

Title:	Direct Marketing Initiative for Beginning Farmers and Ranchers in South Texas		
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Program Code: BFRDP

Program Name: Beginning Farmer and Rancher

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Non-Technical Summary

This project's target audience includes beginning farmers and ranchers in South Texas; specifically, limited-resource Hispanic producers that are often immigrant and first-generation farm workers. Sixty percent of the project budget will be allocated to serving this specific group. These beginning farmers and ranchers need: Lower-cost production methods and techniques that require minimal acreage; reduced risk of catastrophic loss due to adverse weather conditions; Drip-irrigation technology that reduces water consumption on small acreage; extended season multi-crop production that provides income throughout the year; higher sales prices for their agricultural products. The goal of this Standard BFRDP project includes enhancing the sustainability of beginning farmers and ranchers by helping them to successfully direct market their agricultural produce and products. This goal provides a solution to the five needs expressed above a solution that provides low start-up and production costs on minimal acreage, reduced risk of catastrophic loss due to adverse weather conditions, reduced water consumption, and extended production periods. The objectives of this project include increasing the awareness of direct-marketing options, while enhancing land stewardship, financial viability, and competitiveness, in order to improve the overall viability of beginning farmers and ranchers. The outputs for this project include aggressive and measurable outputs in training and technical assistance. This training and technical-assistance output will result in outcomes that address the needs of beginning farmers and ranchers lower-cost production, reduced risk of crop loss, reduced water consumption, extended crop seasons, and higher sales prices. Within a 10 year planning horizon, this renewal project expects impacts that include: 1) tripling the number of beginning farmers and ranchers in the South Texas region that directly market their produce; 2) doubling the number of established farmers' markets in the region, and; 3) doubling the earnings of beginning farmers and ranchers that directly market their produce. Over 540 beginning farmers and ranchers will be served by this project, which is expected to result in the creation and retention of 136 new farm startups.

Accomplishments

Major goals of the project

The goal of this Standard BFRDP project, the Direct Marketing Initiative for Beginning Farmers and Ranchers in South Texas, is to enhance the sustainability of beginning farmers and ranchers in a 34 county region of South Texas, specifically targeting limited-resource Hispanic producers that are often immigrant and first-generation farm workers by helping them to successfully direct market their agricultural produce and products. Sixty percent of the project budget will be allocated to serving this targeted group. This Standard BFRDP Project is a strong, collaborative effort that includes a sub-awardee and leading community-based organization, the Texas/Mexico Border Coalition CBO; Texas AgriLife Extension Service, and the

National Immigrant Farming Initiative. Supporting objectives include: Increase the awareness of direct-marketing options and agricultural programs available to beginning farmers and ranchers through coordinated outreach efforts. Enhance the land stewardship by beginning farmers and ranchers through production and management strategies. Enhance the financial viability of beginning farmers and ranchers through business management and decision support strategies. Enhance the competitiveness of beginning farmers and ranchers through direct marketing strategies. Improve the viability of beginning farmers and ranchers through legal strategies that provide land and farm acquisition and transfer. Expected outputs include: Initiate a nine-month apprenticeship program for Hispanic limited-resource participants to teach them land stewardship and how to grow and market their produce. Provide technical assistance to individual beginning farmers to assist them with planting, cultivation, drip irrigation, and other farming practices. Provide start-up and on-going technical assistance to program participants at their farm and garden premises through a full-time circuit rider. Provide hands-on training and experience through assistantship opportunities to college students and other beginning farmers and ranchers. Maintain at least two demonstration projects that clearly show land stewardship practices including planting, drip irrigation, cover cropping, crop rotation, and other practices. Provide start-up assistance and supplies to program participants that successfully complete the project's nine-month apprenticeship program. Implement a mentorship program by having graduates of the nine-month apprenticeship program assist new cohorts of beginning farmers and ranchers. Provide beginning farmers and ranchers with entrepreneurship training by partnering with the UTPA Small Business Development Center (SBDC). Provide beginning farmers and ranchers with business-management and financial-management training by partnering with the SBDC and UTPA's OASDFR projects. Provide beginning farmers and ranchers with risk-management training by partnering closely with TMBC and its RMA-funded project. Provide outreach promoting acquisition and transfer strategies to beginning farmers and ranchers by partnering with Texas/Mexico Border Coalition CBO (TMBC).

What was accomplished under these goals?

This Project reached out to 1,347 participants through trainings, workshops and classroom presentations during its three years of operation. During the first year, Project included 23 participants in an extensive 9-month training program and 67 in less extensive training sessions. Of the participants in the extensive training program, 22 successfully completed the program and 13 substantially adopted methods and techniques from the program. Also during the first year, of the 90 participants that completed any part of the training program: 100% (98/98) plan to start farming or expand their operations; 73% (66/90) are farming; 73% (66/90) plan to continue farming. A change of knowledge occurred with project participants: 84% (76/90) experience a positive change in knowledge, and 78% (70/90) experienced a change in attitudes. A change in skills occurred in 73% (66/90) of participants; 78% (70/90) experienced a change in their approach to growing vegetables and fruits; and 73% (66/90) plan to continue participating in the trainings. During the first year of project operation, as a result of the training: 25% (22/90) changed business practices and started selling their produce through direct-marketing techniques and methods; 73% (66/90) changed farming/land management practices; 25% (22/90) changed marketing practices; 5% (40/90) developed a farm business plan; 14% (13/90) increased productivity; 25% (22/90) increased profitability; 73% (66/90) increased knowledge and practices in environmental sustainability; 73% (66/90) increased their social wellbeing. During the second year of operation, the project had 33 participants in an extensive 9-month training program and 65 in less-extensive training sessions. Of these participants, 23 Individuals successfully completed the extensive training program and 12 substantially adopted methods and techniques from the program. Of the 98 participants that completed any part of the training program: 100% (98/98) plan to start farming or expand their operations; 68% (67/98) are farming; 68% (67/98) plan to continue farming. A change of knowledge occurred with project participants: 87% (85/98) experienced a positive change in knowledge, and 74% (73/98) experienced a change in attitudes. A change in skills occurred in 72% (71/98) of participants; 74% (73/98) experienced a change in their approach to growing vegetables and fruits; and 77% (75/98) plan to continue participating in the trainings. During this second year of project operation, as a result of the training: 19% (19/98) changed business practices and started selling their produce through direct-marketing techniques and methods; 85% (83/98) changed farming/land management practices; 19% (19/98) changed marketing practices; 9% (9/98) developed a farm business plan; 45% (44/98) increased productivity; 19% (19/98) increased profitability; 85% (83/98) increased knowledge and practices in environmental sustainability; 80% (78/98) increased their social wellbeing. During the final year of this project, the number of individuals participating in an extensive training was 39, and 50 in a less-extensive training program; 27 participants graduated from the extensive-training sessions and 15 participants incorporated methods and techniques they learned from the program. From the 89 participants that completed any part of the training: 96% (85/89) plan to start farming or expand their operations; 81% (72/89) are farming; 81% (72/89) plan to continue farming. A change of knowledge occurred with project participants: 96% (85/89) experience a positive change in knowledge, and 69% (61/89) experienced a change in attitudes. A change in skills occurred in 65% (56/89) of participants; 67% (60/89) experienced a change in their approach to growing vegetables and fruits; and 78% (69/89) plan to continue participating in the trainings. During the last year of project operation, as a result of the trainings: 18% (16/89) started selling their produce through direct-marketing techniques and methods; 76% (68/89) changed farming/land management practices; 18% (16/89) changed marketing practices; 9% (8/89) developed a farm business plan; 61% (54/89) increased productivity; 18% (16/89) increased profitability; 90% (80/89) increased knowledge and practices in environmental sustainability; 79% (70/89) increased their social wellbeing. Some of the positive changes among project participants are: 1) Beginning farmers increased and gained knowledge on organic farming practices; 2) Beginning farmers and their families benefited from having access to fresh vegetables and increased their consumption while reducing

their food expenses; 3) A collaborative group of beginning farmers increased their production capacity by having access to more farm land; 4) Beginning Farmers learned new marketing strategies that resulted in better sales of their products. Throughout the life of the project, the Direct Marketing Initiative for Beginning Farmers and Ranchers in South Texas continued collaborating with the HOPE for Small Farm Sustainability Incubator Project, where 21 low-income participants expanded their knowledge in sustainable production and benefited from having access to fresh and chemical-free produce; 14% (3/21) of the participants in this project started marketing their produce at their local farmers market and were able to improve their financial situation. Activities included ag-production related tours, teaching, mentoring, facilitating, assessment and surveys. A total of 162 events were conducted during the lifespan of this project including trainings, workshops, field days, classroom presentations, and tours. Covered topics included: Introduction to Organic Farming, Compost and Compost tea, Soil Quality and Fertility Improvement, Fall Planting Schedule, Spring Planting Schedule, Vermicomposting, Organic Pest Control, Vegetable Families, Benefits of Cover Crops, Organic Pest control, Cooking your Vegetables, Plant Propagation, Marketing Strategies, Organic Pest control, Vegetable Families, How to Take a Soil Sample, Tomato Diseases, Plant Diseases, Weed Control, Opportunities in Sustainable Agriculture, and Harvest and Post-Harvest Management. On the second year of this project, the BFRDP project was introduced in detail to potential low-income and Hispanic Beginning Farmers and Ranchers in two events and in 2 occasions the training events were promoted on a local T.V. station, which resulted in an increased number of participants at the events. During the three-year period of this project, 490 one-on-one technical-assistance visits were provided by the project staff to individual beginning farmers and ranchers providing counsel, hands-on trainings on efficient organic production practices, soil improvement, drip-irrigation installation, and marketing techniques that apply to local farmers markets or CSA's. A great accomplishment occurred during the last part of the project. With the collaboration of the Subtropical Organic Agriculture Research Project at the University of Texas-Pan-American, a major local hospital, and local farmers; the first Farm-to Work program in the region was implemented. This Farm-to-Work Program resulted in a great need to provide specialized training to beginning and potential farmers to successfully supply the demand of organic fruits and vegetables in the Rio Grande Valley.

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

During the three-year project period, the following opportunities for training and professional development were attended by project staff: 6th National Small Farm Conference "Promoting the Successes of Small Farmers and Ranchers" Memphis, TN, September 18 - 20, 2012, (Amelia Soto-Sanchez,); Workshop on Fall Planting, El Cenizo, TX, November 14-16 (Amelia Soto-Sanchez, Juan Raygoza); Project Directors' Meeting "Regional and National Models for Beginning Farmer & Rancher Education" Rochester, MN, December 5-6, 2012 (Amelia Soto-Sanchez, George H. Bennack); Southern SWAG' Conference, Little Rock, AR, January 23-27, 2013 (George H. Bennack); Canning Course in Chaparral, NM, Feb 20-24, 2013 (Amelia Soto-Sanchez); Vegetable/Strawberry Production and New Small Farm Loan Programs, Weslaco, TX, Feb 21, 2013 (Cruz Salinas); Grafting Workshop, Bayview, TX, February 23, 2013, (Cruz Salinas); Presentation/Hands on Demonstration on Planting Spring Vegetable, Laredo, El Cenizo, TX, March 7, 2013 (Amelia Soto-Sanchez); Texas Agricultural Cooperative Council (TACC) March 10-12, 2013 San Antonio, TX, (George H. Bennack); Building Stronger Rural communities/MAFO Conference, San Antonio, TX, March 17-20, 2013 (Amelia Soto-Sanchez); Orchard Crops and Small Farm Loans Workshop, Weslaco, TX, March 20, 2013 (Cruz Salinas). BFRDP 4th Annual Directors Meeting "Cruzando Fronteras", McAllen, TX, November 13-16, 2013. (George Bennack, Cruz Salinas, Juan Raygoza) ; Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group Conference, Mobile, AL, January 15-18, 2014 (George Bennack, Cruz Salinas, Juan Raygoza); UTPA staff training "Public Speaking with Confidence", June 24, 2014 (Juan Raygoza); NRCS Soil Health Seminar, Raymondville, Texas, December 4, 2013 (George Bennack, Cruz Salinas); TACC Cooperative Conference, San Antonio, TX, March 9-12, 2014 (George Bennack); 6) Aquaponics Training Overview, Weslaco, TX, May 27, 2014 (George Bennack); 7) Permaculture Overview, Rio Grande Valley, TX, July 7, 2014 (George Bennack, Juan Raygoza); National Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program, Project Directors Meeting, Baltimore, MD, September 23-25, 2014 (George Bennack, Juan Raygoza); Sustainable Agriculture Working Group Conference, Mobile, AL, January 14-17, 2015 (Cruz Salinas); Small Farm Production, Marketing and Food Safety Workshop, Weslaco, TX, May 7, 2015.

How have the results been disseminated to communities of interest?

Since this is not a NIFA-funded research, results are not being disseminated to communities of interest. However, materials produced to promote the program or recruit beginning farmers for training events are distributed in targeted local places. Another source for dissemination and promotion of educational events is the facebook page: www.facebook.com/begfarmers.

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 with Staffing Roles			Computed Total by Role
		Undergraduate	Graduate	Post-Doctorate	
Scientist	0	0	0	0	0
Professional	2	0	0	0	2
Technical	1	0	0	0	1
Administrative	0.3	0	0	0	0.3
Other	0	0	0	0	0
Computed Total	3.3	0	0	0	3.3

Student Count by Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) Code

{NO DATA ENTERED}

Target Audience

Target Audiences that were served by the project include: 1) Beginning farmers and Ranchers that are limited-resource Hispanic producers and often immigrant and first-generation farm workers, living in food-desert areas or "colonias"; 2) The school-age children of these low-income Hispanics that are often Immigrant and first generation farm workers; 3) Farm workers and other low-income people seeking to become independent farm business owners, as well as farm owners/operators with less than 10 years of experience; 4) Youth at local schools; 5) Beginning farmers and ranchers that are Hispanic.

Educational methodologies included: 1) The provision of an intensive 12 month-training program, in English and Spanish, to socially disadvantaged and limited-resource beginning farmers and ranchers at more distant locations that were more challenging to support; 3) The provision of training to beginning farmers in a farm incubator with training events on a variety of subjects; 4) The development and use of demonstration sites using different farming techniques; 5) The provision of technical assistance to ensure the succesful adoption of tecniques reviewed during training events; 6) Hands-on training events in rural areas in collaboartion with non-profit organizations.

Products

{Nothing to report}

Other Products

Product Type

Audio or Video

Description

An informational video discussing Huitlacoche's history, use, markets as well as the possibility of commercially producing it in South Texas to increase the revenues of beginning farmers.

Product Type

Audio or Video

Description

An informational video including; a brief history, potential markets, and growing requirements for olive production in Texas. A discussion on the benefits and risks for Beginning Farmers growing olives in South Texas is included.

Product Type

Audio or Video

Description

An instructional video showing how to perform bud grafting on grape vines, specifically grafting the grape cultivars LeNoir (Black Spanish) and Blanc du Bois to the native-grape root stock Dog Ridge and Mustang; which are proving to be the best graft combination for wine grapes in the South Texas region.

Changes/Problems

{Nothing to report}