Farm work is dangerous work, but access to health services is a huge challenge for farmworkers in North Carolina. Poverty wages, lack of transportation, isolation and language barriers result in an inability to afford basic health costs or even access to free clinics.

Through SAF’s 2011 Sowing Seeds for Change health fellowship 5 recent college graduates reached hundreds of farmworkers during the agricultural season (June-November) by enrolling them in migrant health clinics, transporting them to doctors appointments, interpreting for them during clinic visits, conducting health assessments, and educating them about health issues including HIV/STI prevention, pesticides and heat illness.

Fellows also completed documentary, theater and community health projects with farmworkers. In addition, they organized events and wrote articles and blogs to raise awareness about farmworkers in the community. Fellows presented about farmworkers and their SAF experience to over 525 community members through various public speaking opportunities.

Thank You Funders!
Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs
Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation
Environmental Protection Agency
North Carolina Farmworker Health Program

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“By working in the clinic here in Linville and shadowing interpreters on appointments with specialists, I have seen how important it is for nurses, staff, and medical providers in North Carolina to speak Spanish.”

“I have also learned about how helpful it can be for medical providers to have a stronger understanding of the challenges that some of their farmworker patients face, and I hope to one day be a doctor who can serve this group of extremely hard-working people.”

“Through SAF assignments like journals, the fellows’ blog, my personal blog, and presentations to UNC students, I’ve become much more aware of policy issues affecting farmworkers and am informed enough to keep up-to-date on these topics.”

“I am more committed and informed in my choices as a citizen and a consumer. My work informs the conversations I have with friends and family, and moves me to talk about what I’ve learned whenever and wherever I can. In this sense, SAF has made me a farmworker friend and advocate for life.”

Robyn Levine
UNC-Chapel Hill
Appalachian Regional Health Boone, NC

Nandini Kumar
Duke University
Piedmont Health Services Moncure, NC

Kathryn Cox Shrader
UNC-Chapel Hill
Wake County Migrant Health Fuquay Varina, NC
“Even though I already had some exposure to farmworker issues, the SAF fellowship really allowed me to deepen my understanding of the struggle for farmworker justice and deepen my connections with the farmworker community. Through the workshops, journals, my placement and interactions with farmworkers, SAF showed me how deeply the injustices against farmworkers are rooted in globalization, racism and poverty.”

“Even though organizing change is a difficult, challenging and arduous project, I saw glimmers of hope each time a farmworker opened up about his/her experiences, each time we did a theater workshop in the camps and each time we carried farmworkers’ voices to the greater community. Change may be slow, but it’s like a steady stream that grows into a mighty river capable of carving into rock. SAF has equipped me with the tools necessary to begin carving rivulets of social change in my community. I am very grateful for that.”

“I had an encounter with a migrant worker from Florida. He was very sick. He was able to see a doctor for very little, and get his prescriptions at little cost. He paid $5 for his visit. He said ‘this may seem like very little to most people but for me this was worth 13 buckets of sweet potatoes.’”

“He said he was so thankful for the services of the migrant health program. It was a positive experience to connect him with the program, but it also made me think about all the farmworkers who do not have access to these services. What do they do?”

Fellows health outreach and health education work consisted of many responsibilities:
The Community Awareness Project was a true success this season - Luis’ articles were published as well Nandini’s. It was really impressive to see the impact the interns did during such a short period of time. Another complete success was the participation in the health fairs, it was a great way to inform community organizations about the clinics, the Migrant Health Outreach Program and SAF.

-Patricia Morales, Piedmont Health Services

Fellows and interns organized the Copa Cosecha soccer tournament, hosted by Carolina Family Health Centers Inc. The event was designed to give farmworkers a break from work. 200 workers from 6 different camps, community members, non-profits and farmworker agencies attended the event.

Fellows Marichel & Natalie pose with SAF interns and farmworkers at the soccer tournament in Spring Hope, NC, July 2011

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Natalie helped organize over 200 people to celebrate farmworkers in Benson, NC on October 9, 2011. The Agricultural Exposition, hosted by the NC Farm Workers Project drew many farmworkers, local churches, organizations and community members, including the Mayor. There was an art exhibit featuring 60 handprints & stories from local farmworkers, free food, music, kids activities and tabling by organizations that work with farmworkers.

Fellows Marichel & Natalie pose with SAF interns and farmworkers at the soccer tournament in Spring Hope, NC, July 2011

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Katie (center) holds a sign at a community awareness-raising action in support of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers' campaign targeting Quiznos Restaurants. SAF Orientation, Winston-Salem, NC, June 2011.
Community Health Projects

Through the Community Health Project, fellows engaged 40 farmworkers in small groups to increase education and take action around an occupational health issue of their choice. This project gave fellows the opportunity to engage workers on a deeper level than their usual one-time health education encounters.

Project Goals:
- To enable a small group of farmworkers to take action in addressing their occupation-related health concerns
- To conduct popular organizing with farmworkers to identify a shared health concern and create an action plan
- To engage the allied community in supporting farmworkers to realize the action plan
- To note some behavior change among farmworkers in regards to taking care of their health

“If I had to choose a single most meaningful project from the past several months, it would be this one [the Community Health Project]. Meeting regularly and repeatedly with the same group of people allowed us to step out of the roles of patient and case manager. Throughout our meetings, aside from the planned lesson, we had long, thoughtful conversations about health, family, migration, food, work, and politics. It unified for me so many of the things that I have loved about—and learned from—my experience with SAF.”

–Katie Cox Shrader, 2011 SAF Fellow

Top and bottom left: Farmworkers participate in workshops about dehydration and heat illness. Right: Meeting agenda and human body drawing by Katie Cox. Photos by Katie Cox, Wake Co., NC 2011
"The camp I chose to do my community health project with was also the camp that allowed me to work in the fields with them, so we had formed a special bond. They were very welcoming to me and every time I visited the camp I was amazed at how they were willing to sacrifice their time so that they could participate in the project."

"I think one thing I definitely learned through this experience was the goodwill of humanity and just how hard people are willing to work to support their families. I have a lot of respect for and give many thanks to my friends from xxxx camp."

-Marichel Mejia, 2011 SAF Fellow

"For my community health project, I met twice with a group of seven farmworkers to discuss nutrition and strategies for healthy eating during the Christmas tree season. Using both soda/Gatorade bottles filled with the amount of sugar they contain and beverages from their kitchen, we talked about label reading, diabetes, and healthier food options."

"Although we only met as a group twice, this project demonstrated to me the power of popular education. The idea that everyone has knowledge from life experience to contribute to the group really resonates with me, and it was exciting to watch the farmworkers become excited about the project after I explained that this would be the foundation for our next three meetings."

-Robyn Levine, 2011 SAF Fellow

"My community health group consisted of 7 workers that were all interested in pesticide exposure and occupational skin rashes. The experience of the community health project is what most strengthened my interest in health education in regards to occupational health issues."

"It also strengthened my ability to do popular education. I learned that it takes patience and listening skills to understand the needs of others, and to be able to give assistance in a way that is actually useful."

-Natalie Hyatt, 2011 SAF Fellow

Top left: The Popular Education Spiral was the basis for fellows’ facilitation methods when meeting with workers. 
Middle: Natalie’s flyer about contact dermatitis is meant to hang in farmworker housing for continued learning. 
Bottom right: Marichel’s posters on skin rashes developed for farmworkers.
Natalie and Marichel participated in SAF’s theater group and performed for 101 farmworkers. The play, “Más Vale Prevenir que Lamentar/Better Safe than Sorry,” addresses the risks involved in having unprotected sex, and the importance of using a condom to reduce the risks of contracting Sexually Transmitted Infections. Farmworkers received a condom demonstration, condoms and fotonovelas to read more information on HIV and STI’s.

The group returned to two camps and facilitated theater exercises with 30 workers, so they could share and act out their experiences of oppression. Farmworkers got an entertaining break from the routine and great conversation. The actors gained trust quickly, allowing SAF and the host organizations to better address their needs.

Hosts included:
Legal Aid of NC-Farmworker Unit
Carolina Family Health Services
NC Farmworkers Project

Nandini, Katie and Robyn created beautiful photo & audio documentary projects with farmworkers. SAF’s 2011 theme was Labor Lore, collecting stories of work and working conditions, rituals of preparing for work, traditions of passing time at the end of the day, and jokes, jargon and narratives shared between workers.

In addition, Robyn created a 9-minute film for her clinic site about the daily lives of a group of 7 H-2A-contracted Christmas tree workers who live together in Boone, NC. She helped coordinate a screening event and panel discussion on ASU’s campus. They had a great turnout of 150-175 students, community members, and 8 farmworkers (three of whom participated in the project). La Vida Diaria can be viewed at: http://vimeo.com/33971503

The fellows documentary project, Robyn’s film and the Cosecha Countdown blog were presented at the 2011 NC Latin American Film Festival in Durham.

The 5 fellows collaborated on creating the Cosecha Countdown Blog consisting of 20 posts about farmworkers in the Southeast and throughout the United States leading up to Thanksgiving holiday.

They conducted research, collected SAF documentary quotes and photos, and selected actions people can take after reading each blog post. Each post has a downloadable flyer people can print and share on their campus or at work to help spread knowledge about farmworkers and the blog.

http://cosechacountdown.wordpress.com/