



# CHILDREN in the FIELDS

The facts about child labor in North Carolina

## QUICK FACTS

- **Child working on farms are more likely to die from work-related accidents, and face higher injury and illness rates than adult workers.**

Each year, over 100 youth die from farm-related injuries in the U.S., and many more are injured. Children who work in fields treated with pesticides are at greater risk of developing neurological and reproductive health problems, as well as cancer.

- **Children are more vulnerable than adults to repetitive stress injury.**

Farmworker children are often bent over in the fields 8 to 12 hours a day, increasing their risk of developing musculoskeletal disorders. Since children are still developing physically, their exertion often places a greater stress on their bodies, with serious long-term consequences.

- **Farmworker children live in poverty.**

Farmworker children have limited access to health care, live in substandard housing and face food insecurity; all of which limit their ability to cope with the hazards they face and injuries they may suffer working in the fields.

- **Laboring in the fields negatively affects farmworker children's school performance.**

The fatigue, injury and illness that come with working in the fields negatively affect development and school performance. Instead of participating in sports and other enrichment activities, child farmworkers face high dropout rates and an uncertain future.

North Carolina child labor law permits children as young as 12 years old and in some cases as young as 10 to labor in the fields, while in every other industry the minimum age is 14 or above. Agriculture is one of the three most dangerous industries in the nation, and yet every year across the country close to 500,000 farmworker children and youth risk their childhood, health, and well-being in order to bring food to our tables. Children in North Carolina are no exception.

Field investigations in North Carolina have uncovered children as young as six working in the fields. Most Americans still envision farms as safe, nurturing places. Unfortunately, the safe, happy and healthy farm life that many of us imagine is just a myth for farmworker children in North Carolina.

## HEALTH AND ACCESS TO CARE

Many pesticides have a more significant effect on children than adults, because their bodies are still growing and developing. Children's exposure to pesticides in the field has been associated with an increased risk of developing cancer, nervous system disorders and infertility or sterility during their lifetimes.

The physical wear and tear from heavy lifting and bending several hundred times a day in the field affects the growth of a child's developing body, often causing muscle and joint problems that endure for the rest of the child's life.

Despite farmworker children's increased risk of injury on the job, they often lack transportation to and information about health care facilities.





## About the Farmworker Advocacy Network (FAN)

FAN is a statewide network of organizations that work to improve living and working conditions of field and poultry workers in North Carolina. Since 2003, we have been collaborating to bring workers' voices to the legislative process. In the past, we have identified and led campaigns to improve housing conditions, pesticide safety and wages. To learn more, visit: [www.ncfan.org](http://www.ncfan.org).

## THE SOLUTION

While the tradition of working on the family farm can be easily preserved through a specific exemption, our child labor laws should be updated so that children working in agriculture are subject to the same laws and protections as all other industries in our state.

### Recommendations

- **End discriminatory child labor law** by making the laws protecting young agricultural workers the same as in all other industries.
- **Increase the minimum age** at which a youth can perform hazardous work from 16 to 18 years old.

Child labor laws were written in the early 20th century, and reflect a time when farming was very different. These laws must be updated to reflect the realities and dangers of the current agricultural industry.

Growing up working on the family farm is an important tradition that should be preserved, but employing young children in hazardous work should not be a tradition any longer.

**Child labor laws should be the same for every industry.**

Let's work together to protect North Carolina children from preventable injuries and death and ensure them a safe, healthy and bright future.

## GET INVOLVED!

### Endorse the campaign!

You can endorse the campaign online by visiting [www.ncfan.org/endorse](http://www.ncfan.org/endorse) and signing on in support of the campaign as an individual, a business owner or as an organization!

### Make a video or photo postcard

Send us a video and/or photo postcard telling us why you support better conditions for farmworkers. Visit [www.harvestofdignity.org](http://www.harvestofdignity.org) to find out more!

### Host a Harvest House Party!

Email us at [harvestofdignity@gmail.com](mailto:harvestofdignity@gmail.com) to get a party packet or ask questions!

### Write an op-ed or letter to the editor.

Send an op-ed or a letter to the editor about why you support justice for farmworkers! Email us at [harvestofdignity@gmail.com](mailto:harvestofdignity@gmail.com) for talking points and tips for writing letters to the editor.

### Contact your Legislators

Ask your state legislators to support legislation that protects children in the fields and makes farm work safe and fair! Visit [www.ncleg.net](http://www.ncleg.net) to find out who represents you in NC.



**FARMWORKER ADVOCACY NETWORK**

*Reform for North Carolina's Farmworkers*

[WWW.NCFAN.ORG](http://WWW.NCFAN.ORG)