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#312	Pursuing Sustainable Farming and Ranching Production Methods: The case of Latino farmers and ranchers in Missouri	Submitted
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Title

Latino Farmers and Ranchers' Perceptions on Native Plants for Sustainable Agriculture in Missouri.

Authors

1. **Dr. Nadia Navarrete-Tindall** - *Lincoln University of Missouri*

2. **Dr. Eleazar Gonzalez** - *University of Missouri*

Abstract

A research study was conducted in Central and Western Missouri regions to determine Latino farmers' perception about the importance of native plants in conservation practices and as specialty crops in farms. In 2016, data was collected among 100 Latino farmers and ranchers to evaluate their skills and knowledge about growing and managing native plants as a sustainable farming method to support other sustainable farm and ranch production activities. In sustainable agriculture, native plants have an important role because they provide habitat for native pollinators and other beneficial insects, can be used in conservation practices and at the same time provide additional income if grown as specialty crops. Native fruit trees like wild plum, gooseberries, elderberries and paw paws, as well as, herbaceous perennials like wild leeks, goldenglow and nettles, evaluated at Lincoln University, have shown great potential as specialty crops. The service that pollinators offer to farms is hard to value and the impression among Latino farmers and ranchers that native plants are weedy and are not good for anything still persists. To rate the level of knowledge and interest regarding native plants, participants had the choice of responding on a Likert scale from strongly agreeing to strongly disagreeing to a series of questions related to skill and knowledge about native plants. The results were very consistent for all the questions. Eighty to 94% responded that either that they did not know how to identify native plants, did not eat them, did not protect them, did not establish them on purpose and did not grow them for pollinators or butterflies. Only 4 to 20% indicated that they knew, consumed, protected and grew them in their farms. We feel that these preliminary results justify the need for training them about how native plants relate to sustainable agriculture production methods. We know that native plants' resilience and adaptation to unpredictable and extreme weather events will be beneficial for Latino farmers and others. We are including native plants as a training topic in a sustainable agriculture curriculum to increase skills and knowledge for new and beginning farmers and ranchers with this topic in Missouri. During training, food samples using native plants will be served to advance knowledge and acceptance, and special effort will be made to reach more youth and women, with the expectation that their participation will increase native plants' inclusion in farms as a step forward to sustainability.

Topic Areas

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