**EVALUATION DESCRIPTION**

**CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The GtG evaluation employs a comprehensive social ecological framework, focusing on five core areas that highlight the multifaceted impact of sustainable practices:

- **Environmental Impact:** The program’s sustainability, creating a synergetic relationship between human activities and the environment. By fostering sustainable practices, the program contributes to a healthier planet and community. It also plays a role in driving economic growth while enhancing environmental quality.
- **Local Food System:** The program recognizes the importance of a holistic approach to the food system. This involves integrating sustainability into food production, processing, distribution, consumption, and waste management. By doing so, it not only secures the sustainability of the local food supply chain but also addresses crucial issues like food security and access to nutrition.
- **Health Impact:** The emphasis on safe farming practices and knowledge dissemination within the program leads to a range of positive health outcomes. This includes a decrease in morbidity and mortality rates, the prevention of chronic diseases, and an overall improvement in the quality of life for the individuals. Furthermore, the promotion of physical activity through sustainable practices contributes to overall community health.
- **Economic Impact:** The program contributes to community wealth by fostering locally based employment opportunities. This is achieved by boosting the income of local farmers, encouraging residents to keep their food expenditures local. Additionally, the initiative creatively repurposes vacant lots into productive spaces, generating income and providing avenues for job training and employment.
- **Social Impact:** The program's impact extends beyond economic and environmental considerations to encompass social dimensions. It promotes human capital development by improving new skills and creating economic employment opportunities. Through the cultivation of social capital, characterized by trust and cohesion, the initiative strengthens social networks, contributing to overall social well-being.

The evaluation methods employed for the baseline, midyear, and year-end reports are delineated as follows. The baseline assessment relied on a combination of mixed methods, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative approaches. In contrast, the midyear evaluation primarily utilized qualitative methods to explore the intricacies of the program. For the year-end report, although quantitative data were collected, the predominant reliance was on qualitative methods. This shift is attributed to the constraints posed by a limited sample size, prompting a more in-depth investigation, and understanding of the seasonal aspects through qualitative analysis.

**RESULTS**

**SUMMARY OF CHALLENGES**

- **Recruitment and Program Reputation:** Participants and partner organizations expressed uncertainty about their roles in recruiting applicants, resulting in a decline in applicants and concerns about the program’s reputation.
- **Training and Compensation:** Farmers lacked formal training in pedagogy and mentorship. Trainees felt unprepared and uncertain about their responsibilities, causing discontent.
- **Program Orientation:** The initial focus on realistic job applications and financial need for improved compensation during the final stages of the program.
- **Logistical Challenges:** Dependence on personal vehicles for work-related activities impacted both training and mentorship.

**Conflict Management and Emotional Well-Being:**

- **Conflict management** posed a significant challenge for improvement from the previous year.
- **A structural framework** for emotional communications through emotional intelligence training was deemed essential.
- **A structured outline** for conflict resolution was developed to oversee critical partners in moderating conflicts promptly and impartially.

**Community Engagement and Morale:**

- **Regular formalized celebrations** were valued important for boosting morale and group cohesion.
- **Importance of community engagement** was highlighted for fostering in-viability and shared purpose.

**ACTIONS TAKEN**

- Farmer organizations received tailored guidance on how to conduct quick assessments.
- Recruitment was expanded from four months to one year.
- Trainees were given a galactic structure.
- Trainees were given an enhanced schedule.
- Structure of the program was changed from a full-time (40 hrs) to a part-time (20 hrs) training schedule.
- Options for conflict management and resolution were explored.
- Trainees received feedback on their progress.

**SUMMARY OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

- **Transformer and Sustainable Practices:**
  - Farmers transformed several plots into productive landscapes, yielding approximately 15,000 pounds of food.
  - They made conscious efforts to see water efficiently, aligning with the program’s sustainability goals.
  - Between 2020 and 2023, 30 people had passed through the training component, and 12 had continued to become involved in the community.

- **Impact on Individual Lives:**
  - Trainees reflected on farming as a lifelong career, expressing pride and empowerment.
  - Participants unconditionally affirmed the program’s value, recognizing the substantial benefits from their participation.

- **Community and Environmental Impact:**
  - Participants recognized the program’s contribution to benefiting consumers and the environment through conscientious land management and sustainable food cultivation practices.
  - The program emphasized the interconnections between agriculture, the environment, and the water cycle.

- **Collaborative Problem-Solving:**
  - Weekly workshop meetings with organizations served as vital platforms for problem-solving and addressing program-related issues.
  - These meetings facilitated a sense of community and built a collective knowledge base, enhancing the program’s effectiveness.

- **Desire for Closer Relationships and Community Engagement:**
  - Participants expressed a desire for closer relationships with partner organizations and increased community engagement through on-site visits.
  - They proposed community centers as platforms for community members to learn about the program and participate in local projects.

- **Recruitment and Awards:**
  - In 2023, the Grow the Growers program was awarded the “Heart of the Land” award for its leadership in farming and marketing by the New Mexico Food and Agriculture Policy Council.

- **Development of Human Capital:**
  - The program equipped participants with practical farming techniques, business skills, and leadership qualities, preparing them for agricultural careers and beyond.
  - The program provided continuous on-site support, contributing meaningfully to the program and to their communities.

**DISCUSSION**

- Using a social ecological framework, the program’s evaluation employs mixed-methods to assess impacts, address challenges, and highlight achievements such as increased agricultural productivity, land stewardship, and development of human capital.
- The evaluation data from GtG characterizes typify program participants, exploring their engagement with sustainable agricultural practices and the impact on various aspects of their lives, such as health, safety, and community involvement, which have not been previously collected.
- This study is generating data and providing valuable information that may be essential for the allocation of resources to other similar farmer training programs across the country.

**CONCLUSION**

The evaluation of the Grow the Growers (GtG) program contributes to the broader understanding of farmer training programs and their impact on occupational health and safety within the agricultural sector. GtG represents a holistic approach to farmer training, addressing not only technical skills but also health, safety, and community well-being. This evaluation highlights the importance of such programs in promoting sustainable farming practices while considering health and safety of farmers, ultimately contributing to the resilience of agricultural communities.

**FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

Future directions for this evaluation could involve expanding the scope to include a longer-term follow-up to assess the sustained impact of the program on participants and communities. Additionally, exploring the scalability of successful elements of the GtG program to other regions or similar farmer training initiatives could provide valuable insights for broader agricultural development efforts.

**SUPPORT & CONTACTS**

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