United States Department of Agriculture
Research, Education, and Economics
National Agricultural Statistics Service
Office of Small Farms Coordination

Small Farms Success Stories: USDA Small Farms and Beginning Farmers and Ranchers Coordinators' Collections, 2006 - 2008

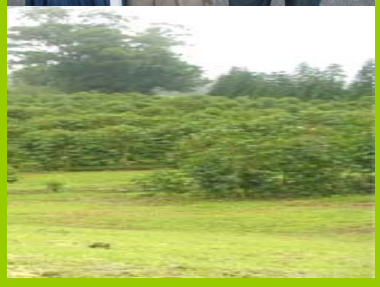

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Table of Contents

Continued

Table of Contents

Preface

This publication of success stories was prepared by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Office of Small Farms Coordination. These stories collected by the USDA Small Farms and Beginning Farmers and Ranchers Coordinators highlight some of the many successes that demonstrate the continuing efforts made by the Department to facilitate economic vibrancy to rural communities and improve the quality of life for the Nation's small farmers, beginning farmers and ranchers, and farmworkers.

Departmental Regulation (DR) 9700-001, Small Farms and Beginning Farmers and Ranchers Policy, dated August 3, 2006, emphasizes the importance and role of small farms and beginning farmers and ranchers to U.S. agriculture and the establishment of strategies, systems, and a Departmental framework for achieving and maintaining the viability of small farms and beginning farmers and ranchers.

According to the USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service's 2007 Census of Agriculture results, the number of farms in the United States has increased by 4 percent and the operators of those farms have become more diverse in the past 5 years.

Small farms have been critical to the American society throughout the Nation's history. Small farms are key to safeguarding the future sustainability of agricultural production. Today, as historically, the vast majority of all farms in the United States are small. The viability and sustainability of these farms is important to our Nation's economy, to the wise stewardship of our biological and natural resources, and to the leadership and social fabric of rural communities. Their economic contribution is important to the Nation and is especially critical to the thousands of rural communities where they pay taxes and to the thousands of businesses they support.

Photos in this publication represent the farmers associated with the stories or were obtained from the USDA Photography Center Web site.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

As Acting Director of the USDA Office of Small Farms Coordination, I would like to thank all of the USDA Small Farms and Beginning Farmers and Ranchers Coordinators who worked with such determination and great sincerity to provide input into this publication. These dedicated individuals and their diligent work are essential to the future and viability of America's small family farms.

This publication is another demonstration of their commitment to the Department's efforts to reach out to agricultural and rural communities. These success stories further illustrate that small farms play an important role in the U.S. agricultural sector. Many thanks to the subcommittee members: Kathryn Hill, USDA Office of Communications; Sharon Hestvik, Risk Management Agency; Velma Charles-Shannon and Geraldine Herring, USDA Office of Outreach; and Edgar Lewis, USDA Rural Development, Business and Cooperative Programs.

I wish to give special thanks to Rosannah Taylor, Assistant to the Director, USDA Office of Small Farms Coordination, for coordinating and editing the final document, including designing the cover and layout. I sincerely appreciate Sharon Hestvik, USDA Risk Management Agency, for her assistance with editing the final document. I deeply appreciate the work of Lisa M. Mason, USDA Office of Outreach, who worked closely with the committee on the final editing of the document design and layout.

Also, I wish to thank all the other individuals who contributed to the success stories and helped to make this publication possible.

I would also like to thank Alfonzo Drain, National Agricultural Statistics Service, for his support and guidance.

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Continued

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Edgar Lewis

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Agricultural Research Service (ARS)

Supporting Small Farm Success With Shiitake Mushrooms

Shiitake (*Lentinula edodes*) mushrooms are good for you—and shiitake byproducts can be good for other crops. These mushrooms contain high-molecular-weight polysaccharides (HMWP), which some studies suggest may improve human immune function. Other research indicates that the shiitake compound eritadenine may help lower cholesterol levels.

Agricultural Research Service's agronomist David Brauer at the Dale Bumpers Small Farms Research Center (Booneville, Arkansas) in collaboration with small farm producers Tom and Brandy Kimmons, Mark Philip, and Larry Dollar have been studying shiitake production at the Shiitake Mushroom Center in Shirley, Arkansas. This team evaluated whether shiitakes grown on logs have higher levels of a HMWP than shiitakes grown on commercial substrates.

The group inoculated logs with spores from three different shiitake varieties and compared the yield with shiitake yields grown on commercial substrates. They found that the log-grown shiitakes had HMWP levels as much as 70 percent higher than the substrate-grown shiitakes. The team also observed that shiitakes grown on red and white oak logs had higher levels of HMWP than shiitakes grown on sweet gum logs.

Inoculated logs with spores from three different shiitake varieties

Logs used in shiitake production generally provide good yields for around 2 to 3 years. Larger shiitake farms may have 3,000 or more logs on the premises and retire around 1,000 of them every year.

To avoid wasting these used logs, Brauer's team chipped a selection of spent logs, added urea and green grass cuttings to the chips, and then composted the mixture. They found that the nitrogen levels in the resulting compost were comparable to nitrogen levels in other purchased soil amendment materials.

Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES)

Attracting Young Beginning Farmers to Farming

Tuskegee University and Jacob Waddy entered into a formal Memorandum of Understanding to attract young men and women beginning farmers to farming. This included production, processing, business principles, and marketing of farm-raised products, such as goats, pasture-raised chickens, turkeys, rabbits, beef calves, and organic vegetables. This project greatly contributed to several research areas including: (1) integrative small ruminant research; (2) evaluation of alternative farming practices on environmental and water quality in Alabama; (3) maintaining agricultural systems that improve competitiveness in domestic production, processing, and marketing; and (4) enhancement of economic opportunity for families, youth, and communities.

Goats in the forest environment

Farmers, and particularly small and limited-resource farmers, are trying to find ways to cut costs, reduce risks, and increase income. One way to do this is to diversify the farming enterprise. Waddy's farm is a highly diverse system that specializes in goat production, agroforestry, pasture poultry and vegetable production using plasticulture, all with significant youth participation.

Waddy's vegetable production using plasticulture plots

A student observing chickens in poultry pens

Pasture Poultry is one way to increase income from small-scale poultry production. With the potential to raise almost 400 birds, Waddy was having trouble with high mortality rates in his flock and resultant loss of income. Tuskegee University's Cooperative Extension agents and research scientists recommended that Waddy move his poultry pens and more frequently change the water and feed. Almost immediately, his flock's health improved and mortality decreased to zero. A critical problem was resolved, and income from this portion of the farming system was restored.

Keeping the Family Farming – One Kansas Family's Story

Ever since he learned his way around a computer, Darin Grimm knew he had a knack for technology. In fact, he chose a career in computer network support. A few years later, changes occurred at his workplace, forcing him to reexamine his career choice. After learning his parents had a need for him on the family farm, he quickly realized that he could incorporate his technological ability into the family farm operation. Gerald and Ruby Grimm welcomed Darin and his wife Marci into the family business.

Incorporating another member into an active role in the family farm can be a happy occasion but the transition can also be wrought with difficulties, according to Kansas State agricultural economist Rod Jones. The stresses of running a farming business intertwined with family relationships can sometime lead to misunderstandings. To address this, Jones and fellow agricultural economist Duane Hund developed a series of workshops called "Keeping the Family Farming" with funding from the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service's North Central Risk Management Education Center.

"For many farms and ranches, planning for the future of the business is informal and starts with a consideration of current resources," Jones said. "Activities and enterprises are then selected to fit the existing resources." Jones cautions that vague goals may be the result. Often, a better approach is to develop a more strategic and participatory management style beginning with both the management team and stakeholders sharing their vision of where they want the business to go. This vision then focuses on a concrete mission, accomplished through careful consideration and documentation of long-term objectives and short-term goals.

In the Grimm's case, once Darin Grimm came back to the family farm, the division of responsibilities evolved. He is responsible for buying inputs and seed for the family business, in addition to incorporating precision agricultural technology.

Women in Agriculture 2-acre fragrant lavender field

The Essence of Lavender Fields

Three long-time friends and now women in agriculture – Sharon Harris, Marie Mayor, and Mary Ann Etu – jumped feet first into farming when they bought a farm, "Lavender Fields." Etu and Mayor are both retired Cooperative Extension home economists, and Harris is a retired attorney. Retirement, however, is far from reality for these "women in agriculture." Their 5-acre Milton, Delaware, farm, including 2 acres of lavender, keeps them very busy. Since first taking ownership, they have allowed their creative vision to transform the farm into its present beauty-luscious lavender and everlasting gardens that are vibrant and fragrant.

Managing and operating a successful farm, though, is much more involved than creating an aesthetically pleasing landscape. Becoming entrepreneurs required an additional set of risk management tools. Through participating in a small farm mentoring project, funded through the Northeast Center for Risk Management Education (NECRME), the owners of Lavender Fields met with a mentor to help them develop a business and marketing plan. In retrospect, they said it took a while to implement all the recommended ideas, but they have done everything that was suggested.

To further grow their small niche business, the women have participated in annual regional Women in Agriculture (WIA) conferences, which are also sponsored by NECRME. At the conferences, they have found opportunities to learn in a collaborative, cooperative, and non-competitive environment. Past WIA conferences have offered workshops such as marketing, computer recordkeeping, small business loans, and on-farm kitchens. Those topics helped the Lavender Fields' owners further develop and broaden their entrepreneurial skills – specifically gaining early entry into local farmers markets to build their customer base and securing a small business loan. In essence, the time and effort these agricultural women have invested in education is paying off and their business "has grown leaps and bounds between 2003 and 2008."

Transitioning to Grass-Fed Beef

A 400-acre grain farm in Delaware was no longer competitive. The Joneses, a father and son team from Sussex County, came to this realization and began a proactive process of research and business planning to address charting a new course for their operation. They sought advice from several sources, including an Entrepreneurial Ventures workshop series funded by a 2005 grant from the Northeast Center for Risk Management Education and conducted by Delaware Cooperative Extension agent Gordon Johnson.

Utilizing knowledge acquired in the workshops, the Joneses' team developed a business plan to transform their grain operation into the production of "grass-fed" Angus beef that would be sold directly to consumers.

The workshops covered topics such as identifying a market niche, which led them to develop a mission statement that included "meeting the demand of health-conscious consumers" with a product that would allow them to remain "good stewards of the land," and ultimately to "maintain the family farm." The workshops also stressed the need to take adequate time to develop a business plan, and since it was first written, the Joneses have adapted their plan to offset economic changes and other outside forces.

Thanks to their investment in a careful, comprehensive business planning process, the Joneses are well on their way to meeting the objectives of their current mission statement. The grass-fed Angus herd now numbers around 80 head, of which 20 are slaughtered each year. Consumers generally learn about the Joneses' meats by word of mouth and may order either a whole, half, or quartered cow. Thirty-pound sample packs are also available, which include steaks, roasts, and hamburger. The transformation of their operation has resulted in the Joneses once again running a competitive agribusiness.

A black Angus cow in a grass field

Rainbow Organic Farms butcher products for sale at Kansas City area grocery stores.

Rainbow Organic Farms

Finding the time, gaining the knowledge, and obtaining the funds to market their products can be a major hurdle for many small family farms. To tackle this problem, Diana Endicott of Rainbow Organic Farms established the Good Natured Family Farms (GNFF) alliance of small farmers in eastern Kansas and western Missouri, with supporting grants from the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES) Small Business Innovation Research program. The alliance enables farmers to sell many of their products through a network of grocery stores in the Kansas City area (Hen House and Price Chopper food stores).

Products include eggs, milk, honey, various kinds of produce and fruits, and other types of meat products such as buffalo and heritage pork. The GNFF program provides extra income for the participating farmers and a series of quality products for the consumers in Kansas City. The beef is produced without use of hormones or antibiotics and is dry aged and thus of a higher quality than what is available in most stores. The milk is pasteurized slowly at a low temperature, resulting in a better tasting and higher quality product. Similarly, all of the products sold under the GNFF label are local, fresh, and of a higher quality than comparable products. The GNFF alliance started with 30 farms, and today over 100 family farms participate in the alliance.

Rainbow Organic Farms products for sale at Kansas City area grocery stores.

Developing Ethnic Vegetable Markets in the Northeast

Rapid urbanization and continued land development have put pressure on the profitability of farming. In New Jersey between 1987 and 1997, there was a 6.9 percent drop in total farmland acreage. To preserve farmland for agricultural use, there is a need to identify alternative enterprises that will enhance the profitability of small and medium-sized farms. Such an opportunity may have been created by the growth of immigrant populations, which in turn is fueling the growth of ethnic vegetables like cilantro and bok choy, and giving farmers new, potentially more profitable, revenue streams to add to their American staples of corn, sweet peppers, and tomatoes. Small farmers have less competition for this narrow niche, crops that an ethnic population would have consumed in their home country, now growing in small quantities in the United States.

A Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service's National Research Initiative (NRI), Agricultural Prosperity for Small and Medium Sized Farms Program, funded by Rutgers University, is documenting the market demand and finding opportunities for East Coast farmers to grow and cooperatively market ethnic crops, creating a year-round supply. The researchers have also created a blueprint to develop a market along the East Coast—including Connecticut, New Jersey, Florida, and Georgia— to link growers with ethnic consumers. Economists have measured the demands carefully so farmers won't glut the market and make these potentially premium crops lose their value. Farmers in New Jersey, Florida, and Massachusetts are testing the climate for the crops with growing trials over a 2-year span. Chuck Obern, a farmer with 2,500 acres in the Eastern Everglades in Florida who is test-growing some of the Rutgers University crop, said the idea of an East Coast cooperative is promising, and it would create a year-round supply that could compete with California.

Dr. Ramu Govindasamy explaining Chinese cucumber harvest maturity to farmers.

Bitter gourd is examined for quality.

Patch-Burning for Cattle and Prairie

Kansas rancher Jane Koger, who raises 125 head of cattle annually in a cow/calf herd, is trying an ambitious new strategy to ranch more caringly in her rare prairie ecosystem: patch-burning. Like her ranching neighbors, Koger used to burn her 4,000 acres of prairie yearly to improve its nutritional value for cattle. Yet full-scale burning destroyed habitat for species like the rapidly declining greater prairie chicken, as well as native plants.

Koger learned about a Nature Conservancy patch-burning project in Oklahoma that featured burning one-third of the property each year, with a repeat cycle during the following 3 years. Data from Oklahoma State University showed that yearling cattle will gain as well under patch-burning as with annual burns. We know we can produce Big Macs, said Koger, "but we're losing some of our bird species. This is a better way to protect them."

The fires mimic historic patterns in nature, and actually control the movement of the livestock, which migrate to the burned area a few days after the fire is out. The new growth is more palatable than older grasses, said Koger, who saw her cattle spend 80 percent of their time in a just-burned patch. Moreover, patch-burning leaves 2 years of old-growth grass, creating more fuel for a hotter burn in the next cycle, which helps get rid of invasive, woody species.

More and more farmers and researchers are experimenting with patch-burning. In addition to Koger's Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) funded work, SARE-supported researchers at South Dakota State University are exploring the technique to better balance ranching with habitat diversity.

Jane Koger's smile demonstrates her success in patch-burning.

Koger said, "We do have high hopes that others might be willing to consider a proven double-bottom-line approach that allows them to do good for the environment while continuing to do well in the cattle business."

New Farmer Direct Market Success in Colorado

Boulder County, Colorado, is home to thriving direct markets for local food. Mark Guttridge had access to a family farm with irrigation, but lacked the production, marketing, and business management knowledge to implement a viable market farm business. Guttridge participated in a Colorado State University (CSU) Extension program designed to help new farmers build a sustainable market farm business. The new farmer program, Market Farm Track, was launched in 2007 by Boulder County Extension. Guttridge learned from CSU agricultural business instructors, successful market farmers, and other agricultural service providers how to craft a business plan. His wife, Kena, suggested focusing part of their business model on produce and crafts that appeal to the Latino market. Her Mexican ancestry and family connections helped with ideas and resources to develop this unique marketing strategy. The Guttridges were also able to secure financing from USDA Farm Service Agency for capital improvements and a line of credit.

Guttridge built a produce stand in the spring of 2008 and a hoophouse in the winter of 2008. He was accepted into the Market Farm Mentorship program also by Boulder County Extension and was matched with an experienced market farm mentor. He made irrigation improvements, modified crop selection and plantings, and expanded production based on what he learned in the class and from his mentor. Accepted as a member of the Longmont Farmers Market, Guttridge found that the demand from his produce stand and from his market booth outpaced his original production plan. With expanded production, Guttridge currently projects sales to exceed triple their farm's expected annual sales and is exploring leasing adjacent agricultural land from Boulder County to further expand their production for 2009.

Providing Water Quality Education to California's Ethnic Chinese Farmers - California's Central Coast/Santa Clara County

In 2005, California's Central Coast Water Quality Control Board began an agricultural waiver program for water discharge that required farmers who use irrigation to learn how to best manage water quality. To earn the waiver, growers were required to complete educational courses—offered in English and Spanish. The region's only major agricultural population that didn't have access to water quality courses was the ethnic Chinese growers, who operate a large number of small-scale farms.

With assistance from Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Services (CSREES) funding for socially disadvantaged farmers, Small Farm Program advisor Aziz Baameur spearheaded a cooperative effort to provide water quality education for the ethnic Chinese. Baameur received support from the local water district, fellow Extension advisors, Farm Bureau offices, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the University of California, Riverside (UC). The UC Small

Farm Program also hired a translator to work on printed course materials. Classes were designed with input from the ethnic Chinese agricultural community leaders.

The effort yielded six water quality workshops for ethnic Chinese farmers on pest management, irrigation, nutrient management, erosion management and plan development. The hands-on workshops were culturally appropriate, presented in Cantonese, and had Chinese-language print materials.

Approximately 63 farmers participated in each of the workshops, with about 60 percent completing all classes necessary to earn the waiver. Making these courses available turned what could have been a punitive approach to water quality into an educational opportunity. These previously underserved farmers were provided additional knowledge, skills, and encouragement on water quality issues, with the goal of cleaner run-off and less waste. The project also improved the working relationship between Extension and the area's ethnic Chinese farmers, which has led to more agricultural meetings. Regulatory feedback will provide further direction for the next step of water quality education for this community of growers.

University of California Small Farm Program advisor Aziz Baameur, center, discusses leafy greens production with a visiting professor and a grower.

Helping Family Farmers Navigate Through Labor Regulations

Many immigrant and refugee farmers in California rely on extended family members to help on their small-scale farms. These relatives often volunteer or exchange their work for future assistance. However, the State considers these relatives as employees, requiring a workers' compensation insurance policy and compliance with labor regulations.

In 2005, Hmong farmers in Fresno County were fined $14,000 - $22,000 each for not having workers' compensation insurance and not meeting the requirements of Occupational Safety and Health Administration regulations. In 2008, additional Hispanic and Hmong farms were fined up to $26,000 for the same problems. The University of California (UC) Cooperative Extension office in Fresno received frequent calls from Southeast Asian farmers asking, "Is it safe to work on my farm today?"

Farmers harvesting green beans.

Small Farm Program advisor Richard Molinar, through the University of California Cooperative Extension Fresno office, received a grant from the Western Center for Risk Management Education to provide outreach and educational materials to help minority farmers comply with regulations. Molinar and assistant Michael Yang worked with organizations such as Hmong American Community, National Hmong American Farmers, African American Farmers of California, Fresno's County Economic Opportunities Commission, and the California Department of Industrial Relations to clarify the regulations. The information was presented in English, Spanish, Lao, and Hmong to many of Fresno County's 4,000 farmers via meetings, radio, television, trade magazines, newsletters, and newspapers.

More than 425 farmers attended meetings to learn about the regulations. Hmong farmers near Fresno were also educated through a biweekly Hmong radio program hosted by Yang. An informational publication is near completion, and employment posters were distributed to 60-plus farmers.

These farmers better understand how to comply with labor regulations. By working with community organizations, Molinar helped create community support for regulatory compliance. His work has allowed farmers to continue traditions of sharing work with family in a safe and legal way.

Asian vegetable variety.

New Mexico Grower Saved by the Sun

Don Bustos poses in field in front of his thermal heating system green houses.

Don Bustos' family farm at the edge of the Sonoran desert gets ample sunshine, but the short season and rising fuel costs encouraged the New Mexico grower to investigate solar power as a way to heat his greenhouse.

This was a logical choice for Bustos, who farms 3-1/2 acres of certified organic land in the small town of Santa Cruz. A USDA Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES), Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) grant allowed Bustos to test a root-zone thermal heating system.

To minimize costs, he recycled solar collectors from a demolition site. Heating fluid runs from these panels through buried copper tubing to warm water in an underground tank. The warm water then circulates through plastic tubes under the greenhouse's beds, raising soil temperatures to between 48 and 52 degrees. And the system even works in reverse: in summer, Bustos circulates the water underground to cool it.

The first season was extremely successful. Annual heating costs dropped from $2,000 to zero and yields increased nearly 40 percent over the standard cold frame. The only ongoing cost is a $5 monthly electricity charge for water-circulating pumps.

With the solar-heated system, Bustos now produces vegetables and greens from October to March. He has a solid, local market, thanks to the strong collaboration among the New Mexico Department of Agriculture, private citizens, and farmers that permit the Santa Fe school district to buy directly from growers like Bustos.

Local marketing cuts transportation-related energy use, allowing him to adhere to his philosophy of marketing his food within 28 miles of his farm. Bustos is now investigating how to get entirely off the grid by increasing energy efficiency, expanding the solar panels to the house, and filling his tractors with biodiesel.

The solar greenhouse fits perfectly with Bustos' philosophy: "We wanted to retain our land for future generations and not have to develop it into houses."

Creating Markets for Small Forest Owners

In 2005, Connor Bailer and a multidisciplinary team of researchers at Auburn University received an Agricultural Prosperity for Small and Medium Sized Farms grant from USDA Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES) to identify small-scale appropriate harvesting and wood processing technologies to generate income and employment for small-scale forest owners. A secondary objective is to train architecture students to produce building materials that can be used to improve the living conditions of the rural poor.

During the last 30 years, the forest products industry in the South has undergone rapid transformation. Long gone are the bobtail trucks that were used to transport short wood to small mills. Today, the industry is dominated by large complexes supplied by capital-intensive logging operations that are efficient on large tracts but equally inefficient on tracts of less than 50 acres. However, there are approximately 20 million acres of forest land in the South with

Logging equipment used to train architecture students.

tracts of 50 acres or less. This implies that there are approximately 400,000 owners without a market for their timber. This under-utilized resource coincides with the resource needs to address the problem of substandard housing. Approximately 6.2 million Americans live in substandard housing and can benefit from building materials produced with this timber.

Through the Rural Studio (whose mission is to seek solutions to the needs of the community within the community's own context), the project is teaching architectural students about the social responsibilities of well-constructed homes for poor communities in rural west Alabama, part of the so-called "Black Belt." They have already

designed and constructed one house using primarily local materials and in 2008-2009, they will focus their entire program on low-cost housing using local material from small-scale forest owners. Outreach activities to other universities in the South are creating programs similar to the Rural Studio. Therefore, the potential long-run impacts of this grant on small farmers and the rural poor are tremendous.

From One Immigrant to Another, Good Fortune Is Spread

When Maria Moreira emigrated from Portugal some 40 years ago, she sought to continue the treasured farming lifestyle and family traditions she learned growing up. But the road wasn't easy. She and her husband just could not make ends meet on their dairy farm in Lancaster, Massachusetts. They turned to their roots for the answer and came up with an entrepreneurial idea: adding value to their milk by producing native Portuguese cheese. The farm prospered.

Moreira decided to pass on her good fortune by helping other immigrants facing similar problems. First, she helped Hmong refugees from Laos start growing and marketing their traditional vegetables. This experience led to Flats Mentor Farm (FMF), a 70-acre farm that supports small-scale farmers of diverse ethnic backgrounds by securing the land, infrastructure and marketing assistance required for successful farming enterprises. The program offers resources, hands-on training, and technical assistance on sustainable practices that

Good fortune shared with others who are now selling their produce at farmers markets.

build soil fertility, develop irrigation, manage pests and weeds, and promote marketing.

With support and assistance from the USDA Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service Sustainable Agricultural Research and Education (SARE) program and organizations such as the University of Massachusetts Extension, and Moreira's continued mentoring, the farmers evolved from growing just enough for their families to selling their produce at farmers markets in and around Boston. In 2007, FMF immigrant farmers produced ethnic crops on 26 acres of land, sold their produce at 23 farmers markets, and grossed more than $20,000 on their newly piloted wholesale effort.

Thanks to Moreira, the growing ranks of the Northeast's immigrant farmers can avoid many of the obstacles she faced so many years ago. "When you have the passion, you need to make it work for you," Moreira says. "I want to help other farmers, especially new farmers facing many of the challenges we faced, learn how to make agricultural marketing systems work for them."

Farm Service Agency (FSA)

Georgia Farmer Wins "Farm Family of the Year" Award

Georgia's Fort Valley State University awarded a Lowndes County, Georgia, farmer, Quentin "Bo" White, with the 2007 Farm Family of the Year Award for his outstanding contributions to agriculture and natural resources. White is a fourth generation farmer. His farm has been in the White family for over 100 years. He produces approximately 450 acres of corn, cotton, peanuts, and soybeans.

Left to right in the USDA Service Center in Lowndes County are Quentin White and Terrie Wolford, County Executive Director.

White ventured out on his own about 9 years ago, applying for a beginning farmer loan with the USDA Farm Service Agency's Farm Loan Program and, eventually, the Direct Loan Program. He also participates in Farm Service Agency's Direct and Counter-Cyclical Payment Program, Commodity Loan Program, and Loan Deficiency Program.

White credited the Beginning Farmer Loan Program with helping him to get established with his own operation and allowing him to continue farming. In his opinion, a farmer needs to have the mindset to succeed and thoroughly enjoy farming and the independence that comes with it. He plans to continue farming and hopes to pass his farm on to the next generation. The staff at the Lowndes, Lanier, Clinch, and Echols County Farm Service Agency office expressed their pride in White's success.

Farm Service Agency Youth Loan Recipient Honored at Missouri Future Farmers of America (FFA) Convention

The Missouri FFA Association recognized Levi Oxley from the Gainesville, Missouri,

FFA chapter as the Area 13 Star Farmer at the 80th Missouri FFA Convention held April 17-18, 2008, in Columbia, Missouri. As an area winner, Oxley competed for the title of Missouri's "Star Farmer." Oxley was excited about the opportunity to compete for the State Star Farmer Award. "It would mean a lot to win the State Star Farmer Award," Oxley said. "Winning would give me something to look back on. It will help me to not give up, to push harder, and to set bigger goals."

Left to right, Missouri FSA State Executive Director Tim Kelley with Levi Oxley, and his FFA advisor, John Wilson, at the 80th Missouri FFA Convention.

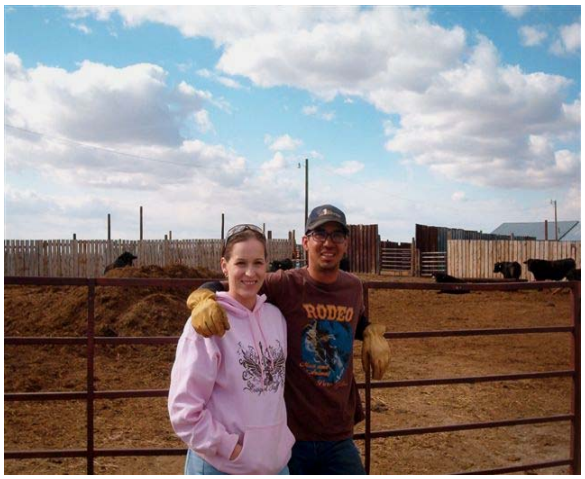
Seminar Promotes FSA Program Awareness to Minority Farmers

On March 10, 2008, several Latino Central Missouri residents gathered at the University of Missouri Extension center in Marshall, Missouri, for a program aimed at increasing their awareness and participation in Federal agency programs. The University of Missouri received a grant from USDA Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service's (CSREES) program to hold a series of seminars across the State to address the needs of Latino, African-American, and Hmong farmers to familiarize them with Federal services available through the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and CSREES' Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program The goal was to connect producers, or those interested in becoming involved in agriculture, with Federal agencies and to be better able to request or receive services.

Maria Graves from the Kansas City Commodity Office presents FSA program information in Spanish.

Maria Graves from the Kansas City Commodity Office presents FSA program information in Spanish at a recent seminar sponsored by the University of Missouri Extension Service.

Ranching Successfully in North Dakota



Myron and Kindra Johnson looking over the ranch.

A story from a few years ago illustrates Myron Johnson's drive to succeed. After high school, Johnson participated in regional rodeo events. He rode bulls, a competition requiring 8 seconds on a one-ton of muscle, bone, fire, and general ill-will toward all humankind.

Johnson wanted to enter a big rodeo in Connecticut. But, Connecticut was 2,000 miles away from Mandaree, North Dakota. He asked his parents for bus fare and entry fees. Settling for a one-way ticket, he promised to return on his own. At the rodeo, Myron also entered bronco busting, figuring the more events he tried, the more likely he could get home. And get home, he did—in the new Dodge pickup he won!

Johnson got his ranching start with a purchase of bred cows in 2006 using a Farm Service Agency's direct loan. He now has his third calf crop on the ground. Not only has he been able to maintain his herd successfully, he has managed to use his calf proceeds to expand his herd to 180 cows and 9 bulls.

Getting a start in ranching successfully guarantees a few realities---long hours and little money left over for one's troubles. Not only have Myron and Kindra Johnson worked long hours on the ranch and off, they have shown a willingness to learn about budgeting and financing that is also commendable.

Proof of ranching comes at the calf auction. After Johnson sold his steers last fall in Dickinson, North Dakota, his calves were impressive enough that his steers brought a nickel a pound more than any other in their weight class that day. A nickel might not sound like much, but it adds another $27 per 550 weight calf. And that amount over 150 calves becomes a substantial return for good management!

Often new borrowers think that the USDA Farm Service Agency farm loan program documentation and paperwork is overwhelming. To his credit, Johnson isn't afraid to ask questions or ask for assistance if he needs it. Asked recently about his thoughts about the Farm Service Agency loan program, he said simply, "I don't know how else a fellow can get start-up financing."

National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)

National Agricultural Statistics Service and Community-Based Organizations Partner Up for Success

During annual USDA Partnership meetings, community-based organizations (CBOs) have requested that NASS provide a more accurate count of minority producers in the Census of Agriculture. Minority producers could be deprived of USDA programs, services, and funding when census data are not reflective of their significant contributions to U.S. agriculture. To address this, NASS worked closely with the USDA Office of Small Farms Coordination and the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights to find ways to better communicate and build relationships with minority, tribal, community and faith-based organizations. The goal was to help these groups understand the importance of their constituents' participation in the Census of Agriculture. NASS also collaborated with other USDA and Federal agencies, the USDA Office of Outreach, and land-grant institutions to promote the Census at various conferences and workshops for small and minority farmers.

NASS held a national CBO planning workshop in Kansas City in November 2007. Fifty CBO representatives were invited and 37 of them participated, representing 32 CBOs. USDA speakers included Margo McKay, then-Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, and Carl-Martin Ruiz, Director of the Office of Outreach and Diversity. Workshop participants developed preliminary partnering plans that focused on holding "Census Days" around the country to help small and minority producers complete their Census of Agriculture forms.

Community-based participant discussing 2007 Census strategies with colleague.

The benefits of the NASS/CBO partnership can be measured not just by tangible results, but by intangibles such as enhanced working relationships. The Census Days enabled NASS to demonstrate its commitment to minority and underserved farmers and ranchers. Partnering with CBOs enabled NASS and its field offices to tap into the trust that CBOs have developed.

The Landowners Association of Texas Helps NASS Develop Census Days

The Landowners Association of Texas (LAT) is a community-based organization (CBO) in eastern Texas, the part of the State where most of the African American-owned farms and ranches are located. Minority-owned farms in eastern Texas don't historically respond well to government requests for data.

This posed a challenge for NASS, a USDA agency that conducts the Census of Agriculture every 5 years. Census data, at the county level, are used by government decisionmakers and others who serve rural areas. So NASS reached out to local CBOs to help boost Census response rates.

LAT partnered with the NASS Texas Field Office to increase Census response in traditionally low-response counties in eastern Texas.

The purpose of census days was to help local farmers complete their census forms or to provide a form to farmers that did not receive one. The plan was for the regional directors to hold Census workdays in each county from January through March 2008. These workdays reached over 300 minority farmers in east Texas.

In addition to the many Census forms that were completed, an additional benefit to this partnership was the close working relationship formed between LAT and the NASS Texas Field Office. This partnership helped forge more trust and understanding within the local agriculture community and will also benefit ongoing NASS programs and the 2012 Census of Agriculture.

Community-based participants discussing 2007 Census with NASS State Director

Risk Management Agency (RMA)

Finding Success at the Annual Midwest Organic Farming Conference

Each year, farmers and ranchers mark their calendars and make travel plans to attend the Organic Farming Conference held in La Crosse, Wisconsin. The Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service (MOSES) hosts the Organic Farming Conference annually as part of its mission to help agriculture make the transition to a sustainable organic system of farming that is ecologically sound, economically viable, and socially just. The organization's goal is to provide information, education, and research and to integrate the broader community

into this effort. This conference has been supported by funding from the USDA Risk Management Agency Commodity Partnerships and Community Outreach Partnership programs since 2003. One recent goal was to deliver training and information to improve skills in financial management, expose organic and other farmers to current risk management tools and help them make sound decisions, and educate farmers on the benefits of the Adjusted Gross Revenue - Lite (AGR-Lite) Federal Crop Insurance Program.

A buckwheat cover crop on an organic farm

The 2008 Organic Farming Conference had 2,350 producers and others participants in attendance and included 130 exhibitors and 60 workshops addressing a wide diversity of topics ranging from managing weeds, soil management and crop rotations, to financial risk assessments and overviews of government programs. An additional attraction was the Organic Research Symposium where 30 university and farmer researchers provided presentations on cutting-edge research relevant to organic farming systems.

The target audience included beginning/new farmers, farmers already transitioning to organic production, certified organic farmers, and women farmers. MOSES believes that successful organic farming involves a dedication to the creation and maintenance of strong systems and intensive management on all levels. The Organic Farming Conference provides new and transitioning organic farmers with easy access to basic information on transitioning to various kinds of organic production, organic markets, and reliable answers to production marketing and financial management questions. The organization believes that networking is an important part of the conference to find appropriate tools, supplements, advisors, or educational resources that will ultimately reduce the time needed to find information and manage risk.

Women in Blue Jeans Celebrating Women of Rural America

The Women in Blue Jeans Conference promotes risk management education to women working in agriculture to reduce risks in their agricultural businesses. This conference has been funded in part by the USDA Risk Management Agency Community Outreach and Partnership program since 2002. Women in Blue Jeans (WIBJ) members are completely volunteers – none of the steering committee members are paid by the project. Yet WIBJ has people volunteer each year to make this conference a success.

Multiple generations of WIBJ have attended the conference, from 20-year-old women either marrying into a farm family or contemplating agribusiness as a career to 70-year-old women looking back at a life spent on the farm. Also, mothers and daughters attend the conferences as "girls' weekend out." "We honor a rural woman each year and it is wonderful to see that woman realize that her life is exceptional, that she has inspired other women, and that she has been more than just a farmer's wife," said Diana Goldammer of WIBJ from Mitchell, South Dakota. Darlene Engelmeyer of Alexandria, South Dakota, has attended the conference yearly and says it is the "highlight" of her year's work as a farmer. At a time in my life when things were hectic and the need for a support group arose, the WIBJ Conference came to fruition. As a farm partner on a diversified family farm, I needed to attend a conference like WIBJ. Listening to informative, interesting speakers and being able to network with a group of multigenerational women for a couple of days in the middle of a South Dakota winter was just the prescription the "doctor" had ordered. In so many other professions, there is that opportunity to have conferences and educational workshops to enhance one's career and in our unique roles, we had very few available. In 2006, Engelmeyer was nominated for a Spirit of Women in Blue Jeans Award. She was humbled to be chosen from such an elite group of special people. "Humor and fun are important elements in keeping one's resolve when nature's elements and a tough economy affect our lives so dramatically," Engelmeyer said.

In a tight farm economy, WIBJ generates more than $10,000 each year in sponsorships of $500 or less each. "We have such strong support from the community. The businesses see the benefits of this event for the people they serve, for the people who do business with them. When women leave WIBJ each year, they assure us that they'll be back next year. Often they come with the same group of friends, sometimes with a new group, but they come back. Seeing women find kindred spirits is uplifting. Knowing that we make a difference is what keeps us, the committee, working to produce an event better than the last," says Diana Goldammer.

Women in Blue Jeans members attending annual conference in South Dakota.

Family Ties Cultivated in Massachusetts

Donald Carrasquillo, his wife, Aikza Quinones, and one of their daughters displaying joy over their joint produce harvest.

These days, it is rare to see a whole family joined together in any regular activity other than television viewing. Donald Carrasquillo, his wife Aikza, and their four daughters are working to reverse this trend. The family had a rough time after their departure from Puerto Rico 12 years ago. They eventually settled in Lawrence, Massachusetts. The loss felt by the distance from their extended family, as well as limitations due to language barriers, created challenges for the family.

Both Donald and Aikza Carrasquillo grew up on family farms in Puerto Rico; however, they didn't imagine that farming would be an option after leaving their homeland. They were thrilled to learn about the New Entry Sustainable Farming Project (New Entry) funded in part by USDA Risk Management Agency (RMA). New Entry trains beginning farmers to cultivate small-scale farming enterprises. Farmer trainees are expected to operate independently after 3 years of training by New Entry. Donald and Aikza Carrasquillo, and two of their daughters graduated from the farm business training program in 2007 and currently grow produce on a 3/4 acre plot of land near their home.

Prior to planting their first seed, the Carrasquillos developed plans to tap into a diverse array of local markets, including a

local pizzeria, a nursing home, several small ethnic grocery stores, a flea market, and the New Entry's Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) organization. They also set up a farm stand on their front lawn (an urban farm stand), where they sell fresh produce to neighbors.

What makes the Carrasquillo farm unique? Donald Carrasquillo's father who lived in Puerto Rico has now joined the family in Massachusetts. With the help of New Entry, a three-generational family farm enterprise has now been established. The feeling of loss of family ties is no longer as acute. On most weekend afternoons, you can see all seven members of the Carrasquillo clan cultivating their crops as they cultivate their family connections.

Since 2003, the USDA Risk Management Agency has provided funding through the Community Outreach Partnerships for the project, the New Entry Sustainable Farming Project, Risk Management Outreach Training and Technical Assistance to Tufts University, and the Community Team Work, Inc. The mission of the New Entry Sustainable Farming Project is to assist people with limited resources who have an interest in small-scale commercial agriculture to begin farming in Massachusetts.

Oregon's Emerging Farmer Training Project

Throughout 2008, the USDA Risk Management Agency (RMA) Community Outreach and Assistance Partnership with "Friends of Zenger Farms" has successfully reached immigrant, refugee, and minority and limited-resource farmers and ranchers throughout the Portland Multnomah areas of Oregon.

Zenger Farms is a unique, working urban farm promoting sustainable food practices, youth education, environmental stewardship, and community and economic development (a non-profit educational farm in metropolitan Portland, owned by the City of Portland's Bureau of Environmental Services). A total of 9 multilingual farmer workshops were held, and each session had an interpreter with personal microphones – serving approximately 100 immigrants and refugee Hmong, Mien, Lao, Russian, Vietnamese, Hispanic, and Burmese farmers, potential farmers, and community leaders. Nine workshops were held from January to July at Zenger Farms farm site and green house, Jeans Urban Forest, and the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO) Center. The workshop topics included Soil Fertility and Land Access and New Crops; Crop Planning, Farm Plan and Seed Ordering; Pest Management; Choosing Your Best Market Option; Farm Business Management; Plant Propagation, Transplanting and Direct Seeding; Farmers Market Display, Merchandising and Customer Service; and Preparing Producer for Market.

The primary success of this collaborative effort was ensuring that all RMA programs are available to all farmers and ranchers. This partnership specifically reached out to many underserved small farmers and gardeners in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Alaska (Spokane RMA Region), creating awareness of the Risk Management Agency and availability of the tools to help them manage risks such as the Limited-Resource Farmer "Waiver" benefits for both Catastrophic Crop Insurance (CAT) and information about the Farm Service Agency, Non-insured Assistance Program (NAP).

Small Farmer From Zimbabwe - Reconnecting With Her Past

Eight years ago, Sinikiwe (Nikki) Makarutsa arrived in the United States from Zimbabwe. Later, Makarutsa's three children and husband joined her to settle in Lowell, Massachusetts. At first it was difficult for her to adjust to life in the United States. Though she was comfortable in her career, she knew something was missing. While in Zimbabwe, Makarutsa's family never bought vegetables, since she grew them throughout the year. She claims that everyone in Zimbabwe farms "from the time they are born." Makarutsa experienced an inescapable draw to the land, yet she had no idea how to reconnect to her passion.

Sinikiwe (Nikki) Makarutsa proudly displays her certificate of achievement from New Entry Sustainable Farming Project.

Eventually, Makarutsa visited a farm plot managed by a graduate of the New Entry Sustainable Farming Project (New Entry). Since 2003, the USDA Risk Management Agency has provided funding through its Community Outreach Partnerships for this Project: Risk Management Outreach Training and Technical Assistance to Tufts University and the Community Team Work, Inc. New Entry trains beginning farmers to cultivate small-scale farming enterprises. Farmer trainees are expected to operate independently after 3 years of training by New Entry.

In 2007, Makarutsa graduated from New Entry's farmer business training project. She and other New Entry graduates produce crops on small plots leased from New Entry. She developed a unique marketing plan which places her on the road to independence. After observing that local Liberian, Zimbabwean, and Kenyan church communities had nowhere to purchase African vegetables which were ubiquitous in their homelands, Makarutsa implemented a plan to fill the void. As a result, parishioners now have access to crops they enjoy, including hot and sweet pepper, maize, sweet potato greens, collard greens, okra, pumpkin green, nyovi, and drape. Makarutsa's family makes fun of her for spending every available free second on the farm.

What are the results? Despite moving to the United States, Makarutsa has retained her sense of cultural identity. She credits this achievement to her involvement with the New Entry Sustainable Farming Project. Makarutsa reconnects to her farming passion, makes money, and conquers her sense of loss through reconnecting to her past.

Latino/Hispanic Farmers and Ranchers Northwest Conference

In early 2008, the Center for Latino Farmers (CLF) co-hosted the 2008 Latino Producers Regional Conference in Yakima, Washington, with funding from the Rural Community Development Resources – Center for Latino Farmers partnership with the USDA Risk Management Agency (RMA) Community Outreach and Assistance Program. Approximately 100 farmers, ranchers, and others participated in this 1-day workshop. Along with RMA, other primary USDA agencies participating with educational breakout speaker sessions included the Farm Service Agency, National Agricultural Statistics Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Rural Development, and the National Office of Outreach and Diversity as well as Washington State Department of Agriculture. In addition to other RMA speakers, the RMA Outreach Coordinator provided a crop insurance presentation during two separate breakout sessions held throughout the day's event. This successful initiative also included an interesting stakeholder's grant writing workshop, and CLF staff worked one-on-one with Hispanic and Latino farmers from central Washington, specifically on topics related to crop insurance.

In addition to the 1-day conference, a series of monthly radio talk shows were held, namely, Risk Management Programs Radio Hour or Hora de Radio Programas de Riesgo Manejar and a Live Spanish Radio Show at KDNA Spanish Radio--FM 91.9, in Granger, Washington. RMA staff participated in various live radio interviews (which were translated into Spanish) relating to the Federal crop insurance program, such as crop sales closing dates and other risk management tools and information for producers.

Partnerships with CLF have made great strides in reaching Hispanic/Latino farmers with education and outreach, resulting in significantly improved numbers in crop insurance participation thereby helping these farmers manage the risks on their farms.

An example of crop loss due to flooding

Filipino Immigrant Farmers Put Ka'u Coffee on the International Specialty Coffee List

A group of Filipino immigrants who once worked in a sugar mill at Pahala, a small village in the Ka'u district on the island of Hawaii, have learned to grow coffee and now comprise the Ka'u Coffee Growers Cooperative. The immigrants were inspired by the worldwide reputation of Kona coffee, encouraged by the ideal conditions for coffee growth on their leased farms. They were aided by the University of Hawaii program titled Risk Management Training Program for Socially Disadvantaged Filipino and Other Southeast Asian Growers of Hawaii. They were also funded through a 2005 and 2007 USDA Risk Management Agency (RMA) Outreach Partnership Agreement. In 2006 they were funded by USDA Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES). These farmers have overcome their once-limited knowledge of coffee production and marketing.

Obra's coffee field.

In May 2007, after more than a decade of effort, 14 farmers submitted samples of their coffee beans for the Specialty Coffee Association of America (SCAA) Annual Cupping Competition in San Diego, California. SCAA is the world's largest coffee trade association, with members in 40 countries. William Tabios (Rising Sun) received 6th place, and Marlon Biason (Aroma) placed 9th in the competition. In the 2008 cupping competition, Manuel Marques's Ka'u Forest was awarded 11th place, topping Kona coffee, which ranked 12th. With new production and marketing knowledge obtained from RMA risk management workshops and field visits by Extension personnel, these formerly marginalized farmers put Ka'u coffee on the international list of specialty coffees.

Lorie and Rusty Obra came to Pahala in 2000 to farm. With 12 acres of coffee trees, the couple nurtured the orchard together until Rusty Obra succumbed to an illness in 2006, leaving Lorie to run the farm herself. She is now co-president of the 32-member Ka'u Coffee Growers Cooperative. Her coffee (Rusty's) bested six Kona coffees in a cupping workshop in Kailua-Kona in 2007. She harvests, processes, and roasts her coffee, and markets it online and at the Naalehu Farmers Market. Obra's and Tabios's coffees are on the prestigious Alan Wong's Restaurant menu. They also recently brought the Ka'u Coffee name to the upscale Kapiolani Farmers Market in Honolulu.

Ka'u Farm and Ranch, the leaser and managing entity of the coffee farms in Pahala, assisted the farmers in submitting

their samples to the international cupping competitions. With support by the Federal agencies and Ka'u Farm and Ranch, these hard-working farmers are reaping the fruit of recognition of Ka'u Coffee. The project's current goal is to increase production of this quality coffee to meet the increasing demand for 100 percent Ka'u Coffee.

Recordkeeping Education Enables Native American Producers To Make Marketing Decisions and Secure Financing

From 2005 to 2008, Southwest Native American agricultural producers have been participating in a recordkeeping training project funded by the USDA Risk Management Agency (RMA) Community Outreach and Partnership Program in 2005 and the USDA Cooperative, State, Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES) - Western Center for Risk Management Education.

During this time, over 40 workshops have been conducted, reaching approximately 1,000 producers. Participants have indicated that the continued support and training have been critical in the implementation of a records system and in learning how to use records to improve productivity, marketing, and ranch planning. Changes in the livestock industry, such as the implementation of the USDA National Animal Identification System as well as consumer demands for food safety, have resulted in the need for improved livestock recordkeeping. At the same time, many tribal producers are becoming more aware of opportunities to market "Native" or "Natural" beef, realizing that recordkeeping is necessary for niche beef marketing to be successful.

Both formal workshops and one-on-one training have been offered to several of the tribes in the Southwest. Formal workshops provided opportunities for group discussion of current issues, and basic recordkeeping training allowed groups of individuals to learn and support one another throughout the initial recordkeeping system set-up. The individual training sessions provided an opportunity for producers to apply and practice the skills they learned at the workshops, and to ask questions they may be uncomfortable asking to a group comprised largely of non-native producers.

An assessment of the effectiveness of the training and tools on the participant's management decisions is currently underway, and preliminary results are very positive. Of the 116 responses received so far, 27 percent have improved their knowledge of where their expenses go, 11 percent have increased the prices they receive for their livestock and other animals, and 12 percent have a completed management plan for their ranch.

These indicators suggest that the training and tools provided through this project funded by RMA and CSREES are providing positive and long lasting results.

Warm Springs Indian Reservation (Oregon) Partnership Initiative Gets Heated

The Warm Springs (including Wasco and Paiute Tribes) Tribal Reservation is located in north central Oregon and is inhabited by nearly 4,000 tribal members and 650,000 tribal acres (primarily range/grassland for livestock; wheat and alfalfa). In early 2008, the USDA Risk Management Agency (RMA) participated in a partner initiative organized by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Warm Springs Tribal Nation Liaison. This one-day workshop was held at the Kah-Nee-Ta Reservation Casino, in Warm Springs, Oregon.

The day-long event included an RMA presentation on multi-peril crop insurance, including a recent Livestock Risk Protection program for Feeder Cattle and Fed Cattle. In addition to NRCS and RMA, the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Farm Service Agency, Rural Development, and National Agricultural Statistics Service, and other partners, Bureau of Indian Affairs and Northwest Farm Credit Services, provided interesting presentations of interest to the Warm Springs Tribe. At the end of the day-long event, a video documentary about American Indians called "American Indian Homelands" was shown, along with a presentation by Katherine Minthorn Good Luck, the Northwest Regional representative of the Intertribal Agriculture Council and a member of the USDA Secretary's Advisory Committee on Beginning Farmers and Ranchers.

Women Managing the Farm Project

In 2003, individuals involved with farm families and rural communities met at Kansas State University to discuss collaborative activities to address the increasing needs of women in agriculture. This led to the development of the Women Managing the Farm project. The project's mission is to recognize and acknowledge that women play an active role in all aspects of financial and risk management of farm operations.

In 2006, 2007, and 2008, the conference received funding through the USDA Risk Management Agency (RMA) Community and Outreach Partnership Program. This cooperative effort is managed by personnel from Kansas State University and Kansas State Research and Extension, with active collaboration with approximately 25 partners.

Women Managing the Farm Conference was held February 7-9, 2008 in Hutchinson, Kansas. Total attendance was 335 women from nine States, which was a remarkable turnout attributed by an extensive advertising campaign, word of mouth, and repeat participants. Keynote and motivational speakers and concurrent workshops addressed the five major risk areas for farming operations as identified by RMA: human, production, price, financial, and legal rights. Additionally, the conference featured an exhibit hall where commercial, agency, and other appropriate parties displayed information and products in 31 booths.

Networking opportunities offered to conference participants relate to the role that

best describes their primary position in their farm operation: agriculture partner, agriculture helper/farm homemaker, business manager, absentee landowner, or independent agricultural producer. A designated discussion time is set aside at the conference, allowing participants to build support networks and to continue them after they return home. The great success of the Women Managing the Farm Conference is due to the supportive environment (according to participant evaluations) that allows women to ask the questions foremost on their mind and to address the issues of family dynamics so important to the success of family farm operations.

Rural Development (RD)

Spinning a Tale of Entrepreneurship in Illinois

Eight years ago the Lehrer family decided to forego their suburban lifestyle for a 10-acre farm in rural Big Rock, Illinois. They began raising sheep, goats, poultry, and specialty vegetables, selling their products at farmers' markets, and offering a produce subscription service in suburban Chicago. But it is what these agricultural entrepreneurs are doing to fashion a better future for sheep producers that has distinguished them in a remarkably short period of time.

Looking for a market for the wool from their Cheviot sheep, Donna Lehrer and daughter Natasha found a niche that could benefit fiber artists and Illinois' declining sheep industry. With a Value-Added Producer Grant from USDA Rural Development in 2005, they created the Green Pastures Collection of identity preserved wool, began buying quality fiber from Illinois breeders, and opened a retail outlet in a restored Victorian home. They sell supplies and gifts, conduct scores of classes, and offer visitors a back-to-the-earth overnight tourist destination.

Donna and Natasha Lehrer's next step was to spearhead the formation of the Illinois Green Pastures Fiber Cooperative. They

Natasha Lehrer in the field with Cheviot sheep while spinning fiber artifacts.

received a Rural Development Small Minority Producer Grant to improve marketing, promotional, and educational services for their members.

With their sophisticated, yet authentic promotional style, outreach has expanded to numerous new, often urban, venues. The cooperative was invited to a prestigious Chicago fine arts fair where they sponsored a fiber art contest, garnering entries from across the country. The winning piece was displayed at USDA's Jamie L. Whitten Building in Washington, DC.

The Lehrers work passionately together to connect producers to their fiber products, cultivate an appreciation for America's high-quality natural fibers, and develop domestic and international arts markets for fiber products. They started with an ewe and a lamb and with hard work and ingenuity, they created an opportunity for countless others.

Natasha and Donna Lehrer celebrate their success at their second Fleece to Fiber Festival at the Cantigny Fine Arts Fair in suburban Chicago, Illinois.

From Kentucky Bluegrass to Blue Cheese

Kenny Mattingly didn't grow up on a farm, but that didn't prevent him from farming. In 1976, at age 19, he moved with his family from Indianapolis, Indiana, to rural Austin, Kentucky. After helping his parents operate their farm for 6 years, he moved back to Indianapolis. Four years later the "call of the land" beckoned him back to Austin, where he has remained.

During the 1980s he struggled, as did all small farmers, with the uncertain farm economy. As a member of the Community Farm Alliance, he took part in an agricultural tour of Europe.

Kenny Mattingly in his cheese factory

During this trip he was struck by two things: the effect of the fall of communism and the ability of the smaller European farms to add value to their products for the local markets.

Upon returning home to Austin, he realized that he would have to adapt to changing

market conditions here in the United States as well. This revelation led him down the path to Kenny's Cheese.

Mattingly's operation has evolved from purely a tobacco and dairy farm to one in which approximately 40 percent of his dairy production is further processed into a variety of cheeses. Currently he markets 25 varieties of cheddars, colbys, and blue cheeses from his home in Austin. Most of his current sales take place at either farmers markets or in-store demonstrations.

He was approved for a Value Added Grant to conduct a feasibility study for improved marketing techniques, including Internet sales which he hopes will enable him to increase his production to the point that he uses not only 100 percent of his dairy output but also the dairy output of other local farmers.

Sweet Savings With Maple Sap

Roy and Shirley Davis, owners of Border Farm Maples, located less than 2 miles from the U.S. and Canadian border, received a Rural Development (RD) Renewable Energy Systems and Energy Efficiency Improvements grant in 2007 and zapped the cost of making sap!

Border Farm Maples' operation taps over 3,500 maple trees located on Davis' land. Maple sap is collected through a tubing system and brought to the sugarhouse where it is processed into maple syrup.

The Davis' produce over 800 gallons of syrup per year, with help from family and friends. The RD energy efficiency improvement grant helped the Davis' to

Brian Davis, family member, checks the readiness of the sap for bottling.

purchase and install a reverse osmosis machine and complementary equipment. The Davis' are reducing the cost of production by using less wood and water in the sugarmaking process.

As fuel costs rise, so does the demand and cost of heating wood. With their new equipment up and running, the Davis' will burn 13 cords of wood per year, compared to the 73 cords per year they were using without this equipment. For every gallon of syrup produced, they will now have to boil 9.8 gallons of raw sap, compared to the 56 gallons of raw sap in years past.

Since the reverse osmosis process reduces the boiling time by taking water out of the raw sap before it is boiled, the Davis' have more time to improve on the efficiency of

Border Farm Maples' maple trees with sap bucket along the sugar house visitor's path

the operation. Instead of standing over the boiler, they can spend more time in the woods checking lines to ensure that they are tight and as leak-free as possible. Greater efficiency allows the vacuum to reach its maximum potential, thereby getting the most sap from the tree.

Border Farm Maples' sugar shack boasting its American pride

Future Farmers of America (FFA) Project Becomes Full-Time Business

Brett Nunnenkamp had always dreamed of coming back to the family farm in Sutton, Nebraska, after completing his college degree. He was raised on a traditional family farm in south central Nebraska where corn and soybeans are the primary crops. Nunnenkamp knew from an early age that farming was his life dream. At age 13, he started raising pumpkins for his Supervised Agricultural Experience project for FFA. Nunnenkamp planted two varieties of pumpkins that year and parked a trailer loaded with pumpkins on his driveway with a plastic ice cream bucket and relied on the honor system for payment. Each day the trailer was restocked with fresh picked pumpkins, and the bucket of money was collected. The project earned Nunnenkamp the National FFA 2005 Star in Agribusiness award and supported him through both high school and college.

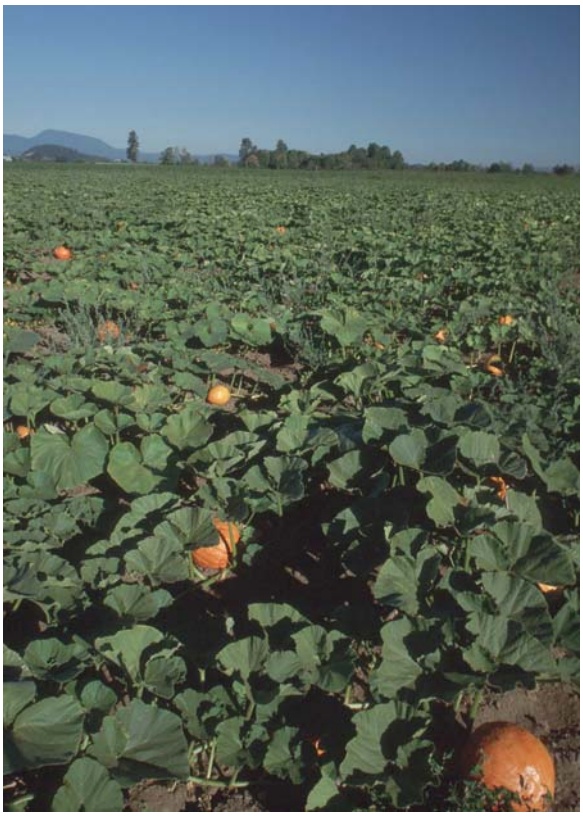
In 2006 Nunnenkamp returned home from college with a degree in horticulture. He wanted his business to grow and knew he needed to complete a business plan and feasibility study to help determine how best to proceed. He applied for a Value Added Producer Planning Grant from Rural Development for assistance with completing a business and marketing plan as well as a feasibility study. The grant funds helped Nunnenkamp conduct a market study on the assessment of the competitive environment. He also evaluated different opportunities for increasing revenue, including adding value to the pumpkins so the product can be sold year round and looking at how to best market his products.

Today the “Country Pumpkin” has grown to offer more than 50 varieties of pumpkins, squash, gourds, and ornamental corn including many heirloom types. In addition, straw bales, cornstalk bundles, broom corn, decorated pumpkins, and other fall centerpieces are all for sale at the farm site. Pumpkins are sold both on-site and wholesale to many local areas stores.

The diversification into pumpkins and other ornamentals has allowed Nunnenkamp to return to the farm and the life he loves. His business is growing, and he hopes to see continued growth in the future.

A scrumptious and good for you! pumpkin pie that is loaded with a healthful phytonutrient called beta-carotene

A pumpkin sunning in the field



A pumpkin patch

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