

# Former farm worker graduates to the boardroom

By Rosalee Crowe

Chadd Garcia, a 1998 University of Arizona graduate, knows firsthand of the difficulties of successfully navigating the application process for any of the top business schools in the country.

He knows because he went through the process and eventually obtained his MBA from Harvard's business school in 2004.

It was not a simple matter, he says. Not for him or for anybody. But for those who come from a background as far removed as possible from the world of business and MBAs – the world of migrant farm workers, for example – the task can be daunting.

Someone from such a background typically has no contacts with business schools; no family members, close friends or business associates to mentor them through the application process, Garcia said. He's proof that the obstacles can be overcome, but it's hard because, basically, you're on your own, and that is a scenario he and some close friends want to change.

The vehicle for that change is the Rising Farmworker Dream Fund, an organization that aims to transform the lives of farm workers using the power and resources of business.

Garcia and the group's other co-founders started the Migrant MBA Project, the fund's first initiative, to help farm workers' children gain admission to top-tier business schools.

Currently, the project provides advice to prospective students to help them navigate the admissions process. In the future, the project plans to provide financial aid to help students get tutoring for the Graduate Management Admissions Test, or GMAT, the requisite admissions exam for business schools, as well as for tuition.

The idea for Rising Farmworker Dream Fund came about while Garcia and Martin Curiel were students at Harvard. They talked often about their lives and how fortunate they were to be where they were. They also recognized that knowledge of business is not only helpful to individuals, but also to society – particularly if it can be used in conjunction with government and charitable groups to help lift people out of poverty.

Basically, they reasoned, if education and the study of business could help them, it could do the same for others. Curiel, now CEO of the fund, is a former farm worker, and Garcia grew up working on farms. His father had been a farm worker, eventually saving enough money to buy his own citrus farm in Yuma.

“We feel that the farm-worker community is unique in the issues that it faces, issues such as relative isolation to the rest of American society, poor working conditions and legal status,” Garcia said. “Our goal isn't to merely have children from this community gain access to a top business school. Our goal is – in 10 to 15 years, after our students graduated from a top business school – to have them be leaders in the business community. They will have leadership skills as well as financial and political capital that they can bring back to their community.”

The agricultural community plays an important role in society, Garcia said.

“The migrant workers who harvest the food that we eat are among the hardest-working people that I met,” he said. “Don’t their children deserve a shot at the American dream?”

For more information, contact Garcia, Curiel or other Rising Farmworker Dream co-founders through the fund’s Website: [www.risingfarmworker.org](http://www.risingfarmworker.org).