



## **FIATE: for reliable foreign workers**

April 14, 2020

Le Producteur de Lait Québécois Magazine

Like a growing number of dairy producers, Serge Boivin elected to hire temporary foreign workers. To facilitate their integration and ensure they would be ready to work as quickly as possible, he opted to use the [FIATE service](#) offered by Lactanet, which offers training for the integration and support of foreign workers.



From left to right: Edgar Ramirez, Omar Sandoval, Hebert Castillo, Serge Boivin (owner) and his niece Kaila Boivin who will most probably be an important part of the future of Juar Farm.

## The challenges of integrating foreign workers

Regardless of the business sector, best practices for welcoming and integrating new employees are known to enhance motivation and build skills. Not an easy task, however, when the language barrier limits communication.

“That was my main worry when I applied to receive temporary foreign workers,” acknowledges Serge Boivin, co-owner of Ferme Juar inc. with his spouse, Annie Lévesque. Serge shared some of his concerns with his Lactanet advisor when she visited the farm:

“I wanted to be sure they would be successfully integrated into the team and that they would understand everyone’s role right from the start. I wanted to make sure they were comfortable in their work and that they were up and running as quickly as possible.”

His advisor suggested the FIATE service, offered by Lactanet. In Spanish, *FIATE* means “be trustworthy”. In French, it is the acronym for the program known in English as Training for the Integration and Support of Foreign Workers. Sensitive to the challenges facing foreign workers and their employers, Omar Sandoval Caycedo developed an approach for technical and human support designed to smooth the integration of foreign workers into the workplace on dairy farms.

## Personal experience that profits others

Originally from Columbia, Omar himself experienced the trials of having to adapt to life in Quebec while dealing with the language barrier. He has worked as a dairy production technician since his arrival here in 2011, and, since 2019, has been working as an advisor for the FIATE service offered by Valacta/Lactanet.

Omar travels the countryside daily, meeting with dairy producers for whom he supervises milk recording. In 2019, he met the requirements to become a member of the Ordre des agronomes du Québec. He is also a recognized service provider for Réseau Agriconseils.

Successfully integrated, you say? When meeting with a foreign worker who has just flown in from Guatemala and is setting foot in a dairy barn for the first time, let’s just say that Omar knows how to find the right words.

“It was a very emotional experience,” Edgar says, recounting his arrival here as a temporary foreign worker for the first time. “When I left Guatemala, I was afraid. I didn’t know what I would find arriving in Quebec,

my new workplace... I asked God for a good boss and colleagues willing to help me do things right at work.”

Edgar’s prayers have been answered. Upon landing at the Montreal airport in October, Edgar and his fellow countryman Hebert received a warm welcome from Serge and Annie.

“We tried to put ourselves in their shoes. You don’t know the two strangers who are coming to pick you up, you have no points of reference, you can’t communicate... it must be stressful.” As soon as they got in the car, Serge called Omar on his hands-free phone: “No se preocupen, mañana estaré con ustedes en la granja, conmigo podrán hacerle todas las preguntas que tengan de lo que va a ser su vida aquí y todo sobre su nuevo trabajo!”<sup>1</sup>

## And so their journey begins

At dawn the next day, Omar was in Coaticook for a day of intensive training with the farm’s two new team members, whose main responsibility was milking the herd’s 150 cows. “We had a few conversations with Omar beforehand,” Serge explains, “to bring him up to speed on how we do things, our priorities and our goals.”

At the end of the day, Edgar and Hebert were not only able to operate the equipment but were also able to use proper milking methods. This was actually Hebert’s second experience working on a Quebec dairy farm. “I already knew how to milk cows but I didn’t know why I had to comply with every step of the milking process and what the impact would be if I didn’t do so,” says Hebert.

“Serge keeps us informed of how we’re progressing at work and regularly shows us the somatic cell and bacterial counts, concepts that we were only able to understand thanks to Omar’s explanations,” concur the two enthusiastic workers. And the quality of Edgar and Hebert’s work has had

a tangible effect on herd performance. The evidence is in the results: the operation has been able to get the second premium since they joined the team. “We’re glad our boss has good results, because if all goes well for him, we benefit from that as well,” Hebert and Edgar explain with obvious satisfaction.

## Breaking the language barrier for a better integration

For Edgar and Hebert, the FIATE training in their native language has been the greatest gift that Annie and Serge could offer them. “I didn’t know anything about specialized dairy production in Canada. At home we milk by hand, and there’s no technology, no genetics and nowhere near the standards you have here,” says Edgar.

Thanks to Omar’s involvement and the FIATE training service, Serge feels he has successfully integrated his new employees and provided them with a solid knowledge base. He says the money he spent on the training is an investment that has certainly exceeded his expectations. “They are motivated and qualified. I saw two reliable people when Omar left the farm.”

[FIATE](#): A service you can trust...

<sup>1</sup>Don’t worry, tomorrow I’ll be at the farm with you. You’ll be able to ask me all your questions about life here and about your new job.

By Julie Baillargeon, agr., M. Sc.

Over the years, Julie has developed an expertise in knowledge transfer that she shares with her peers as well as with partners in the field and dairy producers.



By Omar Sandoval agr.

[FIATE](#) is a service available to Quebec dairy producers who hire foreign workers.