

Protecting the Hard Working Hands

By Melanie Forti, Director of Health & Safety Programs, AFOP

In United States, farmworkers are one of the most forgotten and unacknowledged workers. The general public has little knowledge of all the challenges agriculture workers face on a daily basis, from very limited access to health care, poor salaries, extreme exposure to pesticides and heat related illnesses, to the lack of representation in society due to language and cultural differences, as well as, the fear of interacting with the law enforcers and government because of immigration status. Yet we forget that they are the responsible ones for planting and harvesting most of the food eaten both nationally and overseas.

Farmworkers are the backbone of the agricultural sector in the US economy by generating billions of dollars in revenue; but at what cost? In exchange for a nation being well fed, farmworkers offer their life, health, food, dignity, housing, clothing, fair pay, and much more. Cesar Chavez said: "It is ironic that those who till the soil, cultivate and harvest the fruits, vegetables, and other foods that fill your tables with abundance have nothing left for themselves."

Agriculture is consistently ranked among the top three most hazardous jobs in the United States due to vigorous physical labor, pesticide exposure and dangerous equipment. Farmworkers are at great risk of respiratory and dermatological illnesses; dehydration, heat stroke and heat illness; as well as chronic muscular/skeletal pain. Farm work is not a low-skill occupation. Farmworkers must perform a variety of tasks with speed and precision. They often work up to 12 hours a day, six days a week. Having programs that offer them tools to better protect themselves is vital.

AFOP's Health & Safety Programs strive to empower farmworkers to protect themselves against pesticides and heat stress through health and safety education. We provide farmworkers interactive, low literacy and multi-language trainings that will be put into practice in their daily routines.

As we continue celebrating the National Farmworker Awareness Week, AFOP's Health & Safety Programs team, has joined the national effort by having a long sleeve shirt drive in over 65 locations in 12 states including Puerto Rico. Our goal is to collect at least 1,000 long sleeve shirts by the end of the week. To find where the drop-off locations are, please [click here](#).

Once this week is over, we shouldn't forget the hard working hands that put food on our tables. To learn more about farmworker health & safety issues [click here](#).