

THE STORY OF A FARMER

This is a story of one Hispanic farmer who came to Michigan and began his and his family's farming operation. This story is written by the farmer in his own words and edited by Morse L. Brown for this article for Michigan Food and Farming System's (MIFFS) electronic newsletter. The farmer's name is:

Sigifredo Morales

I came from Mexico to Chicago, Ill where I started working in factories and was there for years. While I was there I had to learn the first words of the English language because I saw that you really needed to know the English language. While in Chicago, I met friends who invited me to come to Michigan in 2000. This friend had already purchased a farm and had established blueberry plants and at that time was harvesting blueberries.

It was he who told me about this blueberry crop. On this visit I could see that he lifted the boxes that were harvested by people who were helping him and bringing them in to him and they were receiving a check for an amount that got my attention.

When I returned to Chicago with my friend we talked about blueberries and I carried this in my mind the idea and then decided to come to Michigan that same year (2000).

I arrived in Michigan and was able to buy a blueberry farm with blueberry plots that were already established and were producing. I knew nothing about growing this crop or other crops in Michigan. I knew nothing about fertilizer, weed control, pesticides etc. I had to hire an aircraft company for pesticide application to control blueberry pests. I had to do this for about 9 years. There were also many other practices that I was not aware of but a friend who had more experience in this than I had helped me to manage this on my farm.

It was in 2008, I was invited to the first blueberry training by a relative who already had been attending other training events. When I attended the training I met Filiberto Villa-Gomez, Spanish Speaking Outreach Coordinator for Michigan Food and Farming Systems (MIFFS). Filiberto was promoting the workshops being given by MIFFS and Michigan State University Extension (MSUE).

Since these initial trainings I began to learn about farming practices and the programs provided by USDA agencies; Farm Service Agency (FSA), Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA) and Michigan State University Extension (MSUE).

After hearing about FSA loans I started looking for information and they helped me buy my tractor and a little more ground. I also had an invitation from Filiberto who is always inviting people here in this area to attend trainings for MIFFS. MIFFS was having workshops on pesticides, business plans, fertilizer, Good Agriculture Practices (GAP) and more on blueberries and vegetable crops. I now have an application request in for an Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) with NRCS. My application has been in for almost three (3) years and I still have no answer, but I am still waiting. This application is to get help to build a chemical building.

My ratings of the agencies based on the information from the workshops and the referrals that were made I rate them on a scale from 1-10 as follows:

MIFFS: I have gotten very good knowledge very good knowledge and I agree to continue working with this organization and I wish they were always bringing courses for me and most producers because "I acknowledge that we have a long way to go." I rate the programs:

FSA= 10, NRCS=0 (on a scale of 1-10).

Sigifredo makes agriculture his profession because he was born on a ranch in the country where his parents had land and he grew up doing those activities. Now he continues to do so in Michigan because he likes the field and the field allows him more freedom than factory work. He enjoys the outdoors.