

Progress Report

Title:	Tierra de Oportunidades Project - Immigrant and Refugees Beginning Farmer Training and Incubation in Western and Central Massachusetts		
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Program Code: BFRDP**Program Name:** Beginning Farmer and Rancher**Project Director**

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Performing Department

{NO DATA ENTERED}

Co-Project Directors

{NO DATA ENTERED}

Departments

{NO DATA ENTERED}

Non-Technical Summary

The latest agricultural census report shows again that farming in the United States is in crisis. While the average age of farmers is increasing, insufficient numbers of new operators are entering agriculture. As the number of farms continues to decline, prime farmland is also being lost to increasing development pressures. "Between 1992 and 1997, the U.S. paved over more than 6 million acres of farmland, an area approximately equal to the size of Maryland." (American Farmland Trust, 2002). The result is a precarious national food system. How can we preserve our local farmland and maintain our regional food security when the number of farmers in this region is shrinking Part of the answer lies within our immigrant communities. However, these farmers face great challenges when attempting to establish farm businesses in this country: language and cultural barriers, lack of financial resources, limited access to credit, and an insufficient understanding of farm services. In addition, the soaring cost of land in this region makes finding affordable farmland extremely difficult, and few agricultural professionals in the area speak Spanish or have experience working with Hispanic or other immigrant populations. Nuestras Raices works with primarily with Puerto Rican Latinos. Language and cultural barriers make it difficult for Hispanic and refugee beginning farmers to access the existing programs and resources designed to support them. There are organizations serving beginning farmers in Western Massachusetts, including state programs, but courses are in English only and generally assume a high degree of literacy and internet access as well. While the Northeast does have a number of immigrant farming programs, Nuestras Raices and LSS are the only immigrant farming projects serving the distinct project area of Western Massachusetts, and featuring bilingual staff and training and resource materials in Spanish, Russian, and other languages. Nuestras Raices has years of experience working with Latino and Refugee populations, and is uniquely positioned to supporting this community lead a new generation of farmers. Therefore, for the purposes of this grant, Nuestras Raices and its partners will provide language-appropriate training, materials and resources, technical assistance, support finding farmland and markets, and access to credit opportunities to beginning Latino and refugee farmers in western Massachusetts. These activities match the objectives of the Standard BFRDP Project to enhance the sustainability of beginning farmers and ranchers by addressing farm risk associated with crop production and management, business management and financial viability, marketing, and legal constraints. The potential long-term impact of these activities is that beginning immigrant farmers are keeping local farmland in production, strengthening rural farming communities, and increasing the supply of local food available in city neighborhoods.

Accomplishments

Progress Report**Accession No. 223561****Project No. MASW-2010-03089****Major goals of the project**

The goal of the project is for Latinos and refugees with agricultural backgrounds to start farm operations, and to assist Latino and refugee farmers in their first 1-5 years of farming to improve and enhance their farm businesses. The objectives of the project are 1) Increase awareness of farm startup opportunities among Latinos and refugees with farm backgrounds per year, 2) Increase capacity of Latino and refugee beginning farmers through native language training and technical assistance on financial, production, and marketing topics, 3) Increase revenues of Latino and refugee farmers by connecting them to improved market opportunities, 4) Overcome obstacles to farm start-up by providing access to land to Latino and refugee beginning farmers; and 5) Overcome obstacles to farm start-up by providing access to credit to Latino and refugee beginning farmers. From an outreach pool of 10,000, 105 aspiring farmers will be trained. 45 will start incubator farms, and 9-15 will "graduate" to start their own farms. 45 returning participants will participate in advanced trainings, and of these 35 will increase acreage or profitability by 25%. Fully 100% of project budget will serve participants who are limited resource, socially disadvantaged, and/or immigrant farm workers desiring to become farmers or ranchers.

What was accomplished under these goals?

At the end of project year 3, 60 Latino, immigrant, or refugee growers participated by renting land with either Lutheran Social Services/New Lands Farm or Nuestras Raices - 12 from NR and 48 from NLF - and by regularly attending trainings. Over 144 hours of trainings were held for New Lands Farms and Nuestras Raices growers, reaching a total of 69 non-duplicative farmers.

This year a new training topic was introduced, whereby technical assistance on bookkeeping and reporting were conducted by Pantoja Tax Services, in group settings and on a one on one basis. As a result of the Phytophthora Capcisi problems, the very first training of the year focused on management strategies for this disease; all 12 NR farmers went to this training, increasing their production knowledge in light of this potentially destructive disease. As a result, our farmers adopted production techniques tailored to combat the disease's continued spread.

Trainings on safe food handling and application of pest control from UMass extension led to greater safety for farmers and consumers. Together farmers built a washing station with a clean water source, and a dry and pack station was constructed on the back fields. A collectively used cooler and shed were also established. These trainings led to the adoption of management practices that increase food safety and produce marketability.

Nuestras Raices successfully achieved the following market outcomes during the duration of the beginning farmer and rancher training program: WIC voucher redemption at the Holyoke farmers market increased 81.63% since 2011 and 47.26% since 2012. EBT usage increased 296.8% since 2011 and 83.7% since 2012. Senior Voucher usage increased 48.04% since 2011 and 16.03% since 2012. The greatest improvement is seen in Fruit and Veggie Prescription Coupons, up 154% since 2011, which are administered through the Holyoke Health Center physicians to support nutrition in low-income patients.

What opportunities for training and professional development has the project provided?

As a result of farmer interest this year we offered trainings on tractor operation and tractor safety, as well as pesticide safety, that were taught by UMass Extension.

Cynthia Espinosa worked one-on-one with farmers to support them in writing their business plans. Some do not read or write English and appreciated this planning and support.

In the summer of 2013 a Latina owned Holyoke firm, Pantoja Tax Services, provided a powerful and positive bookkeeping and business planning program with the farmers. Laura and Rosa Pantoja have developed a hands on and in person method, aligned with the relationship based community orientation of the farm itself. Visiting the farmers multiple times weekly, the Pantoja sisters mentor and collaborate with the farmers in recording inventory and sales. At this juncture, and for the first time, most of the farmers are tracking outputs and sales and sharing them with NR. 100% of participants reported that they thought these trainings were the most useful out of all the ones provided.

Continued trainings on farmers market and marketing trainings provided by CISA led to improved techniques at farmer's markets. Marketing has largely transitioned over from a Nuestras Raices run component of the program to something that is managed by the farmers themselves. The CISA trainings developed the skills necessary to make this transition successfully.

How have the results been disseminated to communities of interest?

The program was advertised through 4190 AM Nuestras Raices Radio Show every Wed from November 2012 through Jan 2013. It was also advertised on social media, our website, and further shared through social media by friendly/partner community organizations. Flyers were made and distributed in Holyoke and at our farm advertising the program. Workshops and events were advertised in a similar fashion: on our radio show, through our website and social media accounts, and through flyers. Members also received direct mailings and personal reminders of upcoming workshops and trainings.

What do you plan to do during the next reporting period to accomplish the goals?

{Nothing to report}

United States Department of Agriculture
Progress Report

Accession No. 223561

Project No. MASW-2010-03089

Participants

{Nothing to report}

Target Audience

This reporting period a total of 60 Latino, immigrant, and refugee farmers participated in the program at either New Lands Farm or Nuestras Raices farm.

Products

{Nothing to report}

Other Products

{Nothing to report}

Changes/Problems

The major problem this year was the continued presence of the phytophthora capsici organism in most of our farmer's fields, which resulted in large losses of many Latino-favored crops, including aji dulces and calabasa. This didn't effect fundamental aspects of the program but it did significantly lower yields and profits for most participants, leading to frustration and discouragement. This is reflected in a reduced number of farmers signing up for plots in 2014.