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Why I went on the trip:

Waushara County is the home to the largest number of migrant farm laborers in Wisconsin each summer as they seek employment through producers of Christmas trees, cucumbers, peppers and potatoes, with the majority of them being Hispanic. Our county is also the permanent residence of approximately 900 (4% of our population)"settled out" Hispanic residents.

In 2003, the UW-Extension office identified the settled out Hispanic residents as an underserved audience. We conducted focus group interviews including twenty Hispanic residents to better understand the needs of this population. Two main needs being addressed by the Hispanic Coalition are the language barrier and the need to develop a better understanding about cultural similarities and differences.

I developed the following appreciations and understandings through this experience:

- One comment I hear periodically is that many of our Hispanic residents know English but will not speak or acknowledge that they know the language. I greatly understand the confidence one needs for speaking in a language other than their native language and not being comfortable taking the "risk" to practice for sake that a simple error could be embarrassing.
- The families of Wisconsin farm workers that we visited were benefiting from the receipt of money for their family but question arises as to how families and communities are dealing with the loss of young male adults. In one region of Vera Cruz 80% of the men had left for work in the United States, Canada, Spain or larger cities.
- I developed a greater understanding of the history of immigration to the United States and how the changing policies will affect those wishing to legally immigrate or work to the United States. We learned about the Mexico's need to for economic development to support the 500,000 workers entering the labor force annually. There are an estimated 260,000 Latinos working in Wisconsin, about 1/3 are undocumented and 80% of the Latinos work in the green industry. Twenty-five billion dollars in remittances are sent annually to Mexico by workers.

What will I do with the information obtained:

I have shared my observations with the Central District 4-H Agents and the Waushara County Agriculture and Extension Education Committee at their December meetings. I will also share my observations with the Waushara County Hispanic Coalition in January as we continue to work on projects focusing on understanding the two predominant cultures and languages in our county. I also hope to have discussion with others, such as trip participants and the Hispanic Task Force, about resources UW-Extension can provide to staff working with this audience.