

FROM THE GROUND UP

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SAF

STUDENT ACTION WITH FARMWORKERS

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Focus on Occupational Safety and Health



Left 1994 SAF intern Pedro Ortega holding a bilingual sign warning against pesticides *Photo by SAF Intern*



Right Workers loading tobacco leaves into a curing shed. *Photo by SAF Intern*

Occupational Safety and Health Facts

According to a 2001 monograph published by the National Center for Migrant Health, farmworkers are "at a much greater risk of death than workers in every other industry except construction." The document, titled *Environmental/Occupational Safety and Health*, divided these injuries into the following categories: Ergonomic Conditions/musculoskeletal injuries, traumatic injuries, respiratory problems, dermatitis, infectious diseases, cancer, eye problems, and pesticide exposure. Here are some of the facts:

Fatalities: Agricultural crop and livestock production, combined with agricultural services, accounted for 13% of all occupational deaths from 1994-1999, while only covering 2% of overall employment (Bureau of Labor Statistics BLS, 2000).

Ergonomic Conditions: Back and neck pain are the most common type of chronic pain encountered, with over 40% of workers leaving their jobs because of the pain they experienced. Contributing factors: poorly designed tools, lack of training, and long work hours.

Traumatic Injuries: Includes crushing from farm equipment, accidental slicing with hand tools, transportation injuries, and falls (31% of total).

Respiratory Problems: Irritants include pesticides, dust, plant pollen, and molds. These hazards can be worsened by poorly ventilated spaces and smoking.

Dermatitis: Causes include plants that scratch the skin, allergies, chemical exposure, etc. Over 1/2 of tobacco workers experience green tobacco sickness each season. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, skin disorders account for almost half of all occupational illness in agriculture.

Infectious Diseases: Deficient sanitation at work and residence sites along with poor or contaminated drinking water are contributors to tuberculosis and parasitic diseases.

Cancer: A high prevalence of various cancers found among farmworkers may be caused by exposure to known carcinogens and constant exposure to sun.

Eye Problems: Dust, pollen, and chemicals that farmworkers are exposed to can cause eye problems, as well as mechanical factors such as tree branches and tools.

Pesticide Exposure: Every review of occupational health issues for agriculture lists pesticide exposure. Although this is well-documented, the effects of long-term exposure are not well understood. Also, clinicians receive little training on the diagnosis and treatment of pesticide related illness.

Source: Environmental/Occupational Safety and Health. Alice Larson, Ph.D., Natl. Center for Migrant Health, 2001. www.ncfh.org

SAF is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization whose mission is to bring students and farmworkers together to learn about each other's lives, share resources and skills, improve conditions for farmworkers, and build diverse coalitions working for social change.

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ACTION ALERTS

To receive SAF's weekly Action Alerts about legislation affecting farmworkers, organizing campaigns, campus events, and job opportunities, send an email with the word "subscribe" to <farmworkers-request@duke.edu>

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Pesticides and North Carolina's Farmworkers

by Ghassan Hamra, Agricultural Resource Center/PESTed ghassanhamra@yahoo.com

Exposure to pesticides is a major environmental health hazard for the 400,000+ migrant and seasonal farmworkers employed in North Carolina each year, and for their families. North Carolina's farms use over **62 million pounds** of toxic pesticides each year. Farmworkers are exposed to pesticides first hand while on the job. Farmworkers and their families are also commonly exposed to pesticides "second hand," as residues are brought home from work on skin, clothes and equipment, or from pesticides that blow onto them or their homes from the fields, known as "drift."

Because pesticide residues may be invisible and odorless, pesticide exposure can be especially challenging for health practitioners to diagnose and treat properly. The most common symptoms of pesticide poisoning - headache, skin rashes, breathing difficulty, nausea, dizziness, diarrhea, muscle twitching and vomiting - are also associated with many other common health conditions, and may not be attributed to pesticide exposure. Unless a health practitioner asks patients directly about recent chemical applications, and unless a farmworker knows that s/he has been exposed, pesticide poisoning may escape proper diagnosis.

North Carolina's farms use over 62 million pounds of toxic pesticides each year

Chronic low-level exposure to pesticides may increase the risk of debilitating illnesses for farmworkers. For example, a recent study from the California Cancer Registry (www.cccal.org) found that farmworkers in California suffer from significantly higher incidence of several types of cancer than the general Latino population, including leukemia, stomach cancer, cervical cancer, and uterine cancer. Pesticide exposure may also have serious impacts on reproductive health for both men and women. One example comes from the Agricultural Health Study, an ongoing EPA/NIH investigation of health issues in agricultural communities in Iowa and North Carolina (www.aghealth.org). These researchers recently found that women who live or work on farms are 60-100% more likely to have disrupted menstrual cycles than the general population, making them more vulnerable to reproductive health problems.

For almost 20 years, the Agricultural Resource Center/PESTed has been advocating for pesticide regulations that better protect all of North Carolina's communities from exposure to pesticides, including farmworkers and their families. In 2003, ARC/PESTed successfully defeated a proposal before the NC Pesticide Board to weaken regulations on aerial spray drift, thanks in great part to the good work of their allies in the farmworker and environmental communities. In September of 2004, the NC Pesticide Board voted to raise its long-standing fine for violations of NC pesticide regulations by private applicators (i.e. farmers) to \$500 *per violation*. This should result in higher fines for more severe offenders, and allow for greater leverage in negotiating settlement agreements. For example, an offending applicator that exposes multiple workers or families to pesticides could now be fined \$500 for *each person* exposed, instead of just \$500 total. It is widely hoped that this change will improve enforcement against pesticide violations that harm farmworkers and their families.

Check out ARC/PESTed's new Spanish-language website for pesticide information and resources en español! On the web at: www.pested.org/espanol

Pesticide Drift

Any time a pesticide is used, some of it "drifts" away from the intended application site and into neighboring areas. Regulations typically prohibit drift onto people or sensitive areas such as schools, homes, churches or hospitals. **North Carolina's pesticide regulations prohibit drift from aerial application within 100 feet of homes, including farmworker housing.**

ARC/PESTed has a toll-free, bilingual hotline for victims of pesticide drift in NC and others who need more information and assistance: **1-877-NO-SPRAY**. Please help spread the word about this service to NC's farmworker population and the agencies and individuals who serve them!

**START
PLANNING
NOW!**

FARMWORKER AWARENESS WEEK

March 28-April 3, 2005
Nationwide

Save the Date!

Did you know that the Mt. Olive Pickle Boycott ended last September? Well it did! The **victory** is due in part to **students like you** putting pressure on the company, grocery stores and their schools to listen to farmworkers' demands for better wages and working conditions. Mt. Olive Pickle Co. and the NC Growers' Association have signed a union contract with the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC) that is worker-friendly, ending the 5 1/2 year boycott. But there are other campaigns to work on and **farmworkers still need your support!**

Students across the nation will plan events, rallies, teach-ins and numerous creative activities to raise awareness of farmworker issues and support farmworker campaigns. Use your voice and your power as a student to make an impact on the farmworker movement for justice!

- * **Boycott Taco Bell**
- * *Organize a teach-in*
- * **Show a film on campus**
- * Volunteer with farmworker organizations
- * **Support UFW's Gallo Wine and Sorrento Dairy campaigns**
- * *Celebrate Cesar Chavez's birthday, March 31st*
- * **Support farmworker legislation-AgJOBS**

PLANNING MATERIALS AVAILABLE ON SAF'S WEBSITE
Visit www.saf-unite.org to download or print organizing materials and fliers from farmworker unions and community organizations. View past FAW reports and see what students nationwide have organized for the past 4 years. Call or email Laxmi Haynes, SAF National Student Organizer for ideas and support, 919-660-3660, farmworker_justice@yahoo.com.

SPONSORS:

- ★ COALITION OF IMMOKALEE WORKERS (CIW)
- ★ STUDENT FARMWORKER ALLIANCE (SFA)
- ★ STUDENT LABOR ACTION PROJECT (SLAP)
- ★ UNITED FARM WORKERS (UFW)



SAF

Student Action with Farmworkers

SAF's mission is to bring students and farmworkers together to learn about each other's lives, share resources and skills, improve conditions for farmworkers and build diverse coalitions working for social change.

www.SAF-UNITE.org

6 talented Fellows on the East Coast **+**

4 intensive trainings with Student Action with Farmworkers (SAF) **+**

1 individual project improving conditions for farmworkers **=**

The experience of a lifetime!

Accepting
Applications
for the:

Sowing Seeds for Change Fellowship 2005-2006

You will gain:

- * Intensive training on policy, labor organizing, outreach and documentary
- * Experience working directly with farmworkers
- * Experience in local community organization and on-campus student organizing
- * Peer support, a local mentor and guidance from SAF Staff
- * \$3000 stipend to pay for local travel and project expenses
- * Academic credit

Qualifications:

- * Fluency in Spanish and English
- * Junior/Senior/Grad Student
- * Previous experience with farmworker issues
- * Enrolled at participating university

Participating universities:

Dickinson College
Georgia Southern University
Gettysburg College
Pennsylvania State University
University of South Carolina-Columbia
University of Tennessee-Knoxville

APPLICATIONS DUE MAY 6, 2005

Questions? Contact SAF at 919-660-3660 * farmworker_justice@yahoo.com * www.saf-unite.org

