

# SAF

STUDENT ACTION WITH FARMWORKERS

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**Support Changes to the NC Migrant Housing Act!**  
**See Page 3 to find out how.**



Examples of NC farmworker housing conditions. Photos courtesy of the NC Dept. of Labor

## Focus on Farmworker Housing

### Immediate Changes to NC Migrant Housing Act are Necessary

by Ann Warsaw, Intern- Farmworker Advocacy Network

**“In my personal experience,** we have come across one or two houses in Eastern North Carolina that had raw sewage coming out into the yard, and there were children living there,” says Steve Davis, Farmworker Resource Director for Greene County Health Care, Inc. Although the especially atrocious cases of these unregistered migrant labor camps are rare, farmworker advocates believe that the minimum standards for farmworker housing in North Carolina need to be raised. Farmworker advocates in North Carolina frequently see workers living in sub-standard housing, and now they are calling for the legislature to take action and hold housing operators accountable.

Overcrowding, structural problems, poor sanitation, proximity to pesticides and lack of inspection and enforcement are primary concerns for farmworker housing advocates. As Christopher Holden, formerly with the Housing Assistance Council (HAC), writes: “Farmworkers are among the worst-housed groups in the United States. After long hours toiling in the fields, few farmworkers can look forward to a warm shower, clean laundry, or a room to call their own. Even a decent supper is hard to come by if the stove is broken, the refrigerator does not work, or the place lacks a kitchen altogether.”

A HAC survey of farmworker living conditions in the Eastern migrant stream (New England to Florida) published in 2000 found that barrack style dorms and mobile homes are the most common types of housing in farm labor camps. More than eight out of ten of all housing units were overcrowded, and many of those inspected had several exterior structural problems.

#### NC’s Migrant Housing Act should be changed to guarantee the following:

- \* Right of farmworkers to have visitors
- \* At least one working telephone at each camp and a functioning washer and dryer
- \* At least one shower for every five workers and one working toilet for every ten workers
- \* A mattress for each person
- \* Coverage of any farmworker housing that is provided because of employment
- \* Post-occupancy inspections by NC Department of Labor
- \* Accountability for employers whose workers are housed by a crew leader
- \* Procedures to prosecute repeat violators of the law and those who don’t register their camps

**“After long hours toiling in the fields, few farmworkers can look forward to a warm shower, clean laundry, or a room to call their own”**

Sanitary concerns included moldy walls, bathrooms and mattresses, lack of toilet and shower facilities, and vermin-infested eating and cooking areas. These conditions are particularly dangerous when workers are unable to bathe properly or keep food fresh, which can lead to serious health problems. Of the housing surveyed, researchers found 38 percent severely inadequate or unfit for human habitation.

According to the National Advisory Council on Migrant Health, workers living in such substandard housing risk physical harm from lead poisoning, respiratory illnesses, ear infections, and diarrhea. Additionally, the National Center for Farmworker Health reports that farmworkers suffer from the highest rate of toxic chemical injuries of any workers in the U.S. The two most pressing reasons for concern about

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