



UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
EXTENSION

Illinois Migrant Council

PREPARING A NEW GENERATION OF ILLINOIS FRUIT AND VEGETABLE FARMERS

a USDA NIFA BEGINNING FARMER AND RANCHER
DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM PROJECT
GRANT # 2012-49400-19565

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Why a new farmer training program

- The average age of farmers is >55; for fruit growers it is ~58. To meet future demands, new farmers are needed. This need extends to traditionally underserved groups, including Hispanic workers.
- There is increased demand for locally produced foods in IL, but only 1.1 percent of all crop sales recorded in IL in the 2007 Ag Census were fruits and vegetables.
- Starting a new fruit and vegetable enterprise – with lower acreage and equipment needs – is more realistic financially than starting a new commodity crop enterprise. Our focus on training new fruit and vegetable producers makes best use of our skills and resources and offers the greatest likelihood of success for new small farmers.

Our goals

1. Increase the number of new farmers producing fruits and vegetables throughout Illinois and enhance the viability, profitability, and sustainability of new and beginning enterprises to meet increasing demand for local produce and contribute to local economies.
2. Assist a specific target audience – seasonal Hispanic farm workers – in beginning viable, profitable, and sustainable small produce farms.
3. Increase the expertise of extension educators, high school and community college teachers, and educators in allied organizations so they can better aid new farmers.



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Our Objectives ...

1. Provide year-long programs of classroom and hands-on / in-field instruction for 60 or more new farmers per year for three years so that new growers have the information base to be successful. Provide qualified (local) participants access to land as needed to allow low-risk experience growing vegetables with expert oversight.
2. Provide year-long programs of classroom and hands-on / in-field instruction for 30 Hispanic workers who want to become independent farmers so that they have the knowledge to become successful. Provide qualified (local) participants access to land to allow low-risk experience growing vegetables with expert oversight.
3. Develop human and informational resources by providing year-long classroom and hands-on / in-field instruction on essential skills and information to Extension educators, allied educators, and vocational agriculture and FFA teachers so that these educators can continue programs for new growers and by developing an online resource library (English and Spanish) of educational materials for new and aspiring fruit and vegetable farmers.



- Classes are offered free of charge to participants ... applications are screened based on likelihood of success, and a “drop out” deposit is required ... more on that below.
- Classes are held one Saturday per month, 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m., at each location ... you are encouraged to attend at least one session at locations other than your main site.
- Year 3 classes are scheduled for December, 2014 - November, 2015. Calendars and a syllabus are available at www.newillinoisfarmers.org.
- Dates and locations are under development for Spanish language programs.

Content:

See the syllabus link at www.newillinoisfarmers.org.

Basics of vegetable production, fruit production, and business planning, cultivar selection, FSA and NRCS programs, transplant production, succession plantings, high tunnel construction and operation, greenhouse production, pruning and training, soils, fertilizers, soil quality, record-keeping and taxes, irrigation, equipment, farm safety, business structures, IPM, pesticides, OMRI-approved pesticides; organic certification, weeds, diseases, composting, contracts, wildlife management, insects, pollination, beekeeping, harvesting and postharvest handling, food safety and GAPs, labor, insurance, cover crops, multi-year planning, hydroponics, cottage food regulations, Farm to School, management and marketing analyses, aggregation and food hubs, wholesale marketing ... and more. With farmer presentations and visits to established farms.





John Gehrke, USDA Farm Service Agency, discussing FSA's loan programs, particularly the new microloan program, in January, 2013, at Dixon Springs. Several of our students have applied for and received USDA microloans and NRCS cost-sharing funds through the EQIP program.





Vegetable transplant production:
Seeding flats and transferring seedlings
to larger pots.





Growing in high tunnels – unheated greenhouses -- is an important part of season extension and income generation, and we demonstrate high-tunnel growing practices in different seasons as the course progresses.





- Equipment
- Pruning,
- Irrigation
- Post-harvest handling



How the class is run

- Lectures are recorded for students to view and listen to before each month's class
- Attendance and participation in classroom discussions each month
- Field / high tunnel visits in the afternoons
- Completion of assignments
- Previews, follow-ups, and networking between classes by means of a list-serve
- Additional opportunities
 - Related programs offered by Extension and other groups

Incubator plots

- Up to ½ acre per individual; applicants are evaluated to determine likely success
 - Regular on-site work is required
- Primary tillage and access to irrigation provided, along with some simple equipment
- All labor and management supplied by the participant
- Participants may sell produce grown on the plots



Spanish-language programming

- Variable approaches in 2013-2014
- For 2015, contact ...
 - Rick Weinzierl at 217-244-2126 or weinzier@illinois.edu
 - Esperanza Gonzalez, esperanzgonzalez@sbcglobal.net
 - Gloria Richards, glorricha8@aol.com

Requirements to begin the course

- Documents to complete and return
 - Farming Skills Self-Evaluation
 - Personal and Farm Data Form
 - Participant Waiver
- Commitment to participation
 - Form to be signed at the first class meeting
 - \$300 refundable check to your regional food bank ... dated November 30, 2015

Resources

- Many specific online and printed resources for individual topics
 - Use the syllabus link at <http://newillinoisfarmers.org/> for resource listings as topics are covered in class
- Illinois SARE (Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education) calendar
 - <http://illinoissare.org/calendar.php>
- Illinois Fruit and Vegetable News
 - <http://ipm.illinois.edu/ifvn/>
- University of Illinois Extension's Local Food Systems and Small Farms team home page
 - <http://web.extension.illinois.edu/smallfarm/>

To reach us

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