

● FROM THE EDITOR

# ON THE JOB WITH PESTICIDES

For me, as for most people, working is not optional. I work so I can buy groceries for my family, pay my property taxes, and take care of the dentist bill. And, I admit, so I can take my family out for ice cream every now and then. But what if earning that paycheck means being exposed to pesticides? Most of us don't have the option of changing jobs or doing without our income, so if our job involves pesticide exposure we breathe and touch pesticides, like it or not.

The issues raised by pesticide exposure on the job got a heart-wrenching face recently when the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services released a report about Carlitos Candelario. He's an infant born to parents who work on tomato farms. Carlitos, of course, is adorable, but he grabs our hearts because he was born with neither arms nor legs.

Based on information provided by the company that employed Carlitos's mother, the Department of Health and Human Services was able to put

together a list of all the pesticides used on fields where she worked just before and during the first part of her pregnancy. Exposures during this time,



Taylor Jones/Palm Beach Post

research tells us, are the ones that are most likely to cause birth defects. The list is not pretty. She was probably exposed to 14 pesticides. At least 5 of them have caused birth defects or genetic damage in laboratory tests. Of course, there's no way that the state of North Carolina can prove that pesticide exposure is responsible for

Carlitos's missing arms and legs, but the report concludes that there is a plausible link.

When I read Carlitos's story I am saddened by the price that he and his family have paid so that our agricultural system can continue its unhealthy, unsustainable dependence on pesticides. I am angry, too, that the person paying so much of the price is an innocent child. Let's channel our sadness and anger for Carlitos and his family into change. Think about Carlitos next time you're at the grocery store or the farmers market. Let your food buying habits support a different kind of agriculture, one that does not rely on these chemical poisons.

—Caroline Cox

*P.S.* This is my last issue as editor of JPR, as I am starting work with the Center for Environmental Health in a few weeks. It's been an enormous privilege to work with you over the years, and I look forward to continuing to work with you and NCAP.