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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 Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association (ALBA) submits a Renewal application for a Standard Project to serve socially disadvantaged aspiring and beginning farmers in the farm worker communities in the Central Coast region of California. The target audiences reached by ALBA are limited-resource, immigrant farm workers, with field skills and entrepreneurial drives that can be leveraged with business education and farm opportunities, with 100% of the budget will be allocated to address this population. Programs now operating as ALBA for the past ten years have operated for 40 years, serving hundreds of beginning socially disadvantaged farmers starting in 1971. Today ALBA continues that focus in the context of very-high-value specialty crop fruit and vegetable production. The goals of the project are to increase the number of beginning farmers in the region; expand opportunities for accessing land, capital and markets; and increase the viability of beginning farmer education programs at ALBA and elsewhere by demonstrating results. The objectives of the project include core functions of ALBA's work: Beginning Farmer Education for at least 75 aspiring farmers; Farm Business Incubation and Development for at least 50 beginning farmers; and Monitoring and Evaluating Farmer and Program Success with advanced information technology tools to maintain records on farmer education and program outcomes. The continued support for ALBA's model of farm business incubation is vital for continuing to demonstrate key project outcomes such as at least twelve (12) farmers establishing independent businesses, beginning farmer sales of at least \$2 million annually and others.

Accomplishments

Major goals of the project

GOALS include: 1. The number of regional beginning farmers and their rates of success will increase with consistent recruitment, business education and start-up opportunities for low-income families, particularly aspiring farmers in farm worker communities, 2. Opportunities for long-term access to land, capital and viable markets increase for beginning socially disadvantaged farmers who, with bilingual (Spanish-English) training and technical assistance, sustain and grow independent farm businesses. 3. The viability of ALBA and others' beginning farmer education programs increases with advances in management systems and program evaluation strategies that demonstrate tangible economic outcomes that validate strong returns on investment in education. OBJECTIVES include: 1. Beginning Farmer Education will generate opportunities for at least 100 aspiring and beginning farmers to gain skills in production, business, management and marketing. 2. Farm Business Incubation and Development will sustain access to land, irrigation and equipment in a highly structured farm incubator system that grows 60 successful beginning farmer businesses. 3. Monitor and Evaluate Farmer and Program Success in order to demonstrate outcomes, measure success, inform beginning farmers' multi-year business development and provide practical solutions for growing the quality of beginning farmer education.

What was accomplished under these goals?

Objective 1. Outcomes Summary

- PEPA graduates = 68
- Sales from Apprenticeship/Student Enterprise = \$53,000
- Beginner Farmer Workshops = 38
- Workshops participants = 250 (est. 100 unique participants)

Objective 2. Outcomes Summary

- Incubator tenants = 152 (74 unique count)
- Continuing farmers = 50 (of 74) still farming at project end date (does not inc. 2015 first-year farmers)
- 1st-year farmers (in incubator) = 41
- Farmers transitioning off incubator and continuing to farm = 13
- Loans/financing obtained by farmers = 44
- ALBA Organic sales (gross) of farmers' products = \$12,000,000+ (project duration)
- ALBA Organics # of farmer vendors = 41 (incubator + incubator grad) + 20 (non-incubator) per year (avg.)
- ALBA incubator farmers participating in farmers markets = 11 per year (avg.)

Objective 3.

The result of ongoing internal evaluations of our programs, several important changes were made to PEPA and the organic farm incubator during the reporting period:

1. We adjusted the Farmer Education Curriculum to be more accommodating to participants annual work schedule and different levels of capacity. The next class will start two months earlier on November 4, taking advantage of the relatively slow winter months, when our target participants - farm workers - are less busy working in the fields. By the time April 2016 arrives, participants will already have finished 3 modules. ALBA will break PEPA into two tracks after the 3rd module enabling those with more experience to get on the ground even earlier.
2. We revised our Farmer Policies two times, including the addition of an annual milestones chart which outlines program requirements for participants and will drive the training program in the future. Our farmer policies are a key document in our incubator toolkit which is frequently shared with organizations nationwide.
3. Two new modules were added to PEPA in 2013 (record-keeping and applied organic farming). In addition, all PEPA modules were revised through Hartnell's Curriculum Committee as part of the course's accreditation process.

The Annual Milestones will provide farmers with production and profitability benchmarks; compliance requirements; goals for engagement with specific USDA programs, and other skills that can aid them in being effective small business managers (e.g., computers and English proficiency). Renewal of the land lease for incubator farmers is contingent on achieving or making measurable progress toward these milestones.

ALBA is working with partners (El Pajaro Community Development Corporation and CA FarmLink) to assist farmers one-on-one with their financial record-keeping and developing financial projections. Another partner, Kitchen Table Advisors, is beginning to work with a select number of our 'advanced beginners' who are on the verge of graduating/have graduated out of our incubator. These farmers need more advanced business analysis as they make important decisions about scaling up their business, and achieving their profitability goals. We have learned that we cannot provide all services for all of our farmers and part of our strategy moving forward is to develop these strategic partnerships to help our farmers achieve these important skills for business success. In late 2015, ALBA began working with the California Center for Cooperative Development on a project to evaluate farmer education programs, develop best practices, and indicators for program and participant success.

In 2015 ALBA thoroughly reviewed all available USDA opportunities for farmers. We sent a bulletin to all of the farmers on our mailing list about Organic Certification Cost-share, NRCS EQIP, FSA Microloans, and the Value-Added Producers Grant opportunity. We routinely brought USDA representatives into our Farmer Education Course and monthly farmers meetings to share their resources.

ALBA participated in a multitude of emerging projects that aim to support the needs of beginning small farmer. Examples from

2014-15 include:

- Leading a SARE project that helps other incubator projects in Western States collaborate and share best practices
- Piloting a Group GAP food safety certification along with 6 other organizations nationwide
- Providing nutrient management education on high-value organic vegetable crops in the Salinas Valley
- Leading a project that helps farmers streamline organic and food safety certification processes

Approximately, 75% of ALBA farmer participants received an annual interview that included calculating profitability and making a projection for the following year. All of the PEPA graduates completed business plan presentations in which they received live feedback from ALBA staff, agricultural professionals and farmers. Farmers are now required to fill out a business plan template in their third year of the incubator.

Products

- Guide = 5 (e.g., Food Safety Compliance Guide; Cover Crop Quick Reference Guide)
- Report = 2 (adaptive research reports on N management in high-value vegetable crops)
- Brochure = 3 (PEPA brochure)
- Monthly bulletin = 30 est. (monthly bulletin sent to all incubator farmers and staff)
- Bulletin = 1 (mailing distributed to 300+ regional farmers and ag professionals)
- Event invitation = 12 est. (color postcard mailings for formal workshops held at ALBA)
- Newsletter = 4 (annual newsletter sent to 300+ regional farmers and ag professionals)
- Farmer profile = 5 (ALBA participants for flyers, website, and other media)
- Promotional flyer = 1 (2-pg color flyer on ALBA's program, inc. success stories)
- Media = 23 (articles in national and local media)
- Conference = 1 (train-the-trainer conference for farmer educators at ALBA)

Participant Stories

The following is a sample farmer profiles written during the project period:

- Victor Cortes - La Granjita Organic Farm ('A True Family Farm')

Victor hit the ground running upon his arrival from Michoacan 10 years ago. He distinguished himself from many of his peers by taking English courses at Salinas Adult School and Hartnell Community College. "You can speak with your friends in Spanish, but no one else listens. Learning English is a way to empower yourself", says Victor.

After a couple of years working in the fields for \$10-\$11 per hour, he was recognized for his reliability and language skills and promoted to ranch manager. Though the job paid significantly more - \$16 per hour - he felt it was taking too much time away from his home life. With three children at home, family time was too precious. This drove Victor to ALBA in 2013.

His vision is to start his own farm, be his own boss and set his own schedule. Both he and his wife have quit their jobs and devoted themselves entirely to their new family farm business. They are off to great start, farming 2.5 acres of strawberries, jalapenos and cucumbers. In fact his peppers will be going to the Chipotle restaurant chain come summer.

They will gradually add acreage as the years pass but don't plan to grow beyond 10 acres so that the business doesn't distance him from home life. Staying small, he can handle most of the work with his wife and eventually introduce his children into the business to keep the earnings in the family. Though there is a lot of hard work ahead, the strategy will give him much more time with his young family, which is all part of the plan.

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

Objective 1.

The Farmer Education Course (PEPA) was offered annually during the project. The beginning of the project in September 2012 saw participants through the last applied farming module ('apprenticeship'), and the last year of the project saw participants through the first three modules in which 25 students were projected to graduate. On average, ALBA received 50 PEPA applications, interviewed the majority of applicants, and offered admission to 30-35 students. Each year the course was offered over 10-months with 350-hours of contact time and an average of 72 class meetings (a combination of lectures, field days, field trips, and hands-on experience in the practice field). The 2013-2015 module topics included Organic Vegetable Production, Organic Produce Marketing, Small Farm Business Management, Record-keeping and Applied Organic Farming. In 2012, the latter was called the 'beginning farmer apprenticeship' and students had to apply to carry on in that experience.

Based on the success and positive feedback of the hands-on nature of the 2012 'beginning farmer apprenticeship experience', in 2013 the apprenticeship further evolved into a 'student enterprise' that happens concurrently with the whole course. The idea was to weave the field experience directly into the course structure and content, and provide more management opportunities for the students. Thus, the students now collectively farm a 1-acre practice plot following a pre-determined crop plan. Students contribute to the management of the field, including planting, weeding, fertilizing, irrigating, pest control, record-keeping for organic certification and food safety. They are encouraged to explore alternative markets for the crops that are grown. Sales and production costs are consistently shared with the students. The enterprise becomes a very good reference point for participants own farm planning, and provides a healthy dose of reality for those wishing to enter ALBA's incubator. After covering the production costs, the profits were shared amongst graduating students to offset tuition costs or as a credit towards the Small Farm Incubator. Fully integrated into the course, all PEPA graduates participated in the student enterprise.

During the project, ALBA consistently held workshops on production, compliance and business management for incubator farmers. There was an estimated 100 unique aspiring and beginning farmer participants at the workshops. Below is a sample of the workshops provided from JAN - AUG 2015:

- Meet the Buyers (marketing workshop)
- Basic GAPs (food safety)
- Strawberries (quality control and pack)
- Tractor Safety
- Marketing Roundtable
- Food Safety Record-keeping
- Broccoli (harvest and packing)
- Food safety and Organic Farming Practices
- Organic Nitrogen Management
- Natural Resources and Conservation Practices
- Ag Order Compliance (water quality conservation)

Between guest lecturers in PEPA and ALBA's workshop programming, at least twenty partner organizations were involved in ALBA's trainings each year.

Objective 2.

During the project duration, ALBA hosted 74 farmers in its incubator, including 41 first-time farmers. ALBA also successfully transitioned 13 farmers off its land. These transitioned farmers are engaged in land leases and continue to farm independent of ALBA. Of the farmers that leased land during the project, 50/60 (83%) are still farming (not counting the first-year farmers in 2015, since we don't know whether they will 'continue' to farm).

Incubator farmers receive copious amounts of direct technical assistance. Program staff advise them on both production and business management issues throughout the year. The Farm Incubator manager focuses on cultivation issues such as soil preparation, production planning, planting, pest control and irrigation. He also trains them on equipment use and maintaining safety protocols and well-tended fields. The Enterprise Development Specialist advises farmers on business issues such as obtaining finance, record-keeping, regulatory compliance and financial management. Given that we are in a new era of food safety, she has been particularly occupied with assisting farmers in obtaining independent certifications. The paper work and preparation can be quite extensive for beginning farmers until they are familiarized with the process. Our efforts have yielded considerable results, including 40 farmers achieving food safety certification since 2013. From June 2013 - Dec 2014, there was also extensive technical assistance delivered related to Ag Order (water quality conservation) regulations and requirements. This technical assistance was provided to 25 non-ALBA farmers and 25 ALBA farmers.

ALBA provided significant amounts of formal training and direct technical assistance to help farmers market their crops.

Starting in 2014, ALBA provided regular crop-specific 'harvest and pack' workshops to farmers on key crops. This was in an effort to increase product quality and consistency for the food hub. The education continues at the field level where ALBA staff will assist farmers in making harvest projections, coordinate harvest dates, and pack. At the cooler, product quality is inspected, pallets are built, boxes labelled, and invoices issued. ALBA Organics marketed the crops of the majority of our participants, but also incubator graduates and non-ALBA farmers (many of whom are regional small farms). The average number of ALBA Organics farmer vendors per years was 41 (incubator + graduate) and non-ALBA was 20; however, the unique count would be much higher. The project coincided with the highest record sales of farmers' produce with an estimated \$12,000,000 in sales of famers' produce.

A small handful of farmers strictly pursued direct marketing channels, while many more dabbled in direct marketing throughout the project. ALBA provides training on direct marketing in PEPA and through additional marketing roundtable workshops in the incubator. We also routinely help farmers market managers seeking new vendors connect with appropriate farmers in our incubator.

Farmers undergo an annual evaluation tied to specific milestones before qualifying to renew their leases. In 2015 ALBA formalized the comprehensive milestones in its Farmer Policies. For example, ALBA farmers need to achieve independent organic certification before going into their third year in operation in the incubator and have to complete a profit and loss projection each year. A business plan template is now required of farmers in their 4th year at ALBA in preparation for transitioning off our land. All farmers complete an annual crop plan and as of 2014 sign a marketing agreement (if they choose to market crops through ALBA) prior to signing land leases. ALBA hosted an average 10 monthly farmers meetings/yr during the project.

Farmers obtained 44 loans or other types of financing during the project period. A few farmers were successful in applying for FSA microloans and the rest primarily received financing through our partner, CA FarmLink. ALBA also piloted a new product with CA FarmLink, where farmers could be advanced their sales within one week of turning in product at 1% interest. Some farmers found this very helpful to maintain cash flow in their operations.

How have the results been disseminated to communities of interest?

{Nothing to report}

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	1.6	0	0	0	1.6
Technical	0.3	0	0	0	0.3
Administrative	0.3	0	0	0	0.3
Other	0.1	0	0	0	0.1
Computed Total	2.3	0	0	0	2.3

Student Count by Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) Code

{NO DATA ENTERED}

Target Audience

The target audience for this work consists of farm workers and other low-income people seeking to become independent farm business owner-operators, as well as existing farm operators with less than 10 years of experience. More than one

quarter of the working-age population in Monterey County consists of field laborers or low-wage employees in the fresh produce packing industry. According to data available from the USDA NRCS, 56% of farms in Monterey County are considered limited-resource and 32% of farms are operated by beginning farmers or ranchers with similar figures for San Benito and Santa Cruz counties. Currently, ALBA has 300+ regional farmer and agricultural professional contacts in its database, focused mainly on Latinos, and at least 110 of which started their careers in training programs now operated by ALBA. There are two primary categories of farmers with which ALBA works: 1) Aspiring farmers in ALBA's Farmer Education Course (PEPA), 2) PEPA graduates who become farmer-tenants in the Small Farm Incubator and 2) socially-disadvantaged and limited-resource farmers in the region described above, most of whom speak Spanish as their first language but are not ALBA tenants. The ALBA farmer-tenants have acreages ranging from one-half to nine acres, and typically gross annual sales incomes of \$15,000-25,000 per acre with at least two annual cycles of organic vegetable row crops or berry crops. The participants tend to focus on wholesale production with a smaller amount marketing their crops through retail or consumer-direct channels.

PROGRAM PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS (SEP 2012 - AUG 2015):

I. Farmer Education Course = 93 total, of which:

- a. socially-disadvantaged = 87
- b. immigrants = 56
- c. farm workers = 50
- d. females = 27

II. Small Farm Incubator = 74 - 27 (already counted above) = 47, of which:

- a. socially-disadvantaged = 44
- b. immigrants = 27
- c. farm workers = 27
- d. females = 9

TOTAL PARTICIPANTS (target audience) = 140, of which:

- a. socially-disadvantaged = 131 (94%)
- b. immigrants = 83 (59%)
- c. farm workers = 84 (60%)
- d. females = 36 (26%)

An additional 15-25 non-ALBA farmers per year (avg.) attend our workshops and seek out ALBA for technical assistance. However, we do not track demographic information for this audience. There was a surge of non-ALBA farmers seeking help when ALBA began providing consulting for water quality conservation regulations in 2013.

Products

{Nothing to report}

Other Products

{Nothing to report}

Changes/Problems

- **Objective 3c.** Improve and sustain a Salesforce-based client relationship management database to track farmers' progress, including those farmers in ALBA's Small Farm Incubator and others.

ALBA was under new leadership as of 2012 with Christopher Brown hired as Executive Director. Overall, his approach was to deemphasize the use of Salesforce, as it was high cost, and its 'dashboard' approach really was more output oriented than useful for outcomes. Most staff agreed that the software was tedious, hard to manipulate and not suitable for many of the tasks for which it had been envisioned. By this final reporting period, Salesforce had fallen completely out of use by

ALBA.

Previous improvements that had been made with the Salesforce tool (such as, in 2013-14 specific grant tracking and monitoring) are now being managed with simple Google sheets. Other types of farmer outcome monitoring (such as, farmer regulatory compliance - liability insurance, organic and food safety record-keeping, etc.) have been much easier to track in basic spreadsheets or Google docs. During the project, ALBA had multiple opportunities to share its Salesforce experience and more current approach to evaluation through webinars and direct technical assistance to peer organizations throughout the country. Thus, the experience gained in the project continues to have relevance.

During the project, ALBA re-focused tracking the most important outcomes of its participants, such as sales; obtaining organic and food safety certification; farmers successfully transitioning off our land; and loans obtained. Moving forward, amongst other measures, we hope to better capture individual farmer profitability.

During the project, ALBA has its first internal alumni survey to gauge program impact. The results are a culmination of a process that started in 2013. The steps involved included:

1. The creation of a comprehensive list of alumni was made piecing together several different sources of information from our Salesforce database, Quickbooks financial records and various program documents.
2. For each participant, we determined whether he/she graduated from PEPA, whether they farmed in the incubator and how much land they farmed in each year in the incubator.
3. After the list was completed, initial calls were made to confirm contact information and ask whether they would be willing to participate in a survey at a later date. We reached nearly 100 people.
4. We then called the alumni to conduct the impact evaluation.

The survey aimed to determine:

- Whether alumni are still working in agriculture,
- What their specific jobs are and whether they are still farming independently.
- The survey asks whether they benefitted financially due to participation in the program and, if so, to estimate by how much (as a percentage increase).
- Finally, we also ask them to describe how else they benefitted from participation.

In all, we surveyed 73 alumni by phone. This represents roughly one-third of all alumni through 2014 (we consider anyone who has graduated PEPA alumni, regardless of whether they entered the incubator). We were able to collect the following results:

- 52 are still working in agriculture in one form or another. (71% of those surveyed and only two still engaged in seasonal field work)
- 28 of the respondents are still farming independently! (38% of those surveyed).
- 64% of respondents answered that involvement in the program helped them financially.
- We found it difficult to quantify the improvements in income. There was either hesitation to discuss this issue in detail or difficulty in measuring it themselves.
- Regardless of whether there was clear economic benefit, responses were overwhelming positive about the experience, including references to healthier lifestyles, fond memories, better understanding of the environment, and a better outlook on their future.

Although the results of the survey apply to participants engaged in ALBA's programming partially outside the BFRDP project years, the work has helped create footing for tracking our outcomes and impacts in the future.