



UNITED FARM WORKERS

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March 30, 2020

Dear agricultural employer or organization:

On March 17, the United Farm Workers sent an “**open letter**” to agricultural employers and organizations calling for meaningful steps to protect farm workers’ health and safety from coronavirus covid-19. We called upon you to work with the UFW because we must all do more during this period of genuine crisis to safeguard farm workers, our communities and the domestic food supply.

First, the UFW directly appealed to each union contract employer, and their responses are encouraging: Changing picking practices and styles even if productivity is reduced, implementing best workplace practices and training workers, including special crew meetings. Most union workers can, if needed, draw upon health care, paid sick leave and vacations, and personal days off. Some unionized companies are offering to pay workers if they become ill or offering to cover health care for older workers if they are laid off.

Yet responses from these unionized employers only highlight the urgent need for further, more widespread efforts. Admittedly unscientific recent polls of a large number of farm workers on popular UFW social media platforms showed 90 percent had not been advised by their employers about guidelines or best practices—or seen them implemented at work.

Gestures such as issuing letters or post cards affirming farm workers are essential employees do not substitute for real steps to stem the virus. Many growers point to guidance and best practices flowing from trade associations as evidence of industry action. But these same organizations do little if anything to ensure 100 percent compliance by their affiliated members. Given the peril of the pandemic and the emergency in which we find ourselves plus the urgent need for an uninterrupted food supply, the essential women and men working in agriculture need and deserve nothing less than immediate 100 percent compliance, such as:

- Extending sick leave to 40 hours or more;
- Eliminating 90-day wait periods for new workers to be eligible for sick pay;
- Eliminating required doctors’ notes when workers claim sick days;
- Implementing mandatory, formal workplace plans to enforce social distancing, protect workers and minimize infections;
- Cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces multiple times daily;
- Arranging for easy access to medical services plus screening, testing and treatment for the great majority of non-union farm workers who have no health care;
- Providing for daycare and flexibility since schools are closed;
- Working with the UFW to cover farm workers under federal and state relief or stimulus benefits since at least half of U.S. farm workers are undocumented.

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The agricultural industry just received \$9.5 billion in grants and \$14 billion in loan assistance in the relief bill passed by Congress. As you know, at least half of farm workers will not receive benefits such as extended unemployment insurance or taxpayer checks under that measure because they are undocumented, according to federal data.

To express appreciation for their essential services, some employers are providing what amounts to hazard pay for employees who must labor to keep us healthy, safe and fed. Hundreds of thousands of retail food workers are getting an extra \$2 to \$3 an hour. Some unionized growers are doing the same, providing pay raises or bonuses amounting to up to \$2 an hour or more.

Don't you think that farm workers—who are also designated as essential employees and are required to put themselves at risk by going to work—should receive the same hazard pay as their counterparts who are health care and retail food workers and first responders?

Thank you for your consideration. We are available to discuss these issues and work with you in implementing the vital safety and humanitarian actions outlined in this letter.

Sincerely yours,



Teresa Romero,
UFW President



Armando Elenes,
UFW Secretary-Treasurer