



[Home](#) > [Courses](#) > [Bay Area Farmer Training Program](#) > [Models of Agroecological Production](#)

[← Previous Module](#)

[Next Module →](#)

Module

14. Catalán Family Farm and JSM Farm

Module Progress: 

Background Material

Catalán Family Farm



[Reti \(2009\) María Inés Catalán: Catalán Family Farm](#)

Catalán Farm Grows Food, Family, and Community

The following article was adapted from the [CUESA article](#) from September 23, 2011.

CUESA visited Catalán Family Farm in Hollister last month. We took notes and photos [and compiled them into this slideshow.](#)

“We like it when people come to the farm,” said Juan Catalán, pictured above with his mother, María Inés Catalán. “It lets us know people appreciate what we do.” (You can appreciate them by visiting their booth at the Thursday or Saturday market, or by taking [a virtual tour of the farm.](#))

At the end of our tour, over a beautiful picnic the Catalán family prepared, María Catalán spoke to our group (in Spanish, with translation by Juan) about her family history, the origins of her farm, and what she is doing in the local community.

María’s father and grandfather came to Texas in the 1970s. Her grandfather was a farmer and cattle rancher from Guerrero, Mexico. Her mother migrated 30 years ago to Los Angeles; María and her brothers came after that, 24 years ago.

María worked for seven years as a field laborer, harvesting vegetables for different companies: broccoli, lettuce, chile peppers, cauliflower, parsley, etc. She then went through [an agricultural training in Salinas](#) where she learned to drive a tractor and grow vegetables organically. She found organic farming to be similar to traditional growing methods her family used in Mexico.

After the training, she was able to fulfill her dream of starting her own farm. “All I wanted was for my grandchildren to be free to run and to grow up with lots of food like I did,” she said.

Making the leap from field worker to farm owner isn’t easy. According to María, “Here, the reality of an immigrant farm worker is that they’re not free. Whole families of six or eight people live in one small room. They have a hard life, and they live there generation after generation.”

She considers herself fortunate, and it is through sustained effort that María

created the life she has today. “As an immigrant woman without money and not speaking the language, it’s been very difficult to get to this place and have what I have. I am where I am because people know our work. And we *all* work. My kids are my voice, and they say what I can’t say. Some work at the farmers market; others work here.”

María is now helping other small farmers by providing information and technical assistance. “Lots of small farmers here aren’t recognized,” she said. “They grow organically, but are not certified because they don’t know how to do the paperwork. They are selling these organic vegetables at a low price, like prices for conventional produce.” María is helping them get certified and get into farmers markets. Last year she formed a group called Pequeñas Agricultores de California (Small Farmers of California).

María said they are applying to become a nonprofit. She feels it’s important for communities to have the means to produce their own food and to receive the recognition they deserve.

“It pains me when they view us immigrants as being low,” she said. “We are the people who work the hardest for the least money. It’s because of us that food is cheap. When you buy cheap food, you are helping big companies exploit workers.”

María described how times are particularly hard right now. “Some of our members have lost land because the land owners have lost land.” The Catalán family is having a similar struggle. They have been working to realize their dream of land ownership by purchasing their farm from the land owners, but in the economic downturn, the owners have lost their investment. Though the Cataláns have paid a large sum so far, there is still even more owed to the bank, and the payments have gone up.

Despite her own farm's economic challenges, María Catalán is eager to help others. "We're small farmers, but they're even smaller. They need more help. The USDA has an assistance program, but the majority of these farmers are not here legally. The USDA funds only go to legal citizens."

"With our organization, we are looking to involve the community so we can work together to come out of this bad economic situation and look for solutions. It's the only way we can keep surviving as small agricultural producers."

View the slideshow of [Catalán Family Farm](#).

JSM farm



JSM Farm Visit (2017).

Once in US illegally, Pajaro Valley organic farm owner pays it forward: JSM Organics in Royal Oaks employs 20, feeds thousands



Modified from [a news article](#) published in the Santa Cruz Sentinel by Ryan Masters on Tuesday, April 11, 2017.

ROYAL OAKS. If President Donald Trump fulfills his pledge to deport millions of workers in the country illegally and build a wall at the Mexican border, prepare to pay a lot more money for far less food.

“That’s reality,” said organic farm owner Javier Zamora. “My farm and many others would go out of business. At the very least we would have to scale back to feed

just our families and immediate communities.”

As owner of [JSM Organics](#) in the North Monterey County community of Royal Oaks and a former undocumented worker, the 51-year-old Zamora has a unique perspective on the situation.

In 1986, Zamora immigrated to Los Angeles from Michoacán, Mexico, at the age of 20. His timing was good. That same year, President Ronald Reagan signed the [Immigration Reform and Control Act](#) into law, which granted Zamora and 2.7 million other workers legal status.

Although he was the son of a successful farmer and lived in a community where farming was taught to children in the schools, Zamora spent the next two decades working in the L.A. restaurant and nightclub world.

“I worked in a nightclub that booked national touring acts – Ray Charles, Michael McDonald, Etta James, Peter Frampton – every night it was a different crowd with different tastes,” Zamora said. “That where I learned American culture.”

When the U.S. housing bubble burst, signaling the beginning of the Great Recession, Zamora and his wife and two daughters moved north to Stockton. At the age of 43, Zamora went back to school. He earned his GED diploma and then a degree in landscape design from San Joaquin Delta College.

“I had a teacher who said, ‘Come on, you’re smarter than this,’” said Zamora.

Figuring his teacher was probably right, Zamora enrolled in Cabrillo College and earned an associate of science degree in horticulture production. While at Cabrillo, he discovered [ALBA](#), the Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association.

Over 11 months in 2011, ALBA taught Zamora the skills he needed to establish and grow JSM Organics. The company's initials stand for Javier Sanchez Medina, his first name combined with his mother's middle and last name. When he graduated, he bought 1.5 acres of land with an ALBA-subsidized lease and planted his first crop.

Today, Zamora owns more than 200 acres and leases another 55 acres. At present, he has roughly 80 acres planted – mostly strawberries, but also raspberries, blackberries, various vegetables and flowers.

To farm those acres, he employs 20 workers and will be hiring 15 more at harvest. Depending on how long they've worked for him, Zamora pays his employees from \$12 to \$18.

“The reason I've grown so much in five years is that my customers know how well my employees are treated and how well the land is treated,” Zamora said. “I have an open door policy. Everyone is welcome to come out to the farm and take a look.”

While Zamora will not disclose how many of his workers are in the U.S. illegally, he said many Americans' preconceptions about those workers are detached from reality.

“These are not people who possess a sense of entitlement. They want a place to work, live and provide for their families. They're not here to take anything away from anyone else,” said Zamora. “The reality is we're not going to get other people to come out and do this work.”

In addition, Zamora said he pays his workforce with company checks – checks from which federal and state payroll taxes are deducted.

“These guys never file taxes so they don’t claim any of that money back. Plus, they can’t receive unemployment,” said Zamora.

But the real point, Zamora said, is the amount of work those in the U.S. illegally perform to feed America every day.

“It’s incredible the work they do,” said Zamora. “For those who believe kicking these people out is a good idea, I invite you to do your due diligence and see the economic reality of the situation.”

Zamora knows his own story would be radically different if not for the amnesty provided by Reagan’s Immigration Reform and Control Act 30 years ago. That’s why he is an outspoken opponent of Trump’s rhetoric. He has also sought congressional support for minority farmers in Washington, D.C.

In addition, Zamora serves on numerous boards, including ALBA, the Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency and the [Ecological Farming Association](#); as well as the USDA’s Advisory Committee on [Beginning Farmers and Ranchers](#).

“You help others to succeed because you’ve been given that opportunity,” said Zamora. “That’s the real American way, man.”

Reflection Questions



14. JSM Farm

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