

For Immediate Release

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To: All Media & PSA Directors

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Producers Recognized & Became More Informed at Small Farms Conference

Yakima,-WA- The Small Farms Conference hosted on February 6, 2015 at the Yakima Convention Center in Yakima by the Center for Latino Farmers was “awesome and producers were engaged”, said Luz Bazan Gutierrez, CEO of RCDR. The conference succeeded in bring in 165 Hispanic/Latino farm operators from all part of WA, from Tonasket close to the Canadian border, Yelm in the Western side of the site and visitors from Portland. The **Small Farms Conference entitled "Changing Dynamics of Agriculture"** was an all day event for producers, professionals and businesses to network and hear from experts and other farmers about the issues facing small producers.

Jim Davenport, Board Chair of the Rural Community Development Resources (RCDR) welcomed everyone to the session, and spoke about the challenges faced by all farmers. David Reeploeg, Central WA Director of Senator Cantwell's office delivered a message from the Senator expressing her support of the Center's efforts in assisting Latino farmers to access USDA programs. Jon DeVaney, president of the newly formed WA Tree Fruit Association spoke about the dynamic changes that had taken place when four industry groups merged to better serve the producers. He was selected to take the helm and wanted all to know that the group wants to provide more information to better serve all producers. He provided information on the 2014 bumper crop apple productions and the challenges faced by smaller producers. He offered his services and asked to better partner with the Center in their work. He said that the union current work stoppage at the port is hurting the Ag industry and foreign sales. While it meant better wages for farmworkers, it did not necessarily mean more money for the producers.

Juan Marinez of the Alliance of Hispanics in American Agriculture (AHAA) said he was so pleased to be part of the program. He said that his organization is working closely with USDA to make sure that Latino farm operators are counted in their recurring five year Ag Census. Before he provided the growth charts, he provided a historical prospective as how the Mexican people did not just arrive here. They have been involved in farming and cattle operations for generations, and owning their land was the driver for their successful operations.

Aviva Kamm of Stokes Lawrence Law Firm was the keynote luncheon speaker and spoke about the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and employer compliance. While she reported that it was not the most exciting presentation, it was important for employers to know what they must do to comply with the new law that impacts them beginning this year, if they employ a certain number of employees. All agreed it was important, but getting the assistance to make sure they comply is important.

During the luncheon, six Latino producers were recognized for their leadership and involvement in being elected or appointed to the FSA Advisory Committees in their respective counties. Those receiving awards were:

- Ernesto Lara-Benton County 5 years
- Jesus Limon from Okanogan County committee and appointed by President Obama's Administration for State Advisory Committee 6 years (Served a total of 15 years)
- Porfirio Covarrubias- Douglas County 2 years
- Raul Sanchez- Chelan County 6 years
- Sergio Marquez-Yakima County 5 years
- Victor Castro-Okanogan County 5 years



(Right-Left: Víctor Castro, Susan Castro, Jesús Limón, Maria Limón, Porfirio Covarrubias, Lilia Márquez, Sergio Márquez, Not present: Raúl Sánchez, Ernesto Lara)

Maria DJ Rodriguez said, “These are producers that took the lead and got involved in the decision making process. We want you to follow their lead and get involved in your county to become a representative”.

Maria Giedra Farm Outreach Specialist for five years with the Center received a recognition award for the outstanding work in reaching out to the Latino producers to assist them in all areas of need and diligent work in taking the lead to organize such a successful conference.

Presenters from federal and state agencies spoke about the topics such as participation on the USDA programs and services, organic farming, marketing strategies, crop insurance, farm succession, conservation, estate planning, good agriculture practice, affordable care act, labor issues, H2A program, farm workers housing and how to increase farm profits with good soil care.

The WA State Dept of Agriculture (WSDA) partnered with the Center by hosting WPS Hands-On Training for pesticide handlers as part of the conference. The workshop provided practical hands-on training that exceeds the state and federal training requirements of the Worker protection Standard (WPS). A total of 19 Latino producers and/or farm workers obtained their Handlers Training Verification Card and were given 6 credits for the existing license holders.

This year the total of exhibitors doubled from the previous year to 13. Exhibits from federal, state and private businesses filled the hall way to connect with potential clients for their services.

