

Hailing from rural New York, filmmaker Nancy Ghertner has a long history interacting with U.S. agriculture and the migrant community that comes with it. In 2000, she began a decade-long project to find out exactly what life is like for farm workers in her local community. In her time spent with five migrant women, she builds a series of compelling portraits on U.S. immigrant life. This week, www.freshfruitportal.com had the chance to catch up with Ghertner on her film, "After I Pick the Fruit", featured earlier on the website as a [review](#). 

Ghertner has notably put a great deal of thought not only into the depiction of the women featured in "After I Pick the Fruit", but also into the life that the finished film will take on.

She has chosen to self distribute the documentary for the time being, out of concern for the privacy of its participants. No public showings are to be made near where the women live, out of concern for possibly exposing the undocumented.

From the beginning of production, she has had an unspoken agreement with the women to create a piece that they felt comfortable with. She would ask for their input and share footage with them to ensure a collaborative, accurate final product.

"It's one thing to see yourself on television and another to see yourself in an interview. So there became a consciousness that the camera was there, which actually was good because my attitude toward the film was that they should have participation and ownership in terms of their permission and in terms of what we included," she said.

Part of the footage sharing was done for the benefit of families back home who may not have seen their relatives in quite a long time.

"We were taking footage back to each of the families to share because a lot of people don't have footage of their children or different things going on that they really wanted to show their families in Mexico, particularly what their life was like. So they liked viewing the footage that I had shot," she said.

Ghertner explained a progression throughout the decade that made undocumented work and the ability to visit home increasingly difficult. Especially after 2006, she saw a crack down on immigration and increased anxiety from workers.

The ups and downs of immigration policy are a natural part of the film, although Ghertner does not insert her personal views on advocacy into the work.

On an individual level, however, she does care deeply for the future of migrant workers.

"They are the kind of people you can tell are steadfast, loyal to their farm and they deserve the opportunity that other immigrants have had to gain legal status," she said.

Her stance is shared by the farmers she met who have developed a bond with their immigrant laborers.

"[Farmers] would like to see that they could sponsor the workers who they've known for a long time to start on a legal status. They would like to see less persecution that scares their workers," she said.

"That affects the harvest because they like to get the fruit in. So for immigration reform they see that it would provide them with the workforce that they used to have because the people who would qualify would probably come back to their farms.

"And they might not have to use as many guest workers, which would give them more money because the guest worker program is expensive for the small farms."

For the workers themselves, Ghertner came to know people who share the common desire to settle down, support a family and become a part of a greater community.

"They're part of the economy of fruit production. The good worker who is loyal, has a knack and can learn higher skills - they might develop an eye for pruning, how to operate equipment - they stay. That's their life after they pick the fruit," she said.

"The other question is if they will have the status to lead a normal life and we still don't know that part with the possible immigration reform on the table. I don't think that is ever totally solved."

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