

Breaking Barriers for Beginning Hispanic Farmers and Ranchers

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Introduction

Two of the most important limitations Hispanic beginning farmers and ranchers face in their activity are the lack of awareness of the existence and access to government's programs, and public and private agencies and organizations that can help them with the acquisition of information on finances and marketing (market and loan programs), productive/natural resources, and management practices which can support their decision making process to make their agricultural activity successful.

This problem is mainly caused by several constraints and barriers such as language, education level, technological knowledge and access, institutional discrimination (real or perceived), and lack of culturally similar role models (farm and ranch owners or operators), among others.

In this context, to help Hispanic producers to achieve the level of knowledge necessary to become effective operators of their own agricultural operations the Breaking Barriers for Beginning Hispanic Farmer and Rancher Development Program was created at Texas A&M University – Commerce*.

Overview

The Breaking Barriers for Beginning Hispanic Farmer and Rancher Development Program will utilize systems theory and a participatory, community based approach to identify the needs for information of Hispanic producers. Training seminars, workshops, presentations, and demonstrations will be developed and delivered in Spanish by qualified professionals who are fluent in both Spanish and English. Instructional materials will be provided in Spanish and English, when necessary. Cultivating business, professional, and social networks for beginning Hispanic farmers and ranchers is another goal of the project.



Objectives

The objective of this project is to provide to prospective Hispanic farmers and ranchers, who are seeking to establish their own productive operation, with tools to be successful by delivering:

- ✓ training in sustainable agricultural management practices;
- ✓ relevant information on how to access agencies and organizations involved in supporting farmers and ranchers; and
- ✓ training on complementary knowledge in non-technical (production agriculture) subjects.

Methods

The initial phase of this project is underway and includes:

- ✓ Establishing an advisory committee.
- ✓ Hiring an Extension Associate to manage the day to day operation of the project.
- ✓ Hiring an Extension Assistant to establish public schools and 4-H partnerships
- ✓ Recruiting three Graduate Assistants to collect, review and develop instructional materials and assist with participant recruitment and presentations.

Strategies

Some of the strategies used for this project were:

- ✓ Developing promotional materials in Spanish and English .
- ✓ Launching a promotional campaign with informational booths at fairs, personal contacts, and public service announcements on radio and newspapers.
- ✓ Surveying participants/initial needs assessment.
- ✓ Implementing a series of training seminars in Spanish with translation to English, when needed (Fig. 1.).

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Results to date

A series of six seminars in technical and business topics was conducted during the Fall 2011 semester :

- Interested in Agricultural Production, Which is the Next Step?
- Land and Facilities Assessment .
- What, When and How to Produce?
- Introduction to Basic Farm Business Activities and Terminology.
- Fundamental Record Keeping and Financial Statements.
- Labor Management in Agribusiness.

Fig. 1. training seminars delivered during the Fall 2011 semester.

Challenges

Although there was a promotional campaign very low levels of participation were registered. A total of 14 people, representing nine households, attended at least one training seminar. Only two families were present at all of the seminars offered.

Future Plans

- ✓ Given the low level of participation, a shift from centralized location to community-based training is anticipated for the second year.
- ✓ Expansion to neighboring counties and beyond through field days, a locally hosted conference for small and beginning farmers, and promotion and outreach through social media is expected.
- ✓ Efforts are underway to recruit student volunteer ambassadors to assist with outreach activities directed at schools. Also, a potential partnership with the University's Office of Hispanic Outreach to co-deliver school-based outreach is under discussion.
- ✓ It has become obvious that there is greater interest in the program from groups other than Hispanics, thus, new strategies that facilitate a heterogeneous audience will be employed such as development of training seminars with real-time translation and delivering instructional materials in Spanish and English through the Internet.