Mentorship Matters

A case study of a Pembroke farming cooperative

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Introduction:

- Why we researched:
  - Research proposal project that has morphed into something much bigger.
  - *When Helping Hurts* – Steve Corbett & Brian Fikkert
  - Firm belief in community sustainability
  - Desired to research the impact of mentorship and relationships.

- What is a Farming Cooperative?
  - Farmers working together to support their own community.
  - Improving farming practices through education and trainings.
  - Building a relationship not a business
What is Pembroke?

- Small rural town located 30 minutes outside of Kankakee
- Population of 2,208
- Median age: 37.8
- Unemployment rate: 11.4%
- 80% of the population is African American
- Nearest school is 20 minute drive
Clientele & History

- Pembroke sold to freed slaves by white people.
- In the early 1980’s banks gave out loans with certain criteria.
- However, the bank would eventually repossess the farmland when farmers went bankrupt or died in debt.
- Eleven families are involved in the Farming Cooperative.
Pembroke Farming Family Association

- Began in 1992 by Johari Cole-Kweli and local leaders.
- **Mission:** to build a community-based food system that would facilitate progress in community development by using sustainable farming practices.
- **Vision:** to unite farming families in the community and become a key component of the emerging local food systems developing across the state of Illinois.
Problem:

- New objective of building a food processing plant in Pembroke
  - However, there is hesitation to move forward because of the cultural beliefs about safety in small-scale farming.
- Farmers unwilling to engage due to fear of bankruptcy
- Failure of the farming cooperative would have long term detrimental effects on the community, as learned helplessness would be reinforced.
Research Question:

What are evidence based practices of successful farming cooperative models in similarly impoverished communities, which can be applied to the Pembroke farmsteads?

Independent variable: evidence based practice models of successful farming cooperatives

Dependent variable: economic development away from poverty in the community
Literature Review
Overview of Results

- Effective executive leadership
- Knowledge of diverse farming methods
- Awareness of governmental grants and wealth redistribution.
- Intergenerational replacement rates
- And, utilization of available community resources, such grain elevators
Literature Review

- Varied reasons for farming cooperatives
- Pembroke Farming Family Association

- Study of farming cooperatives in impoverished, rural communities in South Africa
- Rate of successful new farming cooperatives in rural, impoverished communities is currently 12%
- Two Types of Ownership:
  - Worker-Producer Cooperatives
  - Worker-Owned Cooperatives

- Farming and Education
- Strategies and initiatives


- Grassroots women’s cooperative vegetable farm
- Hleketani Community Garden
- Value of collaboration and resilience was among the most significant characteristics needed in the cooperative members
- Core Concept: Training younger generations
Main Theme: “Knowledge is Power”

- Evidence-based practice
- Education and awareness increases likelihood of success
- Mentorship as an effective intervention
Research Design

- Data Collection: seasonal pre/post-tests
- Limitations
  - Willingness to participate
  - Small sample size
- Ethical considerations: Cultural competence

(National Family Farm, 2011)
Future Implications:

Think Bigger

- Implementation of research
  - VanDrunen Farms
  - Green Tech Touch
  - Community Development Council

- Get involved!
  - Start with building relationships
  - Resource management
    - Time, Leadership, Skills
    - Knowledge is Power
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References


Questions?