



# UNITED FARM WORKERS OF AMERICA, AFL-CIO

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## FARM WORKER FACTS

There are nearly 3.5 million farm workers in the United States today. Although they represent many races, creeds and colors, the greater majority of farm workers are native-born blacks and Mexican-Americans. They sow and harvest crops that net growers billions of dollars in profits every year, yet the farm workers do not share in those bountiful profits accruing from their labor. Most earn incomes which fall far below the federal poverty level.

Compelled to accept an inadequate wage, the farm workers suffer exceptional hardships - substandard housing, malnutrition, illiteracy and disease. And barred from the laws which protect the rights of other laborers in this land (e.g. the National Labor Relations Act), the farm workers have no immediate remedy for their special plight.

In short, the workers who gather the fruits and vegetables from fields across this country, endure conditions unknown to any Americans today. To use the words of the Preamble to the 1970 Florida Laws, the farm worker is "the most economically and socially deprived segment of the population."

There is no way, of course, to fully convey the suffering of these workers. Facts and statistics can only explain a fraction of their story. But facts and statistics reveal at least one indisputable, painful truth: the farm worker lives and works in a nightmare and, ironically, can not afford to buy the same fruits and vegetables that s/he harvests for us to put on our tables.

- WAGES - The average farm worker in the nation earns \$1,576 per year. (US Department of Agriculture)
- The average farm worker family earns \$2,021 per year. (Migrant Research Project)

### EMPLOYMENT

- The average farm worker in the nation can only find work 4.9 months per year. (US Department of Agriculture)
- More than 95% of all farm workers work for labor contractors, who dictate the workers' place of employment, hours of work and rate of pay. (New College)
- In March 1973, a labor contractor in Homestead, Florida was charged with enslaving 28 farm workers at the Far South Labor Camp. The year before, 11 other labor contractors in the state were indicted for holding their employees against their will. (The Farmworkers: A cry for Justice from Florida's fields)

### CHILD LABOR

- About 800,000 paid agricultural workers - or one out of every four - are under the age of 16. (US Senate Subcommittee on Migratory Labor)
- About 375,000 paid agricultural workers - or about one out of

every eight - are children between the ages of 10 and 13.  
(US Senate Subcommittee on Migratory Labor)

#### EDUCATION

- Since most migrant children must drop out of school to help their families in the fields, 90 % of those children never complete their education. (US Dept. of HEW)
- Twenty-five percent of all farm workers in the nation have just 4 years of schooling or less. (US Senate Subcommittee on Migratory Labor)

#### HOUSING

- While the average migrant family in Florida has about five members, the average Florida migrant dwelling has only 1.9 rooms. (Florida Christian Migrant Ministry)
- About 90.4% of those dwellings has no sink; 95.6% have no toilet; and 96.5% have no showers or bathtubs. (Florida Christian Migrant Ministry)

#### HEALTH

- The average farm worker lives to be 49 years old. The average American lives to be 70. The average farm worker is more than twice as likely to die in infancy as the average American; more than three times as likely to die from flu and pneumonia; and almost four times as likely to die from tuberculosis and other infectious diseases. (US Senate Subcommittee on Migratory Labor)
- In a recent examination of 34 migrant children from Immokalee, Florida, doctors found that 23 of them suffered no less than 38 clinical diseases, including pneumonia, anemia, respiratory infection and worms. (Variety Children's Hospital)

#### SAFETY

- While farm workers constitute 7% of America's work force, they suffer about 22% of the nation's job fatalities. (US Senate Subcommittee on Migratory Labor)
- About 75,000 farm workers in the United States suffer acute poisoning each year from pesticides. (National Sharecroppers Fund)

#### AGRIBUSINESS

- Agricultural firms in the United States recorded \$60.6 billion in sales and \$20.3 billion in profit in 1972. (US Dept. of Agr.)

### THE UNITED FARM WORKERS OF AMERICA

Because of the deplorable living and working conditions, such as mentioned above, farm workers realized that the only way to improve their conditions was to form a union and collectively bargain with the employers. In 1965, under the leadership of Cesar Chavez, the United Farm Workers Union was formed and the workers in the grape fields went out on strike in Delano, California. After 5 years of struggle and sacrifice, farm workers gained over 200 contracts covering approximately 90% of California's table grape harvesters. For the first time in history, migrant farm workers had their own medical plan as well as restrictions on the use of dangerous pesticides, vacations, holidays and paid sick days.

Frustrated by similar conditions and inspired by the victories of the grape harvesters, lettuce workers in California and Arizona sought representation by the United Farm Workers. In mid-July 1970, the UFW asked lettuce growers to allow union representation elections by the workers. In response to this request the growers invited the Teamsters Union in an effort to avoid dealing with their employees. On July 23rd without the farm workers knowledge or consent, the growers signed contracts with