

OREGON FARMERS



When many people across the country think of Oregon, they imagine mountains, forests, skiing; the great outdoors. It might surprise them that 28% of Oregon land is classified as farmland. Twenty-seven percent of Oregonians are classified as rural.

Oregon experiences a significant urban-rural divide. A drive through the Willamette Valley is predominantly colored by farmland. Farms play as significant a role in Oregon's collective psyche as does forests and the timber it produces.

Rural Oregon is more than farms; more than farm owners. It is also about farmworkers. Almost half of all hired farmworkers (migrants) live in just five States: California, Texas, North Carolina, Washington, and Oregon. Oregon's migrant population is five percent of its total population.

It is no surprise that of the three local Catholic Campaign for Human Development grants awarded by the Archdiocese of Portland in 2010, one went to a farming project in Eugene; one of the two national CCHD grants that were awarded within the Archdiocese went to a farmers market program in Forest Grove. Both programs assist migrants as they lift themselves out of poverty.

(The Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) is the domestic anti-poverty, social justice program of the U.S. Catholic bishops. Its mission is to address the root causes of poverty in America through grants awarded to organizations where the poor are empowered through participation and essential leadership roles).

Also mostly unknown is the position of the Catholic Church on agriculture and farming. In *"Catholic Reflections on Food, Farmers, and Farmworkers"*, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2003, the U.S. Catholic Bishops wrote:

"We recognize and encourage those who carry out and contribute to the work of agriculture in the United States and abroad: farmers and farmworkers, leaders of rural communities, and those who serve them in our Church. ... For all those who devote their lives to agriculture, we offer words of support and appreciation, as well as a plea to work together more cooperatively and constructively for the common good."

[Huerto de la Familia](#) (The Family Garden) of Eugene received a local CCHD grant for its Small Farmers Project of Lane County. This project is comprised of ten low-income Latino families who have worked together since the spring of 2007 to plan and develop their own organic farm business. Ten families are working on five acres of land to create their own farm business growing organic black cap raspberries and strawberries, which they sell.

The goal of the Small Farmers Project is to increase each family's income, create greater access to sufficient, nutritious food, and educate on methods of organic agriculture and the skills to manage their own cooperative farm business.

[Adelante Mujeres](#) of Forest Grove received a national grant for its Farmers Market program. Adelante Mujeres, established in 2002, helps dozens of Spanish-speaking immigrant families develop the knowledge and skills necessary to operate a sustainable farming business. The sustainable farming project, called Adelante Agricultura, is 22 weeks of classes and trainings. The goal is to provide lower-income Latino immigrant farmers and farm workers with the training and skills necessary to farm using organic and sustainable methods and to successfully market their produce.



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Graduate farmers of Adelante Agricultura can use their newly-acquired knowledge on 12 acres of land, called Adelante Farm. Here they learn to manage their own small farming business. They also work collectively with the other farmers on the land to grow produce to be sold directly to the consumer, such as the Forest Grove Farmers Market. Adelante Agricultura supports the farmers in establishing their farm businesses and eventually their transition to other locations as independent farmers, where they operate their own farming business.

The tapestry of Oregon's history was woven with the fabric of farms and farmworkers. Agriculture is an essential component to Oregon's economy, which means that migrants are essential to Oregon's economy; agriculture also has a special place in the Catholic Church. When we realize this then we understand that it is only natural that the Archdiocese of Portland awards CCHD grants to programs that use farming as the means for low-income farmworkers to lift themselves out of poverty: Farmworkers have a special place in the Oregon Catholic Church.