

# HARVEST of DIGNITY

**A Study Guide for the Film by Minnow Media**



By the Farmworker Advocacy Network  
and the NC Council of Churches



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## Introduction

Farmworkers feed the world. Farm and poultry work is some of the most difficult, most dangerous and most important work in our community. North Carolina is home to roughly 150,000 farmworkers and 28,000 poultry workers and their families. The vast majority of the fruits and vegetables and nearly all of the poultry we eat are picked or processed by hand.

However, the people who feed our families through their hard work are often among the worst paid and least protected workers in our state.

The Harvest of Dignity campaign, coordinated by the Farmworker Advocacy Network, is working to change the deplorable conditions that lead to a harvest of shame. North Carolinians are joining their voices in demanding safe places to live, safe places to work, and strong enforcement of existing laws so that some of the state’s most vulnerable workers will have dignity on the job. Find out more at: [www.harvestofdignity.org](http://www.harvestofdignity.org).

~ Chris Liu-Beers & Lisa Marie Talbott, 2011

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[www.ncfan.org](http://www.ncfan.org)

## How This Film Began

In November of 1960, Edward R. Murrow presented the documentary *Harvest of Shame* the day after Thanksgiving on CBS News. This landmark documentary depicted the plight of migrant farmworkers in the United States, a primarily African American workforce at that time. *Harvest of Shame* explores the conditions under which farmworkers labored, including health risks, poor wages, harsh living conditions, and few opportunities for their children.

Sadly, today’s migrant farm workforce faces many of the same conditions. Largely a Latino population of immigrants from Mexico and Central America, these workers still face poverty, food insecurity, hazardous working conditions and few protections under the law.

On the 50th anniversary of the original *Harvest of Shame* documentary, the Farmworker Advocacy Network worked with Minnow Media to produce a new documentary film, revealing the conditions farmworkers faced then and now. Because migrant farmworkers are a largely invisible population to most residents of North Carolina, it is important to educate our community about where our food comes from and to highlight the pride many farmworkers take in their work.

Through sharing the stories of the meaning of work for farmworkers and the realities of their working conditions, the Farmworker Advocacy Network and the NC Council of Churches hope to promote community dialogue and understanding, and to support our policy and advocacy work to improve conditions for farmworkers.

### A Question Before Viewing:

Food is often a central part of family interactions and community building. Think about a significant holiday or family gathering and describe the importance of food in that situation. How does food strengthen your family or community? How does the act of sharing a meal influence your relationships with others?

Through a collaborative partnership with One Economy, the entire film is available for free at [pic.tv/harvest](http://pic.tv/harvest). You can order DVD copies of the film at [www.ncfan.org](http://www.ncfan.org).



## Facts About Farmworkers

Major NC crops requiring hand labor include: tobacco, Christmas trees, sweet potatoes, cucumbers, apples, bell peppers, and other fruits and vegetables.

Nationally, farmworkers' average annual income is \$11,000; for a family it is approximately \$16,000. Farmworkers on the East Coast earn about 35% less than the national average.

Most farmworkers are exempt from minimum wage laws, and all are exempt from overtime provisions, despite long work days during peak harvest.

In a recent study, nearly 5 out of 10 North Carolina farmworkers reported that they cannot afford enough food for themselves and their families.

## Farmworkers and Health

Farmworkers endure the highest rate of toxic chemical injuries and skin disorders of any workers in the country.

Nausea, vomiting, cramping and itchy/burning eyes are known short-term effects of acute pesticide poisoning while long-term health effects of pesticide exposure include cancer, neurological disorders, miscarriage, memory loss, and depression.

Nationwide, nearly half of farmworkers report having skin rashes. Green tobacco sickness, or nicotine poisoning through the skin, is experienced at least once in a growing season by 24% of tobacco workers. In just one day, workers can absorb the amount of nicotine found in 36 cigarettes.

Of the more than 150,000 farmworkers in the state, less than 20% receive health care.

## Facts About Child Labor

NC 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 NC are no exception.

Field investigations in NC 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.

## Protections Under the Law

Nearly all of NC's migrant farmworkers live in housing that is provided by the grower or crewleader. The Agricultural Safety and Health Bureau of the North Carolina Department of Labor (NCDOL), which is headed by Commissioner Cherie Berry, is responsible for inspecting migrant housing prior to occupancy and for investigating complaints when the housing is substandard.

Federal and state audits, as well as independent research, reveal the following serious problems in NCDOL's enforcement practices:

- NCDOL is inconsistent in the way it issues penalties.
- NCDOL does not classify violations correctly, resulting in incorrect penalties.
- NCDOL routinely reduces and/or negotiates fines downwards.
- NCDOL does not focus its inspections on the worst migrant camps.



## General Discussion Questions

1. Put yourself in a farmworker's shoes. Imagine being separated from your family and working 14-hour days in harsh conditions. What would be the hardest thing about this life for you?
2. What did you see in the film that surprised you the most?
3. The film *Harvest of Shame* was a Thanksgiving special. Why do you think that film was released at Thanksgiving? How do you think the audience viewed it in light of the holiday?
4. One of Edward R. Murrow's goals in 1960 was to make farmworkers more visible. Do you think this goal was accomplished? Are farmworkers more visible today than they were 50 years ago?
5. What does "harvest of dignity" mean to you?
6. What are some of the challenges of maintaining family life for farmworkers? What are other challenges related to this work?
7. Farms are exempt from many child labor laws. Today's child labor laws allow children as young as 10 to work in the fields for 30 hours a week. Do you think this should be allowed? Why or why not?
8. In the film, Guillermina says: "After the work is over, no one remembers the people. Or the children who worked." Based on your own values, what does this film call you to do? How will you remember the people and the children who worked?

## Questions for Faith Communities

1. Put yourself in a farmworker's shoes. Imagine being separated from your family and working 14-hour days in harsh conditions. What would be the hardest thing about this life for you?
2. What did you see in the film that surprised you the most?
3. What role does food play in our faith tradition? Are there important stories, rituals and/or traditions that revolve around food?
4. If food has an important role in our faith tradition, what are the implications for how the food is produced?
5. Does our faith tradition speak directly about how workers should be treated?
6. The Bible has many passages that talk about protecting vulnerable agricultural workers (see Lev. 23:22, Deut. 24:19, Prov. 13:23, Ezek. 22:29, James 5:4). How can people of faith put these principles into practice today?
7. In the New Testament, the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) challenges us to reconsider our concept of neighbor. How does *Harvest of Dignity* challenge us to recognize more people in our community as neighbors?
8. "Treat others as you would like to be treated" is a theme that runs through many different faith traditions as a guideline for our relationships with others. In the film, we see farmworkers living and working in deplorable conditions that we would never choose for ourselves or our families. In what ways can our faith communities put the Golden Rule into action?



## Questions for Students

1. Put yourself in a farmworker's shoes. Imagine being separated from your family and working 14-hour days in harsh conditions. What would be the hardest thing about this life for you?
2. What did you see in the film that surprised you the most?
3. Imagine you are a 12 year old who is working 30 hours a week and going to school. What do you think your biggest challenges would be?
4. Choose one person from your group to represent a grower, one person to represent the North Carolina Department of Labor, and one person to represent a farmworker. Describe the conditions on a typical farm from each of these points of view.
5. Why isn't the NC Department of Labor more proactive in protecting farmworkers and their rights?
6. Why do you think it's so easy for people to ignore farmworkers?
7. Have each person read aloud a quote by or about farmworkers from page 5. What are some common themes? What responses or actions are requested or implied?
8. Dolores Huerta, a famous farmworker and labor organizer, said: "Be angry about injustice! Use your skills to make the world a better place." How can we put our education, experiences, and skills to work to do this?
9. Investigate the food supply for your school. Where does the food come from? What can you do to advocate for fair food at your school?

## Questions for "Foodies"

1. Put yourself in a farmworker's shoes. Imagine being separated from your family and working 14-hour days in harsh conditions. What would be the hardest thing about this life for you?
2. What did you see in the film that surprised you the most?
3. Why does food matter? What values do you want your food and patterns of consumption to reflect?
4. How do you determine which products to buy?
5. What books, film, blogs or other resources speak to you about food? Do they talk about living and working conditions for farmworkers?
6. Farmworkers seem to remain invisible even within food justice movements. Why do you think this is the case? How can we broaden the conversation to include all workers?
7. Do individuals have the responsibility to make purchases that are produced under fair working conditions?
8. How can consumers demand fair treatment for the laborers who pick and pack the food we eat?
9. The food system is complex. What are some of the factors that contribute to the cost of food?
10. How can our values regarding food influence other parts of our lifestyle? What kind of positive change could happen within the food system when we put our values into practice?



## Quotes by Farmworkers

Even though we are farmworkers, we are all humans.

~ North Carolina farmworker

It's ironic that those who till the soil, cultivate and harvest the fruits, vegetables and other foods that fill your tables with abundance have nothing left for themselves.

~ César Chávez

We are only shoulders here, wanted because we do the work no one else wants to do.

~ North Carolina farmworker

Be angry about injustice! Use your skills to make the world a better place.

~ Dolores Huerta

Every time we sit at a table to enjoy the fruits and grain and vegetables from our good earth, remember that they come from the work of men and women and children who have been exploited for generations.

~ César Chávez

I have planted Christmas trees, fertilized and sprayed [pesticides]. I have planted cabbage, squash and tobacco. I think the chemicals have harmed me some. But my brothers, I have brought them to the emergency room because of the tobacco, because of the chemicals they use.

~ Wilmer, North Carolina farmworker

What do we want the Church to do? We ask for its presence with us, as Christ among us. We ask the Church to sacrifice with the people for social change, for justice, and for love of brother and sister. We don't ask for words, we ask for deeds.

~ César Chávez

I believe it is better to speak up than to stay with the same conditions and do nothing – either way I might lose my job. [But] if I speak up at least I do something for my co-workers.

~ North Carolina farmworker

## Quotes about Farm Labor

The migrants have no lobby. Only an enlightened, aroused and perhaps angered public opinion can do anything about the migrants. The people you have seen have the strength to harvest your fruit and vegetables. They do not have the strength to influence legislation.

~ Edward R. Murrow

The farmworkers that we work with are some of the nicest, hardest-working people that I know. And they're probably the most under-appreciated, underpaid workers that I know as well.

~ Steve Davis, Migrant Outreach, Greene Co. Health Care

Social and geographic isolation, lower than advertised wages, less work than promised, dirty and dilapidated housing, dangerous working conditions, and even forced labor or slavery typify the experience of many guest workers... But, allowed to work only for a single employer who can send them home at will, most guest workers are too fearful of retaliation to speak out about these harsh (and frequently illegal) working conditions.

~ *No Way to Treat a Guest*, Farmworker Justice

Despite their contributions, undocumented immigrants exist in a shadow economy — subject to the whims of unscrupulous employers, unable to assert their rights and, for all practical purposes, beyond the protection of labor laws that protect the rest of us from abuse, discrimination and wage cheating in the workplace.

~ *Injustice on Our Plates*, Southern Poverty Law Center

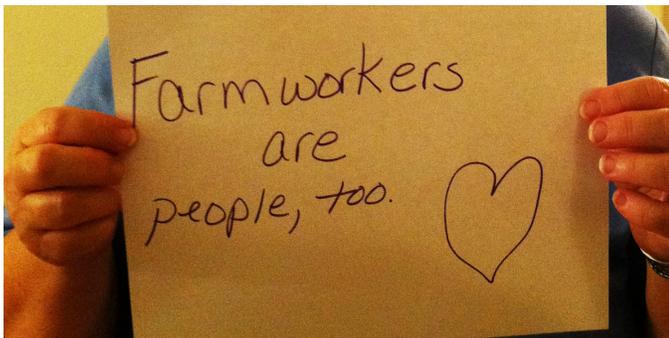
Laws that deny farmworkers protections enjoyed by other workers, combined with poor enforcement of existing laws, contribute to farmworkers' poverty and financial desperation that compels children to work and makes farmworkers even more vulnerable to exploitation.

~ *Fields of Peril*, Human Rights Watch

## Take Action

### Photo Postcards

When you snap a picture of a sign supporting farmworkers, you're helping to make a difference in their lives. As part of the Harvest of Dignity Campaign, we're asking people across North Carolina to donate 2 minutes of their time to make a photo postcard. Check out [www.ncfan.org/photos](http://www.ncfan.org/photos) to submit your photo.



### Host a House Party

Invite friends and colleagues to watch Harvest of Dignity or share a meal together to talk about farmworker issues. Check out [www.ncfan.org/host-a-house-party](http://www.ncfan.org/host-a-house-party) for more info.

### Write an Op-Ed

Help raise awareness in your community through local media. It only takes a minute. Visit [www.ncfan.org/write-to-your-newspaper](http://www.ncfan.org/write-to-your-newspaper) to get ideas, talking points, and more.

### Support Farmworker Campaigns

Many farmworker-led organizations have active campaigns and boycotts. Learn what to boycott and why from the National Farm Worker Ministry: [nfwm.org/campaigns](http://nfwm.org/campaigns)

### Buy Local

The industrial food system is bad for workers. Buy more of your food from farmers' markets and local sources.

### Join FAN on Social Media

You can get updates on the latest from the Harvest of Dignity campaign by liking us on Facebook or following us on Twitter. Get the links at [www.ncfan.org](http://www.ncfan.org).

## NC Farmworker Organizations

**Harvest of Dignity Campaign HQ**  
[www.harvestofdignity.org](http://www.harvestofdignity.org)

**Farmworker Advocacy Network**  
[www.ncfan.org](http://www.ncfan.org)

**ALIANZA (UNC Chapel Hill)**  
<http://studentorgs.unc.edu/aza>

**Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs**  
[www.afoprograms.org](http://www.afoprograms.org)

**East Coast Migrant Head Start Project**  
[www.ecmhsp.org](http://www.ecmhsp.org)

**Episcopal Farmworker Ministry**  
[www.efwm.org](http://www.efwm.org)

**Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC)**  
<http://supportfloc.org>

**Legal Aid of NC - Farmworker Unit**  
[www.farmworkerlanc.org](http://www.farmworkerlanc.org)

**National Farm Worker Ministry**  
[www.nfwm.org](http://www.nfwm.org)

**NC Community Health Center Association**  
[www.nchca.org](http://www.nchca.org)

**NC Council of Churches - Farmworker Ministry Committee**  
[www.ncfarmworkers.org](http://www.ncfarmworkers.org)

**NC Farmworkers' Project**  
[www.ncproyecto.org](http://www.ncproyecto.org)

**NC Farmworker Health Program**  
[www.ncfhp.org](http://www.ncfhp.org)

**NC Justice Center**  
[www.ncjustice.org](http://www.ncjustice.org)

**NC Latino Coalition**  
<http://nclatinocoalition.org>

**NC Migrant Education Program**  
[www.ncpublicschools.org/mep](http://www.ncpublicschools.org/mep)

**NC Occupational Safety & Health Project**  
<http://ncosh-project.org>

**Student Action with Farmworkers**  
[www.saf-unite.org](http://www.saf-unite.org)

**Toxic Free NC**  
[www.toxicfreenc.org](http://www.toxicfreenc.org)

**Telamon**  
[www.telamon.org](http://www.telamon.org)

**Western NC Workers' Center**  
[www.workersunitedwnc.org](http://www.workersunitedwnc.org)



# Notes