

MAFO: the History

MAFO began in the late 1960's to represent issues facing migrants and the mid-west farmworker organizations that serve them at the national level. The federal government focused their attention primarily on migrant's home states and ignored the mid-west and/or receiver states. As a result, farmworker organizations began grouping together in the mid-west on a regional level.

Today, as a National Partnership of Rural and Farmworker Organizations of Rural and Farmworker Organizations, MAFO's uniqueness has allowed it to marshal its resources and provides a national conference for farmworkers, farmworker organizations and federal and state agencies as a forum in which to coalesce and address issues and policies impacting farmworkers. These issues and policies are not limited to programmatic items, but encompass all issues that affect the lives of farmworkers. Currently, MAFO is the only national organization that has a broad-based participation and its conference emphasis has change to market need and demand. We have become a training vehicle, if you may, to large groups and educating American on the continued plight of not only disadvantage farmworker but also the Rural Latino population.

In the early 1970s; when we first organized ourselves as MAFO in the mid-west, our endeavor created or evolved into the National Association of Farmworker Organization (NAFO). MAFO, itself, took a back sit while this new association addressed the farmworkers needs on a national level. However, MAFO became an integral part of this organization when its board was organized based on geographical coalitional and maintained its structure and cohesiveness as the Midwest Coalition. There were four coalitions; the Midwest, Eastern, Southwest and Western. These coalitions have become an important factor on farmworker issues, along with MAFO; some have evolved and maintained a presence in their region or state. The eastern coalition has evolved into the Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs (AFOP) which has become the association representative of the farmworker jobs skills training programs through out the United States. The western coalition, on the other hand, has evolved in a strong presence in California, as La Cooperativa Campesina de California.

In the 1980, MAFO worked closely with the National Council of La Raza (NCLR) to develop the National Farmworker Center (NFC) as a division of NCLR. As part of this division, NCLR addressed issues of farmworkers, as well as Latinos. In the last five years, MAFO and NCLR partnered together to bring together all the national farmworker groups under another national initiative, the National Farmworker Alliance (NFA), which is not incorporated but its membership include the United Farm Workers of American (UFW), Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC), Farmworker Justice Fund and other national farmworker organizations and groups. MAFO's current chair, Lupe Martinez, serve as chair this national initiative.

The intent of this initiative, the NFA, is simply to bring all national groups or organizations together and work collectively in promoting a national farmworker budget and agenda and supporting individual issues faced by each association.

MAFO biggest strength is the building of partnerships and coalitions that have lasting impact on the community it serves.

The Changing Face of 'Rural' America

' The most dramatic impact of the Latino population on the demography of the nation has taken place over the last few decades. The number of Latinos in the United States more than double between 1980-2000, accounting for 40 percent of the growth in the country' s population during that period' , according to Rogelio Saenz, A&M Professor.

Historically, Hispanics, for the most part, have lived in the rural areas of America, although great importance has been placed in their existence in larger cities. They have worked as farmworkers and followed the harvest season of American farms. Unlike the often cited statistics about the out migration and declining populations in rural areas, the 2000 Census shows that Latinos account for 25 percent of all non-metro population growth. The southern and Midwestern states can account for the most growth in rural areas.

But in closer examination, you will find that these states, for the most part, have always had the demand for farm labor. Agriculture and the demand for labor have contributed to the migration of Latinos to most states, in particular to rural areas, ever since the WWII and the bracero program, which imported labor, from both Mexico and southern states to supplement those who had joined the army. These same rural farm towns developed food processing companies locally to have their product processed for the market. These companies along with the small farm became the center for most rural farming communities. The smaller town thrived as the demand for their products and labor needs were met. The development of ruralplexes, in the rural areas, was established through this process. Processing companies along with agriculture provided subsistence to most rural towns and the labor demands for these two industries were met by the local communities. Families were large to meet the demand of farming. The immigration of people from other agricultural countries augmented the demand for more farmers, even then.

With the aging of rural American and migration to metro areas of educated youth or simply youth looking to the promise of better paying jobs, rural areas were and are being depleted of labor. Latinos, in the past and for many years were transient due to the demand of their labor during the planting, picking and harvest season. They migrated to other states as farmworker. Many stayed in rural towns but eventually moved to metro areas, working in the auto industries in such cities as Chicago and Detroit. Today, Latino migration has affected and transformed the food processing and meat-processing industries. In the past few years, rural areas have witnessed changes in their ethnic demographics and Latinos account for the greatest influx of most groups. Latinos have stayed in the rural towns where they once visited during the summer to work the fields or harvest the crops.

Beyond the dynamic and vibrant cultural traditions that Latinos bring to rural communities, new and growing Latino communities also provide significant opportunities for economic development and rural revitalization. Many have developed businesses and are entering into the operation of small farms. Small to large, rural cities have experienced the growth of Latino businesses. You will find 20-30 small Latino businesses have sprung up in the last 10-15 years in areas where before there were none.

Harvesting the American Dream

A review of history and literature can provide us with an argument that Hispanics have been rural for the most part and have been small scale farmers since the founding of this country. If you look at the history of Texas, New Mexico, Colorado and California, you will find Hispanics were an important factor in ranching, farming and settling of the west. Many Hispanics, who live in this country, like most immigrants, have an agricultural or agrarian background that transcends centuries.

The number of Hispanic farm operators has more than doubled in the past decade, according to the United States Department of Agriculture. Every state has registered an increase.

As in the past agricultural families, the Latino farm operator is a family endeavor, in which relatives work long hours together and pool resources. Although the Latino farm operator account for only 50,600 of total of American agriculture map, the question that seems to ever be present is; Can Latino farm operators play an important role in the strengthening of our declining national agricultural sector and in assisting in the revival of either the traditional smaller family farm or rural life, itself?

While the number of American farms has been declining and there seems to an exodus from farming, the Latino farmers on the other hand are not exiting, but entering the agricultural sector and at a rapid pace.

For the past 20 years, rural policy has been based on a problem-solving approach. Rural advocates, in the past, seem to have worked on various policies which would simply patch up one deficiency or another. Despite policies and allocation of national resources to solve problems, the overall situation in rural American continued to decline, i.e. migration out of rural areas, loss of tax base, lack of economic development, etc.

Rural America is not only known for its agriculture but also for its rural values. Much has been said of rural values, rural people have never set great riches or grand cultural institutions as goals. They have instead aimed for a decent life in exchange for hard work and determination. These values mirror Latino families, in general, as well as the Latino farm operators'.

The question for rural America is sustainability of its current structure and values. It must analyze its approaches and perspectives on the changing character of rural America itself, and view it changing face as an opportunity that we have.

We must promote the value of sustainability – sustainable communities, sustainable economy, sustainable farming, and industries, along with organizations to assist in the promotion of sustaining the very fabric of rural communities. In our case, building and sustaining Latino farm operators that will eventually impact rural communities and most important, its economic base.

Currently, in larger rural towns or cities, Hispanics have already developed an economy base by establishing grocery stores, restaurants, clothing stores, garages and other enterprises. The Latino business plexes are already contributing and playing major roles in the business sector of rural towns and government. Civic participation is pivotal for any business sector to grow. There is a need for us to address the needs of the Latino farm operators and provide them with not only the tools to succeed but also with sufficient training to assure their success, sustainability and their vitality of their farms, which in turn will impact rural America.

Much of the strength of rural American has traditionally come from the broad distribution of ownership – small farms, small retail stores on Main Street, home ownership, small manufacturing plants, and cooperatively owned enterprises. As is evident, Latino businesses are currently thriving and providing, although, a minor impact in the business sector in rural America. Their approach is reflective of Latino style business approach or model. Most businesses start small but began to expand after

establishing themselves firmly. Most of the Latino business growth has been realized in the past 10-15 years. Imagine the impact of the Latino businesses, if more time was provided, inclusive of more resources or capital to market products, provision of training, and support from appropriate business group responsible for business and economic development. How can we capitalize on this element or opportunity?

MAFO's National Strategy and the Conference: Civic Engagement

MAFO is a National Partnership of Rural and Farmworker Organizations that is a broad-based collaborative of many community organizations drawn together to work on creating a welcoming, non-discriminatory environment with respect and opportunity for all. Social capital is defined as human connections that make for healthier people, neighborhoods, communities and society.

We base our strategy on the strengths of our community. All communities, regardless of social, economic and physical conditions has assets and resources that can be mobilized when the individuals are better informed, empowered, and in greater control of their community. Resources that can be more effectively aligned to respond to community-driven priorities and needs. MAFO provides opportunities for Rural Latino communities to become better organized, trained, acquire the necessary skills and develop new leadership and assets to accomplish the work of building capacity and building community through social strength. We champion and seek to increase capacity of individuals, organizations and communities to become more effective in changing the social and physical environment fabric to improve ourselves to be a healthy community. Our activities and work is designed to support activities that promote community directed strategies intended to transform and improve the civic, working and living conditions of rural Latinos, including farmworkers.

A key element is the provision of technical assistance which includes support in training and technical assistance, research, communications and public affairs and policy impact.

Our Training Approach:

The MAFO has used a training module or conference to help keep community leaders invested and involved in civic engagement which impacts our community. We developed the National Farmworker Conference, which has been our organizations' signature event or function since 1989. The conference was developed to address Latino farmworker issues and to provide the country with a venue to discuss those issues not cover by other associations with a particular discipline. As stated before, we began the conference 1989 and at that time, we partnered with the Texas Department of Agriculture and the Department of Housing and Community Affairs. Our first conference was held in Austin, Texas and was a success with about 325 participants.

Our tenure or success with our training conference has span 20 years. We have taken the conference to a national level. Our audiences are practitioners who work closely with and care about Latino farmworkers, which include local, state and federal levels. In our second year of convening the conference, we partnered with the Department of Labor and brought the National Monitor Advocate system into our family. This partnership has spanned almost the entire life of our conference longevity. Our history of partnership to provide the best vehicle and training on rural Latinos and farmworker needs is demonstrated by these long standing partnerships. Our approach for the conference has always been as John McKnight book suggests with an Inside-Out Approach, where we listen to our constituents and formulate the best conference to meet their training and civic engagement needs.

To better serve our constituents and address their needs, MAFO has established a National Planning Council, composed of expert volunteers and practitioners, to plan and develop the conference agenda. As part of this process, MAFO sends out request for proposals throughout the United States soliciting proposals for presentation and consideration. The committee also plays a role of reviewing such proposals submitted and suggests new relevant workshops. Workshop considerations are based on the availability of very limited workshop space.

MAFO FOCUS AREAS

Workforce Solutions

This track provides innovative strategies and best practices that impact Rural Latino and Farmworkers. This track will highlight efforts that target an emerging population and their impact on industries with articulated career paths, corporate partnerships that provide meaningful opportunities, powerful workforce-system partnerships and program models, and strategies that addresses the need of the increasing population of English Limited Learners in today's global community of both the metro and rural areas in America. How best to meet the training needs and well as the demands from industry soft skills requirements.

Community Asset Development

This will focus on homeownership, economic and commercial development and workforce development through education/training strategies. It will also include up-to-date education policy as its affect Rural Latinos and farmworkers and address educational alternative such as charter and alternative schools.

Healthy: Welcoming Communities

Participants will learn how Rural Latinos and Farmworkers encounter several problems such as racial profiling, discrimination, and lack of understanding diversity. This track may also include workshop which address access to health care and health promotion and prevention efforts and program currently available. Also, we consider that provide advocacy methods and strategies on pending legislation, major policies, and minimizes negative outcomes for farmworkers.

Immigration: It's Impact on Rural Communities

This track will present effective program techniques and approaches for addressing a new community; i.e. leadership development, advocacy training, community empowerment, and grassroots organizing. This track will also include discussion on federal policies and their impact on foreign workers and other individuals as the demand for labor continues in the United States. It will include roundtable discussion with federal representative, along with representatives from the Home Land Security Agency.

Education: Issues and Opportunities

With the fast pace growth of our Hispanic population, it is imperative to address and ensure the educational success of our community. MAFO wants to present innovative approaches and effective practices that address potential topics such as 2 – 4 year old model programs, effective educational outreach programs and effective practice that assure college graduation. As MAFO, we are concern on the educational gap evident in our children education.

Minority Farmers & Ranchers

MAFO's intent with this track is to work cooperatively with Hispanic Latino Farmer and Ranchers Association/HOLA, USDA and other Immigrant Farming groups to promote the coalescing of Latino farm operators and develop a venue for increased training opportunities, provide services and meet the training needs of Latino operators, as well as rural Latinos. This Latino Farmers and Ranchers is a growing phenomenon throughout the United States. However, it is important to point out, that attendees to this track encompass Latinos, Blacks, Hmong's and other minorities.

Monitor Advocate Training

Through a partnership with the Department of Labor (DOL), MAFO has provided a special educational and training track for the states Monitor Advocates for the last 18 years. The Monitor

Advocates is a system implemented within the DOL to address the needs of farmworker within Job Service, which was a by product of NAACP vs. Brener. This track is integrated within the conference agenda; Monitor Advocates play an important role in developing the conference agenda, itself, and their own training.

MAFO Desired Outcome: Working Together

Since its inception, MAFO has always emphasized that *WORKING TOGETHER*, collaboratively, we have a tremendous potential for building social capital and aligning our community assets to impact our community's well being. MAFOs' strategy is designed to collect the talents of many from throughout the country and involve grassroots leaders, community members along with the state and federal agencies to community driven solutions for Latino rural communities. MAFOs' strengths is built on those who participate through its learning, the interaction and socialization which motivates us to continue our growth and built community.

What matters: Working Together in National Partnerships addressing issues through core services, training, and approaches and finding lasting solutions to improve lives and build a stronger rural community.