

TEACHING TOLERANCE



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READING 3

Isabel

Like other migrant farmworkers, Isabel's workday is decided by the season. The 39-year-old farmworker in upstate New York has picked strawberries, grapes and apples. Regardless of the crop, her days usually begin at 4:30 a.m. She and her husband wake up, make a few tacos for lunch and brew up coffee before making their way to the fields and orchards.

"There are a lot of people who can't take this work," she says. "I've seen that people who just arrived and take this work, they quit. They don't like it. It's hard."

But Isabel and her husband take pride in their work. "We've done it for a long time and we know how to do it."

During her time in the fields, Isabel has learned that a grapevine can live for many years, but it takes a practiced and skilled hand to prune it correctly.

Working in these fields takes a physical toll. At times, Isabel must spend whole days hunched over. In addition, "we have a lot of hand movement and use big scissors to cut the little branches and cutters for the big branches."

At the end of the day, the pain can be numbing, Isabel says. "Sometimes I don't feel my hands. I feel like an animal bit me. I have a pulsing in my arms, and I feel the pain when I sleep. It's like biting me. It's intolerable the pain, from using the scissors so much."

She also suffers from headaches from the pesticides. "It's such a strong smell," she says. "When I start to breathe that in, my head starts to hurt, and I feel nauseated."

She earns roughly \$40 a day, but she does not collect a paycheck. Her husband gets a single check for both of them.