

NEXO

The Official Newsletter of
The Julian Samora Research Institute
The Midwest's Premier Latino Research Center

MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

University Outreach
and Engagement
Julian Samora Research Institute

An excerpt from Vol. XX · No. 1 | Fall 2016

Survey of Cooperative Extension Educators: On Serving Latino Populations in Michigan

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INTRODUCTION

According to the Center for Progress, by 2040 it is projected that 34% of Michigan's population will consist of persons of color. Latinos will contribute to this population shift as the fastest growing ethnic minority population in Michigan. As of July 1, 2015, the Latino population in Michigan was estimated at 485,974, representing about 4.9 percent of the total population in the state. In Michigan, Latinos are concentrated in the Southeast region, especially in Wayne, Oakland, Macomb, and Washtenaw Counties, and in the West and Southwest areas of the state, especially in Kent, Ottawa, Muskegon, Kalamazoo, and Van Buren Counties. Other counties with sizeable concentrations of Latinos include Ingham, Saginaw, Genesee, Allegan, Berrien, and Lenawee counties (See Martínez et al. 2015). Although the Latino population in Michigan has been increasing, the state's populations and institutions are relatively unfamiliar with their cultures and generally lack the capabilities to serve them.

Leaders of Extension units at land grant universities across the Midwest recognize that unit capabilities must be increased at both individual and programmatic levels so that services can be extended to Latinos and other diverse populations in the region. A starting point for enhancing the capabilities of Extension personnel and units to effectively serve Latino populations is to identify the learning needs of Extension educators. Such an assessment sheds light on the perspectives that Extension educators hold relative to their own abilities and the capabilities of their units to effectively deliver services to

Latino communities, and whether or not serving these communities is a priority for them and their units. This study assesses the needs of Cooperative Extension Outreach Educators in Michigan relative to their capabilities and skills to effectively serve the Latino population in their service areas.

METHODS

Data for this study were collected through an online survey of Extension educators in the North Central Region. The Julian Samora Research Institute at Michigan State University conducted the survey on behalf of the interstate initiative "North Central Extension Research Activity (NCERA) 216: Latinos and Immigrants in Midwestern Communities." Data were collected during the summer months of July and August, 2015, using Survey Monkey.

The questionnaire was a modified and expanded version of the questionnaire developed and used by "SERA 37: Latinos in the New South" in 2009 to assess the educational needs of Extension educators in the South to better serve Latino communities. Members of the Executive Board of NCERA 216 reviewed a draft of the questionnaire and provided suggestions for improvement, as did some Extension employees across the Midwest who were contacted by their respective directors to review the instrument. The questionnaire consisted of 25 questions covering a wide range of topics, including local and state demographics, populations served by Extension employees, opinion and attitudinal items on the populations served, community

context of reception, and Extension unit services for Latinos.

A convenience sampling process (not a probability sample) was used to recruit respondents. A letter was sent to the North Central Regional Association of State Agricultural Experiment Station Directors asking for the support of state directors by endorsing the survey and promoting awareness of, and participation in, the study among their employees. A total of 727 Extension educators and employees in 10 of the 12 Midwestern states completed the survey questionnaire.² This report only uses the subsample of respondents from Michigan.

Analysis of the data proceeded in three stages: (1) descriptive analysis (means, standard deviations, frequency distributions, and graphs) of demographic and Likert-scale item variables; (2) factor analysis to reduce the number of items into composite factor scales; and (3) bivariate analysis of constructed factor scales by race/ethnicity. All analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics, version 22 (IBM Corporation).

RESULTS

Sample Characteristics

Michigan Respondents by Race/Ethnicity and Sex

The sample of respondents in Michigan is comprised of 80 Extension educators, representing about 11 percent of the total sample of 724 in 10 Midwestern states. Of those who responded to the items, a majority of survey respondents in Michigan are female (71.8%). In terms of race/ethnicity, 82.3 percent of respondents indicated that they are White or European Americans. About 11 percent of respondents (7 cases) are Latinos/Hispanics, and five percent are Blacks or African Americans (3 cases).

Number of Years of Experience

With regard to experience, about 31.3 percent of respondents indicated that they have worked in Extension for 16 or more years, 26.3 percent between 6 and 15 years, and 42.6 percent for five years or less, respectively.

Fluency in Spanish Language

The majority of respondents indicated that they are not fluent in Spanish. About 72 percent indicated that their reading skills in Spanish are poor, 82 percent reported poor Spanish speaking skills, and 83 percent of respondents indicated that their writing skills in the Spanish language are poor. Only About 11 to 12 percent of respondents indicated that they are fluent in reading,

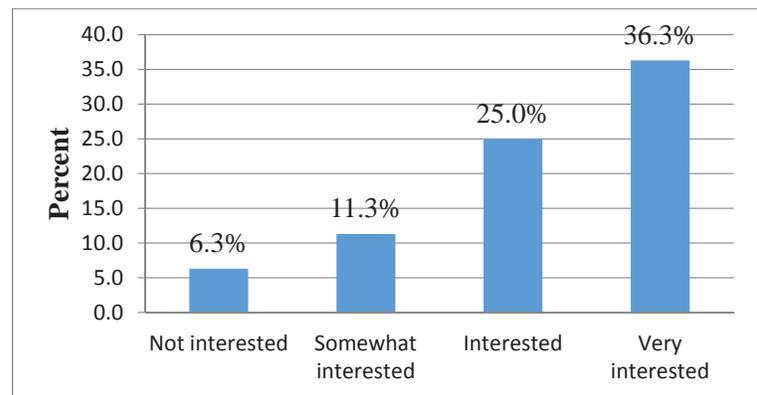
speaking, and writing in Spanish.

About 30 to 32 percent of respondents indicated that they, individually or collectively in their Extension units, often or very often experience a language barrier in meeting the needs of Spanish-speaking clients. Approximately 27 percent reported that language is sometimes a barrier when serving Latinos and 39 percent indicated that it is a problem for their unit. Interestingly, 44 percent indicated that language is rarely or never a barrier when serving Latinos, and 29 percent indicated that it is rarely or never a barrier for their unit.

Serving the Latino Population

Figure 1 shows that about 61 percent of respondents are interested or very interested in collaborating with Latino-serving organizations in their area to more effectively reach out to Latino communities. Approximately 11.3 percent are somewhat interested, and 6.3 percent are not interested.

Figure 1. Proportion of Respondents Interested in Collaborating with Latino-serving Organizations in their Areas to Reach out to Latinos



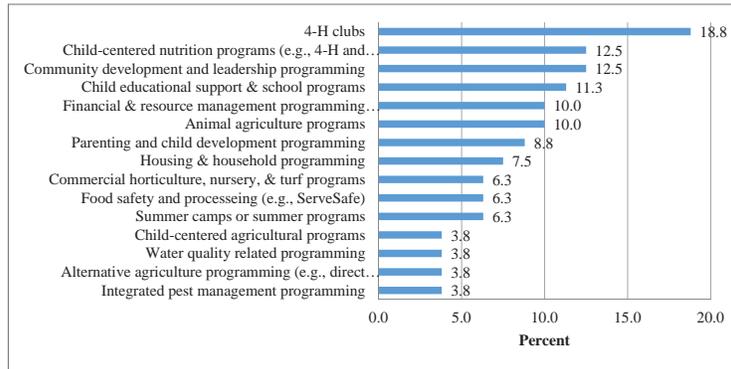
Respondents' Areas of Work

Figure 2 displays the top 15 focused areas of work of the respondents in the survey. Respondents were asked to indicate up to three areas of work in which they focus their efforts. About 19 percent of respondents indicated 4-H clubs, followed by child-centered nutrition programming (12.5%) and community development and leadership programming (12.5%), child educational support and school programs (11.3%), financial and resource management programming and animal agriculture programs (10.0%), and parenting and child development programming (8.8%).

When asked about serving the Latino population, about nine percent of respondents indicated that

their position specifically focuses on serving Latinos or Spanish-speaking populations. About 17 percent indicated that they have volunteers working with Latinos or Spanish-speaking populations. Among those who use volunteers to work with Latinos or Spanish-speaking populations, 64.3 percent have volunteers who speak the Spanish language.

Figure 2. Top Extension Work Areas of Focus of the Survey Respondents



Capacity to Serve Latino Communities

Respondents were asked to indicate on a scale ranging from “1 = strongly disagree” to “5 = strongly agree” if they interact with or are actively involved in reaching out to Latino communities, translated their programs into Spanish, or collaborated with members of their community, including the Latino community, in developing their programs. About 41 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they regularly interact with the Latino community, whereas 47 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed. About 42 percent of respondents indicated they are actively involved in reaching out to the Latino community in their respective county (or state). About 24 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they have program materials translated into Spanish to facilitate use by the local Latino population, whereas 47 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed. About 41 percent agreed or strongly agreed that they have worked with members of the community, including Latinos, in developing their program to make sure that it meets targeted population needs and interests. About 43 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they have worked with public and private agencies to address the range of services needed by Latinos.

Only 22 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their Extension unit helps them stay informed

of new policies and procedures and changing state and federal laws that impact Latinos in their region, whereas about 45 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed. About 19 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their Extension unit provides ongoing and well-crafted training opportunities for staff at all levels to learn about and work with Latino communities, whereas about 48 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed. Only six percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were trained in adopting new strategies for dealing with mental illness, addiction, HIV/AIDS or incarceration in culturally competent ways that strengthen Latino communities, whereas 81 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed.

About 36 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their Extension unit reaches out to and establishes connections with Latino communities, as well as coalitions, councils, and other collaborative boards, to examine issues facing Latino communities and seek ways to address their needs. About nine percent agreed or strongly agreed that they do not have support from their Extension leaders to focus part of their educational programs on Latinos in their county (or state), whereas 63 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed.

About 34 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that key members of the Latino community are aware of the resources offered by Cooperative Extension, whereas about 25 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed that such is the case. The majority of respondents (64.1%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that they are familiar with other organizations that offer services to the Latino community in their region. By contrast, about 42 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they do not know how to find or approach key partners that could help them work with the Latino community. This is an area in which a programmatic effort could easily lead to important outcomes.

The majority of respondents in Michigan (76.8%) agreed or strongly agreed that Extension should invest in hiring bilingual persons to serve Latino populations. Only about two percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that devoting funds and resources to serve Latinos through Extension may not be a good idea given the current economic situation, whereas 21 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed with that view.

Approximately 42 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Extension educators should learn

Spanish in order to better serve Latino populations, whereas 17 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed with that view. However, 89 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Extension educators should learn more about Latino cultures to more effectively serve Latino populations in their area. About 77 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Extension agents should develop programs aimed at serving Latinos.

About 20 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that staff members in their county Extension unit are well prepared to work with the Latino community, whereas half or 50 percent of them disagreed or strongly disagreed that such is the case. About 27 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the Latino community in their county (or state) is reluctant to seek help from outsiders (i.e., from those outside of their ethnic community), while a majority (53.2%) neither agreed nor disagreed with that view, implying, perhaps, that they are not familiar with the Latino population.

The overwhelming majority of respondents (97%) agreed or strongly agreed that they interact with peoples with cultural backgrounds different from their own. About 74 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they are comfortable attending cultural celebrations held by Latino communities in their county (or state). Roughly 78 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they are interested in working with the Latino community, while about one fifth are not sure that they are interested in working with Latinos or that they are comfortable attending their cultural celebrations.

About 64 percent of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that schools in their county (or state) welcome the Latino community. By contrast, about 46 percent and 49 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that most churches and most businesses in their county (or state) welcome the Latino community, respectively. Overall, approximately 46 percent indicated that most of their institutions welcome Latinos in their county (or state).

About 39 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the needs of low-income Latino residents are similar to those of low-income, non-Latino populations. About 16 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that most Latinos in their county (or state) are poor, whereas 33 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed that such is the case. Approximately 52 percent neither

agreed nor disagreed with the statement, again implying, perhaps, that they do not know the Latino population very well. On the other hand, a majority of respondents (78%) agreed or strongly agreed with the view that Latinos are represented in all socioeconomic strata in their county (or state).

About 13 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that most Latinos have low levels of education. Approximately 62 percent indicated that they neither agreed nor disagreed with that view, again implying that they may not be familiar with the Latino population in their respective counties. About 78 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that some members of the Latino community may be poor or lack formal education, but that they are generally hard-working and resourceful.

On immigration, about 8 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that new immigrants should understand "what it takes to survive in the U.S." before deciding to move here, whereas 47 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed with that view. Approximately 45 percent did not have a clear position on the matter. About 95 percent of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that there is little that they can learn from members of the Latino community. Further, about 91 percent of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that they are reluctant to develop programs for the Latino community because immigration is controversial.

About 81 percent believe to some or much extent that residents trust Latinos who live in their county (or state). About 89 percent of respondents believe to some or much extent that Latino workers contribute to the economic health of their county (or state). About 60 percent and 54 percent of respondents believe to some or much extent that Latinos are joining or creating local civic or social organizations in their respective community or county (state), and that they are actively involved in community improvement activities in their county (or state), respectively. Of interest is the 46 percent of respondents that indicated that Latinos are not involved or little involved in community improvement activities.

About 66 percent and 71 percent of respondents believe to some or much extent that local leaders and residents are working to make Latinos feel welcome in their county (or state) and that their county (or state) is working to provide needed services to members of the Latino community, respectively. Close to one-fourth

(24.2%) of respondents believe to some or much extent that the growth of Latinos created more conflicts among local residents and/or groups, whereas 48 percent indicated that little conflict was created and 27 percent indicated that there was no conflict at all.

Scale Construction Using Factor Analysis

Factor analysis was used to reduce the number of items by combining them into composite scales (Kim and Mueller, 1978). Factor scales allow parsimonious analysis and presentation of similar items into a single measure (Kim and Mueller, 1978).

To confirm the validity and internal consistency of the scales, eigenvalues, factor loadings, and Cronbach's alpha were examined. All factor scales were computed as an average score of corresponding composite items.

The first factor scale represents respondents' perceptions about Latino community inclusion. Five items strongly loaded on that factor and describe the extent to which Latinos are; 1) trusted; 2) join or create local civic or social organizations, 3) are actively involved in organizations; 4) are welcomed, and 5) receive needed services in their community.

The second factor scale represents Extension's capacity to serve Latinos. Five items loaded high on this factor: 1) Extension educators should learn Spanish; 2) Extension services should hire bilingual employees; 3) Extension should devote funds and resources to better serve the Latino community, 4) Extension educators should learn more about the Latino culture, and 5) Extension agents should develop programs aimed at helping the Latino community.

The third factor scale represents respondents' personal receptiveness toward Latinos. Three items loaded high on that factor: 1) Extension educators enjoy interacting with persons of different backgrounds than their own; 2) they are interested in working with the Latino community; and 3) they are comfortable attending cultural celebrations organized by the Latino community in their county (or state).

The fourth factor is about welcoming the Latino community. The following four items loaded high on this factor: 1) Overall most civic groups, churches, schools, and businesses in my county (or state) welcome the Latino community; 2) Most churches in my county (or state) welcome the Latino community, 3) Most schools in my county (or state) welcome the Latino community; and

4) Most businesses in my county (or state) welcome the Latino community.

The fifth factor scale is about Extension educator outreach to the Latino community. Four items loaded high on this factor: 1) I regularly interact with the Latino community; 2) I am actively involved in reaching out to the Latino community; 3) When I develop a program, I usually have it translated into Spanish to facilitate use by the local Latino population; and 4) When I develop a program, I work with members of the community, including the Latino community, to make sure it meets their needs and interests.

The sixth factor scale describes Extension-unit-support for Latinos. Four items loaded high on this factor: 1) My Extension unit helps me to stay informed of new policies and procedures and changing state and federal laws that affect Latinos in my region; 2) My Extension unit reaches out to and establishes connections with Latino communities as well as coalitions, councils, and other collaborative boards to examine issues facing Latino communities and seeks ways to reduce problems; and 3) My Extension unit provides ongoing and well-crafted training opportunities for all levels of staff to learn and work with Latino communities.

The seventh factor scale describes awareness of resources and services that are available to Latinos. Three items loaded high on this factor: 1) Key members of the Latino community in my region are aware of the resources offered by Cooperative Extension; 2) I am familiar with other organizations that offer services to the Latino community in my region, and 3) I don't know how to find or approach key partners that could help me work with the Latino community (reverse coded).

The eighth factor scale describes respondents' attitudes toward Latinos. Three items loaded high on this factor: 1) New immigrants should understand "what it takes to survive in the U.S.," before deciding to move here, 2) There is very little I can learn from members of the Latino community, and 3) I am reluctant to develop programs for the Latino community because immigration is controversial.

Bivariate Analysis

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) of the differences between means across categories of race/ethnicity was performed and significance levels were assessed using F-tests. The results show that the means for

Latinos (although their number is small) are significantly higher than those for White Americans for the following factor scales: Extension should Develop Capacity to serve Latinos, Personal Receptiveness toward Latinos, Welcoming the Latino community, and Extension Outreach to the Latino community. With regard to Awareness of Resources/Services for Latinos, White respondents had a higher mean than Latino respondents, indicating that Latinos may perceive a gap in the availability of resources and the delivery of services to Latino communities by Extension programs.

CONCLUSION

The objective of this study was to assess the needs of Cooperative Extension Outreach Educators in Michigan as they seek to enhance their skills to work with Latino communities. A majority of Extension educators in Michigan are not fluent in Spanish and indicate experiencing a language barrier in attempting to meet the needs of their Spanish-speaking clients. However, most are interested in developing their skills and knowledge to better serve Latinos. Further, many respondents reported being familiar with organizations that offer services to Latino communities and are interested in working with those organizations in order to reach out to their Latino clients. Finally, the overwhelming majority of respondents do not see Extension staff as adequately trained to serve Latino communities, and most perceive the need for Extension units to allocate more resources to serving Latino communities.

Most respondents believe that community institutions, especially schools, welcome the Latino community and that the majority of residents trusts Latinos and believes that they contribute to the economic health of their county (or state). Many believe that community leaders and residents work to make Latinos feel welcome and believe their county (or state) offers needed services to members of the Latino community.

In terms of actually serving the Latino community, four out of ten Extension educators in Michigan agreed or strongly agreed that they regularly interact with the Latino community, are actively involved in reaching out to the Latino community, involve members of the community, including Latinos, in developing their programs, and work with other agencies to address the range of services needed for Latinos.

About one in five Extension educators in Michigan

agreed or strongly agreed that they have translated program materials into Spanish in order to facilitate outreach to the Latino community. While direct translation of materials is certainly helpful and is a major step in the right direction, an understanding of culture is also very important, and many see the need to learn more about Latino cultures.

About 22 percent of Extension respondents indicated that their units inform them about new policies, procedures and laws that may affect Latinos; about 19 percent indicated that they provide well-crafted training opportunities to learn and work effectively with Latino communities; and about 36 percent responded that they reach out to and establish connections with Latino communities, coalitions, councils, and other collaborative boards to address issues facing Latinos and find ways to reduce their problems.

Limitations

The main limitation of this study is that it relies on a convenience sample that may not be representative of all Extension educators and units in Michigan. Despite this limitation, the results from this study shed light on the perceived needs and perspectives of Extension educators relative to Latino communities in Michigan. The data are also helpful in determining what Extension units could do to meet the perceived learning needs of Extension educators in the Michigan in order to be able to serve Latino communities.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The population of Latinos continues to grow in Michigan; however, programs and policies are not keeping pace with the needs of the community. There is a high interest among Extension educators in partnering and developing programs that meet the needs of Latino populations. Barriers that were identified include: a perceived lack of organizational support, language barriers, and limited awareness by Extension staff of Latino communities and their needs.

- 1) There is a strong interest among Extension educators to work with Latino communities.
 - a. Long-term programs should be developed to build diversity competent cadres of Extension educators in Michigan.
 - b. Extension employees should be provided long-

term diversity competence training on how to effectively and constructively engage and serve Latino communities.

i. Existing diversity training programs should be evaluated to see what impact they have had in providing services to Latino communities and actions taken accordingly.

c. Incentives should be provided to Extension employees to build coalitions and partnerships with local Latino and Latino-focused community organizations.

2) Extension educators and employees believe that there is a lack of organizational support for working with Latino populations.

a. Extension leaders should develop diversity competence skills, stay informed of policies and directives that affect the Latino population in the state, and allocate resources to a level that better serves Latino communities.

b. Unit directors should take stronger leadership roles in developing and implementing programmatic approaches to enhance the capabilities of Extension educators and employees to meet the needs of the growing Latino population.

3) Extension educators believe that language barriers inhibit program development and implementation.

a. Extension leaders should increase the number of bilingual/bicultural staff and educators to more effectively meet the needs of Latino communities.

b. Extension leaders should promote multicultural work environments to ensure that Latino and bilingual employees feel included in the workplace, even when they speak Spanish in the workplace.

4) Many Extension educators feel unprepared to work with Latino populations.

a. Extension units should provide training for their staff members that will enhance their knowledge of Latino communities in the state.

b. Extension units should host and support community forums focusing on Latino community issues as a way of increasing employee understanding and to expand opportunities to better assess and meet community needs through partnerships and collaborative initiatives.

5) Most Extension educators believe they can reach out to Latino community leaders and organizations, but may not have the social capital needed to do so or may not be engaged in doing so at a meaningful level.

a. Project-based partnerships should promote alignment of Extension units' and educators' priorities and practices with the actual needs of Latino communities.

b. A compilation of best practices should be shared by Extension leaders across the state to help Extension educators establish meaningful connections and sustainable relationships with Latino communities.

6) Most Extension educators and employees want and perceive the need to serve Latino populations.

a. Communities of practice focused on serving Latino populations should be developed within and across the state to engage and support Extension educators in learning about and implementing best practices.

b. A Latino news section should be added to newsletters and internal Extension communications materials to inform educators and employees about relevant issues relating to services and needs. 

Endnotes:

¹ This is excerpted from the full report which is available online: <http://www.jsri.msu.edu/publications/research-reports>.

² There were not any respondents from the states of Minnesota and Wisconsin.

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