

2020 UCSAREP Competitive Grants Program

Date of Report: September 9, 2022

Title: Agricultural Plastics Recycling Education Project for small-scale producers (AG-PREP)

Project Category: Education & Outreach

Priority Area: Supporting Famers & Ranchers

Project Summary:

The Agricultural and Land-Based Training Association's (ALBA) project, AG-PREP, helped reduce environmental pollution associated with agricultural plastics in the region through piloting a recycling program amongst primarily Spanish-speaking small-scale producers. The objectives included 1) educating farmers on the environmental consequences of the use of single-use agricultural plastics, as well as recycling alternatives; 2) piloting an agricultural plastics recycling program at ALBA; 3) the creation of new informational tools and outreach to guide Spanish-speaking farmers on the topic. The target audience of AG-PREP was 200 socially-disadvantaged, small-scale, and limited-resource producers. The activities included bilingual workshops and meetings reaching 50+ participants, direct technical assistance to 25 farmers, and an outreach and informational campaign. The results included increasing the knowledge of 80 participants through workshops and field days, and the initiation of an onsite drip tape recycling opportunity for ALBA farmers reaching 40 farmers.

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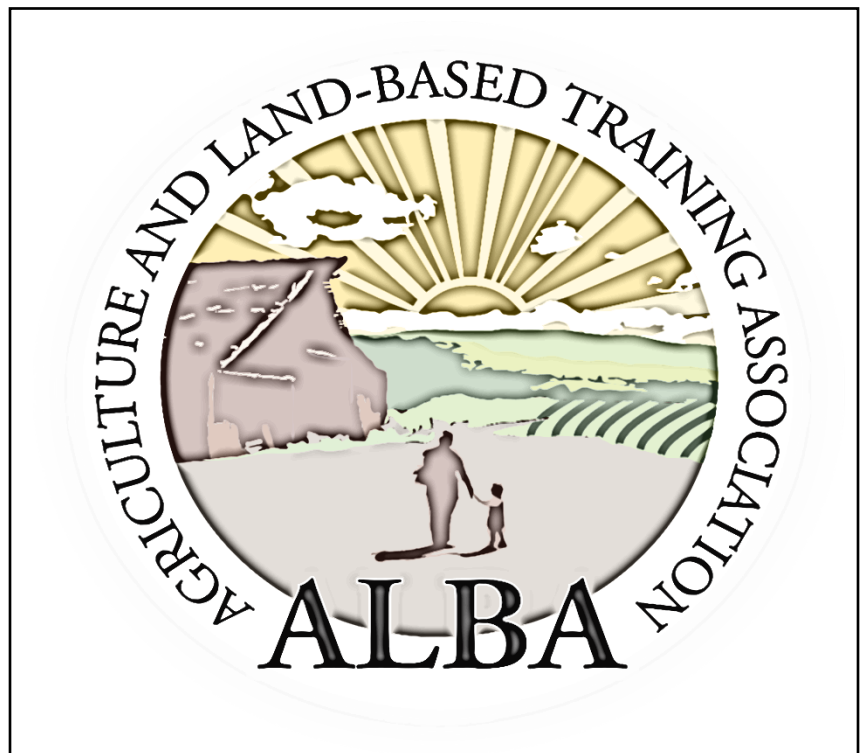
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Location: Salinas, CA (Monterey County)

Commodities: vegetable row crops and strawberries

Grant Amount: \$7,000



A. Specific Results

1) Educate farmers on the environmental consequences of the use of single-use agricultural plastics, as well as recycling alternatives.

ALBA partnered with the CA Marine Sanctuary Foundation's (CMSF) Research and Outreach Coordinator (Jazmine Majia—Munoz) to provide workshops to ALBA and regional farmers. This was an ideal partnership, as CMSF had already begun a program to reduce agricultural plastic pollution in the Monterey Bay. It helped, too, that Jazmine was a Spanish-speaker.

A virtual workshop was held at ALBA in October 2021 reaching 22 aspiring farmers, and another one was held in December reaching 34 existing farmers at ALBA. The topics included the environmental issues associated with agricultural plastics and some of the recycling options available in the area. A third virtual workshop was provided in collaboration with ALBA, CMSF, and an irrigation supply company as part of the annual Ecological Farming Conference in March 2022. The CMSF has continued its work on this topic outside the scope of this grant with several more workshops and field days.

2) Pilot an agricultural plastics recycling program at ALBA.

Achieving this objective proved to be more difficult than expected at the onset of the project. Most of the recycling efforts in our region are geared towards large, heavily mechanized operations that contract out many of the production needs. These companies have made advances in using specialized equipment, sometimes contracted out through the irrigation vendors, to retrieve the tape and then haul it away for recycling.

ALBA worked with many irrigation and recycling vendors to see if there was a path forward for small farmers to recycle their tape. The collaborators learned a lot about how the tape needed to be managed for recycling. Although there were many roadblocks, one vendor was interested in having ALBA trial their smaller-scale drip retriever. This unit was priced at \$20k+ new, but ALBA waited patiently to see if there would be an opportunity to rent one and – then, if successful – consider purchasing a used one at < \$7k. That opportunity never came to fruition; however, the company agreed to accept ALBA's hand-rolled tape going forward.

As such, ALBA designated an area at its training facility to begin accumulating hand-rolled tape. To date, there are several acres of tape ready to be recycled, but ALBA will wait till the end of 2022 or middle of 2023 to obtain the minimum load for the company to retrieve the used tape for recycling. It took some ground presence and reminding to farmers as they were removing tape that there was an option available at ALBA for recycling, but this is beginning to catch on.

Although this occurred outside of the period of this grant, a new recycling opportunity emerged in the summer of 2022 that allows growers to simply drive their tape to a designated facility. This may be a convenient path grower for small-scale farmers outside of ALBA.

3) Create new informational tools and outreach to guide Spanish-speaking farmers on the topic.

The CMSF had a clear head start in developing an outreach and informational campaign related to the topic. They took the lead and ALBA assisted with amplifying the outreach to our group of 120+ regional Spanish-speaking farmers. ALBA communicated with its 40 tenant farmers at monthly meetings to advise them on the status of the recycling pilot and promote the many workshops provided by CMSF. When the CMSF held field days in English, ALBA provided interpretation services. Another 80 farmers were reached via ALBA's text messaging service for workshops promotions.

B. Dissemination of Findings

The sharing of the project was an iterative process between CMSF, ALBA, and private vendors. The options for recycling ag plastics in our region are continually evolving. Several new companies came to the fore during the timeframe of this project. Thus, the project team met regularly for updates and to find ways to help smaller-scale farmers participate in the important work of recycling their agricultural plastics. The findings of these meetings were then shared with other partner organizations and, crucially, the farmers. The farmers learned about project updates through monthly meetings, workshops and conferences. The work under this project helped inform the CMSF on the needs of small-scale farmers, which has continued to be an important consideration for them post-project, as they continue to implement their outreach and informational campaign.

C. Benefits/Impacts on Agriculture and/or Food Systems

In practical terms, this project has helped ALBA and other regional small-scale farmers understand their options for drip tape recycling, and provided options to do so. Upon completion of this project, ALBA has realized that drip tape recycling options are always evolving, and the options go hand in hand with the irrigation vendors. Thus, it is important to develop relationships with private vendors. It also pays to be persistent, as some companies don't want to deal with small quantities but can be convinced. Small farmers need to consider joining forces with other farmers to achieve minimum thresholds for recyclers to come pick up their tape. ALBA is hopeful that smaller-scale mechanized drip tape retrievers will be developed, as fetching tape from field by hand is a relatively slow and costly way to manage tape.

D. Impact on Target Audience

- A. Number of adults reached – estimated 100
- B. Number of youth reached – N/A
- C. Number of businesses reached – estimated 60

Of the numbers listed above, at least 90% were Latino. The average demographic for ALBA participants is in the range of 66% male and 34% female.

D. Literature Cited

N/A

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