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*A Newsletter for Farmworker Friends and Advocates*

*Fall 2011*

## Announcing Our Campaign: The Food Justice Project!

Alexa Malishchak



For years, in our educational workshops about pesticides, workers have talked about the difference in the food they are able to eat here compared to their home countries – the pesticides, the freshness, the cost, and the availability.

The goal of this new campaign is to address these concerns and for the immigrant community in the area of Bridgeton, NJ, to be able to buy, prepare, and eat food that is healthy and produced without chemicals. We seek to promote the well-being of immigrant families in the community.

The first phase of the project will be to conduct interviews with a number of families in the Bridgeton area. This will enable us to understand what are these families' current habits in terms of buying and preparing food, and what are the barriers that keep these

families from eating healthily.

Using this information, we will be able to carry out the three elements of this project:

First, using the information from the interviews, we will develop a workshop or series of workshops about nutrition, including healthy recipe suggestions. The workshop/s will take place in Bridgeton, and CATA members and contacts will be invited to participate.

We also want to increase people's access to food that is healthy and produced without chemicals. Often, Latino immigrants can't buy organic food because it is too expensive or simply isn't sold in areas where they live. Through this project, we will engage with area farmers who grow organic produce and form a organic farmers' market in Bridgeton

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***CATA is a non-profit, migrant farmworker organization governed by and comprised of farmworkers who are actively engaged in the struggle for better working and living conditions.***

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A Letter from Nelson's Desk...

## Reflections on Occupy Wall Street

Some weeks ago during the Trouble Makers School organized by Labor Notes in Philadelphia, we reflected on what will be the future for working people. ***There was consensus that the interest of working people, regardless of ethnicity, race or origin; or even what country they live in, is the same.*** In the context of a global economy what we are seeing today in the streets of New York City or here in Philadelphia is a reflection of events that are happening all over the world. What is happening in the Middle East, in Asia or Europe is the reaction of people who realize that if they don't do something to take control of their lives, things will be desperate not only for themselves but for their children – the struggle will be one for survival. ***The challenge is how to turn that struggle into a new society built on principles where people are valued and not treated as commodities. It's a struggle for our humanity.***

Here in the United States, the safety net that is the foundation for a perceived well-being for Americans has been systematically eroded and the gains of organized workers have been dismantled in order to ensure that the rich maintain and increase their well being. ***Unemployment is becoming a permanent reality. Work is available only in temporary positions, underpaid, with no health benefits, retirement benefits or compensation.*** Politicians talk in favor of dismantling social security, how universal health care threatens the core of our society, and how the decent wages and benefits won by organized workers are the cause of our Financial distress. ***Piece by piece, the middle class is being dismantled. People feel the pressure and take to the streets looking to voice their discontent, anger and frustration.***

***For the migrant community and for poor people in general, the current economic reality has been their reality for a long time.*** It has only been in this economic crisis when large sectors of the middle class and citizens have come face to face with desperation of struggling for survival, or living in a permanent state of destitution.

***Perhaps the greatest challenge to the Occupy movement is figuring out how to address this tension.*** On the one hand, "We Are the 99%" is a deeply powerful message. It illustrates how so few elites are able to control so much of our

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## Food Justice Project...Continued from Page 1

charging affordable prices.

Finally, we plan to purchase or rent a plot of land where CATA members and community members can cultivate gardens of their own. This food can be consumed and/or sold, depending on community interest.

A committee of CATA members has been formed to coordinate the project activities and determine if the project is meeting its goals.

Christina Ocampo, a Drew University student who worked with CATA this summer, conducted interviews with families. In the following article, she shares what she learned.

### Did you know?

- ◆ **38% of all Latino children** (in the U.S.) between the ages of 2-19 are overweight or obese.
- ◆ **Latino children are more likely than others to develop diabetes in their lifetimes.**
- ◆ **Latino neighborhoods have 1/3 fewer chain supermarkets** than other neighborhoods.
- ◆ **Latino children born in the U.S. are more likely to be overweight or obese than Latino children born outside the United States.**

*\*Statistics taken from a Fact Sheet produced by Leadership for Healthy Communities on Overweight and Obesity among Latino Youths in May 2010.*

***We wish to thank the Kresge Foundation and the Presbyterian Hunger Program for providing CATA with the funds to carry out this important project.***

### **How Can You Support the Project?**

1. Do have expertise about nutrition, or experience in community nutrition education? We are looking for your advice in developing workshops.
2. If you know of land in Bridgeton that would be suitable for community gardens and might be open for rent or sale, please get in touch.
3. Do you know organic/sustainable farmers who might be interested in participating? Let us know!
4. As always, you can donate to support CATA's programs by filling out the back page of the Siembra or by donating online through our Just Give webpage at **[www.bit.ly/Donate-To-CATA](http://www.bit.ly/Donate-To-CATA)**. If you wish to donate specifically to the Food Justice Project, please note that with your check or donation.

## What Are We Going to Eat Today?

Christina Ocampo



This was the very question contemplated by CATA members on July 20, 2011 when the Food Justice Project (FJP) Committee met for their second time. Six committee members and CATA staff members gathered at the Glassboro office and participated in a workshop titled, “The Public Narrative: How to Tell Your Story of Self”. At the end of the meeting, everyone had a spectacular dinner that was both homemade and healthy.

Let’s return to the question—what will we eat today? It’s incredible that such an easy question requires so much thought and preparation. Although the delicious dinner enjoyed at the meeting was simple—chickpeas and brown rice—it required great amounts of planning on the part of CATA and Jeanette Matias, who cooked the meal.

After the reflection on the topics discussed during the meeting, it was clear that the surrounding, culturally-diverse community holds a wealth of knowledge regarding healthy eating. The varying experiences of each person are valuable and necessary to discuss the path to a more just and healthy food system.

Toward this end, part of the FJP includes conducting interviews with farmworkers and their families. The interviews are informal and consist of a series of simple questions— what is your family’s favorite food? Where do you shop for groceries? What would help you and your family have access to healthier food?

Some overarching themes are clear from the interviews conducted. For example, individuals and families who recently relocated to the United States prefer traditional meals from their home countries, while their children—the new generation—prefer fast food and other meals prepared outside the home. My role in the FJP is to share these stories - the stories of workers and their families - with others. Through this process, the FJP can play a role in sharing the healthy habits and traditions brought to the United States by those from other nations—both improving our health and preserving our culture for further generations.

The final stages and results of the FJP cannot be accomplished without the people’s stories and knowledge. THEY are at the center of this campaign.

### ¡Gracias!

Many thanks to our summer interns—Natalie Sanchez and Christina Ocampo! Natalie is a student at Princeton University and Christina is from Drew University. We thank the two of them for the work they have done and only wish them the best in their futures.

# Jeremias, Donato, and One Latin-American Immigrant Community

Natalie Sanchez

A few weeks ago when I interviewed Jeremias - a farm worker from Hammonton— he told me that he came to the United States *“to have something”*, to have the opportunity to advance. As he said, *“we came to work, not to rest; we came out of necessity”*.

Jeremias is only one of thousands of Latin-American immigrants who left their home countries and headed for New Jersey farms in order to survive.

Jeremias’s story begins in San Cristobal de Las Casas in Oaxaca, Mexico, his hometown.

As a young boy and teenager, Jeremias worked on a plot of land with his family; they cultivated corn, oranges, mangoes, and coffee without pesticides or fertilizers. Although they sold some of the surplus coffee, Jeremias’s family consumed most of what they grew. Because of the high cost of school supplies—books, uniforms, materials— Jeremias was not able to complete his studies. With few opportunities to earn a living in his hometown, Jeremias made the journey from Chiapas to the United States at age 15. He has spent the last three years working at farms in various states, from Florida in the south to New Jersey in the north. At his current job, Jeremias wakes up at 4:30am, sometimes buys a morning coffee, picks vegetables, packs the day’s harvest, finishes work at 6 or 7 in the evening, often

plays a game of soccer with his co-workers, and finally goes to bed. The next day the routine continues. Although he keeps in contact with his family in Chiapas, Jeremias is unsure about one day returning to Mexico. As he says, *“you get used to it”*. When I asked

him about his plans for the future, Jeremias simply answered *“we’ll see what happens; I still have no idea about anything”*.

Besides Jeremias, I also had the opportunity to have a conversation with Donato - a farm worker in

Vineland. Although they differ in age, experiences, and outlook, Donato and Jeremias’s stories are similar in other ways.

Donato was born in Teococuilco de Marcos Perez in Oaxaca, Mexico. As a child, he hoped to become a schoolteacher; however, as he told me, his parents *“did not have enough resources. And so my friends encouraged me— talked to me about the United States”*. After a few months, Donato’s friends convinced him to seek opportunities and economic stability in the United States. The group of young men took a bus from Oaxaca to Mexico City and then onward to Tijuana. Donato told me how simple it was then, in the 1980’s, to cross the border after hiring a *coyote* (a smuggler who is hired to help people cross the border); as he said, *“it*

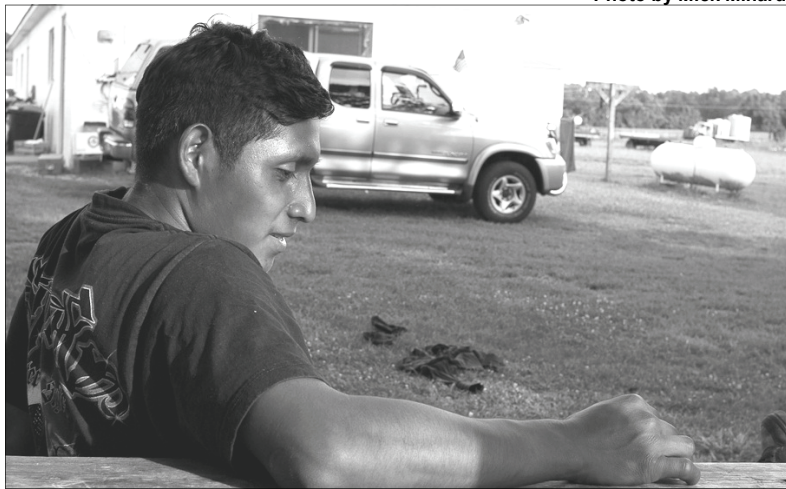


Photo by Mick Minard

Jeremias

## Jeremias and Donato...Continued from page 5

*used to be easy back then, it used to be easy; we crossed the border quickly*". In the late 1980's, Donato became a permanent resident due to a legalization program authorized in 1986. Since then, he spends the winter months in Mexico with his wife and children. Although Donato has this privilege, he knows that returning to their families and home countries is highly improbable for many other farmworkers; as he explained to me, "*for them it's hard —they tell me*". Donato has been working at the same farm for the last 6 seasons in order to provide for his family.

After he spends a few months in Mexico at the end of this year, the cycle will continue. Beyond their numerous differences, it is clear that Jeremias and Donato have at least one thing in common: both are part of a community of Latin-American immigrants struggling to provide for themselves and their families. Both of these men and the other people I have met during my eight weeks at CATA have given me a wider perspective on the lives and types of decisions made by the immigrant farmworkers that produce much of the food we consume.



## Farewell to Stephanie!

Stephanie Krivus worked with CATA for the past two years as our Communications Coordinator. She came to us from the Jesuit Volunteer Corps and signed up for a second volunteer year in order to continue working with us. Stephanie finished her time with us in August of this year. We are grateful for all her efforts in helping the organization develop a more consistent message to our members and supporters. We wish her all the best in her next endeavor!

## Reflections on Occupy Wall Street...Continued from page 2

country's wealth and exploit so many. On the other hand, it's important not to universalize. ***Within the 99%, there are millions of different struggles and experiences.*** A white, middle class, English-speaking citizen with mortgage, healthcare, and student loan debt is facing very different struggles from an undocumented, Latino, non-English speaking farmworker experiencing wage theft by their employer. ***When the Occupy Movement can figure out how to give voice to both of these truths - that we share common struggles, and that those in more privileged positions within the 99% should stand in solidarity with those in less privileged positions - then real movement building can occur.***

## Other News!



The Agricultural Justice Project's Food Justice Certified program is up and running in the Pacific Northwest. In May of this year AJP trained approximately thirty people in Eugene, Oregon, including staff from five certification agencies and representatives from five farmworker organizations from around the country. **AJP has received applications from interested farmers in Oregon, and is working with interested farmers in California and Florida. AJP is also actively seeking farms and food businesses in the Northeast and mid-Atlantic that are interested in Food Justice certification.** For more information about AJP, go to: [www.agriculturaljusticeproject.org](http://www.agriculturaljusticeproject.org)

**The Domestic Fair Trade Association will be holding its annual meeting on December 6-8 in San Diego, CA.** CATA is a founding member of the DFTA and now serves as Chair of the DFTA's board of directors. The DFTA is a unique coalition of workers, farmers, food businesses, and NGOs working together to promote and uphold a meaningful domestic fair trade.



**CATA is serving in the international Core Group to plan this year's Civil Society Days of the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD), which will take place in Geneva, Switzerland on November 29 and 30, 2011.** The GFMD has become the most important policy-setting process for international law affecting migrants and their families. CATA continues to play a leadership role in working with other organizations to push for international migration policy respects the human and labor rights of all migrants.

**CATA is proud to be a member of EarthShare New Jersey (ESNJ), a non-profit organization created and directed by member organizations to represent us in employee workplace giving campaigns.** Campaign season is taking place right now so please consider making a donation to CATA through your workplace. Don't have a workplace giving campaign at your office? Contact CATA to assist you in setting one up. **For more information on ESNJ go to [www.earthsharenj.org](http://www.earthsharenj.org).**



**CATA Codes to Remember:**

**Combined Federal Campaign (CFC):** (All Federal worksites) **39411**  
**NJ State Employee Charitable Campaign:** (All state employees) **3341**

*Yes, I want to be part of the  
farmworkers' struggle for justice!*

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