

FROM THE GROUND UP

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SAF

STUDENT ACTION WITH FARMWORKERS

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Current FAN Members:

East Coast Migrant Head Start
Farm Labor Organizing Committee
Farmworker Unit, Legal Aid of NC*
National Farm Worker Ministry-NC
NC Community Health Center Assoc.
NC Farmworkers' Project
NC Farmworker Health Program*
NC Justice Center
Student Action with Farmworkers

*Advisory Members



Focus on Reform

Raising our Collective Voice

by Melinda Wiggins, Executive Director of Student Action with Farmworkers

Access to just and favorable work conditions, fair wages, and a standard of living adequate for the health and well being of one's family are universally acknowledged standards of human rights that are regularly denied to farmworkers. Over half of all farmworkers are undocumented; many risk their lives crossing the U.S./Mexico border only to arrive indebted to human smugglers and future employers. The majority of farmworkers live in poverty, with undocumented workers consistently earning less than other workers.

Many are paid by the piece, and thus do not consistently earn minimum wage. During harvest, farmworkers work long hours without receiving overtime pay, holidays, sick days, workers' compensation, health insurance, vacation or retirement. Farmworkers also face many work-related health stressors, including exposure to highly toxic pesticides and inadequate housing. Farmworkers are consistently treated as different from other workers under the law. Where legal protections do exist, unique conditions and vulnerabilities of migrant life fuel under-enforcement.

The rapid growth of the Latino community in North Carolina has recently made this state a national flashpoint in the public debate over immigration. In response to this growing hostile environment, as well as to the lack of a proactive farmworker advocacy strategy in NC, SAF began talking with other farmworker support groups to develop the Farmworker Advocacy Network (FAN) in 2003.

FAN is the first and only cross-sector network in NC strategically addressing problems and issues affecting farmworkers, monitoring government agencies that enforce regulations affecting farmworkers, and bringing farmworkers' voices to the legislative process. During the past several years, FAN has successfully researched models of involving farmworkers in policy advocacy campaigns; monitored legislation impacting farmworkers; supported FLOC in their efforts to enforce their contract covering guestworkers; and supported litigation efforts with farmworkers.

Most significantly, FAN initiated a Migrant Housing Campaign that included working with legislators to introduce a bill to the state legislature, preventing the removal of migrant housing protections from existing laws, and pressuring the NC Department of Labor to adopt changes in their enforcement procedures. We also educated the public about migrant housing issues and garnered support from over 70 health, housing, legal, labor, and social justice organizations.

As we move forward in addressing the challenges that come with supporting a diverse farmworker population in a difficult political climate, we will advocate for stronger policies governing farmworkers and greater enforcement of laws covering farmworker housing, wage and hour, and pesticides (as presented in this newsletter). We will also continue to educate and involve students, religious groups, and community leaders to create a supportive environment for farmworkers to achieve greater social and economic justice.

