

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

By KATE STALEY

Innovative resources meet the needs of an increasingly multicultural society

Pennsylvania is in the midst of a sweeping demographic transformation. In just 10 years, the Latino population has grown 70 percent, while the Asian population grew by 60 percent. In 2000, the number of foreign-born Pennsylvanians increased by nearly 40 percent from a decade before. And in just five years (between 1997 and 2002), the number of Latino-owned and operated farms in Pennsylvania grew by nearly 30 percent.

These rapid changes mirror similar transformations happening throughout the United States.

Penn State is taking a lead role in Pennsylvania

in responding to this demographic revolution. In efforts statewide, the University is offering programs and activities that aim to increase multicultural understanding, build bridges between cultures and act proactively to anticipate future needs of a changing Pennsylvania.

Creating a Support Network

A recently formed University-wide planning committee appointed by Associate Vice President for Outreach and Cooperative Extension Director Dr. Daney Jackson is responsible for some of these efforts.



On the Web

College of Agricultural Sciences' International Programs

www.cas.psu.edu/international

The Latino Agricultural Resource Center

www.cas.psu.edu/docs/international/LARC/LARC.html

Dairy Alliance

www.dairyalliance.org

The Center for Intercultural Leadership and Communication

www.abington.psu.edu/psasite/cs/cilc.htm

The first major initiative to come from the committee was a workshop for Penn State Cooperative Extension educators so they “could better understand how their local communities are changing, more appropriately respond to their new multiculturalism and aid them in creating more effective programs for working with these groups,” said committee member and College of Agricultural Sciences Director of International Programs Deanna Behring.

Another goal of the workshop, titled *Extension Reaching Out to Multicultural Communities: At Home and Abroad*, was to serve as a forum for educators to “share stories and individual experiences from within their local communities” in order to create a support network for dealing with the different cultural values and practices they are encountering, said Behring. The workshop was offered four times this past spring in different parts of the state.

Dr. Patreese Ingram, associate professor of agricultural and extension education, led a workshop session on cultural competency—a crucial quality for extension educators. “Working effectively with people from different cultures involves more than just dealing with language differences,” she said. “For instance, understanding that family is very important in Latino culture might mean creating whole family programming instead of separate events for children and for parents.”

Other topics at the workshop included immigration law, global trade, international travel, culture and family. The curriculum, which was a modification of a similar project at Purdue University, was the first comprehensive statewide training on the issue offered anywhere in the United States.

International Extension Program Leader Michael

McGirr, from the USDA's Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service, said about the training: “[It was] an example of the leadership role the University is playing, not only in Pennsylvania, but throughout the nation, by developing innovative, replicable approaches to meeting the needs of a multicultural society.”

Regional Cooperative Extension directors are planning to offer—annually—similar workshops to help educators maintain focus on diversity issues.

Bridging Cultures

With the merging of languages and cultures, job and workplace training for immigrants is a major issue. As on the national level, many immigrants in Pennsylvania are working at jobs that many United States-born residents don't want. This includes jobs in the food service and hotel industries and even the dairy industry—a big moneymaker in Pennsylvania, generating \$1.5 billion in state income annually.

The dairy industry is hurting for workers, and as a result it is hiring large numbers of immigrants.

Penn State's Dairy Alliance, an initiative of Cooperative Extension, has responded to a large influx of Spanish-speaking workers with new training sessions in technical and workplace skills, all in Spanish. “The trainings have been a powerful experience,” said Richard Stup, associate director of the alliance. “Dairy employers from all over the state have sent their workers to them, and posttraining evaluations were extremely positive.”

The training sessions were conducted in collaboration with the new Latino Agricultural Resource Center in the College of Agricultural Sciences, another effort to bridge the cultures of North Americans and Latin Americans. The center translates documents into Spanish; facilitates training and other interactions for faculty and extension educators; and develops strategic partnerships with Latin American organizations.

The center “can help manage communication between our two cultures, because there's more than a language difference,” said center coordinator Isabel Hanson. “People need to understand the background and cultural nuances that facilitate the development of real, working relationships.”

That's the catalyst for a new resource at Penn State Abington, where 40 percent of students are minorities and 30 percent of students speak two or three languages.

Penn State Abington's Center for Intercultural

Leadership and Communication, established by Associate Professor of Speech Communication Dr. Carla Chamberlin-Quinlisk, aims to improve communication and leadership skills for individuals preparing to work in multicultural and multilingual communities. The center offers ESL courses to nonnative speakers in the community in order to help them get jobs, in addition to offering resources and consulting services for managing diversity within the classroom and on campus. “The center seeks to promote multilingualism as a positive, instead of making it a problem,” said Chamberlin-Quinlisk.

A Look Ahead

As the face of Pennsylvania continues to change, outreach will change along with it. The Office of International Programs is creating a dataset about shifting demographics across the state, with a specific focus on agricultural arenas. The dataset will be used to identify and coordinate priority needs for outreach; build a library of available resources on multicultural issues for shared use; and identify smaller state-based groups and organizations with international ties that can help Cooperative Extension be more strategic, effective and coordinated in its outreach.

“We need to understand the complete big picture of what’s happening around the state,” said Behring. “The changes are out there; we just need to pull all the information together—from extension educators, farmers, multicultural organizations and agricultural-related businesses—so that once we have the data we can better decide how to use available resources and leverage them to get them where they are most needed.”



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Migrant Farmworkers and Health Services

There’s a bitter irony to many of the foods we enjoy each day. Farmworkers with little or no health insurance are busy harvesting the fruits and vegetables that are an essential part of a healthy diet. The Pennsylvania Office of Rural Health, housed at Penn State University Park, is working to change that with Migrant and Immigrant Health in Rural Pennsylvania: Blending Cultures for a Healthy Community—a two-day conference held annually each spring for agricultural producers, advocates, educators and policy-makers who work or interact with migrant and immigrant farmworkers.

“The migrant communities are often very isolated and hidden from mainstream services,” said Laurie Sicko, Penn State Cooperative Extension educator in Chester County. “People don’t realize what’s in their backyards or how they can help.”

The migrant and immigrant health conference is the only such event in the state that brings together the health care and agricultural production communities to address the medical, behavioral, housing, legal and occupational needs of this population, according to Lisa A. Davis, director of the Pennsylvania Office of Rural Health.

Now approaching its sixth year, the conference provides important information on worker protection standards, health care issues and effective outreach, education and advocacy programs for the migrant and immigrant population—currently estimated at 1.6 million.

—Karen Wing



Courtesy of the Latino Agricultural Resource Center