

# Cultivating Opportunity for California Strawberry Workers

How Extensive Labor Standards, On-the-Job Training and a Strong Work Ethic Create Upward Mobility



California Strawberry Commission Report



# Our Commitment to Workers

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California's family strawberry farms are a special place where the state's 55,000 on-farm strawberry workers are united by the core value of hard work for a better life.

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## Starting Out

For a century, immigrants have sought strawberry field work – not only because strawberries mean higher incomes than other rural jobs, but the workforce also knows strawberry farming represents an opportunity to grab the first rung up the economic ladder.

This work has always been hard, but in the past 50 years, updates in labor regulations and farming practices ensure a safe and fair workplace.

## Rising through the Ranks

As they rise through the ranks to become foremen and supervisors, field workers see their hard work rewarded. They acquire new, valuable skills that boost their ability to advance with greater responsibilities and pay.

## Positive Work Environment

California strawberry farmers – many of them Latino and Asian immigrants themselves – foster a safe, positive, and productive work environment for employees to thrive as leaders on the job and throughout their communities.

Strawberry farmers know that respect and opportunity result in success for everyone, especially workers who move up the ladder toward the American Dream. As is the case with in any sector of the economy, some workers are more successful than others. Some may attain farm ownership while others may strive for the success of the next generation.

More so than any other crop, California strawberry farming helps make this dream a reality.

*Lorena Chavez  
DL Farm Management,  
Santa Maria*





"I did not have an education...  
the strawberry gave me my start."

— ALEJANDRO RAMIREZ



Research



Nurseries



Cooling &  
Shipping



Crop Protection & Irrigation



Harvesting & Packaging



Sales/  
Marketing



**55,000**  
On-Farm Jobs

+

**15,000**  
Related Jobs

=

**70,000**  
Total Jobs Created



Soil & Field Prep



Planting

# Promotion & Farm Ownership

Strawberry fields have historically provided opportunities for field workers to advance to management positions and even farm ownership. This is the result of unique properties of the strawberry crop and the robust education and training programs for workers.

- The many types of jobs on strawberry farms provide ample opportunity for workers to move up in pay and responsibility.
- Strawberry farming has given Latinos more ownership opportunities than any other major crop.
- Latinos now comprise two-thirds of strawberry growers in California.
- 25% of California's strawberry farmers started out as field workers.



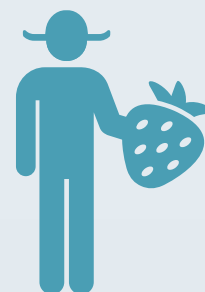
Latinos now comprise two-thirds of strawberry growers in California.



## Growing Generations of Latino Family Farmers

25%

of Latino strawberry farmers  
in California started out as  
field workers (estimated)



FARMER



FOREMAN



FIELD WORKER



"I came from Mexico with nothing –  
just two empty pockets. I gave it  
everything I had."

— **LUIS CHAVEZ**

Owner, L&G Farms, Santa Maria  
Pictured with his daughter, Lorena Chavez



# Competitive Wages & Fair Treatment

Since many started in the fields themselves, California strawberry farmers recognize that field jobs are hard work and care deeply about their employees. Workers are vital to strawberry production: a safe and fair working environment is essential to the success of any family strawberry farm.

- California berry fields provide competitive wages in rural communities:
  - Annual average wage of over \$12.50 per hour<sup>1</sup>
  - More than \$30 per hour during peak harvest<sup>2</sup>
- Most farm employees receive health insurance: farms with 50 or more employees comply with the Affordable Health Care Act health insurance coverage options.
- All farm employees receive medical and disability insurance for work-related injuries.
- Under California's worker compensation system, employees are provided prompt medical treatment for on-the-job injuries or illnesses, no matter who is at fault.

Advancement opportunities also extend to the children of strawberry workers, who are eligible for California Strawberry Scholarships. The state's strawberry farmers are committed to upward mobility through education. Over the past 20 years, more than \$2 million in college scholarships have been awarded to the children of strawberry field workers.

**\$12.56**  
Annual average wage<sup>1</sup>

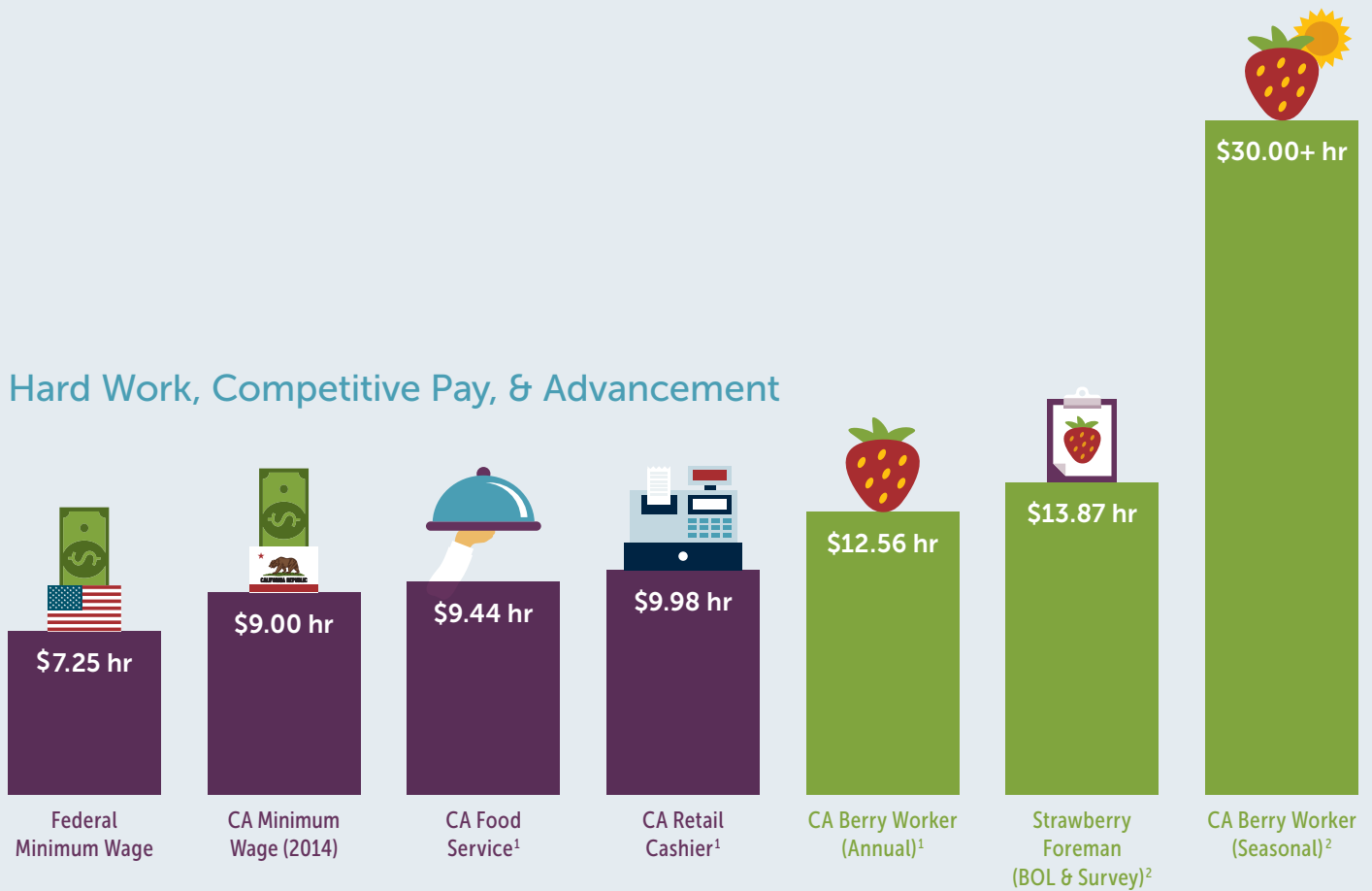
**\$30**

During peak harvest<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> California Employment Development Department agricultural labor statistics, 2014

<sup>2</sup> California Strawberry Commission

## Hard Work, Competitive Pay, & Advancement



<sup>1</sup> California Employment Development Department, 2014

<sup>2</sup> California Strawberry Commission

"I like strawberries. They give me enough for my family to survive."

— BRIAN SAETERN



# Education & Training Programs

The California Strawberry Commission has created a program that exists nowhere else. More than 3,000 employees are trained annually through regular workshops and training events for farmers, ranch managers and crew supervisors. These workshops provide continuing education and skills development for strawberry farming's mid-level management workers.



Workers benefit from an array of leadership, managerial and safety training programs focused on developing:



Labor Management



Communication Tools



Employee Morale



Conflict Resolution



Heat Illness Prevention



Pesticide Safety



Sexual Harassment Prevention

California has the  
**most comprehensive  
worker benefits** in  
the nation.



California has the  
**most robust heat  
illness prevention  
program** in the US.



## Safety & Standards

Farmers and their families live near their farms and work in their own fields. They care deeply about protecting the safety of their workers, neighbors and communities.

California employers, including strawberry farmers, comply with some of the most stringent laws and regulations in the U.S., requiring extra steps to protect workers in the field.

## Uniquely Comprehensive & Stringent Regulations

California has the most comprehensive farm labor protections in the country. California strawberry farmers comply with more than 70 laws and regulations.

In addition to federal labor regulations, California is the only state that has regulations and enforcement infrastructure, including a system of regional offices in the state.

California strawberry farmers take steps to address heat illness prevention, sexual harassment prevention, nondiscrimination, pesticide safety and overall farm safety.



Every grower has a **safety and health program** tailored specifically to their fields.

California has **70+ regulations** in addition to Federal requirements regulating pesticide use.



California berry farms pay an **annual average of over \$12.50 per hour**, and **\$30 per hour** during peak harvest season.





### **Alfredo Ramirez**

Alfredo came to the US at the age of 18. He moved on from hoeing weeds in the strawberry fields to becoming the supervisor of a nursery, which during peak season swells to 350 workers who help raise 500 million plants annually.



### **Glen Hasegawa**

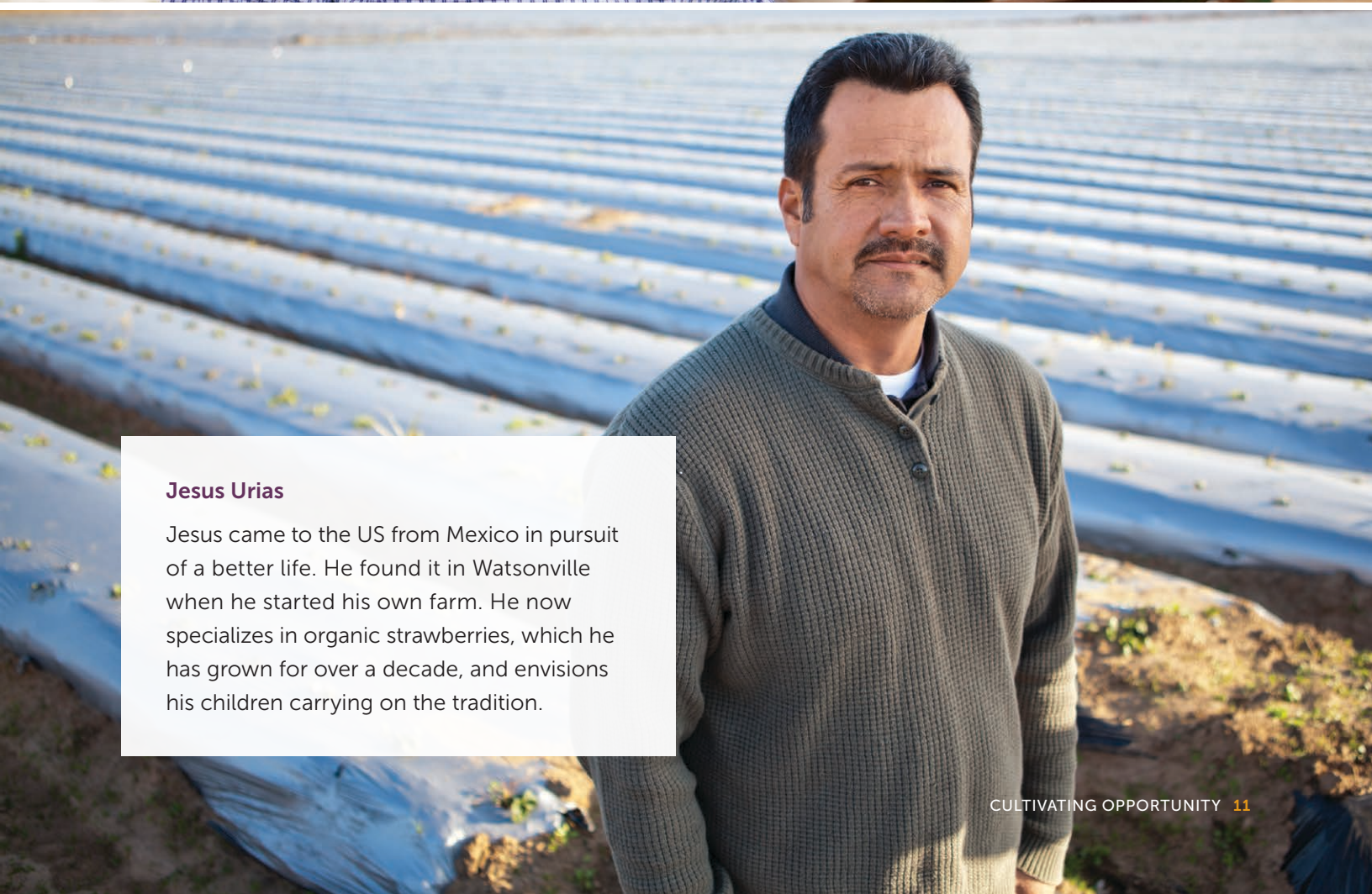
Glen is a third generation Japanese-American farmer who has farmed strawberries his whole life. He appreciates the importance of being a good neighbor in the community, farming in ways that demonstrate his commitment to good health.





### **Dave Peck**

Dave's family roots go back to farming in the Midwest. After graduating from Cal Poly Pomona, he took a job for an agricultural chemical company before he struck out on his own growing strawberries, which he's done for the past 30 years.



### **Jesus Urias**

Jesus came to the US from Mexico in pursuit of a better life. He found it in Watsonville when he started his own farm. He now specializes in organic strawberries, which he has grown for over a decade, and envisions his children carrying on the tradition.





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