



*1LEDE Alum Adrian Gonzalez inspects agricultural enterprises as an Environmental Specialist.*

The origins of the food we eat can span far and wide. With the momentum towards eating locally-grown foods as part of a sustainable lifestyle, eating crops grown in your backyard can reduce the environmental impacts of the food supply system and support employment of your neighbors. But who watches to make sure what we eat makes sustainability come to fruition? PCGS alum Adrian Gonzalez works behind the scenes in the Tampa Bay region to ensure what is grown in the backyard of PCGS echoes the sustainable principles of its teachings.

Adrian began working in agriculture at the age of 13 back home in Mexico. His parents managed a blackberry farm and Adrian helped to continue the family affair. One thing that remained on his mind was the heavy use of pesticides in growing local berries and how he could go to school to help his family. “I began to wonder how berries can be grown with reduced use of pesticides? This question later became the focal point of my undergraduate thesis.” Adrian presented his thesis on plant growth regulators as part of his Agricultural Engineering degree he earned at Higher Technological Institute of Los Reyes.

After completing his undergraduate degree, Adrian sought to continue his education while exploring more opportunities to help develop solutions in the agricultural sector. In particular, he sought out PCGS because of the opportunity to practice solutions in the United States. “If I could bring solutions to

fruition in the United States, I can have a better chance to expand my knowledge in producing food sustainably.”

Adrian recalls his experience attending PCGS fondly, noting how several courses encouraged him to shift his thinking. “The traditional way of solving problems in society has been replayed consistently for a long time. Nowadays, viewing or proposing alternatives with a holistic view can stimulate superior solutions. I would previously initiate my thinking using my engineering background. But PCGS stimulated me to examine all components of a situation.”

It is this holistic thinking which Adrian has the privilege of applying in his current role as an Environmental Specialist for the Florida Department of Agriculture. Among his responsibilities, Adrian conducts inspections of farms to ensure their operations adhere to state regulations and application of products such as pesticides follow labelled instructions. “My background in agriculture and pesticides has come in handy for my current role. I use this to assess these enterprises and ensure their business practices are not harmful for Floridians like you and me.”



*2 Adrian dons a beekeeper suit while inspecting a bee farm.*

Adrian believes PCGS also played an important role in guiding the work he does. “When I attended, I was fortunate to be introduced to people of many different backgrounds. Discussions with them in and out of the classroom impacted me to emphasize sustainable thinking – impacts upon society, economy and environment – in all situations.” Adrian points to this community of diverse viewpoints coalescing towards achieving a common goal as a key strength of PCGS.

This principle of community has carried into his work. When conducting inspections, Adrian questions employees to garner their experience performing the work in the field – sometimes at farms where there is suspected noncompliance. “My work also ensures worker protection standards are being followed. We have to make sure they work in a safe environment. In as much as you and I get to enjoy the fruit of their labor, they should as well.” This widening philosophy to consider far-reaching effects is

one that is starting to take root and branch out. “An engineering viewpoint underscores needing to produce at a low-price rate. Learning to think sustainably identifies that the price of doing things as they are currently is too high upon the environment. We have to consider the fate of such actions by the agricultural sector upon the environment and our fellow people.” With Adrian’s help, it’s a fate which grows a little greener each day.