

New Immigrant Agriculture Project

Final Report for LNC02-209

Project Type: Research and Education

Funds awarded in 2002: \$69,000.00

Projected End Date: 12/31/2007

Region: North Central

State: Minnesota

Project Coordinator:

[Glen Hill](#)

Minnesota Food Association

Project Information

Summary:

The New Immigrant Agriculture Project is designed to increase the number of new immigrants engaged in niche market, sustainable agriculture through:

- 1) Publication of a compilation report analyzing the niche/ethnic market research that explores what current research is saying about potential markets for small-scale, sustainable growers in Minnesota;
- 2) Creation of a replicable farm business management curriculum that instructs on crop production using sustainable/organic methods, record keeping, financial and risk management, marketing, and farm planning and evaluation.

Introduction:

(Note: Due to staff turnover and part-time work, resulting from funding instability for MFA during the periods of 2003 – 2006, this report was delayed. Much information has been kept in MFA's files, while some information is incomplete. The original staff implementing this grant project are no longer with MFA. Some of the information on this project is incomplete, resulting that some sections of the report are not as strong as they should be. We apologize for this. Some of the sections of this report reflect activity that has taken place since this grant period, and more specifically during the 2007 training / growing season.)

Issues and Needs

Minnesota's foreign born population more than doubled in the 1990's, from 2.6 percent of the population to 5.8 percent. Over 40 percent of the new arrivals came from Asia, nearly one-fourth come from Latin America, 17 percent from Europe, and 14 percent from African nations. Immigration is a significant factor in the demographic shifts seen in Minnesota in the 1990's.

While Minnesota's population remains predominantly Caucasian and Minnesota-born, our state leads the nation in several areas of immigration: we have the largest population of Somali immigrants, the largest concentration of Hmong immigrants/refugees in a single city, and the most refugees.

Often new immigrants come to Minnesota because they know someone, usually a family member. On arrival they face an entirely new way of living. Often uprooted from an agrarian culture, new immigrants arrive to find themselves in large cities with many expenses and few opportunities for generating income. To support their families, many new immigrants have to learn new employment skills or how to adapt the skills they have to their new environment.

Most new immigrants go into low-paying service jobs. Over time, many work their way into higher paying technical positions. Many, however, would prefer to preserve and pass on the way of life familiar to them—farming.

While many immigrants come from agrarian backgrounds and are interested in continuing to farm, they find that the practice of agriculture in Minnesota is quite dissimilar from their county of origin. Minnesota farm business practices, record-keeping, finding or creating a market for one's product, environmental protection—these are often new aspects for immigrants accustomed to supporting themselves off the land.

Communities to be Served

The communities that will be served by this grant are new immigrants, particularly Southeast Asian/Hmong, Latino/Hispanic and African.

Despite an economic downturn at the start of this decade, the population of immigrants in Minnesota continues to grow. A new resettlement program for Hmong refugees from Thailand added about 5,000 immigrants to Minnesota's population in late 2004.

The demographic factors vary among foreign-born Minnesota residents. For example, there are those that are highly skilled and who have come here to fill specialized jobs; there are those who arrived 20 years ago and have had time to establish stable communities and advance in the workforce; and there are those who have recently arrived. The target communities for this grant are new immigrants, those who are most in need.

Although demographic studies often do not distinguish between these groups, we know that even as a composite group international immigrants are more likely to be in poverty, linguistically isolated and dependent on earned income. The earned income of international immigrants is more likely to come from wages or salaries than from self-employment. International immigrant families have the lowest median household incomes, when compared to interstate movers and non-movers. When income is calculated on a per capita basis the gap widens.

An interesting phenomenon is taking place on the southern and western borders of Minnesota. The native-born populations in those areas are decreasing while the foreign-born population is increasing.

The influx of new immigrants to these areas is nearly the sole source of economic growth in these areas. And yet, there is a gap between the economic conditions of the native populations and the new arrivals. The new arrivals are less likely to own homes or property and are largely employed in low-wage food processing jobs. The New Immigrant Agriculture Project is one means of helping these immigrants gain the tools they need to improve their economic standing and, thus, to socially integrate the communities and to strengthen these regional economies. The Project focuses on new immigrants who are choosing agriculture as their means of income.

Project Objectives:

Objectives:

-With the assistance of a New Immigrant Advisory Task Force, develop

comprehensive, sustainable strategies to address economic, health, safety and nutrition concerns related to food production as a means to economic self-sufficiency for New Immigrant farmers.

- Assist the incorporation of New Immigrant farmers into rural communities, improving individual and community vitality by enhancing the rural economies.
- Educate New Immigrant farmers in the environmental benefits of sustainable methods.

Facilitate permanent linkages between New Immigrants and agricultural-based organizations.

Outcomes:

- Expand the numbers of new immigrant people involved in niche market, sustainable agriculture as well as assisting them in becoming a permanent part of both rural and agricultural communities.
- Report that analyzes niche/ethnic market research.
- Creation of a replicable, educational curricula related to sustainable/organic production techniques, incorporating experiential learning.
- Enhance the ability of New Immigrant farmers to access farming and financial resources by verifying their farm business management skill.

Desired Outcomes (from Evaluation Plan):

- Expand the number of new immigrant people involved in niche market, sustainable agriculture by 50.
- Assist these farmers in becoming a permanent part of rural communities.
- Publish and disseminate 300 reports that analyze niche/ethnic market research in the metropolitan and out-state areas of Minnesota.

Creation of a cultural food web in which new immigrant producers sell products to ethnic retailers.

-Adaptation of Sustainable Agricultural Farm Business Management Curricula incorporating traditional farm business management techniques as well as sustainable/organic methodologies, emphasizing experiential learning. By completing the curriculum, participants earn a certificate in farm business management that will be utilized by lending institutions in processing loans.

Usage of these curricula in training future New Immigrant or other socially disadvantaged farmers. New Immigrant farmers become a permanent part of the rural and agricultural communities in Minnesota, thus adding to the vitality of rural economies.

Research

Materials and methods:

- Cross-sector collaboration with public, private and nonprofit agencies each bringing resources to support the effective introduction of educational materials, as well as access to a variety of financial and technical resources. Experiential learning adapted to cultural needs and expectations. Outcome-based evaluation assessing measurable progress or benefits to individual participants. Focus on longer-term goals of financial and social success in broad terms. Measurable reduction of negative environmental impacts resulting from inadequate training and experience with conventional agricultural chemicals and methods.

Enhanced access to culturally appropriate foods to both the ethnic markets as well as mainstream

Research results and discussion:

1. Expand the numbers of new immigrant people involved in niche market, sustainable agriculture as well as assisting them in becoming a permanent part of both rural and agricultural communities.

At the time of submitting its original proposal to NCR-SARE November 2001, the US Department of Agriculture's Farm Service Agency had contracted with the Minnesota Food Association for a period of five years, 2001 being the third year. The funding source for the contract is known as the 2501 Fund, the number of the rules and regulations that dictated that the Farm Service Agency reach out to "socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers," including new immigrants in Minnesota.

Changes within the National Administration required that the Farm Service Agency terminate all sole-source contracts, including the five-year contract with MFA even though we were only in our third year. Administration of the 2501 Fund was to be moved to the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES), and put out on competitive bid.

The first chance that MFA had to submit an application in response to the request for proposals was in 2003 for the 2003 fiscal year (October 1, 2003 - September 30, 2004). The application submitted by MFA to CSREES was not funded. The next time that the RFP for 2501 Funds became available, MFA submitted an application which was funded for the two year-period of October 1, 2004 - September 30, 2006.

The brief history accounted above is by way of explaining why, when MFA submitted its application to NCR-SARE, we proposed to increase the number of new immigrant producers in niche market, sustainable agriculture. Through the federal funds that were to be made available to MFA during the last two years of the five-year contract, MFA had planned to continue to reach out to new immigrants interested in farming in the Southeast Asian/Hmong, Latino/Hispanic, and African/Somali communities. However, with the contract being terminated, and MFA not being awarded a grant when funds became available again, meant that MFA had to lay-off all staff who were working on the New Immigrant Agriculture Project; the very staff who would provide outreach, training, and technical assistance to the new immigrant producers. This incongruity affected the effectiveness of the program.

2. Report that analyzes niche/ethnic market research.

Gathering and analyzing more than 35 reports, studies, and articles led to the development of Niche Marketing: A Compilation of Studies on Ethnic Markets.

As the introduction to the report states:

To focus the research, MFA examined existing research that would shape and inform the development of a market niche that was, at once and the same time:

- 1) Profitable,
- 2) Matched both the consumer's desires with the producer's needs, and
- 3) Shaped by the ethic of caring for the land.

A variety of specialty markets, therefore, were reviewed up and against the demographics of ethnic consumers. The following compilation of reports and studies, then, details the findings and makes recommendations for future market development.

The conclusion drawn from review and analysis of the compiled material indicates that:

It is clear that the face as well as the plate of Minnesota consumers is changing. It is no longer limited to white bread, hotdogs and apple pie. Consumers are following the lead of their new neighbors. The variety of cultures such as that of Hispanics, Southeast Asians and various African cultures are introducing new foods to the diets of Minnesotans. This, along with the increasing populations of these cultures is creating an ever growing market demand for ethnic and specialty products as well as natural and organic products. The potential of these markets is large enough perhaps to accommodate the small-scale and sustainable producers of the state, as well as some new faces to the agricultural economy. Many of the barriers that non-immigrant farmers face such as language and lack of product knowledge are non-issues for New Immigrant farmers; therefore, the ethnic market seems to be a wonderful match for the New Immigrant farmers.

3. Creation of a replicable, educational curricula related to sustainable/organic production techniques, incorporating experiential learning.

Breaking New Ground: Learning to Manage a Small-Scale Farm in the United States was completed in December 2003.

Immediately upon being awarded the grant from NCR-SARE, Minnesota Food Association engaged people in the community to serve on an advisory committee, which began meeting as of July 25, 2002; and engaged a curriculum writer as a consultant to shepherd the process of designing and developing a first-year farm business management curriculum for new immigrants.

Breaking New Ground as completed in 2003 focused on farm business and personal goals, farm planning and marketing, record keeping, risk management and evaluating the annual growing season. In 2006, production knowledge was added into the curriculum and marketing was expanded to include wholesale markets. The curriculum is taught in a variety of methods including one-on-one, small groups, practical applications during the season, and classroom sessions primarily during the off-season.

4. Enhance the ability of New Immigrant farmers to access farming and financial resources by verifying their farm business management skill.

An intake process with the New Immigrant farmers identifies their current management skills as well as personal goals. This process establishes benchmarks for training on an individual level with each farmer, so that their personal goals of accessing land and financial resources can be achieved. The Staff Coordinators then document and verify their ability to maintain records and accomplish personal goals in accessing lands and loans. Each year farmers are given a certificate documenting their farm business management skills. In 2007, two farmers (brothers) who participated in our program for the third year had adequate motivation and farm business management skills to qualify for a private loan and have acquired their own 40-acre farm. They will operate this farm for the 2008 growing season as a transition participant in our program. They will continue to participate in our program and their experience will be shared with the other immigrant farmers in our program. This farmer-to-farmer sharing will surely provide motivation for the others.

MFA has taken a strong and active approach in outreaching to the larger community. We are connecting more and more farmers with more local organizations and government agencies that assist the farmers in a variety of ways (health, taxes, legal issues, loans, farming production, language and more). This exposure is increasing their access to many and diverse resources necessary to become a successful farmer. MFA has partnered with local community-based organizations and the FSA to identify local landowners who are willing or seeking to find farmers to farm on their land. This process of connecting landowners and

farmers will accelerate in 2008.

Research conclusions:

Approximately 700 farmers have been through MFA's training programs for new immigrant farmers since 1999 when it started. In 2007, there were 92 farmers that participated in the Minnesota Food Association New Immigrant Agriculture Program. These farmers were in 28 different farm groups. In addition to this, 30 traditional gardeners and 28 micro farmers who are hoping to learn to farm at a production level also received support from MFA in obtaining small plots to farm and plot preparation. The 92 production farmers had 93.5 acres in production and 2 wholesale markets, 8 farmers markets, 5 direct to grocery stores, 2 ethnic restaurants, 2 ethnic markets, and 8 farmers with direct sales to individuals patterned after Community Support Agriculture farms.

Immigrant farmers in the NIAP program have attended local, regional and national farming conferences, applied for SARE grants, and have indicated their interest in learning to be certified organic, grow for larger markets and accomplish their personal and farm business goals.

Included in the above numbers are sales to a new niche project designed by the Minnesota Food Association and implemented in 2007. Big River Foods is a food distribution training program that has developed wholesale markets to 1 major fast food chain and 3 local high end grocery stores. 11 immigrant farms involving 38 farmers initially signed up to grow large quantities of green peppers, heirloom tomatoes, grape tomatoes, and slicer tomatoes. 4 of the farms dropped out due to issues with other jobs and poor production techniques due to lack of time. The remaining successful 7 farms had an average of nearly \$5,000 in sales for the 2007 growing season. Plans for the 2008 growing season include that farmers may be able to grow as much as \$20,000 each in vegetables to this one market, while they are learning to grow 12-15 different crops.

The impact of the 2002-2004 SARE grant was significant in creating a tipping point of success for MFA's New Immigrant Agriculture program. Since this grant, funding has been relatively more steady and more farmers have been attracted to the program. There has been greater success in assisting farmers in creating a significant income for themselves and their families within the local food and sustainable food system.

Economic Analysis

This project (2002 - 2004) aimed at developing some markets and training and education related to farm management. Actual "inputs, costs and yields" were not as relevant to this project as it was not focused on actual production methods, or comparing old vs. new production methods. MFA has good records of the farmers that sold their produce through MFA's Big River Foods distribution service, however this covered only a fraction of the farmers and not all of their production as well. During the 2007 season, record keeping was emphasized with the farmers, but not well-practiced. MFA has intensified its training approach towards record keeping as a practical means for the farmers to improve their farm enterprises. MFA has no real concrete data on the inputs, costs, yields and income of the immigrant farmers in the program. Most all the farmers from the 2007 season are returning to MFA in 2008, because they believe that their 2007 season was successful, they all were able to sell their produce and earn money, and they appreciate the training and MFA's support. This is a good indicator of the success of the program and the impact it has and will have on the farmers and their livelihoods. Those farmers not

returning are doing so because of their own personal reasons and situations (for other non-farm/ non-MFA reasons).

Farmer Adoption

All of the production farmers in the NIAP program participate in the Breaking New Ground Curriculum. There has been resistance to record keeping and to risk management, but as markets open up, the resistance is diminishing. The resistance stems from not seeing the value of record keeping and assessing the risks in their own farm enterprises. As more of the farmers we work with are moving towards their financial goals (more of them are making more and more money), we will see more farmers interested in record keeping and risk management analysis. The Big River Foods project has helped to introduce this to farmers, since BRF has opened a new market opportunity for them, they are making more money, and BRF is regular and complete in its records and the farmers appreciate that.

In the 2007 season, there were many farming adaptations made. One significant one was the move by almost all the farmers to a more economical drip irrigation system. Farmers that had been using sprinklers or flood irrigation have stopped and seen the benefits drip irrigation. Another significant adaptation was the increase use and sophistication of trellising for tomatoes. Many farmers tried new means of trellising which increased their production, and hence income, significantly.

Participation Summary

Educational & Outreach Activities

PARTICIPATION SUMMARY:

Education/outreach description:

"Breaking New Ground: Learning to Manage a Small-Scale Farm in the United States," December 2003

"Niche Marketing; A Compilation of Studies on Ethnic Markets," December 2004

Project Outcomes

Recommendations:

Areas needing additional study

Identifying the impact on farmers on learning farm management requires a long-term approach. Adequate and secure funding are essential to maintain the momentum and to collect consistent and complete data over the years that would be beneficial to an economic study on the impacts MFA's training and support has on farmers' livelihoods and the impact the farmers are having on the local food system.

MFA seeks to expand its training program by fully integrating with the MFA CSA, to include more production knowledge, to increase another market outlet and to increase the productivity of the immigrant farmers. MFA seeks to train all farmers to practice organic farming and to begin the process of becoming certified organic.

MFA seeks to identify and develop sustainable means for low income communities to have access to affordable, healthy fresh produce to where farmers receive a fair price and the consumers in low income areas demand local fresh produce through raised awareness. MFA will begin to conduct pilot programs in season extension through expanded use of hoop-houses. This seeks to provide a new knowledge and production technique for immigrant farmers as well as opening another marketing opportunity. Three local Co-ops have partnered with MFA in guaranteeing to purchase the produce. MFA plans to identify and develop more programs that work with youth and the next generation of farmers and consumers (eaters) through a new School-to-Farm-to-School Program. MFA plans to identify more innovative means for funding and income generation for the organization so that the programs can develop, strengthen, and flourish for many years; hence capitalizing on this growing pool of knowledge and experience. We seek to have a healthy balance of financial support between government agencies and programs, private funders, memberships and earned income. In this process of financial and program growth, MFA also actively seeks to build strong partnerships, networks and collaborations with a diverse array of government agencies, community-based organizations, education institutions, local business, and individuals. We would greatly appreciated future partnerships with SARE.

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the view of the U.S. Department of Agriculture or SARE.



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