

IMMIGRATION STATUS

HARVEST OF JUSTICE 2022: CHILD LABOR IN AGRICULTURE



Photo Credit: David Bacon

Regardless if farm workers are U.S. citizens, legal permanent residents, seasonal laborers on special guest worker visas, or undocumented workers, most are affected by immigration status. The immigration status of their children also varies and a lot of families are of mixed-status, meaning some are documented while others are not. According to experts, the majority of farm workers are foreign-born.

Because of the many challenges immigrant farm workers face, such as language barriers, low wages, and lack of rights and protections to address issues, many children of farm workers must work in the fields alongside their parents in order to make enough money and to translate for the adults. Additionally, the immigration status of a child, parent, or whole family, frequently makes them more susceptible to exploitation.

Many farm workers, particularly young farm workers, are reluctant to speak out against unsafe working conditions because they fear being retaliated against. Some supervisors threaten to report undocumented youth or their family members to authorities if workers don't comply with all of their demands. In multiple studies, farm worker youth reported being harassed by crew leaders, but they were too scared to share their grievances or had no one to report the abuse to. In a male-dominated work environment, farm worker women and children also face the risk of sexual harassment. The lack of oversight and penalty, due to the isolated nature of the work environment, exacerbates the number of criminal acts committed against child and adult farm workers.

Immigration status can also be a barrier to accessing the community resources farm worker families need. Farm workers are often scared to utilize programs or sometimes even leave their homes due to fear of being deported. This persistent fear of deportation for themselves or family members can weigh heavily on farm worker youth, which leads to many experiencing high rates of mental illness.

Many of these undocumented farm workers would like to change their immigration status and obtain citizenship, but a pathway to citizenship is almost impossible. With the current structure of the legal system, it's very difficult to become a legal U.S. resident even with a family member that's a U.S. citizen or permanent legal resident. Without family in the U.S., it's nearly impossible. Additionally, the immigration system in the U.S. makes it more difficult for persons of color and low economic status to immigrate here.

Reflection Questions:

- What do you think are some of the main reasons people immigrate to the U.S.?
- Do you think immigrants are treated well in your community and/or the U.S.?
- What are the biggest challenges immigrants face in the U.S.?

Prayer:

For those who come to our country to work, to fill jobs Americans will not do, for a better life or to flee violence or poverty in their own country, we pray to the Lord. Lord, hear our prayer.

Act!

The Southern Poverty Law Center estimates that 6 out of 10 of our country's farm workers are undocumented.

Contact your congressional representatives and press for immigration reform that includes a reasonable path to citizenship for farm workers and their children.

Learn more

Citations and links to additional resources at 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.

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