

Final Report

Title:	A Comprehensive Intercultural Training for Beginning Latino and Hmong Farmers and Ranchers.		
Sponsoring Agency	NIFA	Project Status	COMPLETE
Funding Source	Non Formula	Reporting Frequency	Final
Accession No.	229258	Grants.gov No.	
Project No.	MINW-2012-00695	Award No.	2012-49400-19554
Project Start Date	09/01/2012	Proposal No.	2012-00695
Reporting Period Start Date	09/01/2012	Project End Date	08/31/2015
Submitted By	Yolanda Cotterall	Reporting Period End Date	08/31/2015
		Date Submitted to NIFA	07/26/2016

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Non-Technical Summary

This project represents a unique collaboration of half a dozen community-based organizations working in tandem with state government and spearheaded by two immigrant-led organizations to serve the specific needs of beginning farmers and ranchers in their communities. The target audiences for this training program are Hmong and Latino immigrants. Minnesota has a growing immigrant minority population, and many of these new Minnesotans are poor. Hispanics in Minnesota have a poverty rate that is two and a half times that of white residents, and we also have one of the highest concentrations of Asians in poverty in the country. Many factors contribute to this situation, but immigration status is certainly one of them, along with language and cultural barriers that are still faced by many new immigrants, even after 35 years of residence in this country. While the experience of Hmong and Latino farmers certainly have their differences, a number of commonalities emerge: both experience impediments to entering the financial mainstream due to language and cultural barriers; both are often involved in the food production industry already, but at a subsistence level that makes it difficult to rise above a low income level; while growing, neither immigrant group is of a size where marketing product only to their cultural cohorts makes financial sense - both are in need of more efficient ways to market to mainstream consumer; and finally, in both cases, participants in farming currently operate at such a small and fractured scale, that they would substantially benefit from more coordinated economic efforts. Goal One: to increase the ability of immigrant farmers to make a successful living from farming while respecting traditional methods and cultures. We will address this problem by developing a culturally-specific farmer training curriculum and by offering a variety of classes designed to help existing immigrant farmers increase farm income, sales and yield and help new immigrant farmers to enter the field. Goal Two: is to expand economic opportunity for immigrant farmers through value-added and collaborative production and marketing. Immigrant farmers in Minnesota generally work small plots of land producing vegetables and are unlikely they will convert to large scale, mainstream commodity agriculture. Instead, we will help them augment farm income by offering specific training and support in value-added production and collaborative marketing with the expected outcome of increased income for participating farmers. Goal Three: to enhance the chances for farming to become a long-term, productive, multi-generational pursuit for immigrant farmers. We believe if immigrant farmers could produce a more stable family income, if engaging, value-added business opportunities were part of the mix, and if immigrants had greater access to land ownership, then farming would be more attractive to the next generation of Americans. To meet this goal, we will target our training at young farmers and family groups and work with legal and financial experts to increase opportunities for land ownership by immigrant farmers.

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Accomplishments**Major goals of the project**

Our project has three major goals: The first is to "increase the ability of immigrant farmers to make a successful living from farming while respecting traditional methods and cultures". To do this, over the three year period of our grant we will produce 24 culturally-specific beginning farmer training modules, train over 600 farmers in a series of 10 week, 4 week and 1 day long training seminars on various topics. The expected outcomes will be a 15% increase in farm income and sales for these farmers and a 20% increase in yield. We expect at least 75 new immigrant farmers will begin farming operations and expect that 85% or more of graduates of our training programs will report scores of 4 or 5 on a 5 point scale to indicate their increase in knowledge post training. Our second goal is to: "Expand economic opportunity for immigrant farmers through value-added and collaborative production and marketing." At the end of three years as a result of our activities we expect that over 200 immigrant farmers will have attended training in value-added production and marketing cooperatives, that 50 of these will test value-added product ideas and that the number of immigrant farmers participating in cooperative marketing efforts will increase by 25%. The ultimate outcomes we expect of these activities are that 40 immigrant farmers will successfully be selling value-added products at the end of the grant period and that the farmers in our group will see at least a 15% increase in farm income from these activities. Our third goal is to: "Enhance the chances for farming to become a long-term, productive, multi-generational pursuit for immigrant farmers." To do this, we aim to identify and train at least 50 farmers under the age of 35 with at least 20 of these being part of a parent-child farming team. We will also complete the legal work necessary for launching a land cooperative for immigrant farmers to make ownership of farm land more accessible and identify at least 4 lenders willing to work with immigrant farmers toward land purchase. The outcomes of these activities we expect will be at least a 20% increase in the acreage of land that is owned by immigrant farmers and the development of at least two new loan products that will specifically help immigrant farmers with their financing needs.

What was accomplished under these goals?**First Goal: Trainings influenced by and respecting of cultural values and existing knowledge:**

- 24 - Culturally-Specific beginning Farmer Training modules
- 600 - Farmers participating in the series
- 15% - Increase in farm income
- 20% - Increase in farm yield
- 75 - New farmers
- 85% - Of trainees increased knowledge

Second Goal: Expand economic opportunity

- 200 - Farmers attend value-added production and marketing
- 50 - Will test value-added product ideas
- 25% - Increase farmers participating in co-op marketing
- 40 - Selling value-added products
- 15% - Increase in farm income from these products

Third Goal: Enhance the chances for farming to become a long-term, productive, multi-generational pursuit for Immigrant farmers.

- 50 - Identified and train farmers under 35 years of age
- 20 - Being parent-child farming team
- 4 Identified lenders for land purchase and legal structure for land cooperative
- 20% Increase in owned farm land by immigrants

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

For LEDC and HAFA, initial trainings are an entry point and a recruitment tool to identify committed prospective farmers that have the potential of becoming full time farmers over a sustained period of development that will take several years if they are beginning with minimal farm experience. This approach to farm beginnings does not produce outcomes in large numbers, and it produces outcomes that are measured over 5-10 year time periods. We can and do measure intermediate outcomes that are steps toward our goal and those can be reported on an annual basis.

We have found that our developed model for Latino farmers of a "farm incubator cooperative" is the most innovative aspect of our program. It is linked to training and to the launch of a cooperative business by each classroom group. Field training continues for three years with intensive LEDC staff support to the business as it advances through a series of growth steps. The first year involves raising a mix of up to ten vegetables on a one acre plot. The second year the farm expands to 3 acres, then 5 acres, with production and sales growth each year.

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The co-op farmers working with LEDC have come to be recognized as leaders in their communities. Their hard work and their farm plots are representations of what they can accomplish. We have seen that as Latino farmers gain confidence in their farming skills they begin to extend themselves out into the market place as owners with a quality product. Their success in production of quality products gains them credibility and easier connections for increased civic engagement in their local communities. This experience has replicated itself in rural communities where the farmers are acknowledged as ambassadors like connectors to broader community. HAFA farmers have taken great pride in their involvement with the HAFA farm. The ownership they feel is being passed down to the next generation and there are clear indicators that the farming tradition will continue to be an important aspect of the Hmong community here in the Twin Cities. The HAFA farmers (family groups) have also gained professional development skills as they work collaboratively toward efficient and equitable use of the land and the farm infrastructure. In the face of initial issues around a lack of acceptance of the farm by their community their presence and their professional growth as stewards and business owners has gain them respect in their community. For HAFA farmers and the next generation of farmers are seeing the favorable side of farming when it is run like a business and their is pride of ownership.

How have the results been disseminated to communities of interest?

We have had opportunities to share our work in a variety of ways. We have been invited to participate on panels, presentations at conferences and other gatherings where folks interested in economic development, sustainable farming and economic development for immigrant communities are in attendance. We have not disseminated our work broadly via printed or electronic media tools. We have however compiled a summary report of our agricultural development work. This piece was released and disseminated at a widely invited community event where invitees were individuals, organizations, government who are interested in economic development, farming and sustainable food systems. We have been in contact with Latino organizations in California, Oregon, Washington and Florida state where there is significant interest in our methodology and model for farmer cooperative formation and development of farm businesses as economic development tools for Latinos. As we have seen projects similar to ours we have shared our strategies and lessons learned. The HAFA Farm has become an important model for Hmong farmers in the Twin Cities and the greater Metro area. Their leadership and dissemination of information about what the project has been able to accomplish and the strength of the model has drawn much interest. Their use of printed and electronic media opportunities have created broad knowledge of their work, their products, their community and their mission.

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

{Nothing to report}

Participants

{Nothing to report}

Target Audience

This project represents a unique collaboration of half a dozen community-based organizations working in tandem with state government and spearheaded by two immigrant-led organizations to serve the specific needs of beginning farmers and ranchers in their communities. The target audiences for this training program are Hmong and Latino immigrants. Minnesota has a growing immigrant minority population, and many of these new Minnesotans are poor. Hispanics in Minnesota have a poverty rate that is two and a half times that of white residents, and we also have one of the highest concentrations of Asians in poverty in the country. Many factors contribute to this situation, but immigration status is certainly one of them, along with language and cultural barriers that are still faced by many new immigrants, even after 35 years of residence in this country. While the experience of Hmong and Latino farmers certainly have their differences, a number of commonalities emerge: both experience impediments to entering the financial mainstream due to language and cultural barriers; both are often involved in the food production industry already, but at a subsistence level that makes it difficult to rise above a low income level; while growing, neither immigrant group is of a size where marketing product only to their cultural cohorts makes financial sense - both are in need of more efficient ways to market to mainstream consumer; and finally, in both cases, participants in farming currently operate at such a small and fractured scale, that they would substantially benefit from more coordinated economic efforts.

Goal One: to increase the ability of immigrant farmers to make a successful living from farming while respecting traditional methods and cultures. We will address this problem by developing a culturally-specific farmer training curriculum and by offering a variety of classes designed to help existing immigrant farmers increase farm income, sales and yield and help new immigrant farmers to enter the field.

Goal Two: is to expand economic opportunity for immigrant farmers through value-added and collaborative production and

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marketing. Immigrant farmers in Minnesota generally work small plots of land producing vegetables and are unlikely they will covert to large scale, mainstream commodity agriculture. Instead, we will help them augment farm income by offering specific training and support in value-added production and collaborative marketing with the expected outcome of increased income for participating farmers.

Goal Three: to enhance the chances for farming to become a long-term, productive, multi-generational pursuit for immigrant farmers. We believe if immigrant farmers could produce a more stable family income, if engaging, value-added business opportunities were part of the mix, and if immigrants had greater access to land ownership, then farming would be more attractive to the next generation of Americans.

To meet this goal, we will target our training at young farmers and family groups and work with legal and financial experts to increase opportunities for land ownership by immigrant farmers.

Both of these target audiences lack understanding of the opportunities that exist within the agricultural industry for vegetable farmers and the opportunities through value-added and collaborative production and marketing.

Products

{Nothing to report}

Other Products

Product Type

Audio or Video

Description

We have produced a Beginner Farmer series of videos. The series includes 6 videos which are in Spanish. They cover a variety of topics; Soil Testing, Field Prep, Direct Seeding, Transplanting, Bed Prep, Plastic Mulch & Irrigation Systems and Tractor Safety. The Hmong farmer group have been primary partners in the development of and joint use of the Tractor Safety Video.

We also produced an community information video which spotlights the cooperative farming model we have developed and the Latino farming opportunities; successes and methodology.

Product Type

Educational Aids or Curricula

Description

We have also produced a "Crop Manual" in Spanish which serves as a field guide for farmers and provides instructions for planting, watering, weeding and pest control, feeding and harvest of 13 individual crops. Included in our product list are training materials in Spanish which are materials used in classroom settings. These materials cover Co-op model Introduction and Development, Farm Business Development and Beginner Farmer Training. These materials are all in Spanish and we continue to improve and revise them including evaluations. We anticipate a final printing of our curriculum book before this years farm season.

The Hmong farmer group has also produced training which includes materials for 23 modules and a delivery system to assure participation and learning for their busy group of farmers. The modules cover topics like business development; management and finances, writing; safety plan. Included are farm / vegetable production; from soil health to post harvest handling. Also; organic farming principals, GAP practices and operations as well as cover crops and high tunnels.

We have focused on learning methodologies that take into consideration the traditional cultural knowledge base of the participants we work with and strive to always learn from them how best to present information and consider their best ways of learning.

Changes/Problems

Hafa farmers represent unique challenges. Many of those farmers working with Hafa are family farm operators. While they have traditional, cultural production methods and typical Farmer's Market sales that are not too bad, sales are not enough to

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lift them into middle class status. Their lack of stability long term access to the same land year after year was a problem. It made the acquisition of farm infrastructure impossible and they could not take advantage of the some more lucrative crop like asparagus and some flower varieties. These farmers needed stable land access. The solution to this problem came as a result of a relationship that developed between HAFa and a group of philanthropic investors who wanted to support sustainable agriculture and immigrant farmers. They purchased a 155 acres piece of farm land just outside the Twin Cities Metro and leased it to HAFa. The location of the land was important because the Hmong farming community mostly live in the Twin Cities and their need was for land within travel distance of their home (they are heavily concentrated in St. Paul). HAFa was able to fund raise for the development of the additional infrastructure additions. This land now provides land for growing for 17 farm families (about 68 individuals). There are wash stations, a large modern cooler, packing area, a barn and a house that serves as offices for HAFa and meeting space for HAFa members. The expense of the lease of this land from the investors is passed on to the farmers who now have their own plots on a long term basis. At a future date the farmers will have the opportunity to purchase their plots (5 to 15 acres). This will solve the stable land access problem for Hmong farmers and also create wealth and attractive opportunities for the next generations of Hmong farmers.

As we moved through our plans for the training and development of programming that would build on existing cultural knowledge of farming with the two immigrant communities; Hmong and Latino we encounter some challenges. We understood that access to land, language barriers, participant's levels of knowledge and the capacity of staff would all play important roles in our ability to appropriately build skills or build on existing skill whichever the case might be and have people view farming as a business opportunity. This offering to Hmong farmers established HAFa as a land based program and a way of solving the problem of easily accessible, affordable with long term access land. HAFa over the course of the grant has been able to establish the 155 acres (The HAFa Farm) as a center where additional Hmong farmers who farm off that land can attend training, use infrastructure and take advantage of developed markets. The challenges of this model are that learning for the many farmers attracted by the HAFa offering have varied levels of knowledge, varied schedules and different demands on their time. HAFa trainings have been able to adjust to these varied demands and still address the challenges.

Latino farmers are for the most part beginning farmers who aspiring to create a farm business. Unlike Hmong farmers, who live in the Twin Cities, most Latino farmers live in rural communities up to two and three hours' drive from the Cities. This presented us with a logistical challenge. Delivery of orientations and trainings needed to be done in rural communities...we needed to go to them. It was an uphill climb to do outreach, orientations and trainings in these situations. We met this challenge by creating groups of interested aspiring farmers and introducing them to the concept of forming cooperatives as way of gauging and getting a commitment to beginning farming.

However the challenge continued to be that the region in which we work is large. This requires careful planning and long hours. We frequently send out a technical assistance staffer and a trainer together so that we can maximize the value of the trip. We sometimes group together communities that are close together and provide services or training in one then we move onto another or bring them together if we can.

How we envisioned the development of the farm businesses has rolled out with minor changes. Example; we have learned that it is good to have at least 10 people demonstrating interest in forming a co-op. This number provides a good chance that by the time the co-op is actually formed there will be at least 5 members (what we consider the minimum for an effective co-op).

We have made great progress toward accessing land for rent. We have networked and garnered the support of our states Department of Agriculture and their network connections to identify land that can be rented. We have found important allies in economic development agencies in rural communities that have been able to point us to under utilized land and have been able to rent the land for growing. Usually it is one to five acres. However one of these arrangements has resulted in negotiations for our first co-op formed to be able to buy 54 acres.

The series of steps to purchase their own farmland and the development of an economically viable vegetable farm on a scale that will provide full employment to their members is our goal. LEDC is duplicating this agricultural development model with additional beginning Latino farmers in four other Minnesota rural communities. The outcomes of this model will take some additional years to calculate but strategic adjustments as we learn what works will be critical the refining what works going forward.