

PROFILE: FAITH BOUCHER

## Educating migrant women at risk of cervical and breast cancer

For more than 20 years, medical anthropologist Faith Boucher has been working to educate and improve the lives of agricultural workers and their families. A Peace Corps volunteer in India from 1966 to 1968, Boucher created a forum for farmers to meet and work with professors of J. Nehru Agriculture College in Gwalior, an ancient city south of New Delhi. She also started clubs similar to 4-H to teach children vegetable gardening and animal raising.

During the 1980s, Boucher served as director of refugee/immigrant services for San Joaquin and Stanislaus counties, working with Mexicans, Cubans and Southeast Asians. "The situation faced by Cambodian, Hmong and Vietnamese refugees was very serious because many spoke no English, were illiterate in their own languages, and had no job skills besides farming," said Boucher. "I started an ag program to capitalize on the agricultural skills and family-based work organizations that the people already possessed. Contrary to welfare-reform rhetoric, you can't make electronics technicians out of everyone, nor should this be the primary goal of acculturation and education in these populations."

With three students from the Graduate Group in International Agricultural Development at UC Davis, two of whom were former Peace Corps volunteers, and refugee Mutual Assistance Organizations, families determined to farm were assisted to rent land, obtain seed and fertilizer loans and contact agricultural technical assistance organizations.

"Marketing their produce was a problem, so we began with the farmers' market circuit. The families got a lot of help from the Quakers' Rural Economic Alternatives Program to help sell their goods," said Boucher. "Now if you go to farmers' markets anywhere in Northern California, you'll see Hmong, Cambodian and Vietnamese

families selling their produce."

Subsequently, Boucher administered medical, public health and dental programs serving 45,000 Hmong and other Lao hilltribes in Northern Thailand, and integrated traditional herbalists and other practitioners into treatment activities. She also formed and headed Community Services of Bangkok, a State Department-funded project providing mental health and other services to expatriates.

Boucher is currently involved in a two-year study that began in September to determine the knowledge of and utilization of preventive health care services for cervical and breast cancer in migrant and seasonal farmworker women. During interviews, investigators asked women if they are aware of and utilize preventive screening methods available to them, including Pap smears and mammograms. They also seek to identify the socioeconomic, educational and cultural barriers that prevent migrant women from accessing services.

To begin to address these barriers

and lack of knowledge of preventive behaviors and services, the project will train lay health advisors (consejeras) to conduct education in the migrant camps. The approach of training community volunteers has been shown to be very effective both in Latin America and with farmworkers in other parts of the United States. The project will serve the community by giving volunteers responsibility to design and conduct education on cervical cancer and environmental health issues of concern to farmworkers.

Boucher is working with Center Director Marc Schenker, principal investigator for the project, along with Steven Samuels, associate adjunct professor in the Department of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine, Rina Alcalay, associate professor of rhetoric and communication, specialists in Hispanic health care and education issues, and several UC Davis students who are involved in the lay health advisor training.

"Our main goal is to document

(see *Boucher* on page 6)



From left, Sombat Chutimanukul, MD, assistant Provincial Health director, Rayong Province, Thailand, and Center Investigator Faith Boucher. Last July the Center hosted a one-month course in environmental epidemiology for 24 physicians from Thailand's Ministry of Public Health Division of Rural Health. Center investigators Schenker, McCurdy and Boucher have been invited to give a workshop in Thailand to begin implementing five projects, including 1. respiratory function of children in areas of industrial pollution, 2.) pesticide contamination monitoring, 3.) Ergonomics issues in Thai industry, 4.) occupational and environmental health functions within the MOPH: a survey, and 5.) indoor air quality in government buildings.

*(Boucher from page 5)*

knowledge of and utilization of cancer prevention services to enumerate the barriers they encounter in obtaining preventive care and to address some of those barriers through education and community organization. We also intend to inform the provider community about possible outreach strategies that will increase the rate of Pap smears, mammograms and other preventive services in this population," explained Boucher.

Born in downtown Chicago and raised in the lake region of northern Illinois, Boucher said she initially wanted to be a cowgirl, but when she found her first arrowhead and her first fossil invertebrate, she became interested in archaeology. Then she explained, "the first time I was exposed to myths of the Greeks and the Native Americans, I became enthralled by what we now call cultural anthropology." Boucher received her bachelor's degree in anthropology from CSU Hayward in 1970, and her Ph.D. in medical anthropology from UC Davis in 1980. Her dissertation explored the practice of religious healing in Mexican, Filipino and white communities in San Joaquin and Sacramento counties.

She initially joined UC Davis in 1987 as an administrator for the Area Health Education Center program in the Department of Family Practice. With funding from the Federal Department of Health and Human Services, the program provided continuing medical education in rural areas. In 1990, Boucher became a community health

program representative in the Department of Community Health, where she remained for three years before leaving to work for the California Public Health Foundation. She returned to UC Davis in 1995 as a postgraduate researcher in the Department of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine.

After living in the Sacramento River Delta for many years, Boucher now lives in Sacramento, where she sings alto with the Sacramento Chorale Society, formerly known as the Sacramento Symphony Chorus. She also enjoys traveling, hiking, biking, and gardening, specializing in growing orchids indoors. She speaks and reads Spanish as well as Thai and Hindi-Urdu (the language of Northern India).



*(Keifer from page 4)*

study was the lack of sufficient exposure among test participants."

Keifer says he is not convinced that testing for cholinesterase is the best way to measure a person's exposure to chemicals. "Testing for something like lead is a little more clear-cut. Cholinesterase testing requires a baseline, which makes it much more complicated and expensive."

Keifer believes that a needs assessment of the costs and questionable accuracy of current cholinesterase testing technology should be resolved before a mandatory testing program is implemented in Washington state.



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# CALENDAR

## March 4

Visalia Convention Center  
**Western Agricultural Safety  
Conference & Exposition**  
Information: Kimberly Naffziger  
(209) 278-4405

## March 6

TB 137, Davis Campus  
**Migrant Health Care Centers in  
California** Patrick O'Connor-  
Marer, Ph.D., Jennifer Weber,  
UC Statewide IPM Project

## May 1

TB 137, Davis Campus  
**Health Outcomes in Agricultural  
Ergonomics**  
Julia Faucett, R.N., Ph.D.,  
Occupational Health Nursing  
Program, UC San Francisco

## June 5

TB 137, Davis Campus  
**Communicating With Hispanics to  
Improve Health Behavior: Lessons  
From the Field**  
Rina Alcalay, Ph.D., Rhetoric  
and Communication, UC Davis

## Sept. 13-15

UC Davis Buehler Alumni  
Center  
**1998 Western Regional Conference  
for Agricultural Health and Safety**  
Contact: Eleanor Wood, (530)  
752-5253; Fax (530) 752-5047;  
E-mail ewwood@ucdavis.edu

**California Train the Trainers  
Workshop Schedules can be found at**  
[www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/IPMPROJECT/  
workshops.html](http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/IPMPROJECT/workshops.html)

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