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# Hacia el rancho: Mexican immigrants, farming and sustainable rural livelihoods in Iowa

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**Hacia el ranchito:  
Mexican immigrants, farming and Sustainable Rural Livelihoods in Iowa**

by

**Hannah Kathryn Lewis**

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
MASTER OF SCIENCE

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Ames, Iowa

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## ABSTRACT

Latinos are the fastest growing ethnicity of farmers in Iowa and across the U.S., and 3.7 percent of Iowa's total population. This case study of four Mexican immigrant farmers explores why and how they farm in Iowa, and how agricultural institutions can support them. I conducted in-depth interviews and observation, using the Sustainable Rural Livelihoods framework in analysis. These farmers learned as children to tend livestock and butcher animals for home consumption. Each bought a small Iowa farmstead by assembling social, human and limited financial capital. They work off-farm fulltime, while on-farm producing meat, dairy, and/or vegetables for home consumption, and selling slaughter animals through networks of co-workers, friends and family. They are disconnected from farm agencies, and desire information in Spanish on regulations, production and marketing. This study suggests potential to develop institutional linkages that strengthen local food systems by building on Mexican immigrant farmer knowledge, practice and networks.

## CHAPTER ONE

### IMMIGRANT FARMERS: CHANGE AND OPPORTUNITY

Latinos are the largest and fastest growing group of minority farmers in Iowa and across the U.S. (National Agricultural Statistics Service 2002a). The total Latino population in Iowa quadrupled between 1980 and 2005, making Latinos the largest ethnic minority at 3.7 percent of the population (State Data Center of Iowa 2007). This thesis explores why and how Latino immigrants start farming in Iowa. Using the Sustainable Rural Livelihoods (SRL) framework, I argue that part-time farming can enhance Latino immigrant farmers' resilience to shocks and stresses related to having a low income and being an ethnic minority and newcomer in the Midwest.

I focus on four immigrants from Mexico who farm part-time on 10 to 20 acres. These individuals have been able to enter farming on a small-scale; build healthy livestock herds; supply their households with vegetables, dairy and meats produced on-farm; and develop marketing networks, with little or no assistance from agricultural institutions. By several accounts, Latino farmers, especially immigrants, are not well connected to U.S. Department of Agriculture Farm Services Agency, Iowa State University Extension, or other agricultural agencies. Capacity-building support from these organizations could expand the marketing and production capability of these farmers.

Additionally, connections with non-governmental organizations, such as Iowa Network for Community Agriculture and Practical Farmers of Iowa,<sup>1</sup> could thrust Latino immigrant farmers into contact with other small-scale farmers and create opportunities for them to participate in the local food systems movement<sup>2</sup> in Iowa. Hinrichs (2003) points out that food

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<sup>1</sup> Practical Farmers of Iowa (PFI) is a farmer organization whose mission is to develop and expand alternative production and marketing systems. Iowa Network of Community Agriculture (INCA) is a membership organization that connects farmers and consumers interested in promoting locally produced foods and local food systems development.

<sup>2</sup> A local food system is variously defined by activists and scholars, but generally refers to a geographically and socially defined (Selfa 2004) system of food production and marketing. In Iowa, these systems take the shape of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), farmers' markets, and institutional procurement of Iowa-grown foods (Hinrichs 2003). Producers and consumers participate in local food systems for a variety of reasons, including: "environmental sustainability, availability of healthy food, and maintaining working landscapes or open space" (Selfa 2004). "Movement" refers to the recent growth in such marketing arrangements. There are 170 farmers markets in Iowa, up from a few dozen in the 1980s, and thousands nationwide. CSAs emerged in the U.S. in the 1980s and by the turn of the new century numbered more than 1,000 (Halweil 2002).

system “localization can foster social and gustatory exchanges that demand new receptivity to difference and diversity.” She states that a new trend in institutional procurement of local foods has evolved from featuring primarily traditional Iowan farmhouse dishes to meals that reflect national and global cultural influences as well as a changing demographic composition:

Iowa-grown banquet meals have begun to incorporate explicitly non-northern European dishes and flavors, as where Iowa free-range chicken might appear in enchiladas or okra forms the base of a (somewhat spicy) vegetable stew. Does this represent a dilution of the state’s historical cuisine, further erosion of any lingering stable regional food identity? Perhaps, but it also signifies a promising opening, where “local” foodstuffs are combined in new ways reflecting the changing diversity of producers and consumers now living in the region (Hinrichs 2003).

An embrace of diversity in the evolution of Iowa’s local food systems is a point of departure for my thesis. Immigrants, with distinct and rich cultural traditions, are unequivocally part of the local Iowa context, their food traditions forever mingled with those featuring pancakes, casseroles and green beer on St. Patrick’s Day.

Today, Iowa has the dual challenge of integrating multiple ethnic groups into a functioning pluralistic society and developing rural economies in an evolving agricultural context. An impressive opportunity (but not necessarily a coincidence considering the effects of global economic integration) is that as Iowa’s traditional Anglo farming population dwindles, rural communities are being repopulated by displaced Mexican *campesino* farmers (among others). In this chapter, I introduce the changes in Iowa and Mexico that have brought about this situation, and outline some strategies taken in other states to support immigrant farmers.

### **Immigration in Context**

Iowa has changed dramatically in the past few decades, agriculturally and demographically. While remaining a farming state, with nearly 90 percent of the land area devoted to farming (U.S. Department of Agriculture 2007), the character of Iowa’s agriculture is new. Thirty years ago, there were roughly 140,000 farms, averaging 250 acres each (SETA 2002). Today, 90,000 farms remain, averaging 350 acres each (SETA 2002). These farms are growing more corn and soybeans and less of any other pulse or grain crop,



and more pigs in proportion to other livestock. In other words, farm ownership has become more concentrated, and farming systems less diverse.

Meanwhile, Iowa has become much more diverse demographically. The Latino population, which was 25,500 in 1980, quadrupled to 109,000 by 2005 (State Data Center of Iowa 2007). Between 1980 and 2000, the Asian population grew by 300 percent from 11,300 to 36,600, the black population grew by nearly 50 percent, and the white population dropped from 97.4 to 93.9 percent of the state total (State Data Center of Iowa 2007). Many new Iowans migrated here from Mexico, Central America, the Horn of Africa, and Southeast Asia. The largely white farming population fell as farms consolidated and European Americans moved out of the countryside and out of Iowa.

Iowa's new ethnic diversity is partly related to changes in the meatpacking industry, which moved its core of operations from former urban hubs like Chicago to the rural Midwest, and recruited low-wage workers from Mexico, the Texas border, California, and elsewhere. The restructuring of meatpacking in Iowa originated with the founding of Iowa Beef Packers (IBP) in 1960 (Fink 1998). IBP set a precedent for a "new breed" of plant that increased mechanization, deskilled labor, and established an industry standard of packaging cuts of meat in boxes instead of shipping carcasses to retail butchers. IBP is also responsible for the innovation of locating operations near farmers to save money by purchasing livestock directly instead of through stockyards. Rural plants save money on labor too because a rural workforce is less likely than an urban one to be unionized and more likely to accept lower wages. A series of mergers and buyouts in the 1980s consolidated the transition to this new breed of meatpacking, which is now dominated by ConAgra, IBP and Cargill.

The vast majority of Latinos in Iowa are of Mexican heritage (74 percent) (State Data Center of Iowa 2006). In the U.S., Mexican migrants are typically from the western states of Michoacán, Jalisco and Guanajuato, and from rural areas where many worked in agriculture, although migration of urban workers is increasingly common (Durand, Massey and Zenteno 2001). Mexican migration to the U.S., significant throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, surged in the 1990s. Several self-reinforcing factors contribute to Mexico-U.S. migration (Massey and Espinosa 1997). This includes household-level predictors, such as having a family member living north of the border who can assist with finding a job and housing, and macro-level

drivers, such as Mexico's integration into the global economy, especially through ties with the U.S. Global integration has ushered major changes in the economic and social structure of Mexico.

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), ratified in 1994, dismantled trade barriers between the U.S. and Mexico, including a phasing out of Mexican tariffs. The case of corn, a staple food and ubiquitous crop in Mexico, illustrates how NAFTA and intervening factors affected farmers there. NAFTA spelled out a 15-year transition period during which Mexican tariffs would be gradually reduced (Ramirez 2003). Corn growers were assured that during this time, the Mexican government would support them in the form of credit, investment and technical advice.

However, just as NAFTA was implemented, the value of the peso plummeted, and the country spiraled into economic depression. The government responded to a pressing need to feed the country's swelling population of poor by importing more corn than the tariff-rate quota allowed. A temporary fix on consumer prices, this opened trade in corn between Mexico and the U.S. much more rapidly than what had been planned for, devastating Mexican producers. They saw domestic corn prices fall by half between 1994 and 1996 (Ramirez 2003).

Since 1993, exports of U.S. corn to Mexico have doubled (Edwards 2004). The share of corn consumed in Mexico that was imported from the U.S. grew from 14 to 24 percent between 1994 and 2000 (Fitting 2004). Many *campesino* corn growers, unable to compete against subsidized U.S. corn (Fitting 2004), sought other means to support themselves and their households. This includes finding local work, such as construction, agricultural day labor, *maquiladora* work, and running small stores (Fitting 2004). Huge numbers of rural Mexicans have chosen to migrate domestically and to the U.S. to find work. The number of migrants in the U.S. from rural Mexico was 452 percent higher in 2002 than in 1980 (Taylor et al. 2005).

The signing of NAFTA is just one part of a comprehensive neo-liberal turning in Mexican policy since the early 1980s toward integration into the global economy. Mexico embarked on an economic liberalization project following the 1983 Debt Crisis, when it announced it could no longer service its debts to foreign lending agencies. The World Bank

conditioned its financial assistance upon Mexico's compliance with structural adjustment policy, which removed federal funding from agricultural and other social spending programs to the trade and finance ministries (Raynolds et al. 1993).

Prior to the liberalization period, Mexico shielded farmers and consumers from international price volatility by buying corn and other products at a guaranteed price and subsidizing the cost of these products to consumers (Canales 2003). *Campesino* farmers had guaranteed access to plots of farmland through the *ejido* system of communal lands, established in the agrarian reforms of the Mexican Revolution. In 1992, *ejidos* were privatized (Ramirez 2003), meaning they could be sold or rented.

The pre-liberalized industrial sector was based on an import substitution model, meaning manufacturing was geared toward the domestic market (Canales 2003). Transition to an export-oriented economy displaced workers from government bureaucracies and parastatal industries (Massey and Espinosa 1997).

The outcome of these macroeconomic changes is discernable in social indicators that help explain why so many have sought employment in the much more robust economy across the border. The decade of the 1990s witnessed a steady decline in the purchasing power of the minimum and average wages in Mexico (Ramirez 2003). The minimum wage in real terms fell 23 percent between 1993 and 1999 (Ramirez 2003), while the percentage of the working population making minimum wage increased from a quarter to a third over roughly the same period (Canales 2003).

### **Support for Immigrant Farmers**

Some 20 networked projects around the U.S. are helping immigrants from Mexico and elsewhere transition to farming. Heifer International sponsors this network and published the following in its bimonthly newsletter World Ark:

For recent arrivals to this country, the projects help ease the transition, giving immigrants practical skills with which to support themselves as well as access to fresh inexpensive food. By emphasizing sustainable agriculture, these projects are also helping to reform and revitalize farming the United States, which is heavily industrialized (Wilcox 2007:9).

The project network is the National Immigrant Farming Initiative (NIFI). The article goes on to point out that farming is a much more common livelihood activity in the developing world than it is in the United States, and that for immigrants from those regions, farming is “a way to bridge the gap between their old and new lives” (Wilcox 2007:10).

In the spirit of these nationwide initiatives, my thesis is based on the assumption that creating opportunities for immigrants to farm in Iowa is good for immigrants and good for Iowa. Part-time or full-time farming is an income-generating activity grounded in skills and experience many immigrants have, and therefore constitutes a meaningful alternative or complement to standard-fare immigrant work in low-wage, industrial jobs in Iowa. I believe that increasing accessibility to farming for immigrants is good for Iowa because it can keep land in farming, increase availability of fresh, whole foods, and create grounds for new rural food-based enterprise.

NIFI projects support immigrants from Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, Laos, Cambodia, Iraq, Mexico, El Salvador, and many other countries. I chose to focus my research on Latino immigrants because Latinos are the largest and fastest growing minority population in the U.S. and in Iowa. Moreover, Latinos are entering farming at a high rate. According to the Census of Agriculture, the number of Latino farmers in the U.S. grew from 33,450 in 1997 to 50,592 in 2002, an increase of more than 50 percent (NASS 2002a).

In Iowa, there are 537 operators of Latino origin, 380 of which are principal operators (NASS 2002a; NASSb). In addition to these established farmers, which may represent second and third generation Latino immigrants, there are many new immigrants in Iowa from rural, agrarian Mexico and other Latin American countries. Furthermore, among immigrants, Latinos are particularly vulnerable because of the socio-economic, legal and political conditions of their migration. There is, therefore, an urgent need to address the issue of how to facilitate Latino immigrant integration into American society.

### **Organization of Thesis**

Through in-depth interviews with established Latino immigrant farmers, I explore how and why these individuals farm, paying close attention to how their particular life histories led them to farming in Iowa, and what life goals farming helps them achieve. In Chapter 2, I

begin by introducing SRL as an integrating conceptual framework for this thesis. Next, I address the component parts of this framework in terms relevant to the experiences of Latino immigrants in the U.S. and rural Midwest. I present my research methods in Chapter 3. I begin by explaining the pragmatic orientation and context of my research, and then describe my process of data collection and analysis, as well as reliability and validity concerns. In Chapter 4, I present my research findings organized according to the SRL framework. This includes a discussion of respondents' use of multiple capitals (resources), their livelihood strategies, and their objectives for farming and the outcomes of these endeavors. In Chapter 5, I summarize the motivations and approaches to farming among my respondents, and discuss the role institutions can play in supporting immigrant farmers.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **SUSTAINABLE RURAL LIVELIHOODS FRAMEWORK AND LATINO IMMIGRANTS IN THE RURAL MIDWEST**

To explore my research question, I use the Sustainable Rural Livelihoods (SRL) framework as an organizing structure. SRL is a development framework which addresses individual and household agency within a given socio-economic and historic context. In this study, I apply the framework to the experiences of Latino immigrants who have begun part-time farming in Iowa. SRL conceives of actors as forging livelihoods by mobilizing social, human, cultural, financial and other capitals to access opportunities in the market and other institutional contexts, and to cope with and bounce back from shocks and stresses.

The framework has been used in the developing, agriculturally based economies of rural Africa and Asia, where livelihoods are based on subsistence farming. In these contexts, achieving formal employment as an antidote to poverty is unrealistic when jobs are scarce. But instead of simple income poverty, SRL addresses poverty in terms of the broader concept of deprivation, which includes the related conditions of social inferiority, isolation, physical weakness, vulnerability, powerlessness, and humiliation (Chambers 1995). A sustainable livelihood overcomes deprivation by assembling a portfolio of income-generating and quality-of-life-improving activities. By definition:

A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks, and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, while not undermining the natural resource base (Scoones 1998:5).

This paper focuses on the livelihoods of immigrants in the rural Midwest, where the economy is built on agriculture, in addition to manufacturing, hospitality, and other industries. Immigrants arrive in the Midwest for jobs in these industries, often seeking full-time, formal employment. Many leave subsistence farming behind. Whereas SRL has been applied to subsistence farmers, and how they patch together other income-generating activities to make a living, this study focuses on wage-labor immigrants who add farming to their portfolio.

The presence of Mexicans in Iowa points to an initial livelihood strategy originating in Mexico, where migration to higher paying U.S. jobs is the means of improving household conditions. SRL highlights migration as a livelihood strategy commonly employed by the rural poor. Some migrants leave their hometowns seasonally in search of work, others leave for years at a time and return, while still others make their new home where they've found work. The Mexicans in this study fall into the third category, making their home in Iowa indefinitely or for good. For those who settle in Iowa, the state becomes the context for a new livelihood strategy.

The Mexican immigrants in this study were involved in farming in their home countries, and carry agricultural skills and traditions to their new homes in Iowa. In the livelihoods framework, these skills and traditions represent human and cultural capital, which, combined with other capitals (such as financial and social capital) and mediating institutions (such as banks, agencies and universities), can be integrated into livelihood strategies that incorporate farming as one of the elements.

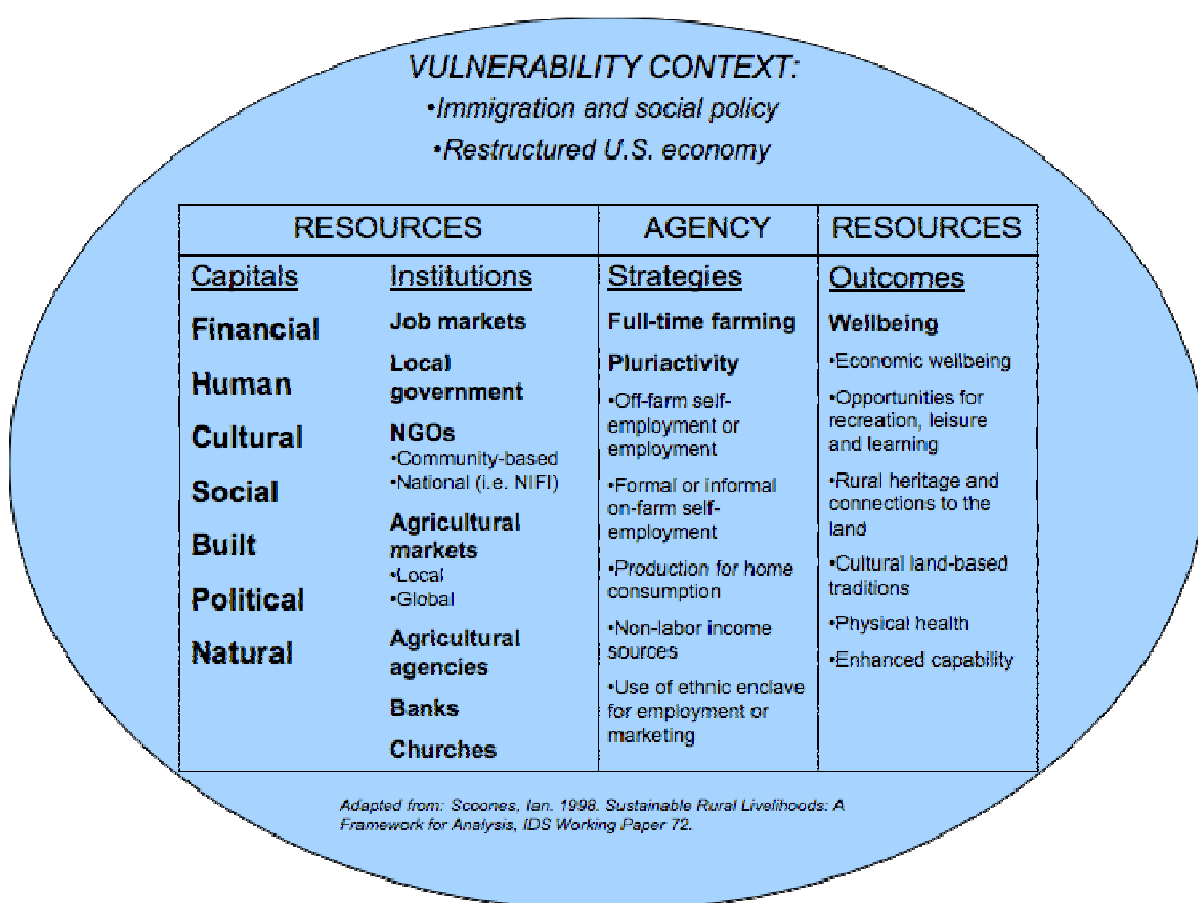
Conventional agriculture is typically a financially risky pursuit, and in Iowa, it is prohibitively expensive to enter given high land and equipment prices. But the livelihoods framework broadens livelihoods goals to include non-financial outcomes, such as increased well-being (spiritual, emotional and physical health), food security and reduced vulnerability (or enhanced resilience to shocks and stresses). So while farming may be used for added income, it is also incorporated to achieve other goals.

### **SRL Concept Map**

The following diagram illustrates how Latino immigrants might construct livelihoods as part-time farmers in the rural Midwest. The “capitals” and “institutions” represent the tools or resources that individuals use, while “strategies” are the activities they engage in to bring about desirable “outcomes.” A positive feedback loop can occur as livelihood capabilities improve and farming establishes new grounds for building social, cultural, human and financial capitals.

These elements of personal agency are framed within the vulnerability context to emphasize the influence of socio-economic and political processes on individual efforts to

build a sustainable livelihood. For Latino immigrants, U.S. immigration and social policy and a bifurcated job market are structural factors that lie outside the control of individuals or households. The points listed in each column are organized according to Scoones' (1998) conceptual diagram of Sustainable Rural Livelihoods, but are particular to what the experiences of Latino immigrant farmers in the Midwest might be. I chose the institutions and strategies listed in this diagram based on my review of literature on Latino immigrants in U.S. society, and by focusing on a rural, agricultural context.



*Diagram 1: Sustainable Rural Livelihoods framework adapted to reflect literature review of Latino immigrants as farmers in the rural Midwest*

### **Vulnerability Context**

Vulnerability refers to exposure to and defenselessness against shocks, stress and risks (Chambers 1995). Awareness of the vulnerability context and the constraints it places on



livelihoods can shed light on what lies within the ability of individuals, households or communities to control or manage. Legal status is a major concern for unauthorized Latino immigrants and their families. The following description of an immigration raid in Iowa shows how the policy and political context can play out in the everyday lives of unauthorized immigrants:

*At 8 am on Tuesday, December 12, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) entered the Swift and Company pork processing facility in Marshalltown, Iowa. They blocked the exits and began checking identification, sorting workers into groups of citizens, legal residents, and those without legal documentation. Using handcuffs, they arrested 90 people, loaded them into three buses with opaque windows, and drove them away. Families, lawyers and members of clergy struggled to get straightforward information from ICE officials about detainees' whereabouts. After 72 hours, the arrested workers were deported or transferred to out-of-state federal detention centers. A few were charged with identity theft, and the majority with immigration violation. Five other Swift plants around the nation were raided on the same day, and a total of 1,282 workers arrested, making this the largest immigration raid (on a single company) in U.S. history (Rood 2006; Perkins, Brasher and Alex 2006; Norman 2006; Jacobs 2006; Brasher 2006).*

Latino immigrants are vulnerable in U.S. society because many are perpetually subject to deportation. The Swift raid in Marshalltown deported or imprisoned mothers and fathers of Marshalltown families. This led to horror stories of a motherless breast-feeding baby, an asthmatic child without his medication, a house with 35 orphaned children being cared for by neighbors (Rood 2006). Another element of vulnerability for Latino immigrants is linked to the first. Partly due to the legal limbo in which they live, undocumented immigrants are subject also to the lowest paying, most hazardous jobs in the U.S. Even legal residents struggle with low incomes and limited access to social services. In this section, I will discuss these aspects of vulnerability, as well as the social climate of the immigration reform debate. All color the context within which livelihoods are built.

The fundamental problem for Latino immigrants is that many lack legal immigration documentation (Millard and Chapa 2004). The foreign-born Latino population in the U.S. is 18 million people (Pew Hispanic Center 2005). Of this, nearly half are unauthorized migrants (Passel 2006). The majority of Latino immigrants are Mexican, and 85 percent of migrants from Mexico are unauthorized (Passel 2006). These rates of unauthorized immigration speak to the number of families like those in Marshalltown, which are vulnerable to being broken

apart by deportation. There are 13.9 million individuals who live in an “unauthorized family,” in which the head or spouse is unauthorized (Passel 2006).

Compounding the deportation risk for unauthorized immigrants are related conditions of social vulnerability, due to a limited range of types of jobs available to them and their undocumented status. Over half of people in “unauthorized families” lack health insurance. Average household income is more than 40 percent lower for unauthorized than for legal immigrant families or native families, and poverty rates are higher (Passel 2006). Furthermore, being in the U.S. for more than 10 years does not increase income levels much for immigrants who remain unauthorized. Legal immigrants, by contrast, do see their income levels rise to near parity with natives after 10 years in the U.S. (Passel 2006). The legal immigrant population consists of naturalized citizens, legal temporary and permanent residents, and refugees, and includes all nationalities of immigrants.

The issue of legal status among immigrants is salient in recent public discourse on immigration policy. It raises questions about who does and who does not belong, who has the right to participate in the economic, political, and social systems of the nation, who should be permitted to practice their traditional culture, and even, who has the right to be treated with dignity. These are questions as old as the nation.

The U.S. has a long history of boundary maintenance through differential application of citizenship rights. “American citizenship has been defined, by those who have it and therefore speak for all citizens, as universal and inclusive; yet it has been highly exclusionary in practice” (Glenn 2002:24). Women, slaves, the poor and Native Americans were excluded from citizenship by the nation’s founders. Formal citizenship has since then been widely applied, but “substantive citizenship” is still denied to many racial minorities. Substantive citizenship refers to the ability to exercise the rights to which one is formally entitled, and the way rights are enforced (along racial lines) by local, state or federal government. The pre-civil rights era of blacks in the South is an extreme example of differential public interpretation and legal enforcement of citizenship rights. The social and cultural realms are more subtle areas of substantive citizenship. Social citizenship includes the right to education and a bit of economic security, while cultural citizenship is “the rights to maintain cultures

and languages ... without losing civil or political rights or membership in the national community” (Glenn 2002:54).

Today’s contentious debate over immigration policy should come as no surprise, focusing as it does on Latinos, a racialized pan-ethnic group. Latinos compose 81 percent of unauthorized immigrants, and are therefore targets of anti-immigrant sentiment, despite the fact that the majority of Latinos are legal residents or citizens (Passel 2006). Latinos as a whole are stigmatized also because of the low standing of Mexico and other Latin American countries in the global division of labor, and because of the lower-class origins of many migrants (Grosfoguel 2004). Grosfoguel describes immigrants from countries that have been dominated historically by the host country as “colonial immigrants,” and states that racial social hierarchies are based on power relations established through European colonialism. “Who belongs and who does not belong to the ‘nation’ is informed by the historical power relations between Europeans and non-Europeans” (Grosfoguel 2004:327).

The location and flexibility of the boundary around American citizenship and substantive citizenship is ultimately negotiable, but it is subject to the play of power. Undocumented and even non-citizen Latinos lack certain social, civil and political rights accessible to other Americans. Of a total Latino population of nearly 42 million, around 17 million people (of those 18 years or older) are citizens (Passel 2006; Pew 2006). Non-citizen immigrants, legal and unauthorized, are ineligible for federally funded welfare benefits, such as food stamps (Wilson 2000). According to the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996, legal permanent residents can become eligible if they prove they have worked and paid social security tax in the U.S. for 10 years. Unauthorized immigrants are eligible only for emergency services such as: emergency medical aid, short term in-kind disaster relief, public health immunizations and treatment for communicable disease (Wilson 2000).

Inadequate access to health care services is of concern to Latino immigrant workers in particular in Midwestern meatpacking towns where injury rates are high at the plants. Employer-sponsored health benefits typically don’t start until six months of employment have passed (Millard and Chapa 2004). In rural places, a further constraint to health care is a

low ratio between doctors and population, and lack of interpreter services to enable providers and patients to communicate. Although Midwestern towns were often unprepared to provide the social services needed for the reproduction of the new workforce, many state and community organizations have reached out to immigrant communities, and are providing language and education services, and assistance with housing, legal documents and social justice issues (Griffith 2004).

In addition to the effect of U.S. social and immigration policy on the vulnerability context, the structure of the U.S. economy also conditions Latino immigrant livelihoods. The economy is becoming more segmented, with high-salaried, highly education, high-skill jobs at the top, and jobs at the bottom and a shrinking middle (Koval 2004). Mexican immigrants and native-born as a whole are stuck at the bottom of this hourglass structure, and have the lowest intergenerational mobility of any minority or immigrant group in the nation (Koval 2004). These bottom-level jobs make up the secondary job market, which is characterized by “low status, low pay, poor benefits, and little or no chance for advancement. Working conditions can sometimes be less clean and safe. Job security is often low” (Flora and Flora 2004:87).

The median weekly earnings of Mexican migrants in a 2005 study were \$300 (Kochhar 2005a). In a study of Latino immigrants, the median earnings were \$384 in 2004, down from \$390 in 2003 (Kochhar 2005b). Following the 2002 recession, Latinos (native and foreign born) were the only group whose median earnings fell two years in a row. This was explained by the researchers as due to the high rate of Latino immigration and entry into low-paying jobs.

A quarter of Latinos have zero or negative net worth, which makes them particularly vulnerable to economic shocks, such as the 2001 recession (Kochhar 2004). Between 1999 and 2001 Latinos lost 27 percent of their net worth, which was below average before the recession. During the same period, the net wealth of non-Hispanic whites increased 2 percent. The median Latino household owns nine percent of the median net wealth of non-Hispanic white households, although Latinos earn about two-thirds the income of whites (Kochhar 2004). Net wealth is strongly associated with home-ownership; 48 percent of Latino households own houses, compared with 69 percent of non-Latinos.

Several factors contribute to these discrepancies in wealth, including a greater number of immigrants among the Latino population, younger households, less education, and concentration in coastal cities, where houses cost much more. Latinos in the Midwest are wealthier and more likely than on the coasts to own homes. The collective net wealth of Latinos is reduced by \$30 billion per year in remittances sent by U.S. families to their relatives back home. This amounts to more than \$2,500 per U.S. Latino household (Kochhar 2004).

The use of transnational migrant labor is explained as a way to provide industry with access to cheap labor without burdening the host society with social costs of reproduction (Buroway 1976; Cantu 1995; Wilson 2000). Buroway defines a system of migrant labor as one which separates the processes of renewal from those of maintenance; in other words, a worker migrates far away from his home and family for work. Through a migrant labor system, employers and/or the host country can externalize the costs of labor-force renewal (education, health and other social services). Buroway argues that migrant labor systems are reinforced by the state, through policies that regulate geographic mobility and restrict occupational mobility.

This conceptualization illuminates the mechanisms which make non-citizen immigrants vulnerable. Although increasingly families are immigrating with the primary worker, California's Proposition 187, the deployment of military forces to the U.S.-Mexico border, and an ongoing threat of deportation demonstrate a clear resistance in American society to paying the costs of renewal, despite a fundamental dependence on that migrant labor force (Wilson 2000). U.S. immigration policy ensures powerlessness among migrants by withholding from them the rights of citizenship or legal resident status. Thus rendered powerless, migrant laborers cannot demand state or employer support for their costs of renewal.

These conditions of economic, legal and social vulnerability of Latino immigrants make it especially important to find ways to develop institutions that support Latinos immigrants in their efforts to construct sustainable livelihoods.

## **Capitals**

Latino immigrants enter the U.S. economy through the secondary labor market, consisting of the jobs which are lower paying, lacking in benefits and sometimes unsafe. This pattern is related to an overall low level of formal education and limited English skills of Latino immigrants, and the nature or their previous job experience – elements of human capital. At the individual level, this pattern affects the opportunity structure, or available occupations. For rural Latinos, this limited opportunity structure overlaps with a similar opportunity structure for rural people – one consisting of limited job opportunities, most of which are in the service or manufacturing industries and are low paying.

A small paycheck is associated with limited financial capital, or money available to invest in an activity which garners more money, such as buying land for farming. Access to land usually depends on access to financial capital to purchase the land. However, application of the capitals framework has shown that the absence of financial capital does not necessarily prohibit low-income people from purchasing land, if other capitals can be mobilized. Indeed, farmers in my study had low paying jobs and nevertheless purchased a small plot of land to start farming.

For Latino immigrants, four capitals are especially important: financial, human, cultural and social (Dozi and Valdivia 2005). These capitals facilitate access to other capitals, such as built, natural, and political capitals. The latter refers to voice and influence when decisions about the allocation and distribution of resources are made (Flora and Flora 2004). Political capital typically accrues to members of the dominant culture, although marginalized groups can gain political capital by organizing to put their issues onto the agenda. Natural capital refers to the stocks, processes and qualities of the natural environment. Water, land and air quality are elements of natural capital, as are the activities of soil micro-organisms, the genetic quality of livestock, and biodiversity. A prominent feature of Iowa's natural capital is its deep, fertile, rain-fed soil.

### ***Financial/built capital***

The financial and built capitals are closely linked because they are easily transformed by investing financial capital to make built capital and converting built capital to financial capital through sale, mortgage, or similar mechanisms. Financial capital includes the various

financial instruments that at any point in time have a specific monetary value. This includes but is not limited to stocks, bonds, money orders, car title loans, payday loans, savings accounts, and cash. Individuals and businesses can use financial capital to make more money by investing it in productive resources, such as built capital. Built capital is the physical structures that support human activity (Flora and Flora 2004). For communities, this refers to bridges, water towers, fire services, schools, hospital buildings, and other constructions built for the public good. For a farm household, built capital includes the house, garage, machines, barns, and silo, for instance. Businesses and individuals wanting to expand their productive capacity can generate financial capital by selling built capital (a car, for instance), saving money, or securing a bank loan.

To get a loan, an applicant needs to demonstrate willingness and ability to repay the loan and interest it accumulates. Banks grant loans based on three criteria: the applicant's net worth, cash flow or personal character (Flora and Flora 2004). High net worth means the applicant has collateral, such as land, buildings, livestock, and machines, which can be taken by the bank if the loan is not repaid in full. The applicant must not have outstanding indebtedness which outweighs the value of the collateral. People with low or even negative net worth can still get a loan from a more speculative banker if they can demonstrate their future ability to make a positive cash flow. While the net worth criterion creates a bias toward people who already have financial capital, the cash flow criteria favors better educated people, or at least those with accounting know-how (Flora and Flora 2004).

The third criterion requires personal knowledge of the candidate, and has therefore been commonly used in small towns. Applicants are evaluated on their credit-worthiness in the eyes of the loan officer. A screening technique obviously subject to bias, this criterion has resulted in discrimination, in particular, against women and minorities applying for loans (Flora and Flora 2004; Green 2003). It is a good vehicle, though, for young people embarking on entrepreneurial careers. As banks consolidate and decision-makers are increasingly located in cities, it is less common for a loan applicant to be personally known by the loan officer, making this practice increasingly rare. Given these barriers to getting loans, alternative sources of credit have been established to increase access for underserved communities.

### ***Human capital***

Human capital refers to the set of personal characteristics that give agency to an individual. This includes inherent and cultivated intellectual, physical and temperamental strengths, which can be improved through education, training, therapy, practice and other self-improvement interventions and experiences. Human capital is used in economic theory to describe an asset that facilitates movement up the job ladder, and from the secondary to the primary job market (Flora and Flora 2004). Low levels of education, limited English language ability, and job history in the secondary labor market are associated with Latino immigrant concentration in the secondary labor market.

The earnings of Latinos in rural Missouri were shown to be higher for individuals the higher his/her level of education attainment; earnings were further increased when combined with good English proficiency (Dozi and Valdivia 2005). Duration of work experience in an industry had the greatest positive effect on wages.

In addition to actual shortfalls among immigrants in the types of human capital sought by U.S. employers, immigrants' upward mobility is further stymied by employers' reluctance to recognize educational credentials and job experience obtained abroad (Sanders and Nee 1996). Co-ethnics<sup>3</sup> do recognize these credentials, by contrast, and would be in a better position to provide employment commensurate with one's qualifications. However, these businesses tend to be too small-scale to provide opportunities for promotions and upward mobility. Sanders and Nee thus hold that self-employment becomes an attractive method by which to more fully utilize one's human capital.

Baker and Hotek (2003) argue that common measures of workers' skills – formal education and earnings – fail to capture other forms of human capital among Mexican immigrants in the Midwest. Their study in Marshalltown, Iowa, revealed a wide array of industrial skills among Mexican men and women. Ten percent had 10 years or more experience in telecommunications work, 6 percent had at least 10 years in earth-moving equipment operation, and 5 percent had at least 10 years of commercial truck driving experience. The most widely possessed skills are carpentry (50 percent), masonry (43 percent), earth-moving equipment operation (34 percent), plumbing (33 percent), and vehicle

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<sup>3</sup> "Co-ethnics" refers to members of the same ethnic group.



maintenance and repair (30 percent). Because of the limited range of job opportunities in this meatpacking town, these and perhaps other components of human capital remain latent and hidden.

### ***Cultural capital***

Cultural capital encompasses the values, norms and traditions transmitted through generations (Flora and Flora 2004). It influences one's perception of what is important and what career to pursue, and is based on the values and interpretation of reality imparted by one's family, community, social class, and society. Class has a strong influence on the cultural legacy transmitted from parents to children (Flora and Flora 2004). Flora and Flora argue that the professional class, confident in its ability to command high salaries and share in decision-making, values independent thought and action, and perceives success as deriving from higher education. The working class, by contrast, often has to settle for the low wages and industrial jobs they can get, and learns skills on the job instead of at college. Families who depend on a natural resource base for their income more strongly associate legacy with place than the professional class, which participates in regional or national job markets.

Culture is also associated with national, regional, rural or urban context. In rural Mexico, agriculture as a means of survival is central to the way of life, and children grow up watching and later helping their parents perform everyday agricultural tasks, such as milking and herding cows, and grinding corn stalks to use as feed (Bruna 2006). In her discussion of the differences in the school experience of Mexican children compared to American children, Bruna states that education in Mexico encompasses classroom experience, as well as the farming and household activities in which the whole family participates together. "In fact, the meaning of *educación* [education] in Mexico goes beyond what we attribute to it; it does not mean just schooling, but the process of learning to be a well-mannered and moral individual."

### ***Social capital***

Among the capitals necessary to build a sustainable livelihood, social capital is foundational because people gain access to resources through interactions with other people. Bebbington (1999) asserts that social capital is the "critical precursor" to other resources because it "inheres to the types of relationships that allow access." He explains that social

capital facilitates group action, such as formation of rotating savings and credit associations, which create access to financial capital. Similarly, the group action of forming a local or regional organization can create new linkages with market, government, and other civil society actors, and access to resources in those spheres of society.

By way of definition, social capital is a resource that is created within groups or between individuals, exists intangibly in these relationships, and accrues to persons in the form of access to community resources. Making claim to these resources requires adhering to the norms of reciprocity within a group, and making ongoing investments or “giving of gifts (real or symbolic) that instill emotions of gratitude friendship, respect” (Flora and Flora 2004). Relationships, therefore, at the family and community level, and with (outside) actors in the spheres of state, market and civil society must be effectively managed to build social capital, from which benefits are to be drawn (Bebbington 1999).

The concept includes bridging and bonding social capital. The latter consists of the connections and trust among members of a group defined by particular social characteristics, such as class, ethnicity and kinship (Flora and Flora 2004). Bridging social capital refers to the interconnections and trust between members of two or more socially distinct groups, such as between a community group and outside actors in the spheres of civil society or government.

When bridging social capital is missing within a local community, it leads to factionalism, lack of trust and conflict between groups. For the less dominant group, this restricts access to economic, social and political institutions which are controlled by the dominant group (Flora and Flora 2004). In a study of the vulnerability context and wellbeing of Latinos in rural Missouri, Valdivia (2005) shows that the social climate between Anglos and Latinos (as measured by incidence of racial profiling) had a negative effect on wages (Valdivia and Dozi 2005). This suggests that Latinos’ ability to integrate economically is impeded by a climate of hostility or social discrimination/exclusion.

In development terms, building social capital is a starting point to improving livelihoods because, like cultural capital, it does not necessarily require wealth, status or other forms of group privilege to develop within a household or community. This is because social capital is built upon exchanges between and among individuals, and “inheres in the relationship

between actors rather than in physical assets like financial capital, or in personal human capital,” according to Sanders and Nee (1996). In their study of immigrant self-employment, they focus on the social capital within a family, built upon mutual obligation and trust. The authors find that being married increases the chances of being self-employed; they conclude that immigrants rely on the social capital inherent in family relations to draw upon the financial and labor resources needed to start a business.

Families and family networks play an important role for Mexican migrants in aiding them upon their arrival and settlement in the United States. Eighty-seven percent of respondents in a 2005 survey of Mexican migrants reported having relatives (in addition to a spouse and children) living in the United States (Kochhar 2005a). Furthermore, the social networks of Latino immigrants often extend beyond kinship ties to include other former residents of their hometown. Roughly half the Latino workers at Swift pork packing plant, the largest employer in Marshalltown, Iowa, are from a single farming town in the state of Michoacán, Mexico (Grey and Woodrick 2002). A small stream of male migrants from Villachuato to Marshalltown began in the 1980s, and as these men established themselves their families joined them. Today, Marshalltown and Villachuato are mutually dependent on each other for workers and remittances, respectively.

In addition to family and transnational hometown networks, Latino immigrants also establish and reinforce social networks through involvement with their local church (Millard and Chapa 2004). Many Latino immigrants carry with them strong connections to the Catholic Church, which is deeply embedded in the cultural traditions of Mexico and other Latin American countries. In the rural Midwest, “it is not uncommon for families to drive more than an hour to attend services in Spanish” to interact with other Latinos on spiritual, cultural, civic, and community matters (Millard and Chapa 2004:193).

Social capital has also been shown to be vital for Latinos in getting started and staying in farming (Garcia 2005). Among 31 Latino farmers located in a fruit-producing county in southwestern Michigan, 75 percent were part of at least one of four known informal social networks. The Latino farmers in this study did not rely on U.S. Department of Agriculture programs. Either they were not aware of the programs, did not believe they were eligible, or they distrusted government. Therefore, Latino farmers accessed resources and problem-

solving assistance through social relations with other Latino farmers, including family, friends and acquaintances.

These social networks provided information about use of agrichemicals, crop disease threats, marketing, and the availability of farmland and machinery. They also shared labor crews and equipment, and assisted each other with planting, harvest and machine repair. Family members provided one another with loans to purchase land and equipment. The authors of this study conclude that “without this assistance, irrespective of the [financial] capital at their disposal, new immigrant farmers would not know how to start, and could run the risk of debt accumulation and business failure” (Garcia 2005). By contrast, Latino farmers in Missouri are generally unaware of other Latino farmers in their vicinity, despite the presence of 450 Latino farm operators in the state (Lucht 2006). Furthermore, these respondents of a 2004 Missouri Latino Farm Survey expressed little interest in joining a group of Latino farmers, and had low participation rates in any type of farm-related organization<sup>4</sup>.

The results of the Michigan study are consistent with other studies on the role of social capital in immigrant entrepreneurship. Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993) outline two sources of social capital commonly developed and utilized in immigrant groups that facilitate economic action: enforceable trust and bounded solidarity. The latter encompasses a mutual sense of moral duty among members of an oppressed or marginalized group or social class. This concept is rooted in Marx’s analysis of the proletariat gaining consciousness of itself as an exploited class, and becoming willing to struggle together for its common interests. Bounded solidarity is distinctly a collective response to a particular historical situation, such as the settlement of immigrants in a host society hostile toward them. In this context, “the confrontation with the receiving society is capable not only of activating dormant feelings of nationality among immigrants but of creating such feelings where none existed before” (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993).

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<sup>4</sup> It is possible the apparent difference in attitude between Latino farmers in Michigan and Missouri has to do with research methodology. Farmers in Michigan were interviewed face-to-face about their social networks, from which researchers derived a theory about the structure and role of informal networks. In-depth questioning of Missouri farmers may (or may not) have revealed greater reliance on kinship and other social ties than was revealed through a mail-in survey.

This response can be seen in the Mexican/Latino response to proposed U.S. immigration legislation to strip undocumented immigrants of several human rights, making them more vulnerable members of society. Legal and undocumented immigrants rallied together in protest. In mass demonstrations across the country in the spring and summer of 2006, Latinos carried Mexican flags and sang the U.S. national anthem in Spanish, pronouncing their national and cultural heritage as well as their right to participate in the U.S. economy, society and political process.

Portes (1998) explains that this form of social capital is manifest in altruistic behaviors among group members. These can be drawn upon by individuals for their own pursuits, such as being defended in a problem situation or supported in a productive initiative. Immigrant entrepreneurs draw on bounded solidarity to access markets for culturally defined products, reliable low-wage labor, and start-up capital. Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993) describe a niche market in Miami, created in the context of bounded solidarity, for traditional Nicaraguan *cotonas*, cotton shirts that symbolize a shared cultural heritage.

Enforceable trust is a source of social capital based on compliance with group norms in exchange for periodic rewards associated with group membership. Unlike bounded solidarity, which is motivated by moral commitment, enforceable trust is utilitarian and rational (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993). Investment in a group may be made by giving a symbolic or real gift to an individual or in making a contribution to the group itself, such as through volunteer work. Social transactions are monitored by the collectivity, which “itself acts as guarantor that whatever debts are incurred will be repaid” (Portes 1998). Capital accrues in the form of status, honor or approval, and punishments are meted out in the form of shame or exclusion.

Among immigrant groups, enforceable trust creates social conditions for group members to lend money to one another on the assumption that recipients will repay to avoid being ostracized, and to build or maintain their social capital for future needs (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993). The extent to which enforceable trust functions as a source of social capital depends on the group’s ability to enforce norms and monitor behavior. By this criterion, small towns – where social monitoring is easier with fewer people involved, and people depend upon one-another for favors, such as plowing driveway after a blizzard – would be likely communities for enforceable trust to operate.

### **Institutions and Organizations**

Institutional processes, such as markets, policies and educational systems, mediate an individual's access to resources (Scoones 1998). These processes take place within organizational structures, such as government, NGOs, schools and private companies. Processes can grant or deny access to resources to individuals or communities, depending on their particular relations to it. The job market is for Latino immigrants is a process that provides abundant opportunity to be employed. It is easy to enter the secondary job market, and to move between jobs within that market, but quite difficult to make the transition from the secondary to the primary job market.

The following diagram shows the most common industries nationwide for Latino immigrant workers and common occupations and associated wage rates. To construct this matrix, I identified the five industries and 20 occupations with the highest numbers of Latino immigrants employed (Kochhar 2005b). I then looked at the median wage rates of the largest occupations within these industries (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2006). The largest occupations in the industries were not necessarily the same as the most common occupations for Latino immigrant workers. Therefore, I entered the occupations and median wage rates in the matrix only for the largest occupations within each industry that were also among the most common occupations for Latino immigrant workers. The matrix is not complete or exhaustive, but is rather a sampling of common Latino immigrant jobs and the official industry pay rates for those jobs.

The dashed lines illustrate lateral mobility among jobs of comparable quality. The edges of the matrix are also perforated to underscore the importance and the possibility of Latino immigrants moving into non-traditional occupations.

Occupation median pay rate:	<u>Construction</u>	<u>Wholesale &amp; retail trade</u>	<u>Manufacturing (durable and nondurable)</u>	<u>Eating, drinking and lodging services</u>	<u>Professional and business services</u>
\$15-17/hour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Carpenters</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ First-line retail supervisors</li> </ul>			
\$13-15/hour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Painters, construction &amp; maintenance</li> </ul>				
\$11-13/hour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Construction laborers</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Filling machine operators &amp; tenders</li> </ul>		
\$9-11/hour		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Laborers &amp; freight, stock &amp; material movers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Laborers &amp; freight, stock &amp; material movers</li> <li>■ Packers &amp; packagers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Cooks - restaurant</li> <li>■ Janitors &amp; cleaners</li> </ul>	
Less than \$9/hour		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Retail salespersons</li> <li>■ Cashiers</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Maids &amp; housekeeping cleaners</li> <li>■ Cashiers</li> <li>■ Waiters &amp; waitresses</li> <li>■ Cooks - fast food</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Production workers</li> <li>■ Construction laborers</li> <li>■ Packaging &amp; filling machine operators</li> <li>■ Laborers &amp; freight, stock &amp; material movers</li> </ul>

(Kochhar 2005b, Bureau of Labor Statistics 2006)

Diagram 2: Matrix of common industries and occupations with official wage rates

### ***Latino immigrants as workers***

The majority of Latino immigrants in the U.S. are employed in construction. The next largest employer of these workers is (durable and nondurable) manufacturing, followed by eating, drinking and lodging services; wholesale and retail trade; and professional and business services (Pew 2005b). The industries where Latino immigrants work are among the U.S. industries with the most jobs overall, meaning this group enters many of the mainstream industries of the U.S. economy. An exception is that while construction is the largest employer of Latino immigrants, it is not among the top five industries for the total U.S. workforce, while educational, health and social services is. In addition to a high

representation in the construction industry, Latino immigrants as a group are differentiated from the average U.S. worker by the occupational niches they occupy across industries.

Professional and business services, for instance, includes scientific, engineering and architectural professions, as well as landscaping and waste management jobs (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2006). Within this sector is the employment services industry, which places workers in temporary and permanent jobs. It has occupations ranging from the top executives and placement specialists to the professional, service and production workers they place. While the median hourly earning of a registered nurse in this industry is \$30.37, packers and packagers make a median wage of \$7.80 per hour (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2006). Note that construction laborers in this industry earn at least two dollars per hour less than construction laborers hired on a permanent basis in the construction industry.

Latino immigrants are only seven percent of the U.S. population, but 48 percent of plasterers and stucco masons; 45 percent of drywall installers, ceiling tile installers and tapers, and pressers of textile garment and related materials; and 40 percent of miscellaneous agriculture workers (Kochhar 2005b). The occupations with the highest number of Latino immigrant workers (across industries) are: maids and housekeeping cleaners, grounds and maintenance workers, janitors and building cleaners, construction laborers and cooks.

The industries with the highest concentrations of native-born Latinos are the same as for the total U.S. workforce: educational, health and social services; wholesale and retail trade; eating, drinking and lodging services; (durable and nondurable) manufacturing; and professional and business services. Construction industry employs the most immigrant Latinos, while education, health and social services employs the greatest number of native-born Latinos (Pew 2005). Although educational services is among the industries with the highest rates of unionization, it is also among those with the greatest number of part-time workers, as are the social assistance and child day care services industries. However, these industries have a lower injury rates than construction, which ties with manufacturing for having the highest injury rate of all U.S. industries (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2006).

The job market for Latinos in Iowa is generally consistent with the national context, except that manufacturing is by far the dominant industry, employing nearly 40 percent of the Latino population (State Data Center of Iowa 2006). Accordingly, the production,



transportation and material moving occupations employ about 40 percent of Latinos in Iowa. Service occupations, the second largest occupational niche, employ less than 20 percent of Latinos.

A study in six large U.S. cities (Kochhar 2005a) shows that Mexican migrants find jobs through networks of family and friends, and that jobseekers with and without legal documentation have the same rate of success in finding a job. Furthermore, even as more Latino immigrants enter the workforce, their rates of unemployment dropped two percentage points in 2004 (Kochhar 2005b). This suggests ample lateral mobility among the primary occupations where Mexican and other Latino immigrants work.

While changing jobs within the secondary job market is not difficult, upward movement to the primary labor markets is limited (Flora and Flora 2004) without higher education. Upward mobility is detectable among immigrants in cohort studies. The number of immigrants who entered the U.S. workforce during the 1980s occupying the lowest paying jobs dropped by 200,000 between 1990 and 2000, while those in the highest paying jobs increased by 150,000 (Bean, Leach and Lowell 2004).

However, overall job growth in the 1990s (not within a cohort), disaggregated by nativity, shows Latino immigrants clustered in the low and middle range jobs, while Asian immigrant job growth was disproportionately in the higher paying jobs (Bean et al. 2004). This has to do with a steady high influx of Latino workers entering the secondary job market every year. In 2004, Latino employment in the U.S. increased by one million workers, 83 percent of whom were employed in jobs requiring a high school education or less (Kochhar 2005b). Fewer than 10 percent of Latino immigrants were employed in occupations calling for a partial or complete college education.

### ***Latino immigrants as rural residents***

Rural areas are less likely than urban areas to have the organizations and other public and private structures needed by people to climb and stay out of poverty (Department for International Development). What rural areas do have is local governments, although these vary in their degree of inclusiveness. “Local governments are important to rural areas because they (1) offer a structure by which community members participate in local decisions, (2) provide services and community facilities and (3) link rural revenues to local

needs” (Flora and Flora 2004:319). And yet these governments suffer chronically from shortages of funding, and struggle to provide adequate services to residents (Flora and Flora 2004). Funding can come from state or federal allocations or local taxes. Because of smaller, sparser populations it is more expensive in rural areas to run public institutions, such as schools, libraries, and fire departments, and provide public services (Green 2005).

In addition, rural Midwestern towns generally have a limited range of employers and low economic diversification. Upward mobility among rural people is hampered by difficulty accessing credit and minimal job training opportunities (Green 2005). However, community organizations and firms can address these problems collaboratively by creating networks to improve the information flow in the local labor market and initiate job training and job search activities (Green 2005). Community organizations can also facilitate the creation of community development banks, which leverage and allocate credit differently than private banks. Access to credit is essential for people buying land or a home, and for entrepreneurs.

### ***Latino immigrants as farmers***

To manage the risks of farming, farmers use a range of other institutions, including markets, and with varying degrees of dependence. Row crop farmers in the Midwest are heavily dependent on U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) farm subsidies. Many of these farmers are also heavily capitalized, and depend on input suppliers, credit agencies and international commodity markets (Marsden 1990). Other types of farmers rely on local institutions, such as farmers markets and Community Supported Agriculture, free manure from a neighboring farm, and farm auctions for used equipment. Government agencies, such as Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), Farm Services Agency (FSA) and state departments of agriculture provide other services to farmers, including organic and meat-inspection certifications, loan programs and technical assistance. U.S. farmers use university extension programs for education and consultation on farming techniques and technology.

Only recently have these organizations begun to publicly recognize the increasing ubiquity and needs of Latino farmers in the U.S. The USDA shows signs of wanting to improve outreach to Latino farmers by having launched a Spanish-language Web site. ATTRA (National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service), a private non-profit with

USDA funding, has also extended its programming to Latino farmers by creating a bilingual Web site.

In addition to extending existing structures to new audiences, social change is also facilitated by creating new organizational structures such as many of those networked through the National Immigrant Farming Initiative (NIFI). These are collaborative, capacity-building initiatives to help immigrants enter and succeed in farming. They have been established mainly in urban areas. Projects like New Entry Sustainable Farming Project based at Tufts University in Boston provide training and ongoing assistance to immigrants from Southeast Asia, West Africa and Latin America in farm business development and production. Many also provide land for beginning farmers to use while they establish a farm business and, later, assistance in finding more permanent farmland to rent or buy. Below is a listing of programs for immigrant farmers:

<b>Immigrant farming project, location</b>	<b>Programming</b>
New Entry Sustainable Farming Project, Tufts University, <i>Boston, MA</i>	Production, business and marketing training, access to land
New Farmer Development Project, Cornell Cooperative Extension, <i>New York, NY</i>	Production, business and marketing training, mentoring, credit opportunities, access to land
Southside Community Land Trust: Farm Business Incubator, <i>Providence, RI</i>	Production, business and marketing training, access to land
Nuestras Raices Tierra de Oportunidades, <i>Holyoke, MA</i>	Assistance in transition from community gardening to commercial farming
Agriculture and Land-Based training Association (ALBA), <i>Salinas, CA</i>	Production, business, marketing and organic certification procedures training, access to land, ESL classes
Minnesota Food Association: New Immigrant Agriculture Project, <i>Minneapolis, MN</i>	Production, business and marketing training, access to land

*Table 1: Immigrant farming projects throughout the U.S. and types of programming*

### **Livelihood Strategy**

A household's livelihood is comprised of household members' capabilities, the activities they do to make a living, their tangible and intangible resources, and what they gain from engaging their capabilities and resources (Chambers and Conway 1991). Livelihood activities yield food, money, shelter and other goods sought through making a living. Livelihood strategies of the rural poor are grouped into three types in the SRL framework: migration, livelihood diversification, and agricultural intensification (or extensification).

### ***Immigrant household strategies and entrepreneurship***

Immigrant household strategies to avert poverty – induced by low wages and commitments to family back home to export earnings in remittances – include packaging multiple incomes. This is possible through engaging in various forms of formal and informal work<sup>5</sup>. The household, not individual, is the appropriate unit for analyzing economic wellbeing among low-skilled workers because of the economies of scale, according to Tienda and Raijman (2000). “The analysis of household incomes revealed highly complex packaging strategies that involved activities in the formal and informal market, as well as non-labor income sources such as rent and transfer income” (Tienda and Raijman 2000:307).

Latinos hold multiple jobs at a lower rate (3.1 percent of all employed persons) than Whites (5.4 percent), Blacks (5 percent) or Asians (4.1 percent), although the race groupings do not exclude Latino ethnicity (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2005). It is likely that unauthorized immigrants are not included in these figures, and that they have the highest multiple job holding of all Latinos. Informal and part-time work are critical components of total household earnings, and are neglected in most conventional assessments of income levels among low wage workers (Tienda and Raijman 2000). Nearly a quarter of respondents in a study of Mexican immigrants in Chicago worked informally in such endeavors as childcare, housecleaning, laundry services, at-home or street vending, gardening, and repair work. These households generated an average of nearly 19 percent of their total income through informal self-employment and part-time jobs, and five percent through non-labor income (Tienda and Raijman 2000).

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<sup>5</sup> Informal work refers to income-generating activities that are unregulated by state institutions in regard to the status, pay and conditions of employment, as well as the form of management, including recording cash transactions (Raijman 2001).

There are different theories about why immigrants become self-employed (Portes and Zhou 1996). The first is that they are pushed into it as a result of discrimination in the mainstream job market, where they cannot find jobs commensurate with their skills; they become self-employed because it's the only decent option. Expertise or education obtained abroad is often not recognized or accepted in the receiving country's market. Another theory is that immigrants are pulled into self-employment in their ethnic enclave economy, where they recognize great niche market opportunities. Both theories are plausible.

Evidence of a "pull" into entrepreneurship is that self-employed immigrants have higher earnings on average than have their salaried counterparts (Portes and Zhou 1996). However, the self-employed may also work longer hours, have more years of work experience and residence in the U.S., and more knowledge of English.

Mexican immigrants in an ethnic enclave of Chicago began their path to self-employment in the informal sector, as street vendors, or home-based or flea market shops, and built up to a formal storefront business (Tienda and Raijman 1999). More than one quarter of Latino businesses in the study started informally, a high percentage compared to other ethnic groups. As a stepping stone to formal self-employment, the study suggests that informal business activity allows immigrants to test their products on the market, accumulate capital or learn how to access it, and practice their business skills, without a large up-front investment.

Employment in a co-ethnic<sup>6</sup> business is another path toward self-employment. It was more common for Koreans in the Chicago study, while informal self-employment was more common step toward entrepreneurship for Mexicans (Tienda and Raijman 1999). Recent newspaper articles, especially from the West Coast, where Latino farm workers have a large historical presence, have documented Latino farm workers becoming farm operators.

An article in Oregon, titled "Farm to Field" (Wides 2005), noted: "The evolution from farm worker to farm operator is occurring as farmers in general find it increasingly tough to eke out a living. Many white families are leaving the industry and selling their ranches to workers rather than passing them on to sons or daughters." Another from Washington State

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<sup>6</sup> A co-ethnic business is one where the employer and employees are members of the same ethnic group.

(Schilling and Olmstead 2006), titled “Once limited to field work, Hispanics now buying farms” made a similar observation that farm workers are buying the farms of their employers.

### *Pluriactive farming*

A concept for understanding rural household strategies in advanced industrialized countries is pluriactivity. This refers to “the propensity of farm households to engage in work other than farming, a mode of household economy that has reached major proportions in some parts of industrial societies” (Fuller and Bollman 1992:202). In 68 percent of U.S. farm households, the operator, spouse or both worked off-farm in 2003 (Hoppe and Banker 2006). A farm is defined by the USDA as any place with annual sales of \$1,000 or more in agricultural products.

Economists Duffy and Nanhou (2003) note an important distinction between farm and farm household: A farm is a business whose main goal is profit, while a farm household strives to achieve a range of things, including, for instance, income, job and family satisfaction, prestige and a quiet life. In the SRL terms, these household goals are elements of “wellbeing.”

The theoretical link between SRL and pluriactivity has been made by Kinesella, Wilson, De Jong, and Renting (2000), who describe the latter as a livelihood strategy, alongside other strategies such as full-time farming and leaving agriculture altogether. They studied two western Ireland counties where pluriactivity is a long-standing tradition, and farmers’ reasons for farming are not strictly economic. Three distinct classes of pluriactive farmers revealed by this study include: those who recently started working off-farm of necessity, breaking a family history of full-time farming; those for whom farming for generations was paired with a complementary off-farm income source; and a third class of new or returning farmers. The third group of people chose pluriactive farming, despite being otherwise gainfully employed, for the quietude of country life.

Pluriactivity can take the form of off-farm work (in professional or low-wage jobs), or on-farm reinvestment and diversification of activities (Fuller and Bollman 1992), such as establishing a bed-and-breakfast. It is seen as evidence of social change and evolving concepts of work (Fuller and Bollman 1992). Part-time work and multiple job holding are becoming the norm throughout society, including the agricultural sector. In the U.S., farm

households are about as likely to be “dual career” (with two spouses working in two different jobs) as U.S. households in general (Hoppe and Banker 2006). Pluriactivity is also seen as a form of household resistance to market-dependence in the face of agricultural restructuring and commoditization (Marsden 1990).

As a livelihood strategy, pluriactivity is distinct to advanced industrialized societies. The pressures on households are different in the rural Midwest than they are in, for instance, rural West Africa or Mexico. Whereas SRL households in developing countries often lack formal employment opportunities outside of farming, pluriactive farmers in industrialized countries struggle to continue farming despite more plentiful opportunities outside of agriculture.

Pluriactivity is increasingly part of rural development discussions in the U.S., Europe and Canada (Fuller and Bollman 1992). Europe’s new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) emphasizes the importance of supporting a competitive and sustainable agriculture while developing a broader rural economy. Specifically, the policy promotes “the maintenance of vibrant rural communities, capable of generating employment opportunities for the rural population” (European Commission 1999). Kinsella et al. (2000) recommend the creation of jobs which are compatible with part-time farming to promote pluriactivity. They state that: “rural development is about the construction of linkages between different economic sectors, households regaining control over their farm resources, and people actively choosing to construct their livelihood in the countryside” (Kinsella et al. 2000:494).

In addition to farming and formal off-farm employment, household strategies in the rural U.S. can also involve subsistence activities (such as gardening), money-saving activities (such as doing one’s own building or repairs), and work in the informal economy (McGranahan 2005). These are strategies to augment income or get by with less income.

### **Aims and Outcomes**

Chambers (1995:199) states that the SRL “analysis reframes and shifts the balance of objectives of development: from reducing income-poverty to diminishing deprivation and enhancing wellbeing.” Wellbeing is a very general concept referring to “the experience of a good quality of life” (Chambers 1995:175), which encompasses economic wellbeing. A high quality of life may also entail opportunities for recreation, leisure and learning, healthy

relationships, a sense of security and control, and meaningful work, for instance. For people who choose rural life, or those whose heritage is intimately linked to the land, rural living itself may provide their greatest sense of wealth, even if they are income poor (Bebbington 1999).

In her study of maple syrup producers in Vermont and Quebec, Hinrichs (1998) observed multiple motivations for farmers and non-farmers to continue to participate in a cottage industry which is not very lucrative. The study shows that maple syrup enterprises are not typically the main income source for producers, nor is the market value of syrup a central concern. Yet sugaring is integral as a risk-management strategy to rural livelihoods that combine multiple income-generating activities. It makes use of forest resources and labor resources to multiply the benefits. For instance, sugaring is a way for dispersed family members to reunite annually for the shared work of sugaring the family woodlot. For farmers, sugaring makes use of a time of year (spring) when the land is covered in snow and not available for other operations.

Hinrichs finds that maple sugaring is integral to the economic and cultural wellbeing of small producers. It is a way to assert a rural identity and to honor a sense of family and regional tradition. She notes that comments such as: “‘in springtime, it’s absolutely necessary to go and sugar. We’ve always done it. It’s just our custom’ ... suggest a cultural imperative emerging from tradition and custom” (Hinrichs 1998:524).

For people building a livelihood from a marginalized or impoverished situation, the criteria for wellbeing may be more rudimentary. When asked by development workers about what contributes to wellbeing and a good life, local people indicated a wide range of factors beyond income wealth (Chambers 1995). Several criteria (compiled from sources in Asia and Africa), expressed in negative form, include: being disabled or widowed, lacking land, livestock or equipment, having to put children in employment and not school, and having to accept demeaning work. Improvement on any of these fronts through livelihood strategies drawing on multiple capitals, then, could enhance wellbeing even without higher income.

From a development perspective, awareness of the livelihood objectives sought by individuals, households and communities themselves is critical to measuring meaningful progress. In this paper, the multiple objectives of my respondents provide an explanation of



why income-poor immigrants enter farming, which is perceived as risky in Iowa, Mexico, and throughout the world.

### **CHAPTER THREE RESEARCH METHODS**

Despite a sizeable and growing Latino population in rural Iowa, these and other immigrants are noticeably absent as producers in local food systems. Some new immigrants grew up on farms in their home countries. As I became aware of this, I wanted to investigate Latino immigrant motivations, challenges and resources to farm in Iowa. I decided on this research topic in the spring of 2005 after my proposal to U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)'s Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) for a graduate student grant was accepted. My proposal, titled "Assessing the Feasibility of Entry into Entrepreneurial Agriculture for Immigrants in Marshalltown," entailed survey, focus group and in-depth interview research. This thesis focuses on the in-depth interview data. Here, I provide background to highlight the pragmatic purpose of my research.

As I embarked on the project, I learned of others interested in exploring the topic of immigrant farmers. In particular, Tanya Meyer-Dideriksen, state outreach coordinator for Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and Linda Barnes, director of the Entrepreneurial and Diversified Agriculture program at Marshalltown Community College, both wanted to cater their respective agricultural programming to an immigrant audience. Their interest made my research more relevant as I gained a professional/institutional audience.

I chose to use only the data collected through my in-depth interviews for this thesis because of its richness and aptness for theoretical analysis. By comparison, the survey data were simplistic and less theoretically interesting. They were valuable, however, in establishing some evidence that research and development to support immigrant farmers are worthwhile. In addition, the survey and focus group project spurred valuable relationships for grant-seeking initiatives related to immigrant farming in Iowa.

In regard to this pragmatic context for my research, I hope this paper achieves a few things: first, by sketching out the types of farming systems these farmers created in Iowa, I hope to paint a picture of the kinds of farms that might appear if more immigrants from subsistence farming backgrounds entered farming. These farmers have great potential to contribute to sustainability in Iowa agriculture, given a proclivity among them toward

diversified horticultural and livestock production, local marketing, eating fresh, whole foods, and being productive members of a rural community. Second, I hope to show that pluriactive farming can enhance the resilience of Latino immigrants against pressures they face as sometimes vulnerable members of U.S. society. And third, by parsing apart the component parts of a livelihood into resources, activities, and institutional processes, I wish to direct attention to places where agencies might valuably intervene with institutional “tools” to improve livelihood outcomes.

### **Case Study**

This thesis is a case study of Mexican immigrant farmers in Iowa. A case study is an inquiry that “investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin 2003:13). The context is the experience of immigrating to rural Iowa from rural Mexico. A case study approach to qualitative research is useful when the contextual conditions are “highly pertinent to your phenomenon of study” (Yin 2003:13). These conditions are pertinent because they are unique in the Iowa farming community, and characterized by particular set of challenges and opportunities.

I use the Sustainable Rural Livelihoods framework to analyze individual action within a given socio-economic and geographic life-history context. I am using the capitals framework embedded in SRL as an “individual theory” (Yin, 2003:31) to analyze how individuals draw upon and transform multiple resources/capitals in carrying out their livelihood activities to achieve desired outcomes.

### **Finding Farmers**

In Iowa, there are 537 operators of Latino origin, 380 of which are principal operators (NASS 2002a; NASS 2002b). I set out to find at least four to interview. I anticipated finding farmers more easily than I actually did. My survey in Marshalltown was the first vehicle I used to locate farmers. I asked each survey respondent for referrals to any Latino immigrant farmers they might know, and none knew of any.

Next, I called the Iowa National Agriculture Statistics Office (NASS) office for tips on finding Latino farmers in Iowa, but the person I spoke with couldn't provide me with confidential information on the whereabouts of individual farmers. Ironically, a few weeks into my search, another Iowa NASS staff person (who had heard about my study at a state agriculture outreach meeting) called me asking for tips on how to find Latino farmers. I told her I had found only one Latino-owned farm by that point, and expressed my surprise at not having located more, given NASS's much higher figure. She suggested the number could be an overestimate due, in part, to error and to alternative interpretations of the question on ethnic origin (depending on how far back in one's lineage one looks for Hispanic roots).

Other studies (Garcia and Marinez 2005) suggest the opposite, that Latino farmers are undercounted. In Van Buren County, Michigan, 33 Latino farmers were located through a USDA-funded project, "Farmworker Transition to Farm Ownership." Researchers used local contacts and social networks to find farmers, and conducted personal interviews to learn whether these farmers were using USDA programs.

The findings of that study reveal that Latino immigrants do not use federal or university extension programs. The barriers to participation, according to the authors, included a lack of awareness among Iowa State University (ISU) Extension and Farm Services Agency (FSA) of immigrant farmers, and, among immigrant farmers, of the Census of Agriculture. Other barriers to filling out Census forms included language and illiteracy. Immigrants were also apprehensive about the USDA's regulatory role, and about revealing their identity to a federal agency in an era of backlash against unauthorized immigration. Other barriers to census participation included: a practice where the farm loan holder is not farming, but rather lending his/her good credit rating to the family member who is farming; informal farming arrangements where only the farm owners are listed as farmers, although other family members also farm on the same land; and lastly, farmers who are also farm workers do not consider themselves farmers.

The authors recommend that an alternative enumeration be carried out to locate Latino farmers, collect their basic information, learn whether they had participated in the most recent census, and if not, to understand why they were omitted. They argue that only with

accurate census information can Extension and FSA effectively serve Latino farmers, and advocate for farm legislation that addresses Latino farmer needs.

All farmers I interviewed were reluctant to call themselves farmers, either because they were just beginning to farm or they didn't depend on it as their primary income source. None had used NRCS, FSA or Extension, which helps explain why they were hard to find through those channels. It is likely that there are more second or third generation Latinos and fewer immigrants in NASS's Latino farmer count for Iowa.

As part of my search for Latino immigrant farmers, I put together a survey for ISU Extension, inquiring about farming experience and access to resources, which NRCS delivered to 24 Latino farmers who have used their services. I sent Spanish and English versions of the survey in each mailing. Two English-speaking people responded to the English survey, and one English-speaking Iowa native with a Hispanic name called me. No Spanish-speakers responded. The caller said he raised corn, beans and calves, just like a regular Iowa farmer. He was confused as to why he had received the survey: "I'm an American. I was born here," he said. Although he seemed agitated at first, even offended, we continued to talk and eventually found common ground talking about grazing cattle. This survey did not lead me to Latino immigrant farmers.

I was referred early in my search to a county economic development director, who invited me to a meeting of Latino community leaders in a packing plant town in southeast Iowa – traditional melon-farming country. I went to the meeting and spent the next day in a small, mixed Latino-Anglo town tracking the contacts the leaders had given me the previous night. I optimistically expected to find two or three farmers. But of the half-dozen Latino households I asked, those who knew any Latino farmers knew of the same individual – this person became my first interview respondent, and the only one I found through a methodical search. I encountered my other interview respondents by chance through my own involvement in another project, or by referral from colleagues familiar with my project.

Prior to doing this research for my thesis, I conducted research in northwest Iowa on the market for goat meat among recent immigrants in the urban Siouxland area. An exploration of the supply chain for goat meat from producers to purveyors led me to a custom meat locker in the area. By chance, this locker owner was Mexican, and in the course of our

interview, he mentioned something about a brother or cousin who owned a farm. When I was looking for immigrant farmers a year after that, I remembered this reference and looked back in my notes from that interview. This Mexican locker owner became one of my respondents, as did his cousin who lived in a neighboring town.

In spite of my lack of success in finding immigrant Latino farmers through a methodical search using institutional contacts, this search is informative. It suggests that, whether there are few or many first-generation Latino farmers, they are not well connected with the institutional structures that support farmers or immigrants. I inquired with the following individuals/organizations involved in agriculture, food systems or immigrant services/integration:

- The state outreach coordinator of the FSA
- 10 district conservationists with NRCS
- ISU Extension directors in the 10 Iowa counties with the highest Latino populations
- New Iowans Center (5 regional offices)
- New Iowans Center (Migrant and Seasonal Farm-worker Program, 2 regional offices)
- Iowa Division of Latino Affairs
- Eight small, local Latino/community centers around the state, referred to me by Extension directors and others

### **Male Bias**

Each case study focuses on a male farmer, despite that each was married to a woman who contributed equally to maintaining the farm household, including, in some cases, doing farm work. I chose to focus on the man in each case for a few reasons. First, I interviewed the specific person to whom I was referred, and I was never referred to either a woman or a couple. Second, I wanted to learn about the life course of individuals, their particular agricultural experiences, and how those experiences provided a foundation of skills, values and direction toward pursuing agriculture as a livelihood component; I was not interested in the experience of a couple or a family, per se. Had I chosen to focus at the level of household

rather than individual, I would likely have seen a more nuanced picture of family motivations to farm and outcomes from farming, and a more complete picture of the activities and work involved in household maintenance and livelihood activities.

### **Conducting Interviews**

To arrange three of the four interviews, I called the respondent in advance to introduce myself and the project and settle on a meeting date and time. I conducted interviews with these respondents in two stages – while touring the farm, and sitting or standing face to face. I arranged the fourth interview through a community liaison for the meatpacking plant where my respondent works. The liaison arranged a meeting for him, the respondent and me at a Mexican restaurant in the town where they both live; the respondent's wife also joined us. The liaison agreed to assist me by sitting in on the interview and interpreting as needed; after the formal (recorded) interview was complete, the liaison bought dinner for all of us and we stayed and chatted for another hour.

Each of the four interviews lasted two hours and, with respondents' permission (each gave me permission), was recorded. I conducted two interviews in Spanish assisted by a bilingual colleague and two in English on my own. All four respondents are men, and in two interviews, the respondent's wife sat in for a part or the whole interview. Each interview was open-ended, guided by three question themes: What is your past farm and work experience, how did you start farming in Iowa, and why do you farm?

I began each interview with small talk to warm up, and then explained (usually as a recap) the purpose and nature of my project. This typically prompted the respondent to begin telling me why or how they started farming, which I would have to interrupt to explain the informed consent process. I introduced the informed consent sheet (in Spanish or English), highlighting my request for the interview to be audio recorded, and gave the respondent a few minutes to read and sign the form. I also presented at this time an honorarium form, which called for a social security number, home address, and contained a short questionnaire about current, past and family employment at ISU, and personal citizenship/residency status in the U.S. This was required in order to pay my respondents an honorarium of \$50 each, which the university mailed out after the interview.

Having these forms filled out at the start of the interview created unavoidably clumsy interaction, and the request for a social security number was somewhat intrusive, especially given the precarious legal status of many Latinos. In one interview, the community liaison assured the respondent, as I asked for the forms to be filled out, that he should not be alarmed or threatened. The respondent hadn't acted alarmed, but the liaison reminded him anyway I was simply a student doing research, and nothing more. Except in creating an added feeling of formality between me and the respondents, beginning interviews this way didn't noticeably inhibit their responses. I chose to not ask respondents any questions about their legal status in order to avoid unnecessarily creating discomfort or mistrust, especially since that issue is not directly pertinent to my study.

In addition to recording, I also took notes through each interview. I followed up after the visits by sending language-appropriate literature on farming topics respondents had requested or I thought might be useful to them, and Census brochures given to me by NASS. I called respondents for clarification or for additional information a few months after the initial interviews.

My Spanish language ability is such that although I can follow a simple narrative and respond appropriately, I am aware of missing details, and I easily get lost when speech is rapid or not straightforward in meaning. Therefore, it was essential to have assistance for the interviews and transcriptions. The first Spanish interview I conducted with assistance from a bilingual native of Colombia – a college student intern working with me over the summer. I transcribed this interview myself, and then had a native Spanish speaker from Uruguay listen to the recording and correct my transcription errors and gaps. The second Spanish interview I conducted with the assistance of the bilingual community liaison of the meatpacking plant. I had it transcribed by a native Spanish speaker originally from Mexico, raised in Iowa – a college student.

In both interviews, I asked questions and listened to responses in Spanish, and turned to my interpreters for help as needed. Both interpreters interjected a few of their own questions as they arose. I did not have these transcriptions translated into English in their entirety, but rather, asked for assistance from a native Spanish speaker when meanings in the transcriptions eluded me. The two interviews I conducted in English were transcribed by two



college students, one of whom was the same bilingual student who transcribed one of the Spanish interviews.

### **Analyzing Data**

I began data analysis after conducting all the interviews. I began analysis by open-coding the transcriptions. Coding is the process of dissecting data, and sorting it into meaningful categories. The goal of coding in qualitative analysis is “not to count things, but to fracture the data and rearrange them into categories that facilitate comparison between things in the same category, and that aid in the development of theoretical concepts” (Maxwell 2005).

First, I read through the transcriptions and underlined parts that stood out as relevant to my research question: how and why did this person start farming in Iowa. In the right margin, I noted the pertinent topics being addressed to serve as flags for later reference. I then entered all the topics from a single transcription in a notebook and grouped them into a few umbrella themes, such as: “adapting to rural Iowa,” “family,” “community,” and “personal connection to the land.”

After I had gone through two transcriptions and one set of field notes, I compared the sub-themes from each interview. I looked for cross-cutting themes, and found broad themes such as “social relations” and “personal motivations.” I then returned to the SRL framework for an organizing structure for the data, and tried to relate my emergent interview themes to the SRL categories: “capitals,” “structures and processes,” “livelihood strategies,” and “outcomes.” I added an additional category, which I called “paths,” to refer to the career and life path of each respondent.

I saw that I could combine “aims” (or “personal motivations”) with “outcomes,” and think about these data in terms of why Latino immigrants farm. Similarly, I incorporated the sub-themes of “social relations” into “capitals” (social capital), and thought about it in regard to how Latino immigrants farm. I continued to sort data in this way, eventually incorporating all emergent themes in SRL categories, and clustering these categories into what would become sections of my results chapter: “what,” “how,” and “why.”

I returned to the transcriptions with a new coding system that combined the theoretical structure of SRL with the emergent themes of the data. I established a color coding of blue

for “what,” green for “why,” and orange for “how.” In the left margin of each transcription, I flagged lines and passages according to cluster (what, how and why) and category (livelihood strategies, capitals, structures and processes, and outcomes). For instance, when a respondent discussed experience or knowledge (human capital) about farming acquired in Mexico, I would mark the margin orange for “how,” and write: “ca/farm – hu-mx.” Similarly, to flag an instance of social capital which facilitated the purchase of land, I would mark the margin orange and write: “ca/land – soc,” and so on.

Once the transcriptions were coded this way, I went back through each interview to pull out color-coded references and transfer them to a series of “data buckets.” These data buckets are simply sheets of paper that I labeled by cluster and theme – for instance: “How: social capital,” or “Why: meaningful work,” or “What: career pathway.” These then provided me with the content, by section, for my results chapter.

I often had to return to my theory section for further development before I could proceed with data sorting and analysis. For instance, when I began organizing data related to social capital, I realized I was unclear about how to identify instances of social capital that contributed to livelihood sustainability. This compelled me to review literature on immigrant social capital to find theories that fit what I was seeing in the data. Thus, the process of analysis and theory development was iterative.

I also began to see during analysis how the capitals function cumulatively. For instance, according to the SRL framework, “ability to entertain friends and family” is a desired outcome of a sustainable livelihood. It is also an indicator of social capital, which is a critical input of a sustainable livelihood, such as in the case of some of my respondents whose primary (niche) marketing channel is through an extended network of friends and family. Therefore, I had to be careful as I sorted through the data to distinguish between “cause” and “effect” or “how” and “why” as much as possible.

### **Reliability**

Literature on conducting qualitative analysis stresses the importance of using more than one researcher to collect and review data, given the proneness of data to the researcher bias. I used a second person only for help with translating and interpreting Spanish interviews.

**Validity**

Validity refers to “the correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation or other sort of account” (Maxwell 2005:106). In my analysis, I attempted to place the life choices and motivations of my respondents in a cultural context. This was important because the context in which they became farmers and continue to farm is what interests me about them. They are Latino immigrants with experience in the secondary job market, who nevertheless have been able to buy land and pursue farming. I have sought to understand the meanings in my respondents’ livelihood activities by linking these to the cultural and socio-economic aspects of their personal life histories. I have also drawn on theories about cultural legacy and social capital to find meaning in respondents’ activities and the productive resources which they use. Despite these efforts, I may not always have been able to distinguish cultural causes from personality causes of behavior. I am not interested in analyzing individuals’ personalities, and have tried to exclude examples of personal behavior which were not relevant to the cultural and socio-economic context I was exploring.

Although I interacted only twice with each respondent, and just once face-to-face, I collected “rich” data in the form of detailed and varied narratives that were tape-recorded. Studying the transcriptions then forced me to address what was actually said, including nuances or things that may have contradicted my personal biases. In this paper, providing verbatim accounts of respondents’ experiences enables me to tread closely to their own accounts and interpretations of their lives. Since my primary concern is with respondents’ values, dreams, and perceptions of their own wellbeing, taking their words and expressions at face value is appropriate.

## CHAPTER FOUR PATHWAYS, MOTIVATIONS AND STRATEGIES

This chapter explores the farming and life experiences of four Mexican immigrant farmers in Iowa using the Sustainable Rural Livelihoods framework. I address my research question of how and why Latino immigrants start farming in Iowa by sorting the elements of SRL into three parts: what, why and how. I introduce each respondent by describing what life and job path he took that led to his achieving farm ownership. Next, I look at why the respondents have chosen to farm, and what outcomes have resulted. Finally, I look at how each assembled the resources he needed to buy land, produce vegetables and livestock, and develop markets. I conclude this chapter by addressing these farmers' livelihoods holistically, first focusing on how they recovered from the personal shocks and stresses, and then how pluriactive farming accommodates multiple goals and capabilities.

The four respondents grew up in rural Mexico and pursued a career path consistent with the predominant industries and occupations of Latino immigrants in the U.S. economy, including meatpacking, food service, and migrant farm work. In addition, two engaged in non-farm self-employment. All four entered the U.S. toward the beginning of the current wave of Latino immigration that began in earnest in the 1980s.

In the following narratives, I trace the career path each individual took prior to buying land and beginning to farm. I then sketch their current livelihood strategies by highlighting each activity by which they earn or save money. A livelihood strategy is a means of gaining a living through multiple activities and sources of food, income, and security (Chambers 1995). To protect the confidentiality of each interview subject, I use pseudonyms for the individuals and the towns in Iowa where they live. When a place of employment would identify a town, I assigned a pseudonym to the employer as well. Their ages are my approximation, judging from their appearances and life stories.

### **Arturo**

*36 years old, custom locker builder and owner, goat herder, Southeast Iowa*

Arturo grew up in a small town in Hidalgo, where his family had a few goats, chickens and pigs for home consumption, a few dozen sheep, and a small field of corn, beans and

squash. It was Arturo's responsibility to walk the herd out of town each day to graze, and back in again in the afternoon. He left home at age 13 to work at his brother's butcher shop. After a year, he moved on to work at a poultry processing plant in the mornings and for the same owner in the afternoons at a ranch looking after cattle, poultry, pigs, and purebred dogs (sold as pets). He spent two years there and then moved to Mexico City, where he worked at a corner tortilla shop.

He was eighteen when he moved from Mexico City to Washington State, and found work as an asparagus picker and then as a jawbone remover at a beef slaughter plant. He spent three years in Washington. Upon hearing of a beef plant in Wisconsin that paid better wages, he headed east with four other men. The position had been falsely advertised, however, and actually paid three dollars an hour less than the job he'd left behind. Within 48 hours on the job in Wisconsin, he packed his bags for Iowa. He got work at Carne Factory in Bonn, Iowa, once again removing the jaw from the skull. He was later assigned to tongue removal, a post he continues to hold today, for which he is paid less than \$12 per hour.

When he arrived in Iowa, Arturo knew nobody except a man he moved with. Now his siblings and their families live in town. In his first few years in Iowa he also worked for a pig farmer, who also provided lodging to him. Later, he rented a small farmstead along a major thoroughfare. Arturo noticed an unmet demand for goat meat in his area and asked and received permission from his landlord to put some animals on the property. He got a couple of pygmy (dwarf) goats as pets at first, but these caught the attention of passers-by who offered to buy them, so Arturo bought a few more. Within a few years he had a reputation as a meat goat vendor.

About this time, Arturo married Pilar, another Hidalgo native, and the couple bought a house in town. When they had their first child, they started looking for a bigger house in the area. They even considered moving back to Mexico. But the farmstead they now own came up for sale. The owner was the manager of the local bank, whose father had just died and had willed his land in four pieces to his children. Arturo was able to talk the owner down to a price he could afford to pay, and he bought this farm. He secured his loan from the same bank manager.

This was in 1999. As soon as he and his family moved on to the land, Arturo began building his herd. He had reached 137 goats and sheep when the barn burned down, taking the livestock with it. This was a devastating blow, but was mitigated by a payment from the insurance company of \$30,000. In time, he was able to rebuild the barn, and he added a state-certified custom meat processing plant.

Today he has a herd of a few dozen doe goats, flocks of chickens and turkeys, and a vegetable garden for home consumption. He charges \$1.50 per pound for a live goat, five to ten dollars extra to butcher, and an additional \$25 fee to cook *barbacoa* (barbecue). He takes the best looking goat for his family's home consumption about once every two weeks, as well as an occasional turkey, chicken, cow or sheep. He works full-time at Carne Factory. He wants to become a full-time farmer and leave his day job, which he describes as “mucho trabajo, poco sueldo” (“much work, little pay”). In the short-term, he is growing his goat herd back to the pre-fire level of 100 does, and hopes to increase customer traffic on his farm. His dream is to tap the Chicago market. His preference would be to have his plant set up for federal inspection, which would allow him to ship meat to Chicago; alternatively, he would ship live animals there.

### **Jaime**

*54 years old, meat plant worker, house reseller, west-central Iowa*

Jaime was born in the state of Guanajuato, and grew up in Michoacán 50 miles outside a city of about 90,000 people. Jaime describes his grandparents as *hacendados* who owned hundreds of acres of land and many head of livestock. His own parents owned much less land, and raised goats, sheep and chickens for home consumption. Jaime milked the cows. He left Mexico for the United States at age 17, and spent the next decades in migrant farm work. He and his wife Victoria and children were constantly moving from place to place following the harvests of fruits and vegetables. They worked on farms and orchards in California, Texas, Arizona, Colorado, Illinois and Michigan. He describes his work:

*El trabajo de la agricultura es un trabajo eventual. Son cuatro semanas de cada trabajo – como de la fresa son como seis semanas, la manzana es una semana... En durazno son dos semanas, las sandia son como tres semanas, el melón me parece que son tres semanas de melón. La cebolla es como más de un mes de la cebolla.*

Agricultural work is contingent work. Four weeks is a typical job – like for strawberries, they are six weeks, apples one week... In peaches, there are two weeks, watermelon about three weeks. In melons, I think there are three weeks of melons. Onions, it seems like more than a month for onions.

During that time, Jaime wanted to return to farm his grandparents' land in Mexico, but his five children wanted to stay in the United States. Jaime and his wife rented a small acreage in California at one point, but with utilities it was too expensive so they gave it up. Jaime and Victoria were on their way to Chicago for a job and stopped in Sioux City to visit friends and relatives. They were referred there to the Hacienda meatpacking plant in Frankfurt for a decent paying job. On this visit, Jaime noticed an inexpensive house listed in the paper. He believed it was a bargain, so they called all their friends to ask them to lend them money, and then bought it.

Jaime still owned livestock in Mexico, which he promptly liquidated to repay the loans from his friends. He could not get work at Hacienda immediately, although construction work was available. But instead of construction work, which Jaime dislikes, he and Victoria went to Michigan to pick fruit for a spell and then returned to Frankfurt. He continued seeking work at Hacienda, but had a conflict with the manager. He was able to collect unemployment benefits for a while until he finally managed to get a meatpacking job more than a year after moving to town. A year after that, Victoria got a job at the plant, and they have both worked there full-time ever since.

In the dozen years they have lived in Frankfurt, Jaime and Victoria have bought two houses in town in addition to their 20-acre farmstead. Jaime purchased each property for what he believed was less than market value; he turned one house around in eight months for twice the amount he paid for it and made a \$15,000 profit, without making any improvements. Their youngest son lives in the other house, and Jaime and Victoria lived on the farmstead in my first interview with them in August of 2006. When I caught up with Jaime the following winter, the farmhouse, tragically, had burned down, and the couple had moved back into their house in town. Jaime said his insurance would contribute little to the rebuilding, and that he would have to do as much of the less skilled work involved in cleaning up and rebuilding as possible.

The barns and livestock were not damaged in the fire, so he goes daily to tend to them. The couple has a dozen goats, 18 cows, 200 chickens, and they used to have a horse and 12 sheep. They also have a vegetable garden, an alfalfa field, and a few dozen newly planted peach, apple, plum and other fruit trees. Victoria milks a couple of cows and makes cheese to eat at home and to share with friends. They sell live animals to friends, although sometimes at a price below market value, and butcher some for themselves. Their primary source of income is the meatpacking plant, where both work.

The couple grows vegetables and fruits for home consumption, but is keen on the idea of also selling the produce. When I suggested selling at the farmers' market, they had not realized it was possible for them. They were concerned about being sued by someone who might buy their produce and get sick or choke on a seed. Despite this, Jaime was interested in getting more information about selling produce. He also wants to learn more about regulations on raising livestock, but feels limited by not speaking English.

### **Rigoberto**

*38 years old, meat locker owner, pig finisher, Northwest Iowa*

Rigoberto grew up in mountainous rural Jalisco, Mexico, where his dad raised several dozen Brahman (Zebu) cattle for milk and meat, and his grandpa raised high quality boars for breeding stock. Rigo was a young adult when his father went bankrupt and had to sell off the herd, he explained, because of high interest rates. Rigo left his hometown at age 19 for Dodge City, Kansas. He moved in with several family members and got a job at the Excel meatpacking plant. After about a year, he went on vacation back to Mexico. When he returned to the U.S., he got married to Ana, a woman from his hometown, and the newlyweds moved to their own place. This was a seven-acre farm they rented, and eventually bought.

Rigo was an assembly line crew leader at the plant, an awkward position between upper managers, who demanded increased line speed from workers, and the workers, who got injured as line speed increased and blamed Rigo for it. His attempt at country life was less than ideal since he remained near a somewhat densely populated area, and there were no farmers around to help him learn local farming customs and connect to resources. After about



12 years in Dodge City, Rigo's brother in Sioux City, who owned a meat locker<sup>7</sup> in the town of Galway near Sioux City, offered him the chance to manage the small plant. Rigo and Ana accepted the offer, sold their farm to Rigo's sister, and traveled back to their hometown in Mexico to visit and buy land – for future visits and for family members to use. They returned to the United States having spent all but \$1,000. They moved into an apartment a few blocks from the locker, and soon bought a small house in town. The couple managed the locker for five years before buying it from Rigo's brother.

Since moving to this town of fewer than 500 people, Rigoberto and Ana had their eyes on a small farmstead at the edge of town. Three years after they moved to Iowa, the property came up for sale, and they bargained the price down to \$110,000 and bought it. Today, in addition to their income as owner-operators of the locker, they make eight cents per day per hog finishing 500 hundred pigs in two old barns. The gross income from pigs is about \$1,200 per month. They receive rent from a neighbor who boards his bulls on their land, and earn pocket cash by selling homemade cheese to friends. For home consumption and occasional sales to friends and neighbors, they keep a half dozen meat goats, several dozen red chickens for eggs and meat, a rooster, a cow for milking, and a calf. They have a horse for riding, and some geese, a cat, a dog, and a pot belly pig for ambience. In his spare time, Rigo volunteers with the Booster Club, at the Catholic Church, and as an interpreter for the fire department, the school district, and some local businesses.

In the future, Rigo would like to put cattle on his pasture and acquire a parcel of row crop land adjacent to his farm. He also considers direct-marketing goats to Latinos in the neighboring town, and expanding the number of pigs he finishes and upgrade to a more modern feedlot facility.

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<sup>7</sup> There are 87 state-inspected meat and poultry plants (also known as “meat lockers”) in Iowa (National Association of State Department of Agriculture 2006). Meat lockers are establishments that provide slaughter and butchering services to farmers and hunters for small numbers of pigs, sheep, deer and other animals, typically for home consumption. Lockers were established in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century as places where farmers and others could rent space to store fresh or frozen meat, but these businesses soon began to diversify into slaughter, processing and even delivery services (American Association of Meat Processors).

**Marcos**

*54, restaurant owner, chef and gastronome, “hobby” farmer, Northwest Iowa*

Marcos is Rigoberto’s cousin. They grew up together in the small town in Jalisco, Mexico, where their great grandfather first farmed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. That farm was divided between their fathers – Rigoberto’s dad got the mountainous section and Marcos’ dad got the flat section and the house built by their great grandfather. Marcos and three brothers took over their dad’s farm and bought additional acreage, where they run a couple hundred head of cattle on pasture and grow just enough corn to use for feed. The operation supports one family only, so the brothers take turns living there and running the farm. Marcos took his turn over the decade of the nineties.

Marcos moved as a 16-year-old from Mexico to Los Angeles, where he was hired as a cook and learned to cook Jewish food. He worked in hotels, delis, and steak houses for 24 years. He then took his family back to Mexico, where he raised corn and cattle on the family land and additional rented acreage. Making use of a Mexican government program at the time to reimburse small farmers for used farm equipment, he took a trip north to the Midwest to buy two used corn planters. He drove through northwest Iowa and took in the agrarian landscape, which reminded him pleasantly of Mexico. He returned home to Jalisco with a thought to return to Iowa if he ever left Mexico again. Marcos farmed full-time for eight years, and kept goats, pigs, rabbits and other animals at hand for home consumption. As input costs rose and the price of corn fell, he decided to give up farming and move back to the United States.

Marcos and Rigoberto are part of the fifth generation of their family to migrate to the United States for work. Although cousins, uncles and grandfathers had left home seasonally for agricultural work in California and Washington, others migrated to the United States and stayed. When Marcos and his family headed north again, they went to Sioux City, where he has a brother and two cousins who had worked at the Iowa Beef Plant (in neighboring Dakota City) since the 1970s. An uncle who had moved to Siouxland even earlier helped the cousins get established. The siblings of Marcos’ wife Lidia live in the area too.

When he arrived in 1999, Marcos got work at a packing plant in Siouxland and after half a year transferred to HyVee grocery store to work as a cook. He soon heard from a co-worker

about a café for sale in the nearby small town of Canterbury. Marcos bought and resuscitated this café, which had been struggling to survive through numerous previous owners. After three months of commuting, they bought the least expensive house they could find in the area. His menu of Jewish, Mexican and American-diner food quickly caught on in Canterbury and surrounding communities, and sales have grown 15 to 20 percent each year. He's expanded seating from 44 to 88 to 155, and added a new dining room. The café has a classic black and white checkerboard tile floor, a soda fountain bar, and old photographs on the wall of Marcos on horseback and family members in Mexico. Kitschy teacup, teapot and salt and pepper shaker collections adorn a high ledge along the perimeter of the dining area. He attributes his success to the things that make any food establishment successful: consistent, high quality food and good service in a clean environment. He employs four full-time and three part-time employees, mostly family members.

Marcos bought the farmstead in 2005, after several good years of growth at the café. On a property just shy of 10 acres, Marcos has a rotating menagerie of animals. He buys “non-standard” farm animals (such as orphans or late calves) at a discount, and resells them to an extended network of friends and family, who butcher them on site. When I visited in late summer, Marcos had a few goats, cows and pigs, 12 sheep, 100 laying hens, some turkeys, geese and ducks, a pet rabbit, dog, cat, and five horses (including two miniatures). The following winter, he also had five llamas.

The family sells eggs and live animals to recoup feeding and purchase costs. They rent out a grain bin and a machine shed to a neighbor. He has a few acres in row crops, which he'd like to convert to pasture, and he'd like to acquire more pastureland. Marcos says that half of what his family eats is the meat and eggs from their own animals and vegetables from their garden. They also gather purslane and other edible wild plants and mushrooms. Lidia makes several kinds of cheese with milk from Rigoberto's farm. Marcos says he farms for the pleasure of it, not to earn money, although he expects the hobby to pay for itself. Lidia works at a meat packing plant for income and insurance benefits.

<b>Arturo and Pilar</b>	<b>Jaime and Victoria</b>	<b>Rigo and Ana</b>	<b>Marcos and Lidia</b>
Bonn, SE Iowa (pop. 1,825)	Frankfurt, West-central Iowa (pop. 7,375)	Galway, NW Iowa (pop. 600)	Canterbury, NW Iowa (pop. 1,475)
Carne Factory	La Hacienda	Locker owners	Café owners

### **Aims and Outcomes: Dimensions of Wellbeing**

All four respondents stated clearly that the reason they farm is that it brings them personal satisfaction, even joy. Farming is recognized by all as a secondary source of income, despite the fact that some wanted to be full-time farmers. Farming was not pursued for its profit potential, but for its quality-of-life and quality-of-work benefits.

In the SRL framework, this “joy” outcome is referred to, generally, as well-being. Chambers (1995:199) states that the SRL “analysis reframes and shifts the balance of objectives of development: from reducing income-poverty to diminishing deprivation and enhancing well-being.” The elements of well-being to which my respondents alluded pertained to qualities of living in the countryside, the qualities of living with direct access to animals, and meaningful work. None is completely separable from another, nor are any from cultural capital, a learned sense of meaning and value influencing life.

#### ***Vivir en el campo: social inclusion and privacy***

Marcos said: “We actually wanted to live on acreage because we like privacy. We don’t like too many people for neighbors, you know? They’re watching you or whatever you do, and some people don’t like... It’s less problems. This way you can do whatever you want to do and nobody bothers you and you don’t bother anybody else. It’s more quality of life that we like.” But if Marcos likes living on a farm (outside of town) for the privacy, he values being connected to town for the social opportunities it provides. Commenting on his interactions with the town community through his role of restaurant owner, he said “everybody knows us, knows our names and so... it’s really, really fun to live in a small town; it’s great.”

Marcos spent over two decades in Los Angeles, and chose to come to Iowa when he moved back from Mexico because he had family here. And “because it’s like the countryside – I mean I like this area. It’s not as crowded as L.A., there’s not as much crime; it’s more like where I grew up.” Iowa farm life offers the possibility to raise his own children under conditions similar to those of his own childhood. “You got your kids here and they can run around free, and there’s no other kids that are going to run up and tell them, ‘let’s do this and let’s do that.’ You have a little more control over your family, and the kids grow up [with] a little cleaner mind.”

Rigoberto dislikes cities and prefers to be away from the multitudes, which is why he bought his first small farmstead on the outskirts of Dodge City. His appreciation for his Iowa farm has to do with the space and the quiet of privacy. “We can buy a house in town and I like it, [but if] I can sleep outside I like it better... I kinda relax and watch stars. I want my [mind to wander] to Mexico.”

Well-being relates to capability, or the internal tool set individuals use to pursue valued activities that enhance well-being. Chambers and Conway (1991) include social capabilities, such as being able to visit and entertain one’s friends, as integral to well-being. In this view, owning a farm and raising livestock enhances social capability to the extent that it provides a space and an attraction for friends and family to visit, such as for Jaime.

Jaime has never sold a vegetable from his garden, but he likes to give the produce to friends: “Me gusta regalarlas porque yo tengo mucha amistad, muchos. A mi me visitan bastantes amigos. Tengo bastantes.” (“I like to give them away because I have many friends. Lots of friends visit me.”) His friends, all of whom are friends from the meatpacking plant, are especially keen to see him during harvest time: “Me visita mucha gente, y cuando hay verduras, cuando hay elotes, me visitan mucho.” (“Many people visit me and when there are vegetables and corn-on-the-cob, I have many visitors.”)

Jaime also has visitors to buy his goats and other animals. As if to nurture his friendships, he sells animals to close friends for less than they are worth. “Nunca les vendo el precio lo que vale el animal. Si el animal por decir vale 70 dólares, yo les doy por 55 o 50 dólares.” (“I never sell animals to friends at value. If an animal is worth, say, 70 dollars, I give it to them for 50 or 55 dollars.”)

Farming also establishes grounds (sharing equipment and information) for interacting with farmer neighbors, as for Rigoberto. If Jaime builds relationships around products (Mexican specialty products such as goat), Rigo builds them around production. And as half of the only Latino couple in town – although there is a larger Latino population in a neighboring town – Rigo has built social capital with Anglo farmers. It is appropriate, then, that Rigo’s primary production is pigs, which his neighbors can relate to and assist him with, instead of goats, which are unfamiliar to Anglos. An older farmer, who Rigo affectionately refers to as “Grandpa,” has helped Rigo learn to vaccinate and medicate pigs. Another

neighbor lends Rigo a tractor and implements to clean the barns and dispose of manure (by spreading it on fields). Still other friends in town have given him gifts, such as a pet pot belly pig, a donkey, and a calf. These social interactions are made possible only by living on a farm.

***Vivir con animales: health and tradition***

In addition to the quality of life derived from small-town and country life, respondents were drawn to farming because of a strong appreciation for animals. After commenting on his children's disinterest in farming and working with livestock, Jaime emphatically defends his own love of animals. He describes being with them as therapeutic:

*Lo bonito es vivir uno con los animales y saberse uno convivir con ellos. No, es una chulada. Yo sabia que si no tuviera los animales, no estuviera así como estoy. No le hace que tuviera buen trabajo que ganara doble de lo que gano, yo ya me hubiera muerto con mi enfermedad que tengo. Pero yo con mi enfermedad se me controla bien los animales, como ahorita llego a ver que tengan agua, los estoy viendo. Voy y me siento con ellos, se me arriman.*

It is lovely to live with animals and to know how to coexist with them. It's great. I know that if I didn't have animals, I wouldn't be as I am. Even if I had a better job and earned double what I do, if I didn't have animals I'd be dead because of [my diabetes]. The animals regulate my illness, like now I come see that they have water, I check on them. I sit with them; they come up to me.

Arturo says something strikingly similar to Jaime's comment, that "if I didn't have animals, I wouldn't be as I am." In Arturo's words, describing how he felt after his barn and all the animals burned: "Sentia que no era yo quien soy porque no tenia animales." ("I felt that I wasn't who I am because I didn't have animals.") Both respondents express feeling incomplete without having animals in their lives.

Similarly, Rigoberto has several dozen multicolored (non-commercial) chickens that he keeps for meat but also to have them scratching around the farm for people to see, as if for ambience. He has a couple of roosters that he's proud to say have reintroduced their characteristic daybreak crowing to this rural area. Rigo's cousin Marcos has similar chickens on his farm, and says: "I like them because they're pretty." His ambivalence about the birds' importance for productive versus aesthetic uses, is reflected in his lack of concern about predators. Marcos loses "a lot of chickens because of the eagles or birds – big birds – eat them." But he says, "I don't mind because they gotta eat too." Marcos and Rigo both have

horses too, which they keep for fun. Marcos uses the horses to teach his children about Mexican traditions, as well.

### ***Meaningful work***

Meaningful work pertains to the division of labor in industrial society, in which laborers are relegated to tedious work formulated and directed by managers or owners. It contrasts Marx's concept of alienated work. Arneson (1987) defines "meaningful work" as interesting and challenging work, which the worker participates in defining. He explains that interesting work is subjective, depending on the particular talents of the worker, and his/her attitudes toward those talents.

Each respondent was or is employed as a low-skilled laborer in the U.S. capitalist economy. All four have been workers in the meat-packing industry. In addition, Marcos was a cook and Jaime a migrant farm worker; Rigoberto eventually became a low-level supervisor at a meat-packing plant. Schwartz (1982) describes industrial jobs thus: "Instead of being hired to achieve certain goals and left to select and pursue adequate means, workers are employed to perform precisely specified actions. Even the order in which they perform those operations, the pace at which they work, and the particular bodily movements they employ are largely determined by others' decisions."

This is an apt description of meatpacking work. Deborah Fink is an ethnographer who worked at an IBP meatpacking plant in 1992 to study the experience of the meatpacking workers. She describes her work on the teat line table, where she was assigned to remove the lines of teats from sow bellies with an electrical knife.

My assignment was to grab a piece of teat line or other scrap, lay it flat on the table in front of me, trip all remaining skin and teats and throw them in a barrel on my left side; flip the slab over, trip off the lean meat, and push that into another barrel next to the table on my right; and then throw the mostly fat remainder into a large metal tub at the foot of the table. (Fink 1998:19)

The repetitive, "precisely specified" tasks involved in meatpacking, as described above, can lead to physical strain and injury. Fink explains further that, although this vibrating, electrical knife takes minimal skill to operate, it caused her hand to ache after the first hour, and to fall asleep after a few hours of work. She states that:

By the middle of the second week I couldn't hold a pencil to write. My hand was constantly asleep as I drove or slept. I repeatedly awakened in the night with my hand

clenched in a tight, painful knot and had to use my left hand to straighten the fingers one by one. (Fink 1998:25)

Although most production jobs in meatpacking require little training, the work is physically demanding and difficult. It involves standing for long periods, lifting heavy objects, moving on slippery surfaces, and using dangerous cutting and grinding tools and machines (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2006). Animal slaughtering ranks among the U.S. industries with the highest rates of injury; workers are “highly susceptible to repetitive-strain injuries to their hands, wrists and elbows” (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2006).

Arturo has spent most of his adult life working in meatpacking plants, alternately performing one of two pairs of tasks: handling cattle heads and removing the jaw bone from the skull, or removing the tongue and marking the nose. He was glad to have been given the same task (the former) at Carne Factory that he had performed in Washington State because he already knew how to do it. But, also, he disliked that job because the heads were heavy to lift. So he transferred to tongue removal, which is where he works today. He finds this less straining than other tasks, but still hard work for low pay.

Rigoberto advanced to the level of assembly line crew leader. The pay was better, but the job itself was as bad as line work, in its own way, because he was compelled by his boss to push his workers to work ever faster. And when they got hurt, Rigo got in trouble. He describes the mentality of the plant’s management toward production, and his own enforcement role:

If you make five cents today, tomorrow you need seven cents. And always you have the radio, and you push ‘em and push ‘em and push ‘em, and sometimes you don’t have the people and anyhow you push ‘em just to do the job, you know? And you push ‘em keep going ... and [you tell them,] ‘I want some production. I don’t care if somebody gets hurt.’ ... And you do that and sometimes you got a job that needs to be seven or eight people, and sometimes you have five and you want to do the same speed on the chain. It never slows down, but sometimes, Hispanic people want to be nice with the supervisor, and they say, ‘no, it’s O.K., we can take care of it.’ So the next day, the supervisor, he watches that, so the next day you’re left with five.

Carlos, the community liaison at Hacienda Meatpacking Plant, explained that some employees don’t last long because of the difficult working conditions at the plant: “Ahora La Hacienda no es nada fácil. La línea va rápida y muchas reglas... y en un año los corren.” (Work at La Hacienda is not easy. The line goes fast and there are many rules... and people



leave after a year.”) For Jaime and Victoria, though, meatpacking is not as bad as migrant farm work. The couple expressed disdain for the migrant farm work they did for so many years. Victoria says she hurt her back doing fieldwork. Jaime never liked the work at all; he explains how arduous, tiring, tedious and physically straining it was:

*La sandia se le fue de los manos porque se le hinchan así a uno, porque hay sandias mínimo hasta de 35-40 libras. Y la va pizcando uno, son cuatro surcos, cuatro, cada cual va al troque y la van echando para arriba. El primero que va al troque tiene que echar la de los otros tres compañeros y la de él. Pero cada vuelta se compone, cada vuelta le toca a uno. La fresa es todo el día a gatas, a gatas, sin descansar. ... También, la naranja y el limón son pesados. Los jale porque los sacos son – hay que cárgalos aquí en el pescuezo. Y el melón también tengo el saco cargado aquí en el pescuezo.*

The watermelon slips because your hands get swollen because the watermelon weigh at least 35-40 pounds. And you go picking, there are four rows, four for each ... to the truck and loading them up because the first person to the truck has to pick up his own and his three partners'. But each trip you have to do that, each trip you have to do this. For strawberries it's all day on hands and knees, on hands and knees without rest. ... Oranges, lemons are heavy. ... Because I take them you have to carry them up on your neck, and the melon you also have to carry on your neck.

But while Jaime clearly hated picking vegetables as a worker, he speaks fondly of the dozens of fruit trees and vegetables he planted in a garden, and of giving the produce away to friends in the summer. He also responded enthusiastically to my suggestion of selling vegetables at a farmers market (despite some doubt about the feasibility of it). He urged me to send him information about how to direct-market vegetables.

Jaime and Victoria, who share the farm work, undoubtedly work hard planting and maintaining a vegetable garden and Jaime states that tending livestock is also hard work. He explains why he supposes other Latino immigrants with agricultural roots don't farm:

*Tienes una batalla de que antes de venirse a trabajar uno se levanta a ver los animales al pendiente de todo. ... A lo mejor muchos no quieren porque es un trabajo poco difícil – no es fácil. ... Y, pues, muy tarde voy llegando a checar los animales, a ver que hicieron, a ver cuantos se salieron, a ver si están allí.*

You have a struggle that before leaving for work one has to get up to see the animals to check on everything. Most people don't want to because its hard work, it's not easy. ... And, well, late in the day I go out to check the animals, to see what they did, to see if any are missing, to see that they're still there.

Although Jaime believes other are disinclined to take on the additional work and responsibility of keeping livestock, he himself is calmed and revived by the work; he enjoys

it. Just as Jaime speaks of checking the animals before and after work each day, Rigo also discusses waking at 6 a.m. to tend his livestock, and staying out until 10 at night. He likes to be active and to be outdoors, after working indoors all day at the locker. Arturo and Marcos echo this sentiment of the pleasure of outdoor work and being physically active. Rigo and Arturo both dislike watching television.

Building on the idea of the enjoyment of doing active, outdoor work, Arturo said that he likes, simply, to have work:

*Como aquí lo que más me gusta a mí que siempre ando movido, activo, y yo nunca estoy adentro viendo la tele. Me gusta la tranquilidad aquí en este rancho. Me gusta andar allá con mis chivas. Me gusta matar así. Me encanta tener trabajo, si. Es lo que mas me gusta de estar aquí.*

What I like most about being here is that I'm always moving, active, and I am never inside watching television. I like the tranquility here on the farm. I like to go out with my goats. I like to do the slaughter. I love to have work. That's what I like best about being here.

Arturo and Jaime both state that if they could expand their businesses, they would prefer to quit their meatpacking jobs. As it is now, though, it is their full-time jobs that permit them to be farmers on the side. Jaime describes his work on the farm as a pastime to emphasize the pleasure he takes from it. But his pastime is not a game of chess or golf, it is a productive activity, with a consumable output. This output includes cheese, made of milk from their cows, vegetables, fruit and meat.

## **Capitals**

### ***Financial/built capital to buy land: transforming other capitals***

In this section, I discuss how my respondents started farming – what capitals they utilized, where and how they developed human, cultural, social and financial/built capitals, and how they transformed these capitals to achieve livelihood goals. In particular, I focus on how my respondents, as Latino immigrants with experience in the secondary job market, overcame financial barriers to buy land and start farming in Iowa. A few secured loans because the bankers knew the applicant (personally or through references), and could adequately judge their credit-worthiness. And some respondents secured small loans because

they had some collateral. I begin by addressing specifically how each respondent achieved access to land, given his current or past placement in the secondary job market.

As data from my interviews show, the absence of financial capital does not necessarily prohibit low-income people from purchasing land, if other capitals can be mobilized and transformed. Mary Emery (2006) illustrated how capitals interact in her discussion of a small-town leadership development program designed to build community members' human capital, especially that of youth and minorities. The teamwork required of participants in this leadership program fostered social capital among them. It also contributed to cultural capital in the form of a changed attitude toward leadership positions, now seen as a means to help people to work together to make change.

Similarly, Jaime's case shows how social capital can be transformed into financial/built capital. When he and his wife decided to buy a house, they gathered money for a down payment by borrowing money from friends. They later replenished that stock of social capital (preserving the trust between themselves and these friends) by selling their livestock in Mexico to repay the friends. Thus, Jaime and Victoria mobilized social capital to transfer the stock of financial capital (livestock) they had in Mexico to Iowa, changing it in form to a house. They later sold this house to purchase a farm.

Rigoberto mobilized social, human, and financial/built capital when he purchased his farm. After five years in Galway, Iowa, as meat locker manager, and recently also its owner, he had accumulated a stock of social capital among the business community of Main Street. When Rigoberto asked the local bank for a loan to buy land, the board of directors already valued him as a member of the community and trusted him as a businessman and client. To make the down payment, he sold his new sports utility vehicle, bought a jalopy and used that and his bicycle to get around for the better part of the first year after buying the farm. In using a bicycle as transport, Rigo utilized human capital in the form of his physical fitness.

Arturo utilized the social capital between himself and his wife Pilar to earn and save enough money to buy a farm. They both worked fulltime for several years as a couple before starting a family. He also used financial/built capital, in the form of a house, a high-value vehicle, and some livestock. They sold the house and used the vehicle and livestock as collateral when they applied for the loan.

Marcos mobilized social, financial/built (a small house) and human capital (training as a chef). He was a cook at HyVee grocery store when he heard that the café was for sale in Canterbury. Marcos' skills as a chef, acquired from years of training in the steak houses and Jewish delis of Los Angeles, were quickly recognized, and the management gave him creative license to prepare a range of dishes, from Mexican to Chinese. Observing his abilities, a coworker from Canterbury told him about the vacant café and encouraged him to consider buying it. The café had struggled through a succession of unsuccessful owners, and had been on the market for nearly a year.

Marcos applied for a loan at the local bank. He said they gave him a loan because they wanted to keep the restaurant alive for the benefit of the town. Moreover, he had two local references. One was his co-worker, who vouched for his cooking ability and his character. Another local person was the kill floor manager of a meatpacking plant in Sioux City, where Marcos' cousin had worked for 35 years. Both spoke to the bank president and to the mayor on behalf of Marcos. With the loan, he made a down payment of \$3,000 to buy the place, which was already furnished with tables, chairs, equipment, and table settings.

As soon as the café was up and running, Marcos bought the least expensive house available in the area. It was easy, he said, to get a loan to buy a 10-acre farm five years after having established the café because his prowess as a businessman was commonly known, and he was valued for his contribution to Main Street. Furthermore, he could make the down payment with the sale of the smaller house.

### ***Human capital***

To become a farmer, one needs more than simply to own (or otherwise have access to) farmland. S/he also needs to know what to do with the land – how to grow vegetables in a garden, how to make the land productive with grasses, forages or other feeds for livestock, or how to husband animals to keep them productive and healthy. Equally important, a farmer needs to know how to access markets (for buying and selling goods), how they operate, and the skills to use them effectively. In this section, I discuss the elements of human capital, including skills (animal husbandry, dairy and meat processing, language), knowledge (of markets, institutions, animals), and experience (business, managing employees), used by my respondents in farming.

These skills and knowledge were gained in Iowa and Mexico. Each respondent had tended livestock in Mexico, and made reference to their animal husbandry knowledge or skills that originated there. Marcos, Rigoberto and Jaime learned to milk cows in Mexico, and their wives knew how to make specific regional styles of cheese. Every respondent knew how to butcher animals. Marcos' unique experience of having farmed in Mexico for a decade during his middle adulthood lent him more recent knowledge of farming, and offered him the chance to take greater responsibility than those who previously farmed only in their childhood.

### *Butchering*

Narrating his own life work experience, Arturo detailed the particular skills he picked up at each job, beginning in Mexico. From his older brother at the butcher shop, he learned to butcher goats, sheep, cows and pigs.

*Se aprendía destroz ar una vaca, a matar, desde matar hasta descuartizarla todo. Me enseñé a lavar tripas, me enseñé a pelar patas, a pelar cabeza, a sacar pieza por pieza de las vacas, de las partes de la vaca.*

I learned how to slaughter a cow; from slaughter to cutting it into pieces, everything. I taught myself to wash the intestines, to skin the feet, skin the head, to take the cows apart piece by piece – the different parts the parts of the cow.

He learned much less about meat processing at the slaughter plants in Washington State and Bonn, where each individual performs a single task in an assembly line. In Washington, he removed the jawbone from the head of a cow, and in Bonn, cut out the tongue. He learned valuable animal husbandry skills working for a farmer in Mexico, including how to castrate boars, wean piglets, and to assist sows in difficult labor. In Iowa, he worked for a pig farmer who put him in charge of castrating pigs, which he described as difficult work that if not done properly, can result in the animal's bleeding to death.

*Con él, aprendí muchas cosas también porque el capaba ya los puercos, dejaba, hay veces, 50 o 100 para sementales. Luego no le gustaba, y me ponía caparlos. Nunca se me murió un puerco por cuestión de castración. Cuando yo capo un puerco, casi no sangra.*

With him, I learned many things also because he already castrated pigs...he would leave 50 to 100 as boars. Later, he decided he didn't like that work and he would have me castrate them. I never killed a pig from castrating it. When I castrate a pig, it hardly even bleeds.

As an independent farmer, having this skill enabled Arturo to buy three boars for a favorable price from a farmer who was getting rid of his pigs, and couldn't sell intact boars in the regular market. Arturo wanted them for meat, not breeding, and could use them for such if castrated. He castrated them as piglets and raised them to 250 pounds.

Rigo's childhood experience with the pigs his family kept for home consumption has sped up his learning curve in tending the pigs he has today. He diligently monitors the health of his pigs, and with assistance from neighbors, is learning to respond adequately to signs of illness:

I have a notion, you know. I know what the pig looks like when I see something. We got our experience from Mexico. You can see it, this pig is coming down, it's sick. I know that. The one that got the ears down, see, it wants to eat, but he's never gonna grow up no more, you know. It's going to stay right like that. In the future, he's gonna die; he's got lung problems or something.

### *Language*

Marcos and Rigo are bilingual, a human capital stock which allows access to a wider audience of potential customers, advisors and partners of various sorts. For Rigo, being bilingual has been a vehicle for building social capital as a volunteer interpreter for the school district and fire department. Both have built relationships and sought assistance in farming from their English speaking neighbors.

Jaime and Arturo, however, both of whom speak only Spanish, have also made important developments for their farms with English-speakers. Despite difficulty communicating and mutual mistrust at first, Jaime has worked out a land-sharing arrangement with his neighbor. The two neighbors merged their respective cattle herds and let them graze together on both land-owners' property. Arturo worked with the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS) to build a custom meat locker on his land. Without knowing English, he learned all the rules and specifications for construction and operation through a hired interpreter.

### *Business operation*

Most of this experience was garnered in the United States since nobody but Marcos lived in Mexico during his adulthood. Marcos ran a cattle and crop operation in Mexico for eight years, for which he hired eight to 20 seasonal employees at a time to help with soil

preparation and harvest. He provided a detailed accounting of annual costs and revenues in our interview, suggesting his bookkeeping skills were developed through this experience.

### ***Cultural capital***

Cultural capital provides an understanding of the world and one's place in it, what is possible, and what is desirable to achieve. In this sense, cultural capital provides direction in life, without which little can be achieved. In this section, I discuss the values, traditions and outlooks of my respondents as related to their particular upbringings, and how these qualities have shaped the paths they have taken into adulthood.

Arturo values the experience of raising livestock, especially goats, and eating what he produces. His family raised mixed livestock, squash and grain mainly for home consumption. Today, he emulates this way of life by planting a vegetable garden and raising mixed livestock to feed his family:

*Cada 15 días, mato uno (chivo) para nosotros. ... Y escojo un mejor es para mí. Es así, lo hago a mi gusto.*

Every 15 days, I slaughter a goat for us. ... And I choose the best for me. It's like that – I do it as needed.

He grew up in an environment where keeping livestock was integral to family survival, and yet he's also aware that he, among the members of his family, had a particular fondness for animals. From a young age, he took on the responsibility for taking care of his family's small herd.

*Yo era él que las cuidaba, borregos o chivos, yo era él que andaba siempre entre de ellos. Es algo bonito porque de ahí agarra uno... Se aprende uno mucho, se da uno cuenta. Como dicen, el que cuida tiene y el que no cuida no tiene nada. Él que quiere tener tiene, y él que no quiere tener tiene nada, pero pues... En México hay muchas formas. Supongamos, si tiene un corral, va y los echa como, supongamos, yo ahí, yo a estos ya no los cuido y ahí no más les doy agua, les doy maíz, allá en el potrero porque no salen. Y en México hay lugares así también. Pero yo, en mi casa, yo tenía que andar cuidándolos diario, diario, diario.*

It was I who took care of the sheep and goats; it was I who always herded them. It's a lovely thing because from this, one grasps... one learns a lot, one is aware of a lot. As they say, he who cares for something gets to keep it and he who wants something enough gets to have it. Yeah, but in Mexico there are many ways. Let's suppose, if you have a corral, you go and put the animals in it. Then all you have to do is give them water and corn because they're confined at a ranch like that. And in Mexico, there are places like that too. But at my home, I had to walk with them [out of town to graze] and back every single day.

Arturo kept in close contact with animals, working in animal husbandry or meat processing consistently except for two years at a *tortillería* and a spell as an asparagus picker. His particular career path suggests agency (what is desirable) and structure (what is possible): agriculture and meat packing are among the industries widely available to Latino workers, and yet he might well have chosen to work in the hospitality, construction or another field with high concentrations of Latinos. He emphasizes his lifelong love of working with animals, even suggesting his life is incomplete without it.

*Desde chico... me gustan los animales. Yo no puedo estar sin tener animales. Como ahora se me quemó aquí me quedé sin nada, ni animales, ni nada. Pero sentía yo que totalmente fuera de serie... totalmente sentía que no era yo quien soy, va, porque no tenía animales.*

Since I was a child, I like animals. I can't exist without having animals. Like now, when my barn burned I was without anything, no animals, no nothing. But I felt that I was totally out of place, you know, because I didn't have animals.

Yet while Arturo's values and life course were guided by his love of working with animals, he might have been equally content as a veterinarian or some another type of professional. Obviously, Arturo's choices were constrained by the poverty in his youth which called on him to start working as a 13-year old instead of go to school. Arturo describes the community of subsistence farmers, who were poor and lacked access to (irrigation) technology to ensure a harvest:

*En mi lugar donde yo nací y crecí, es un pueblo pobre, que no había [riego] – es temporal, si llovía se daba, si llovía sembraban, y si no lluvia, no sembraban.*

In my home where I was born and raised, people are poor. There was no [irrigation] – it's seasonal, if it rained, the land provided; if it rained, people planted, and if it didn't rain, they wouldn't plant.

The experience of Arturo's family and community, as subsistence farmers, of being vulnerable in this way to the vagaries of the climate undoubtedly affected his outlook. An individual's cultural capital involves the values and traditions imprinted upon him by family and community, which includes what he believed to be possible in his life.

The cultural legacy of Mexican farming shows up on Rigoberto's Iowa farm in his recreation of the way of life of his childhood – a legacy passed from his parent to him (Flora and Flora 2004). Rigo populated his farm with a variety of animals, including red fighter



cocks. His yard is decorated with potted cacti in symbolic reference to Mexico, his horse's stable is adorned with a Mexican-style saddle, and he prides himself on reintroducing fresh eggs and the cry of the rooster to this rural Iowa setting.

Rigo grew up on a diversified farm, where his dad raised cattle, corn, pinto and other types of beans, oats, bananas and mixed vegetables. In Mexico, he said, they didn't differentiate between a milking cow and a meat cow: "In Mexico, you're looking for milk and meat, you're looking for everything and easy to handle, you know? It's not like here." Milking for home consumption doesn't require the volume needed for commercial production. He bought a low-yielding Angus-Holstein cross at discount from a dairy farmer, which he wakes to milk each day at 6 a.m. This is a few hours later than he did with his dad as a child:

I was four years old ... It was three thirty in the morning always when we'd wake up, three thirty, four o'clock. And always I follow him. I'd hear him wake up, so I'd walk behind him, and we start to put the milk in buckets and I would sit right in between those buckets. That way I can get a little warm on it. It's warm buckets and you can warm up. And then I fell asleep right there. I mean, I tried to warm up. Yeah, but always I walk behind my dad, always, I don't know. Always I like to go behind him.

In addition to milking, Rigo wants a small cattle herd for meat once he's paid his mortgage down further, and he wants to graze the cattle like his father did. Rigo mentions his dad again when he talks about the demands of feeding out pigs and keeping them healthy. He spends a lot of time tending to the pigs; his dad taught him the value of being responsible in caring for livestock. Rigoberto comes from a family of farmers. A brother and a cousin (Marcos) farm in the United States, and cousins and uncles still farm in Mexico. "We got the acreage and everything, have livestock, you know; we like to have livestock on it. We have for generations, you know. My dad, he was a farmer; we all wanted to be a farmer."

Jaime and Marcos speak much less about their childhood farming experiences, although Marcos discusses his experience raising his own family as a farmer in Mexico. He also discusses the family tradition of agriculture. Echoing Rigo, Marcos says: "My grandfather was born in 1902 and his father owned the same ground that we own right now. My dad owned the house my great-grandfather built. Our farm went smaller – that's about it." In addition to farming, his family has for several generations also depended on seasonal and temporary migration to the U.S. for work. "My grandpa came up to Nebraska in 1918, and

his brother and some friends, and then he worked there and then moved back to Mexico in 1922, I believe. And then he start, you know, working in his farm down there.” Marcos and the other men from his generation adopted the same basic strategy. Unlike many of his cousins, Marcos was averse to seasonal migration so he stayed in Los Angeles for more than a decade when he first came to the U.S. Now, he has moved to Iowa for good.

Between these two northern migrations, he lived and farmed eight years in his home town. He struggled to raise his family on a farming income as corn prices fell and input costs increased, and eventually quit for this reason. The experience gives him an appreciation today for accessibility to agricultural technology and insurance. Reflecting on Iowa’s high-tech, subsidized agriculture, he says: “It’s amazing to me. I mean, wow, you guys got it easy. You know? And I still talk to farmers and they complain; and I say, ‘my god – if you really want to complain try Mexico!’”

Having given full-time farming his best shot, Marcos keeps agriculture pared down to a size that eliminates the stress and keeps the pleasure. He rents out a grain bin and machine shed and sells just enough livestock to make the farm pay for itself. But the restaurant and his wife’s job at a meat packing plant support the family. Marcos says his 10 acres helps keep him from being homesick for Mexico, but it’s better now because they’re not going broke.

The pleasure of farming for Marcos comes from tending to animals, growing his own food and types of food, and passing the traditions of rural Mexico on to his children. His family has horses, and a Mexican saddle and traditional *charreada* garb with which to ride the horses. *Charreada* is a traditional Mexican festival, popular on both sides of the border (Lawrence 1994). Similar to the North American rodeo, it involves competitors mounted on horseback demonstrating their skills at subduing cattle according to set rules and patterns. “For Mexicans and Mexican-Americans, it is a social drama that evokes ethnic pride and confirms ethnic identity, drawing the community together. Linking the present with the past, *charreada* serves as an important means of perpetuating traditions and preventing cultural disintegration” (Lawrence 1994:704). Marcos has the traditional *adelita charra* dress for his daughter, who goes horse back in it in local parades; his son participates in the Sioux City rodeo. In addition, Marcos’ son raised goats and vegetables through FFA, a national agricultural education program for youth.

Marcos and his wife enjoy preparing traditional foods, but to do so must raise their own ingredients. How else would you make stew with the more flavorful meat of an old hen, if grocery stores only sell the meat of young chickens? How would you season it with weeds and wild mushrooms, if you hadn't enjoyed these plants as foods in Mexico, or otherwise known they were edible? "Here we try to kill the weed," Marcos notes. "We eat those! They're healthy for us."

The couple makes duck tamales, duck with orange, and many dishes with rabbit – all foods from Mexico. Marcos showed me the curds draining on their kitchen counter of a cheese Lidia was in the process of making with milk from Rigo's farm. She made *queso fresco* (fresh cheese) and other types of cheeses as well, but this particular one was a dry cheese their grandparents used to make. "That's how we used to do it – the old-timers," Marcos explained. "They'd milk the cows in the spring and then they'd make enough cheese to leave it at room temperature for a whole year. ... And that's how they used to provide for their protein."

Like the others, Jaime mentioned milking cows on the farm of his youth, which also had goats, sheep and chickens. Today, he has all the same animals. Jaime laments that his diabetes prevents him from milking anymore, but his wife still milks and makes Michoacan-style cheese. His cattle are *vacas corrientes* – which he defines as cows for butchering, as opposed to pure bred dairy cows. He says the former are common in Mexico, where people use the same animal for meat and dairy.

*De todos los Mexicanos, todos son vacas corrientes las que tienen porque son para matanza y cuando son para la ordena, son mas finas. Según todos los Latinos, ese es el modo de hablar.*

All Mexican have common (mixed breed) cows because they are for slaughter, and when they are for milking, they are refined (higher quality). This is how we Latinos refer to types of cattle.

Jaime prefers the milk from *vacas corrientes*, because he finds it better tasting and believes it has more vitamins. And he gets to utilize the cow for milk while the calves (being raised for meat) are growing.

### ***Social capital***

I use Portes' theories on the sources of social capital among immigrant communities to sort how respondents utilize social capital for farming according to either bounded solidarity

or enforceable trust. Arturo and Jaime live in counties with Latino populations higher than the state average of 2.8 percent, respectively: 12.6 percent and 8.7 percent. Each has tapped into extensive social networks whose hubs are the meatpacking plants in their respective towns. As immigrants, racial minorities and members of the rural proletariat, Latino meatpacking workers are triply marginalized, and thus prone to establishing bounded solidarity.

During the immigrant rights protests in the spring of 2006, Latino packing plant employees in Iowa walked out on May Day (traditional international day of recognition of workers rights) in solidarity with Latino workers across the country to demonstrate their value in the U.S. economy. In my interviews with Arturo and Jaime, each hinted at a sense of class consciousness, or shared identity with other Latino workers. Arturo said: “I am a Carne Factory worker,” and later alluded to his sense of this as unfair work: “They give much work and little pay.” Jaime said he has a lot of friends, and that every last one – hence, his entire social network – is a co-worker at the plant.

Portes (1993) states that a common claim made with the social capital derived from bounded solidarity is the “creation and consolidation of small enterprises. A solidary ethnic community represents, simultaneously, a market for ethnically defined goods.” These ethnically defined goods are, for Arturo and Jaime, goats. In addition, Arturo butchers goats and cooks them in *barbacoa* for festive occasions. Jaime supplies *elote* (corn-on-the-cob) and other vegetables in addition to goats. Both raise and sell a handful of other, slightly-less-popular livestock products to Latino co-workers, such as lambs, poultry and pigs. As the only Latino farmers in their respective areas, both farmers are in a position to provide what Anglo (or non-coworker) farmers could not: a culturally attuned understanding of and ability to cater to the Latino market, and an appeal to customer loyalty based on bounded solidarity.

By contrast, Rigoberto built a social network with his local community of Anglo farmers. By learning and speaking English and practicing the customs of small town Iowans, he invests in the social capital of enforceable trust. Contrary, therefore, to Portes’ theory of enforceable trust as something established among immigrants, Rigo is attuned to enforceable trust among fellow small town residents.

Rigoberto and Marcos live in neighboring towns in adjacent counties, where the Latino populations are less than the state average, respectively: 2.5 percent and 1.3 percent. Both (and immediate family of each) are the only Latinos in their respective towns. Like his cousin, Marcos speaks English and has social capital with Anglo neighbors and farmers. Marcos is well-known by Anglo residents because of his role as successful local restaurateur.

The café is a space for interacting with people as well as returning favors. Marcos shows gratitude to his neighbors who plant and harvest his two acres of corn and snowplow his driveway (since he doesn't have the equipment) by picking up their tab when they dine in the café. In another manner of investing in social capital, Marcos embraces local culture (while keeping his own) by entering his daughter on horseback dressed in Mexican garb in the local parade. As if in a reciprocal gesture of goodwill, the town twice granted the girl first place prize in the parade.

Rigoberto's account of his efforts to invest in social capital with fellow townsmen exceeds what Marcos recounted of his own efforts. In addition to Rigo's value as a service provider (butcher) to farmers, he has gone the extra mile to make friends in the community by joining the booster club, the church council, and acting informally as a volunteer interpreter for the fire department and school district. He is explicit about why his reputation matters – why he always agrees to pitch in and volunteer.

I never say no. I can't say no either, you know? I think it's part of my – what do you say? The people get happy with me because the farmers they want to do something – butcher or something done... [If] he tell me he want to do that today, I accept. We accept because all those guys, you know, I work for those. I want to keep me busy and they the only guys who's gonna keep me busy.

Rigo states here, in other words, that the success of his business depends on more than just the quality of the services he provides formally in his shop. It also depends on how he's perceived as a community member. He explains further:

If someone wants to build a business in town, a hundred percent welcomes you, you know? But, like I say, you need to be honest with the community. Other communities work that way, you know? But if you're cheaters or something, you'll be out too. The same way you're coming in, the same way you go out too. It's easy. That's the small town is, that's what the community is for, you know, to help each other. In the big cities, you open a restaurant or something and nobody know nothing. You go and eat, and if you don't like the food you don't go no more. ... In this community, if it's not

good or something, it's out, that's it. So it's kind of the tough part, it's kind of the tough part. You need to be careful with everybody, you know, be careful.

As newcomers and the only Latinos in town, Rigo and his wife have to prove themselves to gain acceptance in the community, let alone build a loyal customer base. As if choosing sides, Rigo indicated he keeps his distance from the Latino community of neighboring meatpacking town: "This town is pretty nice town and I know just about everybody in town. Everybody is pretty nice, but if some people or Hispanic people come and they start to do some problems I'm gonna feel bad myself." Rigoberto expresses wariness about whether other Latinos would fit in, and concern that he, by association, would become responsible for fixing any problems that might arise.

Rigo's assimilation to Anglo culture is most apparent in his choice of work. His customer base is Anglo because Iowans traditionally use meat lockers, which do not lend themselves to Mexican custom. The few Latino customers he's served have wanted the entrails, and Rigo is not licensed to provide them unwashed; he doesn't wash them because it's not cost effective to do so.

Rigoberto's social network of Anglo farmers and small town residents is equally important to the business of his meat locker as Arturo's network of Latino coworkers is to his livestock and processing business. Rigo explained many of his decisions and goals in terms of preserving his reputation as honest businessman, responsible farm owner, and reliable community member.

Unlike Arturo and Jaime, Rigo is reluctant to market goats directly from the farm because he doesn't want unexpected visitors: "I don't have the time to keep at those guys, people like we never know, what they doing at your house? ... Strange people that went to your house, what are you doing over there, you know?" In this way, the social ties and type of social capital Rigo can lay claim to shape the way he farms and markets, just as Arturo's social ties do for him.

Rigo yields to the agricultural norms of this town, apparently integrating these into his own worldview. Conscious of the etiquette of keeping the odor of manure from wafting into town, Rigo is intent upon having the acreage that juts into town in pasture. If it were in corn and beans, he'd be inclined to spread manure on it. Although he grew up with the pasture-

based system of his father, Rigo is open to the conventional corn and beans system of Iowa. He wants to acquire an additional five acres to have in corn and beans. He embraces another standard of agricultural Iowa, as well – confined animal feedlot operation – and considers investing in buildings to do that. In these ways, Rigo is conforming to the ways of a typical Iowa farmer.

Some respondents rely on their extended families for help farming. Jaime and Victoria have only their son in town, but Arturo, Rigo and Marcos have siblings, cousins and in-laws nearby. Marcos and Rigo have each other, in addition to brothers and cousins in Sioux City, who come visit to assist with farm projects. Rigo's brother, an electrician, installed outdoor lights at the farm for Rigo to do night work, and other family members came out to help him paint. Similarly, Marcos' brothers and cousins come out to help put in fence, have a picnic and make a day of being on the farm.

### **Institutions and Organizations**

The farmers in this study have utilized a range of agricultural institutions and organizations familiar to Iowa farmers in general. These include markets for livestock, livestock auctions, county fairs, banks, meat processing regulations, and Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS). Respondent have experimented with buying livestock at auctions, and with markets for different kinds of livestock. Knowledge and experience with these various institutional processes gives farmers choices about what kind of farming they want to pursue.

### ***Markets***

Some respondents discussed the market for buying and selling hogs in Iowa, which is highly commoditized. Marcos commented on this in stating that hogs were difficult to purchase because they are not typically available in small numbers. Arturo discussed the markets for sheep, pigs and goats, articulating structural differences between them. He describes how hog producers contend with volatile market prices, sometimes opting for the security of a contract with buyers.

*En el puerco, varía mucho la venta porque como ahorita puerco esta, no estoy exactamente seguro, pero anda como 46 centavos la libra. Ha habido temporadas que el puerco se pone hasta 15 centavos la libra. Entonces, como los que tiene*

*contrato con las compañías que les tiene que entregar, supongamos, 200 puercos, y si tiene un contrato que les van a pagar 45 centavos o 40, el rancho esta ganando porque por fuera el que no tiene contrato quiere vender y ellos pagan a 20 centavos la libra. Un puerco de 250 libras a 20 centavos seria \$50. Entonces el rancho esta perdiendo allí, supongamos, \$30 por puerco. ... Hay vez también cuando el puerco esta caro y el que tiene contrato, si el contrato esta 40 centavos, y si el puerco esta 60 centavos, no le pagan mas de 40 centavos porque tiene contrato. ... Y hay muchos rancheros que hacen contrato y muchos rancheros que no, porque a veces sube y otras baja o sea que no es nada seguro, no es estable el precio.*

With hogs, sales vary a lot because right now, hogs are – I’m not exactly sure, but they go for about 46 cents per pound. There have been times that hogs get down to 15 cents per pound. So, those that have a contract with the companies, and let’s say they have 200 hogs, and if they have a contract, they’re going to get paid 45 cents or 40. The farmer is winning because if he didn’t have a contract he’d have to sell it on the open market and they pay 20 cents per pound. A 250-pound pig at 20 cents per pound would be \$50, so the farmer is losing there, let’s say, \$30 per hog. ... And there are also times when hogs are expensive and he who has a contract, if the contract is 40 cents and the market price is 60 cents, he won’t be paid more than 40 cents because he has a contract. ... There are many farmers who have contracts and many who don’t, because sometimes the price rises and sometimes it falls; the price is volatile.

Becoming aware of the unstable commodity market for hogs was Arturo’s cue to devote himself to the goat market. Rigoberto has a different attitude toward pigs. Because the bank encouraged him to raise hogs on contract to help him pay his mortgage, Rigo has accommodated himself to them – although he’d rather raise cattle as his father did. His job is to provide shelter for 500 feeder hogs, clean out manure, feed and water them, watch for illness, and administer medicine.

Having invested much time and effort but little, if any, money – the feed and medicine is provided, and the buildings (old barns used by the previous owner for pigs) came with the farm – Rigoberto is compensated at a rate of eight cents per day per pig. This made finishing pigs a low-risk income generating strategy. While he considers starting a goat business and, like Arturo, marketing to the local Mexican population, he is also drawn to the idea of increasing his income and efficiency by raising at least twice as many pigs in an upgraded confinement facility: “The same way you gonna waste your time with five hogs is the same time you gonna waste for a thousand pigs.” His experience has given him a different understanding of the same hog market Arturo encountered. Both have used this knowledge to engage the market in ways that apply to their particular circumstances and styles.



Arturo has had pigs on occasion but has chosen not to get into the business of raising pigs on the same scale as goats. He simply prefers goats to every other animal, finds them inexpensive to raise, has pastureland well suited to goats, and believes the market to be strong and growing. He says at Christmas time and for other festive occasions, local demand for goat is high.

Over the half-dozen years he has raised goats, he has seen the demand rise steeply, and with that, the price. Buyers from Philadelphia and Chicago come to the Kalona Livestock Auction (among the largest in the state for goats), and buy up much of the local supply. Arturo expects to see supply continue to grow to meet demand, bringing prices down again. Boer goats, which have a higher ratio of muscle to fat, are the most sought after in his area. He has responded by building his herd, which was originally a mix of breeds, on pure-bred Boer stock from Texas.

Although several African and Muslim customers from Moline and Rock Island have bought sheep from Arturo for their festivals, sometimes four or five people in a day, he finds the market for sheep to be generally weaker than that for goats.

*Se que los chivos es más comercial que el borrego. El borrego solamente es para llevar a las subastas. ... Hay personas que ni los conocen porque nunca han comido el borrego, y el chivo es más comercial, más conocido por todos.*

I know that goats are more marketable than lambs. Lambs are only good for taking to the sale barn. ... There are people that don't even know sheep because they have never eaten lamb, and goat is more marketable, better known by all.

### ***Rural institutions***

Livestock auctions can be a venue for Iowa livestock producers to quickly and easily acquire and dispense of livestock. Jaime describes his experience:

*Cuando yo compro animales, y no me gustan por ciertos problemas, ciertos defectos, los llevo para atrás. ... No se, los problemas que se vean los animales o los llevo para atrás para venderlos no hay problemas.*

When I buy animals and am not happy with them because they have certain problems or defects, I take them back. I don't know. The problems the animals show or that I take back to sell, it's no problem.

He's discovered that the price one pays for the convenience of a livestock auction is lack of control as a seller over prices, and as a buyer over quality. He explains that the highest bid can be pretty low when there are few or no bidders. Arturo states that the prices he fetches at

the sale barn are lower than when he direct-markets, so he only uses the auctions as a last resort.

County fairs have multiple uses for farmers, most notably showing animals and promoting various products. Arturo went to his county fair to find high quality Boer goats to buy as breeding stock. Marcos went to the fair in Sioux City with his son who entered the rodeo as a *charro* (Mexican rodeo cowboy).

### ***Regulations***

Most respondents referred to business experience they have developed, including working with banks, managing employees, and observing regulations on sale of agricultural products. Respondents have familiarized themselves with certain regulations, especially regarding meat processing and sale, since being in the U.S. In rural Mexico, many people have their own animals and know how to process them. Those who don't, buy fresh meat from their neighbors. In the U.S., by contrast, meat can only be sold from state- or USDA-inspected plants, where each animal is inspected before and after slaughter. Individuals wishing to eat meat from animals they already own can conduct the slaughter and processing themselves or pay for this service at a custom meat locker. These plants are also inspected to meet health and safety standards, but individual animals are not inspected.

Rigoberto, who is better acquainted with meat processing regulations than most other Iowans, explains differences between Mexico and Iowa in this regard:

Hispanic people, you know, [say] 'well, I want to butcher the beef. O.K., we're gonna butcher the beef and I wanna eat right away.' And I tell him, 'no, they need to be in the cooler for twenty-four hours at least or it's seventy-two.' ... I still got the ideas like from Mexico. You butcher a cow in the morning but by dinnertime you don't got nothing on, it's gone. We sold it right away.

Many of my respondents commented on how they have dealt with regulations. When Arturo discovered butchering meat for a customer was illegal without state-certification, he initiated discussions with IDALS about how to install a state-certified locker on his property. Jaime's wife Victoria, having learned that selling milk and homemade cheese is illegal without state-inspected facilities, emphasizes that she gives her cheese to friends only as a gift. Similarly, Marcos is aware that, without proper inspection and certification, he cannot

use poultry raised and butchered on his farm, nor the dozens of surplus eggs from his hens, in this restaurant.

Clearly wanting to steer clear of committing infractions, perhaps to the point of overcompensating, respondents were reluctant even to sell homegrown vegetables, which do not require inspection. Marcos believed he would not be permitted to use tomatoes from his garden in the restaurant. Furthermore, he fears litigation. If someone were to get sick from food they had eaten, (unless it had to do with the preparation) a paper trail of receipts could be followed to the distributor or producer, freeing Marcos of liability. This is an understandable concern given a recent outbreak from contaminated California spinach. Jaime, too, is wary of being sued if he sells vegetables at the farmers market. He suspects that if a child choked on a watermelon seed, he might be held responsible.

### **Vulnerability and Resilience**

Vulnerability refers to exposure to shocks and stresses, the sources of which are outside the power of an individual or household to control. Exposure can be persistent and drawn out, as with economic or political trends, or acute and unpredictable, as with human health shocks, natural disaster, and the Immigration and Customs Enforcement raids on workplaces employing undocumented workers. The primary elements of vulnerability for Latino immigrants are low wealth and income potential, limited access to social services, and the perpetual threat of deportation within families and communities.

“Any definition of sustainability has to include the ability to avoid or, more usually to withstand and recover from, such shocks and stresses” (Chambers and Conway 1991:10). The Latino immigrants in this study demonstrate resilience to the pressures from working in the secondary job market. Each mobilized social capital to access farmland. Each relied on newly formed and/or long-term relationships with people to get a bank loan to buy a farm. Rigo and Marcos formed critical relationships with Anglos who could vouch for their creditworthiness. Arturo and Jaime leaned on friends and family members to produce enough money to make a down payment.

Respondents have withstood shocks too. Jaime and Arturo each lived through the devastating shock of having their house or barn burn down in an accidental fire. Both had

insurance, but the costs of clean up and rebuilding exceeded insurance payments. Jaime's livelihood strategy of purchasing under-priced houses (he has bought two and resold one) has helped him recover from the destruction of his farmhouse. He now lives in the second house in town, and visits the farm every day to tend the animals and to slowly clean up and rebuild. He intends to do all the unskilled recovery work himself.

It took Arturo two years to rebuild his barn. In the meantime, he bought back the same number of animals he had lost in the fire. However, when lambs died from exposure to the elements, he realized he had to rebuild the barn first. Arturo sold the remaining animals and focused on rebuilding. As he built a new barn, he began to think about designating an area of the building for butchering and slaughter. An agent from the Iowa Department of Agriculture visited his farm around this time, and instructed him to build a processing facility according to regulations for a custom meat locker. Arturo took this advice and received his license. He is slowly rebuilding his herd, and selling a few animals per week.

Rigo struggled through a personal conflict with his brother who was reluctant to sell him the meat locker at first. Rigo felt hamstrung by his brother's control over the plant and quit managing it for a few months until the two could reach an agreement. He worked at a large meat packing plant in a neighboring town during this time. His future remained uncertain until his brother agreed to sell him the locker.

All respondents have used farming to achieve wellbeing. Physical, emotional and spiritual health and wellbeing enhance resilience to shocks and stresses. Jaime, for instance, regulates his diabetes by spending time with animals and being soothed by them. Rigo, Marcos and Arturo state, similarly, that working outside and with animals is a way to unwind and to be revived after a long day of indoor work.

### **Forging Sustainable Rural Livelihoods in Iowa**

The stories of the Mexican immigrants in this study illustrate how farming can be part of a sustainable rural livelihood. Each farmed in his home country, and carried agricultural skills and traditions to Iowa in the form of human and cultural capital. They combined these with social and financial capital, mediated by a bank, to acquire land and start farming. In their productive activities on the farm, each has discovered and made use of other

institutional processes to access supplies, information and markets. Experiences with institutions such as livestock markets, banks, county fairs, and IDALS have influenced these farmers in particular ways.

Arturo, for instance, worked with IDALS to innovatively establish a custom processing facility on his farm. Rigo's agreement with the bank required that he secure a secondary income, and his banker suggested he do this by using the buildings on the farm to finish pigs. Thus, pluriactive farming directly contributed to Rigo's being able to live on an acreage, to the extent that his bank loan to buy the land mandated pluriactivity by requiring a second income.

Pluriactive farming facilitates living on acreage for all respondents by making productive use of the land, while allowing for a steady, off-farm income. Farming as a pastime (akin to sports or games) improves resilience to shocks and stresses by enhancing health and wellbeing. Furthermore, farming is a productive pastime with a consumable output. Similarly, owning land increases net wealth, and thus serves as a buffer against financial shocks or stresses.

Conventional agriculture in Iowa is financially risky prohibitively expensive to enter, given high land and equipment prices. But unlike indicators of farm or firm profitability or household income, SRL seeks multiple outcomes. The framework clarifies how Latino immigrants can enter agriculture, given their particular vulnerabilities in U.S. society, by addressing the multiple resources and outcomes involved in part-time farming.

The experiences of the farmers in this study illustrate the multiple uses of farmstead acreage. In addition earning a \$10 profit on a head of livestock, farmers may use an animal to provide fresh milk, the opportunity to teach a child something new, and a way to unwind while tending to it. It is also a way to maintain culturally based dietary preferences, such as homemade Mexican-style cheeses, fresh vegetables, goat meat, and the meat of "old hens." The land itself, in addition to being a financial investment and a productive resource for growing crops and livestock, is also a place to entertain friends, a safe environment for raising a family, and a spot to "relax and watch stars" letting one's mind wander to Mexico.

## **CHAPTER FIVE DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

This thesis explores how and why Latino immigrants become farmers in Iowa. Across the country, Latinos are entering farming at a high rate, and immigrants of all backgrounds are participating in training and business incubation programs geared toward their particular needs as immigrant farmers. Yet, in Iowa there is limited connection between agricultural agencies and Latino or immigrant farmers. Sustainable Rural Livelihoods provides a conceptual framework for examining the multiple resources respondents in this study used to acquire land and develop farmstead businesses. The framework also takes into account structural barriers Latino immigrants as a socio-economic class and ethnic minority encounter in U.S. society, as well as the structural elements (institutions) that can be leveraged to improve livelihood outcomes. Lastly, the framework illuminates the multiple outcomes, beyond income generation, that result from pluriactivity as a livelihood strategy.

These outcomes become new resources as farmers achieve a lifestyle that promotes their physical and emotional health, and thereby their capability or human capital. Owning a farm creates opportunities to entertain and to give and receive favors, thereby building social capital, often with new individuals and groups. Finally, owning farmland and farm buildings is a boost to the family's net wealth, as well as serving as the natural and built capital to run a farming business.

I applied the SRL framework in this study to experiences of four Mexican immigrant farmers in Iowa. The following diagram illustrates the particular vulnerabilities, capitals, institutions, strategies and outcomes involved in their livelihood activities. It is a revised version of the diagram in Chapter Two. The institutions italicized are those that are underutilized or not used by these farmers. This is where intervention in the system could improve the livelihood outcomes for these farmers.

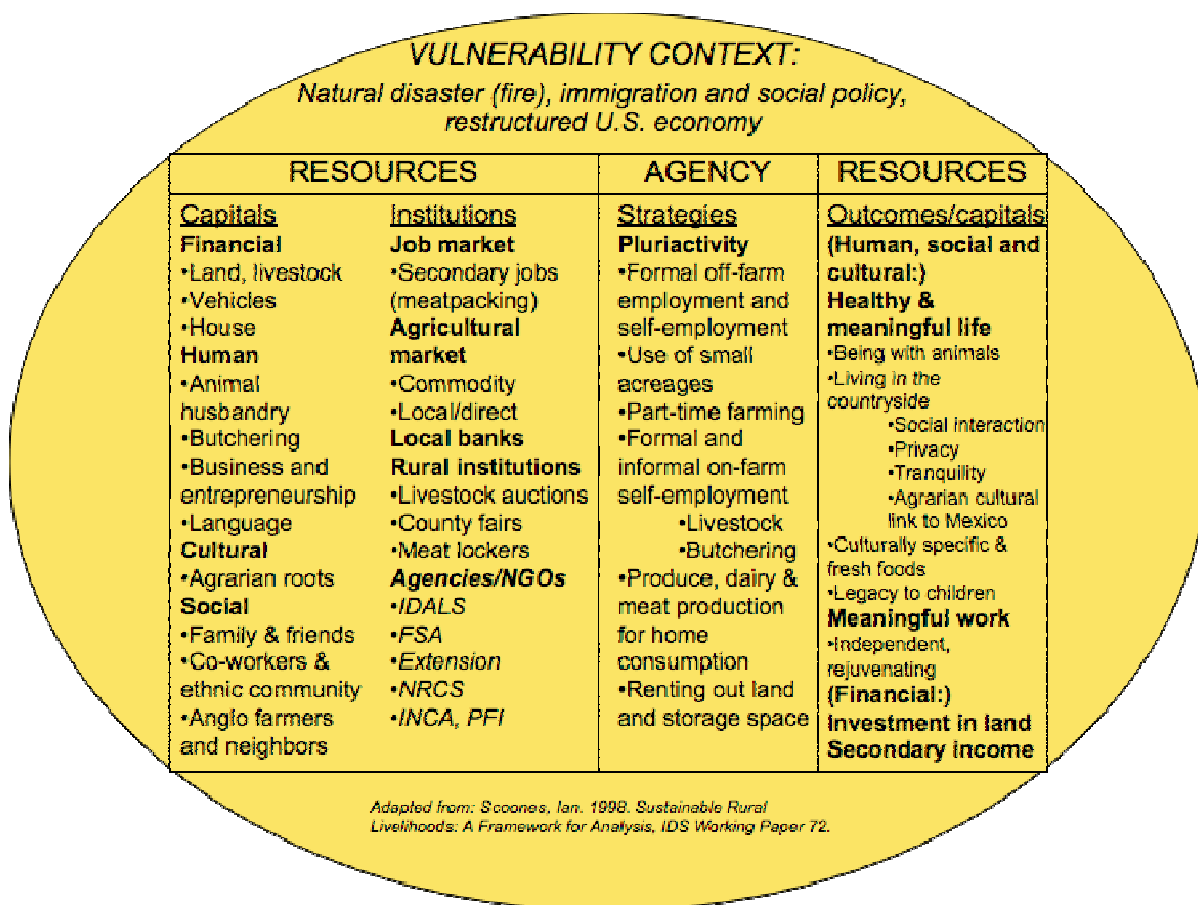


Diagram 3: Adapted SRL framework adjusted to reflect this study's findings

### **Assessing Motivations: Why Farm?**

Motivations to farm relate to outcomes insofar as farmers achieve what they hope to achieve. The farmers in this study were motivated to farm in part to live in the countryside, a goal each has clearly achieved. Rural life supplies access to several activities and amenities these farmers value, such as producing specific types and quality of food not otherwise available. Some prefer rural living for social reasons. These include the privacy of living on an acreage, and on the other hand, the possibility of being a member of a small town and being able to entertain visitors on a farm. Some respondents like to farm because it is outdoor, physical work, stimulating and relaxing. Some take particular comfort in working with animals. One who is diabetic stated that being with animals is healing to him. Two said working with animals makes them feel whole.

A sense of tradition also motivates some of these farmers. One explained that rural Iowa is much like rural Mexico, and that living on a small farm keeps him from missing Mexico. He wants to pass on traditions of rural Mexico to his children. In milking cows, making cheese, and keeping and butchering animals, these farmers are recreating the practices of their childhoods.

### **Assessing Approach: How to Farm in Iowa**

A common response when I tell people about my research is this: how could working class people afford to buy land to start farming? Farmland in Iowa is expensive. On a trip to southeast Iowa in search of interview subjects for this study, I met several residents of a small town along a main road between two meatpacking plant towns. I was referred to one couple, who referred me to someone else, and so on.

One was George Gonzalez, an older man and long-time Iowan originally from Durango, Mexico. No, I haven't heard of anybody getting into farming, he told me, let alone a Hispanic farmer. Anyone who's farming in this area has been farming for a very long time, and inherited a farm from his or her parents. I also talked to John Barns, owner of a 450-acre mixed melon and vegetable farm that employs 250 migrant workers from Mexico and Texas each summer. He also grows corn and beans. I asked him the same question, to which he replied: It's too expensive to start farming. Even my sons tried it and it didn't work out for them.

I heard the same thing from the county Extension directors I talked to in my search for Latino immigrant farmers. Many commented that farming is too expensive to enter without inheriting a farm from one's parents. One Extension agent noted that I'd have more luck finding people to interview if I were looking for immigrant farm workers rather than farm owner-operators.

The experiences of my respondents show that buying land for farming is possible for immigrants, even with low income, by mobilizing various forms of social and financial capital. The respondents are part-time farmers on 10 to 20 acres, and each relies on off-farm employment as a primary source of income. These individuals bought farmsteads with houses, rather than vast acreages, and raise mixed livestock, rather than input-intensive crops.



Their costs, therefore, have been lower than one would expect for a farmer entering conventional agriculture in Iowa. Furthermore, part-time production of vegetables, meats and dairy for sale and home consumption has a more dynamic set of outcomes than simply adding income and reducing grocery expenses. It can also improve resilience to shocks and stresses by enhancing physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing, and by increasing net wealth through land ownership.

The farmers in this study got bank loans to buy land by mobilizing social capital – with friends and family members – to raise enough money for a down payment, and with Anglo residents in their local communities who served as character references to a loan officer. They mobilized financial/built capital from Mexico or Iowa in the form of houses, vehicles, livestock and land.

This research shows that tending livestock is a low-risk way to enter farming because of: 1) past experiences tending livestock, butchering meat, milking cows and making cheese; 2) the opportunity to develop niche markets among Latino immigrants for goats, pigs and other slaughter animals; 3) low-overhead and quick turn-around in small-scale livestock production; and 4) the daily morning and evening schedule involved in tending animals is compatible with working off-farm during the day.

Each farmer smoothly adapted his livestock production experience in Mexico to an Iowa context. Each did this by utilizing rural institutions and relationships with other local farmers to acquire livestock, sometimes at discount, and tapping into co-ethnic networks and commodity chain markets to sell slaughter animals. In fact, the style of farming of these respondents depended on their social connection. Rigoberto, whose social network was with Anglo farmers, farmed in a style typical of a small-scale Anglo farmer in Iowa – he raised pigs on contract. Despite such assimilation, though, his Mexican roots were evident in his practice of milking a part-Angus (*corriente*, or mixed breed) cow for home consumption, and keeping goats and red, free-range chickens.

All four farmers have experimented with owning and selling animals before building larger herds. None has made large capital investments (compared to large-scale commodity farmers) in machinery, buildings or inputs; some have mobilized family social capital to

make improvements. Furthermore, grazing livestock as opposed to planting crops allows farmers to make use of marginal land, which may be less expensive than prime cropland.

Arturo made significant improvements to his farm, partly in response to his barn burning down. He built a barn, a simple slaughter facility, and fencing around his pasture. He built the barn with the help of an insurance payment, and decided opportunistically to add the slaughter facility. Marcos built fencing using recycled materials and family labor, and he made improvements to the barn. Jaime also built fencing. Rigo uses the fencing and buildings that were on the farm when he bought it. He upgraded only the electrical work (furnished by his brother) to improve outdoor lighting for working at night.

Other research (Tienda and Raijman 1999) has shown that some Latino immigrants enter entrepreneurship through the informal market because of low-risk up-front investment. The farmers in my study sell livestock informally through extended networks of friends, coworkers and relatives. Their operations are informal in the sense that they are sole proprietorships, or businesses not represented by a formal legal organization; any income earned is reported on the owner's personal income taxes (Hamilton, Luedeman and O'Brien 2005).

A sole proprietorship is the simplest form of business operation, and can work well on a small scale. However, when a business becomes more heavily capitalized, it behooves the owner to create a separate legal entity, such as a limited liability company or a corporation, to protect his or her personal assets from claims on debts incurred through business operation.

Arturo is beginning to formalize his livestock operation by obtaining state certification for processing. Marcos, Rigo and Arturo spoke of wanting to expand their herd sizes and land acreage for livestock grazing; Jaime expressed interest in diversifying into commercial vegetable production. With the farmers' goals of expansion in mind, we turn to the institutional interventions that can help them go forward.

### **Implications: Role for Institutions**

In order to expand, these farmers need better access to information, such as information on the different types of legal business organization. Rigo and Marcos are bilingual, but Jaime and Arturo need information in Spanish. All four could benefit from information on

marketing and regulations governing the sale of agricultural products. Each currently uses his own social connections and networks to market livestock. But none sells through local marketing institutions such as farmers' markets or Community Supported Agriculture, nor do they sell to restaurants, grocery stores or other retail, wholesale or food service operations. Language, for Arturo and Jaime, could present a barrier to doing business with Anglo clients.

In addition to learning about new marketing opportunities, these farmers would also benefit from information about regulations on selling agricultural products. For instance, farmers can sell fresh processed meat to their customers only if they process the animals in a state-inspected facility. This meat cannot then be resold unless the animal from which it came was inspected by a state or federal agent before and after slaughter. Every respondent was aware of U.S. rules against home-processing and selling fresh meat, which is common practice in Mexico. There are also rules against selling fresh eggs to any establishment (like a restaurant) without state certification. However, fresh eggs can be sold directly to consumers through a farmers' market or directly from the farm.

Given the U.S. restrictions for selling meat, eggs and dairy, some respondents are inclined to believe that similar tight restrictions govern fresh produce sales. Marcos believed he would not be permitted to use tomatoes from his garden in the restaurant. Furthermore, he fears litigation. Jaime, too, is wary of being sued if he sells vegetables at a farmers' market. Farmers need information not only about regulations that apply to selling agricultural products, but also on how to comply with regulations, and about opportunities to sell vegetables and other products that do not require state inspection or licensing.

Jaime, Marcos and Rigo had not used public agricultural agencies, such as Farm Services Agency or ISU Extension. This was because they did not know how to use them, given language barriers, or they were unaware of them or of the services they provided. Marcos wanted information on how to direct-market a small quantity, like eggs by the dozen. Jaime wanted information related to livestock production, such as how many animals could be kept on acreage and what types of facilities were required. He also wanted to know how to sell vegetables.

The experiences of these farmers suggest, further, that institutions have a role to play in connecting aspiring farmers with small acreage farmsteads. This research shows that growing

food for sale and home consumption is a quality-of-life choice, and that living in the countryside is integral to what respondents value about farming. Being a small-scale farmer offers at once the recreational activity of tending livestock, the economic activity of making secondary income, the opportunity to experiment (informally) with entrepreneurship, and the possibility of growing a business.

***Summary of implications***

- Farmstead with small acreage may be sufficient and even ideal
- Aspiring farmers who own houses may be in a better position to get bank loan to buy a farm
- Knowing and being known by townspeople can help secure bank loans
- Entering farming via livestock production and trade builds on human, social and cultural capital, and can be developed/expanded little by little
- Mexican immigrant farmers are not yet well connected with agricultural institutions, but could benefit from information presented in person in Spanish on regulations, production and markets

***Methodological implications: finding farmers***

Since Mexican immigrant farmers are not yet well connected to agricultural institutions, and given that most federal agencies are restricted by law from providing contact information for clients, going through these agencies to reach Latino farmers may be unproductive. Instead, it may be fruitful to go through the institutions these farmers commonly use, such as livestock (and used farm equipment) auctions, local livestock supply stores, county fairs, and local banks. One might also examine land deed records at county assessors' offices, looking for small acreages and Spanish surnames.

**Conclusion**

The farmers in this study are pioneers. They forged pathways into Iowa agriculture by drawing on their own skills, ambitions, social connections and limited stocks of financial wealth. They have at once preserved traditions from their Mexican agricultural heritages and adapted to the conditions of Iowa, where institutions, terrain, soils and climate differ significantly from those in Mexico.

Their experiences serve as examples of what is possible for other immigrants who want to farm. And they are instructive in highlighting the types of assistance that Iowa's agricultural organizations can provide to immigrant farmers. Organizations can facilitate access to small farmstead acreages and bilingual information on regulations, production and marketing, and help connect farmers to a variety of local markets, such as farmers markets, Community Supported Agriculture and institutional procurement arrangements.

If Iowans value the agricultural character of the state, access to fresh foods through local food systems, and healthy rural communities, then there is good reason to facilitate access to agriculture for new Iowans who want to farm. And with additions like homemade *queso fresco*, fresh, farm-processed meats, *charreada* riders in small-town parades, and free-range chicken enchiladas, the agricultural character of Iowa is bound to be strengthened.

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