



center for rural policy and development

Seeking Solutions for Greater Minnesota's Future

Educational Interests, Needs and Learning Preferences of Immigrant Farmers

Thaddeus McCamant, Ph.D.

Across the United States, immigrants are buying land and starting new farms. In some states, immigrants are making small farming enclaves, such as Sikh farmers in California, Old Believer Russians in western Oregon, and West Africans in Maryland (NIFI). Other immigrants quickly assimilate, often marry local people, and can only be distinguished from their neighbors by their accents. Some assimilated immigrant farmers came to this country with agriculture degrees to work on large farms and have since started their own farms.

Hispanics are the most diverse group of immigrants and include groups that have formed their own enclaves and those who have assimilated. In states with large commercial fruit or vegetable production, like Washington and Michigan, many Hispanics started out as farm laborers and either worked into managerial positions before buying their own land or saved up enough money to buy their own land. In those cases, they are farming the same crops that they previously worked with, applying the knowledge gained by picking and weeding a crop to start their own businesses (Rhodes and Hughes, 2004). Other Hispanic farmers started out as factory workers and bought land so that they could raise their children away from

www.ruralmn.org

Twitter [@ruralrealityMN](https://twitter.com/ruralrealityMN)
facebook.com/ruralmn

A PDF of this report can be downloaded from the Center's web site at www.ruralmn.org.

© 2014 Center for Rural Policy and Development

Thaddeus McCamant has a doctorate in botany and is the specialty crops management instructor for Central Lakes College in Staples, teaching farmers around the state on topics such as disease and pest control, soil fertility, legal compliance, and business plans.

The Center for Rural Policy and Development, based in St. Peter, Minn., is a private, not-for-profit policy research organization dedicated to benefiting Minnesota by providing its policy makers with an unbiased evaluation of issues from a rural perspective.

urban problems (Ariza, 2009).

Officials in most states see the increase in immigrant farmers as a good trend. There is a strong history of immigrants coming to this country and starting their own farms, both as enclaves and as workers. Many towns in rural Minnesota started out as enclaves of German, Dutch, or Scandinavian farmers. Government officials see the new immigrants as an effective way to stem the loss of population from rural areas and to meet the rising demand for locally grown vegetables (Lewis, 2009).

Immigrant Farmer Characteristics

A survey was given to immigrant farmers in late October and early November 2012. Most surveys were administered verbally. The Hmong surveys were conducted by the Hmong American Farmers Association, where hired people administered the survey verbally. The Latino surveys were administered by Juan Carlos Cervantes and by the Latino Economic Development Center (LEDC). For the Hmong survey, people hired to conduct the survey translated the survey verbally from English to Hmong while they were giving the survey. The LEDC translated the written survey into Spanish prior to giving the survey. Some of the Spanish surveys were given verbally, while others filled out the surveys themselves.

Immigrants are normally reluctant to take surveys, and the normal reluctance was exacerbated by the presidential election, when people were suspicious of receiving unsolicited calls. In the end, we received 41 completed Hmong-language surveys and 45 completed Spanish-language surveys.

The Hmong data was separated between men and women, but since as a rule there were few differences in educational interests between men and women, most of the data below shows the responses of men and women combined. In the Latino survey, there were a number of answers left blank on many questions, so the number of responses varies

from question to question. The question number on the Hmong survey is at the beginning of each question.

Demographic characteristics

Hmong farmers surveyed were an average age of 48, compared to 41 years for Hispanics, and 16 of the 41 Hmong farmers surveyed have been farming more than 20 years, while only 9 have been farming less than five years. More than 40% of the Hmong respondents were women, compared to 20% of Hispanics respondents. In the Hmong community, there is a concern that the farmers are growing older, with few younger people replacing the older farmers (Langston, 2013). The Hmong have been farming on average 14 years. The results of the survey conducted in Spanish were unclear regarding how long people have been farming. In the Spanish-language survey, the question was worded, "How long have you been working in agriculture," which could include years working as hired labor on larger farms. (The number before each question is the number on the survey.)

Q34. Average age in years.

Hmong Men	52.0
Hmong Women	46.5
Hispanics	41.4

Q1. Average number of years farming.

Hmong men	13.3
Hmong women	14.5
Hispanics	9.4

About half the Hmong respondents had no formal education, but another 40% had completed eighth grade or high school. Nearly all Hispanic respondents had some formal education, with about three fourths completing either eighth grade or high school. One reason the survey was given verbally was that

Q38. Highest education level completed.

	Hmong		Hispanic	
	n	%	n	%
8 th grade	4	10	20	45
High School	13	32	14	32
Some college	2	5	8	18
No formal education	22	54	2	4

Q36. Country of birth.

Hmong	n	%	Hispanic	n	%
Laos	37	90	Mexico	32	76
Thailand	3	7	Guatemala	3	7
Other	1	2	El Salvador	4	10
			Texas	3	7

Q37. Working off the farm (Hmong).

	n
Full time	24
Part time	14
No off-farm job	3

Q39. Home ownership.

	Hmong		Hispanic	
	n	%	n	%
No	9	22	29	69
Yes	32	78	14	31

Q41. Total annual income.

	Hmong		Hispanic	
	n	%	n	%
<\$30,000	19	46	29	69
\$30,000-\$50,000	19	46	10	23
\$50,000-\$75,000	2	5	3	7
>\$75,000	1	2	0	0

Q40. Net farm income (Hmong).

	n	%
<\$10,000	22	48
\$10,000-\$50,000	21	46
\$50,000-\$75,000	2	5
>\$75,000	1	2

some respondents were illiterate in all languages.

Many of the differences between the Hmong and Hispanic groups are due to the fact that Hispanics in Minnesota are relatively recent immigrants compared to the Hmong. The Hmong are wealthier, with nearly half of respondents earning between \$30,000 and \$50,000 in total annual income, and the rate of home ownership among the Hmong was over twice that of Hispanics. Few Hmong were farming full time, with only three respondents saying they have no off-farm income. The percentage of Hmong working off the farm is similar to other direct-market fruit and vegetable producers in the state, who usually either use the farm to supplement their income or their retirement. The question in the Spanish survey was translated as "Are you working now on your farm?" rather than "Do you work off the farm?" in the Hmong survey, and the results are not included here.

Farm Characteristics

Hmong farmers have farm incomes similar to other direct-market farmers in Minnesota: slightly less than half make less than \$10,000 a year, and another 46% make \$10,000-\$50,000 per year. All vegetable growers were asked to compare their per-acre income to the statewide average of \$8,700 per acre; 85% of Hmong farmers reported sales of less than the \$8,700 average. The low income is a concern for the future of Hmong farming since young people are unlikely to enter a field with high labor and low returns. A small percentage of Hmong farmers were quite profitable, with gross farm incomes greater than \$50,000. The growers with a net farm income greater than \$50,000 were the

same farmers that recorded per-acre returns at or greater than \$8,700 per acre. One possible reason for the low per-acre returns is the lack of irrigation, with only 25% of Hmong farmers growing on irrigated land.

Few immigrants own their own land, although rates of land ownership in Minnesota appear to be higher than reported in other states, such as Washington (Langston, 2012) and Oregon (Mercy Corps Northwest). The majority of Hmong respondents were clustered in the east metro of the Twin Cities and were farming between 1 and 10 acres, while the majority of Hispanics were farming on average less than one acre in Greater Minnesota. In terms of rent, 74% of Hmong farmers pay between \$200 and \$400 an acre, which is consistent with rental rates for cropland in rural Minnesota. Unlike Anglo farmers, the Hmong were primarily farming one farm in one location rather than multiple plots. Most Hispanics were farming small plots of land supplied by companies or other organizations. Those cultivating land supplied by an employer were also not paying rent for it. With Hmong farmers, there appeared to be no correlation between the presence of irrigation and higher rental rates.

Many people who work with immigrant farmers stress that farming is more than a business, and is an activity that helps immigrants maintain a connection with their culture and family. Our study strongly supports these observations. In one question (Q8), immigrants were asked how they thought of their farm. The most popular answer among all respondents, at almost half, was as a business. With the Hmong, the second most common answer was as a family garden where they sell the excess. Among Hispanics, the second most common answer was as a garden to feed the family. In another (Q14), they were asked why they farm (respondents could mark more than one choice). About half the Hmong respondents said they farm to make money,

Q2. Land Ownership

	Hmong (n)	Hispanic (n)
Own land	4	4
Lease land	34	7
Use relative or friend's land	3	6
Land provided by employer	0	12

Q3. Farm size

	Hmong (n)	Hispanic (n)
< 1acre	3	34
1-5 acres	15	7
5-10 acres	15	2
10-20 acres	6	1
>20 acres	2	0

Q4. Farm Location

Hmong (n)		Hispanic (n)	
Dakota County	17	Steele County	13
Washington County	10	Todd County	6
Anoka County	2	Waseca County	4
Hennepin County	2	Hennepin County	2
Winona County	3	Stearns County	2
Wisconsin	4	Wisconsin	2
Scott, Rice, Isanti, Olmsted, Wright	4	Wadena, Washington, Dakota	

Q7. What do you pay in rent for your land each year?

	Hmong		Hispanic	
	n	%	n	%
<\$200 an acre	1	11	8	20
\$200-\$400 an acre	29	72	5	12
\$400-\$600 an acre	3	7	0	0
>\$600 an acre	0	0	5	12
Not applicable	5	11	23	56

Q8. How do you think of your farm?

	Hmong		Hispanic	
	n	%	n	%
Business	20	48	22	42
A garden to feed family	3	9	21	40
A family garden and sell the extra	20	43	5	10
Not farming yet	0	0	4	8

Q9. What style of farming do you use?

	<i>Hmong</i>		<i>Hispanic</i>	
	n	%	n	%
Conventional	15	49	7	17
Certified organic	0	0	6	14
Organic transitional	5	12	0	0
Sustainable	31	78	0	0
Pasture	0	0	1	2
Organic procedures but not certified	11	29	28	67

Q12. How do you sell your products? (Hmong)

	n	%
Farmers markets	40	98
Wholesale	4	10
Friends and Relatives	4	10

Where do you sell your products/vegetables? (Hispanics, most common answers)

Friends, relatives, churches	24	62
Mexican stores	6	15
Mexican restaurants	3	8
Farmers markets	1	3
Do not sell/personal consumption	4	10

14. Why do you farm?

	<i>Hmong</i>		<i>Hispanic</i>	
	n	%	n	%
Make money	20	49	22	50
Raise vegetables not in stores	3	8	4	9
Provide food for the family	33	80	20	45
Relax and de-stress	19	48	2	4

while 80% marked “to provide food for the family,” and 45% indicated they farm “to relax and de-stress.”

Hmong indicated that they sell primarily at farmers markets, while Hispanics are more likely to sell to churches, relatives, Mexican stores, and restaurants. The Hmong sell at a wide range of farmers markets in the Twin Cities metro area and in southeastern Minnesota, with 18 different markets listed by respondents. Most producers go to a market in or near the county where their farm is located (Q4). Only three Hispanics indicated that they sell their products at farmers markets.

A large percentage of Hispanic respondents (67%) reported that they were using organic procedures even though they were not certified, while Hmong farmers were more likely to call themselves sustainable. About 30% of the Hmong respondents said they followed organic procedures but did not certify, which is similar to direct-market fruit and vegetable producers across the U.S.

The Hmong are sophisticated vegetable producers, raising products for diverse communities in the Twin Cities area. They select crops that can be sold to Asian, African, and Hispanic communities. Hmong farmers in other parts of the country have a history of adapting their growing practices to adjust to changing markets as well. In Seattle, Hmong farmers learned to raise fresh flowers for the farmers markets, although flower production was not part of their culture in Indochina (Langston, 2012). Hispanic farmers are raising products primarily for their families and their community.

Q16. What products are raised on the farm?
(Hmong)

	n	%
Vegetables for Asians	35	87
Vegetables for Africans	20	49
Field corn	1	2
Vegetables for Hispanics	25	60
Soybeans	17	41
Sweet corn	29	73
Berries and fruits	7	17
Vegetables for Americans	35	87
Others (herbs, flowers)	4	10

What products are raised on the farm? (Hispanics)

	n	%
Vegetables for Hispanics	43	96
Sweet corn	5	11
Alfalfa	1	2
Soy	1	2
Fruit	6	14
Vegetables for Americans	9	21

Q17. Which of the following animals are on your farm?

	Hmong		Hispanic	
	n	%	n	%
No livestock	33	83	32	73
Beef	1	2	5	11
Hogs	0	0	0	0
Chickens for eggs	4	9	3	7
Chickens for meat	6	13	3	7
Geese and ducks	1	2	0	0

Q21. Would you like to learn about raising livestock?

	Hmong		Hispanic	
	n	%	n	%
Yes, for sale	1	2	4	10
No, but I would like to someday	10	22	14	33
Yes, for family	6	13	0	0
Not interested	29	63	22	52

Hmong women were twice as likely as men to put down, "No, but I would like to someday."

Livestock

Few immigrants have livestock, but the survey indicated that many would like to have livestock someday. Among Hmong farmers, the lack of interest in learning about livestock appears to be tied to landownership. All Hmong respondents who reported owning land had some type of livestock. Hmong farmers are primarily interested in poultry, including unconventional poultry like ducks and pigeons. Hispanic farmers had a stronger desire to raise cattle, with some wanting to start their own dairy operations. One person even wanted to sell beef leather. Although nobody in either group reported currently raising pigs, many people expressed a desire to raise pigs in the future. Throughout the United States, education programs for immigrant farmers have primarily emphasized vegetable production. According to this survey, there is enough interest in raising livestock and poultry that people designing education programs for immigrants should consider including livestock courses as well.

Q22. List two animals that you would like to learn about.

	Hmong (n)	Hispanic (n)
Beef	5	10
Milk cows	0	2
Chicken and Turkeys	11	4
Pig	3	4
Wool	0	2
Duck and goose	3	0
Horse	1	0

Business Management and Crop Production Education Interests and Needs

The survey asked growers about business education interests and needs and crop production education interests and needs. Like other vegetable growers, these immigrant farmers were more interested in crop production topics than in business management topics. Beginning growers of all stripes want to learn how to grow crops before they worry about running a business. There were some exceptions, however, especially among the Hmong, who have been growing vegetables for many years and are therefore experienced in crop production.

For business topics, the Hmong were most interested in finding profitable varieties for Minnesota. They were also very interested in food safety, suggesting that Hmong farmers are following news reports on the topic. Other business topics they considered important included their rights as a renter, how to rent land, how to buy land, renting land, applying for loans, and pricing product. Prior to conducting the survey, one Hmong leader

saw a huge need in making a yearly plan for producing and selling vegetables, but the farmers themselves were only moderately interested in developing a yearly plan. The two business topics Hmong farmers were not interested in were hiring employees and passing on their farm to their children.

Hispanic farmers indicated an overall lower interest in business topics, and there was not a big difference between the most popular and least popular topics. Many Hispanic respondents put one number (either high or low) for all topics. Like Hmong respondents, the highest score for business topics was identifying profitable crops for Minnesota.

For crop production topics, both groups were interested in a wide range of topics that included fertilizers, soils, and identifying insect pests and diseases. Hispanic respondents were especially interested in learning about starting plants and installing greenhouses. When designing an educational program for a broad audience of immigrant producers, any of these production topics should generate interest.

Other topics could be addressed to

Q18. What business management topics do you want to learn about? (Hmong)

Topic	Rank	Raw Score	Score
Identify crops that will be most profitable for Minnesota	1	110	89
Food safety rules and regulations	2	109	89
Your rights as a land renter	3	107	87
How to find rental land	4	106	86
How to buy land	5	105	85
Learn how to buy crop insurance or liability insurance	6	103	84
How to price a product	7	102	83
Develop a yearly plan for selling vegetables and fruit	7	101	82
Learn procedures for selling produce wholesale	8	99	80
Irrigation design and timing	9	98	79
How to apply for loans	9	98	79
How to hire employees	11	74	60
How to pass the farm to children or other relatives	12	68	49

Q18. What business management topics do you want to learn about? (Hispanic)

<i>Topic</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>Raw Score</i>	<i>Score</i>
Identify crops that will be most profitable for Minnesota	1	107	83
How to price a product	2	104	81
Food safety rules and regulations	3	103	80
Develop a yearly plan for selling vegetables and fruit	4	101	78
How to buy land	4	101	78
How to apply for loans	4	101	78
Learn procedures for selling produce wholesale	5	100	77
Learn how to buy crop insurance	6	99	77
Irrigation design and timing	6	99	77
How to hire employees	7	93	72
How to find rental land	7	93	72
Your rights as a land renter	8	91	70
How to pass the farm to children or other relatives	9	88	68

smaller groups. Although 41% of the Hmong respondents considered themselves organic (although not officially certified) or organic transitional, some did express an interest in applying pesticides safely, obtaining a pesticide applicator's license, and choosing herbicides. Since many immigrant education programs emphasize organic production, teaching about pesticides is an unmet need. Although the data above implies little interest in learning about hiring employees, nearly 25% of the respondents put "very interested."

To score educational interests and needs, respondents rated each topic as being very interested, somewhat interested, and having no interest. No interest was given a score of 1, somewhat interested a score of 2, and very interested a score of 3. The *raw score* is the total for all responses added together. The *score* is based on a percentage of from 30 to 100. If all the respondents put "very interested," the score would be 100. The topics below are listed from the highest to the lowest score.

Preferences for the Delivery of Education and Training Programs

Educational Information

When immigrants need information about growing crops, they are most likely to ask other farmers or relatives, the survey results showed. In surveys of Hispanic farmers in Wisconsin (Lezberg and Reyes-Hamann, 2010) and Michigan (Ariza, 2009), friends and family were also the most common sources of information about farming.

In this survey, Hmong farmers also used seed or farm supply companies, while Hispanic farmers were more likely to use the Minnesota Food Alliance or a vegetable specialist. Neither group relied on Extension educators to learn about farming. Four Hispanic farmers put down that they used the Internet to find information, although "Internet" was not listed on the survey. Three Hispanic farmers stated that they couldn't find anyone, indicating that some Hispanic farmers may be isolated from both educational organizations and other farmers.

Crop Production Management Education Interests and Needs
 Q19. What topics do you want to learn about? (Hmong)

Topic	Rank	Raw score	Score
The soils on your land	1	113	92
Identify insect pests	1	113	92
Identify diseases	1	113	92
Select the best varieties for Minnesota	4	112	91
Learn the most effective way to apply pesticides	5	111	90
Fertilization	6	110	89
Food safety rules and regulations	7	109	89
Operate a greenhouse or high tunnel	8	108	88
Choosing herbicides	8	108	88
Develop a yearly plan for planting and harvesting	10	105	85
Obtain a private pesticide applicators license	11	104	84
Install irrigation equipment	12	99	80
Repair equipment (sprayers, seeders, tillers)	13	95	77
Storing and transporting harvested product	14	94	76
Buy equipment	15	92	75

Q20. From the above list, what are the three most important topics for your farm?

Topic	Number of responses	
	Men	Women
Fertilization	13	7
Herbicides	9	5
Applying pesticides safely	7	5
Identifying insect pests	7	5
Choosing varieties for Minnesota	4	7
Soils on your land	5	4
Installing a greenhouse	3	4
Obtaining a pesticide applicators license	4	1

Q15. Where do you go when you have questions about farming? (Hmong)

	n	%
Educator from immigrant organization	4	10
Extension educators	2	5
Other farmers	29	71
Relatives	19	46
Minnesota Food Alliance	0	0
Seed or farm supply companies	12	29
Nowhere/can't find anyone	1	2

Language

All but one of the Hmong farmers said they would prefer to have the instruction in the Hmong language, but seven of the men and three of the women said they would like a mixture of English and Hmong. One respondent was born in the United States and preferred English. It has been suggested anecdotally that most American-born Hmong struggle with their parent's language, suggesting that any education program that would also reach out to young people would have to be in a mixture of Hmong and English.

All the Hispanics wanted the instruction in Spanish, except for one respondent who wanted English and Spanish. Even the respondents who were born in Texas preferred Spanish.

Education Delivery

Immigrant farmers indicated that they would prefer to learn on the farm, either through workshops, field days, or field trips. They would also like attending conferences such as the annual immigrant farmers' conference. There was little interest in online delivery and webinars. More than half of both groups reported not using the Internet in their business.

More than three fourths of all immigrants did not attend any educational programs the previous year. For both

Q19. What topics do you want to learn about? (Hispanic)

Topic	Rank	Raw score	Score
Starting plants inside or in the field	1	110	85
Identify diseases	1	110	85
Identify insect pests	3	109	84
Select the best varieties for Minnesota	4	105	81
Storing and transporting harvested product	5	103	80
Food safety rules and regulations	6	102	79
Develop a yearly plan for planting and harvesting	7	101	78
Operate a greenhouse or high tunnel	8	100	78
Install irrigation equipment	8	100	78
Fertilization	8	100	78
Learn the safest way to apply pesticides	11	98	76
The soils on your land	12	97	75
Buy equipment	13	93	72
Pesticides	14	93	72
Obtain a private pesticide applicators license	15	91	70

Q20. From the above list, what are the three most important topics?

Identifying diseases	15
Starting plants	12
Varieties for Minnesota	10
Buying equipment	10
High tunnels and greenhouses	10
Irrigation	8
Fertilizers	7
Soil analysis	6
Pesticide applicators license	5

Q15. Where do you go when you have questions about farming? (Hispanic)

	n	%
Educator from immigrant organization	4	9
Extension educators	1	2
Other farmers	9	20
Relatives	11	25
Minnesota Food Alliance	6	14
Seed or farm supply companies	2	4
Vegetable specialists	6	14
Internet	4	9
Nowhere/can't find anyone	3	7

Hispanics and Hmong, the major reason for not attending conferences was that they were not aware of the events. For the Hmong, the second reason given was being too busy, followed by time conflicts and language barriers. For Hispanics, the second and third reasons for not attending educational events were that they were already learning everything from family and friends and time conflicts. The fourth reason Hispanics chose for not attending educational events was that the cost of the program was too high.

Determining how much to charge for education or deciding whether or not to charge for education is a big challenge for groups designing educational programs for immigrants. On average, all immigrants were willing to pay \$34 for a three-hour workshop and \$55 for an all-day workshop. There were large differences between Hmong farmers and Hispanic farmers and between Hmong women and Hmong men as far as willingness to pay for a workshop, however. Hispanic farmers were willing to pay \$44.60 for a three-hour workshop and \$69.38 for an all-day workshop, while Hmong farmers were willing to pay only \$24 for a three-hour workshop and \$40.61 for an all day workshop. Hmong women were only willing to pay \$18 for a three-hour workshop, compared to \$31.67 for Hmong men. Five of the Hmong women and three of the Hmong men were not

Q25. Where would you like the education and training programs to be held? (Hmong)

Response	Rank	Score
At a host farm with similar farmers	1	94
In a traditional classroom setting	2	91
At farm organization meetings (MFA, MFVGA)	3	82
At my farm	4	76
As a blend of face to face and online delivery	5	47
Totally online	6	46

Q25. Where would you like the education and training programs to be held? (Hispanic)

Response	Rank	Score
At a host farm with similar farmers	1	76
In a traditional classroom setting	2	67
At farm organization meetings (MFA, MFVGA)	3	65
At my farm	4	55
As a blend of face to face and online delivery	5	54
Totally online	6	48

Q26. How do you like to learn about farming? (Hmong, top 5)

Response	Rank	Score
On farm classes with hands-on activities	1	94
Field trips	2	91
Conferences like the Immigrant Farmers Conference	3	87
One-to-one conversations with other farmers	4	80
Individualized in-person instruction	5	73

Q26. How do you like to learn about farming? (Hispanic, top 5)

Response	Rank	Score
Field trips	1	79
Conferences like the Immigrant Farmers Conference	2	76
One-to-one conversations with other farmers	2	76
Print materials	3	60
Communication with instructor by telephone	4	58
Webinars	5	57

willing to pay anything for a workshop. The most money people were willing to pay was \$100 for a half-day workshop and \$200 for a full-day workshop. Five of the Hmong men were willing to pay over \$100 for a half-day workshop. There was no correlation between the number of workshops attended in the past year and the willingness to pay for a quality workshop, but there was a slight correlation between gross farm income and willingness to pay for a workshop. Growers with a gross farm income over \$50,000 were more willing to pay money than growers with a gross farm income less than \$10,000. Price resistance for education is common among all fruit and vegetable growers, and the results here are not a great deal different from those for Anglo farmers.

Hmong men were more willing to travel in order to receive education than Hmong women. The distance that Hmong men were willing to travel varied from 10 miles to 200 miles. The distance that Hmong women were willing to travel varied from 2 miles to 100 miles. Only one woman put 100 miles. The next highest distance was 50 miles.

Internet Access

Q29. Do you use the Internet in your home or farm business office?

	Hmong	Hispanic
Yes	48%	43%
No	52%	57%

Do you have high-speed Internet access?

	Hmong	Hispanic
Yes	35%	38%
No	39%	58%
I don't know	26%	4%

Q42. Do you have:

	<i>Hmong</i>		<i>Hispanic</i>	
	n	%	n	%
Children under 18	35	76	27	61
Children graduated from college	21	46	7	16
Children who are working	30	65	6	14
No children	1	2	5	11

Q43. Do your children help with farm production or sales? (*Hmong*)

	n	%
Children help sell vegetables	28	68
Children help plant, weed and harvest	31	76
Children do not help because they moved away	3	7
Children live at home but do not help with the farm	7	17

Q43. Do your children help with farm production or sales? (*Hispanic*)

	n	%
Children help sell vegetables	4	11
Children help plant, weed and harvest	7	20
Children do not help because they moved away	15	43
Children live at home but do not help with the farm	9	26

Q44. Do your children plan on taking over the farm?

	<i>Hmong</i>	<i>Hispanic</i>
No	50%	69%
Yes	50%	31%

Q45. Do you want your children to grow and sell vegetables?

	<i>Hmong</i>		<i>Hispanic</i>	
	n	%	n	%
Yes	7	15%	21	50%
No, I hope they find another job	17	37%	17	40%
I hope they can find a job AND continue farming	22	48%	4	10%

Children and Immigrant Farmers

Gardening for Hmong farmers is a family activity. Most of the farmers have children helping out with the farm, even when the children are grown, college educated, or working. When asked how their children are involved with the farm, the most common response (over 50%) was that the children help sell vegetables and work in the field. This is a sharp contrast to Anglo fruit and vegetable growers, who find it extremely difficult to put their own children in the field, but not as difficult to put them to work selling the product. The percentage of Hispanic children who help with the farm is similar to Anglo farmers.

Attitudes toward farming

One goal of the survey was to find out how the different groups think about farming. A question that arose frequently during the preparation of the survey was whether immigrants farm because they like to farm or because they have no other options for making money. Two questions in the survey give insight into attitudes toward farming.

The first (Q14) asked respondents: Why do you farm? Half of both immigrant groups said they farmed to make money, and 80% of Hmong farmers and 45% of Hispanic farmers said to provide food for their families. But nearly half of the Hmong respondents also said that one reason they farm is to “relax and de-stress.” Clearly, they are not just farming for the money. We find similar attitudes among Anglo fruit and vegetable growers, who always say that they do not do the work just for the money.

The second question that addresses attitudes towards farming was the last question: Do you want your children to grow and sell vegetables? When farmers have a good attitude toward farming, they want their children to take over the

business. When times are poor, they want their children to find other work. In this survey, a majority did want their children to take over the same work, even if they adopted another profession, but at the same time, a significant minority of both Hispanic and Hmong farmers did not want their children to farm.

As with any group, the Hmong showed a variety of attitudes about any topic. One respondent in particular seemed to hate farming. He didn't want to learn anything about farming, and he did not want his children to take up farming. Hispanic farmers had a similar range in attitudes toward farming.

People who desire to educate Hmong farmers should be aware of this split among the group. As Hmong farmers age, there is a question of whether or not their children will take over their businesses. According to the results of this survey, a small majority of families will continue to farm, but about a third of the farmers will quit. The educators should try to concentrate on the majority who do have a positive attitude toward continuing to farm.

Insights into the findings

Immigrant farmers present a new opportunity for educational organizations. Although Minnesota has been a leader in developing educational programs for immigrant farmers, there is still a tremendous need for education among the people interviewed here. Any educational program being developed should take into account that there is already a good educational program for recently arrived immigrant farmers.

People who have worked with Old Believer Russians have offered advice that applies to working with any immigrant group. The first step is to develop trust with some members of the group, then use the existing leadership to reach out to other people. Developing that trust takes time.

In Minnesota, devising an educational program for Hmong farmers would be easier than for Hispanic farmers since Hmong farmers have several organizations with recognizable leaders. One difficulty in working with Hmong growers, however, is to find an educator who could teach the classes, because few or no Hmong children have been majoring in horticulture or agriculture. The best format may be to hire an interpreter.

There are many Hispanics who are qualified to teach horticulture, animal science, and agriculture, but Hispanics are a diverse group scattered across the state. Working with the LEDC is a first step, especially given the need for education in rural communities like Owatonna and Long Prairie. The number of Hispanic farmers will grow for the foreseeable future, and they are willing to pay for workshops.

Any educational program should start with the topics that respondents gave as being the most important. Hispanic growers really want to learn how to identify different plant diseases, and they want to learn how to start plants inside. Both groups are interested in identifying soil types and in soil analysis. The Hmong want to learn about fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides.

The immigrant population is growing in rural Minnesota, and those who are interested in farming will be replacing a dwindling population of traditionally white farmers. The state has a unique opportunity to provide education through programs that already exist but only need some adaptation to fit language and cultural needs. This could be an excellent opportunity for the agricultural community to ensure that those who continue farming are continuing with the knowledge they need to be successful and grow the industry.

Literature Cited

Ariza, B.L., 2009. "Understanding Hispanic Farmers and Their Educational Needs: A case study from Southwestern Michigan." Proceedings of the 25th annual meeting. www.aiaee.org

Langston, J. 2012. "What do immigrant farmers need?" *Sightline Daily*. daily.sightline.org

Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, 2012. "Iowa Immigrant and Refugee Farm Incubator Program." Competitive Grant Report M2011-13.

Lewis, H. "From Mexico to Iowa. New immigrant farmers." *Community Development*, 40: 139-153.

Lezber, S. and J. Reyes-Hamann. 2010. "Hispanic Farmers in Wisconsin." www.uwex.edu/sustainableag.

NIFI: National Immigrant Farming Initiative. www.immigrantfarming.org.



center for **rural policy**
and development

Seeking Solutions for Greater Minnesota's Future

PO Box 3185, Mankato, Minnesota 56002-3185

www.ruralmn.org
Twitter @ruralrealityMN
www.facebook.com/ruralmn