

# Latino Views of Agriculture, Careers and Education: Dispelling the Myths<sup>1</sup>



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## Abstract

Conventional thinking offers and popular media commonly reinforces the notion that Latinos generally dislike working in agriculture, do so because of lack of alternate opportunity and would prefer employment in other sectors. Our survey of 475 Washington Latinos contradicts this and indicates instead that Latinos in north central Washington have a very positive view of agriculture work, perceive opportunity for personal and professional advancement in agriculture and that they will encourage their children to pursue agriculture careers. Also clearly indicated was an appreciation of education for agriculture career attainment and advancement. The Latino population in rural Washington has doubled over the last decade and now comprises the majority of those employed in agriculture. As traditional rural populations eschew agriculture and enrollments in agriculture programs of study decline, Latino agriculturists and their children are a significant pool from which future farmers and professional agriculturists can be cultivated.

## Introduction

The Latino population, across the U.S. is growing rapidly (Rochin, 1997). The Council of Economic Advisors (2000) projects that in approximately 20 years one in six U.S. residents will be Latino and by mid-21st century that will increase to about one in four. Though traditionally concentrated in the Southwest, by 2000, for the first time, half of all non-metro Latinos lived elsewhere in the U.S., increasingly in the mid-west, southeast and northwest. Latinos accounted for over 25 % of all non-metropolitan population growth during the 1990's. In the last decade the Latino population in rural America doubled from 1.5 million to 3.2 million and

now makes up the most rapidly growing segment of non-metropolitan county residents. According to the U.S. census data, between 1990 and 2000, Latino population growth in 149 non-metro counties in the U.S. exceeded 150 % and in 2000 a total of 230 non-metro counties had Latino populations of 10% or more. Thus Latinos constitute the largest and fastest growing minority group in the U.S. and in the rural sector in particular (Kandel and Cromartie, 2004). This dramatic population shift and its implications are being noted and discussed by many interested in rural social dynamics (Allensworth and Rochin, 1998; Thilmany, 2003; Turner and Wood, 1998).

Measuring Latinos as a percentage of total state population, Washington ranks 17th in the nation and 11th in terms of the total number of Latino residents. In Washington's rural north central Chelan, Douglas and Grant Counties (the geographical location of this study) the Latino population grew 168 %, 136%, and 138%, respectively, from 1990 to 2000. In the two subsequent years, between 2000 and 2002, the Latino population in Washington State grew another 10%. Thus for example, one in three residents of Grant County, Washington is now Latino (Maher, 2001; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000). To a large extent this demographic transition in rural Washington and other rural regions of the U.S. is attributed to employment opportunities in the agriculture sector (Allensworth and Rochin, 1998; Kandel and Cromartie, 2004; Rochin, 1995; Rochin, 1997; Thilmany, 2003; Turner and Wood, 1998).

Latinos in agriculture have long been equated with migrant laborers and seasonal farmhands relegated to performing undesirable, menial and low-paying work and who were, as often as not, illegal entrants (Martin, 1978; Portes and Hao, 2004; Rochin, 1995; Whitener, 1982). Many U.S. farm fields

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are worked and crops (particularly horticultural) harvested by Latino laborers (Kandel and Cromartie, 2004; Martinez, 2001; Valle, 1994). Rochin (1997) reported that Latino farm workers have accounted for a large percentage of hired farm labor in Pacific states (72%), the Southern Plains (47%) and mountain states (37%). In western states Latino workers in agriculture predominate (Rochin, 1995; Thilmany, 2003; Turner and Wood, 1998). However, more recently, Latinos are recognized playing an expanded, increasingly critical role in U.S. agriculture and rural communities. Nationally, farms operated by Latinos have increased dramatically. Most are small to mid-sized family-farm operations. From 1987 to 1992 the number of Latino owned farms with sales over \$10,000 increased from 6,000 to 8,000 (Rochin, 1997). The U.S. census indicates that while the total number of U.S. farms declined by 0.7% between 1992 and 1997, farms operated by Latinos increased 32.3% from 20,956 to 27,717 in the same time period and to 61,094 by 2002 (Van Epen, 2004; Martinez, 2001). O'Sullivan (2000) reports that between 1987 and 1997, the number of Latino farmers in the southern region nearly tripled. Likely, these estimates are low because many farms owned and operated by underrepresented populations go uncounted by government surveys (Merrill, 2004).

In Washington, from 1992 to 1996, Latinos operating farms increased from 378 to 625 with about two-thirds of them owning the farms they operated (Martinez, 2001). In Douglas County, Washington the 2002 census indicated 957 farms operated by Latinos for an increase of 4.7% since 1997 (Wheat, 2004). Latino agriculturists in Washington State and elsewhere in the U.S. are putting down the deepest of roots buying the farms where they work (Van Epen, 2004). It seems fair to say that Latinos are changing the face of U.S. agriculture and our rural communities (Rochin, 1995). Indeed Rochin (1997) and others (Kandel and Cromartie, 2004; Merrill, 2004) discuss the notion that Latinos are and will be key to the revitalization of our rural, agriculture sector, countering the exodus of traditional farming populations (and decades of population decline in many states), expanding tax bases, revitalizing schools, infusing cultural diversity and in general invigorating local economies. Kandel and Cromartie (2004) offer that the Latinos in rural communities may in fact, counter the impetus for employers to relocate businesses domestically or internationally.

Despite evidence to the contrary it is likely that, for most, the image of Latinos in agriculture remains that of migrant and seasonal laborers performing menial, undesirable work that others will not do (Cook, 2003; Larke and Barr, 1987; Rochin, 1995). Part and parcel to this perception is the notion that, across the board, Latinos working in agriculture do so because of a lack of alternatives and that they would prefer a life and means of income outside of agriculture. The popular media, seemingly by convention,

regularly proffer and perpetuate this sentiment (Holley, 2002; Gilstrap, 2001). At the same time it is generally perceived that Latinos, in agriculture and elsewhere, are cavalier or noncommittal about education as a means of social and economic advancement (Trevino, 2003). Others contest this perception (Valle, 1994).

Latinos traditionally have been underrepresented in higher education (Morse and Hammer, 1998; Santiago, 2004) and the gap is currently growing (Mathews, 2002). The proportion of Latinos who graduate at the baccalaureate level is half that of European-Americans (Council of Economic Advisors, 2000). Likewise, Latinos are particularly and conspicuously scant in agriculture programs at land grant universities (Jones and Larke, 2001; Litzenberg et al. 1991; Trotter, 1988). For example, Latinos in Washington State University agriculture programs of study, in 1995, constituted 2.02% of total enrollments and only 3.10% nine years later, in 2004 (Office of Institutional Research, 2005). Some contend, across the board, that colleges of agriculture have, thus far, been largely unresponsive to the increasing Latino involvement in agriculture (Flores and Kellogg, 1989; Rochin, 1995). Conversely many have attributed this to a negative perception and general disdain of agriculture by Latinos (Bechtold, 1996; Nichols, 1993; Talbert and Larke, 1992). Others have identified additional potential factors and impediments including financial, language and other preparatory issues, family responsibilities, lack of mentors, bigotry, and perceived lack of professional opportunity (Fisher and Griggs, 1994; Nichols, 1993; Mitchell, 1993; Pew Hispanic Center, 2004; Trotter, 1988; Whent, 1994). Many cite a lack of effort to recruit Latinos and other minorities, by colleges of agriculture, and call for concerted efforts to rectify this deficiency (Byler, 1987; Bowen, et al., 1991; Larke, 1987). While this substantial pool of potential agriculture students and professionals goes largely untapped, college of agriculture enrollments remain stagnant or in decline and demand for agriculture professionals generally exceeds supply (Byler, 1987; Jones and Larke, 2001; Rocca and Washburn, 2005; Whent, 1994). Seemingly, if agriculture, family farming and rural communities are to remain healthy and vital it will be through the efforts and talents of future professionals who embrace and advance agrarian values and way of living. It is imperative that intelligent and motivated persons be recruited to be agriculturists, to study agriculture at land grant institutions and to provide leadership in agriculture and the rural sector (Jones and Larke, 2001). Long-term prospects for U.S. agriculture and our rural communities may very well depend upon our efforts to attract, educate and retain Latino agriculturists in the professional ranks, (Kandel and Cromartie, 2004; Larke and Barr, 1987). Many questions remain regarding Latino's perceptions of and attachment to agriculture, their inclination to pursue agriculture education and professional

agriculturist careers as well as factors that impinge on the aforementioned. Bowen (1987) points out the paucity of research into and subsequent failure to attract minorities in agriculture programs of study and professions. He calls for a concerted effort to generate the knowledge needed to change this course.

Latino populations in central Washington's agricultural regions and communities are growing and Latinos are increasingly owning and operating farms. Simultaneously enrollments in agricultural programs of study are low while demand for agricultural professionals often goes unmet. Latinos seem a likely source from which future agriculturists could and should be nurtured. As such, this study sought to test the notion that Latinos generally hold agriculture work in low regard and would prefer means of making a living other than agricultural. Additionally we sought to assess the disposition of Latinos residing in rural agricultural communities of central Washington State regarding careers in agriculture, the role of education and factors affecting educational pursuit. Therefore, in addition to gathering general demographic information, the specific objectives of this study were to:

1. Determine if Latino residents generally like and value working in agriculture
2. Determine if Latino residents perceive agriculture work as providing personal and professional opportunity
3. Determine if Latino residents would encourage or dissuade their children from pursuing careers in agriculture
4. Ascertain Latino views regarding education relative to agriculture career attainment and advancement
5. Elucidate respondent perceptions of accessibility and impediments to agriculture education programming

**Methods**

In order to test the notion that Latino affinity for agriculture is questionable, a bicultural research team, composed of agriculturists and a social scientist created and applied a 25-question survey instrument. In addition to 12 of the 25 questions directly addressing specific research objectives (Table 1), many elements of the instrument (the remaining 13 questions) were designed to obtain demographic information that is only partially presented here. Demographic questions included residence/work locale history, current residential location and preference, place of birth, duration of U.S. residence, age, gender, education level, income and source of income. Demographic data were used to qualify research participation eligibility (confirmation of being a Latino resident of the three county area).

**Table 1. Twelve specific questions, from a 25- question survey, asked Latino survey participants in Chelan, Grant and Douglas Counties, WA, intended to assess attitudes and perceptions regarding agriculture work, career opportunities in the agriculture sector, the role of education in career attainment and advancement and impediments to pursuing agriculture education.**

1. Why do you work in agriculture? (Please check all that apply).  
it is what I like to do, it is a good job, no other jobs available, friends or relatives work there, it is all I know, pays better than other jobs
2. Would you continue to work in agriculture if it continues to provide for you and your family?  
yes, no
3. Do you believe that education plays an important role in fulfilling your dreams?  
yes, no
4. Would you encourage your kids to work in agriculture?  
yes, no
5. Would you encourage your kids to work in agriculture if they had the appropriate level of education?  
yes, no
6. If you answered yes to the last question, what would the appropriate level of education be?  
short term technical, two year professional, four year degree, other- please specify
7. In what areas of agriculture do you perceive the best opportunities to be?  
farm management, farm ownership, warehouse processing management, agricultural business and services, technical consulting, other- please specify
8. Do you believe you can achieve a better life working in agriculture?  
yes, no
9. Do you believe you could achieve a better life working in agriculture with an appropriate level of education?  
yes, no
10. Do you have access to education in agriculture?  
yes, no  
If you don't, would you like to?  
yes, no
11. If agriculture education programs were accessible, how likely would you or your children be to take the opportunity to participate?  
highly likely, moderately likely, not likely
12. Based on the last question's answer, what major impediments would you face? (please check all that apply) cost, time, family, language, afraid, don't know how

Questions were developed through several iterations by the investigators, in attempt to reduce ambiguity and better assure succinct, uniform acquisition of desired information. The prototype survey was pre-tested with Latino subjects to assess readability, if questions were understandable, and general response time. The finalized survey instrument was prepared on institution letterhead and, included a brief explanation of survey purpose and instructions for completion. The explanation simply stated that the survey was intended to assess how members of the Latino population, in agricultural communities of north central Washington, viewed work and opportunities available to them in agriculture, and how they regarded education affecting these opportunities. The survey also conveyed that the information obtained would be used to help develop educational programming and possibly be reported.

The survey was administered in 2002, by bilingual members of the research team, to Latino persons (N = 475) in the rural central Washington counties of Chelan, Douglas, and Grant (Figure 1). One survey administrator was a principle investigator and two others were student assistants. All three survey administrators were Latino immigrants and speakers of Spanish as a first language. It was not feasible for us to construct a randomized sampling list (subjects randomly selected from all possible participants) for survey administration. As such a quasi-random approach was utilized. Researchers chose and visited locations, such as grocery stores, sporting events, Catholic churches, and various other social gatherings known to be frequented by Latinos during the period between mid-July and August. At these places Latino persons were indiscriminately asked to participate in the research

by completing a survey. Approximately half of those asked agreed to do so.

Churches provided the venue yielding the greatest number of completed surveys (approximately 50%), followed by stores (approximately 25%), and sporting events (20%). Respondents were afforded the option of filling out the survey themselves or having it orally administered. Most respondents (70%) completed the survey independently, on the spot, but the remainder preferred that the researcher administer the survey orally. A small number of respondents took the survey home and

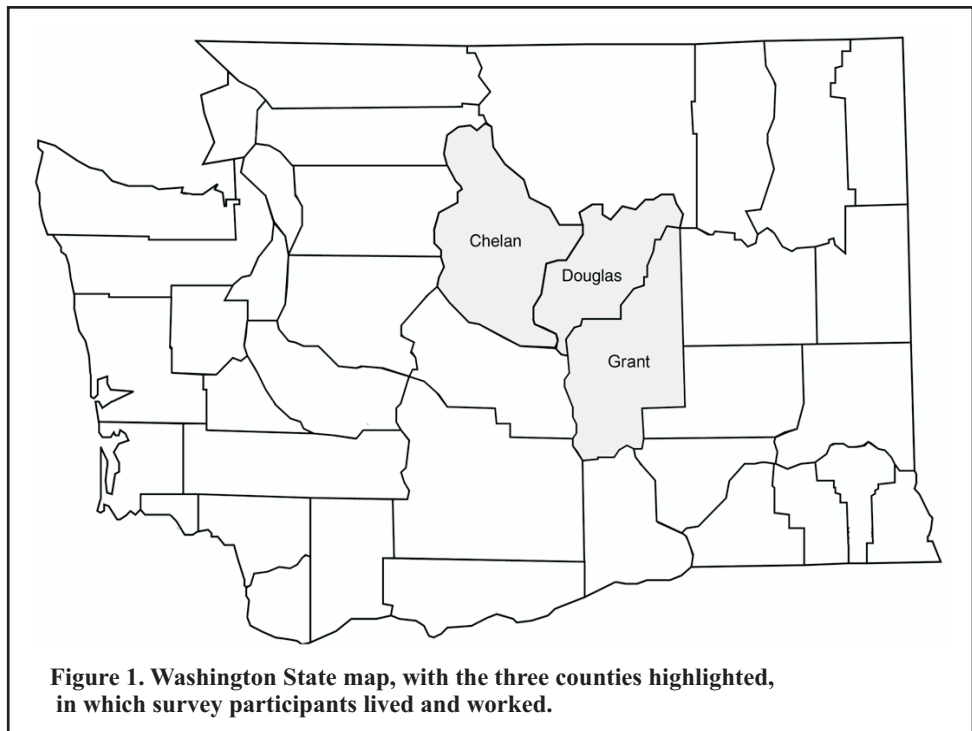


Figure 1. Washington State map, with the three counties highlighted, in which survey participants lived and worked.

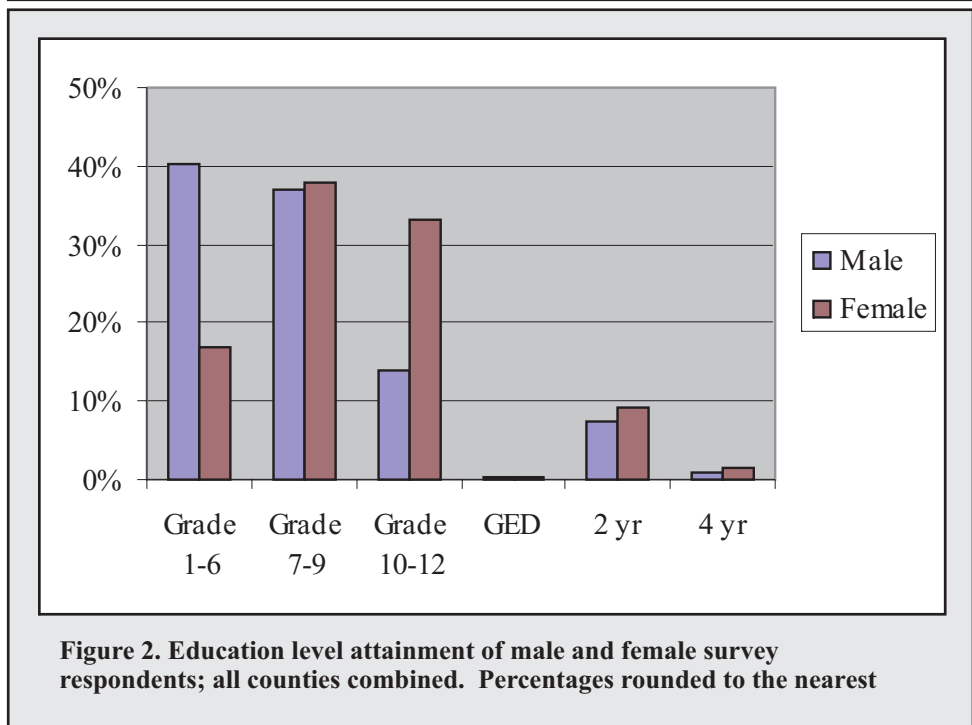


Figure 2. Education level attainment of male and female survey respondents; all counties combined. Percentages rounded to the nearest



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later returned it. Survey administrators attempted to assure no single respondent completed the survey more than once and it is believed that no duplication occurred. The relatively high rate of survey completion is likely attributable to the fact that the survey administrators were themselves Latino immigrants from Mexico and thus able to ease potential respondents and encourage participation. An attempt was made to acquire a near equal number of responses from each county (Chelan, N= 169; Douglas, N= 151 and Grant, N= 155). Surveys were available in either Spanish or English.

## Results and Discussion

The majority of respondents, approximately 85%, indicated they were natives of the Mexican states of Jalisco, Michoacan and Oaxaca and had lived in the U.S. an average of 14.5 years. Most other survey respondents were U.S. born but a few were natives of other Latin countries. Most had previously resided in California (49%), Texas (8%), or Oregon (6%) before moving to Washington. Other states respondents had lived in included Arizona, Colorado Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Michigan, Montana, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, Tennessee, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. Male and female respondents were nearly equal (51% and 49% respectively) and the average respondent age was 34 years. Respondents indicated that 70% were working in agriculture with an average tenure of 11 years. Male respondents (80%) were more likely to work in agriculture than female respondents (60%). Additionally female respondents had a somewhat higher level of educational attainment. Overall respondents indicated that 8% had earned associate degrees and 1% baccalaureate degrees (Figure 2). Mean annual household income of respondents was \$26,167 and mean respondent income from agricultural employment was \$17,497. Curiously, Chelan County respondents had the highest mean yearly household income but lowest mean individual income earned in agricultural employment.

Differences between high and low annual household incomes as well as individual earning from agricultural employment, by county, exceeded \$3,000. The lower individual earnings in Chelan County may be attributable to more being employed in the post-production sector at lower paying jobs but that is

speculation only. In that a majority of respondents (per questionnaire responses) were employed in agriculture and that yearly household incomes were substantially greater than average individual annual income it seems likely that many respondents were members of multiple income families (with two or more family members employed in agriculture) just as are the preponderance of U.S. citizens.

To assess respondents general affinity for agriculture work we asked (only to those who indicated that they were agriculturally employed), "why do you work in agriculture?" and provided the following possible responses; "it is what I like to do, it is a good job, friends and relatives work there, it is all I know how to do, no other jobs available, pays better than other jobs." Respondents could offer multiple answers. Fifty-six percent of respondents indicated, "it is what I like to do" and likewise 56% indicated, "it is a good job" (Figure 3). Seventy-one percent of Chelan County respondents indicated it was what they liked as did 71% of Douglas County respondents indicate it was a good job. However, only 11% of all respondents indicated they worked in agriculture because it "pays better than other jobs." Fewer than 20% responded that there were no other jobs available to them. Clearly these responses do not support the generalization that Latino agriculturists dislike their agriculture work.

Following this line of inquiry and to further elucidate perceptions of north central Washington Latinos we asked two more questions; 1) "Would you continue to work in agriculture if it continues to provide for you and your family?" and 2) "Do you believe you can achieve a better life working in agriculture?" An overwhelming 96% said they would

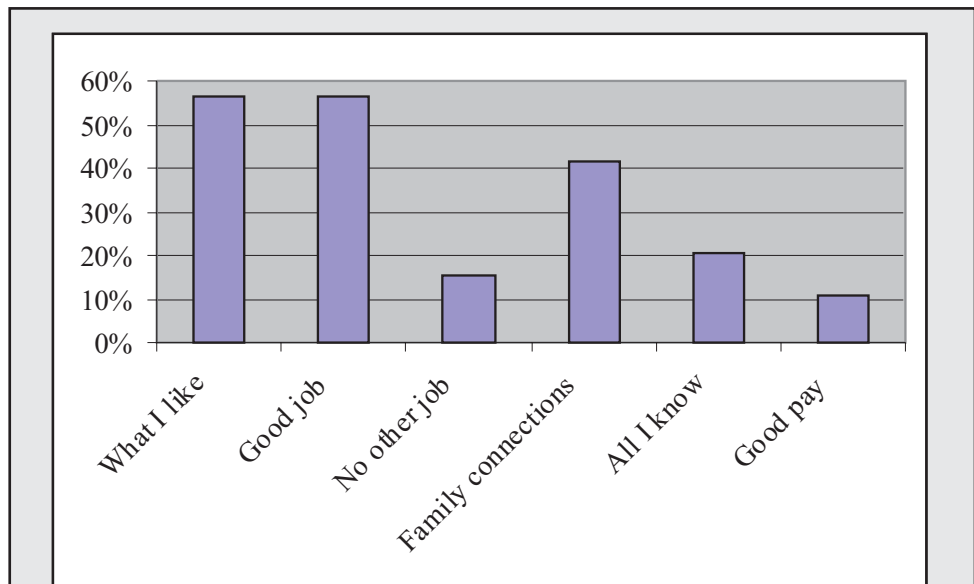


Figure 3. Response rates to the questions "why do you work in agriculture?" by Latino survey respondents who indicated they were employed in the agriculture sector; all counties combined, multiple responses possible. Percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.

continue working in agriculture and a majority, 56%, indicated that they believed they could achieve a better life working in agriculture. The survey then qualified the latter question based on education. When asked, if they could achieve a better life working in agriculture with an appropriate level of education, 88% then responded yes; a 32% increase. Again all responses seem an unequivocal refutation of the perception that Latinos do not like agriculture and would preferentially seek employment in other economic sectors. This response is also a clear indication of the recognition by respondents that education is important for professional/personal actualization (Figure 4).

Likely one of the truest indicators of a person's proclivity or aversion to anything, including a vocation, is the extent to which they might encourage or discourage their children to embrace it. Larke and Jones (2001) found that Latino (and other minority) graduates were more likely to pursue agriculture careers if they were encouraged by people of color to do so or if their father's occupation was agriculture related. Accordingly, the survey asked, "Would you encourage your kids to work in agriculture?" Again, refuting Latino agriculturist's aversion to agriculture occupations, 52% responded affirmatively. As before, the survey then qualified the previous question based on education and asked "Would you encourage your kids to work in agriculture if they had the appropriate level of education?" An overwhelming 92% answered yes (Figure 5). This response may be interpreted as a nearly irrefutable affirmation of rural north central Washington Latino resident's internalization of agrarianism as a lifestyle and means of livelihood.

For those who answered yes, they would encourage their children to pursue agriculture careers with the appropriate education, the survey then asked what the

"appropriate level of education" would be. Most (44%) indicated a baccalaureate level, with 23% indicating an associate level and 20% short term technical. This response may be interpreted as an indication of the recognition that many careers in the agriculture sector require a professional level education typical of a baccalaureate degree program of study. The recognition of associate level and short-term technical programs of study as appropriate levels of education may be attributable to the fact that a regional community college has conducted technical training programs for Latino agriculturists for the last twelve years and has had an associate level

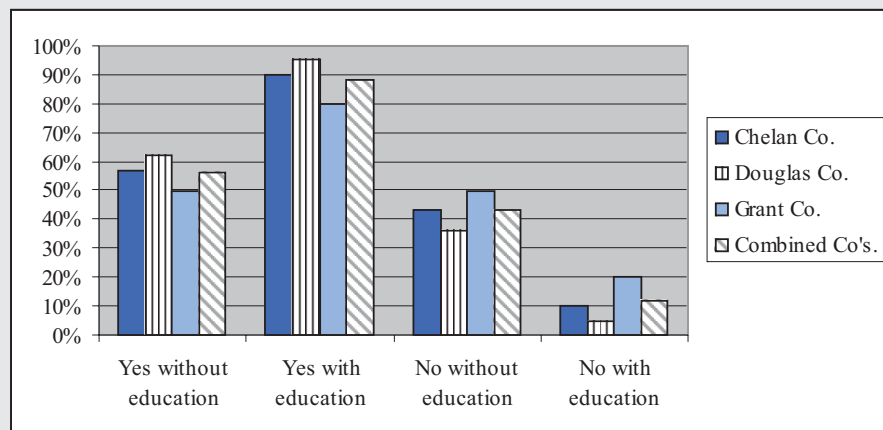


Figure 4. Comparative response rates by county of Latino survey participants to two sequential questions; asking first if they could realize a better life working in agriculture and then if it was possible with the appropriate education. Percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.

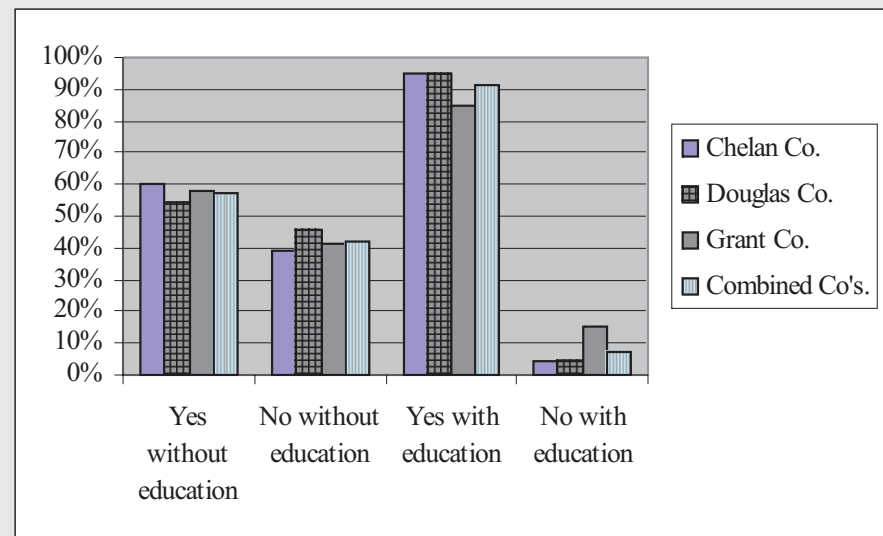


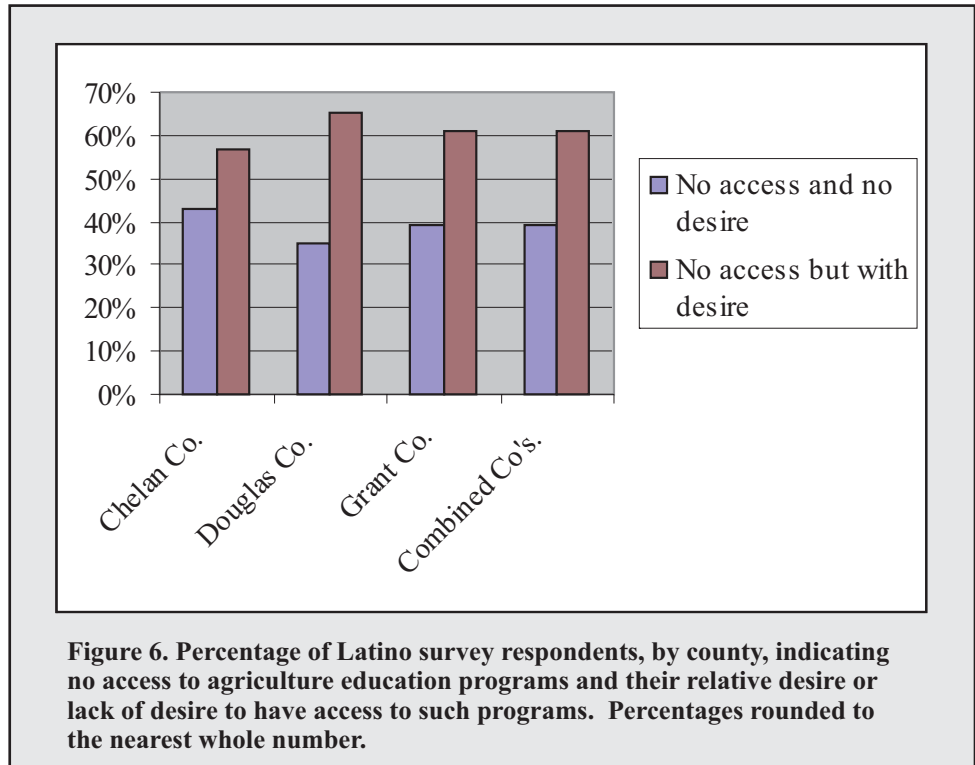
Figure 5. Comparison of rates, by county of Latino survey participants to questions asking if they would encourage their children to work in agriculture and then if they would encourage them to work in agriculture with an appropriate education. Percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.

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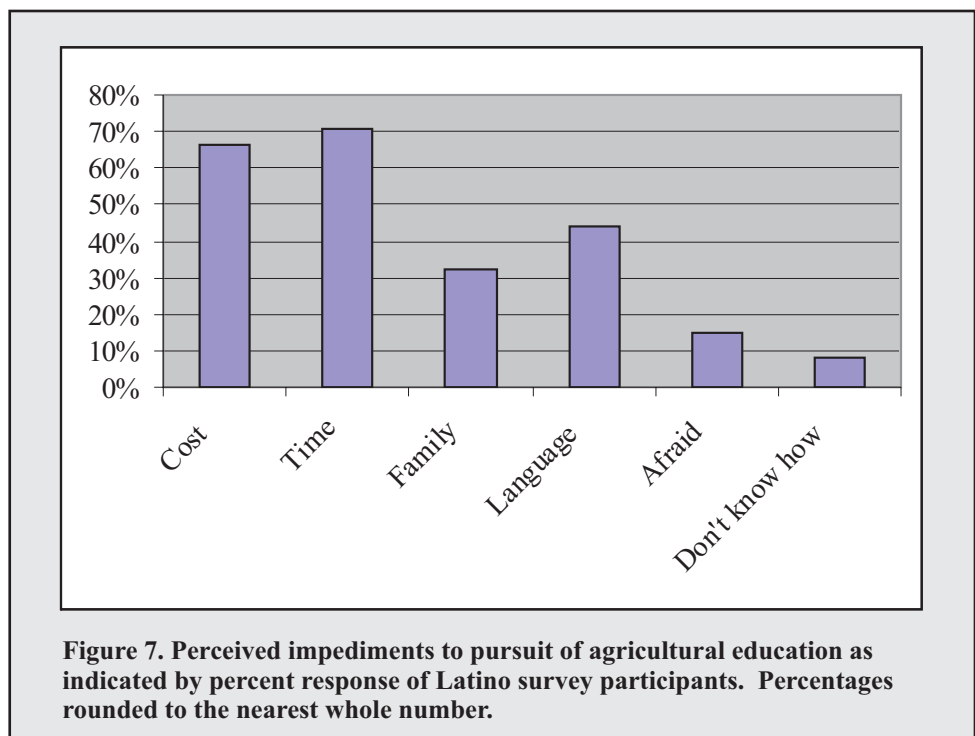
agriculture degree program for 20 years. Both of these educational programs have garnered significant attention and recognition for excellence by students and industry.

Not only did Latino respondents rather decidedly indicate their enthusiasm for agriculture careers and recognition of the importance of education in the pursuit of agriculture careers they also indicated that they perceived a wide and diverse range of professional opportunities in agriculture. The survey asked, "in what area of agriculture do you perceive the best opportunities to be?" Several responses to this question were provided but all responses were recorded. The most frequent response (39%) was farm ownership. Twenty-eight percent (the fourth most frequent) indicated farm management as a professional possibility. Interestingly, for the county of Chelan, where farms are under the greatest encroachment-development pressure and farmland prices are generally highest, fewer indicated farm ownership while more indicated farm management compared to responses from the other two counties. Given that many college of agriculture programs of study are designed to professionally prepare owner/operators of farming and ranching enterprises and that the average age of farmer in Washington and the U.S. approaches sixty years (Mullinix, 2001) this response should be noted. Post-production processing/packing facility management was the second most frequently indicated (38%) potential profession. This three county region is dominated by the production of horticultural crops (tree fruits and vegetables) and as such there are many post-production/processing operations. Again there was a striking difference in response between counties. Respondents in Chelan and Grant Counties indicated

this area of professional opportunity at much higher frequencies (46% and 42% respectively) than did respondents in Douglas County (26%), probably because there are far fewer post-production facilities in the latter county than the former counties. Thirty-six percent (third most frequent response) of our respondents indicated that they perceived professional opportunity as technical consultants in north central Washington's agriculture industries. Technical consulting in production and pest manage-



**Figure 6. Percentage of Latino survey respondents, by county, indicating no access to agriculture education programs and their relative desire or lack of desire to have access to such programs. Percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.**



**Figure 7. Perceived impediments to pursuit of agricultural education as indicated by percent response of Latino survey participants. Percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.**

ment, as an independent professional or affiliated with a packing-sales company is amongst the most well regarded professions in Washington's tree fruit industry. Washington is the top producer of apples, pears and sweet cherries in the U.S. and apples are typically Washington's most valuable agricultural crop. Virtually all production and pest management consultants in Washington's tree fruit industry have professional degrees in Pomology, integrated pest management, agriculture business management or some combination thereof. And finally, 22% indicated that agribusiness provided promising opportunity (Figure 6). From these responses it seems that Latinos residents, in this rural agriculture region, envision themselves functioning professionally in all aspects and at all levels of agriculture industry in North Central Washington. An equally reasonable conclusion is that our group of Latino agriculturist respondents envision themselves as part of our agriculture sector.

Our final line of inquiry focused on education program accessibility, desire and inclination to participate in agriculture programs of study, and impediments to doing so. Overall only 36% indicated that agricultural programs of study were accessible to them. Only 28% of respondents residing in Grant County (which is furthest away from the regional community college that delivers agricultural education programs) indicated adequate access compared to 44% of respondents in the other two counties. A majority (61%) indicated that they would like to have access to agricultural programs of study and 57% indicated a high likelihood of participation by their children, in agricultural programs of study were they accessible. An additional 40% indicated a moderate likelihood of participation by their children. The highest rate of "highly likely" (71%) was for Grant county respondents, the same county in which respondents indicated the poorest access.

Finally survey subjects were asked what major impediments might impinge on their ability to avail themselves to agricultural programs of study. The following anticipated responses were provided; cost, time, family, language, afraid, and don't know how. Again multiple responses were acceptable. Time was most frequently cited by respondents (71%) and cost (67%) second most. Language was indicated as an impediment by only 44% followed by family at 34%. Nichols (1993) also found family and financial considerations important barriers to Latino participation in higher education. But unlike Nichols (1993), in our survey, fear was not indicated as a significant barrier; only 13% indicated being afraid as an impediment and only 8% indicated that they didn't know how to participate in education programs (Figure 7). Thus escalating costs of higher education may significantly affect or preclude participation in agriculture education programs by many rural Latinos even if programs are made more accessible. Additionally time and family obligation constraints

may be mitigated by delivery of programs closer to where these potential students live and work and by adjusting class schedules to coincide with the agricultural season.

Certainly the Latinos we surveyed would like to advance their agricultural careers via education. These are all factors that should be taken into account when developing and delivering programs to address the needs of the growing rural Latino agriculturist population.

## **Summary**

The perception that Latinos dislike working in agriculture is not supported by the results of this work. An impressive majority of surveyed Latino residents of north central Washington, a major tree fruit farming region, indicated that they very much liked and valued their work in agriculture, would preferentially continue working in agriculture and saw a promising future in it. There was no response indicative of a general disdain for agriculture work. On the contrary, only one in five indicated they worked in agriculture because it was all they knew or all that was available to them. Moreover our respondents perceived a breadth of opportunity for careers in the agriculture sector including farm ownership and management, technical consulting and agribusiness management. Most encouraging, and substantially counter to conventional thinking, was the fact that an overwhelming majority of respondents indicated that they would encourage their children to pursue careers in agriculture if they had the appropriate educational preparation. Respondents conveyed their full appreciation that higher education was key to the pursuit of and advancement in agriculture careers and that they would partake of educational programs were they available, accessible, affordable, and did not compromise family relations or obligations. It is incumbent upon colleges of agriculture to serve this talented, dedicated, burgeoning group of U.S. agriculturists and develop and deliver professional education programs by means and methods that are effective and appropriate.

In light of agricultural consolidation, corporatization, globalization and subsequent perceived lack of opportunity by traditional U.S. agriculturists (Strange, 1988), the U.S. agriculture sector struggles to encourage the next generation of farmers and agriculturists. It may very well be that many immigrant and first generation U.S. born Latinos value and embrace an agrarian lifestyle and have not yet adopted the negative perception of and poor regard for agriculture and rural peoples generally held by U.S. industry and citizenry (Berry, 2002). As such, Latino agriculturists will likely be key to the revitalization of family-based agriculture and rural communities in the U.S. Regardless, as Jones and Larke (2001) point out, "Demographic trends indicate that...more of these (ethnic minority) students must be recruited into agriculture careers in



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order to sustain the agriculture industry for the future and to insure that the U.S. remains globally competitive." It is critical that the agriculture sector and those institutions having accepted the charge of educationally preparing agriculture professionals understand the actual commitment of Latino agriculturists to agriculture. Undeniably, Latinos are a significant pool from which future agriculturists should and could be nurtured. The means and mechanisms to do so must be pursued through research and creatively applied educational programming. The future nature of our nation's agriculture system and rural communities may very well depend upon it.

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