

## **Latino Agriculture Entrepreneurship (LAEP) Tips for Working with Latinos**

These tips are provided as an orienting guide for service providers working with or preparing to work with Latino farmers in the Midwest. Depth in knowledge will come from direct experience and continuous learning.

Latinos are a broad ethnic population comprised of several distinct subpopulations (Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Mexicans, and several immigrant groups from Central and South America). In other words, they are a highly heterogeneous population.

Yet, while differences exist in identities, cuisines, dialects, and cultural practices, there are several commonalities among them. These include the Spanish language, traditional cultures, and levels of bilingualism and biculturalism, for example.

The Spanish language allows individuals from different Latino subgroups to communicate and enjoy music, poetry, and other cultural elements.

Many are more or less bilingual, with many fluent in English and others with limited fluency in the English language.

Two key features of the different subcultures of Latinos are *personalismo* and *familismo*.

Personalismo, or the personal emphasis of culture, stresses relationships among persons. That is, getting to know the other person through person-to-person contact is important. This feature of human relations is common among traditional cultures, and is different from American and Western cultures, which are task oriented. That is, persons are often seen as means to an end, and getting the task done is more important than getting to know the other person.

Trust is important in traditional cultures and is best developed through person-to-person contact, which leads to mutual respect and understanding.

Familismo, too, is a cultural value. It stresses dedication and loyalty to the family and is based on collectivist values which emphasize interdependence. Often, decisions are made with family members rather than singly by an individual, and information is sought within their own networks. This differs from the American culture which emphasizes individualism and independence.

Given these differences and the many subpopulations of Latinos, it is important to get to know the person with whom one is communicating, as they will differ on all of these dimensions of life. They may not be immigrants, or they may not be bicultural. Working with Latinos requires getting to know them on a personal level.

Finally, it is important to keep in mind that Latinos, while being the second largest population in the U.S., are the least connected to American societal institutions. This requires helping many of them understand how one's agencies and organizations work. Again, doing that requires person-to-person contact, as well as a sense of where a particular person is in terms of their knowledge of your particular organization.