



Sharon Saldarriaga, Nelson Diaz, U.S. Congressman Glen C. Nye, Jessica Garcia, Teresa Anderson

While in Washington, D.C. in March for the Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs conference, staff that work with the National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP), also took the opportunity to meet with some of our congressional representatives and staff to discuss the impact of the program in Virginia. Above is a photo we took when meeting with U.S. Congressman Glen C. Nye who represents the Virginia Beach and Eastern Shore areas. We wish again to thank Representative Nye for his support. The NFJP is an employment and training program funded by the U.S. Department of Labor, which assists farmworkers with creating career pathways that lead to self-sufficient employment. Farmworkers looking to get jobs outside of agriculture or upgraded positions within agriculture are provided with the full range of workforce development services and support services that enable them to effectively participate in activities that will upgrade their education

and/or occupational skills. Telamon Corporation has been operating the program in Virginia since 175. Since then we have helped hundreds of farmworkers secure a better future. Our corporate headquarters is in Raleigh, NC and Telamon operates the NFJP in ten states.

Farmworker Awarded Hoop Tunnel



Julia Medina and Nelson Diaz

Julia Medina, a farmer facing economic challenges, came to our Telamon office here in Montross, VA in desperate need of assistance. After speaking with her, we came to the conclusion that, unfortunately, she did not meet the eligibility criteria for the National Farmworkers Jobs Program, which left her very distressed. She was burdened with worries of not being able to start up her crops for this season due to financial difficulties. After her husband passed away, she was left being a single mother of three young children. We found that she was constantly looking for housekeeping

opportunities on the side, just to make enough income to pay her bills. In the meantime, we contacted our community partners to find who might assist Mrs. Medina. That's when we found out about the USDA *Natural Resources Conservation Service* office in Warsaw, VA and referred her to them. They were taking applications for the Hoop Pilot program. It is an amazing pilot project under the "Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food" initiative for farmers to establish hoop houses in order to increase the availability of locally grown produce in a conservation-friendly way. We soon received the news that Julia was awarded with a Hoop Tunnel worth \$5,400.00. Julia was overjoyed and she beamed with new hope in her eyes. She gives thanks for our program and expresses that she will be forever grateful for our kindness and determination. Although we could not work with Julia, we provided her with a stepping stone to reach her goal. Currently, Julia is coming to our office on a regular basis to take advantage of our online self-service ESL and computer literacy access. She hopes that in the future she will increase her skills and have greater opportunities for financial stability.

Telamon—Virginia

Message from the State Director Sharon Saldarriaga

Well, we have had a taste of spring that, for many of us, is quite welcome after all the snow this year. With the season upon us, it won't be long before our National Farmworker Jobs Program staff become even busier as they begin serving the influx of farmworkers who arrive to plant and harvest Virginia's crops. Although our focus is on training and employment for farmworkers, during the spring and summer months, staff also will assist hundreds of workers with support services they often need to be able to sustain themselves in farmwork. These services might include assistance with transportation, food, clothing, health items, and sometimes, blankets when the weather turns colder than usual. (continued on pg. 3)

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A Step Forward For Pesticide Safety Training

From: www.greenhousegrowers.com
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The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), of course, requires all greenhouse operations using pesticides to train workers in their native language about safety. For years, growers have trained their employees by popping in short videos that meet the safety standards.

But growers in Virginia are taking pesticide safety training a step further by welcoming a bilingual pesticide trainer from the Telamon Corporation to their operations for more hands-on instruction.

"Our service goes a step beyond," says Nicholas Zetts, the pesticide safety trainer for Telamon. "We offer an informal classroom setting and you have interaction with a trainer – and it's bilingual. You're going over information workers understand. They're also now free to ask questions to the trainer. And it's a completely free service. "When you're watching a video, no one is there to assist you."

Zetts' pesticide safety training sessions range from as short as 45 minutes to as

long as two hours. Typically, training sessions last one hour.

"A lot of the time, the length of a session depends on how much time I'm given by the greenhouse operation," Zetts says.

The Virginia Department of Agriculture funds most of Telamon, which also receives funds from the National Farmworker Jobs Program.

One greenhouse operation that recently took advantage of Telamon's free service is Top 100 Grower Battlefield Farms, whose employees are now EPA certified in pesticide safety for five years. After training sessions, employers receive a roster complete with the names and signatures of the workers who are trained.

"From what I've seen, most farmers take care of their employees well," Zetts says. "They want to take care of employees because they're an investment. They don't want them out of work because of a mishap with pesticides. So they look at us as a good thing."



On-site training is a good alternative solution for educating employees about pesticide

Work Experience with Telamon



By Jessica Garcia
Case Manager, Exmore VA

Spring has arrived and here in Belle Haven the flowers are blooming. Bilingual migrant worker, Juanita Hernandez, came to us last year for help to stay permanently here on the Eastern Shore with her fourteen year old son. She didn't want to migrate any more from Florida to Virginia and then back to Florida. This was not the life she wanted for her son or herself. Telamon Corporation's Belle Haven office assisted Ms. Hernandez in finding a home to plant her roots and worked very hard to look for work for Ms. Hernandez. We encouraged Ms. Hernandez to earn her GED so that she would have more job opportunities. Ms. Hernandez was not sure she would be able to go to school and work and take care of her family responsibilities. We had our Employment Specialist, Nelson Diaz, work with her for a day....and what a difference a day makes! She was fired up with an "I can do it" attitude. We reviewed her initial assessment and asked Ms. Hernandez if she would be willing to do a Work Experience with Telamon Corporation and learn office operations; she happily accepted. Now with more time in her schedule, she is able to care for her family's needs, attend her GED classes and at the same time learn soft skills that will enable her to enter into a full-time office position. "Thanks to Telamon Corporation my life has changed a lot," says Ms. Hernandez. We expect Ms. Hernandez to have her GED by the end of May.

Support Virginia Agriculture

'Tis the Season---Where will you be shopping?

By Nick Zetts

The peas have sprouted next to their companion, carrots, while farmers and backyard gardeners are working full steam to meet the demands for fresh, great tasting seasonal produce. One has to admire the small local farmer who produces organically or sustainably to deliver an amazing product to the people who have no green thumb. True heroes? I think so. What they produce will not only benefit the land's health in which they are grown, but also, the people who ingest them. Eating locally and sustainably has only positive influences that stretch beyond the immediate gain of a full stomach. It seems that cancer rates are exponentially increasing and it is a fact that the processed food diet is part culprit.

When we buy produce out of season, we are supporting something that is not sustainable or, in other words, realistic. Why? Does it make sense to grow a tomato in California using imported labor and chemicals made from petroleum, then shipping the tomato thousands of miles before it finally arrives at the supermarket?

This is the season to

support Virginia agriculture and your local farmer through Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), farmers' markets, road side produce stands, and restaurants that value the local farmer more than the prepackaged industry. We now have the options to make ourselves healthier and so the hope remains in all of us to see the long term benefits of a healthy local diet, which now can be bought. Where will you be shopping?

Message from the State Director
Sharon Saldarriaga
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Their hard work and that of our Virginia growers enables us to enjoy fresh, homegrown produce that contributes much to our ability to eat healthy foods. (See Nick Zetts's article this page.) We are thankful to Virginia's agricultural community that keeps agriculture the top industry in the Commonwealth. We recognize their contribution to the state's economy and, for those who support Virginia's agriculture by buying Virginia's produce, the contribution to healthier eating.

I also wish to give thanks to all the other service providers that work tirelessly to serve farmworkers, particularly during peak seasons. We could not do what we do without their support and the services they provide. We look forward to continuing and strengthening our many partnerships with our faith-based and community-based service providers.

Why AgJOBS?

By Sarah Howard, Office Manager

Across the United States, there are not enough documented agricultural workers to do the pruning, picking, packing, and harvesting that keep U.S. farms in business. When American farmers suffer, there is a ripple effect felt throughout the nation. Over 50% of farmworkers are undocumented and living in constant fear. Their wages are low and they live in the shadows of our society. We depend on these workers for the food on our tables. We need a stable and legal agricultural workforce in order to protect our food supply and keep American farms in business .

The Agricultural Job Opportunities, Benefits and Security Act, or AgJOBS, is longstanding bipartisan legislation developed to address this issue. It represents a unique agreement between farmworker organizations and agricultural employees and has the support of labor unions, civil rights organizations, Latino community leaders, religious groups, and farmworkers and growers themselves. Below are some of the highlights of this proposed legislation:

- The Agricultural Job Opportunities, Benefits and Security Act ("AgJOBS") is a two-part bill. Part one would create a pilot program to identify undocumented farm workers and allow those already working in U.S. agriculture to continue to work in the United States legally if they first pay a fine, show that they are current on their

taxes, have clean criminal records, and commit to working in U.S. agriculture for the next five years. The second part would reform the current H-2A program that, if local workers cannot be hired, provides farmers with a legal path to hire workers to harvest their crops.

- Undocumented agricultural workers would be eligible for a "blue card" if they can demonstrate having worked in American agriculture for at least 150 work days over the previous two years.
- The blue card would entitle the worker to a temporary legal status. The total number of blue cards would be capped at 1.35 million over a five-year period, and the program would end after five years.
- The spouses and minor children of blue card workers would be eligible to apply for a blue card if they already live in the United States. The blue card holder would be required to work in American agriculture for an additional three years (working at least 150 work days per year) to five years (working at least 100 work days per year), before becoming eligible to apply to become a permanent legal resident. A blue card holder would also need to pay a fine of \$500, be current on their taxes, and show that

been convicted of any crime that involves bodily injury, the threat of serious bodily injury, or harm to property in excess of \$500.

- Finally, the H2-A Program would be modified in a balanced manner to streamline the program while continuing to protect famrworkers. The H-2A temporary foreign agricultural worker program permits employers to hire guestworkers to fill agricultural jobs that last no longer than ten months.

It is time to provide our nation with a secure and legal agricultural workforce and guarantee our nation a safe and secure food supply. AgJOBS is a critical component of comprehensive immigration reform meeting the unique needs of agriculture.

Staff Notes

We would like to announce that **Jessica Garcia** is the new Case Manager in our Belle Haven office on the Eastern Shore. She recently completed all required coursework and passed the exam for her Certified National Farmworkers Job Program Workforce Professional 1 certificate. She is dedicated to workforce services for migrant and seasonal workers.