

Heifer Project International Project Partner Meeting Nuestras Raices, Holyoke, Massachusetts

20-22 March 2009

Heifer Project International

- Heifer's focus is changing from food security to food sovereignty, more on advocacy
 - rights to access food, land, water, seeds (means of production)
 - to distribute produce
 - rights to self-determination
 - right to choose what kind of food to consume and whom to buy from
- Michelle Obama broke ground today on an organic garden at the White House with school kids
- ? WIC coupons & EBT at farm markets – double value – can we do that here?

Some history of Holyoke

- started by Boston industrialists when they noticed the drop in the Connecticut River that could be used to generate power and built a dam
- textile then paper mills flourished until business moved overseas in the mid-20th century
- around the same time, 1940's and 1950's, Puerto Ricans came to the area to work in the shade tobacco fields along the Connecticut River
- has the highest percentage of Puerto Ricans of any city in the US at 40%
- 6th poorest city currently in terms of unemployment and poverty rate
- Large population of Irish immigrants – the whole city was decked out for the St. Patrick's Day Parade while we were there!
- Other immigrant groups include Russian and Chinese

Nuestras Raices – Board of Directors

- Board is aware of all programs, good communication with projects
- Diverse board – skills, backgrounds
- Leadership training emphasized strongly
- Everyone has a voice and needs training
- Don't be afraid to grow
- Board members know each other
- Take time for personal sharing before meetings, esp. if something important is going on
- Garden coordinators and farm leaders elected by garden families, they liaison w/NR and NR provides leadership training
- Contractors pay their own taxes, staff members work for NR
 - stipends are tricky and auditors don't like them
 - Stipends can be paid for training
- Process in place for conflict resolution from Garden Coordinators to NR staff/board

- Board gets training in presentations, communicating w/leaders (mayor), action planning, grant writing, etc.
- Leadership Training is modified for this community
- 12 sessions that cover values, communication, listening, politics, policy change, parenting, action plans, power, empowerment, community resources
- Garden coordinators take lead. Training and meet w/NR at least once a month during growing season
- Green Jobs training program – solar hot water installation, jobs waiting for students
- Women’s group started by Hilda w/school girls
- Women mentored for a while
- Now girls after school, women work on other issues (business, English)
- High youth retention rate – sense of belonging, respect, address real immediate needs – tutoring, mentoring, listening, jobs, speakers on issues
- Straight Talk – teaches conflict resolution using positive feedback combined with asking for change, helping kids set goals for change
- Business training classes with farmers
- Policy coalition
- Farmer training and social/political training must be integrated
- Intergenerational – integrated in larger community
- Integrate informal training and empowerment w/youth, etc., every day
- Analogy of geese – trade leadership in V formation and take care of each other
- Community like family
- Find each person’s comfort level
- Create additional jobs

Partnerships

- consider needs and motives of possible partners
- ask questions
- get it in writing
- stay focused on mission
- be clear in communicating w/everyone
- work w/board of directors before committing
- clear roles in partnerships
- maintain internal harmony/systems
- avoid ego and turf battles to work together
- know when to say no
- look for unlikely partners

Leadership training

- be aware of gender dynamics
- be ready for change
- always keep learning all aspects of the organization
- when programs are a success sometimes funding is lost
- educate yourself about the people you work with

- use free community resources
- keep social events going, coffee, food, speakers, discussion
- create personal relationships with people
- learn who people are, help people learn who they are
- offer schools help w/out asking a lot from them
- ⇒ work w/food shelf, feed stores, farm markets, community suppers, churches, other groups, Vershare camp, Wellspring, Chelsea Health Ctr., and other health centers, local stores, LACE
- ⇒ recruit interns at local college presentations
- ⇒ use food to connect NCFN to other groups, connect farmers and consumers
- ⇒ MCFM not just for farmers, help farmers see themselves as the cultural foundation
- ⇒ Reach out to ethnic communities
- ⇒ Focus on the Network as a resource center for organizations, education, mentors
- ⇒
 - Working with youth – respect and listen to them – they know how they feel and what they want, let them make decisions
 - After school programs to apprenticeships
 - Farm markets can hire youth
 - Make jobs for youth
 - *People Empowering People* created for U Conn Coop. Ext. – leadership training
 - Sponsors – businesses, banks
 - Negotiate w/groups, partners
 - Common theme – where do you come from?
 - Find leaders in each group, community
- ⇒ Change membership form to include options for committees, volunteering, resources, etc. boxes to check

NR members

- all participants in all programs including the parents of the youth
- annual member meeting
- 2 year board terms
- Interview candidates for the Board throughout the year
- Board recruits before annual meeting
- Provide food at Board meetings
- Board members bring someone to meeting
- Committee interviews candidates
- Recruit board from membership, offer training
- Board orientation – mission, bylaws, organization by pres, vp or director
- ⇒ Need new NCFN member orientation
- Board retreats by consultants – annual or 2/year
- Retrain regularly – keep up on recent changes in laws, ordinances, needs, etc.
- Use what you learn – 1st item on next agenda is follow up
- Creative meetings

- Repetition at meetings – keep putting out the messages, using the skills, building projects
 - Keep meetings simple, short when possible
 - Conference call meetings sometimes work
 - People get involved in various ways besides farming – office work, art, etc.
 - Use the media to communicate over large areas
 - All gardens have their own parties
 - Start training people as soon as they get involved
 - Include training in each staff or board meeting or member meeting (even 15 minutes)
- ⇒ Assign or invite committee chairs & reps to present at meetings and to other groups
- Use worksheets in meetings and electronically
 - Make the process into a product – NR, NCFN, VCEA

Nuestras Raices Economic Development:

- encouraging foot traffic again on Main St. where many shops are now vacant in a previously thriving neighborhood
- Dean Technical School's culinary teacher partners with NR to teach students to use and appreciate local and fresh foods through a federal program called School to Work or School to Career
- Stimulus money may be available for Workforce Investment Act
- Coral reef growing business is thriving – goal is to use all renewable energy and go off the grid to pay youth workers with the money saved not paying for electricity and heat
- La Plaza restaurant serves (delicious!) Puerto Rican food
- Bakery soon to open
- Nancy's Tropical Ice Cream - Tropical fruit flavored all natural ice cream business soon to open
- Green jobs training for youth in solar hot water installation, etc.
- The enterprises NR incubates create more jobs than just for the owners

Suggested reading for leadership and community building:

- *A New Weave of Power, People and Politics: The Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation* by Lisa Veneklasen
- *Technology of Participation (ToP)* by the Institute of Cultural Affairs to the USA, www.ica-usa.org
- *People Empowering People* created for the University of Connecticut Cooperative Extension

Spanish words:

- Nuestras Raices – Our Roots (both as in roots of plants and ancestral traditions)
- La Finqua – The Farm
- La Finquita – The little farm or garden
- El Mercado – The Marketplace

- Perfectamente – perfectly
- Casita – little house, toolshed
- Le noche – night
- Phases de la luna – phases of the moon
- Listos – ready
- Una persona – anybody, a person
- L’agua – water
- Insalata – salad
- Caliente – hot
- Mujeres – women
- Manana – tomorrow
- Rapido – quickly
- Urbano e rural – urban and rural

Mohawk for “hello” is “sago”

Other projects:

Added Value – taking over Governor’s Island off the coast of Manhattan!

Brooklyn Rescue Mission – farm market in the city

City Farms Project – many projects in Brooklyn including Just Food and City Chickens

City Seeds – gave away 150 packets of seeds; encouraging people to save seeds, helping with new farmer start-ups with seeds saved by City Seeds; preserving regional and organic seeds

Cornell Small Farms Program – Cooperative Extension service supporting many farmers

Dig It! – training kids to become Assistant Leaders, then Crew Leaders over the summer, then they go back to school and teach other kids

East NY Farms! – over 100 applicants for youth programs; farm markets, community gardens with Brooklyn and upstate NY farmers

F.R.E.S.H. – Mobile Market in New London, CT bringing fresh vegetables into city neighborhoods, working on a pre-pay program like CSA

Farmers of The World -

Flats Mentor Farm Project – immigrant farmers, especially Mung, farming 30 acres of vegetables with 10 commercial farmers in 40 farm markets this year; offering mentoring, infrastructure

Heifer International – our hosts and great supporters of agriculture worldwide!

Independent Consultant – Hilda Colon of Nuestras Raices who started as the Office Manager and worked her way up through the growing organization until she started her own consulting business

Kanenhi:io Ionkwaienthonhakie – Mohawk community on both sides of “the imaginary line between Canada and the US” that tends 147 acres owned by the Akwesasne Free School and provides fresh food for school lunches; helps with infrastructure for family farms like fencing; Intensive Preventative Project for youth; local group home garden plot

National Immigrant Farming Initiative -

New American Sustainable Agriculture Project – folks in Maine from many different countries bridging language gaps and uniting members of warring tribes to work together

on agricultural projects

New Farmer Development Project -

North Country Farming Network – farmers in 6 rural Vermont counties sharing equipment, passing on livestock, attending training and working together to preserve the Vermont’s agricultural traditions and grow support for small farmers

Northeast Pastured Poultry Assn. -

Northern NY Farmer Partnership -

Nuestras Raices – our hosts and a powerful community organization in Holyoke, Mass. built around city gardens and a farm on the outskirts of town

Pittsburgh Project – these folks have had a baseball field donated to their agricultural project and enjoy partnership with the local Health Dept. to provide cooking demos on how to use fresh local food, working to improve nutrition

Small and Beginner Farmers of NH – theoretically every county in NH has a project, but some are more developed than others; partnering with a prison to have farmers cut the fields for hay; partnering with local ag. museum to connect the past & present of farming