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The Augusta Chronicle ^(/)

Posted May 15, 2010 08:32 pm - Updated May 29, 2010 12:30 am

By Julia Sellers (/authors/julia-sellers)

South Carolina Bureau Chief

Farmers use labor programs to hire migrant workers

Compliance costs more, but violations are risky

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AIKEN --- It doesn't take any coaxing for Michael Lulich to find Hispanic laborers willing to work on South Carolina farms each year. The Charleston recruiter brings legal immigrants to the state through U.S. Department of Labor programs.

He's up front about back-breaking work, but says they'll jump at the chance to make some money.

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"I'm not promising them the Ritz Carlton, but it's clean. All of it's regulated, and there's a set base of rules," said Lalich, the owner of Lowcountry Labor and MLT services.

Lalich and farmers such as Ridge Spring's Chalmers Carr III, CEO of Titan Farms, say taking the legal route is more expensive but better than taking a chance that an illegal crew could be detained and an entire harvest wither. And farmers don't want to run afoul of the law.

In 2008, South Carolina adopted the Illegal Immigration Reform Act, which levies penalties up to \$1,000 per violation for businesses found with illegal workers.

In the first phase of the plan, state Labor, Licensing and Regulation agents went after businesses with more than 100 employees for violations such as not registering employees with E-Verify and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Employers have 72 hours to comply or face penalties, including having a business license revoked.

THE ONLY OFFENSE in Aiken County since 2008 involved ASCO Valve Manufacturing Inc., which was penalized \$1,700 in February for not using E-Verify to test new employees' status. The penalty was waived because it was a first-time violation.

Ninety-four employer citations have been reported statewide since 2008. Businesses with fewer than 100 employees have until July 1 to meet compliance.

It's estimated that between 40,000 and 100,000 illegal immigrants live in South Carolina, according to a 2008 Pew Hispanic Center study. Lalich, who works with farmers across the state to set labor plans for the year, said he still sees about 50 percent of the work conducted by illegal immigrants.

WHILE SOUTH CAROLINA laws are among the toughest in the country, enforcement of illegal immigration is most often left up to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement through a system that local law enforcement and lawyers say is flawed.



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"If a complaint comes up, we'll address it," said Sgt. Dave Myers, Aiken County Sheriff's Office spokesman. "We may not get the response that we need (from ICE)."

Representatives of the regional ICE task force did not return messages requesting interviews for this story.

Myers said illegal immigrants often are discovered when they're being processed for jail.

Enforcement in Georgia doesn't differ much, said Paul Balducci, an Augusta lawyer who has focused on immigration since 1996.

"There is a law, passed a couple of years ago, in Georgia that requires law enforcement to notify ICE if they have a DUI or felony charge and determine that they're not a U.S. citizen," he said.

If determined to be here illegally, ICE places a detainer on the immigrant, Balducci said. During that time, ICE has 48 hours to pick up the immigrant. If 48 hours passes, then the immigrant is free to go after paying his bond.

"There's no separate mandate, like in Arizona, where all law enforcement is supposed to detain people who aren't in the U.S. legally," he said.

LAST week, South Carolina legislators used Arizona's blueprint to add more teeth to the state's laws.

Sen. Larry Grooms, R-Bonneau, introduced a bill Thursday that would require law enforcement to check someone's immigration status if there is "reasonable suspicion" the individual is in the country illegally.

In April, a similar bill, H. 4919, was introduced in the House. Nineteen members of the Senate, including Sen. Greg Ryberg, R-Aiken, co-signed the bill.

Balducci said he has even seen a case in which an illegal immigrant from Haiti approached ICE about trying to get back home, but ICE couldn't afford to deport him.

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"There is barely enough money to deport aliens," he said, let alone go looking for them.

With a lack of funding and officers to track illegal immigrants, employers will continue to use the laborers who will do the jobs Americans won't, Lulich said.

"It's a chance, a risk (employers) take."

Staff Writer Bianca Cain and the Morris News Service contributed to this story.

Migrant workers harvest job security (/metro/2010-05-15/migrant-workers-harvest-job-security)

States regulate hiring of migrant workers

SOUTH CAROLINA

The South Carolina Immigrant Worker Compliance is part of the state Illegal Immigration Reform Act that was passed June 2008. The system is regulated by the state Labor, Licensing and Regulation Department.

Requirements

- Employers must verify federal employment eligibility within five days of hiring a new employee.
- Employees are authorized through the E-Verify federal work program through the Department of Homeland Security.
- Employees must have a valid state driver's license or ID card, or identification from one of 26 other states that are in compliance with state laws.

Employers

- Employers with 100 or more workers were to be in compliance with the law by July 1, 2009.



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- Employers with fewer than 100 employees will begin being audited July 1 to see whether they meet compliance.

Penalties

- Notification to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and state and local law enforcement
- Employer can be charged no less than \$100 and no more than \$1,000 for each violation.
- Employer has 72 hours to meet compliance.
- An employer's license can be revoked or suspended if illegals were knowingly hired. During a suspension or revoked status, the employer cannot employ any employees.

Source: South Carolina Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation

GEORGIA

The Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act governs labor relations for migrant workers in Georgia.

Requirements

- Each employee must provide: name, permanent address, Social Security card and a Farm Labor Contractor Employee Certificate of Registration.

Employers

- Each labor contractor must disclose the following for employees: wage, activities, period of employment, transportation, housing and other benefits.
- Each contractor must be registered with the state Labor Department.

Penalties

- Violations can cost up to \$1,000 for each penalty.

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- Criminal convictions for first-time violators can include one year in prison and a \$1,000 fine.

- Repeat offenders could serve up to three years in prison and be fined \$10,000.

Source: Georgia Department of Labor



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Golden Girl: Brianna Rollins '13

January 1, 2017 / in [Alumni Profiles](#) / [1 Comment](#) / by: [Julia Sellers](#)



One, two, three – jump. One, two, three – jump. With a fierce face and a breakneck pace, former Clemson track standout Brianna Rollins lunged across the finish line. A time of 12.48 seconds earned Rollins a gold medal in the 100-meter hurdles at the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in August. Right behind

her were USA teammates Nia Ali and Kristi Castlin in second and third place. “It was awesome feeling to have to my teammates up there on the podium alongside me. We made history and I couldn’t have been happier to share it with Nia and Kristi. Kristi and I train together, and Nia is a really good friend of mine. It just goes to

It just goes to show you that if women can come together as one we can accomplish something huge.”

show you that if women can come together as one we can accomplish something huge.”

After catching their breath, the women draped their bodies in three American flags and jumped for joy for the cameras and the television crowds back home. It was the first time three American women claimed all three medals in a track and field event in the Olympics.

Rollins isn’t new to claiming victories. In 2011 and 2013 she was the NCAA indoor champion in the 60-meter hurdles, the 2014 NCAA outdoor champion in the 100-meter hurdles, and the 2013 IAAF world champion in the 100-meter hurdles while still a student at Clemson. But it wasn’t until her time at Clemson that she realized she could compete at an elite level. Rollins didn’t begin competing in the sport until she was in high school in her hometown of Miami. In 2012, as a sophomore at Clemson, she made the Olympic Trials. In the next months she earned a win at the NACAC Under-23 championships. From there she blossomed into the runner she is today.

“At the 2012 Olympic trials is when I realized I could compete on the professional level. I had the second fastest time coming back in the finals at the trials. I finished sixth in the finals but seeing that I was competing with the professional and running so close gave me the hope I needed,” she said. “Training as an elite-level athlete is a blessing; it comes with a lot of hard work, sacrifices, commitment, and focus but it is all worth it when the reward is being an Olympic champion and an inspiration to those who look up to me.”

Rollins is the second female from Clemson to win a gold in track

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By Julia Sellers (/authors/julia-sellers)

South Carolina Bureau Chief

Migrant workers harvest job security

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RIDGE SPRING, S.C. --- Pruning, thinning and harvesting a peach crop is hard, repetitious work, made graceful by experience and speed. Titan Farms field employees are in the second act of the yearlong push to harvest.

Workers are now running their hands up and down lush peach tree branches along 3,900 acres, choosing which pieces of fruit are worthy of staying for the final act, which will send the crop to area homes and markets next month.

The leafy limbs provide little solace from the Southern humidity and heat. Winter is hard, too, with early mornings of below-freezing conditions that numb fingers and chap lips.

It's work that few locals can manage, and it has become the craft of migrant workers who make their way to the area from Mexico for three to 10 months of each year.

A dozen years ago, Titan CEO Chalmers Carr III made a decision to invest in migrant workers in a way he hadn't done before through a U.S. Department of Labor program called H-2A.

The program pushed out illegal immigrants who might have been unreliable. With the promise of work and lodging, rural Mexican employees line up to take the jobs each year. Carr's commitment to a healthy work environment is

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also a major draw, bringing back 99 percent of the more than 400 employees to Ridge Spring for harvest each year.

The program

Titan Farms' worker program is something like a summer camp with a military regimen.

About 440 workers travel on an air-conditioned bus from Mexico to the back roads of Ridge Spring.

The cost for visas and entry into the H-2A program runs about \$200 per person, much cheaper and safer than the \$2,500 they could pay a smuggler to sneak someone into the country for work.

Tucked away behind peach fields and dirt roads are dormitories where men sleep four to a room and 32 to a house.

The dorms smell of sweat and wood and lack a homey feel -- except in the kitchen, where employees' favorite foods line shelves and playing cards and games are stashed in the corner to pass evenings.

Carr and his farm manager, Amancio Palma, said outsiders often talk about their employees taking American jobs, but they're doing the work no one wants.

"It's too hard, and we're lazy," Carr said.

In the past year, fewer than 40 local workers, about 10 percent of Carr's labor needs, filled out an application to work on his farm. Only three are still on the job.

The life

Palma started working in the Titan fields 17 years ago, just a year before Carr took over the company to push labor and production.

The pair are almost like brothers, laughing in between field checks over the walkie talkies.



(/news/2010-04-03/sheriff-office-sees-missing-man)

This Week



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During harvesting season, Palma has workers out before 6 a.m. to beat the sweltering heat.

Depending on the weather, workers might toil until sundown to beat a storm or leave early to get out of the sun.

"If you have three fields ripening at the same time, you have to keep going or you'll lose the crop," Carr said.

Getting the guys ready for a day of work is like preaching to them, Palma said.

"We're family, and this belongs to everybody," he said. "If they do a sloppy job today, we may not be here tomorrow. I tell them that this money is theirs to take back to their homes."

Employees earn \$8-\$10 an hour, with the rule being \$2 more an hour than minimum wage, Carr said.

This year, a wage increase will bump that pay up to \$12-\$14 an hour.

Wages are also tax-free because employees are not eligible for unemployment, Medicare and Social Security.

"The only expense a worker incurs is his food, clothing, personal hygiene products and any extra items he desires," Carr said.

Employee Sebastian Hernandez, 38, who got into the program about 11 years ago, said coming to the U.S. isn't about becoming a citizen, but just taking care of family back home.

The untaxed money he earns the 10 months he's here is sent back to his father. The other two months of the year he works in a sweat shop in Mexico sewing clothes, he said.

More than a decade of work at Titan also means seeing an extended family when he returns to South Carolina.

"I wouldn't exchange these guys for nothing in the world," he said.

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Evenings are spent playing soccer, or futbol, and goofing off to celebrate a hard day's work.

Palma even misses dinners with his wife to eat with the workers at the dormitories to build relationships and keep morale high.

"It's a better life, and this is a land of opportunity," Palma said.

Farmers use labor programs to hire migrant workers (/metro/2010-05-15/farmers-use-labor-programs-hire-migrant-workers)



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This site contains REAL police records (court records of driving citations, speeding tickets, felonies, misdemeanors, offenses, mugshots, etc.), background reports, court documents, address information, phone numbers, and much more.



Aspiring architect finds inspiration in her childhood home

http://www.habitat.org/lc/stories_multimedia/why_we_build/WWB.McCulley.aspx

By Julia Sellers

Staring out the passenger window of a Chevy Cavalier into an empty, tree-lined lot, 10-year-old Mandy Elm saw her future.

“This is where our house is going to be,” she told her mom.

Mandy’s mother, Lisa, had brought her and her 8-year-old brother, Justin, to look at the site of what would be Habitat for Humanity of Story County’s very first house, in Story City, Iowa.

Though there wasn’t much to see, the lot’s potential painted a pretty picture. The Elms saw in it an escape from the cramped quarters of their two-bedroom apartment, with its “playground” of asphalt and cemetery plots behind the building. They imagined a garden and a house with space for friends to sleep over.

Lisa tried to explain to her daughter that even though she had filled out an application, she wasn’t guaranteed a home.

But Mandy possessed a child’s faith: “No, Mom, this is where our house is going to be built,” she said. “I just know it. I just know it.”

Mandy, now 25, ties her successes to that late summer night when her mother first told her she’d applied for a Habitat home. Something about watching her mother help build that home —viewing the building plans, smelling the sawdust or seeing the exposed studs of the frame — inspired her to become an architect.

“I wouldn’t have come into construction and homebuilding otherwise,” Mandy said. “And I probably wouldn’t have even thought about it. (Architecture) is definitely not a career a lot of ladies choose.”

Pulling away

Within six months of filing the application, the family moved into the new home. It had white siding and black shutters — and bedrooms for everyone.

“Justin and I, we finally had a place to invite friends over for sleepovers, birthday parties and late-night cookouts,” Mandy said. “Our home became a place of comfort and safety, not only to ourselves but our friends.”

Justin, now 23, lives in Brooklyn, New York, where he’s about to start working on a master’s degree in interactive telecommunications. He says having a home gave him a sense of normalcy.

It “gave me a sense of belonging, making me a well-adjusted individual,” he said. “I got to go through the same school system and go through the same things with my friends.”

Mandy’s experience was more complex. She appreciated the opportunities the home provided but felt the experience of getting it had exposed her as a child of poverty. She remembers the embarrassment of watching her classmates landscape her future home as part of their volunteer work, and feeling she’d forever be known as “the Habitat kid.”

So while attending Iowa State University, Mandy stepped away from Habitat, glad to escape childhood labels. But when she couldn’t find a job in her field after graduation in 2010, she was led back to Habitat through AmeriCorps. She went to work as a sustainable building coordinator with Habitat for Humanity of East King County, in the Seattle, Washington, area.

Rediscovering Habitat’s impact

Working with partner families and volunteers allowed Mandy to open up about her own homeowner experiences for the first time, even to her mother.

Lisa learned the full impact Habitat had on her daughter after reading a speech Mandy gave during an affiliate breakfast in the spring of 2011.

“She talked about remembering seeing the plans and the lines and how they formed a house. At the time I didn’t realize how much she was paying attention. I didn’t realize how it struck her like that. It was really neat that it gave her a desire to go into architecture.”

The speech also detailed the life Mandy imagined she would have experienced without the home — a life of continued poverty. She doubts she would have gone to college, figures she might not even have finished high school.

“I’ve seen so many people who have had similar life experiences,” she said. “And pretty much everyone I know is not doing well. There are drugs, or extreme depression or teen pregnancy, or any of that kind of stuff. We’ve been really blessed to have a stable environment.”

As Mandy’s AmeriCorps service ended in 2011, a volunteer tipped her off about a job opening at an area architecture firm. She’s now an intern in her first year of a three-year process of becoming a certified architect. She and her husband, Joe McCulley, are on the cusp of homeownership in Woodinville, Washington. In her free time, Mandy volunteers with her local Habitat affiliate, helping educate homeowners and walking families through the same emotions she felt.

“I actually had one daughter in one of our families who is a little older — 13, I think— who said, ‘I don’t want to be THAT Habitat family,’ ” said Mandy. “It’s nice to be able to talk to them on that level and share how Habitat has affected my life.”

The meaning of ‘home’

Fifteen years after the Elms’ trip to that vacant lot, Lisa is watching her children lead the adult lives she dreamed for them.

“They needed stability, security,” she said. “That was my ultimate goal — and to teach them that they could go do anything. They believed me!”

Though the affiliate that helped build the Elm home has changed names (to Habitat for Humanity of Central Iowa), not much has changed in the house itself. The blue carpet, white walls and original appliances look almost as they did on move-in day. Lisa misses the noise of her children and their friends, but she can’t wait to fill her home with grandchildren.

“I know a lot of families aren’t so lucky. You work so many hours and work so hard, and rent goes up and you have to move again. I feel so lucky that it was affordable,” Lisa said. “It has allowed me to not only afford a home, but still have time to invest in the kids and their lives. I would have had to work more, or harder, and the kids would have raised themselves.

“The word ‘home’ is such a simple word, but it has so much meaning behind it, and it means so much to so many people. I do feel very blessed and very thankful and also pretty amazed at times that we were selected as a partner family.”