



VISION & VOICE

Gallery and Documentary Workspace



The Golden Cage

Mexican Migrant Workers and Vermont Dairy Farmers

Photographs by Caleb Kenna with audio and text excerpts from interviews conducted by Chris Urban / TRAVELING EXHIBIT

Migrant Mexican farm workers began arriving on Vermont dairy farms almost seventeen years ago and continue to work here living hidden lives. Through intimate photographs and interviews, this exhibit strives to create a revealing portrait of dairy farmers and their Mexican employees and offer a glimpse into their interdependent lives—exploring who they are and what they hope for.

EXHIBITION / The exhibit was held at the Vermont Folklife Center's Vision & Voice Gallery from September 17, 2008 - January 31, 2009, and is available to travel to traditional and non-traditional exhibit spaces around the state.



Vermont Folklife Center
88 Main Street, Middlebury, Vermont

The Golden Cage *Exhibit Specifications*

Description

In 2008, there were an estimated two thousand migrant Mexican farm workers in Vermont helping to produce more than half of the state's milk. In Addison County alone, there are about five hundred Mexican workers. They are primarily young men helping to sustain a working landscape while supporting their families in Southern Mexico. This important population has been in Vermont for almost seventeen years, yet remains mostly invisible despite contributing to communities.

The Golden Cage Project shares faces and voices of fifteen Addison County dairy farmers and migrant Mexican workers in a nonjudgmental and educational environment. The project's goal is to provide a more human perspective on issues that are often politicized and overshadowed by law and policy.

Conceived by former Vermont Migrant Education Program tutor Chris Urban whose work teaching English brought him to farms around Addison County, the exhibit pairs photographs by Caleb Kenna with audio and text excerpts from interviews conducted by Chris Urban. The dairy farmers and farm workers who are featured here elected to participate in the project but have chosen to remain anonymous.

Although this exhibit focuses specifically on Addison County, the same stories could be told in dairy farming communities around Vermont—and throughout the United States. The documentary process brings this world into view in all of its complexity and contradiction.

Content

Photographs – Twenty 16 x 24 inch color prints on photographic canvas stretched on internal wooden frames (10 Vertical, 10 Horizontal); five 24 x 36 inch color prints on photographic canvas stretched on internal wooden frames.

Text Panels – Thirteen 17 x 14 inch text panels; two 17 x 24 inch text panels; fourteen 6 x 6 inch foam core audio prompt panels.

Audio - Fourteen interview excerpts explore the individual experiences of migrant farm workers and dairy farmers; excerpts do not exceed 3 minutes and are delivered via a cell phone call-in system.

Reference the following pages to see photographs and audio interview excerpts.

Public Programming

Under the Cloak of Darkness: Vermont Mexican Migrant Farm Workers — a screening of Bjorn Jackson's video followed by discussion with Addison County dairy farmers.

Responding to the Needs of the Migrant Community — a panel discussion including Cheryl Connor (co-chair Addison Farm Workers Coalition), Ken Dabbs (Director of Addison County's Open Door Clinic) and Susan Veguez (advocate and volunteer for Addison County migrant families).

Putting Faith into Action — A presentation by Diana Scholl (Chaplain at Middlebury's Porter Hospital) and Cheryl Mitchell (co-chair Addison Farm Workers Coalition) on putting values into action.

Creating the Golden Cage Exhibit — Chris Urban and Caleb Kenna reflect on the process of creating the exhibit, what it means to them, what they hope it will accomplish.

Teaching about Migrant Mexican Workers in Vermont — a workshop for educators led by Carolyn Shapiro and Jean Lathrop from Montpelier-based Cultural Links program.

The Golden Cage *Exhibit Specifications* (continued)

Public Programming (continued)

Police Policy for Undocumented Foreign Nationals — panel that brings together Chief Hanley, Middlebury Selectman Craig Bingham, and Vermont Commissioner of Public Safety Tom Tremblay to discuss both Middlebury's policy and state police policy regarding undocumented foreign nationals statewide.

Exhibit Press

Flynn Center — <http://www.sevendaysvt.com/vermont/photoaudio-exhibit-reveals-original-back-to-the-landers/Content?oid=2137308>

Center for Media and Democracy — <https://www.cctv.org/watch-tv/programs/tarrant-gallery-golden-cage-mexican-migrant-workers-and-vermont-dairy-farmers>

Vermont Public Radio — http://www.vpr.net/news_detail/82191/exhibit-looks-at-lives-mexican-farm-workers-in-ver/
Seven Days — <http://www.sevendaysvt.com/vermont/farm-friendly/Content?oid=2135128>

The Middlebury Campus — <http://middleburycampus.com/article/the-golden-cage-focusing-in-on-vermonts-hidden-migrant-worker-population/>

Fees

The exhibit is available for loan for a fee to be negotiated based on the unique conditions of each host.

Website

More information on the exhibit can be found on: <http://goldencageproject.org/>

Exhibit Content *Photographs*

All prints on photographic canvas stretched on internal wooden frames.

LARGE SIZE: 36in. x 24in. – 5 photographs



Exhibit Content *Photographs* (continued)

All prints on photographic canvas stretched on internal wooden frames.

SMALL SIZE: 24in. x 16in. – 20 photographs (10 vertical)

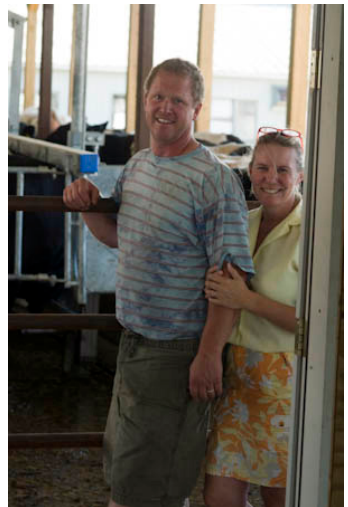


Exhibit Content *Photographs* (continued)

All prints on photographic canvas stretched on internal wooden frames.

SMALL SIZE: 24in. x 16in. – 20 photographs (10 horizontal)



Exhibit Content *Text Panels*

Excerpts from interviews with Mexican migrant workers and Vermont dairy farmers are represented on text panels.

17in. x 14in. - 13 panels

“ Todos los días trabajando, nada más comes, descansas y el trabajo te espera. Es un poco duro, no es fácil, pero, pues, el pensamiento de nosotros es que vale la pena, sufrir unos años para tener algo. ”

- Migrant Worker

Every day working, you just eat, rest, and the work waits for you. It's a little hard, it's not easy, but, well, our thought is that it's worth the pain to suffer a few years to have something.

“ Si, muchas noticias de la familia, enfermedad ... uno siempre está pensando en su padre, su hermano. En cualquier momento uno puede recibir malas noticias y es difícil estar lejos. ”

- Migrant Worker

Yes, lots of news from the family, illness... You're always thinking about your father, your brother. At any moment you might get bad news and it's hard to be far away.

“ Lo único que queremos es trabajar y tener un futuro mejor en México. ”

- Migrant Worker

The only thing that we want is to work and to have a better future in Mexico.

“ Pues, no sé... si soy mexicano o un esclavo del trabajo. Es una pregunta que tengo. ”

- Migrant Worker

Well, I don't know... If I'm a Mexican or a slave worker. It's a question that I have.

“ El que viene a hacer daño aquí, no entra tampoco de ilegal... ¿Por qué entrar caminando en el desierto? El que viene a hacer daño entra con papeles. ”

- Migrant Worker

If you come to do harm, you don't enter illegally... Why enter walking through the desert? The one who comes to cause harm enters with papers.

“ If they left us tomorrow I'm not sure what we would do. You know, who would milk the cows? Who would do anything around here?... You hear about it in other places where they've gone in and taken all the workers and you just wonder, are we going to be the next ones? ”

- Dairy Farmer

Exhibit Content *Text Panels* (continued)

Excerpts from interviews with by Mexican migrant workers and Vermont dairy farmers are represented on text panels.

17in. x 14in. - 13 panels

“ They're scared just because there has been some deportations, arrests... But just to be afraid to go to the store that's two miles away? I mean, you're almost like a prisoner. ”

- Dairy Farmer

“ I would definitely prefer something different than the scenario that is in place at this time. It's uncomfortable to me as an American citizen to have to feel that I'm doing something wrong. ”

- Dairy Farmer

“ Farming is a business that needs to be run 365 days out of the year and Americans don't want to work Christmas, weekends, and I understand that. So we've gone to a work force that we can depend on and rely on. ”

- Dairy Farmer

“ It's interesting to get up in the morning at 3:30 and you hear the guys singing in the barn or at their job. They're already singing. And that, to me, is just like, you know, there's a good mood going on. ”

- Dairy Farmer

“ My kids love 'em, love 'em to death. They'll go out there and they'll talk to 'em. Of course, neither of 'em can understand each other, but they'll talk away to 'em, you know, and they'll make a point of listening to 'em. ”

- Dairy Farmer

“ Yeah, there's been nights where you worry about them, you know? They're just like, I guess they're just like my own children and that's the way I treat them. I feel they should be treated equally. ”

- Dairy Farmer

“ Esa es la realidad. Mi realidad y la de todos los que vivimos acá. Están encerrados y de la casa al trabajo a menos que tengas tus papeles en regla. ”

- Migrant Worker

That's the way things are. My reality and that of everyone who lives here. You are trapped, from the house to work, unless you have your papers in order.