



Oregon Mid-Valley

Creciendo en Salud Initiative

Summary

Creciendo en Salud’s goal is to narrow disparities by improving access to affordable, healthy foods for low-income families, including the migrant and seasonal farm workers who sustain the thriving agricultural base of Oregon’s Willamette Valley.

“We’re sitting right here in farmland, but so many people don’t have access to the locally grown, healthy produce,”

says project director Tatiana Dierwechter.

Contact:

Rocio Muñoz
Benton County Health Department
PO Box 579
Corvallis OR, 97339
(541) 766-6362
Rocio.munoz@co.benton.or.us

Challenge

While Latinos represent the largest minority group in Oregon, there have simultaneously been significantly lower levels of participation among low-income and Latino residents in local government processes as compared to other groups in the project area, Linn and Benton Counties. Existing pockets of high poverty within the project area have traditionally lacked civic engagement and community empowerment. Finding partners motivated and capable of enacting change has been a major challenge.



Due to a 50% increase in Latino population in Benton County and a 102% increase in Linn County during the last 10 years, it has become very important that Latino families participate in the local food system, with the potential to impact food insecurity and chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart disease, which are often related to poor diet.

The Creciendo en Salud project collaborated closely with the Oregon Food Bank and Western Oregon University to conduct community-based participatory research and assess the most effective strategies to overcome identified language and cultural barriers. Such barriers discourage or prevent immigrant Latino families from participating in their local food systems. Ultimately, the assessment paved the way for Latino immigrant families to become involved in community gardens, small scale organic farming, the farmer’s market, food preservation, and other aspects of the local food system.

Quick Facts

-25.8% of Latinos in Oregon are food insecure (Edwards, 2007), almost twice the state average.

-Latinos are more likely than Whites to live in communities that meet the definition of “food deserts” with limited or no access to healthy, affordable food (OSU Extension, Las Comidas Latinas Nutrition Assessment, 2007-2009).



Solutions

Access at the Farmer's Market

Collaborating with the Corvallis-Albany Farmers Market Association, the initiative focused on increasing access to low-income Latino families. A first step involved ensuring signage and advertising at the Market were displayed in both English and Spanish, including information on SNAP and WIC programs. In addition, during the summer of 2013, more than 60 Latino families were provided a Spanish guided tour of the market, including samples of local products, and the chance to learn about fresh, healthy, organic, and in-season products. For many of these families, it was their first time to the market and some mentioned that the variety of foods and outdoor atmosphere reminded them of open-air markets in Central and South America.

Sowing Seeds for better nutrition and increasing access

Creating a community garden was accomplished with the leadership of the women of *Organización de Latinas Unidas*, a grassroots non-profit organization. With the support of Creciendo en Salud, this group of women took the initiative to start planting fruits and vegetables where fresh produce can be harvested year-round.

Community Outreach and Engagement

Recognizing the importance of engaging residents, the partnership focused much of its efforts on capacity building and community mobilization. The partnership collaborated with many community organizations and residents to build trust and increase involvement among residents, particularly vulnerable populations, in policy development, advocacy, and community change. Residents were given the opportunity to attend workshops and trainings, testify before City Council and Commissions, and determine priorities and strategies for the partnership.



Families at the Corvallis Farmer's Market tour, 2012.

"Comer mejor para vivir mejor" or

"Eat better to live better"

-Jovany Velazquez, of Velazquez Organic

Results

Increase lower-income and Latino residents' access to local food. Since 2012, the Creciendo en Salud project hosts the annual Farmer's Market Tours and family engagement and works with the farmer's market to provide culturally appropriate entertainment and environment. The Farmer's Market reported a 19.2% increase in SNAP use from 2011 to 2012, the year the farmer's market tours were implemented.

Increase the capacity of organizations and grass roots community leaders. The That's My Farmer initiative initially conducted by the Benton County Health Department later transitioned the program to Ten Rivers Food Web to ensure sustainability. Additionally, grass roots community leaders took ownership of the Farmers Market tours by guiding their peer local community.



Members of *Organización de Latinas Unidas* learning about gardening

Sustainable Success

As Latino community members become involved in the local food system and help build sustainable food sources, the whole community benefits. Payoffs include sustaining a diversity of food and farms, promoting healthy eating habits, and creating a more welcoming community environment for all. In the future, results could include decreasing rates of food insecurity, and decreasing rates of chronic diseases such as diabetes and hypertension within the Latino community. Finding meaningful ways for community members to be welcomed and involved in such projects ensures their success and continuation far into the future.

