



Rural Development • Rural Housing Service • Farm Labor Housing Program

Affordable Housing Sets Farmworker Family on Road to Prosperity

For years, the Ortiz family had no choice but to live in substandard housing, most recently at a trailer park in The Dalles, Oregon, that had unmet maintenance needs and numerous safety issues. Wasco County in north central Oregon, like many other areas of the state, is experiencing a critical housing shortage, which has driven up rent beyond what many working families can afford. The Ortiz family simply could not take on higher rent payments with their single income—Cora Ortiz is raising their three daughters at home and has a son on the way, while her husband works in the agriculture sector picking cherries at the local orchards.

When the Ortiz family learned about a new affordable apartment complex specifically for farmworkers and their families, Cora filled out an application that very day. Two weeks later, they were approved as tenants at the new Heritage Heights Apartments.



Cora Ortiz with her youngest daughter, Estefania, in front of her new apartment at Heritage Heights in The Dalles, Oregon.

Built with \$3 million in funding provided by USDA Rural Development through its Farm Labor Housing Program, Heritage Heights provides two-, three-, and four-bedroom apartments for 23 farmworker families, along with one unit for on-site staff. The Ortiz’s new apartment is larger than their last rental, and in pristine condition. As its first occupants, they are able to enjoy all the benefits of new construction with modern fixtures and appliances. And it is more affordable than their previous home. With the help of rental assistance from Rural Development, which ensures low-income tenants pay no more than 30 percent of their income on rent, their monthly housing bill has decreased.

Heritage Heights is not only providing an affordable, safe place for the Ortiz family and others to raise their children, it is also creating a community. The facility includes a playground, community room, computer lab, and community garden. “I’m still getting to know all the new neighbors, but already we sit down in each other’s homes for coffee and help each other watch the kids,” said Cora. “It feels like home.”

Obligation Amount: \$1.5 million grant and \$1.5 million loan

Date of Obligation: February 2013

Congressional District: Representative Walden, District 2; Senators Wyden and Merkley

Partners: Columbia Cascade Housing Corporation (developer); Community And Shelter Assistance Corporation of Oregon (consultant); Oregon Housing and Community Services (funder); Energy Trust of Oregon (energy incentives); and CenterPointe Community Bank (funder)

Demographics: The Dalles, Oregon; population 13,620

Impact: Twenty-three farmworker families now have modern, safe apartments with affordable rent that will ensure they pay no more than 30 percent of their income on housing.