

## Pizcando Sueños/Harvesting Dreams

### The Voices of Mexican Migrant Women

by Fabiola del Castillo, Fran Ricardo and Robin Lewy of the Rural Women's Health Project  
Article Four in a Series of Five

#### "Working in the fields / La Labor"

*"Aquí he aprendido pues a verme por mi misma, por que son muchas cosas que tiene que hacer uno sola."*

"Here I have learned to see myself for what I am, because there are so many things that you have to do alone."

**K**ey to understanding the migration of Mexicans to the United States is their entrance into the U.S. work force. Farmworker families leave their home communities to come North with the hope of finding their dreams in the fields of the United States. For the farmworking women of *Pizcando Sueños*, the act of integrating themselves into the paid workforce brings with it its own unique characteristics.

The majority of *Pizcando Sueños* participants had never worked in their home communities except for tasks that correspond with roles common to rural women in Mexico, i.e. food preparation, sewing, embroidery, childcare and helping in the fields during the harvest time. For these jobs, women rarely receive personal remuneration; instead any money generated by their work is simply included in the family income.

The immigrant women's transition to the new role as "paid worker" brings with it diverse characteristics, some positive and others much more challenging. All of the women found the transition process to be the first blow that they experience.

*"Lo más difícil cuando llegué fue aprender a trabajar, porque cuando uno llega, pues, va y se presenta a trabajar y varios trabajos*



continued on page 2



continued from page 1

*están difíciles hasta que a uno se acostumbra."*

"The most difficult thing when I came here was to learn how to work, because you show up for work and many of the jobs are difficult until you get used to them."

Family life is turned upside down and the female farmworker is emotionally stretched by leaving her children to be raised by others while she works in the fields.

*"Trabajar también se siente mal por que uno no esta todo el tiempo con sus hijos, usted no sabe qué están haciendo sus hijos y usted no sabe con quien se juntan sus hijos usted no sabe del peligro que pasan en la calle cuando vienen de regreso a la casa. No sé cómo ayudar a mis hijos, no encuentro la forma."*

"Working one feels bad because you can't spend time with you children. You don't know what your children are doing and you don't know who they are making friends with and you don't know the dangers they can run into on the street as they return home. I don't know how to help my kids. I can't find the way to do it."

*"Yo nunca los dejo solos [a mis hijos], cuando los tenía que dejar en el daycare mi nuera nada más trabajaba y se venía y los sacaba. Yo les dejaba el alterón de tortillas, el jarrón de frijoles o cualquier cosa que comieran..."*

"I never leave my kids alone. When I have to leave them in daycare my daughter-in-law picks them up right after she finishes work. I'd leave them a basket of tortillas, a pan of beans or whatever there was to eat..."

*"Cuando yo di a luz a mi niña nada más estuve 3 semanas y yo me fui a trabajar."*

"When I had my little girl, I was at home with her for no more than three weeks and then I went back to work."

*"Pos, aquí la mera verdad que cuando yo salgo (silencio) a trabajar yo ni pienso en mi familia, yo pienso en lo que voy a hacer, en lo que voy a ganar y en lo que lo voy a invertir, porque aquí así son las cosas..."*

"Well to tell you the truth, when I go to work (silence) I don't think of my family, I think about what I am going to do, how much I am going to earn, and how I am going to spend it, because that is how it is here..."

The farmworker woman's relationship with her spouse is affected by her new role as wife, mother and laborer. Her new income, her intense exhaustion and the continuation of her traditional roles affect the couple's interaction, and as stated by one farmworker women, de-feminizes her in the eyes of her man. She becomes more a source of income, than a wife.

*"Trabajando como hombres pues aquí perdemos ese crédito de ser femeninas, pues el trabajo en el campo es duro y llega el momento en el que a nuestros hombres se les olvidan que somos mujeres necesitadas de ser tratados como tal."*

"Working like men, well we lose the credit of being feminine. The work in the fields is hard and the moment comes when our men forget that we are women who need to be treated as such."

With the demands of the work, free time is a luxury of which few enjoy. To fit something else into the week, aside from work is a dream. Church, parties and studies are easily forgotten.

*"Me venía durmiendo como a la 1 de la mañana, y luego me levantaba a las 4 de la mañana para echarle el almuerzo de mi esposo, las chamacas se iban a la escuela...metía 80 horas en una semana. ¿Tú crees que tenía tiempo para ir a la escuela, ni una hora tenía para la escuela? No pude estudiar, mi mente no pudo."*

"I usually went to bed at 1:00am and then I get up at 4:00am to make my husband's lunch, get the kids ready for school...I racked up 80 hours in a week. Do you think that there is time to go to school? Not even an hour for school. My mind couldn't study, it couldn't."

The dangers found in the field are exacerbated by the other socio-emotional challenges faced by the female farmworker. Concerns about working while pregnant and exposure to pesticides were commonly cited.

*"Ya a medio día sientes que la espalda le hormiguea anda uno cansadisimo Cuando yo trabajaba embarazada ya cuando se terminaba yo me tiraba en el suelo sentía que se me estaba quebrando la cadera, la carga de la panza y la carga de la cubeta del chile sentía que ya no aguantaba."*

"By the middle of the day you feel tingling in your back and you are tired. When I worked while I was pregnant, when it was the end of the day I would throw myself on the ground and I felt like my back was broken, carrying the belly and the big bucket of chilis I felt like I couldn't go on."

*"El trabajo es bien duro por que el spray por que es lo más que le cae a uno, y cuando uno se quiere levantar ya no se puede levantar la cubeta, hay veces que amanezco bien adolorida de aquí ..."*

"The work is really difficult because of the spray, when it falls on you and you want to lift up the bucket, sometimes you can't do it, there are times when you get up in the morning with pain [in the palms of the hand] from holding on to the bucket."

*"Nos enfrentamos a enfermedades por el químico que ponen en las labores. Algunos sufrimos de ronchas en el cuerpo, dolores de cabeza, dolores de espalda y más peor, que no tenemos aseguranza médica..."*

"We confront illnesses from the chemicals that they apply in the fields. Some suffer from rashes on the body, others head aches, back aches and what is worse we have no health insurance..."

Work for these women is like a double-edged sword, one side is full of all the sharp negatives, but the other side has many important aspects that must not be overlooked. Self-worth and the realization of steps to a better life are amply celebrated. And to have earned their own money has motivated women to reflect on the value of money through the eyes of their learned experiences.

*"He aprendido a valerme más por mí misma, a buscarle más a mí misma para salir adelante. He aprendido a sacar de mí todo eso que estaba, yo creo, dormido"*



*¿verdad? Yo he tenido que agarrarme hasta de lo que no me gusta para salir adelante”.*

“I have learned to appreciate myself for what I am and to turn to myself to get ahead. I have learned to pull out of me all of this stuff that I think has been sleeping, right? I have had to do things I never thought I'd do, in order to get ahead.”

*“En la labor es bonito, allá andan todos los troques que con la gente grite y grite, con su música que la traen la troca bien recia que hasta ganas de bailar le dan uno”.*

“Working in the fields is nice, there you are with all the trucks and the people screaming and with the music blaring out of the trucks, it makes you want to dance.”

*“Es un aliviane más para que sepas valorarte por ti misma, por que el día de mañana o pasado no sabes el futuro que te espera entre tú y él, si se llegan a separar, tu tienes dinero.”*

“It is a relief because I know how to value myself because tomorrow, you doesn't know the future that waits between you and he [husband]. If he up and leaves, you have money.”

*“Yo creo que todas las mujeres decimos que es algo bien lindo (ganar dinero) y más cuando le pagan a uno por semana, es bien bonito cada viernes recibir uno lo que uno se gana con su sudor .... Es un aliviane por que 4 semanas trae el mes por que 2 semanas de billes y dos de su dinero. Es algo para mi trabajar, es estar mejor para mi y para los niños”.*

“I think that all of the women say that it is something great (to earn money) and more so when they pay you weekly. Its something to receive your pay every Friday, its what you have won with your sweat... It is a relief because every month has four weeks, two for bills and two for your money. It is good for me to work, its better for me and my children.”

*“Cuando uno ve que la gente malgasta que es que no saben lo que cuesta. Yo así era, me compraba que esto caro, que lo otro caro, ahora ya no, ya sé como se gana el dinero”.*

“When one sees how people waste, they have no idea what it costs to get things. I was like that, I bought this that was expensive, and that which was expensive, but now, no. I now know what it is to earn money.”

*“Uuuu, yo siento que este trabajo que es casi como dicen la mitad de mi vida porque sin el dinero no sale uno adelante”.*

“Ugh, I feel like this work is like as they say, half of my life, because without the money, you can't get ahead.”

*“Es bonito por que así me alcanza mandarles dinero a mis papás, pues es bonito por que así le podía comprar a mis hijos lo que ellos querían... yo sentía muy bonito poderles ayudar”.*

“Its nice because this way I have enough to send money to my parents, and its good that I can buy for my children the things that they want...I feel wonderful to be able to help them.”

*“Me gusta tener mi propio dinero, sin depender del marido y decir este dinero es mío y si me lo quiero gastar me lo gasto y si no lo tengo guardado. Pero aprende uno a cuidar el dinero que se suda”.*

“I like to have my own money, without having to depend on my husband and to say that this money is mine and if I want to spend it I spend it, and if not I can save it. But one learns to appreciate the money that has been sweated for.

To come to the U.S. implies that parents are searching for a better future for their children, a future not always easy to see within in their communities of origin. The parents work hard so that their children study and can aspire for better work. There exists a real concern that their chil-

dren don't have to suffer the same problems that they have faced.

*“Mi hija dijo, ‘Mami yo cuando este grande yo no voy a trabajar en la labor yo voy a estudiar pa’ yo agarrar una carrera y yo trabajar en un trabajo que no sea la labor dice porque en el trabajo de la labor te matas bien mucho. No mami no creas que yo voy a trabajar en esos trabajos, yo voy a estudiar pa’ sacar adelante”.*

My daughter said, “Mommy, when I am older I don't want to work in the fields. I am going to study to get a career and I am going to work in a job that isn't the fields because it kills you. No mommy, don't you think that I am going to work in those jobs. I am going to study to get ahead.

The massive agricultural complex in the U.S. doesn't offer the opportunity to this population to have a relationship between the land and its fruits. The relationship in which the land is conceived as the mother and the fruits as gifts from her has been destroyed by the system in which farm-workers work. As immigrant women lose their relationship with the mother-land they also have to reconstruct their role as mother, wife, and breadwinner. The women of *Pizcando Sueños* work constantly to recapture their old relationship in which they can enjoy the fruits of their labor as they move forward in harvesting their dreams.

*Pizcando Sueños* is a project of Fabiola del Castillo and Fran Ricardo and Robin Lewy of the Rural Women's Health Project. For more information about the *Pizcando Sueños* project, or to read other articles in this series, please check our web site at: [www.rwhp.org/pizcando](http://www.rwhp.org/pizcando)

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For more information, please see our web site,

[http://www.migrantclinician.org/programs/research/irb\\_home.html](http://www.migrantclinician.org/programs/research/irb_home.html)