

Hector Mora

“My wife likes farming more than I do.”

Hector’s hometown, Cieneguillas, Michoacán, isn’t really a town. “They call it a ranch. It’s mainly logging around there—the only farming is a little corn for tortillas or animals for personal use.”

Hector left at 15 years old to stay with family near the US-Mexico border. He used to play basketball with kids on both sides. They would wait until the border patrol was out of sight and then hop over. “It was just like any other fence,” he says, imitating an easy climb over a waist-high barrier. A cousin back home once mentioned that he was thinking of paying a coyote to smuggle him across. Hector said the plan was ridiculous: “That’s not necessary, man—I play basketball over there all the time.”

Eventually, Hector found work in the US and stayed put. He did construction for eight years, renovating old buildings. He liked it, “probably more than farming.” After he completed ALBA’s PEPA program in 2001, his construction skills made him something of a local hero. “ALBA’s cooler was abandoned at the time. I fixed it up with [some other people] and got it going again.” Hector also drove truck for ALBA before beginning his own farming operations.

“My wife likes farming more than I do,” Hector says with an ironic grin. “I liked construction—it was nice having regular hours and a regular paycheck. Farming is much more insecure. I worry about tenancy, about the weather, about the prices. And there’s no schedule. There’s no rest.” The one thing Hector worries less about as a farmer than as a construction worker is his kids: “I definitely wouldn’t see my kids as much if I still worked construction. You know, we live in kind of a bad part of Salinas—lots of violence. But my kids are always busy out here on the farm, and my wife and I—or at least one of us—is always available to go pick the kids up from school or whatever. And on the weekends they’re busy helping me sell at the market. I think it’s really kept them out of trouble.”

Hector’s kids like farming even less than he does. But they love helping him sell at the market. “That’s fine. My kids can do whatever they want when they’re older—I just want them to do well.”