

Focus on Advocacy

Student Action with Farmworkers

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The Farmworker Advocacy Network (FAN) is a coalition of farmworker legal, labor, health, advocacy and immigrant assistance groups that work together to advance justice for farmworkers and their families in North Carolina. FAN is the first and only cross-sectoral network dedicated to government accountability and policy formation in support of farmworkers in the state.

FAN meets with state agencies to improve enforcement practices, educates policy makers, other advocacy organizations, and the larger public about issues affecting farmworkers, works with policy makers and government agencies to support positive legislation for farmworkers, and fights policies that pose negative affects for agricultural workers. FAN also works directly with farmworkers to educate them about their legal rights, supports the leadership development of farmworkers by involving them in determining which policy and enforcement issues to prioritize, and provides opportunities for them to meet with elected and appointed officials to voice their concerns.

Major changes in the structure of our agricultural system, and the way labor is valued, will have to take place before social, economic, and environmental justice is achieved. These long-term changes include farmworkers being treated with dignity in their workplace and receiving paid sick leave, health insurance, a living wage, safe housing, and a voice on the job. It also includes enforcement of federal and state laws governing farm labor wages, housing, and pesticide application, as well as mass changes in public opinion about the current farm labor situation and what can be done about it. We seek a world in which farmworkers are empowered to play an active role in their communities, are able to make well-informed decisions about their health and well-being, earn a living wage, and have dignity in their workplace. ★

Farmworker Wages

Agriculture is North Carolina's leading industry, bringing in \$59 billion and providing 22% of the state's income. Crops that are hand-harvested by the over 150,000 farmworkers and their dependents bring in more than \$1.8 billion in sales each year to the state. Farmworkers contribute to North Carolina's national standings in production of tobacco (#1), sweet potatoes (#1), Christmas trees (#2), blueberries and strawberries (#4), and greenhouse/nursery (#4). According to a 2000 study, each farmworker contributes more than \$12,000 a year in profits to NC's economy.

Despite their enormous contributions, farmworkers do not reap the benefits of their labor. Farmworkers are typically paid hourly or by the bucket of fruit or vegetable they pick. Their average annual income is \$11,000, making them the second lowest paid workforce in the nation. In addition, workers in North Carolina earn about 35% less than this national average. After adjustment for inflation, farmworker wages have actually decreased by 5% over the last decade. The vertical integration of the agricultural industry leaves workers and growers sharing less than \$.30 of every food dollar, while corporate food processors, transporters, and advertisers reap the overwhelming majority of money spent on food.

Farmworkers are excluded from most labor laws protecting other workers. Farmworkers

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71¢ = Corporate Food Processor
23¢ = Farmer
6¢ = Farmworker



An Unfair Percentage:

Even though their labor is essential to agriculture, farmworker wages make up around 6% of every dollar we spend on food. As a result, the average annual wage for a farmworker in the US is less than \$12,000.

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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Farmworker Advocacy Network

Members

East Coast Migrant Head Start Project (ECMHSP) establishes, provides and promotes continuity of Head Start services to migrant children and their families along the East Coast of the United States.

Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC) is a farm labor union that organizes for economic, legal and human rights for farmworkers. FLOC seeks to address the injustices of sub-minimum wages, exclusion from protective legislation, poor sanitation, health care and housing.

★**Legal Aid of North Carolina - Farmworker Unit**, provides legal representation to farmworkers on a number of issues including, but not limited to, workers' compensation claims, lost wages, health and safety standards, retaliatory employment discrimination, and blacklisting. Legal Aid also conducts outreach to migrant labor camps and conducts community education on migrant issues.

National Farm Worker Ministry - NC Office, mobilizes the religious community to support farmworkers who are organizing for justice, empowerment and equality.

NC Community Health Center Association provides and coordinates technical assistance, training, policy monitoring, and resources to 23 Migrant and Community Health Centers within North Carolina, and in seven mid-Atlantic states (VA, WVA, MD, DE, SC, KY, TN) in order to enhance cultural competence and improve health care delivery to Hispanic/Latino and farmworker patients.

NC Farmworkers' Project is a community-based organization dedicated to organizing migrant and seasonal farmworkers and developing farmworker leaders.

★**NC Farmworker Health Program** is committed to providing health care through a statewide network of service providers working together to improve the health of migrant and seasonal farmworkers and their families in North Carolina.

NC Justice Center Immigrants Legal Assistance Project provides legal representation to farmworkers who are unable to access traditional legal services programs, and focuses on class actions and impact cases. ILAP also conducts outreach to migrant labor camps and provides education to immigrant advocates about workers' legal rights.

★**NC Latino Coalition** is a nonpartisan, multi-issue network of organizations dedicated to building relational power among grassroots Latino leaders that fulfills their goals by identifying, developing, and training grassroots leaders, strengthening institutions throughout the provision of technical assistance and addressing concerns through collective public action.

Pesticide Education Project (PestEd) is a nonprofit organization that advocates for alternatives to toxic pesticides in North Carolina.

Student Action with Farmworkers (SAF) is a nonprofit organization that brings 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.

★**Telamon Corporation** promotes the development of human potential in farmworkers by providing resources and creating opportunities in the communities served in the areas of Head Start, Job Training, Housing and Youth Opportunities.

★**Advisory members only**

Important Resources:

Abundant fields, meager shelter: Findings from a survey of farmworker housing in the eastern migrant stream. Housing Assistance Council (2000)

Krieger J, Higgins DL. *Housing and health: time again for public health action.* American Journal of Public Health (2002)

The human cost of food: Farmworkers' lives, labor, & advocacy. UT Press (2002)

Holden C, George L, and Smith A. *No refuge from the fields: Findings from a survey of farmworker housing conditions in the United States.* Housing Assistance Council (2001)

Phelps E, *North Carolina Migrant Housing and Safety Standards: an Empirical Assessment of Compliance and Enforcement Statistics.* (2006)

For free fact sheets on farmworkers, visit www.saf-unite.org (English & Spanish)



Farmworker Housing in North Carolina



Undignified Conditions: Farmworker housing standards in North Carolina dictate the minimum requirements that growers must meet when housing workers. As the above images demonstrate, there is a great need for reform. *Photos by Josie Ellis*

Decent Housing is a Human Right

Get Involved- visit www.migranthousing.net to find out more

Each agricultural season, approximately 150,000 men, women, and children labor in North Carolina's fields and most live in housing provided by a grower or crewleader. Farmworker housing is regulated by the North Carolina Migrant Housing Act.

Originally enacted in 1989, this law sets embarrassingly low standards.

As a result, thirty-eight percent of farmworker housing in Eastern North Carolina is classified as severely inadequate, and basic amenities need not be provided, including: locks on doors and windows, mattresses, telephones, and privacy partitions between toilets and between showerheads.

Substandard housing conditions lead to significant health risks for farmworkers and for the surrounding community.

Overcrowding, a pervasive problem in farmworker housing, can contribute to the spread of infectious diseases such as tuberculosis and other respiratory diseases, influenza, hepatitis, and skin diseases. Inadequate food storage and bathroom facilities are associated with gastrointestinal and other infectious diseases. Long waits for showers mean an increased risk of pesticide-related illness among farmworkers and their families.

Poor housing conditions are exacerbated by under-enforcement of the few protections currently in place. Only 1,870 of the projected 4,000 housing units were registered as required with the state in 2005, and less than 8 persons are assigned to inspect camps either prior to occupancy or as the result of a complaint. Housing that is not properly registered and inspected is far more likely to have serious problems. ★

The Farmworker Advocacy Network supports the following efforts to improve farmworker housing:

Housing Reform: The NC Migrant Housing Act needs to be updated so that there are basic farmworker housing standards, including access to telephones, adequate numbers of showers and toilets, privacy in bathrooms, among others.

Stronger Enforcement: Full funding should be provided to the NC Department of Labor so that all farmworker housing is inspected pre- and post-occupancy. In the meantime, FAN believes scarce enforcement resources must be targeted to prioritize the worst violators and that fines should be made sufficient to deter bad actors.

Inter-agency Collaboration: FAN urges state enforcement and service agencies,

including the NC Department of Agriculture and the NC Employment Security Commission, take steps to obtain and share information about unregistered or problem farmworker housing with the North Carolina Department of Labor.

Ultimately, FAN believes that farmworkers should have the opportunity to control their own housing. Where housing is provided by employers, farmworkers cannot advocate for improvements without risking job loss.

Farmworkers deserve access to quality, affordable, safe housing and must be able to safely advocate for changes when there are problems.

Farmworkers and Pesticides in North Carolina

North Carolina's farmers apply more than 62 million pounds of pesticides to agricultural crops each year, and much of this work is done by farmworkers. Pesticides are poisons designed to kill crop-damaging organisms such as insects, weeds and rodents, but they can also pose serious hazards to human health. Pesticides are registered with the US Environmental Protection Agency and regulated in our state by the NC Department of Agriculture.

Pesticides present serious human health hazards, from acute poisoning symptoms like headaches and rashes, to an increased risk of asthma, cancer, birth defects, stillbirth, and other long-term illnesses. Farmworkers are at heightened risk of health problems because of their exposure to pesticides, both on the job and in the housing provided by their employers. Farmworkers have limited knowledge of the levels, sources and remediation of pesticide exposure. Furthermore, farmworkers are rarely provided with adequate protective clothing and are routinely exposed to pesticides while working in the fields.

Farmworker families are at risk because contaminated work clothes, hair, and even skin can all bring pesticides into the home. Pesticides can also drift into farmworker homes from spraying in nearby fields. Farmworker children are at increased risk for pesticide exposure due to their heightened sensitivity during development and living and playing so close to the fields. In fact, children whose parents work in agriculture are more likely to have measurable pesticide residues in their bodies. ★

The Farmworker Advocacy Network seeks to reduce the threat that pesticides pose to farmworkers and their families by supporting the following:

Right-to-Know. Everyone who works around pesticides deserves the right to know what chemicals are being used, what their effects are, and how to avoid hazardous exposure.

Pesticide Reform. We support long-term changes in North Carolina's regulatory structure, so that workplace pesticide exposure is officially treated as a legitimate matter of environmental health. This includes ensuring worker confidentiality when reporting violations and protecting them from retaliation, as well as requiring employers to keep good records.

Sustainable Future. FAN supports sustainable growing practices that will make our agricultural system less dependent on dangerous chemicals that harm farmworkers and agricultural communities.



Pesticide Risk: Prevalently used in NC Agriculture, pesticides often lead to numerous health risks for workers and their families.

Above: AgMart is the subject of an ongoing investigation for pesticide violations that may have led to severe birth defects in several children.

Below: Farmworkers apply pesticides to Christmas trees in Western NC.
Photos by Chris Johnson

Get Involved-
visit www.saf-unite.org/involved/advocacy.htm
to find out more

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are not covered by the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), which protects workers that organize and collectively bargain, nor by various provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), including the minimum wage, overtime, and child labor laws. Instead of incorporating farmworkers fully into these two key labor laws, a special Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act (AWPA) was passed in 1983 to specify certain housing, employment, and transportation standards for farmworkers. However, AWPA does not provide the same protections as the NLRB or the FLSA, and agricultural guest workers are excluded from its coverage. Many states also exclude farmworkers from state laws covering most other employees. For instance, North Carolina Workers' Compensation Act does not cover most farmworkers. There have been numerous failed attempts, the most recent in the 2003 legislative session, to amend the Act to cover farmworkers in the same way other employees are covered.

Where labor protections do exist for farmworkers, the government agencies charged with enforcing these laws are often under-staffed, closely tied with employers, tend not to provide information to workers in a culturally or linguistically appropriate manner, and rarely understand the unique barriers that farmworkers face.

Farmworkers deserve dignity and justice in the workplace. FAN supports the self-determination of farmworkers and believes that farmworkers deserve a living wage and benefits, including workers' compensation, health benefits, sick days, and vacation. ★

Farmworker Remembrance and Call to Action

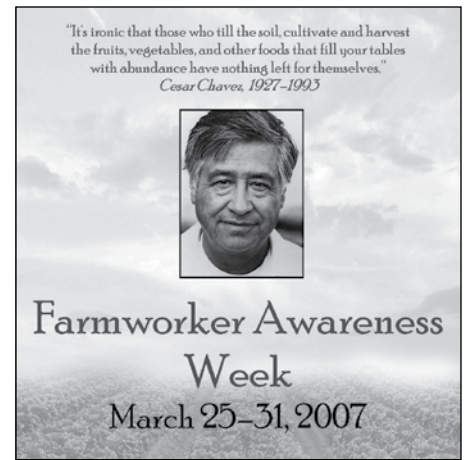
Twenty national and state religious leaders and more than 100 community supporters gathered in Raleigh, NC on March 7, 2007, to denounce the tragic deaths of 11 farmworkers in the fields of North Carolina in the last two years. They also called for action to end the deaths, abuse, and exploitation of farmworkers.

The church leaders all emphasized that farmworkers are children of God, and the tragedies and abuses that they suffer reflect on all of us as fellow children of God. They also pointed out that people of faith have a moral obligation to act in the name of God to make sure that fellow children of God are treated with love and peace that God intends for all his creations and issued a call to action.

Join the struggle to end tragedies in the fields:

- **Labor Camp Delegations:** Learn about farmworkers' lives from the workers themselves. This summer, National Farm Worker Ministry (NFWM) will be partnering with the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC) to lead delegations of church members and community groups into the fields and farm labor camps to better understand farmworker realities.
- **Host Farmworker Speakers in Your Church.** This summer, members of FLOC and the Farmworker Ministry Committee of the NC Council of Churches will be available to visit congregations and community groups across the state to share about farmworker lives and ways to improve conditions.
- **Future Campaigns.** FLOC announced a new campaign in December that includes the broader struggles faced by all immigrant workers, especially undocumented people in NC and the South.

For more information, contact NFWM at www.nfwm.org or 919-489-44854 in North Carolina or FLOC at www.floc.com.



National Farmworker Awareness Week 2007 is a HUGE Success!

In late March of 2007, over 60 sponsors, community organizations, and student groups planned:

Over 110 FAW events, in 66 U.S. cities and 17 states, at 79 colleges, universities and high schools, involving thousands of people.

FAW events involved well over 20,000 people this year! This number includes 1,000+ people who took action in the Justice @ Smithfield Campaign, 10,000+ who marched in memory of Cesar Chavez, and 12,000+ students who took part in the Citrus Freeze Donation Drive.

SAF would like to thank all of its supporters for taking action to raise awareness about farmworkers. The educational and advocacy work that we join together to do is key to bringing justice for farmworkers. Let's make sure that in 2008 we reach even more people!

Thank you also to FAW sponsors:

César E. Chávez Foundation, Farmworker Advocacy Network, Farmworker Association of Florida, Farmworker Justice, Farm Labor Organizing Committee, National Farm Worker Ministry, Pesticide Action Network of North America, Student Farmworker Alliance, Student Labor Action Project, United Farm Workers, United Food & Commercial Workers



Thank You! to all the local businesses that donated to SAF as Spring Planting Partners:

- ★ 9th St Bakery
- ★ Duarte Auto Sales
- ★ Fishmonger's Seafood Restaurant
- ★ Grassroots Press
- ★ Mary & Parrish Events
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Beaufort-Jasper Health Care Services, Blue Cross Blue Shield of NC Foundation, Carolina Family Health Centers, Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University, Church Women United in NC, Conservation Fund, Donation Line, Duke Chapel Fund, Duke Endowment, East Coast Migrant Head Start, Environmental Support Center, Episcopal Farmworker Ministry, Farmworker Unit of Legal Aid, NC, Fulfilling the Dream Fund, Geneseo Migrant Center, Greene County Health Care, Heifer International, Henderson County Migrant Education, Hispanics In Philanthropy, Kirk of Kildaire Presbyterian, Latino Advocacy Coalition, L.P. Brown Foundation, The Lyric Foundation, Natl. Children's Center for Ag. Health and Safety, National Farm Worker Ministry, NC Community Shares, NC Council of Churches, NC Farmworker Health Program, NC Farmworkers Project, NC Humanities Council, NC Justice Center, New Garden Friends Meeting, Noël Family Fund of the Triangle Community Foundation, Olin T. Binkley Baptist Church, Paul Green Foundation, Pesticide Education Project, Pesticide Environmental Trust Fund, Piedmont Health Services, Public Interest Projects Inc., Puffin Foundation, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Shelley and Donald Rubin Foundation, SC Legal Services, SC Primary Health Care Assc., Strowd Roses Inc., Triangle Community Foundation, UCC Justice & Witness Ministries, Wake County Health and Human Services, Watauga Medical Center, Watts St. Baptist Church, Western NC Worker's Center, Whole Foods of Durham and Raleigh, Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation

Upcoming Events:

2007 Summer Trainings for interns and fellows

June 4-9 Orientation, Asheville, NC
July 5-7 Mid-summer Retreat, Greensboro, NC
Aug 10-12 Final Retreat, Durham, NC

2007 SAF Solidarity Days

July 20th:
ADVOCACY DAY

November 20th:
FARMWORKER JUSTICE CAMPAIGN

Through Solidarity Days, SAF alumni have given hurricane relief to workers in Mississippi, sent work gloves to congress in support of immigrants, and donated tools for a farmworker community garden.

get involved!

Contact Laxmi at farmworker_justice@yahoo.com



Save the date!

SAF 15th yr Anniversary Quinceañera

August 10, 2007

@ the SAF Office in Durham

Contact SAF to be a Padrino/a! www.saf.unite.org

SAF

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