

Progress Report

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Program Code: BFRDP**Program Name:** Beginning Farmer and Rancher**Project Director**

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Non-Technical Summary

IRC San Diego' Refugee Entrepreneurial Agriculture Program (REAP) will assist new American refugee farmers in becoming future leaders of a sustainable, urban and ethnically-oriented agricultural sector. The program will equip refugee farmers in San Diego County with training, resources and technical support to create and expand their own independent farming businesses. Based on IRC's current work with refugee and new immigrant food and farming entrepreneurs in City Heights, IRC San Diego will continue to develop and refine innovative business and marketing models for urban farming and micro-enterprise businesses that can be adopted by many ethnic immigrant communities as well as lower-income residents in urban communities.

Accomplishments**Major goals of the project**

Objective 1: To increase awareness, educate and demonstrate urban farming opportunities to potential refugee farmers, REAP will utilize a variety of City Heights-based food and farming projects for REAP outreach. Outputs include 20 new refugee families will be incorporated into one of IRC's City Heights food projects; One new quarter-acre community garden will be created in City Heights; 30 refugee youth will complete 30 hours of volunteer support; 50 refugee clients will receive ESL lessons related to food and farming subject matter; and, 100 newly-arrived refugee families will receive produce grown at City Heights community gardens. Objective 2: To increase the farming capacity of refugee farmers, REAP will offer an intensive, hands-on farming practicum. 50 total REAP participants will complete 80 hours of a Beginning farming practicum, including 30 Somali Bantu refugees and 20 Southeast Asian refugees; 45 Somali Bantu farmers will complete at least 40 additional hours of Intermediate farming practicum; 30 Somali Bantu farmers will complete at least 40 additional hours of Advanced farming practicum; and, 105 total Somali Bantu farmers will complete in the REAP program. Objective 3: To increase business skills of refugee farmers, REAP will offer a series of farming business courses as well as one-on-one technical assistance. 65 REAP participants receive between 60-80 hours of financial literacy courses and credit-building workshops; farming sales and marketing workshops; and small farm business planning, finance and management; and, 30 Advanced REAP participants receive 40 hours of education and technical assistance on independent leasing arrangements. Objective 4: To engage refugee farmer in innovative niche-marker microenterprise programming. 65 participants complete 30 hours each of language-appropriate training on high-yield growing practices; 30 REAP participants introduced to three tested

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and proven micro-producer business plans; \$50,000 in commercial sales achieved by the REAP participants; development of a refugee-grown logo and label; "Fresh Start" refugee food product business line. Objective 5: To provide support for future beginning refugee farmers, REAP staff will increase the organizational capacity of ethnic-based refugee organizations, such as the Somali Bantu Organization, to fund, train and oversee future farming programs in San Diego. Outputs include: 16-20 Somali Bantu farmers will seek IRC San Diego's refugee microenterprise services; Somali Bantu Organization of San Diego (SBO) will increase their organizational capacity; a national network of Somali Bantu farmers through quarterly video conferences with other Somali Bantu farming groups in other parts of the country; and, assistance in the creation and development of ethnic-based organizations for Burmese, Karen, or Cambodian farmers in San Diego.

What was accomplished under these goals?

Increase awareness/education about and demonstrate farming opportunities in the urban setting to potential refugee farmers: During this reporting period, IRC continued to operate its new five-acre community garden in the City of El Cajon (the New Roots Fresh Farm, a collaboration with Kaiser Permanente) as an agricultural production site and community gathering space for 36 refugees (in addition to 24 other community members). Similarly, IRC's certified farmers' market operated every week (with the exception of Thanksgiving and Christmas weeks) in El Cajon, providing a nexus for refugees and aspiring refugee farmers to connect with established agricultural entrepreneurs and to earn income from farming themselves. Three community gardeners seized this opportunity and started selling their produce at the farmers' market during this reporting period.

Increase the farming capacity and business skills of refugee farmers: The IRC

- successfully completed one round of its Beginning Farming practicum for 28 aspiring farmers (the training was completed by 23 participants, for a completion rate of 86%),
- continued to serve 16 graduates from trainings in the previous reporting period with ongoing training and technical assistance at its farm incubator sites,
- developed a second new urban farm training site adjacent to the community garden in El Cajon; and
- continued to serve two additional beginning farmers at additional production sites.

All of the participating farmers are significantly socioeconomically disadvantaged.

The training comprised 83.5 core hours of hands-on field training and classroom learning, over the course of 12 weeks. In addition, the training provided eight hours of financial literacy education for participants to provide the necessary foundation for sound farm business management.

For this training round, IRC partnered with the "School for Sustainable Farming" operated by the "San Diego Roots" project at their "Wild Willow" farm and education center (please also see "Changes/Problems" for details). As in past iterations, the production training components covered a full spectrum of topics ranging from starting seeds in a greenhouse to post-harvest handling, while the farm business training components provided instruction in basic farm business planning, record keeping, marketing and sales, access to land and food safety.

Continuing participants received ongoing assistance in all of these areas. As was the case during the previous reporting period, IRC again collaborated with partner agencies to offer workshops in innovative niche-market microenterprise strategies, including high-yield container crops suitable for urban growing, such as dragonfruit (by the University of California Cooperative Extension Small Farm Program).

During this reporting period, IRC assisted one graduate of the first year's Beginning Farmer practicum to obtain an independent lease. IRC provided help with site inspection and landlord negotiation, and partnered with California FarmLink in developing appropriate lease terms for the farmer. The participant proudly moved off the IRC's incubator farm and onto his "own" land, where he started crop production in March, 2014.

As a direct result of participation in the program, refugee farmers reported significant increases in knowledge. Evaluation for the new Beginning Farming cohort is based on pre- and post-tests measuring 15 agriculture-specific knowledge areas spanning the spectrum from horticulture to marketing, on a scale from one (lowest) to four (highest). The pre-test was administered at the beginning of the practicum, and the post-test was administered during the final classroom session at the end. Of the 26 participants in the new cohort, 23 participants completed the entire practicum, and project staff obtained the post-test scores for 20 (87%). Of those, the average score on the pre-test was 1.77. On the post-tests, the average score had risen to 2.96, an overall increase of more than one full point, with nine participants (45%) scoring above three.

Further assessments based on the IRC's proprietary "New Roots Participant Survey," conducted at the end of the Beginning Farmer practicum, revealed that:

- 95% of newly-enrolled participants in the Beginning Farmer practicum noticed improvements to their physical health as a result of participation in this program (29% strong yes, 67% yes),
- 100% had better access to (or awareness of) healthy, culturally-desirable foods as a result of participation in this program (52% strong yes, 48% yes),
- 90% felt generally more positive about their lives as a result of participation in this program (62% strong yes, 29% yes),
- 95% felt more connected to their neighbors and their community as a result of participation in this program (33% strong

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yes, 62% yes),

- 90% saw this program as having a positive impact on their family (43% strong yes, 47% yes),
- 81% saw this program as having a positive impact on their neighborhood/ community (24% strong yes, 57% yes),
- 81% were saving money on groceries – and eating healthier – as a result of participation in this program (43% strong

yes, 38% yes), and

- 81% believed that farming is a good business for them to pursue (52% strong yes, 29% yes).

Participants also demonstrated significant changes in their actions. Of the previous year's cohort, those who continued on the IRC's 20-acre training farm used drip irrigation, seeders for direct seeding, and the green house for seed propagation. These are all techniques that the participating farmers had not previously used in their home countries and which they learned during the Beginning Farmer practicum. Similarly, during this reporting period, all participants started using planting and farm activity planning calendar tools, and writing sales invoices for all produce sales made. Independent crop availability projections have also increased in quantity and quality across all participants.

Introduce refugee farmers to innovative marketing channels: During this reporting period, the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program first piloted and then established during previous reporting periods grew its membership to up to 70. Additionally, IRC staff acquired new boutique restaurant accounts and facilitated direct meetings between chefs/restaurant owners and participating farmers. Further, the IRC's efforts to cultivate productive relationships with produce retailers culminated during this reporting period in the successful application to Whole Foods Market as a new vendor, facilitating refugee farmers' produce sales to one of that national chain's natural food stores in San Diego. Sales commenced on May 17, 2014. This also provided REAP participants with opportunities to meet with Whole Foods produce "foragers," produce buyers, and produce department "team members" as well as customers of that chain. As a combined result of all marketing efforts, project beneficiaries achieved sales of \$68,724.08 (up from \$45,592.28 during the previous reporting period, a 34% increase year-on-year). Of those, IRC directly facilitated \$54,204.58 through the CSA and direct sales to restaurant and retail customers, with the remainder generated by project beneficiaries at certified farmers' markets operated or co-operated by IRC. In addition, participants leveraged the skills obtained through the Beginning Farmer practicum and ongoing assistance to develop independent sales channels, including at other farmers' markets, to members of their community, ethnic grocery stores/restaurants, and "mainstream" third-party "farm box" aggregators.

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

{Nothing to report}

How have the results been disseminated to communities of interest?

To recruit participants for the new cohort to be trained during this reporting period, IRC staff conducted three community outreach sessions (attended by 55 new prospective participants) and three tours to the farm sites of the REAP project (attended by 34 new prospective participants). Information about the community outreach sessions was provided via fliers (translated into four languages), direct communication, and at the IRC offices. Moreover, IRC staff reached out to several service providers in San Diego County who regularly interface with refugee and other socioeconomically disadvantaged clients and also disseminated project-related information via the listserv of the San Diego Refugee Forum. Additionally, fliers and posters were displayed prominently at gathering places for refugees, such as places of ESL instruction, places of worship, and ethnic cafes, restaurants and grocery stores. Further, IRC engaged in an innovative social media campaign, utilizing recorded video messages on Facebook targeting the Arabic-speaking community, which has comprised the vast majority of newly arriving refugees in San Diego over the past five years.

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

{Nothing to report}

Participants

{Nothing to report}

Target Audience

During its third year, REAP continued to serve limited-resource, socioeconomically-disadvantaged refugee and immigrant farmers and ranchers. Refugees are forced to flee their homes abroad due to war and persecution and survive against the greatest odds. Often after perilous journeys to temporary safety followed by long years in the uncertainty of refugee camps, they are resettled in the U.S. with little more than the clothes on their backs. As soon as they arrive, the clock is ticking for them to become economically self-sufficient within the eight months of federal assistance available to them. For most

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refugees, the majority of whom arrive with little or no formal education or knowledge of English, this is a formidable challenge.

During this reporting period, the project served 46 individuals. Of those, 20 had been enrolled during the previous reporting period and continued their participation in the project, and 26 participants were newly enrolled. Two of the participants who had received ancillary support in previous reporting periods were enrolled into the core training program for the first time during this reporting period, for a total of 28 participants trained. At the time of their enrollment, of these 28 participants:

- Twenty-two (79%) were unemployed, three (11%) had part-time employment, and three (11%) had full-time employment
- Seventeen (61%) had monthly earned income of less than \$500, five (18%) had between \$501 and \$1,000, three (11%) between \$1,001 and \$1,500, two (7%) between \$1,501 and \$2,000, and one (4%) greater than \$2,500.
- Fourteen (50%) received Temporary Assistance to Needy Families and fifteen (54%) were enrolled in the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
- Eleven (39%) had arrived in the U.S. less than two years ago, eight (29%) between two and five years ago, and seven (25%) more than five years ago, and two (7%) preferred not to provide this information.
- Six (21%) were women

The countries of origin of project beneficiaries are as follows (first number indicates newly enrolled participants during this reporting period, second number is cumulative for all 46 individuals served during this reporting period):

Afghanistan: 0/1

Bhutan: 0/1

Burma: 0/1

Cambodia: 0/1

Democratic Republic of Congo: 0/1

Iraq: 21/22

Liberia: 0/1

Mexico: 0/1

Somalia: 0/8

Sudan: 1/1

Uganda: 0/1

Uzbekistan: 0/2

Zimbabwe: 4/5

Products

{Nothing to report}

Other Products**Product Type**

Educational Aids or Curricula

Description

- IRC developed a new "Introduction to farming in San Diego" presentation to assist in the orientation of aspiring refugee farmers, particularly those with vast experience in their home countries, to the differences and realities of farming in San Diego;

Product Type

Other

Description

- IRC's REAP project, with a focus on the "Bahati Mamas" participant group and the CSA, was featured on the local San Diego NPR affiliate during its Midday Edition radio show and its evening edition television show. Links to both are found here: <http://www.kpbs.org/news/2014/may/07/local-farmers-help-san-diegans-connect-their-roots/>;

- IRC's REAP project, community garden projects and farmers' markets/double value coupon projects were featured on a Cox San Diego Connection television show on food access. A link to the full length video is here: http://www.4sd.com/cox-san-diego-connection_2.html;

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Product Type

Data and Research Material

Description

- Achenbach, R. 2014. Creating flourishing farmers' markets, Workshop co-facilitation at the Institute for Social and Economic Development 2014 Refugee and Immigrant Small Farmer & Market Gardener Conference

Product Type

Other

Description

Event: - IRC staff conducted one round of the Beginning Farmer Training Practicum and provided ongoing trainings to graduates from last years' practicums (see "Accomplishments" section for details).

Product Type

Other

Description

Services: - IRC staff provided a range of technical assistance services to strengthen the technical expertise and develop the business acumen of the participating beginning farmers, including direct marketing and sales support (see "Accomplishments" section for details).

Changes/Problems

{Nothing to report}