

FARM WORKERS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

A C U R R I C U L U M

N a t i o n a l F a r m W o r k e r M i n i s t r y

Farm Workers and the Environment

A Curriculum

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About NFWM

National Farm Worker Ministry (NFWM) is a faith-based organization committed to justice for and empowerment of farm workers. NFWM educates, equips and mobilizes member organizations and other faith communities, groups and individuals to support farm worker led efforts to improve their living and working conditions.



NATIONAL FARM WORKER MINISTRY

Farm Workers and the Environment

A Curriculum

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1. Introduction

The impacts of climate change are being felt all over the U.S. through higher temperatures, increase in wildfires, prolonged droughts, frequent flooding and more frequent and stronger hurricanes. Farm workers - men, women, children, documented, undocumented, migrant, resident - are on the frontline of the brunt of climate change. The impacts of climate change on farm workers only exacerbates the many injustices that farm workers already face. As climate change forces significant agricultural adaptations and farmers continue to feel pressure to make shortcuts concerning labor, farm workers will feel the first and most severe impacts on their working and living conditions.

This curriculum is designed for middle and high school aged youth to explore the impacts of climate change on farm workers in the U.S. and inspire action with farm workers for justice. The education design is participatory and justice focused. The curriculum does not present all sides of agro business, corporations, immigration, etc. but rather leans heavily on the perspective of farm workers. This aligns with the work of the many farm worker partners and member organizations of the National Farm Worker Ministry (NFWM).

As you will see throughout the curriculum it is very difficult to talk about climate change and its impact on farm workers in isolation. Review the curriculum and note where the content connects to other subject areas that students have studied (i.e. U.S. immigration policy and U.S. history, labor organizing and social studies, science and climate change, push/pull factors and history of Latin America and the U.S. etc.). The curriculum is not exhaustive and teachers, leaders and facilitators should feel free to go deeper or wider as time allows. If leading this in a religious setting, research what that group has stated around workers' rights, immigration, climate change, etc. Some are available [here](#).¹

There are six sessions, each with its own theme, divided into steps. Sessions are 70-95 minutes

long. Some resources for going deeper, by topic, can be found in Additional Resources.

Session 1: Migration (90 minutes)

Session 2: Climate Disasters (70 minutes)

Session 3: Heat Stress (95 minutes)

Session 4: Pesticides/Herbicides (95 minutes)

Session 5: Children Working in the Fields (75 minutes)

Session 6: Putting it All Together (90 minutes)

Sessions 1-5 have info sheets for you to review. These info sheets, available online, will give you additional background on the impacts of climate change on farm workers.

For more background on farm workers visit NFWM's [Issues Affecting Farm Workers](#)² and the [Blessing of the Hands: A Curriculum \(Revised in 2008\)](#).³ For more information on climate change see [Climate Justice Alliance](#).⁴

National Farm Worker Ministry (NFWM) is a faith-based organization committed to justice for and empowerment of farm workers. NFWM educates, equips and mobilizes member organizations and other faith communities, groups and individuals to support farm worker led efforts to improve their living and working conditions. Grounded in faith, NFWM works side by side with farm workers and their organizing groups throughout the country, to organize vigils, picket, coordinate boycotts and educate constituents. NFWM brings together national denominations, religious orders and congregations, regional groups and concerned individuals to act with farm workers to achieve fundamental change. To see more about the work of NFWM, watch an introductory video [here](#).⁵

Endnotes

1. National Farm Worker Ministry, *Statements and Resolutions*, <http://nfwm.org/faith-based-partners/statements-and-resolutions/>. Retrieved July 17, 2020.

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4. Climate Justice Alliance, <https://climatejusticealliance.org/>. Retrieved July 17, 2020.

5. National Farm Worker Ministry, *NFWM 2017*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=133&v=9gTN3GQJCEg (November 23, 2017). Retrieved July 17, 2020.

Session 1: Migration

90 minutes

By the end of this session students will have

- Named “push and pull” factors of migration.
- Heard stories of how climate change is pushing people to migrate.
- Read the timeline of Immigration and Agricultural Labor.
- Discussed the timeline and identified themes.
- Created an action ideas list.

Preparation

- Review the [Global Migration Info Sheet](#)¹
- Flip chart paper or board for listing push/pull factors.
- Prepare computer, projector, speakers, and load video.
- Access to NFWM website or [printout](#) of the [Timeline of Agricultural Labor](#).²
- Flip chart paper or designated space for the “Action Ideas”.

Step 1: Push/Pull Factors (10 minutes)

Frame the session: People move for all kinds of reasons - proximity to family, job or school, less expensive rent or to buy a new house. Ask students if any of them have ever moved and hear some reasons why. Today we will be exploring what pushes and pulls people to move or migrate.

On a board or flip chart paper draw two columns and write PUSH PULL at the top of each. Explain that "push" factors are forces that drive people away from a place and "pull" factors are those that draw people to a place. Starting with the examples the students shared, list some

reasons people migrate and determine whether they are push or pull factors. List them in the appropriate column on the flip chart paper.

What are some reasons people migrate from one place to another (within a country or across borders) (examples: Push: war, loss of employment, natural disaster, etc. Pull: work opportunity, family reunification, etc.)?

Leader Notes

Draw out connections: the reasons students may have for moving from one neighborhood/city to another are similar to the reasons immigrants may have for migrating (access to work, proximity to family, etc.).

Be sensitive to the more challenging reasons some immigrants face such as human trafficking, the Atlantic Slave Trade, or refugees fleeing war or natural disasters. Some students may relate with these experiences through being forced to move from one foster home to another, avoiding violence, or the loss of a home after a flood, hurricane, or for other reasons.

Step 2: Farm Workers' Realities (10 minutes)

Watch [The New Face of Climate Change- The Climate Migrant](#)³

Ask the following questions and add them to the push/pull factor paper.

- What were some of the push/pull factors that came up in this video?
- How is climate change changing or compounding the push/pull factors of migration?
- How does climate change increase vulnerability for farm workers?

Step 3: History of Immigration Policy and Agricultural Labor in the U.S. (65 minutes)

Framing: Throughout the history of the United States, people from other countries have been brought over to work in our fields, often against their will. For instance, white laborers were brought over from Europe as indentured servants in the 1600's, and Africans worked in the fields after being forced onto slave ships from the 1600s to the 1800s.

Historically, agricultural workers in the U.S. have been brought from countries with vulnerable populations, have always been a disenfranchised group of workers, and have in general never had the right to vote. We can see this history of exploitative conditions in the events and policies that laid the groundwork for our broken agricultural system today. We are going to look at a timeline of agricultural labor in the U.S.

In pairs read the [Timeline of Agricultural Labor](#)⁴ in the U.S. from NFWM's website or print the abbreviated version [here](#).⁵

Answer the following questions:

- When have we as a country been open and inviting of immigrants?
- When have we discouraged immigration?
- Were these policies for people from specific places?

Discuss the following questions as a whole group:

- What trends do you notice? (ask for examples)
- What role does race play in agricultural labor policies? (ask for examples)
- How are immigration policies connected to agricultural labor?
- Are our current policies inviting or discouraging?
- How do the current policies address the push/pull factors we identified?

Leader Notes

If you have limited time divide the timeline up so that each pair looks at two to three time periods.

Expand this activity by having students put their own family's migration story into the timeline. Did their family migrate to the U.S? If so, when and why? What was going on in the U.S. when they came? Were the policies welcoming? For Native Americans in your class, ask, how have policies supported or inhibited their family's rights?

Step 4: Wrap-up (5 minutes)

Introduce the Action Idea List. As we are working our way through these sessions, ideas for ways we can help may come up. Let's list them on this Action Idea List and we can review it at the end of all the sessions to create action plans. List any action ideas that participants name.

Between now and the next session create a food journal to document all the food you eat in one day.

Endnotes

1. National Farm Worker Ministry, *Farm Workers and the Environment: Global Migration*, http://nfwm.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Harvest-of-Justice_-Global-Migration.pdf. Retrieved July 17, 2020.
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4. National Farm Worker Ministry, *Timeline of Agricultural Labor in the U.S.*, <http://nfwm.org/farm-workers/farm-worker-issues/slider-test/>. Retrieved July 17, 2020.
5. <http://nfwm.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ImmigrationFWTimeline-for-download-FINAL.pdf>

Session 2: Climate Disasters

70 minutes

By the end of this session students will have

- Defined key terms relating to farm workers and immigration.
- Read and discussed Farm Workers' Realities articles.
- Reviewed the food journal to make connections with what we eat to farm workers.
- Added to the Action Idea list.

Preparation

- Review the [Natural Disasters Info Sheet](#)¹ and [Water, Drought and Wildfires Info Sheet](#).²
- Write key terms on board or prepare slide.
- Print the Farm Workers' Realities articles.
- Write the discussion questions on the board.

Step 1: Key Terms (15 minutes)

There are many terms used when discussing farm workers and immigration. Let's review what they are and what they mean. Write the terms on the board or prepare a slide and ask students to define the terms. Then show the definition or write it using students' input. See key terms below:

Citizen/Citizenship - People born in the U.S. are U.S. citizens. If one or both parents are U.S. citizens, their child is probably a U.S. citizen. Others who want to become U.S. citizens must apply for citizenship, also called naturalization.

Deported - when someone is ordered or removed from the country.

Detention - Keeping immigrants in a place where they are not allowed to leave. Some immigrants may be forced to stay in detention until an immigration judge decides if they may stay in the United States. Others may qualify to be released on bond. Many of today's detention facilities are also community jails.

Documented - an immigrant with permission from the U.S. to live here (with papers such as a visa or green card).

Guest Worker - an immigrant with temporary permission to work in the U.S. (example: H2-A visa).

H2-A visa - a guest worker program offering temporary status to agricultural workers for 10 months or less.

Immigrant - a person who migrates from one country to another.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) - the government office that enforces U.S. immigration laws. ICE arrests, removes and/or deports people who do not have permission to stay in the U.S.

Migrant Worker - person who leaves their country to find work, particularly seasonal or temporary work.

Status - Immigration status refers to a person's legal situation or options. Someone with status has a legal right to be in this country and includes: U.S. citizens, green card holders, H2-A visa holders, asylees, etc.

Undocumented - an immigrant who does not have permission from the U.S. to live here (examples: expired visa, crossed border illegally without papers, etc.)

Step 2: Farm Workers' Realities (30 minutes)

[California's Burning, and Farmworkers are Still in the Fields](#)³

[Months After Florence Undocumented Farmworkers Still Struggle to Recover](#)⁴

[As Wildfire Smoke Fills the Air Farmworkers Continue to Labor in the Fields](#)⁵

[Hurricane Irma's Overlooked Victims: Migrant Farmworkers Living at the Edge](#)⁶

[Wildfires in California's Wine Country Hit Vulnerable Immigrant Farmworkers](#)⁷

- Divide into small groups, assign one article per group. After reading the article discuss the following questions in the small groups.
- What is the impact on farm workers?
- What makes farm workers particularly vulnerable in times of disasters?
- What are some barriers to farm workers when seeking assistance?

As a whole group hear some of the answers from the questions. Based on what we learned about immigration policy and agricultural work in the last session, ask:

- In what ways does immigration policy impact the farm workers you read about?

Step 3: Connection to Farm Workers (20 minutes)

In small groups, have each student share their food journal and make a collective list of all the things the class ate. Go back through the list and circle the produce (things picked/harvested). Include processed food, i.e., tomatoes in pizza sauce, and the pickles, lettuce, tomatoes used in fast food sandwiches.

Discuss in your group your own connection to farm workers:

- How are we connected to farm workers?
- What are the implications of our food choices?
- How are our lives embedded in the systems with which we may not agree?

All of these items were touched by farm worker hands. Our ability to eat the foods we want is thanks to the work of farm workers.

Step 4: Wrap Up (5 minutes)

Add any ways we can help to the Action Idea List.

Endnotes

1. National Farm Worker Ministry, *Farm Workers and the Environment: Natural Disasters*, [http://nfwm.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Harvest-of-Justice -Natural-Disasters.pdf](http://nfwm.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Harvest-of-Justice-Natural-Disasters.pdf). Retrieved July 17, 2020.
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5. Jack Herrera, *As Wildfire Smoke Fills the Air, Farmworkers Continue to Labor in the Fields*, Pacific Standard, <https://psmag.com/environment/as-wildfire-smoke-fills-the-air-farmworkers-continue-to-labor-in-the-fields> (November 14, 2018). Retrieved July 17, 2020.
6. Georgina Gustin, *Hurricane Irma's Overlooked Victims: Migrant Farm Workers Living at the Edge*, Inside climate News, <https://insideclimatenews.org/news/16102017/hurricanes-florida-agriculture-migrant-farm-workers-jobs-crop-loss> (October 17, 2017). Retrieved July 17, 2020.
7. Carmen Sesin, *Wildfires in California's Wine Country Hit Vulnerable Immigrant Farmworkers*, NBC News, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/wildfires-california-s-wine-country-hit-vulnerable-immigrant-farmworkers-n809871> (October 13, 2017). Retrieved July 17, 2020.

Session 3: Heat Stress

95 minutes

By the end of this session students will have

- Read and discussed Farm Workers' Realities articles.
- “Experienced” what farm worker labor is like.
- Written letters to representatives to advocate for farm workers.
- Added to the list of action ideas.

Preparation

- Review the [Heat Stress Info Sheet](#).¹
- Print the Farm Workers' Realities articles.
- Write the discussion questions on the board.
- 5-gallon bucket filled with 32 lbs of something.
- Space to create a “row in field”.
- Prepare computer, screen, speakers and loaded video.
- Print/copy fact sheet on Asuncion Valdivia Illness and Fatality Prevention Act.

Step 1: Farm Workers' Realities (25 minutes)

[Farm Workers Are Dying from Extreme Heat](#)²

[Heat is Now the Deadliest Threat to Farmworkers. Only Two States Protect Them From It](#)³

[It's National Heat Awareness Day- Let's Protect Farmworkers from Extreme Heat](#)⁴

Divide into small groups, assign one heat stress article per group. After reading the article, discuss the following questions in the small groups.

- What causes heat stress?
- What makes farm workers particularly vulnerable to heat stress related illnesses?
- What are the impacts of heat stress related illnesses?
- How do other injustices like the lack of access to health care impact farm workers?

Gather as a whole and hear the responses from the questions from a few groups.

Step 2: Farm Worker Experience: Tomato Picking (45 minutes)

Create a 32 lb bucket of "tomatoes". Get a 5-gallon bucket (often available for free from restaurants, grocery stores, or paint supply stores). Fill the bucket with 32 lbs of something, for example, 5 lb bags of rice (give the rice away to a food pantry when done). Make a layer of "tomatoes" in the top of the bucket using balls of red paper. *An alternative is to use 32 lbs of potatoes, spaced along the floor. Participants go down the row picking the potatoes until the bucket is full and they carry it back to the start.*

Each participant carries the bucket for some distance; and tries to lift it over their heads. While they are carrying the bucket, explain the following:

Most farm workers are paid by the bucket (called the "piece rate"), not by the hour like in most jobs. In south Florida where a lot of tomatoes are grown, a tomato picker picks a bucket full of this weight, carries it down the long row and then hoists it up above his/her/their head, handing it to another worker standing in the truck who dumps the tomatoes into a bin. The farm worker then takes the empty bucket back down the row, picks another bucketful and so it goes all day long. Workers pick about 125 bucketfuls a day.

Farm workers aren't working just a few hours at a time. Tomato pickers will pick up to 12 hours a day during the harvesting season - the crops have to be brought in. They work in the hot sun with temperatures up to 105 degrees. During the harvest season, when the produce is ready and must be brought in, farm workers are often required to work 6 days a week.

Once everyone has carried the bucket debrief the activity with the following questions:

- How much do you think you should get paid to pick all the tomatoes in this bucket? (farm workers are paid \$.40-\$.50)
- What's your favorite meal to eat out*? How much does it cost to eat that meal?
- How many buckets would a farm worker have to pick to buy that meal?
- Farm workers can pick about 6 buckets per hour. How many hours would a farm worker have to work to make enough money to buy that meal?
- What about other expenses? Grocery, rent, utility bills, childcare, medical costs, entertainment, etc.

We had the luxury of doing this activity indoors in a climate controlled space. Farm workers do not have that luxury- they are working outside in the sun with very little access to shade and drinking water, at risk of heat stress and exposure to toxic pesticides.

Leader Notes

If you are leading this curriculum through a distance learning platform, encourage students to find a way to do this at home - perhaps measuring a path in their home to carry a bag of canned goods or dumbbells. Students could also recruit siblings and other family members to participate and share their experience.

*Please keep in mind you may have students who cannot afford to eat out for even a cheap meal and adjust this question as appropriate.

Step 3: Advocating with Farm Workers (25 minutes)

Asunción Valdivia, age 53, suffered a fatal stroke in 2004 after picking grapes for 10 straight hours in 105-degree temperatures. Instead of calling an ambulance, Valdivia's employer allegedly told Valdivia's son to drive him home. During the car ride, Valdivia began foaming at the mouth and died. [The Asuncion Valdivia Illness and Fatality Prevention Act](#)⁵ is proposed legislation to protect workers in extreme heat.

Read Farmworker Justice's [fact sheet](#)⁶ about the proposed legislation.

Write a letter to your representative to encourage them to pass the Asuncion Valdivia Illness and Fatality Prevention Act. Find your representative [here](#).⁷

Add any additional action ideas to the list.

Additional Resources for Session 3:

[How the World Warmed](#)⁸ (video)

[Protecting Farm Workers as Temperatures Rise with Climate Change](#)⁹ (video)

Endnotes

1. http://nfwm.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Harvest-of-Justice_-Heat-Stress-5.pdf
2. Nathalie Baptiste, *Farmworkers Are Dying from Extreme Heat*, <https://www.motherjones.com/food/2018/08/farmworkers-are-dying-from-extreme-heat/> (August 24, 2018). Retrieved July 17, 2020.
3. S.E. Smith, *Heat is Now the Deadliest Threat to Farmworkers. Only Two States Protect Them from It*, *Talk Poverty*, <https://talkpoverty.org/2019/06/20/farmworkers-heat-illness-deaths/> (June 20, 2019). Retrieved July 17, 2020.
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8. Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), *How the World Warmed*, <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/peril-and-promise/series/how-the-world-warmed/>. Retrieved July 17, 2020.
9. UC Davis, *Protecting Farmworkers as Temperatures Rise with Climate Change*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q0DDzikPrGI> (August 31, 2017). Retrieved July 17, 2020.

Session 4:

Pesticides/Herbicides

95 minutes

By the end of this session students will have

- Read and discussed farm workers' realities.
- Discussed farm worker led organizing.
- Participated in a role play showing the various parts of the food system.
- Read about the Coalition of Immokalee Workers Fair Food Program.
- Brainstormed action ideas and selected an action to support the Fair Food Program.
- Added to the list of action ideas.

Preparation:

- Review the [Pesticides Info Sheet](#).¹
- Print the "[Exposed and Ignored](#)"(pdf)² stories.
- Write the Dolores Huerta quote on the board.
- Print the Role Play.
- Prepare computer, projector, speakers and loaded video.

Frame the session: With a longer growing season and a warmer climate, weeds and pests proliferate, leading to more pesticide use – which is itself responsible for harmful emissions that further exacerbate climate change. The warmer temperatures cause faster evaporation, requiring more pesticide application. The warmer weather means that insect mortality drops and weeds can flourish, again requiring more pesticide and herbicide application.

Step 1: Farm Workers' Stories (20 minutes)

Divide into pairs or small groups to read and discuss the two stories from [Farm Workers' Realities: Exposed and Ignored \(pdf\)](#)³

Graciela's Story - Pierson, Florida

“Ever since I was a little girl I worked; first in Mexico and then here in Florida. I always thought that work was a good thing, something that built character. But I didn't realize that someday work would be the cause of so much pain in my family.”

Graciela lives in the small community of Pierson, Florida. Despite its size, Pierson still manages to hold the title of “fern capital of the world.” Low-hanging tarps stretch over a vast area of land providing the shelter for ferns, destined for the global flower market, to grow. The humid climate and long hours of direct sunlight in this area of Florida provide an ideal environment for this greenery to flourish. Long-time Pierson residents recall that ferneries began as far back as the 1920s, and soon became the staple industry. Because of the success of the ferneries, immigrant communities flocked to this area building a solid workforce for the busy production of ferns. Graciela's family moved to this area of Florida when she was a young girl.

“I remember heading to the ferneries throughout my summer vacation with my mother. At the beginning, I would play with my friends. We would race through the long rows, and sometimes when the sprinklers went on we would rush under them, trying to cool down our bodies.”

The sprinklers Graciela mentions are often used in chemigation— the channeling of pesticides through sprinklers or irrigation pipes. Farm workers, and children especially, often aren't aware that this water can actually contain dangerous chemicals.

As Graciela grew older, she began to work alongside her mother, carefully and quickly cutting the bundles of ferns with sharp shears. Eventually Graciela married and had two daughters. And just as her mother had done, she brought her own children with her to the ferneries.

“It seemed to make the most sense to me. I remember as a young girl how much I loved running and playing in the lush ferns. I also thought it was really important to spend as much time with my daughters as possible. I didn't want to leave them in daycare all day (nor could I afford to) so the obvious solution was to bring them with me.”

Graciela brought her two daughters, Ana and Celia, to work with her regularly until Celia was diagnosed with leukemia at the tender age of 15.

“I am so grateful my daughter has been in remission for two years now, but I feel so guilty. I wonder every day if my daughter's sickness could have been my fault. My heart hurts when I think that my daughter could have died, and this would have been my responsibility.”

Doctors told Graciela that it was hard to know exactly what caused the leukemia but that her daughter's exposure to toxic chemicals, especially from such a very young age, created a situation of heightened risk for her.

“I think now about how the very nature of cutting ferns exposes me to pesticides. First of all, we are working under these tarps every day, and because they are so low down, the chemicals can't really escape into the air. And in order to cut the ferns and get those nice long stems that we need, we have to put our faces practically down into them. I realize now how dangerous this is. We are breathing in those pesticides all day long, and how could they not cause us harm.”

If Graciela and her family had been fully informed about the health effects of pesticides and how to avoid exposure, they would not have risked the health of their children. Communicating about hazards and preventing them can have far reaching impacts across generations of farm worker families.

Juana's Story - Arizona

With an intense gaze, Juana describes her childhood experiences of crossing the border into Arizona every morning with her parents. They would dress her in multiple layers of clothing to protect her from the harsh rays of the sun. “We were always so worried about the sun because in Arizona and Mexico it is so very strong.

What I didn't realize was the real danger was actually the pesticides that were all around us.”

During her first pregnancy, in her early 20s, she worked in the lettuce harvest. “I was in charge of packing the boxes with heads of lettuce. It wasn't heavy work; I just had to be quick. At that time, I didn't know how important it was to wear gloves and protect myself from pesticide residue. I would lean right into the boxes, breathing in that residue. I thought it was important to do the work as quickly as possible; I didn't realize it was more important to think about protecting myself and my baby.”

Juana lost her baby when she was well into her pregnancy and even now wonders if her miscarriage was due to working so intensely with a crop loaded with pesticides.

About 10 years after her miscarriage she was diagnosed with lymphoma, and shortly thereafter her youngest son was diagnosed with the same disease.

“Our house was (and still is) right along the edges of the lettuce fields. When we started living there I still didn’t know about how dangerous pesticides could be. I would hang the clothes outside to dry in the fresh air, and my son would play in the water that collected in the irrigation ditches. We didn’t know the risks.”

Both she and her son have been cancer-free for a number of years, but she still fears for their health because they are living in the same house, and Juana continues to work in the lettuce harvest.

“I try to be so much more careful now. I understand how important it is to wear clothes that can help protect me when I’m working. We drink bottled water instead of the water from our land because I just don’t trust it. And I try to have my son play in places that are truly safe for him and won’t cause him any more danger.”

“I think it’s so important that every single person know about how dangerous pesticides really are. If you are living in our community or any other farming community in this country, you could be at risk because pesticides don’t have boundaries. They can freely cross wherever they want and we all need to know this.”

Juana’s experience demonstrates that with knowledge, farm workers are able to take precautions to minimize their exposure to pesticides. However, even these precautions are inadequate to prevent all risks as some exposures are beyond their control.

Discuss as a group

- What were some of the challenges the farm workers faced relating to pesticides and herbicides? (health, notification, etc.)

Step 2: Quote & Discussion (20 minutes)

Write the following quote where everyone can see and have a student read it aloud:

“If you dehumanize people, then they lose their self-worth and they won’t fight for their rights. The union gives workers self-worth, it gives them faith in their ability to really change their situation.” Dolores Huerta, Co-founder, UFW

In pairs or small groups discuss the following questions:

- Unions are a way of organizing collectively. Farm workers have unions in several parts

of the country. They also have other kinds of farm worker organizing groups, too, like coalitions, associations, support committees, etc. (See farm worker [organizing groups](#)⁴ near you.) What makes collective organizing powerful?

- In what ways do you think organizing gives workers “self-worth”?
- What are some of the basic rights of every worker and why?
- What worker rights need to be expanded?
- How do we as a society guarantee the rights of workers?
- Gather as a whole group to hear various answers from pairs or small groups.

Leader Notes

If you have more time refer back to the Immigration Policy and Farm Worker timeline to note moments in U.S. history of workers and communities organizing.

If leading in a religious setting refer to faith group’s statements around workers’ rights. Find statements and resolutions [here](#).⁵

Step 3: Role Play (25 minutes)

Identify 4 volunteers from the group who are successively taller. Assign the “Farm Worker” role to the shortest person, then the “Grower,” “CEO,” and the “Consumer” roles to the progressively taller persons.

The “Farm Worker” stands in front of the group and reads her/his part. The “Grower” stands directly in front of the farm worker and reads his/her part. The “CEO” stands directly in front of the grower to read her/his part and the “Consumer” stands directly in front of the CEO to read. They form a line, with the “Consumer” at the front blocking the view to the rest of the readers.

Role Play Parts

Farm Worker:

I am a farm worker from Chiapas, Mexico. I come to the U.S. to pick crops - tomatoes, sweet potatoes, apples - in the fields from Florida to Michigan, from Texas to Washington. I do not mind the work, but I earn so little. My wages come to only \$11,000 a year. Also, I had to pay \$1500 to a coyote, or smuggler, to bring me across the border. I’m still paying it off! In every place the contratista, or labor contractor, takes us to work. The housing is run down and I often have to live with as many as 12 other workers. Last year, I had to go back home in July because I got sick from the pesticides sprayed on the plants. I would rather stay in Mexico with my family, but we really need the money and back home there is no work.

Grower:

I am Mr./Ms. Grower. I am very good for the community because I provide jobs, though most Americans don't want them. I know these migrants are happy working for me. Some of them complain about the wages I give them, but it's better than what they make back in their home countries, so I don't pay any attention to that. I am proud to sell my produce to big companies like *Tasty Foods Corp* who supports my business and even provides me with the seeds to grow and tells me when to plant. Even if I wanted to pay my workers more and provide decent housing, it wouldn't be economically viable unless the corporations paid a higher price for my produce. I depend on my partnership with the company.

Tasty Foods Corp CEO:

I am the CEO of *Tasty Foods Corp*. We make several very popular food items sold all over the U.S. In fact, our earnings are in the hundreds of millions. To our customers, *Tasty Foods* means quality and value. We are able to keep our costs to the customer low and our profits high because we are such a large corporation. Our large size means we can negotiate for the lowest prices for the fresh produce we use or sell. We think that growers from whom we buy mean well, and we trust that they follow the law when it comes to the farm workers. Besides, we don't hire the farm workers and we don't want to interfere with how the growers run their businesses. That's not our responsibility.

Everybody Consumer:

Every week when I do my shopping, I look for *Tasty Foods*. My family likes their products and they are so often on sale. Last week, I got another two for one deal. These farm worker advocates are telling me I shouldn't buy *Tasty Foods*, but how will that help farm workers?

After the role play discuss the following questions in small groups or as a whole:

- What happened to the farm worker as everyone else read their part?
- How does not being able to see the people involved feel?
- How could a farm worker organizing group help to equalize the highlighted roles?
- What power do we have as consumers?

Leader Notes

If leading this through a distance learning platform the visual power of this role play will be weakened. As an alternative, ask the student reading the role of the farm worker to cover their face with a piece of paper, the grower reader to cover their face from the nose down (just showing

eyes), the corporation reader to cover their face from the mouth down (showing eyes and nose) and the consumer reader to not cover their face at all.

Step 4: Organizing for Change (30 minutes)

Watch [Naranjeros](#)⁶. Ask for reactions from the film.

The Coalition of Immokalee Workers, located in Immokalee Florida, are organizing for change through the Fair Food Program. The program is a unique partnership among farmers, farm workers, and retail food companies that ensures humane wages and working conditions for the workers who pick fruits and vegetables on participating farms. Join National Farm Worker Ministry and the Coalition of Immokalee Workers in pressuring Wendy's to join the Fair Food Program. Read more [here](#).⁷

Discuss as a class or in small groups some potential actions (for example, start an educational campaign at school to boycott Wendy's, submit a letter to the editor, deliver letters to local Wendy's restaurant managers, etc.).

Leader Notes

NFWM supports the boycott of Wendy's. NFWM follows the lead of farm worker organizations, and farm worker organizations have found boycotts an effective tool to bring about change. Learn more about these organizations and their history [here](#).⁸ *(There may be students or students' parents who work for Wendy's. Be sensitive that many families depend on this income and so do farm workers.)*

If there is time and interest go deeper into boycotts. Uplift examples of boycotts in U.S. history.

Additional Resources for Session 4:

Read more about pesticides at [Pesticides Action Network's](#)⁹ website.

Watch "[Dolores](#)"¹⁰ documentary from PBS

Watch [Food Chains](#)¹¹ film

Endnotes

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Session 5:

Children Working in the Fields

75 minutes

By the end of this session students will have

- Read and heard facts about child labor in the fields.
- Read narratives from child farm workers and discussed their realities.
- Advocated for policy to protect children working on farms.
- Added to the list of action ideas.

Preparation

- Review the [Women and Children Info Sheet](#).¹
- Print/write the [Farm Workers' Realities](#)² on sheets of paper, preferably on various shades of green paper.
- Make the “repollo” ball (see step 1).
- Print the stories from [The Stories you Should Know \(pdf\)](#).
- Write the discussion questions on the board.

Step 1: Farm Workers' Reality (15 minutes)

“Repollo” is Spanish for cabbage. Create a “repollo” of information as a fun way to read the facts. Print/write the Farm Workers' Realities on sheets of paper, preferably on various shades of green - one reality per sheet. Starting with the last reality, ball up one sheet of paper and then layer each successive piece around the ball to make a cabbage-like ball of paper. The outer layer should be the first reality listed.

Students sit in a circle and pass the “repollo” to each other, each unpeeling a sheet of paper to read the reality aloud until all the realities have been read.

Farm Workers' Realities - "Repollo"

45% of adult immigrant farm workers are married and have children, but leave their families behind while working in the U.S. Most live in isolated labor camps provided by employers. About 90% of the families left behind live in Mexico.²

400,000-500,000 children between the ages of 12-17 are estimated to be working in U.S. agriculture.³

Under current U.S. law, youth working in agriculture do not receive the same protections provided to other working youth.⁴

Farm worker children who migrate must be uprooted from their homes, schools, and communities 2-3 times a year.⁵ For many migrant children, it takes three years to advance one grade level.⁶

48% of farm worker children working in the fields have been sprayed with pesticides.⁷ Children are more vulnerable to pesticide exposure because they have a high skin to bodyweight ratio and are in a more rapid stage of development.

1 in 3 children die in agriculture every three days. In that time, 99 children are injured.⁸

From 2005 to 2008, 43 children under age 18 died from occupational injuries in crop production—27% of all children who were fatally injured at work during this period.⁹

In July 2015, Human Rights Watch interviewed 26 children, aged 16 and 17, who worked on tobacco farms in North Carolina that same summer. Almost all of the children interviewed—25 out of 26—said they experienced sickness, pain, and discomfort while working. Most children interviewed experienced the sudden onset of at least one specific symptom consistent with acute nicotine poisoning while working in tobacco farming in 2015, or after returning home from working in tobacco fields, including nausea, vomiting, headaches, dizziness, and lightheadedness.¹⁰

In a 2012 study Human Rights Watch reported nearly all of the 52 adult workers interviewed said they had experienced sexual violence or harassment or knew other workers who had.¹¹ Girls working in the fields also experience sexual violence or harassment.

Discuss (as a whole or in pairs)

- What stood out to you about these facts?
- Did you know any of this prior to this session?
- How do you think society would react if they knew this information?

Leader Notes

If leading this activity on a distance learning platform consider having the facts on the screen and asking one student to start and after they read the first fact to call on another student to read the next (like passing the "repollo") and so on.

Step 2: Stories from Children in the Fields (30 minutes)

Divide into pairs or small groups and have each pair or group read one story from [“The Stories you Should Know \(pdf\)”](#)¹²

Joel	Abigail	Iker	Jharexy
Luis	Dulce	Miguel	Alondra
Yesenia	Miranda	Ariana	Fernando

As a class discuss the following questions:

- What stood out to you about this story?
- What challenges might youth immigrants face that adults do not?
- What makes young people working as farm workers more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change?
- In what ways does our current agricultural system put roadblocks in the way of migrant farm workers meeting their responsibilities as parents?

Leader Notes

The “Stories you Should Know” are not as explicit as the other session stories regarding the impacts of climate change. You are invited to tease the nuances out.

If there are more stories than pairs then assign several stories to a pair.

Step 3: Take Action 30 minutes

Write a letter to your representative asking them to support the [Children’s Act for Responsible Employment and Farm Safety](#).¹³ Find your representative [here](#).¹⁴

Additional Resources for Session 5:

Learn more about children farm workers [on the NFWM web site](#).¹⁵

Watch [The Harvest \(La Cosecha\)](#)¹⁶

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Session 6:

Putting It All Together

90 minutes

By the end of this session students will have

- Recalled the impacts of injustice on farm workers.
- Identified the root causes of injustices toward farm workers.
- Distinguished between acts of justice and charity.
- Discussed and identified action ideas from a list of action ideas.
- Determined a personal or collective action.
- Written an action plan.

Preparation

- Have the Action Idea List available.

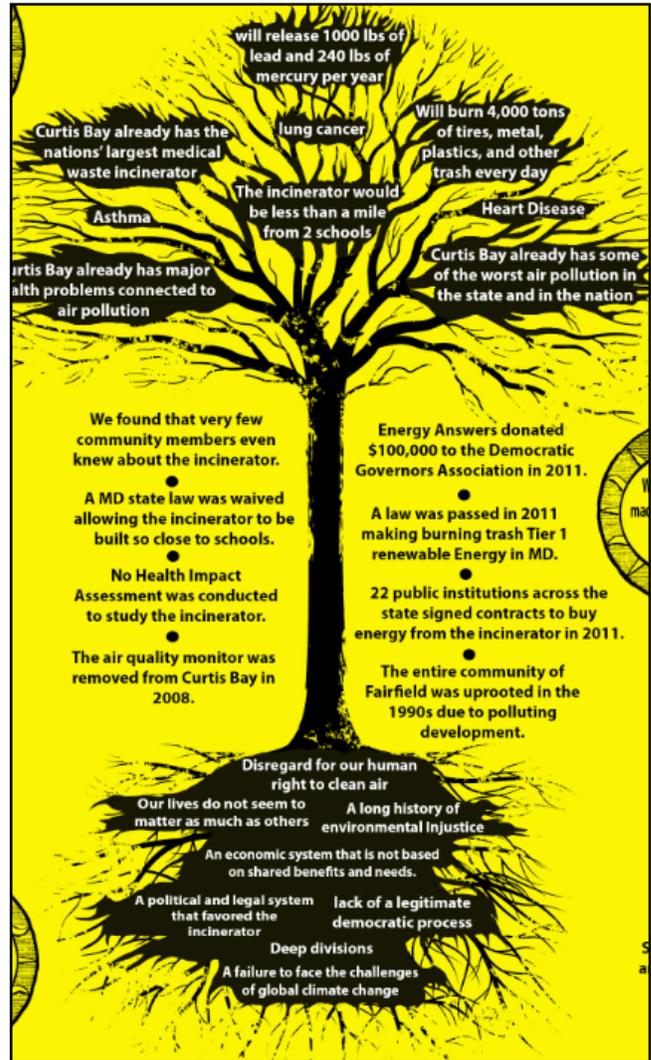
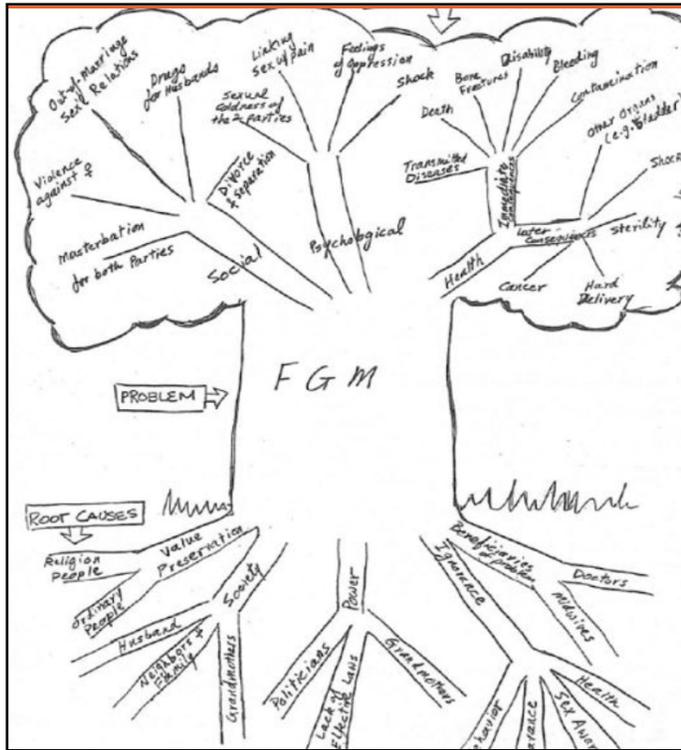
Step 1: Problem Tree (45 minutes)

To help recall all the issues that students have learned about through the curriculum, start with a broad discussion using the following questions (note the responses where everyone can see them):

- What are challenges that farm workers are facing?
- How does climate change exacerbate these issues?

Create a problem tree. Divide the class into small groups. Students will use their own knowledge from the previous sessions to help in identifying the root causes of injustice towards farm workers and how these impact farm workers. The tree will be a visual aid with each root representing an injustice (i.e., climate change, greed, racism) with the branches/leaves as the effects of these on farm workers (heat stress illness & fatalities, fear, low wages, etc.). Each small group will create their own problem tree.

See Problem Tree examples below:



Draw a large trunk of a tree. In the center of the trunk write “injustices”. Draw branches and roots.

Leaves are effects/impacts .

Think about the various stories that we have read and watched in the previous sessions. What are farm workers facing? What impacts have we seen and heard about? Encourage students to layer the effects with the effects of the effects (ex: low wages ► poverty ► hunger).

Roots are causes.

Discuss and identify the situations, factors, issues and values that have led to injustices (nourished the tree). Continue to ask "why" to get to the causes of the causes to show the multiple layers of an issue (climate change ► excessive CO2 emissions ► over consumption ► greed).

Once each group has created their tree, hang them around the room and ask students to do a gallery walk around and look at the other groups’ trees.

As a whole group. Discuss the following:

- What are some solutions to these trees?
- Which parts of the tree do these solutions address? (the roots or the leaves)
- Addressing the roots are what we call acts of justice (i.e. changing policy, organizing movements to change our consumption patterns, etc.). Acts that address the leaves are acts of charity/mercy (i.e. giving out food at a pantry, handing out water containers, etc.).
- Emphasize that we must address both the roots and the leaves of the tree. If we only address the leaves then the roots will continue to grow new limbs and leaves. If we only address the roots it will take a long time for the leaves to be addressed and farm workers will continue to suffer.

Leader Notes

Although the curriculum is focused on climate change and its impact on farm workers, this activity is more expansive. Climate change exacerbates many injustices that farm workers already face. The tree helps to create a broader picture.

Addressing climate change through personal, community and nationwide actions does impact climate change and farm workers, yet does not resolve all the issues farm workers face.

Step 2: Action Planning (45 minutes)

Review the action idea list that you created. Ask for any additional ideas. See if there is any energy around 1 to 3 ideas. Divide into groups based on the action ideas that have energy. In groups students will create steps to execute the action idea. The action plans should include:

- Description of goal to be completed
- Steps/tasks needed to be carried out to reach goal
- People who will be involved in carrying out tasks
- When these tasks will be completed
- Resources needed

See Sample Action Plan below:

Goal: Organize a screening of "Food Chains" for the school and the community.

Steps/Tasks	Who	When	Resources
Get permission from school faculty for screening	Jennifer	September 20	Background info on film and overall plan
Purchase film & screening rights	KJ	September 30	\$295
Promote screening at school & in the community	Sergio Lindsay Tamika	October 1	Posters, announcements, etc. Coalition of Immokalee Workers NFWM
Host screening & fundraiser	Kyla Marquentin Flor Sophony Sanjay	October 16	Volunteers (tickets, ushers, snack vendors, postcard writing station) Tech crew

Each group will report their action plan back to the whole class.

Additional Resources for Session 6:

Write a Credo from [Just Climate](#)¹

Watch [Freedom to Breathe Episode 4: Food, Framing and Climate Change](#)²

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