

FROM THE GROUND UP

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Reflections on the Summer: Excerpts from Interns' Journals

Into the Fields: Internship and Leadership Development Program

SAF's Into the Fields Program provides annual opportunities for 30 bilingual (Spanish/English) college students to support farmworkers as they address health and safety concerns, educational barriers, unfair policies, and workplace discrimination.

Into the Fields was SAF's first official program and traces its history back to a number of internship programs based at Duke University in the 1970s and 1980s. The summer of 1993 marked the first Into the Fields Program.

Since 1993, nearly 350 SAF interns, representing farmworker families, public and private universities, and community colleges, have spent their summers working with over 65,000 farmworkers to improve farm labor conditions.

Interns participate in a week-long orientation, a mid-summer training, and a final retreat to prepare them for their field work. Interns spend the majority of their time working with farmworkers through rural health clinics, migrant education programs, legal aid, immigrant assistance organizations, community groups, and labor unions.

In addition, interns complete documentary projects, participate in the Levante theater group, conduct community presentations, and write weekly guided reports. The journals serve as a way for interns to reflect on their summer experiences and develop plans for continuing to support farmworkers.

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Interns protest Mt. Olive Pickles at a Kroger in Asheboro, NC. Photo by Libby Manly

Dora Cruz, University of South Florida Placement: Episcopal Farmworker Ministry

I work with the Episcopal Farmworker Ministry in Newton Grove. I teach ESL on Thursdays at a camp and on Sundays here at the Episcopal Church. I am also participating in the Sister Communities Project.

This past Sunday was the first time I taught ESL; I was a little nervous at first because I had never taught a class, but it turned out grand. I thought the students really wanted to learn and that they were also very motivated. It felt so good teaching that class. I actually felt that they learned a few things; hopefully they felt the same way.

In addition, we do outreach here at the ministry; we go out to the camps and give food that is left over from Sunday. We also go and look for camps and see how many people are in the camp and make them aware of the Episcopal Farmworker Ministry. Going out to the camps and seeing the conditions they live in just made me even more aware of the problems that exist in the agricultural industry in reference to the farmworkers. Many are intimidated for a variety of reasons.

I have seen and heard from H2-A workers that they are at the mercy of their boss and they have to abide by the boss' rules and what he says. They have to be ready for work at anytime. For example, when my coworker Raul and I go out to camps and invite them to participate in an activity, their answer is always yes we would like to but, we can not guarantee anything because the boss might not let us. We might have to work and we don't have a say on when we want to work. For most farmworkers that's exactly what they came for, and they do not want to cause any problems.

They come here looking for a better life, but it seems like it is just as it is back home. **Listening to farmworkers and hearing their stories just makes me understand that everyone deserves their basic human rights no matter what their situation is.** Meeting all these farmworkers just made me more of an advocate; hopefully with the skills I learn I can take them with me wherever I go and also help anyone who can be helped by me.

SAF is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization whose mission is 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.

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Send an email with the word "subscribe" to <farmworkers-request@duke.edu> to receive SAF's weekly Action Alerts about legislation affecting farmworkers, organizing campaign updates, job opportunities, and campus events.

For more information or to submit articles, contact:

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STAFF UPDATES

SAF would like to welcome two amazing new staff members, Nadeen Bir and Ilda Santiago, who both joined the SAF staff in August. SAF also would like to thank our outgoing staff members for their dedication, commitment, and service to SAF's mission linking students and farmworkers to improve farmworker conditions.

After graduating from the College of Charleston in May 2002, **Nadeen Bir** participated in SAF's Into the Fields summer internship, working at the Episcopal Farmworker Ministry and the National Farm Worker Ministry. She then served as an AmeriCorps ACCESS member with El Pueblo for a year. Nadeen is the 2003-2004 SAF Apprentice and will be responsible for coordinating the Into the Fields program. For questions about the internship, contact Nadeen at itfcampo@duke.edu.

SAF's Education Director **Ilda Santiago** is originally from Oaxaca, Mexico. She moved to the United States fifteen years ago and was the first in her family to attend college. Ilda was a SAF intern during the summer of 1998, during which time she worked with El Centro Hispano. Ilda will coordinate Project Levante, SAF's leadership development program for migrant youth.

SAF's Education Director **Ramiro Arceo**, originally from Colima, Mexico and the son of migrant farmworkers, recently began working with Teach for America. Ramiro was a SAF intern during the summer of 1996 and began working with SAF full-time in 2000 coordinating Project Levante. Ramiro helped develop over 15 AIM peer support groups for migrant youth in the NC public schools. Ramiro can be reached in Baltimore at ramiroarceo@yahoo.com.

SAF's 2002-2003 Apprentice **Esteban Echeverria** began working with SAF in 1998, as a participant in the 1998 Into the Fields Program. During his apprenticeship this past year, Esteban coordinated College Days for migrant youth in North Carolina and worked on both state and national in-state tuition legislation for undocumented students. This fall, Esteban will begin law school at NC Central University and join SAF's board of directors.

SAF Program Director **Libby Manly** began her tenure with SAF when she graduated from Guilford College in 1997. She served as a Public Ally working at SAF to coordinate Project Levante. In 1998, she became the Program Director and began coordinating the Into the Fields Internship Program. Libby has dedicated 6 years to improving SAF's internship program linking students with farmworkers in the Carolinas! Libby can be reached in Boston at libbymanly@yahoo.com.

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**Emily Hall, Warren Wilson College
Placement: National Farm Worker
Ministry**

I just finished my second week of work with the National Farm Worker Ministry. It has been incredible so far! The Ministry's mission is to give church support for farmworker organizing. I'm working primarily with the Sister Communities Program. The program is designed to bring together farmworkers and church groups in a cultural exchange. We hope that this will raise awareness of farmworker realities and reduce the isolation in which they live. Also, we want to encourage people to know about the lives of other people that live close by, but that they usually don't come in contact with. We work with the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC) to build support for their organizing efforts.

In the past weeks, I have been collecting ideas for activities for the Sister Communities visits, and also doing some outreach in the camps. We have done two Sunday visits. The first was with a group from the Eno River Unitarian Universalist Fellowship. We went to a large camp in Greene County. We were pleasantly surprised by the number of camp residents who wanted to participate. There was some shyness on all sides, I think, but also a lot of interest.

The second visit was with the White Memorial Presbyterian Church from Raleigh. The camp we visited had about 25 residents, and they were very receptive of the church visitors. We introduced ourselves, ate, and played some icebreaker games. I was a little nervous because I was in charge of leading one of the games, but it all went well and I think by the end we had built some trust with each other. **It is really beautiful to be part of the sharing that has gone on, because I feel like the participants are learning a lot about each other, and recognizing that although there are a lot of differences in backgrounds, lifestyles, etc., there are also a lot of ways that we can all connect.**

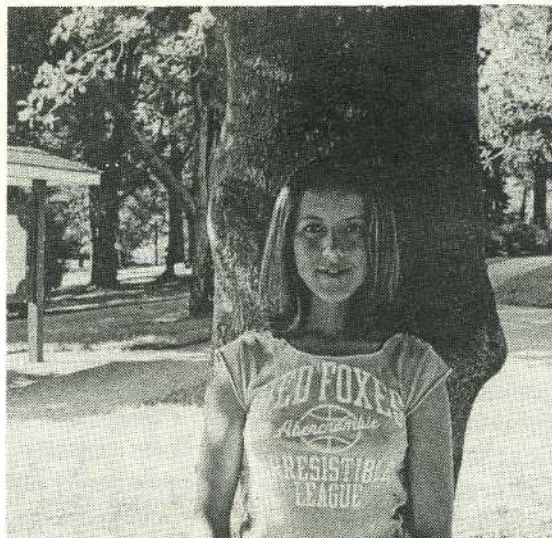
**Rosemary Sharples, Frontier College
Placement: USC High School Equivalency Program**

I am in beautiful, however humid, Columbia, South Carolina right now, volunteering with an organization that provides migrant, oftentimes undocumented, Mexican agricultural workers the opportunity to earn a high-school equivalency certificate in Spanish. We also give ESL classes, sometimes intermingled with the GED and pre-GED classes. The ESL classes are my favorite, mostly because I had a hard enough time with geometry in English the first time around!

At this point, most of my lessons have come from my co-workers more so than my students, who I am just getting acquainted with. The wonderful thing is that the majority of my colleagues who are also doing this internship come from migrant agricultural families themselves. SAF provides volunteers the opportunity to develop leadership skills as well as work with a population they are not entirely removed from themselves. During our training, other SAF interns shared stories of their move from Mexico to the United States, or staying in Mexico with family after their parents left and eventually joining them in the U.S. They told of yearly migrations from state to state to follow different harvests. Other interns referred to themselves as 'growing up in the fields' and talked about the strong bonds in their families that were built working together day after day, year after year.

What I have seen in the Carolinas with a population of farmworkers that are not just men on their own spending months away from their families, but whole families working together, is the tremendous commitment between parents and their children. The risks that they have taken with and for their children, and the hope that conditions in the U.S. will eventually provide a better life than that which they left behind. **Many parents' motivation for increasing their own literacy both in Spanish and English is to facilitate helping their children with their school work or working more secure and better paying jobs to help pay for their children's education.** All of this in the hopes that their children's lives won't have to be as difficult as their own have been.

Last night in our ESL class, one of my students recounted that he worked another 90 hour week. Although he has been working in South Carolina in the Christmas tree industry for two years now away from his wife and two children in Mexico, he passed his GED exam earlier this year and comes out to English class for two hours every Wednesday evening.



Intern Maria Escareño at
a SAF retreat
Photo by Libby Manly

