

**WHEN IT COMES TO BUYING PRODUCE, WORKERS MUST BE PART OF THE DIALOGUE.**



ENSURE THAT WORKERS ARE PAID A LIVING WAGE, ARE SAFE AND RESPECTED AT WORK AND HAVE ACCESS TO THE RESOURCES THEY NEED TO KEEP THEMSELVES HEALTHY.

Farm workers have historically been **invisibilized** because food production in the Americas and the U.S. was built on the labor of enslaved African and Indigenous people, meaning that farm labor has always been exploited and undervalued.

**“The invisibility of farmworkers** contributes to [their] devastating experiences of abuse and hardships...Farmworkers are among the poorest workers in the United States...Beyond low wages, farmworkers experience great physical tolls, yet it is very rare for a farm job to offer healthcare benefits. To add irony to injury, “Food insecurity among farmworkers is also a harsh reality, with some studies showing that 66% of farmworkers are food insecure and do not have access to the very vegetables that they grow.”

Resource: Adalja, 2021, “Farmworker Health Here at Home,” Edible New Mexico. <https://www.ediblenm.com/farmworker-health-here-at-home/>

To ensure the sustainability of our food systems, we must push for safer working conditions and livable wages for all farm workers. To achieve this, the culture around the invisibilization of farm workers must **shif t**.

### **How this resource came about:**

In the summer of 2022, the Not Our Farm project (in collaboration with FairShare CSA Coalition) hosted a series of focus groups, talking with nearly 40 majority BIPOC workers to find out what they want and need to be able to sustainably work on farms. A vast majority of these farmers expressed a desire to continue growing food but are unsure if farming is a viable career because of the seemingly inherent financial instability that accompanies this path.

Most people expressed concern about low and unlivable wages and the seasonal availability of work. (Did you know that agricultural labor isn't subject to minimum wage laws in most states? Some farms pay by the bucket or piece, some pay monthly stipends, others hourly and some not at all—calling it an internship program!) During the off-season, farmers are faced with the possibility of being unemployed for months on end. How is it that such fundamental work—feeding people—is so detrimental to the people who do it?

Sustainable food systems mean....  
**SUSTAINABLE LABOR & LIVING FOR FARMERS & FARM WORKERS**

This pamphlet's content was synthesized and written by Nico Estrada! Layout designed by Alicia Robinson-Welsh!



To learn more about the farm worker experience and hear stories from workers directly, visit:

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

[@notourfarm](https://www.instagram.com/notourfarm)

# LET'S TALK ABOUT **LABOR** AND YOUR



## LOCAL PRODUCE

AS A CONSUMER, FARMERS' MARKET SHOPPER AND ADVOCATE OF LOCAL AGRICULTURE,

**HERE ARE SOME THINGS YOU CAN DO:**





**Ask questions at your local farmers' market and before joining CSAs!** Workers from all over the country on farms large and small, for profit and nonprofit, urban and rural have offered up some questions you can ask directly to the farms you're buying from.

**DISCLAIMER:** Sometimes the people working at market are not the farm owners, but employees on the farm. Be sure to find out who you are talking with first. Workers may not feel comfortable or safe answering these questions, so it's always best to ask and direct your questions to the farm owners.

## 1. Do you have any farm workers?

*If yes, here are some follow-up questions:*

- Are they unpaid or stipended interns? How much is the stipend?
- Are they employees? How much are they paid, either hourly or salaried? Is that a livable wage for this area? (Hint: \$15/hr. is the minimum to be considered a living wage)
- How long have they been working there?
- Do you have high turnover rates in your staff?
- Do you have any returning employees?

🚩 (Red flag: High turnover rates are often a good indicator of worker discontent & mistreatment)

• Are you comfortable providing contact information of current workers to hear their experiences?



## 2. Do you offer benefits?

- Do you offer Paid Time Off (PTO) to your employees?
- Do they receive any benefits? (produce, health insurance, sick days?)
- Do your employees have health care? Do you provide a stipend to help cover health expenses?

## 3. How do you and other farm workers handle decision-making around working in the elements and extreme heat or cold?

## 4. Do you have a bathroom at your farm?

- Is it a flush toilet, compost toilet, or porta potty?
- Do you have access to drinking and hand washing water?



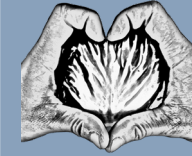
\*Small farms are often not subject to food safety inspections & don't necessarily provide bathrooms. Keep in mind that many farms lease across multiple fields, so having bathrooms at each site is tricky (but still important!) Some farms may not have bathrooms, but offer alternatives (i.e., having mobile handwashing stations or have a friendly neighbor who lets the crew use their bathroom).

## 5. Can your employees afford to buy the produce that they're growing?

- If not, are they allowed to take produce home for free to ensure adequate access to the food they're growing?

## 6. Do you accept tips?

Farm workers, like people in food service, are not legally required to be paid minimum wage. However, most farm workers are not tipped to supplement their income.



## 7. Does your farm support workers from all backgrounds, including race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender identity, religion, socioeconomic status, etc.?

- What tangible systems/policies do you have in place to support these employees?

## 8. Is your farm engaged in the community?

- What does this engagement look like?

🚩 *If employers seem caught off guard or don't know how to respond to these questions, this could indicate that they don't consider worker conditions a priority. An employer shouldn't feel the need to hide anything as long as their workers are being treated ethically.*

Show support for farm workers! We can shift the culture to be more worker-centered one conversation at a time.

If you can ask how the chickens are living/being treated, you can ask if the workers have access to a bathroom!

