Community and Economic Development for the Hispanic Women in the Mountains of North Carolina

“empowering the Hispanic women in overcoming economic and social disparities and supporting them in adapting to their new community and environment through Agriculture”

Sue Counts, Watauga County Center, North Carolina State University
Diane Price, Owner and Operator, The Farm at Mollies Branch

Watauga County, located in the mountains of northwestern North Carolina, has significant and growing communities of migrant people. The most recent census indicates that the Hispanic/Latino population in North Carolina increased 355 percent in the last decade. Although the migrant men are seasonable or otherwise employed, the women and children remain disenfranchised because of issues of communication, transportation and lack of skills.

The North Carolina Cooperative Extension agents from Watauga County, small-farm owner Diane Price, Master Gardeners, High Country Amigos, Women in Agriculture and community volunteers focused on bringing together these women and children in a supportive environment and holding educational programs in areas needed to overcome obstacles and give them necessary skills.

These programs included English as a Second Language classes, basket-making workshops, note-card making workshops, and classes to identify and grow agriculture produce and specialty crops. In addition, workshops to teach agriculturally-related business and marketing skills were held. Hispanic families will be able to gain sustainable agricultural and business knowledge and skills that will help them network, integrate into society, and add to the family income. In addition, these families will be able to start a “cottage industry” in their homes to add to their family income.

Since the programs inception, over twelve families have been reached. Several of the families are working on items in their homes (basket-making and note-card making). It is anticipated that many of the items will be sold at the local farmer's market and at different area festivals and fairs.