Involving new immigrants and minority youth in local food systems

The project helped these Latino youth understand more fully the social role of the food value chain in their lives by using the PhotoVoice program. It also was meant to assist in the integration of Latinos in local/regional food groups in Iowa.

What was done and why?
Latino high school students from three communities in Iowa (Des Moines, Council Bluffs and Ottumwa) participated in a PhotoVoice project with ISU Sociology Extension with the intent of raising their awareness of local food systems. Through photography, youth artistically engaged the local food system, and came to better understand how they and their families are an integral part of the food web. This effort was fueled by collaboration with regional food groups and allied sponsoring organizations in each region.

Objectives:
1. Involve immigrant and minority residents in local and regional food groups:
   a. Using participatory techniques (the project chose PhotoVoice, a community-based participatory research process that uses photography as a tool for engaging people in a critical reflection process around a specific issue), train youth to better understand the food system in their communities.
2. Strengthen capacity in RFGs and in their regions for integrating immigrant and minority groups into community food systems.
3. Disseminate materials, methods, and insights to other RFGs in the RFSWG and beyond via the Sociology Extension website.

What did we learn?
The project succeeded in involving Latino youth to reflect on how food is embedded in culture and in relationships, particularly of the family. It encouraged them to think about where their food comes from and how it moves from seedling to the dinner table. Latino youth learned how to use the technique called PhotoVoice to better understand the food system in their community. This PhotoVoice training program and curriculum can be used in the future to assist Regional Food Groups and others interested in involving immigrants, refugees, and minority group members in a community food system.

Involving Latinos or other immigrant or minority groups in the local food system requires long-term effort. Several cultural barriers need to be addressed by all participants, organizers, youth and parents. Trust and more participation can be built through recognition of differences and of shared goals by members in the community, if supported by appropriate learning tools. As a consequence of this project, a subset of Iowa Latino teens became aware of opportunities associated with local foods.