

Hispanic/Latino Focus Group
Waushara County – October 2, 2003
Conducted by UW-Extension

Migrant workers, primarily from Texas, began coming to Waushara County in 1949 to assist with the harvest of farm crops, primarily from July to September. The main crops harvested at that time were cucumbers and peppers. Today we continue to see migrant workers coming into our county from June through October to assist with the harvest of a variety of farm crops including cucumbers, peppers, potatoes and Christmas trees. For the period of 1997 to 2002, Wisconsin has had an average of 4533 migrant workers, of which an average of 943 (20.8%) come to Waushara County (Bureau of Migrant, Refugee and Labor Services, Department of Workforce Development). Eighty percent of Wisconsin's migrant agricultural/field workers come to Waushara County. Not all of the migrant laborers included in these statistics are Hispanic/Latinos; however, our observation is the majority of migrant workers in Waushara County are Hispanic/Latino.

Throughout this time, some of the migrant workers have settled out of the migrant labor stream and have chosen to make Waushara County their permanent residence. The 1990 census indicated that Waushara County had 379 Hispanic/Latino residents, making up 2% of the county's population. In the following ten years, there is a marked increase in the number of Hispanic/Latino residents in Waushara County as the 2000 census indicated 848 Hispanic/Latino people resided in our county, making up 3.7% of the population. Both the Village of Plainfield and City of Wautoma are home to over 100 Hispanic/Latino residents. In each of the Towns of Plainfield and Dakota and the Village of Redgranite, 51 to 100 Hispanic/Latinos reside. According to the 2000 US Census, of the 680 Hispanic/Latino people that are age 5 and over, about 71% speak Spanish at home and 21% do not speak English well or not at all. This number does not include many migrant workers or people who have moved in to the county in the last three years. According to the 2000 US Census about 28% of the Hispanic/Latino population speak only English at home, so programs in only Spanish would miss a portion of the Hispanic/Latino population. In March 2004 the US Census Bureau projected that the Hispanic/Latino population is expected to triple in the next half century in the United States.

Waushara County UW-Extension faculty members noted very limited involvement of Hispanic/Latino residents in our two traditional programs of 4-H and HCE in the past ten years. It was also noted there has been very limited involvement in our community educational initiatives, such as comprehensive planning and agricultural programming.

In order to better understand the needs of this population, as well as educate them about the educational mission of UW-Extension, faculty members conducted three focus groups in October, 2003 with the assistance of community professionals working with the Hispanic/Latino populations as well as Community Resource Development Faculty members Arlen Albrecht from Taylor County and Rob Burke from Door County. Community professionals Rosa Ortega of the Department of Workforce Development,

Silvia Carter of the Waushara County Job Center, Sister Pat Flanagan of St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Wautoma and Julie Vargas, Migrant Education Coordinator for the Tri-County School District extended personal invitations on our behalf to members of the Hispanic/Latino community to participate in the focus groups. Three focus groups were formed based on the language preference and length of permanent residence in Waushara County. Long-term residents (more than 5 years as a year round resident) were divided into two groups, with one being conducted in Spanish and one in English. The third focus group included those who were year round residents for less than five years. This group discussion was conducted in Spanish. Each group consisted of 8 to 10 Latino residents, one facilitator and one or two recorders.

The set of questions asked to each focus group was adapted from the Latino Focus groups conducted by Manitowoc County UW-Extension (2001) and the Waushara County Comprehensive Planning surveys currently being conducted in Waushara County.

I. What do you think your children need now and in the future to have a better life?

Job Training/Post High School Education

Young people seeking post secondary education need more information on career choices, financial aid, degree programs and institutions. Also a better understanding of how technical college courses can be taken while in high school is desired. Financial aid is needed as families cannot provide this support and it is difficult to go to school and work at the same time. A need was expressed for jobs for teenagers.

Educational, Recreational and Social Opportunities

Participants are interested in having a variety of educational, recreational and social opportunities available for youth people both at school and outside of school. After schools programs could be a time to offer these opportunities. Specific opportunities identified include organized sports, computers, gardening, swimming and art. Participants wish to receive more information on existing programs such as 4-H, sports and little league. A place to "hang out" such as a community center with adult supervision is desired. Hispanic/Latino youth "often feel left out."

Schools

The focus group participants see a need for good schools. Some specific things that they would like schools to provide are more bilingual teachers so children learn English faster, information taught in both English and Spanish, homework help for children as parents who do not speak or read English are not able to provide help to their children and supportive teachers.

Adult Education

A need for adults is to have educational opportunities with a skilled instructor to learn written and oral communication skills in English. Parents want the opportunity to complete adult basic education courses and receive their GED with, ideally, these courses

being available in Spanish.

Childcare

Reasonably priced day care, preferably with bilingual providers is needed.

Housing

Short term family housing is an issue when migrants arrive prior to the completion of housing inspections and for families settling out of the migrant stream. Sometimes families do not have rent money.

Taking Action

No one does anything with information from the results of these kind of meetings.

II. What do you need now and in the future to have a better life?

Economy/Employment

Because of the poor economy and budget cuts, parents are experiencing difficulties. In addition to a better economy, more factory and year round jobs are desired so families can establish their families and stay in one place. Basically, there is a need for more local jobs in general.

Language

Focus group participants expressed the difficulty in understanding the federal tax system, stating that H & R Block is expensive yet there is the need to have someone who understands the area of taxes and can help. They realize that there are people who are willing to help but, will charge for their services. This is difficult for those who cannot help themselves because they lack money and education.

A strong need exists for the interpretation of services and documents including: medical, legal, immigration, contracts, police, courts, and bills. The language barrier presents particular difficulty in trying to help doctors understand a person's illness.

Adult Education

Participants stated the need for a variety of adult education programs. In particular, there is a need for English as a Second Language (ESL) classes that are available to anyone, are held at times convenient for individuals who work late into the evening, are taught using Spanish and English, are not just available on cassette tape and will teach basic English for better communication on job sites.

Other types of classes that participants desire include: adult basic education, arts and crafts, health, classes about food nutrition, cooking, stretching money to buy food, how to get a driver's license and how to develop a good credit history.

Individuals also want access to classes that will teach them how to open their own business, qualify them to work in day care centers and help open their own day care

business.

Housing

Focus group participants had strong feelings and frustrations about rental housing in the county. Specifically, they feel that there is poor rental housing to choose from stating that landlords do not keep up their properties, which are in disrepair, and recurrent problems like cockroaches and other pests are not dealt with. Participants said that they feel some people blame the “dirty” renters for the condition of the rental property, when the landlord does not take care of it. Renters feel that if they complain, their lease may be terminated and they could be forced to move, and may be homeless. Participants stated that this type of “slumlord” keeps this cycle going and then next renter moves into the same bad condition and there’s no protection for the renter. If the landlord is confronted, there is a risk that the renter won’t be a good reference when they apply for a new place to live. Without a general housing inspector, (except for in migrant labor camps), there is little the renter feels he/she can do. Renters are not aware of who they can contact regarding unhealthy rental conditions and what their rights are as renters.

Off-season housing for migrants is hard to find, especially when migrant workers initially have little to no money for rent. Participants stated they would like to see some form of transitional housing for short stays until the camp inspector has inspected the employer-provided housing. A statement was also made that not all migrants live in the camps and so there is a need for good quality, low-income housing for other migrant workers as well.

Finally, focus group participants stated that there was a need for more housing options that which include bigger, yet affordable places to rent. They also said that it was most difficult for middle-income Hispanic/Latinos to access housing as the poor and the rich can find and access housing. Also, there is a need for help in understanding the process of buying a house.

Childcare

In the area of childcare, participants said they would like to see a daycare center specifically for their children. In general, they feel that childcare is very expensive, often far away from where they work and/or live and that there are few slots for night shifts and for infants still in diapers.

Healthcare

The group felt that both the poor and rich are able to afford medical or dental services and insurance, but that the middle class people had the most difficulty doing so. Also, dental care is very expensive and many individuals delay too long to see the dentist and then have to wait long periods of time in between appointments. Finally, the participants found it difficult to access insurance in general.

Recreational and Social Opportunities

Participants mentioned the desire to have a Spanish bingo hall or lottery and activities for

the elderly.

Culture

A need for assistance with burying a loved one or choosing to send a loved one's body back home to Mexico was stated. There is also a feeling that the non-Hispanic/Latino community needs to be educated about the Hispanic/Latino Culture, which might include opportunities for Mexican and non-Mexican cultures to exchange things like food, dance, history and stories. Participants also expressed the desire to allow and encourage their children to carry on cultural traditions.

More welcome feeling

A comment was made that the Social Services Department needs to show compassion when working with the Hispanic/Latino population.

III. What would make your community (town/county) better?

This is our community

While the Hispanic/Latino population aligns their heritage and culture to places outside of the United States and Waushara County, they consider their home here and do not plan to move away. Waushara County has been noted as a peaceful and quiet place to live. Having lived in this area, many for generations, there has been an adaptation of some American ways but they do not want to forget their culture and would like to preserve it. They would like to see: more education on Hispanic/Latino culture to all children in schools, organization in towns of Mexican festivals such as May 5th and September 16, and incorporation of Spanish into more activities so the language is not lost.

Language

The Spanish/English language barrier has not been broken down. Those who do not understand English are not able to participate in many events or services offered and many don't even know what is available to them. There is a need for: adult education classes in Spanish to learn about budgeting, cooking, knitting, etc.; books and resources at libraries and schools to be available in Spanish; communication of activities that government and businesses are doing to the Hispanic/Latino community as well as offering those activities in Spanish; and schools with classes in Spanish. LaClinica is the only place offering medical help in Spanish. They have no emergency room; appointments can take up to 2 weeks. Would like more health providers who can explain things and work with you in Spanish. Resources are needed to learn laws, courts, and taxes in Spanish. There is a need for therapists and counselors, including marriage counselors, who speak Spanish. Interpreters are needed that understand the terminology in medical/health care and the court system.

Employment/Economy

This is a general comment drawing attention to a feeling that their aren't many jobs/businesses in the area and thus their also aren't many businesses and services offered. Particularly, Plainfield could use more businesses like a grocery store and

restaurants

More welcome feeling

There is a feeling that the Hispanic/Latino community is not welcome at community events such as the county fair. Businesses and the general public tend to be standoffish. People do not say “hi” or acknowledge you. When you see someone in town they do not come up to you and greet you. Alcohol is served at nearly every community event making them unfit for families. Would like to be able to go to schools to teach and break down barriers. Would like a community center for everyone to meet and talk about their differences to break down barriers. This interaction would help. Would like a Hispanic/Latino resource center or community center to better bring the Hispanic/Latino community together with activities and be the link to government services. During the time when there are fewer jobs available, they could form groups at the resource center to carry out other activities such as food preparation or other ideas to raise funds. Together they could do a lot to help one another.

IV. What if anything prevents you from being involved in local organizations and clubs, local government meetings, or informational and educational programs or classes?

Language

The focus group participants expressed a desire for programs and information to be in Spanish as well as English. Specifically, they would like access to local and international news in Spanish and more critically warnings about bad weather. Information about where to take refuge from tornadoes and other bad weather should be available in Spanish. Many programs do not have a Spanish interpreter present, so language becomes a barrier that prevents people from being involved in local organizations and clubs, local government meetings, and informational and educational programs or classes. The Hispanic/Latino population of Waushara County feel more invited when invitations and announcements of programs are in Spanish as well as English.

There is a preference that communications and newsletters be bi-lingual. Communications in both English and Spanish allow people who do not have a complete understanding of English to gain information and feel invited. In addition, bilingual communications can help people learn English as well as preserve an understanding of the Spanish language. .

Culture

Some Hispanic/Latino people in the feel uninvited or discriminated against because of cultural differences. They feel there is a need for understanding of the culture. As was mentioned earlier, there may be a culture difference in the way that people acknowledge or don't acknowledge one another when they meet on the street.

Discrimination

Discrimination is not a problem for all Hispanic/Latino people in the community. Some

said there is no discrimination, and others felt that discrimination is an issue that prevents them from becoming involved. Some do experience attitudes of discrimination, even when shopping remarks are made that offend them. They are treated differently. There is a need for understanding of the culture. Some feel more comfortable in groups with other Hispanics/Latinos.

Childcare

Access to reasonably priced day care, especially in the evening, can limit the participation from the Hispanic/Latino population.

Transportation

Not everyone has access to transportation to get to meetings, activities, classes, and other programs. There is limited public transportation in the county.

Educational/Social/Recreational Opportunities

The Hispanic/Latino population has not noticed a great deal of places in which to participate. The number of places where you can dance is limited. There are few art courses. Shops are limited. They are looking for basic classes in cooking, hair cutting, mechanics, carpentry, classes for first time mothers, first aid, money management, computers, art, house painting, and house maintenance.

Not Knowing About Opportunities

Some of the opportunities listed above may be available in the county, but the Hispanic/Latino population does not know about them. There is a lack of information on activities in the county. A number of people lack ways to get notified about upcoming activities. This maybe because the newspapers, most radio stations, and information flyers are in English only, which brings us back to the first point, communication should be bilingual.

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