

8-1-2012

## Leveraging University Diversity to Reach Potential Immigrant Farmers

Jason P. De Koff

*Tennessee State University*, [jdekoff@tnstate.edu](mailto:jdekoff@tnstate.edu)

Dharma S. Pitchay

*Tennessee State University*, [dpitchay@tnstate.edu](mailto:dpitchay@tnstate.edu)

Jacqueline O. Joshua

*Tennessee State University*, [jomega84@gmail.com](mailto:jomega84@gmail.com)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

---

### Recommended Citation

De Koff, J. P., Pitchay, D. S., & Joshua, J. O. (2012). Leveraging University Diversity to Reach Potential Immigrant Farmers. *The Journal of Extension*, 50(4), Article 12. <https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/joe/vol50/iss4/12>

This Ideas at Work is brought to you for free and open access by the Conferences at TigerPrints. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Journal of Extension by an authorized editor of TigerPrints. For more information, please contact [kokeefe@clemson.edu](mailto:kokeefe@clemson.edu).

## **Leveraging University Diversity to Reach Potential Immigrant Farmers**

**Jason P. de Koff**

Assistant Professor and Extension Specialist  
[jdekoff@tnstate.edu](mailto:jdekoff@tnstate.edu)

**Dharma S. Pitchay**

Assistant Professor and Extension Specialist  
[dpitchay@tnstate.edu](mailto:dpitchay@tnstate.edu)

**Jacqueline O. Joshua**

Graduate Research Assistant  
[jomega84@gmail.com](mailto:jomega84@gmail.com)

Tennessee State University  
Nashville, Tennessee

---

**Abstract:** *As new residents of the U.S., immigrants may have inadequate access to organizations that provide free technical support. These underrepresented populations may rely more on personal relationships for information. An Extension meeting was developed and implemented between two Extension specialists and nine immigrant community members interested in U.S. agriculture. The bridge between these two diverse groups was an international graduate student who had developed a relationship with the participants and had a similar cultural background. Following the meeting and Extension presentation, guidelines were identified that may prove useful to others wishing to implement this concept.*

---

### **Introduction**

Many of today's new farmers are immigrants, minorities, or other socially disadvantaged groups (Melone, 2006). According to the 2007 Census of Agriculture, the number of farms with non-white principal operators increased from 4.8 to 5.9% between 2002 and 2007. Immigrants who are originally from farming communities and wish to pursue farming in the U.S. may find it especially difficult due to the different laws, regulations, climate, market supply and demand, farming techniques, crops, and available aid in addition to other social and cultural differences. In many cases, the government and academic institutions charged with providing this type of support may provide information that is not appropriate for their needs due to barriers created by language and culture (Melone, 2006).

As an example, most Mexican strawberry farmers in California were unaware or mistrustful of the public agencies that were available to provide information to them (Mountjoy, 2001). Most of the farmers relied on personal networks, agricultural vendors, or berry shipping representatives for their agricultural advice. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) mindfully established trust with the farmers by providing valuable information and bilingual support and were able to implement important conservation practices to improvement their land (NRCS, 2006).

Diversity is an issue of great importance for Extension, and there is interest in trying to increase the diversity represented in needs assessments by concentrating on underrepresented populations (Ingram & Syvertsen, 2005). It is also important to focus on diversity when working to attract underrepresented populations to Extension programs. Others have provided suggestions on ways to do this, which include increasing Extension staff diversity, hiring

individuals with the skills to work with diverse populations, seeking professional development focused on working with underrepresented populations, and joining local groups that assist these populations (Grogan, 1991; Schaubert & Castania, 2001). The use of international students on university campuses for Extension programming purposes may also be a unique application to improve dissemination to these socially disadvantaged groups.

University campus diversity is a key component in the education of undergraduate and graduate students and is one of the many factors used to assess a school's quality. Many students come to the U.S. from other countries not only to learn about their major of interest but also to experience our social and cultural society. Many of these international university students identify and congregate with the social and cultural groups from their home country. These students can be an important asset in bridging the knowledge gap between those in need of information and the university and Extension programs creating that knowledge.

## Program Design

A graduate student was identified who had developed a relationship with recent immigrants from Africa who were now living in Nashville, Tennessee. This student was originally from Tanzania and had lived in the U.S. for over 6 years. She began her graduate education at Tennessee State University in 2010 and had known the nine immigrant participants for more than 1 year. The participants had been in the U.S. for 2 to 5 years and originated from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Burundi. They had relocated to Tanzania prior to moving to the U.S. These participants were not fluent English speakers but understood Swahili, as did the graduate student. The participants expressed their interest in gardening and agriculture in the U.S. to the graduate student prior to the presentation, and their needs were incorporated into the presentation development.

At the beginning of the presentation, the graduate student introduced both Extension specialists to the group and asked again about specific areas of interest. Each specialist then spent time discussing certain areas of their expertise (soil science and horticulture, respectively) and answering questions. The presentation and question/answer session were both performed using the graduate student as interpreter.

Based on personal assessment of the use of this method of Extension, some guidelines were identified for future use.

1. Remember to speak to the audience rather than the interpreter. Even though they may not be fully aware of the meaning of your words, it still helps to establish personal contact with the audience.
2. Pictures, drawings, and basic examples are even more important in this type of setting to help with understanding of material. It may be possible to use native crops that the audience is familiar with to explain material about other crops that they do not have knowledge about.
3. An outside audience may have preconceived ideas about certain methods of practice even though they have been living in the U.S. for a number of years. It is possible that these ideas are brought with them from their home country or that they are reinforced by their native community in the U.S. It may also indicate a lack of access to information.
4. Flexibility is key. One of the PowerPoint presentations that was originally to be used was replaced by more of a chalkboard presentation. This change was due to the needs of the audience, but it also allowed a certain versatility that made the presentation more interactive.
5. Use of handouts, preferably translated into the language of the audience, would be helpful in reinforcing the information to the audience and also to act as a point of reference for the future.
6. Incorporation of field demonstrations would be helpful in reinforcing the information and

keeping the audience engaged.

## Summary

It is important to identify populations of stakeholders that may not normally attend well-established seminars or workshops. It may be best to tailor these meetings to these populations and to work with an individual who can bridge both the stakeholder and the specialist/agents groups. Graduate students at universities with high levels of diversity can be a great asset in this endeavor and help to establish trust and understanding between the stakeholder and the university. It may also allow stakeholders in need to seek out help in the future and increase information accessibility for underrepresented populations.

## References

Grogan, S. (1991). Targeting audiences for the 21st century. *Journal of Extension* [On-line], 29(4) Article 4FUT1. Available at: <http://www.joe.org/joe/1991winter/fut1.php>

Ingram, P. D., & Syvertsen, A. K. (2005). Hearing their needs: Voices of underrepresented populations. *Journal of Extension* [On-line], 43(5) Article 5FEA1. Available at: <http://www.joe.org/joe/2005october/a1.php>

Melone, B. (2006). Broadening the education infrastructure in organic agriculture for farmers. *Crop Management*. Retrieved from: <http://www.plantmanagementnetwork.org/pub/cm/symposium/organics/Melone/>

Mountjoy, D. C. (2001). Ethnicity, multiple communities, and the promotion of conservation: strawberries in California. p. 221-237. In C. Flora (ed.) *Interactions between agroecosystems and rural communities*. CRC Press, Boca Raton, FL.

National Agricultural Statistics Service. (2007). *Census of Agriculture, Vol. 1, U.S. Summary and State Reports*. Retrieved from: [http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/Full\\_Report/usv1.pdf](http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/Full_Report/usv1.pdf)

NRCS. (2006). *Elkhorn Slough watershed project 1994 to 2005 summary report*. United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Monterey County, CA.

Schauber, A.C., & Castania, K. (2001). Facing issues of diversity: rebirthing the Extension service. *Journal of Extension* [On-line], 39(6) Article 6COM2. Available at: <http://www.joe.org/joe/2001december/comm2.php>

---

*Copyright* © by *Extension Journal, Inc.* ISSN 1077-5315. Articles appearing in the *Journal* become the property of the *Journal*. Single copies of articles may be reproduced in electronic or print form for use in educational or training activities. Inclusion of articles in other publications, electronic sources, or systematic large-scale distribution may be done only with prior electronic or written permission of the *Journal Editorial Office*, [joe-ed@joe.org](mailto:joe-ed@joe.org).

If you have difficulties viewing or printing this page, please contact [JOE Technical Support](#).