

# LA VIDA EN EL CAMPO

FARMWORKER STORIES FROM THE  
SAN MATEO COUNTY COAST

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La mejor vida que se puede vivir es en el campo. Trabajar en lo que te apasiona, sentir el aire fresco y experimentar esa libertad en el campo es algo hermoso y forma parte de nuestra cultura. Me siento como en casa cuando estoy en el campo.



The best life to live is in the field. Working in your passion, feeling the fresh air, and experiencing that freedom in the countryside is something beautiful and a part of our culture. I feel as if I'm at home when I'm in the field.

- José, Half Moon Bay

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From nurturing seeds to caring for livestock, farmworkers sustain life for so many in the Bay Area. They take great pride in their work, but life is not so easy for campesinos.

For decades, farmworkers on the coast of San Mateo County have endured deplorable housing conditions, rising rents, and harassment. No longer content to wait for change, farmworkers are organizing themselves to improve their community.

In partnership with Coastside Hope and Puente, we had the opportunity to speak to 22 farmworkers on the Coastside who shared their experiences in the hopes of building a future where everyone can live in a dignified home.



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# JUANA

**Juana was born and raised in Guanajuato, Mexico, and then made the journey to California in search of better economic opportunities.** Upon arriving, she secured a job at a nursery in Pescadero where she cultivated herbs such as rosemary and basil. She later transitioned to harvesting asparagus, mushrooms, and flowers. Juana finds agricultural work rewarding because it allows her to constantly learn new skills.

“All the jobs I’ve had I like them all because they’ve made me feel good. I like to learn about how to grow different crops.”

As a single mother of three young children, Juana feels that her hard work is not in vain because she can provide for her children. She is proud to be a farmworker because “I can help get my children ahead - it’s just me caring for the three of them.”

However, Juana finds it difficult to secure housing on San Mateo County’s Coastside because of the region’s high cost of rent and limited housing inventory. “It is always very difficult to find a place to rent when you have children. Sometimes [lessors] will only offer you very expensive rooms or tell you ‘No’ because there are too many people.”

Unfortunately, Juana and her family have a history of dealing with difficult landlords. After renting a room for three years in a house where she lived with the landlord, Juana was given sudden notice that they were planning to sell the property. Juana searched for a new place to live for two months, but couldn’t find one that would rent to her. In an urgent plea, she asked for a rental extension from her landlord, who initially agreed. However, the landlord began to take away Juana’s privileges and harassed her.

“The landlord said ‘I’ll let you stay this week’, but then she wouldn’t give me a chance to cook. She was in the kitchen all day, even if she didn’t cook... When my kids would shower she would complain that they took too long and about the water bill. After that, I had my two girls shower quickly together, but it was the same complaint.”



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Eventually, Juana found a bedroom to rent for \$1,700 in a shared house, but she and her family only lived there for four months before having to leave due to the home's crowded conditions. "The landlord went to check on the house one day and he saw there were more people home than there should've been. So, they kicked out the people renting in the living room and me as well because he said there were too many of us in the room."

Soon after, in 2023, there was a mass shooting at Juana's workplace - a mushroom farm - that made national headlines. After the shooting, Juana and her children were housed in a hotel, with assistance from San Mateo County. Although she is grateful for the support, she is determined to find permanent housing. "There's no [affordable] housing here. I have searched for apartments, like in San Mateo, and there are none. All the low-income housing is occupied or the opportunity to apply has closed."



Living in affordable housing is a necessity for Juana because she is currently unemployed and still healing from the trauma of the mass shooting. Aside from paying rent, she has other expenses for her kids. "If my children need clothes, I say okay, I can only buy clothes for one because I can't afford to pay for all three. And then I'll wait until I have more money to buy clothes for the next one."

Juana has called the Coastside home for 23 years and it's where she has raised her children. She wishes to continue living in Half Moon Bay because she likes its quaint character. "Here, you can go biking or walking and it's calm outside. You go out with ease. So moving somewhere else, it's not going to be the same security that you have here."

Juana also hopes to continue building a brighter future for her children, "I think an ideal place to live would be somewhere you can rest with ease, where my children have a room for themselves so that they can relax. Where they can enjoy playing in the park and in a yard that is theirs. That is what I think would be the best thing."

Juana longs for privacy and freedom in her home, with no one tracking what she uses, but her focus revolves around her children and making their life as safe and comfortable as possible. She says, "There should be more housing support for single mothers who need housing. I think it would be beneficial to provide single mothers with a little bit more help."

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# MARÍA



**María is a second-generation agricultural worker from Jalisco, Mexico and has lived in Half Moon Bay for 32 years.** Many years ago, her parents migrated to Half Moon Bay where they worked at a nursery and María later followed in their footsteps. She remembers the long days of farm work when business was in higher demand, “I would work from 6:30 AM or 7 AM to 8:00 PM. But since the pandemic, they’ve reduced our hours. Now I only work six and a half hours.”

While business has slowed down, María has not. At 67, she can identify dozens of flowering plants and uses this skill to support managing the nursery’s inventory. “I’m not necessarily proud, because people have to work for a living, right? Because if you don’t work, where are you going to live? Agricultural work is what I do.” Still, María’s impressive cultivation skills are evident in the diverse plants she works with, like sunflowers, dahlias, alstroemerias, kangaroo paws, amaranths, kale, and sweet peas.

While María has always been a hard worker, she knows that it doesn’t ensure affording rent on the Coastside. “If you want to live in a decent home, you have to work day and night, and all of your money goes to paying for rent. Right now to rent an apartment here you have to pay \$3,500 for two small rooms or a single room, a small bathroom, and a kitchen. Renting by yourself is very difficult.”

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Like many others on the Coastside, María once lived with multiple roommates to afford rent. She remembers the burdens of living with six other roommates, “There were two bathrooms, but when you wanted to take a shower, the bathroom was occupied. If you wanted to go to the bathroom, you had to wait in line. Cooking was also a problem.”

After living in a shared housing, María now feels at ease because she now shares an apartment with only her husband, daughter, and son-in-law. “I live happily in my home because only my husband and my daughter live there.” María has rented the same apartment for the past 27 years and considers her rent affordable. “The good thing is that the landlord is following the law, she raises [our rent] 10%, as the law indicates. The landlord isn’t exploitative like others... My rent is still affordable. Thank God, I can still pay my rent.”

María’s two-bedroom apartment is relatively affordable compared to others in her neighborhood. However, María’s landlord isn’t perfect. “She doesn’t keep up with the apartment’s maintenance all the time. For example, if we need a new stove, then I have to buy it. If I need a new refrigerator, I have to buy it. But when I move, I’ll leave with my stuff.”

For María, securing affordable rent is critical to have enough to pay for other expenses. She continues to work so she can afford rent and support her husband who worked in the agricultural sector until he fell ill. “My husband has not worked for five years since he had surgery. But I work so my priority is the rent. I work to pay the rent, [and] my daughter also helps me pay rent.” María is also concerned about how she will manage rent once she retires, especially considering other costly expenses such as food. “Everything is very expensive in town. You go to the Mexican store or buy a bag’s worth of groceries from Safeway, one bag is \$100. You can’t go grocery shopping with \$20 anymore because you can’t buy anything.”

“ [Many] older people continue to live here, but younger people are moving to other places because of the cost of living. People who have moved to Modesto, Stockton, Sacramento, and Oregon because the housing there is more affordable. ”

Due to the high rental costs, María has observed a trend of people migrating to other towns or states. “[Many] older people continue to live here, but younger people are moving to other places because of the cost of living. People who have moved to Modesto, Stockton, Sacramento, and Oregon because the housing there is more affordable.... My colleague lived in San Mateo and moved to Oakland, then he moved to Oregon because he found a house just like the one he was renting in Oakland but rent was less than \$1,000.” But María intends to stay in Half Moon Bay and hopes that she and her husband can live independently in a subsidized housing unit. She imagines a space where they can comfortably grow older, “When you’re older, life is different and there is nothing like living alone in your own small space.” María says that a modest space would suffice for her to feel content, “For me, a home with my little room, my little bath, and my little kitchen. A place that is my own. Not with luxuries or anything.”

María hopes the housing conditions in her community will continue to improve. “What I would say is that people should be more informed so that they can take advantage of their rights. Because we all have rights, with papers or without papers. Let’s make our vote or our opinion count for something.”

# TERESA

**With all of her family back in Mexico, one of the reasons Teresa loves working on the farm is the independence.** “The beauty of farmwork is that you can do it by yourself,” she says. “Although it’s not your land, you are still working it and can do the harvesting by yourself.” To Teresa, there is something magical about “being the first phase of that whole long process.” She especially loves watching the sunflowers bloom and the pumpkins popping from the ground in the fall.



But finding a place to live near her job is hard for a single mother like Teresa. She immigrated to the area about three years ago from Oaxaca, Mexico and she and her young son currently live in a room in Moss Beach. She rents a bedroom in a three-bedroom, two-bathroom mobile home for \$700 a month. Three other families live in the mobile home, with one family in each room, for a total of 9 people living under one roof.

The crowded conditions make life difficult. Teresa shares that, “It’s hard to find a place to live with my child. We have wanted to leave because it does feel very suffocating. But unfortunately my job doesn’t pay enough, so I can’t find another place.” To pay for her and her son’s living expenses, Teresa works in the fields during the agricultural season and during the off-season she works at a restaurant. Even working multiple jobs, the housing costs are too expensive to move elsewhere.

At first, she was sharing a room with another woman because most of the single rooms she could find were more than \$1,500 a month. Even now, at the lower cost of \$700 a month, Teresa still worries about getting evicted. “It becomes a bit worrying when you can’t find work. Then, if you can’t contribute to the rent, they might evict us. So not having stable work can indeed be worrying.”

The place she’s living in currently may be cheaper, but it comes at a cost. “The rooms are very small,” Teresa says. “Only the bed fits, and there’s a small space left for clothes.” Sharing facilities leads to conflict as well because everyone wants to use them at the same time. “Sometimes you want to cook, but the other families are also cooking, so when you want to cook, they are eating,” Teresa explains. “So we’re always clashing with that. It’s the same with the bathroom.”

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**“My former housemate's boyfriend also worked in the fields, and because he's a man they would let him rent a place at work. He paid \$200 or \$300 a month, but lived in a room with eight or ten people. I asked the boss [if I could rent there], but he told me that because I'm a woman he couldn't provide a place for me to live due to safety concerns for me and my child. That's why he prefers to hire only men.”**

In addition, Teresa and the other tenants deal with pests and dilapidated conditions. For example, the window in the room she rents has been broken since she arrived. Although Teresa informed the main tenant to change it when he could, he still hasn't done so. "I have my child and broken glass is dangerous," she explains, "but he hasn't paid attention yet... I bought another blanket so that I don't feel as cold, because the cold air comes in since the window is broken." Without a heater, not only does it get very cold, but also "it gets very moldy - it's blackish and appears on the walls." At one point, the tenants were also dealing with rats. "When we walked, we heard the noise below us. The other family set traps for them."

Despite these conditions, Teresa doesn't feel comfortable asking her landlord for repairs. "He speaks a little Spanish, but it's not very easy to talk to him," she says, while also sharing that he isn't around very often. "He only comes on the first day of each month to collect the rent or to inform us about any complaints. They'll say that we don't recycle or separate the trash well. Or if the water or electricity bill has gone up, then he tells us we need to save more electricity. So, if certain lights are not being used, we have to turn them off." But she worries about asking for repairs. "I've thought to myself, what if he says 'I'm going to charge you for the repair costs'?"

Teresa would like to live somewhere more spacious, but bigger spaces are much more expensive and landlords prefer tenants "not to have many children, not to have pets, and mind the noise too." According to Teresa, it is often cheaper to live in employee housing, but it is hard as a single woman. "My former housemate's boyfriend also worked in the fields, and because he's a man they would let him rent a place at work. He paid \$200 or \$300 a month, but lived in a room with eight or ten people. I asked the boss [if I could rent there], but he told me that because I'm a woman he couldn't provide a place for me to live due to safety concerns for me and my child. That's why he prefers to hire only men."



When Teresa imagines what dignified housing could look like for her and her son, she shares that she would like "a slightly larger space, where I can at least have a bit more privacy... [it] would be more spacious, and above all, would have heating when the winter season begins. Once December comes around, or when the rains start, it gets very cold." She dreams of a patio and garden to relax in, and having her own kitchen, but she's not sure if it will be possible for her to do that here. "I would like to stay in the area, but sometimes you get discouraged when there isn't much work. I should have looked into living in Oregon or Santa Rosa or somewhere else."



## GABRIEL

**Gabriel is originally from Guanajuato, Mexico, and migrated to Pescadero in 2001, following in his father's footsteps.** His father was a farmworker in Pescadero and helped him settle into the area by arranging a job and a place for him to live. Gabriel works in agriculture, harvesting various crops including asparagus, leeks, peas, and fava beans.

He has lived in employee housing for the past seven years and shares the home with his family. His household includes his wife, his brother and sister-in-law, and four nieces and nephews. Although Gabriel enjoys living with his family and considers the housing conditions decent with affordable rent, he desires a position with higher pay and housing not tied to his job. However, the high cost of living in San Mateo County makes relocating difficult, "I can't move to another place, exactly because of the lack of affordable housing."

Seeking better pay, Gabriel once tried applying for a job at a different farm but the outcome was disappointing. He approached a farm for employment, but when the owner discovered who his current employer was, he refused to hire him. This rejection upset Gabriel, and he remembers thinking to himself, "I'm not their property."

Gabriel is uncomfortable with his current situation not only because he would like a higher-paying job, but also due to the management at his work. Gabriel is dissatisfied with his work environment, noting that his bosses are cruel and demanding. He recalls instances where his bosses yelled at the workers and ignored cases of rampant sexual harassment. He worries that these types of actions from their boss might someday affect his family's housing arrangement.

“Thank God, so far there hasn’t been a serious issue with them. We have stood up for ourselves when there’s been disagreements at work. But sometimes, we actually stay quiet when something in the house needs to be repaired because we worry that they’ll evict us and not pay us.” Gabriel and his family make sure to keep their place tidy and try to handle any household repairs themselves to avoid attention from their landlord.

Gabriel also feels disappointed with local efforts to improve the working and housing conditions of farmworkers. He wishes someone from the County would meet directly with farmworkers to understand their experiences and work towards bettering their conditions.

“In all of the years that I’ve worked there, there’s never been inspectors that come to speak with the workers to ask how we’re being treated.” Gabriel is aware that when County inspectors do conduct water quality or housing inspections, they only interact with the employers, therefore only hear one side of the story. He feels that to create change within the farmworker community, County inspectors should engage with farmworkers, “I think the only thing that would help is if someone [from the County] actually came and talked to the farmworkers when the boss isn’t watching over us. They should speak with the workers because it’s not the same as only speaking with the boss. For me, that would be the best thing they could do. I think it would change many things.”

Despite the problems Gabriel has with his employer, he feels at peace living in Pescadero. “I like living here because it’s calm. There aren’t many problems. There’s no vandalism, at least for the time I’ve been here. Everything is quiet.” He plans to continue living in Pescadero and is hopeful that he and his family will someday be able to live under better circumstances. “Dignity would mean not being tied to an employer. I believe it’s no longer dignifying to be bound to a boss, as it limits what you can do. I’ve even found myself in situations where I would consider working elsewhere.” Ultimately, Gabriel hopes he can afford to rent a place to live on his own and be free of dependence on his employer.

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# ARACELI

**Araceli is from Oaxaca, Mexico where she devoted herself to raising her daughter and managing household duties.** Araceli migrated to Half Moon Bay two and a half years ago where she was reunited with her husband who migrated to the area months before her in hopes of gaining economic stability.

The couple worked hard for a year and a half to pay off Araceli's migration debt and to save enough money so that they could afford to bring their daughter North as well. Combined, their border crossing fees amounted to \$30,000.

Araceli quickly began working at her current job, a mushroom farm, where she cultivates mushrooms and packages them for distribution. She finds satisfaction in knowing that her laborious work contributes to feeding people, "Work in our field is very tiring. Sometimes we'll have to pull out bags of soil where the mushrooms are grown, we take out the soil, and then grind it. We have to be in the sun all day long. [But] it's nice to be able to contribute food in that way. You have to be careful because you're handling food, we make sure to be very hygienic cutting and packaging [the mushrooms]."

Araceli's husband works long days juggling two jobs so the family can make ends meet. "He goes to his first job at 8 AM until 3:30 PM and goes to his second job at 4 PM until 10 PM." While her husband works hard to support his family, this type of labor comes with a tradeoff.

“**My husband works double shifts, so we have enough for food, clothes, rent, and everything. But it's a sacrifice because he doesn't spend as much time with us.**”



"My husband works double shifts, so we have enough for food, clothes, rent, and everything. But it's a sacrifice because he doesn't spend as much time with us." Araceli would like her family to spend more quality time together but she understands that as recent migrants without a safety net, they have no other option but to keep working.

The family rents a bedroom for \$1,300 in a home shared with six other roommates. Adjusting to her current housing situation has been a challenge for Araceli, as she remembers life in Oaxaca was quite different.

"It's difficult because in our village, we lived in a bigger house even though we didn't own it. We had this illusion of wanting to have our own house when we came here... And then I arrived only to rent a little room in a house. [Back in Oaxaca] my little girl had her bed there and everything. Here the space is very small."



Araceli also finds it difficult to live with the main tenant due to strict rules like limiting the use of water and electricity. “The refrigerator broke and it spoiled my milk and other groceries. We dealt with that for a long time but the main tenant didn’t show much interest in fixing it.” Still, Araceli puts up with it all because she’s close to work and it’s not easy to find a room to rent with her child.

Araceli dreams of providing a better life for her daughter. “I think housing with dignity is a home for a family that has the essentials, like a room for you and your spouse or partner, another room for the kids, a kitchen, a bathroom, and I think with that I would be happy.”

However, the high rents make it challenging, as most of their income goes toward rent, leaving little room for savings or additional expenses. Still, Araceli hopes one day to have a small, private place for her growing family. “I would like to have another baby, but where I live it’s not possible because it’s too small. Hopefully soon I’ll find another better place.”

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# EVITA

**As the single mother of four children, Evita’s biggest concern is being able to afford housing alongside her children’s expenses for school, healthcare, and food.** Originally from Guanajuato, Mexico, Evita migrated to Half Moon Bay in 2005. She works at a nursery with orchids in Half Moon Bay, and previously worked harvesting brussels sprouts. “Right now, it’s not something to be too proud of, right? Because there’s a lot of problems. I have to work for my four children.”

Without any family in the area, Evita is under a lot of pressure to make sure her children are safe and healthy. She’s been renting a bedroom in Half Moon Bay for the past twelve years in a house that they share with four or five other people. “When I first moved in, I was paying \$850 or \$800 just to rent the bedroom,” she shares. “Then my rent went up to \$1,200 and soon they’re going to raise it another \$100.”

While Evita lives in adequate housing with basic amenities, “there is no heating or air conditioning - nothing. When the weather is cold, you’re freezing.” In addition, the overcrowding makes it hard to find a convenient time to cook or use the bathroom. Her children spend most of their free time confined in the room because the living room is typically occupied by the other household members.

At night, the room is too small to fit them all. “Two of my kids sleep in the kitchen and the other two sleep with me in the bedroom. But we’ve noticed that mold is starting to spread near the kitchen and it smells bad.” Not wanting her kids to get sick, Evita wants to find somewhere else for them to sleep or move somewhere else, but it’s difficult to find a room big enough for her family at an affordable rate.

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However, she may not have the choice to stay. “They’re going to raise my rent by \$100, and once my son turns 18, they’ll raise it more because he’ll be considered an adult.”

With the additional increase, Evita may not be able to afford her rent anymore. She also worries about the possibility of a no-fault eviction. “We’ve heard that the owner wants to take the house back because I think she wants to fix it up or tear it down, and that worries me. I’ve been thinking about what I’ll do if they suddenly ask us to leave. That’s why I’ve been trying to get information about the housing options that will be available here.”



Affordable housing options, however, are slim to none - especially for a single mother. "It would be great if there were more housing options because it's very complicated here; housing is very expensive, way too expensive for just one bedroom," Evita shares. "Like this weekend, I went to the laundromat and found a single room for \$1,500, not including the utilities. But they didn't want kids, only wanted to rent to a couple." Most landlords only want to rent to one or two people, and if they accept children at all, usually they are only okay with one.

Evita knows she's not the only one struggling to stay housed. "A lot of people are moving because of the housing situation. It's very complicated to pay rent in the Half Moon Bay area. Many people I knew no longer live here; they moved to Madera, Manteca, and other places where the housing is cheaper." But Evita doesn't have plans to try to find housing outside of Half Moon Bay. "What I like about living here is the community assistance because in many [other] places, I've heard there isn't as much help as there is here in Half Moon Bay. Here there's help with housing, food, transportation, help for Medi-Cal."



Right now, Evita makes about \$2,180 a month, making it impossible to pay for rent, food, and other expenses for her whole family on her own. Organizations like Coastside Hope that provide rental assistance and free groceries have been a huge support for single mothers like Evita and their families, especially when other benefits aren't as reliable. "I used to receive food stamps, but I don't know what happened because suddenly they were discontinued. Sometimes I can't afford to buy things like milk, cereal, and all those foods that my children like." Although Evita has thought about returning to Mexico to be with her mother, she is motivated to stay in Half Moon Bay so her children can receive an American education. She also knows that she won't be able to find a job that matches her current income in Mexico.

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Despite the obstacles, Evita remains optimistic and believes in a brighter future for her and her children. "For me, a dignified house would be where my kids have their privacy and I have mine. To come home and rest freely, without having to stress about waiting for another person before I can cook, or having to stay up very late to clean." Even if it was a small room or an apartment - as long as she and her kids could have a bit more privacy - she would be happy. She also dreams of returning to Mexico one day. "When I left, I was young and didn't get to say goodbye to my parents. Recently, my dad passed away, and it hurt not having said goodbye."

# NICOLÁS



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| **An agronomist starts from the seed. You sow them, you grow them, you develop them, and you make them beautiful. And when it's ready for the market, well, there's what I did. This is my fruit and this is what I sell. That's what I do. It's my passion.** |

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**For Nicolás, working in agriculture is a source of great pride.** Originally from Nayarit, Mexico, he received an education in agricultural engineering. “I’m an agronomist,” Nicolás says. “I’ve come to this country to learn and continue working. In Mexico the profession is a bit more challenging, but here I have found opportunities on the Coastside and I feel very good working here.”

Nicolás first came to work in Kentucky under the H2A visa program before moving to be closer to his son in Hayward. Now living in Pescadero for 14 years, he has developed his knowledge in harvesting techniques and plant inspections. “I feel proud because I take care of pest control, diseases, plant development and hydration - watering them so they can grow. The beautiful plants that you see sold in the stores are produced in our greenhouse.”

From start to finish, Nicolás loves being part of every step of the growing process. “An agronomist starts from the seed. You sow them, you grow them, you develop them, and you make them beautiful. And when it’s ready for the market, well, there’s what I did. This is my fruit and this is what I sell. That’s what I do. It’s my passion.”

For the past 12 years, Nicolás has been living in employee housing. His home is a three-bedroom mobile home that he shares with five other people. Four people live in a large room and the two other small rooms have one person each.

“Oh yes, I have a good relationship with my landlord and boss,” Nicolás says. “I pay \$146 per month to rent my bedroom. So this is relatively very little and we have gas, electricity, water, air conditioning, and heating when it is cold. We have free garbage service from our employer. We have parking spaces and the freedom to be at ease in that place.”

Nicolás’ rent hasn’t increased in the decade he’s lived there and the houses are only about four to five years old and well-maintained inside and out. The maintenance person is also quick to repair and replace things. “There is never confrontation or blaming like that you broke something. We have no problems. Our landlord tries to make sure we feel comfortable and understands that if we feel at ease, then we are going to put a lot of effort into our work.” Nicolás says he’s very lucky to live where he does. “Our housing is very noble on the part of the employer-landlord... He also provides us a free lunch in the middle of the day - where else does that happen? Nowhere. So that’s the reason why we stay here. And we’re always paid on time.”

Nicolás didn't always live in such pleasant circumstances. When he first moved to Hayward, he worked at Caltrain for two years and most of his paycheck would go to rent. "I've rented rooms in Hayward, San Leandro, and in Oakland many years ago. They were expensive, unsanitary, and in poor condition. Here I have found comfort and tranquility." When he moved to Pescadero for agricultural work, his housing continued to be poor. "For about a year and a half, I lived on a farm where the housing was in very bad condition. The base boards were vile, the beds were vile, and conditions were terrible. When I came here it was a total change."

For Nicolás, the drastic change in his circumstances makes him more motivated to take care of his home. "We all have the obligation to keep the trailers inside and outside as clean as possible," Nicolás says. "We take care of our home because not all employers provide this type of housing." Now, Nicolás feels like he can pay rent, afford essential expenses, and put money towards savings.

Nicolás' varied experiences in housing has strengthened his belief that people need to push for better living conditions. "If the ranchers want to, they can make their workers' living conditions better. Their workers can feel comfortable and they'll go to work comfortably. But it's bad when they keep you - I hate to say it - like a little animal. There you work and there you're going to stay. Not anymore - things have to change going forward."

**“ —  
| We can't continue to go  
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— ”**

One of Nicolás' previous employers listened to his workers when they complained about the conditions together. "My former boss put his heart and soul into making our housing better and put in vinyl flooring. Because we insisted, he put in air conditioning, he put in potable water - we put pressure on him and it worked." Nicolás knows these changes don't happen overnight, but shares, "There have been very substantial changes in the rancher's mentality. I like that, because it helps all of us."

Nicolás says workers aren't looking for anything fancy. "For us farmworkers, we are content with having a bed, a good room and a small closet where you can keep your clothes." He says for him and his wife, who lives in Mexico, they would be happy with a simple but spacious and clean one-bedroom. "Something comfortable. Something for my family to inherit, for our children. To arrive and say, 'Wow, I have something that is mine'. Maybe something rented or owned, but it would be something comfortable."

Nicolás understands that many people don't feel the same confidence he does in speaking to their employer about their housing conditions, and he believes people need to be informed of their rights and the possibilities. The first thing he recommends is attending organizing meetings with Puente de la Costa Sur and Del Campo al Cambio. "There's lots of apathy," Nicolás says. "People don't know what they are missing - Puente gives us valuable information each time we meet. They are our link to stay informed on many topics. So I would ask the community to join us, to come and get informed, to come and fill themselves with this information. I do not understand this apathy. People ask for support, but it would be beneficial for them to understand the information that is out there."

Once people are informed, Nicolás says the desire to organize will overcome the fear of being fired or evicted. "We are getting informed on decent housing, healthcare, and many other topics," he shares with pride. "We can't continue to go on like this. If we are all together, we'll move forward better and faster. We have a strong voice as a team."

# YOANA & PERLA

**Yoana and Perla, sisters in their early 20s from Guanajuato, Mexico, have lived in Pescadero since October 2023.** Before migrating to California, they worked in agriculture in Mexico to help provide for their family, but their weekly earnings were low and amounted to less than \$100. The sisters decided to migrate to California to earn higher wages so they could continue supporting their retired mother, two siblings, and nephew. It wasn't an easy choice to leave their family behind and endure the conditions at the border and beyond. "[In the U.S.] you don't live very comfortably," Yoana says, "but there is a lot of work and a lot more money to be made."

But to even get to the U.S., both sisters had to pay \$11,500 each - and then successfully cross the border. Perla recalls, "The first time I tried crossing, I had to crawl because my phone and my uncle's phone had no signal, and we couldn't remember the directions. We decided to keep going and I arrived completely scratched up... and then, when I climbed over the wall, it was like it all went away." Yoana reminds her sister, "The second time they caught you again in San Diego, and this time you were almost over the wall. I stayed hidden for about an hour. The plane was overhead and they tell you not to look up because of the lasers - They were shouting 'Mexicans!' They let the dogs loose, and they sniffed around until they found us but didn't bite." The sisters remember the way their panic set in while detained. "Some immigration officers ask 'Do you feel okay? Did you drink that water, do you need anything?' There are some that say, 'Shut up, and go away.'"

When they finally made it across on their third attempt, the sisters contacted their family in California: an aunt in Tulare and another aunt in Pescadero. Yoana and Perla first lived with their aunt in Tulare for six months. They worked in agriculture harvesting peaches, grapes, almonds, and pistachios. "We try, especially with food, to handle it with care because if you think to yourself, 'Maybe I'm going to buy it and eat this produce someday.'"

After half a year in Tulare the sisters moved to Pescadero to work on a cannabis farm. When they first arrived, Yoana and Perla rented with their aunt in her studio for three months. But after seeing an ad at a gas station in January 2024, they moved to a room in a manufactured home that they share with their landlord and the landlord's family. "We rent a small room, it's just big enough for a bed and a small piece of furniture. Only one of us can walk by the narrow space between the bed and the dresser. They charge us \$957 for rent plus \$300 for gas every three months." Even though they don't have to share a room with their aunt anymore, it's not without a cost. "The rent is expensive. Well, it seems expensive for a room, because my aunt pays \$1,000 for her studio with everything included and we pay \$900 plus expenses."



Even with these higher costs, the house has problems. “The room we rent is damp. The ceiling has mold. The room smells of humidity.” Yoana adds, “The door is no good. The knob won’t lock so we lock it with a piece of board from the inside.” But despite these issues, Yoana and Perla have no plans to tell their landlord. “You think to yourself, ‘Oh, what if I tell them and they get mad at me and ask me to leave?’” Perla confides. “There is nowhere to rent in Pescadero.” As long as their landlord gives them their privacy and maintains the necessary parts of the trailer, they’re content. “She’s a good person. We just go to work and when we get home, we eat and we go to our room.”

**“ —  
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— ”**  
- Yoana

So far the sisters have enjoyed living in Pescadero, where the weather is more bearable and the scenery more beautiful compared to their time in Tulare. “We like living here because it’s quiet and you can relax.” Yoana and Perla do hope that one day they can live somewhere more private.

When asked what dignified housing means to them, Yoana says, “Housing that is in good shape, where everything works.” Perla adds, “Having your necessary things like gas, water, electricity, and no leaks. I’d like to have a nice room.” Yoana continues, “Yes, a place with a nice small kitchen and a small bathroom.” What’s most important to both the sisters in a dignified home is privacy, but they know this is hard to come by in Pescadero. “The rents should be lower. We’d like to live independently. Even if it was just that, we could afford a studio.”

“Right now where we live, we are comfortable... but there’s some little things that we have to endure,” Perla shares. “I would like my space and my privacy. There are some little things currently where I live that are not a big deal, but there are things that you can say have been annoying. But the landlord will say, ‘If it bothers you then go look for some place better.’”

Despite the challenges, Yoana won’t be deterred. “We have to go back [to Mexico], but only God knows what will happen. For now I’m going to continue working.” Perla adds, “Because if there is no work then there’s no way to pay rent, right? I don’t pay rent and they’re going to kick me out.”



**“ —  
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— ”**  
- Perla

# PALOMA



Paloma's good relationship with her employer has allowed her to find a stable living in farm work, despite its challenges. She has lived in employee housing in a manufactured mobile home for the past 14 years with her husband, her two children ages eleven and nine with another child on the way, her in-laws, and her brother-in-law. Splitting the rent between them means her share is usually about \$80 per month. After paying rent, Paloma's family has enough to cover their other expenses and even build up some savings. "It's not a large amount, but it is enough to buy food and things for our children or to be able to save money."

**During her teenage years, Paloma's family migrated around California following the growing seasons before settling in Half Moon Bay in 2007.** Since then, Paloma has followed in her family's footsteps, developing skills from crop cultivation to produce packaging to forklift operation. "Working in the fields really inspires me," she says. "People tell me, 'Why don't you look for an office job? You're educated and you know English perfectly well. You could be a translator or something.' But I tell them, 'I don't like sitting in a chair in front of a computer. I like to be moving and active. I don't like just being in one place.'"

“—  
Working in the fields really inspires me... People tell me, 'Why don't you look for an office job? You're educated and you know English perfectly well. You could be a translator or something.' But I tell them, 'I don't like sitting in a chair in front of a computer. I like to be moving and active. I don't like just being in one place.'

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Although she feels like she can ask her employer to make repairs when necessary, Paloma likes to make home repairs and improvements herself as a thank you to her employer for this reduced rent. She even takes on odd jobs whenever someone calls her for help with housing repairs.

Paloma acknowledges that many others are not as lucky. “Thank God we have a good boss, not everyone has one,” Paloma says with relief. “He cares a lot about his people. Like when we’re not working, he asks us, ‘Are you doing okay financially? Do you need help?’” Like many other farms, work is seasonal so oftentimes the workers have to find work elsewhere when the season ends. Having an employer that is understanding of the seasonal financial gaps has allowed Paloma’s family to live in their home since 2011.

As she imagines her future, Paloma hopes she can stay with her family in her quiet little home on the ranch with clean air and water where her children have the freedom to play all day long away from cars. The reality is, however, that this may not be possible in the future, which is why Paloma made investments in land in Mexico. “I only have DACA [status]. If I don’t manage to fix my situation and immigration comes to remove me, I have something to provide for my children.” Whatever the future holds for Paloma, all she hopes for is the continued happiness and well-being of her children.



“**Thank God we have a good boss, not everyone has one...He cares a lot about his people. Like when we're not working, he asks us, 'Are you doing okay financially? Do you need help?'**”

Paloma may have a few places she calls home, but when she works in the fields she feels it all become connected. With her hands in the damp soil, covered in earth, she muses on her time as a young girl in Michoacán, México. “That smell really brings you back,” Paloma says fondly. “It brings back memories of where you come from, like when you’re in Mexico. It brings back that memory of your roots. That’s what I like, the fresh air.”

# FELIPE

**No one has seen and understood the drastic changes in conditions of farmworker housing on the Coastside more than Felipe.** Felipe migrated from Michoacán, Mexico in the mid-eighties, settling with his family in Half Moon Bay. He's been working with flowers for decades, planting, cutting, and cleaning them as well as maintaining the greenhouse. He says he gets joy from "simply seeing how the plants are growing. Making sure they're looking nice when you're taking care of them, watering them regularly, and watching them grow from a young stage and then seeing the results they produce. Everything is nicely in bloom and looks really beautiful." Agricultural work used to seem as abundant as the fall harvest. "There used to be a lot more people here," Felipe says. "I remember when I arrived in '85 there were a lot of people. Now there aren't. A lot of people have moved to Modesto and Madera where it's cheaper and bought houses."

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| **There used to be a lot more people here...I remember when I arrived in '85 there were a lot of people. Now there aren't. A lot of people have moved to Modesto and Madera where it's cheaper and bought houses.** |  
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But the allure of homeownership isn't a draw for Felipe. He and his wife managed to buy a home in Half Moon Bay back in 2001, but lost it in 2004 when the economy took a downturn. "The payments became very expensive. We couldn't manage it. We had to put the house on a short sale, and it sold for a very low price."

Now, like most other working families, Felipe can no longer afford to buy a home and rents instead. For 13 years, he's been renting a four-bedroom home in Moss Beach with wife, his daughter and son-in-law and his two grandchildren. The rent for the house is \$3,450, but the family splits the rent and Felipe contributes \$1,750. "It's a big house. The house has four rooms and two floors. Upstairs there are three bedrooms and two full bathrooms. It has two living rooms and two kitchens. One upstairs and one downstairs. My daughter lives upstairs with her two kids. I live downstairs, on the lower floor, with my wife."

Luckily, Felipe hasn't had many issues with his landlord. "I don't even know her because we always go to pay the rent at the management company. I just go in to drop off the check through a box." With regards to the management company he says that "so far, they have treated us well. It's been about two years since we've had an increase. We don't bother the landlord. If something happens or needs repair, my son-in-law works on everything." But for big things the property management will send someone over, like when their garage door broke.



What has been difficult for them is living with a pet. “Before we rented a house in Half Moon Bay for three years, but we had to leave because of our dog... Now I keep my dog on the ranch where I work because they wouldn’t let us keep it in our current home either.”

Still, Felipe likes his living situation. His boss at the flower nursery where he’s worked for decades offered him employee housing, but he refused. Although he previously lived in employee housing and described the housing as well-maintained with working amenities, he says, “In my home, nobody tells me anything. After I saw how the boss was throwing the tenants’ things around. Why would I go live there?”

But the independence he has in his current home is hard to maintain. “We don’t have any problems. The only problem we have is paying the rent.” The ranch where Felipe works used to have more work, but now work has been so slow the ranch almost closed before putting the workers on a reduced schedule of six hours a day. “Paying the rent has been a bit tight. These months have been tough because we’re not working many hours. I’m having a hard time. It’s tough because I have to pay all the bills, pay for the truck, pay insurance, and the phone bill.”

Housing is sparse and rents are high and Felipe knows he would have better luck following some of his neighbors and friends to Stockton, Modesto, Sacramento, or Madera to buy a home. But no matter how tough it is, Felipe has no plans to leave his community as long as he can afford rent.

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Aside from the family he lives with, Felipe also has a son who lives in Pacifica and a brother that lives in the area. He takes pride in the work that he does and he’s used to the climate and culture on the Coastside. “For a lot of people it would be a dream to have their own house. But as I said, in these situations it’s difficult to buy here, it’s very hard. Here, prices are above 1 million. Even if it’s a small house, at least you can lie your head down. It doesn’t have to be a luxury house if you can’t afford it. What good is having a huge mansion if you can’t pay for it?”

# CARMEN

**The Coastside has been Carmen's home for the past 24 years.** Originally from Guanajuato, Mexico, Carmen first arrived in Pescadero with her then one-year-old child and immediately had trouble finding housing. Their living arrangements had fallen through and her husband, who had gone alone on a different route, had been delayed at the border.

"I was really worried because I didn't know what to do with my little one. We had nothing—no money, no place to go, nothing. My extended family helped us, thank God. They made things a bit easier, and they took us to look for jobs at a local farm."



Even after her husband arrived, however, they still had trouble finding housing before someone offered a small storage room by a restaurant for them to stay in. "We were to cook inside and use the bathroom for the toilet and showering. We stayed there for around five months while we looked for other rentals." Carmen and her family then bounced around different employee housing options before finally settling in Moonridge in Half Moon Bay.

The first place they stayed was at a ranch. "The ranch owners needed someone to clean the animals on weekends, and in exchange for that, they would provide housing," Carmen shares. "We had to work on weekends and pay a bit more, but we stayed there for about three years before moving [to El Granada] because the lady said she was going to sell the ranch." After El Granada, they moved back to Pescadero into a mobile home with another family that was difficult to live with. When Carmen received the news that her family could move into Moonridge she was thrilled - she knew she couldn't pass up the opportunity to live in a subsidized housing complex, even though she and her husband continued to work on farms in Pescadero.

Carmen, her husband, and her two younger sons have been living in the same three-bedroom house in Moonridge for 19 years. But although Moonridge is considered affordable housing, Carmen disagrees. "I live in affordable housing but I don't consider it affordable anymore. Sometimes they increase our rent by \$100, sometimes \$150. Before, they would go long periods without raising our rent, but now it's very consistent. It's every year now." Looking back on when she first moved in, Carmen says, "I remember at that time, we paid about \$800 for the house - now I'm paying \$2,000."

**"I live in affordable housing but I don't consider it affordable anymore. Sometimes they increase our rent by \$100, sometimes \$150. Before, they would go long periods without raising our rent, but now it's very consistent. It's every year now."**

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**Housing is very expensive. When we can no longer work, what are we going to do?  
How will we afford such high costs?**

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In addition, she’s recently been more worried about safety due to the rise of thefts and shootings. “It wasn’t always like this. Before, everything was very peaceful, but now it’s a bit more frightening. They’re changing the rules again because of all the recent incidents.” That’s partially why Carmen sends her children to school in Pescadero - so they can be closer to her and stay with the Pescadero community they grew up with. Their deep connection to the Pescadero community even has Carmen considering moving back. “If I were given the opportunity - if my boss were to offer me a trailer or a small house, no matter if it’s here where we work - I would be thrilled. I like where I am now, but living in the countryside would be more peaceful.”

Although their housing situation was often in flux until Moonridge, Carmen’s employment has been very stable. She works at a flower nursery that also grows vegetables in the winter. “I like my job because I love flowers. I really enjoy planting them. I love the summer season, because there are so many flowers to pick. I love making bouquets. It’s something I really enjoy,” Carmen explains. “I think that’s why I’ve stayed there and haven’t worked elsewhere. People often ask me, ‘Why don’t you work somewhere else? You could get another job that pays a bit better or is cleaner.’ I say, maybe, but I really like it.”

Like many farmworkers, winter is the toughest season for Carmen. “In the summer we work full time, but in the winter it’s very difficult. We often work only two days, sometimes three if it rains, or sometimes not at all. Sometimes, they say we’re just going to fulfill the order (three hours of work), and then everyone has to go home.” Carmen’s husband works more in the winter and earns more than she does, so he ends up covering the expenses in the winter.

“Sometimes we’re tight on money, but we manage. It’s not that we have extra, but we usually have just enough to buy food,” Carmen says. “Right now, we’re not doing great, but we’re not doing terribly either. In the winter, it’s harder because we worry about whether we’ll have enough for food, bills, electricity, water, and other necessities.”

Living paycheck to paycheck also means that retirement seems impossible. “Housing is very expensive. When we can no longer work, what are we going to do? How will we afford such high costs?” When asked about her ideal home, Carmen has a very practical answer: “Something that is within our means of affordability, because the costs are so high and our earnings are so low.”



# ANA



**Ana is from the state of Michoacán, Mexico, and migrated to the Coastside with her two sons in 2001.** She reunited with her then-husband who was living in a small home on a ranch in Montara, but left behind two daughters in Mexico. She stayed on the ranch briefly, before the property was sold. Ana then applied for subsidized housing in the Moonridge community and was accepted.

Although Ana liked her new home, her relationship with her husband began to deteriorate. He became controlling and unsupportive of their family, leaving Ana to be financially responsible for their children despite not having any financial freedom.

“I hardly had any money to spend because my husband didn’t give me any money for the bills. He wanted to keep it all to himself.”

The period of being separated from her daughters and facing marital problems was particularly challenging for Ana. She recalls feeling like she missed out on being present for her family, “I left my little grandchildren behind, and now they’re grown up. Before, every week my daughters would come over for a meal. I suffered a lot because I didn’t have their company here.”

“ —  
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However, Ana was hired at a nursery in Half Moon Bay where she learned how to cultivate flowers and this job not only distracted her from her problems but also brought her joy. “When I first got here, I felt depressed but I became happier when I was working with plants.” She worked at the nursery for twenty years until recently retiring. She loved working with flowers, especially roses which she described as a privilege since the nursery supervisors were selective in choosing workers to handle roses because they require high skill and maintenance.

Ana endured years of living in a possessive environment. Most of the time she tried to avoid her husband but he would provoke her by charging her rent out of spite. “At first, I only paid for the electricity, gas, telephone, and cable, but later on, he started charging me rent as well.” Ana had to manage a tight budget while living with the threats from her husband. While she did not want to live with her husband she knew she could not afford to rent a place alone. When the pandemic happened Ana’s work hours were reduced and work was scarce. During this time, Ana let her husband know that she wouldn’t be able to contribute to the rent. “He threatened me, saying, ‘But you’ll see how you’re going to have to pay.’ And I thought to myself, that’s what he always says.”

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| **When I first got here, I felt depressed**  
| **but I became happier when I was**  
| **working with plants.**  
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But one day Ana noticed she hadn’t seen her husband for days and realized he had left indefinitely. Soon after, Ana discovered that her husband had not been paying rent for months leaving her with thousands of dollars of unpaid rent. Ana was overwhelmed by debt and reached out to a local caseworker for help. The caseworker connected her to financial resources. “The first place where they helped me was at the church, which helped me somewhat. It was a big debt. And later Coastside Hope helped me with \$5,000 for rent because I was really deep into a severe depression.” Receiving this financial assistance helped Ana regain her footing, and for the first time in a long time, she felt hopeful that everything would be alright.

Ana’s situation improved even further when she received the news that a subsidized unit for seniors was available for her in Half Moon Bay. She moved into her new studio apartment in 2023 and now feels comfortable and settled. “I’m comfortable here for one reason, I’m close to the stores, and I can walk there.” Ana still faces some challenges, such as dealing with a racist neighbor and lacking space for her plants, but overall she is at ease now that her housing and relationship concerns are behind her.



# LORENA

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**Unfortunately us farmworkers are the most marginalized in the workforce. Because we are paid the minimum wage, sometimes what they pay us is not enough to put food on the table and pay the bills... I tell myself I'm just trying to survive.**

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**Before arriving in Half Moon Bay 25 years ago, Lorena migrated to Salinas from Jalisco, Mexico.**

Lorena quickly left Salinas at the urging of her cousins who wanted to be closer to her. Finding housing was challenging, especially with her two children, leading her to live in various uncomfortable situations before finding stability in the Moonridge community.

The first place Lorena lived in Moss Beach was a mobile home where she lived for about two months. “When we arrived we had nothing. Nothing at all. My cousin brought me some comforters and pillows. Another cousin took my kids and bought them clothes... We would walk everywhere, including to work. It was very difficult. I used to say, ‘I want my kids to have their own space, their privacy.’” They then moved to another house in the same area, but the main tenant would harass her, hiding silverware and dishes from her family. Then they moved to another house near Moss Beach with 14 roommates. “We had to wake up very early to use the bathroom because there were so many of us.” Finally, Lorena was able to find stable and affordable housing in Moonridge where she has been renting her three-bedroom, two-bathroom home for 23 years, at \$1,016 a month. She lives with her son while her daughter lives in Oregon.

Lorena enjoys having her own space near nature with the hills behind her house, a garden, and the beach just a mile away. In all this time, Lorena hasn't had any problems with getting repairs done. When she notifies them that something isn't working in the house, Lorena says, “I always find them very courteous. They've always been very accessible; if something's not right, they come and fix it. But I also take good care of the unit.” She calls living in Moonridge a blessing and a privilege because of the privacy at the affordable price, but it's not all perfect. Due to high housing costs on the Coastside and even at Moonridge, some tenants sublet their extra rooms or the living room, which Lorena says is reflected in the lack of parking.

After an accident that put her out of work, Lorena similarly worries about her future ability to pay for her housing. Lorena previously worked at a nursery where she started with plant cultivation and inventory before eventually she was promoted to managing interior and exterior plant decor for the nursery's major clients. She would decorate offices, malls, hotel lobbies and rooms, outdoor spaces, and holiday displays in San Mateo County and San Francisco





I was grateful because I was putting food on the table. No matter how hard the work was, I had a job. Because when you don't have a degree or another qualification, it's tough. I had to be thankful because my boss believed in me, and I couldn't let him down because he gave me his trust." She adds, "People asked me where I studied and I would tell them I didn't study anywhere. Necessity was my best teacher."

Unfortunately, an accident at work left her with difficulty walking and standing for extended periods, and she is no longer able to work. She receives workers' compensation but struggles with the little income she receives. "At first, I was making \$13,000 a year. Later, I earned \$40,000 and some change. But now, I receive \$12,000. All of it goes to rent. Everything. Because of the water, the electricity, and all the bills."

Many farmworkers like Lorena will have an accident or disability that eventually puts them out of work. Even before her accident, Lorena had arthritis in her fingers from years of planting. "Unfortunately us farmworkers are the most marginalized in the workforce. Because we are paid the minimum wage, sometimes what they pay us is not enough to put food on the table and pay the bills... I tell myself I'm just trying to survive. Yesterday I made potatoes, but I used to always make soups, salads, meats like steak or shrimp, and some fruit. And now, no. It frustrates me."

Despite her setbacks, Lorena still looks towards the future with hope. She believes everyone should have their own space with adequate services like water and electricity. "A home with dignity would meet your basic needs. It doesn't need to be large, you don't need a mansion." She dreams of having breakfast in her own garden and maybe participating in an activity or two in the community. She jokes, "Even though I'm like this, I would like there to be activities... As someone who's older, I'd like to craft, even if it's just making a seashell necklace. Drawing, sewing, or even taking guitar lessons. It would also be great to have nutrition classes." Ever with an active and joyful spirit, Lorena leaves us all with a valuable piece of advice: "Live intensely and enjoy what God gives us each day, in whatever way we are... Because we are never prepared for an accident."

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**At first, I was making \$13,000 a year. Later, I earned \$40,000 and some change. But now, I receive \$12,000. All of it goes to rent. Everything. Because of the water, the electricity, and all the bills.**

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# MARTIN



**Originally from Oaxaca, Mexico, Martin migrated to California to be able to support his family, his wife and son, in Mexico.**

Because his father wasn't in his life, Martin had to begin working in the fields at age 10, where he cultivated fruits like papaya, banana, and lime. His tough childhood made him even more motivated to be a better parent and provider for his son. "We had a father who wasn't there for us. So I said, I'm not going to do the same. If I have to work hard, I'd rather do that than have my child suffer like I did. I'm doing it for him because if one day he wants to get an education he'll have the opportunity."

Martin previously worked and lived on a strawberry farm in Davenport but left when the farm went out of business. When Martin moved to Pescadero, he wanted to continue working in the fields. "I enjoy working in agriculture because it reminds me of being in the fields like in Mexico. In Mexico, you're always out in the fields. If you end up working in a restaurant, it's not very comfortable. It feels better to be like a bird that's free."

He also shares what a big help Puente was when he first arrived. "They provide substantial assistance with food. When you first arrive, they give you a bag of supplies or provide help that you wouldn't get elsewhere. They've also given out food cards." This initial assistance helps newcomers build a sense of community in a place where they are far from home and family.

For the past four years, Martin has been working at a flower nursery and living in employee housing, renting a bedroom in a mobile home for \$150. He shares the three-bedroom home with five other roommates. "The colleagues you're working with, it's like they're your brothers, your family, and you feel comfortable with them. You feel sad when someone leaves because you get along so well."

Luckily, they haven't had any problems and his employer-landlord treats the workers well. "Where we're living, about three or four months ago, he set rules," Martin explains. "Rules to keep things clean. It benefits us because it helps maintain a clean environment in the house and avoid conflicts." Martin is also able to go to his employer when things need to be fixed. "When we have issues, like when the power goes out or a stove or fridge isn't working, we let him know. He takes care of it because we have a maintenance person. He handles it and then buys a replacement if needed."

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**I enjoy working in agriculture because it reminds me of being in the fields like in Mexico. In Mexico, you're always out in the fields. If you end up working in a restaurant, it's not very comfortable. It feels better to be like a bird that's free.**

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Plus, every day at noon they get a little taste of home from a lady from Oaxaca that his employer pays to deliver lunch to the workers. “Our boss has been providing us with a prepared lunch for just over a year now. You have to be thankful because you don’t get a paid lunch like that anywhere else.”

The main issue Martin has with his living situation is the lack of access to clean water, which he has to get all the way in Half Moon Bay. “A machine that provides clean water would be very helpful for me. It would save a lot of effort because you work every day, and water is one of the things you spend the most money on. If you don’t have water, you can’t cook, since the water from the houses isn’t usable for that purpose.”

He adds, “I would like it if we had washing machines, but supposedly it’s not allowed because of all the water regulations.” That’s why Martin has stockpiled a lot of clothes, so he can avoid having to go to the laundromat so often. “Every week, you end up paying around \$40 or \$20 just to wash clothes, and every time you go out, you get hungry too. So you end up spending at least \$120 to \$130 every month.”

Martin knows it’s not paradise, but at this price it’s hard to beat. “It’s almost like a freebie because we pay \$150 per month. Sometimes new people come in and say they don’t like the job. I ask them, ‘Do you think you want to leave for the city? In the city, you’ll pay \$700 to \$1,000 for a bedroom or sharing a room.’ I tell them they have to get used to it.”

But it’s only because of the employee housing that Martin’s accommodations are so affordable. “I see families here who come, but they’re only making it day to day because they pay \$3,000, \$2,000 a month in rent. To live here long term, for me, that’s not worth it.” For Martin, housing with dignity is just about having the essentials. “The most necessary things should be there, like a kitchen and whatever else is needed for a home. It’s better to have a dining area if possible. But if you can’t afford it, you make do with what you can.”

Through Martin’s hard work, he is able to support his family in Oaxaca, paying for his nephew to rent a home while he pursues his education and funding the construction of a home for his wife and son. “It’s nice here because you can give your children all the luxuries. It’s nice, but I also think it’s nice to be able to invest back in the place where you were born.”

When thinking about his ideal home, he says, “I’d like it to be as nice as possible, the nicest it can be. Because now that I’m here, I have the opportunity to build a nice house in Mexico.” Martin believes building something stable is important, especially when the future is so unpredictable. “One suffers a lot when you come over as an undocumented immigrant,” he says. “And you know what? Tomorrow you might go back there. Having somewhere to go is important because we’re not from here. We don’t have papers. Tomorrow, immigration might come and take you away. I’ve seen a lot of videos.” Martin knows one day he’ll have to go back but for now he just wants to work as much as he can while he can.

“**A machine that provides clean water would be very helpful for me. It would save a lot of effort because you work every day, and water is one of the things you spend the most money on. If you don’t have water, you can’t cook, since the water from the houses isn’t usable for that purpose.**”

# JOSÉ

**Originally from Jalisco, Mexico, José is no stranger to life in the fields.** “I grew up planting corn, squash, and beans. My dad would go to the U.S. to work, and my mom would tell me to plant something so we would have food to eat.” José’s father was also a farmworker and worked in Half Moon Bay for 40 years. Now, José rents a small plot of land in Half Moon Bay to grow his own crops. José works alone, harvesting aromatic and fine herbs, and various vegetables like lettuce, beets, nopales, and beans. He then sells his produce at local farmers’ markets and supplies local restaurants. “More than anything, I feel proud because it’s something I enjoy, something I’m passionate about, and I’ve been doing it since I was seven years old.” Reflecting on what he’s most proud of in his work, he says, “What I really enjoy is trying to establish a connection with my customers. I provide recipes and suggest combining your vegetables with those herbs. It’s great. The fact that you grow your plants and watch them grow, the whole process. It’s everything.”

With the proceeds of his business, José helps pay for a \$1,900 three-bedroom unit in Moonridge that he shares with his retired parents and his brother. The staff are responsive and able to fix things quickly, but Moonridge is no longer as affordable as it used to be. “When we first moved in, we were paying about \$607, but little by little, it’s gone up. Now we’re paying about three times more than what we started with.” With everyone’s rent increasing, people have looked for work in other industries such as hotel work, even though Moonridge is set aside for people who work in agriculture or fishing. As one of the few people at Moonridge still working in agriculture, rental increases put a huge strain on José’s finances, especially as he’s caring for his parents. “My parents are retired now, but unfortunately, everything is very expensive. It doesn’t matter if they’ve raised the minimum wage by half of what it was. If things cost three times more than they used to, it doesn’t really help.”

With costs in everything rising, José has found it hard to keep up with bills. “My former employers told me, ‘Work, work, work hard.’ They gave me various pieces of advice, like saving money. So I tried to follow those tips. I pay the rent and the bills, and put away a little bit of money, but the money I set aside runs out in the first two months. The time for farmers to rest is in December, but what good are vacations if there’s no money? There’s nothing left for the rest of the time, and that’s when it gets tough.” José explains that he has to borrow money to get through the winter months before he starts planting again.



“ I pay the rent and the bills, and put away a little bit of money, but the money I set aside runs out in the first two months. The time for farmers to rest is in December, but what good are vacations if there’s no money? There’s nothing left for the rest of the time, and that’s when it gets tough. ”

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**I worry about everything. I worry about stopping work or generating less. I also worry about the possibility of losing my apartment because everything is interconnected.**

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“Most ranchers have about five months where you’re not producing anything, and during that time, you still have to pay the rent for the property.” Living paycheck to paycheck means that even the smallest unexpected cost can be catastrophic. When he had a problem filing his taxes, José went to Coastside Hope for help. Even though Coastside Hope were unable to help him get his money back, staff suggested he fill out an application for rental assistance.

“When they say that, you feel a sense of hope and relief. But once they actually help you, it makes you want to cry because, practically speaking, people don’t give you much help. So when you see such a gesture, it feels really nice.” For many farmworkers on the Coastside, assistance is the difference between staying housed and homelessness.

Luckily for José, he’s still a healthy man who loves his job, but watching the way his parents have struggled on their retirement funds, he knows he has to plan for the future. “I worry about everything. I worry about stopping work or generating less. I also worry about the possibility of losing my apartment because everything is interconnected.”

That’s why José says dignified housing might look different for everyone, but all people should at least be able to have affordable and spacious housing. “Families with children should have a big enough space,” he starts. “Older people should also have affordable, low-cost rent, because people like my parents can not afford to pay high rent with their retirement.” He hopes there will be more focus on housing in the future, because people need very specific help. “There are many people who are working but are not living in optimal conditions. There should be more fair housing options.”

He also thinks there should be more support for small businesses so they can sustain themselves and grow. “There have been people who wanted to come work with me, and they are people who I know are struggling and I can’t help them. That’s what’s sad. I would like to hire people and pay them more than the minimum wage because working on the ranches is hard work. And people who work there do it with passion.”

As a generational farmer, José knows that farming is challenging, underappreciated work. “If you’re earning minimum wage, you want your children to improve their situation and not lead the same life you have.” Still, he wouldn’t change his profession for anything. “The best life to live is in the field. Working in your passion, feeling the fresh air, and experiencing that freedom in the countryside is something beautiful and a part of our culture. I feel as if I’m at home when I’m in the field.” He reminisces fondly upon his time living on a ranch with other workers. “Those were times when we worked, cooked, and shared meals together. It was very healthy and wholesome.”



# MARINA

**Originally from Oaxaca, Mexico, Marina and her husband migrated north in 2010.** They first lived in Santa Cruz where they rented a bedroom in a house. Her husband would commute to work in Pescadero from Santa Cruz until they eventually moved to Pescadero in 2017.

For the past seven years, Marina has been living in a two-bedroom mobile home in employee housing with her four children and husband for \$1,200 a month. “When we first arrived, we paid \$1,100, and now, after two years, they’ve raised it to \$100 more.” But there aren’t many other options, she explains. “There are houses available, but they’re more than \$3,000 or \$4,000 in this area. And we don’t make enough. My husband only earns a little even in the busy season. When it’s not, he makes around \$1,000 to \$1,200. It barely covers the expenses.”

Marina used to contribute to the family’s income, but isn’t working right now to care for her children: a seven-year-old, a six-year-old, a two-year-old, and a ten-month-old. Some of her children are dealing with health issues, making it difficult for Marina to leave them alone. “I’m thinking about going back to work if everything goes well with my children. If my children’s physical condition improves, I can work while they’re at school. But if they need a lot of my attention, I won’t be able to work.”

“**There are houses available, but they’re more than \$3,000 or \$4,000 in this area. And we don’t make enough. My husband only earns a little even in the busy season. When it’s not, he makes around \$1,000 to \$1,200. It barely covers the expenses.**”

The loss of Marina’s income has been hard for the family. “Sometimes we manage, but with all the expenses, the money is tight. Sometimes there’s a little left over to spend, and that’s when we have to carefully budget everything. Since only my husband works and has to pay for insurance and other expenses, he handles everything.” Marina also has to account for utilities costs which are billed every three or four months and can be especially high during the winter.

“We get billed between \$400 to \$600, but it never goes below that,” Marina explains. “But it’s more difficult during winter when there isn’t much work. They only work two to three days a week. You manage to get by if you look for help, because in Half Moon Bay they offer a lot of food and other assistance.”

Marina says, though, that there aren’t any problems with her housing. “There are many ranches where I know the water smells really bad. Here, the water is clean, they get it from the hill.” In a place where contaminated water is the norm, having access to clean water is a huge privilege. “I feel good and happy at home. I have electricity and water. Every time something breaks down, we let them know. The bosses come and fix it or send someone to do it.”



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What I feel is that one doesn't feel confident standing up to your boss, because you know that if they don't like the way you act, they can fire you and you'll be left without housing... I think everyone who lives with their boss feels the same way.  
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However, Marina does understand the hesitance to reach out to employer-landlords about issues. “What I feel is that one doesn't feel confident standing up to your boss, because you know that if they don't like the way you act, they can fire you and you'll be left without housing... I think everyone who lives with their boss feels the same way.”

She adds, “But one tries to avoid problems with the employers and live well and stay housed. It's very different when you have housing that isn't yours; it's very, very different.”

Marina shares that when she used to live in Santa Cruz and commute to work in Watsonville, she didn't have that same fear of reporting issues to her employer. Now, her living situation depends on many other factors and she even worries about county inspectors. “The boss said that they were going to inspect our home but they haven't come yet. But we were afraid they were going to take the housing away from us.”

Despite all the difficulties, Marina hopes that she can continue to live in Pescadero where her two sisters also live and where the weather is pleasant. All she really hopes is that her home can be “a place where you feel good.”



# HÉCTOR

**Héctor comes from an agricultural lineage in Oaxaca, Mexico, growing up with four sisters and five brothers.** “Most of my siblings and I work in agriculture. If not here, in Mexico as well. Because my dad had many children and my parents had land, the only option was to work in the fields. That’s what he passed down to us—the knowledge of how to work.” As soon as he was strong enough, Héctor began working on his family’s farm every day and brought that knowledge with him to Pescadero where he lived at first for five years and now for two and a half years.



Héctor currently works on a farm with livestock including chicken, pigs, and turkeys. “When I was younger, my dad had cows and we were responsible for taking care of them. I like the work here because it also involves working with animals,” Héctor says. “I’ve been working in farm labor almost my entire life... And now it’s like a habit.”

Héctor previously lived in employee housing in a room with two bunk beds that he shared with four people, but he moved out because of the rent. “I suspected they were going to charge us more. I used to sleep on the top bunk and I never got the space below. And I was tired of going up and down, up and down.”

Héctor now rents a bedroom for \$315 that he shares with another farmworker in a building that is designated as farmworker housing. He’s been living in his current home for a little over a year and luckily hasn’t had problems with his landlord. “He is a good person, and we’ve never had any problems. We also do our part by paying the rent on time.” Héctor sometimes worries about making rent in addition to his daily food costs, because he also has to save enough money to send to his family. “I send a bit, about \$1,500 or so. It also depends on how things go at work, because sometimes I only work five days, sometimes six, seven, it depends.” With those additional responsibilities, the threat of eviction is always looming in the background, but he usually tries to keep a positive mindset.

Héctor reports that repairs are usually timely as well. “There was a time during the rainy season when the roof started to leak, but then I reported it to my supervisor, and he fixed it. Because when the leak was in the middle of the two beds, it wasn’t a big problem, but when it started dripping on me, I didn’t like that.”

“ I would also like them to install another shower because sometimes we almost all have the same work schedules. Then we all get home, and we all want to shower at the same time, and it’s not possible. We have to wait our turn. ”

**“ A home for just yourself or with your family...  
And to have everything in good condition,  
because that’s the main thing. Because right  
now, during the dry season, it’s fine, but  
when it rains and there are problems with the  
electricity or the water, it’s difficult. ”**

There are still improvements that could be made, however. Héctor shares a kitchen and bathroom with the other tenants. “I would also like them to install another shower because sometimes we almost all have the same work schedules. Then we all get home, and we all want to shower at the same time, and it’s not possible. We have to wait our turn.” He also adds, “The shower knob is broken and they also need to replace the toilet because it seems very old.”

And, as is common in Pescadero, lack of access to clean water is a major issue. “We mostly use the water in our home for showering and washing dishes, but for cooking or drinking, we have to buy water. So I buy bottled water or I go to Half Moon Bay and fill up jugs.”

Héctor would be content with basic changes. “I’d like a more spacious place to have more things because it’s quite small here. You can’t have many things because there’s no space. You have to stack your things on top of each other.” Space and privacy are a luxury to Héctor who has been living in such crowded conditions. When asked to describe dignified housing, Héctor says, “A home for just yourself or with your family... And to have everything in good condition, because that’s the main thing. Because right now, during the dry season, it’s fine, but when it rains and there are problems with the electricity or the water, it’s difficult.”

For now, Héctor enjoys living in Pescadero, especially since two of his sisters live in the area, but he doesn’t plan to stay forever. “I think it’s very good for me to live because there are many people, and everyone is calm,” he says. “It won’t be long. I plan to return to Mexico because I have my wife and my two children. I still have my dad, my siblings, and my land.” Even when Héctor returns to Oaxaca, he’ll continue farming with his family, planting corn, beans and coffee trees.



# LUCÍA

**For many years, Lucía lived in her hometown of Oaxaca, Mexico.** But as the single mother of four children, she hoped her children would have more opportunities in the US and journeyed to Pescadero in 2000. When she arrived, Lucía found work at a farm that provided her with housing. She would start work in the early morning and return late in the evening to a home that housed 22 other tenants. “There were nine rooms, nine couples, and two bathrooms for nine couples. I really suffered living there with my children.” Lucía lived there for a decade before she began renting the manufactured home she has now lived in for twelve years. She pays slightly above \$1000 per month for a space where she feels more at ease without roommates, “Thank God, I don’t suffer anymore because I live alone in my own space... I see other places around here in Pescadero where the rent is \$1,200 for a tiny room. Here I have a mansion. Two big rooms and a very large kitchen all to myself.”



This solitary paradise is not without its own struggles. For two years, Lucía’s roof leaked without repair, which resulted in her floor becoming damaged, and, like many others living in Pescadero, at one point her tap water became contaminated. While Lucía has a good relationship with her landlord and has never received any complaints, she has held back from asking for necessary housing repairs due to concerns about retaliation from her landlord. The language barrier also makes even standard communication difficult, meaning most of the time Lucía doesn’t directly communicate with her landlord.

Despite its flaws, Lucía prefers to focus on the good qualities of her home like the quiet and calm neighborhood. She describes her home as simple yet comfortable. And for Lucía, the best part of her housing situation is that she can live with her three pets without any roommates complaining when her son visits periodically from Mexico. Housing in the area is also severely limited for farmworkers. Since agricultural work has low work periods, Lucía’s hours and wages decrease when business is slow. “There are times when there is no work like in December, you might earn like \$1,000 a month, and then you have to pay for bills and everything else.” But Lucía is strategic about saving money in the months leading up to the low work season, so she can afford rent and other essential expenses.

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There are times when there is no work like in December, you might earn like \$1,000 a month, and then you have to pay for bills and everything else.

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**“My whole life is here. I've been here for 24 years, and I would feel bad leaving to move somewhere else. But I would like it if, God willing, there was more housing in Pescadero.”**

Now 56 years old, Lucía has been a part of the Pescadero community and worked in the fields for 24 years, harvesting crops including carrots, beets, squash, mushrooms, melons, and cilantro. Her current position is at a nursery tending to flowers and houseplants, where she uses the harvesting techniques she has mastered. Lucía lights up when she talks about her work, “It makes me proud that I am a campesina. I am out in the fields working to get ahead, and I feel proud being a hard worker. I have always been a single mother and worked hard in the field.”

In her many years of living in Pescadero, Lucía has observed positive changes in the community like the increased support from the organization Puente de la Costa Sur, “Back then there wasn't support like there is now, where if something serious happens, you can say 'Look, this is happening to me,' and you actually get help. Before it wasn't like that, there wasn't all this help like there is now.” She has developed a community with Puente and participates in education workshops, “Right now, I feel happy because there is a lot of support in Pescadero.”

However, Lucía's optimistic outlook and desire to stay in Pescadero indefinitely is clouded by the unsettling changes she has observed such as former colleagues being pushed out due to the high cost of living on the Coastsides. Lucía knows that once she can no longer work she may have to leave Pescadero, “My whole life is here. I've been here for 24 years, and I would feel bad leaving to move somewhere else. But I would like it if, God willing, there was more housing in Pescadero.”

And there haven't only been general changes to housing or the economy in Pescadero, but deeply tragic ones in Lucía's personal life as well. “I came to this country and worked hard to get ahead. Unfortunately, three of my children passed away. In Mexico my father and mother were killed, and my husband mistreated me. I've had a hard time all my life until now. Thank God, I don't feel bad anymore because now I have my job, I have my home, and I feel peaceful, right? But yes, I have suffered a lot.”

Despite this immense grief, the support from the community in Pescadero has played a crucial role in preserving Lucía's positive outlook. And now, just as she did when she first came to Pescadero back in 2000, Lucía still dreams of a better life with more opportunities for her family. She imagines living somewhere “spacious and affordable,” like a two-bedroom home, with one room for herself and one for her son, next to a small park. But for now, she finds solace in her current home and remains committed to working to afford living in Pescadero.



# URIEL & SOFÍA



**Originally from Oaxaca, Mexico, Uriel and Sofía have been living on the Coastside with their children since 2006.** Both farmworkers, Uriel is still working on an organic farm growing rosemary and cilantro while Sofía is no longer working due to an accident at work. “Everything we grow has to be very clean,” Uriel says. “That’s why it’s organic and it’s worth a lot.”

The family has been living in a two-bedroom home in employee housing for \$700 a month for the past 14 years and in all that time their rent has only gone up \$100. Uriel’s family previously shared the home with a coworker. When the coworker moved out, their employer-landlord let their family stay in the entire house, which consists of two-bedrooms, a bathroom, and a kitchen.

“We don’t have a lot of needs here,” says Sofía. “Since the farm owner lives here we have clean water. You can drink from the tap.” In addition to having all the basic amenities, the couple also get along well with their employer-landlord and his family. “Sometimes they come here and my wife makes them tamales,” Uriel says. “The other day the water was giving me a lot of trouble, and I told the landlord, ‘I need this repaired.’ And he quickly went to buy the tools and we installed it and the problem was fixed. I’m not afraid or embarrassed to ask him anything anymore. I even go to his house and ask him directly when I need something.”

Unfortunately, Uriel experiences animosity from his neighbors who are looking to push him out. “Sometimes the neighbors have visitors and they leave a can or something on the property,” Sofía explains. “Then they take a photo and send it to the boss and they blame Uriel. Because all the neighbors are related except us.” When their son used to play ball in the yard, a neighbor complained saying he might break the windows. “We’re always like the cat and the mouse,” Sofía says. “We can’t do anything because they’re watching us.”

“**If you get hurt and don't work for a week they say they won't pay you even though you got hurt at work... Uriel hurt his knee and reported it to the doctor. The doctor stopped him from working but the company told him they weren't going to pay him.**”  
- Sofía

His home is not the only place where Uriel feels harassed. Uriel's kind employer-landlord is only home on the weekend because he manages other properties. While he's away, the management treats the workers poorly. "If you get hurt and don't work for a week they say they won't pay you even though you got hurt at work," Sofía shares. "Uriel hurt his knee and reported it to the doctor. The doctor stopped him from working but the company told him they weren't going to pay him."

**" I don't want to say anything about that, since I live here with my family... I can live wherever I want, but my family is here too. - Uriel "**

Without pay or workers' compensation, Uriel and Sofía struggled, especially since Sofía isn't working, but Uriel feels like he can't report it. "I don't want to say anything about that, since I live here with my family," he says. "I can live wherever I want, but my family is here too. The management is being unjust not just to me, but to a lot of people. It's not right." Many other workers have experienced similar issues but management has suppressed attempts to organize. "In this company we can't talk about politics because they are against that. A while ago we wanted to form a union, but my coworkers became afraid and we had to call it off." Uriel hopes that one day conditions change, if not for him then for future workers. "I would like there to be someone else in charge here, but change is difficult. All my coworkers work with integrity, they put in effort to make the company succeed," he explains. "But they don't appreciate or value us. Even if someone is an excellent worker there isn't much support."

Uriel and Sofía also hope for better housing for their family. "For me a dignified home would be housing that is your own." Uriel says. "And for me," Sofía adds. "Dignified housing is where you feel comfortable and safe. Where you feel that you have rights. Where they won't neglect your needs." Sofía thinks about living somewhere in Pescadero instead. "I'm not very comfortable so I would like if some day there is an opportunity, we can move somewhere else. So as not to be, like, enslaved here." Even as they look toward the future with hope, the present is still filled with challenges. "The truth is right now it's hard to afford everything because I'm not working," Sofía admits. "Our daughter is studying so she only works two days. There's also our kids' expenses, so it's difficult to buy food, pay the bills, and still pay the rent because Uriel doesn't earn enough." Plus, they have to worry about whether or not they'll be able to stay housed after Uriel retires. Sofía says, "We'll have to leave because other coworkers have stayed because their sons continue to work here. But my daughter doesn't want to work here, she wants to study. And my son doesn't want to work here either because he sees how hard the work is and how they pay."



The difficulties they've faced living on the Coastside often lead the couple to reminisce on their homeland fondly. "We feel like we have nothing as far as housing," Sofía says. "Here, any day they might tell you, 'You need to vacate the house.' And in Mexico, no one is going to say anything because it's your house. It's very different." According to Uriel, even the work is different. "Over there, the days are longer but more calm. In Mexico, you work all day but very comfortably. Not here, because here we're always watching the clock, and waiting for it to be time to go home. Work is very fast-paced. Here you have to pay for the car, pay for electricity, pay the bills, and in the end, you're left with nothing. You're just giving away your money," Uriel says. "But in Mexico we are free."

# VICTORIA

**Agricultural work is in Victoria's blood. She grew up in Oaxaca, Mexico helping her father working on his small farm.** He would work on the sugarcane and she would help with the cows. "Out of all of the women in our family, I was the only one who liked going to the fields to help." Her love of agricultural work hasn't changed even as an adult. "I love everything," she says. "I feel proud of being a farmworker because no matter what, starting from a tiny seed, we harvest it, we plant it, we do everything. I really like it. If they told me, 'Oh, we don't have work for you anymore,' I would look for another job in the field. If it wasn't that, I'd say forget it, I wouldn't work in a restaurant or in the kitchen." Now working in Pescadero, Victoria has gained experience cultivating tomatoes, peppers, squash, cucumber, melon, chard, lettuce, and flowers.

**"I feel proud of being a farmworker because no matter what, starting from a tiny seed, we harvest it, we plant it, we do everything. I really like it. If they told me, 'Oh, we don't have work for you anymore,' I would look for another job in the field. If it wasn't that, I'd say forget it, I wouldn't work in a restaurant or in the kitchen."**

Three years ago Victoria emigrated alone, leaving her two children, a nine-year-old and a five-year-old, in Mexico with her parents, and endured dangers and incurred debt while crossing into California through Tijuana. She currently lives in employee housing where she rents a bedroom in a mobile home with her husband and their infant daughter, sharing a kitchen and bathroom with other farmworkers and their family. In total there are nine people sharing a three-bedroom, two-bathroom trailer. Victoria's rent is deducted from her paycheck every two weeks. "We pay \$4 per day worked. For example, if I work 11 days, they'll only charge me \$44. But each month, they also deduct \$70 for gas so you have to pay \$44 for rent and \$70 for gas." Victoria's housing is very affordable, but living with so many people in such a small space can be difficult. On weekends when they want to rest their housemates are up slamming doors or the kids are running around or playing loud music. "My husband sometimes gets frustrated and says he doesn't want to continue living there because it's difficult to share."

Mostly, Victoria is just grateful to have her own space. When she first arrived, she went to Paso Robles, then Santa Rosa, and then to Pescadero with her husband where he already had housing with his employer. "It was very difficult for me because in that house, there were like five people living there, all men, and we had to live in the living room," she explains. "They always had visitors, always. And we would be in the living room, seeing people arrive at 8, 9, or 10 PM, and they would play cards in the living room." For Victoria, the amount of shared space and the fear of losing housing was a new experience. "I've never had to suffer from not having a house because, in Mexico, you're living with your parents and then you come here and you have to share this, and share that, and have to follow certain rules you didn't have before."

**“ I’ve gotten used to being here and I can’t imagine it any other way. I came, started working, and I’ve really gotten used to it, even though there are struggles. If I have the opportunity to continue living here, I’d like to keep working here. ”**

Compared to their previous situation, Victoria much prefers her current house. Her employer-landlord responds to repair needs quickly, like when their sink was dripping and he changed it himself. “The only thing I’d like is another fan, like the one for the stove because it’s greasy and dirty and it’s impossible to clean it.” Victoria gets along well with her employer who she describes as very understanding and kind. “That man is a godsend. If I could ask God for anything someday, it would be for him to be my boss again in the future. I really wish I could find more bosses like him. He’s always been very good. He never tells you, ‘Put in more effort. Work this way.’ I don’t like that.”

Although Victoria is content with her living situation, it’s missing the most important thing: her children. “If I found a rental that I could afford, say around \$1,200 a month, I would bring them. But it would have to be here. Because if I had to move to another city, honestly, I can’t imagine it. I’ve always pictured myself living here.”

But bringing her children over will not be easy. The first hurdle is that since her third child was born, Victoria hasn’t been working, so saving money for a bigger place has been difficult. “This previous winter, they laid off some of us. I’ve already done the math for the time that I haven’t worked, it’s been a year and a month.” This means that expenses are tighter so although the family is able to go to the food bank and travel as far as Watsonville to get cheaper groceries, it’s still not enough. “It’s very difficult to find housing here, or if you do find it, it’s extremely expensive.”



Her second hurdle is the cost and danger of bringing her children across the border. Victoria and her husband still have their own debts from crossing the border that originally totaled to \$25,000. “If I were to bring them here, it would cost me between \$16,000 and \$17,000. That’s because they’re still small. When they’re older, it costs \$13,000 each. That’s why I get very anxious when I think about it. I don’t have a job and I’m in debt, but I still want to bring my children here. It’s a desperation that’s hard to explain.”

Though her children are far from her, Victoria still has hope and doesn’t have plans to leave the Coastside. “I’ve gotten used to being here and I can’t imagine it any other way. I came, started working, and I’ve really gotten used to it, even though there are struggles. If I have the opportunity to continue living here, I’d like to keep working here.” Victoria dreams of one day having her own little house. “For me, it would be everything I could have, it would be a blessing... As long as the home has just one bedroom, a small living area, and a few other basic things, that would be fine. For me, it would be enough.”



### About Urban Habitat

Urban Habitat works to democratize power and advance equitable policies to create a just and connected Bay Area for low-income communities of color. Through strategic partnerships, UH supports increasing the power and capacity in low-income communities and communities of color.

In partnership with Coastside Hope and Puente de la Costa Sur



Coastside Hope  
*Neighbors Helping Neighbors*

**PUENTE**

