

 DATA FOR *PROGRESS*

Best Practices To Support Farmworkers During Coronavirus

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INTRODUCTION:

As the coronavirus has spread throughout Florida, not all communities in the Sunshine State have been impacted equally. For instance, in the city of Immokalee, 25,000 farmworkers and their family members have faced disproportionate harms. 72.1% of the population in Immokalee is Hispanic or Latinx, an ethnic group that is almost 3 times more likely to be hospitalized than Whites from coronavirus. Governor Ron DeSantis (R), called the contagion in agricultural communities Florida’s “No. 1 outbreak.” Farmworkers like those in Florida and the millions across the country are uniquely vulnerable to coronavirus due to crowded living and transportation conditions, poverty, lack of hospital care, lack of testing and other public-health resources, and difficulty socially distancing in the fields.

This exposure is compounded by the fact that farmworkers are essential workers who have continued working throughout the pandemic to harvest and grow food for all of us to eat. Despite the critical role that farmworkers play in our economy, the efforts from state, local and federal officials to provide relief to farmworker communities have been inconsistent and, in many cases, woefully inadequate. In light of this, local organizations and coalitions have risen to the challenge of providing aid and support to farmworker communities. Since the pandemic began, community-based organizations across Florida have been on the frontlines of working for better protections for farmworker communities to get them through this crisis.

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We worked with some of these groups to compile their learnings into a list of best practices, in the hopes it will help inform and bolster similar relief efforts across the country. We can expect the pandemic to be a part of our lives for the foreseeable future; and as seasons change and farmworkers migrate to different parts of the country—including the return of thousands of migrant farmworkers to Immokalee in the early fall, at the same time that thousands of farmworker children will be returning to school—the need for targeted, informed relief is more critical than ever.

URGENT MEASURES TO PROTECT FARMWORKERS AND THEIR FAMILIES

Since the start of the pandemic, farmworkers and other essential workers have not been provided access to very basic protective measures, such as testing and self-isolation housing, which are key to slowing the spread. Ensuring provision of the following measures will immediately and sharply reduce the spread of coronavirus in farmworker communities.



Best practices for county and state officials:



TESTING

Provide free and accessible rapid-turnaround testing for all farmworkers, symptomatic and asymptomatic alike, including H2A and migrant farmworkers.

See San Francisco [program](#) for Latinx workers who fear getting tested.



PUBLIC-HEALTH EDUCATION

Ensure that farmworkers receive critical health, emergency, and safety information directly from sources that they trust, and in language and formats most likely to be effective, including through adequately funded partnerships with community-based organizations.



CONTACT TRACING

Conduct aggressive contact tracing—linked to the provision of social resources to effectively self-isolate or quarantine—that engages trusted community organizations in adapting protocols to the local, social, and cultural context.

Massachusetts has a model [Community Tracing Collaborative](#) that could be implemented in each state to reduce cases.



ACCESSIBLE, SAFE ISOLATION OPTIONS

Provide local, safe, comfortable isolation options for farmworker communities, actively promote the availability and use of those resources to the community, and ensure the options incorporate regular health checks and basic necessities, including food.

See California [Housing for Agricultural Workers](#) new plan.



PROVISION OF MOBILE HEALTHCARE SERVICES

Provide local healthcare options through local clinics, medical schools, or hospitals to conduct proactive medical checkups, interim symptom checks for quarantined coronavirus-positive patients, and timely referral for those with worsening symptoms.



SOCIAL SUPPORT

Work with community partners to ensure that farmworkers—regardless of immigration or employment status—receive the supplemental income they need to survive. This should be done by:

- ▶ Setting up lost-wage funds that cover full replacement of wages for both farmworkers and for employers who pay lost wages.
The California system can be looked to for applicable lessons
- ▶ Setting up a fund to cover the basic costs (rent, utilities, food) of farmworkers unable to work while quarantining.

Best practices for employers:

Employers should strictly enforce any state or local mandates to protect their employees. Furthermore, employers are strongly recommended to join a worker-driven social responsibility program (WSR), such as the Fair Food Program or the Milk With Dignity Program. These programs help empower workers to monitor and protect their own rights to a safe and healthy work environment through mechanisms including farmworker education, comprehensive auditing, and an effective complaint-resolution mechanism that functions free of retaliation. If not already mandated through legal requirements or a WSR program, employers should implement the following measures:



PLAN

Create a coronavirus response plan that includes requirements to report symptoms, train supervisors on the plan, and identify a response plan coordinator.

Regularly assess the workplace for compliance with the above plan.



SICK LEAVE

Waive any waiting period for farmworkers and other workers to be eligible for sick pay.

Provide sick pay even if the employer's size exempts them from federal law regarding paid sick leave.

Eliminate the practice of requiring doctors' notes when farmworkers take sick time.



EDUCATE

Educate farmworkers in best practices (PPE, hygiene, social distancing, etc.), using farmworkers' preferred language as well as popular education materials and approaches.

The CIELO group has an [example](#) of working with Indigenous language speakers.

Provide farmworkers with accurate and current information on coronavirus symptoms and the severity of the pandemic, using language they understand, that is culturally appropriate, and at an appropriate literacy level.

Inform farmworkers of the grower's sick-leave and return-to-work policies that protect both their health and ongoing employment.

Post educational materials at central locations at work and in farmworker housing.



PROTECT

Procure and distribute personal protective equipment free of charge, requiring that masks be worn on buses and during high-contact encounters at work, including trainings, clock-ins, and paycheck distributions.

Train farmworkers in proper use of PPE

Ensure that farmworkers are not retaliated against for complaining of unsafe conditions at work.

This [CA Alliance](#) of stakeholders highlights an example of collaboration to protect farmworkers.



DISTANCE

Ensure that trainings, rest and meal breaks, and other group gatherings allow for social distancing, and schedule such meetings staggered and by crew.

Assign bathrooms by crew

Assign crews and shifts by housing assignment

Upgrade farmworker housing to meet all relevant standards—including emergency public-health standards—and minimize the use of bunk beds and the number of farmworkers per unit.

Reduce the numbers of farmworkers transported

on each bus to allow for social distancing, and keep bus windows open at all times (weather permitting).



SANITIZE

Increase sanitation of buses and farmworkers' housing and eating areas.

Create handwashing stations (with disposable towels) at high-contact locations, such as at rest and meal breaks areas and at bus boarding and deboarding zones. If a handwashing station is not possible, provide hand sanitizer for farmworkers at the aforementioned high-contact locations.



SCREEN, TEST, QUARANTINE

Screen farmworkers for temperatures and symptoms prior to them getting on buses or starting work each day.

Keep healthy farmworkers isolated from sick farmworkers. When farmworkers have temperatures above 100.4, do not have them board the bus or report to work; instead, immediately test and quarantine until they are fever-free with reduced symptoms for three days—and no sooner than ten days since their first appearance of symptoms.

Announce all positive tests to other farmworkers on the same crew, ask farmworkers daily as to whether anyone in their household is ill with coronavirus-like symptoms or has tested positive for coronavirus, and facilitate testing for any exposed farmworkers, symptomatic and asymptomatic alike, paying farmworkers for the time required for that testing.

Designate separate housing for coronavirus-positive, symptomatic, or exposed farmworkers.

Regularly monitor workers who have been exposed but are asymptomatic, and quarantine coronavirus-positive workers or workers with symptoms waiting for test results where they can receive medical attention.

Provision farmworkers with food, access to medical care, and recommended over-the-counter medications and other necessities throughout the quarantine period.

STRUCTURAL CHANGE TO ENSURE LONG-TERM HEALTH AND SAFETY OF FARMWORKERS

The recommendations laid out above offer a path forward for supporting farmworker communities during the coronavirus emergency. It is not, however, an exhaustive list of every change that must be made in order to fully support farmworkers communities in the long term. The pandemic has only exacerbated existing vulnerabilities, which must ultimately be addressed through systemic, nationwide change. We must move quickly and urgently to implement the lifesaving best practices laid out above while also remaining steadfast in our fight for structural changes. We must start today to prepare for the next crisis in order to ensure the safety and well-being of the people harvesting our food—and to ensure the integrity of the nation’s food system itself.

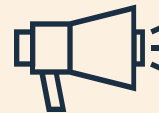
EXAMPLES OF STRUCTURAL CHANGES TO ADDRESS FARMWORKER VULNERABILITY:



Strengthening the H2A guest-worker program and OSHA regulations to provide higher pay and paid sick leave for all essential workers.



Making long-needed improvements to farmworker housing regulations and existing housing stock.



Expanding the implementation of systems that protect and amplify farmworkers’ voices in the workplace, including the Worker-driven Social Responsibility model.

ADDITIONAL READING AND RESOURCES:

[New York Times: What Happens if America's 2.5 Million Farmworkers Get Sick?](#)

[Naples Daily News: Opinion – 'Partners In Health' stands in partnership with Immokalee and Collier County](#)

[New York Times: On Native American Land, Contact Tracing Is Saving Lives](#)

[Doctors Without Borders: Florida – MSF and local health partners bring COVID-19 testing and mobile health clinics to migrant farmworkers](#)

[The Rockefeller Foundation: National COVID-19 Testing Action Plan](#)

[Clinica La Raza: Coronavirus Response](#)