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**For Immediate Release**

**2015 National Farmworker Awareness Week, March 22-28, 2015**

 **Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs’ Long Sleeve Shirt Drive Helps Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers**

*Washington, DC –* 85% of the world’s fruits and vegetables are handpicked. In the United States, approximately 2 million farmworkers labor to bring food to our tables and those of the world.

During National Farmworker Awareness Week, March 22-28, the Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs’ (AFOP) Health & Safety Programs is sponsoring the Second Annual National Long Sleeve Shirt Drive. The goal is to collect over 1,000 long sleeve shirts to help farmworkers protect themselves from harmful chemicals and heat stress. (During the 2014 National Farmworker Awareness Week, 6,044 new and gently used shirts were donated.) This year, 21 states, including Puerto Rico and Washington, D.C. are participating in this campaign

“As simple as it sounds, a long sleeve shirt can protect a farmworker’s skin from pesticide residues, and help prevent sickness due to heat exposure” states Melanie Forti, Director, Health & Safety Programs, AFOP.

Forti also states, “Farmworkers are exposed more than anyone else to the approximately 1 billion pounds of pesticides annually applied to U.S. farms, forests, lawns and golf courses. Each year, the Environmental Protection Agency estimates that 10,000-20,000 doctor diagnosed pesticide poisonings occur among U.S. agricultural workers. Pesticide applicators, farmers, farm workers, and communities near farms are often most at risk. Over 90% of all pesticide exposures are through the skin and may result in increased rates of Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s, various cancers and birth defects, among others.”

“To help protect farmworker health, long sleeve shirts will be distributed to workers at Pesticide Safety and Heat Stress Prevention trainings conducted by AFOP’s Health & Safety trainers throughout the coming year” says Daniel Sheehan, Executive Director of AFOP.

**According to the North Carolina Farmworkers Project-**

**• High rates of illness: Farmworkers face higher incidences than other wage-earners of heat stress, dermatitis, urinary tract infections, parasitic infections, pesticide-related illneses and tuberculosis. Eight out of ten North Carolina farmworkers surveyed had skin disease.**

**• Limited access to care: Barriers to receiving health care include lack of transportation, limited hours of clinic operation, cost of health care, limited interpreter services, and frequent relocation in order to seek farm work.**

**• Hard work, low pay: At 40¢ per bucket (5/8 bushel), a farmworker must pick and haul two tons of sweet potatoes to earn $50.**

**• Few wage protections: Most farmworkers are exempt from minimum wage laws, and all are exempt from overtime provisions, despite long work days during peak harvest.**

**• Few benefits: Despite pervasive poverty, less than one percent of farmworkers collect general assistance welfare nationwide. Only ten percent of farmworkers report having health insurance through an employer health plan. Fewer than four out of ten workers interviewed said that they would receive unemployment benefits if out of work.**

**• Hunger: Nearly five out of ten North Carolina farmworkers cannot afford enough food for themselves and their families.**

**• Poor housing: Research suggests that the health of farmworker families is at risk due to substandard housing. State regulations require only one wash tub for every 30 workers, one shower for every 10 workers, one toilet for every 15 workers, and do not require telephone access in case of emergency.**

**• Overcrowding: Seven out of ten farmworkers on the East Coast live in crowded conditions.**

**• Pesticide exposure: Up to 44% of farmworker families live in housing directly adjacent to agricultural fields, increasing likelihood of pesticide exposure. A 2006 study in Eastern North Carolina showed that most farmworker children are routinely exposed to pesticides.**

**• Limited Workers’ Compensation: In North Carolina, very few farmworkers are covered by workers’ compensation. Only farmers employing ten or more year-round workers or any H2A worker are required to carry workers’ compensation insurance.**

There is always a need and plenty of ways to get involved. To find out more about farm workers and some of the health issues they face while working in the fields, or to find a long sleeve donation location, please visit http://afop.org/health-safety/nfaw/.

“Individuals coming together and helping one another through small acts of kindness creates a win-win community for everyone” states Robert Crumley, Director of Communications for AFOP.

**The Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs is a non-profit, national federation of 52 non-profit and public agencies that provide training and employment services to migrant and seasonal farm workers. Our mission is to improve the quality of life for all farmworkers and their families through advocacy, education, and training. For additional comment or an interview regarding pesticides or heat stress, please contact Melanie Forti, Director of Health & Safety Programs at 202.828-6006 ext. 107 or forti@afop.org . Alternately, you can reach Robert Crumley, Director of Communications at 202-828-6006 ext 140.**

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