

Best Practices for Better Serving Socially Disadvantaged and Limited Resource Beginning Farmers and Ranchers

These are the consolidated comments by break out session participants at the BFRDP Directors' Meeting, Ft. Collins, CO. Concerns were expressed by both session leaders and attendees related to the overall approaches which might be used to enfranchise farmers and ranchers stigmatized by long term racial prejudice and poverty. Consensus opinion was that cooperative approaches to meeting Socially Disadvantaged (SD) and Limited Resource (LR) farmers and ranchers needs were most in line with cultural norms of these groups. Encouraging shared risk taking, information transfer, and collaborative business management practices were cited as high probability approaches to agricultural success. A strong sentiment among participating leaders and audience members was that USDA services can be a bridge to success if trust and support is earned through information delivered in a culturally sensitive manner, relying on customs, language, and social networks dominant in local settings. Recognizing and appreciating culturally based views of generational responsibility, time, and spirituality is a key to successful interactions with SD and LR producers.

General suggestions offered during the two breakout sessions for better serving the needs of SD and LR producers follow:

- 1. Adapt the project to the targeted participants' culture*—Fruits and vegetables grown and marketed directly to local consumers need to reflect the local culture. Also, project staff need to understand this local culture and speak the participants' language. Finally, many low-income participants may be women that are growing food for their families and earning supplemental income by direct marketing their produce. In these circumstances, women can often times better communicate and instruct participants.
- 2. One-on-one training is essential*—Low-income SD and LR producers often do not speak English or are limited English speaking and have a low educational attainment. Conventional training methods and curriculum will often times not be effective with these groups. Training emphasis should be placed on simple, graphic curriculum and lots of hands-on, one-on-one assistance.
- 3. Provide some focus on social media*—Direct marketing of farm produce is becoming more and more dependent on social media as time passes. Today's young people will be tomorrow's producers and consumers and they will lean heavily on social media. The consumers willing to pay a premium for wholesome produce are often more affluent with access to broadband connectivity. The Internet is rapidly becoming the preferred method of communication in preparation for farmers' markets and CSA transactions.
- 4. Effective Partnerships are paramount*—As interest grows in the direct marketing of produce, and as resources become more limited, collaborative efforts among multiple organizations will be the most effective and successful means of assisting beginning farmers and ranchers. The most effective partnerships to assist beginning farmers and ranchers with the direct marketing

of their produce will include institutions of higher education, community-based organizations (CBOs), and cooperative extension. Educational institutions can provide financial and administrative depth, CBOs can provide grass-roots participation, and cooperative extension can provide subject-matter expertise. Focus/advisory group meetings, collaboration with local grassroots & community organizations, partnerships with local, state, government agencies, and evaluation and client feedback should be included as part of comprehensive programs to reach SD and LR producers.

5. *Innovative approaches to outreach* - farmer focus groups, cross interdisciplinary training, community leader involvement, hands-on training, demonstrations and seminars site based, field tours and field days using local successful farm and ranch training sites, active use of website / internet resources and accompanying training in effective use of these tools, basic email literacy and encouraging use of this communication medium, encouraging full participation of churches and civic organizations in supporting and facilitating agricultural training.

Some suggested specific topics for outreach programs which will meet the unique needs of Hispanic, Native American, African American, and immigrant producer populations are as follow: Financial Management - balance sheet, cash flow, accurate record keeping (digital and hard copy); range tours and field workshops; NRCS programming and NRCS grant opportunities; information on the importance of sustainable agriculture practices and awareness of SARE grant opportunities; grazing lands coalition practices and experiences; adult farm management - farming and ranching as a family operation including the importance of record keeping, goal setting, decision making; basic livestock practices; risk management curriculum; entrepreneurship & business training; understanding production and marketing strategies; farm diversification; environmental compliance; development of and leasing of trust land; direct technical assistance related to farm and ranch production; value added opportunities partnership; young and beginning farmers grant/loans; FSA – loans/youth; conservation programs; alternative marketing updates; direct marketing; alternative and agri-tourism opportunities identified.