

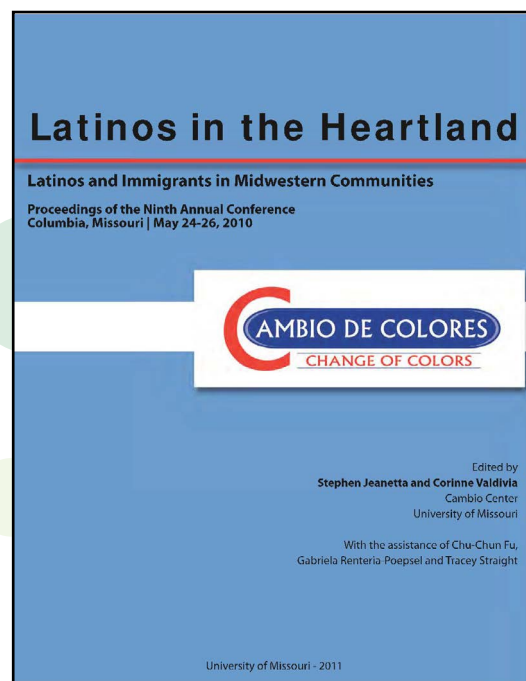


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Human, Social, and Cultural Capitals among Latino Gardeners in Denison and Marshalltown, Iowa

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- Sorkin, D.H., Pham, E., & Ngo-Metzger, Q. (2009). Racial and ethnic differences in the mental health needs and access to care of older adults in California. *Journal of the American Geriatric Society*, 57(12), 2311-2317.
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► Human, Social, and Cultural Capitals among Latino Gardeners in Denison and Marshalltown, Iowa

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Abstract

This paper explores different community capitals among Latinos participating in community gardens and farmer starter programs in Denison and Marshalltown, Iowa. Using the community capital framework, this study describes what makes it possible for Latinos to become gardeners in two rural Iowa communities and the circumstances that facilitate the process. For the methodology of this study, four in-depth interviews were carried out in Denison and four in Marshalltown, with Latino gardeners who have different backgrounds and purposes for their participation in farming. In addition, participatory observation at people's homes and garden plots was used to understand the programs. This research analyzes how human, social, and cultural capitals are essential elements for Latino gardeners and how the interaction between this three capitals build the structure for their motivation to become farmers, be civically engaged, and have access to food. This study also describes how the participants have previous knowledge related to agriculture, fresh food and local marketing, which is a result of not only their original countries, but also as a consequence of their migration patterns among rural communities in the US. This study concludes with some recommendations for Latino gardener programs and initiatives.

Introduction

From 1990 to 2000 the Latino population in the U.S. grew 57.9%, and in 2001 Latinos were 12.5% of the total population in the country (Guzmán, 2001; Díaz & Guzmán, 2002). The growth was even more rapid in the Midwest (Díaz & Guzmán, 2002), particularly in rural towns with meat packing plants like Denison and Marshalltown, Iowa. Labor markets and local enterprises in both towns were affected by the new immigrants.

Beginning in 2005, Latinos in those two towns participate in farming and gardening programs organized by Iowa State University Extension, the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, Iowa Valley Community College in Marshalltown (MCC), National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT), National Immigrant Farming Initiative (NIFI), and M and M Resource Conservation and Development Council in Carroll and the Prairie Rivers of Iowa RC&D Marshalltown.

Latino gardeners and beginning farmers in these programs opened new opportunities of social, economic, and cultural integration in local agriculture and local food systems. In Marshalltown, two Latino gardeners and farmers were chosen from "COMIDA"¹ and its related course, Start Your Own Diversified Farm² at Iowa Valley Community College in Marshalltown, and two from the Community Gardens at the same college. In Denison, four respondents were chosen from Latino gardeners participating in the Denison Community Gardens.

I used the Community Capitals Framework (CCF) to identify elements that facilitate Latino/a involvement in these enterprises, the challenges, and the implications that these farming and gardening initiatives have within the Latino community and the larger community. The CCF includes seven types of

capital: natural, cultural, human, social, political, financial, and built (Flora and Flora 2008). By examining their interactions, we can understand which are more important and critical in the experience of Latino gardeners and beginning farmers in these two rural communities of Iowa. This framework provides tools for the creation of social inclusion that can make rural communities more socially just, and economically and environmentally sustainable.

Research Methods

I choose eight Latino/a immigrants gardeners and beginning farmers that participated in two different community gardens and in small-scale incubator plots in Denison and Marshalltown. I used purposive sampling to ensure different backgrounds in gardening and farming, different nationalities (Mexico, El Salvador, and Guatemala), different ages (from 32 to 57 years), and male and female gardeners.

In addition, I had informal conversations with many garden participants during 2008 and 2009, and in the fall of 2009 I carried out the eight in-depth interviews with six gardeners and two beginning farmers. I participated as organizer and interpreter (English to Spanish) in three classes organized for gardeners in the ISU Extension Office in Denison and in three meetings with the gardeners in their plots. I participated in the course Start Your Own Diversified Farm as a student and as organizer. Moreover, I had the opportunity to visit three of the four case study gardeners in their homes. My case studies include six community gardeners (Denison and Marshalltown) and two beginning farmers that had been gardeners in the past.³

Findings and Discussion

Human, social, and cultural capitals were mentioned by all of the participants in this study as the most important elements of their farming and gardening enterprises in these two rural towns of Iowa (See Table 1). Their agricultural knowledge and background, the cultural meanings that gardens have, and the importance of sharing both food and experience were mentioned by all the interviewees as the main motives of their participation in growing vegetables, fruits, legumes, and herbs in their gardens.

Human, social, and cultural capitals have a great role in gardening and farming among Latino/a gardeners and beginning farmers, and those capitals can mobilize, transform, and reinforce the rest of the community capitals.

In analyzing the interviews, I found that *natural, political, built and financial capitals* were not mentioned by the respondents as critical elements in their gardening experience.

Table 1. Number of times respondents mentioned each of the community capitals during the interviews.

Gardeners	Human Capital	Social Capital	Cultural Capital	Natural Capital	Built Capital	Financial Capital	Political Capital
Oscar	5	3	4	4	3	2	1
Guillermo	10	8	2	3	1	1	1
Pablo	8	9	3	2	1	1	0
Martin	5	4	4	2	4	3	1
Lucia	10	5	3	0	1	2	0

¹ County of Marshall Investing in Diversified Agriculture

² In Spanish: “Comience su propia granja diversa”

³ Although the interviews were individual, sometimes I included husbands or wives as they were part of the team that participated in the same plot. The information from their partners was registered with field notes and informal conversations with them. In addition, for all of the participants I use pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of the individuals interviewed.

Gardeners	Human Capital	Social Capital	Cultural Capital	Natural Capital	Built Capital	Financial Capital	Political Capital
Ricardo	6	11	4	1	2	1	0
Juan	4	7	4	0	0	2	0
Raul	10	6	2	3	1	1	0
TOTAL	58	53	26	15	13	13	3

Human capital: Agricultural Knowledge and Skills. In relation to the hypotheses, my findings about human capital confirm that Latino/a gardeners and beginning farmers have an agricultural background (initial human capital) acquired from both their home countries and the U.S. The specific knowledge about gardening and horticulture was mostly obtained from previous gardening experiences in the U.S., particularly in Iowa and/or from other gardeners.

Gardening and farming among Latinos serve to transmit agricultural and food knowledge (increase human capital) to new generations, relatives, friends, and other gardeners (both Anglos and Latinos). Based on the experience of these Latino/a gardeners and farmers, human capital and its strength can mobilize financial, natural, built, cultural, and social capitals.

Gardening, Farming and Building Social Capital. The results of this study confirm that social capital is one of the most important community capitals among Latino/a gardeners and beginning farmers and this capital can mobilize other capitals. Social relationships can represent either a positive or negative aspect in their gardening and farming experiences in Iowa and in their access to other community capitals. However, social relationships among Latino/a gardeners with the rest of the community not only motivate them to participate in gardening and farming programs, but also provide new opportunities for social integration and inclusion through sharing food and agricultural experiences. Although much of the literature about community gardens and participation of immigrants focus on social and historical processes, cultural traditions and adaptations by immigrant groups, the meaning of gardens, cultural expression, manifestations of urban activism, social capital, and planning (Lawson, 2005; Glover, 2004; Aponte-Pares, 1996; Kransy & Saldivar, 2004; Ogawa, 2009; Hou et.al., 2009), these studies do not explore the potential that sharing the produce and the experience can have in the social interaction between Latino immigrants and long-term residents. This study shows how gardening and fresh food can create bridging social capital to overcome the cultural barriers and establish rich relationships and cultural exchange between different ethnic groups.

Cultural Meanings. Among Latino/a gardeners and beginning farmers, cultural capital has an invisible role and is embodied in their motivations rooted in their “agri-cultural” background. Among these gardeners cultural capital includes the meaning rooted in farming culture, sharing, the revalidation of life in the countryside, food identity, and the use of public spaces. Gardens are more than recreational places or even more than the produce they generate; they are “*un pedacito del campo*” — a little piece of the countryside. Because farming and eating fresh food is an essential part of the Latino immigrant culture, the fact that they can have this experience in these rural towns enriches other capitals and consequently the whole society.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Human, social, and cultural capitals are the capitals that most benefit Latino/a gardeners and beginning farmers in Iowa. Human and cultural capital would appear to enhance social capital. All three capitals facilitate access to other capitals. Although Latino immigrants bring experience in diversified agriculture and an appreciation of local, fresh food, they need assistance focused on practices of horticultural and

agricultural production that are specific to the geographical and geological context of the region in which they currently live. Strengthening of human capital through the use of appropriate educational tools for this population can considerably improve their gardening success, because in this country they find many natural, economic, and cultural challenges that need to be solved with new knowledge and new skills. The focus on giving away rather than selling the produce by the Latinos is in sharp contrast to the focus on selling and profit of those offering the training. The validity of sharing as an end in itself must be recognized by the Anglo institutions organizing the courses. Spaces provided for learning and gardening allow the transmission of advice and support for healthier agricultural practices, appreciation of fresh and organic products and practices, and channels to access natural capital and high-quality agricultural inputs such as natural fertilizers or pesticides. Human capital, enhanced by education, can facilitate access to financial opportunities such as selling and marketing their produce. However, for all except one of the eight cases, financial gain was not a major motivator for increasing their gardening skills. Enterprises need to be based on the cultural meanings that gardening and farming have for the Latino community.

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► Poverty and Health of Children from Racial/Ethnic Minority and Immigrant Families in the Midwest

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Abstract

Using data from the 2007–2009 Annual Social and Economic (ASEC) supplement of the Current Population Surveys (CPS), this study explores the relationship between poverty and health of children from various racial/ethnic minority and immigrant families in the Midwest. Findings show that:

(1) Racial/ethnic minority children experience poorer health than non-Hispanic White children; (2) Increased poverty among children predicts poorer children's health; (3) Immigrant children have poorer health than natives; and (4) Second-generation immigrant children have poorer health than first and third-generation immigrant children. This study demonstrates the health disadvantages of Mid-western children from racial/ethnic minority families faced by poverty. The gap in children's health between non-Hispanic White and minority children persists even after accounting for the effects of immigrant status, poverty, family structure, parental education, health insurance coverage, and metropolitan/nonmetropolitan residence. Improving the economic well-being of all racial/ethnic and immigrant families would improve children's health.