

SAF

STUDENT ACTION WITH FARMWORKERS

Inside this Issue:

- Stories from the Summer.....1
- 2006 ITF Intern Journals...2-5
- Levante Theater Report.....5
- Upcoming Events & Announcements.....6
- SAF Supporters.....6



This summer helped me to understand that I can make a difference in someone's life. It has also taught me that if I want my people to speak up for themselves, I need to start speaking up more.

-Nancy Preciado, 2006 Intern

Check out these photos of the 2006 ITF Interns!

Stories from the Summer: Focus on Intern Writings

by Lupe Huitron, Internship Coordinator of Student Action with Farmworkers

Who are farmworkers? They are our neighbors and friends. In some cases, they are our brothers and sisters, our mothers and fathers. Who are we? We are the children of farmworkers, the neighbors and friends who choose to stand beside them in a unified call for justice and equality.

I was born a poor farmworkers daughter- farm work has been and continues to be a part of my life. When I came to North Carolina one year ago, I wanted to change the world, give my knowledge and experience to workers. I never imagined that I would receive so much in return. Visiting with farmworkers gave me the opportunity to know their fears, concerns, and struggles. Many come here with dreams of a better future and with the belief that if they work hard enough, nothing bad will happen to them. Yet the reality is that many will never reach their dreams- because our society does not value them enough to give them the means to do so.

So I ask myself: *Why do this work?*

Since 1992, SAF has given students like me an opportunity to work alongside one of the most marginalized populations in our country through the Into the Fields summer internship and leadership development program. This past summer, twenty-five college students from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds worked collectively to support farmworkers as they addressed health and safety concerns, wage & hour issues and discrimination in the work place.

The following writings chronicle the experiences of ten young people as they encountered and interacted with farmworkers in North and South Carolina. These journal entries give us a unique insight into the lives of farmworkers and advocates alike, portraying first hand accounts of privilege, oppression, and poor living and working conditions. They also narrate stories of dignity, humility, personal growth and learning. I hope that the passion, sorrow and camaraderie the interns express through these writings will educate and inspire you.

When we think of an advocate, many conjure up the idea of a brave, heroic leader who saves those in need. Ironically, it is not always we as advocates who lead the way, but rather those we serve who educate and inspire us. They are the ultimate instructors: teaching us sacrifice, hard work and dedication. I believe that this is why I do this work, not for what I can give to farmworkers but for what I may be privileged to receive.



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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<farmworkers-request@duke.edu>

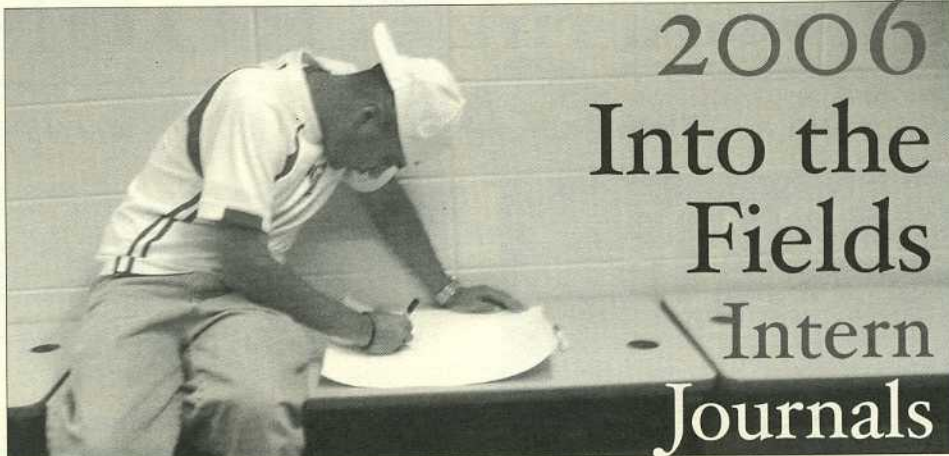
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2006 Into the Fields Intern Journals

Sarah Stephens- June 21, 2006

"Keep going and make a right at the red flag."

We had been driving down the same twisting country road for about 20 minutes and on our left huge brick houses lined a man-made lake. The cluster of houses was bordered by an ornate sign labeled "Buckhorn Plantation." As we passed the houses I still could not see any sign of a red flag. "You just missed it, turn around." As we turned around I saw that the "red flag" was nothing but a 4 by 5 inch piece of red plastic attached to a small wire sticking out of the overgrown grass. We pull onto a rocky dirt rode and drive through the endless fields of sweet potato plants. After about a quarter of a mile we drive through a row of trees and into a clearing with a set of three cement barns with red tin roofs.

As we pull up in a minivan to pick up patients for the clinic the few women quickly run inside and several men duck back into their barracks (the terminology used for farmworker residences which are primarily converted barns). Within seconds the area is empty of people. I approach the kitchen door and a small woman peeks outside. I introduce myself as a health outreach worker and read the list of names of men who have medical appointments that evening. The woman continues peering at me through the crack in the screen door, abruptly says that none of the men are there and closes the door.

I stood outside the kitchen alone and confused...frightened eyes looked at me through closed doors.

"They are afraid.... They don't know your face..."
-I am told.

They are in constant fear of immigration, of being deported, of losing their job. Their undocumented status prevents them from receiving healthcare, prevents them from filing housing complaints, prevents them of rights they are guaranteed. They live in a culture of fear and intimidation, and even a 5'4" female from a health clinic could pose a threat.

- Our cheap food comes at high costs.

Our immigration policy allows for cheap labor and unregulated working and living conditions. My political views on immigration policy have been changed over the past few weeks, because I saw the precedence and need for policy change. Keeping workers in fear of deportation is a form of oppression, just as many black Americans were oppressed throughout US history. During orientation SAF showed us a map of the locations of the concentrations of sharecroppers and slaves over a hundred years ago. The SAF interns all noticed that we would be living in the same places.

We pull out past the red flag, van empty; out of the 7 workers we were supposed to pick up none came...out of fear, out of lack of money...it is difficult to know. The water ripples over the lake and the Buckhorn Plantation sign swings in the breeze. Our food has always come at a price. Oppression in the South never ended...it still continues- just more quietly.*

Jessica García- June 28, 2006

One of the days that I was doing outreach -I don't remember the exact date- I remember talking to one of the farmworkers and I started asking him questions of what part of México he came from and what was it that brought him here... After he responded to those questions I opened up to him and told him about myself, that my parents were from México and that they worked in the fields as well.

He then seemed to be more in his comfort zone and he began to tell me how difficult it was for him to raise his family and he spoke more in depth about them. I then began to tell him how sometimes, even though we live here in the United States already, we still go through our rough moments. I began to tell him briefly about my childhood experiences, even though at the time of telling him I started choking up. Conversations like the one I had with the farmworker are what allow us to make a better connection with them in helping them. This is something I wrote from our conversation once I got home:

Sin Título

Todo nuestro trabajo, todo nuestro esfuerzo
Es un paso más para no quebrarnos el pescuezo.
Semana, día y noche, fines de semana
Le pedimos tanto a Dios que mejore el mañana.

Mis hombros me duelen, mi cuerpo se agota
Cuando el trabajo no es bueno
siento la lluvia gota a gota.
Mis pensares se hundien entre mi nostalgia
Hundiendo mi corazón, suspirando por magia.

Para mis padres o para mi esposa e hijos
Levanto cada cosecha para pronto volver a verlos.
Camino por el campo como un vagabundo
Navegando con mi Dios adelante
Recorriendo por todo el mundo.

Untitled

All of our hard work, all of our strength
It's a closer step...to not break our necks
Weeks, days and nights, weekends
We ask God to enlighten our tomorrow

My shoulders are sore and hurt,
my body feels weak
When the work of harvesting is not good,
I feel the rain, raindrop by raindrop
Sinking my heart, hoping for magic

For my father and mother or wife and children
I pick and pull every harvest to see them real soon.
I walk through the fields like a vagabond
Walking with my God in front of me
Traveling the world, to seek what's ahead.

Amy Gellatly- July 10, 2006

I thoroughly enjoyed mid retreat. This group of interns is incredible. Never before in my life have I felt so close to such a big group of people that I've only spent a total of 15 days with.

There is a certain characteristic that I have become more aware of this summer, and it is called humility... During our SAF orientation one intern mentioned that her humility made her strong. If you had asked me before that week to give a list of characteristics associated with strength and success I would have included words like determination, courage, self-confidence, knowledge, being understanding and accepting. I've been thinking a lot about the culture in which I was raised which I feel like has always told me that I could achieve anything I wanted. I'm starting to wonder if it was all for the right reasons. Is it because American society believes in the potential of every individual or more just those who are born with privilege?

"During our SAF orientation one intern mentioned that her humility made her strong"

I am starting to understand the meaning of humility by my visits with farmworkers. My only interaction with arrogance during the entire internship occurred when a grower came to his front door in his underwear to see what I wanted. I felt an absolute lack of respect from this man towards myself as a woman. This experience really emphasized for me how welcoming and respectful the farmworkers have been to my fellow intern and me during our many unexpected visits to their homes. They may be proud of who they are and where they come from, but they express this in a very peaceful way that never involves anyone being better than anyone else.

So one of my new goals for the summer is to become a more humble person- for example not to get so many thrills out of personal successes... Humility is a way to be strong and believe in yourself without your strength coming at the expense of any other person, and I am very grateful that I have been able to meet so many wonderfully strong people this summer. *

Erica Bratz- July 14, 2006

It is really interesting for me to begin to understand the need for connections to be made when working toward social change. I am not just talking about finding all of the people who think, dress, and feel the same way I do, but seeking out people who, personally for me, I would never have been talking to. In order to effect change, comfort boundaries need to be crossed. In my case, it probably makes more sense for me to take the first step and go meet a religious community group than for them to come to my anarchist collective. I have understood for some time the need for intergenerational movement building, as well as all other sorts of cross-pollination of ideas with groups who are different than me in various ways. *

Ben Gaspar- August 2, 2006

What is an advocate? To me, an advocate means lots of things. In my eyes, an advocate is someone who stands up for his/her people, someone who will make sacrifices not just for the community but for an individual. An advocate to me is someone who will fight to the bitter end in the name of peace and justice, an advocate is a leader, a hero, and most importantly- a friend.

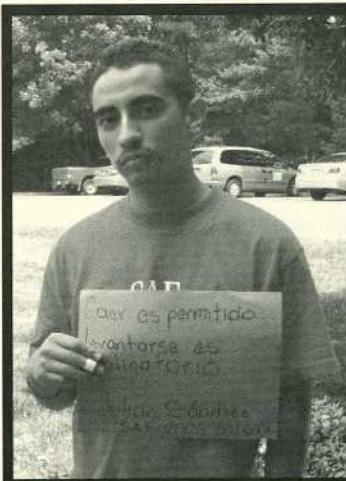
I would consider myself an advocate for my people- the Guatemalan people. I believe in social justice and peace, and I also believe that we are all equal regardless of what your skin color is, or what religion you believe in, or where you are from. As students, we play a major role in this community and in this world. We are the key elements for those in need. As students, our roles are to educate others, learn from each other, share new ideas with each other, and work together. I feel that I am part of this movement for farmworkers, I believe what I am doing makes a difference in people's lives and am thankful for that. *

Rito Escareño- August 2, 2006

Two months ago the word SAF was only three letters in my mind. No matter how hard I looked at it I only saw the letter S, the letter A, and the letter F. Now, a few days before I go back to New Mexico, every time I hear or see SAF my mind is clustered with happy memories and a feeling of comfort that only true friends and family can give. Memories of SAFistas running around with a smile on their faces trying to find a free chair when they hear *super choque*, and students and Smithfield workers joined together for justice are all part of this year's SAF experience.

SAF also showed me how important it is to be an activist for those people who are unable to protest when a plane sprays them with pesticides or when they break their backs due to long hours of work. Images like the toilets without divisions, and a farmworker extending his hand in a clinic as he showed me his burns due to an allergic reaction are reminders of how much I really need to support farmworkers. Those memories somehow were always connected to my family. I now appreciate even more the sacrifice that "mi papa" has made in order for me to study and to have these work experiences and personal experiences.

The theater group will also be missed since it made a big impact on me this summer. I will always remember how we sang "El Rey" next to other farmworkers sharing a smile and a good time. Those memories helped me realize that I made a difference; that I made someone happy at least for a few hours. I was honored to hear how farmworkers told me to continue studying and that someday I would be able to help them even more. They seemed proud that migrant students who formed the theater group were helping them and that we would never forget about them. This is my SAF experience and it is not a thing of the past after I leave; I am certain that somehow it will be a part of my future, and it will remain with me forever. *



...now that I think about it, every experience has impacted me in different ways.

They all have made me realize how lucky I am and also how much power I have in me to help farmworkers or any immigrant in general.

-Julian Sanchez

Julian Sanchez- August 2, 2006

When I heard that I had been selected to participate in the SAF internship program I could not believe it. I had heard about SAF only once and it sounded really great. I had heard about the help that the SAF interns provide to farmworkers and about all the advocacy projects that they do to try to improve farmworkers' living conditions. However, nobody told me about another great side of this internship. Nobody told me that I would be able to meet and get to really know some other great students who also want to make a change in the life of farmworkers. It was a place not only to learn about farmworkers, but also to learn about myself and my strengths. I believe that SAF will help me grow as a person as well as a leader in my community.

Throughout the internship I have had some great experiences. Some of them have been really frustrating, but some others have been just really fulfilling. It would be almost impossible for me to choose an experience which has impacted me the most. I have answered this question many times, but now that I think about it, every experience has impacted me in different ways. They all have made me realize how lucky I am and also how much power I have in me to help farmworkers or any immigrant in general.

Coming to this conclusion has probably been the greatest piece of knowledge that I have acquired throughout the course of my summer experience. Now I know that I can be a great ally to farmworkers. I can use this new piece of knowledge and take it back to California to put in practice everything I have learned. Hopefully I will be able to find an organization similar to my placement or similar to SAF so that I can continue being an ally and working to improve farmworkers' lives. *

Mayra Albor- August 7, 2006

This summer has been the most wonderful yet, shocking and educative I have ever had. It has taught me many things of which I was ignorant, about many things of which are valuable and that I will always carry along with me. It has changed my life completely and now I understand the real dangers that my parents as well as other farmworkers are exposed to while working in the fields.

The most shocking things that I have encountered during this summer are all those stories I have heard from farmworkers. Their life and sacrifices they make to have a better life and survive. The way they live here, how they are treated. I never thought or expected any one to live under such awful conditions and do nothing about it, and on top of all that come back year-by-year to do the same thing and live the same way or worse.

I thought that the only ways of getting sick from working in the fields were falling down from a ladder while trying to harvest the fruit or tripping while working, only because this has happened in my family and I have witnessed it.

Now I am more aware of things and the reality of my family. Things make more sense to me now. All those times my parents would come home from work and the strong odor in their shirts and then hearing them complain about being always so tired, dizzy, and overwhelmed. Now I feel more knowledgeable about the issues that farmworkers face... I know what my mission is now, which is to go back home and let my family, my relatives, and people I know know about the danger of working in the fields and let them know that I will be there to help them out if they need me. I will always help farmworkers one way or another, because in my mind I have a quote that says "Si Se Puede" and I believe that is totally true!*

Erica Bondy - August 9, 2006

After going into camps, interpreting in the clinic, meeting people like our documentary subjects, and even just working on small projects in the office, I began to learn SO much. I feel like a different person. Seeing the injustice faced every day by the people we work with and to see the racial tensions and disconnections we are fighting to resolve changed me. The living and working conditions of farmworkers here in the South persist for no other reason than close-mindedness and prejudice...

Every time I'm faced with an audience that knows very little about the things I've learned and seen in our own backyards, I see it as an opportunity to change minds and give back some of what I've learned in hopes that at least one person may go home, do some research, and feel motivated to change the current situation. I feel that if they can see me, and see my dedication to the cause, then perhaps they see that no matter who they are they, too, have the power to fight against the injustice and for the basic human rights of farmworkers.*



Top: The last scene ends with fists raised **Bottom:** Nancy gives a photo to worker. Photos by Aylwin Lo and Bart Evans



iSacúdete! Theater for Social Change

SAF's Into the Fields interns performed the new play *Sacudete!* during the summer of 2006 to inspire dialogue and action among farmworkers, to address concerns about their health, housing and environmental conditions. The actors reached over 130 workers in 6 performances.

Sacudete! was written for SAF by Fausto E. Arellano, a poet and playwright from Ecuador, and likens Don Quijote to a migrant worker pursuing the American Dream. The play encourages workers to "shake off" fear and other obstacles they face and work towards justice in the fields. Student actors provided dinner for the workers, performed the play, led group discussions and took polaroid photos with workers as mementos.

"It was very good- there were things [in the play] that really happen in the fields. They [the characters] teach us things that we don't know..."

- worker commenting on the play

HOLIDAY SALE!

* Get your Sustainably Grown Fraser Fir Wreath!

Your purchase of a beautiful Fraser Fir wreath, grown in the Appalachian Mts. of North Carolina, will benefit SAF and Certified Organic Growers Linda and Aubrey Raper. (18" and 24" wreaths available, plain or hand-decorated) Contact SAF by Nov. 20th to reserve yours!

* 'Tis the Season to Buy SAF Gift Baskets!

This season we're offering the *Cafe Gift* featuring fair trade coffee, a union-made SAF mug, and an exclusive CD of student documentary work titled *Sounds of the Summer*. We're also offering the *Gourmet Gift*, including an assortment of hand-made treats and our new *Campesino Cookbook*, featuring recipes from farmworkers and SAF alumni!

Shipping available on all orders!

* Purchase Classic SAF Merchandise!

We're offering *The Human Cost of Food*, as well as our *Sí Se Puede* T-shirt, *Levante Theater* DVD, *Sí Se Puede* Mug, Notecards, and a new Children's Book featuring the art of Maria Okie Baum.

* Make a donation to SAF in Honor of a Friend!

A great gift idea for that person that has everything! Make a donation in any amount that you choose in honor of your friend, co-worker, or family member.

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SAF Alumni in action!

Above: SAF Alumnae Lori Khamala, Nancy Preciado, Lynne Walter, and Remedios Martinez pose with United Farm Workers Co-Founder Dolores Huerta (middle) at the 2006 National Farm Worker Ministry Youth and Young Adult Summit in Keene, CA

Announcements:



SAF is Celebrating its 15 year anniversary in 2007! **Mark Your Calendars-** The SAF 15-year Anniversary Celebration will happen on **August 10th, 2007!**

New Staff! SAF would like to welcome Rocío (Rosie) Rangel, our new Migrant Youth Director, to the SAF staff. Rocío interned with the National Farm Worker Ministry as an ITF intern in 2005. Congratulations, Rosie!

New Resource! SAF and our partners in the NC Council of Churches Farmworker Ministry Committee have just completed the first edition of the **NC Farmworker Institute Speakers Bureau.** Visit our website to download a copy in pdf format or contact us to find a speaker for your organization!

Upcoming Events:

- October 27-28.....** SAF Solidarity Day, McDonald's National Days of Action
- November 18-26.....** SAF-STITCH Delegation to Guatemala
- December 8-10.....** Southern Human Rights Organizers' Conf., Houston, TX
- February 20, 2007.....** SAF Solidarity Day
- March 25-31, 2007.....** National Farmworker Awareness Week
- August 10, 2007.....** SAF 15 year Anniversary Celebration, Durham, NC

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