



Ohio State HCS News

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Extension Addresses Mexican Migration, Agriculture



OSU Extension Educators recently traveled to central Mexico to experience, first-hand, rural Mexico and its agriculture and how they relate to Mexican migration in the US.

With migrant agricultural labor continuing to increase in Ohio, especially in the nursery/landscape and livestock industries, the greatest challenge for growers and producers is how to effectively communicate and work with their new employees.

On the heels of the current immigration debate in the United States, a group of Ohio State University Extension Educators recently traveled to central Mexico to experience, first-hand, rural Mexico and Mexican agriculture and how they relate to Mexican migration in the United States. The purpose of the visit was to help participants better serve their clientele back home. For Extension floriculture specialist **Claudio Pasian**, knowledge gained during the tour will help reinforce training programs directed toward growers in the nursery industry.



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"What I learned on the trip just validated the information I use to help nursery growers better work with their migrant labor force," said Dr. Pasian, an associate professor in Horticulture & Crop Science who also holds a partial research appointment with the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. "Now that I have an even better understanding of Mexican social organizations, I can provide even more useful information to those seeking to improve their working relationships." Pasian also plans to launch teaching seminars based on information

gleaned from the tour for students entering the horticulture industry.

Other participants of the Extension study tour included **Don Breece**, a farm management specialist at the OSU Extension Center at Lima; **Joanne Kick-Raack**, OSU Extension program director for the Department of Entomology and the state's pesticide coordinator; **Jim Skeeles**, OSU Extension Educator for Lorain County; **Francisco Espinoza**, an OSU Extension Educator with the Agricultural Business Enhancement Center's Ag and Hort Labor Education Program; and **David Hansen**, director of the Office of International Programs in Agriculture within the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences.



From witnessing the challenges faced by farmers to experiencing the direct impacts of migration on rural communities, the study tour was an eye-opening experience for all.

The 10-day trip, which took the participants to such central Mexican locations as Mexico City, Texcoco, Tlaxcala, Cholula, and other agriculturally based communities, was the result of collaborative efforts between Ohio State's Office of International Programs in Agriculture and the Colegio de Postgraduados. The Colegio is Mexico's premiere agricultural institution with a main campus just outside of Mexico City and five branch campuses throughout Mexico.

"The purpose of the program was to broaden the participants' perception and understanding of Mexico's rural areas and communities experiencing migration," said tour host **Fernando Manzo-Ramos**, Extension and adult education specialist for the Colegio. "From our perspective, this tour may help OSU Extension participants better understand the reasons why these young small farmers migrate, their strong cultural and social ties to their families and communities back in Mexico, and the objectives they pursue when they leave their families behind. All this information can become an important asset when OSU Extension designs its programs."

Individuals of Hispanic or Latino origins make up only a sliver of Ohio's population: 1.9 percent of nearly 11.5 million residents, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. But migrant labor, especially in agriculture, is on the rise. Based on the 2004 Ohio Department of Job and Family Services Migrant Agricultural Ombudsman Report, there are 15,782 documented migrants in Ohio's farm labor force. This represents an increase of 500 workers from the year before. The demand for migrant labor is

anticipated to grow between 3 percent and 5 percent a year for the next several years. Additionally, it is estimated that between 75,000 and 150,000 unauthorized migrants work in Ohio, based on a national population survey by the Pew Hispanic Center. That number is also likely to grow.

"The future of agriculture and the future of the productivity of U.S. migrant populations can be positively impacted by collaboration between the Colegio and Ohio State," said Manzo-Ramos. "By sharing our experience working in these small communities, creating a bi-national program in Extension, education and rural development, and using the migration process and the transnational communities it generates, we can help agricultural and rural communities in both countries improve."

From learning about Mexican history to understanding the idea of "community" in Mexican societies; from witnessing the challenges faced by farmers to experiencing the direct impacts of migration on rural communities, the Extension study tour was an eye-opening experience for all those involved.

The Extension study tour has been one of the most extensive and intensive collaboration efforts between the Colegio and Ohio State. The project builds on collaborative efforts that began during the 1990s when CFAES administration, including Dean **Bobby Moser**, OSU Extension Director **Keith Smith**, and Dave Hansen consolidated the partnership between the two institutions. But if all parties involved have their way, this trip won't be their last. Efforts are already under way to host representatives of the Colegio in Ohio, with special emphasis on the nursery, landscaping, poultry and dairy industries. The potential also exists to conduct a similar Extension study tour in Mexico next year.

Watch a narrated slideshow of this story with additional photos here: [Extension Addresses Mexican Migration, Agriculture Slideshow](#). Free [Quicktime](#) software is required to view the slideshow.

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