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A Newsletter for Farmworker Friends and Advocates

Winter 2016

A Time of Transition

BY: JESSICA CULLEY

After 24 years of work, November 9, 2016 was Nelson Carrasquillo's last official day as CATA's General Coordinator. He is not leaving the organization completely – indeed it would be hard to imagine that – but will continue representing CATA in certain coalitions and initiatives to which we are committed.

We are deeply grateful to Nelson for his work, his vision, his dedication to creating the space for the leadership of members and for his unwavering commitment to the vision of a community organized for power. On a personal level, I am thankful to Nelson for the time I have been able to work with him, for his role in my formation as an organizer and for his friendship.

Now we find ourselves in a moment of transition, and transition on multiple levels. At the organizational level, we have a transition of leadership to take into consideration as we continue strengthening the organization and striving for our mission?

At the societal level, this is a time of much uncertainty. The rhetoric against the immigrant community and other communities of color turns more hateful each day. President-elect Trump has brought individuals into his close confidence who promote white nationalism and white supremacy. We do not know what exactly awaits us with the new administration, but we know for sure that it will not be the full recognition of the contributions and human rights of the immigrant community and the working class of our society.



Nelson Carrasquillo, CATA's General Coordinator since 1992, stepped down from the position this year but will continue to work closely with CATA.

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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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2016 Highlights



CATA members gave testimony, spoke at press conferences, and advocated face-to-face with legislators as a part of a state-wide campaign to raise the minimum wage to \$15/hour. This campaign is just getting started and CATA will continue to fight in 2017.



CATA members marched for an end of deportations and rights for all immigrants at the Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia this past summer.



CATA's Women's Group came together to support one another and discuss how they persevere daily in their workplaces and family lives.

Transition... *Continued from page 1*

I believe that in a moment like this, it is crucial to take the time to reflect on how we want to respond to this convergence of conditions. We could take a defensive position and close our eyes, hoping that nothing will happen to us and just focus on our own daily reality.

Or, we can open our eyes and see what is happening around us, what is happening to our neighbors, to communities across the country, and we can respond actively, in solidarity with others.



CATA members held the General Assembly to discuss the next two years of goals and elect a new Board of Directors to lead the organization.

I believe this reaction will define us – who we are and who we want to be. Will we only work for our own survival? Or, will we see the connections we have to a diversity of communities including refugees, Muslim communities, the LGBT community, the black community, women and more.

Trump won this election precisely by creating divisions between us, permitting that one community blame another for their sufferings and difficulties. But the truth is we are all fighting each day to pay our bills, keep a good job, provide an education to our children and seek out some peace and tranquility in this life. This seems to be the same for all of us, independent of our race, color, gender, religion, immigrant status, or political affiliation, and is what unites us all together.

I hope that this moment gives us an opportunity to reflect on how we can live our values, that it provides us the opportunity to act in the defense of those values and gives us the chance to seek more justice and unity among us all.

“Juntos Somos Más” (“Together We Are More”)

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.



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. The code for CATA for the Federal Campaign is 39411 and the NJ State Campaign is 3341. Visit www.cata-farmworkers.org for a complete list. **For more information on ESNJ go to www.earthsharenj.org.**

Organic Agriculture

BY: NELSON CARRASQUILLO

Organic food production must be the future of agriculture. As consumers become aware of the impact eating organic, healthy food has on their health, they will demand more access that will force a shift towards a healthier and more affordable food supply.

Traditionally, organic food production is based on the knowledge of how the Earth provides the food that our bodies need. Indigenous cultures recognize this and, instead of changing nature, they allow the earth to deliver and work with the land to provide for their needs. There is a recognition that respect for the land and those who live in it is the affirmation of life.

One of the main principles of CATA is that all human beings be treated with respect and dignity. For this reason we believe that the concept of organic-based agriculture includes the well-being of workers and consumers. That is why we co-created and promote the Food Justice standards of the Agricultural Justice Project. These are a set of high-bar social justice standards for labor and trade practices that represent a pathway for achieving a viable and vibrant food system that is grounded in the respect of the land and all human beings.

The challenge that we face is to empower consumers so they can promote and demand that organic food production become the backbone of a just and fair food system. Consumers need to move away from a passive approach to food to an assertive way of thinking by taking direct action in support of organic food production that respects workers all along the food chain.

The principles that drive the food system in the United States are based on the exploitation of the land and the treatment of human beings as commodities. There is no respect and no dignity in this system that is based on the historic use of the plantation model and the exploitation of workers as slaves.

Organic farming is contrary to this system and the industrial agricultural model that we use today. Government policy serves the interest of industrial agriculture and is trying to control and undermine the true meaning of organic. This will not serve the interest of consumers or workers.

We believe that the standards of the Food Justice Label will create the fair food system that consumers and workers need and deserve. We are sending this message to you, our friends and allies, so you can get involved and support the important work that CATA is doing to change our current, corrupt food system. On the next page you can see some of the work we have done this year and, with your support, we look to keep moving forward in the new year.



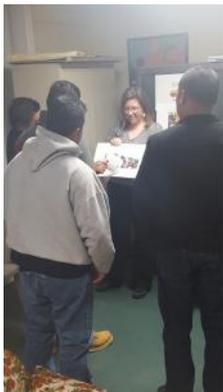
2016 Food Justice Work



CATA members working in the Bridgeton Organic Community Garden.



CATA staff joined other organizations and members of the Agricultural Justice Project to protest poor treatment of farmworkers.



CATA members participated in trainings on food justice and herbal medicine, learning how issues of food justice impact their daily lives and sharing different medicinal uses for native plants found in New Jersey.



CATA members shared their work experiences at a three-day agroecology encounter, speaking to the need to change the current food system and shift our focus to a more holistic approach to agriculture.

**Keep up with CATA on Facebook!
Just search for CATA - The Farmworker Support
Committee to see pictures and updates of our
members and the work that we do.**

Chasing the American Dream

BY: KATHIA RAMIREZ

This is an excerpt from a longer article written on the challenges of migration and its relation to the food system in the United States. To read the complete article, please visit www.cata-farmworkers.org.

“I do not want my children to suffer like I did but how will I do that? If I stay over there, I will not be able to better myself because I noticed that in my country, the situation is harsh. You can’t succeed. You can’t. And so I made a decision. I said ‘It’s better if I go, and I only ask God to help me make it, and I will make it no matter how the journey is. No matter how the route is, all I think of is getting there. And once I arrive there, I know that I will work and I will start sending money so my children can go to school...’ and thank God for helping me. It took so long, I suffered. They kidnapped us and everything that happened on the way here but I never gave up; for my kids. And I arrived here, and all my check, all of what I earned, I would send it and I told my wife to buy them clothes, take them to school so they can study and thanks to God my children, not all, but two have graduated...”

-CATA Member

El Sueño Americano—The American Dream

Many of our parents left their home country and their families to be able to give their children a better future. The majority of those who migrate to this country, do so with the hope of finding and living the so-called “American Dream” that they hear about from those who have returned from being in the United States. The American Dream means different things for different people, but most comes with the hope of rising out of poverty and providing future generations with opportunities that they themselves never had.



Farmworkers in the blueberry fields of New Jersey.

When migrants go back to their country of origin, they tell their countrymen that life is lived to the fullest in the United States. Often times they say that people make a lot of money, that life is great, that many people have cars, etc. and they live life to the fullest. Then, people continue to migrate based on this image in their heads, one of motivation and hope, so they take the risks to come to this country without much thought on the consequences and obstacles, some of them potentially deadly, that they will encounter.

Regardless of the high risk factor, people cross the border with the hope of making enough money to build houses back home, and provide the best for their children, including an education. It is with this mindset that they embark on a journey to a foreign country, with hopes of finding a great job and being able to send money back home to their families.

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American Dream... *Continued from page 7*

However, once in this country, they encounter a harsh reality that they have to live with everyday. Although many become discouraged with this reality, they stay. They stay because they are now in debt after borrowing the money needed to make the trip. They stay because they want to fulfill the promises they made to their family and prove that leaving them behind was worth the trip. Many say they will come for a short period of time, just to make the money they need, but by the time they realize it, they have spent their entire lives here.

One summer, while working at a produce packing house in southern New Jersey, a supervisor screamed to his/her workers *"You want the American Dream, but the only dreams you'll have will come from exhaustion."* This is something that struck me because it's true, many people suffer through hunger and exhaustion in order to have enough money and be able to survive the month. They are willing to eat cheap food that harms their health and work long hours to make more money. We say that people should work to live and not live to work, but in most cases people have to work constantly to be able to survive.

Los Invisibles—The invisible

Farmworkers are the ones who make sure we have our food on our tables and yet they are the ones who have the least access to it. Because of industrial countries like the United States, Latin American countries suffer the most due to bad trade policies and cheap labor practices, divesting many people from their roots and home countries. Many living in Latin America lose their land leaving them in bankruptcy circumstances because they cannot sell their produce at a lower price than what competitors sell it for.

"The biggest problem in our country when us peasants sow beans and cornfield, is that we invest too much money and sometimes we borrow money to be able to purchase fertilizer and seeds. When the time to harvest comes, it does not even make up to the expenses that we had; it's so cheap. It is so cheap and people do not even buy it."

--CATA Member

To read the complete article, please visit www.cata-farmworkers.org.

2017 is going to bring many uncertainties, but one thing that is certain is that CATA will be here. CATA has been in this fight for over 35 years and that will not change. **We will continue to work together to empower, educate, and protect the migrant community. We will continue to be a strong presence, lifting up our member's voices so that they will always be heard and respected. Now, more than ever, we need to stand together in support of the rights of all people, including migrants who are some of the most vulnerable.**

For CATA, the work now is to challenge society to not be guided by fear and intolerance, but by the recognition of the value and inherent dignity of human life. We wouldn't be able to do this important work without the help and financial support of our friends and allies. Any contribution to CATA, large or small, puts us all one step closer to living in a society that respects the rights of all people. **Please go to www.cata-farmworkers.org for information on how to support CATA. Thank you!**





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