

Continue Training Your Key Hispanic Employees at the Coming 2018 Hispanic Summer Fruit Tour in Wayne County – Saturday August 25th, 1:30-5:30pm

Mario Miranda Sazo

The CCE LOF team is in the process of organizing the fourth Hispanic Summer Fruit Tour to be held in Wayne County from **1:30pm until 5:30pm on Saturday August 25th, 2018**. In addition to the traditional horticultural stops to be hosted by Adan Aguilera from VanDeWalle Fruit Farm and Hormisa Bellona and Ignacio “Nacho” Onofre from Teeple Fruit Farm (see pictures), some of the tour activities will continue gathering feedback from Hispanic orchard workers on skills they need to improve within their fruit farm business for greater success and job satisfaction. There will be small group activities to reinforce topics related to supervision and better communication. Because some orchard workers have expressed some skill deficiency with understanding workplace culture on Western NY fruit farms, there will be specific examples of how to work efficiently. The importance of punctuality, work ethic, and commitment will also be highlighted.

The need for highly qualified Hispanic employees

Over the past five years, many New York fruit farm operations have undergone significant growth. Orchards that used to employ only a handful of people with low-skill horticultural talent now look for more help to meet this demand. Why does one fruit grower always have highly-efficient labor, while other similar farm operations do not? Why are some Spanish-speaking crews so efficient, hard-working, motivated, and committed, while other similar crews at other places aren't?

Today, many fruit growers have found that their horticultural or machinery skills don't always translate to Spanish-speaking people skills. Despite their search for horticultural talent to support their recent plantings and new investments, some fruit growers still lack a reliable, skillful, and committed horticultural team to fuel potential growth in the next 5 to 10 years. The competitive challenge for growers is to find, attract, and retain the right people (whether Spanish-speaking employees or not) from within the farm operation, assuming that full-time Spanish-speaking employees are legally employed, satisfied, engaged, and waiting for a new job opportunity inside the farm. Finding and training the right people who can support the development of new business opportunities won't be easy. Assembling the wrong horticultural team and staffing up prematurely could become costly and catastrophic. Innovative fruit companies understand that it is much cheaper to develop a highly skilled and motivated Hispanic fruit team than it is to go out and bring in new people year after year. Empowered employees and orchard managers will perform at their best level, make independent decisions, and find ways to improve orchard operations – including planting, pruning, hand thinning, and harvest.

Training Hispanic Horticultural Teams via CCE LOF

Creating a high-functioning horticultural team is challenging under any circumstances. But when the team you are trying to build crosses different cultures, how do you meld individuals' talents, cultural expectations, and communication barriers into a super-performing team? For example, if you manage a Spanish-speaking harvest team (where only one or two people can barely communicate in English), you face greater communication challenges than those who lead a Jamaican harvest team (where the majority can speak English). Complicating your communication task is the probability that this growing season you will incorporate the use of some type of new technology or a motorized platform for higher labor efficiency and won't be fully able to explain the benefits of the technology to your Spanish-speaking employees.

In this complicated and rapidly evolving labor situation for fruit growing, you have to take action to capitalize on new opportunities and execute them efficiently. But it is also essential for you and your teams to learn quickly, to keep up with developing events, and stay ahead of the competition. That will happen only if you foster strong working relationships with your most talented Spanish-speaking employees and assemble skilled horticultural teams inside your farm via CCE LOF Hispanic educational training.

Main manager level development stages of orchard workers in WNY fruit farms

Early this year we conducted several roundtable discussions (with a total attendance of 95 Hispanics) and identified three manager level development stages of orchard workers as part of the Latino Readiness Project (Pereyra and Wayne, unpublished). Many orchard workers do not fall squarely within these development stages, and often carry skills or traits of multiple stages. The following are what we have identified as characteristics of the corresponding stages: (1) **Beginner**: A Hispanic orchard worker that does not speak English and works exclusively in Spanish-speaking teams. Their understanding of the overall business and workplace culture is low. They do not manage younger or less experienced farmworkers. They are often an H-2A employee and therefore limited in their ability to grow into management positions. While in the lowest farm positions, they show personality traits consistent with manager level positions, including decisiveness and initiative,

(2) **Intermediate:** A Hispanic orchard worker that has very basic spoken English language skills but strong production skills, often with a comprehensive understanding of one core production component. They often have been working with the same farm for at least two full seasons. They manage some younger or less experienced employees and communicate with a supervisor, and (3) **Advanced:** A Hispanic orchard worker that has an intermediate or higher level of spoken English that allows them to regularly communicate with owners, business partners, and supervisors. They have a strong understanding of multiple core production components, but some of them lack complete understanding of full-farm production systems



Featured Hispanic Tour Hosts

Adan Aguilera has worked for Scott VanDeWalle of VanDeWalle Fruit Farm for more than 14 years. In the last five years, he has positioned himself as a key and reliable Spanish-speaking employee. He is the kind of person who carries Scott's vision for almost any orchard task with the greatest execution and labor efficiency. Whether it is planting a new orchard, pruning, or hand thinning, he is always willing to lead his co-workers by example. Most, if not all of his orchard work, is proudly done "right" the first time around and there is almost "zero" tolerance for errors. He has become an important Hispanic employee at VanDeWalle Fruit Farm.

Tour participants will visit the most recent VanDeWalle plantings of high value apple cultivars - all established at 2.5ft x 10ft since 2016 (30 acres), 2017 (72 acres) and 2018 (90 acres) – and will learn modern fruit production practices with Adan.



Hormisa Bellona and Ignacio "Nacho" Onofre are a married couple who have worked at Teeple Fruit Farm for 14 and 20 years, respectively. They met at Teeple Fruit Farm in 2003 and they have three children. They are the kind of Hispanic employees that fruit growers – if very lucky – would like to find, attract, hire, train, cultivate, and retain for future success at their farms. For several years, Hormisa and Nacho have been considered *advanced Hispanic employees* (see definition above), who regularly attend most of the educational programs offered through CCE LOF (commercial winter fruit schools, summer tours, NY Expo, IFTA conferences, etc.). Since the early beginnings of the CCE LOF Hispanic educational program in 2011, Hormisa and Nacho have

always attended Hispanic schools and tours, offered advice to others, and served as models for younger generations of Hispanics coming to Western NY. They have good people skills, can build confidence and generate enthusiasm, enjoy interacting with other fruit growers and Hispanics, know the horticultural details of orchard tasks, and reliably help to make budgets and deliver results. They also excel at mobilizing and exciting Spanish-speaking workers and are clear about the tasks to be accomplished.

Tour participants and hosts will have a facilitated discussion and training about supervision, communication, and workplace culture at Teeple's facilities. Activity will be guided by Mary Jo Dudley, Director of Cornell Farmworker Program.