

Local Business Owner Admires the Industrious Work of Immigrants

By: Skyler Sigl

PERRY, Ohio -- With spring break just an arms length away, students and staff of Perry High School are yearning for some time off. With the weather warming up, reminiscent thoughts of summer fill the halls. After a long winter, it feels like things are finally starting to turn up.

While spring break is habitually a time to relax and refresh, that is not the case for nursery workers. As winter comes to an end, farmers markets begin planning for the upcoming season.

Local 5th generation business West Orchards Farm Market is very familiar with the hectic work that comes with pre-season planning. Owner Ame West relies on the dedication and tireless work of immigrants to make sure their season is off to a good start.

West Orchards is known for their “U-pick” strawberries and sour cherries -- an opportunity for families friends to pick their own fruit off the lush trees on their 70 acre farm -- along with their plentiful crop of peaches and sweet corn that are harvested later in the season. Taking a trip to the market on a nice spring day can be quite the treat, but obtaining all of these wonderful fruits and veggies wouldn’t be possible without all the hard work behind the scenes.

The agricultural business requires reliable, responsible workers that are willing to work flexible hours. West compliments the consistently good work ethic that comes from their immigrant hires.

“[It’s] always been that way,” West exclaims. West Orchards has been dependent on immigrant workers since the business began in 1891. At the time, the population of immigrants were mostly haitian, and later jamaican. Today, the immigration workers mostly consist of hispanics.

Over the last century, there has been a recurring theme that surfaced as a result of employing immigrants to work in the fields. When compared to Americans, it’s simple: “[They’re] willing to do the harder work”.

In the past, West has experimented with different hires, yet she continues to gravitate toward Hispanics. “They’re attracted to this work, they’re used to it”.

West Orchards currently employs two legal immigrants that have been with the company for fifteen years. Their constant hard work and reliability makes them valuable members on the job.

Though West hasn't hired any illegal immigrants, she shares her insight on the obstacles some employers might face while doing so.

There are numerous restrictions on employers when it comes to hiring immigrants, whether they're legal or not. For instance, managers cannot question the validity of their workers' documentations, however they're inevitably responsible if they hire someone that's illegal. West believes there will eventually be a computer function that reveals legality of future hires in an effort to eliminate these problems.