

Tierra de Oportunidades Project

Nuestras Raices of Holyoke, MA received \$70,818 to train immigrants and refugees in farming and business skills necessary to raise and sell products at farmers markets and other direct-to-consumer venues in Western Massachusetts. Funds were used for tents and EBT machines for markets and farm stands; to develop multi-lingual (English, Spanish, and Russian) advertising and EBT marketing campaigns for the community to support local farmers markets; and training for farmers markets vendors, farmers and market managers.

Final Report

**Nuestras Raíces Farmers Market Promotion Program
Final Report
January 8, 2010**

Project Title: **Tierra de Oportunidades Project**
Agreement #: **FMPP MA-079-2008**

Summary of Issue:

Immigrant and refugee consumer and farmer lack of access to direct sales of farm products opportunities.

How Issue or Problem Was Addressed:

The project provided training and technical assistance, as well as access to land for beginning immigrant and refugee farmers. It conducted outreach, education, and promotions to market local farmers markets to low-income people, immigrants and refugees.

Nuestras Raíces worked to re-connect the immigrant and refugee community, in a large part with agrarian roots, to agriculture and markets in the region. Nuestras Raíces worked to make sure that farmers were connected with the markets, and brought the specialty crops sought by immigrant and refugee communities. Nuestras Raíces worked to connect immigrant and refugee community members with the farms – they visited the farms, learned about them through media, learned that the crops they sought were available and that they could use their public benefits to purchase them. Nuestras Raíces worked to build a community around local agriculture and farmers' market connections.

Nuestras Raíces conducted the following specific activities:

- Outreach and promotion to potential and current beginning farmers through flyers, radio advertisements and shows in Spanish, English, and Russian.
- Orientation programs, training, and technical assistance to beginning immigrant and refugee farmers in workshops and at the farms around farm management and direct marketing.
- Incubator farm parcels and support at Nuestras Raíces Farm site as well as Westfield incubator sites.
- Nuestras Raíces intensively promoted sales at the Holyoke, Springfield, and Westfield farmers' markets.
 - Produced flyers, radio, and television promotions in English, Spanish, and Russian, hosted weekly radio show on popular Spanish-language radio station promoting markets and local agriculture.

- Partnered with local and state offices of Department of Transitional Assistance, WIC, elderly agencies, and health centers to promote the markets to clients.
 - Provided, through foundation funding, voucher, prescription, and doubling programs to increase low-income people's access to the fresh healthy produce and sales for the farmers.
- Festivals to promote the farmers' markets and locally-produced food, each with direct market opportunities

Specific Contributions of Partners:

The primary partner of the project was Lutheran Social Services of New England (LSSNE), a refugee services provider. LSSNE fulfilled the terms of their contract and grant expectations, providing support for:

- Recruitment of beginning farmers
- Space for orientation programs and training
- Use of land in their service area for training and incubating beginning farmers
- Russian-language expertise and media
- Specific promotion of Westfield farmers' market

In addition to LSSNE, the partner specified in the grant application, Nuestras Raíces convened a host of partners to most effectively implement the project. These partners and their contributions included:

Massachusetts Office of Refugees and Immigrants – outreach and recruitment support, funding

Wholesome Wave Foundation – funding

Valley Opportunity Council – promotion of Holyoke and Chicopee Markets

Holyoke Food & Fitness Policy Council – Promotion of Holyoke Markets

Food Bank of W MA – Promotion of Springfield markets

City of Holyoke Mayor's Office – Promotion and management of Holyoke market

Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture – connection with farmers

University of Massachusetts Agricultural Extension Services – additional training services for farmers

Results, Conclusions, Benefits:

Outreach was conducted to over 100,000 potential and current immigrant and refugee farmers, raising awareness of farming and direct sales opportunities, recruiting new farmers, in the Western MA and northern Connecticut area. Outreach through Spanish-language television and radio, as well as festivals and other outreach media, had documented audiences of over 100,000.

38 beginning farmer candidates participated in an orientation program, "Living the Small Farm Dream," including an introduction to direct market opportunities. 29 beginning farmers participated in a direct market training courses.

20 beginning farmers received land to start farming operations and over 16 hours each of technical assistance on direct marketing from NR staff, UMass, and consultants.

20 beginning immigrant and refugee farmers began sales at area farmers' markets and cooperative farm stand.

- Participating farmers will increase sales and profitability by 300% (compared to objective of 25%)
- 5 cultural events and activities were held at farm sites and markets attended by over 4,900 community members

Project partners used the following strategies to assess and document outcomes:

- Documented media coverage and ads, and circulation of media
- Maintained sign-in sheets for orientation and training programs
- Logged provision of technical assistance hours
- Documented participation of beginning immigrant and refugee farmers in direct markets through surveys and market forms
- Surveyed farmers to determine sales and profit margins
- Surveyed immigrant and refugee community by evaluation consultant

Additional findings include:

- Need for additional incubator farm space, especially a site to support intermediate steps towards independence
- For immigrant & refugee communities, "local" has little resonance as a marketing tool. Freshness, quality, connection to cultural traditions and roots has much greater strength.

Description of People, Entities, Organizations, Communities That Benefitted:

The project had layers of benefits:

1. The twenty participating immigrant and refugee farmers, beginning micro-farms
2. The other local farmers participating in Holyoke, Westfield, Chicopee, Springfield farmers' markets, almost all small vegetable and nursery farmers.
3. Farmers may have increased employment, benefitting farm workers
4. The consumers of each of these markets benefitted from additional access to specialty crops, use of public benefits, more exciting market experience.
5. Residents of each of these communities benefitted from increased public health as they ate healthier food, more downtown activity, and economic development.

Current and Future Benefits:

- Holyoke Farmers Market was dwindling scarily, now one of the most vibrant in the region, with growing numbers of vendors and increasing community participation. Westfield, Chicopee, and Springfield markets are new and increasingly stable.
- Immigrant and refugee farmers are excited about direct sales, exploring many ways of increasing sales, including a cooperative mobile market.

- Food policy councils have been launched in Holyoke and Springfield, MA, each with support and promotion of urban farmers' markets high on their agenda. Farmers' markets are becoming increasingly recognized as central to promotion of nutrition and community development in area cities.

Recommendations of Future Research:

- Efficacy and best practices related to “double voucher” programs, EBT systems at farmers' markets
- More documentation of public health, and downtown development connections of farmers' markets

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