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Initiating The Paso Del Norte Immigrant Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Network

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1National Immigrant Farming Initiative Inc. **Introduction** *The National Immigrant Farming Initiative (NIFI)* proposes a project with the long-term goal of improving food security and community development among a network of our partners in the Paso Del Norte region of southern New Mexico and West Texas. The proposed work will take place in a region where the economy is largely agriculture-based. Food and farming are central in their lives and through agricultural work they are hopeful to transition to having sovereignty over their livelihoods and their food. The primary expected outcomes during the three-year project timeframe are:

- Sixteen new farm startups
- Sixty beginning farmers and ranchers who will make beneficial changes in farm operations as a result of this project
- Thirty agricultural service providers who will develop new relationships with and provide services to immigrant beginning farmers The Objectives associated with the Goal and priorities are:
 - Develop viability of small-scale sustainable beginning farmers
 - Increased food security for low access communities and the greater region
 - More committed consumers and stronger markets within own communities
 - More engaged communities of food growers and producers
 - More agricultural service providers intended to offer services in equitable ways

Key Approaches

NIFI's approach begins with convening a network of regional partner organizations that have a mission to serve and existing relationships with immigrant beginning farmers in the Paso Del Norte region. Relationship building among support organizations, beginning farmers and USDA Programs (NRCS & FSA) service providers is a key strategy that will be intentional in every aspect of this BFRDP. Events include workshops and technical assistance in: Production, business and marketing; Land access and natural resource management and planning; Mentoring, apprenticeships, and internships.

It will be important that not only agricultural skills are developed but that community capacity is built to withstand challenges such as poor economic conditions. If every community NIFI works on develops greater resilience in producing its own food therefore by taking care of itself this project will be successful and demonstrate sustainability.

Targeted Audiences

This project address the needs of limited resource, socially disadvantaged beginning farmers or ranchers and immigrant farm workers planning to become

beginning farmers or ranchers. A small subset of these immigrant beginning farmers and ranchers are also military veterans. One hundred percent of NIFI's project will be allocated to serving these groups.

This initiative's focus will be to enhance the sustainability of beginning farmers and ranchers in six contiguous counties in the Paso Del Norte region bordering Mexico. Due to the persistent poverty that afflicts that rural area, Dona Ana, Otero and Luna counties in New Mexico and Hudspeth, Culberson and El Paso counties in Texas have been designated as USDA StrikeForce Counties. The Colonias population in west Texas is 97 percent Hispanic. Their annual average income is \$5,000. The Council for the Development of the Colonias recently conducted a study in southern New Mexico It found that 54 percent of the households that relied on farm work had an annual income of \$9,999 or less.

Acknowledgments

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References

1. National Agriculture Statistics Service.2012. www.nass.usda.gov
2. The Border Colonias Region: Challenges and Innovative Approaches to Effective Community Development Housing Assistance Council, 2011
3. USDA StrikeForce for Rural Growth and Opportunity. 2015 National Results "This project is supported by the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, USDA, Grant # 2016-70017-25523. Program of

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