

Sí Se Puede

Farmworkers, Publix & Me



By Kara Inga Hoffmann

I am from Valrico, Florida, a rural area where farms line the sides of the roads. Last summer, my mom motivated me to do well in school by taking me to experience field work. It was one of the hardest things I have ever tried to do. Between the heat and the backbreaking monotonous toil, I had no energy left at the end of the day. I was glad to leave those fields behind and return to school. Most field workers never leave the fields and do not have other options for income.



Farmworkers pick in local strawberry fields.

I used to think I was poor because my family doesn't take extravagant vacations and I share my bedroom with one of my three sisters. Migrant workers not only share bedrooms, they share beds. Sometimes sleeping several people in one bed! They are packed into trailers like sardines so they can afford to send some money home to families in other countries.



Migrant workers house

Farmworker men, women and children get paid by the pound, around 40 cents for produce such as tomatoes and sweet potatoes. They would have to pick at least two tons of these vegetables to earn \$50 a day.



Migrant workers camp



By the time a migrant child is 12, they may be working up to 16-18 hours per week.

Farmworkers and their families organized a march in Tampa to call on Publix Supermarket “to do the right thing” for those who pick their tomatoes. Their goal was to peacefully ask Publix and other supermarkets to do their part to pay an additional penny per a pound for tomatoes and enforce a code of conduct against abuses for workers.



More farmworkers picking strawberries.

I went to the march with my mom, and my sister. We helped to make posters to protest with the farmworkers.





When we were protesting, we saw the Publix employees standing and pointing at us and talking to the police. I could see by their faces that they were annoyed. At first, our numbers were small and the Publix workers were outside joking and laughing about us. When our numbers increased, it was no longer a laughing matter. They went inside.

We began to march through the streets. “Free trade coffee sounds great, what about tomatoes in your own state?! Just one penny more!”



The farmworkers accepted me and were happy that I was there to support them. This experience has changed me. I don't want to think only of myself. Now, I have a greater awareness of others. I have seen that people following their faith can do amazing things. I now believe, "Yes we can!" —Si Se Puede.





“Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you? And the King will say to them in reply, ‘Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine you did for me.’”

Matthew 25.