

# FROM THE GROUND UP

a publication of STUDENT ACTION WITH FARMWORKERS

VOLUME 4, NUMBER 1

APRIL 1996

## Focus on Farmworker Women

### Working With Farmworker Women: Reflections on my SAF Summer Internship

As I look back over my summer experience with SAF I am "blown away" by the countless things that I have learned. At the beginning of the year I thought that the videos I had seen and the materials I had read had given me a firm foundation for a lifetime of farmworker advocacy. That was before I met Clara Hernandez.

Clara was born in Mexico City and came to the U.S. with her family to work in the fields of Florida. Throughout the seasons, she and her family followed the migrant stream through North Carolina, and eventually settled here. Clara studied nursing at a local community college for two years until she decided that she wanted to open a Mexican food store. So far, her store, "La Charrita," has been a huge success and has proven to be a central gathering place for the migrant community. Clara's involvement with this project has made her a central community figure.

This summer I attempted to coordinate a discussion group for farmworker women in

*Continued on the next page*

### What You Need to Know about Women Farmworkers:

- More than 1/4 of the estimated 2.5 million migrant and seasonal farmworkers in the United States today are women (U.S. Dept. of Labor. "Migrant Farmworkers: Pursuing Security in an Unstable Labor Market." Research Report #5. May 1994).
- About 57% of all women farmworkers are U.S. born, as compared with 34% of men (U.S. Dept. of Labor. Research Report #4. March 1993).
- The discrepancy in income between male and female farmworkers is caused by the confinement of women to lower-paying tasks, resulting in incomes 2/3 less than those of male farmworkers (The California Commission on the Status of Women. "Campesinas: Women Farmworkers in the California Agricultural Labor Force. 1978).
- The average work year of farmworker women is 4.9 months, although 61% say that they would like to be employed year round (The Committee on Women in Agriculture. "A Study of Agricultural Workers in Ventura County, California." 1993).
- Farmworker women are 2.5 times more likely to be unemployed than men (Ibid).
- 24% of farmworker men have paid sick leave and 49% have health insurance, while only 11% and 35% of farmworker women (respectively) have the same benefits (Ibid).
- Over 1/3 of farmworker women have experienced domestic violence in the past year (Evaluation of the Migrant Clinicians Network, April 1995).

### Also in this issue . . .

"WOMEN ON THE MOVE".....	3
"LIVING IN FEAR: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN FARMWORKER COMMUNITIES".....	4
CALENDAR OF UPCOMING EVENTS/OPPORTUNITIES.....	6
BOOK REVIEWS.....	6

## SAF Mission:

*To bring students and farmworkers together to learn about each other's lives, share resources and skills, improve conditions for farmworkers, and build diverse coalitions working for social change.*

---

## SAF Board of Directors:

Darnell Arnoult/ Chair  
Susan Brock/ Vice Chair  
Alexandra Lightfoot/ Secretary  
Karen Miller/ Treasurer  
Pam DiStefano  
Sarah Carroll  
Alejandra Okie  
Katie Pomerans  
John Moses  
Connie Gates  
Ted Parrish

---

## SAF Staff:

Margaret Horn, Executive Director  
Melinda Wiggins,  
Program Director  
Josh Harkinson,  
Documentary Coordinator

---

*Student Action with Farmworkers is a 501(c)3 non-profit funded in part by: The Corporation for National Service, The Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation, The Presbyterian Church Women's Ministries, The Kathleen Price Bryan Family Fund, The North Carolina Humanities Council, Church Women United, and donations from local individuals, students, churches, and farmworker agencies.*

---

For more information or to submit articles, contact:  
SAF, P.O. Box 90803  
Durham, NC 27708  
Phone: 919-660-3652  
FAX: 919-681-7600

---

Editor: Josh Harkinson

Published by SAF

Copyright 1996

## Working With Farmworker Women *Continued from page 1*

order to form a support system and forum through which they could identify their own needs. Since Clara already had played a large role in the lives of many migrant women, we asked her if she would be interested in serving as the group leader for this project. She was excited about the idea and we quickly immersed ourselves in planning. We thought that we were going to have a huge turn-out based on the responses of the women we had talked with and invited to the group.

On the day of the meeting, no women showed up. I thought we had covered all of the necessary bases needed to get the women there. But as we were trouble-shooting, Clara mentioned that it was possible that the women didn't come because their husbands didn't want them to. Latino men, she explained, often do not want their wives or girlfriends to go out and do things by themselves.

Clara's input was based on her first-hand experience and proved to be extremely useful in our plans to re-structure the meetings so that more women would be able to participate. To make the discussion groups accessible to a large number of women, we decided that instead of asking the women to come to our meetings, we would take our meetings to them. We thus "piggy-backed" our meeting with another event that Latinos in the area were already

attending. The Hispanic church in Stem, NC had activity days on Sundays for the local Latino community, and we saw this as the perfect opportunity to gather large numbers of women together for our group, and at the same time, have the men nearby so that they would not be concerned about their wives or girlfriends.

Since the "catastrophe" of the first-ever Farmworker Women's Discussion Group in Oxford, NC, four successful meetings have been held at the Hispanic church with fifteen to twenty women participating each time. These meetings have focused on health issues, dental care, and nutrition. More importantly, the women have been able to get together for the first time as a group to identify their needs and concerns about their lives and their families. The goal of the discussion group is to do away with feelings of isolation and provide the Latino women with a sense of community that all-too-often is not felt in their lives here in the United States.

Without Clara's insight, we might have lost hope in the success of the discussion group—thus depriving the women of a wonderful opportunity to establish valuable relationships and to realize that they are not alone.

*by Palmar Plonk, 1995 SAF Intern*

