

Spring/Summer 2020

# NATIONAL FARM WORKER MINISTRY NEWS & VIEWS

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## Covid-19 Pandemic Shines Light On Inequities And Systemic Realities

For the last few months, the societal effects of Covid-19 have made it nearly impossible to ignore the inequities that have always permeated and sustained American systems. As we continue to witness the impact of this pandemic on farm workers, we see that these inequalities are the very forces holding together the U.S. food system. Everybody needs to eat, which is why farm workers are considered "essential" – they are still picking strawberries in California's fields and bringing in milk from New York's dairy farms.

And as usual, the government has done very little to protect their health and safety, their incomes, and their children. The first coronavirus case of a seasonal farm worker was confirmed in eastern North Carolina in April with more reported every day. But while farm workers are currently left out of federal aid packages, farm worker unions and organizations are responding to these vulnerabilities with resiliency and intelligence. For decades, farm workers have voiced their experiences of low wages, wage theft, threats to health, inaccessible health care, sexual harassment, child labor and poor housing conditions. With the devastating impacts of climate change on the horizon, we are also seeing farm workers report heat illness, housing damage from natural disasters, forced migration, increased pesticide usage and contaminated water sources. What is both unsurprising and horrifying is that the federal government continues to subsidize the conventional farming methods that have created these dangerous working and living conditions. We need farm workers to be able to work and yet we are allowing their workplaces to become increasingly uninhabitable. The Covid-19 crisis has highlighted these issues even more.

**To keep up with NFWM's ongoing efforts/information/actions related to the pandemic, go to <http://nfwm.org/news/coronavirus-the-latest/>**

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**WE ARE WORKING  
TO CHANGE THE  
SYSTEMS THAT  
KEEP  
EXPLOITATION  
IN PLACE:  
LAWS,  
REGULATIONS,  
AGRICULTURAL  
PRACTICES,  
CORPORATE  
RESPONSIBILITY,  
CONSUMER  
CONSCIENCE, ETC.**

**OUR FARM  
WORKER  
PARTNERS ARE  
STRUGGLING NOW.**

**-JULIE TAYLOR,  
EXECUTIVE  
DIRECTOR**

## The Work Continues

If I were writing this under “normal” circumstances, this reflection would be all about mobilizing for farm worker public protests, seeking mass group turnout to create impact. But normal has changed and organizing has been more focused on two things: 1) protecting farm workers from the coronavirus, getting them supplies, seeing that regulations are in place, addressing physical distancing in work, housing and transportation and 2) using this particular moment to let people know that the concerns about farm workers' current realities are simply coming to light now because of the pandemic. All our farm worker partners, allies and even NFWM have been sought out by media for interviews to gain a deeper understanding of the problems and specifically for stories from farm workers on the ground. It has been a busy time.

While Covid-19 has impacted the way in which farm worker support can be given, racial violence issues near the middle of this year are being pressed into the social conscience even as efforts are being made to “reopen” the country. This, too, is an opportunity for us and our farm worker partners to offer the reminder that racism has been at the heart of farm worker legislation and realities in this country. Racism has been the impetus for excluding farm workers (and others) from protection against retaliation when they organize and for why farm workers are excluded from overtime and other labor laws that most US workers receive, except for some states where there are a few provisions. We've seen the lack of comprehensive immigration reform year after year. We know all too well that the pattern of exploiting people of color for manual labor in this country makes corporations rich and many farm workers poor. And we, as consumers, even unintentionally, benefit from it.

That is why the ongoing work of the National Farm Worker Ministry (NFWM) is so important. We are working to change the systems that keep exploitation in place: laws,

regulations, agricultural practices, corporate responsibility, consumer conscience, etc. Our farm worker partners are struggling now. Most of them had spring fundraising events which have been canceled. Most are overwhelmed by the needs of farm workers and their families so are struggling to handle calls and provide supplies. Many are pursuing efforts both nationally as well as by state to address making their working environments safe as **essential** workers. We are trying to support all of this.

But our farm worker partners are also trying to continue their organizing work even as allies are offering support in creative ways (see sidebar.)

## Partner Updates:

**Rural and Migrant Ministry** was instrumental in helping New York State pass the Farmworker Fair Labor Practices Act last year to support improved conditions and protections for farm labor organizing in the state. As this law continues to roll out, Rural and Migrant Ministries is continuing to support the creation of a farm labor organization in the state. The **United Farm Workers** union is working on federal legislation to provide overtime to farm workers and to address their working conditions. They are also working on national regulations to protect farm workers from heat stress. The **Coalition of Immokalee Workers** have received the support of Doctors Without Borders to assist farm workers in Immokalee and are continuing their efforts to get Wendy's to sign on to the Fair Food Program. The **Farm Labor Organizing Committee's** organizers are continuing to put pressure on tobacco companies, specifically Reynold's and Philip Morris. **Familias Unidas por la Justicia** is providing advice and support to striking farm workers in Washington State (see sidebar.) The work truly continues and you can learn more about it through NFWM's Action Alerts and monthly enews, as well as online at [www.nfwm.org](http://www.nfwm.org).

-Julie Taylor, Executive Director

## Creative Ways of Supporting Farm Workers

At the end of May, two faith organizations, one on each of the opposite coasts, scheduled "Caravans of Solidarity." On the West Coast, a caravan of supporters, including Farm Worker Ministry-Northwest (FWM-NW), traveled from the Tri-Cities to support striking fruit shed workers in Yakima and Selah. Familias Unidas por la Justicia (FUJ) already had representation on the ground working. Striking workers at Matson, Allan Brothers, Jack Frost, Monson and Columbia Reach are on strike for their safety, protection from the coronavirus, hazard pay, the end of abusive supervisors and for recognition that they truly are essential workers. On the East Coast, Rural and Migrant Ministries, joined by a coalition of farm worker organizations, unions, faith groups and community organizations formed Caravans of Solidarity and Dignity for farm workers and Food Chain Workers.



# NFWM Winter 2020 Board meeting: Tampa, Florida

NFWM has worked nationally for decades through its member organizations, congregations, and individuals. That broad spectrum of support was clearly evident at the January meeting in Tampa. Presbyterian, Methodist, United Church of Christ, Episcopal, Disciples of Christ, Alliance of Baptists, Loretos, Society of the Sacred Heart, the Brethren, Sisters of Charity, BVM, Sisters of Charity of Nazareth were participants at the meeting. All are actively involved in promoting justice for the workers who harvest our food.

The NFWM welcomed the Catholic Labor Network (CLN), which links and promotes the

cause of workers and Catholic social teaching in labor unions, parishes, and other organizations such as the NFWM. And obviously the CLN has the protection of immigrants as one of its priorities.

Farm worker protections were a priority topic. Heat stress, exposure to pesticides and other toxic chemicals, wage theft, sexual harassment are a clear and present danger for farm workers. Antonio Tovar, of the Farmworker Association of Florida, told it like it is for those who work in the fields and orchards of the United States.

Immigration is a big issue as

many workers are undocumented. Racism is another concern. Kidney failure is a big problem among sugar cane workers. And yet another large problem for citrus workers is the rate of eye infections. Add the pressure of the piece rate system and lack of water, rest, shade for farm workers and the growing, harvesting—the work of farm workers is difficult and filled with hardships. The Farmworker Association of Florida, founded in 1983 by the School Sisters of Notre Dame, "continues to lead and support farm workers as well as other low-income workers in aspects of immigrant rights, worker protections and the promotion of food justice."



NFWM Board of Directors & Staff

On a rainy, cool Saturday morning, about twenty other NFWM board and staff members made a two-and-a-half-hour drive to the small Southern Florida town of Immokalee where workers from Haiti, Guatemala, and Mexico pick mainly tomatoes, and peppers. Lot of tomatoes and peppers! The workers have joined together to form the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW). "The CIW is a worker based human rights organization internationally recognized for its achievements in the fields of corporate social responsibility, community organizing, and sustainable food." There are three broad and overlapping spheres of CIW work: the Alliance for Fair Food, the Fair Food Program, and anti-slavery work. Yes, workers have been held against their will. The NFWM board spent about three hours at the CIW center which includes a meeting room, a radio station, a library, and a cooperative store. "Consciousness + Commitment = Change" is something CIW has put into practice and it works.

The CIW is boycotting Wendy's because the world's third largest hamburger chain has refused to join the Fair Food Program. This very successful and unique program of worker-led monitoring and

enforcement has effectively addressed sexual harassment, forced labor and other long-time human rights violations in the fields. McDonald's, Burger King, Subway, Taco Bell and Chipotle plus other major food retailers have joined the CIW Fair Food Program. Wendy's has not gotten on board.

It was a long day in Immokalee on Saturday, February 1, and we still had a long drive back to Tampa and our hotel. But as we sat down to a Mexican dinner with Immokalee farm worker families, Marilyn Yockey and Antonia from Ouxaca, Mexico showed each other pictures of families in Mexico and the United States. Two women, both wives and mothers not separated. Laughing, talking, sharing. St. Francis of Assisi is smiling!

-Roger Yockey,  
FWM-NW Board Member

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**TWO WOMEN, BOTH  
WIVES AND  
MOTHERS NOT  
SEPARATED.  
LAUGHING,  
TALKING, SHARING.**

**ST. FRANCIS OF  
ASSISI IS SMILING!**

**-ROGER YOCKEY,  
FWM-NW  
BOARD MEMBER**



**CIW staff and families in a circle of blessings with NFWM Board members**

# NFWM Updates

## Coming this fall: Harvest of Justice 2020!

Harvest of Justice is an opportunity to raise consciousness, commitment & contributions for the Ministry's work with farm workers!

The Harvest of Justice Season falls between Labor Day and World Food Day. Labor Day in America focuses on our country's labor movement and the many ways that US workers have given their toil to make our country prosper. Farm workers are among them. It is a fitting beginning to the Harvest of Justice season.

And we end with World Food Day, an annual recognition of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations founding in 1945. Primarily observed by organizations concerned with food security, we recognize that many farm workers are themselves in need of food despite the fact that they pick fruits and vegetables for the rest of us.

The Harvest of Justice program is a way to educate your faith community, family, and peers about farm worker issues. You can take action by getting together with your community and raising awareness about farm workers. This year: learn about the challenges climate change brings to farm workers.

## Welcome, Jonathan!

NFWM welcomes our newest summer intern from the Duke Divinity School.

Jonathan Milliken is a rising second-year Master of Divinity student at Duke Divinity School. He is passionate about scripture, particularly the Old Testament. He is also passionate about justice. He has a heart for marginalized communities, and hopes that his work will center around this.

Jonathan loves dogs and hopes to have one of his own (as opposed to having to go see his family in Montana to get a dog fix). He is thrilled to be a part of the National Farm Worker Ministry this summer and looks forward to "all the work I will be able to do and things I will be able to learn!"

Jonathan can be reached at [ddsintern@nfwm.org](mailto:ddsintern@nfwm.org)



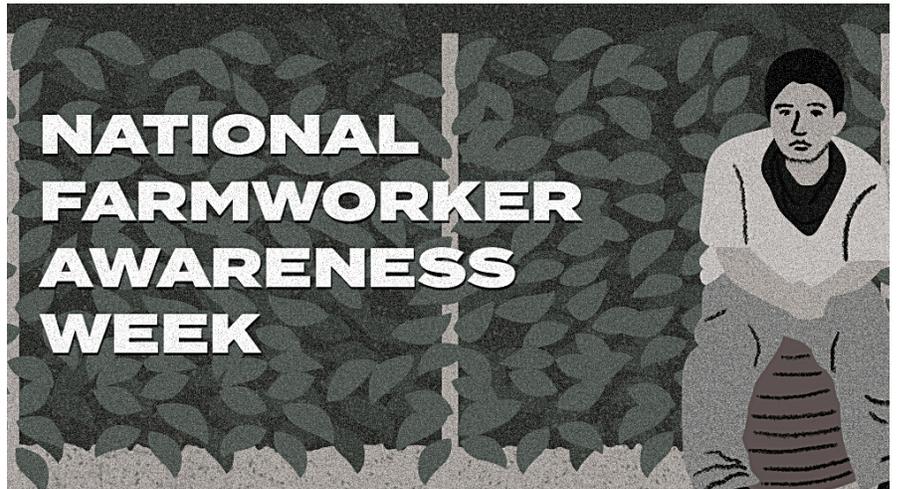
# Stay Connected!

NFWM is currently switching to a new communications and constituent management system in order to stay better connected with YOU! Please be patient with us during this time of transition.

Help us make sure we have the best address for you....if this isn't reaching you at your preferred mailing address, you're getting duplicates or we have your name wrong, please let us know by emailing [admin@nfwm.org](mailto:admin@nfwm.org) or calling the office at 919-807-8707.

Please also make sure we have the best email address for you as well so you can be sure to receive our monthly e-Newsletter as well as Action Alerts and more. Email us at [admin@nfwm.org](mailto:admin@nfwm.org) or sign-up through our website: [www.nfwm.org](http://www.nfwm.org).

You can also stay connected through our social media channels as well. Follow us on Facebook, Instagram, and more! Links can always be found on our web site.



National Farmworker Awareness Week (NFAW) is an annual week of action for students and community members to raise awareness about farm worker issues. In 2020 we celebrated the 21st Annual National Farmworker Awareness Week to raise awareness about farm worker conditions and to honor their important contributions to us every day!

NFWM supported this effort by promoting it via social media. We took a day of the week to highlight our work through the "Pasa la Papa" Instagram, posting about "Shade" throughout the day on March 27. Many thanks to our 2019-2020 intern, Hanna Stamey, for coordinating this effort! These posts not only spread the word about our important work but also helped us gain Instagram followers.

A few of our Instagram posts highlighting the need for shade:



Be sure to follow us, too, at <https://www.instagram.com/nationalfarmworkerministry/>



## **National Farm Worker Ministry**

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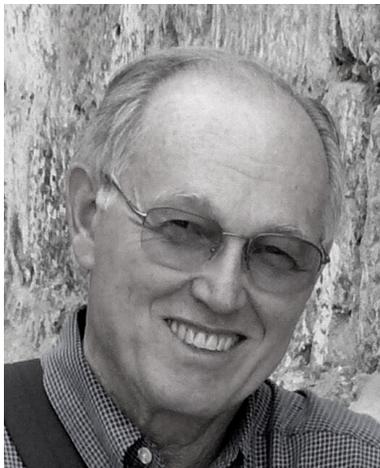
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**¡Presente!**

**Gary Massoni, August 7, 1942-November 3, 2019**

**Co-Founder, Oregon Farm Worker Ministry**

Gary and his wife Betty were long time supporters of peace and justice, including the Farm Worker struggle to unionize the workplace. Gary accompanied Vern & Rosemary Cooperrider,



**Gary Massoni**

David Papen, Ellen Lowe, Rev Fred Eyster and others to begin farm worker ministry in Oregon in the early 1980's. In 2014, Oregon Farm Worker Ministry became Farm Worker Ministry Northwest to engage people of faith and conscience in the struggle for justice. This

organization has been a member of National Farm Worker Ministry since its origin in 1985. We are grateful for all Gary's support and will miss him dearly.

NFWM

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