

# 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

...continued on page 5

**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.

#### SAF STAFF

**Lyndsey Beutin**, Apprentice 2004-2005

**Laxmi Haynes**, National Student Organizer

**Tony Macias**, Assistant Director

**Andres Potes**, spring intern

**Noah Raper**, spring intern

**Ilda Santiago**, Migrant Youth Director

**Denise VanDeCruze**, Operations Manager

**Ann Warshaw**, spring intern

**Melinda Wiggins**, Executive Director

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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>](mailto:farmworkers-request@duke.edu)

**For more information or to submit articles to the newsletter, contact:**

From the Ground Up Editor  
*Tony Macias* - [tmacias@duke.edu](mailto:tmacias@duke.edu)

# SAF

Student Action with Farmworkers

1317 W. Pettigrew Street

Durham, NC 27705

(919) 660-3652; (919) 681-7600 (fax)

[www.saf-unite.org](http://www.saf-unite.org)

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## Design Corps Offers Affordable, Quality Alternatives to Poor Farmworker Housing

by Kelly Lowry, Design Corps Fellow

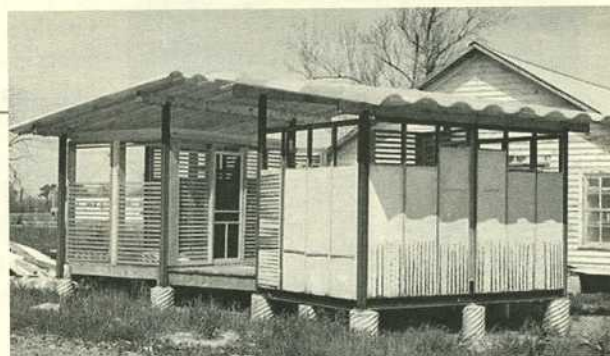
**Fourteen years ago**, architects Bryan Bell and Victoria Ballard Bell founded Design Corps, a nonprofit organization that provides architectural, planning, and design services to low-income individuals and community-based organizations. Design Corps has addressed migrant farmworker living conditions on several levels, including housing, community development, and economic development.

Design Corps is currently working with The Housing Development Corporation (a coalition of farmworker advocacy organizations) to address food security issues in Newton Grove, NC through the development of a worker-run flea market and community garden project. Not only will this initiative address an immediate concern, it will also work to build the backbone of a much larger project – that of a model migrant farmworker community, including housing, community resources, and social services.

### Affordable Innovation

**Bathroom facilities** often present the most pressing environmental health concerns in migrant worker housing. Design Corps' Bath House Project addresses this housing issue by procuring grant funds to finance bath units which are attached to existing worker housing. The new bath houses consist of showers, toilets, and sinks, the numbers of which are coordinated with the number of workers and often exceed the code to make for more comfortable worker living conditions. The grower provides the land, water, and septic system required for the bath house. The result is a win-win situation: workers receive the improved living conditions that they deserve as a basic human right, and the farmer is able to provide this at an affordable cost. Design Corps uses this same model to carry out its worker housing program, which has been successful in Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Florida, and is slated to begin in North Carolina next year.

Design Corps' mission is to find ways to offer quality, affordable design service to the many that don't currently have it available. For more information about how to get involved in this work, visit [www.designcorps.org](http://www.designcorps.org). Kelly Lowry can be reached at 919-824-1182 or [kellylowry@gmail.com](mailto:kellylowry@gmail.com).



**Above:** A migrant bath house located in Sampson County, NC- designed and built by North Carolina State University architecture students. Photo by Bryan Bell

### Housing Development Corporation (HDC)

**Member Organizations:** Design Corps, Episcopal Farmworker Ministry, NC Farmworkers Project, Telamon Corporation, and Student Action with Farmworkers

**To get involved with HDC, contact:** Bryan Bell ([bryan@designcorps.org](mailto:bryan@designcorps.org)), or Melinda Wiggins ([mwiggins@duke.edu](mailto:mwiggins@duke.edu))

### Further Reading on Community Design

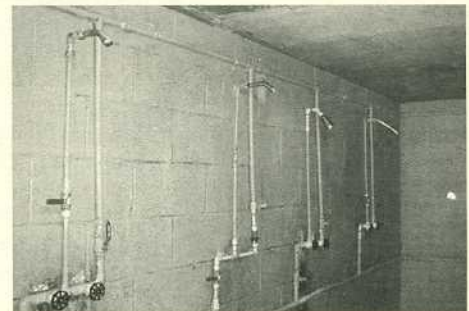
([www.designcorps.org](http://www.designcorps.org))

**Participatory Design-** Henry Sanoff  
**Architecture of the Poor-** Hassan Fathy  
**Redesigning the American Dream-** James Howard Kunstler  
**A Better Place to Live-** Phillip Langdon  
**Defensible Space-** Oscar Newman  
**The Timeless Way of Building-** Christopher Alexander

# NC ACTION ALERT:

## Current Farmworker Housing Conditions in North Carolina are Unacceptable

- \* **Toilet facilities are often few and far between.** North Carolina standards require only one toilet for every 15 people of the same sex and a single urinal for every 25 men.
- \* **Employers are under no obligation to provide mattresses.** As a result, many farmworkers resort to sleeping on wooden bed frames, cardboard boxes or blankets.
- \* **Only one showerhead is required for every 10 workers.** Farm work is of course, one of the dirtiest, most dangerous and physically grueling occupations. Routine exposure to pesticides necessitates that workers have ready access to decent washing facilities.
- \* **Current standards require only one laundry tub for every 30 workers.** Given the regular exposure of farmworker clothing to pesticides, residues and other toxins, this standard all but guarantees that workers have no safe, clean clothing.
- \* **Employers are under no obligation to provide access to a telephone.** Because of the rural isolation of most camps, the lack of a phone can be a grave problem during health-related emergencies.
- \* **Kitchen facilities need only have one stove burner for every 5 people** and one refrigerator for every 27.
- \* **Employers are under no obligation to permit visitors.** Even church ministries, social workers, licensed attorneys, and SAF interns can be (and regularly are) barred from visiting workers.
- \* **As the NC Department of Labor is understaffed, fewer than half of typical farmworker camps are inspected each year.**



**Above:** Examples of poor housing conditions in Western North Carolina farm labor camps. Many workers are forced to live in unsound structures and enjoy little privacy. *Photos courtesy of the NC Dept. of Labor*

## TAKE ACTION TODAY

- \* Please call and email the members of the NC Senate Commerce Committee AND your Senator THIS WEEK to ask that they support SB962.
- \* Send the members of the NC Senate Commerce Committee AND your Senator a migrant housing postcard regarding SB962. Please contact Lori Khamala ([lori@nfwm.org](mailto:lori@nfwm.org) or 919-489-4485) to receive free postcards.

[www.migranthousing.net](http://www.migranthousing.net)

### WHY NOW?

The deadline for our bill to be heard and pass the Commerce Committee is SOON, so senators need to hear from you ASAP.

Please take time over the next week to call, email and write your Senator!

### WHO TO CONTACT:

To find your Senator, go to the NC General Assembly's webpage:

<http://www.ncga.state.nc.us/gascrpts/members/memberList.pl?sChamber=Senate>

To send a pre-written email to your Senator go to:

<http://capwiz.com/ncjustice/issues/alert/?alertid=7508466&type=TA>

### The Farmworker Advocacy Network (FAN)

is a coalition of NC organizations that advocates for improvements in farmworkers' living and working conditions. FAN members include: the Episcopal Farmworker Ministry, Farm Labor Organizing Committee, Farmworker Unit of Legal Aid\*, National Farm Worker Ministry, NC Community Health Center Association, NC Justice Center's Immigrants' Legal Assistance Project, NC Farmworkers' Project, NC Farmworker Health Program\* and Student Action with Farmworkers. *\*Advisory Members only.*

### FAN CONTACTS:

Lori Fernald Khamala, National Farm Worker Ministry, (919) 491-0039, [lori@nfwm.org](mailto:lori@nfwm.org)

Melinda Wiggins, Student Action with Farmworkers, (919) 660-3616, [mwiggins@duke.edu](mailto:mwiggins@duke.edu)

