

## Rural Enterprise Center

### strengthening communities through **ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT**

Poverty is a significant barrier to participating fully in community life. People with limited income and those who are working multiple jobs to provide for their families find it challenging to engage with their children's education and activities, much less participate themselves in creating solutions to shared community challenges.

Main Street Project's Rural Enterprise Center takes an enterprise development approach to poverty reduction and community capacity building: bringing together the support infrastructure, resources, systems and programs that rural community members, and specifically, Latin@ entrepreneurs need to succeed.

### building on strengths of **CULTURE and EXPERIENCE**

The assets shared by many Latin@ families in southeastern Minnesota and beyond point to small-scale sustainable agriculture as an opportunity:

- At heavily-attended community meetings we've hosted, more than 70 percent of Latin@ attendees indicated that they either came from rural areas in Latin America where they were directly involved in agriculture, or have worked as laborers directly involved in production of livestock, fruits and vegetables.
- Nationally, Latin@s are more than twice as likely to become entrepreneurs than established populations of previous immigrants.
- A cooperative, family-focused agricultural systems model is culturally familiar.

## the **AGRIPRENEUR TRAINING** approach

The Rural Enterprise Center has created an innovative scalable approach that capitalizes on strengths, and addresses challenges often tied to structural racism: the lack of access to land, working capital, marketing and business support infrastructure, and focused training. The approach is designed to require minimum investment or inputs and deliver maximum return or outputs, moving through three phases:

### **Phase 1: Discovery**

Building community support infrastructure (Anglo and Latin@); identifying opportunities based on community assets; involving interested Latin@s and families in community farming ventures such as community gardens; offering experiential learning opportunities in raising free-range poultry and market gardening

### **Phase 2: Development**

Learning and participating in an agripreneur training program or incubator of specialized small-farm training units that replicate actual sustainable farming conditions

### **Phase 3: Launch**

Matching Phase 2 graduates with farmer mentors, financial resources and support to buy or rent their own agriculture operation or become involved in local food product processing as a member of a cooperative structure; providing ongoing support with marketing and sustainability principles



## what CHANGES?

The agripreneur training approach has the power to transform the way food is produced and distributed, and the quality of lives of community members. Here are three exciting outcomes we expect to see in communities:

### **Stronger Families & Communities**

The training approach supports local ownership and partnership at multiple levels of the agricultural process: land and resources, financing, growing, processing, distribution. Income generated through a successful cooperative network can remain within the community and contribute to its long-term economic vitality.

Latin@ and Anglo farmers involved with the agripreneur training approach in southeastern Minnesota have formed the **Hillside Farmers Cooperative** to collectively share resources and risks.

The approach also has the capacity to attract and re-engage youth in food and agriculture in a way that row crops and the need for high-priced machinery do not. Retaining educated and motivated young people is critical to the long-term vitality of rural community life.

### **Better Health**

The training approach is focused on growing natural, healthy food products and begins to address the negative impact of a U.S. processed food diet on the health of Latin@ immigrant families. Consider these facts:

- After living in this country for five or more years, Latin@ immigrants are one and a half times more likely to have high blood pressure than when they first arrived.
- According to the Centers for Disease Control, Latin@ children obesity rates are nearly double those for whites.

### **Sustainability**

Finally, training is focused on using natural resources in a sustainable, efficient way to protect the local environment. This taps into consumer demand for local, whole/natural food options – one of the fastest growing industry sectors in the country.

## why POULTRY?

Although it's not the only agricultural product, producing natural, free-range chickens is at the core of the Rural Enterprise Center's current project to help Latin@ farmers succeed. Here's why:

**Turnaround** – Poultry has a short life cycle and a concurrent cash flow. That means it's possible for a low-income family to begin raising poultry without having to disrupt their current situation significantly.

**Culture** – Most immigrant Latin@ families already have experience and knowledge around this kind of poultry farming (which is very different from conventional poultry farm methods).

**Sustainability** – In sustainable farming systems, biological activity needs the presence of livestock. For example, chicken manure is nature's fertilizer, and will help the farmers grow more nutritious products more efficiently, such as vegetables, nuts, fruits and honey.

*"Over the years, we've tried many different ways to secure a piece of land and achieve our farming dreams. The training and the cooperative have given us a renewed sense of opportunity."*

— Maria and her family

## what NEXT?

Northfield, Minn. area is a pilot community for the agripreneur training approach, with a deep support infrastructure, expanding community gardens, and three prototype poultry operations (two summer and one year-round).

During 2010, we'll reach out to more Latin@ families, connect more families with farmer mentors, and build out our classroom and experiential training platform.

**To find out** how you can support this innovative program and Latin@ families, go to [ruralec.com](http://ruralec.com).

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