

# Growing With The Fields In America Lizeth Caballero

Bakersfield, CA

"Venganse a la escuela!" grito el mayordomo. Yo, todavia un poco dormida, corro para entender el trabajo de hoy...mi dia a comenzado. It is half passed 3:00 a.m., when my mother, who is exhausted from lack of rest, walks into my room and whispers, " diez minutos para irnos." Without thinking twice about it, I am up and wide awake. I gather my belongings and get ready for yet another draining journey...at the grape fields.

For about 6 years, my family has dedicated their lives to planting, picking, and packing the grapes that our nation feeds on. These experiences have put us through distressed, wretched, and hideous moments I will never forget. At sunrise, I am riding in the car with my mom to pick up the workers that carpool with us; after picking them up, we have forty-five minutes to an hour of driving ahead of us. The dreadful fields are our destination where our everyday work awaits us all. Once work has begun, everything completely changes. In Kern Country, everyone is exposed to the heat hitting the triple digits; however, we field workers have it worst. The grape vines are only so tall that we receive barley any shade. With the scorching and blazing sun hitting us from behind, my mother is frequently trading my spots of the "surco" or "groove" to keep me from being exposed to the aggressive heat for too long. I always try to even out our time on the sun, but she insists on taking the side of the extra heat, before anyone gets injured.

Injuries, like heat strokes, surround us and have happened recently. Many of us have fainted and been taken to the hospital. One person even passed away due to a heat stroke. This chain of events has left us speechless; I am thankful to God that my family and I have not been part of that situation.

However, my family has been a victim of the effect of working in the fields. Recently, a traumatizing and heart-breaking event occurred in our lives. A couple of months ago , my mother became very sick; she constantly had fevers, chills , lack of energy , and also had rashes and huge blisters all over her ill body. Until one night, my father rushed my mother to the emergency room, leaving me in charge of my younger sisters back at home. We soon found out about the illness my mother had contracted... it was valley fever. Valley fever is a type of fungus created by the soil that is inhaled once it is up in the air. After working in the fields for 6 years my mother, unfortunately, caught this fungus. Going through this was extremely difficult for my family and me. My sisters and I had to step up and take care of the house, while my father worked even harder than before and my mom was in and out of hospitals. She became fragile and depressed and was isolated from other patients. Since my mother's illness was rare, she

was kept under strict observation, having constant checkups throughout the day. Her room was labeled "Danger Zone" because of the meds she was on. At first, the doctors believed she was suffering from tuberculosis, putting her through chaos. When we were allowed to visit her, my sisters and I had to wear special suits in which we looked like little ducklings looking for their mommy. It tore my heart to pieces seeing my mother cry and go through all that pain.

Growing up and working in the fields that feed the whole country has been a truly challenging, extremely difficult, and hugely concerning feat for me and my family. Having to depend on the season and fruits well-being to be able to continue, is stressing. As my parents move from ranch to ranch and city to city to find work, I pray to God to get me through just one day of work. The field work does not pay well, but it is what my family lives on. Today, my mother is back and better working the grape fields. When we tried convincing her to stay home and catch up on rest, she refused. My mother appreciates and gives numerous thank you's to farm owners for providing the work. Even with a permanent sickness, this job has helped sustain my family and given my mother many memories. One of her favorite things about the job is watching the grape develop; from a baby plant to a juicy fruit that we see in a supermarket were soon ends up onto our table. I don't complain whatsoever because both of my strong parents struggle EVERY SINGLE DAY. When I have a hard time either at work or at school, I think about both of them, who wake up every morning to go yet another unbearable day at work. My parents are my motivation towards success and a better future. They teach me how to fly out from my little nest, to go towards a greater future that I soon believe they will be part off. Growing up in the fields of America is only helping me grow into a resilient, independent, and successful person so that one day I can lead America to a better future.