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Campesinos

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Campesinos – Radio Story that introduces several Mexican perspectives on immigration to the north. The piece aired on KUNM-FM in November 2007; Reporter: Richard J. Schaefer, University of New Mexico journalism student, Edited by Richard J. Schaefer, mp3 format file runs 4:59.

ANNOUNCER:

In many ways the Mexican state of Morelos (More-AYE-Los) is similar to New Mexico. Both have slightly under two-million inhabitants taking advantage of the mild climates and marvelous scenery. Both have their own living indigenous cultures that add to the richness of life there.

Some thirteen years after Mexico and the United States signed the North American Free Trade Agreement, goods now move freely across the border. The prices of most items have stabilized. . . food costs less in Morelos, . . . electronic goods cost a little more.

But even in the wake of NAFTA. . . one commodity is not free to cross the border with impunity . . . That's labor.

Richard Schaefer reports.

PKG RUNS: 4:59

Nats . . . (Morelos song for 5 seconds then sound under).

RPTR:

Although the people of the state of Morelos in Central Mexico, sing its praises. . . many of those same Mexicans are leaving their homes in droves. . . They're the campesinos who used to work the fields in states like Morelos. . . growing corn, beans, rice and sugar cane.

For generations their numbers have been growing, so the fields they once cultivated are now shared among many brothers and cousins. As their numbers grow, the land does not. It's impossible to earn a living.

So they head north . . . from rural towns like Tilzapotla, where Cynthia Isabel Villegas, who has seen 80 percent of her male schoolmates cross to the United States. . . now lives in a pueblo devoid of young men.

Cynthia Isabel Villegas 4:10 y 6:35 No hay hombres aqui. . .

/// Los personas van, por ejemplo, es mas facil a trabajar en un restaurante, en jardines, y quitan nieve, en fabricas. . . de papel. Es mas facil encuentra trabajo a hoy ya. . . un mejor vida, y un vero dinero.

There aren't any men here.

The people go because it's easy to work in a restaurant, as a gardener and in snow removal. . . in factories. It's easier to find a better life and real money.

RPTR:

That better life is not necessarily for the migrants themselves. When they're in the North, they generally work low-wage jobs and live crammed into squalid rental units.

Former economist for the Inter-American Development Bank, Ernesto Castellanos, says they put up with these hardships to save two or three hundred dollars a month home to send home to their families. . . who are counting on their support.

Castellanos bite 47:05:

They live like hell there. Because in order to send the money. . . they have really to be in the worst of the worst. . . . Because for them is most important that their family lives better, event that they have to die. . . . Family comes first.

RPTR:

Ironically, Morelos needs these fleeing laborers to work the truck farms that support Cuernavaca's food markets, or "mercados," which are some of the richest in the world.

Nats. . . (market sound under previous narration, up for 1.5 seconds then under again.)

RPTR:

But the great migration threatens this centuries-old bounty. As much as twenty percent of the population of the State of Morelos has crossed to the United States.

Morelos' deputy governor Sergio Alvarez Mata says that for Mexico, the problem may start with men fleeing the countryside, but it affects the whole society.

Alvarez Mata Bite 1:09

Many men have abandoned the campos, they can't cultivate the fields. . . it's not just a problem for the government, the big problem is escalating prices in the countryside.

RPTR:

Those rising prices are for staples . . . corn, beans, and rice.

Once thriving truck-farms around Mexico's central cities are now populated mostly by women.

In December, the countryside comes back to life. . . a little. . . as men return from the North with some change in their pockets . . .

But that's become more difficult with the tightened border security.

Alvarez Mata says that the government and people of the United States could do both countries a favor by making it easier for migrants to return to their villages.

Alvarez Mata Bite 1:58

This would be much better if the people who have gone to the United States for employment were allowed to return to their loved ones.

RPTR:

Despite the Mexican government's expressions of concern, some of its own policies have contributed to the problem.

In its efforts to modernize, Mexico's granted water and other resource rights to developers and industrialists. . . to build things like golf courses and tract homes.

That's made it difficult for the campesinos – and their wives, children and parents, who have stayed home and tried to work the land, and make a living.

So those who can, leave. . . they're following in the steps of men like Juan Molinero who left twenty years ago for the bigger salaries and cold climates of the United States.

Juan Molinero 1 2:52 y 4:00 y 2:17 It's hard working there because. . . the temperature there in the wintertime, very, very cold, summertime, ooh, it's very, very hot. ///

Sometimes I work till 9, 10 in the night. ///

All my money, every weekend, I go to the currency change. My money coming to Mexico, to make a house. . . my son go to the university . . . everything.

RPTR:

Ironically, as men like Molinero have left the crowded Mexican countryside, even less corn is being produced close to home, so its price naturally rises.

It's a modern-day anomaly that people who once grew corn and sugar cane for Mexico's cities and industries now find they can neither afford to stay and work the land. . . nor are there local jobs that pay well enough to enable them to buy the crops their families once produced.

For K-U-N-M, this is Richard Schaefer.

(pause) This is Richard Schaefer

ANNOUNCER TAG:

That report and others to follow comes from the Cross-Border Group. It's made up of students and journalism faculty from U-N-M and Universidad Fray Luca Paccioli. . . who worked together this summer in the state of Morelos to produce reports on immigration.

Their next report will be on the "muro," or wall, that the United States is erecting to stem the migration tide from the South.