

## Luis Silva – PEPA Graduate 2015

“The whole family came to this country of opportunities to have a better chance. To grow. To learn. And that is how it has been for me.”

Luis Silva may not have gotten the chance to go to school as a child, but he always knew that to do better, he had to not only work harder, but work smarter. “I have always worked in agriculture. I love it and I think everything about it is beautiful. But even though I was always picking strawberries, I never knew any of the theory about how to get a good product.”



Since 1986, Luis has been in the United States, working as a farmer, primarily picking strawberries for major conventional growers. One day in the fields he was joking around with a friend, saying that “One day, I’ll be the boss. I’ll be the one to plant these strawberries...I just don’t know where to start. And my friend said, ‘don’t wait, go to Alba.’” Luis had already gotten the chance to finish his GED and get a certification in Business Office Technology. Another chance to learn about what he loved, agriculture, was exactly what he needed. Now, he can say he is a graduate of Alba’s Farmer Education Program, PEPA, in 2015. “My goal is to be the owner of something. That is the only way I can progress.” PEPA was a launching point to move him forward.

Back in Michoacán, Mexico, where Luis is from originally, he remembers that no one used chemicals when growing good. Now he says, “We are using so many chemicals that we are killing ourselves. Learning with Alba, my mind was opened to these issues.” He wants to ensure that his customers know exactly what they are getting: pure organic food. “I plant, and then take a photo. When it starts coming out of the ground, I take a photo. When it is growing well, I take a photo. Then I bring a box of the product along with the photos, to show my customers exactly what I have grown and what they are buying.” That personal connection, the honesty and sincerity with which he farms, is essential to how he sees himself as a partner in agriculture.

Luis’s commitment to integrity in his product shines through his philosophy about farming and the future. “Little by little, is how you grow. This year, I am saving up all our earnings so that next year we can expand.” Luis is growing vegetables right now, but in the next few years, he really wants to grow strawberries. “I know the techniques now. How to rotate the soil, how to make organic food grow the right way.” Little by little. Today, first the little plants, then the photos. Tomorrow a personal website, and clients who see the value in taking advantage of every opportunity along the way.

