Working alongside tractors, cuts, falls, pesticides, and extreme heat make agriculture very 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 Student Action with Farmworkers’ Sowing Seeds for Change health fellowship 5 recent college graduates reached over 1 thousand farmworkers during the agricultural season by enrolling them in migrant health clinics, transporting them to doctors appointments, interpreting during clinic visits, conducting health assessments, and educating about health issues including Nutrition, HIV/STI prevention, stress reduction, pesticides and heat illness.

Fellows also engaged farmworkers through documentary, theater and community health projects. In addition, they organized events and wrote blogs to raise awareness about farmworkers in the community. Fellows presented about farmworkers and their SAF experience to many community members through various public speaking opportunities. SAF provided training and mentorship. This report highlights the fellows reflections and accomplishments in a year full of new experiences and challenges.

Thank You Supporters!
Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs | Arthur Carlsen Charitable Fund of Triangle Community Foundation | Environmental Protection Agency | Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust | North Carolina Farmworker Health Program: Office of Rural Health and Community Care, NC DHHS | Fellows’ host organizations & Individual donations

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Bernardo Lopez
Graduate of New Mexico State Univ.
NC Farmworkers’ Project, Benson, NC

“Dejar mi familia en Nuevo México fue lo más difícil este verano porque mis padres quedaron trabajando la tierra para proveer por mi familia. Los entrenamientos nos prepararon para aplicar nuestras habilidades y sabiduría durante este verano.

Lo que más me impacto del entrenamiento fue la motivación que cada estudiante tiene para luchar contra las injusticias de los campesinos. La diversidad entre nosotros y la relación que construimos en tan corto tiempo fue la clave para el desarrollo de nuestras metas.”

Katherine Furgurson
Graduate of William & Mary Piedmont Health Services, Prospect Hill, NC

“Despite the various demographic categories that farmworkers fall into, they are first and foremost people. And this is the most important fact to keep in mind when we consider the state of farm labor today. People are subjected to undignified living conditions. People are exposed to harmful chemicals. People are exploited to put food on our tables (and tobacco in our cigarettes).

That’s why even though I did not grow up doing farmwork and my family did not migrate here from Mexico I feel connected to the farmworker justice movement. Because I am a person and I believe that people deserve better.”

Michael Mian
Graduate of UNC-Chapel Hill Piedmont Health Services, Moncure, NC

“One thing I have certainly taken from this summer is the power of listening and being present. While I may not be positioned to fill the needs of all those I meet, I can hear their stories, and the one thing I’ve heard from everyone I’ve worked with is this: “Thank you so much for coming. You don’t have to do this work, but you are here doing it, and we appreciate it.”

Though there may sometimes be frustrations about the limitations of the work being done and the systems creating the need for that work, those words are a constant reminder that what I’ve been doing matters, whether I can see the difference being made or not.”
Beatriz Cruz  
Graduate of SUNY-Oneonta  
Wake Co. Health, Fuquay Varina, NC

“This summer was a memorable experience from doing outreach, being an interpreter at the clinics, working with providers, learning how to file paperwork in the office and doing [data] entry. Along with that, my intern partner and I also worked on gardening with one of the camps and did a cooking demonstration with them too.

One of the things that impacted me the most...was seeing depression taking the toll on one of the farmworkers I had seen come to the clinic a few times. I know being away from your loved ones can be tough, especially when you’re isolated or don’t even know where you are, but knowing I’m able to provide health services to make a difference is always rewarding.”

Nicholas Rinehart  
Graduate of UNC-Asheville  
Vecinos Inc., Cullowhee, NC

“Probably the most important thing I have learned is that this type of work, as my supervisor likes to say, “ain't no joke.” I came in thinking it was going to be all about fire and brimstone social change, and getting in the faces of the patrones and the contractors and sticking it to them, but of course, it is waaaay more complicated than that. There are a lot of ... things that need to get done in order for the non-profit to function, and the change comes very slowly.

I have gained a great tool with the documentary and community awareness projects to help spread the word and make this invisible population more visible to the rest of society.”

Health Outreach Accomplishments

Fellows reached 1,291 un-duplicated patients  
(16% increase over 2012)

Fellows had 6,609 health education encounters  
Health education topics include hypertension, diabetes, nutrition, pesticides, heat illness, and HIV/STI’s. (41% increase over 2012)

Fellows had 1,400 case management encounters  
Case management includes transporting workers to clinics, interpreting, and making referrals. (13% increase over 2012)

Fellows provided resources to patients 3,130 times  
Resources include condoms, over the counter medications, toiletries, vitamins, food and clothing. (60% increase over 2012)

“The addition of the SAF Fellow makes us more efficient and able to accomplish more follow-up case management activities.”

-2013 Fellow Sponsoring Organization
Community Awareness Projects

The Community Awareness Project helps community members learn about where our food comes from, how injustices against farmworkers go unnoticed in mainstream U.S., and what campaigns to support in order to create positive change for farmworkers. Fellows were asked to:

- Promote awareness and action through presentations.
- Organize a service project with the community to support farmworkers’ immediate needs.

“We hosted a volleyball tournament for migrant farmworkers. Forty farmworkers attended the event, with about twenty-five playing on one of four teams. Each team played three games, and all teams received prizes including Spanish-English dictionaries, water bottles, and international calling cards.”

-Mike Mian, Piedmont Health Services [In collaboration with Kate Furgurson, Piedmont Health]

POEM
Soy campesino, soy tu vecino
Pero a veces me miras como enemigo
Trabajar duro aunque me rompa el Corazón
Tu lastima por mí no sirve de nada
Mejor lucha por la justicia y crear un major mañana
Agradezco de corazón la gente que nos ayuda
Tenemos que cambiar las injusticias que suceden
Como dijo Cesar Chávez Si Se Puede!

-Excerpts from original poem by Bernardo Lopez

“Angela, the owner of [the restaurant] Centro, volunteered to do a [healthy] cooking demonstration at one the camps that we have been staying in contact with. The food was donated by a local farmers market and with the recipes in hand; we headed off to the camp to cook!

She was preparing fajitas with cactus and a kale salad with beans. The smell of the chicken, peppers, cactus, started to infuse the air and they started getting excited to try to the food. The older gentlemen also known as the “abuelito” was helping prepare los nopales as all the men watched.”

-Beatriz Cruz, Wake Co. Health

Left: Volleyball Tournament, photo by M. Mian. Center: Bernardo Lopez tabling for SAF at Episcopal Farmworker Ministry’s annual farmworker festival. Right: Healthy cooking demonstration at a farmworker camp by B. Cruz.
Community Health Projects

Through the Community Health Project, fellows engaged 21 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

“My supervisor put me in touch with a group of women who work in a nursery near the clinic. They decided that they wanted to learn more about exercise as a way to control their weight and alleviate stress. So tonight we went and got a taste of yoga. The instructor is also a therapist ..., so she gave some really great tips for stress management and showed them special poses they can do when they get sore at work.

My compañeroas face quite a few obstacles which I do not have to worry about. They do not drive or speak English, which makes going to the gym a challenge. And then there’s the minor detail of them being working mothers. My hope is that the studio will be able to host more classes like this one, even perhaps one at the clinic from time to time, so that exercise stress-relief can become more of a routine for these hard-working women.”
- Kate Furgurson, Piedmont Health Services

“The [farmworkers] were diagnosed with high cholesterol and they are treating it with medication, but did not know much about it. They had various questions about how to control it, what food they could eat, what was good and bad cholesterol, along with many other concerns. I promised to look for the answers to these questions, develop a lesson plan, and create a chart that showed food that could reduce high cholesterol level.

Llego la fecha de nuestra última reunión para comer saludable, divertirse, cantar y compartir. Ahí les pregunté lo que habían aprendido sobre el colesterol y la mayoría de ellos recordaban la comida que debían evitar y lo que era saludable. Eso mostraba el interés que tenían por mejorar su salud y calidad de vida.”
- Bernardo Lopez, NC Farmworkers Project
OMAR
Yo: “Tiene un nombre en su tatuaje -- ¿de quién es?”
Omar: “Mi hijo, Ozmar.”
Yo: “¿El entiende porque Ud. está aquí?”
Omar: “Pues yo lo digo.”

“I first came upon Omar while he was washing his clothes by hand outside his trailer. He had Spanish music playing on his phone and said he’d be happy to do an interview after he finished with his clothes. An hour later, I’d learned about his family, how to do “el corte,” what clothes he’ll be bringing back to his son, his difficulties in getting to the medical clinic, and much more.”
- Mike Mian, Piedmont Health Services

AGUSTIN
“Agustin needed to be checked on again, because he is epileptic, and has been since his childhood. However, as he told me in his interview, he said that the sickness didn’t matter to him much, as he had a strong support from his mother, who took him to every doctor’s appointment in his hometown of Oaxaca.

Agustin comes from a family that he described as “tranquila” and “en paz,” and although it seemed like he was reluctant to delve deep into how he felt leaving Mexico and crossing the border, he seemed very at peace with how his life has turned out.”
- Nick Rinehart, Vecinos Inc.

Fellow Bernardo Lopez participated in SAF’s theater group and performed for 85 migrant farmworkers. The play, “Una Chela al Año No Hace Daño/ A Beer a Year Doesn’t Hurt,” addresses the family separation, stress, isolation and mental health toll that can come with a migrant lifestyle.

Actors portrayed the risks involved in abusing alcohol and presented healthy alternatives to drinking such as playing sports, keeping in touch with family, creating art/music/dance, breathing exercises and a yoga demonstration.

Sixteen men from different states in Mexico live and work at a farm in North Carolina for six months out of the year. They share their ideas of family and community, both here at their camp and back in their hometowns. The importance that their families hold in the workers’ hearts and minds is reflected in the way that they have built their community here in North Carolina.

The nature of their interactions with each other and the way that they work together has caught the attention of the health workers at the migrant clinic. The farmworkers attend an evening migrant clinic in Zebulon, where Blanca Brito and Ricky Simms work. Blanca is a WIC Counselor, and Ricky is the security guard. They both share their thoughts on the farmworkers and their journeys. These perspectives of community are connected into our documentary to create a patchwork of others’ to make a diverse and unique puzzle of community life.

Beatriz, Edith & Jaslin’s video documentary, Rompecabezas/Puzzles is available online: https://vimeo.com/75308625

SAF Student Action with Farmworkers

PUZZLES/ROMPECABEZAS