

# Latino farmers and local multicultural food and marketing systems

**Abstract:** Iowa needs a new generation of community-scale organic and sustainable farmers and market gardeners. Two different approaches were used in two communities with significant immigrant populations (Marshalltown and Denison) to assist these groups of farmers.

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*This two-year project launched a new generation of community-scale organic and sustainable farmers and market gardeners in Iowa by trying two different approaches in two communities with substantial immigrant populations.*

## What was done and why?

Researchers attempted to link Latino organizing efforts with grassroots planning for local food systems. This included bringing new vegetable/specialty growers (immigrant and native-born) together with experienced local growers and professionals; establishing a bilingual farmer training program with opportunity to rent plots for organic production at a reasonable rate; and planning and developing marketing systems that link these small-scale growers with local consumers looking for healthy, locally grown produce.

Leopold Center funds were used for three segments of a larger project:

- Support for a coordinator to bring together Marshalltown-area partners and encourage immigrants to consider farming and community members to establish a local food system;
- Matching funding for a person to manage the organic farm operated by Marshalltown Community College (MCC), an operation that would serve as a farming business incubator and site of hands-on training opportunities for interested farmers;
- Hiring a coordinator in the Denison area to bring together local partners to plan and execute a process to encourage community gardeners to become market gardeners.

## What did we learn?

One impact was the successful transfer of coordinating efforts for the project from the project leaders to food systems leadership teams in each community. Latinos and immigrants make up a significant portion of the teams.

The experience with the community garden in Denison suggests that the reasons Latino immigrants grow vegetables are much more complex than the project organizers anticipated, involving social and cultural capital first, with financial capital as a lower priority.

At the mid-term point in the project, participants commented on the need for more Latino involvement in leadership at both sites, and the need to encourage entrepreneurship and collective marketing opportunities. These remain significant challenges.



**MARKETING**