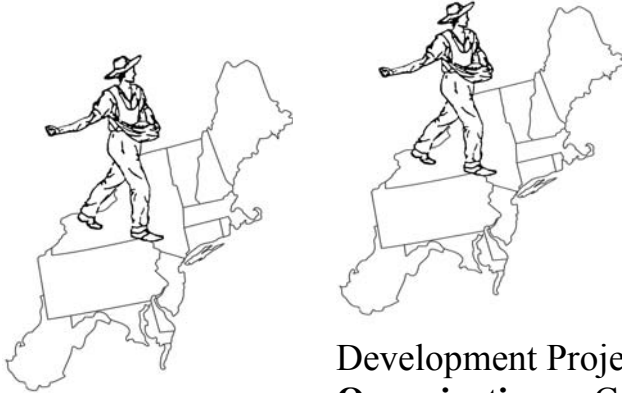


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Program: New Farmer

Development Project

Organizations: Cornell Cooperative Extension-New York City, collaborating

with Greenmarket – City University of New York (CUNY) and the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets

Dates: 2000 through present

Audiences: Explorers, Planners and Startups

Need

Today's immigrants in New York City come from six countries in Central and South America. They often have vast agricultural experience. But when new immigrant farmers try to establish themselves in farming in the United States, they must not only adjust to a very different culture and climate but also overcome the same obstacles that all beginning farmers encounter.

The Program

The New Farmer Development Project was developed to encourage a new generation of skilled farmers to farmland in downstate New York. The project recruits individuals interested in becoming independent farmers and/or working in farm-related jobs, with an emphasis on management not farm labor. The goal is to help this ethnically diverse group learn farm production methods relevant to New York, marketing skills and how to access the local farmer's market system.

The project only accepts individuals who have previous farming experience and are interested in market-oriented production but who lack the necessary business expertise to run a successful farm.

The project consists of a pre-season series of training sessions, called 'La Nueva Siembra,' held at Cooperative Extension offices in Manhattan. During the growing season, participants use demonstration plots in Staten Island, Far Rockaway and Astoria, Queens. The Astoria site, known as the Phoenix Triangle, is operated in cooperation with

Goodwill Industries. The project added a new site in 2003. At each site, participants learn to raise produce, and the project assists them in marketing through the established New York City Greenmarkets farmer's markets.

The New Farmer Development Project is not the first of its type in the United States. The promise of developing new farmers can be seen in a similar program in Massachusetts. The New Entry Sustainable Farming Project, sponsored by Tufts University, helps disadvantaged Hmong immigrant farmers from Cambodia become commercial farmers.

Like the New York City project, it has three major goals:

- To re-energize the region's agriculture through diversified operation and ownership.
- To develop greater economic self-reliance among the disadvantaged.
- To expand production of ethnic foods by providing immigrant farmers with land that is leased at a low cost and with mentors from the farming community.

The Massachusetts program's teaching methods include dual translation teams to help overcome language barriers and videotaped demonstrations.

In Minnesota, the large acreage once available to immigrants has disappeared, and new immigrant farmers must find a way to do more with less land. The state's Farming Incubator Program helps them make the transition into sustainable small-scale farming operations by leasing them parcels of land for up to four years at the University of Minnesota's Rosemount Research and Outreach Center.

A New Immigrant Farm Program complements the Farming Incubator Program by working with immigrants who are farmers and already own or lease land.

Both of these programs provide classroom and field-based educational activities. In turn, the immigrant farmers inject an enthusiasm into area farmers markets and introduce new foods to consumers.

Response

In the second year of the New Farmer Development Project, 25 residents from the City and surrounding counties participated in workshops and hands-on instruction. The 15 fully attended sessions covered all aspects of production important to new farmers, including what to expect the first year, marketing strategies, transport options, selecting farmers' markets, niche and ethnic markets. Some participants also completed a certificate short course in hydroponics.

In 2003 land was prepared in Long Island City (Queens), under sponsorship of Silver Cup Studios, for participants interested in demonstration plots. New sites in the city mean farmers can avoid long-distance weekly commutes to work on out-of-town plots.

As the number of new immigrant farmers continues to grow, programs such as the New Farmer Development Project will help ensure the success of this new generation of Americans. "I think we're beginning to see the renaissance of the American small farm," says Joanna Green, senior Extension associate with Cornell University's Small Farms Program. "New immigrant farmers are going to be an increasingly important part of that renaissance."

Funding

The project is funded by Cornell Cooperative Extension-NYC, Greenmarket – City University of New York and the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets.

Analysis

SUCSESSES: Completing its third year in 2003, the New Farmer Development Project has helped new farmers overcome the challenges of getting started in farming.

“Everyone benefits from this program,” says Norma Brenes, Extension Educator with Cornell Cooperative Extension of New York City. “The farmers get the information and resources they need to become successful. Greenmarkets are able to expand and enrich their present farmer’s market operations, and consumers have a dependable source of locally grown and exotic fruits and vegetables.”

The success of the program has already being seen. One participant leased land in Upstate New York and is marketing eggs and produce at farmer’s markets in Tribeca and elsewhere in the City. Others have taken positions with local farmers as managers or with farmers at the market to assist with sales.

CHALLENGES: The project needs to develop new farming sites, so participants will not have to make long-distance weekly commutes to work on out-of-town plots. Also, funding must increase so the program can expand to serve more immigrant farmers.

Next Steps

The Project has two major goals: To seek additional funding sources so that more participants can be served. To locate and develop new parcels of land that can be farmed, preferably in areas that don’t require long commutes.

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