

# Exploring Farming and Ranching Sustainable Production Methods Among New and Beginning Latino Producers in Missouri



# Objectives

- **To document Latino producer's perceptions, views, skill levels, knowledge and awareness of sustainable production methods.**
- **To identify the challenges and constraints that new and beginning Latino producers face in using sustainable production practices.**
- **To develop curricula that matches Latino producers' learning needs in sustainable agriculture.**



# Leading Question

- How Latino farmers and ranchers approach agri-food production practices?
  - Conventional
  - **Sustainable** (profit-stewardship-quality of life)
  - Organic



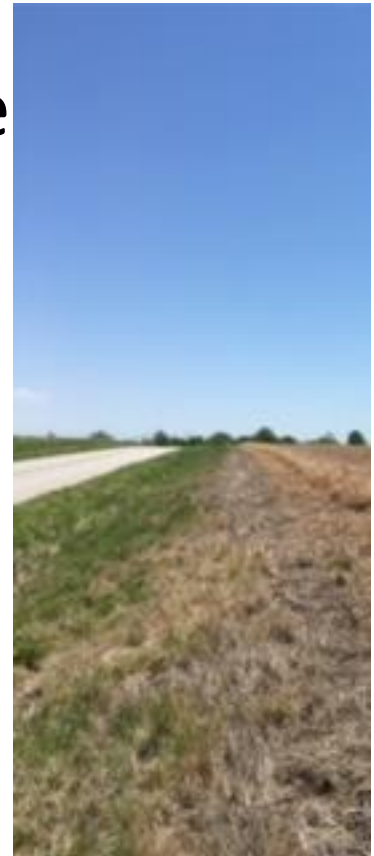
# Research Methods

- Focus Groups
  - 4 focus groups (30 participants)
    - Complementary interviews (3 interviews)
- Survey (100 participants)



# Qualitative Analysis

- Main categories to explore sustainable agriculture methods
  - Financial management
  - Agro-ecology management
  - Conservation practices
  - Pest-control management



# Financial management

- Business planning
  - Farm profitability
    - Balance sheets and Cash-flow
    - Record keeping
    - Inventory management
  - Risk management

*“I began farming activities just like that, without any knowledge on how to produce here. Here, we started by buying dairy calves and followed recommendations from other people.”*



# Agro-ecology management



- Holistic farming methods
  - Biological monitoring (healthy soils)
    - “What we are adding to the soil is helping because when you add the one that stinks, it gets very bad, I don’t use that one, some people say is good others said that it allows weed to grow.”
    - “I thought that it was like in Mexico. There, we never took care of the grass.”
- Holistic livestock practices
  - Grazing management systems
    - *We don’t know what it is need. If we ask the guy who sells triple 17, he is going to say his product is the best, and that is what we get.”*

# Conservation practices

- Soil management
  - Crop rotation
  - Cover cropping/mulching
  - Crop sloping
  - Tilling/non-tilling



- “ I started with 6 cows, then over 4 years they reproduced and become 15 cows, but all my grass died over time and my land looked like a desert. Then I started adding fertilizer and the grass started coming back again.”
- “Sometimes we don’t know much about soil. We think that adding more fertilizer is going to help, but if the soil is not strong enough it is pointless.”



# Pest control Management



- Weed control methods
  - *“The fertilizer is great, because it kills weeds too, ...contrary to chicken manure.”*
- Insects, birds, rodents and other mammals and control methods
- Micro-organism (nematode, pathogen, virus, fungus bacteria) management
  - *“I would like to produce in a natural way. But we need to know more about natural pesticides that don’t pollute the environment and produce healthy food.”*

# Conclusions

- Most Latino farmers have misunderstandings about their current production methods. They are unaware about the best production methods that will sustain the farm and maintain its profitable.
  - “Economic interests are involved. We care about having healthy products. But most of the time, you don’t think about the product... if it is contaminated or not. You don’t worry, if it is bad for your health. Most of the time, you just ignore that.”
  - “I think it gets ignored (sustainable practices) when you start growing on a large scale. But when it is a small farm, it is not ignored.”



# Conclusions

- We found there was a large information and education gap concerning sustainable production methods. Most participants are biased to follow conventional production practices.
  - “I just buy grass killer. I didn’t know much about it. I added it to all the edges of my yard to burn the grass, and effectively killed it. Then, I have my plants, the instruction bottle says to pour it around the plant to stop the grass from growing. Then, I noticed the plant didn’t die, but the grass did, it was poison for the grass.”



# Implications

- Maximizing farming profits by focusing on basic production methods (profit)
- Generating early success rates in the farm and in local community markets to influence other new and beginning farmers to pursuit ecological production methods (quality of life)
- Farmer-to-farmer sharing of successful practices (Stewardship)



# Feedback is Welcome



Thank you,  
Connect Latino new and beginning farmers to:  
[Gonzalezzeu@missouri.edu](mailto:Gonzalezzeu@missouri.edu)  
573-268-5785