



Hispanic/Latino/a Farmers in Pennsylvania: Characteristics, Farming Challenges, and Engagement Barriers with Non-Formal Educators

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Abstract: The number of Hispanic/Latino/a farmers is on the rise in the United States, and Pennsylvania is not an exemption. However, research about the characteristics and needs of Latino/a farmers in Pennsylvania has not been explored. Similarly, there are no previous research studies about the challenges and opportunities that Cooperative Extension personnel experience when attempting to connect with Latino/a farmers and respond to their agricultural needs. Through semi-structured personal interviews with both groups, this study gathered qualitative data to assess the needs to achieve improved programming for Latino/a farmers in Pennsylvania.

Keywords: Hispanic/Latino/a farmers, Pennsylvania, Cooperative Extension, semi-structured interviews

Introduction

According to the USDA Census of Agriculture, Hispanic farmers in the United States increased 21 percent from 2007-2012 (USDA-NASS, 2014). This makes them the underrepresented group with the largest number of farm operators in the U.S. (USDA-NASS, 2014, 2019). In Pennsylvania, the growing trend is similar with a 24 percent increase from 2007 (526 operators) to 2012 (652 operators) (USDA-NASS, 2007, 2012). Currently, Pennsylvania reports 759 Hispanic producers, from which 590 are principal producers (USDA-NASS, 2017a, 2017b).

The purpose of Cooperative Extension is to provide useful and available training and information to all people around the state. Cooperative Extension in Pennsylvania is assisting Spanish-speaking workers and farmers, by making resources available in Spanish. However, research-based information regarding the non-formal agricultural educational needs of Latino/a farmers and operators in Pennsylvania and its relationship with Extension did not exist.

Selected Research Questions

This paper is part of a larger dissertation study with Latino/a farmers in Pennsylvania and with educators within Cooperative Extension and government institutions. The following three research questions were selected to present at the 2019 Cambio de Colores Conference:

1. What are some characteristics of Latino/a farmers and operators in Pennsylvania?
2. What are the main challenges that Latino/a farmers and operators face in managing their farms?
3. What are the engagement barriers and opportunities between educators and Latino/a farmers in PA?

Methodology

Population and Sampling Method

This study worked with two different population groups. One group corresponded to the Hispanic

or Latino/a farmers, aspiring farmers and/or operators (FAFO). This group is described as people that have their origins in Spanish-speaking countries or Latin America and that are currently farming in Pennsylvania or have an active desire to do so. Operators are those that have main management responsibilities of the daily farm operation, even if they don't own it. The second group is formed by non-formal educators. They are defined as professionals that work at land-grant universities as Extension educators/agents or in government institutions that provide agricultural education at some capacity, and that have been involved in programming or service for the Latino agricultural community.

A snowball or referral sampling method was utilized to recruit participants. Seventeen Latino/a FAFO in Pennsylvania and twelve educators participated in the study. Educators were located in one of two participating states, and belonged to either Cooperative Extension or an agricultural government institution.

Data type and analysis

Qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews with Latino/a FAFO and educators during Summer/Fall 2018 and Spring 2019. Interviews lasted between 30 to 60 minutes, and were conducted in either English or Spanish based on the preference of the participants. Latino/a farmers, also completed a paper questionnaire to learn more about their background and farming characteristics. Interviews were transcribed in the original language. Qualitative data were gathered, organized and analyzed using MAXQDA 2018 (VERBI Software, 2017). The questionnaire was treated as quantitative data, and was organized and analyzed using descriptive statistics with SPSS (IBM Corp, 2017).

Findings

Characteristics of Hispanic/Latino/a farmers and operators in Pennsylvania

Demographic Characteristics: Gender, Age, Country and Education.

From the seventeen Latino/a individuals, 88% were men (n = 15) and 12% women (n = 2). Ages ranged between 27

and 65 years-old, with an average of 43.2 years old. The variable "country" indicates the Latin American or Hispanic country of origin of either participants or their families. Educational level was divided into four categories. A summary of these findings is presented in Table 1.

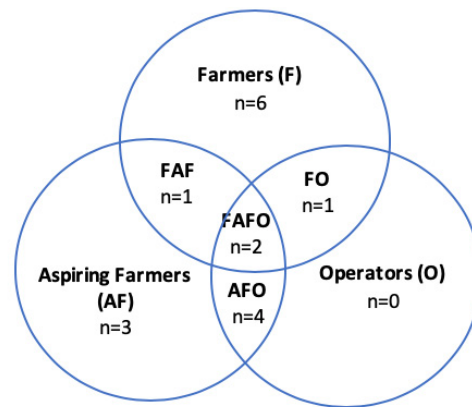
Demographic Characteristics	n	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Women	2	12%
Men	15	88%
Age range (years)		
Range (years)	27-65	
Average	43.18	
Country		
Mexico	11	65%
Colombia	2	12%
Brazil	1	6%
Honduras	1	6%
Spain/Italy/USA	1	6%
Argentina/USA	1	6%
Educational level		
Less than high school	6	35%
High school	4	24%
Some College	2	12%
Completed 4-year degree	5	29%

Profile Characteristics: Farmer, Aspiring Farmer, Operator. The seventeen participants that belong to the Latino/a group were categorized according to the characteristics of their roles and interests into one or a combination of the following profiles: farmers, aspiring farmers, or operators (Figure 1).

Main Profiles. Six participants (35%) were characterized as farmers because that was their main occupation; three (18%) were aspiring farmers because their main occupation was different from farmer or operator. None of the participants were only an operator, since operators shared roles with at least one of the other profiles, as shown in Figure 1.

Combined Profiles. One participant (6%) was an aspiring farmer and a farmer because he is a farmworker that also maintains a large garden and a few animals at his home. Another participant (6%) was characterized as a farmer and operator because he manages a large operation that he doesn't own, but at the same time he grows

and sells different crops from his properties (here and in his home-country). Four participants (24%) were classified as aspiring farmers and operators, because they manage farms in Pennsylvania but they have an active desire to have their own farming operation. Finally, two participants (12%) belonged to the three different profiles because they were the main managers of agricultural operations, but also had a side agricultural business and they wish to expand to become a full-time farmer.



Farming Interests. Participants were mostly involved or interested in growing horticultural crops (n = 14). Participants' interests and involvement also included: dairy farming (n = 1), live-stock (n = 1) and timber products (n = 1).

Main Challenges of Hispanic/Latino/a Farmers, Aspiring Farmers and Operators

In order to learn about the main challenges that Latino/a participants face when managing their farms, they responded to a few different questions. One of them, was a multiple-choice question that inquired about the most important factors that keep them from meeting their goals as a farmer. The top three most commonly mentioned factors were: access to operational resources (n = 12), financial aspects (n = 10), and marketing (n = 5). Access to operational resources and financial aspects were commonly mentioned in association. Other factors were: knowledge of programs/reliable information (n = 2), government regulations (n = 1), and time (n = 1).

Engagement Barriers and Opportunities Between Educators and PA Hispanic/Latino/a Farmers

Educators' Characteristics. Twelve non-formal educators participated in the study. Half of them were women (n = 6) and half were men (n = 6). Most of them worked in a land-grant institution (n = 10) and two were affiliated with a government institution (n = 2). Their areas of expertise were: business and entrepreneurship (n = 4), horticultural production practices (n = 4), dairy (n = 2) and conservation practices (n = 2).

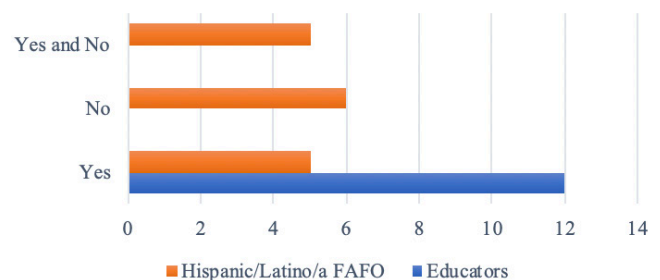
Educators' Perceived Engagement Barriers. Educators were asked which (if any) obstacles they face as professionals when trying to meet the needs of Latino/a farmers, aspiring farmers, and operators. Responses were analyzed and coded into eight theme groups: language (n = 4), finding farmers/outreach (n = 3), not having enough Spanish-speaking educators (n = 3), time constraints (n = 3), lack of institutional support or understanding (n = 2), physical appearance (n = 1), meeting unique needs (n = 1), and finding ways to distribute material and information (n = 1).

Language was commonly cited as a barrier for non-Spanish-speaking participants. One of them shared "Language. I mean, even though I do speak some Spanish I'm still not to the point where I can just easily have a conversation with somebody on a farm". However, others indicated how language is not necessarily a barrier, for example another educator said that "It is a barrier, but you know what? I never have that problem when I visit the farms. They speak to me in English. They just told me in the beginning that they learned best in their native language and that's why they wanted this programming. But you saw when — when I didn't speak Spanish and we were talking about [topic], they knew exactly what I was saying in English".

Finding farmers was a barrier mentioned by at least three participants. The context associated with this theme is that educators do not know Latino/a farmers, maybe due to their location, but also to the self-identification of the farmers as Hispanic or Latino/a.

Two final examples of common challenges were time and not having enough Spanish-speaking educators. At least three participants indicated that their major constraint was that all the programming for Latino/a audience was an addition to their main job responsibilities. Others mentioned how there are only a few people that could present or develop programs in Spanish, so they need to cover many topics. These two factors overlapped in some cases, since there are only a few educators working with programming for Latino/a clientele, and thus they feel they have a lot of work to do and not enough time to complete it all.

Perceived Challenges by Group. Both groups shared their thoughts about particular issues that Latino/as could face just because of their ethnicity. Results differed by group, as shown in Figure 2. While all educators (n = 12, 100%) agreed that Latino/as face particular issues in regards to farming due to their ethnicity; Latino/a farmers, aspiring farmers and operators (n = 16) had a more divided opinion, from yes (n = 5, 31.25%), to no (n = 6, 37.5%), and even a yes/no answer (n = 5, 31.25%), in which they either said yes or no, but as they were explaining their choice, they moved towards the other option.



When prompted to explain their answer choice, educators mentioned issues like language or communication, culture, land resources, access to services, discrimination and migration status. Latino/a FAFO that selected "yes" (n = 5), agreed that land resources, stereotypes and racism were issues that affected this group, plus financial issues. Latino/a participants that selected "no" (n = 6), indicated that any business has issues and they don't see problems associated with their ethnicity. Some even see a window of opportunity for larger profit and talked about inclusion

opportunities in Pennsylvania. The general rhetoric around “yes and no” responses was that there may be particular issues that Latino/a face (like initial fear, lack of unity, language, etc.) but the characteristics and skills of these individuals (like being hardworking, having initiative, identify opportunities, etc.) overcome those issues.

Conclusions

Seventeen Latino/a farmers, aspiring farmers and operators, and twelve educators participated in the study. The Latino/a group was represented by fifteen men and two women. Most of them had a Hispanic origin in Mexico (n = 11). The two perceived main challenges for farming in Pennsylvania were: access to operational resources and financial components (commonly mentioned in association). The challenges educators faced in engaging and meeting the goals of Latino/a farmers were grouped in eight themes. Not speaking Spanish was the most cited barrier. Time constraints due to other main responsibilities was commonly mentioned along with the need for hiring more Spanish-speaking educators. Latino/a FAFO and educators differed in their perception about particular issues for Latino/a farming in Pennsylvania. While all the educators agreed that Latino/a farmers faced particular challenges, the Latino/a FAFO varied in their responses as they identified areas of opportunity and strengths, not only challenges. Findings cannot be generalized beyond the sample groups.

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