

Caridad Torres July 2, 2014

Jarmoc Farm

56 years old

Puerto Rico

00:01 I am from Puerto Rico. I have been here since I was 8 years old. I was raised in Springfield Massachusetts. I came to work with Steve Jarmoc since 1992. I worked in previous farms before but Steven, He is the best boss there is. I used to work as a health aid, then an assistant nurse and then I got laid off back years ago and then someone asked if I wanted to go work on the farm for a couple of months and I said sure. I liked the first year out there so I stayed. Been here for 20 years or more

1:30 Right now we are hoeing. But I call it the four steps in one year. First of all we do the seeds in the greenhouses, There are a lot of greenhouses. Use trays. We fill it up with dirt, soil. We water them until they grow. After they grow I make sure I put in some fertilizer in them. When they are about an inch or so we put them out in the fields. We start the seeding in April. Then in May we start pulling the tobacco so they can put them in the fields. From there we are hoeing. After hoeing comes topping. By end of July it is harvesting season. The plants grow up to 5 feet. It is a lot of people who come around. This is the first field we do. From Harvesting we hang it up in the barns. That is the man's job because it's a lath that has sick hooks with six plants. The women pick it up in the field and hand it up to the hooker in the Jalopy, the trailer that brings it to the barn. After it dries, they are real dry and nice, we strip the plants. Pack it in a bundle, paper, from October to November that is the end of the harvest and the stripping. The end of the job is around November. I stay some people get laid off and go clean the camp, tie laths and go to the warehouse and do different types of jobs. Before that we used to be steady.

5:00 We used to have shade the one that they sew. I used to be a supervisor in one of the barns. I used to run one hundred people or more. I used to make sure they put the leaves in the basket. I wish we still had that job. You seed the men would slide it down the aisle on their butts. In the baskets under the cloth. Picking leaf by leaf. Under the cloth it is hot. That in there is hot, hot, hot. 90 degrees outside, 105 in the tent.

6:00 That was a decent nice job. He ran it for 5 or 6 years until the economy started messing around. There are a few farms who still do shade. I have been here with Steven his father and his mom for a long time. I do appreciate that I am here with him.

6:40 Over 20 years I have done all kinds. I like to do all of them. I know how to do all of them. When new people come in I usually teach them.

7:20 The shed I love the most is on the home farm because it reminds me of Mr. Jarvis. He was a sweet heart. He was a good man. He died in June 2009. Every time I go down to the barns it reminds me of him. He was a good boss. Now Steven is the boss. I am the last one of the old days. With this crew on this farm I love it. After work I go home. I live right here in one of Steven's houses with my son and my granddaughter who is 8 years old. Right now there is a camp for others. The Jamaicans just arrived. There is only one house for me. Right there in the middle with the fields around me.

9:20 My youngest son worked throughout the years for Steven. Right now he stays home. The last two years he was diagnosed with lymphoma cancer. He is a single parent and now I want him to stay home

and take care of the house and take care of his daughter. He wants to come back but right now there's hardly nothing. Not yet.

For new people the greenhouses is hardest. I have to keep on how they pull the tobacco. If they pull it from the stem they don't know how to pull the seedlings they might pull the heart. If the heart is cut off the plant will grow but it will stay short. Then it won't grow. The heart is the leaf that continues growing and the flower comes out of that. The big leaf when you set it in the field come off but the heart keeps growing beautifully. Bud, flowers and then we start topping. Then we top them so that the leaves get wider and wider. I know everything about tobacco. The only thing I don't know is how to run it!

11:40 The leaf is the wrapper. In the warehouse when we used to do the sorting. All the bundles went into the warehouse on Broadbrook. I was the inspector. It is like a table with eight slots. The person has to take the whole bundle leaf by leaf, separate it and sort it out. Leaf, texture and color. The first one, the binder has one or two or three holes. Second is the lightest color but thin. Medium is most expensive. Real dark blown, heavy and oily when you press it. Dark 1 and Dark 2. Stemming I call it the junk it is the filler inside. The damaged leaves.

Grading and sorting takes, start in November and finish by April. That's a lot of acres and a lot of barns. In one barn will be 4 -500 bundles. We have 45 barns. In the warehouse, the people who had to sort did five or six bundles a day. I used to run 12 people in the top and another 12 in the bottom. I used to call myself a little bear cause I only came to work when it was dark and went home in the dark.

15:00 The broadleaf you don't sort it out. The shade, I have sewn. It is fun but you have to be fast and careful. There is a needle, thread the machine, get somebody else piles the leaves and holds the leaves for you. Two up like this, clamps pinch it and they come with the string already, it is fun. Ladies do that job. Have to be gentle with leaves. Grab with two fingers on back of the stem so no damage. After that it dries up. All leaves in the center and then tie it up and then pack it. From there I don't know where he sends it to Santa Domingo I don't know.

17:00 More social in the sheds. Mostly everyone gets along. Sometimes there is problems in the heat and we look to diffuse it quickly. I blame it on the heat. That is why you see me like this, cover my head and my eyes for the sun and the dust. I work 8 or 9 hours a day. I wish you could come back and harvest and see it.

(Dale shows her the shade grown sewing photos we took in one of Steve's sheds 4 years ago.)

19:00 I used to run the barns. I used to put the man to empty the trucks. Make a chain help each other. It is faster that way. Unload the truck. My son used to drive the tractor and pick up the baskets in the field. He went up in to the peak the top, he used to do everything. I taught him my son how to do everything in tobacco.

It is not rare to have women working in the fields. Right now it is slow. They are coming back. About five or four years ago we had a woman who was 80. She didn't want to stop working. Finally she retired. The girls are 20-22, The youngest guy we have right now is a Jamaican, 23.

22:00 Tobacco for me, I call it a sauna fro summer, you have to stay in shape, you have to walk, walk ,walk doing two plants and two rows at one time. After harvest they come back and clean up the fields.

Thank god I don't suffer from no illness. No diabetes, No nothing I am 56 and have 7 grandchildren. I am outside all day. It is not stressful as long as you know how to do your job, get along with everybody and you follow orders. Stephen tells me what to tell the people. They work with me all day and I work with them all day. It is like a family. I love it. I don't want to go someplace else. I went to college but look where I ended up in tobacco because I love the outside. I love begin outside.