

Guidebook

Reaching Out to Minority Farmers

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All programs and services of these groups are offered on a non-discriminatory basis without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, marital status, or handicap.

This guidebook explains some techniques for extending conservation programs to minority groups. It also makes recommendations for building productive working relationships with these groups. This text has information on:

- How to identify minority and "socially disadvantaged" groups
- How minorities have contributed to changes in rural America
- Some disadvantages faced by minority groups
- General characteristics of these minority cultures:
 - Hispanic and Latino
 - African American
 - Asian
 - American Indian
- The effects of a dominant culture on minorities
- Techniques for building relationships with minority communities

Introduction

The United States has witnessed significant demographic changes in rural areas in the last few decades. At a time when the country has experienced a national decline in the number of citizens who choose farming as a profession, the U.S. has also seen a dramatic change in the number of those farmers belonging to ethnic and racial minorities.

Paralleling the decline in agriculture producers are decreases in the number of farmers from some minority groups. However, some minority groups have maintained roughly the same numbers of agricultural producers, while others have even increased their numbers.

Many minorities are plagued with problems that have handicapped their efforts to compete in the agriculture industry. Some of these problems include:

- limited resources
- poor educational backgrounds
- discrimination
- distrust of government assistance
- lack of equipment
- differences in language and culture which inhibit communication
- poor access to private and public loans
- poor access to Conservation District/USDA programs and services

These problems have created social disadvantages for agricultural producers from minority groups, which have resulted in a low participation in conservation programs. These "socially disadvantaged" farmers are ethnic minorities and people of color, including:

- African Americans
- American Indians and Native Alaskans
- Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders
- Latinos or Hispanics

This guide explains some of the disadvantages these groups face. The guide also explains cultural differences that partnership employees must understand in order to successfully reach out to minority agricultural producers. This text also lists techniques for building trusting relationships between the partnership and minority communities; thereby increasing the potential for minority participation in conservation programs.

The term "socially disadvantaged group" refers to those individuals who have been subjected to racial bias, prejudice or other forms of discrimination of a group, without regard to their individual qualities" (Public Law 100-624, 1990)

AMERICA'S AGRICULTURE: A CHANGING PANORAMA

In the past four decades, major demographic changes have occurred in the rural U.S., especially among minority populations.

For example, the numbers of African American farmers have decreased dramatically; while the numbers of American Indian, Hispanic/Latino, and Asian farmers have stayed the same or, in some cases, increased.

Let's look at some specific demographic changes that have occurred among minority groups.

Decline in African American Farmers

The 1987 census showed a 95 percent decline in the number of African American or black farmers since 1954. Of the five million black residents now living in rural areas of the country, only two percent live on farms. These changes are a result of a number of factors, including:

- Farm mechanization
- Difficulty of small scale agriculture to compete with large scale producers
- Problems with, or lack of land ownership
- Lack of financial, educational, and technical agricultural assistance
- Aging of the black farm population

Most of the above factors stem from social structural changes that have excluded a whole class of people because of scale and size. The aging of the black farm population has also resulted in lower rates of adoption of conservation practices among blacks. Older adults are typically less likely to adopt conservation measures than young farmers.

Number of Hispanic/Latino Farmers On The Rise

Two million Latino/Hispanic people currently live in rural areas of the U.S. Between 1962 and 1987, the number of Hispanic-owned farms grew by eight percent. The largest number of these farms is in California where there are approximately 3,500 Latino/Hispanic farmers. Texas has the second largest number of Latino/Hispanic farms.

In contrast to the decline of farmers in African American communities, the number of Latino/Hispanic farmers is currently on the rise. This increase may be due, at least in part, to new immigrants.

Asian American Agricultural Population Remains Stable

Asian, or Asian American, is a broad term that categorizes individuals from China, Japan, Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam, Korea, Laos and other Asian countries.

Of the 6.5 million Asians living in this country today, 69 percent have immigrated since 1980 - a figure that has made Asians the fastest growing segment of the population in the United States.

Asian farmers cultivate 1.3 million acres of high-value cropland - a figure that remained stable during the 1980's. The largest number of Asian and Pacific Islander farms exist in Hawaii and California.

Geographic Locations of Minority Farmers

Minority farmers in the U.S. are usually located in specific geographic areas, for example:

- Blacks: Most heavily concentrated in the southern states.
- American Indians: Tend to be clustered in areas of the West such as New Mexico, Arizona, California and the Dakotas; also a notable population in North Carolina.
- Asian-Americans: Many live in California, and Hawaii; more recently in some Southern states - Mississippi and Alabama.
- Hispanic/Latino: Heaviest populations found in California, Texas, Arizona and Florida.

Number of Native American Farmers Grows Slightly

Approximately 300 American Indian and Native Alaskan tribes exist in the United States. Between 1980 and 1988 the overall American Indian population increased by 19 percent. Studies show this increase was due to people changing their racial status to American Indian, and not due to immigration or favorable increases in the birth/death ratio. The number of American Indian agricultural producers either stayed the same or grew during the 1980's, contrary to the national trend.

Disadvantages Faced by Minority Groups

Many members of minority groups faced certain social disadvantages in the past that may cause them to be reluctant to work with the Partnership. Partnership employees must be aware of and sensitive to these disadvantages. Two of these disadvantages are discussed below.

Lack of Education

Many older African Americans and American Indians were either denied access to formal education, or received a limited education. Discrimination led to educational disadvantages. Many young minorities worked on the farm instead of attending school because of financial hardships.

Many individuals from other minority groups also face an educational disadvantage because they have emigrated from countries that also offered them little formal education.

When members of a culture have a poor educational background, then written documents that require reading and writing skills can be intimidating, embarrassing and confusing. Written materials are seldom effective for conveying information in situations where one party has a limited educational background. This is especially true if the individual does not speak English, or speaks it as a second language.

Partnership employees must remember that the dominant U.S. culture relies heavily on the written word; while other cultures emphasize oral and visual communication.

Fear/Distrust of Government

Historically, many minority groups have been treated badly by the government, some by officials here in the U.S. and others by the ruling parties in the country from which they migrated. Harsh treatment results in distrust, or even fear, of the government by many minority communities.

Distrust can make it difficult for minority groups to accept and cooperate with partnership employees. When approached by any government employee, a minority member may express alarm, doubt, or be coldly polite, especially if the employee is also a member of the majority culture. These feelings can cause minority individuals to be reluctant about adopting, or even listening to, conservation techniques.

American Indians have historically endured a legacy of abuse and displacement at the hands of the U.S. government. Therefore, partnership employees may have to work especially hard at gaining trust within Native American communities.

Other minority groups may consist of people who have recently immigrated from war torn and impoverished countries and who:

- may not speak English very well
- may fear authority figures due to their immigration status
- may have fled from danger, trauma, starvation and death of loved ones; or suffered other severe emotional distress

Partnership employees must keep these backgrounds and experiences in mind as they reach out to minority farmers; and consider altering their normal methods of approach when working with individuals from these groups.

Understanding Minority Cultures

In order to work more effectively with minority group members you need to understand their culture.

African Americans make up the largest ethnic minority group in the rural U.S.; but Asians, American Indian and Latino or Hispanic individuals also comprise a significant number of minority farmers.

However, grouping people into categories such as these can be misleading. Care must be taken to avoid making broad assumptions about people based solely on the ethnic group to which they belong.

Similarities and Differences of Minority Cultures

It's important to understand that different minority groups may possess a number of physical or cultural similarities as well as differences. It is also common to find cultural variations among the same minority.

Consider the Hispanic/Latino and African populations, for example. Some Latinos are of Spanish descent and have a Caucasian appearance, while others are descendants of Indians or Africans and have physical traits of those groups. Some Spanish-speaking people from Latin America possess physical traits similar to African Americans; however their cultural backgrounds are typically very different. On the other hand, many Mexican Americans (who have lived in the U.S. for generations) speak English, attend U.S. schools, and intermarry with Caucasians; and have, therefore, adopted many cultural and physical traits of an Anglo society.

Among the Asian community, groups from different regions speak a different language, have different physical traits, have a different religious orientation, and use different farming techniques. Individuals from Asian countries may be refugees from war, recent immigrants, or long established citizens. Nationalist tensions also exist between certain Asian countries.

American Indian tribes each have their own particular culture, which often varies widely. Different tribes have distinct languages, customs, traditions, history and religious beliefs.

Because these major differences exist within cultural groups, you must be careful not to stereotype or over generalize simply because someone belongs to a specific minority. However, there are some general cultural traits that apply to most people in a minority group. Remember that exceptions to the characterizations below are abundant. Some general cultural characteristics are listed below.

General Traits of Hispanic/Latino Culture

- Catholicism is the dominant religion.
- Decisions are usually made by males.
- Tradition plays a key role in agriculture.
- There is not a traditional meeting place for Hispanics. Church is not a place to conduct business or influence change.
- Some of the people may lack formal schooling, but they may possess a wealth of experience and wisdom.
- Hispanics have a close contact culture; people touch one another and stand closer than Anglos.

General Traits of African American Culture

- The church serves as a central and unifying institution in the community.
- Women participate more in decision making than in other minority cultures.
- Skin color may effect how well or badly a person is treated; in most cultures, darker skinned people face more discrimination.
- Emphasis is on verbal communication and oral history.
- Body space is closer than in Anglo culture, but not as close as in Hispanic culture.

General Traits of Asian Culture

- Major differences exist between individuals from different countries and regions.
- Emphasis is on family unity and togetherness.
- Older people are treated with great respect.
- Body space/proximity tends to be close.
- There exists a tendency not to trust U.S. government programs.

General Traits of American Indian Culture

- Approximately 300 different tribes exist, with 300 separate cultures.
- Cultures may not subscribe to Anglo beliefs regarding land and livestock ownership. They emphasize sharing and the commons.
- Cultures may have differing beliefs about time. Navajos, for example, believe that when the time is right, things will happen.
- Some tribes have a religious belief that all things are living.
- The emphasis is on the group before the individual.
- Individuals may be caught in internal cultural conflicts, as more American Indians are living in cities and adopting elements of the dominant culture.

Influence of the Dominant Culture

Differences between minority groups and the most prevalent, or dominant culture have the potential to impede communication between conservationists and minority farmers. If you are a member of our country's dominant culture (Caucasian, European descent), it's important to understand the characteristics that make your culture unique.

Many people find it difficult to identify their own cultural traits. This is especially true for those belonging to the dominant culture of a society since these traits are the accepted "norm" and therefore largely go unquestioned. You are more likely to recognize your cultural attributes when they are contrasted with cultures of other groups - and at those times most people feel their own culture is superior to others.

Since the dominant culture in the U.S. can be described as Anglo (defined as white, of non-Mexican descent), let's examine the attributes of this culture. In doing so we find that most Anglo people generally subscribe to the following beliefs that are represented by the corresponding clichés.

It's important to remember that individuals from non-Anglo cultures may possess very different beliefs and practices from those illustrated in the table.

<p>People from Third World countries and some Indian tribes, for example, may have very different perceptions about time. Often in these types of cultures: the majority of people are not slaves to clocks; transportation may be slow, unreliable, or nonexistent; and face-to-face communication is most common.</p>	<p>Cultural Attribute Stay Busy - Be Industrious Prevention</p>	<p>Cliche Time is money A stitch in time saves nine.</p>
<p>In this type of environment it may be perfectly appropriate, even expected, to arrive "late" to an appointment. Many minorities now living in the United States have this type of orientation towards time - and this is just one example of these cultural differences.</p>	<p>Industriousness Deferred Gratification Time Schedule</p>	<p>"Keep your nose to the grindstone." A penny saved is a penny earned. Time and tide wait for no man (woman.)</p>

Other cultures may also have different perceptions regarding living arrangements, planning, dress, trust, giving and receiving help and money, forms of communication, education, and much more.

Meaning of Cultural Differences For Marketing

Because differences exist between dominant and minority cultures, Partnership professionals may need to modify their regular practices in order to reach minority farmers.

Marketing to minority groups is, in some ways, very similar to marketing to other groups-it is important to find out their needs and understand their perspective. However, the information gathering process may be much slower when working with minorities; so expect this up-front and don't get discouraged if the pace seems slow.

Establishing rapport and building relationships with trusted and respected members of the community takes time. SCS personnel should be conscious of the authority or "power" differences between themselves and the minority farmers with whom they are working, so as to avoid inadvertently alienating or intimidating these farmers.

In some cases the minority group may express needs beyond what your agency can deliver. If this occurs, remember that extended partnerships, alliances and coalitions can be formed to provide assistance.

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Techniques for Adapting To Cultural Differences

An important aspect of reaching out to people whose cultures are different from your own is to be especially observant and sensitive to cues in their behavior. Following are some tips for working with minority groups in your community:

Develop a Trusting Relationship

The first technique is to build a trusting relationship with members from the minority community and develop reliable "contacts" from the group. Following are some guidelines:

- Work with a leader or other influential member of the group.
- Organize a team of local community members to advise you.
- Establish a local alliance/coalition; include other agencies and community groups, agricultural and civic groups.
- Share the stage with community leaders.
- Establish trust; be patient; move slowly if cultural differences are great.
- Ask your contact to accompany you on farm visits and demonstrations to increase your credibility among other members of the community, and to build your advisor's confidence in your intentions and honesty.
- Meet in locations where minority groups are comfortable.
- Encourage minorities to identify their needs in their own language.
- Avoid using slang terms or agency jargon.
- Ask minority groups to establish goals, and try to connect these goals with the conservation agenda.
- Establish special projects which foster a spirit of mutual aid and cooperation.
- Use visual and hands-on methods of educating and informing.
- When written communication is necessary, translate material into clear language written at a sixth grade level (the sixth grade level is standard for communicating with any group).
- Find out where the members of the group get their information (churches, community groups, local community newspaper, etc.) and distribute your information through these media.
- Implement programs in which people can help themselves.
- Establish equipment loan programs and inform minority farmers that they are available.
- For some American Indian tribes you need to work systematically with tribal members before working with tribal leaders.

Resolve Misunderstandings

Cultural differences will tax even the most observant and sensitive person. However, you must remember that differences in culture do not equate to differences in intelligence.

If you think a misunderstanding has occurred, or if you feel you are having problems establishing trust, then talk to your minority contacts and ask for their help.

Following are some skills for improving communication and thereby eliminating many misunderstandings:

VERIFYING "What I understand you to mean is Is that correct?"

ALIGNING "Let me look at it from your point of view"

PROBING "Tell me more about what concerns you"

PHRASING "How can we work it out so that ... ?" (Include your concerns and theirs)"

ASKING "What will it take to ... ?" (Include your concerns and theirs)

The information you obtain by using these techniques could be very enlightening and even surprising. Once you understand the reasons behind the miscommunication, you will find it much simpler to explain yourself, and communicate with the minority members.

Find Alternative Ways to Communicate

If you are working with an individual who is not fluent in English, remember to speak slowly and plainly and avoid slang terms and other colloquial expressions.

Remember that sometimes people say they understand even when they do not to avoid embarrassment or because they are trying to be polite – so don't assume that someone understands just because they nod their head, or otherwise imply comprehension.

Remember that differences in culture do not equate to differences in intelligence."

People who do not speak or read English fluently, or who have a limited education, may require that information be passed to them via different means. Consider alternatives to speaking or written documents to communicate your message, especially for information and awareness-raising materials. Videos, demonstrations, and verbal instruction in the native language of the group would probably get better results than written information such as mailed bulletins and newspaper articles. For example, purchasing and using a camcorder to videotape conservation techniques used by local minority group members to show to other minority group members is an excellent outreach techniques.

Another effective technique is to ask respected leaders of the minority group to learn about a program or practice first, and then let them communicate the information to others in the community who trust and understand them. These leaders may also act as translators for farmers who have limited use of English. Also consider going to churches, PTA meetings, civic organizations, schools or local social service organizations to deliver information. People are much more receptive to new ideas in a setting where they feel comfortable.

Finally, recruiting or transferring a partnership employee who is also a member of a minority group or is familiar with a minority community, can make reaching minority farmers easier.

- Alternatives to Written Information:**
- Videos
 - Demonstrations
 - Explanations
 - Small group meetings
 - Radio
 - Word-of-Mouth
 - Photos
 - Displays

Conclusion

Many minority farmers are struggling with serious problems that will ultimately affect their ability to keep their farm and to adopt conservation methods.

In the past, socially disadvantaged farmers have been further handicapped by public policies that excluded them or didn't meet their needs. By learning from mistakes of the past, and applying the techniques discussed in this guidebook, your agency can help minorities improve their surroundings while adopting measures to conserve natural resources.