

<b>Title:</b>	<b>AGROpreneurship, A Collaborative Model for Diversifying and Strengthening Beginning Farmers and Ranchers</b>		
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**Program Code:** BFRDP

**Program Name:** Beginning Farmer and Rancher

**Project Director**

Stephanie Larson

707-565-2621

slarson@ucdavis.edu

**Recipient Organization**

REGENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,

1111 FRANKLIN ST, 6TH FL

Oakland, CA 946075201

DUNS No. 604591925

**Performing Department**

ANR

**Co-Project Directors**

DuVernay, Lorraine

Srinivasan, Ganesan

**Departments**

{NO DATA ENTERED}

Agriculture/Natural Resources

**Non-Technical Summary**

AGROpreneurship, A Collaborative Model for Diversifying and Strengthening Beginning Farmers and Ranchers, places a priority emphasis on service to low-income, underrepresented, and Latino populations. AGROpreneurship simultaneously addresses two linked challenges critically impacting the vitality of the farming and ranching community in Sonoma County, the state, and nation: 1) the approaching retirement of large numbers of current farmers; and 2) the significant underrepresentation of large segments of the county's population, especially Latinos, in career and educational pathways that will lead to farmer and rancher occupations. AGROpreneurship directly addresses three of the most significant barriers to beginning and sustaining successful farming and ranching businesses in Sonoma County: 1) Obtaining directly relevant business skills and training; 2) Gaining relevant work experience with farming and ranching production and business management; and 3) Obtaining access to land and financing. AGROpreneurship works in close collaboration with Santa Rosa Junior College, the largest community college agriculture program in the State of California, and benefits from access to its unique 365 acre Shone Farm, a multifaceted, whole farm training center which provides opportunities for hands-on training in the full range of agricultural business opportunities. Ten master farmers and ranchers have pledged their support to this program and will provide side-by-side mentoring/internship opportunities.

**Accomplishments**

**Major goals of the project**

Objective 1: Increase access to customized business training for beginning farmers and ranchers - By month two following grant award, complete customization of NxLevel curriculum and other training resources and systems - Develop and utilize partners' community linkages and a variety of media resources to recruit a minimum of 150 interested AGROpreneurship participants (50 per year for three years) - Select 25 participants for each of three (one per year) AGROpreneurship cohorts - Provide a 9-month intensive and interactive agricultural and business training utilizing the resources of the Santa Rosa Junior College and their 365-acre Shone Farm and the SRJC's Small Business Development center - Support each AGROpreneurship participant in developing (or improving) a business plan. Objective 2: Increase access to hands-on mentorship training for beginning farmers - By month two following grant award, formalize internship pathways with participating Master Farmer and Ranchers - Provide a wide range of hands-on study programs throughout the course of business training, using resources available at Shone Farm and through participating Master Farmers and Ranchers - Following completion of AGROpreneurship business training, provide all certified graduates with a minimum of three pathways for accessing additional specialized internships in their chosen specialty. Objective 3: Increase access to affordable

farmland for beginning farmers through leases, purchases, and use of available county lands - By month 10 following grant award, complete development of County Lands systems (process for application, use, and renewal) - Include within County Lands lease terms the requirement (in exchange for a reduced lease rate) that farmers contribute a percentage of their crop to the Redwood Empire Food Bank for direct distribution to low-income residents - By month 10 following grant award, the County of Sonoma will recognize AGROpreneurship certification as meeting requirements to successfully utilize County lands for farming and ranching businesses - Provide customized support to each AGROpreneurship participant to include within their business plan a detailed land tenure strategy Objective 4: Involve participating partners and professionals in collaborative learning communities supporting the broad dissemination of best practices and AGROpreneurship learning. - Develop and implement a user-friendly data tracking system for use in monitoring AGROpreneurship progress - Develop and agree upon meaningful indicators for all AGROpreneurship outcomes and use these as the basis for creating a simple but powerful "dashboard" for communicating AGROpreneurship progress - Communicate AGROpreneurship dashboard results to all partners and key stakeholders at regular six-month intervals - Conduct formative and summative evaluation work with AGROpreneurship participants and partners to measure AGROpreneurship impact on participants' ability to launch, expand sustain farming businesses, the impact of these businesses, and AGROpreneurship impact on partners' ability to sustain and grow activities in support of beginning farmers and ranchers.

### What was accomplished under these goals?

Goal 1: increase access to customized business training for beginning farmers

Scholarships: each year scholarships were provided: year 1 – 5 (with an individual donating; year 2 – 8 (2 dropped); year 3 – 13 (5 dropped). We did receive some donations each year to help with scholarships: an individual in year 1, and Slow Food group in years 2 & 3. We asked for some financial commitment from participants – skin in the game.

Outreach: We partnered with Latino Service Providers to reach the Latino community members who could be likely candidates for this program. As a result we had 9 Latinos/Latinas who graduated over the three years. We also reached out to the Ag community, via multiple organizations, the media and word of mouth.

Over three years we had 184 applicants. We accepted 79, and graduated 69 BFRs. 38 women, 31 men, of those there were 4 African Americans, 4 Native Americans. We also recruited through Farmers Veteran Coalition and in year 3 we had 3 veterans in the program. Each year there were more women than men.

Curriculum: Full ag/business curriculum was created during year 2 and used in year 3.

Goal 2: Increase access to hands-on mentorship/internship training for beginning farmers

Each year we worked with a wide variety of farmers and ranchers to provide one-on-one, or at their farm/ranch/veterinary business, or farm market in small group settings. Year one we did a series of panel discussions which were video-taped: [http://ucanr.edu/sites/BFRSOCO/Curriculum/Videos\\_of\\_2012\\_Presentations/](http://ucanr.edu/sites/BFRSOCO/Curriculum/Videos_of_2012_Presentations/)

Years 2 & 3, we arranged optional farm/ranch visits throughout the county with mentors ranging from fruit orchards, to grain growing, sheep/goat/cow/water buffalo dairies, as well as time with veterinarians and livestock operations.

Each of the three years, BFRs had the opportunity to work a small plot at SRJC's Shone Farm, under supervision in year one by the Shone Farm Manager, and in years 2 and 3, graduates from years 1 & 2 were available as mentors to help year 3 students with their enterprise projects (from seed to market).

Due to legal issues in our state around "internships", we did not establish specific internships – we created as many opportunities as possible to connect our BFRs with a broad range of local farming and ranching expertise.

Goal 3: Increase access to farmland for beginning farmers through leases, purchases, and use of available county land.

All three years, we partnered with California FarmLink as a resource for land linking and assistance with leasing. They are experts in this field and we made sure all of our BFRs had the opportunity to sign up with them to utilize their services, rather than us duplicating what already exists. We did set up a page on our website for land opportunities, for when someone contacted us directly asking to be listed: [http://ucanr.edu/sites/BFRSOCO/Land\\_Opportunities/](http://ucanr.edu/sites/BFRSOCO/Land_Opportunities/)

An interesting outcome from those who went through the program, 22 of them (31%) already owned land. So, a conclusion could be that they were motivated to do something useful with it, or already were, but wanted to be more efficient and more successful with their operation.

Goal 4: Involve participating partners & professionals in collaborative learning communities supporting the broad dissemination of best practices and AGROpreneurship learnings

There are a couple of farmer training programs starting to appear – Permaculture Skills Center is starting a "farm school" in Sonoma County, which will have a business component and mentoring; Grange Farm School in Willits is underway.

Goal 5: Evaluate AGROpreneurship Processes and Results

**Our BFRs were given training on how to use our Google Group, encouraged to "like" our Facebook page, and to utilize Sonoma County UCCE's website with the resources from our Livestock, Small Farm, and IPM Advisors and Ag Ombudsman. They were connected with California FarmLink who provides access to land and financing, as well as help with leases.**

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

In addition to class and hands-on time at SRJC's Shone farm, we connected the BFRs with local successful agricultural entrepreneurs, through a wide variety of panel discussions (videos are posted on our website:

[http://ucanr.edu/sites/BFRSOCO/Curriculum/Videos\\_of\\_2012\\_Presentations/](http://ucanr.edu/sites/BFRSOCO/Curriculum/Videos_of_2012_Presentations/)), diverse opportunities to visit and talk with

ranchers on their farms/ranches;

"Resource Day" brought in a variety of local experts: Range management, value-added, Ag-tourism, organic & humane certification, lenders, Whole Foods rep, California FarmLink rep, marketing specialist, and Ag ombudsman who answered questions in small group settings. These experts would have been difficult to reach without our help.

"Shark Tank Day" was another well received aspect; students presented their business plans to lenders, Kitchen Table Advisors, SBDC counselors and experienced farmers/ranchers; this was invaluable feedback for the students.

These interactions with experts gave them access to people and resources that would have been much harder to track down on their own.

#### **How have the results been disseminated to communities of interest?**

Each year, we created a flyer that was used for events, meetings, on-line, and also as a method for Latino Service Providers to recruit Latinos. We did four radio interviews for different stations, got articles in local publications: The Community Voice, Sonoma Marin Farm News, Edible Marin & Wine Country, Go Local Magazine, Press Democrat, Sonoma West Times & News, Upbeat Times. We also spoke at meetings, workshops, and other related food/ag organizations.

Locally, we partnered with Ag related organizations: California FarmLink, Sonoma County Farm Bureau, CAFF, Sonoma County Food System Alliance, North Coast Regional Food System (five counties: Sonoma, Marin, Lake, Mendocino and Napa), and Farmers Guild to disseminate results from the program. Social media included our webpage on Sonoma UCCE's site; Facebook page. Numerous articles in local newspapers and magazines, plus updates to our county board of supervisors kept our community aware and supportive of this program.

We attended the 2013 CA Small farm conference to share our program, and had a booth at the 2014 California Small Farm Conference. We attended the 2013 & 2014 Ecological Farming Conferences where we participated in a California BFR Network sharing best practices and committing to partner on a future BFR grant project.

We are partnering with Sonoma County Agricultural and Open Space District to create an incubator farm on county-owned land. This has been an on-going project since 2012. The incubator farm is a "next step" for aspiring farmers who still need support in the form of shared land, infrastructure, equipment and mentoring for up to 5 years, paying "less than market rate" for this service. We envision this a next step for those BFRs who went through our program, as well as others in our region, who need this support to become successful Agpreneurs.

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

{Nothing to report}

#### **Participants**

{Nothing to report}

#### **Target Audience**

Our target audience was socially disadvantaged beginning farmers and ranchers; defined by USDA as having less than 10 years of farming/ranching experience, also low-income, minorities, and women. We focused on the growing Latino population in Sonoma County, through a partnership with Latino Service Providers providing outreach.

Over the three years, 69 completed the program; with 48 of those completing business plans. There were a total of 38 women, 31 males. Ethnicities broke down into 9 Latinos, 4 Native Americans, 4 African Americans, and 52 Caucasians.

#### **Products**

{Nothing to report}

#### **Other Products**

##### **Product Type**

Educational Aids or Curricula

##### **Description**

Educational Aids/Curricula: full curricula (Ag & Business) was produced by SRJC Business and Ag Instructors:

Program Outline

Land Assessment & Procurement

Facilities, machinery, & equipment needs

Production Requirements

Variety & Selection & Procurement

Standard Operating Procedures & Regulatory Requirements (both business & product information)  
Planning Ahead & Exit Strategy  
Time Budgeting  
Cost of Production  
Pre-Assessment  
Executive Summary  
Company Description  
Vision Mission Values  
Business Entities  
SWOT Analysis  
Future Plans  
Marketing Strategy  
Business Analysis of the Competition  
The four Ps  
Management Team, Employees  
Support Team  
Budgets Cash Flow Projections  
Monetary Requirements  
Personal Bio  
Business Agricultural Plan Components  
Contact List

### **Product Type**

Educational Aids or Curricula

### **Description**

Powerpoints:  
Fertility Assessment  
Production Requirements Links  
Variety & Breed Selection factors  
Regs, GAP, SOP  
Are You Suited for Self Employment  
Fictitious Name Filing  
Business Entities  
Analysis of the Competition  
Sales Forecasting  
Financial Plan  
Executive Summary  
Value-Added Products

### **Product Type**

Evaluation Instruments

### **Description**

Evaluations were used differently over the three years:  
Year 1 – we gave evaluations after each class (which was monthly)  
Year 2 – We asked for evaluations at the end of class; 15 evaluations were submitted  
Year 3 – same evaluation questions as Year 2; 17 evaluations submitted  
• Feedback was used to improve the program each year

### **Changes/Problems**

In the first two years, we had only 5 Latinos. In year 3 we had 6 (2 dropped), one was fluent in English but the other 3 were somewhat challenged.

The SRJC planned to offer ESL class prior to year 3 to assist those whose English language comprehension was not good. That did not happen.

During year three, we had one SBDC counselor who was bi-lingual and a SRJC Shone Farm staff member who was also bi-lingual. Our team, including the instructors, PI, and Coordinator did their best to assist those struggling with "business language" to ensure they could complete the course.