“Food Security among Oaxacan Immigrants in New Brunswick: Exploring the Potentials of Amaranth”

Katie Fudacz

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The Leadership Scholars Certificate Program is a two-year selective, interdisciplinary certificate program that prepares Rutgers undergraduate women to be informed, innovative, and socially responsible leaders.

Leadership Scholars design and implement social action projects to expand their understanding of issues and problems and to develop leadership skills.

This project gives Scholars the opportunity to apply the theoretical knowledge they have gained about leadership, advocacy, and social change with the practical and experiential knowledge they have developed about a particular policy issue or problem through the field site placement. It also further develops leadership skills by giving undergraduates the opportunity to practice leadership through action.

To find out more please visit the Institute for Women’s Leadership’s website at http://iwl.rutgers.edu.
Oaxaca, Mexico

• Oaxaca is a primarily indigenous state in southern Mexico with a population of approximately 3.3 million.

• According to the 2000 census, Oaxaca is the second poorest state in Mexico.
Malnutrition in Oaxaca

• Malnutrition affects one of every four children under five years of age in urban areas and two of every five children in rural areas.
• One in five children between the ages of 5-11 suffers from anemia, as does One in every four pregnant women.
• By the end of 2004, diabetes had become the leading cause of death in Oaxaca due to vast consumption of junk food and soda.
• High rates of neural tube birth defects (face, brain and spinal column) lead to high rates of miscarriage and infant death.
What is Amaranth?

- Amaranth is a native Oaxacan plant that is exceptionally drought resistant and bountiful.
- Each Amaranth plant produces 40,000-60,000 nutrient-rich seeds seasonally.
- Seeds are 13 to 15 percent protein, high in fiber, calcium, iron, potassium, phosphorus, zinc, and vitamins A and C.
- Leaves are also edible, containing calcium, phosphorus, vitamin C and folate.
Why Amaranth?

- Amaranth grows abundantly throughout the rural south of Mexico, where malnutrition is highest.
- Consuming Amaranth alleviates malnutrition, prevents neural tube birth defects and miscarriage.
- Amaranth can be stored for up to 15 years, enhancing food security during seasons of scarcity.
- Amaranth can be eaten in grain form or processed into flour. It’s leaves are edible as well.
Puente a la Salud Comunitaria

- Puente a la Salud Comunitaria is a Oaxacan based NGO that contributes to food sovereignty and advances the health and well-being of rural communities in Mexico by promoting the cultivation, consumption and commercialization of amaranth.

- **Values** - Dignity, Equity, Integrity, Respect, Responsibility, Solidarity, Transparency
Programs

- Healthy Families: Puente works with families throughout 27 of Oaxaca’s most underdeveloped communities to promote the cultivation and consumption of Amaranth.
- Eco Amaranth: Puente works with local farmers to produce amaranth and other nutritious foods using agro-ecological techniques.
- Livelihoods: Through partnership with civic organizations and businesses, Puente aims to commercialize Amaranth to improve the lives of small-scale growers, their families and their communities.
Jersey Roots, Global Reach

- In New Brunswick, there is a large Oaxacan immigrant population
- Amaranth is a culturally relevant crop that serves as a tool to connect the global (Oaxaca, Mexico) to the local (New Brunswick, New Jersey)
- Elijah’s Promise, a community development center, “harnesses the power of food to change lives”
- **Networking**: Lazos Unidos, Slow Food Club, A Better World Café, RAICES, HQ Coffee, NB Public Library, EPIB Trail affiliates, RU Garden of Eden, Professors & Deans, Alpha Zeta brothers, Voorhees Fellows, DRC students, Ameri Corps Interns, Mantle of Power church
“Amazing Amaranth”

• On November 22, 2013, I hosted a participatory Amaranth cooking workshop in partnership with Elijah’s Promise.

• Chef Rachel, manager of A Better World Café and instructor at EP Culinary Institute, Edith & Edwin, EP Culinary students

• 46 participants
Reflections

• What are your big picture insights about the social issue you addressed in your project?
• What lessons did you learn about social justice-based women’s leadership?