Hispanic Farmers in Wisconsin: Background and Information Needs

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Introduction: The research detailed in this paper is part of a larger project "Effective Outreach for a New Wisconsin Agriculture: A Social Marketing Approach to the Environmental Management Needs of Hispanic and Women Farmers." The research is funded by the North Central Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) Grant program and conducted by staff at the Environmental Resources Center of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, with outreach support from the Wisconsin Farm Center, Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection. This report is the first in a two part series.[1]

Objectives and Methods

The goal of this project is to increase the effectiveness of outreach strategies to reach Hispanic farm operators in Wisconsin.[2]

En route to that goal, we identified several research objectives:
(1) ground-truth agricultural census data to determine if census numbers were accurate,
(2) gain a better understanding of Hispanic farm operators in Wisconsin,
(3) document constraints, resource and information needs, and environmental management practices of these farmers,
(4) understand the gap in provision of Extension services to Hispanic farmers, and
(5) make recommendations on how UWEX could better serve these farmers.

We used several methods to accomplish these objectives:
(1) Survey of 215 Hispanic farmers (104 responses, 48% response rate) who reported in the 2002 or 2007 agricultural censuses that they were Hispanic and the principal farm operator,[3]
(2) Queries to agricultural extension agents and agricultural professionals on whether they are working with Hispanic clients,
(3) In-depth regional searching,[4]

[1] Research Brief #2: Wisconsin Women Farmers: Conservation Practices, Information Gathering, and Opportunities for U.W.-Extension. University of Wisconsin-Madison: Environmental Resources Center, 10/2010.

[2] The United States Census of Agriculture (2002) defines the "principal operator" as "The person primarily responsible for the on-site, day-to-day operation of the farm or ranch business. This person may be a hired manager or business manager." Our study defined principal operator as those women who farm solo or with a spouse or partner, but who make or help make the main decisions about how the farm is managed.

[3] The United States Census of Agriculture is conducted every five years by the Department of Agriculture. Census data for Wisconsin are collected and analyzed by the Wisconsin Agricultural Statistics Service (WASS). For our research, we used the mailing lists compiled from the WASS database for the 2002 and 2007 censuses of Agriculture. We sent out 215 surveys to Hispanic principal operators between October-December, 2008, using a modified Dilman survey technique, where each potential respondent received 4 contacts from us (preliminary letter, first survey with letter, reminder postcard, and second survey with letter).

[4] Our outreach worker, Ms. Julia Reyes-Hamann, traveled to nine Wisconsin counties where census numbers showed a relatively high number of Hispanic farmers. In these counties, we contacted Extension agents, Hispanic community leaders, meat processing plants, milk plants, and Hispanic food markets. Brochures were left at various community centers.

USDA NCR-SARE grant LNC07-290

(4) Analysis of land records lists for 7 counties,[5]
(5) Outreach to the Hispanic community,[6] and
(6) Interviews of 25 individuals for a more in-depth understanding of their farming practices.

How many Hispanic farmers are there in WI? Ground-truthing the Census of Agriculture
Wisconsin's agricultural census showed a marked increase in the number of Hispanic farmers (principal operators) from 1997 to 2002 (from 308 to 523, a 70% increase), while 2007 census data indicated a significant decrease in the number of principal operators (down to 245 from 523, a 53% decline from 2002 to 2007). The reported census numbers for 1997 and 2007 show less variation than these years compared to 2002. If these two census years are compared, the numbers indicate a 20% decrease in Hispanic farm operators during the decade from 1997 to 2007.

Given the experience in other states, the difficulty in finding these operators and in building census lists, and the resistance of minority operators to participate in census surveying, we considered the possibility that Wisconsin's reported numbers were undercounts. On the other hand, we had evidence that state institutions – U.W. Extension, the Department of Agriculture, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service – had put in place outreach strategies to reach Hispanic operators and had only been minimally successful.

UW-Extension Programming
Discussions with agricultural Extension educators highlighted a gap in service to minority populations, as few UWEX agriculture agents had any contact at all with the Hispanic farming population, outside of farm laborers. Our research attempted to determine the reasons for this gap in service provision. We hypothesized that there could be any of several reasons to explain this gap: (1) that the population was smaller than 2002 census numbers indicated, (2) that Hispanic farm operators were farming 'below the radar' and were not seeking assistance from UWEX or other state sources of support, (3) that the Hispanic farming population was dispersed and hard to identify or reach, or (4) that language and/or cultural barriers impeded the ability of Extension educators to reach this population.

Survey Results

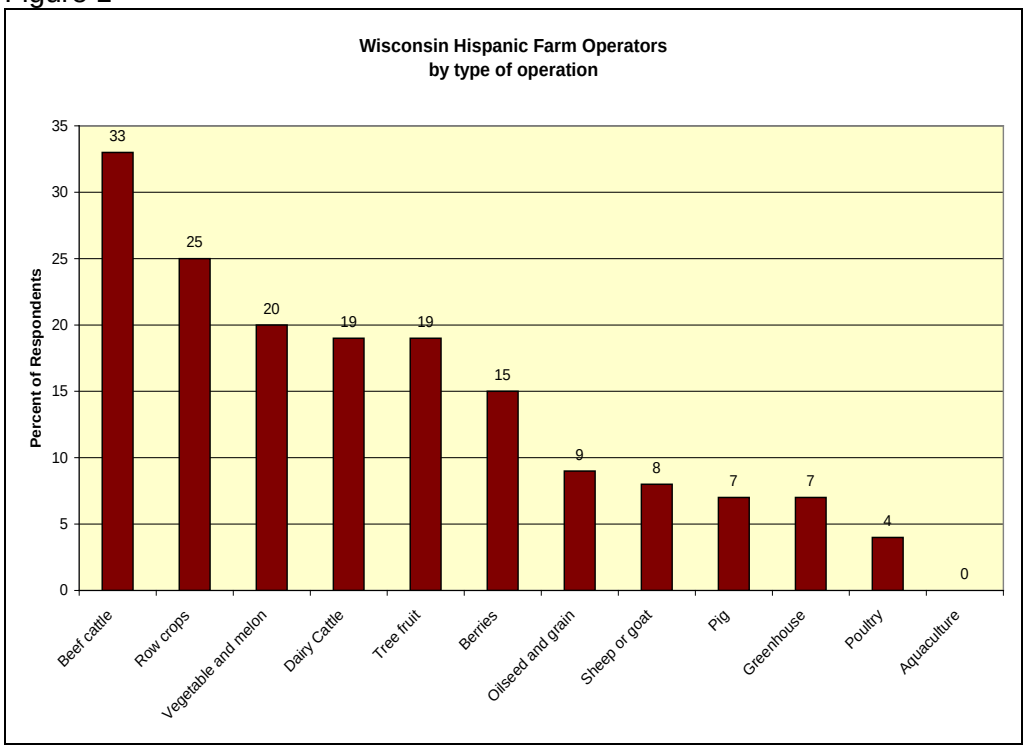
In an attempt to maximize response rate, we purposefully kept our survey short. We focused on the survey on objectives of understanding the type of farms that Hispanic farmers operate and the information needs and information sources of this population.

A snapshot of the Hispanic Farmer Population in Wisconsin
Figure 1 shows the distribution of Hispanic farm operators by the type of farm operation they manage. The greatest number of operators manage farms with beef cattle, row crops, vegetables and melons, dairy cattle, or tree fruit. Our survey included a catchall 'other' category, which is not included in the graph, as it represents a variety of different enterprises. Types of operations with responses in the 'Other' category include**:** horses (4 operations), Christmas trees (3), CRP (3), hay production (2) and grapes (2).

[5] We selected land owners who had five or more acres in agriculturally zoned areas. Ms. Reyes-Hamann contacted people on the lists who had Hispanic sounding names.

[6] We printed an article in one Spanish language paper and attended Hispanic cultural events.

Figure 1



What Information do Hispanic Farmers Seek?

Survey respondents were asked the question "Do you want any information or training on the following topics?" We supplied a list and asked respondents for a "yes" or "no" response for each topic. The topics were general categories, rather than specific training areas. Results from this question are shown in Table 1. While there was no clear topic for which the bulk of farmers wanted information, three categories (sustainable or organic farming practices, environmental improvement and conservation, and marketing) received higher percent 'yes' responses. Note that all topics suggested received less than 40% 'yes' responses.

Table 1

Topics for which information is desired	Percent Yes
Sustainable or organic farming practices	37
Environmental improvement and conservation	35
Marketing	35
Crop production methods	30
Animal husbandry	27
Financial record keeping	22
Legal issues	22

Information sources - Organizational and Institutional

Our survey also asked four questions regarding preferred means of getting information. The first question asked: "During the past year, did you consult with any of the following people or organizations when making decisions about your farm?" Results from this question are shown in Table 2. Of all sources of

information listed, survey respondents reported that they tended to consult other growers or farmers for information more than other sources, followed by farm supply dealers or producer coops. The United States Farm Service Agency (FSA) was also a common source of information. Less than 30 percent of respondents reported using state-run sources such as UW-Extension and the WI Department of Agriculture.

Table 2

Sources of Information: People Consulted	Percent Yes
Other growers or farmers	64
Farm supply dealers or producer coops	49
United States Farm Service Agency (FSA)	41
Bankers, financial consultants, or private paid consultants	31
Grower Association or Farmer Organization	30
University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension	28
United States Land and Water Conservation Service	24
Your State Department of Agriculture	20
United States Natural Resources Conservation Service	17

Information Sources – Print and Other Media

Access to information is critical in a field such as farming, where farmers need to be well versed on a wide range of topics, from agronomy and animal husbandry to marketing and regulations. We asked survey respondents "Do you use any of the following to find information regarding your farm?" Our findings, shown in Table 3, indicate that farm magazines or newspapers are the primary source of information for the majority of Hispanic farmers, but that use of the internet is also widely used for finding information for the farm operation.

Table 3

Printed Sources of Information	Percent Yes
Farm magazine or newspaper	70
Internet	60
Radio	49
Television	47
Local newspaper	46
University of Wisconsin Extension publications	42
Field days and demonstrations	39
Conference or workshop	33
Product promotion materials	33

Use of Internet

To understand how farmers are using the internet, we asked: "Listed below are internet-based ways to receive farm-related information. Would you use any of them?" As Table 4 shows, the traditional format of information summary sheets or full reports was the preferred method to receive information.

Table 4

Preferred Information Delivery Method – Internet specific	Percent Yes
Information Summary Sheet or full reports	43
Training modules	34
Power Point or slideshow	30
Video presentation (YouTube)	28
Interactive on-line class	28
Audio presentation	24

Interview Information

Interviews with Hispanic farmers provided rich portraits of selected individuals. Our interview sample included 16 immigrant farmers, 3 first generation farmers, and 6 second generation farmers. There was great diversity in the type of operation that these individuals managed, although all would qualify as small farms. We asked interviewees general questions about their farms and their path into farming, marketing strategies, environmental management issues, how they got information, and challenges or barriers they faced.

Path into Farming

Individuals followed various paths into farming. We identified the following different ways in which interviewees got into farming (followed by the number of individuals).

1. Hispanic woman marries a man from a non-Hispanic farm family (7)
    - Hispanic man marries into farm family (1)
    - Hispanic parent married into farm family (2)
2. Farmers works/worked at another job, then buys land (4)
3. Primary work as agricultural consultant/researcher, farming part time (3)
4. Sponsor or partner's family lets grower use land for vegetables (3)
5. Dairy herdsman/foreman becomes employer's partner (1)
6. Dairy herdsman buys heifers in order to own share in farm (1)
7. Dairy herdsman raises steer on employer's farm (1)
8. Land managed in forest (2)

Country of Origin

While we anticipated that many of Wisconsin's Hispanic farmers were from Mexico, we were surprised by the wide diversity in country of origin. Of the immigrant farmers (where the individual interviewed was born in another country and subsequently immigrated to the U.S., even if this immigration occurred many years ago), 8 out of 16 were from Mexico. Others were from Colombia, Dominican Republic, Argentina, Puerto Rico, Bolivia, and Brazil. First and second generation farmers were from Mexico (7 out of 9), Puerto Rico, and Cuba.

Farm Challenges

Of the farmers we interviewed, several farm challenges were predominant and consistent, regardless of whether the respondent was a new immigrant or a second generation farmer. These challenges were: capitalization (access to loans), profitability, and finding suitable and consistent markets for farm products.

Immigrant farmers cited several additional, unique challenges (i.e., different from 1st and 2nd generation Hispanic farmers, and from the farming population in general), including: lack of knowledge and experience in farming, language barriers, culture shock, lack of a drivers' license, not knowing who to go

to for assistance, and difficulty understanding regulations. Some immigrant farmers reported having more difficulty finding information pertinent to their farming operations and services to support their enterprises. Additionally, several of these farmers tended to operate outside of formal channels and expressed lack of familiarity with Extension and other farm services. Many lived in areas where there was no solidly defined Hispanic community, and they reported limited networks of social capital. The farmers we interviewed tended to be risk-takers, but many had not engaged in feasibility or business planning.

Discussion

Wisconsin's Hispanic farmers are characterized by diversity – in farm operation, country of origin, path into farming, and other aspects of the farming operation. We did not identify any major concentration of farmers, either geographically or in type of farming operation.

While the Hispanic farming population is currently not large, we anticipate that it will grow in future years with two potential new groups of entering farmers. First, the urban Hispanic (non-farm) population has been steadily increasing in Wisconsin, and there is evidence of interest in community gardening and direct market vegetable production among this population. Second, the Wisconsin dairy industry, at present, is heavily dependent on immigrant labor, and the number of Hispanic dairy workers has increased significantly over the last ten years.[7] These workers have gained critical skills in animal husbandry and other aspects of dairy farm operations. We anticipate that urban Hispanic residents and/or immigrant dairy farm workers may contribute to the next wave of future farmers, particularly if there is national immigration reform. The challenge for Extension and other government agencies will be to be ready to assist these future farmers with information, services, and financing when that time comes.

Extension educators can provide assistance to Hispanic farmers by developing education programs on how to procure loans (working with FSA and ag. lenders), business planning for profitability, marketing options, understanding regulations, and gaining familiarity with government agencies and sources of assistance. These programs should be offered either in Spanish or with Spanish translation.

Based on our interview results and analysis, we feel that Extension can be better positioned to support Hispanic farm enterprises now and in the future. We offer the following recommendations:

1) Increase our understanding and awareness, as educators, of how Hispanic residents are participating in agriculture (either as a farm operator, a farm laborer, or in other parts of the food system).
2) Recognize the differences (in opportunities and constraints) between immigrant farmers and 1st or 2nd generation Hispanic farmers.
3) Be aware of how immigration issues might affect farmers, gardeners, or farm workers.
4) Seek out immigrant farmers and develop one-on-one relationships with them.
5) Provide one-on-one technical assistance, and where necessary, work through a translator.
6) Target outreach and educational programs to smaller scale farms.
7) Target assistance to urban gardeners.
8) Utilize the Hispanic press and radio stations to deliver information in Spanish.
9) Provide information sheets to farm supply dealers and FSA offices in Spanish, and seek assistance from these enterprises and organizations to distribute farming information.
10) Provide farming information on the internet through web sites that are easily accessible to Hispanic farmers seeking this information.

[7] See Harrison, J, S. Lloyd and T. Okane. *Overiview of Immigrant Labor on Wisconsin Dairy Farms*. PATS Immigrant Labor Briefing. Available at: http://www.pats.wisc.edu/pubs/98