



High Tunnel Management Perspective from Immigrant and Minority Farmers



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INTRODUCTION

Agriculture has always been an evolving practice that shifts accordingly for the benefit of the community at hand. Places with extreme climate conditions such as most of the Midwest in the United States don't engage in typical farming practices during the winter months. Fortunately, in recent years, there has been an alternative that has been developed called high tunnels. High Tunnels are a cost effective alternative to greenhouses in regions with short growing seasons. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has developed a program called Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP), with the primary goal of promoting conservation. Along with, encouraging the construction of high tunnels within historically underrepresented populations such as immigrant and minority farmers. The objective of this research is to learn from current and potential farmers how to improve the accessibility of government assistance programs such as EQIP to best serve under-represented groups.

METHODS

For this research, the process of surveying is used to learn about the experiences of immigrant and minority farmers with growing in high tunnels and the High Tunnel System cost-share program available through the Environmental Quality Incentives Programs (EQIP) from the US Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). The survey includes two sections to highlight the experiences of immigrant and minority farmers. The first section is "High Tunnel Experience and Management" which asked respondents about their experience growing crops in a high tunnel. The second portion of the survey asked about growers experience with EQIP or other government assistance programs.

The survey was administered verbally to 29 conference attendees at the 12th Annual Minority and Immigrant Farmer Conference on January 28-29 of 2017 at the University of Minnesota in the Continuing Education and Conference Center. However, some participants did not answer all questions, reducing the response rate for portions of the survey.

CONCLUSIONS

Findings from this research indicates that most survey respondents reported that language translation would make governmental assistance programs like EQIP more accessible. Since NRCS currently provides language translation and interpretation, outreach designed to increase awareness of existing services may make the program more approachable to diverse demographics.

However, it is also important to note that survey respondents were not asked their racial background, or whether they identify as an immigrant or minority farmer, so we cannot make comparisons or draw conclusions about disparities between immigrant and non-immigrant grower populations.

As we were speaking to people throughout the conference, there were people who felt that the definition of minority farmers could extend to gender, sexuality and socioeconomic levels. However, the research was initially proposed using a narrower definition of minority that focused on marginalization in terms of racial background including Native Americans, people of color who happen to be first generation, or other ethnic group of Americans that have ancestry elsewhere.

RESULTS

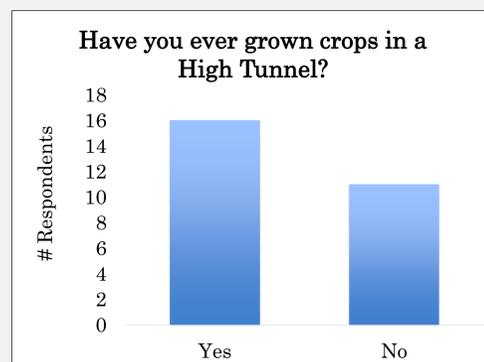


Fig 1: A figure that illustrates farmers who have used high tunnels vs those who have not

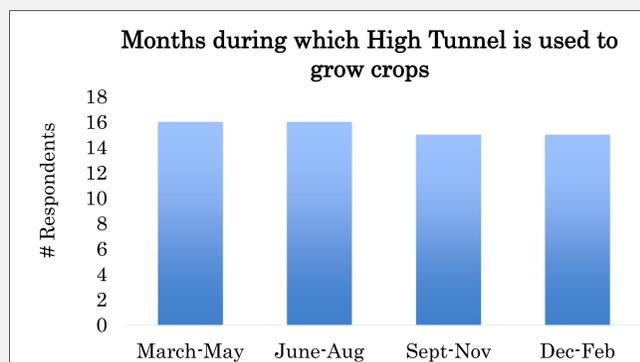


Fig 2: A figure that illustrates the distribution of seasons farmers grow in their high tunnels

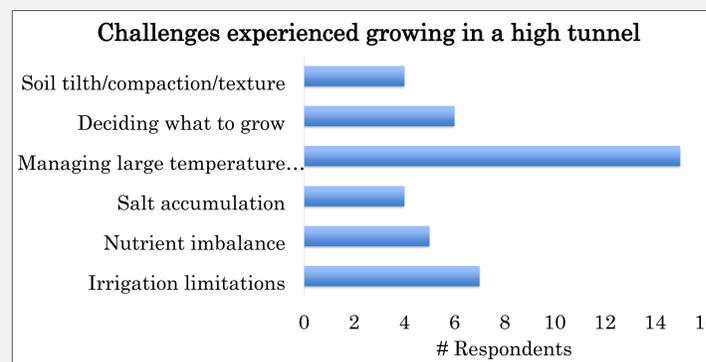


Fig 3: A figure to show farmers' challenges with growing in high tunnels.

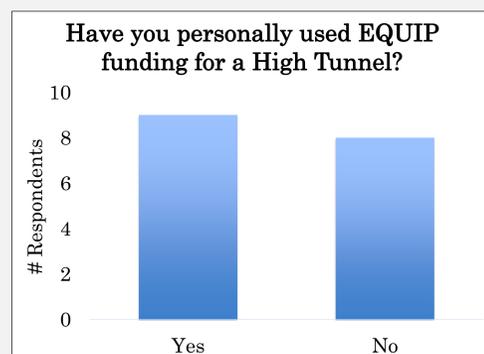


Fig 4: A figure showing if growers have used EQIP funding for high tunnels

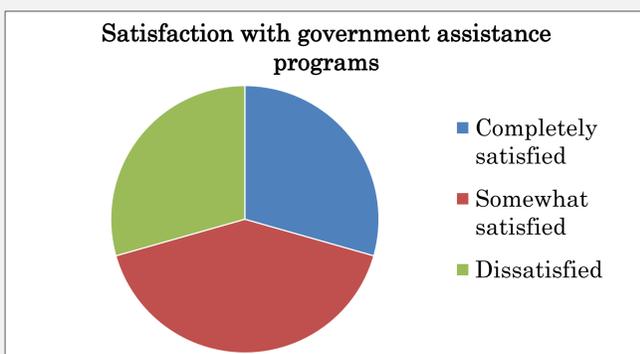


Fig 5 A figure showing the general overall satisfaction with government assistance programs for minority and immigrant farmers



RESEARCH GAPS

Problems : omitting respondents from self-identifying as either minority or immigrant forcing the reframing of the research by expanding the definition

Future work: That would be an assumption, a future work would require (1). Change the language of the survey to make it universalized to diverse audiences (2). Let respondents self-identify in order create a sharpness in the responses given on the survey.

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