Efrén Diego, a member of CATA, has been president of the Kaolin Workers’ Union in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania since 2005.

Mónica Rivera, another active member of CATA and a mother of three, was a leader in organizing a work stoppage of over 30 workers, fighting for better conditions in the chicken processing plant where she worked.

The membership of CATA is made up of migrant farmworkers and other low-wage workers, most of whom face unjust treatment and abuse in their jobs and in the communities where they live. CATA empowers workers by providing them with the tools to have a stronger voice in the fight for justice. While CATA provides these tools, it is the members who do the work.

Efrén was first interested in working with the union because he would see supervisors treating the workers poorly. As a mushroom picker, he experienced first hand what he described as a very “rough” treatment from the supervisors and the company. He was identified as a strong leader and was encouraged by others in the Union to accept the position of President.

“...Continued on page 3

Mónica stated the working conditions at the plant where she used to work as “horrible.” They were denied overtime pay and bathroom breaks, forced to work long hours, and given inadequate tools, such as dull knives and scissors, that lead to long-term hand and shoulder problems. She decided that something needed to be done and was one of the leaders to organize a work stoppage. In 2010, Mónica and her co-workers held the stoppage and filed an official labor complaint against the company, which they won.

Neither Mónica or Efrén see themselves as brave or see what they do as anything extraordinary. Their focus is on the people around them and their motivation is making sure those people know how they should be treated in their place of work.

“The thing that motivates me the most is, what I have learned about that contract, I want every worker to know that too. It's the greatest motivation, to make everyone an expert in the contract. That everyone knows what the contract means and that they are not afraid to talk to their supervisors,” Efrén said.
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  

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  
Alexa Malishchak  
Communications Coordinator:  
Meghan Hurley  

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.  

A Letter from Nelson’s Desk…  

It seems that the narrative of engagement within the political context today is one based on the assumption that to stand up for workers rights is not in vogue. What is most important is to stop the far right agenda and put our energies into ensuring the reelection of the Obama administration. We, as a migrant workers organization, are called to participate at the table and speak on the challenges that migrant workers face because they need to be addressed by the policy makers. If we are not at the table, we can’t be a voice or negotiate for better working and living conditions for the community that we represent.  

The problem with this mind set is that in these past four years the situation for farmworkers has only worsened in the areas of wages, health and safety, and housing. With the increased enforcement provisions through the E-Verify Program and the Secure Communities program at the federal level, anti-immigrant legislation increasingly promoted in various states, and the role of the Judiciary in criminalizing the undocumented community provides a scenario that leaves out many reasons to think that to stop the right wing agenda is the priority for the migrant community. At a moment when in reality it is been strangled by those who say to have their best interest at heart.  

We have long recognized that the issue of immigration is a workers’ rights issue, but that it is only part of what contributed to undermining the advances that workers in the United States had achieved. We don’t look at policy makers as those who will take into consideration the best interest of workers when history tells us that they have been consistent in undermining workers’ rights. We have to take it upon ourselves to generate the strength needed to change the conditions. We know this will not be easy and don’t it expect it to happen in this year’s elections or in 2016.  

The results of the 2010 census are slowly trickling in and it is telling us that minorities are becoming the majority. Policy makers are afraid of what this could mean in terms of the power balance in this country. It is on us, the people of color, the migrants, the undocumented, to overcome fear and step up to reaffirm that the values based on the dignity of the human being are the core principles to guide us in our future action.  

Yes, we can’t afford to wait but we have to be smart about creating our own capacity to influence the process of decision-making. In CATA we begin with our members and the importance for them to realize that is on them to be the principal actors. We depend on our friends and allies to understand the importance of being in solidarity and be supportive of our work.  

So it is in this spirit that we are presenting this Siembra, as an effort to show the direction that we are moving and the impact that we intend to have. We invite you all to be part of this effort that is both a challenge and an adventure.
For Mónica, the changes that happened after the stoppage did not last very long.

“At first, things changed. The supervisors were afraid of the people who were a part of the strike because they [the workers] had courage, so they let them have bathroom breaks, they respected them more because the supervisors wanted to avoid another scandal,” she said. “But now, it’s gone back to the same, the sexual harassment, terrible working tools.”

Because she was identified as a leader, Mónica was one of the few workers not given their jobs back after the stoppage was over. She is now working in a flower shop, but that hasn’t kept her from continuing to help organize her former coworkers.

“If we want a definitive change, we know the steps we have to follow, we have to organize ourselves, with leaders, to form a union,” she said. “We aren’t making excessive demands, we just want what is just, not to take advantage of the boss, just to be able to work with a just treatment.”

CATA, as a membership organization, can only be as strong as its members make it. They put themselves out there, many times putting their jobs at risk, because they want to do whatever it takes to make change, to fight for the rights they know they deserve. Mónica and Efrén have emerged as leaders within the membership of C.A.T.A, but more importantly, as leaders in their communities. They are respected and looked up to by the people they work with and, at great risk to themselves, stand up for what they know is right.

---

Meet the President of the Board of Directors

BY: HUMBERTO AVILA

Hello, my name is Humberto Avila and I am the president of the Board of Directors of CATA I was born in a small town in the state of Guanajuato in Mexico. Seeing the lack of work where I lived, I was convinced and seduced by the stories of my friends about the better life and better salary that I could have here, so I decided to come to the United States.

The salaries were certainly better but the working conditions were not. They were extremely dangerous, sometimes life-threatening and the work was very strenuous. I worked first in Illinois for one year, where I met people who were my friends and people who were friends of the boss, whose job was to take advantage of the workers.

After a year of working in Illinois, I moved north where some friends introduced me to CATA I started going to meeting and was very interested in the goals of the organization. It’s been twelve years now that I have been working with CATA I started out as a member, going to council meetings where I lived, then I became Vice-President of the Board and now I am President.

I have had the opportunity to meet with our members who come from all over, including the Caribbean, Mexico, and Guatemala. Because of what I have lived, I have seen the need for us to know what our rights are as workers and human beings, and that is what CATA teaches us. They educate us so that we understand what this means. For me it is a great advantage to be able to work with CATA, a philanthropic organization that helps others without distinction. To move forward, all we need is to be able to work together, CATA, it’s supporters, it’s members, and it’s potential members.
CATA’s members are divided up into three councils, known as Concilios. Each state that CATA works in has its own Concilio that meets roughly once a month to talk about issues they are facing at work, what’s going on in their communities, and to plan activities. This year, CATA also held a retreat for staff and members where they identified several goals of the organization including to increase membership and increase CATA’s fundraising capabilities. A series of check-in meetings with representatives from each of the Concilios are scheduled throughout the year leading up to the Annual Assembly in the fall.

This year, CATA has participated in many events with groups interested in supporting the organization. CATA shared a table with Harvest Local Food, a local foods delivery service, at the Philadelphia Farm and Food Fest where we distributed information about the organization and the Agricultural Justice Project to people with interest in issues of local, sustainable agriculture. Harvest Local Foods also sponsored a screening of three of CATA’s documentaries about workers’ rights and sustainable agriculture, and afterwards three CATA members answered questions about what it is like to work in the agriculture industry and the challenges they face. CATA members were also invited to speak with students and others at Villanova University on immigration issues.
CATA’S WORK: TRAININGS

An important part of CATA’s programming is the trainings that the organizers facilitate with groups of farmworkers. They conduct between 4-5 camp visits a week, offering training in how to protect oneself from pesticides, HIV education and prevention, heat safety, worker’s rights, and immigration. These trainings are important, both to educate workers about their legal rights and to provide a space for workers to discuss common problems at work and how they can work together to resolve them.

Here, a worker participates in a pesticide training, learning about the dangers of exposure to the pesticides used in farmwork.

The Food Justice Program

BY: NELSON CARRASQUILLO

For CATA, Food Justice work is becoming the frame and focus of our efforts to address the injustices within the food system. The food system has evolved towards foods that are highly processed and reliant on the use of chemicals and consumers are now beginning to realize the negative impacts on their health. This awareness of the impact of how food processing creates the opportunity to transmit diseases focuses the consumer’s on food safety. The human dimension, the workers, are left out when considering the food system.

The same can be said about policy makers. For example, the USDA argues that the workers issues are not their area of responsibility so consideration of the impact their policies can have on workers is not their main concern. Usually, when it comes to policy making, the interests of businesses and farmers are their primary concern.

From our point of view the food system has to be seen in a holistic manner in which each area is interconnected and reliant on the other; not in terms of its parts, but the relationship between them. When working conditions are safe and sanitary, the quality of food is better. When workers are paid and treated adequately, they can feed their families adequately.

With this in mind, our work has been focused on where we can make the maximum impact on the food system. In the last year we have framed our work into a complete program called the Food Justice Program, composed of:

- Food Justice Project with bases in New Jersey and Pennsylvania to engage families and workers to promote healthy eating habits among our children.
- Engagement of food workers around beginning to improve working conditions knowing that this will enable them to better care for their families.
- Expanding the Agricultural Justice Project to certify and recognize those farms and businesses doing the right thing.
- Participating in the Domestic Fair Trade Association which addresses the issue of Fair Trade in the USA and Canada, using a high bar approach to fair trade in a context where workers’ rights are a fundamental component.

We would like to express our thanks to our funders, the Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation, the Kresge Foundation, the Claneil Foundation and the Presbyterian Hunger Program for enabling our work.
Every day, CATA’s organizers hear from workers about the many abuses they face in low-paying, unsafe jobs. Our role is to bring together groups of workers to discuss problems they are encountering at work, and what they can do about it. We want workers to know that no matter what, they don’t have to put up with mistreatment. CATA’s members have come to the U.S. for a reason and it’s not to be exploited and taken advantage of at work. By working together, they can win more just working conditions.

This takes many forms. Sometimes, workers decide that they want to do a legal complaint to address workplace problems. In 2011, we were approached by a group of ten workers from a warehouse in New Jersey. A supervisor had falsely accused them of stealing from the company. He was threatening to make illegal deductions from their wages and was using racial slurs to refer to the workers, who were mostly Mexican. In conversations with CATA organizers, the workers also identified a number of health and safety problems at the plant, including unsafe storage shelving, employees being exposed to chemicals, and infestations of rats and birds in the warehouse.

The workers decided to request an inspection by OSHA, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, an agency of the U.S. government, to address some of the issues they had identified. CATA organizers accompanied one of the leaders of the group to talk directly with the OSHA Area Director and file a complaint against the company. An investigator conducted an inspection and found a number of health and safety violations that the company was required to fix. They also fined the company over $6000.

In other cases, workers may decide that they want support in directly confronting an employer about an issue they are experiencing. Often, this goes beyond what workers can address through legal means. For example, often workers are not paid a fair wage for the difficult work that they do, especially when supervisors are pressuring them to work extremely fast. However, if an employer is paying the legal minimum of $7.25 per hour, with overtime, there is not much that can be achieved with a legal complaint, since the employer is following the law. So workers can decide to take things into their own hands.

At a recent CATA Board meeting, a CATA leader shared a story about such a situation. He works at a plant nursery. Lately, he has been troubled because his pay has not increased much, if at all, in all of the time he has been with the company – about ten years. Yet, his cost of living has continued to increase. So, he talked to his other co-workers, and about fifteen of them went as a group to talk with their employer about it. In the end, the employer did agree to a pay increase, which showed up on their next paycheck. By staying unified and not being afraid to speak up, the workers were able to make a change.

CATA also has a long history of supporting workers who want to form a union. We recognize that groups of workers often can achieve immediate changes addressing specific issues at work – as in this story about workers organizing in favor of a pay increase, or workers who demand that the manager deal with an abusive supervisor. However, in many workplaces we know that workers are facing a variety of problems that cannot all be immediately resolved in this way. Workers can win more dignity at work by organizing a union, with a strong contract and a well-organized group of leaders who are ready to defend it.

The most successful example of this is the Kaolin Workers’ Union in Kennett Square, PA, an independent union of mushroom workers, mostly Mexican immigrants. CATA has accompanied the workers throughout their history: in their strike for a union election, the seven-year struggle to get the company to recognize the union, and the subsequent fights for their first and second contracts.

Don Efrén Diego, the President of the Union, is profiled in this edition of the SIEMBRA. CATA continues to educate workers in many workplaces about their right to form a union and benefit from the kinds of protections that the workers at Kaolin have fought so hard to achieve. We want all workers to know that they too can do it!
The Impact of Secure Communities

BY: MEGHAN HURLEY AND JESSICA CULLEY

“It is very worrisome; I didn’t know that [the police] shared information with Immigration.”

Víctor Panjoj, a member of CATA who is quoted above, told the story of his brother who had an outstanding ticket for driving without a license from two years ago. A few months ago, he was pulled over again by the police for a burned out headlight and, because he had not completely paid the previous ticket, he was put in jail.

Victor was completely in the dark about what happened to his brother. “In the first couple of days, I didn’t know what was going on, he disappeared Friday night. Saturday I went to work and then didn’t see him on Sunday. I thought he had been home, but gone out. I saw it in the newspaper,” he said.

According to Victor, his brother was held for 46 days and then was taken to immigration detention. He had to pay a $5,000 bond plus $870 in fines for his tickets. Now, he is in the process of being deported.

The Secure Communities Program, a program of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), has been widely contested around the U.S. The program is an information sharing program that links local police, the FBI, and ICE. When someone is fingerprinted by local police, as part of the process to check their criminal history, their immigration status is automatically checked. If they register as undocumented, they can be held and taken to a detention facility to begin the deportation process.

While the implementation of the program has varied widely, statistics published by Deportation Nation in March of 2011 listing the top 31 jurisdictions with non-criminal deportations showed that more than 40% of those identified and deported had NO criminal issues at all, and the only factor contributing to their removal was their status as an undocumented immigrant. In Philadelphia, PA, statistics showed that 62% of the people deported had no criminal record at all.

According to ICE, the point of the program is to deport undocumented immigrants who are serious criminals, but ICE’s own data tells a different story. According to a report published by the Berkeley Law School of the University of California, “...well over half of those deported through the Secure Communities had either no criminal convictions or have been convicted only of very minor offenses, including traffic offenses.”

“Supposedly it [the program] is meant to get rid of criminals in the country, supposedly. But all criminals are already registered with the FBI, not Immigration, so to connect the information to Immigration is a direct attack on the undocumented population,” stated Victor in his interview.

And he’s right, there are already several other programs like the Criminal Alien Program (CAP), also problematic, that exist to facilitate the deportation of convicted criminals. The Secure Communities Program widens the reach of ICE to people who may (or may not be) charged with a crime, and whose rights to due process are often completely circumvented by prematurely pushing them into the deportation system.

The program has also been criticized heavily as it promotes distrust of the police in the immigrant community. For Victor, it’s better to not have any contact with the police at all.

“And at the same time, there is distrust of the police. If I go somewhere and they ask me for ID and they won’t accept what ID I have, are they going to arrest me for not having legal documents,” he asked. “That’s scary to me, better to avoid all contact with them, there’s too much distrust.”

This program is not a just treatment of the undocumented population, the majority of whom are living here peacefully, working and supporting their families.

“What we are doing here is not bad, we are working, that’s it,” Victor said.

As of the end of May, Secure Communities has been implemented completely in all but four of the 50 states.
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