

Meeting needs of new Latino immigrant families

Informing policymakers through research

The issue. Rural communities often resist immigration, but without immigrants to fill labor shortages, pay taxes, and consume goods, many rural communities would dwindle.

By 2050, one fourth of the U.S. population will be Latino. While only 2.8 percent of the Iowa population is Latino, the state's Latino population grew 38 percent from 2000-2006.

Latino immigrants often come to Iowa to escape poor economic conditions in their home countries, but once in the United States, they often struggle to meet their most basic needs, due to language barriers, limited skills, weakened social networks, scant financial resources or credit history, documentation issues, and mistrust of institutions.

According to our research. Overall, new Latino immigrants in rural Iowa do not have access to an adequate amount of food obtained in socially acceptable ways on a regular basis, or access to adequate, affordable and safe housing. In other words, they are *food insecure*, and lack housing stability. New Latino immigrants who are food and housing insecure rely mainly on family, friends, church, government, and private agencies to help them meet these basic needs, as well as other needs such as childcare, transportation, and paying medical bills. Immigrants who are food and housing secure also access social support from family and friends, but they more commonly access government resources to meet their food needs (e.g., WIC, food stamps, school meals), have stable employment, and are knowledgeable about managing financial resources.

We recommend. To ensure that their communities thrive, educators, service providers, and policymakers should collaborate with immigrant families to establish support systems that strengthen food and housing security by delivering:

- adequate information that identifies community resources and explains how to navigate them
- education on how to manage finances and connect with food and housing assistance
- policies that ensure affordable and safe housing for all families
- media messages that communicate values, goals, strengths, and contributions of immigrant families to longer-term community residents
- dialogues to increase understanding and identify strategies for helping families and communities succeed.

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For more information, visit:
www.hs.iastate.edu/makeadifference

This policy brief is based on published research: Greder, K., Cook, C., Garasky, S., Sano, Y., and Randall, B. (2008). *Rural Latino immigrant families: Hunger, housing, and social support*. In R. L. Dalla, et al. (Eds.). *Strengths and Challenges of New Immigrant Families: Implications for Research, Policy, Education and Service*. Lexington Books.

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