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## This is Campesino Life

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## **This is Campesino Life**

By Chelsea Rios Gomez

My name is Chelsea. I was born and raised in the Central Valley, which is on Yokut land. The Central Valley is California's most productive agricultural region with an estimated value of 17 billion a year. I grew up here surrounded by campesino life. What does "campesino" mean? The literal translation is "peasant" but that word is outdated. Another translation can be "farmer" but that doesn't feel right either. I won't tell you what word in English is a good enough translation to represent the complexity behind the word campesino, because there isn't one. Instead, I will tell you what it means to me.

Both of my parents work in the fields. Once we were at least 11 or 12 years old, my mom would take us to work during school breaks or on weekends. She wanted to show us the true meaning of hard work. She always told me, "Mija, te quiero enseñar que duro es este trabajo para que le echas ganas en la escuela, yo no te quiero mirar aquí conmigo." Which translates to "My daughter, I want to show you what hard work is so you put effort in your schooling. I don't want to see you here with me." And it was, it was very hard work, but my mom never complained, rather she enjoyed her work. But it's hard work for minimal pay. So why did she stay? She found the work rewarding and honorable. I did too. I loved when my mom would pick me up from school in her dirty work clothes. I wanted everyone to see how hard of a worker my mom was.

I learned so much working with my mom. I learned how to grow grape vines and take care of them. I learned how to pack and label. I learned all the chisme or gossip from the people working with my mom like who got pregnant or who's getting a divorce. I learned about their culture, I've met people who were from all over (Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua). I learned about the complexity of each one of their lives.

There is beauty behind this type of life. Waking up before the break of dawn and driving for at least 30 minutes to an hour to the job site and meeting the people you'll be working with, sometimes for the first and last time and other times, they become lifelong friends. Another important aspect in campesino life is food distribution. My community is an immigrant community full of Spanish speakers with big hearts and friendly faces. There's this joke among children

of immigrant parents. That our parents only know to show their love by feeding us or more specifically by serving us freshly cut fruit. Therefore, I deemed the giving of fruit an act of endearment. So when my mom's work buddies always stopped by and gave us a bunch of different fresh produce for free. I realized that we are all we have. In the country where we are responsible for feeding millions of people yet get paid little to nothing. We are all we have. This is campesino life. It's more than a job title, it's a way of life. We support one another by providing jobs, feeding each other either fresh produce, meat, homemade cheese or other dairy products. We donate clothes to people who just moved to the United States or we offer discounts at our stores. We educate one another. We direct each other to resources available. We are there for each other when the government isn't doing their job to support our community especially during this pandemic. This is campesino life.