



An urgent message from our farmworker family to yours
RE: HARVESTING IN A GLOBAL PANDEMIC

Dear Mrs. Jennifer Newsom and Governor Gavin Newsom and the State of California,

On behalf of agricultural workers and families in California, we are presenting to you this urgent message in a time of crisis that is affecting us all. We take this opportunity to first thank you for your rapid response via the series of executive orders you have issued in the past weeks. With regard to farmworkers, however, we are learning from our peers that there is little understanding as to the measures they should take with their own families.

The spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19) has reminded us that we are interrelated. Recent interviews and conversations conducted by Líderes Campesinas, (a network of women farmworkers leaders) reveal that although “essential” to the U.S. economy, farmworkers remain one of the most vulnerable links in our nation’s food supply chain, labor force, and citizenry. Our concerns for farm workers extend to all tending fields, canneries, packing houses, nurseries, as well as those handling poultry and livestock, and all pertaining to the agricultural industry. We represent an essential sector of the many who sustain our economy.

We request that State officials immediately prioritize and address the concerns below that farmworker women, men and families across California have expressed.

(You can hear them here.) [Link: video currently not activated].

We also ask the proposed solutions be considered, or alternatives offered that assure safety. We believe that in doing so, the basic human rights of these families would be met, while also safeguarding the public at large.

CONCERN 1: Inadequate health education on COVID-19. Currently, there is no education directly on the fields by medical/health professionals on COVID-19. Supervisors or foremen are presenting this information at their discretion. Witnesses have claimed little time spent on the topic, sometimes minimizing disease risks and underestimating the global pandemic. Farmworkers have also reported continued work in groups of 20 and sometimes 60 people side-by-side, exceeding social-distancing standards. Similarly, there is concern for car-pooling continuing as usual, which also surpasses social-distancing standards.

Recommendation 1: Health professionals conduct COVID-19 orientations on the fields, Farmworkers, would like to receive the care and attention of qualified personnel through COVID-19 briefings on-site, opening these to forepersons, supervisors, and labor contractors as well. We propose State and county health departments mandate farms/growers and welcome them to also do testing, infrared thermometer body temperature checks, provide masks and gloves and monitor health standards as well as COVID-19 sanitation guidelines, e.g. social distancing, access to bathrooms with soap, water, and toilet paper. We understand the State is quickly calling all past and retired medical providers to support, perhaps offering a larger pool for this solution.

CONCERN 2: Inaccessibility to Healthcare, Farm workers already experience less access to healthcare due to a lack of funds and their immigration status. Amidst well-intentioned actions to stop COVID-19 from spreading, these regular barriers grow making it far more unlikely for farm workers to visit a doctor in response to cold and flu symptoms or other health conditions, including mental health and overall stress, that add to weakened immune systems. We have spoken with individuals with serious flu symptoms unable to follow-up with appropriate care and affordable medications. In at least one case, a worker was told by his doctor that if his symptoms continued he would be given an appointment for the ER on a date three weeks in the future. Farmworkers have also shared their worries of exposing their families to potential illness when going to work and leaving their children in other households, increasing their fear for exposure.

Recommendation 2: Healthcare for All, In on-going interviews with farm workers conducted by *Lideres Campesinas*, they have expressed a need and desire for such attention and care. We demand health care for all in this state of emergency and that there be no rejection of medications due to lack of funds nor have care services limited to Covid19 related illness. We also feel secure that field visits will allow healthcare professionals to efficiently guide them on what steps they should take in case they and their family members are sick. Mobile clinics should be fully equipped to visit rural areas, farm labor camps and other housing developments dedicated to agricultural workers.

CONCERN 3: Essential Workers Without Essential Human Rights, In light of the agricultural sector being deemed part of an “essential infrastructure,” workers are being handed letters certifying their status as “Essential.” If stopped by the police, these letters would help communicate their status as essential workers and thus excluded from the stay-at-home order. In some cases, they are also telling workers to carry their work identification cards. So, on top of the fear of contracting and spreading the Coronavirus to their family, they now also fear the loss of work, which may result in inability to pay bills, child-care or other basic needs. Many farmworkers now second guess traveling to

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and from work due to their immigration status, should they be stopped, arrested and deported.

Recommendation 3: Alert law enforcement to be sensitive and cautious, Farmworkers request that they be given the same basic human rights and be treated equal to other “Essential” workers, especially in this time of crisis and a global pandemic. *Lideres Campesinas* would request that Attorney General Becerra urge law enforcement agencies to guard against pretext stops as well as other targeting of this class of workers. We would also request that the attorney general endorse vehicle decals for farmworkers affirming that they are essential workers and should not be unnecessarily impeded from travel to and from work; e.g. “I Am Essential.” *Lideres Campesinas* has designed such a sticker to distribute to workers.

CONCERN 4: No food and basic needs in stores, Farmworkers who work six days a week and long hours have expressed being left without options to obtain food and other basic needs at their local stores. At times this requires them to drive far distances to other stores, experiencing greater travel expenses and exposure to potential sickness.

Recommendation 4: Essential Shopping Hour, We suggest an “Essential Worker” shopping-hour be set aside for ALL “Essential workers,” by advising major food chains and local grocery stores of this need, such as some stores are honoring for senior citizens and healthcare workers in some areas.

CONCERN 5: Foodbank Access, Many working farmworkers are unable to access foodbanks during open hours.

RECOMMENDATION 5: Food Banks to the Fields, There is a need for volunteers and/or the National Guard to deliver boxes of the basic needs TO WORKERS IN THE FIELDS, PACKING PLANTS, CANNERIES, DAIRY FARMS, ETC : e.g. flour, powdered milk, rice, beans, oatmeal, cereal, soups, cooking oil, eggs, vegetables, fruit, chicken, pasta, toilet paper, bottles of drinking water for those without access to potable water.

CONCERN 6: Unhoused Farmworkers, Unhoused farmworkers are increasing in numbers as the COVID-19 pandemic continues, despite their status as “essential” workers. We must garner all resources necessary to strengthen the weakest link in our food-supply chain.

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RECOMMENDATION 6: Shelter for ALL, Housing should be made available to unhoused farmworkers immediately and without burdensome conditions or requirements. This could be hotel rooms, camps, tents, and other temporary shelters with bathrooms, showers and hand washing stations at no cost. Rent stipends for housing could be provided by employers and/or appropriate governmental agencies for all farmworker families.

CONCERN 7: Ineligible for Unemployment/Stimulus, many farmworkers as we know are below poverty levels and are undocumented; and this was true even prior to the present crisis. In our conversations and interviews, we have observed women and older adults, those perceived to not produce as fast, are being laid off disproportionately, posing an additional burden on households. Also those who depend on two incomes are having to keep one parent home to care for their children.

RECOMMENDATION 7: Compensate all Workers, all workers pay into taxes and all, with or without a ITIN number should receive compensation. Child care, food, shelter, and healthcare are a basic human right that should be afforded to ALL. Economic aid of \$1200 per adult and \$500 per child a month should be given to ALL. In addition, California needs to provide relief to the already visible mental, and physical distress that poverty inflicts, especially during a pandemic that is profoundly affecting the lives of farmworkers and their families. As an alternate and viable solution, we recommend an Emergency Farmworker/Agricultural Relief fund regardless of immigration status to compensate for lost wages.

CONCERN 8: Crisis Within a Crisis, Lideres Campesinas is composed of victim advocates and organizers dedicated to preventing violence against farmworker women and girls since our early beginnings. As Cal CASA's CEO Sandra Henriquez says "This global crisis does not change the reality that sexual violence continues to be an everyday crisis in our communities. For some people, stay-at-home may increase the possibility of experiencing sexual violence." Domestic Violence reports have more than doubled in different areas across the state. Domestic Violence and rape crisis centers, who depend highly on private funding are finding themselves short of resources, something they foresee will only worsen amidst the COVID-19 crisis.

RECOMMENDATION 8: We propose immediate funding be provided by the state government for the following: Fund centers in place and put to use vacant dwellings to house women and children so they can protect themselves from both the risk of exposure and abuse. Many cases are left on hold, creating an extreme danger for survivors and our victim advocates have recognized the need for remote intervention. Proper training and resources should be given to navigate and acclimate to the stay-at-home order could assist in helping women see their cases through.

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Given farmworkers' circumstances are more dire overall, Lideres Campesinas also recognizes all local, state and federal politicians and officials, our friends and allies who take a lead in their communities conducting virtual and/or telephonic town halls in Spanish and English and several Mexican Indigenous languages and urge more to do the same.

As a network of female farmworkers and their families who have allied, partnered and established relationships globally since the 80's, we are prepared to build on existing coalitions to get the work done and address these and all other related concerns.

In Partnership,

Lideres Campesinas

Lideres Campesinas



Suguet Lopez

Lideres Campesinas' Executive Director