

Executive SUMMARY

When thinking about the future of rural communities, there are two things important to understand about the Latinos that live there.

1. Culture, experience, formal training and education all point toward agriculture as a path to economic success for rural Latinos. Nearly 70 percent of rural Latinos are estimated to have either come from rural areas in Latin America or previously worked as farm laborers directly involved in the production of livestock and fruits and vegetables.
2. Nationally, Latinos are more than twice as likely to become entrepreneurs than established populations of previous immigrants.

Main Street Project, through its Rural Enterprise Center, has created an innovative model that capitalizes on these strengths, and addresses weaknesses: the lack of access to land, working capital, marketing and business support infrastructure, and focused training. Beginning with the grassroots work of creating a broad business/community support infrastructure, and moving towards the launch of new Latino 'agripreneurs' or family-scale farmers -- our goal is to help rural Latinos succeed economically and contribute to the long-term vitality of their communities. The model works through three phrases (see attachments A and B for a visual representation):

- **Phase 1 – Discovery**

Building community support infrastructure (Anglo and Latino), identifying potential projects and long-term opportunities based on community assets, involving interested Latinos and families in community farming ventures, offering bilingual business training courses

- **Phase 2 – Development**

Learning and participating in an Agripreneur Training Center or incubator of specialized small-farm training units that replicate actual farming conditions

- **Phase 3 – Launch**

Matching Phase 2 graduates with farm mentors, financial resources and support to buy or rent their own agriculture operation or become involved in local food product processing; providing ongoing help with marketing, fair trade and sustainability principles

An exciting outcome of this work is the potential to transform the way food is produced and distributed:

- **COMMUNITY ASSET BUILDING**

The Agripreneur Training Model supports local ownership and partnership at multiple levels of the agricultural process: land and resources, financing, growing, processing, distribution. Wealth generated through a successful cooperative network can remain within the community and contribute to its long-term economic vitality.

- **BETTER HEALTH**

The training model is also focused on growing healthy food products. This begins to address the negative impact of a U.S. processed food diet on the health of Latino immigrant

MAIN STREET PROJECT AGRIPRENEUR TRAINING

families. Consider this fact: after living in the U.S. five or more years, Latino immigrants are one and half times more likely to have high blood pressure than when they first arrived.

- **SUSTAINABILITY**

And the training model is focused on using natural resources in a sustainable, efficient way to protect the local environment. This taps into growing consumer demand for local, healthy food options.

Moving forward

The concept of economic development via agricultural entrepreneurship, or **agripreneurship**, began in Northfield, Minnesota through the Rural Enterprise Center.

Phase 1 projects in the area (community and market gardens and a CSA free-range poultry operation) have been successful and captured the imagination and interest of community and regional schools, institutions and organizations. We're helping other southern Minnesota communities begin to organize support resources as well. The next important step towards transforming community food systems on a regional scale is creation of the Agripreneur Training Center.

About MAIN STREET PROJECT

Main Street Project is a grassroots cultural organizing, economic development and media justice initiative, working to help rural communities face today's realities with hope. We provide creative and practical tools to give rural people of all ages, cultures, economic and immigration status the opportunity to more fully participate in all aspects of community life.

Since our beginnings in 2005, we've successfully used a culturally competent, movement-based approach in working with increasingly diverse rural communities in Midwestern and Western states. Our strategy is to focus on economic and civic leadership development, which in turn, strengthens local capacity for problem solving – so that answers to challenges come directly from within the community.

About the RURAL ENTERPRISE CENTER

We know that poverty is a significant barrier to achievement and participation in civic life. Main Street Project's **Rural Enterprise Center** takes an economic development approach to poverty reduction and community capacity building: organizing programs, resources and the support infrastructure needed to maximize the success potential of rural entrepreneurs and small businesses. We leverage individual, family, and community strengths in a systematic model focused on long-term success.

1. **Reaching out** to entrepreneurs
2. **Exploring and evaluating** business ideas/environment for viable projects – **Analyzing strengths** and potential of individuals
3. **Training** for success – through both business management and practical experiential training
4. **Connecting** entrepreneurs with resources – start-up capital and critical partnerships
5. **Providing technical business management support** for growing enterprises
6. **Supporting community involvement** and a long-term approach to community vitality

MAIN STREET PROJECT AGRIPRENEUR TRAINING

Reginaldo (Regi) Haslett-Marroquin directs the Rural Enterprise Center based in Northfield, Minnesota. More than just a successful entrepreneur and business coach/consultant, Regi is a catalyst for community building. A Guatemalan native, Regi began working on economic development projects with indigenous Guatemalan communities in 1988, and has served as a consultant for the United Nations Development Program's Bureau for Latin America and advisor to the World Council of Indigenous Peoples. He also founded the Fair Trade Federation and created Peace Coffee, a successful fair-trade coffee company.

A vision for TRAINING SUCCESSFUL AGRIPRENEURS

Business training is an essential ingredient, but training without experiential learning rarely leads to success. We've seen that old model fail to deliver results many times before in rural communities. Becoming a successful agripreneur, able to contribute in a real way to one's community, requires training and experience at multiple skill levels. And it requires ongoing support and resources – what we call infrastructure – at every level.

PHASE I — Discovery

The Rural Enterprise Center has been working with rural Latino entrepreneurs for more than two years in Northfield and neighboring communities in southeastern Minnesota:

- Offering basic business training courses in Spanish
- Building a broad support infrastructure of business and community partners open to new projects, ideas and opportunities
- Organizing community gardens that are beginning to spin off market gardeners
- Helping start a successful CSA free-range poultry operation

Phase 1 Outcomes:

The poultry operation's focus on sustainability and healthy food production has captured the attention and imagination of local colleges, now ready to partner in scaling up production. In the course of two years, the number of community garden plots has tripled. And a growing cadre of business training graduates are beginning work on implementing their business plans. Phase 1 results are positive, as we see rural Latino agripreneurs begin to build business and leadership skills, generate much-needed additional income and move out of isolation by connecting with other community members.

Part of Main Street Project's Phase 1 experience has been learning how to approach building support infrastructure and networks in a way that successfully translates to other communities and regionally. We're fine-tuning and replicating our successful grassroots approach in more than a half-dozen other regional communities.

But by adding a second phase to our agripreneur organizing approach, we see the potential to realize even broader outcomes in a replicable way for community members.

PHASE 2 — Development

Rural agripreneurs who are successful in Phase 1 will move into the Phase 2 **Agripreneur Training Center**, a structured, hands-on learning and agribusiness environment. Center participants would operate at least five different farming and meat production sectors each season.

The Agripreneur Training Center is an incubator for small-scale farmers, closely replicating actual farming conditions. By partnering with colleges and land-grant institutions, the center will have access to land and other resources (a deeper level of infrastructure). Discussions already begun in Northfield show a high level of interest

MAIN STREET PROJECT AGRIPRENEUR TRAINING

among school administrators, students, community volunteers and potential farmer mentors.

Phase 2 Outcomes:

In addition to enhanced leadership skills, Phase 2 agripreneurs would have the skills, experience and support to:

- Generate more family income which will also grow the community economy
- Improve their diet and overall health by growing and eating their healthy food products
- Learn how to produce and consume energy more efficiently
- Use natural resources in a sustainable way that protects the local environment
- Build and deepen relationships within and outside of their immediate community, capitalizing on interest from academic organizations and students

PHASE 3 – Launch

Agripreneur Training Center graduates move into Phase 3 where they could acquire their own land for agribusiness through rental or purchase, or become involved in local food product processing. The U.S. Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency has already indicated that they're willing to waive their three-year farming experience requirement on a farm purchase loan for Agripreneur Training Center graduates.

The community, organizational and agribusiness support infrastructure that the Rural Enterprise Center facilitates will be very instrumental in Phase 3, helping new farmers find land and money to finance their operations, and providing ongoing help with marketing, fair trade and sustainability principles. A farming mentorship program also supports the new agripreneurs.

Phase 3 Outcomes:

These are similar to Phase 2, but more long-term in nature. As the agripreneur moves toward ownership or invests in rental farm property, their roots to the community grow even deeper. We see the potential for a new, successful generation of family farmers in rural America – not because of a paternalistic hands-on approach, but rather, because we're joining hands with and among communities for mutual learning and peer support. In economically challenging and increasingly xenophobic times, the success of the rural agripreneurial approach has the power to build community bridges, and transform community food systems.