

## **PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE AMONG LATINO FARMERS**

**José L. García, Ph.D.**

**A project supported by the Sustainable Agriculture Network (SAN)**

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### *Background and Purpose*

This project was initiated based on the interest of the Sustainable Agriculture Network (SAN) to promote its Spanish bulletin “Estrategias Económico Ambientales en la Crianza de Cerdos” and to identify other potential topics for publication in Spanish. Information related to Latino farmers is scarce and scattered. Also, extension educators and organization and agency professionals have little or no training opportunities in reaching out and working with Latino farmers. These shortfalls of information, awareness, knowledge, and skills, as well as language and cultural differences represent barriers between Latino farmers and the services available to them.

The purposes of this project, conducted by Dr. José García of the University of Missouri, are: 1) to compile existing information about the demographics, language, and farming operations of Latino farmers in the country; 2) to raise awareness about sustainable agriculture resources in English and Spanish, including the Spanish language bulletin *Estrategias Económico-Ambientales en la Crianza de Cerdos* among media and educators in rural areas; and 3) to provide recommendations to the SARE Program to better reach out Latino farmers by using media outlets, extension and agency educators.

### *Findings*

Most of the information collected in this project comes from sources such as the Agriculture Census, ERS, NRCS, journal articles, newsletters, and other publications. Demographic figures reveal that about 3.2 million Latinos live in rural counties and that 72,329 were farmers in 2002. Puerto Rico adds 17,659 Latino farmers making a total of almost 90,000 farmers. Latino seasonal, temporary and migrant farmworkers make up another important group of Latinos involved in food and agriculture who are potential (future) farmers and users of sustainable agriculture resources and information. Finally, almost 1/3 (i.e. 1 million) of Latinos in non-metro counties was foreign-born which suggests that Spanish is a frequently spoken language in rural areas.

Some other findings of José García’s compilation include:

- The vast majority of Latino farms are small to mid size farms
- Over 1/3 of all Latino farms are beef cattle operations representing the largest category
- The second largest category is non-traditional (other) crops with about 16% of Latino farms followed by fruit and tree nuts with 15% of Latino farms
- In Puerto Rico, coffee and dairy are the two leading categories
- The vast majority of Latino farms are individual or family farms (90%)
- Close to 60% of all farms are run by a full time operator
- Over 60% of all farms are in the < \$ 10,000 economic class
- Latino farms are the most rapid growing farmer group in the U.S.

- Average sales of Latino farms increased faster than most groups
- Many have not been on the farm long enough to establish long-term relationships with USDA-programs (or USDA needs to be more pro active to reach them out), therefore
- Latino farmers have little or no awareness of services and programs and their participation in USDA programs is low
- Latino farms went from a regional (Texas, SW States, California) to a national phenomenon
- Latino farmers have a great diversity of backgrounds, informational and service needs.
- USDA and State agencies and Extension have little/no information of Latino producers' needs.
- Latino producers may be less organized than other groups.

*“Cerdos” Publication, Latino Farmer Needs, and Recommendations*

To increase the awareness of the *Cerdos* publication García has generated a database with 130 entries of organizations, professionals and media outlets interested in Latino farmers. SAN is using the database entries to send an announcement letter on the *Cerdos* bulletin, as well as to make the subscribers aware of additional sustainable agriculture related information for Latino and other minority audiences.

There obviously is no “one-size-fits all” answer in regards to the needs of Latino farmers in the country. Many factors play a role in identifying what is needed and relevant to Latino farmers, some of those factors are:

- Farm operations
- Level of education
- Years on the farm (and experience with S.A.)
- Language preference
- Cultural aspects

Concerning their information needs, below are some that were identified by José García. It is important, however, to understand that the bullets are just an initial detection of Latino farmers needs. Much more time and resources are needed to acquire a complete picture of Latino farmers' information needs:

- Sustainable Business Planning
- Marketing opportunities and strategies
- Livestock (cattle, dairy, but also small livestock)
- Small fruits (berries) and nuts
- Gender and generation issues
- Legal and labor issues (farmworkers, family labor)

In addition, he has formulated several short term recommendations to reach out Latino (and other minority) farmers (1-2 years):

- Develop a long term strategy to promote sustainable agriculture information to Latino farmers:
  - Establish direct contact with Latino farmers

- Publicize S.A. information relevant to Latino farmers
- Make information available to farmers and organizations working with them
- Write articles and stories in rural publications in English and Spanish
- Develop S.A. fact sheets and publish stories in newsletters
- Participate in—or organize—conferences meetings on Latino/minority
- Generate a systematized set of information on Latino farmers and organizations serving them
- Identify and analyze the strengths and weaknesses of existing outreach practices for Latino farmers
- Identify 2-3 key needs of Latino farmers and 2-3 needs of Latino ranchers and develop a strategy to provide education and information.
- Create venues of collaborations with other USDA agencies to develop programs for, and reports on, Latino farmers.

Also, some mid-term recommendations (3-5 years) to work with, and provide sustainable agriculture information to, Latino farmers and ranchers are proposed by García:

- Create an initial set of policy and research recommendations that will address 1) the current and future needs of Latino farmers in sustainable agriculture and 2) The increase of the body of knowledge about Latino farmers and ranchers.
- Establish a committee or taskforce to develop a strategic plan to include Latino farmers into USDA and Extension programs.
- Adjust (or develop new) USDA and Extension programs to better respond to the sustainable agriculture needs of Latino farmers.
- Establish partnerships with land grant universities to increase research on, and outreach to, Latino farmers in the S. A. field.
- Seek partnerships with Latino farmer organizations and other organizations serving Latino and immigrant farmers to provide S. A. opportunities
- Organize regional conferences on Latino farms and their needs.
- Establish an information and clearing house center on, and a network of service providers of, Latino-minority-immigrant farmers.
- Long term efforts and initiatives to serve Latino farmers will be more efficient and turn into positive impacts than short term projects.

As mentioned above, this was a pilot and small project funded by SAN, but it has clearly shown that meeting the information needs on sustainable agriculture of Latino farmers is a complex issue and should be approached with the necessary commitment and resources.