

**USDA REGIONAL FOOD BUSINESS CENTER PROGRAM  
SEMI-ANNUAL PERFORMANCE PROGRESS REPORT  
ALL CENTER KEY HIGHLIGHTS BRIEF**

**July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024**

(with highlights from the most recent reporting period: January 1 – June 30, 2024)

**Regional Food Business Centers Reporting: 12/12**

The data presented below reflects data submitted by all 12 USDA Regional Food Business Centers. This is an interim report reflecting the first (of five) years of Regional Food Business Center (RFBC) Program activity. RFBCs submit performance progress reports (PPRs) to USDA semiannually.

**Center Progress and Accomplishments**

In this reporting period, Centers continued to build vital Center infrastructure while shifting to implementation of key activities. Primary accomplishments and activities during this period include:

- Strengthening internal Center systems and coordination, including implementing reporting systems, developing governance structures, and staffing key Center roles
- Facilitating communication and coordination of food systems stakeholders across the region
- Building awareness of the Regional Food Business Center program, with an emphasis on engagement and partnership with underserved community partners
- Planning and/or launching tailored training and technical assistance (TA) programs
- Planning and/or launching Business Builder Award programs
- Collaborating with other Regional Food Business Centers
- Leveraging and coordinating with other USDA programs, especially the Resilient Food System Infrastructure program
- Capturing regional information to inform program planning through strategic planning, asset mapping, and needs assessments

**Program Administration Related Challenge – Administrative and Technical Systems**

Centers continue to navigate internal administrative challenges as they transition from planning to implementation. This includes challenges hiring staff while also dealing with the pain points that arise due to rapid growth of an organization (more staff, larger budget, additional programmatic and federal requirements, etc.). Centers are also working to establish technical platforms/systems such as customer relationship management tools, file and data sharing systems, and communication platforms that work across all partner's internal systems and meet the security standards of all partners.

## Activity Highlights

Activity Highlights and Key Outcomes include cumulative numbers as reported from the beginning of the program (July 2023) to the end of the most recent reporting period (June 2024).

### Coordination

**1,531** new partnerships/collaborations were developed. Of those,

- **257** were formalized with written agreements (i.e. MOUs or signed contracts).
- **473** partnerships were with organizations representing underinvested communities.

#### Coordination Related Challenge – Partner Coordination and Center Governance Structure

Many Center partners have not collaborated prior to the RFBC program so they are working to develop trust and strong foundational relationships. Centers note this relationship development takes significant time and is particularly challenging in a virtual work dynamic and across different types of organizations.

### Technical Assistance

Centers reported working with **319** technical assistance providers.

- **1,717** businesses/organizations have been served via the technical assistance providers.
- **2,818** individuals have been trained or received technical assistance through the Centers.
- Most frequently reported technical assistance topics (and number of individuals who received TA on that topic)<sup>1</sup>
  - Market development (978)
  - Using new strategies to improve local/regional food processing, distribution, aggregation, or storage (823)
  - Minor business development (647)

#### Technical Assistance Related Challenge – Meeting Diverse Needs of Beneficiaries

Several Centers note the challenges of working across vastly diverse geographies with different language needs, technical assistance priorities, and access to resources. Additionally, several Centers identified challenges in finding technical assistance providers and partners with appropriate expertise and experience working with their priority populations. Finally, Centers and TA providers are working to increase their knowledge of USDA programs.

### Capacity Building (Business Builder)

One Center initiated their Business Builder Award Program:

- **15** Business Builder Subawards were distributed
- **\$607,100** Total funding awarded for Business Builder Subawards

#### Capacity Building Related Challenge – Allocating Resources

Multiple Centers noted the challenge of preparing for Business Builder Award applications due to uncertainty about the needs of applicants and volume of applications. Centers also saw challenges in distributing resources equitably across their partners and geographic areas.

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<sup>1</sup> Individuals may have been trained in more than one topic. The sum of individual topics is greater than the total number of individuals.

## Key Outcomes

### **Outcome 1: Expand and strengthen regional food systems networks and partnerships in response to hardships and vulnerabilities exposed by recent national emergencies, particularly the COVID-19 pandemic.**

Of the **1,531** partnerships/collaborations developed through Regional Food Business Center activities, Centers reported:

- **72** partnerships resulted in increased sales/purchasing of regional food products.
- **263** partnerships worked together on coordinated communications or marketing campaigns.
- **249** partnerships led to more efficient and coordinated use of resources.
- **46** partnerships secured additional funding as a result of the partnership

Other examples of collaborative activities include:

- Value chain meetings for producers, joint learning activities for Center partners, and assisting Missouri Farm Service Agency in serving small specialty crop producers. (Heartland RFBC)
- Sharing and strategizing with other Centers to understand and address the needs and opportunities within Indian Country. (National Intertribal Food Business Center)
- Supporting statewide coordination efforts (including Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure (RFSI) grant support and grant writing workshops), expanding program offerings across the region (e.g. Fancy Food Show Sponsorships, Meaningful Marketplace Podcast). (Northwest and Rocky Mountain RFBC)
- Developing collaborative data management systems to address overlapping needs. (Delta RFBC and Rio Grande Colonias RFBC)
- Coordination with state department of agriculture to identify organizations to host loan guarantee programs (to expand access to affordable financing); cross organizational coordinating to support in-person cross-network convening. (Islands and Remote Areas RFBC)
- Grant writing technical assistance and creation of a resource repository. (North Central RFBC)
- Collaborative grant proposals with regional tribal entities for RFSI grant program. (Great Lakes Midwest)
- Coordination with regional food policy councils to increase reach and support collaborative change. (Appalachia RFBC)
- Launch of Inter-Center working groups and inventory of technical assistance offerings in the region. (Rio Grande Colonias RFBC)
- Outreach and events to increase membership and engagement in Center's DEI Council and Community Advisory Council. (Northeast RFBC)
- Collaborative grant proposals to support urban farms and local food supply chains. (Southwest RFBC)

### **Outcome 2: Create more and better markets and increase market awareness and access, ensuring small and mid-size producers and processors have the opportunity to gain access to distributors, retail outlets, and institutions.**

**355** partnerships/collaborations were established between producers/processors and market access points.

RFBCs also conducted other activities with the aims of improving market access and supply chain transportation and distribution. This included:

- Mapping regional gaps to develop supply chain improvements.
- Providing training and capacity building to new and existing shared use kitchen operations.
- Increasing capacity of food hubs to serve local and regional food businesses.
- Provision of additional storage for a meat processing plant.
- Supporting clients in refinancing debt to more reasonable terms, allowing them to invest in infrastructure and equipment.
- Increasing institutional purchasing of local foods at juvenile centers.

- Increasing footprint of food hub aggregation to allow more producers access to distribution.
- Increasing sales to wholesale markets.
- Increasing technical assistance providers' capacity for outreach and 1:1 services.
- Mapping of institutional supply chains including distribution vendors, product/volume analysis, and cost variance analysis for transitioning purchasing to small, underserved producers and enterprises.

**Outcome 3: Increase food and farm business and financial acumen, increase the number of new food and farm businesses and improve viability of existing businesses.**

- **252** business plans were developed.
- **7** Centers reported leveraging additional resources for the region due to Center activities this reporting period (January 1 – June 30, 2024), resulting in a total of \$4,165,000 awarded to Center partners and clients through Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Grants, Specialty Crop Block Grants, Value Added Producer Grants, Meat and Poultry Processing Expansion Program, Western SARE, Minnesota Farmers Union, Rural Energy for America Program, Congressional Community Project, CDFA Urban Agriculture Program, and private foundations.

**Total Program Activities and Outcomes**

<b>Coordination</b>	<b>PPR 1</b>	<b>PPR 2</b>	<b>Total</b>
# of New Partnerships	302	1,229	1,531
Partnerships formalized with MOUs	155	102	257
Partnerships with underinvested communities	95	378	473
<b>Technical Assistance</b>	<b>PPR 1</b>	<b>PPR 2</b>	<b>Total</b>
# of TA providers	136	183	319
# of businesses/organizations served	343	1,374	1,717
# of individuals trained or provided TA	694	2,124	2,818
<b>Capacity Building</b>	<b>PPR 1</b>	<b>PPR 2</b>	<b>Total</b>
# of Business Builder Awards Distributed		15	15
Total Funding Awarded		\$607,100	\$607,100
<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>PPR 1</b>	<b>PPR 2</b>	<b>Total</b>
Partnerships resulting in increased sales	23	49	72
Partnerships working together on coordinated comms	117	146	263
Partnerships leading to more efficient resource usage	123	126	249
Partnerships securing additional funding based on partnership	17	29	46
Partnerships between producers/processors and market access points	72	283	355
# of business plans developed	85	167	252
Additional financial resources leveraged for region (approximate)	\$165,000	\$4,000,000	\$4,165,000



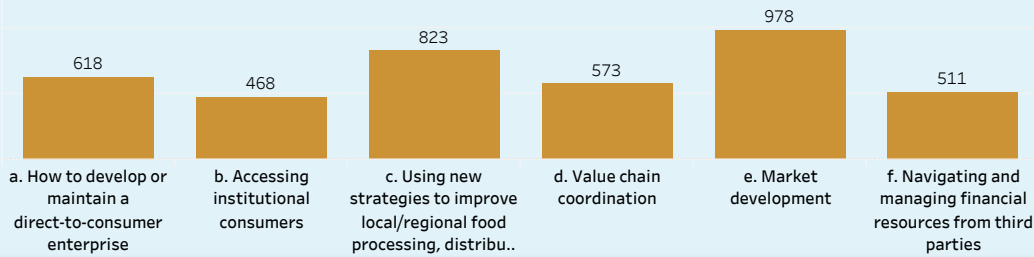
# Regional Food Business Center Program Performance Activities and Outcomes

Recipient Organization Name All	Reporting Period All	Status All	<a href="#">CLICK FOR DETAILS</a>	
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## Key Activities

<b>2,818</b>	<b>Individuals Received Technical Assistance</b>	<b>\$607,100</b>	<b>Total Funds Distributed Through Business Builder Subawards</b>
<b>1,531</b>	<b>Number of New Partnerships and Collaborations</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>Business Builder Subawards Distributed</b>

### Number of Individuals Trained by Training Topic



## Expand and Strengthen Food Systems Networks and Partnerships

<b>474</b>	<b>Partnerships with Underinvested Communities</b> The number of partnerships with organizations representing underinvested communities	<b>72</b>	<b>Increased Sales</b> The number of partnerships that reported increased sales/purchasing of regional food products
<b>263</b>	<b>Coordinated Marketing Campaign</b> The number of partnerships that reported coordinated communication or marketing campaigns	<b>249</b>	<b>Coordinated Use of Resources</b> The number of partnerships that reported more efficient and coordinated use of resources

## Create More and Better Markets and Increase Market Awareness and Access

<b>355</b>	<b>Collaborations</b> Number of partnerships and/or collaborations established between producers/processors and market access points (distributors, retail outlets, institutions, etc.)	<b>0</b>	<b>New Market Channels</b> Number of Business Builder Subawardees that were able to access new market channels
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## New Food and Farm Businesses and Improve Viability of Existing Businesses

<b>174</b>	<b>New Food Businesses</b> Number of food and farm businesses created through RFBC activities	<b>387</b>	<b>Increased Knowledge</b> Number of food and farm businesses served reporting increased knowledge about new market opportunities
<b>287</b>	<b>Increased Revenue</b> Number of food and Farm businesses served reporting increased revenue		