

## **Food and Society**

### **IV. Farmworker Wellbeing**

#### ***Summary***

This initiative aims to coordinate research and outreach to improve the lives and working conditions for agricultural workers and their families. We are particularly aware that the “social justice” part of sustainability is often given less attention or neglected altogether; one manifestation of that is that proportionately fewer resources are directed toward the wellbeing of farmworkers. This initiative would provide resources to examine and improve working and living conditions, employment opportunities/ creating viable long-term career paths, training and job development, and access to nutritious, culturally appropriate food through local markets, gardens and government food programs.

#### ***Problem statement/ Baseline***

- More than 85% of all labor that produces California crops and livestock is performed by hired workers.<sup>i</sup>
- Income for farmworker families is below poverty. Average total farmworker family income ranged from \$15,000 - \$17,499 and 2009 Poverty Guidelines for a family of 4 is \$22,050.<sup>ii</sup>
- Job security and benefits for agricultural workers are inadequate.<sup>iii</sup>
- Illness and injury rates for agricultural workers are higher than the rate of injury and illness across all occupations. Pesticide exposure is a primary concern.<sup>iv, v</sup>
- Farmworker health and diets are inferior to that of the general Hispanic population in the U.S. Approximately 75% of agricultural workers have unhealthful weights; 1/3 are obese and a higher percentage suffer from iron deficiency anemia compared to the U.S. population.<sup>vi</sup>
- Farmworkers neighborhoods often do not have adequate access to healthful food.<sup>vii</sup>

#### ***Structural issues/ Broad drivers shaping change***

- Immigration reform is unlikely in the next 5 years.
- Lack of rural development in Mexico forces a stream of economic refugees to enter the U.S. looking for work to feed their families.
- Enforcement of current policies meant to improve conditions for farmworkers is inadequate.

#### ***Strategic opportunity***

- Along with the increased interest in sustainable, local food, consumers and institutional buyers are expressing a growing interest in social justice for agricultural and food system workers and want these issues to become part of the criteria for procurement.<sup>viii</sup>

- Large grower/rancher groups, certification organizations and NGOs are looking into how to include “social certification” into sustainable certification programs (Food Alliance, ANSI standards, Stewardship Index for Specialty Crops).
- Innovative projects/businesses throughout the state are targeting farmworkers to help improve their economic self-sufficiency, self-development and access to quality food. There is great opportunity to multiply these efforts. (CIRS, ALBA, Farmlink, Healthy Corner Store Network, Center for Race, Poverty and Environment, Swanton Berry Farm)

***Desired outcomes***

- Improved economic well-being for agricultural workers through new employment arrangements (year-round labor, training programs to teach business, management, marketing skills for becoming small scale farmers, etc.)
- Improved working conditions for farmworkers, particularly less exposure to agricultural chemicals through changes in farm production practices.
- Improved access to nutritious, culturally appropriate foods through local markets, home and community gardens

***Key Partners***

- Unions
- Legislators, Local government
- Farmers
- Local health organizations, networks
- Legal services (CRLA)
- NGOs (CIRS, PAN, Center for Race Poverty and Environment)
- Farm labor contractors
- Foundations
- UC and UCCE researchers

***Activities*****TOPICS:**

- Improve access to healthful, nutritious, culturally appropriate food for farmworker families through:
  - Flea markets, bodegas/ corner stores, luncheros
  - Community and home gardens
- Improve working conditions through:
  - Transitions to more sustainable farming practices (create innovative farmers/farmworker teams to do outreach, training of other regional farmers about adoption of sustainable farming practices)
  - Increased monitoring, research, outreach/education on the impacts of pesticide drift, water contamination in communities where farmworker families live
  - Research on impact of more environmentally friendly practices on farmworker health and well being.

- Improve economic prospects through:
  - Training and job development programs to increase skills, including business training and career opportunities
  - Promotion of “green jobs”
- Convene diverse stakeholder groups to discuss critical issues and options for improving farmworker well-being.

### ***Process***

- SAREP competitive grants to UCCE, researchers, communities, farmers
- Collaborative research/outreach projects (extramural funding) with UC, other universities, colleges, JCs, NGOs
- Expand SAREP/ASI staffing to coordinate activities more effectively (at least 1 additional FTE-extramural. Could coordinate with other FAS initiatives.)
- Farmworker/family scholarship to study some aspect of sustainable food systems at UCD. [May fit with Education/ Leadership theme].

### ***Resources needed for 5 years***

Total need: \$1.75 million

- Competitive grants @ \$200K/yr for 5 years = \$1 M
  - Research grants
  - Education grants
  - Grants specifically for grad students
- Collaborative research (extramural) @ \$100K/yr for 5 years = \$500K
- Farmworker scholarship @ \$50K for 5 years = \$250K
- *Additional SAREP/ASI staffing (using extramural funds) dedicated to FAS @ \$60K for 5 years = \$300K [part of all initiatives]*

Current extramural grants: \$0

Additional need: \$1.75 million

---

<sup>i</sup> Villarejo, D., D. Lighthall, D. Williams, A. Souter, R. Mines, B. Bade, S. Samuels, and S. McCurdy. 2000. Suffering in silence: A report on the health of California’s agricultural workers: California Institute for Rural Studies, sponsored by the California Endowment.

<sup>ii</sup> United States Department of Labor. 2005. Findings from the National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS) 2001-2002. U.S. Department of Labor, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Policy, Office of Programmatic Policy, Research Report No. 9. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor. <http://www.doleta.gov/agworker/naws.cfm>.

<sup>iii</sup> Shreck, A., C. Getz, G. Feenstra. 2006. Social sustainability, farm labor, and organic agriculture: Findings from an exploratory analysis. *Agriculture and Human Values* 23, no 4: 439-449.

<sup>iv</sup> Reeves, M., T Murphy, and T. Calvo Morales. 2003. *Farmworker Women and Pesticides in California's Central Valley*. San Francisco, CA: Pesticide Action Network North America.

<sup>v</sup> United States Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2009. Occupational employment statistics: May 2007. *National occupational employment and wage estimates*. Washington, DC: U.S. BLS.  
[http://www.bls.gov/oes/2007/may/oes\\_nat.htm#b00-0000](http://www.bls.gov/oes/2007/may/oes_nat.htm#b00-0000).

<sup>vi</sup> Villarejo, D., D. Lighthall, D. Williams, A. Souter, R. Mines, B. Bade, S. Samuels, and S. McCurdy. 2000. *Suffering in silence: A report on the health of California's agricultural workers*: California Institute for Rural Studies, sponsored by the California Endowment.

<sup>vii</sup> Some families pay \$20-\$25 (RT) for rides to larger supermarkets to buy food. Personal communication with Ron Strohlic, CIRS, October 12, 2009.

<sup>viii</sup> Brown, Martha. 2009. Study examines food systems priorities, perspectives of college students. *The Cultivar*: Spring/Summer 2009, pp. 5-6.