACE and the majority of ‘employees’ who keep LACE going volunteer their time and are not paid.” LACE staff also worked hard to gain trust and buy-in from local producers and farmers who have lived in the area for generations and were apprehensive about working with LACE.

To address and counter this misguided public perception, Kym noted, “Ariel stayed strong and kept a positive attitude of ‘just keep doing what we do’ and eventually public reception changes.” In addition, Mary Niebling submitted several press releases to other published media in the area, which were printed verbatim and portrayed LACE in a very positive light. Press releases have also started to be issued on a regular basis to highlight the work of local artists that is for sale in the LACE Gallery and Market. This strategy should help community members understand that LACE is serving to bolster local businesses as a place to get their business off the ground and sell their products. LACE also hosts community centered events such as dinners,

farmers' markets, and children's educational series, which have brought people into LACE who did not initially give LACE a chance. As discussed later in this report, by hiring local employees and Reach Up volunteers to work at LACE, community members are more receptive to the store and customers who would not initially shop there are visiting more frequently.

Partnership strengths

Both organizations are pleased to collaborate with the other as LACE and CVCAC have a synergistic partnership based on common goals of supporting local business, connecting consumers with high quality, locally produced produce, and addressing economic development and revitalization needs of downtown Barre.

Before Ariel Zevon was a business owner, she was a CVCAC client who sought assistance to start a business, which is now LACE. Because she experienced the "client" side of working with CVCAC, she understands how CVCAC operates and the needs of burgeoning entrepreneurs. LACE staff in general appreciate the business expertise that MBDP counselors bring to the partnership and find it very beneficial to be able to consult with them on a regular basis when making business decisions. Ariel notes, "Overall the partnership is working and I have learned a lot from CVCAC and being a part of the grant writing process – even though there has been a learning curve. The end result of the project is beneficial for everyone. Both organizations are quickly figuring out how to work together and learn from the other's expertise." In addition to shared learning and serving common goals, Ariel feels that LACE could not have afforded to renovate the Gallery and kitchen space without assistance from grant funds and the partnership. Despite some miscommunication and administrative process issues, LACE staff appreciate that CVCAC is the fiscal agent of the project.

Kym Maynard and Ariel also have a developed a strong partnership that is mutually beneficial and complementary. Kym appreciates that if she faces issues, she can rely on Ariel to brainstorm a resolution and vice versa. Kym stated that she includes Ariel in almost every decision she makes to maintain communication, trust, and benefit from her expertise. Kym also provides business advice to the Market and Café side of the operation and lends her artistic skills to designing and updating the front window display. Both women share a strong commitment to the mission of LACE and their role within this and put in a tremendous amount of time and energy, paid and volunteer, to foster this project.

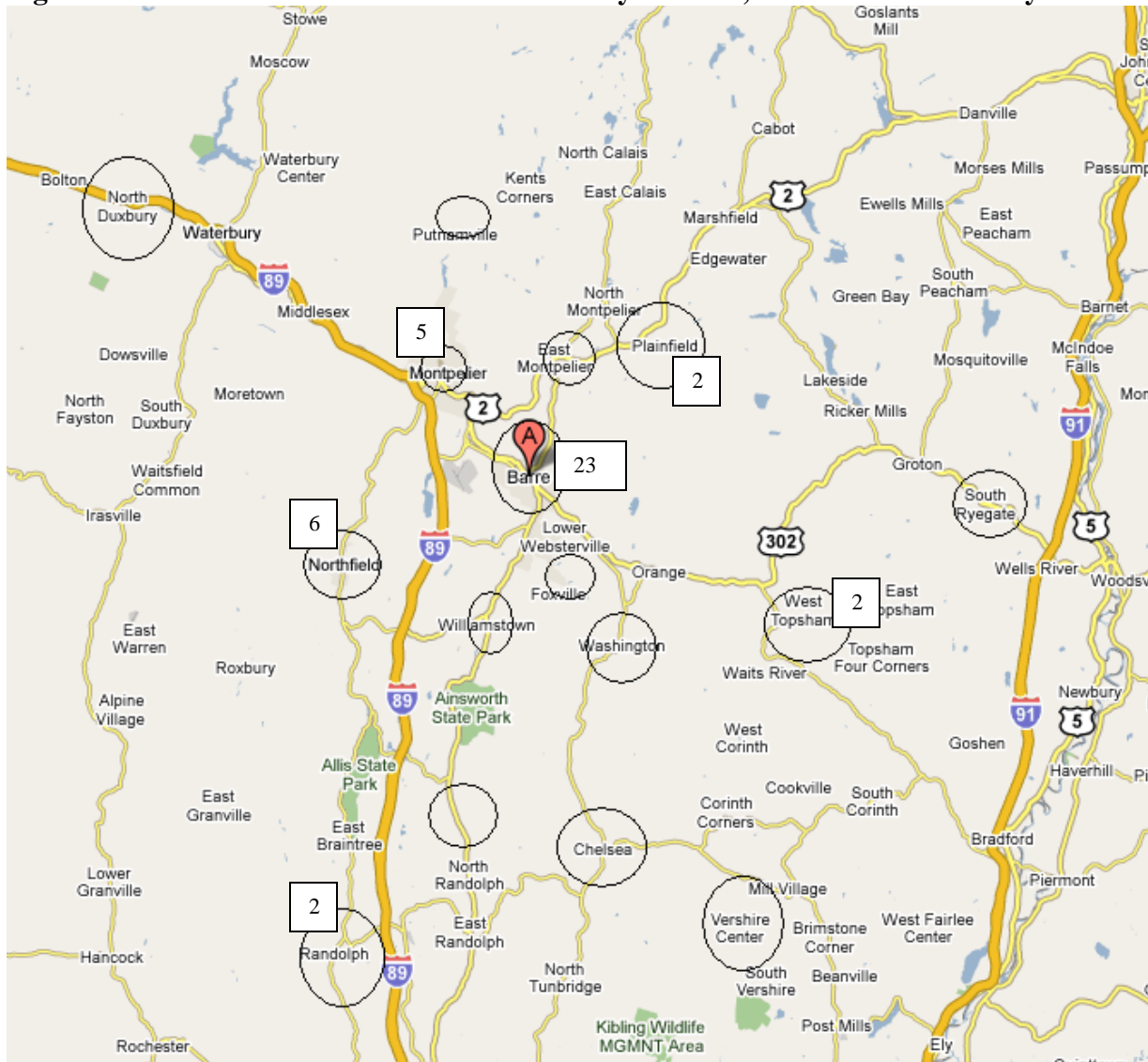
Project Outcomes

The evaluation of the first year of the LACE project examines the characteristics of clients who are members of the Gallery, have products for sale in the Gallery and work with the Gallery vendor liaison for business assistance. In addition, customer opinions and feedback were solicited during intercept surveys collected in August 2008.

Gallery Vendor Demographic Information

A total of 52 clients completed a LACE intake form as a Gallery vendor during the first fiscal year, although others have been selling items in the Gallery who have not yet completed an intake form with CVCAC.

Figure 1. Residential Locations of LACE Gallery vendors, Relative to Barre City



Note: not shown on map: Rutland, VT (1) and Danbury, CT (1)

Geographic location

Figure 1, shown on the previous page, provides a visual depiction of the residential location of Gallery vendors in relation to LACE’s location and the number of vendors from each town (n is shown in the boxes). If no box is present, only one (1) vendor lives in that area). This map demonstrates that LACE vendors are primarily from the Barre, Montpelier and Northfield area. However, smaller surrounding towns are also accessing the market available at LACE.

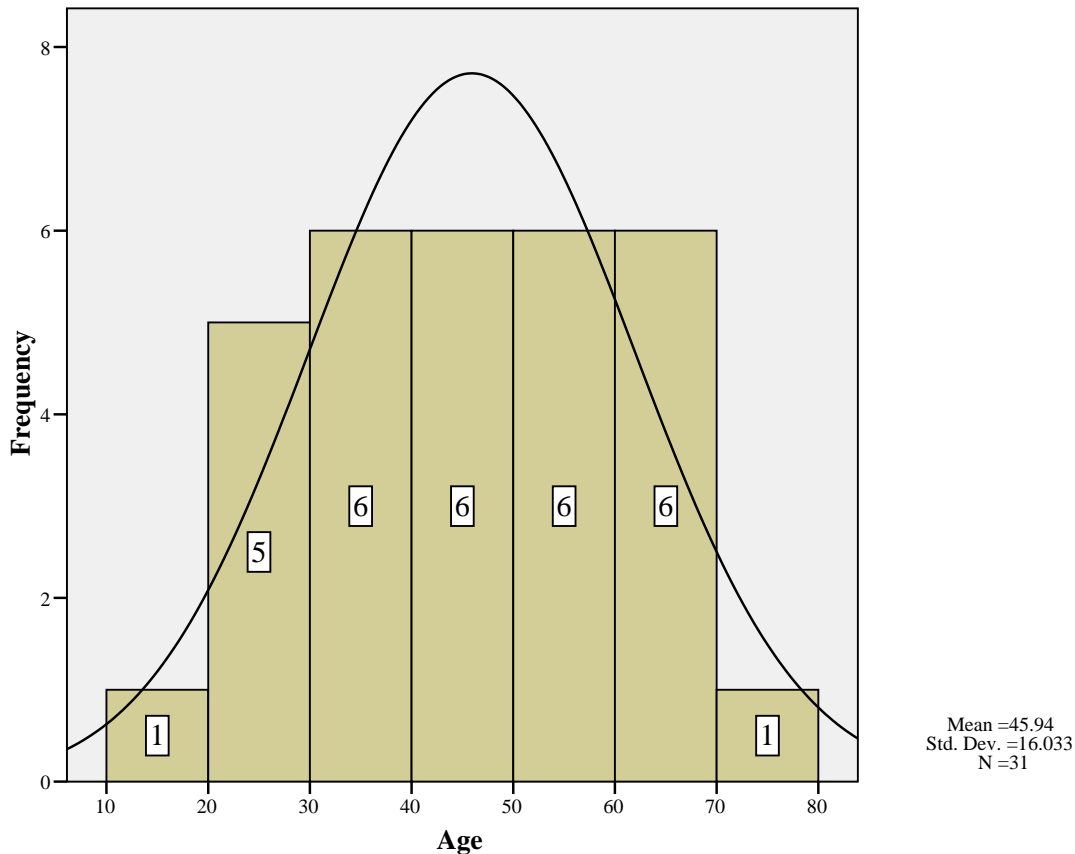
Gender, household members and ethnicity

Slightly more than three quarters of vendors (40) are female and 23% (12) are male. Vendors reported a household size ranging from one person to four people, with a mean and median of 2 and mode of 1 and 2 people (n=10 each). Thirty of the 32 vendors are Caucasian and two are of an ethnic background.

Age

Figure 2 shows the distribution of Gallery vendors’ ages. The majority of vendors are in the age range of late 20’s to mid 60’s, with an overall age range of 18 to 77 years old. The average and median age is 46 and most common age is 28 years old (n=3).

Figure 2. Age of Gallery Vendors

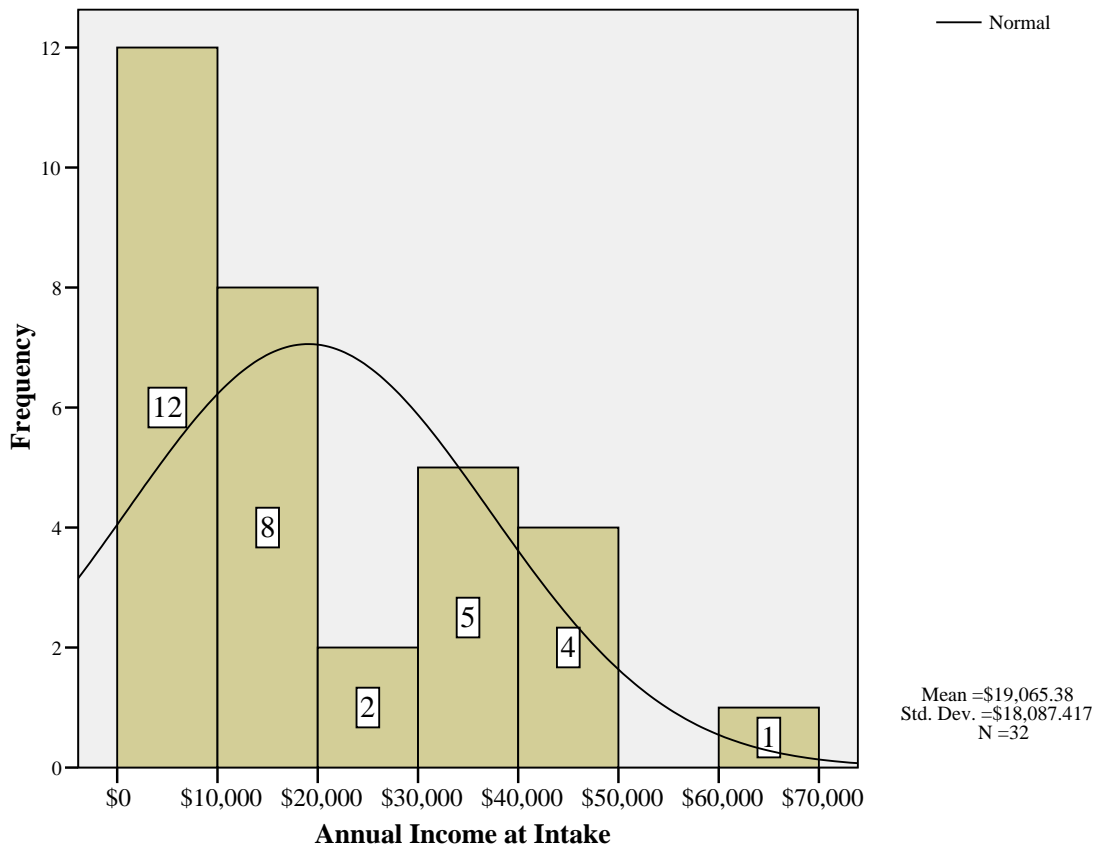


(n=32)

Income and disability

The following data are available for 32 out of the 52 clients. The average annual income of vendors upon intake (self-reported) was \$19,065, with a range of \$0 to \$64,000, median of \$13,500 and mode of \$0 (Figure 3).¹ Two of the 32 clients reported receiving food stamps and nine had a verifiable disability. Change in vendor income and receipt of public assistance benefits will be an area to track over the course of the grant.

Figure 3. Distribution of Vendors' Annual Income at Intake



Education

Gallery vendors had a variety of education levels achieved, ranging from 9-12th grade through college graduate (n=32). Almost two thirds (59%, 19) had completed some college to receiving a college degree. All but 2 vendors completed at least a high school education (94%, 30).

¹ An inordinate number of vendors self-reported income \$10,000 or less, which we suspect is due to problems with the self-reporting of income and, as a result, may have skewed these results. Changes will be made to the intake process during the upcoming period to correct this problem.

Customer Perspective of LACE

A goal of LACE is to serve the needs of the community, by filling a vacant storefront with a much needed grocery store in the heart of Barre City's downtown area. Until LACE was established, many of central Vermont's poor, seniors, and disabled persons, who are concentrated in this community, had limited access to local, fresh and nutrition foods because of a lack of transportation. To begin to understand public perception of LACE, the evaluators started by surveying customers to gain their feedback and perspective on the impact of LACE on the area community. Intercept surveys were conducted in August 2008 with customers at LACE over the course of one week for five days during different time frames to capture variation in customers (See Table 1). A total of 125 customers completed the survey. A total of 175 people were approached and 125 completed the survey for a response rate of 71%.

Demographic profile of respondents to customer survey

The demographic profile of customer survey respondents suggests that LACE has a draw for a variety of customers, regardless of socioeconomic background or geographic distance to LACE. Two thirds of respondents are female (66%, 80) and 34% (42) are male. Customers' ages ranged from 19 to 78 years old, with an average, median and mode age of 46 years. Customers have between 1 and 7 household members, with an average, median and mode of 2 household members. Sixty-nine percent (77) do not have children living at home, while the remaining 31% have between 1 and 4 children; the majority has one child. LACE clientele also earn varying levels of income, with a few households earning \$19,999 or less annually and the majority earning \$20,000 or more annually (Figure 4, shown on next page). The mode response was earning more than \$60,000 on an annual basis. Examining income data by number of household members, 34% (35) of shoppers who completed the survey are considered to be low-income, defined as being at or below 200% of the federal poverty level.

Figure 5, shown on the next page, displays that an even proportion of customers travelled from less than one mile to 11-30 miles to get to LACE, while 11% (13) travelled more than 30 miles to shop there. Almost a quarter (22%, 27) of respondents live in the downtown Barre area, defined as those who travelled less than one mile to get to LACE. Thirty-nine percent (9) of customers surveyed fit LACE's targeted market of being low-income and from downtown Barre. On the other hand, 78% (94) of respondents are from an outlying area that is one or more miles away from LACE, of which 34% (26) are low-income.

LACE works to meet the needs of downtown, low-income Barre residents; however, these findings suggest that LACE's customer base is much wider than the downtown area. This result speaks positively to the marketing and promotional efforts that gained the attention of shoppers outside the Barre area; regardless of whether or not these customers have other grocery store venues, they chose to travel to shop at LACE. This finding could also be related to an influx of tourists during the summer months.

Figure 4. Income Categories of Customer Survey Respondents

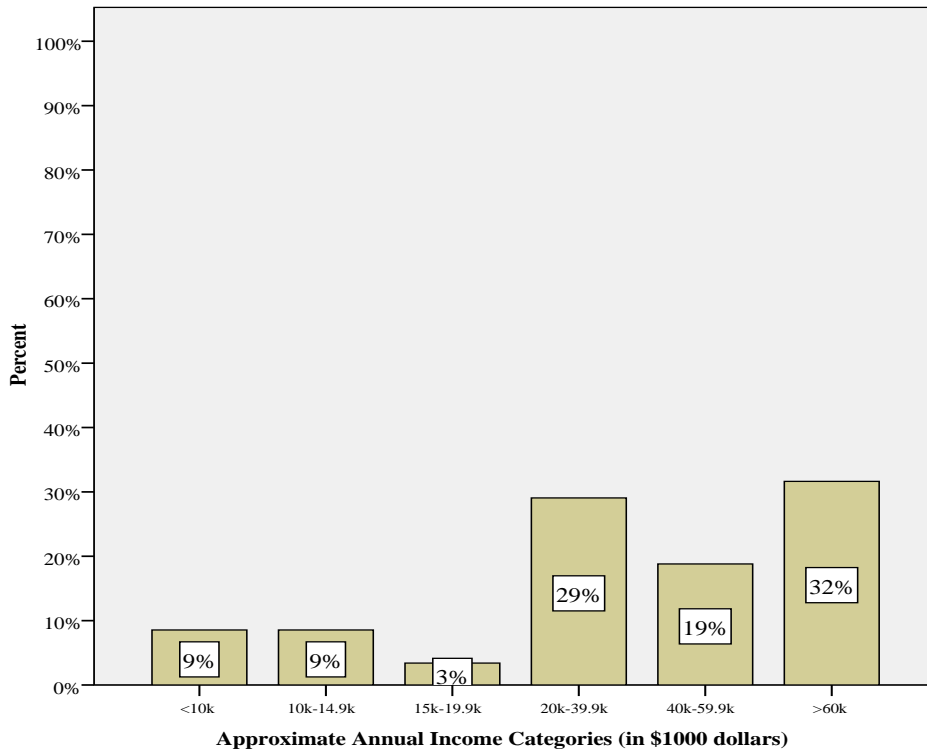
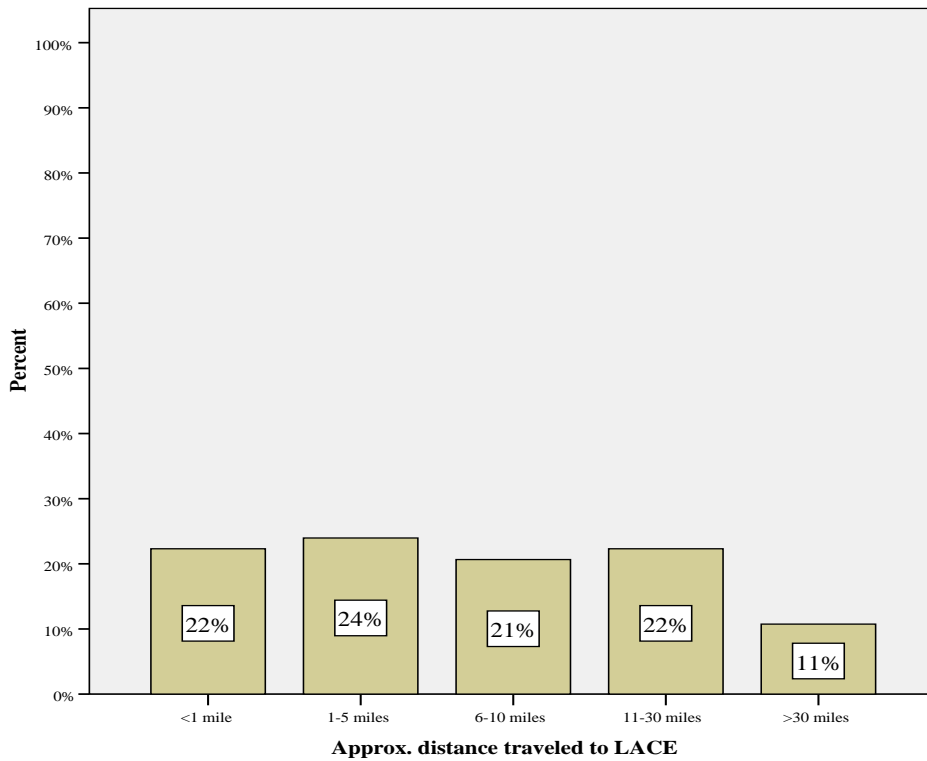


Figure 5. Approximate Distance Customer Survey Respondents Travelled to LACE



Frequency of shopping at LACE

The **Market** at LACE has many repeat customers who purchase grocery items, as 61% (76) or almost one in three customers surveyed reported that they *occasionally* (39%) or *frequently* (23%) shop at LACE (Figure 6). Examining Barre residence status by frequency of shopping at LACE, Barre residents (85%, 23) are significantly more likely than shoppers who live in outlying areas (57%, 53) to frequently visit LACE ($\chi^2=7.481$; $p\leq.05$). In addition, low-income shoppers (regardless of where they live) (77%, 26) are significantly more likely to be frequent shoppers at LACE compared to 55% (38) of above low-income customers ($p\leq.05$).

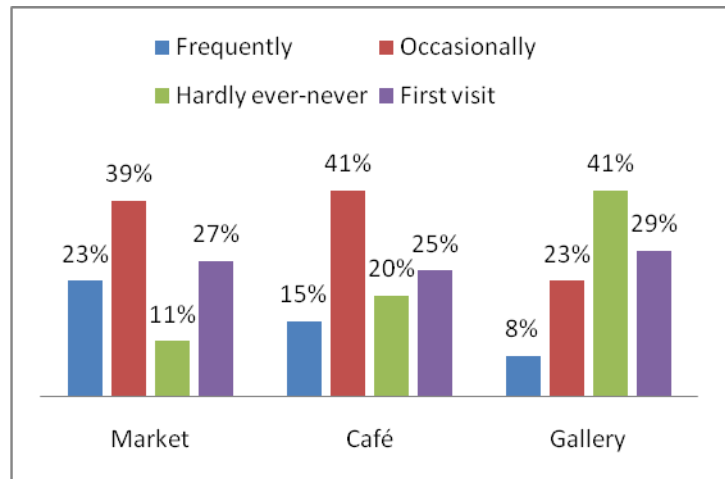


Figure 6. Frequency of Shopping at Market, Cafe and Gallery at LACE

Overall, a little more than a quarter (27%, 34) of all respondents said it was their *first time* shopping at the Market. Customers living in outlying areas (30%, 28) are significantly more likely to be first time shoppers at LACE compared to 7% (2) of Barre residents ($p\leq.05$). They are also more likely to rarely shop at LACE in general (13%, 12) compared to 7% (2) of Barre residents ($p\leq.05$).

More than half (55%) of respondents visit the **Café** for sit down and convenience foods on a *fairly regular basis* (41% occasionally and 15% frequently); three quarters (73%, 19) of Barre residents are regular shoppers compared to 57% (49) of those from outlying areas. Similar to Market customers, a quarter (25%, 31) said it was their *first time* visiting the Café. Twelve percent (3) of Barre residents compared to 29% (25) of those living outside of Barre reported this trip as their first time visiting LACE.

Customers reported less frequently visiting the **Gallery**, as 31% (38) *occasionally* (22%) to *frequently* (8%) visit the Gallery, while 41% (50) said they hardly ever to never visit the Gallery. Similar to shopping at the Market and Café, Barre residents are more likely to frequently shop at the Gallery (50%, 13) compared to 30% (25) of shoppers who live a mile or more away ($p\leq.05$). However, an equivalent proportion of Barre and non-Barre residents (42% each) said they rarely shop at the Gallery. Regarding first time visitors, almost 30% (35) of all respondents visited the Gallery for the first time the day of the survey; almost a third (31%, 29) of outlying residents compared to only 8% (2) of Barre residents said it was their first trip to the Gallery ($p\leq.05$).

Overall, roughly a quarter of all respondents or 1 out of 4 customers surveyed were in the store visiting the three areas for the first time. However, the majority of first time shoppers were from outside of the Barre area. On the other hand, Barre residents were more likely to be frequent shoppers at all three areas, compared to people who live outside of the area. This finding

suggests that some Barre residents are taking advantage of LACE's downtown proximity and offerings on a fairly regular basis.

Purchasing patterns

Almost all persons surveyed browse products available in the Market and Café; 81% (87) reported actually making a purchase at the Market and 94% (95) purchase food from the Café to eat in (68%) or take out (26%). Sixty percent (68) of respondents reported spending between \$11 and \$50 on groceries during an average trip to the Market at LACE. Three people surveyed indicated that they spend from \$51 to \$100 on grocery items. The majority, 88% (99) of Café shoppers spend between \$1 and \$20 on Café foods. Almost 80% (67) of customers browse the Gallery items, with 11% (9) reporting they make a purchase of those items; five of the nine buyers spending between \$11 and \$20 on Gallery items. Two people reported spending \$21 to \$50 on Gallery products. For all three shopping areas in LACE, no respondents indicated they paid more than \$100 during an average visit.

Factors influencing purchasing decisions

The most important quality to customers surveyed when deciding to purchase a food product at LACE is that it is locally produced (61%, 75), which mirrors the mission of LACE (Figure 7). In addition, 73% (19) of Barre residents and 57% (20) of low-income respondents value products being locally produced over other categories. Based on customer response, Table 2 shows that LACE is meeting this need as 92% (108) rated LACE as being very helpful in providing Barre residents with locally produced items. Specially looking at responses from Barre residents, 96% (26) indicated that LACE is very helpful in providing them with locally produced items. Most customers also said that LACE is very helpful in providing a place for farmers (89%, 103) and artists (78%, 84) to sell their products and 76% (86) appreciate that LACE provides a sidewalk farmer's market in Barre one day a week (Table 2). Barre residents' perception of LACE mirrors the larger group surveyed, as the majority agreed that LACE is very helpful in providing a venue for farmers (89%, 24) and artists (80%, 20) and a farmer's market in Barre (80%, 20).

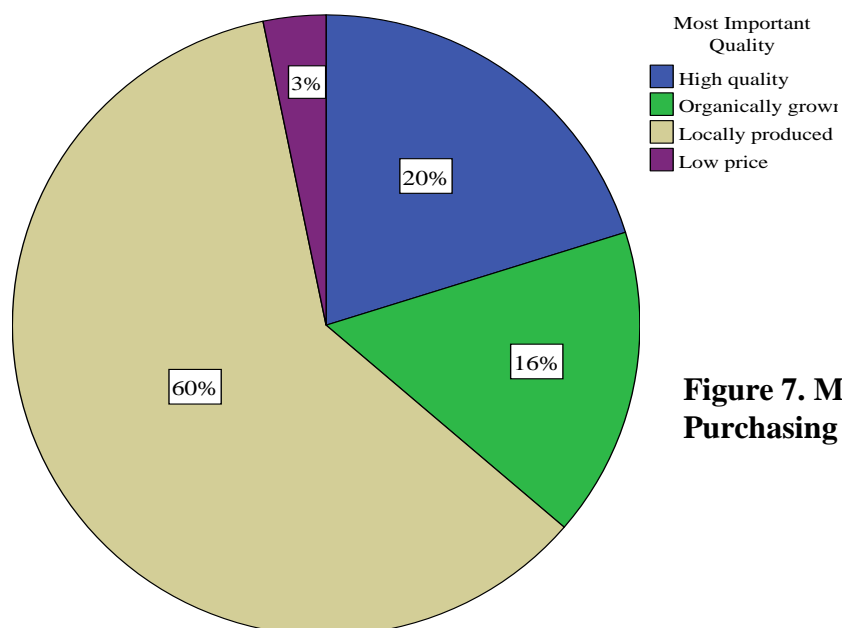


Figure 7. Most Important Quality when Purchasing a Food Product

Table 2. Customer Rating of LACE Providing Local Products

| | Very helpful | Somewhat helpful | Somewhat not helpful | Not at all helpful |
|---|---------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Providing Barre residents with locally produced products | 92% (108) | 8% (9) | 1% (1) | 0 |
| Providing a place for farmers to sell products | 89% (103) | 11% (13) | 0 | 0 |
| Providing a place for artists and crafters to sell products | 78% (84) | 22% (24) | 0 | 0 |
| Providing a farmer's market in the downtown Barre area | 76% (86) | 23% (26) | 1% (1) | 0 |

Regarding the second most important quality when buying a food product, responses were fairly evenly split between food being organically grown (31%, 37), of high quality (26%, 31) and being locally produced (25%, 30). "Low price" was consistently of less concern to the majority of people (19%, 23). When examining results by low-income status, this sub-group of respondents valued products being "organically grown" (26%, 12), followed by locally produced (27%, 8) and then low price (24%, 8). Barre residents surveyed favored organic foods and high quality products evenly (31%, 8 for both) as their second choice.

Rating of price, specials and coupons at LACE

When rating LACE on the price of products, almost half of all persons surveyed and subgroups of Barre residents and low-income persons rated LACE as very helpful in providing Barre residents with reasonably priced products. Of all survey respondents, 48% (54) rated LACE as somewhat helpful and 44% (50) rated LACE as very helpful in providing Barre residents with reasonably priced products. Very few customers (8%, 9) rated LACE as somewhat not helpful in this category. Barre residents surveyed also said that LACE is very (41%, 11) to somewhat (52% 14) helpful in providing them with reasonably priced products, along with low-income persons who completed the survey; this economically disadvantaged group rated LACE as very (49%, 16) to somewhat (42%, 14) helpful in providing reasonably priced products.

On a scale from poor to excellent, 25% (29) rated the price of items at the Market and Café as excellent and 50% (58) rated prices as good. The price of items in the Gallery was rated similarly by customers, with 27% (20) indicating excellent and 45% (34) indicating a good price rating. LACE's offering of sales/specials and coupons for products were also rated on this scale from poor to excellent. A quarter of respondents (24%, 15) said sales and specials were excellent, 43% (27) rated this as good and a quarter (24%, 15) rated this category as average. On the other hand, 41% (13) rated coupons offered by LACE as excellent, 28% (9) rated this as good and 25% (8) rated coupon availability as average.

Rating of quality at LACE

Table 3 shows customer ratings of the quality of Café items and selection of products at the Market from poor to excellent. Items prepared at the Café to eat in the store received the highest marks for excellent among customers (49%), followed by items to take to go from the Café (41% rated excellent). Overall, 77% rated Gallery product selection as good to excellent and 65% rated brand selection at the Market as good to excellent.

Table 3. Rating of Quality of Cafe items and Market Product Selection

| | Excellent | Good | Average | Fair | Poor |
|--|-----------|----------|----------|--------|--------|
| Items prepared in café that you eat at the store | 49% (47) | 36% (35) | 11% (11) | 3% (3) | 1% (1) |
| “To go” items from the café | 41% (32) | 43% (34) | 13% (10) | 4% (3) | 0 |
| Product selection in the LACE Gallery | 32% (30) | 45% (42) | 20% (19) | 3% (3) | 0 |
| Several brands to choose from for products | 24% (26) | 41% (44) | 24% (26) | 8% (9) | 3% (3) |

Table 4 shows that between 92% and 97% of customers rated the fresh products available at the Market as being of good to excellent quality. Meat and poultry received the highest proportion of excellent ratings, followed by fruits and vegetables. Likewise, almost 90% of customers rated the quality of items for sale in the Gallery as good to excellent.

Table 4. Rating of Quality and Freshness of Market Items and Quality of Gallery Items

| | Excellent | Good | Average | Fair | Poor |
|--|-----------|----------|---------|--------|------|
| Quality/freshness of meat and poultry | 64% (49) | 31% (24) | 4% (3) | 1% (1) | 0 |
| Quality/freshness of fruits and vegetables | 60% (68) | 36% (41) | 4% (5) | 0 | 0 |
| Quality/freshness of dairy products | 57% (52) | 38% (35) | 4% (4) | 1% (1) | 0 |
| Quality/freshness of bakery items | 54% (55) | 38% (39) | 7% (7) | 1% (1) | 0 |
| Quality of items for sale in the Gallery | 42% (35) | 47% (39) | 10% (8) | 1% (1) | 0 |

Rating of customer service areas at LACE

Customer service areas presented in Table 5 received a variety of ratings. All areas, with the exception of hours of store operation, received the highest proportion of respondents rating these areas as excellent. Customers seem most satisfied with the courteous and friendly employees at all shopping areas at LACE. Potential areas to address for improving customer satisfaction are increasing checkout time, parking availability, and hours of operation.

Table 5. Rating of Customer Service Areas at LACE

| | Excellent | Good | Average | Fair | Poor |
|---|-----------|----------|----------|--------|--------|
| Courteous, friendly employees at the Gallery | 67% (57) | 28% (24) | 4% (3) | 0 | 1% (1) |
| Courteous, friendly employees at the Farm Fresh Market and Café | 65% (70) | 30% (35) | 4% (5) | 2% (2) | 0 |
| Cleanliness of store | 50% (61) | 39% (48) | 9% (11) | 1% (1) | 1% (1) |
| Fast checkout | 38% (41) | 34% (39) | 16% (18) | 7% (8) | 7% (9) |
| Convenience of parking | 35% (39) | 31% (35) | 25% (28) | 5% (6) | 4% (5) |
| Hours of store operation | 28% (31) | 46% (50) | 18% (20) | 6% (7) | 2% (2) |

Community Impact on the Revitalization of Downtown Barre

It is still early in the grant to gauge the impact LACE has had as a catalyst for revitalization of the downtown Barre area. However, customer survey results and interviews with staff members of LACE and CVCAC provide preliminary information that suggests LACE provides an outlet for buying local food products for Barre residents and those living in outlying areas. The impact of LACE on the local community is perceived as positive by those involved in the grant and LACE customers.

Community perception and meeting customer needs

LACE-vendor liaisons interviewed feel that LACE has slowly improved its standing within the community and also gained the support of influential councils and politicians, local and statewide. LACE opened in July 2007 with a high profile opening, given the grant award received, the project partnership with CVCAC, and the benefit concerts held by Jackson Browne to raise funds for LACE. Vermont's Senator Patrick Leahy attended the grand opening of LACE to support the mission. LACE has also been visited by Congressmen Peter Welch, Governor Jim Douglas, and Vermont's Secretary of Agriculture, among other political figures. Ariel Zevon, who is a board member of the Barre Partnership, feels that LACE also has the support of the Barre Partnership, a 501(c) (3) nonprofit that coordinates activities to maintain and improve civic

pride and the economic, social and cultural quality of life in Barre, with a particular concentration on the downtown area where LACE is located. Even though LACE was faced with initial distrust and suspicion of the local community, staff perceive a shift in this opinion; customer response to the survey show that they highly regard the services that LACE provides.

As previously mentioned, almost all customers who responded to the intercept survey in August 2008 indicated that LACE is somewhat to very helpful in providing a grocery store in downtown Barre (98%) and Barre residents with reasonably priced products (92%). Of Barre residents who live within a mile or less of LACE, a strong majority agree that LACE is very (62%, 16) or somewhat (35%, 9) helpful in providing a grocery store in downtown Barre; in fact, only one Barre resident said LACE is somewhat not helpful in providing this service. These results were not significantly different from responses given by those who live outside the mile radius. Likewise, 68% (23) of low-income respondents rated LACE as very helpful and 29% (10) rated LACE as somewhat helpful in providing a grocery store in downtown Barre. Results were also similar to those received from above low-income respondents.

Table 6 shows that an overwhelming majority of customers feel that LACE provides a family friendly environment, even though only a third of respondents have children living at home, and almost three quarters feel LACE is very helpful in providing events for adults, children and families. Customers also feel comfortable hanging out at LACE (88%, 97 rated very helpful) and almost 1 in 4 customers feel LACE is very helpful in providing Barre residents with a Café for sit down and takeout meals. Ariel and others specifically designed the layout of the store to be comfortable, a place to buy food and relax to eat it and family friendly. Given customer feedback, LACE is providing this intended environment for customers.

Customers also feel that LACE is very helpful in improving the overall image of downtown Barre (84%, 95) and attracting more shoppers to downtown Barre (75%, 80) (Table 6). All of Barre residents surveyed (100%, 25) indicated that LACE is improving the overall image of their downtown community; 92% (23) rated very helpful and 8% (2) rated somewhat helpful in response to this question. In addition, all but one Barre resident who responded rated LACE as very helpful (68%, 17) to somewhat helpful (28%, 7) in attracting more shoppers to Barre. Interestingly, a higher proportion of shoppers from outside of the Barre area feel that LACE is very helpful (77%, 63) in drawing more people to shop in downtown Barre.

Corroborating this finding, during an interview with Ariel Zevon, she said that the opening of LACE attracted people to Barre who have never been there before. People came from the neighboring town of Montpelier, who otherwise do not visit Barre, because LACE gave them a purpose to go to downtown Barre. In addition, LACE is a job placement site for many Reach Up volunteers (as discussed in the following section). Reach Up recipients working at LACE has attracted lower-income people to the store who would not otherwise be likely to shop there. This finding is evidenced in the variety of economic backgrounds of customer survey respondents, which is an interesting finding considering the survey was conducted over a one week time frame. Local community members also recognize that Barre residents work at LACE, which has helped to foster community support.

Table 6. Rating of LACE on Community Support Areas

| | Very helpful | Somewhat helpful | Somewhat not helpful | Not at all helpful |
|---|---------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Providing a family friendly environment | 94% (108) | 6% (7) | 0 | 0 |
| Providing a place for people to hang out | 88% (97) | 12% (13) | 0 | 0 |
| Improving the overall image of downtown Barre | 84% (95) | 15% (17) | 1% (1) | 0 |
| Attracting more people to shop in the downtown Barre area | 75% (80) | 24% (26) | 1% (1) | 0 |
| Providing Barre residents with a café to purchase prepared or “to go” items | 71% (76) | 29% (31) | 0 | 0 |
| Providing events for adults, children and families | 71% (67) | 28% (27) | 1% (1) | 0 |

Improved community food security

Almost all survey respondents feel that LACE is somewhat to very helpful in providing a grocery store in downtown Barre with reasonably priced products, especially all but one of Barre residents and low-income respondents. Customers also value that LACE offers reasonably priced, local foods and high quality items such as meat and poultry and fruits and vegetables. These findings suggest that LACE is serving to address community food security issues stemming from the previous lack of a grocery store in the downtown area.

Conversations with project staff show that LACE provides different types of food – farm fresh, whole foods, raw and bulk ingredients – that have not been available in Barre for some time. Based on customer survey results and anecdotal observations of LACE staff, Barre residents appreciate the increased availability of this type of food. LACE has developed a clientele of people who come to the store every day for food, either prepared or fresh ingredients. This trend is seen anecdotally by Market and Café staff as well as evidenced by the survey results, which show many respondents frequently visit LACE. People who initially were not familiar with the concept of farm fresh and wholesome foods now shop at the Market more frequently. To educate customers about these foods and how to use them in meals, LACE staff plan to provide recipes and product demonstrations, especially once the kitchen is finalized. Ariel feels that increasing their target market is a function of “getting people in the door.” Once they come to LACE, they are more receptive to it and product offerings.

In addition to products available at the Market and Café, LACE also hosts a weekly Farmers’ Market on Wednesday evenings from 3:00-6:00pm during the growing season in Vermont; this market is a source for fresh and local produce and an opportunity to directly support local farmers that has not been available to Barre residents for a long time. The Farmers’ Market this past year had two established produce vendors, which received a positive response from market

shoppers. Three quarters of customers surveyed (76%, 86) appreciate that LACE provides a sidewalk farmer's market in Barre one day a week; as a result of this market, along with products available in the Market and Café at LACE, customers rated LACE as being very helpful in providing a place for farmers (89%, 103) and artists (78%, 84) to sell their products. Ariel hopes the outdoor market will grow with other farmers and possibly Gallery vendors.

Providing work opportunities for Reach-Up volunteers

LACE serves to improve the economic conditions of Barre residents by providing local employment to area residents and being a popular work placement site for local Reach-Up recipients (Vermont's office of the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families or TANF) who need to work between five and 20 hours a week in order to earn their Reach-Up award and other benefits such as a childcare stipend. Ariel stated, "We have the highest number of volunteers from the Reach Up program working here. People who work at LACE through this program recruit other volunteers to seek work here." Working at LACE has given many Reach-Up employees opportunities to gain job skills and experience, in addition to receiving their benefits. Some of the main opportunities include cooking in the kitchen for the cafe, working at the counter to assist patrons at the cafe, working at the register to ring up customer purchases, and working with vendors to document and maintain inventory. Kym Maynard commented that a Reach Up volunteer works closely with her, getting on the job training as she shadows Kym through her day. This young woman assists with inventory management, working with vendors, and creating and interpreting sales reports. Ariel noted that two of the three part time paid employees at LACE were Reach Up volunteers who were hired on to work there. While other volunteers gain experience and skills and use LACE as a solid job reference to find work elsewhere.

Community focused events

Almost all survey respondents (99%) indicated that LACE is somewhat to very helpful in providing events for children, adults and families. Ariel, Kym and Crystal Zevon, with the assistance of other staff, have coordinated various events that welcome all people to the store. LACE has hosted community dinners on Friday evenings as well as weekend brunches. Kym also mentioned the children and youth program "School of Rock." She noted that many kids in Barre who do not have anything else to do will come and hang out at LACE. She coordinated a local musician to teach music lessons for these kids using his many extra instruments that they can play during the sessions.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Local Agriculture Community Exchange (LACE) is a community revitalization project, through collaboration between LACE and Central Vermont Community Action Council (CVCAC) [Grant number 90EE0801/01]. The LACE project is funded by the US Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Community Service for three years, from October 1, 2007 to September 30, 2010. The following narrative summarizes the major findings of the LACE project evaluation report for 2008.

Conclusions

Serving micro and small business owners

After the first year of collecting evaluation data, the Market, Café and Gallery at LACE are successfully meeting its multi-part mission. Serving the needs of the area's micro and small businesses, LACE features local produce and products for sale in the Farm Fresh Market and Café and the artisan Gallery. Training and counseling through CVCAC's micro business development program is also available to vendors in areas such as sales techniques, marketing, pricing, production, business operations, and business plan development. LACE vendors are primarily from the Barre, Montpelier and Northfield area. However, the demographic reach is growing as vendors from smaller surrounding towns and larger cities like Rutland, VT and Danbury, CT are also accessing the customer base available at LACE.

Through training and technical assistance, vendors have gained skills in areas such as marketing, pricing, display and sales and have utilized external resources to which business counselors refer them. Vendors benefit from being a member of a larger venue; by aligning themselves with the Gallery and LACE, vendors' access the diverse customer base of the market and gain visibility through media coverage of the well-known store. Vendors are also possibly less affected by the seasonal nature of sales because they work within a larger venue. Vendors have also gained confidence in themselves and their work and benefit from networking with other vendors and the feedback they receive from this community. Customers', including Barre residents and visitors alike, value that LACE provides Barre residents with locally produced products that are reasonably priced and a weekly Farmer's Market (while in season). Customers also feel that LACE is very helpful in providing a place for farmers and artists to sell their products. While job creation as the primary objective of LACE has not been measured yet, 52 vendors are supported by LACE and the store employs three part-time paid staff, two of whom were previously on Reach Up.

Connecting producers to consumers and improving food security

A goal of LACE is to fill a vacant storefront with a much needed grocery store in the heart of Barre City's downtown area. Until LACE was established, many of central Vermont's poor, seniors, and disabled persons, who are concentrated in this community, had limited access to local, fresh and nutrition foods because of a lack of transportation. To begin to understand public perception of LACE, the evaluators started by surveying customers to gather their feedback on LACE and the impact it has on the community. Intercept surveys were conducted in August 2008 with customers at LACE over the course of one week and different times to capture

variation in customers. A total of 125 customers completed the survey, with almost a quarter (22%, 27) living in Barre, of whom 39% (9) are low-income.

The diverse demographic profile of customers who completed the intercept survey during the one week time frame demonstrates that LACE draws a variety of market segments to shop there. Customer survey results show that slightly more women may shop at LACE than men, however LACE draws a variety of customers, with and without children and from various income backgrounds. In addition, shoppers not only come to LACE from down the street, but LACE is drawing in customers beyond a local radius of 5 miles, drawing people who live more than 30 miles away.

Shoppers surveyed at LACE have a very positive perception of the impact LACE has on the Barre community. Almost all of the respondents (98%), and all but one of Barre residents (98%), feel that LACE is somewhat to very helpful in providing a grocery store in downtown Barre. The majority (92%) also feel that LACE provides Barre residents with reasonably priced products. This finding suggests that LACE is serving to address community food security issues stemming from the previous lack of a grocery store in the downtown area. Customers value that LACE provides them with reasonably priced local foods and high quality items such as meat and poultry and fruits and vegetables. Additional research undertaken in the next two years through surveys and interviews of Barre residents and business community members will help to confirm these findings.

LACE has many repeat customers as 1 in 3 survey respondents frequently to occasionally shop there. Barre residents were significantly more likely to be frequent shoppers at all three areas within LACE, which suggests that some Barre residents are taking advantage of LACE's downtown proximity and offerings on a fairly regular basis. The Café is the most commonly visited and purchased from location in LACE by 94% of respondents, followed by shopping at the Market and then the Gallery. However, shoppers spend the most amount of money (Up to \$100 on an average trip) on Market items. Café patrons prefer to purchase food to eat in at the Café over taking out foods to go. Café products consistently received the highest proportion of excellent ratings, with strong emphasis on the excellence of sit-down meals available from the Café, reflecting that most customers prefer to eat prepared food on site. Perhaps customers enjoy eating at LACE because the majority noted that provides a comfortable place to hang out, which fosters community social interactions and cohesiveness. This finding is most likely related to the large, comfortable seating area that is dedicated to tables of various sizes, chairs and couches available for customer use, as well as free wireless internet access. Customers also feel that LACE is somewhat to very helpful in providing a family friendly environment. This positive response most likely reflects the child focused play area where kids can safely play while their parents shop or eat food from the Café. Ariel Zevon and others specifically designed the layout of the store to be comfortable, a place to buy food and relax to eat it and family friendly. Given customer feedback, LACE is providing this intended environment for customers.

Customers also feel that LACE is very helpful in improving the overall image of downtown Barre and attracting more shoppers to the downtown area. Eighty four percent of all people surveyed and, more specifically, 100% of Barre residents agree that LACE is very helpful in improving the overall image of Barre. This finding is very positive as customer feedback speaks

to the desire for LACE to be a catalyst to revitalize the downtown Barre area. Ariel Zevon notes that the opening of LACE attracted people to Barre who have never been there before, by giving them a reason to visit and shop there. Confirming this finding, people who travelled from outlying areas of downtown Barre were significantly more likely to be first-time visitors to LACE during the time frame of the survey. A higher proportion of non Barre residents (77%, 63) feel that LACE is very helpful in drawing more people to shop in downtown Barre, which they demonstrate by representing about three quarters of customers surveyed. These results speak positively to the marketing and promotional efforts that have gained the attention of shoppers outside the Barre area; regardless of whether or not these customers have other grocery store venues, they chose to travel to shop at LACE. This finding could also be related to an influx of tourists during the summer months.

In addition, LACE is a job placement site for many Reach Up volunteers, two of whom have since been hired as part time staff at LACE. Reach Up recipients working at LACE has attracted lower-income people to the store who would not otherwise be likely to shop there. This finding is evidenced in the variety of economic backgrounds of customer survey respondents, which is an interesting finding considering the survey was conducted over a one week time frame. Local community members also recognize that Barre residents work at LACE, which has helped to foster community support.

Improvements to LACE infrastructure

The Market and Café opened for business in June 2007, prior to the receipt of the grant award. The presence of the Market and Café allowed for local shoppers to learn about LACE and begin incorporating Market products and offerings into their every day routines, prior to the changes brought on by the grant funding. The Gallery vendor has provided artists with a cohesive place to showcase their products. Based on intake data of vendors, the 52 vendors who have completed intake forms showcase their work at LACE.

In addition, the Gallery vendor liaison helped to improve inventory management, pricing and marketing for the Gallery and other LACE offerings and services. By having Gallery vendors become "members" and pay a small rental fee for selling their products there, the Gallery provides income to the overall operation. Improvements to product pricing, vendor management and inventory control have led to an increase in cash flow. Additionally, farmers and other producers with products sold in the Farm Fresh Market and Cafe at LACE access resource partners for technical assistance and business counseling. The kitchen space at LACE is also in the process of undergoing expansion to enable home-based producers to expand their production and increase sales. Several micro business owners in the Barre area eagerly await the completion of the kitchen so they may expand their production and product offering. Business counseling and technical assistance will be available through the recently hired Kitchen vendor liaison and classes will be available in ServSafe certification to those using the kitchen facility in the next fiscal year.

Project partnership

The partnership between the CVCAC and LACE is effectively serving the project. However, any partnership is not without challenges, especially during the first year of working together. Challenges addressed during the first year revolved around communication between partners about roles and shared expectations; building mutual trust and adapting to the working styles of both organizations and individuals; resolving conflicts of interest between serving the needs of MBDP clients while operating a business; and overcoming the public's initial negative perception of LACE.

Both organizations are pleased to collaborate with the other as LACE and CVCAC have a synergistic partnership based on common goals of supporting local business, connecting consumers with high quality, locally produced produce, and addressing economic development and revitalization needs of downtown Barre. Staff benefit from the expertise and resources of all other staff; this partnership is strong and mutually beneficial as it combines the business expertise of CVCAC's MBDP and the expertise, social capital, passion and commitment of LACE. By working through partnership struggles, staff have learned the importance of respecting the autonomy of LACE, expertise from both organizations, the goals and outcomes proposed in the grant, and the administrative process of approving projects within the grant (such as the kitchen) that are financed by grant funds. LACE could not have afforded to renovate the Gallery and kitchen space without assistance from grant funds and the partnership. Despite some miscommunication and administrative process issues, LACE staff appreciate that CVCAC is the fiscal agent of the project.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this evaluation report, the following recommendations are made for project improvement.

Strengthen the partnership

- As strong communication was a common theme related to successful completion of projects, it is recommended that key decision makers meet or speak on a weekly or semi-monthly basis to update each other on project activities, issues and outcomes. The larger group of LACE and CVCAC staff should be included in conversation or meetings on a monthly basis or, at a minimum, every other month. Perhaps the LACE grant could be added as an agenda item on regular CVCAC staff meetings to keep MBDP counselors informed of the project. Periodically, LACE staff should be invited to attend, or at least include the liaisons who can then relay information to the larger LACE staff.

Training and services for vendors

- Because data was not collected or provided to the evaluators on services received by Gallery vendors, it is difficult to determine what services would better serve their needs. However, onsite individual and group based services tailored to vendor Gallery needs are recommended. Previous evaluation of MBDP conducted by the authors show that group based learning fosters a strong support network among vendors, provides opportunities for learning and sharing ideas and receiving feedback, and builds a professional network among local entrepreneurs to support each other's businesses. To facilitate the creation of

networks among all LACE vendors, such as farmers, producers, and other business owners, LACE and CVCAC staff should host informal networking sessions over dinner or coffee to allow vendors to showcase their work and exchange ideas and resources.

- In addition, evaluation research on MBDP clients conducted by the authors also shows that individualized assistance with a specific business counselor is highly recommended (Schmidt & Kolodinsky, 2008). This interaction builds a personalized relationship between the client and counselor that supports and motivates the entrepreneur through the ups and downs of being self-employed. This relationship also fosters trust for MBDP, CVCAC and LACE.

Improvements to the Market, Gallery and Café

- Potential areas to address for improving customer satisfaction are increasing checkout time, parking availability, and LACE hours of operation. Though good ratings were received in the areas of product and brand selection in the Gallery and Market, these areas received lower ratings compared to other areas and could be addressed by LACE staff.
- LACE should continue to employ Reach Up volunteers to provide them with valuable training and job experience. MBDP business counselors plan to work with these people and other employees on developing customer service skills for working at LACE.

Evaluation and data collection

- Research areas to be pursued next year are vendor and kitchen user surveys and focus groups, key project partners and employee/volunteer interviews and focus groups, a focus group with the Barre Partnership, and a follow-up customer survey. These data will include measurement of job creation, increased sales and employment through business expansions as well as new business start-ups.
- In addition, the vendor liaisons at LACE should continue to take and keep up to date vendor intake and contact information so a more accurate portrayal of clients may be shown in the evaluation report. Updated contact information will also facilitate client follow-up over time.

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Appendix A. Staff Focus Group Questions

Project Management

- What are the roles of each staff for background information?
- What services and resources were used to effectively develop LACE to its full potential?
- Tell me about the development of LACE's infrastructure and services. What factors contributed to the success of the following? What challenges were/are faced and how have they been or will be overcome?
 - a. Storefront opening
 - b. Farm Fresh Market and Café
 - c. Gallery space
 - d. Shared kitchen space
 - e. Other?
- How is the project doing in terms of meeting grant goals and timelines?
- What best practices or lessons learned have you identified thus far in the development and management of LACE?

Working with vendors, training, technical assistance and support

- How do you identify and recruit gallery and farmer vendors to sell product in the space? What is the intake process?
- What are the challenges and successes of this process?
- Have you encountered any **problems** in recruiting and retaining vendors in the space?
- What are **major barriers** that vendors face that may impede in their participation in LACE and CVCAC services?
- What types of services are available to vendors? What services are they using and to what extent? How are the on-site CVCAC staff utilized? What impact does on services have on vendors and their business?
- What are the **major sources of referrals** (internal and external) to which you recommend clients? Do you get feedback on whether or not they are helpful?
- What preliminary impact do you see LACE having on vendors? I.e. sales, income, job creation, market expansion, product refinement, etc.

- What is the impact of “on the road” business consultants on farmers and other vendors on their business development?
- What best practices or lessons learned have you identified thus far in working with vendors at LACE?

Community Impact

- What impact do you see LACE having on the following aspects of downtown Barre City? What have been the successes and challenges faced?
 - a. Revitalizing the downtown area
 - b. Connecting local producers to a viable market
 - c. Improving the access and security disadvantaged citizens have to fresh and nutritious food
 - d. Providing jobs to community members and TANF recipients
 - e. A multiplier effect
- What other impact do you see LACE having on the larger community, surrounding areas, or other parts of the state?
- How will this project be sustainable beyond the funds of the grant?

Successfulness of collaboration

Internal communication

1. How is the partnership working between LACE and CVCAC staff? What are the strengths and challenges?
2. What recommendations do you have to improve this partnership?
3. What **communication strategies among staff** are used to coordinate efforts and effectively serve vendors?

Project partners

4. Who have been the key project partners? What role do they play in **referring** and **servicing** vendors?
5. What has been **effective/successful** about collaborating with project partners?
6. What challenges has the program faced with project partners? How have these been **overcome**?

Appendix B. Customer Intercept Survey

Customer Survey: Farm Fresh Market & Café and Gallery at LACE

Hello Customer! Thank you for visiting our store. We are conducting this survey to understand what you like about LACE, the Farm Fresh Market, Café and the Gallery, and how we may improve our product offerings and services. The survey will take about 10 minutes to complete and is completely confidential. We value your information and feedback.



To thank you for taking your time to complete this survey, you may choose a coupon for a free medium coffee OR a cookie from the Café. You may also enter yourself into a raffle for a Gallery Gift Basket with a value of approximately \$65.



-
1. How often do you visit the Farm Fresh Market, Café and the Gallery at LACE?
 - This is my first visit to LACE
 - Frequently (daily to a few times a week)
 - Occasionally (a few times a month to once a month)
 - Hardly ever (a few times a year or once a year)
 - Other (please specify) _____
 - Not sure

 2. What is the approximate distance you travelled to come to the Market today?
 - Less than a mile or within walking distance
 - 1 to 5 miles
 - 6 to 10 miles
 - 11 to 30 miles
 - More than 30 miles

 3. In general, what are your top three reasons for visiting or shopping at the Farm Fresh Market, Café and Gallery at LACE?
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.

 4. Which part of LACE do you most often make purchases from?
 - The Farm Fresh Market (grocery items)
 - The Café (take out or eat in food and drinks)
 - The Gallery (artist and craft products)

5. Approximately how much money do you spend most often on the following items?

| | \$0 | \$01-\$10 | \$11-\$20 | \$21-\$50 | \$51-\$100 | More than \$100 |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Grocery items: | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Gallery or artisan items: | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Café food and beverages: | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

6. What other places do you shop at for food or groceries? Select all that apply.

- Shaw's
- Hannaford's
- Price Chopper
- Local general store/corner market
- Hunger Mountain Co-op
- Farmer's market
- Other, please specify _____
- I don't shop at any location other than the Farm Fresh Market
(If so, please skip to Q11)

7. How often do you visit a grocery store other than the Farm Fresh Market at LACE?

- Daily
- Few times a week
- Weekly
- Few times a month
- Monthly
- Few times a year
- Other, please specify _____
- Not sure

8. What are your main reasons for visiting or shopping at another grocery store *instead of* the Farm Fresh Market at LACE?

9. Of the four choices below, what is *most important* to your decision when purchasing a food product? Please select only one choice.

- High quality Organically grown Locally grown/produced Low price

9b. Not including your choice above, of the three remaining choices what is *second most important* to your decision when purchasing a food product? Please select only one choice.

- High quality Organically grown Locally grown/produced Low price

10. Please rate the following product areas at LACE:

Excellent Good Average Fair Poor Not sure

| | | | | | | |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Several brands to choose from for products | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Product selection in the LACE Gallery | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Items prepared in café that you eat at the store | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| “To go” items from the café | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Quality/freshness of fruits and vegetables | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Quality/freshness of <i>meat</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Quality/freshness of <i>dairy</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Quality/freshness of <i>bakery items</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

11. Please rate the Farm Fresh Market, Café and Gallery on the following areas related to store operations.

| | Excellent | Good | Average | Fair | Poor | <i>Not sure</i> |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Courteous, friendly employees | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Cleanliness of store | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Fast checkout | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Convenience of parking | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Hours of store operation | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Price of items | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Offering sales or price specials | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Offering coupons | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

12. What do you like most about shopping at the Farm Fresh Market, Café or Gallery at LACE?

13. What other products or services would you like to see the Farm Fresh Market, Café or Gallery offer?

14. Please rate the extent you think LACE has been helpful or not helpful in the following ways?

| | Very helpful | Somewhat helpful | Somewhat not helpful | Not at all helpful | Not sure |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| Providing a place for farmers to sell products | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Providing a place for artists and crafters to sell products | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Providing a grocery store in downtown Barre | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Providing Barre residents with locally produced products | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Providing Barre residents with reasonably priced products | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Providing Barre residents with a café to purchase prepared or “to go” items | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Providing a family friendly environment | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Providing a place for people to hang out | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Attracting more people to shop in the downtown Barre area | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Providing a farmer’s market in the downtown Barre area | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Providing events for adults, children and families | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Improving the overall image of downtown Barre | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Please answer the following questions about yourself. All answers are kept confidential and they will help us understand who shops at LACE.

20. Are you: ___Female ___Male 21. In what year were you born? _____

22. Approximately what is your annual household income?

___<\$10,000 ___\$10,000-\$14,999 ___\$15,000-\$19,999
___\$20,000-\$39,999 ___\$40,000-\$59,999 ___\$60,000 or more

23. a) How many members live in your house? _____ b) How many are under 18 years old? _____

Thank you for your taking the time to answer this important survey. We hope to see you again soon!

Please fold your completed survey in half and give it to a member of the Survey Team.

Enjoy your free coffee or cookie on us to thank you for your time! And fill out your raffle form to enter yourself in a raffle for a Gallery Gift Basket valued at approximately \$65. Thank you again!

The *Local Agriculture Community Exchange (LACE)* is a community revitalization project, through collaboration between LACE and Central Vermont Community Action Council (CVCAC) [Grant number 90EE0801/01].

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