

# Migrants get toilets, sinks

By Clarke Morrison  
Times Writer

**HENDERSONVILLE** — During the long, hot workdays in his five years harvesting crops, Agustin Tapia has always looked toward a cluster of trees when it came time to relieve himself. When there wasn't one, he settled for a sheltering row of crops.

And the 21-year-old Mexican had no way to wash his hands afterwards, and before eating.

But as he finished loading a crate full of newly-picked cucumbers at Bill McCay's farm east of Hendersonville Tuesday afternoon, Tapia had a new convenience to get used to: Two shiny white booths mounted on a trailer a short distance away, with sink and cool drinking water too.

"Before, we had to go in the woods," Tapia said, struggling slightly to find the right words in English. "There was no way to wash your hands."

The new bathroom and hand-washing facilities are the result of a program begun this season by the Migrant Family Health Service and a recent federal appeals court ruling requiring farmers to provide such facilities

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In the meantime, three years ago, the Migrant Family Health Service in Henderson County applied for a grant from the Department of Health and Human Services to provide sanitation facilities for migrant workers there. Approval came last year. With the \$30,000 grant the clinic was able to purchase 10 units. Each includes two portable toilets, one for men and one for women, mounted on a trailer along with dual sinks and water coolers.

The migrant clinic began last week loaning the units to area farmers. They pay to have them pumped

and maintained.

"It really came at an opportune time," Garrison said. "The farmers are real glad to get them because it's the law now. Of course 10 units doesn't begin to touch the number of farmers that we have here."

Other farmers here and nationwide are required to rent portable toilets and sinks from private contractors. One toilet and hand-washing facility must be provided for each 15 workers, and they must be located no more than a quarter mile from the work site.

"We all know that you should wash your hands when you go to the bathroom and before you eat," Garrison said. "These people have never



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## Agustin Tapia washes up for lunch

for their workers, said Barbara Garrison, director of the clinic.

Congress mandated 14 years ago that the Occupational Safety and Health Administration implement regulations for field sanitation. "But for one reason or another OSHA has drug their feet, probably because of pressure and money from the large farmers," Garrison said.

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been able to do that.

"People who are going to the bathroom in the fields are contaminating the vegetables and whatever they pick. Common sense tells you that and people don't even think about it, but that's what's been going on for years."

The problem is not as acute here where farms are smaller and there are usually trees nearby, as it is in the Midwest where the rows stretch for miles and miles, Garrison said.

"When they void on the vegetables, then somebody comes along and picks them and puts them in a basket to sell," she said. "They just squat down between the rows. That's what they've always had to do."