Here at CATA, we are always reflecting on how to tell our stories in a way that makes sense to you, our friends and allies, so that they go beyond generating a sense of sympathy and generate a sense of urgency; a sense of urgency to become involved directly by taking action.

As you will see in this edition of the Siembra, the undocumented population is caught up in a vicious cycle. One that creates a demand for their presence while denying them even the most basic rights, putting them into a system that is set up to keep them in poverty.

The need for cheap food and products demands cheap labor, creating the need for an undocumented workforce that can be exploited and taken advantage of because, in this country, the end game is always profit. Being undocumented has been validated as an acceptable reason to treat someone as a lesser human being, all in the name of profit. This is not limited to farmworkers. It includes low-wage workers all along the food and production chain, including those that work in packinghouses, processing plants, restaurants, warehouses, etc. and those in landscaping and construction.

CATA is a migrant farmworker and low-wage worker membership organization. Almost all of our members work in one of these industries. It is important to see how these issues of workers’ rights, food justice, and immigration are all interconnected. Our work is based on the idea that we need to change the system; change it to one that is based on human dignity and human rights. Workers need to organize themselves, educate themselves, and speak out in order to change the system that is set up to work against them.

Our membership understands this reality because they live it every single day in their workplaces and in their communities. They recognize that they are used and taken advantage of due to their circumstances. They realize that for themselves and their children to have a better future with more opportunities, they need to take action by joining forces and actively participating in the “fight for justice.” We invite our friends and allies to join us in this struggle, to be actively engaged and in solidarity with each other. This is one struggle and together we can change this reality.
**El Comité de Apoyo a los Trabajadores Agrícolas (CATA)**

**The Farmworker Support Committee**

CATA  
P.O. Box 510  
4 South Delsea Dr.  
Glassboro, NJ 08028  
(856) 881-2507  
Cata@cata-farmworkers.org  
www.cata-farmworkers.org

66 Atlantic St.  
Bridgeton, NJ 08302  
(856) 575-5511

P.O. Box 246  
220 Birch St.  
Kennett Square, PA 19348  
(610) 444-9696

116-118 W. Main St.  
Plaza Gateway, Suite 205 A  
Salisbury, MD 21801  
(410) 572-5959

**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.**

**Staff**

**General Coordinator:**  
Nelson Carrasquillo

**Administrator:**  
Marge Niedda

**Organizers:**  
José Manuel Guzmán  
Jessica Culley

**Communications Coordinator:**  
Meghan Hurley

**Food Justice Program Coordinator:**  
Rachel Winograd

**Immigration Specialist:**  
Leila Borroto Krouse

**Photos:** CATA Staff

**Notice of nondiscrimination**

In accordance with 40 CFR 5.140 and 7.95 of Title IX better known as the Civil Rights Act, Comité de Apoyo a los Trabajadores Agrícolas (CATA) does not discriminate against anyone from participating in our educational programs or activities based on race, color, national origin, age, or physical/emotional abilities. If you have any questions or complaints, please contact Nelson Carrasquillo, Executive Director, or Marge Niedda, Administrator, at 856-881-2507.

---

**Why We Come: Reflections from CATA Members**

I came to the United States because I wanted a better future for my family. In my country, I wasn’t going to have that opportunity, there were very few job opportunities. The salaries are too low and the jobs are too few.

*Miguel, CATA Member*

We are here because the job situation in Mexico is not good. There’s hardly any work, and when you have a family to take care of, you have to find a way to make a living. I’m trying to give my children the best. They are studying in Mexico, so I have to be here, working hard, so that they can have a better future.

*Francisco Javier, CATA Member*

I came here because my parents left me when I was a baby and my grandparents took care of me. But eventually, they didn’t have enough money to keep paying for school. They gave me everything they had, everything they could, but it wasn’t enough. That’s why I’m here, for them, because they supported me, and now I’m trying to support them.

*Pablo, CATA Member*

I am a widow with 4 children. In Guatemala, I couldn't find work to provide for my children. That’s why I took the risk to come here to the United States. My life here is hard, but I am here fighting for them. I am fighting so that they can study, so that I can build a house for them.

*Guadalupe, CATA Member*

The truth is the economic situation is bad everywhere, in Central America, in Mexico. Even here in the U.S. it’s not that great, but still we can earn more money here than we can in Mexico. This is why we come here, to provide a better quality of life for our families. In Mexico, we earn about $10 a day, but here we can earn this in less than 2 hours. That’s the difference. That’s why we come. We all have things that we want to achieve. If we don’t have a house, we want to be able to buy a house. We want to provide a better future for our children. This is why we are here, to be able to do both instead of one or the other, because in Mexico, you can’t have both.

*Javier, CATA Member*
“I support immigrants, but I don’t understand why people come here undocumented.”

“What are there so many undocumented immigrants?”

Many times, as we here at CATA are out in the community doing educational presentations about farmworkers and other low-wage migrant workers, these types of questions come up in the conservation.

These are totally valid questions, and they reveal the complexity of immigration law and its relative unfamiliarity to the general public. This lack of knowledge leads to a lot of misunderstanding and misinformation about immigration and the undocumented community.

We wanted to unmask some of the misconceptions that exist around immigration and give us all some common ground to start from. The first question deals with why so many people take the risk of coming into the US undocumented. We posed this question to some of our members, you can read their answers to the left.

The other question deals with why the undocumented population has grown to be so large. Under our current system, there are two main ways that immigrants can apply for Legal Permanent Residency, also known as a Green Card. They are either through family members or through a specific offer of a job.

Did you know? A naturalized citizen of the United States can apply for residency for their mother, father, spouse, children, and/or siblings. A Legal Permanent Resident can apply for residency only for their spouse and/or children. However, there are extremely long wait times for Legal Permanent Residents to obtain visas for family members. A husband from Mexico may have to wait 7 years to bring his wife into the United States on a visa.

CATA member Juan Lucero has been waiting over 15 years for his residency. His brother became a citizen in 1997 and soon after applied for Juan and his other brother. They have been waiting ever since.

“They told us we could get papers, but we would have to wait 12-15 years,” Juan said. “It’s been 15 years and we still haven’t heard anything. The lawyer said, you have to wait, there are lots of people ahead of you in line who are waiting for the same thing.”

Until he receives notice that his residency has been approved, Juan is considered an undocumented immigrant. The fact that he is waiting for papers provides him very few protections and almost no rights while working in the U.S.

“They say that having the letter that says I am waiting for residency protects me a little,” he said. “So if ICE (Immigrations and Customs Enforcement) was to come here and I show them the letter, they won’t deport me. But I can’t travel, I don’t have a work permit, this letter doesn’t let me do anything.”

Also, any person who wishes to sponsor a family member must show that they are not likely to be a “public charge” by showing that they earn 125% of the poverty level – obviously creating a bias for more highly educated and more affluent immigrants.

Most of the residency visas available each year through employment are for highly skilled workers.

Continued on page 4
Immigration...Continued from page 3

Only about 10,000 visas/year are available for low skilled jobs.

Many people come into the United States on temporary employment visas – that may last from a few months to a few years. These visas, H1B, H2B, H2A, can be renewed under certain circumstances. Workers with these temporary visas are NOT eligible to sponsor family members.

Currently, for the 11 million people who are in our country without documents, there are VERY FEW options for becoming documented without a change to our immigration laws. For some who are victims of violence, who marry a U.S. citizen, or who came as children, there may be a chance. For the majority, however, there is simply no line to get in, no application to fill out, no fee to pay, no way to get their papers.

For those undocumented individuals who get caught up in the deportation pipeline, very few options exist. For example, if an undocumented person gets accused of an assault and is arrested, even if those charges are dropped because they find evidence that they are not guilty, ICE has already likely been notified and has requested the police NOT to release that person until they come to question them. Then, once placed in deportation proceedings, they DO NOT HAVE THE RIGHT TO LEGAL REPRESENTATION. You can have a private attorney represent you only if you can afford one.

These are just a few examples of how the immigration system is organized. Most of this does not form part of the public discourse. We talk about how the system is “broken,” which it is, but many people don’t understand the ways in which the system is broken, and how it has changed since many of our ancestors immigrated to the United States.

The best way to start “fixing” the immigration system is with Comprehensive Immigration Reform that provides a pathway to citizenship, rights, and protections to the undocumented population. We want YOU, the supporters of the farmworker and the immigrant community to feel confident to speak up and speak out! Now is the time to make the change. We need to acknowledge the contributions and hard work of the migrant community and give them the rights they deserve.

The History of Immigration Law

The history of Immigration Law is one of exclusion. The overwhelming majority of laws have been passed to exclude, limit, prohibit, and generally make coming to the United States more difficult and more costly. Below are just a few examples. Read more at: http://www.kqed.org

1790 Naturalization Act - stipulated that foreign-born persons could become citizens of the United States only if they were free and white

1882 Immigration Act - declared immigration to be a federal concern and barred "idiots, lunatics, convicts and persons likely to become a public charge" from becoming citizens

1882 Chinese Exclusion Act - completely barred any further new immigration of laborers from China for 10 years and barred any Chinese in the country from citizenship.

The 1917 Immigration Act - required all immigrants over 16 years old to be literate in their own language

Emergency Immigration Act of 1921 - kept new arrivals at 3 percent of existing foreign-born numbers of any nationality from the 1910 Census (thus preventing a large influx from any particular country). In 1924, the new quota became even more restricted.

The 1952 Immigration and Nationality Act - removed any racial restrictions for naturalization, however the bias toward favoring immigration from Europe over Asia continued.

In 1965, a new quota system was established for the Eastern and Western hemispheres, with preference given to immediate family members of citizens and skilled workers, creating a basis for our current immigration system.

The Immigration Reform & Control Act of 1986: Legalized undocumented people who could documentarily prove they had been in the United States on January 1, 1982.
True or False?
Test What You Know About Workers’ Rights!

Below are a few statements that come from the misconceptions that people have about farmworkers and migrant workers. Are they true or false? Take a guess and read below for the answer.

**Undocumented workers do not pay taxes.**

*False.* A study of undocumented workers showed that between 60 – 75% are paid with checks, which means they are paying income taxes, social security, medicaid, unemployment etc, just like any other American who works. Since undocumented workers don’t have social security numbers, the IRS provides them with an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN), allowing deductions to be taken from their paychecks.

**Undocumented workers generally are not eligible for food stamps, welfare, social security, etc.**

*True.* Generally farmworkers are not documented, so they do not have the right to apply for food stamps, welfare, etc. Many however are paid by check, which means they are contributing to these programs through taxes. It is said that the social security system is partially viable because of the millions of workers paying into the system that will never be able to claim social security.

**Undocumented workers are entitled to the same rights as documented workers.**

*True.* Every worker has certain rights in the workplace, regardless of immigrant status. They have the right to be paid for their work, to earn the minimum wage (and sometimes overtime), to receive compensation if they are injured while working, and to be able to organize a union and claim their rights without reprisals.

**Undocumented immigrant workers take jobs away from native workers.**

*False.* Studies show that undocumented immigration either has no effect on native workers or actually increases their labor market opportunities by boosting the industries that create new jobs. Undocumented immigrants create more jobs than they themselves fill. They do so directly by starting new businesses and indirectly through their expenditures on U.S. goods and services. Undocumented immigrants often take jobs that others in the community refuse to perform. For example, the railroads across the West were largely built by Chinese immigrants, and large-scale agricultural production still relies on Mexican workers.
Here at CATA, food justice is one of the main focuses of our work. Food justice means food security, that all people have the right to enough food and the right to choose what they are eating. But what do peoples’ food realities actually look like and how is food justice being denied to our members on a daily basis?

Deeply imbedded in the causes of our unjust food system are the vast and ever-growing effects from the hugely influential free trade agreements that the US has established with other countries. The agreements with countries in Latin America, beginning with the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, which flooded the Mexican market with cheap and subsidized American food staples, have caused a remarkable increase in immigration to the United States from Mexico beginning in the mid to late 90’s. No longer able to make a living at home, formerly subsistence farmers were forced to leave their homes and look for work in neighboring towns and cities. With the job-seekers outnumbering jobs, the search continued north to the US.

Therefore, to talk about food justice without talking about the greater picture and roots of US capitalistic imperialism would be missing the point. In the US’ quest for cheap goods and labor, we have intentionally created a need for undocumented, low-wage workers. As we pump cheap food into the Latin American and domestic marketplaces, it is the workers, who we lure here to help us produce this food, that suffer the consequences, coming up against many barriers to securing their own daily meals.

The personal food realities of our members are different and varied depending on a number of factors; where they live, who they live with, what their transportation is like, if they live with family, how many hours they work, etc.

For farmworkers who live in farm labor camps (on-site farm-provided basic housing), there can be a number of possible realities. Some workers, often at small farms, have access to a kitchen and are able to share the cooking duties amongst themselves. They usually get a ride into town once a week to do their food shopping and they share the costs and cooking with one another.

Despite working in the food industry, workers rarely get free food from their places of business as one might expect would be a perk to working in agriculture.

At other, often larger, farms, workers are not able to cook for themselves and have to pay someone else to prepare their meals for them. This can be someone who either lives on site and uses the kitchens or brings the food in a truck. The cost for this is generally between $50 and $70 a week per worker. According to laws of the US Department of Labor, a profit cannot be made from these meals, apart from recuperation of funds for ingredients and pay of cooking staff.

However, due to the isolation of the workers and transient nature of the jobs, as well as the general climate of economic exploitation, the meal production is treated like a business and workers, who have no other food options, are forced to pay for overpriced meals that do not give them the proper nutrition that is required for the hard work that they do.

Although employers are legally required to provide drinking water to workers in the fields, workers are often enticed instead by cold energy drinks and soda, for which they are charged a high fee, generating a large profit for the seller. Due to this, some workers develop

Continued on page 7
abnormal heart palpitations as well as become dehydrated faster due to high levels of caffeine in their drinks.

Workers who live in town and with their families have a whole new set of challenges to eating healthily and providing nutritious meals for their families. Immigrant worker families in poverty face the same challenges that American families in poverty face including not having economic nor physical access to healthy food. However, unlike American families who are earning poverty wages, many immigrant families are not able to apply for and receive help from the government in times of great food insecurity.

Due to their non-citizenship, and despite having taxes deducted from their pay, undocumented workers are not eligible for food stamps or other emergency government food programs.

Despite this and according to research that we have done throughout recent years, migrant families generally spend a larger percentage of their income on food than the majority of the American public, as much as 30-40% of their income in comparison with the average 13% that most Americans spend. One reason for this seems to be that these families, the majority who are recent immigrants, still put a lot of value into cooking traditional meals with fresh ingredients. Even though they are earning poverty-level wages, people are willing to spend a little more when they have access to fresh food products. Many come from traditional agricultural backgrounds and have a deep and profound understanding of the harm caused by eating products grown with chemicals and pesticides.

**CATA’s Food Justice Project: Addressing the issues of food justice with our members in their communities.**

As part of CATA’s Food Justice Project, we are starting Organic Community Gardens to try and provide the low-income migrant community and our members with better access to healthy, organic foods. Our garden in Bridgeton is helping to keep traditional agriculture practices alive, while providing fresh, organic produce to the community.

“The truth is, the food situation is something we’ve found a little sad, because the food has been refrigerated for who knows how many months. So we can’t always eat the way we did in my county. It’s not like it was in my country, the vegetables here have lots of chemicals. But in my country, we cultivated organically, without chemicals.”

*Santos, CATA Member, Secretary of the Board of Directors*

“I have always liked organic agriculture because of my parents, and what they grew when I was young. They planted without synthetic fertilizer, without chemicals. So I was watching and learning and here I am…putting it into practice. It’s so much better for my family because when it has chemicals, its different. Now that we’re with the project, it’s changing, we have all kinds of organic vegetables.”

*Osvaldo, CATA Member*
Yes, I want to be part of the farmworkers’ struggle for justice!

Here is my donation of:

$30  $50  $75  $100  $250  Other

Name:_____________________________________________

Address:_____________________________________________________________

City/State/Zip:_________________________________________________________

Phone:_______________________

Email:________________________________________________________________

Organization (if applicable):_____________________________________________

You can mail your tax deductible checks payable to:

CATA
P.O. Box 510
Glassboro, N.J. 08028

If you prefer, you can donate online through our secure website:

www.cata-farmworkers.org