BEGINNERS FARMERS, RANCHERS AND FISHERMEN DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

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Award Number
2018-70017-28602

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Summary:
The primary goal is to increase the number of beginning farmers, ranchers and fishermen and enhance their success and sustainability by providing them with the knowledge, skills and tools needed to make informed decisions. According to the 2012 Agricultural census, there are 13,159 farmers in Puerto Rico of which only 8.3% are women, 35% have less than 9 years in business, the average age is 59, and only 14.2% are 35 years old or less. Over 85% of all the food consumed in the Island is imported and in terms of fish and seafood consumers depends on small, local restaurants and very few fisheries. We will increase the number of farmers, ranchers and fishermen through a strong recruitment program that will include socially disadvantage farmers/ranchers/fishermen, Veterans, self-sustained and economically viable agricultural product introduction, training and technical assistance for business formalization, start-up and expansion. The key to success is to be able to educate participants about the structure of the industry, also, conduct Entrepreneurship and business training and technical assistance for business plan development, Natural resource management and planning, infrastructure systems improvement to grow their business and increase crops/catch, also, business incubation for value-added products using locally grown raw materials, and mentoring, apprenticeships and internships.

OBJECTIVES:
A. Design and implement a recruitment program of which 10% will be Military Veterans and 70% low-income, of which 60% will complete the program (72 participants) as designed for their specific business needs.

B. Develop knowledge and tools to begin and establish a farm or fishing business with a vision of the use and conservation of natural resources. If possible with renewable power and water sources, and introducing management recommendations for conservation of important freshwater and marine species and habitats.

C. To trigger and empower the next generation of Puerto Rico farmers, ranchers and fisherman by providing a meaningful exchange between experienced and beginning farmers, ranchers and fishers through the implementation of sustainable farming/ranching/fishing practices and business development. This will help strengthening the production infrastructure capabilities of each entrepreneur.

D. Incubate at least five (5) economically viable and self-sustaining value-added enterprises that use locally grown agriculture products.

E. Find farmers, ranchers and fishermen that will join us and share their knowledge in mentoring to inspire and empower the next generation of agro-entrepreneurs with advice from experienced enterprises by Providing mentoring and internships in specific subjects needed by the new farmers,

Expected Outcome:
A. Beginning and small farmers/ranchers/fishermen will develop added knowledge on sustainable agro-ecological crop production techniques, land and natural resources management, entrepreneurial, financial viability, value added crops/catch, marketing, branding, food safety, FDA and/or USDA compliance, nutrition, leadership and community organization and mobilization.

B. Local farmers/ranchers/fishermen (beginners, small and micro), home-based and community farmers (that could start selling their crops/catch, expand their production and develop value-added products), consumers that will be able to buy locally (saving time, money and gaining health), institutional clients such as Head Start, Municipal Departments, locally-owned restaurants, Agro-COOP members and, current business incubators users as well as new ones.

C. Local small farmers/ranchers/fishermen will produce viable economic crops/catch that produces new business opportunities and income in their communities. Low-income farmers/ranchers/fishermen will become connected to other sectors of the food system and will have viable markets for their products. Existing business incubators that serve for production, packaging, processing and marketing centers will have improved quality, technical assistance and training offerings (that can be replicated throughout the commonwealth of Puerto Rico), more and better equipment and improved accessibility of food crops/catch. Consumers, institutional buyers and food providers will have new and viable sources of nutritionally beneficial products to meet their food needs directly from the farmer/rancher/fishermen.