



REFUGEE FARMERS AND THE SOCIAL ENTERPRISE MODEL IN THE AMERICAN SOUTHWEST

Vanna GONZALES¹

Nigel FORREST²

Noreen BALOS³

Abstract: *In recent years refugee resettlement agencies in various parts of the United States have sought to foster sustainable farming projects aimed at empowering refugees. This paper presents the first known case study of a U.S. based marketing cooperative formed by refugees from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Founded in 2011 by the Phoenix International Refugee Committee (IRC), Gila Farm Cooperative (GFC) has 22 members from four different countries of origin who work to support the organizations' newly formed Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) in central Arizona. In the context of a university-community partnership established through Social Economy Arizona (SEAZ), a project affiliated with Arizona State University's School of Social Transformation, the research team worked closely with key cooperative stake-holders to undertake a three month study of GFC in spring 2012. Focusing on the intersection between urban agriculture, social enterprise development and refugee resettlement, our study investigates Gila Farm Cooperative as an experiment in building a new model collective entrepreneurship among refugee farmers from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. We utilize a social enterprise framework to provide a descriptive analysis of GFC's structure and operational processes based on data collected primarily through participatory observation and in-depth interviews with IRC staff and board members representing different refugee communities. Linking this organizational analysis to board members' perspectives of the social and economic value generated by the cooperative, we explore the prospects for reinforcing the GFC's role in empowering refugees through the adaptation of a more deliberative, solidarity based model of collective entrepreneurship.*

Keywords: *U.S. social economy; social enterprise development; community supported agriculture; cooperatives, refugee farmers*

¹ Vanna Gonzales is a Professor in the Faculty of Justice and Social Inquiry within the School of Social Transformation, Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona, USA. E-mail: Vanna.Gonzales@asu.edu

² Nigel Forrest is a Ph.D. candidate in the School of Sustainability, Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona, USA. E-mail: Nigel.Forrest@asu.edu

³ Noreen Balos is a Ph.D. candidate in the Education Leadership and Policy Studies, Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona, USA. E-mail: Noreen.Balos@asu.edu

1. Introduction

In 2011 the Phoenix International Refugee Committee (IRC) formed Gila Farm Cooperative (GFC), a cooperative marketing association comprised of refugee farmers from Somalia, Uzbekistan, Iraq and Togo. Within a year GFC was running its first Community Supported Agriculture (CSA).¹ In seeking to foster a cooperative business among a particularly vulnerable population in the American Southwest, GFC faces unique challenges to its long term stability. Positioning GFC within an emerging social enterprise framework, this article examines the social and economic benefits that GFC generate for its principle stakeholders: ethnically diverse refugee farmers who are both economically and culturally marginalized from mainstream American society. Focusing on the experience and perceptions of GFC's board members, we analyze both the challenges and opportunities facing GFC as an on-going experiment in building a new model of solidarity-based collective entrepreneurship.

Working closely with GFC board members, individual farmers, and IRC staff and consultants, we combined on-going participatory action research spanning 2011-2013, with in-depth interviews and primary documentary analysis to accomplish two key objectives. First, we employ Sutia Alter's model of mission and money relationships within social enterprises to analyze the structure and organizational processes that form the basis of the GFC model in its initial stage of development. This enables us to clarify the linkages between key organizational stakeholders, their relationship to one another and their relevance to the success of the cooperative. Second, we undertake a descriptive analysis of key stakeholder responsibilities, capacities and perspectives in order to identify key factors affecting GFC's capacity to generate social and economic benefits to its prime beneficiaries: cooperative members. While there are a wide variety of factors that are linked to its future success, we focus primarily on identifying the benefits and draw backs of the cooperative social enterprise model for refugee farmers. In so doing we hope to contribute to an emerging literature that seeks to evaluate how diverse organizational forms and cognitive and cultural processes impact 'everyday entrepreneurship' understood as important forums of social as well as economic participation (Steyaert and Katz, 2004; Bouchard , 2009, Perret, 2009).

2. Literature review and empirical background

Social enterprises and the social economy

Analytically, we seek to orient GFC within the social economy. The concept of the social economy originally emerged as a means of characterizing a particular blend of solidarity and entrepreneurialism found within the third sector (Borzaga and Defourney, 2001; Evers and Laville, 2004). More recently it has come to be viewed as

¹ Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a partnership between local farmers and community members who support them by paying in advance for farm fresh produce, which once harvested is then made available by farmers during a regularly scheduled weekly or monthly food pick-up or delivery. In the U.S. they are typically operated as single farmer proprietary businesses.

an emerging development paradigm combining market, state and civic resources (Galliano, 2003; Nyssens, M, 2006; Fonteneau, B.; Neamtan, N.; Wanyama, F.; Morais, L. P.; de Poorter, M., 2010). As such it captures a variety of relations at the interstices of the market, state, and civil society – spheres that have become increasingly interdependent thus blurring the boundaries of social and economic development on the one hand and public, private and non-profit sectors on the other. Arising in response both to the limits of traditional economic strategies and social policies to meet a number of pressing contemporary challenges as well as growing support for more sustainable and just process of wealth creation (Fontan and Shragge, 2000; Fonteneau et al, 2010), the social economy includes a wide variety of social innovations spearheaded by civil society’s attempts to respond to community needs (Gerometta, Haussermann and Longo, 2005; Harrison, Bourque and Szell, 2009) as well as emerging forms of governance characterized by greater integration of policy and practice, increasingly complex organizational interdependencies, and new axes of conflict and collaboration (Amin, Cameron and Hudson, 2002; Koiman, 2003; Turner and Martin, 2005).

Though the conceptual boundaries of the social economy continue to be the subject of considerable debate, from an organizational perspective much of the globe shares a common understanding of social economy organizations as, “enterprises and organizations, in particular cooperatives, mutual benefit societies, associations, foundations and social enterprises, which have the specific feature of producing goods, services and knowledge while pursuing both economic and social aims and fostering solidarity” (International Labour Office, 2009: 2). In this regard the United States is somewhat distinct in that much greater emphasis is placed on social entrepreneurship, which places greater emphasis on individual entrepreneurial activity, market mechanisms, and earned income strategies (Boschee, 2001; Drayton, 2006). While much of the recent literature on the social economy has focused on the ways in which the organizational forms, social objectives and areas of activity encompassed by the social economy vary cross-nationally – often as a result of historically conditioned structural and legal factors (Nicolăescu and Nicolăescu, 2012; Galera and Borzaga, 2009; Defourny and Nyssens, 2010) – macro-level comparative work often obscures important subnational variation. This is particularly salient for understanding the social economy in the United States, a large, heterogeneous country that contains considerable regional variation as well as an enduring legacy of cooperative development that is often ignored in the comparative literature on social enterprise development.¹

As a refugee farmers’ cooperative GFC is both analytically and empirically interesting from an international perspective in large part because it represents a reality that is often overlooked in discussions of the U.S. social economy. Despite a steady increase in research devoted to U.S. based social enterprises, there is a dearth of theoretically informed empirical studies investigating more collective forms of social

¹ Though more concentrated regions such as the Northeast, Pacific Northwest and rural parts of the Midwest, the U.S. is home to an estimated 30,000- 40,000 cooperatives nationwide which provide approximately 450,000 jobs across a wide variety of sectors, from farming to finance (Gonzales and Phillips, 2013).

entrepreneurship in the U.S., particularly among low-income ethnic minorities. Because social economy organizations are differentially embedded in both society and the economy, their relevance for poor ethnic minorities, particularly foreign born non U.S. citizens, is likely to be quite different than for white, native-born U.S. citizens who tend to be the primary subjects of much of the U.S. literature. In this regard the international development literature that focuses on particularly vulnerable populations is instructive. Here attention is less focused on what it takes to catalyze profitable, employment-generating businesses and/or entrepreneurial movements than on factors that facilitate and constrain economic self-sufficiency, empowerment, and cultural integration – themes of particular interest to members of marginalized as opposed to mainstream communities. At the macro level, the degree to which the former are able to participate in frameworks of development (Tembo, 2004) as well as the material and cultural resources available to them within particular geographic and political contexts (Friedmann, 2001) are key to understanding the prospective role that individual social enterprises like GFC play in fostering key social-economic developmental goals. Models of development at the micro-level are also important given that they shape the ways in which available resources are mobilized and managed.

Focusing on the micro-level, our study identifies the key factors that enable the GFC to combine significant ethnic and cultural diversity within a cooperative structure which has long served as an important source of sustainable development for struggling farmers across the globe. Utilizing Alter's social enterprise framework, we analyze the structure and organizational processes that form the basis of GFC's operations as well as the roles and perceptions of its diverse board members to begin to assess the extent to which GFC's development model benefits member farmers. In addition to contributing to our knowledge of social enterprises engaged in urban agriculture, our study is particularly useful for gaining a better understanding of the capacity of cooperative organizations to sustain themselves under challenging conditions—in this case an ethnically diverse group of stakeholders who do not share a common culture nor a deep connection to the land they cultivate and who operate in a socio-political environment in central Arizona that lacks strong sectoral, territorial, and/or socio-economic integration policies which support the growth of the social economy.

Urban agriculture, refugee farmers, and cooperative enterprises in the U.S.

According to a recent survey there are well over 200 refugee-based agricultural projects in the U.S. (Hightower et al., 2012). In many ways they represent a continuation of an American ethos of helping beginning farmers get a foothold on the American dream. Historically, American agriculture has been forged by newcomers, traditionally immigrants from northern Europe, who helped settle the Great Plains (Brown, 2011). Yet with nearly 40 million foreign-born residents, the most of any country in the world, many small farmers in the U.S. today are likely to be subsistence farmers from Asia, Africa and Latin America. Although less than one percent of the U.S. population now identify themselves as farmers (EPA, 2011), new food movements of the last decade, with their growing demand for local, small-scale, sustainable production (Steinhoff, 2005), have helped spawn renewed interest in small farmers and their role in the food

system. In low income communities the economic crisis and social dislocation generated by the Great Recession has further intensified the turn to small farmers as potential engines of rural development and/or urban revitalization.

These trends have spawned a growing interest in farming within the context of economic development programs linked to refugee resettlement (Brown 2011; Hightower, Brennan and Niewolny, 2012). As populations continue to be displaced worldwide due to globalization, war, and human rights violations, refugees and asylees make up a significant and growing share of new immigrants to the United States. U.S. refugee policy aims to provide resettlement consideration to at least half of all refugees referred to it by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), with the number of people ranging over the last decade from a low of 27,000 in 2002 to 73,000 in 2010. Distinct from refugees – generally large groups of individuals who have been simultaneously displaced – asylees in the U.S. ask for protection on a case by case basis after they have arrived in the country (Boyle and Ali, 2009). While the U.S. accepts an average of about 48,000 new asylum claims per year, it is the largest single recipient of new claims for asylum seekers in the world with over 83,000 individuals submitted applications for asylum in 2012 (UNHCR, 2012).

Though the U.S. federal government is ultimately responsible for refugee resettlement, a broad set of national voluntary agencies play a decisive role in protecting and providing resettlement assistance to refugees in the United States. Operating through cooperation agreements, organizations such as IRC, the largest of the secular refugee resettlement agencies, together with a variety of ethnic and religious based charity organizations, determine where refugees will initially settle, sponsor refugees' arrival, and working through their local offices, provide a variety of post-arrival support and services (Mott, 2010). Though they are only required to deliver basic needs support for thirty days, resettlement agencies make community referrals and often offer an extended range of social and employment services critical to refugees who are often dealing with a much broader range of challenges than other immigrants.

In addition to dealing with the trauma of relocating from their home countries, refugees struggle to cope with limited knowledge of English as well as various forms of marginalization and discrimination as they navigate the culture and geography of their new homes. In this context, agricultural projects offer an opportunity to generate economic opportunities for refugees who have few other options, particularly as many refugees are not eligible for benefits otherwise provided to low income citizens in most states. In their quest to help refugee communities gain greater economic self-sufficiency, many federal and voluntary agencies have promoted farms and gardens as potential “model micro-enterprises” (Brown, 2011) generating nutritional, culturally relevant foods in neighborhoods often characterized as food deserts. In addition to enabling producers and their neighbors to generate supplemental income and spend less of their overall income on groceries, refugee farms and garden projects are also seen as providing a variety of social and psychological benefits to refugee communities, for example opportunities for integration and socialization for people otherwise isolated from one another as well as a greater sense of self efficacy and belonging by increasing their visibility and contact with local residents (Hightower et al., 2012).

Against this broader backdrop, what sets GFC apart is its establishment as a cooperative enterprise. Cooperatives have long been seen by small farmers as a solution to the difficulties of competing with bigger producers (Fairbairn, 2003) – a view reflected in the sizable number of farming cooperatives found in the U.S.¹ By sharing costs and spreading out risk cooperatives allow small farmers to compete in the capitalist marketplace while maintaining control over their own business (Briscoe & Ward, 2005; Fairbairn, 2003; Ward, 2005). Farming cooperatives, especially when linked to alternative agriculture, contribute to local community development by halting rural decline and preventing urban sprawl (Sumner & Llewelyn, 2010; Williamson et al., 2003), shortening the distance between consumers and producers (Moroney, Briscoe, McCarthy, O’Shaughnessy, & Ward, 2009), and generating a variety of socio-economic benefits linked to poverty reduction. Internally, cooperatives foster social solidarity, guided by a clear set of values such as democratic control and concern for community, which are enshrined in cooperative principles established by the International Cooperative Association (ICA).² Thus, both ideationally and pragmatically, cooperatives offer a promising structure for refugee resettlement.

Gila Farm Cooperative

Founded in 2011, GFC was originally conceived as an extension of IRC Phoenix’ New Roots farmer food security program, a federally funded program providing training and resources to help new refugees take up farming. With the help of funding acquired through the USDA Farmers’ Market Promotion Program, within a year it had hired a staff member to initiate and manage the early development of the cooperative, enlisted the services of a pro-bono lawyer to help draft its articles of incorporation and by-laws, and officially launched its CSA. Comprised of 22 refugee farmer-members who come from four different countries of origin (Somalia, Uzbekistan, Toto and Iraq) representing four distinctive cultural traditions, ethnic backgrounds, and native languages, GFC operates as a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural social enterprise. Farmers share in the cultivation of a 27-acre plot of land (Gila Farm) located in Central Arizona, just south of the state’s capital city of Phoenix. In addition they help cultivate (both themselves and in affiliation with refugee gardeners) five small IRC affiliated garden plots spread throughout the Phoenix metropolitan area.

While demand for fresh, local produce is expanding in Arizona, learning how to thrive as both farmers and social entrepreneurs in the American Southwest is no easy task, particularly for refugee farmers whom struggle both economically and socially as cultural outsiders in American society. As the only known US-based marketing cooperative comprised nearly exclusively of refugee-farmer members, GFC constitutions a particularly important case to examine as it seeks to transition from a viable start-up to a sustainable cooperative enterprise.

¹ There were 2,310 agricultural cooperatives in the U.S. in 2010 (nine in Arizona) of which 138 were fruit and vegetable marketing coops (USDA, 2011).

² For a full description of the seven cooperative principles established by the ICA see, <http://www.ica.coop/coop/principles.html>.

3. Research design: objectives and methods

While refugee-based agricultural projects are on the rise, to our knowledge there are no studies that focus on the experiences and perceptions of refugee farmers themselves in the process of building a social enterprise. Because GFC was formed as a cooperative it offers a critical opportunity to look at the factors that enable refugee farmers to play a greater role in the operation, management and governance of the cooperative not just as IRC ‘clients’ but as producer-members of a developing social enterprise. Using Sutia Alter’s social enterprise model as a foundation, our study focuses on GFC’s capacity to create social and economic value for its key beneficiaries – ethnically and culturally diverse refugee farmers living and working in central Arizona. In an effort to illuminate the mechanisms by which social enterprises create value as well as the factors that influence the role of refugee farmers in assuming administrative, management and governing roles within the cooperative, we address a number of key questions. What institutional and financial arrangements enable GFC to operate as a cooperative social enterprise? What are the key processes that define its day-to-day operations both as a social enterprise and a CSA more specifically? How do the skills, expectations and knowledge of cooperative members and IRC support staff map onto refugee farmers’ operational roles and responsibilities?

In answering these questions, we draw on a variety of qualitative methodologies, most notably participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, and analysis of primary source documents generated by the IRC. The bulk of data collection and analysis was undertaken from January-May 2012, but because this study evolved from a broader ongoing partnership between the IRC and SEAZ, a project affiliated with Arizona State University’s School of Social Transformation, we also draw on data collected during the previous year. During the four month period in which our primary field research took place, we participated in multiple GFC board meetings, farmers markets, and CSA pick-up events, and collected and analyzed primary and secondary data (i.e. articles of incorporation, grants, aggregate data on farmers) relating to the GFC. Attempting to gain as many perspectives as possible in the time allotted, we conducted interviews with GFC’s five farmer-board members, who together represent the four different ethno-cultural groups comprising the cooperative’s formal membership. We also interviewed and job shadowed the cooperative coordinator as well as two other IRC staff, a pro-bono lawyer hired to consult with the cooperative on a variety of legal issues, and an advisor to ‘incubator farms’ involved in the New Roots project.

4. Utilizing a social enterprise framework to assess value

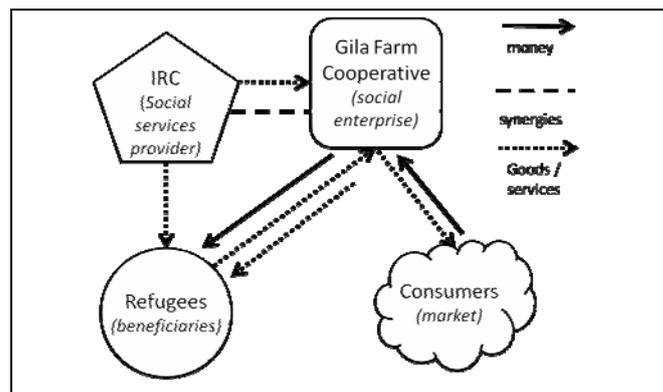
As underscored by Sutia Kim Alter (2006), the context in which social enterprises emerge is often more complex than in either traditional non-profit or for-profit enterprises.¹ By definition, social enterprises combine economic and social purposes but because mission and money are often hard to disentangle, she contends that modeling a social enterprise should begin by identifying "the relationship between business activities and social programs, [and] its purpose" (Alter, 2006: 214). More

¹ Alter is a practitioner and consultant who first developed her model while a visiting fellow to the Skoll Centre for Social Entrepreneurship at the University of Oxford.

specifically, she argues that a social enterprise's social and economic value can be analyzed by mapping the flow of goods and services, money, and synergies between itself and three key organizational components: its beneficiaries, for whom the social enterprise is designed to create social and economic value; sponsoring and supporting organizations; and the target market in which the organization operates.

Applying this model (Figure 1) to GFC, it is clear that the refugee farmers that are its members are also its key beneficiaries. Yet, because its farmer-members work in conjunction with IRC staff, GFC operates as a hybrid organization whose business operations rely heavily on technical support and human capital from the IRC. GFC benefits IRC in return by providing the New Roots program with market outlets critical to its success. Additionally, its social aims are highly connected to those of the IRC, which self-identifies as a refugee resettlement agency.

Figure 1: Social enterprise model of Gila Farm Cooperative



Source: Adapted from Alter, 2006.

GFC's target market is the steadily rising consumer base for locally grown fruits and vegetables in the Phoenix metropolitan area. GFC gains market differentiation from other organizations in central Arizona's growing urban agriculture movement by planting and selling more exotic leafy greens and grains such as chin baung, and creating recipes and newsletters explaining the origin and uses of the produce thus also helping to promote biological and cultural diversity. Though its' key goal is to stimulate consumer demand for its' produce, GFC joins with others in adding value to the broader community through urban landscape beautification, raising awareness and interest in small scale, less intensive farming, and increasing the visibility of refugees among middle class native Arizonans who may not typically interact with this population.

In its money relationships, GFC is not yet financially self-sufficient-- as is common for social enterprise start-ups. It relies significantly on federal funding of IRC programs and staff for operational support. Yet, by connecting agricultural producers to consumers it delivers economic value to individual farmers. As both producers and beneficiaries,

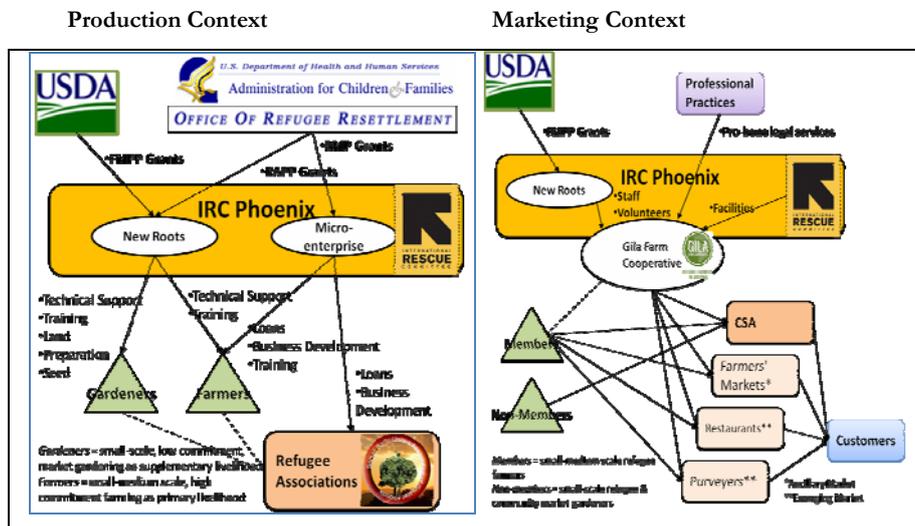
farmer members are paid the consumer price for their produce less a commission retained by the cooperative to pay for operating costs. Additional economic value is delivered to members through shared costs such as farmer insurance which is much lower when obtained through the cooperative than individually.

The synergy between IRC and GFC in its business operations is mirrored in its social mission. GFC provides social value to farmer-members through mutual learning and the opportunities it generates for social and economic solidarity and democratic participation. The IRC delivers social value through a variety of services, such as helping refugees procure Refugee Cash and Medical Assistance in their initial three months in the U.S. and providing specialized support and consultation to help them acclimate to life in Arizona for up to two additional years. Within this context, GFC enhances the social value provided by IRC in ways that support farmer livelihoods while providing an additional pathway towards social solidarity and economic self-sufficiency for recently resettled refugees.

Organizational infrastructure

Focusing on Gila Farm Cooperative's organizational infrastructure helps to gain a better understanding of both its production and marketing functions (Figure 2). Though the two domains are interdependent, they are operationally distinct in terms of funding, services and synergies.

Figure 2: Production and Marketing Support for Refugee Farmers



On the production side, IRC's New Roots and Micro-Enterprise programs assist refugees with farming and business development support to become effective

agricultural producers. New refugees start out as gardeners enabling them to gain access to garden plots and receive assistance with land preparation, water, seed, and technical support for two seasons. At that point they become "market gardeners" and are expected to establish greater financial independence. If they want to pursue more intensive farming, New Roots will help them to lease land and will continue to provide training, support, and business development help. These programs are funded through federal grants (i.e. the Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP), the Refugee Microenterprise Program (RMP), and the Refugee Agricultural Partnership Program (RAPP)) from the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Health and Human Services Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). Additionally, refugee communities often draw additional support from cultural associations like the Somali Bantu Association of Greater Phoenix, which organize social events and provide valuable services such as language classes and child care.

As a marketing cooperative GFC strives to develop markets for farmer-members' produce from which New Roots gardeners also benefit. The IRC supports this endeavor by contributing a wide range of resources, including staff and internship support, office facilities and supplies, and access to third party support such as translation services, much of which is funded through the FMPP grant. The cooperative's principal non-grant income source and market outlet is its CSA, although the cooperative also has a presence within several local farmers' markets and is exploring direct sales possibilities with local downtown Phoenix eateries. As grant funding is intended as seed-money to establish the cooperative in its first years of development, cultivating additional markets is critical to the long-term viability of the social enterprise. Thus, over time, GFC is expected to become less interconnected with the IRC as it relies more on its internal business operations to connect a growing pool of producers to an expanded customer base through a variety of market outlets throughout central Arizona.

Roles and processes related to administration, management, and governance

Having placed GFC and CSA within a broad organizational context we turn to operational and administrative processes, identifying key stakeholder responsibilities, the general competencies required to perform them, and the ease by which cooperative members currently perform these tasks.

Our evaluative criteria, summarized in Table 1, focuses on three distinctive domains: 1) the CSA Operational Cycle, a weekly process that provides each customer with a \$20 "box" of assorted, fresh produce; 2) CSA Management, a collection of less frequent or ad-hoc operational and administrative tasks related to business development; and 3) GFC Governance, which involves cooperative membership, institutional maintenance and strategic development. Within each domain roles and responsibilities are ranked according to how demanding they are to execute.

- *Basic tasks* require only a limited understanding of the social enterprise, basic competency in English language and/or numeracy skills, and limited access to resources, such as reliable transportation.

- *Intermediate tasks* involve greater knowledge of specific aspects of the enterprise, some proficiency in the English language and interpersonal skills and basic business competency as well as access to specific resources such as an internet connection.
- *Advanced tasks* necessitate familiarity with a broad range of roles and responsibilities, advanced general competencies (e.g. specialized computer literacy or proficiency in reading and writing in English), and/or specialized business skills such as marketing and strategic planning, and/or the ability to take on significant responsibilities and authority, such as managing subscriptions and financial accounts.

Table 1: Roles and Responsibilities Relating to GFC Administrative, Managerial and Governance Tasks

Roles	Functions	Skills / Resources	Level	Primary Responsibility
<i>Weekly CSA Operational Cycle</i>				
Placing orders	"Build" produce boxes by placing orders across multiple producers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CSA computer systems • Organization & Logistics • Communications / English • Familiarity with the CSA 	Advanced	Coordinator
Collecting and preparing the harvest	Collect and dress produce at farms / gardens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpersonal • Production skills • Organization & Logistics • Mobility 	Intermediary	Coordinator and Farmer-Members
Composing written materials	Research, write & publish newsletter (articles on farmers, produce, recipes, news)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Computer literacy • Advanced English competency 	Intermediate	Coordinator and IRC Volunteers
Customer Pick-up	Setup / take-down pick-up; meet & greet customers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic English 	Basic	Farmer-Members
Reconciling Orders	Update order records with actual quantity supplied	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CSA computer systems • Organization & Logistics • Communications / English • Familiarity with the CSA 	Advanced	Coordinator
<i>CSA Management</i>				
Production Management	Train & advise farmers onsite on producing for the cooperative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpersonal • Farming / Marketing • Familiarity with the CSA • Mobility 	Intermediate	Coordinator and New Roots Staff

Roles	Functions	Skills / Resources	Level	Primary Responsibility
Customer Relations	Respond to customer inquiries; Pick-up reminders;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familiarity with the CSA • CSA computer systems • Communications / English 	Intermediate	Coordinator and farmer members
Marketing & Customer Sign-up	Recruit & retain customers; collect customer subscriptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familiarity with the CSA • CSA computer systems • Communications / English • Customer payments 	Advanced	Coordinator
Special Orders	check for special orders, place orders with producers, coordinate delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CSA computer systems • Communications / English • Familiarity with the CSA • Customer payments 	Advanced	Coordinator
Pay Producers	Write monthly checks to producers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CSA computer systems • Authorized Payments 	Advanced	Coordinator
<i>Cooperative Governance</i>				
General Assembly	Open exchange and deliberation of ideas; major decision making; election of board members;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobility • Basic Communication skills 	Basic	All members
Fostering Membership	Recruit new members; maintain & deepen relationships among existing members; communicate between board & members; Collect membership fees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpersonal and communication skills • Familiarity with the CSA 	Intermediate	Coordinator and Board members
Board Management	Manage board meetings; make strategic & operational decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deep knowledge of GFC • Leadership • Management • Communication / English 	Advanced	President (farmer); Coordinator; Lawyer
Maintaining Accountability	Perform legal and financial obligations cooperative marketing association status compliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal requirements • Financial management 	Advanced	Coordinator; Lawyer;

In analyzing stakeholder roles and responsibilities across of each of these domains, two points stand out: 1) high reliance on the coordinator, an IRC staff member, to perform key operational as well as administrative and governance tasks and 2), the relatively high level of competence required to perform most tasks needed to operate, manage, and govern GFC as a cooperative enterprise.

Within the CSA Operational Cycle, customer pick-up is the only task requiring minimal technical competencies, skills or resources. Because farmers come from different language and cultural backgrounds it is often difficult to communicate subtleties in meaning, particularly regarding delicate and/or sensitive information such as harvest quality and payment details. English language skills are thus important for effective communication among cooperative members and growers, especially among individuals who do not know one another on a personal level. They are also important for expanding the CSA's consumer market. A second important skill set is computer literacy. Because none of GFC's farmer-members are trained in utilizing CSA management software, and many lack basic competency in using computers and associated hardware and software, the responsibility for generating marketing materials, processing customer's payments and maintaining the cooperative's database of farmer and gardener information lies primarily with the GFC coordinator. Finally, considerable organizational and logistic skills are needed to effectively coordinate and supervise others within tight timescales particularly when placing and reconciling orders.

While CSA management functions overlap with its weekly operation, they are more directly related to business development with the majority of responsibilities requiring advanced competencies. Due to their complexity and the high level of know-how needed to perform marketing and customer sign up, processing special orders and paying producers, these roles are performed exclusively by the Coordinator. In each of these areas familiarity with multiple aspects of the enterprise (e.g. the produce, the producers, and the customers) is critical. Whereas generalized administrative responsibility can be broken down into teachable steps in a series of specialized trainings, the integrative business knowledge needed for many management responsibilities require a combination of experience and specialized technical skills related to small-scale farm production, marketing and basic business operations. Moreover, activities such as tracking CSA customer payments and cutting checks to producers necessitate a fairly advanced understanding of American business banking as well as specific authorization for access to financial systems.

With regard to cooperative governance, unlike roles related to CSA management, farmer members assume a variety of responsibilities, the most important of which include electing board members, voting on key initiatives, fostering membership, managing board meetings, and maintaining accountability. The institutional body responsible for electing board members and voting on key changes, such as amendments to the bylaws, is the general assembly. General assembly meetings, held at least once annually, are open to all members for the purpose of discussing cooperative business. Designed as a forum for the open exchange of ideas and deliberation between members, the general assembly as well as new member recruitment and relationship building among existing members are all domains that require little formal education and few specialized skills. As such, they offer members the possibility of utilizing their

own skills and expertise through on-the-job experience. While farmer members may take on more responsibilities as board members, given the exacting nature of the work, their contribution is somewhat circumscribed due to the legal obligation to ensure appropriate oversight not to mention the considerable financial consequences of any misstep. Thus more specialized skills of a professional nature are required to prepare and manage meetings and oversee related governance tasks such as bookkeeping and financial transactions.

5. GFC board members: assets and aspirations

In utilizing a social enterprise framework to assess the value of GFC for its primary stakeholders, it is critical that we look not only at the formal organizational structure and internal roles set up within the cooperative, but also the ways in which refugee farmers themselves perceive these roles and the social and economic value generated from them. In the discussion that follows we focus on the assets and aspirations of GFC's board members, examining the way they match up with the institutional infrastructure and operational, administrative and governance tasks identified in our organizational analysis. In so doing we are able to highlight points of tension as well as congruence in transitioning GFC towards a more sustainable cooperative model of development.

Formal education and work experience

GFC board members have varying degrees of knowledge and experience with social enterprise development and community supported agriculture more specifically. Though all expressed a willingness to take on increased responsibilities within the cooperative, many board members conveyed a need to learn more about the nature of the tasks required to run a CSA as well as a desire for further education to gain the skills needed to do so. As expressed by one board member, "Education is important. Everybody knows and understands that education is important and that they want to take part in education. And nobody wants to go backwards. Everybody wants to go further and do things. We are interested in everything that gives us knowledge..." (In person interview, 3/27/12).

Work experience and education, whether formal or informal, establish the foundation of cooperative members' capacity to perform all advanced and most intermediate tasks involved in cooperative governance and CSA administration. In this regard it is important to consider the diversity of board members' backgrounds. Though one board member has the U.S. equivalent of a master's degree and another has post-secondary training in mechanics, the majority, like most GFC members, have little formal education beyond grade school. Likewise, not all board members have had experience farming in their home countries. Having operated a farm for ten years or less, they are considered "beginning" farmers according to the USDA definition (Ahearn and Newton, 2009, p. 3). Thus, it is not surprising that the employment experience of the board is considerably varied, ranging from house cleaning, janitorial work, and baking to vocational high school teaching and social work, with only two board members reporting previous involvement in business and/or management.

Farming and the challenges of social enterprise development

Board members' attitudes about farming as a vocation as well as their priorities for skill building in the future are informed not only by their current experiences in the U.S. but those of their country of origin as well. A number of cooperative members described farming as an occupational calling deeply connected to their cultural heritage. As one board member put it, "I am a farmer by heritage, I got it from my dad and grandfather. For 30 years I was operating the machine that used to do farm work" (In person interview, 4/16/2012). However for others with fairly limited farming experience and paid employment in other sectors, farming is seen as more of a supplementary activity.

Citing time constraints and pressures of running a CSA, not all board members viewed cooperative management as a priority on par with simply learning how to become better farmers. Conveying his optimism for the future, one board member exclaimed "Farming is interesting! There is always something to do. You are never annoyed when you are focused on something interesting – really passionate" (In person interview, 4/10/2012). For others, however, farming continues to be a struggle thus raising a variety of questions and concerns about how to deal with on-going economic risk. Recounting an incident in which chemicals used by a neighboring farmer contaminated part of the cooperatives' land, one board member expressed considerable frustration: "...we still struggle with the problems that face us now, among the problem is the chemical on our farm and we spend up to \$35,000 on the farm at that time" (interview, 4/6/2012). Revealing a persistent preoccupation about the ongoing dependence of cooperative members on the IRC, this same board member suggested that cooperative members are unsure as to where else they can go or how else to get land. As a result they feel compelled to accept the terms given to them: "Now [cooperative members] just plant because of the [multi-year] lease signed [with the landowner]" (interview, 3/27/2012). Thus, for some board members fostering social enterprise development is less on the forefront of their mind than determining the viability of urban agriculture for enabling them to succeed in making a viable living in Arizona.

While board members generally understand the importance of stimulating the growth of the cooperative by creating additional markets, they frequently underscored difficulties in the process of producing and selling their crops, for example their ability to reliably provide the CSA with high quality produce though GFC has fewer than thirty customers on their CSA subscription list. They also recognized a tension between ensuring equitable opportunity of members to produce for the CSA and the potential this has for limiting the returns available to each individual farmer. For the most part, board members find 'doing business' in Arizona far more complex than in their native countries. As one board member commented, "Back home ... you just take [things from the farm] straight to the market. Here, some group is bringing stuff from the farm and some other group over here takes the stuff to the market and every place and goes around the city" (In person interview, 4/6/2012). Another board member expressed dissatisfaction with price points becoming a fixed value thus eliminating the process of negotiating price with customers. For him "the difference between here and Africa is that in Africa when somebody buys something and he is missing a shilling he is let go but here nobody lets you go even for one cent...we will have to understand that difference in culture" (In person interview, 4/6/2012). In addition to underscoring the

way in which cultural norms are integral to ‘doing business’, this statement highlights how learned cultural competencies can become just as vital to creating a successful social enterprise as skill building around technical competencies.

Cultural norms and expectations are also integral to board members perceptions of their role in governance. GFC’s incorporation of four distinctive ethno-linguistic communities, each with strong cultural identities rooted in different countries of origin, demonstrates a deep commitment to diversity and inclusion. Yet, it also presents distinctive challenges for fostering and reinforcing solidarity and cohesion. The decision to structure the board according to cultural-linguistic “districts”, with each ethnically defined refugee community guaranteed representation on the board is illustrative. On the one hand it recognizes the need for a balanced board in order to effectively communicate cooperative business and facilitate the flow of information to and from member farmers to the cooperative’s governing body. Yet, disparities in the number of cooperative members that belong to different ethnic groups combined with the cultural and linguistic diversity of the membership generates unequal representation on the board (i.e. the Somali Bantu farmers constitute a clear majority of farmer members and are able to elect more board members than the other ‘districts’) as well as challenges in reaching consensus among board members. The multiple perspectives, ideas and interests complicate more mundane operational and developmental challenges associated with growing a social enterprise. As expressed by one board member, the diversity in board composition presents difficulties in “finding a common decision, one conclusion – to agree,” (interview, 3/27/2012). Concerned for the democratic process, another board member suggested that the current imbalance of membership across cultural groups presents the possibility of domination of the organization along cultural lines, thus threatening the cooperative principle of democratic member control.

Generating social and economic value

While the perspectives expressed by board members reveal the particular difficulties that they and other cooperative members face as refugee farmers, as the principle stakeholders and primary beneficiaries of the social enterprise, they are also quite clear about GFC’s current and prospective social and economic value.

For most board members the CSA’s ability to generate reliable consumer demand for their produce represents an important economic value of the cooperative. They mentioned the financial stability derived from pre-paid orders, the convenience of having a definitive location and time for exchange, and the potential to reach out to a wider consumer base as key economic advantages. Also highlighted by the cooperative’s lawyer were particular economic benefits derived from the cooperative form such as the distribution of income in proportion to member contribution and the ability to enable beginning farmers to overcome high upfront costs such as product liability insurance by pooling resources. Despite board members’ continued reliance on the cooperative coordinator for a wide variety of administrative and governance roles, at least one board member expressed confidence that they are slowly adjusting to how “American” business is done in Arizona and that in the future many of these

responsibilities could be assumed by someone "...found among us...when somebody teaches us what to do what we can do ourselves," (In person interview, 4/6/2012).

With regard to social value, board members identified a variety of benefits of belonging to the cooperative. While many of them could be classified as pragmatic benefits associated with gaining new knowledge and skills as social entrepreneurs, others emphasized solidarity, mutual support, and sharing ideas to work toward a common purpose, values that strongly resonate with the social economy. Although lacking specific knowledge of cooperative principles, one board member expressed his fervent desire to pass on the benefits and support he had received to help new refugee farmers. As he put it, "IRC supported me a lot. Now I want to support the [other] refugees because I learned how to do it, to be a good and successful farmer in AZ." (In person interview, 3/27/2012). The process of building commitment and assuming new responsibilities (as well as risks) was mentioned by the cooperative lawyer as a driving force sustaining the development of GFC, a sentiment echoed by an IRC staff member who, in articulating the cooperative's formula for success stated, "There is a difference when we are working together... I am going to invest more time [than on my own] if we are working together"(Interview, 4/10/2012).

6. Conclusions

Focusing on Gila Farm Cooperative as a novel development within the social economy landscape of the American southwest, our study has utilized Sutia Alter's social enterprise framework to examine how and to what extent GFC promotes the social and economic interests of its primary stakeholders, low income refugees recently resettled to central Arizona. Our investigation of its organizational structure and key operational, administrative and managerial roles juxtaposed against board members' actual skills, experiences and perspectives reveal a number of significant findings, many of which belie the challenges of developing models of collective entrepreneurship among particularly vulnerable groups such as a considerable concentration of authority and responsibility and a substantial mismatch between organizational responsibilities and skill level.

While it is important to recognize that social enterprises' ability to foster broader development goals linked to social, economic and cultural inclusion are highly conditioned by the external environments in which they are embedded, at the micro level, models of organizational development are important in understanding social enterprises' ability to generate social and economic value in the everyday lives of their stakeholders. Given that social economy organizations derive much of their analytic value added from the contention that they are uniquely capable of balancing social and economic purposes, it is essential that researchers subject these organizations to rigorous empirical analysis across a wide range of contexts. Having undertaken this task on our case study of GFC, we devote the remainder of our discussion to analyzing the opportunities and constraints GFC's particular model of development presents for newly resettled refugees, a small but salient group of potential stakeholders in emerging social economy organizations throughout the Southwest. In so doing we provide a

number of recommendations for enhancing GFC's long term viability as a sustainable cooperative enterprise.

Due to the particular composition of GFC's primary stakeholders, low-income refugees from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds with limited business experience, we find that issues related to *education and training*, *organizational culture*, and *resource dependency* are particularly critical in enabling it to sustain itself as a solidaristic form of social enterprise. Recognizing the considerable constraints that refugee farmers face, not least of which include the formidable pressures of having to make a living in an environment that is not only foreign, but often hostile to their efforts to thrive, accentuates the importance of developing long term strategies to facilitate greater economic and social solidarity.

To be able to ensure its long term viability as a cooperative enterprise, GFC member farmers need to assume a broader array of roles and responsibilities within the CSA and cooperative more generally. Yet, as our study reveals, many tasks are not readily amenable to be taken up by farmer-members without additional preparation and training. As it stands, GFC's administrative, strategic and operational leadership is concentrated in the position of the IRC coordinator whose position is in many respects akin to that of a cooperative chief executive officer (CEO) and/or executive director. While the direction and oversight she provides is critical at this stage in the development of the cooperative, many board members acknowledge their extreme reliance on the IRC coordinator as an unsustainable long term arrangement. Though the separation of responsibilities provided by an independent CEO can be beneficial for the development of the social enterprise, it is usually an arrangement that requires a strong board to provide leadership and accountability (Cropp and Zeuli, 2004). In the case of GFC, this type of board-driven leadership has yet to emerge. While there are signs that board members are starting to assume more responsibilities, they remain ill prepared to take on the more advanced tasks required to provide broader strategic planning and management of key aspects of the cooperatives' administration, such as accounting and marketing. Because most of GFC's members are recent refugees, they have only resided in the United States for a short period of time (often less than two years) and thus struggle to acquire basic skills such as proficiency in speaking, reading and writing in English. Additionally, they have limited experience with American business practices. While this can be a benefit for fostering social value within the organization by allowing members to introduce new ideas based on their previous experience, as exemplified by Uzbeki members who are able to draw on their experience in running a successful cooperative enterprise prior to resettling in the United States, for others with little to no business background, lack of understanding of American business practices can cause confusion and lead to tensions as stakeholders attempt to negotiate substantially different understandings of what constitutes best practices both with regard to production and administrative decisions as well as dealings with the cooperatives' primary consumers, native-born Arizonans.

GFC members face a relatively steep learning curve for acquiring advanced competencies in the technical aspects of business development. While cooperative members' educational and support needs are considerable, "on-the-job" training and strategic development of specialized skills offer the prospect of significantly improving

board members capacity to develop intermediary tasks as well as more advanced tasks essential to CSA and GFC management and governance. Yet cooperative members face many competing demands. In most instances they support themselves on the basis of other wage-related work and have extended family and/or community obligations. While IRC supports the development of the GFC as a member-run business, some members view the experience as an opportunity to become better farmers so that they can own and operate a farm on their own or in conjunction with friends and family members. If the goal of forming a social enterprise is to “create farm owners not farm workers” (Joseph, 2012), moving forward it will be critical to facilitate more democratic forms of deliberation about the extent to which recent refugees are content with pursuing a future in farming and/or supplementing their primary livelihood by selling produce.

As part of a broader effort to foster the social economy in Arizona, a state which has tended to support a more individualistic, market-oriented model of entrepreneurialism, GFC’s experience draws attention to key issues pertaining to cultural competency and social enterprise development. Within the context of developing more collective forms of social entrepreneurship among ethnically and culturally diverse stakeholders, governance responsibilities can take on a variety of connotations. For people who have spent an extended period of time in an environment characterized by severe repression, conflict and/or violence, qualities that often inform the refugee experience, strong leadership may be perceived as undesirable, particularly if it is associated with coercion (Fonteneau et al, 2010). As underscored by Fonteneau et al. in these contexts social enterprises may not be as readily associated with the concept of voluntary collective action due to experiences with government manipulation or colonial authorities compelling certain forms of social or economic action. As a consequence, governance problems can emerge which may have less to do with lack of specific competencies or role confusion than with perceptions formed on the basis of past persecution, often maintained through continued cultural and economic marginalization. Although these dynamics were not directly expressed in interviews, they operate as part of the broader organizational culture thus highlighting the relevance of multiple layers of cultural norms and expectations informing relations within GFC as a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural social enterprise. At the same time that cooperative members are engaged in constructing a *cooperative* culture which prioritizes the social solidarity and the common good they are also attempting navigating *individual* and *business* cultures – the former influenced by personal values and beliefs and the latter by norms related to transactions and exchange. Additionally, they are negotiating a variety of *ethnic and national* cultures which vary according to cooperative members country-origin but also particular customs and traditions. Within this cultural mélange of different, and often conflicting, norms, codes, , and unspoken rules, it is not hard to see how GFC’s initial phase of development presents considerably more challenges than is commonly found in most fledgling social enterprises.

Consequently, it is worth underscoring the significant social value derived from the centripetal force that GFC has been able to generate by forging a shared vision and common forum for experiencing new challenges. Applying the organizational logic of Albert Hirschman (1970), it is plausible that in the face of new challenges, cooperative

members who choose not to leave (exit) are more likely to develop deeper commitments (loyalty) and/or express themselves by raising grievances and proposing action for change (voice) over time. Indeed the ability to engage in constructive discussion and decision-making related to governance is already on display in deliberative processes undertaken during board meetings, often involving difficult questions involving issues related equity and fairness. Under the logic of organizational development, there may be a further deepening of stakeholders' sense of mutual obligation as well as greater entrenchment in the governance of the cooperative as GFC matures.

Though board members do not appear to be particularly comfortable currently with the role of *leading* in the context of social enterprise development, they are open and interested in *learning*, a key pre-requisite for developing the intermediary and advanced tasks identified in our organizational analysis as critical for GFC's long term success. As a sponsoring organization specializing in refugee resettlement, IRC has generated a variety of learning opportunities. Yet the vast majority of its formal training focuses on farming in the context of its New Roots program (i.e. how to harvest; getting seeds, risk management in agribusiness, etc.). Support for business training has come mainly from funding derived by the Office of Refugee Resettlement Microenterprise Development (ORR MED) and Program Grants focused on and post and pre loan technical assistance, which are largely short-term and targeted toward the most advanced farmers. Moving forward integrating these ad hoc trainings into a more comprehensive program as well as connecting to additional support services within the broader community, such as skill building around computer literacy, is likely to be important in empowering cooperative members to take on more advanced administrative tasks, despite their lack of formal education. Given the importance of cooperative values for long term sustainability, there is also a need to establish concrete mechanisms for continually reinforcing cooperative principles and linking them to an active adherence to cooperative values throughout the organization. Putting democratic member control and concern for community into practice is likely to further reinforce stakeholder commitment thus deepening democratic processes, which in turn help solidify a distinctive cooperative identity.

While it is important to recognize that GFCs considerable reliance on the IRC as a sponsoring organization is among its key development challenges, it should not be misperceived as a liability. GFC's reliance on the IRC for grant-funded staff is problematic only to the extent that it cannot be sustained indefinitely: however, in the short to medium term it provides space for cooperative members to gain first-hand knowledge of business operations and acquire the kind of institution-building skills needed to assume greater administrative and management of the social enterprise as it matures. While over-reliance on unpaid assistance, such as pro-bono professional services, student internships and volunteer staff, can present their own problems (Thompson, 2008), this type of support can offer the potential to develop innovative solutions to a variety of the organizational and logistical issues highlighted in our analysis. Thus, while strategic planning to gain increasing independence from the IRC will be critical moving forward, more important is the need to broaden external support to build capacity (i.e. raise awareness, enhance credibility, increase access to additional

financing) over the long term. To the extent that GFC is able to extend its support structure beyond IRC and its affiliated community of agricultural experts and ethnic-based community groups, it puts itself in a better position to further develop its human and social capital, not to mention its consumer base. Linking to social economy networks in particular is a promising avenue for building stronger forms of governance capable of deepening member solidarity as well as greater collaboration with supportive community coalitions both locally and regionally. Coupled with greater focus on strategies to reinforce cooperative values, facilitate opportunities for leadership, and expand economic participation, GFC has the opportunity to move forward in strengthening and solidifying its solidaristic model of social enterprise.

Acknowledgements

As part of a broader project seeking to promote teaching and research on the social economy, our research was made possible by a partnership between SEAZ and IRC Phoenix, funded in part by a grant from the Kaufman Foundation. We are grateful to many people, without whom this research would not have been possible. In particular we would like to thank the GFC farmers, Jon Vosper, IRC Phoenix' Economic Development Program Manager, and Jessica Woiderski, IRC Project Manager and GFC Coordinator, each of whom gave generously of their time and expertise.

List of Acronyms

CEO= Chief Executive Officer

CSA = Community Supported Agriculture

FMPP= Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP),

GFC = Gila Farm Cooperative

ICA= International Cooperative Association

IRC = International Rescue Committee

ORR= Office of Refugee Resettlement

ORR MED= Office of Refugee Resettlement Microenterprise Development

RAPP= Refugee Agricultural Partnership Program

RMP= Refugee Microenterprise Program

SEAZ= Social Enterprise Arizona

UN = United Nations

UNHCR= United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

U.S. = United States

USDA= United States Department of Agriculture

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