



# The Neighborhood Pop Up Grocery Project

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## Pilot Project Final Report

November 2020

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### Project Team

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## Background

COVID-19 has had a devastating impact across multiple social and economic sectors in the Austin community, including food access for families and the local food supply chain for local farms and restaurants. Sustainable Food Center, in partnership with Foodshed Investors and the City of Austin, responded to the resulting food crisis with a grocery pilot project by providing local food to neighborhoods in need, while boosting the local economy through restaurants serving as additional food access outlets. The Neighborhood Pop Up Grocery Project (“Grocery Project”) engaged local restaurants to serve as points of fresh and affordable food access, allowing families to travel less distance than full-service grocery stores and reduce exposure to others in these high-traffic outlets, and bringing additional sales outlets to local restaurants and farms.

This project model allowed local restaurants to generate additional revenue, increased food shopping options, and supported local farmers by purchasing food that may have otherwise gone to waste during the pandemic. With an emphasis on local support, almost all the dollars spent through the project went toward Texas-owned enterprises, benefitting the local economy overall.

## Summary of Results

The project addressed immediate needs within the community (specifically for farmers and restaurants). The revenue generated for local businesses exceeded the total project budget. The project saw significant participation concentrated in East Austin, as well as an overall upward trend in sales for all partners until the project activities slowed in mid-September. There were several additional successes seen throughout the project’s lifetime, including partner interaction with farmers, their communities, and general support of the hospitality industry. Challenges were also encountered, including the inclusion of culturally relevant produce in pre-mixed produce boxes, pricing produce boxes in low-income communities, and challenges with produce quality and supply chain capacity. For more details on the successes and challenges of this project, see page 16.

## Key Highlights

- 2602 customers served
- 434 boxes donated
- 29 restaurants participated, 35 restaurant locations
- \$133,000 of revenue for local businesses generated
- 19 jobs retained
- The project received two extensions from the funding partner, an indicator of confidence in the project model and management

## Project Model

The Grocery Project model serves as both a *food access* and *supply chain* solution in the time of a food crisis, utilizing partnerships with local farmers and distributors to source food for communities, and restaurant partners to provide that food at an affordable price point to customers.

Restaurant partners chose between a produce box model, in which they received weekly pre-packaged produce boxes from the Houston-based food hub Common Market - which had five to seven seasonal fruits and vegetables from farms local to Austin - or a grocery market model, where food products such as milk, cheese, bread, pantry staples, and produce were sourced directly from local farmers and vendors.

Figure 1: Restaurant Model options

Produce Box Model	Grocery Market Model
<b>Product Mix</b>	
Pre-packaged produce boxes with a variety of five to seven types of fruits and vegetables from farms across Texas.	A mix of food products including any of the following: milk, cheese, bread, pantry staples, and produce. Product mix is determined by each restaurant, and informed by an understanding of their customer base, past data, and input from the project team.
<b>Sourcing</b>	
Produce sourced from Common Market Texas (food hub vendor partner)	Produce sourced directly from producers in the Central Texas area (e.g. Saga Farms, Farmshare, Urban Roots).  Pantry goods, protein, dairy items, and produce unable to be purchased from local producers is sourced from food hubs (e.g. Farmhouse Delivery, Farm to Table).
<b>Orders and Delivery</b>	
Produce box orders are placed by the project team and then delivered weekly on Wednesdays. Contracted delivery drivers distribute boxes to restaurant partners, or in some cases restaurant partners pick up from SFC.	Food orders are placed by restaurant partners and delivered straight to them weekly.

### Food Access

By creating food access points in areas where low-income families face high barriers to accessing fresh, affordable food, the project provided opportunities for families to access and purchase groceries at an affordable price point. The project team solicited community input to help identify potential restaurants and inform site selection, particularly around the criteria of location, cultural importance, and accessibility. Key approaches to gathering community input included:

- Deploying Fresh for Less Promotoras and Come Sano y Fresco Ambassadors - associates employed by SFC who perform community outreach and engagement around Austin Public Health's Fresh for Less and Double Up Food Bucks programs - to gather information from community members about what restaurants are trusted institutions recommended for this project.
- Posting multiple text-based posts and a video post into the SFC-moderated Spanish-language Facebook group consisting of 1100+ members to gain additional insight into the community's response to the Grocery Project.
- Soliciting a list of frequented restaurants from facilitators of SFC's The Happy Kitchen/La Cocina Alegre® cooking and nutrition program who have intimate knowledge of restaurants within targeted communities.
- Engaging community partners, including GAVA (Go Austin/Vamos Austin), organizers from the Rundberg/St. John's area, Cortez Consulting, which focuses efforts in the Colony Park area, and various community members.



*Common Market vegetable boxes.  
Courtesy of the Hive*



*Local delivery driver loads up on  
Common Market produce boxes.  
Courtesy of SFC.*

Figure 2: Restaurant partners in order of date of participation

	Restaurant Partners	Location	Model Type	Notes on Involvement
1	Hecho en Mexico	Montopolis, 78741	Grocery Market	Joined project: mid-April Part of initial launch as first grocery market model, helping to form a grocery market model for future locations.
2	Country Boyz	East Austin, 78721	Produce Box	Joined project: mid-April Part of initial launch as first produce box model, helping to form a produce box model for future locations. Concluded participation in late April.
3	Eden East	East Austin, 78702	Grocery Market	Joined project: mid-May Second restaurant partner to procure directly from individual producers, helping hone the process.
4	Sa-Ten	Airport/ North Loop, 78751	Combined Produce Box and Grocery Market	Joined project: mid-May First restaurant partner to transition from the produce box model to incorporate the grocery market model. Offered 50% discount to LoneStar SNAP participants.
5	Hillside Farmacy	Central East Austin, 78702	Grocery Market	Joined project: mid-May First restaurant partner to procure directly from individual producers (e.g. Saga Farms). Offered 50% discount to LoneStar SNAP participants.
6	Nixta Taqueria	Chestnut, 78702	Produce Box	Joined project: mid-May
7	Big Easy	Foster Heights, 78702	Produce Box	Joined project: mid-May Concluded participation in early June.
8	Mr. Catfish	East Austin, 78702	Produce Box	Joined project: late May
9	Killa Wasi	Mckinney, 78744	Produce Box	Joined project: mid-May First successful food truck Grocery Project operation.
10	Sam's BBQ	Foster Heights, 78702	Produce Box	Joined project: late May
11	Fish and Chicken Shack	Park Place, 78724	Produce Box	Joined project: late May
12	Casa Chapala	North Burnet, 78758	Produce Box	Joined project: late May Offered \$5 off purchase of two boxes.
13	The Cavalier	Webberville, 78702	Produce Box	Joined project: early June. Operated crisis-response market out of restaurant prior to participation.

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14	Counter Culture	Holly, 78702	Produce Box	Joined project: early June
15	Aster's Ethiopian Restaurant	Central Austin/I-35, 78705	Produce Box	Joined project: mid-June
16	Peace Bakery	North Park Estates, 78753	Produce Box	Joined project: mid-June
17	Cenote	Windsor Park, 78702 Cesar Chavez, 78723	Produce Box	Joined project: June Concluded project at Cesar Chavez location late July due to location being more appealing to tourists, less attracted to project. Offered 50% discount to LoneStar SNAP participants.
18	Sassy's Vegetarian Food	East 7th St., 78702	Produce Box	Joined project: late June Concluded project early August due to lack of storage space and customer interest.
19	Baby Greens	Wooten, 78757	Produce Box	Joined project: late June Concluded project early August due to lack of storage space and customer interest.
20	Thundercloud Subs	Riverside, 78704 Slaughter Ln, 78748 Lake Austin Blvd., 78703	Produce Box	Joined project: mid-June First partner to implement at multiple locations and to donate all revenue to charity. All proceeds donated to the Capital Area Food Bank.
21	Forthright	W. Cesar Chavez, 78701	Produce Box	Joined project: late June
22	Bennu	E. Martin Luther King, 78702	Produce Box	Joined project: early July Offered 50% discount to LoneStar SNAP participants.
23	Waterloo Icehouse	Southpark Meadows, 78748 N. Cap TX Hwy, 78731 Burnet Rd., 78757 Escarpment Village, 78749	Produce Box	Joined project: mid-July
24	Cups & Cones	Steiner Ranch, 78732	Combined Produce Box and Grocery Market	Joined project: mid-July
25	Sesa Pure	North Burnet, 78758	Combined Produce Box and Grocery Market	Joined project: early August

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26	Fat Daddy's Chicken	East Austin/ Springdale Rd., 78721	Produce Box	Joined project: early August
27	The Hive	Mercado Heights, 78748	Combined Produce Box and Grocery Market	Joined project: mid-August
28	512 Brewing Co.	S. 1st St., 78745	Produce Box	Joined project: late August
29	Kome	Airport Blvd., 78751	Produce Box	Joined project: late August

Figure 3: List of project food suppliers

Local Food Vendor Partners	Vendor Type	Notes on Involvement
Common Market Texas	Food Hub	Joined project: mid-April
Farmhouse Delivery	Food Hub	Joined project: mid-May
Farm to Table TX	Food Hub	Joined project: early July
Saga Farms	Producer	Joined project: early June
FarmShare	Producer	Joined project: early June
Urban Roots	Producer	Joined project: mid-June

## Timeline

- Mid-March: City Council begins to prepare COVID-19 relief fund and searches out not-for-profit and for-profit partners to implement crisis relief projects.
- March 26, 2020: NPUG project concept approved by city council.
- March 27, 2020: First project team meeting.
- April 6, 2020: Complete NPUG proposal submitted to City of Austin.
- April 9, 2020: \$15m appropriation for COVID-19 relief funding (RISE Fund) approved by City Council.
- April 17, 2020: The first Grocery Project food purchase (grocery items for restaurant partner Hecho en Mexico).
- May 1, 2020: Contract established between all City of Austin Department of Public Health and Sustainable Food Center.
- Throughout May and early June, more restaurant partners were recruited, with two more grocery models and multiple produce box locations.



- Early-June, SFC received the first extension from the City of Austin, due to the continued pressure from the pandemic and unspent project funds. The project's funding was initially set to expire in mid-June but was then extended to mid-July.
- Late-June, SFC requested a second extension from the City of Austin, similarly due to the continued pressure from the pandemic and unspent project funds. The project timeline was extended to September 30, 2020.
- Mid-July, SFC implemented a paid marketing plan.
- Mid-August, local eggs were added to all of the box locations. Reached five grocery market model locations.
- Mid-September: Sales began to slow, and activities were ramped down as the project neared its conclusion. Boxes, grocery items, advertising support, and personal protection equipment are still distributed to all partners as needed.
- September 30, 2020: The final delivery and conclusion of The Grocery Project.

## Project Activities

### Restaurant Support

Restaurants were contacted by project team members every Wednesday to confirm box pick up and every Friday to confirm box orders. Partners were also asked whether they needed extra assistance in the forms of PPE supplies, flyers and banners, delivery service, and other miscellaneous tasks (e.g. help hanging banners).

### Coordinating with Vendors

Figure 4: Coordination activities of the two project models

Model Type	Tasks
Produce Box Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact restaurant partners weekly to confirm the number of boxes needed for the next week.</li> <li>• Email Common Market with the total number of boxes needed for the next week, to be dropped off and distributed on Wednesdays.</li> <li>• Weekly, coordinate Common Market delivery to the SFC office and distribute them either through local delivery drivers or pick up from the office by restaurant staff.</li> <li>• Coordinate weekly orders of local eggs from local food hub, Farm to Table TX. Eggs were delivered to the SFC office and distributed along with the veggie boxes.</li> </ul>
Grocery Market Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinate with restaurants to place grocery orders weekly from local food hubs. Once restaurants had implemented the grocery model for several weeks, restaurant staff began placing orders directly with the food hubs.</li> <li>• Farmers and food hub vendors deliver directly to restaurant partners.</li> </ul>

### Communications and Marketing Support

Restaurant partners were provided with flyers and informational sheets to give to their customers. Flyers included the name of the restaurant, address, and general information regarding the project. Banners and a-frame signage were also available to all restaurant partners. Restaurant partners were provided with social media advertising copy, images, and support to place their own social media ads, which were fully reimbursed by the project.

Articles and posts about the project were published by several independent organizations including KXAN, JBG Organic Farm, Representative Lloyd Doggett via Facebook, and the Austin-American Statesman. Throughout, the project garnered local earned media coverage, resulting in a significant increase in inquiries from restaurant owners and community members seeking additional information.

In addition to earned media, the project executed a paid marketing plan. Website, print, YouTube video, social media, and radio ads were employed to engage a wide audience. The website, print, and social media ads mainly targeted 20 to 50-year-old individuals interested in the Austin community. Radio ads were able to reach a broader audience of new customers, including the Latino community on 102.7 Latino radio station.

Lastly, Sustainable Food Center's website maintained a list of all restaurant partners, including their address, model type, hours, and contact information, allowing for the public to easily navigate to participating restaurants nearest them.

### Functional Support and General Administration

In addition to coordinating supply orders, deliveries, and advertising support, the project team also offered functional support to all restaurant partners. This was flexible, catch-all support to ensure partners' success and continued participation, which included supplying PPE and brainstorming solutions to problems (e.g. how to increase customers served, how to display produce, how to price items). SFC also provided all general administration support, including invoice processing, staff reimbursement, reporting, and communicating with the funding partner.

Additionally, SFC fielded donations to the project, which included cases of sparkling water and bags of flour.

### Restaurant Recruitment

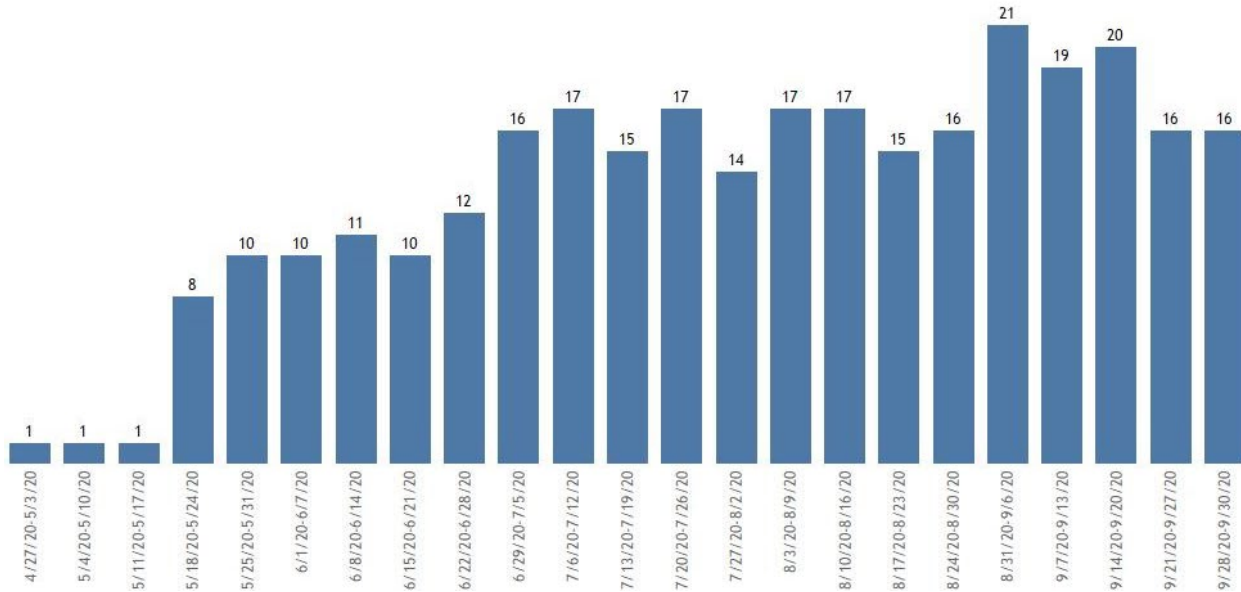
The project team solicited community input directly from community members, as well as community organizers, restaurant owners, and other community representatives, to help identify potential restaurants and inform site selection (more information on page 5). When possible, community members or collaborators provided the project team with an introduction to the business owner or manager providing a starting point of contact. When this was not possible, the project team conducted cold calls. Cold calling was the primary way restaurants joined the project. Project staff introduced the project to potential restaurant partners over phone or email, sharing logistics and the



*Banner announced Grocery Project at participating restaurant. Courtesy of SFC.*

overall mission of the efforts. Restaurants that expressed interest in participating were then onboarded and a produce box order placed for the next week's delivery.

Figure 5: Number of restaurant partners participating per week



*This graph demonstrates how the number of partners grew steadily throughout the project duration.*

## Data Collection and Analysis

Restaurant partners were contacted on a weekly basis throughout the duration of the project to report their previous week's sales, number of customers, and customer zip codes, as well as to provide feedback about the project and ask for support. Every Monday, restaurant partners received an email from project staff asking them to submit an online survey form to report on these data points. Reports were also accepted by email or text and then manually entered into the online survey form by project staff. Restaurant partners received an additional reminder if they had not submitted a report by Thursday morning, and then received a final reminder on Friday morning when placing their order for the upcoming week. On Fridays, data from the previous week (Monday-Sunday) were compiled and cleaned.

Project staff created a dashboard for internal monitoring and evaluation to visualize the data on a weekly basis, focusing on the cumulative number of customers served in each zip code. In this dashboard, the numbers of customers and total sales were updated weekly to reflect the cumulative amounts over the span of the project. Purchasing data were added to the dashboard to monitor gaps in sales and purchasing; these data were pulled from internal SFC budget reports.

## Project Budget

Figure 6: Project expense breakdown

Item	Amount
Food purchases	\$84,970.77
Local delivery drivers	\$9,643.64
Marketing	\$18,774.39
Intern salary	\$1,077.00
PPE and other supplies	\$6,777.12
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$112,541.00</b>

When understanding the project expenses, it is important to note that nearly all staff time (save ½ of an intern’s salary, listed above) was donated in-kind by SFC. The staff involved in the project included a project manager, project director, project intern, evaluation staff, communications staff, and finance and administrative staff.

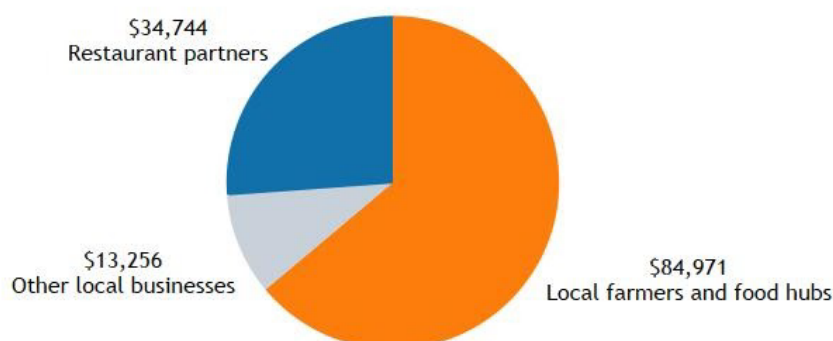
## Results

By the end of the project period, the Grocery Project partnered with 29 restaurant partners at 35 restaurant sites, including three grocery model locations, 28 box model locations, four hybrid locations, and three restaurant partners with multiple sites. Total revenue generated for restaurants was \$34,744, \$28,634 coming from fresh produce sales and \$6,110 from staple food items. A total of 2,602 customers were served by the program.

### Economic Impact

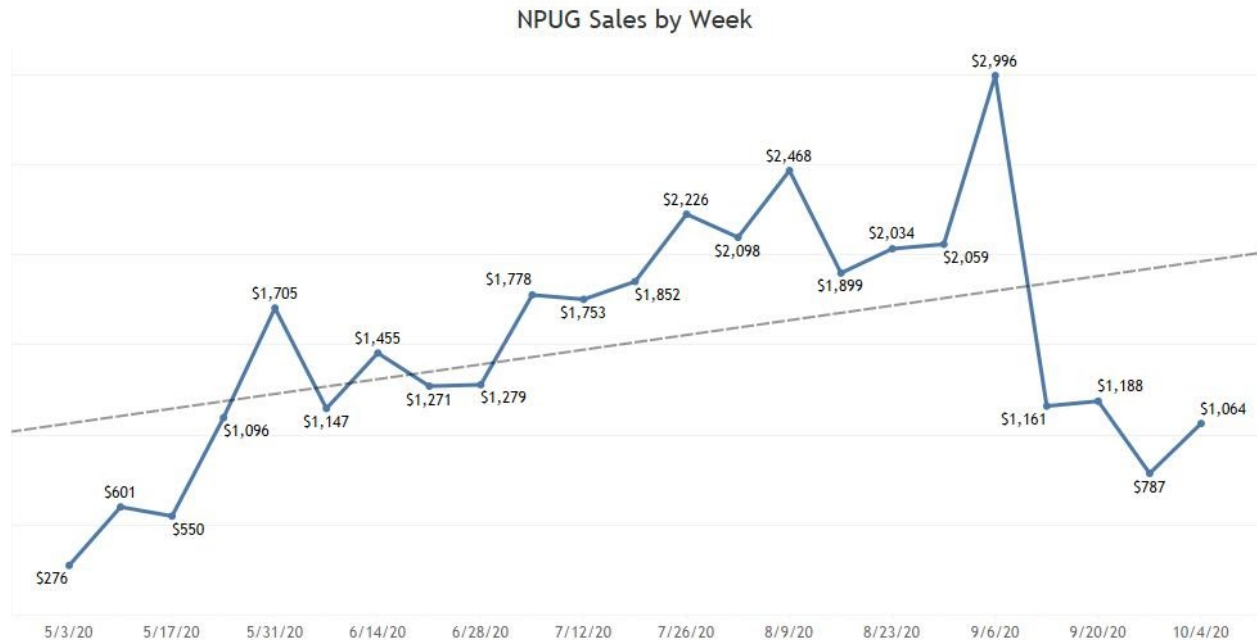
An enormous impact of this project was microeconomic. The Grocery Project provided much-needed revenue to both local food producers and locally owned restaurants as they navigated through a time of crisis. In total, this project generated approximately \$133,000 in revenue for local businesses directly, which is ~\$21,000 (15%) more than the total project budget. This number represents all revenue restaurant partners gained by selling donated food stuffs (\$34,744), the revenue gained by local farmers and food hubs who sold food items to the project (\$84,971), in addition to all local businesses that supplied marketing services, printing services, PPE, and other

Figure 7: Total local business revenue generated by the project



goods and services (\$13,256) crucial to the success of the project. In addition, restaurant partners reported that sales from this project helped retain 19 jobs total.

Figure 8: Restaurant partner sales by week



This graph shows weekly sales for all restaurants combined for each week throughout the duration of the project. Sales numbers fluctuated week-to-week but trended upward overall. The sharp decrease starting in mid-September was due to the project winding down and fewer restaurants participating each week.

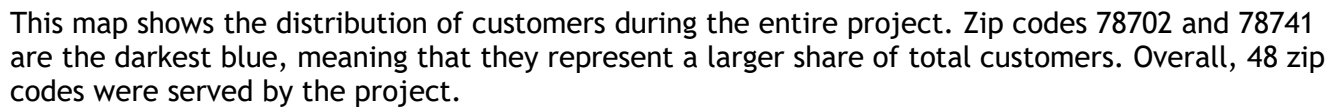
## Trends

Most sales to restaurants came from customers living in the 78702-zip code, composing about 21% of total customers. The 78741-zip code had the second-largest total sales, composing about 20% of total customers. As more restaurants joined the program, North and South Austin saw a rise in customer participation. Notably, the Steiner Ranch area in the 78732-zip code was an area with notable success, reaching 6.69% of total customers. Overall, the Central East Austin area had the most interaction with the project as a key target area and several participating restaurants located there.

*"[This] was a very important part of our story of survival as a small business and also so important to our community. We couldn't have done it without [sales from the Grocery Project]." - Sonya Cote, Hillside Farmacy*



## Customer Counts and Zip Codes



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This map shows the geographic distribution of restaurant partners and which model type they employed (produce box, grocery market, or both). Many restaurant partners were concentrated in Central/East Austin, though far north and far south was also represented.

The project team had difficulty anticipating the number of customers reached, and restaurant partners often faced great variance from week-to-week. This was attributed to the fluctuating nature of life during a pandemic, but there may have been other factors as well.

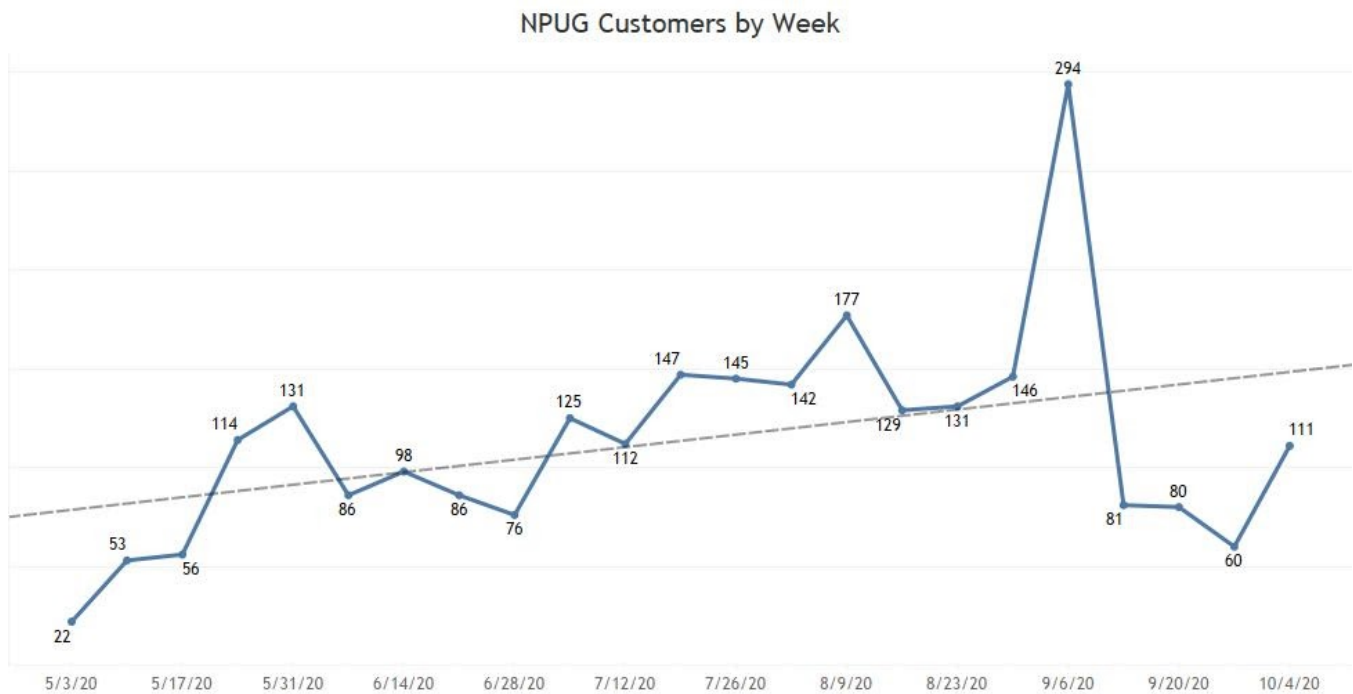


Figure 11: Total customers per week

This graph shows customer counts reported over time throughout the duration of the project. Customer numbers fluctuated week-to-week but trended upward overall. The sharp decrease in mid-September was due to the project winding down and fewer restaurants participating each week.

Notably, there was a large difference in sales and customers for restaurant partners that used the grocery model versus those that used the produce box model. Only three partners used the grocery model, and together, their average weekly sales were \$397, with an average of 12 customers per week. For all remaining partners who used the produce box model, average weekly sales were \$68 with 3 customers per week.

*"[This] has been a good way for us to connect with some local farmers and hopefully provide them an additional outlet. Our staff has really enjoyed talking about the boxes and have been enjoying the leftovers as well!"*  
- Michael Swail, Forthright

### Successes

#### *Connecting restaurants with farmers*

The project directly supported local food businesses. Partners who utilized the grocery market model were able to communicate with farmers and have them deliver to their stores. The Common Market (the Houston-based food hub that supplied nearly all of the boxes for the produce box model) sourced all of their fruits and vegetables locally, and included product lists that highlighted the farms each product came from. Restaurants were able to use this to market the produce boxes and became familiar with The Common Market and the farmers' names and products.

#### *Providing restaurant staff with food and retaining jobs*

In addition to increased revenue, sales from the project helped retain 19 total staff jobs. Further, unsold produce was often given to staff in need, which allowed restaurant owners/managers to strengthen relationships with their staff.

#### *Connecting restaurants with community*

Several restaurant partners stated that they were happy to have been able to connect with their community through this project. Some mentioned that they reached people that they normally would not have interacted with, as well as attracted new customers to their businesses. Several partners donated produce boxes to those in need, which created rapport within their community and a sense of involvement in addressing the food access issue exacerbated by the pandemic.



*Restaurant staff excitedly shows off recently delivered local produce boxes. Courtesy of Waterloo Icehouse.*

### Challenges

#### *Culturally relevant produce boxes in communities of color*

Many restaurant partners who primarily served communities of color reported that there was hesitancy among their customer base around the produce items provided in the produce boxes. This was not universal, but this pilot project fell short in providing culturally relevant foods in some areas of Austin. As this project was a supply chain solution as well as a food access solution the project team made the decision to accept whatever produce farmers needed to sell. If this project were replicated, cultural relevance related to food options might be an important improvement to consider.

*“ We were able to donate some product to our neighbors in need, creating a wonderful report within our community. The amount of boxes we sold was negligible, but the overall program was beneficial to our business...Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this program. We are genuinely grateful.” - Rachelle Fox, The Cavalier*

#### *Selling produce boxes in low-income communities*



Project staff recommended restaurants sell produce boxes for \$20 each, with 50% off given to Lonestar SNAP recipients. Some restaurant partners communicated that even at the lowest price-point of \$10-\$15, low-income customers were not likely to purchase the boxes. A few locations offered customers the option to buy a box to donate to a family in need, however, low-income customers, especially those in assisted housing, did not have access to stoves or methods to cook the vegetables.

### *Produce not always saleable*

There were several instances when food quality was a challenge, such as rotten, old, wilted, or not preferable produce. There were two reasons for this: 1) suppliers sending out-of-date or spoiled items, and 2) lack of cold storage after delivery from the supplier and before arrival to the restaurant. The first problem was addressed directly with suppliers. The second challenge was harder to address, as Sustainable Food Center does not have a loading dock and produce was typically delivered around 11 or 11:30 in the morning, well into the heat of the day. The project team worked as fast as possible to preserve the quality of the produce, but the solution was never ideal. If this project model is implemented in future, the storage and transportation of produce should be a key concern in logistical planning.

*“ The program widened our reach to customers we wouldn’ t normally interact with and provided us a sense of involvement in recovering and survival during the pandemic. The most helpful aspect was interaction with the community. I’ d say overall, everything worked well.” - Kevin Brand, 512 Brewing Company*

### *Supply Chain*

The underdevelopment of Austin’s local food chain caused difficulty in food distribution. While we were able to source thousands of pounds of local produce without difficulty, we had significant challenges sourcing local eggs. The reason that local produce was relatively easy was because The Common Market Texas was already working with farmers all over the state and had a sophisticated distribution system that was able to process bulk orders. We were not able to source local eggs through The Common Market Texas and ran into significant hurdles that made the sale of eggs particularly difficult for restaurants. Austin needs harder infrastructure (e.g. aggregators, storage facilities) to support local supply chain growth, which will be an important consideration for future iterations of this project.

*“ I feel like this program helps small family farms & small businesses so much. This is passed to the consumer & I think that we will continue this model after the pandemic. We hope to provide quality foods at a fair price. Thank you!” - Sonya Cote, Hillside Farmacy*

### *Other Challenge Areas*

Certain restaurants had difficulties with selling their produce boxes. Community-side protests in downtown and east Austin areas during project implementation deterred business for some restaurants, but as time went on, they reported that business improved.

Other restaurants had difficulty advertising due to decrease in business caused by the pandemic, lack of social media, or physical means (e.g. space to put up banners). In response, social media ads were offered to each partner (including assistance implementing and paying for them), and restaurants were provided with flyers and banners if they had a place to hang them.

Lastly, some restaurants faced wary customers when collecting zip code data at point of purchase. To address this, half-sheet informational flyers were created and distributed to clarify to the customers what data is needed and why.

*"[We] are really grateful you all conducted a program to help the local farming community, the hospitality industry and the Austin community at large! We had a lot of enthusiasm expressed by people following on our social media accounts about the program--and even though we didn't sell out of our boxes every week, they benefited our "Waterloo fam" as everyone was happy to have the leftover produce when it was available. Happiness all around. Overall it has been a great program and we were really grateful to be a part of it." - Jena Umstattd, Waterloo Icehouse*

## Takeaways and Discussion

The Neighborhood Pop-Up Grocery Project was initiated in response to the COVID-19 crisis to backfill necessary food access services and support two key economic sectors: agriculture and local restaurant businesses. As the COVID-19 crisis continues and further social and economic damage mounts, projects such as the Grocery Project and other crisis relief efforts are critical components of the food access emergency across the United States. The project team has identified three key takeaways from the project's six-month pilot.

1. *Building relationships and trust takes time. Our work with local restaurant business owners has been a huge asset with immense potential and deep value to future food access work.*

The project team has laid the groundwork with local restaurant business owners by building trust and cooperation among Austin's social good sector and its food business owners, an effort critical to its success. Most having never worked on food access initiatives before, local food business owners were scrambling to continue to serve their customers in the ways that mattered most to them. While the concept of the Grocery Project piqued partners' interest, much groundwork was necessary to shape a food access solution that also held beneficial outcomes for the restaurants themselves.

Within six months, the project team successfully developed and nurtured relationships with Austin business owners to open pop-up grocery sales inside their restaurants. Key to this success was the time spent articulating the needs and goals of the restaurants, and the value they bring to food relief efforts in their own neighborhoods. In this time of crisis, collaboration between public and private sectors is crucial, and relationships are a key asset in addressing the unprecedented food access challenges to come.

*2. This project is providing value to local businesses and consumers but relies exclusively on government subsidy.*

The Grocery Project provides restaurant partners with free farm fresh food to help boost their businesses and feed consumers, all of which is subsidized by a government contract. While this model fills a critical gap right now, continued support beyond this stop-gap measure (for this and other programs investing in good, local food) will help ensure long-term vitality of our food system.

Currently, the federal government spends billions of dollars on food subsidies, both for commodity farmers and for grocery shoppers at and below the poverty line. This project touches both ends of the supply chain and, by supporting local food, this project also cultivates the secondary services that local food and farmers provide, namely: local economic activity, care for local ecosystems, and protection of the safety of those producing and consuming the food products. If we want to build a more just, equitable, and resilient food system, we must invest public dollars in innovative models, like the one described in this case study.

*3. Building new, localized supply chain pathways is vital to building a more resilient food system.*

The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the deep and fundamental flaws in our food system and supply chains, underscoring the dire need to remake regional food systems. We must invest in resources concentrating on economic justice, food access, and long-term resiliency. The Grocery Project converges around local food, local farmers, and the communities they serve. By building connections between local farmers and local restaurants, this project forges new supply channels that keep dollars local, allows for community-level solutions, and ensures good and fair labor practices. In addition, this works to shorten supply chains by reducing intermediaries, which in the long term protects them from and allows them to recover from disruptions more easily. Local food, local businesses, and local control means a more resilient system. It means a system that protects consumers, local economies, and our food future.

## For More Information

For more information about this project or other parts of Sustainable Food Center's work, email Jenifer DeAtley @ [jdeatley@sustainablefoodcenter.org](mailto:jdeatley@sustainablefoodcenter.org) or Hallie Casey @ [hcasey@sustainablefoodcenter.org](mailto:hcasey@sustainablefoodcenter.org), or call (512) 236-0074.