

# Asian Crops for Massachusetts Farmers' Markets

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The ethnic population in Massachusetts has undergone substantial change in the last few decades. Latinos are now the largest ethnic minority in the State, comprising about 6% of the total population. Research and extension activities have identified several Latino crops that can be successfully grown in Massachusetts.

The number of people of Asian origin is also increasing in the State and is expected to reach 4% of the total population by the year 2010 (Mass. Institute for Social and Economic Research, UMass). Figure 1 shows the populations of different Asian nationalities in Massachusetts from the 1990 US Census . In many cases, these numbers greatly under-represent current populations of these. For example, the 1990 Census reported 14,000 Cambodians in Massachusetts. Presently there are an estimated 30,000 Cambodians in Lowell alone (Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association of Lowell).

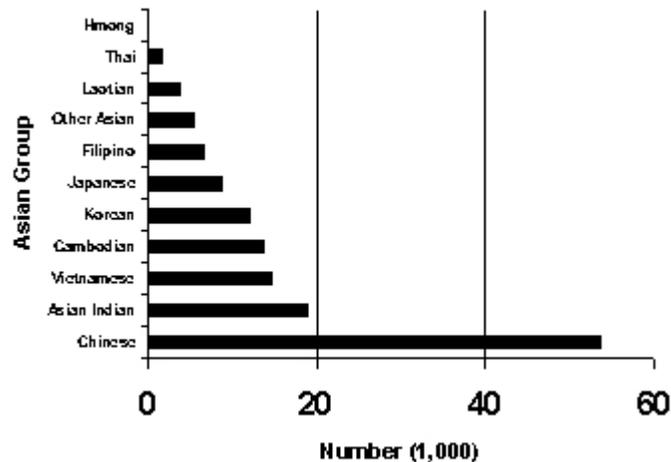


Figure 1. Population of Asian groups in Massachusetts (1990 U.S. Census).

Vegetables are very important in the traditional diet of Asian cultures. These ethnic groups wish to continue consumption of vegetables that are customarily in their diets, thereby giving farmers opportunities for production of crops with a ready market. A collaborative project is underway to evaluate which crops used by the different Asian groups can be successfully grown and marketed in Massachusetts. Organizations working on this project are UMass Extension, Mass. Dept. of Food and Agriculture, Farm Service Agency, Tufts University, and the Federation of Massachusetts Farmers' Markets. This work involves researching production techniques for these crops. This year we will be making regular field visits to growers who produce these crops, to learn more about pest conditions and develop IPM methods for these crops.

This year we are also evaluating the direct marketing of these crops. Seven farmers' markets were chosen based on redemption of farmers' market coupons by Asian participants in the supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children, (WIC) in 1999. Ethnicity of the coupon recipient is traceable through the WIC participant identification number printed on each coupon. Table 1 shows the data for the three most dominant Asian groups in the seven selected markets. This table also shows the total coupon sales for each market.

All farmers who sell at these markets have been given information on each crop used in the cuisine of these Asian groups. Table 2 lists some of the more common vegetable and herb crops used by the three most prevalent Asian groups at these markets: Cambodian, Chinese and Vietnamese. We have interviewed members of these different communities to get a sense of the popularity of each crop. This is reflected by the ranking of each crop, from 0 to 5, with 0 meaning that it is not used and 5 meaning that it is very popular. These rankings should be used only as guidelines since the interviews revealed that there may be differences in crop popularity within each group. For example, we interviewed the produce manager of one of the biggest Asian markets in Boston (Super 88 in Dorchester). He told us that he is from Northern China and he had never heard of basil before moving to the U.S., although basil is very popular among people from Southern China.

This season UMass Nutrition Educators, supervised by Kirsten Johnson, will be conducting cooking demonstrations and nutrition education at selected markets. The educational events will focus on recipes highlighting some of the Asian crops being grown by local farmers. The intent is to provide information and recipes to low income individuals who are not familiar with Asian crops.

In addition, the UMass Nutrition Education Program in Greater Boston will be hiring two part-time staff members for the Farmers' Market season, one who is fluent in both English and Vietnamese and a second who is fluent in both English and Chinese. These staff members will work with current staff at the seven identified Farmer's Markets highlighting the Asian crops to provide education, answer questions and assist in surveying market participants. In an effort to educate members of the various Asian communities regarding the availability of local grown Asian crops at selected Farmer's Markets, advertisements will be placed in local Asian newspapers. Currently, ideas on how to evaluate this advertising effort are being discussed.

Members of UMass Extension and Mass. Department of Food and Agriculture will be visiting the farmers' markets over the course of the season to learn more about these crops. We will be talking with you during the season and at the end of the year to learn more about your experiences.

Table 1. Redemption of farmers' market coupons in 1999 by three Asian nationalities

Farmers' market	% Redemption of all Coupons at Market			Total Coupon Sales
	Cambodian	Chinese	Vietnamese	
Boston City Hall	0	17	1	\$ 5,997
Brookline	0	13	1	\$ 2,932
Copley Square	0	26	1	\$ 6,965
Fields Corner (Dorchester)	0	1	27	\$ 19,687
Lynn	8	0	2	\$ 20,015
Lowell	18	0	2	\$ 21,647

Quincy	0	14	3	\$ 14,617
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Table 2. List of Asian Crops to be evaluated at selected farmers' markets in 2000.

Crops	Genus and Species, where necessary	Popularity, from 0 - 5. 0 = not used; 5 = very popular		
		Cambodia n	Chinese	Vietname se
Herbs				
Basil				
Lemon Basil	<i>Ocimum americanum</i>	2	0	3
Thai Basil	<i>Ocimum basilicum</i>	4	1	3
Cilantro	<i>Coriandrum sativum</i>	3	3	3
Vegetables				
<b>Amaranth, Red and green (calaloo)</b>	<i>Amaranthus tricolor</i>	4	4	3
<b>Beans, Chinese Long</b>	<i>Vigna unguiculata</i>	4	3	5
<b>Cabbage</b>		1	3	5
<b>Cucumber, Pickling</b>		5	3	4
<b>Daikon (Chinese radish)</b>	<i>Raphanus sativus</i>	5	5	3
<b>Eggplant</b>				
Thai eggplant		3	0	1
Chinese (long, thin)		2	4	4
<b>Melons</b>				
Bitter melon	<i>Momordica charantia</i>	3	4	3
Fuzzy melon (gourd)		0	4	4
Sugarbaby (watermelon)		1	5	4
Honeydews		1	3	2
Oriental Greens				
Bok Choy	<i>Brassica rapa</i> (Chinensis group)	3	4	5

Chinese Broccoli (Kailan, Gai-lohn, )	<i>Brassica rapa</i> (flower bud type)	3	5	5
Tatsoi	<i>Brassica rapa</i> ( <i>Narinos</i> group)	1	5	5
Peas, Snow		1	3	5
<b>Peppers, Thai hot</b>		5	3	5
<b>Squash, Buttercup</b>		2	2	3
<b>Zucchini Squash (green)</b>		4	3	3

1 UMass Vegetable Team

2 UMass Nutrition Education Program

3 Mass. Dept. of Food and Agriculture