

FAIR FOOD: FIELD TO TABLE

The issues of factory farming in the US meat industry have become increasingly controversial over the past few years. However, with the focus on meat, people often forget that it is also important to examine the source of the produce we eat. Farmworkers around the country suffer daily from unsafe, unhealthy, and unjust working conditions. These people—many of them immigrants—are overlooked by current legislation and often overlooked by consumers.

Fair Food intends to raise awareness about the slave-like labor situations that many workers face in the U.S. Using the voices of laborers, growers, and advocates, the film drives consumers to question the food production they are supporting.

This brief film is made up of three parts, which are described below along with facts to help explicate what it means to be a farmworker in the U.S.



PART 1: THE FARMWORKERS

The documentary begins with a look into the current harsh reality of farmworker conditions in the U.S.

- Farmworkers are spread throughout the country, but the following states have the largest populations of laborers: CA, TX, WA, FL, OR, and NC.
- There are between 2 and 3 million farmworkers in the U.S. making an average of \$11,000 per year, well below the poverty line. Most farmworkers are not eligible for social services or government benefits.
- Though the official minimum age for farm laborers is 12, children of all ages can be found in the fields.
- Farmworkers suffer from high rates of occupational hazards including pesticide exposure, which estimates suggest poisons 300,000 farmworkers a year.
- 85 percent of produce grown in the U.S. is harvested by hand.

PART 2: THE GROWERS

Next, viewers meet farmers around the country who are providing good labor conditions on their farms—and making a better living themselves by doing so.

- Because they are not legally required to do so, many growers do not provide their injured laborers with workers compensation. They also rarely allow sick leave or pay overtime wages.
- The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 originally excluded all farmworkers, and was amended in 1978 to mandate minimum wage only for farms with more than 11 workers. This same legislation requires that employers provide workers access to toilets and drinking water.
- In NC, state regulations require growers to provide only one shower for every 10 workers and one toilet for every 15 workers. Mattresses and emergency access to a telephone are not required.

PART 3: THE ADVOCATES

Finally, viewers hear from advocates and businesses on the forefront of this growing movement for fair food.

- Since the '60s, **United Farm Workers** has successfully won union contracts in several states. www.ufw.org
- In OH and NC, the **Farm Labor Organizing Committee** facilitates discussion about labor contracts between workers, growers, and food processors. www.floc.com
- Since the '70s, **Student Action with Farmworkers** has joined students and farmworkers in the Carolinas. The students raise awareness about the situation of farmworkers and connect them with legal, medical, and educational support. www.saf-unite.org

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Which images did you find the most powerful? The most surprising?
- What are some of the root causes of poor agricultural working conditions?
- When you buy food do you know how the workers who grew it were treated? Do you find it easy to get information about your food?
- What makes it possible for the growers in the film to produce fair food that is affordable to consumers?
- We have heard stories of sweatshop conditions for years, yet they still exist because consumers continue to support them. What role does social equity play in the minds of consumers?
- How does social justice fit into the idea of sustainability?
- How can we support farmers who already practice good labor conditions?
- Immigration policy is one of the major barriers to better farm labor conditions. How can we work towards an immigration system that meets the needs of workers, their families, and employers? What might this system look like?
- What do you see as the biggest barriers to a fair food system?
- What do you see as the most promising opportunities for improvement?
- Where do you have power to make change? What could you do from where you are to get involved and support fair food?



LEARN MORE

MOVIES

- *Migrant Farm Workers Speak Out*
- *Si Se Puede*
- *The Invisible Mexicans of Deer Canyon*

ORGANIZATIONS

- Agricultural Justice Project: www.agriculturaljusticeproject.org
- Lideres Campesinas: www.liderescampesinas.org
- National Center for Farmworker Health: www.ncfh.org
- California Institute for Rural Studies: www.cirsinc.org

BOOKS

- *Agrarian Dreams: The Paradox of Organic Farming in California* by Julie Guthman
- *The Farmworkers' Journey* by Ann Aurelia López
- *Like Machines in the Fields: Workers Without Rights in American Agriculture*



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