

La Fruta del Diablo

It was mid-April when I visited Watsonville, and heavy rains had recently flooded hundreds of acres. Bright blue plastic barrels from a Smuckers plant were scattered across local strawberry fields and embedded in the mud. Many fields that hadn't been flooded still had been damaged by the rains. I met with strawberry workers at an old labor camp—a small slum set amid rolling hills and strawberry fields not far from town. For most of the year this bleak collection of gray wooden barracks housed about 350 residents, mainly strawberry workers and their families. But at the peak of the harvest hundreds more crammed into its forty apartments. In the mid-1990s there'd been a major outbreak of tuberculosis at the camp, fueled by its crowded living quarters and poor building design. The bedrooms occupied a central corridor of the barracks; none had a window. The tenants paid \$500 a month for their two-bedroom apartments and felt lucky to have a roof over their heads. As I walked around the camp, there were children everywhere, running and playing in the courtyards, oblivious of the squalor.

The sky was overcast, more bad weather was coming, and a year's income for these workers would be determined in the next few months. Half a dozen strawberry pickers, leaning against parked cars, told me that at this point in the season they usually worked in the fields eight or ten hours a day. Only one of them was employed at the moment. Every morning the others visited the strawberry farm on a nearby hillside, inquired about work, and were turned away. The foreman, who had hired them for years, said to try again next week.

Harvest work in the strawberry fields, like most seasonal farmwork in California, is considered "at will." There is no contract, no seniority, no obligation beyond the day-to-day. A grower hires and fires workers as necessary, without need for explanation. It makes no difference whether the migrant has been an employee for six days or for six years. The terms of employment are laid down on a daily basis. If a grower wants slow and careful work, wages are paid by the hour. If a grower wants berries quickly removed from the field, the wages are piece-rate, providing an incentive to move fast. A migrant often does not know how long the workday will last or what the wage rate will be until he or she arrives at the field that morning. There might be two weeks of ten-hour days followed by a week of no work at all, depending upon the weather and the market.

This system did not arise because growers are innately mean and heartless. Harvests are unpredictable from beginning to end. Many growers try to guarantee their workers a certain amount of income each week. Among other things, it makes good business sense to have reliable and capable workers returning each year. And yet there is no denying where the power lies.

The strawberry has long been known to migrants as *la fruta del diablo*—the fruit of the devil. Picking strawberries is some of the lowest-paid, most difficult, and therefore least desirable farmwork in California. Strawberries are fragile and bruise easily. They must be picked with great care, especially the berries that will

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be sold fresh at the market. Market berries are twisted, not pulled, off the stem to preserve a green cap on top. Workers must select only berries of the proper size, firmness, shape, and color. They must arrange the berries neatly in baskets to catch the shopper's eye. Learning how to pick strawberries correctly can take weeks. The worker is often responsible not only for gathering and packing the fruit but also for tending the plants. The drip irrigation system has to be continually checked. Shoots and runners have to be removed. Rotting berries have to be tossed away, or they will spoil the rest. When a piece-rate wage is being paid, workers must perform these tasks and pick berries as fast as they can. There is a strong undercurrent of anxiety in a field being harvested at piece-rate. Workers move down the furrows pushing small wheelbarrows; they pause, bend over, brush away leaves to their left and right, pick berries, place them in boxes, check the plants, and move on, all in one fluid motion. Once their boxes are filled, they rush to have them tallied at the end of the field, rush back, and begin the process again.

Strawberry plants are four or five inches high and grow from beds eight to twelve inches high. You must bend at the waist to pick the fruit, which explains why the job is so difficult. Bending over that way for an hour can cause a stiff back; doing so for ten to twelve hours a day, weeks at a time, can cause excruciating pain and lifelong disabilities. Most strawberry pickers suffer back pain. As would be expected, the older you get, the more your back hurts. Farmworkers, like athletes, also decline in speed as they age. The fastest strawberry pickers tend to be in their late teens and early twenties. Most migrants quit picking strawberries in their mid-thirties, although some highly skilled women do work longer. Age discrimination is commonplace in the fields—it is purely a question of efficiency.

The hourly wages vary considerably, depending on the grower, the type of strawberry being picked, the time of year, and often, the skill of the worker. Wages are higher in Watsonville and the Salinas than in Southern California, because of the greater distance from Mexico. Growers producing top-quality berries for the fresh market may pay as much as \$8 or \$10 an hour. At the height of the season, when berries are plentiful and growers pay a piece-rate of \$1.25 a box, the fastest workers can earn more than \$150 a day. But wages at that level only last for a month or so, and even during that period most workers can't attain them. When a crew of thirty picks at a piece-rate, three or four will earn \$10 an hour, five or six will earn at or below the state minimum wage, \$6.75 an hour, and the rest will earn somewhere in between.

The availability of work, not the pay scale, is of greatest concern to migrants. Despite the hardships that accompany the job, there is an oversupply of people hoping to pick strawberries. The fear of unemployment haunts all farmworkers in California today. Each harvest brings a new struggle to line up enough jobs for a decent income. The average migrant spends half the year working and a few months looking for work.

Another constant worry is finding a place to sleep. Santa Cruz and Monterey counties have some of the highest housing costs in the country. Long popular

with tourists and wealthy retirees, the area has also attracted commuters from Silicon Valley. The residents of Watsonville and Salinas are determined to preserve the local farm economy, despite enormous pressure from developers. Agricultural land that currently sells for \$40,000 an acre could be sold for many times that amount if it were rezoned; there are strawberry fields overlooking the Pacific Ocean. The determination to preserve agricultural land has not, however, extended to providing shelter for agricultural workers. Since 1980 the acreage around Watsonville and Salinas devoted to strawberries has more than doubled and the tonnage of strawberries produced there has nearly quadrupled. But the huge influx of migrant workers required to pick these berries has been forced to compete for a supply of low-income housing that's been inadequate for decades.

10 The few remaining labor camps for single men are grim places. I toured one that was a group of whitewashed buildings surrounded by chain-link fences and barbed wire. Desolate except for a rosebush in front of the manager's office, it looked like a holding pen or an old minimum-security prison. A nearby camp was reputed to be one of the best of its kind. Inside the barracks, the walls were freshly painted and the concrete floor was clean. A typical room was roughly twelve feet by ten feet, unheated, and occupied by four men. Sheets of plywood separated the steel cots. For \$80 a week, a price far too high for most migrants, you got a bed and two meals a day. I've seen nicer horse barns.

Nevertheless, the labor camps are often preferable to the alternatives. When migrants stay in residential neighborhoods, they must pool their resources. In Watsonville three to four families will share a small house, seven or eight people to a room. Migrants routinely pay \$100 to \$200 a month to sleep in a garage with anywhere from four to ten other people. A survey of garages in Soledad found 1,500 inhabitants—a number roughly equal to one-eighth of the town's official population. At the peak of the harvest the housing shortage becomes acute. Migrants at the labor camps sometimes pay to sleep in parked cars. The newest migrant workers, who lack family in the area and haven't yet learned the ropes, often sleep outdoors in the wooded sections of Prunedale, trespassing, moving to a different hiding place each night. On hillsides above the Salinas Valley, hundreds of strawberry pickers have been found living in caves.

Locked into Dependence

The immigration history of Guadalupe, California, can be read in the names and faces adorning headstones at its small cemetery. The Swiss and Italian and Portuguese surnames belong to families who settled in the Santa Maria Valley around the turn of the last century, growing beans and sugar beets, running cattle, and raising dairy herds. The Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino names belong to the first wave of farmworkers, some of whom managed to acquire land of their own. Spanish surnames greatly outnumber the rest, marking the recent graves along with plastic flowers and the images of saints. There is a sepulchral custom in Guadalupe,

practiced for generations: most of the headstones bear sepia-tinted photographs of the deceased. Walking through the graveyard, one sees at a glance the slightly different ethnic traits and the subtle variations in skin color—long the basis of economic status and rivalry. Now all these faces stare in the same direction from the same place, arranged like crops in long, straight rows.

For most of the twentieth century, the Santa Maria Valley had a diverse farm economy. Although migrants were a large seasonal presence, the area lacked the huge industrial farms that dominated the landscape elsewhere in California. The acreage around Guadalupe was devoted primarily to field crops and irrigated pasture. The cattle ranches and dairy farms were owned and managed by local families. Fruits and vegetables, though an important source of revenue, occupied a small portion of the agricultural land.

Then, from the early 1970s to the late 1980s, the Santa Maria Valley was transformed. As field crops and dairy products became less profitable, farmers either switched to high-value crops or quit farming. Much of the land was bought by outside corporations, such as Mobil and the Bank of America. Irrigated pastures became strawberry fields (dotted with oil wells) on leased land. The number of migrant workers soared. In 1960 Guadalupe's population was 18 percent Latino; today it is about 85 percent Latino. The middle classes fled to the nearby city of Santa Maria, leaving behind a rural underclass.

Juan Vicente Palerm has spent the last two decades studying the social and economic changes in the Santa Maria Valley. The director of the University of California's Institute for Mexico and the United States, Palerm is an anthropologist by training. His early fieldwork traced the lives of Spanish guest workers in northern Europe—migrants imported by treaty to labor in the factories and fields. He is an imposing figure, with the graying beard of a patriarch, and has a remarkable grasp not only of labor market dynamics, but also of how every crop in the valley is planted, tended, marketed, and sold. I spent a day with Palerm and one of his graduate students, Manolo Gonzalez (who picked strawberries for a year as part of his research), driving the side streets of Guadalupe, touring the fields, and discussing how the growers of California and the peasants of rural Mexico created an agricultural system that has locked them into mutual dependence.

By relying on poor migrants from Mexico, California growers established a wage structure that discouraged American citizens from seeking farmwork. The wages offered at harvest were too low to sustain a family in the United States, but they were up to ten times as high as any wages Mexican peasants could earn in their native villages. A system evolved in which the cheap labor of Mexican migrants subsidized California agriculture, while remittances from that farmwork preserved rural communities in Mexico that otherwise might have collapsed. For decades the men of Mexican villages have traveled north to the fields of California, leaving behind women, children, and the elderly to look after their small farms. Migrant work in California has long absorbed Mexican surplus labor, while Mexico has in effect paid for the education, health care, and retirement of California's farmworkers.

Whenever migrants decided to settle in California, however, they disrupted the smooth workings of this system, by imposing higher costs on the state—especially if they married and raised children. That is why the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) used to round up and deport illegal immigrants in California immediately after the harvest. Nevertheless, millions of Mexican farmworkers have settled in the United States over the years, most of them becoming American citizens. Although agricultural employment has long been a means of entering U.S. society, low wages and poor working conditions have made it an occupation that most immigrants and their children hope to escape. Farm labor is more physically demanding and less financially rewarding than almost any other kind of work. A migrant who finds a job in a factory can triple his or her income. As a result, the whole system now depends upon a steady supply of illegal immigrants to keep farm wages low and to replace migrants who have either retired to Mexico or found better jobs in California.

Juan Vicente Palerm believes that today there are not only more migrants shuttling back and forth from Mexico but also more Mexican farmworkers settling permanently in California. Throughout the state towns like Guadalupe, Calexico, Cutler, and McFarland are becoming enclaves of rural poverty. In the Santa Maria Valley the increased production of fruits and vegetables, higher yields per acre, and an extended growing season have created thousands of full- and part-time jobs for farmworkers. Broccoli fields now occupy more than 20,000 acres, requiring a large supply of resident workers for a staggered harvest that lasts most of the year. Celery and cauliflower production has also increased the number of full-time jobs. Perhaps 40 percent of the farm labor in the valley is currently performed by workers who live there. Many farmworkers now own houses. But the strawberry fields have drawn thousands of poor migrants to the area. Only 12 percent of the work force at a strawberry farm can claim year-round employment. And cultivating the fruit is so labor-intensive—twenty-five times as labor-intensive as cultivating broccoli—that strawberry production now employs more farmworkers than the production of all the vegetables grown in the valley combined. Most strawberry pickers hope to find jobs in the neighboring vegetable fields, where the wages are better and the work is less arduous. Turnover rates are extremely high in the strawberry work force. But there is no impending shortage of potential migrants. The rural population of Mexico has tripled since the 1940s. “In terms of absolute numbers,” Palerm says, “there are far more Mexican peasants today than ever before.”

Twenty-five years ago academic texts declared that California agriculture—with its large-scale irrigation, sophisticated farming practices, corporate structure, and low-wage, imported labor—was unique. That is no longer true. Southern Spain is fast becoming the “California of Europe,” borrowing many of the same techniques to grow the same high-value crops and relying on illegal immigrants from North Africa. Southern Italy and Mediterranean France are adopting the system as well. Mexico, Guatemala, and Chile, with the aid of foreign investors,

are recreating California's industrialized agriculture in Latin America, producing some crops that now compete with those grown in the United States. Improvements in transportation systems and cooling technology have created an international market for commodities that until recent years were rarely exported. Juan Vicente Palerm believes that the cultivation of fruits and vegetables for processing will increasingly shift from California to Mexico, where labor costs are much lower. Mexico will produce the frozen vegetables for TV dinners, while California grows artichokes, broccoli, strawberries, and asparagus for the fresh market. The harvest of these specialty crops, however, cannot easily be mechanized: their high value is closely linked to their unblemished appearance. The prosperity of California agriculture increasingly depends on uninterrupted access to Mexico's peasantry.

Most of the strawberry workers in the Santa Maria Valley are Mixtec Indians — some of the poorest and most exploited people in the Western Hemisphere. Soil erosion and declining crop yields in the mountains of western Oaxaca have forced the Mixtecs to become migrant workers. According to Michael Kearney, a professor of anthropology at the University of California at Riverside, their choice is simple: "Migrate or starve." Mixtecs now dominate the lowest-paid jobs in California agriculture. In Tijuana you often see wives and children of Mixtec farmworkers, small and dark and beautiful, dressed in the bright colors of their native villages, selling Chiclets to tourists on the street.

Until the 1970s almost all the Mexican farmworkers in California were mestizos with strong links to communities already in the state. The new migrants present social workers with unusual challenges. In addition to the ninety-two dialects of Mixtec, there are at least half a dozen other pre-Columbian languages spoken by the indigenous peoples of Oaxaca. Perhaps one-fifth of the Mixtec farmworkers in California speak little English or Spanish. Throughout their migratory route Mixtecs are the victims of robbery and discrimination. In central Mexico they must run a gauntlet of officials demanding bribes. In Tijuana they are preyed upon by smugglers, rapists, and thieves. In the Imperial Desert, east of San Diego, they risk their lives crossing the border. Two or three migrants now die there from exposure every week.

In Guadalupe many of the settled farmworkers resent the new arrivals from Oaxaca. Illegal immigrants often crossed picket lines during the 1980s, helping to drive the UFW from the valley. Adjusted for inflation, the hourly wages have declined, and there is widespread underemployment. Labor contractors now actively recruit illegals, who work for less money and raise fewer objections than legal residents. At harvest time Guadalupe's population of roughly 5,700 swells by as much as one-third, placing greater demands on local services. Palerm's researchers once discovered twenty-two people living in a two-bedroom apartment.

Despite the hardships of the long journey, Mixtecs hoping to sustain their native villages have a strong incentive to find work in California. Wages in Oaxaca are about two or three dollars a day. Wages in the strawberry fields of Baja California are about five dollars a day. A Mixtec farmworker in the Santa Maria Valley,

making ten dollars an hour at the peak of the strawberry harvest, can earn more in one day than he or she could earn back home in a month. . . .

Bowing Down to the Market

One morning in San Diego County, I met a strawberry grower named Doug. We sat and talked in a trailer on the edge of his field. Doug's father and his grandfather had both been sent to an internment camp for Japanese Americans during World War II. Upon their release, the grandfather bought a used truck. At first he worked for other farmers, then he leased some land. He spoke no English and so Doug's father, still a teenager, assumed an important role in the business. The two grew vegetables with success and eventually shifted to strawberries, shipping and processing the fruit as well. On the land where their original farm once stood, there are now condominiums, a park, and a school. Doug grows strawberries a few miles inland. His fields are surrounded by chain-link fences topped with barbed wire. An enormous real estate development, with hundreds of Spanish-style condo units, is creeping up the hills toward his farm. Many of the farmers nearby have already sold their land. Doug has spent most of his life in strawberry fields, learning every aspect of the business first-hand, but now isn't sure he wants his children to do the same.

25 "Farming's not a glamorous business," Doug said. "Farmers don't have a high status in this community. In fact, we're resented by most people." With all the hassles today from the state and from his neighbors, he sometimes asks himself, "Hey, why do this?" Selling the land would make him instantly rich. Instead, he worries about water costs, about theft, about the strawberries from New Zealand he saw in the market the other day. Rain had wiped out a quarter of his early-season berries, just when the market price was at its peak. Doug cannot understand the hostility toward growers in California. After all, agriculture preserves open land. He thinks Americans don't appreciate how lucky they are to have cheap food. He doesn't understand why anyone would impede strawberry production by limiting his access to migrants. "My workers are helping themselves," he said. "I've picked strawberries, and let me tell you, there is no harder work. I respect these people. They work damn hard. And my jobs are open to anyone who wants to apply." Every so often college kids visit the ranch, convinced that picking strawberries would be a nice way to earn some extra money. Doug laughed. "They don't last an hour out here." 25

We stepped from the trailer into bright sunshine. Workers moved down the furrows under close supervision. Doug takes great pride in being a third-generation grower. He is smart, well educated, meticulous, and it showed in his field. But I wondered if Doug and his workers would still be there in a few years.

Doug picked a berry and handed it to me, a large Chandler that was brilliantly red. I took a bite. The strawberry was warm and sweet and fragrant, with a slightly bitter aftertaste from the soil.

That evening I inadvertently met some of Doug's workers. Ricardo Soto, a young lawyer at CRLA, had brought me to the edge of an avocado orchard to visit

a hidden encampment of migrant workers. Perhaps one-third of the farmworkers in northern San Diego County—about 7,000 people—are now homeless. An additional 9,000 of their family members are homeless, too. Many are living outdoors. The shortage of low-income housing became acute in the early 1980s, and large shantytowns began to appear, some containing hundreds of crude shacks. As suburbs encroached on agricultural land in northern San Diego County, wealthy commuters and strawberry pickers became neighbors. At one large shantytown I visited, women were doing their laundry in a stream not far from a walled compound with tennis courts, a pool, and a sign promising country club living. The suburbanites do not like living beside Mexican farmworkers. Instead of providing low-income housing, local authorities have declared states of emergency, passed laws to forbid curbside hiring, and bulldozed many of the large encampments. San Diego growers appalled by the living conditions of their migrants have tried to build farmworker housing near the fields—only to encounter fierce resistance from neighboring home-owners. Although the shantytowns lower nearby property values, permanent farmworker housing might reduce property values even more. “When people find out you want to build housing for your migrants,” one grower told me, “they just go ballistic.”

The new encampments are smaller and built to avoid detection. At the end of a driveway, near a chain-link fence, I met a young Mixtec who lived in such an encampment. His name was Francisco, and he was eighteen years old. He looked deeply exhausted. He had just picked strawberries for twelve hours at Doug’s farm. I asked what he thought of Doug as a boss. “Not bad,” he said politely.

The previous year Francisco had picked strawberries from April until July. He had saved \$800 during that period and had wired all of it to his mother and father in the village of San Sebastian Tecomaxtlahuaca. This was Francisco’s second season in the fields, but he had not seen much of San Diego County. He was too afraid of getting caught. His days were spent at the farm, his nights at the encampment. He picked strawberries six days a week, sometimes seven, for ten or twelve hours a day. “When there’s work,” Francisco said, “you have to work.” Each morning he woke up around four-thirty and walked for half an hour to reach Doug’s field.

At dusk, thirteen tired men in dirty clothes approached us. They were all from Francisco’s village. They worked together at Doug’s farm and stayed at the same encampment. They knew one another’s families back home and looked after one another here. The oldest was forty-three and the youngest looked about fifteen. All the men were illegals. All were sick with coughs, but none dared to see a doctor. As the sun dropped behind the hills, clouds of mosquitoes descended, and yet the migrants seemed too tired to notice. They lay on their backs, on their sides, resting on the hard ground as though it were a sofa.

Francisco offered to show me their encampment. We squeezed through a hole in the chain-link fence and through gaps in rusting barbed wire, and climbed a winding path enclosed by tall bushes. It felt like a medieval maze. As we neared the camp, I noticed beer cans and food wrappers littering the ground. We came

upon the first shack—short and low, more like a tent, just silver trash bags draped over a wooden frame. A little farther up the path stood three more shacks in a small clearing. They were built of plywood and camouflaged. Branches and leaves had been piled on their roofs. The land-owner did not know the migrants lived here, and the encampment would be difficult to find. These migrants were hiding out, like criminals or Viet Cong. Garbage was everywhere. Francisco pointed to his shack, which was about five feet high, five feet wide, and seven feet long. He shared it with two other men. He had a good blanket. But when it rained at night the roof leaked, and the men would go to work soaking wet the next day and dry off in the sun. Francisco had never lived this way before coming to San Diego. At home he always slept in a bed.

Beyond the sheds, bushes crowded the path again, and then it reached another clearing, where two battered lawn chairs had been placed at the edge of the hill. There was a wonderful view of strawberry fields, new houses, and the lights of the freeway in the distance.

Driving back to my motel that night, I thought about the people of Orange County, one of the richest counties in the nation—big on family values, yet bankrupt from financial speculation, unwilling to raise taxes to pay for their own children's education, unwilling to pay off their debts, whining about the injustice of it, and blaming all their problems on illegal immigrants. And I thought about Francisco, their bogeyman, their scapegoat, working ten hours a day at one of the hardest jobs imaginable, and sleeping on the ground every night, for months, so that he could save money and send it home to his parents.

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We have been told for years to bow down before “the market.” We have placed our faith in the laws of supply and demand. What has been forgotten, or ignored, is that the market rewards only efficiency. Every other human value gets in its way. The market will drive wages down like water, until they reach the lowest possible level. Today that level is being set not in Washington or New York or Sacramento but in the fields of Baja California and the mountain villages of Oaxaca. That level is about five dollars a day. No deity that men have ever worshipped is more ruthless and more hollow than the free market unchecked; there is no reason why shantytowns should not appear on the outskirts of every American city. All those who now consider themselves devotees of the market should take a good look at what is happening in California. Left to its own devices, the free market always seeks a work force that is hungry, desperate, and cheap—a work force that is anything but free.

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Notes (by Paragraph)

- 8 *spends half the year working*: According to the latest NAWS survey, the average farmworker spent 47 percent of his or her time in the United States doing farmwork, 19 percent residing but not working, and 8 percent in nonfarm work. See “NAWS, 1997–98,” p. 24.

- 9 *Since 1980, the acreage around Watsonville and Salinas:* In 1980 there were 4,270 acres of strawberries in the area that produced about 96,000 tons of strawberries. In 2000 there were 11,570 acres that produced about 365,000 tons of strawberries. See "California Strawberry Acreage and Yield by Major Areas, 1972 through 1994," California Strawberry Commission, and the Agricultural Commission crop reports for Monterey County and Santa Cruz County, 2000.
- 11 *A survey of garages in Soledad:* Meuter interview.
hundreds of strawberry pickers have been found living in caves: A decade ago, a large encampment was found near a strawberry farm in Prunedale. Smaller encampments are discovered from time to time in the area. See Roya Camp, "Shanty Camp Draws Aid; Field Workers Found Living in Makeshift Caves," *Salinas Californian*, August 28, 1991; Everett Messick and Susan Ferris, "Authorities to Move Laborers Out of Caves; Seeks Housing for 200 Migrants in Castroville, Salinas Areas," *Monterey Herald*, August 29, 1991; "Back Wages Sought for Farmworkers," *Watsonville Register-Pajaronian*, September 3, 1991.
- 14 *Guadalupe's population was 18 percent Latino:* Cited in Juan Vicente Palerm, "Farm Labor Needs and Farmworkers in California, 1970 to 1989," *California Agricultural Studies*, 91-92, Labor Market Information Division, State Employment Development Department, April 1991, p. 21.
today it is about 85 percent Latino: According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Guadalupe's population was 84.5 percent Latino in 2000. The actual proportion was most likely higher, given the perennial undercount of Latinos by the census.
- 16 *up to ten times as high as any wages Mexican peasants could earn:* See Juan Vicente Palerm with Jose Ignacio Urquiola, "A Binational System of Agricultural Production: The Case of the Mexican Bajio and California," in Daniel G. Aldrich, Jr., and Lorenzo Meyer, eds., *Mexico and the United States: Neighbors in Crisis* (San Bernardino, Calif.: Borgo Press, 1993), p. 327.
preserved rural communities in Mexico that otherwise might have collapsed: According to Michael Kearney, a professor of anthropology at the University of California, Northridge, some villages in Oaxaca now derive 80 percent of their annual income from remittances sent home by migrant workers in California. Interview with Michael Kearney. See also "Binational System," pp. 311, 346; Michael Kearney, "Mixtec Ethnicity: Social Identity, Political Consciousness, and Political Activism," *Latin American Research Review* 25 (2): 74-77.
- 18 *Juan Vicente Palerm believes:* Palerm interview.
Perhaps 40 percent of the farm labor: Cited in Palerm, "Immigrant and Migrant Farmworkers in the Santa Maria Valley, California," Center for Survey Methods Research, Bureau of the Census, 1994, p. 11.
twenty-five times as labor-intensive as cultivating broccoli: Broccoli production requires 80 man-hours per acre; strawberry production requires about 2,000 man-hours per acre. See "Immigrant and Migrant," pp. 4, 6.
The rural population of Mexico: Palerm interview.
- 20 *"Migrate or starve":* Kearney interview.

21 *Perhaps one-fifth of the Mixtec farmworkers*: Interview with Agimiro Morales, Coalition of Indian Communities of Oaxaca.

Two or three migrants now die there from exposure: One hundred and three migrants were found dead in California's Imperial Desert during 2001. Cited in Kenny Klein, "Search Ended for Immigrants Missing in Imperial Desert," *Desert Sun* (Palm Springs), August 15, 2002. The official death toll no doubt understates the number of migrant deaths; many bodies lie undiscovered in remote areas of the desert. For a good account of why INS policies have made crossing the border so treacherous, see Wayne A. Cornelius, "Death at the Border: Efficacy and Unintended Consequences of U.S. Immigration Control Policy," *Population and Development Review*, December 1, 2001.

23 *Wages in Oaxaca*: Morales interview.

Wages in the strawberry fields of Baja California: Kearney interview.

28 *Perhaps one-third of the farmworkers in northern San Diego County*: Cited in Dan Weisman, "Farmworkers Often Homeless: Estimated 7,000 in North Country Lack Housing," *North Country Times*, March 21, 2000.

Exploring the Text

- Note Eric Schlosser's title, "In the Strawberry Fields." Compare the imagery evoked by the Beatles song "Strawberry Fields" and the ceremonial place in New York's Central Park with Schlosser's description in paragraphs 1 and 2.
- How does Schlosser use the resources of language to characterize the work of the strawberry pickers in paragraph 6?
- What are some of the particular hardships facing the strawberry pickers? Which one does Schlosser say is the worst?
- Explain the rhetorical shift that Schlosser makes from "La Fruta del Diablo" to "Locked into Dependence."
- According to Schlosser, how has economics changed the land and the population?
- Schlosser concludes paragraphs 16 and 17 with claims. Analyze his arguments according to the Toulmin model as explained in Chapter 3.
- What aspects of strawberry production differ significantly from the production of broccoli, celery, or cauliflower (para. 18)? How does this affect the lives of the workers?
- Explain the nature of the economic imperative that concludes the section "Locked into Dependence" (para. 23).
- How do you feel about the conditions described in the selection? Does reading it influence your attitude toward eating strawberries? Toward migrant workers? Explain.
- Why does Schlosser conclude with narration and personal experience?
- How would you characterize Schlosser's tone in the concluding paragraphs (34–35)? Do you agree with his conclusions? Why or why not?
- Select an example of a general statement, such as the one that concludes the first section: "On hillsides above the Salinas Valley, hundreds of strawberry pickers