

Hatching a New Ecology of Food



A guide to bringing an inclusive, sustainable farming system to your community

Kate Taylor

Emerson National Hunger Fellow

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The Rural Enterprise Center, a program of Main Street Project, focuses on sustainable food and agriculture as a path out of poverty for families with low income, especially for Latin@s. Rural Enterprise Center Director Reginaldo Haslett-Marroquin is largely responsible for developing this approach, the “New Ecology of Food,” and can be reached at regi@ruralec.com.

This guide was created by Kate Taylor during her time at Main Street Project/Rural Enterprise Center as an Emerson National Hunger Fellow. The Emerson National Hunger Fellows Program is run by the Congressional Hunger Center, a Washington D.C.-based organization that develops leaders in the fight against hunger and poverty. Kate can be reached at ktaylor@hungercenter.org.

In addition to independent research and building on existing Main Street Project and Rural Enterprise Center knowledge and material, this guide relied heavily on personal interviews and conversations with Maria Sosa, Federico Vargas, Todd Prink, Gabriela Burke, Adriana Thuerauf, Jim Blaha, Greg Carlson, Ken Meter, Reginaldo Haslett-Marroquin and Kat Vann. Thanks to the above individuals for speaking candidly and thoughtfully, and contributing important insight to this project.

INTRODUCTION

***Maria Sosa**, originally from Tampico, Tamaulipas, Mexico, has been interested in farming for years, but was unable to overcome the barriers facing many immigrants and people with low income. Since becoming involved with the Rural Enterprise Center, Maria has started farming black beans and garlic.*

***Federico Vargas** is from central Mexico, where he was involved in agriculture for 10 years. Farming and agriculture has remained a strong interest of his, but many challenges, including barriers to accessing land and credit, prevented him from realizing these dreams. Since becoming involved with the Rural Enterprise Center, Federico has started processing poultry.*

Poverty is all too real for many Latin@ families living in Southern Minnesota. It takes its toll on parents, children and entire communities. There is no universal experience of poverty – every family and individual is affected differently. However, there are some commonalities and shared experiences. The greater economic, social and political structures create this environment in which poverty not only exists, but thrives.

"Understanding poverty is more than looking at income."¹

Food and agriculture plays an important role in Southern Minnesota, not only as a significant industry and source of employment, but also because of its harmful effects on the physical, social and economic health of families, communities and the environment. The creation of a new sustainable food system that works – for families, communities and consumers – is critical.

The Rural Enterprise Center has created an alternative system that strives to be **sustainable and inclusive**. To achieve this goal, we have identified free-range poultry as an entry point into farming for families, and as an important center of the ecological system. This system creates economic opportunities for families, while creating an ecologically sustainable system of symbiotically interconnected agricultural enterprises. More on that later.

If this guide is successful it will explain the Rural Enterprise Center's approach to sustainable agriculture and training, why it's so important for our future, and how this approach could work in other communities.

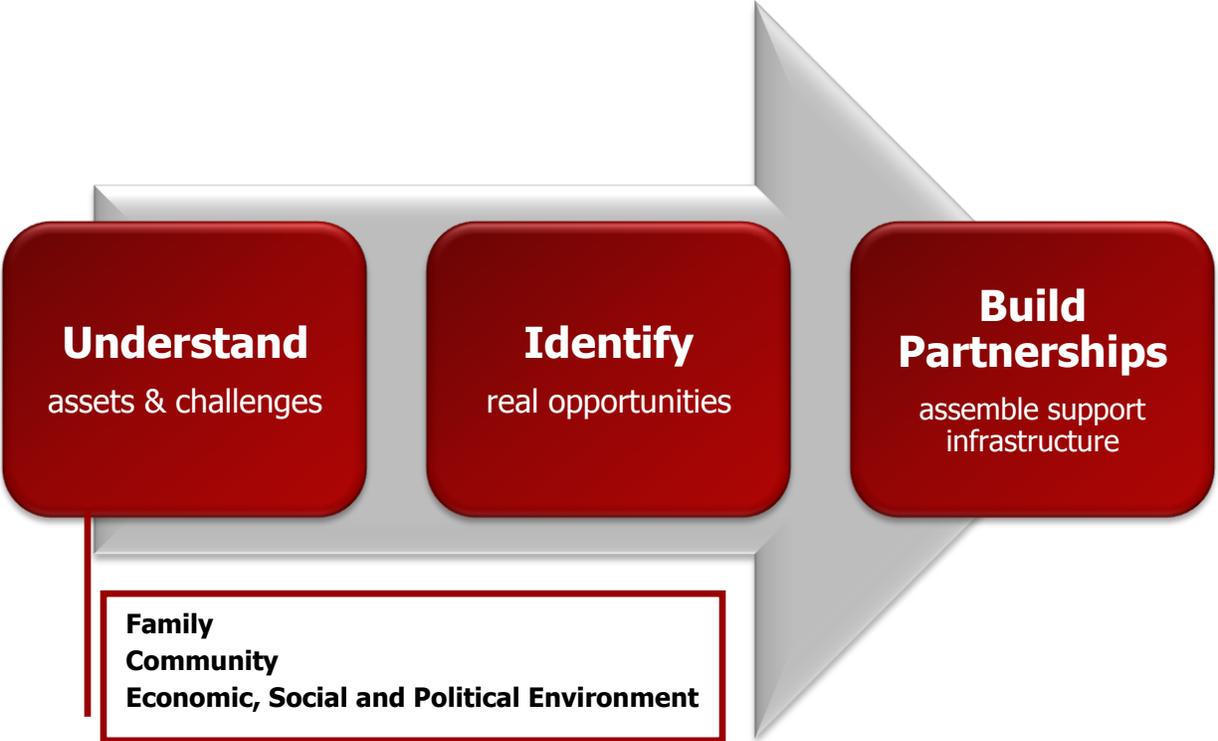
Part one begins by describing the realities facing families living in poverty in our communities. We put these experiences in context by looking at the greater economic, social and political structures that shape these realities. The guide will examine the central role of food and agriculture – both as a significant force in perpetuating the conditions of poverty and as a growing opportunity. Building on that, we will describe an approach to creating a food system that is economically, socially and ecologically sustainable.

Part two explains how to use this information in other communities. This is not a step by step instruction manual, but it provides a better understanding of what it might look like in other communities and the resources and leadership needed to make it happen.

PART I: The Realities of Poverty Meet a New Approach

Telling the Story of Aspiring Farmers

The ecological impact is very important, but first and foremost, this new approach to food and farming systems is **centered around families** and the communities of which they are a part. The Rural Enterprise Center is dedicated to finding opportunities for people living in poverty within the food and agriculture sector, but before we were able to identify opportunities that would allow families to walk a path out of poverty, we had to first gain an in-depth understanding of their realities. Through hearing their stories and experiences, we are able to understand the assets and challenges of each family, the untapped or underutilized resources of the community, and the social, political and economic environment shaping these realities. We then started building partnerships in order to turn these opportunities into a new reality.



Let's begin this the process of understanding by hearing from Maria Sosa and Federico Vargas.



"... I had intentions of doing something similar before ... but there are many barriers that, try as we might, we were unable to remove from the path ..."

"... I see a greater value in what I am doing. I look at it more from the health side ... It is already a gain to be eating something healthy ..."

Watch Maria Sosa tell her story on the CD/DVD included in this guide.

"... I have always wanted to ... farm because that is what I enjoy ..."

"... This is one of the things that pushes me to do the work – because my son has almost the same interest as I ..."

"... Now there are more possibilities. I have always wanted to farm, and now it is easier because I already know more people ..."

Watch Federico Vargas tell his story on the CD/DVD included in this guide.



Maria and her family and Federico and his are only two examples of families who are working within this system to create a better life. Many other Latin@ families living in southern Minnesota face difficult realities each and every day as they attempt to support themselves and their children.



Reginaldo Haslett-Marroquin
Director, Rural Enterprise Center

If you haven't already, **watch** the short interview with Rural Enterprise Center Director Reginaldo Haslett-Marroquin, also included in the CD/DVD.

"... The social, political and economic environment in the whole community has a lot to do with how a family can or cannot thrive, or get out of poverty ..."

"... We must solve problems with existing resources and assets within the community ..."

Understanding the Context of Poverty

Poverty affects people of all races and nationalities; however, in Minnesota, members of **the Latin@ community experience higher rates of poverty** than their white counterparts. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2009 American Community Survey, 26.3 percent of Latin@s in Minnesota were living below the poverty line compared to 11 percent of all Minnesotans and 8.2 percent of non-Hispanic/Latin@ white Minnesotans.²

Families living in poverty face many seemingly insurmountable **structural barriers** when it comes to accessing the land, credit, financing and training that would enable them to break through the cycle of poverty as farmers. It is not simply a lack of money or income that keeps a family in poverty; but a lack of access to credit, education and support networks.

"There were many barriers that, try as we might, we were unable to remove from the path."³

Poverty can force families to live day-to-day, making it extremely difficult to plan ahead. For example, some families do not have a bank account, much less access to the conventional credit system. These barriers to accessing credit make it nearly impossible for someone with limited resources to secure the land, capital, tools, machinery and other resources needed to become a farmer.

And, like any entrepreneur, a farmer needs a support network to be successful. People trying to escape from the cycle of poverty, specifically through the food and agriculture sector, face these major barriers; however, **"for every one of those challenges, families have incredible assets that can be engaged."**⁴

While these individuals and families are unable to easily become farmers, they are often involved in the food and agriculture system – as laborers earning low wages, facing poor

working conditions and working long hours among other challenges. Therefore, in order to begin to change the realities facing members of the Latin@ community, especially those living in poverty, it is critical to understand the current food and agriculture system and the role it plays in perpetuating these conditions.

Sustaining the Unsustainable: The Regional Food and Agriculture System and “Unpaid” Costs

In Southeastern Minnesota food and agriculture is a large and powerful industry employing many individuals. However, it is also a major culprit, not only in exploiting our natural resources, but also in perpetuating poverty.

As consumers, we can buy relatively cheap food, but it is at the expense of many throughout the “food chain.” Cheap food is the result of **“unpaid” costs** that end up being paid largely by those working in the system. The costs include low and unpaid wages and benefits, poor working conditions, ecological deterioration and depletion, and government subsidies coming from taxpayer dollars that often benefit the corporations rather than the families who do the hard work.

"A food and agriculture system that abuses people and creates poverty is not sustainable. We may sustain it artificially by not paying people fully for their work, by not paying for environmental consequences and so on. You sustain it by deferring the cost."⁵

Some employers also use **intimidation** to withhold wages from their workers. This is another way of artificially sustaining a fundamentally unsustainable system. Some workers in the fields and factories are denied their paycheck when they go to collect it, at times facing the threat of violence. The Latin@ community is particularly vulnerable to intimidation in today’s climate of fear and heightened anxiety surrounding issues of documentation and immigration. This climate colludes with the system to allow for such exploitation and abuse. **While this culture of intimidation, racism, abuse and exploitation is part of our infrastructure, “it is not sustainable, and it is not really who we are as human beings.”⁶**

"Now there are more possibilities. I have always wanted to farm, and now it is easier because I already know more people."⁷

In addition to increased vulnerability to intimidation, recent immigrants often lack the support networks and connections that facilitate financial success. Federico Vargas has expressed this sentiment, saying that meeting people and forming connections is one of the most important benefits of the new system. Language barriers, in addition to the demands of working multiple jobs and long hours simply to make ends meet, also make it

difficult to participate in community life and walk a path out of poverty.

The **health of workers and consumers** is another cost of the current system. Obesity and diet-related diseases and conditions have become a national problem. The Latin@ population experiences higher levels of diet-related disease including obesity, hypertension and diabetes.⁹ When a family is trying to save money, they are often forced to buy less healthy foods at the grocery store. This means that consumers with low income are especially limited in their access to healthy and affordable food.

*"Buying organic is going to be more expensive. If you're trying to save money, you have to buy regular food that has chemicals."*⁸

Finally, the **health of the environment** is jeopardized as our current agriculture system exploits, depletes and degrades our natural resources in the production of our food. The current system demands more energy than it produces, which makes it ecologically unsustainable. It relies on nonrenewable resources in the form of fossil fuels, which not only will be depleted, but also have harmful effects on the planet. The current system also degrades the soil, contaminates the water and harms the surrounding ecology.

The Growing Opportunity of Sustainable Food and Agriculture

Food and agriculture is an economically significant industry in Southern Minnesota. The Partnership for Southern Minnesota Regional Competitiveness, using research from the Rural Policy Research Institute, has identified small-scale sustainable food and agriculture as one of the key industries representing "southern Minnesota's core strengths" and is an important part of creating a regional competitive advantage.¹⁰

More and more Americans are recognizing the importance of consuming healthy foods. The combination of the obesity related health crisis, and the changing priorities of the American consumer makes sustainable, responsible and healthy foods an emerging **market opportunity**. The new system developed by the Rural Enterprise Center takes advantage of that opportunity in the Northfield/Cannon Falls, Minnesota area. And because the new system was designed to be replicated, we have the chance to make a systems-level impact on a regional and even national scale.

But the existence of a market opportunity is not enough. There needs to be a *real* opportunity for the families involved, and this means ensuring that the alternative food and agriculture system is compatible with their realities. This new system is not only compatible with the challenges and conditions facing these families and communities, it is designed to use the **unique resources and assets** possessed by many aspiring farmers in the Latin@ community.

Many people who have emigrated from Latin America have some background in farming. For example, Federico Vargas was involved in farming in Mexico for 10 years, growing vegetables and raising animals. In heavily attended community meetings coordinated by the Rural Enterprise Center, more than 70 percent of Latin@ attendees said that they had direct experience in agriculture in Latin America or had worked as laborers in the food and agriculture sector.

"We grew corn, beans, chilies, animals – cows, chickens, sheep, goats – everything!"¹¹

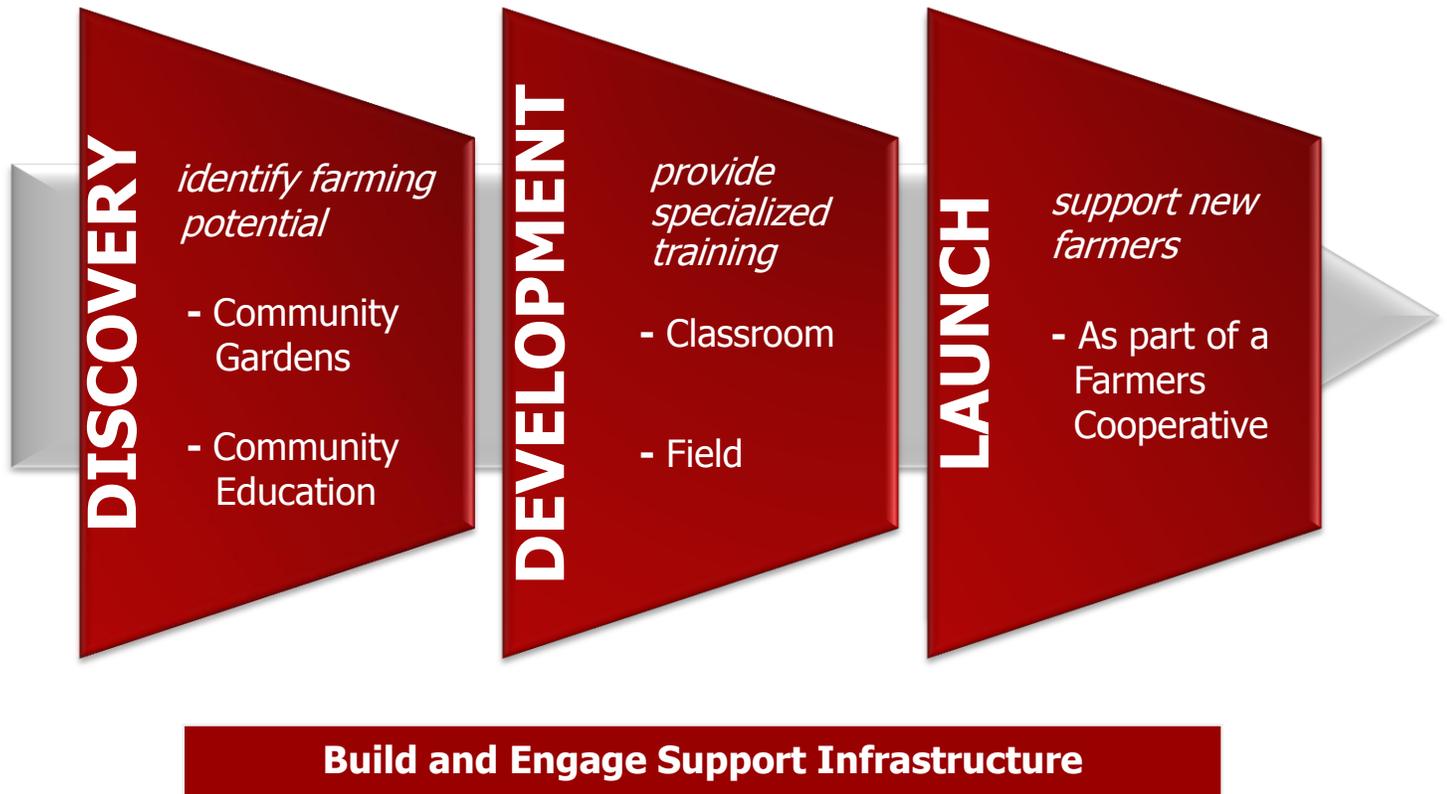
Additionally, many families had exposure to, or experience with, small scale and cooperative styles of farming before immigrating to the United States. The system is designed with an understanding of the challenges facing immigrant communities and people living in poverty and to build upon the unique and rich assets possessed by the same families and communities.

The new sustainable farming system is organized around free-range poultry production. So **"why poultry?"** Raising free-range poultry is culturally and economically compatible with the community while facilitating an ecologically sustainable farming system. This is based on analysis showing that poultry represents the best opportunity based on the economic, social, cultural and environmental realities of the families, their communities and the region.

- **Ecologically sustainable:** a sustainable farming system must begin with something that produces energy rather than consumes it, and that is livestock. The energy produced by livestock, in the form of manure, can be used to grow energy demanding products, like vegetables, that are necessary for a healthy diet.
- **Economically compatible:** while other kinds of livestock are not an economically feasible entry point for people living in conditions of poverty, poultry has a short life cycle and produces a quick cash flow, which is critical for people beginning without much capital.
- **Culturally compatible:** poultry also represents a traditional product in many Latin American fields and kitchens.
- **Short-term health benefits:** families can bring home a lean, healthy form of protein for their families to consume very shortly after getting involved. This short-term benefit is important to engage families and communities and does not compromise the long term sustainability of the system.

The Path Toward a New Ecology of Food

The path out of poverty through the new sustainable food system requires ongoing training and support. Let's take a closer look the different steps of this process: discovery, development and launch.



Discovery is the first phase of the process. Families have the opportunity to participate in the community gardens and community education sessions. Those who show interest in growing and farming in this small scale, informal setting, and/or individuals who are interested in continuing on after the community education may continue on to the second phase, development. While not everyone will continue onto development, all participants in the community garden and community education programs will leave with tangible benefits, life skills and practical knowledge. Those who do continue onto development will participate in more formalized training in order to prepare for launch, our third and final stage, where they will begin their careers as successful farmers. Along the way, building and engaging support in the community is essential.

Now that we can see the entire process and how each phase connects, let's break it down a little:



Discovery

Discovery: *identify farming potential*

The discovery process allows people to self identify as aspiring farmers, and helps the program identify individuals with farming potential. Outreach is an important part of discovery.

Discovery is made up of two complementary programs: community gardens and community education.

Community Gardens: anyone can have a plot and see the benefits of supplementing their diets with healthy fruits and vegetables; however, some families demonstrate extra motivation and interest in farming, and the community garden allows us to *discover* those individuals and families (and for them to self select) for the next phase of the system.

The garden is an important outreach tool. Those who see the tangible results of having a plot will tell their friends and families increasing the number of families that get involved.

Families who participate see almost immediate benefits as their access to healthy foods increases and the amount of money being spent on food decreases.

The community garden also provides a space for community members of all backgrounds and experiences to come together, connect and learn from one another. It creates informal mentorship and experiential learning opportunities.

Community Education begins with informational and open community meetings. Those who are interested can sign up for training sessions covering financial literacy, homeownership and an introduction to food and agriculture.

Upon completion, participants will be invited to begin the next phase, development. Many trainees will choose not to continue on, and that's okay – those who do continue will be genuinely interested in the system, and will be more likely to succeed.

And those who choose not to continue will have gained important life skills and knowledge that will help them be successful members of the community.



Development

Development: *provide specialized training for aspiring farmers*

Also called Agripreneur Training, development builds upon and formalizes the learning and experiences that began in the community garden and community education programs.

It breaks down into two main phases: classroom training and field training.

Classroom training teaches the aspiring farmers the skills and knowledge necessary to start and run a successful business. This includes basic business planning in addition to curriculum tailored to the specific demands of farming.

Field training is designed to replicate real farming conditions and takes place on a functioning farm. This is where individuals will gain hands-on experience farming in this system.

Field training is tailored to the interests, assets and challenges of each individual and family.

Building support networks and teams outside of the classroom is important for new and aspiring farmers. While this support will become critical in the launch phase, training participants begin to build these relationships during development.

Launch

Launch: *provide ongoing support for new farmers*

Launch is a complex process that will vary from family to family and community to community in pace and process. It will include ongoing support for new farmers as they

- Build relationships
- Identify needed resources
- Develop a business plan
- Transition to new farming sites
- Begin and grow business operations
- Move into leadership roles within the program and the community

While there are many options, we believe that new farmers will be most successful if they launch as part of a cooperative. By incorporating all the divisions of the system, a co-op can maximize the ecology and resources without relying too heavily in one family or individual.

A co-op is also better able to get past the barriers and hurdles that an individual or family might face, including credit access, processing, marketing and distribution challenges.

The recently launched Hillside Farmers Co-op is an example of a co-op structure supporting new farmers in this system. The board is made up of Latin@ agripreneurs and established farmers who serve as mentors.

Building a Support Infrastructure

Supporting new farmers outside of the classroom and field training is an important part of this new approach, and takes on additional importance as farmers move into the launch phase of the system. That's why forming support networks and creating opportunities for mentorship is essential. The Rural Enterprise Center is currently working with the Land Stewardship Project to further develop a support and mentorship strategy and program for the system. Aspiring farmers involved in our system are already receiving important support and mentoring from Rural Enterprise Center staff and established farmers in the area. Todd Prink is one of those farmers. He has been farming all of his life and went organic some 25 years ago. His Cannon Falls farm is an important part of the new system and his years of experience translate into helpful advice and guidance for new farmers.

Build and Engage Support Infrastructure

In addition to support networks, the system must be supported by programs and a strong support infrastructure to be successful. Because people living in poverty often do not have access to the conventional forms of credit, we must operate outside of this conventional system. In order to secure the land, capital, infrastructure and other important necessities for a successful launch, we must use and reorganize existing resources within the community and region. This is an important part of a larger support infrastructure.

Various tools and assets are necessary to launch and support these programs and the new system. Let's use the community garden as an example. A successful community garden requires gardening tools, seeds, access to water and, first and foremost, access to land. This is where a support infrastructure comes in. For example, in Northfield a local business leader made land available for the garden. Established farmers have also provided land, guidance and mentoring for new farmers participating in the new system.

There is no recipe for a successful community garden, or formula for how to engage a support infrastructure – this will vary from community to community. However, it is possible to begin these programs and the system with minimal extra capital by using a support infrastructure to engage and reorganize existing resources within the community.

The New Agricultural System

With free-range poultry production at the center, the 12 or so enterprise opportunities that make up the new agricultural system work symbiotically with one another to achieve a highly efficient and sustainable system. (Feel free to reference the diagram on the next page as you read this paragraph). For example, to produce free-range poultry, someone needs to grow grain for the chickens to eat. Someone must also process that grain. Additionally, the birds must be processed before they can be sold. Moreover, the manure produced by the birds can be used to grow vegetables.

That's already five different enterprise opportunities and we haven't even scratched the surface. By incorporating all of these different aspects of production and processing into one system, the system achieves a level of symbiotic exchange and connection that is not only highly efficient, but also brings us closer to the goal of sustainability. And the system provides numerous and diverse opportunities that can be tailored to a family's specific assets, challenges, interests and needs.

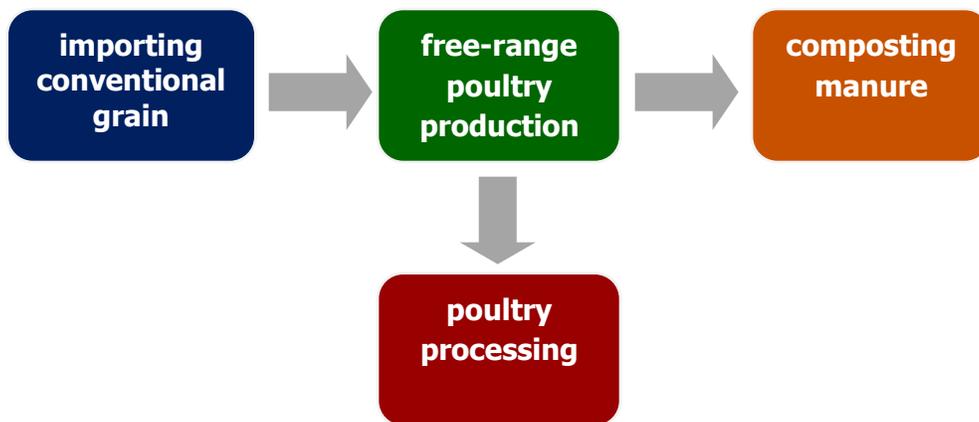


If you haven't already, take a look at the diagram on the next page.

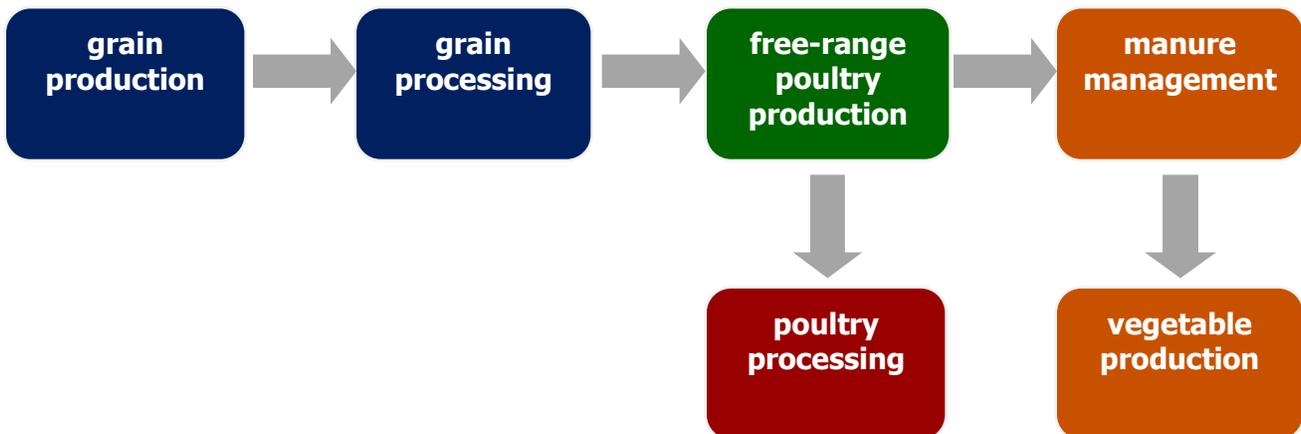
The full launch of the new system will incorporate many or all of these divisions in order to be efficient, sustainable and profitable; however, it does not need to be fully developed to begin operating. In fact, by starting with fewer divisions and on a smaller scale, the system remains accessible for families living in poverty who have limited access to credit and capital.

This sequence will vary from community to community, but you can see a possible progression below (see the next page for an explanation that goes along with the diagram below).

Possible System Step 1



Possible System Step 2



The fact that at step 1, the system does not yet have the capacity to produce or process grain does not prevent it from producing free-range poultry. Similarly, it is not yet ready to capitalize on the opportunity presented by the chicken manure; however, as the system grows and reaches step 2, grain production and processing can be incorporated into the system replacing imported grain, and the vegetable production division can be launched. That said it is important to plan for step 2 before beginning to implement step 1 of the system, even if the plan changes along the way. It's not too difficult to see how, before too long, you could be looking at a fully launched system much like the one seen on page 16.

The system may begin small to ensure an accessible entry point, but it maintains and even increases its economic and ecological sustainability when brought up to scale. We ultimately hope to have a systems-level impact on the way food is produced in the region and beyond, and this requires the deployment of the full system.

Breaking it Down: A Quick Look at the Numbers

Let's take a closer look at some of the numbers – how much land and how many birds are necessary to support a family and to achieve a systems level impact.

- A poultry **production unit**, the smallest scale of production, requires $\frac{1}{4}$ acre of land to produce 4,500 birds a season. The small scale of a production unit allows people to get involved without quitting their jobs and to slowly build up to the point when they can support themselves and their families without the one, two or even three low-wage jobs.
- A poultry **economic unit**, made up of 16 production units, requires 4 acres of land and will produce 72,000 birds a season. This is the level necessary for a family to fully support itself economically without supplemental income from additional jobs.
- An **economic cluster** is made up of 8 poultry economic units and produced 576,000 birds each year. An economic cluster includes the poultry production units in addition to the accompanying enterprises, making up a fully launched sustainable system. This is organized in the form of a farmers' cooperative.

The system is competitive due in part of its efficiency – a family needs only 4 acres of land to produce enough poultry to support itself. This not only makes it more accessible for families, but also friendlier towards the environment.

This is a long process and a long term approach – it may take years for a family to walk a path out of poverty. Cycles of intergenerational poverty will not disappear overnight. However, this system allows families to see benefits almost immediately while they work their way towards a life without poverty.

PART II: Getting Started in Your Community

The new system was developed in response to, and shaped by, specific realities in Northfield, Minnesota and the surrounding region, which means that it cannot simply be exported to other communities. However, this approach can be adapted to the realities of your community.

The Rural Enterprise Center is a resource throughout the process. We don't expect anyone to take this guide and build the system in their community from the ground up. What follows is designed to provide a sense of what to expect and some ways to go about planning and implementing the programs, system and support infrastructure in each community.

Part II describes:

- **Leadership** (individual or small team)
- **Building a core support team**
- **Conducting an environmental scan**
 - Gain understanding of community; analysis of power and resources distribution
 - Foundation for building support infrastructure
- **Implementing the programs, system and support infrastructure**
 - **Discovery:** community gardens and community education
 - **Development:** work with rural enterprise center to plan and implement training
 - **Launch:** plan for and successfully launch and support new farmers
- **Blogging as You Go** ... communicating your message to build support and participation

And remember, input from the community is important – without it we risk ignoring a wealth of local knowledge. As a member of the community, you will have a sense of who to involve in the process to ensure that it reflects the needs, interests, assets and challenges of the community.

What You Will Need: Leadership

To begin, your community will need a leader or champion. This can be one person, or a small group of people. The leader(s) will work closely both with the Rural Enterprise Center and leaders and members of their own community.

In order to successfully navigate the many sectors of the community, the leader(s) should not only demonstrate leadership skills, but also the ability to communicate with diverse sectors of the community, such as government, business, Latin@ community and non-profits.

The leader(s) should have some expertise and/or interest in farming and agriculture. This is a great opportunity for community leaders, but if they cannot envision themselves as active, engaged functioning parts of the system, it may not be a great fit. While each community is different, and each leader will be different, here are some important characteristics:

The Leader(s) Should Possess:

- Ability to work with many different sectors of the population, including government, business, non-profit organizations, educational institutions, service providers, community organizers and members
- Interest and experience with agriculture or farming, desire to be a part of the system/co-op after it is up and running
- Experience working with the Latin@ community, cultural competency in addition to Spanish and English proficiency is preferred
- Willingness to work with the Rural Enterprise Center throughout the process
- Enthusiasm for the work!

Assembling a Core Support Team

The leader(s) need not possess all of the knowledge, skills and resources necessary to implement this new system in their community – that is the role of the core support team and support infrastructure; however, those in the leadership position must be able to assemble, engage and coordinate the team and support infrastructure necessary for success.

The first step is to assemble a core support team. Ultimately the leader's relationships with, and understanding of, the community will need to inform who is a part of the core support team, but here are a few places to look for members of the team:



Being able to coordinate and manage the team is an important role of the leader(s). The support team will be most successful if it represents diverse sectors of the population; however,

this means that there will likely be different if not opposing opinions present. Being able to maintain focus and an environment of inclusivity throughout will be very important.

A system that addresses challenges and opportunities in many different areas can unite individuals and organizations working in these seemingly disparate fields. Food and food systems thinking are increasingly uniting people and groups around a common interest. For example, nutrition and health workers, financial literacy educators, service providers in the Latin@ community and business people who are interested in local economic development and helping small businesses in their community can all unite around the health and economic benefits that accompany the implementation of this system.

The potential benefits to the health and unity of the community may interest leaders and organizations that focus on community life and service in addition to faith-based groups. The Catholic Church is an important community institution in many rural Latin@ communities. Getting the local religious leaders behind this new system can be very important when it comes to outreach and community engagement.

In order to ensure that all team members and leaders are on the same page, you may want to have an orientation or training meeting for the team. The Rural Enterprise Center can help facilitate the training.

Conducting an Environmental Scan

Once assembled and on the same page, the leadership and core support team should begin to assess the composition of the community. The Rural Enterprise Center has extensive experience conducting environmental scans and will assist in this process. It is important that, as members of the community with knowledge and contacts, local leadership play an active and central role; however, the Rural Enterprise Center can help provide the tools and strategy to conduct a successful and useful scan of your community.

The members of the core support team are also important tools. Using the team's relationships, experience and expertise in various sectors of your community will make the environmental scan much easier and more complete!

The environmental scan will identify political, economic and social leaders. Chances are the resources and power are concentrated within certain institutions, so it is important to identify them and understand how they operate.

Here are some places to look when conducting the scan:

- Government: elected officials and commissions
- Food and agriculture sector: farming, related manufacturing and production
- Business community and leaders

- Banking sector
- Educational institutions
- Foundations, non-profits, and other community organizations
- Faith community: churches, other religious institutions and organizations
- Newspaper, other media

This is a lot of information, so using a spreadsheet to keep track of the data can be helpful.

Here are some other tips we learned from when we did it in Northfield:

1. **Use the phone book (or these days, the internet)**

Pull out your phone book, or pull up a search online to begin. City and local governments have websites with contact information, so that's a good way to start.

2. **Don't be afraid to pick up the phone and call**

Once you start making connections, the possibilities are endless. Perhaps the mayor's office knows about a healthy foods initiative, or a bank officer knows a business person who has a passion for sustainable agriculture. And maybe you'll be able to partner with the local food shelf to increase the availability of healthy produce to those in need.

3. While there is a level of informality and flexibility to this process, **do be systematic and methodical with your results**. It can be easy to lose track of contact information, so make sure you're creating a detailed database of some kind.

4. Finally, **use us!** You have the knowledge of your community and are absolutely critical to this process, but the Rural Enterprise Center can help provide guidance and tools.

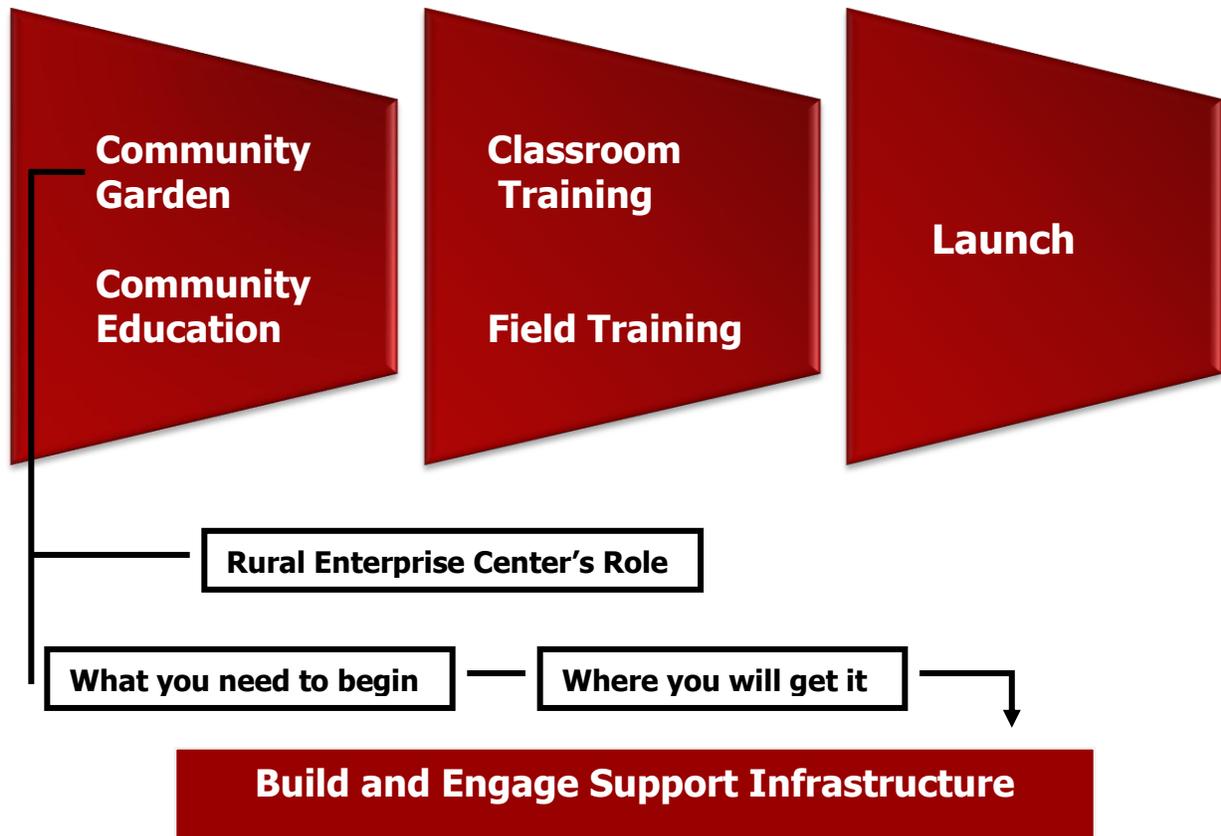
Using the environmental scan to build a support infrastructure is just as important as conducting it. The Rural Enterprise Center will be able to lend guidance and tools for understanding, interpreting and utilizing the environmental scan.

Implementing the Programs, System and Support Infrastructure

Once you have started building a support infrastructure, you can begin to deploy the programs and system. **The Rural Enterprise System will continue to work with you** to plan and implement these programs, but you and the team will be able to take a leadership role in engaging your support infrastructure to secure the necessary resources.

Outreach is another important part of the programs, especially in the beginning. The Rural Enterprise Center Outreach Coordinator and other staff will be able to provide tools and support; however, as members and leaders of the community, the leader(s) and core support team are best equipped to conduct outreach.

As you plan for implementation the Rural Enterprise Center will work with you to identify what you will need to make it happen, what role the Rural Enterprise Center will play and how you can use your support infrastructure to secure the remaining needed resources.



Discovery: community gardens and community education will be the first programs you will implement. Let's take a look at what you might need to begin:

Community Gardens

- Land
- Access to water
- Gardening tools
- Seeds, fertilizer
- Outreach material
- People to coordinate and monitor the gardens, provide assistance

Community Education

- People to conduct outreach
- Outreach material
- Space to conduct training sessions
- Curriculum for training sessions (Rural Enterprise Center)
- Materials and supplies for training sessions
- Instructors for training sessions

Engaging the support infrastructure to secure the needed resources will be critical to beginning community garden and community education programs.

Development: the Rural Enterprise Center will continue to play a significant role in planning and implementing **classroom and field training** in your community. Staff at the Rural Enterprise Center has developed and is revising training curriculum in a way that will be useful in many communities in the region.

If and when there is sufficient interest, investment and activity, the Rural Enterprise Center will work with the local leadership to set up a training facility in the community. The Rural Enterprise Center Agripreneur Training Manager and other staff will train the community leader(s) who will be facilitating the classroom and field training in each community. This step may not happen for a while in your community, but you can take a look at the development worksheet included in the appendix to get a sense of what might be needed when your community reaches this point.

Launch: launching and supporting new farmers as part of a co-op in the new system may be years off in your community, but we've included a worksheet in the appendix to see what might be needed when you are ready to plan for the launch phase. Developing the additional support through individual mentorship and support teams for aspiring and new farmers outside of the classroom and formal training will be important in each community as it has been in Northfield.

Blogging as You Go ...

Communicating and sharing your message is important as you conduct outreach, build support and implement the programs and system. A blog is a great mechanism for sharing your work



The screenshot shows the website for the Rural Enterprise Center. The header includes navigation links for HOME, ABOUT, AGRIPRENEUR TRAINING APPROACH, MEDIA, and CONTACT, along with a link to SUBSCRIBE TO THE RSS FEED. The main banner features the text "Rural Enterprise Center" with the tagline "We see possibilities." and a photo of hands holding a chick. Below the banner, the date "Tuesday, November 30, 2010" is displayed. The main content area features a blog post titled "Happy Chickens, A New Approach under Development" by Reginaldo Haslett-Marroquin, dated October 15, 2010. The post discusses raising heritage chickens in a sustainable way. To the right, there are sections for "About" (Main Street Project), "Community Poultry Processing" (with a video player), "Spotlight" (Hillside Farmers Cooperative), "Latino Farming", and "Donate". A search bar is also present.

with the community. You'll be able to raise awareness about the system and keep the public informed as you go. It also serves as a good mirror for you to reflect upon your work.

Feel free to check out the Rural Enterprise Center blog at: ruralec.com.

You can also create a listserv and send out a regular email to communicate with people. There are many tools out there that can help you not only reach people and share your message, but also to start a genuine space for dialogue and community engagement.

What Changes?

Ultimately we need to show you *why* – why this system is necessary, why this system will work and why you should get involved. The most compelling reason is to have an impact on the families with whom we work. We are working for change – to change the way we produce and consume food in this country and to make a positive change for the families who participate in this new system.

So **what really changes** as a result of this system? The very first thing that changes for the families is their access to healthy food. This begins as early as the family's involvement in a community garden, and continues to grow as families begin to farm. Even before families see any increase in their income, they minimize the amount of their budget spent on food while upgrading the quality and healthfulness of their food. Families also experience lifestyle changes – kids get outside more, interacting with other children as they get exercise.

Entire families are able to connect with their neighbors and communities. The way they perceive and are perceived by their community changes. People no longer feel unwelcomed, unwanted or isolated, but can now participate more fully in community life. The whole dynamic begins to change, and once this starts, the effects snowball.

We are not lifting people out of poverty, we are designing a system that enables families and communities to create and walk a path out of poverty with hard work and support. For every challenge, families bring incredible assets and experiences. Through this system, we are attempting to rearrange the structures and resources so that these assets can be fully engaged.

We are also attempting to make a systems-level impact on the way food is produced in this country and on the impact the food and agriculture system has on people and on the ecology.

This may sound daunting and, quite frankly, very difficult, but as Federico said, **"everything is always a little difficult, but if you don't have the initiative to attack and say, 'yes, I can do it,' you're not going to succeed ... If you don't throw yourself into it, you will never go forward."**¹²

APPENDIX

Appendix I

DISCOVERY

What you might need to begin

Where you will get it

Community Garden

Land

Gardening tools

Seeds, fertilizer

Access to water

Outreach communications material

People to coordinate and monitor the gardens, coordinate outreach, provide assistance

Community Education

People to conduct outreach

Outreach communications material

Space to conduct training sessions

Curriculum for financial literacy, homeownership and food and agriculture training sessions

Rural Enterprise Center

Material and supplies for training sessions

Instructors for training sessions

Appendix II

DEVELOPMENT

What you might need to begin

Where you will get it

Business Training

Space to conduct training

Instructors to conduct training

Materials, supplies for training

Curriculum

Rural Enterprise Center

Field Training

Land (1/4 acre per production unit)

Infrastructure

Including: poultry barns/
buildings, processing facilities

Rural Enterprise Center support

Supplies

Including: seeds, chicks, feed
(grain etc), water, tools

Farming protocols and plans

Rural Enterprise Center

Manure management plan

Rural Enterprise Center support

Support networks and mentorship

Appendix III

LAUNCH

What you might need to begin

Where you will get it

What you will need for a successful launch will vary depending on the structure of your agriculture system and many other factors.

Using the Hillside Farmers Co-op as a model, below is a list of some basic things (infrastructure, supplies etc) you may need.

Aspiring farmers who have undergone business and field training

Agripreneur Training Program

Land

The ultimate goal for each family, an economic unit (the amount necessary to support a family) requires 4 acres; an economic cluster is made up of 8 economic units.

Tools and infrastructure for farming

Including: barns/buildings, grain silo, hopper, tractor, other equipment

Processing and distribution infrastructure

Including: distribution truck, mobile poultry processing trailer and equipment

Marketing and business plan and infrastructure

Including: co-op branding, marketing, and sales strategy, business plan, marketing/sales infrastructure

Supplies

Including: seeds, feed (grain, oat, barley), chicks, water, tools

Support networks for aspiring farmers

Mentoring and ongoing support beyond training

ENDNOTES

¹ Haslett-Marroquin, Reginaldo. Personal Interview by Kate Taylor. December 9, 2010.

² U.S. Census 2009 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates: Minnesota: S1701. Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months: http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/STTable?_bm=y&-context=st&-qr_name=ACS_2009_1YR_G00_S1701&-ds_name=ACS_2009_1YR_G00_-CONTEXT=st&-tree_id=309&-redoLog=true&-geo_id=04000US27&-format=&-lang=en

³ Sosa, Maria. Personal Interview by Kate Taylor. September 28, 2010.

⁴ Haslett-Marroquin, Reginaldo. Personal Interview by Kate Taylor. December 9, 2010.

⁵ Haslett-Marroquin, Reginaldo. Personal Interview by Kate Taylor. December 9, 2010.

⁶ Haslett-Marroquin, Reginaldo. Personal Interview by Kate Taylor. December 9, 2010.

⁷ Vargas, Federico. Personal Interview by Kate Taylor. September 28, 2010.

⁸ Vargas, Federico. Personal Interview by Kate Taylor. September 28, 2010.

⁹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Office of Minority Health & Health Disparities: <http://www.cdc.gov/omhd/Populations/HL/HL.htm#Statistics> and <http://www.cdc.gov/omhd/Highlights/2010/HSeptOct10.html#DISPARITIES>

¹⁰ Partnership for Regional Competitiveness Southern Minnesota: <http://www.mnsu.edu/ruralmn/regcomp.html>

¹¹ Vargas, Federico. Personal Interview by Kate Taylor. September 28, 2010.

¹² Vargas, Federico. Personal Interview by Kate Taylor. September 28, 2010.