



Meet California Strawberry Growers

## Amelia & Ismael Macias

Friends, and the more than 100 family members, of Amelia and Ismael Macias don't call them "a pair of earrings" for nothing. Wherever these strawberry farmers, parents, grandparents, community members go – they go together. And according to this grower duo, that's been the case ever since they were married in 1970.

When it comes to strawberry farming, both Amelia and Ismael have deep roots that date back to the 1800s. Ismael has early childhood memories of his mother picking strawberries. On Amelia's side, her mother, Maria De Jesus Marquez, started strawberry farming when she and her siblings were very young. She recalls working in the fields alongside her four sisters and two brothers to help their single mom with all the hard work.

For the last 40 years, both Amelia and Ismael have been growing strawberries for a major strawberry label and consider their jobs and the strawberry industry an important part of their lives. They have unlimited gratitude to the strawberry industry for providing them with a wholesome lifestyle and the means to send all five of their children to college. They're proud to list off the professional careers their kids are currently enjoying, including accountant, electrical and civil engineer, pharmacist and chemist.

When it comes to the challenges, Ismael – like most farmers – dismisses the thought, adding that he and

Amelia "must like the stress" because despite some of the hard work, long hours and risk, they feel a commitment to "keep the tradition alive." They talk about the strong sense of family and community the local growers share with one another, and the harvest workers.

The couple has built a reputation for making sure that strawberries are a memorable part of major celebrations. For example, there was the time that Amelia and Ismael sent heaps of long-stemmed, sweet strawberries to their daughter's wedding in Colorado. Friends and family remember that occasion as "the wedding of strawberries," and continue to talk about how special it was to this day.

When asked about how they spend their time during the less busy seasons, their warm eyes light up when they share how much they enjoy spending time with their family – especially their six grandchildren. They frequently visit Mexico, making sure to bring family members along to ensure they preserve their rich Mexican culture.

