Recent immigrant workers in Iowa’s meatpacking industry

Archie Green Fellows Project, 2015-2016

Zabdiel Morales Algandar interview, 2016-05-04: interview conducted by John W. McKerley

Interview ID: afc2015026_02840
Date: May 4, 2016
Duration: 01:12:19

00:00:00 Introductions
00:00:45 Birth in Mazatlan, Mexico
00:01:40 Mother’s work experience; father still in Mexico
00:02:40 Moving from Mazatlan to San Luis Rio Colorado (SLRC) on US/Mexico border
00:03:50 Ancestors, including people of Asian and French background
00:06:00 Life in SLRC
00:07:00 Employment opportunities in SLRC; his family’s cross-border migration
00:08:00 Fieldwork as compared with mother’s previous employment in Mexico
00:08:40 Migration’s challenges to family life
00:09:40 Family’s move to California to secure more stable fieldwork
00:11:00 Impact of migration on childhood
00:12:00 Lack of English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) support in California schools
00:12:50 Moves back to Arizona in sixth grade; more language support in Arizona than in California
00:14:10 Childhood goal of not working in the fields like his mother and brother
00:15:00 Working conditions in the fields
00:19:20 Brother leaves for meatpacking work in Beardstown, Illinois; family follows
00:19:40 Meatpacking work compared with fieldwork
00:20:00 Barriers to mass migration to Midwest
00:23:00 Transitioning to small-town life in Illinois
00:24:30 Relations between different groups of Mexicans/Hispanics in town
00:26:30 Relations between Hispanics and whites; police harassment
00:28:27 Role of Cargill (later JBS) plant in the Beardstown community
00:29:00 Rumors about work in plant before he started
00:30:00 Mexican immigrant workers (fear among undocumented, workers and family life)
00:34:30 Going to high school in Beardstown; ESL classes
00:35:40 Racial tensions at school
00:36:20 Starting work in the plant
00:20:50 Attending community college; value of education
00:37:55 Meaning of meatpacking work
00:39:30 Learning about union
00:41:00 Working as loin packer
00:43:30 Solidarity among loin packing workers
00:44:15 Difficulties of packing work
00:44:45 Women workers
00:45:26 Dominance of Hispanic workers in plant
00:45:55 Avoidance of knife work
00:46:45 Work in “pack off”
00:47:45 Comparison between knife work and other work
Deepening ties to union; seniority and union activism

Becoming a steward in pack off

Immigrant rights activism; 2006 Great American Boycott

Demographics of plant

Arrival of Africans in plant

Union role in Great American Boycott

Outspokenness regarding boycott

Assisting other workers with documentation process

Obtaining citizenship

Becoming organizer with UFCW

Union as vehicle for better life

Tensions between Local 431 leaders and Beardstown sub-local over access to education

Hope for future; learning to be an organizer