



UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
EXTENSION

Illinois Migrant Council

PREPARING A NEW GENERATION OF ILLINOIS FRUIT AND VEGETABLE FARMERS

a USDA NIFA BEGINNING FARMER AND RANCHER
DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM PROJECT

GRANT # 2012-49400-19565

Rick Weinzierl, University of Illinois weinzier@illinois.edu

Esperanza Gonzalez, Illinois Migrant Council
Mary Hosier, Jeff Kindhart, Shelby Henning,
Deborah Cavanaugh-Grant, and Nathan Johannung,
University of Illinois



Why a new farmer training program

- The average age of farmers is >55; for fruit growers it is ~58. To meet future demands, new farmers are needed. This need extends to traditionally underserved groups, including Hispanic workers.
- There is increased demand for locally produced foods in IL, but only 1.1 percent of all crop sales recorded in IL in the 2007 Ag Census were fruits and vegetables.
- Starting a new fruit and vegetable enterprise – with lower acreage and equipment needs – is more realistic financially than starting a new commodity crop enterprise. Our focus on training new fruit and vegetable producers makes best use of our skills and resources and offers the greatest likelihood of success for new small farmers.

Our goals

1. Increase the number of new farmers producing fruits and vegetables throughout Illinois and enhance the viability, profitability, and sustainability of new and beginning enterprises to meet increasing demand for local produce and contribute to local economies.
2. Assist a specific target audience – seasonal Hispanic farm workers – in beginning viable, profitable, and sustainable small produce farms.
3. Increase the expertise of university extension educators, high school and community college teachers, and educators in community organizations so they can better aid new farmers. Provide these educators with training materials.



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Our objectives ... each year for 3 years

1. Provide year-long programs of classroom and hands-on / in-field instruction for 60 or more new farmers per year for three years so that new growers have the information base to be successful. Provide incubator plots as needed to allow low-risk experience with expert oversight.
2. Provide year-long programs of classroom and hands-on / in-field instruction for 30 Hispanic workers who want to become independent farmers so that they have the knowledge to become successful. Provide incubator plots as needed to allow low-risk experience with expert oversight.
3. Develop human and informational resources by (1) providing instruction to Extension educators, allied educators, and vocational agriculture and FFA teachers so that these educators can continue programs for new growers and (2) by developing an online resource library (English and Spanish) of educational materials for new and aspiring fruit and vegetable farmers.



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Now in Year 2: December 2013 – November 2014

- Classes offered in English at each of three primary locations one Saturday per month, 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.
 - St. Charles Horticulture Research Center (and Kane County Extension Office)
 - Urbana Research and Education Center
 - Dixon Springs Agricultural Center
- Parallel Spanish-language programs at Harvard, Kankakee, and Cobden
- Classes are offered free of charge to participants ... applications are screened based on likelihood of success
- Lectures (via YouTube) and references provided before class meetings
- Morning discussions and afternoon hands-on opportunities
- Follow-ups via list-serve emails
- Additional opportunities
 - Related programs offered by Extension or other groups



- Content: Basics of vegetable production, fruit production, and business planning, cultivar selection, FSA and NRCS programs, crop rotations, transplant production, succession plantings, high tunnel construction and operation, pruning perennial fruits, soils and soil tests, organic and conventional fertilizers, soil quality, equipment for small farms, food safety and GAPs, irrigation, pesticides, OMRI-approved pesticides; organic certification, IPM, more on insects, diseases, and weeds, more on business planning, hydroponics, pollinators, beekeeping, harvesting and postharvest handling, insurance, labor, record-keeping and taxes, cover crops, aggregation and food hubs, Farm to School, farmer presentations, visits to established farms ... and more



Home counties of participants in Years 1 (completed) and 2 (currently enrolled) combined: 157 participants from 47 counties





John Gehrke, USDA Farm Service Agency, discussing FSA's loan programs, particularly the new microloan program, in January, 2013, at Dixon Springs. A participant wrote us one month later, thanking us for including this information in the course ... she had just received a USDA microloan. Three of our Year 1 students received FSA microloans.

Incubator plots

- Up to ½ acre per individual
- 1 to 2 years
- Primary tillage and access to irrigation provided, along with some simple equipment
- All labor and management supplied by the participant
- Participants may sell produce grown on the plots



Programming for Hispanic workers

- Two approaches for 2013
 - At Urbana and St. Charles
 - Classes offered one Saturday per month, 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m., in combination with “main” program ... in English for bi-lingual students and future trainers
 - At Carbondale in southern IL
 - Classes offered Tuesday and Thursday evenings each week for 12 weeks, January – March ... Jerry Jimenez and Sonja Lallemand
- For 2014 and 2015
 - Spanish-language instruction in all regions

Outputs from Year 1

- 74 participants completed our standard (English) program. Of these, 11 are bilingual and will assist with Spanish-language programming in Year 2.
- 6 Hispanic participants completed the Spanish-language program at Carbondale.
- 8 participants used incubator plots to gain hands-on farming skills.
- 36 educators (faculty, Extension educators, high school or community college agriculture teachers, and urban farming coordinators) attended one or more sessions to gain additional knowledge.
- A teaching curriculum comprised of Power Point presentations and online references was developed to cover all topics presented.
- Power Point presentations and references were made available to participants via a Wikispaces classroom. (New format for Year 2)

Participants' overall evaluations

To what extent did this program meet your expectations?

Exceeded	47 %
Completely	29%
Mostly	22%
Mostly not	2%
Not at all	0%

Pre- and post-course Farming Skills Assessment. Follow-up surveys of production, growing practices, marketing, income, success ... pending.

Impacts

- Participant responses to questionnaires indicate that as a result of this program, ...
- 97% of participants experienced a change in knowledge, abilities, skills, and/or farming intentions.
- 76% changed their farming practices or plans.
- 71% adopted practices that increased their productivity.
- 50% adopted practices that increased profitability.
- 59% adopted practices that increased their environmental sustainability.
- 74% broadened their farming networks and support systems.
- 52% changed their business practices or plans.
- 66% developed a new farm plan
- 48% changed their marketing practices or plans.
- 81% plan to increase their participation in future educational programs for fruit and vegetable producers.



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Resources

- Many specific online and printed resources for individual topics
 - Available to participants at <http://newillinoisfarmers.org/>
 - Final versions will be publicly available before the project ends in 2015
- Illinois SARE calendar
 - <http://illinoissare.org/calendar.php>
- Illinois Fruit and Vegetable News
 - <http://ipm.illinois.edu/ifvn/>

Networking, list-serve, educational programs, and educator contacts



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To reach us

Contacts

Contact information

Rick Weinzierl

weinzier@illinois.edu

Mary Hosier

mhosier@illinois.edu

For Spanish-language programs ...

Esperanza
Gonzalez

esperanz-gonzalez@sbcglobal.net

Gloria Richards

glorricha8@aol.com

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