

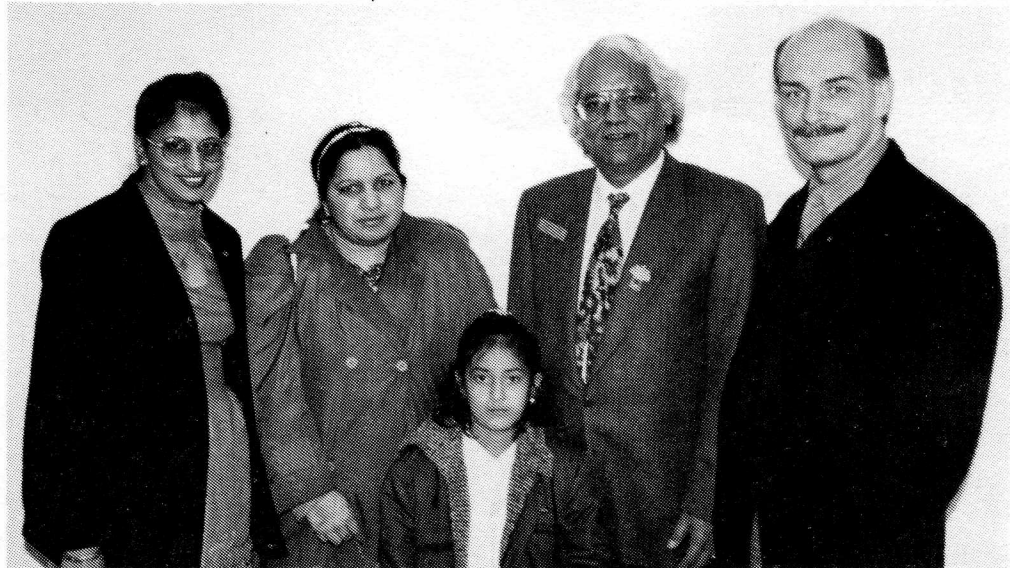
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March 7, 1995



KWANTLEN University College

The Kwantlen Community Newsletter from Langley, Newton, Richmond and Surrey campuses



Surjit Lehal (left), her daughter Kiran (centre), Sarabjit Aulakh, Charan Gill and KUC's Brian MacLean gathered to celebrate the release of the research into the risks faced by Surrey farm workers and their children (see story below). Kiran was aged one when she went to the fields.

A Kwantlen criminologist exposes risks to Surrey farm workers and their children

Almost 1,500 children a year in Surrey are being exposed to dangerous pesticides and machinery as they accompany their parents or caregivers to work on the farms. About 40 per cent of these children, or 600 of them, are under the age of five.

Almost all Surrey's farm workers are Punjabi immigrants and about 80 per cent are women. One in four was exposed to pesticides last year and of these, most became ill.

Brian MacLean practices what he preaches.

"I think that now we are a university college, we should look seriously at undertaking community-oriented research," he says. "South of the Fraser is Kwantlen country, and we should be able to do research that is of direct relevance to our community."

That's just what he has done since he became a criminology instructor at KUC's Richmond campus three years ago. He joined Prof. Gurcharn Basran of the University of Saskatchewan and Charan Gill, president of the B.C. Organization to Fight Racism and together they investigated the plight of the children of Surrey farm workers. The results of their collaborative research were published in a report released at a press conference at the Surrey campus on Feb. 27.

"Almost 1,500 children a year in Surrey are being exposed to dangerous pesticides and machinery as they accompany their parents or caregivers to work on the farms," Dr. MacLean said.

"About 40 per cent of these children, or 600 of them, are under the age of five." And all are Punjabi, the children of recent immigrants.

The report made a number of recommendations, including establishing an affordable childcare program for farm workers.

At the press conference, two B.C. cabinet ministers, the Hon. Penny Priddy and the Hon. Joan Smallwood, expressed support and considerable interest in the outcome of the research and establishing suitable and af-

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March is Diversity Month at Kwantlen

**International Women's Day
March 8**

**International Day for the
Elimination of Racial Discrimination
March 21**

A Kwantlen criminologist. from page one

fordable childcare for farm workers.

"I want to congratulate all those who were involved in this research," said Priddy, who is minister of women's equality. "We will work with the community on this project, and for it to be effective, a childcare centre should be open seven days a week for extended hours during the summer months."

Dr. MacLean reported that there is considerable research which shows that women of child-bearing age exposed to pesticides suffer a greater incidence of spontaneous abortions and a higher incidence of children born with a variety of congenital malformations.

"In one clinic in California, whose clients were farm workers, the number of stillbirths reported was four times the national average.

"But there's very little research on the long-term effects of early childhood exposure to pesticides, especially for reproductive health," says Dr. MacLean.

He and his fellow researchers published a report for the Secretary of State entitled *Farm Workers and their Children*. The report states that the only way to rectify the problem is to open affordable childcare centres for farm workers.

Charan Gill, founding president of the Progressive Inter-Cultural Community Services (PICS), said he started investigating the situation when four children of farm workers died in 1980. One child fell into a pot of water kept for drinking and washing dishes in a worker's bungalow and three others drowned in a pond while waiting for their mothers to finish berry picking in the Abbotsford area.

Many children have been killed or injured while their caregivers are working on farms, Gill says. Many more suffered pesticide poisoning.

"Kids play with the pesticide containers," he says. "There are so many affected and so many that need medical attention."

It's not just the children that are affected. Almost all Surrey's farm workers are Punjabi immigrants and about 80 per cent are women. One in four was exposed to pesticides last year and of

There's very little research on the long-term effects of early childhood exposure to pesticides.

these, a majority became ill.

"When it comes to pesticide regulation, we lag far behind the United States," Dr. MacLean says. "Until just recently, farm workers didn't even receive workers' compensation."

A recent U.S. study stated that 56% of farmworkers suffered abnormal kidney and liver functions, 78% suffered chronic skin rashes and 54% had abnormalities of the chest cavity.

Children exposed to pesticides fared worse than adults. Seventeen out of 20

"When it comes to pesticide regulation, we lag far behind the U.S."

became ill and of these, seven out of eight needed medical help.

Fruit picking by degree

Surjit Lehal came to Canada 12 years ago. She had a university degree, but ended up working on the farm. She took her daughter Kiran, then aged one, with her while she picked raspberries.

"She slept under the raspberry bushes," her mother recalls. "I worked for up to 16 hours a day and there was no one else to look after her." Surjit is one of the luckier immigrants. Educated, intelligent, she has three children and a part-time job at PICS. But the memories of hard work and her child asleep under the bushes keeps her focussed on the need for appropriate child care.

Average income \$6,600

Dr. MacLean estimates that there is one childcare space for every seven children in Surrey who need it. Some startling facts emerged during his research into the lives of Surrey's farm workers. One in eight has a university degree and some have very little education, but all had one thing in common — low incomes. The average annual income from farm labour is \$6,600 a year, with an average working day of 10 hours. Most farm workers have poor English and, as a result, says Dr. MacLean, they are a docile and easily exploited work force.

"They fear deportation, and as a consequence, are unlikely to organize around working issues."

The researchers recommended set-

ting up a childcare pilot project as soon as possible. "It would serve about 30 children, or 10 per cent of those needing care," Dr. MacLean says. The project would be staffed with workers who speak Punjabi and English and are familiar with the culture. Recommendations also include starting a community board of Punjabi farm workers and others to oversee the daycare program and to look at making the farm a safer place to work and play for adults and children respectively.

"We will do something this year," affirmed Gill.

Dr. MacLean promised that all funds raised from the sale of the report, to be published as a book, will go to the childcare project. "I feel that we at the college have a position of privilege, so I try to give back to the community all the expertise that I can."

Crimes against the environment

How did a criminologist become involved with farm workers?

"There are crimes involved, crimes against the environment in the form of illegal pesticide use and handling," he replies.

"Also, my interest is in social justice. And, in a broader context, the creation and maintenance of a vulnerable workforce is a product of our laws." He explains that farm workers only recently gained workers' compensation and under B.C.'s new minimum wage regulations, farm workers will have to work more than 120 hours in a two-week period to gain overtime pay.

He is interested in how our laws are used and how inequality in society is maintained.

"There are at least three lines of inequality in society — class, race and gender. The farm workers are a case study in how those three factors interact."

In April, KUC will be starting a childcare program for workers who speak Punjabi.

"It's time to combat the racism and sexism in our society," he concludes.

"There are at least three lines of inequality in society — class, race and gender."