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Lily Bulb Farmworkers

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Lily Bulb Farmworkers

By Miguel Pelayo

Easter lily bulbs are typically used for Easter as they symbolize purity, rebirth, new beginnings and hope. Currently there is a strong Latino population working at the capital of the world's Easter lily bulb production in Smith River, California. Over the last 40 to 50 years there has been a growing number of workers who have come and gone and work here seasonally. Meet Maria. She immigrated from Jalisco, Mexico in the 1980s and has been working there ever since. She describes the typical work day in these Easter lily bulb farms. She begins her day at 7am and doesn't get off work until 5pm. Her job consists of harvesting lilies which requires her to lay on her stomach on a moving iron board for long amounts of time. When she gets home from work she needs to wash her hands for 20 minutes in order to remove the layers of dirt from the day.

Although she states that she enjoys her job and the relationships she has built with her coworkers, it is tough and she doesn't know how much longer she can work in these conditions. She also grows concerned of the chemicals that are used in the fields. In a report by the Siskiyou Land Conservancy, it is reported that there are 300,000 pounds of highly toxic fumigants, herbicides, and fungicides on the 1000 acres that Maria works in. She is concerned with what this could mean for her health and safety in this workplace. Like many of her coworkers working in these conditions, she fears voicing her concerns due to the retaliation that can be brought from the lily bulb farm owners. These farmworkers sacrifice so much for the rebirth and new beginnings and hope for the next generation of Latinos.

