

## 20-YEAR **IMPACT ASSESSMENT** of ALBA's ORGANIC FARM BUSINESS INCUBATOR / OCTOBER 2023

Founded in 2001, the Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association (ALBA) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization based in Salinas, California. This brochure summarizes the results of ALBA's most comprehensive Impact Assessment to date. In all, 181 graduates of the first-year course — *Programa Educativo para Pequeños Agricultores (PEPA)* — were surveyed, which represents 48% of the graduates in our first 20 years. The assessment measures to what extent ALBA has lived up to its mission of creating economic opportunity for limited-resource farmers.

### THE PROGRAM

On 100 acres of organic farmland on California's Central Coast, ALBA provides on-farm training and farmland access to limited-resource farmers — mostly Mexican immigrants — enabling them to advance their careers or pursue the dream of farm ownership. The program starts with the PEPA Course, which helps up to 30 aspiring farm owners prepare to launch a farm in the second year of the program. A total of 80 workshops are held in the classroom and field, covering topics such as organic production, business management, marketing and regulatory compliance, culminating in the development and presentation of a business plan.

Shortly after completing PEPA, 10-12 participants may enter the Organic Farm Incubator (OFI) to launch a farm business. Over 4 more years, beginning farm owners gain access to farmland and farm equipment at subsidized rates and free on-site technical assistance from staff, as they gradually scale up and prepare for their transition to independent farming. In any given year, 35-40 start up farms are being incubated on our land.

Helping immigrant farmworkers transition to independent farm owners is challenging, to say the least. Fortunately, we have help from partner organizations which complement ALBA's work. They provide essential business support services such as marketing, lending, land matching, and business coaching which assist farms while at ALBA and long after they leave. This unique and proven ecosystem of services — shown in the diagram below — gives our start-up organic farms the time and support to take root and grow.



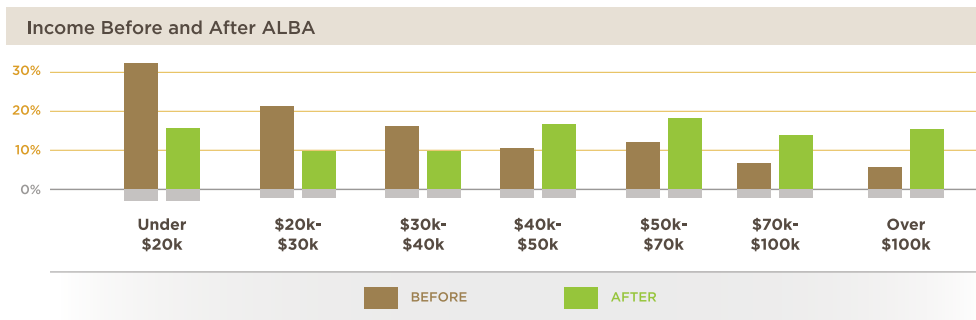


## KICKSTARTING ORGANIC FARMS AND CAREERS

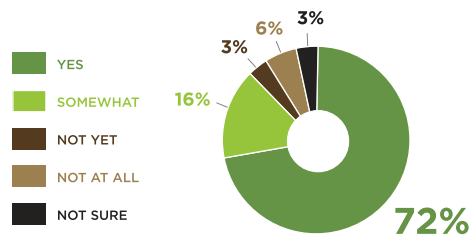
The findings show that ALBA, in coordination with partners, is effectively lowering the cost and risk of starting a farm, helping aspiring farmers develop the skills, knowledge and networks needed to succeed.

A total of 77 respondents are currently operating a farm business, which represents 43% of all respondents, and 64% of the 121 who entered the OFI. Over 90% are still farming organically, typically growing 5 to 10 mixed vegetable crops — and sometimes strawberries — on an average of 14 acres. Moreover, almost 60% of farm owners coming out of ALBA are farming for a living, earning most or all of household income from the farm. In contrast, just 30% of American farm owners earn more than ¼ of their household income from farming.

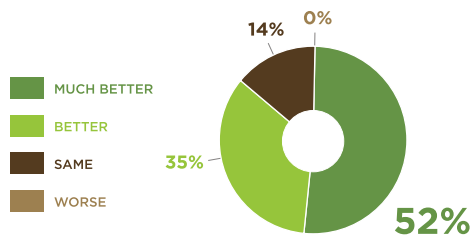
Though ALBA is largely focused on farm incubation, the intensive training in organic farm management also develops skills useful in the job market. Over 60% of agricultural jobs currently held by respondents were ‘entirely’ or ‘mostly’ involved in organic farming and food, showing that ALBA is not only establishing organic farms but building the sustainable farming workforce. Importantly, the results show that the program led to positive career changes resulting in higher incomes and greater career satisfaction, confirming that that the program has benefitted farmers, families and the local economy.



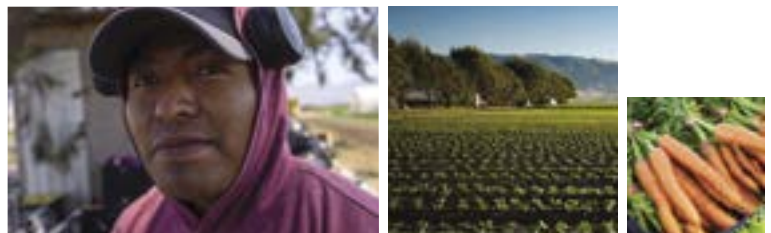
Did ALBA improve business or career opportunities?



How is your career now compared to before ALBA?



“OWNING YOUR OWN LAND AND BEING AN ORGANIC FARMER IS A SOURCE OF PRIDE.”

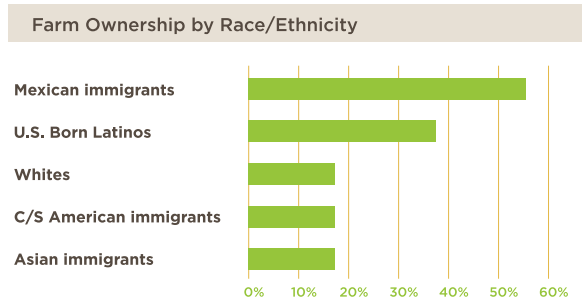




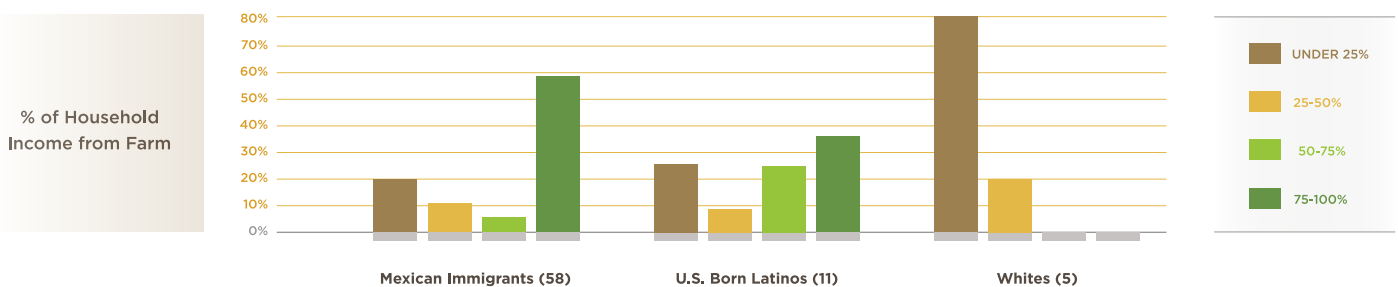
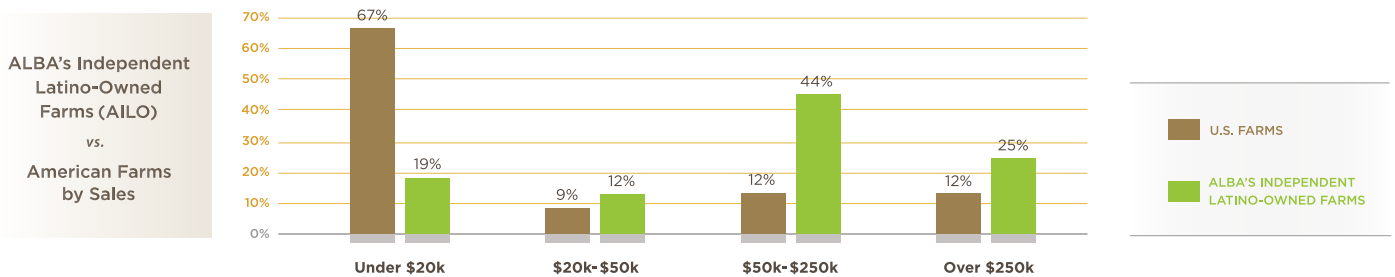
## LATINOS HAVE THE SKILLS AND DETERMINATION TO FARM INDEPENDENTLY

ALBA's story is best told by Mexican immigrants field laborers, who enter the program to pursue independent farm ownership. Mexican immigrants comprised 57% (104) of survey respondents, and U.S.-Born Latinos (USBLs) added another 17% (30). This combined 74% survey representation is still lower than their actual program participation rate of 85% - 90%

Beyond participation, Latinos outperform in other key metrics. An impressive 56% (58 of 104) of Mexican immigrant respondents are operating a farm business, followed by 37% (11 of 30) of USBLs who, together, were 90% of the farm owners surveyed (69 of 77). The same holds true for their commitment to farming as a livelihood, as more than 60% of Latino farm owners surveyed earn a majority of their household income from the farm. Incredibly, ALBA's independent Latino farms (AILOs) even compare favorably with American farms as a whole, as nearly 70% of AILOs are in the top 25% of American farms in terms of sales, and 25% are in the top 10%.



These findings are at odds with the fact that **over 80% of our nation's farmworkers are Latino but just 4% of farms are Latino-owned**. This disparity presents an opportunity. Investment in training and resources for the millions of Latino farmers — and other farmers of color — could catalyze a revival of family farms and the rural economy, while bringing greater equity to American agriculture.





## 20-YEAR IMPACT ASSESSMENT BRIEF

### A SOLID INVESTMENT IN THE LOCAL ECONOMY AND FOOD SYSTEM

For stakeholders involved in sustainable and equitable food systems, looking beyond individual achievement to the program's return on investment is compelling. The 77 farms surveyed cultivate 1,099 acres organically. Multiplying this by a conservative per acre revenue estimate of \$21,000, accounting for those farmers not surveyed (52%) and borrowing an economic multiplier from the Monterey County Agricultural Commissioner (1.62), the economic output of ALBA farms approaches **\$50 million annually**. Comparing this to the grants and contributions of **\$15.7 million awarded over 20 years** yields a clear and impressive return on investment to the local economy.

Less easy to quantify but perhaps just as important, is the economic impact of hundreds of thousands of hours of experiential training and technical assistance which has strengthened the organic food and farming workforce. Add to that the diverse health benefits reaped by the environment, farmers, and consumers as a result of growing food in harmony with nature!

Our 20 years of experience at ALBA serving talented and motivated Latino farmers, allows us to confidently recommend the land-based farm incubation model as a solid investment in local food system and as a strategy to bring about greater equity and sustainability in agriculture.



**ALBA WAS VERY BENEFICIAL FOR ME. I SAW FARMING AS JUST PLANTING AND HARVESTING. ALBA SHOWED ME HOW TO BE A BUSINESSMAN AND MADE ME A BETTER FARMER."**



**Want to read the full report?**

**Have questions or comments?**  
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