

# FINANCIAL BURDEN

## HARVEST OF JUSTICE 2022: CHILD LABOR IN AGRICULTURE



Photo Credit: David Bacon

Miguel looks like a typical middle schooler, but he already has financial responsibilities. When school isn't in session, he is out in the fields picking a variety of crops with his parents and older brother. The days are long and grueling, and his small body aches from the continuous stooped labor. But his family depends on the money he earns as a child farm worker – what his parents make isn't enough to cover all their basic needs.

The average farm worker family earns \$20,000 to \$24,999 a year, and twenty-five percent of all farm workers have a family income below the federal poverty line. The work is seasonal, and even though farm workers put in well-over eight hours – their employers aren't required to pay them overtime in most states. They feed our nation but struggle to feed their own families.

Child labor is prevalent in agriculture because families have no other option but to ask their children to work in the fields, so they can help pay necessary expenses. When parents make poverty wages, they need their children to work too.

Sometimes children aren't out in the fields working, like Miguel, instead, they are at home watching younger siblings because the family can't afford daycare. Most farm worker communities lack affordable and culturally appropriate daycare services or do not offer hours that accommodate farm worker needs. This means older children bare that responsibility.

When all the children are small, many parents must bring their children with them to the fields. They have no other option if they don't have any family or friends who can take care of them. The littlest children often play or sleep on a blanket, whereas the older children might help their parents in the fields. Farm workers are often paid by piece rate, or by how much they pick, rather than by the hour. This means even little children will pick in the fields so their parents can earn enough money.

According to a recent survey from the Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs, about 95% of the children surveyed stated they began working in the fields between the ages of five and six.

Child labor will simply continue if parents are not paid wages that cover all their needs, including housing, food, daycare, and healthcare.

### **Reflection Questions:**

- Why is child labor still so prevalent within the agricultural industry?
- How does child labor impact our society?
- Why is addressing family needs vital to helping end child labor?

### **Prayer:**

For substandard wages paid to farm workers that force them to utilize their children to work in the fields just to pay for basic family needs, we pray to the Lord. Lord, hear our prayer.

## **Act!**

**If parents are paid livable wages, their children are less likely to need to work.**

**Support the "Fairness for Farm Workers Act" which would amend the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) to include agricultural workers in its overtime provisions and remove most of the remaining exclusions of farm workers from the minimum wage.**

## **Learn more**

**Citations and links to additional resources at [bit.ly/hoj2022](https://bit.ly/hoj2022)**

## **About Us**

**National Farm Worker Ministry educates and mobilizes people of faith and conscience to support farm worker led campaigns to improve farm workers' working and living conditions.**

**To learn more, visit [nfwm.org](https://nfwm.org)**



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