

More than 400 workers attend Farm Workers Health Fair

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By SARAH HORNE, Staff Writer

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CALEXICO — While most Calexico residents were sleeping, more than 400 farmworkers got free information, flu shots, checkups and breakfast during the Farm Workers Health Fair.

As music blared from the One Stop parking lot in Calexico early Friday morning, farmworkers visited booths set up by 27 local agencies as part of the Bi-national Health Week organized by the Mexican consulate.

In addition to the information and medical checkups, this year dental exams from the Asociación de Dentistas de Mexicali were provided. Clínicas de Salud del Pueblo also offered flu shots, glucose test and blood pressure checks.

Regional Coordinator for the Health Initiative of the Americas Araceli Gaines said 215 flu shots, 150 glucose and blood pressure checks and 47 oral exams were given during the fair's seventh year.

"It's important because the farmworkers' schedule is totally different than what a normal worker does," Gaines said.

California Department of Public Health Epidemiologist Michael Welton, one of 52 volunteers, was using his "shoving into hands" approach to distribute cards about pesticide illness.

One of those hands belonged to Gilberto Montes.

"They give information about a lot of stuff and you realize everything that they can help you with as a worker that you don't even know about," he said.

Others were there for the burritos and sweet bread.

"First is the food," Pablo Baltazar said. "If I don't get food the motor won't run."

Baltazar, 58, said he attends every year. He had been on the lot since 2 a.m. looking for work but said there's little work this year, especially for him.

"They see me as an oldie and say this guy won't do anymore," he said.

It was the first year at the fair for Jose Gomez, who was there because he was told about it by a friend.

"I'm here to get information," he said. "Mostly about what to do because of the heat and exhaustion."



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ABOVE LEFT: Medical assistant Mary Ramirez prepares flu shots as a patient is examined inside the Health on Wheels mobile clinic Friday morning in Calexico.

Gaines said one of the main ways workers find out about the event is word of mouth.

“Even if they didn’t come today they pass on the information and resources,” she said.

By 4 a.m. the steady flow of inquirers had started to subside, with only those left who were unable to get work for the day.

“My father always said, ‘All work with honor doesn’t dishonor,’” Juanita Nieto Monarrez said.

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FROM LEFT: Silvio Zendejas, with Clinicas de Salud del Pueblo, checks Flabio Montero's blood pressure Friday morning. Montero, 65, has been a farmworker for more than 20 years.