



# COMBINING PASSIONS

## Ag mechanic turns his love for farming and 'turning wrenches' into a career


Ramiro Ruiz Jr. is an unsung hero of agriculture: the one who comes to the rescue when a piece of equipment breaks down and farmers can't finish a harvest, transport produce or plant a field. A mechanic for 16 years for Dole Fresh Vegetables/Bud of California in Monterey County, Ruiz and his 25 colleagues work hard maintaining agricultural machinery—so farmers and truck drivers can get nutritious food to America's dinner tables.

**What drew you to agricultural mechanics?** I grew up on a 5-acre farm in Castroville. We grew fava beans and zucchini. All my family worked in agriculture. My mom picked Brussels sprouts during the winter in Moss Landing and Watsonville. My dad was a forklift driver, but for our own farm, he always fixed his own tractors, trucks and pickups. I would see him working on things and then I'd want to work on things. So, I would always help out when I was a kid. He'd give me a wrench. He'd give me a socket. So, I love farming and I love working on equipment. This was a way to do both of my passions for a living.

**What is your typical day like?** I'm a shop foreman of the division in charge of the (diesel) trucks, the trailers and the foremen's pickups—but we fix everything. We've got different departments of guys who fix, say, just the lettuce harvesters, but when they need help, they call us. I'm also in charge of maintaining our harvest equipment. So, we make sure everything's ready to go to work every day. When our guys fix something and they have problems, they'll call me and I make sure it's done right, and I double check everything. We all travel. None of us stay in Salinas year round. Once the harvesting is done here, I go to Yuma and Huron and all of the Salinas Valley.

**Do you work mostly in a shop or out in the field?** Both. We maintain the trucks and harvesters in the shop and if a harvester breaks in the field and we can't repair it there—like an engine blows up or something big—we bring it into the shop. But if it's something routine, we'll go into the middle of the field, we'll lie underneath the equipment and we'll work on it right there on the dirt. So, sometimes we get muddy and dirty.

**How often do things break down?** Oh, man. People don't realize—it's every day. It's not like corn or soybean farmers back East that harvest once a year and they park their equipment for the winter. In the fresh-vegetable business, it's all year round. So, the machines are worked almost 24/7. It's hard on the equipment.

**What is rewarding about what you do?** Say a harvester breaks down in the middle of the field. The work stops. So, I like going out there and fixing the machine, making sure the people are going back to work and harvesting the vegetables—so they can be brought to the dinner table. I love that. A lot of people don't take into consideration what we do. They know about the farmworkers and the farmers, but they don't know what goes on in between. 

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Find out more about Ruiz's job as well as his photography hobby and popular Instagram page at [californiabountiful.com](http://californiabountiful.com).



Ramiro Ruiz Jr., a mechanic for Dole Fresh Vegetables, welds together a broken engine part, far left, checks out a machinery problem in the field, above, and tightens a bolt, left. Ruiz is a shop foreman of the division in charge of the diesel trucks, trailers and foremen's pickups, but fixes everything.

