

Orange County Interfaith Committee To Aid Farm Workers



NOVEMBER 2020

FUNDRAISER FOR THE NATIONAL FARM WORKER MINISTRY

We in Orange County are the oldest farm worker support group in the nation in our 54th year! The National Farm Worker Ministry (NFWM) is an umbrella organization supporting many different labor unions and various faith communities across the country. We in OC are a part of the NFWM, which is a non-profit group and therefore your contributions are tax-deductible.

Did you know that California produces one third of all the vegetables consumed in the United States and two thirds of all the nuts and fruits? No wonder we have so many farm workers!

During November after the election and until Thanksgiving, the Orange County Interfaith Committee to Aid Farm Workers will conduct our annual fundraiser to benefit the National Farm Worker Ministry—online—as we did our spring fundraiser for the United Farm Workers.

We are grateful for your support then and plan to continue this event again online due to the prevalence of the COVID-19. Dinners and speakers will have to wait until next year! But we will have a silent auction online again.

To donate online with a credit card, you can do so on our Eventbrite fundraiser page. Checks made out to the **NFWM** can be mailed to our Treasurer, Gayle Blume, 2150 Cheyenne Way, Unit 165, Fullerton, CA 92833 or donate by credit card through Eventbrite.

Don't forget to check out the items on our online silent auction being held on our Facebook page and bid on them. If you have an item to donate to the silent auction, please contact Suzanne Darweesh at sdarweesh@aol.com.



Farm workers are considered "essential" workers (we all like to eat!) but are not always provided protective gear nor able to practice social distancing during this pandemic while traveling to work nor in their living conditions, (bunk beds, etc.) Very few workers outside of California are entitled to paid sick leave, shady breaks, clean water, and portable toilets. In California, farm workers not only perform stoop labor under increased temperatures, but also fires and smoke, poor air quality. If workers get sick from the virus and can't work, are not paid, then no rent money, often resulting in eviction. COVID-19 has resulted often in dire straits for farm workers.

CALIFORNIA UPDATE

What's happening now in California and is there some action we can take?

While conditions in California are better than any other state, remember that farm workers and domestics were excluded under the Labor Relations Act of 1938 under FDR and the reason isn't one to be proud of. In order to secure the support of southern states where most farm workers and domestics were black, neither group was given the protections that other workers enjoy such as minimum wage, overtime pay, health benefits, pensions, etc.

Each state has had to fight for farm workers separately due to the lack of inclusion. Conditions in California are better because of the UFW and the California legislature. We mentioned the lack of protective gear and social distancing, working near fires and amid polluted air due to smoke. Lack of child care is a problem everywhere.

But on September 30, the Secretary of Agriculture, Sonny Perdue, made the unilateral decision to eliminate data collection which informs the Secretary of Labor on setting H2A guest worker wages. This is done so as to not adversely affect domestic wages.

On October 14 the UFW filed a lawsuit against Secretary Perdue. His decision could possibly decrease wages by \$7 an hour in Utah and Wisconsin; even in California, workers might lose \$2 per hour.

TAKE ACTION

Please go to the UFW website at www.ufw.org and sign their petition or contact Secretary Perdue directly at <https://www.usda.gov/tellsonny>

**Orange County Interfaith
Committee to Aid Farm Workers
Chair:**

Suzanne Darweesh

Treasurer:

Gayle Blume

Fundraising:

Gerri McNenny, Pam Presnall

Church Liaison:

Barbara Johnson

Newsletter:

Pam Presnall

Labor Liaison:

Marti Schrank

Others: Irene Arellano, Chuck Buck, Mike Clements, Sara Halverson-Cano, Tina Laine, Bill Steiner, Henry Weil

Farmworker Web Pages:

www.ufw.org (UFW)

www.floc.com (FLOC)

www.pcun.org (PCUN)

www.ciw-online.org (CIW)

www.nfwm.org (NFWM)



**National
Farm Worker
MINISTRY**

HARVEST OF JUSTICE

While the Harvest of Justice series produced by the NFWM is over, (World Food Day was October 16), you can open it at any time and learn more about farm workers and the environment, download videos for your church or community, find resources for program planning, and much more at www.nfwm.org.



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FARM WORKER ACHIEVEMENTS

The Coalition of Immokalee Workers, based in Immokalee, Florida, is not a union but gives farm workers a voice in the living/working conditions. It is known as a worker-driven socially responsible organization known for confronting human trafficking and gender-based violence. The Florida Tomato Growers Exchange, a \$600 million industry, offered declining wages and allowed violence against workers to persist. Human trafficking was also a problem and the CIW successfully pursued six legal suits of forced labor where passports were taken from workers who were locked in trucks overnight.

Workers retaliated with work stoppages, marches, and even a hunger strike in 1998. In 2005 the CIW began a boycott of Taco Bell. We in OC witnessed workers traveling here during their spring break to confront Taco Bell, whose headquarters was located in Irvine, asking for a penny a pound increase for tomatoes. Many of us participated with the workers in prayer vigils, rallies, and marches.

After a three year struggle, Yum! Brands, parent company to Taco Bell, signed a contract in 2005. Other fast food companies followed suit: McDonalds in 2007, Burger King, Whole Foods, & Subway in 2008, Bon Appetit in 2009, Aramark and Sodexo in 2010, Trader Joe's and Chipotle in 2012, Fresh Market and Ahold in 2015. The CIW is now focused on Wendy's, Publix, and Kroger (Ralph's) so we ask you not to support these chains with your business and also to ask the local managers to get their corporate headquarters to sign on to the Fair Food Program.

Equally important as the penny a pound is to the workers is the **Fair Food Program** and the Code of Conduct they created in 2010. The Code of Conduct ensures worker dignity for pay and conditions and no verbal or physical assaults which protects women against sexual violence, a great problem for farm worker women often threatened with losing their jobs or being deported. Enforcement mechanisms are built into this code.

The CIW has been the recipient of numerous awards and honors including Presidential and Robert F. Kennedy Foundation in 2003 awards.

The Farmworker Association in Florida (FWAF) is also not a union but working in its community and through its satellite offices to stand with farm workers in their grievances, to advocate for farm worker families and is particularly well-known for its efforts to fight pesticide exposure and environmental pollution.

FLOC, the Farm Labor Organizing Committee, has been most active in North Carolina and Ohio. Founded and still headed by Baldemar Velasquez, it won an unprecedented legal battle with Campbell Soup establishing that corporations could be responsible for harmful working conditions instigated by the contractors, a three way bargaining agreement. FLOC also won better working conditions at the Mt. Olive Pickle Corporation in NC. For a number of years FLOC has pursued the Tobacco Companies for better pay and working conditions.

ACTION NEEDED

During the last week of October, **FLOC** has launched a campaign against corrupt H2A labor contractors mostly in North Carolina. What began as a small program to supplement insufficient numbers of domestic farm workers has now grown into a huge program involving thousands of workers. In 2020 alone **FLOC** lost over 700 jobs due to unscrupulous labor contractors. Abusive working conditions such as controlling work visas, threatening deportation, and using violence to prevent workers from protesting, are now tolerated. To sign FLOC's petition asking the Department of Labor to end the support of abusive labor contractors, please go to their website at www.floc.com to sign.

SOME GOOD NEWS

The Equitable Food Initiative (EFI) now about ten years old, is not a union but is an industry-wide approach to getting better working conditions for farm workers. On EFI farms, farm workers undergo training and assume leadership to work with the growers and/or CEOs to discuss and determine working conditions and wages. Rather than racing to pick as many strawberries as possible in the shortest amount of time due to being paid piece-rate, workers are encouraged to look for quality over quantity and pick more carefully. The EFI was spearheaded by OXFAM with the help of NFWM to bring together farm worker partners to form something that would connect growers, corporations, farm workers and management to produce safer, healthier food for consumers with improved working conditions, better pesticide management, and profitability for farmers, retailers, and food service providers. The EFI comprises about 40 certified farm operations: from Canada 2 locations, 14 in the US, 24 in Mexico, and 1 in Guatemala. These farms employ 36,400 farm workers and have generated \$8.5 million worker bonuses. It is supported by Costco! Look for the certification logo on its fresh produce!