

Who Is Luis Magaña?

Luis Magaña-Acevedo was born in Jaripo, in the state of Michoacán, México, where he attended the Francisco I. Madero School. Coming from a family of migrants, his grandfather was a migrant who worked on the east coast of the United States, and his father was a bracero for 20 years (1942 to 1964).

In 1970 his father legalized him so that he could join the rest of the family who at that time resided in the Central Valley of California. Since then he worked in the agricultural fields of California in order to help his family. It was during this period, as a very young man working the fields as a farm worker, that he became aware of the injustices and exploitive conditions that farm workers endure. His experiences led him, in 1974, to participate in the first strikes of tomato workers in the Central Valley. The devaluation of the Mexican peso, in 1976, spurred him to organize and raise awareness among his fellow Michoacanos about economic and human rights issues.

In 1980 he founded the Asociación Campesina Lázaro Cárdenas, the first community organization in the area. As a migrant leader he organized and led strikes that were able to raise the wages of green tomato pickers in the Central Valley. Afterwards, he established a non-profit organization to address the housing needs of low-income farm workers. In the same way, he has advised and advocated for migrant farm workers to form their own organizations to improve their living and working conditions including indigenous migrants from México and Central America. In the early 90s, in Fresno, under his own initiative, he formed Alianza Campesina, a coalition of nine groups which later became the Organization de Trabajadores Agrícolas de California (OTAC).

His role as a leader has also taken him to México where he has demanded and advocated the Michoacán and Mexican governments in defense of migrant workers' rights, as well as, to improve the services and protection offered by Mexican consuls. He has pushed for binational campaigns to acknowledge migrants' political rights, as is the right to participate in Mexican elections from abroad; and has supported the Absentee Voting Campaign. Moreover, he was invited by the Mexican congress to participate in forums to discuss and push for the approval of Dual Citizenship or "no loss of Mexican citizenship".

In 1989, he was one of the founding signatories of the Mexican political party Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) and one of five orators along with Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, and others during the founding convention. He has collaborated on the issue of health among indigenous children with Mexican actress and activist Ofelia Medina. Similarly, he has collaborated in studies and books on issues of Mexican migrant workers abroad and is the founder of the paper *Semilla*, a paper of and for migrant workers in California.

As volunteer organizer for OTAC, a member organization of migrant farm workers in defense of their labor and human rights, he has pushed for binational projects in support of migrants and their families on both sides of the border and has helped ex-braceros win recognition for their contributions and their pensions. In 2007 he was nominated to run for the governorship of Michoacan as an independent candidate, under the slogan "For the Right Not to Emigrate". Luis Magaña is an active board member of California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA), the Labor Council for Latin American Advancement, AFL-CIO (LCLAA), and Frente de Mexicanos en el Exterior (FME), among others. Currently, he works and maintains solidarity with various institutions, unions, and progressive organizations (NGOs) in both countries in support of migrants from Mexican states with the highest rates of migration to the United States.