

Title:	Supporting Refugees and Immigrants to Farm Successfully in the Puget Sound		
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Program Name: Beginning Farmer and Rancher

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Recipient Organization

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Performing Department

{NO DATA ENTERED}

Co-Project Directors

{NO DATA ENTERED}

Departments

{NO DATA ENTERED}

Non-Technical Summary

The limited resource and socially disadvantaged refugee and immigrant farmers who make up our target audience face numerous obstacles on their road to operating successful farming enterprises, as the Refugee Farm Project pilot demonstrated. These include: Limited educational background; Language barriers and cultural differences; Unfamiliarity with farming in the Pacific Northwest and organic production practices; Lack of culturally relevant educational opportunities; Isolation from social and professional networks; Inadequate access to capital; Difficulties accessing land; and Lack of experience and technical assistance in management and marketing. At the heart of this project is the idea that participating farmers learn best how to operate a small farm by actually operating, in a supportive environment, a small farm, and they learn good business practices by actually running a small agricultural business. This learn-by-doing concept has already proven successful by our project partner, the California based Agriculture and Land Based Training Association (ALBA). Following the ABLA model, the Organic Farming Education Program (OFEP) graduates present business plans in order to be eligible lease land at subsidized rates on the Incubator. Once in the incubator, farmers have access to equipment and utilities at subsidized rates. First year farmers start out with small plots of land. Those plot sizes increase, and the subsidies decrease, in years 2-7 as the participating farmer demonstrates competency through annually renewed business plans and farming and marketing successes. Once a farmer feels ready to farm independently, incubator staff provide assistance in finding appropriate land, continued educational opportunities, technical assistance, and help accessing markets.

Accomplishments

Major goals of the project

Seattle Tilth is building on its thirty-two years of experience in organic agriculture education to give low-income refugees and immigrants with backgrounds in farming and food production the support and tools they need to establish successful farming businesses in King County, Washington. The goal of the project is to help participants achieve financial independence by helping them overcome barriers that prevent them from creating farming businesses. To achieve this goal, Seattle Tilth proposes the following objectives and attendant outcomes: Objective 1) Supply beginning farmer education that is culturally relevant and effective for refugees, immigrants, and low-income Americans. Expected Outcomes - A) 60 participants graduate from Seattle Tilth's Organic Farming Education Program. B) 90 farmers benefit from continuing education workshops covering topics such as Business, Marketing, and Organic production techniques. C) 3 OFEP graduates from refugee and business communities are active mentors to other beginning farmers in their communities. D) 12 OFEP graduates are being mentored by local established farmers. Objective 2) Facilitate land access and provide technical support. Expected Outcomes - A) 15 OFEP graduates lease land at the farm incubator site at subsidized rates. B) 9 other OFEP graduates are assisted to acquire land through purchase or lease. C) 25 incubator tenants receive on-site technical assistance. D) 30 non-tenant OFEP

graduates receive technical assistance. Objective 3) Farm business development. Expected Outcomes - A) 40 beginning farmers receive one on one support on business management issues. B) 15 beginning farmers are assisted to apply for and receive financing. C) 40 beginning farmers are assisted to develop viable markets for their products. D) 30 OFEP graduates are active members of local professional organizations for farmers.

What was accomplished under these goals?

During the funding cycle, Seattle Tilth Farm Works (STFW) delivered education and technical assistance to a variety of producers and entrepreneurs in the Puget Sound Region. Together, this support has helped immigrant, refugee and limited resource individuals incubate small farm businesses. The momentum of the program, coupled with lessons learned from the last three years, have fueled growth and help guide the continued evolution of support mechanisms for new farmers.

Objective #1: Providing Education

During the grant cycle, STFW developed an organic farm education program (OFEP) which is a set of curriculum covering organic farm production, marketing outlets, and small business management. Guest speakers, topic specialists, and STFW staff collaborated to deliver the 18 week course, often in conjunction with interpreters and cultural liaisons. In total, 41 farmers graduated from OFEP. In addition to the formal OFEP delivery, STFW provided a variety of continuing education workshops.

Topics included value added products, cover cropping, season extension, food safety, drip irrigation, tractor maintenance, small farm apiaries and pollination, and on-farm chicken processing.

Mentorship was also identified as an important learning and sharing tool. Returning farmers were asked to provide mentorship, in the form of educational workshops and/or informal production guidance, to the new cohort. This activity generated 5 mentors who consistently reached new farmers on topics of transplanting, flower production, poultry production, small business set-up and cultural awareness at the site. In one instance, a graduate farmer who started a farm-to-table business after finishing the STFW program, presented on securing financing for his enterprise. Another STFW graduate went on to lead the development of a community college campus farm. STFW staff observed that new farmers were acutely responsive to peer mentors and this component will continue to receive increased attention.

Mentorship extended beyond the incubator site to include established farmers partnering with STFW for educational offerings. These relationships offered participants broader exposure to farm systems as well as the regional farming community. Six area farmers offered mentorship on the topics of livestock production and processing, perennial systems, land selection, and beekeeping.

Objective #2: Facilitate land access & tech support

Over the course of the funding cycle, 27 OFEP graduates signed land lease agreements at the STFW incubator site. Leases included land for organic vegetable production, animal pasture and indoor space for mushroom cultivation. At the conclusion of each year a review process occurred between participant and staff to evaluate production and business aspects, and to establish goals for the following year. Lease values were established with diminishing subsidies over time, the objective being for the participants' business to grow, eventually realizing market costs.

In an effort to support participants with the acquisition of land outside of the incubator, STFW partnered with regional agencies which focus on farmland preservation and the matching of farmers and land owners. 5 STFW participants successfully secured land outside of the incubator. The financial challenges of acquiring land in King County have spurred STFW to pursue additional land bases that participants can continue to utilize,

Technical assistance is an on-going service for participating farmers. This assistance happens in the form of production, marketing and broader business management. All of the 27 participants who signed land lease agreements at STFW received technical assistance. It was observed that returning farmers needed considerably less time than new farmers. However, those farmers with limited or no English skills continued to require significantly more time than those farmers with at least some English skills.

Non-tenant farmers also benefitted from technical assistance through STFW. The bulk of this assistance was realized as part of a workshop or farm walk. STFW hosted a Tilth Producers farm walk that discussed with 50 farmers and community members the development of collective models at STFW, specifically the multi-producer CSA and other marketing outlets. In addition, STFW hosted multiple groups of youth who were part of Seattle urban farming programs.

Objective 3: Farm business development

All 41 OFEP graduates received assistance with business development during the program period. STFW staff provided 1-on-1 time with participants to help develop clear business goals and realistic action steps to achieve those goals. The 27 participants who went on to sign lease agreements with STFW, received ongoing support for business development. The review process, noted above, provides a time for participants to review costs and revenues, make adjustments, and set goals for the following year. STFW staff observed increases in revenue and decreases in costs after the financial review process was implemented in year two.

OFEP covers finance options during the program, bringing in speakers from FSA and local agricultural lending agencies, but many participants did not qualify for traditional lending sources or the level of need was below the range of lending. To address these issues, STFW provided nano-loans of up to \$1500. Seeds, tools, and transportation costs could be covered by these loans and repaid throughout the growing season as farmers sold produce. 100% of the nano-loans were repaid. Some participants secured larger funds from traditional lending sources. With STFW staff support, one farmer secured an operational loan for \$30,000 to start a pig operation. Funds came from Human Links and Slow Money NW. An additional

farmer secured financing from Slow Money NW to purchase a farm truck. And two STFW graduates utilized crowdsourcing to secure funds for start-up costs.

During the second and third year, STFW piloted a food hub, Seattle Tilth Produce (STP), to aggregate and distribute the farmer's products. This spawned a multi-producer CSA, increased presence at farmers markets and increased the number of wholesale accounts. Farmer revenues significantly increased with these market developments and some farmers realized a 75% increase in sales from the first to second year of the pilot. Overall, revenue at STFW increased by more than 150% from year 1 to year 3. Farmer feedback of the model has been overwhelmingly positive, with all farmers participating in the food hub. The positive feedback and increased revenue has spurred the food hub's continued growth, which will continue to accommodate increasing farmer participation and business growth. In the first year of operation, STP served 52 members in its 20 week CSA. The second year produced 100 members for 24 weeks and in 2015 STP plans to offer 300 CSA memberships. This growth parallels the increasing production of STFW farmers and overall number of farmers that STFW supports.

In an effort to encourage participating farmers to join professional organizations for farmers, STFW has collaborated with Tilth Producers of Washington, Enumclaw sustainable farm collaborative, Association of Specialty Cut Flower Growers, and the Young Farmer Coalition. After providing guest speakers and various opportunities to engage with these organizations, 14 farmers have participated with these professional organizations. STFW farmers have also been awarded scholarships to attend the annual Tilth Producers Conference, which is one of the state's prominent professional agricultural conferences.

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

STFW developed curriculum for the Organic Farm Education Program (OFEP) during the funding cycle. The basic principles of this training are to balance experiential learning with classroom learning. Each year OFEP is delivered to a new cohort of farmers, beginning in February and finishing in June. Classroom sessions meet Thursday evenings and hands-on sessions are field based during Saturdays. The program lays the groundwork for participants to craft a crop and business plan, which is presented to STFW staff before course completion. 41 participants have graduated from the OFEP program.

OFEP aims to cover the broad swath of topics within sustainable agriculture, specifically organic production, marketing/sales, and small business management. Guest speakers, field trips, workshops/conferences, and staff knowledge all contribute to the OFEP delivery. OFEP offers 144 hours of education from these sources.

To evaluate participant knowledge, STFW staff administer a self-evaluation at the commencement of the program and, for returning farmers, at the completion of each year. The assessment gauges knowledge around farm production, marketing and sales awareness, and business management aspects. STFW staff have observed an increase in knowledge base for farmers that have participated in the OFEP program and/or benefited from technical assistance.

Post-OFEP, STFW staff dedicate significant time to providing 1-on-1 technical assistance for a wide range of topics. Seed selection/purchase, irrigation, weed management, harvest techniques, post harvest handling, and cover cropping are a few areas of focus. The number of hours per participant varies greatly, depending on farming skill set and language/literacy skills. During the growing season, STFW staff spend between 3 and 14 hours per farmer per month on technical assistance.

As noted above, mentorship by returning farmers and other established farmers also contribute to the diverse educational experience. Each returning farmer is asked to identify a topic to be discussed at a mentor workshop. Additionally, some returning farmers take on the informal role of mentor, specifically with individuals of similar cultural backgrounds. STFW staff observed that a large amount of information was shared at the incubator site due to the collective nature of the program and proximity of multiple farm systems in the same location.

How have the results been disseminated to communities of interest?

Results from the program have been shared broadly in the region. There is great interest in securing farmers and farmland by the broader Puget Sound Region and STFW has been acknowledged as a leading agency in support of such activities.

Partnering agencies that work specifically with immigrant, refugee, and limited resource individuals were instrumental in recruiting participants. IRC, Horn of Africa Elders, King County Housing Authority, and regional food emergency agencies are a few of the partners developed as a result of the program. STFW continues to work with these agencies in recruiting and dissemination of information. STFW staff has observed a notable increase in the number of applicants due to word of mouth in the last two years. Participating farmers have become one of the best advocates for the program and references for new farmers.

Additionally, STFW has found partnering opportunities with other regional farm agencies to share resources in an effort to bolster the regional food system. Cascade Harvest Coalition, King Conservation District, PCC Farm Land Trust, NRCS, and Seattle Youth Garden Works are examples of partners that have collaborated with the project.

Conferences and advisory boards have also been a forum to share the results of STFW. Staff have attended and presented at various conferences during the past three years. Tilth Producers of Washington, Farmer-Fisher-Chef Connection, and Puget Sound Food Hub are examples of conferences where STFW results were shared. Additionally, staff have participated on the advisory board of Edmonds Community College for the development of the Sustainable Agriculture curriculum (SAGE).

STFW also encourages participating farmers to engage in local advocacy and education opportunities. One participant has

advanced to now lead a community college course on sustainable agriculture. Others have attended local government meetings to voice their support of EBT funding at farmers markets.

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

{Nothing to report}

Participants

Actual FTE's for this Reporting Period

Role	Non-Students or faculty	Students within Staffing Roles			Computed Total by Role
		Undergraduate	Graduate	Post-Doctorate	
Scientist	0	0	0	0	0
Professional	4	0	0	0	4
Technical	0	0	0	0	0
Administrative	0.5	0	0	0	0.5
Other	0	0	0	0	0
Computed Total	4.5	0	0	0	4.5

Student Count by Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) Code

{NO DATA ENTERED}

Target Audience

During the final reporting period, Seattle Tilth Farm Works (STFW) worked with a diverse target audience including participants from 5 countries of origin: Somalia, Kenya, Thailand, Mexico, and the U.S. 10 new participants completed the Organic Farm Education Program (OFEP) and 12 participants returned from previous years to continue building agricultural and business skills. Of the 10 new participants, 8 signed land-lease agreements and implemented farm businesses. The target audience was recruited through outreach efforts with community leaders and partnering organizations. In addition, returning participants and/or graduates have referred community members to the STFW program, making the word-of-mouth connection a very important and successful means of reaching the target audience.

Products

{Nothing to report}

Other Products

Product Type

Educational Aids or Curricula

Description

Organic Farm Education Program (OFEP): Structured educational curriculum, both classroom based and experiential learning, covering basis of organic farm production and small farm management.

Product Type

Evaluation Instruments

Description

Evaluation tools to capture: number of participants, # of educational hours, # of technical assistance hours, and financial reviews and goals.

Changes/Problems

A variety of challenges were realized during the start of this program, requiring adjustments to approach and support. A collaborative approach between staff and farmers has been beneficial in providing feedback and effectively finding solutions. From the onset, marketing and sales were identified as large challenges for new farmers. During the first year, STFW provided support for participants to develop individual markets at farmers markets and through wholesale outlets. STFW staff quickly saw the need for a more involved approach in helping farmers develop markets. During the second and third year, STFW piloted a food hub, Seattle Tilth Produce (STP), to aggregate and distribute the farmer's products. This spawned a multi-producer CSA, increased presence at farmers markets and increased the number of wholesale accounts. Farmer revenues significantly increased with these market developments and some farmers realized a 75% increase in sales from the first to second year of the pilot. Overall, revenue at STFW increased by more than 150% from year 1 to year 3. Farmer feedback of the model has been overwhelmingly positive, with all farmers participating in the food hub. The positive feedback and increased revenue has spurred the food hub's continued growth, which will continue to accommodate increasing farmer participation and business growth. In the first year of operation, STP served 52 members in its 20 week CSA. The second year produced 100 members for 24 weeks and in 2015 STP plans to offer 300 CSA memberships. This growth parallels the increasing production of STFW farmers and overall number of farmers that STFW supports.

Another challenge in working with the target audience is the range of literacy, numeracy, and language skills. In addition, some participants, specifically the refugee community, required additional support for housing, transportation and other social services that were posing as barriers to success. To address the needs of these participants, STFW contracted with Cares of Washington to provide specialized services from professionals in the social service field. This resulted in participants receiving better and more direct support in the areas of need, while STFW staff could better provide support for farm related issues. Medical bills, housing, transportation, and broader job searches were areas of focus that Cares of Washington was able to support. The service is available to all current STFW participants.

In working with Cares of Washington to address broader social issues, STFW staff was also better able to recruit applicants who could most benefit from the program. It was observed in the first year of programming that participants without reliable transportation or housing were not able to focus on starting a small farm business, and therefore not realizing success. The application process evolved to include questions to help applicants think through the many challenges of starting a small farm business, specifically pointing out the need for stable housing, reliable transportation, and supplemental income while the business grows. After three years of programming, STFW has various examples and references to now point to for applicants who seek additional information about how their situation fits with STFW and starting a business.

Land acquisition continues to be a challenge for new farmers. The Puget Sound Region continues to see rapid growth and development pressure, driving up the price of land. While many participating farmers have refined their skills on small plots at the current incubator, there is a need for many farmers to scale-up their farms in order to increase revenues. Farmers have provided feedback that expresses an interest in continuing to operate within the support network of STFW, specifically to access land and markets. STFW is responding to this farmer feedback and collaborating with city and county agencies to identify a location where the incubator can begin an "advanced" training center. This advanced farm site will allow farmers to increase acreage while still having access to appropriate equipment, technical assistance, and the Seattle Tilth Produce food hub. The intensive training center will continue to offer OFEP and provide small land plots for beginners, serving as a feeder site for advanced farmers who would like to scale-up their business in collaboration with STFW.