



# Improving the Use of USDA Programs Among Hispanic and Latino Farmers and Ranchers



**CENTER for  
RURAL AFFAIRS**  
Lyons, NE 68038      Population 963



## Key Findings

- ◆ Latino farmers and ranchers in both states are very entrepreneurial and are seeking ways to expand their farming and ranching operations, both in size and scope.
- ◆ However, significant barriers exist for them to realize their ideas. The barriers for Latino farmers and ranchers are similar to those expressed by all beginning farmers and ranchers – a lack of resources such as land, capital, equipment and knowledge.
- ◆ Latino farmers and ranchers lack awareness of where to get assistance to address these barriers.
- ◆ Latino farmers and ranchers in both states face barriers other beginning farmers and ranchers do not, language and cultural barriers chief among them.
- ◆ Latino farmers and ranchers in both states have, at best, a limited knowledge of USDA programs.
- ◆ Latino farmers and ranchers and USDA officials in both states have had minimal experience dealing with each other.
- ◆ USDA has minimal outreach to Latino farmers and ranchers in both states.
- ◆ USDA officials in both states have limited knowledge of who Latino farmers and ranchers are and where they are located.
- ◆ Language and cultural awareness are the major barriers on both sides of the relationship.

## Interviews with Nebraska Latino Farmers and Ranchers

Center for Rural affairs (CFRA) staff conducted a total of 17 interviews with Latino farmers and ranchers. Interviews were conducted with residents of Clay, Custer, Dawson, Hall, Lancaster, Lincoln, Madison and Scotts Bluff counties in Nebraska. Eight interviews were conducted in Spanish only, and the remaining nine were conducted in English (or a combination of English and Spanish). The Spanish interviews were translated by a hired contractor fluent in both Spanish and English. The audio recordings of all interviews conducted in English (or a combination of both languages) were listened to and summarized. All interview translations and summaries were analyzed to develop the common themes outlined below.

## Methodology

The following information concerning interview methodology is taken from *Barriers, Challenges and Limitations that Hispanic and Latino Farmers and Ranchers Face to Start, Develop and Sustain Farming and Ranching Businesses in the State of Nebraska* by Rafael Martinez-Feria, a CFRA intern who conducted the interviews for this project.

The process to locate and contact farmers and ranchers was different for each community. For instance, the town of Lexington, Nebraska, in Dawson County is a strong Latino community where friendship, cooperation and family relations prevail among the Latino producers. There and in the similar town of Madison in Madison County, we were able to gain trust, build relationships and share information among the members of the community. We also identified at least one leader in each of these communities who could serve as a promoter of USDA programs in the communities and serve as a bridge with local service providers. These individuals have been put in contact with the local USDA agency personnel, with the purpose of building working relationships that will aid the process

of outreach to Latino producers in the community.

In other parts of Nebraska where Latino farmers and ranchers are more geographically isolated, these types of close-knit communities are scarce or nonexistent. As a result, the approach to locate and contact farmers and ranchers was made on an individual basis. Contact information usually came from rural directories, state producer databases and farm subsidy databases. This work included numerous telephone calls, browsing websites and social media, analyzing databases and networking with people in the field. We also received assistance from local organizations, such as Community Crops in Lincoln, Nebraska, cooperatives and local farmers to receive suggestions and referrals. In addition, we attended events including the Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society 2011 Healthy Farm & Rural Advantage Conference. These events were helpful for meeting producers and agricultural leaders across the state, acquiring networking tools to help locate Latino farmers and ranchers across the state.

Once the farmer or rancher was successfully contacted and expressed interest in participating as a subject for this project, they were visited and interviewed by the data collector. As this study sought to collect a large amount of data to understand the issues that affect access to resources designed to assist farmers and ranchers, a survey instrument was needed to obtain such information. The questions asked during the interviews were prepared by CFRA and its partners and reviewed by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Missouri-Columbia.

Interviews were tape recorded. This helped the interviewer to focus on the dynamics of the interview and not on writing notes. The interviews usually took no more than an hour. If it exceeded this time, the farmer or rancher was asked if he/she wanted to continue or to reschedule the interview. If possible, the interviewer took photographic record of the visit of the farm or ranch. This will help the analyzers gain further understanding of the type and size of the operations.

Participation in this project was voluntary. The farmer or rancher could withdraw from the project at any time without penalty. The information they provided will remain confidential.

All of the methodology information was stated in the document: "Oral Consent to Participate as a Subject of Research 'Improving the Use of USDA Programs among Hispanic and Latino Farmers and Ranchers.'" This document was shared with the interviewee prior to the interview. If the interviewee had a concern or question regarding the programs and services that USDA offers through the Farm Service Agency, the Natural Resource Conservation Service and Rural Development agencies, the interviewer would take extra time at the end of the interview to explain in general terms the broad range of programs, and how the interviewee could find more information.

## **Agricultural Operations of Interviewees**

Most of the interviewees raised some sort of animals or livestock, and in some cases raised multiple types of animals. Nearly half the interviewees raised cattle, followed (in order) by horses, sheep, goats, chickens and pigs/hogs. Fewer interviewees raised crops, but several of the interviewees also had diversified operations, with crop production in addition to animals. Alfalfa and hay production was the most common crop raised (with five of the 17 interviewees), followed in order by corn, vegetables and soybeans.

The majority of the interviewees have over 10 years of farming or ranching experience, with about a third of the interviewees having over 20 years experience. Nearly all interviewees cited previous experience coming from family and their work on a family farm or ranch, primarily in Mexico or other nations in Central America. Most of the interviewees carried on the same type of operation their family had.

Thirteen of the 17 interviewees listed a country of origin outside the United States (primarily Mexico). All of the interviewees who immigrated to the United States stated that jobs brought them to the United States, but most were non-agricultural (two cited migrant agricultural work was the reason they came to the United States). All of the interviewees who immigrated to the United States developed their farm or ranch operation after coming to the United States. Two interviewees hold a college degree. Ten of the 17 interviewees hold off-farm employment, and almost all interviewees have at least one family member (generally the spouse) with off-farm employment. Over half the interviewees receive less than 50 percent of their income from farming or ranching.

## Themes from Nebraska Farmer/Rancher Interviews

An analysis of the interviews with Latino farmers and ranchers revealed several common themes. They are summarized below.

- ◆ **Very entrepreneurial.** Most of the interviewees piece together various agricultural pursuits and wish to expand their operations to include other activities.
- ◆ **Very “country.”** All of the interviewees want to farm or ranch, come from rural and agricultural backgrounds and see it as a lifestyle. Many of the interviewees see farming and ranching almost as a moral obligation to produce food and take care of the land.
- ◆ **Want to expand farming/ranching operation.** All interviewees wish to expand their agricultural operation. But all expressed barriers in doing so. A lack of resources such as land, capital, equipment, and knowledge were the most commonly mentioned barriers. Interviewees universally expressed they also do not know where to get assistance to address these barriers.
- ◆ **Have elementary knowledge about agriculture and agricultural processes, especially for this area.** As discussed above, the knowledge most interviewees possess about agriculture comes from family and experience in their native country. All recognize this limits their operations in Nebraska and the American Midwest/Great Plains. So they have the desire to learn more about Nebraska agriculture, such as planting seasons and what crops are best to grow in this region.
- ◆ **Very self-sufficient and frugal.** Most interviewees started their operations with personal savings. Nearly all either self-financed their operation through savings or a combination of savings and commercial credit. Most have a “pay-as-you-go” style of running the operation, with money from sales of agricultural products reinvested into the operation. There is a limited use or need for credit or loans. Only two interviewees financed their operation with credit only. Some expressed a deep cultural distrust of credit. Most interviewees are very dependent on off-farm work (including spouse and other family members).
- ◆ **Limited (at best) knowledge of USDA programs.** Most interviewees had very little experience employing USDA programs, especially agricultural and conservation programs. An important issue is that USDA programs often do not fit their operations or what they want their operations to be. Interviewees also expressed a suspicion of government, government programs and how the government interacts with them (items such as explanations of programs that are not understood, unsatisfactory dealings with USDA officials and no follow-up from USDA officials were mentioned).
- ◆ **Limited interaction with USDA.** The interviews revealed significant language barriers with many interviewees and USDA. About half the interviewees described a significant language barrier. Several of those who did not claim a language barrier rely on family members (often young children) to be their English translators. Interviewees described USDA materials and invitations to

informational meetings in English that they did not understand. Many interviewees also expressed the desire and need for technical assistance and expert advice, but did not know where to get it or if USDA could assist. Even those who claimed not to have a language barrier admitted their translators (often children) could not help with technical agriculture language. Most interviewees seemed to recognize that USDA or Farm Service Agency (FSA) offices have the answers or information they need, but there was a general consensus that if one does not go to those offices knowing what one needs, USDA or FSA officials are less likely to be able to provide the answers or assistance one needs. Many want to go somewhere and show someone their operation and have an “expert” tell them “this is what you are doing wrong” or “if you did this instead of this, you would make more money” or “your ground is good for this.” A lot of knowledge is gained by networking, but that seems to be lacking here since these operations are, for the most part, nonconventional.

- ◆ **Isolation.** Many of the interviewees described limited interaction with other Latino farmers and ranchers, especially when it came to agricultural issues. There are no formal Latino farmer/rancher organizations (such as Farm Bureau, Farmers Union, and commodity and livestock organizations). The interactions interviewees have with other Latino farmers and ranchers appear to be social and direct sales/purchase relationships. The amount of general agricultural knowledge sharing in these relationships appears to be limited. Several interviewees also discussed undertones of racism and societal isolation. Interviewees mentioned that there is no one to help them, that they do not know where to turn for assistance, issues with neighbors, and no individual or organization takes steps to help.

## Interviews with Nebraska USDA Offices

Center for Rural affairs (CFRA) staff conducted interviews with USDA personnel in seven county offices in Nebraska: Adams, Buffalo, Dawson, Lancaster, Lincoln, Madison and Scotts Bluff counties. Interviews were conducted with all USDA offices—Farm Service Agency, Natural Resource Conservation Service and Rural Development (not all offices have staff in each of the county offices where interviews were conducted). All interviews were listened to, summarized and analyzed to develop the common themes outlined below.

## Methodology

When a fair number of producers were interviewed in a specific region, then the data collector proceeded to interview the local Farm Service Agency, Natural Resource Conservation Service and Rural Development county or area offices. This interview involved the people that have the most experience in providing services to Hispanics and Latinos. If no agents had substantial experience, then those most engaged in outreach, lending programs and/or businesses development programs were interviewed. Sometimes, the interviews were held between the interviewer and several agents, and other times as an individual interview. The data collection process is the same as the one described for the farmers and ranchers.

## Themes from Nebraska USDA Interviews

An analysis of the interviews with USDA officials revealed several common themes. They are summarized below.

- ◆ **Minimal USDA experience with Latino farmers and ranchers.** This limited experience appears to be especially true for FSA and the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). FSA staff admits there is little fit in FSA programs with the reality of most Latino farmers and

ranchers. There is a bit more experience with Latino farm and ranch families in the USDA Rural Development offices, particularly among housing program officials.

- ◆ **Minimal outreach to Latino farmers and ranchers.** USDA staff stated most of their public information is heavily dependent on newspapers through local press releases. There are generally no Spanish language releases (and limited Spanish language media outlets in the areas where the interviews were conducted). There was also no USDA follow-up with the local newspapers. USDA also appears to depend primarily on English only program literature and information.
- ◆ **Limited USDA knowledge of who Latino farmers and ranchers are or where they are located.** A major limitation is participation in USDA programs—once a farmer or rancher participates in or is the beneficiary of a program, the farmer or rancher is in the USDA database. USDA staff recognizes the need to develop new methods and strategies of outreach to the Latino population, and they have ideas to do so. USDA staff seems primarily concerned with their agency budget constraints.
- ◆ **Language is a major barrier.** USDA officials do not recognize the magnitude of the language barrier. The USDA interviewees think they have sufficient tools to overcome any language issues, such as translations of materials into Spanish and as-needed translators. USDA staff stated they often depend on family members or outside (not immediately available) translators. USDA staff admits problems with those types of translators for the type of information they must impart on farmers and ranchers. There was only one staff person in one USDA office who speaks “enough” Spanish.

## Interviews with Missouri Latino Farmers and Ranchers

According to the 2007 USDA Census of Agriculture, the number of Latino farmers and ranchers in the state of Missouri declined by 25 percent from the 2002 USDA Census of Agriculture. While seeking to document the assumption that Latino farmers and ranchers dropped their farming and ranching activities because of not using and accessing USDA programs, we gathered additional secondary data from USDA database sources and also interviewed a representative number of Latino farmers and ranchers. Accordingly, an outreach approach was implemented to find Latino farmers in the Southwest area of Missouri, mainly in Barry and Newton counties where the 2007 USDA Census of Agriculture reported a total of 12 and 14 Latino principal operators respectively.

In order to find Latino farmers and ranchers in southwest Missouri, we implemented networking activities and explored formal and informal connections to local networks of the Latino community in those regions. We networked with non-profit organizations such as churches and Latino social organizations, and for-profit organizations such as radio stations and Mexican restaurants in the area. Once existing local networks were identified, an interview instrument was designed. This interview instrument was implemented to talk with a total of 30 Latino farmers and ranchers. In fact, we were able to find more than 30 Latino farmers, however, only 30 of them wanted to be interviewed. By using a snowball approach to connect with other farmers, we were able to find all participants within a 40 mile radius. We interviewed Latino farmers and ranchers in four counties. This was justified because not only does the same USDA agency cover those counties, but also it was necessary to seek out more farmers to build better data validity and reliability by adding additional Latino farmer interviews. Seventy percent of those farmers were found in Barry and Newton counties, the remaining percentage were found in Jasper and Lawrence counties.

Once the interviews with the farmers were completed, we implemented another interview to investigate the USDA agents' perspectives in regards to improving the use and access of USDA

programs by Latino farmers and ranchers. Four USDA agents and one University Extension Service agent were interviewed. Agencies interviewed were the Farm Service Agency (FSA) and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

Interviews with Latino farmers and ranchers were conducted in Spanish, then transcribed and translated into English. Interviews with USDA agencies were conducted in English.

A total of 35 farmer and ranchers as well as agency interviews were coded with NVivo 9 software in order to be analyzed. Below are the more significant findings that influence the use and access of USDA programs among Latino farmers and ranchers.

## **Project Findings to Improve the Use and Access of USDA Programs Among Latino Farmers and Ranchers in Southwest Missouri**

This section summarizes the findings that describe Latino farmers' and ranchers' use and access of USDA programs. Below are USDA agencies perspectives collected from five interviews. Agencies interviewed include: Farm Service Agencies (FSA) serving Newton, Lawrence, Barry and Jasper counties; the Natural Resources Conservation Service office that works for Barry and Lawrence counties; and the extension service at Lincoln University. This section also reports and summarizes the analysis of 30 interviews conducted with Latino farmers and ranchers.

### **USDA Agencies**

The agency perspectives were classified in three main areas—awareness of Latino farmers, current perspectives of dealing with Latino farmers, and networking to interact with Latino farmers.

#### **USDA Awareness of Latino Farmers**

In order to know the level of awareness of USDA agencies in regards to Latino farmers and ranchers, special attention was focused on three topics that we recommend USDA agencies focus on to get Latino farmers and ranchers to participate in programs.

**Actions to identify Latino Farmers and Ranchers.** We did not find any specific actions by USDA agencies to identify Latino farmers and ranchers. However, there is a high level of interest in getting Latino farmers and ranchers involved, as discussed by one agent:

*“We can do that (find Latino farmers) with letters or phone calls. We can go about that many different ways, but first they have to be identified, and frankly, I don’t know of too many off the top of my head.”*

**Number of Latinos in Farming & Ranching Activities**—According to our interviews we found a significant disconnection between USDA agencies and Latino farmers and ranchers. Some agency comments were:

*“I’m unaware of how many there are, like in Newton, McDonald, right off hand.”*

*“We do not have any Hispanic farmers that I know of in the area, so I don’t have that much experience with working with Hispanic farmers.”*

*“I don’t know what percentage across the county would be Latino or Hispanic farmers...there are a few, there is not a large population, but there are a few.”*

**Programs Targeting Latino Farmers**—There is no specific program used to target Latino farmers; all programs are oriented to any and all kinds of farmers and ranchers. However, agents know about some target programs for minorities where Latino farmers could fit:

*“What we have is what we call ‘socially disadvantaged.’ Socially disadvantaged is basically minority. In addition to what we normally think of as minority, we include females, but certainly Latino would be included in that.”*

## Current USDA Perspectives of Dealing with Latino Farmers

We found that USDA agencies had a lack of experience in dealing with Latino farmers and ranchers. Additionally, agents didn’t know how to differentiate Latino farmers in the community because the protocol to provide services doesn’t permit them to identify Latino farmers. As one of our interviewed agents said, “The thing is, I mean if they come in, and I don’t know if they’re Latino or not, because I cannot ask them, so that is a barrier...”

In this part, we report the main challenges faced by agencies when attracting Latino farmers and ranchers to be involved in USDA programs.

**Agency Barriers to Dealing with Latino Farmers**—Agencies commented on the following barriers to dealing with Latino farmers:

- ♦ No way to identify them. *“I don’t know if they’re Latino or not, because I cannot ask them.”*
- ♦ Cultural barriers. *“Well, and it would help me to learn more about their culture too, so that we have a better understanding. So...”*
- ♦ Language barriers. *“I’m not going to know if they would need the newsletter printed in a certain language, then I would need to be told that.”*

A language barrier is a potential barrier argued by both agencies and Latino farmers and ranchers. Most Latino farmers stated that they have very low English communication skills; a common statement was *“I speak very little English...”* which means an inability to interact in a formal way. On the other hand, agents observed the need for somebody with Spanish language skills in their office, *“There’s nobody in this office who would be fluent in Spanish.”* Furthermore a lack of language communication might also intimidate interaction. One agent said, *“I think it has to be intimidating that we don’t speak the same language, you know. It’s hard.”*

**A General Lack of Experience with Dealing with Latinos**—USDA dealing with Latino farmers alone becomes a barrier. *“We just don’t get enough coming, really, to probably get some idea what we need to do.”* Another agent said: *“Honestly, I haven’t had that much experience.”*

**Using the Wrong Network.** Both farmers and agents agree that not having access to the right network is a barrier to access USDA programs. On networking *“I think one of the issues as far as utilizing, you know, the USDA programs, probably does come back to some of the networking and either knowing and not knowing about it.”*

**Lack of Economic Resources at Agencies.** We found strong arguments mentioned by agents in order to attract Latino farmers and ranchers to USDA programs. A comment collected from USDA agents cited:

*“But I don’t know if funding-wise, financially that they would let us hire somebody.”*

*“We used to be in charge – each county – of our own newsletter, but then, due to budget...”*

*“They cut our traveling so much that it’s hard for us to get out and just be in the places at the right time to connect with Latino farmers or any farmers for that matter.”*

**Lack of Farming Literacy Among Farmers**—Most Latinos farmers interviewed base their farming and ranching activities on empirical knowledge acquired with experience. Latino farmers showed low technical knowledge and skills to effectively operate the farm.



*"I'm thinking they might not know the technical information, or they might not know the right terminology to ask when they get here..."*

**Reasons for Going 'Out of Business' From USDA Perspective**—Common reasons cited among agents interviewed in regards to Latino farmers and ranchers leaving activities are listed below.

**Lack of information about USDA Programs.**

*"I would just say because they're unaware of the programs that we have to offer. That the word is...more outreach needs to be done to that group...specific group. That would be my first response to that."*

**Prices of Land and Low Profitability**—Farmers and ranchers who haven't been able to make money from farming and ranching due to low farming skills or lack of the technical assistance are attracted by currently high value of farming land. It is an argument cited by USDA agents.

*"It could have been just that they weren't making any money,"* And consequently, farmers are selling out. *"A lot of people are selling out, selling their farms, because land is at an extremely high price, and you know some people just get tired of farming, so we do have quite a few people that are selling out, small farmers and selling out to larger corporations. Now specifically, Hispanic farmers, I don't know."*

**Low Rate of Productivity**—It is a reason consistent with Latino farmers and ranchers current level of production.

*"I mean low production, high input cost, you know, you decide. 'I'm tired of fighting with it', and so you sell out and go do something else."*

**Aging**—USDA agents cited that age of farmers is a factor to quit farming and ranching. As a farmer gets older and nobody else in the family wishes to pursue farming and ranching, that land could be inactive for a long period of time.

*"Part of it has been because different [farmers] were old in age and they decide that they want to retire and move on."*

**Lack of Knowledge of How to Formulate a Business Plan.** One agent mentioned sending a farmer to work on a business plan.

*"He needs [the farmer] a business plan, and that's kind of what we sent him out there to work on."*

But farmers also mentioned they did not know how to formulate a business plan.

*"I do not have it on writing, that is I have it, but it is a mental plan that I have by the experiences I have lived."*

## **USDA Networking to Interact with Latino Farmers**

**Registering Latino Farmers and Ranchers With the USDA to Receive Information.** Some suggestions include the idea of registering Latino farmers and getting them a newsletter every so often. Agents suggested publicizing what the USDA has to offer as far as the different kinds of programs. Agencies also suggest organizing meetings with the three main agencies dealing with farmers such as FSA, NRCS and RD. We think that suggestions like the ones below will help to create a dense network between the USDA and Latino farmers in the area.

### **Scheduling Meetings with Latino Farmers and Ranchers in the Area**

*"What we like to do here is, and I would say the majority of the local levels do, since we have*

*an NRCS office and a Rural Development office in this building. When we coordinate something like that, say we're going to coordinate an outreach meeting for Latinos specifically"*

## Information about Missouri Latino Farmers and Ranchers

### Demographic Information

#### Country of Origin

Twenty-seven (27) farmers reported being born in the country of Mexico.

Three (3) farmers reported being born in the USA, specifically Texas. They are descendent of immigrants from Mexico.

#### Immigration status influence

Legally documented: 28 farmers

Undocumented: 2 farmers

#### Income from Farming

Income from Farming (%)	Number of Farmers
Less than 0 or 0%	6
1 to 10%	13
11 to 20%	7
21 to 30%	3
31% or more	1

Table 1. Income of Latino farmers and ranchers in Southwest Missouri

#### Outside Job

Most farmers and ranchers have a job in addition to farming and ranching. We found that 29 farmers reported having an extra, off-farm job

Only one farmer works full time on his farm, but he is also looking for another extra job since he is also spending his savings because of not having enough farming profits.

#### Production Activity

Most farmers interviewed in Missouri have livestock activities. We found the main activities performed by farmers as follow:

Production Activity	Number of Farmers
Cattle	21
Goats	5
Dairy	1
Sheep	1
Horticulture	2

Table 2. Production activity among Latino farmers and ranchers in Southwest Missouri

### Size of Farm in Acres

Latino farmers interviewed in Missouri own small farms.

Years Farming	Number of Farmers
0 to 3	9
4 to 7	10
8 to 10	6
More than 11	5

Table 3. Size of farms of Latino farmers and ranchers in Southwest Missouri

### Years Farming and Ranching

Latino farmers interviewed in Missouri are significantly new to farming and ranching. We found that 19 of the 30 farmers interviewed have been farming or ranching for seven or fewer years.

Table 4. Years of farming and ranching in Southwest Missouri

### Factors Leading Latinos to Become Farmers and Ranchers

Factors that encourage Latinos to become farmers or ranchers are mostly due to a strong cultural influence. They would like to make extra money doing something they enjoy and would like to become their own bosses. Some of them act out of social concerns and a sense of farming as a destiny. The more frequent influence were described as follow:

**The Cultural Influence**—The Latino farmer’ and ranchers’ cultural influence was the most frequently cited reason to becoming farmers and ranchers in the USA. We found that 67 percent of Latino farmers interviewed are influenced by a cultural heritage of farming from their past settlement community, located in the country of Mexico or the State of Texas.

The statements cited below correspond to the responses of Latino farmers’ when we asked them about what influenced their decision to become farmers. Most farmers believe their current farming activities are highly influenced by growing up on a farm in Mexico. Some of their statements are cited below.

*“Well, I do not have a lot of knowledge; but, I come from a ranch from over there in Durango, Mexico. My grandmother had cows, and we helped her out sometimes to milk or graze the cows.”*

*“Well, I do not know, it would be almost like, one says, my parent’s heritage.”*

*“Well, one brings them [cultural influences] here from Mexico.”*

*“Well, I grew up in the fields in Mexico, really, but back then, we had four or five animals, so we didn’t sell a lot, we didn’t have that much, we worked in the fields, we grew corn at that time”.*

**Like Farming and Ranching.** The enjoyment of doing an activity they liked was the second factor cited by participants as a reason to become a farmer or rancher. Fifty-three percent of farmers interviewed mentioned they had a strong attachment to animals. Some of them had noted sacrificing the purchase of something they needed to allocate money to operate their farm or ranch.

Below are statements collected from our conversations with some of them:

*“I came from Mexico, from the state of Guanajuato. My dad is a rancher, you know, he has cows over there, and well, I have always liked it.”*

*“Well, we like the farm life, it is our life and it has always been a dream of ours to have one”.*

*“I love animals. You know that all Hispanics that came here to United States, we have the dream; we have the opportunity. So, we grabbed a little piece of land and started with a cow.”*

**Make Extra Money and Become Your Own Boss—**A third reason mentioned by Latino farmers of why they allocate their lives to farming and ranching activities, is to make extra money and to eventually become their own bosses. We found that “making extra money” was a strong factor; however, Latino farmers interviewed weighed “cultural influence” and a “like for farming” over “making extra money.” According to our analysis, 13 Latino farmers noted that “making extra money” and “becoming your own bosses” as reasons to becoming a farmer or rancher. See some of their statements below:

*“I saw that there was some (extra) money on top of what I was making at my job. Furthermore, I like to be with animals. I started little by little, you know, one (handles things) little by little. I have liked it a lot.”*

*“Well yes, you see with only one job one cannot make it. One starts with one animal or two and this helps out and I sell the animal and that is it! Right?! And it yields a little more.”*

*“So I would not have to work that much in factories; instead working in the animal business—the purchase and sale of animals.”*

**Social Awareness—**We observed that a social awareness in regards to having food security appears as a factor that influences some Latino farmers to allocate their time to growing food. We perceived among all farmers an interest in producing and marketing food. Out of 30 farmers interviewed, we found six farmers expressed worries about food security for future generations.

*“I have thought that the future of humanity is on the farmer and rural development. Who is going to feed humankind? The farmer. And this for me is the profession that if I could follow it 100%, I would do it if I could.”*

*“We know, by heart, that the animals produce, the animals maintain humans.”*

## **Factors That Challenge the Continuation of Latino Farming and Ranching**

The challenges of Latino farmers to stay in production were analyzed based on the frequency of responses to questions with topics related to a set of factors influencing their farming and ranching activities. The answers from farmers and ranchers were weighed by frequency of appearance. Some farmers listed more than one challenge. The main challenges observed are: access to information, limited economic resources to grow their farms, Lack of English communication, not maintaining

records of farming activities, lack of business plans, no technical assistance and a lack of marketing strategies.

**Limited Economic Resources**—Limited economic resources was a frequent factor cited by Latino farmers as a barrier to success in food production. What we mean by access to “economic resources” is not only finding cheap loans from banks to access more land, but also access to low cost inputs and newer equipment to farm and ranch. In this context, most Latino farmers interviewed argued that economic factors to making the farm operational are the main challenge.

*“I’ve had in my head that livestock is a good business. All the time I grew up with it, so here sometimes, unfortunately, one cannot buy a piece of land or do something. But if one could have a large plot, it is a good business.”*

*“Well, money. If I had money, I’d buy good machinery, new machines, really to not be struggling, my machines are old now.”*

**Access to Information**—Access to information is one of the most important challenges Latino farmers currently face to reaching success in the agri-food business. From our conversation with Latino farmers, 40 percent reported “access to information” as the main challenge to staying in farming and ranching. Below, we cited some of the statements collected from our data set.

*“For me, it is probably not having information, and not getting information from the people that should be giving it to us.”*

*“This is another thing, because there is a lack of that information. I have never heard a Hispanic person saying that he has received help from that organization.”*

*“Well, because one does not have much guidance, most of all basic knowledge that tells me: look! go to this program so you can get more help. One does not have knowledge. That is it.”*

**English Communication**—We found that 93 percent of Latino farmers interviewed don’t feel confident communicating in English. Some of them reported being able to communicate in an elementary way, such as going shopping or asking for something. However, they think that they wouldn’t be able to hold a formal conversation regarding formal business transactions. We cited some statements below collected from our conversation with them about their communication skills.

*“Not very good, but I can make myself understandable.”*

*“A man said we need help, but why would I lie to you, I speak little English—the necessary English for my job, to go buy things, to get tags for a car. But, enough English for a longer conversation, I don’t.”*

*“This is what impedes a lot of things: that one receives a paper and instead of reading it, one throws it into the trash can, because one does not know what it is.”*

**Maintaining Records of Farming and Ranching Activities.** Most of the Latino farmers interviewed (96.6 percent) don’t keep records of their farm transactions. Only one farmer reported having his farm transactions recorded for tax purposes. A program to educate Latino farmers to learn how and why it is necessary to keep records of transactions on the farm might help them to better manage the farm business. Some statements collected from interviews are cited below.

*“I really would not know how much is spent on the farm.”*

*“It’s the point I want to reach, one has to report everything. Everything has to be recorded, and that even the government will be doing rounds, because that is what happened with the*

*horses, which is why I'm telling you. All the time, they came to check on them."*

*"We have never kept receipts of that."*

**A Business Plan for the Farm or Ranch**—All farmers interviewed in Missouri reported that they do not have a business plan for their farms. In most cases, we observed that they don't know what a "business plan" is. Some farmers mentioned to keep track of expenses but not in a consistent way.

*"I make my personal notes on this and that, but it is not a written business plan like the one a bank would ask me for. Demonstrate to me your business ups and downs for production and the risk, something like that, I do not have."*

**Receiving Technical Assistance**—All of the farmers and ranchers interviewed in Missouri have never received technical assistance to improve their farming and ranching activities. Their knowledge of the implementation of effective farming and the most effective use of farming and ranching equipment to improve farm productivity is very low.

We observed that most Latino farmers (70 percent) don't know the meaning of "technical assistance." Below, we cited some statements in regards to knowledge of basic concepts related to technical assistance when we questioned them about receiving technical assistance to improve their farms.

*"On that, I do not know; I do not know anything about that."*

*"I do not know what conservation is."*

Low levels of knowledge regarding effective farming and ranching practices among Latino farmers and ranchers is shown below in their own words.

*"Well, yes! I think so. For example, I would like to know more about the types of animals. They could teach us, more or less, on the different breeds. You can see here they are all cows, but they are all from different breeds. I would like to know more about other types of breeds."*

*"Well, right now, the truth is I wouldn't really know."*

*"I think legal aspects of farming. Because I know there is a lot of tax places, tax ID numbers. Tractors versus, you know financing."*

All of the farmers and ranchers showed having very limited knowledge about the operation of equipment and its ability to improve farm productivity. All 30 farmers interviewed pointed to having the right equipment to being able to operate their farm and ranch in a more efficient way.

*"If I had money, I'd buy good machinery, new machines, really to not be struggling, my machines are old now."*

*"Well if one had to invest something, for instance, in a storage place, the necessary equipment to produce milk, a storage room with a floor, the cooler for the milk and the cheeses; all that is money. This is an investment and we do not have the resources to do that."*

**Marketing**—Most farmers (90 percent) interviewed in Missouri focus on livestock activities. They only have one option open to market their production. It is through a local stockyard market where they receive the current price dictated in the market. One farmer who has dairy production sells his milk to a local processor that collects milk at his farm. Two farmers produce horticultural products and sell them in local Mexican stores and restaurants. Marketing the production of most Latino

farmers in the area is a limited.

## Additional Factors That Discourage Latino Farmers and Ranchers from Continuing Farming and Ranching

Seeking to find additional reasons why Latino farmers have been leaving farming and ranching activities as shown in the changes in the US Census of Agriculture from 2002 to 2007, we asked Latino farmers what would be the additional reasons for a Latino farmer to quit farming and ranching activities. We found that Latino farmers interviewed believe that not having profits, the cost of inputs, getting a chronic illness, losing their job, and the weather in the region could also explain the drop of Latino farmers from agri-food activities in that period of time.

**Profits**—We questioned Latino farmers from their point of view in regards to what would make a Latino farmer quit their farming and ranching activities. The main answer of 66.6 percent of these farmers was that the farm or ranch is not profitable enough.

The statements below support this reason of quitting activities:

*“The money is what makes people quit, not much profits are made and sometimes, like us, we have not paid the land or the house or other things. This is what could make us quit.”*

*“I think that many times the person is discouraged; we get discouraged because during this time, we had to pay lots of expenses with the animals. So, on trying to sell at different times, suddenly, the prices go down.”*

*“Well, the money. We are spending like \$150 in food to keep the sheep, the goats, and the cows, plus the medications if they get sick. From those \$150 there is nothing back... this is why there are times that I have said we have had enough.”*

**Cost of inputs**—Cost of inputs is highly related to not having profits; most farmers who agree that they have small profits also argue that the cost of inputs has been making farming and ranching a very tight business. The arguments cited by Latino farmers and ranchers below are aligned with this reason of quitting farming and ranching.

*“...The economy, everything is so expensive now, the diesel and all that, the machinery. I think those who have quit, did it because they had a small piece of land and what they were investing was more than what they were actually making.”*

*“Well, at the time the grains and the food of the livestock and the birds started to increase. The fuel prices also started to increase. This affected small production a lot. There are people here who produced 500 hens in a month to kill and to re-sell among the Hispanic community in the nearby towns, and there were people who were making money out of this. But with the changes in prices, it was not feasible anymore to raise hens because you make out of one hen only \$19, you make out of one pork \$100 or \$150, but they eat \$75 in food plus vaccines and all that.”*

**No Affiliation to Farming Organizations**—Latino farmers are relatively new to the area. Most Latino farmers interviewed are not affiliated to any kind of organization, except for one farmer who mentioned belonging to an association of farmers based in Texas.

**Illness**—Seven farmers interviewed mentioned that getting sick is also a factor that leads to leaving farming or ranching activities. This argument might be very weak; however, it is a reason why some farmers have quit their farming or ranching activities. Some statements cited from farmers are below:

*“I think of some diseases that would not allow me to work; this could be one of the factors to stop working. This is the principal reason because generally one has the energy to work, one likes to work.”*

*“That I would get sick and then I would not be able to work. They were probably sick or unwell and they did not have resources.”*

**Losing Main Job**—Losing a job is another factor for quitting that stood out in our analysis because most Latino farmers (96.6 percent) have a full-time job outside the farm. They argued that by losing their job, they might have to leave their farm activities also because of the low profitability and high payment due every month.

*“ Another one is if one is fired from the job; I have no means, and then I have to sell the animals, and therefore, I cannot keep on going. There are many things.”*

**Weather**—Weather is a factor that some farmers refer to as a reason to quit their farming and ranching activities. The fact that last year’s weather has influenced farming and ranching activities. Some farmers expressed feel skeptical about production. We found that some farmers believe that long droughts and extended winter periods might influence their decision to quit. Some of the arguments cited by Latino farmers are as follow:

*“... if it does not rain, like a couple of years ago when the drought was really bad, a lot of people lost their cattle. A lot of people that I know purchased cattle and were doing good and then like two years ago when the drought was here, it did not rain and it did not rain. They had to purchase pasture and it did not come out. It was more about what they invested than what they actually made.”*

*“Well, mainly, I believe that there is, uh the weather. Because sometimes, like last year it came. It only gave us one cut, right? So, in that aspect, we have to buy food to raise them (cattle) during winter. Then, when there is not enough grass for sale, then it goes up in price. And there is when one get low, sometimes, when one can get discouraged. I think that this would be the main reason for one to retire.”*

## **Factors Influencing Access to USDA Programs**

We found six principal factors that challenge Latino farmers and ranchers when accessing and using USDA services. In addition to demographic factors mentioned above, we found that limited information and knowledge of USDA services, English communication, the feelings about interacting with USDA agencies, a lack of access to formal networks, a lack of literacy regarding the USDA programs and farming loans keep Latino farmers and ranchers from accessing and using USDA programs.

**Information and Knowledge of USDA Services**—Latino farmers and ranchers don’t know about services offered by the USDA. Out of 30 farmers interviewed, 27 mentioned not knowing about the role of the USDA in their farming and ranching activities. This lack of knowledge among Latino farmers and ranchers could be highly influenced by other factors also discussed in this report, including lack of an outreach program with bilingual agents as well as the lack of interest that Latino farmers and ranchers might have to becoming involved. However, the main response that Latino farmers cited was a lack of information they have received from the USDA.

*“Well, knowledge, experience, what someone doesn’t know about, how can it help? Since they’ve never had that kind of help before, and not even any kind of orientation about anything, so one doesn’t even ‘know how the water drains’ with respect to that. “*



**English Communication**—Out of 30 farmers interviewed, 28 don't feel that they are able to have an English conversation with USDA agents. Some of them argued that in cases where they do interact, they will bring somebody from their family to help with translating.

*"I speak very little English. I do not speak a lot and do not understand a lot of things well. You know how in these things one needs to understand well, what is being said and to know what one is going to say."*

Some farmers who feel more confident with the English language still become a bit reticent when they need to go to a public office to do something.

*"I was scared to talk about it because there were some words that I could not understand and I know that they could not understand me."*

**Perceptions About the USDA**—Latino farmers need to be helped to grow more confident in order to interact with USDA agencies. By analyzing the answers to our interview instrument, we perceived weak bonding levels with USDA agencies. We interviewed at least five farmers who have resistance to applying or have been rejected by USDA agencies when they tried to apply for services previously. Some statements noted are:

*"You know the real truth here, in the first place, one is a stranger here. In the second place, all your life is spent working. You don't talk with anyone, nor do you talk about this or that."*

*"Well if it is the same place with that man, no, because he didn't leave a good impression on me. Or, maybe he wasn't there, I guess."*

We documented three cases of Latino farmers who tried to access USDA services. These cases resulted in negative experiences, such as the case of one farmer who described his experience as follows:

*"I moved to Missouri in January 2000, and I wanted to look at that kind of stuff, and somebody said go to the extension office at the court house. So I went to the county extension office. Goat farmer friends who are white told me, 'go over there and they will give you all the information that you need.' so, I went over there and said I have some friends who told me to come over here and get information on grants or loans whatever kind of help I need to improve my operation. And they said, I don't know what you are talking about, we can't do any of that for you. And I am thinking well they told me this is the place to come, and I called somebody on the phone and they told me to come in. And their response was, 'I don't know what to tell you, but we can't help you'."*

**Low Access to Formal Networks**—Out of our interview of 30 farmers, we found that only four farmers had interacted with a formal organization to access services for their farm. However, their experiences discouraged them from continuing to interact with the formal organizations in order to receive support for their farms. One farmer commented:

*"Yes, if you have had several years doing it (farming) and need the money to continue, yes, they could help; but since we were just starting, and we were beginners, because of that, they did not give us help."*

Most farmers (96.6 percent) don't have any ties to formal organizations in order to receive benefits that could help to improve their farming. However, they do want to get connected to an organization that could support their activities. We refer to the following statement:

*"I do not receive any type of support, but I would like to interact with organizations, that could*

*be of some benefit.”*

**Lack of Literacy Regarding the USDA Support Programs**—Data from interviews shows that Latino farmers and ranchers are facing huge challenges to being able to apply for USDA programs. To bridge the gap between Latino farmers and USDA programs, it is necessary to implement training programs in Spanish in areas such as business plans, how to fill out forms, what programs apply to them, financial literacy on commercial loans and applications, farming and ranching main records that need to be filed, other farming and ranching training.

**Experience with Loans**—All Latino farmers and ranchers interviewed in Missouri currently have or have had an experience with private banks. However, none of them had experience using programs offered by the USDA.

## Recommendations

Based on interviews and discussions with Latino farmers and ranchers and USDA personnel in Nebraska and Missouri, the following recommendations are offered to enhance Latino farmer and rancher use of USDA programs:

- ◆ **USDA needs to develop a better database or list of Latino farmers and ranchers.** Without this knowledge, USDA outreach efforts will always be lacking. USDA’s knowledge of the existence of farmers and ranchers, their operations and their needs are based primarily on the use of USDA programs and the involvement of USDA with farmers and ranchers. Obviously, the current reluctance of Latino farmers and ranchers to come to USDA offices and seek assistance lessens the interaction between USDA and Latino farmers and ranchers. But there are ways to change the current relationship or perceived relationship between USDA and the Latino population. One of the first steps USDA can take is to develop a better idea of who is farming or ranching, where they are living and their needs. Given the resource issues faced by USDA (both human and financial), USDA collaboration with organizations that interact with the Latino population could develop local farmer and rancher databases and lists. Entities such as churches, schools, social service agencies and health care providers could be particularly helpful.
- ◆ **USDA needs to expand outreach efforts to Latino farmers and ranchers.** As all the interviews showed, current USDA efforts, though well-intentioned, simply do not seem to reach the Latino farmer and rancher population in any effectual way. To remedy this situation we would recommend:
  - 1) Convening of informational forums with Latino farmers and ranchers at neutral sites, sites where the Latino population will be comfortable (churches, for example)
  - 2) Development of trained translators fluent in conversing in agricultural technical language. We recognize that again resource issues affect the ability to execute this, but if enhanced outreach is important to USDA there are ways to make it happen. For instance, USDA could work with outside organizations to train translators in agricultural and technical terminology.
  - 3) Expand informational outreach beyond traditional, local media. USDA should provide information to places and media outlets where Latino farm and ranch families will see it and be able to act on it. Providing information (in Spanish) to outlets like church bulletin inserts, releases to Spanish language media, handouts through schools, and bulletins distributed at health care facilities, social service offices and other public places are examples.

- 4) Visits by USDA personnel to the farms and ranches of Latino farmers and ranchers will provide USDA personnel an idea of what USDA can offer the farmers and ranchers while also beginning a relationship between USDA and individual farmers and ranchers. It was clear from the interviews that the Latino farmers and ranchers want this, but are not clear how to make it happen. If it is to happen it seems USDA must make it so. USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service is the likely agency to do this since they oftentimes visit farms and ranches to help develop whole farm conservation plans. This would be a vital step and go a long way in building trust with the entirety of USDA if one agency was seen as being helpful.
- ◆ **USDA should be creative in providing assistance and program benefits to the types of agricultural operations owned by the Latino farmers and ranchers.** Those operations tend to be small, diversified and entrepreneurial, at least compared to the typical farm or ranch with which USDA deals. USDA personnel should identify methods for these operations to fit within existing USDA programs and benefits.
  - ◆ **USDA should address concerns about how Latino farmers and ranchers are referred to USDA services.** Numerous farmer and rancher interviewees related experiences where USDA personnel did not refer to farmer and ranchers seeking assistance to the proper USDA office, sometimes in the same building. Others related experiences where USDA personnel could not answer basic questions or provide basic information about which USDA office would be the proper office from which to seek assistance. Of course, this resulted in farmers and ranchers leaving frustrated and never seeking help again from USDA. USDA should seek to develop a “no wrong door” intake approach where Latino families unfamiliar with USDA and its programs are referred to the proper USDA office or staff member. Resources again will undoubtedly be an issue, but USDA and outside organizations working with the Latino population can collaborate on this initiative.
  - ◆ **USDA should implement or assist in implementing basic agricultural training for Latino farmers and ranchers.** The interviews showed this one of the primary barriers and needs for these farmers and ranchers. Almost every farmer and rancher interviewed claimed they needed more knowledge and training in agriculture and agricultural processes of Nebraska in order to expand operations as they wished. USDA holds much of this knowledge, and in collaboration with agricultural organizations, Extension offices, and non-profit organizations could develop a training and education program of great benefit to Latino farmers and ranchers.
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## **ABOUT THE CENTER FOR RURAL AFFAIRS**

Established in 1973, the Center for Rural Affairs is a private, nonprofit organization with a mission to establish strong rural communities, social and economic justice, environmental stewardship, and genuine opportunity for all while engaging people in decisions that affect the quality of their lives and the future of their communities.

## **ABOUT THE CAMBIO CENTER**

The Cambio Center at University of Missouri-Columbia, established in 2004, provides research, education and information to Missouri residents and communities to address the impacts of demographic changes. They explore the integration of newcomers and recently completed a four year study that examined the process of community integration from the perspective of Latino newcomers in three rural Midwestern communities. Results have been shared broadly through journal publications, community forums, national and international conferences and the Cambio de Colores. The program has led to numerous research projects, including a new three year effort at facilitating the integration of Latinos into rural communities. The Cambio Center is a major partner in a new research initiative launched by Extension and the Agriculture experiment stations called “Latinos and Immigrants in Midwestern Communities,” which is facilitating research that strengthens families and family involvement in education, entrepreneurship and business, immigrant-friendly communities, building diverse organizations and civic engagement. The Cambio Center is inter-disciplinary and includes faculty from a variety of academic institutions around the State of Missouri, with 30 faculty fellows and 10 student fellows conducting research and developing outreach projects.

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