

## Maria Ana Reyes – Graduate 2015

“I feel at peace in nature. This environment soothes people.”

Maria Ana is meticulous in her words and her actions, and she does nothing halfway when she commits. “I have been cultivating the land since I was a child. I have always known that opening up the earth, keeping it clean, makes the leaves open beautifully and makes the quality of the plant much better.” Yet, she did not always have the confidence to know that she could do it all on her own.



As a child, Maria Ana grew beans, corn, and squash in the city of Altamirano, in the state of Guerrero, Mexico. Later she came to California and worked at big commercial farms. With some companies, she was not paid. The clouds of pesticides were often only a secondary problem, but Maria Ana did not know how or where to do something else. “You work and you try to understand, and until the day you die you never stop learning...but even when I wanted to know more, I did not know where to start.”

Maria first heard about Alba Organics from a fellow parent while she was volunteering in her son’s school. “When I finally came (to Alba’s Farmer Education Program), I learned so much! How to eat differently, how to plant without pesticides, how to harvest, move the boxes, move the product in the system.” Even though she had worked for over two decades picking strawberries, Maria Ana finally felt like she was learning, and believing in herself that she could accomplish great things. She was able to develop her own ideas and to see the direct effects of those ideas in action.

Her children have watched Maria Ana’s hard work and seen how much time and effort she has spent to learn. Her three oldest children are in college. One is studying social work and the other two are working towards degrees in Agricultural Business. “I am so proud,” and they want to help her expand and grow as a small organic farm. Her youngest son has taken it a step further. “He wants to be a biologist and study organic pesticides. It does me such good to see that they all study and that they are interested in agriculture.”

Above everything else, Maria Ana is looking for quality. “I have a goal. My children have been so successful and that motivates me to expand my horizon and keep doing things well. Alba has the resources for me to start and everything is on hand...I’m not scared anymore. I will keep growing, with tidy rows and beautiful results.”

