



Minnesota Food Association

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AUG 15 2001

FINAL REPORT

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FINAL REPORT

Final Report Abstract:

The Minnesota Food Association (MFA) and Cooperative Development Services (CDS) collaborated to develop a comprehensive training/mentoring program to **support conventional and new immigrant farmers in converting from conventional or traditional farming methods to sustainable and organic production practices**. The educational process included a combination of educational workshops, establishment of training gardens for new immigrant participants, individual on-farm mentoring, development of a farmer network for information exchange between converting and experienced organic producers, and farm and experiment station field days. Over 1000 people, including members of new immigrant communities (Hmong, Latino, and African) and conventional farmers interested in conversion to organic/alternative methods, were directly served by the project. Eleven experienced organic producers participated as mentors in this project. The scope of the project included commodities, small grains, as well as vegetables and fruits. The project's informational outcomes are particularly important at this time when the organic market share is growing at a rate of over 20% annually. Informational materials developed by the project include marketing surveys on "ethnic" and alternative crops, production guides on alternative crops, and, in conjunction with other agencies, a website dedicated to information exchange on organic production. Additionally, information generated by the project will be published and disseminated in a manual on organic conversion by December 2001. The project was facilitated through partnership with public, private, and non-profit agencies, including the University of Minnesota, the Minnesota Extension Service, the Farm Service Agency of the United States Department of Agriculture, the Sustainable Farming Association, and new immigrant community organizations. This project was also financially supported by the Otto Bremer Foundation. For access to further information, contact the Minnesota Food Association at (651)766-8895, Cooperative Development Services at (651)287-0184 or Elizabeth Dyck, Lamberton Experiment Station at (507)752-7372.



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FINAL REPORT

AUG 15 2001

Date of Report: July 1, 2001
Project Completion Date: June 30, 2001
LCMR Final Work Program Report

I. Project Title: Organic Farming Training Project

This appropriation is from the ML 1999, Chapter 231, Section 16, Subd. 7(r) Organic Farming Training Project: \$175,000 the first year and \$175,000 the second year are from the trust fund to the commissioner of agriculture for an agreement with the Minnesota Food Association in cooperation with the Midwest Organic Alliance to recruit and train new immigrant and conventional farmers in sustainable and organic methods utilizing a mentoring approach.

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www.organic.org

Total Biennial Project Budget:

\$LCMR: \$350,000

-\$LCMR Amount Spent: \$317,468.37

= \$LCMR Balance: \$32,531.63

A. Legal Citation: ML 1999, Chapter 231, Section 16, Subd. 7(r)

This appropriation is from the ML 1999, Chapter 231, Section 16, Subd. 7(r) Organic Farming Training Project: \$175,000 the first year and \$175,000 the second year are from the trust fund to the commissioner of agriculture for an agreement with the Minnesota Food Association in cooperation with the Midwest Organic Alliance to recruit and train new immigrant and conventional farmers in sustainable and organic methods utilizing a mentoring approach.

Status of Match Requirement: This project has no match requirement.

II. FINAL PROJECT SUMMARY:

Result: Identify, recruit and train 75 new immigrant and conventional farmers in sustainable production practices as a means to economic self-sufficiency using sustainable and organic farming practices.

Objective One: Identify and recruit 75 pilot project participants

- Identify and recruit 50 “new immigrant farmers” in sustainable production practices through a mentoring apprenticeship at Red Cardinal Farm (Lake Elmo) and on land identified by the Farm Service Agency and contributed by land owners;
- Identify 25 conventional farmers in the SW area of Minnesota that will convert currently owned acreage to organic farming methods.

Both components of this project exceeded our recruitment goals within the first year. The demand for training and mentoring on the conversion process is very high both within the new immigrant community, as well as within the rural agricultural community.

Through the course of the project, hundreds of new immigrant families participated in some way in our training and assistance programs. We include over 80 individuals and families who attended trainings or worked in the training gardens, and over 400 who received information and assistance in understanding and applying for loans and other resources available through the United States Department of Agriculture.

Within the framework of the Organic Conversion project, 43 converting farmers from 21 counties in Minnesota and 1 county in South Dakota have participated in the project by setting the agenda both for workshop trainings, attending training workshops and field days, and allowing project researchers to interview them and document practices on their farms. Of this group of farmers, 21 have also collaborated with project scientists on research and demonstration activities on their farms. Over 450 farmers and agricultural professionals have attended one or more of the training workshops and field days sponsored by the project.

LCMR Budget: \$53,200

LCMR Balance: \$16,947.03

Objective Two: Develop and implement training processes and tools

For new immigrant farmers, the project completed a comprehensive curriculum and adapted formal training to cultural learning styles and the existing information base. Trainings were delivered in several ways. Over the course of the project, it became clear that the learning methodology that is most effective in delivering training is experiential and hands on. While “classroom” trainings were available and utilized by farmers on some topics, the most effective training happened either in the training gardens or on farms during field days and on-site workshops. Classroom topics included:

- Improving soil perma-culture;
- Organic production methods;
- Nutrition impacts of organic foods;
- Alternatives to use of farm chemicals;
- Marketing;
- Whole Farm Planning;

- Financial management and record keeping.

Field days held in conjunction with the Sustainable Farming Association and the University of MN covered such topics as:

- Organic Vegetable Production
- Raising White Corn for Ethnic Communities
- Pasture grazing
- Value Added Processing
- Raising Goats for Dairy and Meat production
- Small Grains and Alternative Cropping systems
- Keeping Tractors Running
- Whole Farm Planning

In addition, participants attended such conferences as:

- Midwest Organic Conference
- Minnesota Organic Conference
- Sustainable Farming Association Annual Meeting
- Organic Growers and Buyers Association Annual Meeting

As a part of our experiential learning process, the project established a total of seven training gardens around the metro area. That encompasses a total of 126 acres of training gardens.

- Chaska site – 11 acres
- Arboretum site – 10 acres
- University of MN Rosemount Experiment Station – 25 acres
- Hamel site – 5 acres
- Stillwater Wilder Forest Site – 5 acres
- Faribault – 2 acres
- Waconia – 8 acres

The land used was donated for use by the project by the following:

- City of Chaska
- University of MN – two sites
- Farmer in Hamel
- Wilder Foundation
- Farmer in Faribault
- Entheo Community

Participants were allocated land based on their skill level and capacity to maintain the plots. The size of the plots ranged from 1/10 acres to 3 acres. Participants received assistance in developing farm management plans and filing their plans with the Farm Service Agency of USDA. Some tools and other equipment, including roto-tillers and small tractors were available for use as needed. Seeds and seedlings were donated or purchased and made available. Participants also purchased their own seeds and seedlings. The gardens were managed by experienced garden coordinators, who were able to provide expertise in organic vegetable production, as well as managing the gardens and equipment. The project depended heavily on the donation of time and interest by community members, including Master Gardeners through the University of MN, who offered training, advice and problem solving.

Coordinate training for conventional farmers:

- Conduct at least four training sessions customized as needed;
Corn flour and sustainable farming June 29th Browerville, MN
Organic Production Reporting July 11th Stillwater, MN
Organic Field Day July 29th Lamberton, MN
Value Added Agriculture Sept. 28 – 30 St. Paul, MN
- Training workshops and field days implemented by the Organic Conversion Project in Lamberton, MN, for converting conventional farmers included the following:

1999

- Organic field day July 29th
- Planning meeting with producers
to develop training workshop agenda Nov. 23rd
- Alternative crops, rotations, and farming systems Dec. 14th

2000

- Getting started in organic production Jan. 8th
- Livestock possibilities in organic farming Jan. 8th
- Management issues in organic farming Feb. 5th
- Production issues in organic farming March 4th
- “Soils 101”: a short course in soil management March 9th
- Preplanting strategy session for the 2000 season March 23rd
- Organic field day July 27th
- Grant-writing for producers Nov. 15th
- Organic/alternative poultry production Dec. 9th

2001

- Small grains and alternative crops Jan. 20th
- Organic grain marketing opportunities Feb. 26th
- Exploring potential for organic pork production
in Minnesota March 5th
- Organic vegetable production and markets March 10th
- Soil fertility management in organic systems March 10th

- Generate field data for future training and conversion manual from 25 farms.
The draft of a manual for conversion to organic production is still in progress. The manual was meant to be based, not only on farmer experience, but also on research-based information generated by the project made possible through funding from a Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) grant. Due to a researcher staffing shortage during 1999-2000, research for the project was delayed. An extension on the SARE grant was obtained, and this research is now being completed. A draft of the manual for farmer/researcher review will be available by December 1, 2001. Upon completion, the manual will be sent to the LCMR offices, as well as our contact person at the Minnesota Department of Agriculture.

LCMR Budget: \$111,574 LCMR Balance: \$5,230.76

Objective Three: Establish training /mentoring relationships with existing farmers (sustainable and organic)

- Develop and implement on farm mentoring program for new immigrants at Red Cardinal Farm;
- Develop and implement one on one mentoring network for both new immigrant and conventional farmers with Sustainable Farming Association members and organic growers.
- Host on-farm training's, field days and workshops hosted by the Sustainable Farming Association and other organic farming organizations and agencies/institutions, as necessary.

For the New Immigrant Project, the on-farm mentoring proved to be the most challenging to create and implement. The original partner for the mentoring program was Red Cardinal Farm. Unfortunately, Red Cardinal Farm discontinued their operation shortly after this project began. In partnership with the Sustainable Farming Association, six organic vegetable farmers were identified and recruited. Unfortunately, most lived on farms that were over two hours from the Metro area. Participants were able to visit farms, either individually or in groups. One farmer, Greg Reynolds, lives closer and was able to meet and interact with project participants.

Geography aside, the more significant factor had to do with the fact that all of our participants work full time. Their participation in the New Immigrant Project was outside work hours. When the project was originally conceived, care was taken to assure that this type of training project qualified as eligible through MFIP to improve work skills. In spite of that eligibility, none of our participants were able to devote full time efforts to their participation.

An additional factor concerned the seasonality of the mentoring process. As indicated above, experiential learning proved to be the best venue to enhance the learning experience. During the growing season, mentors are very busy, as are the new immigrant participants.

Participants were invited to the many field days offered by the Sustainable Farming Association for the duration of the project. In the first year of the project, staff at Wilder Forest, within Farm Service Agency, and at the University of MN provided intensive mentoring assistance. In the final year of the project, experienced garden coordinators met with participants whenever possible to provide assistance and problem solving.

For the Organic Conversion Project, five "mentor" farmers—three grain crop specialists and two crop/livestock specialists—were recruited to work with converting conventional farmers. Mentoring activities in 1999 included a field day at one of the mentor farms

and mentor participation as speakers/presenters in the Organic Field Day at Lamberton and in the fall training sessions. In 2000, two additional mentors—specialists in organic vegetable production—were recruited. In addition, a “mentor hotline” was initiated: participants in the Organic Conversion Project were sent the phone numbers/email addresses of the mentor farmers as well as times during the week when mentors would be available to answer production/marketing questions. Mentors also continued to interact regularly with converting farmers at workshop training sessions and the annual organic field day. Through additional funding from Minnesota Grown Opportunities, the number of mentors was expanded to 11 in Fall 2000. In early 2001, the “mentor hotline” was expanded to serve the state/region through creation of a website—the Minnesota Organic Farmers’ Information Exchange (MOFIE) network (<http://mofie.coafes.umn.edu>). In addition to providing information on each of mentors farming operations and how and when to contact them with questions, the site also lists organic certification agencies and sources of reliable information on organic production and marketing. In May, a hard copy version of the MOFIE network was sent to all those on the Organic Conversion Project mailing list. This pamphlet was also forwarded to the Energy and Sustainable Agriculture Program of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture for inclusion in its information packet on organic farming.

LCMR Budget: \$84,020 LCMR Balance: \$33,772.76

Objective Four: Develop individualized farm management plans for each participant;

- Development of a farm management plan with each of the conventional farmers in the first year, and an update of the plan in the second year.
- For each new immigrant participant, an individualized plan will take into account the individuals personal goals (i.e., do they want to focus on fresh produce, or move into larger scale farming of non-horticultural products (animal or vegetable). In addition, the management plan will incorporate information about their skill level, and site specific concerns.

New Immigrant participants were required to file farm management plans with the Farm Service Agency office in their county. In addition MFA staff worked with a large number of existing new immigrant farmers (mostly Hmong) to assist them in filing farm management plans, as well. By filing their plans, they became eligible for disaster payments and other USDA resources. For the first time in history, new immigrants in MN were eligible to vote in the FSA county elections. Over the course of the project, over 150 new immigrant farmers filed in the state of MN. For the first time, Hmong farmers received disaster payments.

The Organic Conversion Project had difficulty in achieving this objective. Farmers were repeatedly surveyed to assess their interest in developing individual farm management plans, and a workshop session was held on the topic. However, farmers showed no interest in a global approach to planning. Instead, they indicated that they wanted training and help on individual topics—soil fertility management, weed management, marketing, etc. The project was able to make some headway on farm management

planning through individual farm visits—over 50 farms were visited by project staff during the course of the grant.

LCMR Budget: \$43,150 LCMR Balance: -\$3,620.56

While we went over budget on this portion of the project, we took excess funds from the mentoring component to cover extra costs. The activity in each was quite similar.

Objective Five: Explore the possibility of developing a transition process to assist new immigrant farmers in converting from smaller scale truck farming to larger scale production.

- Identify new immigrant project participants committed to farming on a larger scale.
- Host a field day for new immigrant farmers to introduce them to larger scale organic farming.
- Develop training processes, as necessary, to achieve transition.

Fundamentally, this new immigrant portion of our work is intended to find those farmers with potential to survive and be successful as organic farmers in Minnesota. We know that there are many Hmong farmers who sell to the Metro farmers markets. Our research indicates that there are additional niche markets

Der Thao and Nikk Chau Cha

Tou Yang

Xee Vang

Felipe Morales

Elias Quiroz

Jose Moyeda

Anthony Njoku

Nina Bangu

Chris Chomilo

Arit Udeyop

LCMR Budget: \$13,750 LCMR Balance: \$3,030.74

Objective Six: Identify resources, markets and organizational structures needed for long term economic success for program participants; identify and implement strategies to address those needs.

- Explore consumer and grocer market access and preferences;
- Identify potential markets for culturally appropriate products;
- Assess potential markets for new crops or value added products;
- Identify opportunities for new markets and crops at all levels of scale;
- Begin to identify new immigrant crops that might be adapted to Minnesota climate;
- Explore adaptation of organizational structures to new immigrant communities.
- Identify resources and strategies to address identified needs.
- Begin to identify land and communities in rural Minnesota that may provide future homes and farms for new immigrant farmers.
- Identify

- Finalize and publish marketing research findings
 - Two reports accompany this final report that summarize the additional research completed for the project.

In addition to the publication of the market research, the project hosted the Community Food and Farm Festival on April 9, 2001. The purpose of the festival was to facilitate the direct marketing connections between small scale producers and interested consumers. Participants in this project were invited and attended as

Efforts of the Organic Conversion Project focused on experimentation with alternative crops and development of added-value organic products. Production and marketing of such alternative crops as golden flax, buckwheat, sunflower, and “ethnic” vegetables has been demonstrated on the Elwell Agroecology Farm in Lamberton. Project researchers wrote informational articles on buckwheat and flax that are posted on the Minnesota Grown Opportunities website: <http://www.mgo.umn.edu> (See attached materials for hardcopy of the articles). The Project has helped to facilitate two farmer groups: an organic poultry cooperative and an organic pork interest group. The organic poultry cooperative has received MDA funding for market research. The organic pork group was awarded a 2001 SARE producer grant for on-farm experimentation in developing organic feeding regimes.

LCMR Budget: \$41,700 LCMR Balance: 0

As project participants gain information and skills necessary to pursue organic farming independently, both in terms of truck gardening and in terms of larger scale production, conventional and new immigrant participants will need to have a better understanding of what resources, potential markets, and organizational structures will support their economic success.

V. Dissemination: Information gathered in the course of the project will be disseminated in a variety of ways.

- Both MFA and OA maintain web-sites (listed in Section 1) and will regularly update information and results regarding the project.
- As new methods are learned and data gathered concerning organic and sustainable conversion process methods and techniques. The information will also be presented at appropriate field days, seminars, and conferences.
- Media outlets will be utilized to disseminate information about this project on an ongoing basis.
- Information will also be widely disseminated within the new immigrant communities to encourage future participants.
- Copies of the Marketing reports are included with this summary and are available through the Minnesota Food Association at a nominal cost. See Appendix I

VI. Context

A. Significance

Rather than restate the significance previously stated in our individual project proposals, we would like to use this section to articulate the vision that that has resulted from the merger of the two projects. Although daunting and at time a bit confusing, the merger of the two projects has a potential synergy that we have found to be quite exciting.

- ❑ Merging the projects creates a bridge between two types of farmers who both have agrarian backgrounds, both of whom wish to convert to sustainable/organic production. Both wish to find viable ways to stay on the land and farm.
- ❑ Many of the new immigrants in Minnesota have practiced subsistence farming in their home countries, much of which could be technically considered "organic" due to lack of artificial inputs, such as chemicals.
- ❑ Conventional farmers in Minnesota also have a wealth of information about farming, but for a variety of motivations wish to change production practices.
- ❑ Linking the Lamberton Experiment Station with the new immigrant community is an effective way to link University research capacity with the exploration of new products and markets for new products or to assist with the adaptation of food products from other countries to our climate and environment.
- ❑ With a long-term goal of rural revitalization, merging the projects creates an avenue to support the development of urban/rural connections to assure that goal can be met effectively.
- ❑ With both projects, we are able to intentionally design the projects to support documentation of what it takes to make a successful conversion to organic and to assist new immigrants most effectively in reconnecting to agriculture for economic success.
- ❑ The new immigrant population in Minnesota is growing rapidly. With the implementation of welfare reform, new immigrants need new avenues to assure current and future economic security. Building on existing knowledge of food production is a positive way to build economic self-reliance, while supporting a vision of a revitalized rural Minnesota with individuals who seek a rural lifestyle.
- ❑ Conventional farmers in Minnesota are also experiencing the impacts of the global marketplace and reduction of farm supports. Seeking premium prices within the organic market is an effective way to counterbalance the forces that are driving many farmers out of business.

B. Time: July 1, 1999 - June 30, 2001

The project is intended as a pilot to learn how to effectively support new immigrant and conventional farmers in learning sustainable/organic production methods. Two years is just a beginning for even the original project participants. As we evaluate the project over the two years, we will learn more effective ways to accomplish our goals and will incorporate that learning into future project designs as it expands to reach more individuals.

VII. Cooperation

Farm Service Agency, Dan Hockert, Rob Grant
Lamberton Experiment Station:
Dr. Elizabeth Dyck, Southwest State University/Agronomist

Minnesota Extension Service, Nigatu Tadesse
Cooperative Development Services , Todd Thompson, Kevin Edberg
New Immigrant Community Organizations (including: Hmong American
Partnership, Center for Asian Pacific Islanders, Council on Asian Pacific
Islanders, CLUES, and African Community Organizations)
City of Chaska
University of MN Landscape Arboreteum
Wilder Forest, Wilder Foundation
Sustainable Farming Association

VIII. Location: The project will be implemented statewide. Initially, the primary training locations will focus in two general geographic areas.

The New Immigrant Agriculture Project has established seven garden sites within the 13 county Metro area. In addition, there are training gardens in Faribault and Owatonna. Project staff have traveled around the state with information regarding this project to explore replicating the training gardens in other locations.

The Organic Conversion Project is located outside Lamberton, but draws participants and mentors from across the region. They have had many farmers from other parts of the state express interest in participating, but cannot accommodate the numbers of farmers located outside the Southwestern region of the state.

IX. Reporting Requirements: Periodic work program progress reports will be submitted no later than August 4, 2000, September 30, 2000 and January 2, 2001. A final work program report and associated products will be submitted by June 30, 2001, or by the completion date as set in the appropriation.