Farmworker Housing

Summary

Local governments working in conjunction with community development corporations (CDCs) can develop a regional strategy to expand the development of affordable housing for farmworkers and food service laborers in cities and on farms with access to education, child care, healthcare, and other community services.

Tool Type and Potential Partners

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Current Context

Existing farmworker housing is insufficient to provide for the number of farmworkers needed in regional agriculture and related food processing. For example, a recent Washington County study identified the number of needed beds for farmworkers in 2009 as between 10,500 and 11,500.¹

Existing farmworker housing typically involves multiple families living in small apartments or homes, or on-farm housing with far more people per unit than would typically live in a structure. Housing is often crowded, sub-standard, and located in areas with limited access to needed support services. Locations are often far from farmworker jobs, which adds commute time and cost. Due to cost or housing availability fluctuations, low-income farmworker families with children do not often have the opportunity to live in stable home and educational environment. Housing options located on farms are limited in Oregon due to rural land use regulations. Farmers and growers often do not have the expertise or resources to provide affordable farmworker housing or are not able to comply with regulations that can lock them into agreements they are not willing or capable of taking on. Some regulations can be particularly onerous, including from one funding source that dictates farmworker housing be offered in perpetuity for 33 years.²

Barriers/Challenges

Agricultural producers in the region lack a dependable high quality labor force. Farmworkers need safe, sanitary, and supportive housing for themselves and their families. Challenges to obtaining and providing farmworker housing include income, language and cultural differences, household size, migrant status, eligibility criteria to enter farmworker housing, real or perceived legal repercussions, and discrimination. The ability of local governments to provide an adequate supply of housing overall in the region is limited by lack of funds for predevelopment, high land costs, land use limitations, and meeting the support service needs of residents.

Opportunity

Existing networks of housing service providers in the region can be encouraged to develop exemplary community-based urban farmworker housing which address several of the barriers listed above. CDCs engaged in this work currently include the Community and Shelter Assistance Corporation of Oregon (CASA of Oregon, www.casaoforegon.org, based in Sherwood, OR), Hacienda Community Development Corporation (www.haciendadc.org, based in Portland, OR) and the Farmworker Housing Development Corporation (www.fhdc.org, based in Woodburn, Oregon). Community-based housing provides the stability needed for families of farmworkers which other types of farmworker housing do not provide. Community-based housing also comes with supportive services such as education, child care, training, and agricultural business incubation support services for farmworkers and their families. Local governments can support CDC efforts to provide quality, lasting, and supportive community-based farmworker housing in the region as a distinct investment opportunity. Such housing would directly support the local food economy and related food industry cluster.

Proposed Actions

Four actions should be considered: 1. Develop a coalition of farmworker housing developers who are experts in providing homes with built-in services for farmworkers and their families. Focus on models built by the FHDC, CASA of Oregon, or Hacienda CDC to build farmworker housing within an urban environment. Subsides need be packaged to increase urban projects feasibility. 2. Currently, farmworker housing is permitted on farms, but innovations are needed to expand its availability and improve its quality. For on-site farm-worker housing the California Agricultural Innovations Network is exploring the feasibility of assisting farmers and growers with covenants that protect farmworker rights and allow growers to receive public funds to maintain and supply farmworker housing on their property that is supported by a community partner3. 3. A third opportunity is to develop new strategies for farmworkers to innovate new businesses and assume ownership or other equity opportunities in farm land and farm operations. 4. Local governments can also support policy clarification in the Oregon Revised Statutes to better define types of accessory dwelling units for

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3 McIntyre, J. (2012, January 05). Interview by E. Wyoming [Personal Interview]. Ag innovations network director interview.
farmworkers that are allowed on agricultural property for seasonal or migrant farm-workers. Although these dwelling seem to be permitted in EFU zones there is uncertainty regarding local interpretation of state policy.

**Resources, Models, Best Practices**

USDA Farm Labor Housing Funding Programs: [http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rhs/mfh/brief_mfh_flh.htm](http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rhs/mfh/brief_mfh_flh.htm)

Oregon Farmworker Housing Tax Credit Program: [http://www.oregon.gov/OHCS/HRS_Farmworker_Housing_TC.shtml](http://www.oregon.gov/OHCS/HRS_Farmworker_Housing_TC.shtml)

Farmworkers Housing Development Corporation: [http://www.fhdc.org/](http://www.fhdc.org/)

Hacienda CDC: [http://www.haciendacdc.org/](http://www.haciendacdc.org/)