Policy Research

A Note about the Author

“It is important for me to spread awareness of the realities experienced by farmworkers and the circumstances in which they work. This topic is personal to me due to growing up in a predominantly farmworking community as well as having a parent who has been working harvesting table grapes ever since I can remember. Because it is a common practice for parents to take their children along with them to work in the fields when they reach fifteen or sixteen years old, I have experienced, first-hand, what it’s like to work in the fields. I have personally witnessed many injustices in farm laboring companies, such as inhumane treatment, sexual harassment, and lack of empathy. The way that I felt when I listened to people’s stories or observed how workers were treated, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, has driven me to spread awareness and continue to work in solidarity with my community.

The aim of this report is to spread awareness of the social injustices experienced by farm workers and bring this information to light for the non farmworker community and for all stakeholders. The ultimate aim of this policy report is that it will lead to the creation of policies that prevent employers from exploiting the workers in the Central Valley, California, in particular, and farmworkers everywhere. This policy research consists of primary interviews from members of the farm working work cycle (farmworkers, supervisors, contractors) as well as a brief overview of existing policies in place to ensure a just and safe working environment. Through interview analysis and research on existing policies, this policy report recommends solutions to decrease the effects of the threats, abuse, and coercion and improve the labor conditions for farmworkers everywhere,” Wendy A. Barenque Castro.

Executive Summary

Migrant farm workers are the backbone of the agricultural sector in the United States. Many farmworkers live and work in California and other states of the United States with an irregular migration status, which places them at risk of abuse and exploitation. For these workers, reporting violations experienced in the fields, like workplace injuries and mistreatment can imply a great risk. Workplace violations are notoriously underreported. Some contracted farm workers tell that jobs pitched to them by hiring parties often include promises of pay and work environments that in reality fall short. Away from home, with a language barrier and for some, an unofficial immigration status, migrant field workers are a
vulnerable working class in the United States. Fear and isolation place them at countless risks.

Among the challenges they experience, are sexual and physical assault. In some cases, migrant farm workers are not eligible for company pensions, insurance plans, unemployment, disability, and social security benefits. Working in farm work without protections is extremely risky as the chances of getting hurt, sick or experiencing an accident are high.

Farm work can be dangerous and detrimental to the farm worker’s health. Without benefits and with repeated exposure to pesticides, unbearable heat, risks by working in elevated spaces, carrying heavy loads on long, wet, slippery grounds, interacting with snakes, rats, spiders and wild animals, staying focused in the heat while operating sharp scissors, and working under pressures to meet, sometimes, unreasonable goals, place migrant farm workers at great physical and mental risks.

Without citizenship protections; without access to medical insurance; without a safe path to report injustices, these conditions are really harmful to all farmworkers, but especially serious for single parent farmworkers, aging farmworkers, injured farmworkers and undocumented farmworkers. For some, discrimination does not end in the fields. The cultural and language barriers also isolate farmworkers in town, making them vulnerable to community stereotypes.

The language barrier makes it difficult to understand legal forms, tax information, rental contracts, school forms, utilities set ups, etc. In the state of California, looking at the case of Kern County, farm worker educational attainment is low. A recent Kern County community
report states that in 2019, 30.5% of all residents held less than high school education. Some may have not completed high school in their home countries; illiteracy and lack of high school completion can be prevalent in this hard working community.

Children of farm workers may often miss school or fall behind in school, as parents cannot assist them with homework, school conferences or advocate for their children. Some children of farm workers are behind by a grade level or more, and many struggle with reading, reading comprehension, writing and math. Some of these children have learning and physical disabilities. The circumstances are compounded when farm workers are single parents and no daycare is available on days when they are called to work. Farm-working families deal with a long list of challenges and experience exploitation at work.¹

**Bracero Program-Then and Now**

Historically, farmworkers have been exploited for their work. In 1942, U.S. Executive Order, Mexican Farm Labour Program established the Bracero Program. Through a series of contracts between Mexico and the United States over 4 million braceros moved to the United States on short-term labor contracts. These agreements were discussed by the press of the time as mutually beneficial contracts that would alleviate the national agricultural labor shortage created by WWII. Upon its termination in 1964, the Bracero Program hired more than four million Braceros to work in U.S. agriculture and on railroads.

During World War II, the U.S. actively recruited Braceros. Recruitment centers were established in Mexico and the U.S. and both countries negotiated a set of guidelines that

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were supposed to protect Braceros from discrimination and poor wages. However, contracts were not enforced and Braceros experienced wage discrimination, wage theft, mistreatment and exposure to deadly chemicals. Ultimately, they were sent back to Mexico as part of Cold War phobias of the time, returning to Mexico broke, sick and without their pensions.

**Labor Unions**

In 1962 Cesar Chavez founded the National Farm Workers Association and later created the United Farm Workers along with activist Dolores Huerta. Chavez led nonviolent labor strikes and weeks-long fasts. The movement established workers’ rights to organize and secured better pay and working conditions for farm workers. Chavez and Huerta’s movements led to progress in protections for farm workers, but as evidenced in the interviews we conducted with current farm workers and contractors, in 2022, a lot of work remains to be done to reach equality and protections.

**Central Valley, California**

One of the most important jobs held by the people of the Central Valley in California is farm work. Farm workers of the central valley live and work in communities such as Kern County. There are many disparities that affect farm workers including but not limited to housing, access to health care, pay rates, and workplace treatment.

Based on the Community Action Partnership of Kern, about 21% of Kern County’s residents live in poverty (Mcfarland and Arvin are the towns with highest poverty levels) which is the fifth highest rate from all California’s counties. Housing insecurity is a continuous financial barrier for many families in Kern County. 58% of Kern renters use over 30 percent of their income for rent. In addition to the overbearing amount that needs to go to rent, low income families also have difficulty affording child care services due to high rates.
The Employment in the Kern County Oil and Agriculture Sectors estimate that there are about 25,000 undocumented people who are farm workers and that Agriculture is the largest employer for undocumented folks. The Farmworker COVID-19 Community Assessments found that only 33% of their 251 respondent sample used health care services in the U.S during the pandemic while 73% lost their work due to illness.

About Our Policy Report and Recommendations

This policy report takes a mixed-methods approach and includes primary interviews with farm workers, a contractor (JJ & Son’s Baling Services), and a supervisor (Sequoia Farm Labor Inc.). The focus of this policy is to conduct research on farmworkers from the Central Valley California; specifically, McFarland, Delano and Shafter. Most of the interviews that inform this research were conducted in person and others took place through phone calls and video calls.

The policy report is primarily based on qualitative research design as it is concerned with establishing answers to working conditions in the field from multiple stakeholder perspectives. It also includes participatory action research and historical studies. The methodology is based on phenomenological studies, which examine human experiences through the descriptions provided by the people involved to understand the lived experience from the vantage point of those who live them. This policy proposal also serves as a case study of farmworker challenges in the Central Valley in the State of California.
Farmworkers’ Main Concerns

“Estamos ganando MENOS que antes de que subió el mínimo, todo ha subido en precio y no nos alcanza,” Farmworker reaction to wage increase and its negative impact on daily life.

For many years, farm owners have not been required to pay overtime. However, as of this year, the overtime pay rate has changed. As of January 1, 2022, any agricultural worker who works more than 8 hours per day or 40 hours per week will be paid overtime at 1.5 times their regular rate. Double the regular rate of pay will be required after 12 hours in a workday. The minimum wage in California has increased to $15 per hour for large employers with 26 or more employees; and to $14 per hour for small employers with fewer than 25 employees.

“It's a very historic and momentous occasion for farmworkers that they now, for the first time in the history of agricultural labor, have the same rights as all other Californians do,” said Eriberto Fernandez of the United Farm Worker Foundation when the change was announced.

On paper, the law represented the opportunity for these workers to spend more time with their families while earning more when working more than 8 hours a day.

This was supposed to be a positive economic change, unfortunately, the changes have affected farmworker families negatively. Since the passing of the law, employers have found ways around having to pay farmworkers a higher wage. Instead of complying with the $15 minimum wage, they have cut work hours and days from employees. This means that farm workers are essentially earning less than before the minimum wage increased. The increase of minimum wage was intended to help the living situations for many farmworker families but instead they are being stripped away from that opportunity.
Current Policies

These are some of the current policies in place that resulted from the fights towards better conditions in the farm fields.

Policies in Action

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fair Labor Standards Act in Agriculture (FLSA)</td>
<td>Federal law which sets minimum wage, overtime, recordkeeping, and youth employment standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act of 1983</td>
<td>When offering housing to farmworkers, housing must meet local and federal housing standards. If transportation is offered, vehicles need to meet basic federal safety standards and be insured.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Agricultural employers must disclose terms of employment at the time of recruitment and comply with those terms.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Employers must confirm that the farm labor contractors are registered with and licensed by the U.S. Department of Labor.</td>
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Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)

In place to facilitate farm laborers filing complaints if their rights are violated.

Rights enforced by OSHA³:

§ Mandatory Breaks
§ Potable drinking water
§ Well maintained toilet facilities and hand washing facilities

Interviews

Farm Worker Treatment & Working Environment

Farmworker Interviews

To protect the privacy of the interviewees, their general work title is provided but not their names.

Farmworker 1 has been working in the fields since 1985. Over the years she has worked with trees, peaches, plums, and grapes. Her favorite is the pisca de uva. Following are quotes from Farmworker 1’s interview. The quotes have been categorized under the themes discussed during the interviews.

Difficulties on the job:

“Tiring. You must know what you’ll leave on the mata. You must sort through the crops, you have to reach tall branches. We must carry very heavy loads and walk long distances to get to the grapes.”

Training

“Before you start work you are trained. They tell you what they want from the fruit. They tell you to be careful, don’t fall, there are branches on the ground and sometimes you can trip over them and get hurt. They also tell you to be careful with the scissors, you can hurt yourself or others.”

Accidents/Illness

“What happens if you get hurt? They take you to the doctor. They talk to the contractor and take you to the doctor. They have their own doctor they use. If you get hurt you don’t have insurance, they take you to their own doctor.”

Treatment

“Lack of acknowledgement for what we do, and not much assistance.”

Bathrooms

“In the past, we didn't even have a bathroom to go to. We have them now but they are far.”

Shade

“There isn’t enough shade to take a rest from the sun.”
Water
“"They have to give everyone water, and have enough water for the people.""

Respect
“We would like to have more respect. More respect as people and more respect for the jobs we do.”

Understanding
“We wish they would understand that not all people have the same capacity to give the same performance, because there are people who cannot perform and sometimes the bosses ask for performance, and there are people who cannot, they cannot even if they fight for it. No, they cannot yield the results they expect.”

Asking for the Impossible
“"There are times when there are no grapes. They want you to make boxes, too. There are times when they are unfair. The grapes are bad sometimes. And you know how they get mad sometimes when you put the grape in and they say, Oh, that's not the grape I want. But that's the grape there is. You think they would understand that. The work they want you to do is not realistic. Sometimes you can't pick what hasn’t grown. But they blame you and take work away from you.”"

Single Parent Challenges
“"For people who pay for childcare it is hard because to go to work for five or six hours, sometimes not more, it is not enough with that. Like those who have children pay $20 or $30
for childcare and if they make $70 or $80, and have to pay for gas, what do they have left? And with fewer hours, that means less work.”

**Shorter Hours but Same Expectations**

“The work has to be done in fewer hours. We have to do the same thing we did other years in fewer hours. In less hours, you are expected to produce the same as a full day’s work and you have to walk faster, harder, giving it more force so you don't stop, so they don't take away your job.”

**Cost of Gas**

“If we could get assistance with gas, because sometimes you drive people far away. People have to drive far from where they live to get to the grapes and the blueberries.”

**Invest in Our Education**

“Some companies offer you to take classes, to go to classes to learn English and they even pay the workers to go to school. Making this a norm for everyone would be so good.”

**Reporting Injustice-Whose job is it?**

“What is sometimes needed is for people to report more injustices. Sometimes workers want to report injustices, but sometimes you don't have another job, sometimes it can scare people that they're going to let you go. If they report something like improving the conditions, there are many people who do not have papers when they are working there and, so it's scary sometimes to want to talk.”
“The workers are afraid, so who speaks for those people? It's very scary to speak up. There are people, like the butlers, like the supervisors, contractors who could be the voice for these people who can't talk about the injustice they experience. The supervisors should. They should take care of their workers because we are their workers, and many have been in our shoes themselves, so they know what we experience. They are the people who should be our voice. They should make sure that we have rights and security and the opportunities we deserve. I mean, sometimes it's hard, the relationships in the field bind you. And it's difficult because well, for the supervisors too, if the supervisors start saying this they can also take away their jobs.”

**Personal Satisfaction with the Job**

“This job is something everyone should be proud of. All the work we put into deserves more recognition. I like everything. I like all the work, even if it is, sometimes heavy, like pruning. It's heavy, but it's pretty. When you're older you can't do those things as much, your jobs. I like almost all jobs, I like to do them. I recognize that there are injustices, and I also recognize all the good that there is. It has already come as in these years, as the conditions are already better. You can recognize the good that has already happened for the workers. Well, it's heavy work, but it's satisfying because we feed a lot of people. What we are producing, does a lot for everybody. Even if our work feeds people we don’t know.”

“When we come to work almost the majority are happy because they are going to work. But it is very beautiful for me, the work of agriculture is very beautiful. The people who work in these jobs are positive and you are here to work and are available to do whatever you have to do to live here, to support your families.”
“Sometimes in this work you have to endure the patterns. Sometimes in each job there are about ten good people, just as there are some who are not, there are some who are very good, very good supervisors, they are very good people. Among the bad there is still a lot of good ones. There is everything here. The people who do these jobs are people who have come from other countries. It shows how hard workers our Mexican compas are. Mexicans, and Latinos from everywhere.”

“The important thing is to have possible recognition, respect and also ensure their health and their rights. Sometimes you don't have a voice or you don't know what to do to talk about these things. Sometimes I don't know how to say it. I want to look at the good things. It's heavy, it's heavy. but the field work is very beautiful. Yes, and I hope it stays that way, that they make more opportunities to make it more beautiful.”

Farmworker 1 was aware of the injustices that occur in the work field although they had an optimistic attitude about their experiences. They were able to acknowledge the perspective of the employers such as contractors and ranchers. Farmworker 1 brought up changes that would improve conditions: better treatment, recognition, respect, care for health and ensuring rights. They commented that employers do not think about all the expenses that workers have such as day care, and the inflation of rent, bills, gas, and groceries and will send people home if they are not keeping up with production.

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Farmworker 2 has been working in the fields since 2007. She has worked in the whole grape growth cycle such as harvest and packaging. She has also worked in nurseries and
greenhouses which she enjoys most due to tasks continuously changing and being able to learn new agricultural labor skills.

**On Improving Working Conditions**

“Working in a little more shade, and a variety of activities. We cannot go to the restroom because we need to finish production. We are far away from the restroom, or we need to drink water.”

“For our lunches, we have to rush through the food. There's not enough material to complete the job. When we carry heavy things, our feet get wet. We need to buy our own safety equipment. When we have to carry heavy things, we get hurt and we need to keep going. They give us a lot of work. They yell at us- They don't know how to treat us. They make us think that we are useless.”

**Recognition**

“No acknowledgment. No thanks. They don't care about anything other than work. They always want more and more.”

**On the Pandemic’s Impact**

“We had to work to pay bills and rent. There was no help for field workers. For us there was no pandemic.”

**On the Impact of the Increase of Minimum Wage**

“It affects us financially; the contractors no longer want to pay overtime. We are earning LESS than before the minimum was raised, everything went up in price if it is not enough.”
On whether advocacy for farmworkers is helping
“It affects us poorly, after 40 hours they no longer want to give us overtime, the laws that pass are not always favorable. They do not ask us about the solutions.”

On the types of resources needed
“Food resources, salary are not enough. Many people cannot get SNAP. We need clothes and free medical care.”

Best aspect of the job
“When I grab my check. Learning various things, learning new skills.”

Injuries on the Job and Aches and Pain
“I have fallen and gotten hurt. I feel pain in my arms, back and feet after work. But I need to keep going.”

On other improvements
“I wish for better treatment. Don't yell at us like animals. Mayordomos need to get more training on employee treatment, on how to treat us.”

On work protections and insurance for work injuries.
“I have none.”

Do you work with a contract? How long is it?
“No. They can fire you whenever they want.”
On choosing to work as a farmworker
“I had no choice.”

On the dangers of the job
“Heat. Lack of water, sometimes.”

On not keeping up with production
“They tell us that we are low. They stress us.”

Farmworker 2 focused on worker treatment and working environment. This revealed that although beneficial laws and policies have been placed to protect farmworkers, past attitudes and patterns have prevailed in field work environments and continue to affect the physical, mental and financial well-being of farmers. She also expressed that the farm working community is experiencing economic stress and are in severe need of essential resources.

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Supervisor’s Perspectives

Supervisors are put in place to help farm workers complete their jobs and in some aspects advocate for their safety. During this interview this supervisor mentioned that a difficult part of her job entails “working directly with the ranchers because it can be difficult to come to a complete agreement regarding the workers productivity being impacted with environmental circumstances such as heat and rain.”

Many times, the working conditions are dictated by ranchers who may be out of touch with the reality of working conditions for farm workers in the fields. The interviewee shared that
she only gets a nine hour training on OSHA, Pesticides, Sexual harrassment and precautions with COVID safety. She expressed that there needs to be more training in order to create a better working environment and experience for farmworkers.

**On the Training Received**

“We complete training for OSHA, Pesticides, Sexual harrassment and precautions with COVID….I get training once a year for 9 hours.”

**On Accessibility**

“I am very accessible, I help my employees as much as I can.”

**On A Good Working Environment**

“A good working environment needs to have clear communication with the ranchers including discussion of the environment’s condition and whether it’s safe to work in and making sure to supervise if the environment is secure to work in.”

**On What She Enjoys The Most About Her Job**

“Working directly with employees by teaching them and being able to see the success that comes with the work accomplished.”

**On what she dislikes about her job**

“Having to dismiss employees because of the insufficient capability of performance.”

**Thoughts on what needs improvement**

“I think that there needs to be more training taking place regarding farm labor safety.”
On challenges she experiences being a supervisor

“Some challenges of supervising in the field are working directly with the ranchers because it can be difficult to come to a complete agreement regarding the workers productivity being impacted with environmental circumstances such as heat and rain.”

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Contractor Interviews:

Contractor Juan Carlos Vasquez owns his company, J.J & Sons Baling Services. They focus on agricultural services, specifically hay processing. They do everything from cutting, raking and baling the hay. He attended college and took courses on organizational behavior and company culture. These courses have increased his awareness of working conditions and employee treatment. In his interview he commented on mistreatment in the fields:

“I have heard from other people's experiences in different jobs, they are frequently struggling with being treated fairly and being accommodated in the working environment…sexual misconduct and harrassment are also problems I’ve heard happen with farm workers. It happens everyday but you don’t hear it much because victims stay silent or it is higher-ups who do it so they don’t face the deserved consequences.”

On a Contractor’s Perspective

“I was a farmworker myself when I first started working with my dad and I know how these struggles affect you.”
On hiring and finding employees

“Most of my employees are people from when my dad used to be an employee himself and when he branched out to build his company he brought them with him. Other times, we hire friends who want to work or want to learn…we do not have a lot of employees so it’s not a huge contracting company. Or they’re people that some of the workers or friends recommend.

On training novices vs. hiring experienced workers

“We have had to train many workers who have worked with us. We don’t mind but we want people who take things seriously, you know, like, not to fool around or do a messy job because that makes us look bad to the farmers.

On how employees view him as a contractor

“I think they see me as an authoritative figure, while still someone they can talk to as a friend… well I at least hope they do (laugh).”

On ensuring that his workers have a good working environment

“A good environment to me is a place where people aren’t dreading to be in… like somewhere they feel comfortable and safe and are able to continue being a person and not feel like a machine… I feel like we do that.”

On disagreements

“We don’t tend to have any disagreements…We work on a step by step process so there isn’t much room for disagreements but if there is ever something that an employee disagrees with then as long as their solution is reasonable I don’t have any issue working with them to come
to an agreement. If an employee were to ever voice out their opinions, I would totally hear them and take it into consideration.”

**On employee recognition**

“We give out end of year bonuses, company lunches. These are mainly how we show appreciation for the end of the season which is usually around November. We give them a cash bonus and gift them Thanksgiving items like a turkey or gift cards to restaurants.”

**On how he views his employees**

“Look, my employees are my co-workers and I treat them as such. We’re all equals here. I try to ensure equality and fairness. As far as accessibility, I feel like my employees can reach out to me with no problem. They all have my number so if there’s anything they need they can simply call me up at just about any time. I tend to stay open minded and anything my employees want to talk about I listen attentively. We do not have a big contracting business so we have space to build relationships.”

**On the frequency of working in the fields alongside his workers**

“Everyday, all day. Every hour of the day I’m out there with them working towards the same end goal and experiencing the same environment they are in and I wouldn’t make my guys do something I wouldn’t do, so I ensure they are in a good, comfortable environment when working.”

**On learning about farmworker problems among each other.**

“In my company not very often but from what I have heard from other people's experiences in different jobs, they are frequently struggling with being treated fairly and being
accommodated in the working environment…sexual misconduct and harassment are also problems I’ve heard happen with farm workers. It happens everyday but you don’t hear it much because victims stay silent or it’s higher-ups who do it so they don’t face the deserved consequences. I have a sister who works and I would want her company to take it seriously.”

**On frequency of check-ins about worker’s well-being and families**

“Physically? I would say if they look good to me I usually do not ask but if I notice something is strange like them having a limp or if they’re using one hand more than the other, I’ll ask about it and see how I can help and take the best course of action. If I know my guy recently had some kind of injury, I’ll check up on them a few times a week and see how things are going. When he or she can come back to work or if they’re able to work I usually assign them something that doesn’t require any heavy lifting.

“In terms of family life, most of our employees are people we know from the town we were born in or people we’ve known for many years so we frequently talk about family and talk about how things are going for them. Even employees who we’ve recently met, we tend to talk with them a lot and learn more about them and their family. A lot of the time they’re older people maybe in their 40’s so their children and brothers or sisters are who are talked about most. There are times where they have family members who are skilled tradesmen and sometimes, we hire them for jobs we need like mechanics or welders for example.”

**On the pandemic and work demands**

“We have temporary workers and they would leave but our best man had to leave due to his wife being sick in Mexico…and also many people went on unemployment so there was a scarcity of workers.”
On staying fully staffed and working within government guidelines

“I think because of our hours, it is hard for people to want to stay and I understand but it is just what the hay requires, you know…Sometimes we go in at 3 am or sometimes we work on Sundays, it all depends…it depends on the weather and humidity … So this is why we tend to have people who leave after a while…I think our biggest challenges have to do with hours.

Of course, we want our workers to work whenever and as long as they could or want… with good pay of course and good working conditions but since we are a small contracting family business, it can be hard to allow workers to work more than 8 hrs a day 7 days a week, so we have to cut it down and it means I or my mom or dad go out and do the work ourselves. For bigger companies, the owners and contractors do not have to go out there and pick the oranges because it is a bigger scale business…but for us we do need to put that work in…”

On worker injuries

“I do not think workers have gotten injured on the job but for sure we would help them in any way we can you know like financially with medical bills if they do not have medical insurance like workers comp.”
Study Results, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Results

"Que no nos giten como animales"

Through the interviews that were conducted, it is evident that the main concern between farmworkers, contractors and supervisors is that there is not enough training provided to improve the treatment in the workplace. Farm workers reported being treated like machines in order to meet the production demands. Currently, farm workers are fighting against the unreasonable hour cut weekly due to the increase of minimum wage in the Central Valley. This has caused economic strain as some farm workers reported losing an entire day of work since farm owners do not want to pay higher wages. Farmworkers' mental and physical health are continuously challenged.

Contractors and supervisors are both aware of the injustices that farmworkers face everyday. The contractor that received a college education has greater knowledge on the consequences that inhumane treatment can bring to his line of work. Education taught him proper methods to treat his employees while at the same time reaching productivity goals on a daily basis. This suggests that education and training do make a difference in the workplace and the experiences of farm workers.

The supervisor described the challenges in her role: Standing up for farm workers and communicating with ranchers. Her interview revealed the lack of understanding and empathy of some ranchers, as there is a disconnect. The interview revealed that there needs to be more mediation between landowners expectations and farmworkers needs.
**Recommendation Policies for Farmworkers**

In order to address these systemic issues that affect farmworkers’ livelihood and opportunities, stakeholders must strive for policy change in the areas of safety, positive economic mobility and personal building.

**Adequate Training**

Employers and supervisors have little to no training on ethical employee treatment and it is shown in the workplace. Many farm workers experience inhumane treatment in their working area that causes mental and emotional stress. Farm workers continue to be pushed beyond their physical abilities while experiencing diminishing language. This stress becomes part of the working day and creates a hostile working environment amongst working crews. If foremen, supervisors and contractors were to get more than 2-nine hour trainings a year on how to deal with work problems and employee treatment, less employee complaints would arise and respectful treatment would take place in farm fields.

Training is essential for contractors and supervisors. These trainings should include: ethics, harassment, discrimination, farmworker rights, and safety awareness. Farm workers should also participate in these trainings to become educated on their rights. In addition, there should be an external organization that monitors adequate treatment and protocols instead of having an internal safety team that can be biased towards calling out violations.


Mental & Physical Care

Mental health care and free general healthcare should be offered to farm workers. During the interviews conducted it was revealed that farmworkers are only offered workers’ compensation and health care when they were severely injured while working but frequent health checks were neglected and left only for when the workers were very ill. Overall healthcare is essential to ensure farm workers experience an ideal working environment.

Legal Status

As mentioned in the previous sections, undocumented people make up the vast majority of farm workers in California. Although agriculture continues to be sustained by farm workers, stakeholders fail to act towards immigration reform in order to improve the livelihood of many families. Farm workers deserve legalization due to the continuous violations and exploitation that farm labor unfortunately encompasses.

Having work permits, residency, and citizenship for farm workers would allow them to be eligible for retirement, pensions, and/or disability benefits which is essential for elderly folks who have worked all their lives on farms. Many people put their heart and soul into farm labor which allows the economy to flourish, although they are constantly experiencing insecurity when it comes to their immigration status.

Many fear of deportation and being separated from their families which may be a reason for silencing the injustices that they endure. Others have been separated from their families and home countries in order to have a better life and suffer emotional strain from it. Acting towards immigration reform would allow farm workers to have access to better benefits and be secured living in the United States.
Lastly, having immigration reform would allow farmworkers to have access to many opportunities that would allow them to gear towards economic upward mobility.

**Personal & Professional Development**

Communities where farmworkers often reside in, lack quality resources that are essential for personal building and opportunities. Many farmworkers are kept in their position without opportunities to build their skill set in order to find better employment opportunities. Stakeholders must take action and prioritize space for improvement in education and employment mobility. This is important due to Kern County having low poverty and education levels. Having programs where farmworkers can be employed to build their skill set and get certified will create an adequate resume to find employment with higher pay. In addition, creating programs that are designated to ensure farm workers to continue their education if they wish to, is a necessity. Many people do want to take the initiative to finish their education such as receiving their GED certificate and/or learning English, but they do not have guidance on how to accomplish it. Similar to funding that is provided to people who return to college, there should be funds that are designated for farm workers who are in the process of continuing their education regardless if it is GED, certification and/or college degree.

**Wages/ Hours**

The increase of minimum wage was placed to help farm workers with the economic hardships that many face daily. Instead of allowing this opportunity for farm workers, employers took action that resulted in farm workers earning less money in a week. While rent takes a great portion of farm workers' check, there are also many costs that farm workers are responsible for including but not limited to continuous rising gas, food, child care services, and utilities. It is crucial to allow for farm workers to have overtime working opportunities in order to be able to meet their basic needs. Having
policies placed to regulate working hours would be helpful in making sure bigger companies do not go around the minimum wage increases to minimize their costs. Due to the intense labor conducted by farm workers that is needed for the U.S economic sustainability, the minimum wage should increase beyond the current $15 rate. There are many risks and dangers that farm workers are constantly being placed under and because of it, they deserve to be compensated well.

**Bathrooms**

Many of the interviews included that bathrooms and bathroom breaks are not always accessible when working in the fields. The bathrooms that are available to workers are most of the time dirty and unhygienic. Although there are policies that are placed to ensure farm workers have access to clean restrooms, these protocols are not always being taken seriously. Having unexpected government officials visits should be more frequent in order to witness the conditions with full transparency. In addition, having restrooms at a shorter distance from the workplaces should be accessible due to mentions of difficulty of having to keep up with production while needing to go to the restroom.

**Conclusion:**

The voices of farmworkers are not silenced and will continue to rise as more and more people join the fight for social change in farm fields. Education, awareness, rights, workplace trainings, possibility to grow, fair wages and a path to citizenship for farm workers would transform this industry. When lawmakers consider what to do, it is highly important to include the experiences and solutions that farm workers voice because they are the ones who work and live this life every day. They know what is needed to improve. The interviews revealed the need for adequate treatment, higher pay, access to benefits and resources, opportunities for personal and professional development and immigration reform. Their hard work and cultural capital plays an important role in their perseverance and
motivation to continue to show up every morning to work. Farm worker accounts must be taken into account when creating farm work policies and standards.
Summary

Training

- Contractors and Supervisors receive little to no training
  - 18 hrs of training yearly
- Farmworkers need training to safely perform their jobs and to advance in the industry and beyond. They also need training on their rights as workers.

Violation of Rights

- Workers are often pushed out of restroom breaks in order to complete production. Create protections for breaks, bathrooms, water and shade access.
- Sexual harassment is an issue that is constantly being neglected. Train contractors, supervisors and farm workers on their rights and duties.

Hours Work

- Due to the increase of minimum wage for farm workers, employers have decreased the amount of working hours.
- A system needs to be devised so that a raise in minimum wage to protect an underserved work industry does not end up cancelling out what is meant to be a worker improvement and wage protection.

Opportunities

- The lack of education and resources have maintained farm workers in their positionality. Invest in farm workers as they invest in the fields. Offer English and
Citizenship classes. Encourage literacy training. Assist in completion of high school diplomas and a pathway to better roles within the field and beyond.

Immigration Reform
- A large portion of the Central Valley’s farm workers are undocumented
  - Due to the lack of immigration reform, many people’s only working opportunities are the farm fields. The best way forward is a path to citizenship. Citizens have legal protections that are respected and valued.

Health Care
- The farm working community lacks health care which is essential for mental care and physical care for the hard labor they perform. Offer protections for aging field workers, disabled field workers, field workers injured in the fields and field workers with children with disabilities.
**Farmworker Interview Questions:**

Do you feel there is a lack of recognition and assistance that is provided to you as a farmworker?

What hardships did the pandemic bring to you as an essential worker?

You have expressed before that due to the increase of minimum wage, your employers have decreased the amount of hours you work. Can you talk a little bit about that and how it has affected you and your family?

What is your intake on advocacy that is meant to help support farmworkers?

- Do you feel like these organizations like UFW are intouch with the reality of the issues you experience?

What is the main thing you think farm workers need in order to increase their opportunities?

Being from a farm working community what are the main resources you feel are needed?

As a farmworker, what are aspects of your work that you appreciate most?

What are the most difficult aspects of your work?

How does your work affect your physical health and your mental health?

Have you been injured on the job? What types of aches and pains do you feel at the end of each shift and how do you find the strength to go on the next day?

What are some aspects of your job that you wish improved?

What specific steps would you like your bosses to take that would make your job better?

Do you make enough to pay the rent and buy food?

Does your job come with health protections or insurance against work injuries? Do you work with a contract? How long is it?

How did you end up working as a farm worker?

What are some dangers of working in the fields?
### Supervisor Questions:

Name:  
Company:  
Type of work:  
How did you get this job? How easy is it for people to get this job?  
Did you used to be a field worker?  
What does your job entail?  
What does a normal workday look like for you?  
Do you work with training any workers?  
Are there any systems in place that support farmworker rights & safety?  
How accessible are you?  
How easy is it for the employees to reach you  
In your words, what is a good working environment and what do you do to ensure your employees’ have a good environment?  
How often do you go into the work field to experience the working environment?  
How much training do you get a year?  
What are aspects of the supervisor job that you enjoy and what are aspects of the job you don't like?  
Is there anything you think needs to be improved in regards to farm labor safety?  
What are some of the challenges of supervising in the field?  
What are some of the most common problems that arise?  

### Questions for Contractors:

Name:  
Company:  
Type of work:  
How do you think your employee’s view you?  
How often do you check up on them?  
- physical health  
- Family  
- Their working environment  
How would you rate your relationship with them?  
In your words, what is a good working environment and what do you do to ensure your employees’ have that good environment?  
How do you resolve disagreements between you and your employee?  
How do you show your appreciation?
How do you reward your employees after a completed season?
Do you view your employees as co-workers or your subordinates?
How easy is it for your employee’s to talk to you?
How often do you go into the work field to experience the working environment?
How often do you see or hear from problems amongst farmworkers?

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Recommended Readings

6. Guerrero (2022). It was supposed to be a historical change for the Farm Working Community. https://latinarepublic.com/2022/04/26/it-was-supposed-to-be-a-historical-change-for-the-farm-working-community/

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