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Program Name: Beginning Farmer and Rancher

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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 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 the three year project period, IRC broke ground on, developed and operated a 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 refugee community gardeners (in addition to 24 other community members). Since March 2013, IRC also operated a weekly certified farmers' market 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 the final year of the project. Increase the farming capacity and business skills of refugee farmers: The IRC

- served a total of 74 beginning farmers with training and technical assistance
- successfully completed three rounds of its Beginning Farming practicum for a total of 63 beginning farmers (the training was completed by 53 participants, for a completion rate of 84%),
- continued to serve 16 graduates from trainings in the previous reporting period with ongoing training and technical assistance at its farm incubator sites,
- developed two new urban farm training sites, one in the City Heights neighborhood of the City of San Diego, the other adjacent to the community garden in El Cajon; and

All of the participating farmers were significantly socioeconomically disadvantaged (see "Target Audiences" section for detailed demographics).

The Beginning Farmer practicum combined hands-on field training with classroom learning, over the course of 12 to 15 weeks. 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.

Participants in the Intermediate Farming practicum received ongoing assistance in all of these areas. Throughout the three-year project period, IRC 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), pastured poultry (by the Sustainable Agriculture Information Service/National Center for Appropriate Technology) and beekeeping (by a local beekeeper).

During the three-year project 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 each new Beginning Farming cohort was 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. Over the course of the three-year project period, only 23.6% of incoming new beginning farmers scored higher than 2 on the pre-test; following completion of the REAP Beginning Farmer practicum, that number had risen to 78.8%.

This improvement in knowledge was aptly demonstrated by participants throughout the project period by changes in their actions. Participant farmers used drip irrigation, seeders for direct seeding, and the green house for seed propagation for the first time, as evidenced by weekly "field assessments" conducted by project staff. 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, all participants started using planting and farm activity planning calendar tools, and writing sales invoices for all produce sales made. Independent crop availability projections also significantly increased in quantity and quality across all participants throughout the project period.

Further assessments introduced in the second year of the three-year project cycle using the IRC's proprietary "New Roots Participant Survey," also conducted at the end of the Beginning Farmer practicum, revealed that of all participants who completed the Beginning Farmer Practicum in years two and three:

- 98% noticed improvements to their physical health as a result of participation in this program (27% strong yes, 71% yes),

- 100% had better access to (or awareness of) healthy, culturally-desirable foods as a result of participation in this program (32% strong yes, 68% yes),
- 95% felt generally more positive about their lives as a result of participation in this program (43% strong yes, 52% yes),
- 98% felt more connected to their neighbors and their community as a result of participation in this program (23% strong yes, 75% yes),
- 95% saw this program as having a positive impact on their family (30% strong yes, 65% yes),
- 90.5% saw this program as having a positive impact on their neighborhood/ community (35% strong yes, 55.5% yes),
- 90.5% were saving money on groceries – and eating healthier – as a result of participation in this program (44% strong yes, 46.5% yes), and
- 67% believed that farming is a good business for them to pursue (38.5% strong yes, 28.5% yes).

Introduce refugee farmers to innovative marketing channels: During the three-year project period, the IRC established a pilot Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program that quickly grew its membership from twenty in year one of the project to up to 70 in its final year. Additionally, IRC acquired several boutique restaurant accounts and facilitated direct meetings between chefs/restaurant owners and participating farmers. Further, the IRC cultivated productive relationships with produce retailers, with Whole Foods Market beginning to purchase beginning refugee farmers' produce in May of 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 \$122,923.36 during the three year project period. In addition, participants leveraged the skills obtained through the Beginning and Intermediate Farmer practicums to develop independent sales channels, including at farmers' markets, to members of their community, ethnic grocery stores/restaurants, and "mainstream" third-party "farm box" aggregators. Since these sales are less well documented, the actual total sales number achieved by participants in REAP is even higher.

To provide additional support to socioeconomically disadvantaged beginning farmers, the IRC also offered work readiness and job search/placement services for project participants. As a result, eleven REAP participants were hired by local farms and food establishments, allowing the participants to use their newly-learned skills in fostering economic self-sufficiency and stability for themselves and their families through wage-based employment, as they strive to rebuild productive lives in their new communities.

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 REAP, IRC staff implemented comprehensive outreach campaigns, including

- a total of nine community outreach sessions (attended by more than 100 refugees interested in farming in the U.S. for the first time) and
 - five tours to the farm sites of the REAP project and neighboring farms (attended by 48 refugees interested in farming in the U.S. for the first time).
 - information disseminated via fliers (translated into four languages), direct communication (through IRC resettlement case managers), at the IRC offices, and via the listserv of the San Diego Refugee Forum, a multi-stakeholder collaborative of all agencies serving refugees in San Diego
 - outreach to several service providers in San Diego County who regularly interface with refugee and other socioeconomically disadvantaged clients
 - display of fliers and posters at gathering places for refugees, such as places of ESL instruction, places of worship, and ethnic cafes, restaurants and grocery stores.
- an innovative social media campaign, utilizing recorded video messages on Facebook targeting the Arabic-speaking community.

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

CHANGES/PROBLEMS CONTINUED:

As a result of the experience outlined above, IRC delineated two core lessons of its experience during the three year Beginning Farmers and Ranchers Development Program period:

1. Urban farming is a more viable approach for refugee farmers in San Diego.
 - Since refugees live almost exclusively in San Diego's urban core, the time and effort it takes to travel to rural farmland is prohibitive. In fact, transportation accounted for up to 80% of beginning farmers' expenses in REAP (not including the

opportunity cost of productive time lost). Unfortunately, relocation to rural areas is not an option for refugees, who have been traumatized already by being uprooted and who now rely on social support networks and employment opportunities that are culturally and linguistically accessible, but unavailable in San Diego's rural hinterland.

1. Beginning refugee farmers require a nimble approach to training.

- Refugees need to cope with many, and often competing priorities. These include at least part-time employment to stabilize often precarious economic situations, learning English, and navigating a complex set of new rules and regulations in their everyday lives (including an educational system for their children). Competing scheduling demands pose too great a challenge to successful participation in long-term, intensive training programs. Moreover, time comes at a premium for individuals who have lost everything and are eager to rebuild their lives.

Consequently, and with a view to continuing and renewed assistance to beginning refugee farmers and ranchers in San Diego, IRC has adjusted its strategy around the following two core pillars:

1. Focus on urban farming

- Focusing on farming in or close to the urban core, greatly enhancing the production possibilities for beginning refugee farmers.

1. Meeting beginning farmers where they're at

- Meeting farmers where they are at, both literally in terms of production site as well as figuratively in terms of their skill level, without lengthy upfront mandatory trainings. This would allow aspiring and beginning farmers to engage with the project when they are ready (without having to wait for a new "cohort" to start), at a production location that suits their needs (see Land Bank below), with a flexible scheduling options to fit their lives, and with an "a la carte" approach to respond specifically to their individual training and technical assistance needs.

This revised, evidence-based strategy would be implemented through:

1. Land Bank

Through a Land Bank, new urban production sites would be identified and made available to beginning farmers

1. Training schedule

Trainings would be offered on an ongoing basis with flexible weekday/weekend, daytime/evening hours to accommodate various (and often changing) scheduling needs

1. Technical assistance

A pool of agricultural experts would be able to provide targeted and individualized technical assistance to participants in all aspects of farming

Interestingly, in discussions with beginning and established farmers in San Diego, as well as other service providers working with beginning farmers, it has become clear that the nimble approach to training with a heavy urban focus is also what is needed by beginning farmers who are not refugees. IRC is therefore excited about exploring future opportunities to implement the new strategic direction for the benefit of beginning farmers in San Diego, and hopes to leverage its own expertise with the many collaborative connections made throughout the three year REAP period to benefit refugee farmers and other beginning farmers alike.

Participants

{Nothing to report}

Target Audience

Throughout its three-year project period, REAP served 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 refugees, the majority of whom arrive with little or no formal education or knowledge of English, this is a formidable challenge.

During the three years period, the project served 74 individuals from 13 different countries. At the time of their enrollment, of these 74 participants:

- Fifty-five (74%) were unemployed, five (7%) had part-time employment, nine (12%) had full-time employment, and five (7%) reported being self-employed.
- Forty-four (59%) had monthly earned income of less than \$500, ten (14%) had between \$501 and \$1,000, twelve (16%) between \$1,001 and \$1,500, five (7%) between \$1,501 and \$2,000, and two (3%) greater than \$2,500.
- Forty-five (61%) received Temporary Assistance to Needy Families and forty-nine (66%) were enrolled in the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.
- Twenty-seven (36%) had arrived in the U.S. less than two years ago.
- Twenty-six (35%) were women.

Twelve participants (16%) were from Burma, and twenty-seven (36%) from Iraq, with others hailing from Afghanistan, Bhutan, Cambodia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Mexico, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda, Uzbekistan, and Zimbabwe.

Products

{Nothing to report}

Other Products

Product Type

Other

Description

EVENT - IRC staff conducted three rounds of the Beginning Farmer Training Practicums and provided ongoing Intermediate Farmer Training Practicums to graduates from the previous years' Beginning cohorts (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).

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

Software or NetWare

Description

- IRC staff produced a new website as well as a new double-sided, full-color tri-fold brochure to recruit members for the participant farmers' CSA: <http://www.Rescue.org/sdCSA>;

Product Type

Other

Description

MEDIA: - IRC and various aspects of its healthy food and farming programming, including REAP, were featured in the following media stories:

- "Savor San Diego" on KPBS TV (San Diego's regional public television channel):

<http://video.kpbs.org/video/2365007363/>;

- Brown, P.L. 2011. When the Uprooted Put Down Roots, New York Times;

- "Midday Edition" and "Evening Edition" on KPBS radio and KPBS TV, respectively, San Diego's regional national public radio and television affiliates: <http://www.kpbs.org/news/2014/may/07/local-farmers-help-san->

diegans-connect-their-roots/;

- "Cox San Diego Connection" television show on food access: http://www.4sd.com/cox-san-diego-connection_2.html.

Product Type

Educational Aids or Curricula

Description

- IRC staff contributed presentations on lessons learned to other beginning farmers trainers via the following presentations:
- Achenbach, R. 2012. Micro Producers and Income Patching – Collective Marketing at City Heights Market, Workshop presentation at the Institute for Social and Economic Development Refugee Agricultural Partnership Program annual workshop in San Diego, CA;
- Payton, C. 2012. Concurrent session workshop presentation, the Institute for Social and Economic Development Refugee Agricultural Partnership Program annual workshop in San Diego, CA;
- 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

Changes/Problems

Over the course of the three year project period, the implementation of REAP was faced with three primary challenges necessitating innovative modifications. These resulted in a paradigm shift in thinking about how to most effectively offer support to beginning ranchers and farmers from refugee communities in San Diego. These challenges, modifications and revised approaches are outlined in detail in what follows:

First, the composition of the target audience experienced changes that required a slight revision of the original vision for the project: While the project proposal for REAP anticipated primarily engaging the community of refugees from Burma in San Diego, with ongoing assistance to the Somali Bantu community, the actual number of refugees resettled from Burma was in fact much lower than projected. Instead, San Diego saw a significant increase in the number of Iraqi refugees, primarily from the Christian Chaldean minority. While San Diego advanced to the status of "refugee resettlement capital" of the U.S. just before launch of the project, receiving more refugees for resettlement than any other area of same size in the country, up to approx. 90% of those newly arriving came from Iraq, helping create the second largest community of Iraqis outside Iraq in San Diego. A significant portion of Iraqi refugees resettled in San Diego possess an extensive background in agriculture. Consequently, outreach efforts for REAP, particularly in the final year of the project, focused on that community. As a result, 36% of the total number of project beneficiaries during the three year project period were Iraqi, compared to only 16% from Burma. Throughout the project period, REAP continued to serve beginning farmers from the Somali Bantu community, who began doing business collectively as "Bahati Mamas," grossing more than \$25,000 in agricultural sales in the final 12-month period of the project and thus accounting for more than two thirds of all sales achieved by project participants during that year.

Second, project staff found that the level of economic stability of the majority of participants was severely compromised, with project beneficiaries un- or under-employed, living at or below federal poverty guidelines and often with little ability to navigate their new host communities linguistically and logistically. Project staff found that this may result in a situation where the generic risks inherent in farming enterprise could have disproportionately destabilizing effects on the beginning farmers in the absence of additional supports. Consequently, IRC provided a more comprehensive suite of "wrap-around" services to beginning refugee farmers participating in REAP, including ESL instruction, "work readiness," and financial literacy trainings. The resulting expansion of the scope of the project, and time commitment required of participants, presented its own challenges: Aspiring beginning refugee farmers and those already engaged with the project had difficulties juggling their farming endeavor with their family commitments with often multiple children and other income-generating activities. This was particularly so due to the location of the main training farm utilized by IRC in year one of the project, located a 70-minute drive from most project participants' residences, introducing additional challenges in transportation costs and productive time lost in transit. As a result, several participants had to discontinue their farming operation even during the three year project to search income generating opportunities closer to home, and with the intensive assistance of ancillary IRC services offered as part of REAP, 11 secured employment, with seven job placements in the agricultural sector, including one as site manager of an heirloom bean farm, and four in the food service sector.

Third, access to land proved to be a significant challenge for the project and its beneficiaries alike. Just before the beginning of the project, the IRC's project partner and landlord, Tierra Miguel Foundation, dissolved, jeopardizing plans for REAP and the timely launch of the project. While this situation was eventually remedied when IRC obtained a new lease agreement for the same farm site in Pauma Valley directly from the landowners, the Pauma Band of Luiseno Indians, the distance of that remote rural site to most participants' homes in low-income urban neighborhoods proved to be a significant obstacle, even

calling into question the viability of rural farming for beginning refugee farmers in San Diego, with the cost and time taken to reach this and other similar sites being prohibitive to aspiring refugee farmers. To mitigate this challenge, the program responded by focusing attention on urban farming and creating two new urban farm training and incubation sites (one in 2013, one in 2014), serving 25 beginning refugee farmers, 34% of the total number of project beneficiaries. It also adopted a much more nimble approach to training, allowing for flexibility in scheduling for the beginning farmers and for laser-like focusing of services to the specific needs of each participant in the project.

This revised approach of a much more flexible structure and a focus on production in urban areas already proved to be the most viable approach for this target population: Luchia Lokonyen, for example, a single mother of five who participated in the REAP beginning farmer practicum during year one of the project, was unable to continue to the intermediate stage, having to juggle doctors' and school appointments for her children while trying to make a living. She now receives assistance on a 600 square foot plot at the IRC's New Roots Community Farm in the heart of City Heights, San Diego's most densely populated neighborhood and a "hotspot" for refugee resettlement due to the abundance of affordable housing. During the first four months of calendar year 2014 (January – April), Luchia grossed \$1,836 from sales at one local farmers' market and through the New Roots Food Hub. Luchia also found a job as a garden assistant in a local restaurant's kitchen garden with help from the IRC's Center for Financial Opportunity to pursue an income-patching strategy, with farming providing a significant boost to her family's financial wellbeing. This further demonstrates the potential of using "income patching," the combination of wage-based and self-employment income to increase household income, for refugee farmers. This is particularly relevant in light of research by the Aspen Institute, which found that 84% of income patching entrepreneurs raised their household income above the Federal poverty line, compared to only 70% of non-income patching entrepreneurs.