I. Introduction

Latino farms are no longer distributed only regionally; they can be found throughout the nation. The growth of Latino farmers presents new opportunities as well as challenges for United State Department of Agriculture (USDA) agencies, Non-Governmental organizations (NGO’s), and farm leaders because the Latino farmers in rural communities do have several common challenges:

- social, cultural, customs and/or language barriers
- minimal awareness of USDA programs
- limited management skills.

Additionally, as a population their level of formal education is below the national average and they are generally less likely to take business risks and adopt new technology. As a result the immigrants or Latino farmers are considered as “Socially Disadvantaged” and/or “Limited-Resource” producers.

In spite of their growing number, Latinos and/or immigrant producers are being bypassed or under-served by the institutions that were set up to serve them. A reason for this situation is that educators, agricultural professionals, and farm leaders face cultural barriers when working with Latino farmers, who have different values, customs, and language. Even though USDA agencies, NGO’s, educational institutions have the desire to promote a sustainable food and farming systems among Latino farmers, they often lack human resource skills to reach these emerging farming groups.

II. Assumptions

1. cultural differences affect -directly and indirectly- the effectiveness of sustainable food and farming outreach programs with immigrant or Latino farmers.

2. if educators understood cultural values and the farming background of Latino farmers, they can develop partnership and improve communication with them in order to increase productivity, viability and greater environment awareness in US agricultural communities.

3. knowing and continuing to learn cultural values and customs of Latino farmers can help educators understand their attitudes and reactions and therefore reduce stereotypes.
III. Purpose

The purpose of this Professional Development Program (PDP) is to enhancing the capacity of educators and farm leaders to work with socially disadvantaged Latino farmers by means of an educational model that integrates an Experiential Learning Curriculum (ELC) that is focused on Mexican cultural values and sustainable farming systems.

Participants will be immersed directly into the culture and values of traditional rural Mexican communities, from which many of our new US farmers derive. Under this learning model, extension educators will increase their consciousness of the barriers faced by individuals who belong to this demographic farming group, in an environment where the language, values, and traditions are different from your own.

IV. Program Objectives

1. to enhance the capacity of educators and farm leaders to work with socially disadvantaged Latino farmers.

2. to assist educators and farm leaders to become more capable in conducting sustainable food and farming outreach programs with socially disadvantaged Latino farmers.

3. to provide a unique reflective learning environment for the participants through a experiential learning program.

V. Partners

This Program is organized by Michigan State University and La Universidad Autónoma Chapingo.

Experiential Learning

The purpose of this Professional Development Program (PDP) is to enhancing the capacity of educators and farm leaders to work with socially disadvantaged Latino farmers by means of an educational model that integrates an Experiential Learning Curriculum (ELC) that is focused on Mexican cultural values and sustainable farming systems. Experiential learning occurs when participants are placed in a situation where they think and interact; learn in and from a real-world environment. While traditional teaching and learning is typically teacher-directed, content-driven, text-oriented and classroom-based, experiential learning involves active participation of the learners in planning, development and execution of learning activities, is shaped by the problems and pressures arising from the real-world situation and occurs most effectively outside the classroom.
