

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.

