



Food Justice: Farm Workers

In 2014, Food Day has a special focus on issues related to food justice. We envision food that is healthy, affordable, and produced with care for the environment, farm animals, and the people who grow, harvest, and serve it.

The Facts:

- In the U.S., there are two to three million farm workers especially concentrated in California, Texas, Washington, Florida, Oregon, and North Carolina.¹ Most of these workers are married and/or have kids, but more than half live apart from their immediate family members.²
- Farm work is the eighth lowest paid job in the country³ with an average income of between \$10,000 and \$12,499 per year or about \$15,000 to \$17,499 per year for a family.⁴
- Farm work is one of the most dangerous occupations in the country. Farm workers face health risks like heat stress, urinary tract infections, and eye injuries. And 10,000 to 20,000 farm workers in the U.S. are diagnosed with pesticide poisonings each year.⁵
- More than half of farm workers in the U.S. are undocumented. Despite their low earnings, undocumented workers cannot receive welfare, food stamps, Medicaid, or other social services. A quarter of farm workers are U.S. citizens and 21 percent are legal permanent residents (green card holders). Less than 10 percent of farm workers use food stamps and less than 1 percent use welfare.⁶
- The highest average grade level completed by farm workers is seventh grade, with 13 percent finishing fewer than three years of school and 13 percent finishing high school.⁷
- Notwithstanding their oftentimes difficult living situations, farm workers are becoming increasingly vocal. Most notably, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers in Florida has campaigned successfully for better living and working conditions, partly by working with progressive organizations to press restaurants and food service companies to pay a little more for tomatoes.⁸



1 North Carolina Farmworker Institute. <http://www.ncfarmworkers.org/2012/06/united-states-farm-worker-factsheet/>. Accessed 3/28/14.

2 U.S. Department of Labor. http://www.doleta.gov/agworker/report9/news_rpt9.pdf. Accessed 3/28/14.

3 Smith, J. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/jacquelynsmith/2013/05/13/the-best-and-worst-paying-jobs-in-america-2/>. Accessed 3/28/14.

4 U.S. Department of Labor. http://www.doleta.gov/agworker/report9/news_rpt9.pdf. Accessed 3/28/14.

5 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/pesticides/>. Accessed 3/28/14.

6 U.S. Department of Labor. http://www.doleta.gov/agworker/report9/news_rpt9.pdf. Accessed 3/28/14.

7 U.S. Department of Labor. http://www.doleta.gov/agworker/report9/news_rpt9.pdf. Accessed 3/28/14.

8 Coalition of Immokalee Workers. <http://ciw-online.org/>. Accessed 3/28/14.