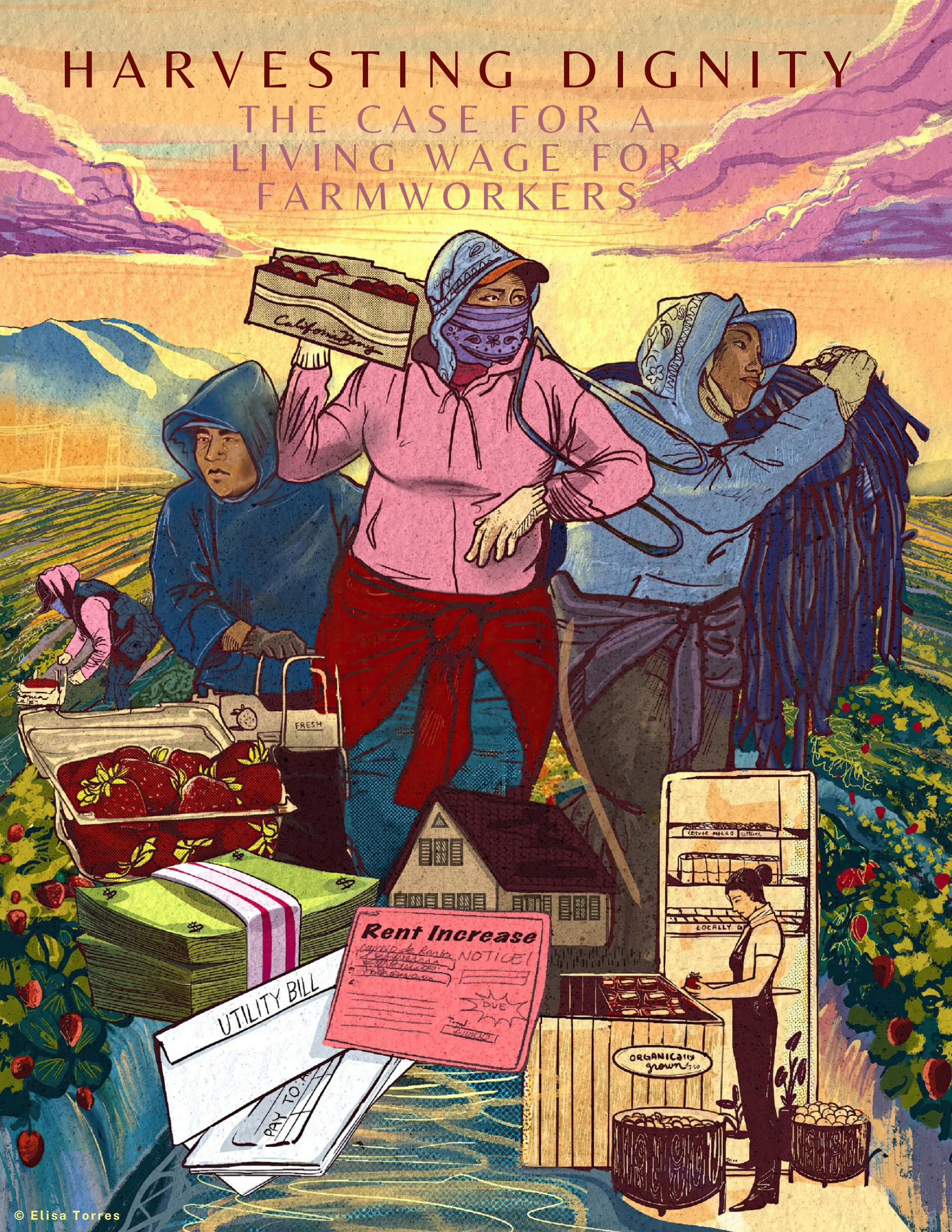


HARVESTING DIGNITY

THE CASE FOR A
LIVING WAGE FOR
FARMWORKERS





**Central Coast Alliance
United for a
Sustainable Economy**



**Mixteco/Indígena
Community
Organizing Project**

Cover Illustration by:

© [Elisa Torres](#)

**All Photographs
courtesy of:**

© [David Bacon](#), unless
otherwise noted.

Report Published:

April 1, 2024

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>Executive Summary</u>	3
<u>I. Overview of Farmworkers in the Central Coast</u>	5
<u>II. Historical Context of Farm Labor</u>	7
<u>III. Context of Farmworker Wages</u>	9
<u>IV. Cost of Living in Santa Barbara county & Farmworker Communities' Current Earnings</u>	11
<u>V. Farmworker Injury and Mortality Rates in Comparison to Other Sectors</u>	22
<u>VI. Agriculture Industry: Declining Immigration, Aging Farmworkers, and Labor Shortages</u>	26
<u>VII. Crop Production, Harvesting, and Revenue</u>	34
<u>VIII. Proposal of a Living Wage for Farmworkers</u>	38
<u>IX. Conclusion</u>	41
<u>X. Appendix</u>	43
<u>Acknowledgements</u>	44

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Agricultural laborers have historically been among the lowest paid occupations in the United States. Predominantly pulling its labor pool from among the most marginalized people in our communities, farm labor has relied heavily on waves of external and internal migration of workers who had limited economic options due to racial discrimination, labor exclusions, and immigration policy. This has long hindered and deterred progress in working conditions and quality of life for farmworkers.

Farmworkers' wages have seen little improvement to keep pace with the rise of living expenses such as housing, food, childcare, and healthcare, particularly in high cost of living areas like California's Central Coast where many labor-intensive specialty crops are grown. Yet agricultural work is essential to the economy of California, including many expensive coastal counties such as Santa Barbara county.

Our report details how farmworkers are paid far less than comparable jobs like construction and truck driving, which are similarly physically demanding and hazardous. The agricultural workforce is aging and labor supply is tightening as many workers shift into other occupations that offer safer working conditions or more livable wages. For nearly two decades, the United States has experienced declining immigration, particularly among undocumented migrants from Mexico which make up the vast majority of farmworkers. Declining birth rates and growing economic opportunities within Mexico are driving a long-term shift away from migration to the United States to work in the fields.

Some agricultural corporations have turned to new technologies and mechanization to maintain crop production and harvesting, but crops like strawberries remain notoriously difficult to automate and remain overwhelmingly hand-picked. Other companies have participated in the H-2A temporary worker visa program to fill in farm working positions, but pay far more than local wages in the total cost of housing, food, transportation, recruitment and visas for seasonal workers. This is not a sustainable practice for the industry. Instead, we argue that agribusiness must address the central problem of low wages and backbreaking labor in the fields to attract and retain the highly skilled talent required to harvest fresh produce. The expenses being invested towards the H-2A program show that the industry can afford to invest far more in wages to recruit workers.

Because of the small share of the

price of agricultural products that ultimately goes towards farmworkers' wages, corporations like Driscoll's could pay enough to their suppliers to provide a living wage for farmworkers at negligible costs to consumers.

Farmworkers are determined to fight for better working conditions and wages so their families can sustain themselves. They see the labor movement sweeping across the nation winning higher wages in fast food restaurants, auto plants, hospitals, and movie sets. They have continued to work through pandemics and natural disasters and been told their labor is essential. Farmworkers not only need but deserve higher wages to meet the rising cost of living, and fairly compensate for the hazardous nature of their work. Industry and policymakers working to lift wages in the fields is crucial for the well-being and sustainability of farmworkers, the agricultural industry, and our communities.



PART I: OVERVIEW OF FARMWORKERS IN THE CENTRAL COAST



The shiny, red, sweet fruit floats in your lemonade, sits on top of your pancakes swirled in whipped cream, and blushes your smoothie pink on a Sunday morning. Still, the hands that carry it from the rugged dirt to your cool fridge are overlooked. Consumers across the globe who enjoy the strawberry's sweetness are often oblivious to the farmworker families who struggle to survive on the poverty wages paid for their backbreaking labor. Strawberries, cauliflower, broccoli, blueberries, and all the fresh produce that travels from the farms to your table are picked by no one else but our neighbors, farmworkers.

“CALIFORNIA HAS THE LARGEST STATE AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION IN THE U.S.”

As the costs of rent, groceries, and childcare continue to rise, farmworker wages remain stubbornly low, marked by a legacy of racial inequality. Yet in recent years, hundreds of farm workers in the Central Coast of California have taken action into their own hands, leading spontaneous work stoppages and strikes to demand a living wage.

California has the largest state agricultural production in the U.S. ([Fwd 2022](#)). ¹



The Central Coast region produces most of the nation's strawberries, among the most labor-intensive crops, with Salinas-Watsonville, Santa Maria, and Oxnard as the leading production areas ([USDA 2023](#)).² Farmworker communities pride themselves on their tenacity, diligence, and in the notion that a person can reap tremendous benefits from their hard work; however, these characteristics are often overlooked by the false description of farm labor as “unskilled” and, therefore, minimally compensated.

Farm labor is vital to the success of the complex agricultural industry. This labor should be recognized and compensated for its skill, difficulty, and danger. As fewer workers choose agricultural work and labor markets tighten, the agricultural industry must adapt to survive, starting with paying farmworkers a fair and living wage.

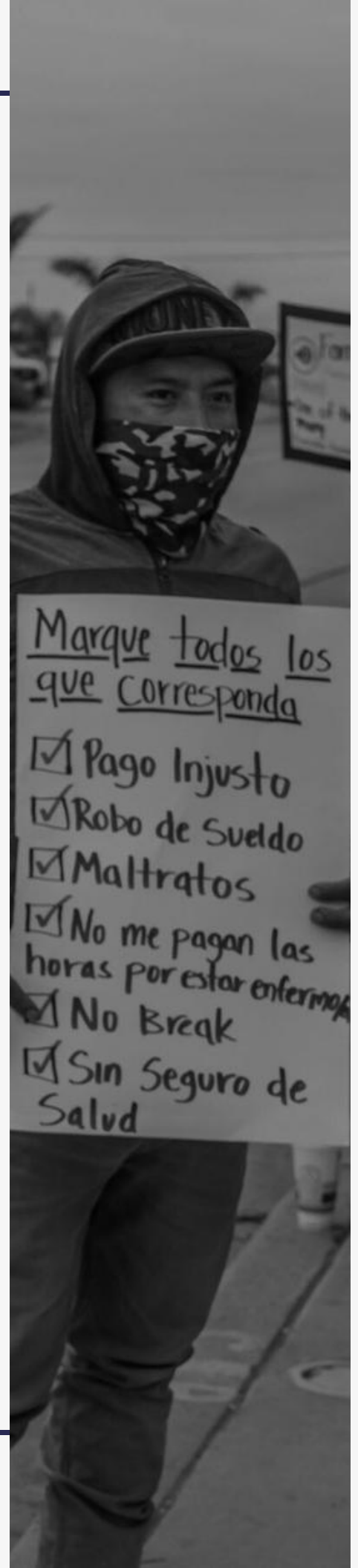
“THE CENTRAL COAST REGION PRODUCES MOST OF THE NATION’S STRAWBERRIES, AMONG THE MOST LABOR-INTENSIVE CROPS, WITH SALINAS-WATSONVILLE, SANTA MARIA, AND OXNARD AS THE LEADING PRODUCTION AREAS.”

PART II: HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF FARM LABOR

Racially marginalized groups have historically filled farm labor in the United States, with few other options. From the first European colonies in the Americas, Native American subjects and imported enslaved Africans typically worked the fields. During the Reconstruction Era, African-Americans continued to work the fields of the South as sharecroppers, often indebted to their former owners, as U.S. laws made it extremely difficult to enter other occupations (NFWM).³ In the West, indigenous people were forced to work the fields under Spanish rule.

In the late 1800s, immigrant workers were imported to meet growing labor demands as agriculture industrialized and enslaved labor was no longer available. Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, and Mexican workers each became the primary labor force in the fields, often replacing the last after anti-immigrant sentiment resulted in policies like the Chinese Exclusion Act.

In the 1900s, workers organized to achieve unionization and legislative victories such as child labor laws, an eight-hour



workday, and a five-day workweek; unfortunately, agriculture workers were excluded from them ([Perez 2020](#)).⁴ Between the 1940s and 1960s, the Bracero Program was implemented to grow the agriculture workforce. About 200,000 temporary Mexican workers, or braceros, were imported ([Perez 2020](#)). Though the development of the Bracero Program intended to meet WWII-era labor needs, it continued long after the war because of its profitability. Braceros worked long hours for low wages, and coming in as temporary migrants with immigration status controlled by their employers, they did not have the opportunity for other job options due to discrimination. Eventually, farmworkers fought to end the Bracero Program, and “unionization spread through the agriculture industry within the decade” ([Perez 2020](#)). In the 1960’s, Mexican farmworkers joined Filipino workers to organize the United Farm Workers and demand that laws protecting other workers also protect them. Farmworkers gained victories in better working conditions, wages, and protections, but the movement began to lose momentum in the 80’s.

During Reagan’s administration, industries moved overseas, and unions and UFW’s organizing tactics became villainized. Moreover, agricultural corporations used farm labor contractors to replace unionized farmworkers with non-union workers, often pitting workers against each other along lines of immigration status ([Martin 2004](#)).⁵ From then on, wages stagnated for farmworkers.



PART III: CONTEXT OF FARMWORKER WAGES

Since the late 1990s, farmworker wages have slightly increased, barely keeping up with the rising living costs.

WAGES OF HIRED FARMWORKERS

Figure 1, shows farmworker wages remain very low compared to other sectors, hovering consistently around half of the average wage of nonfarm jobs (USDA 2022).⁶

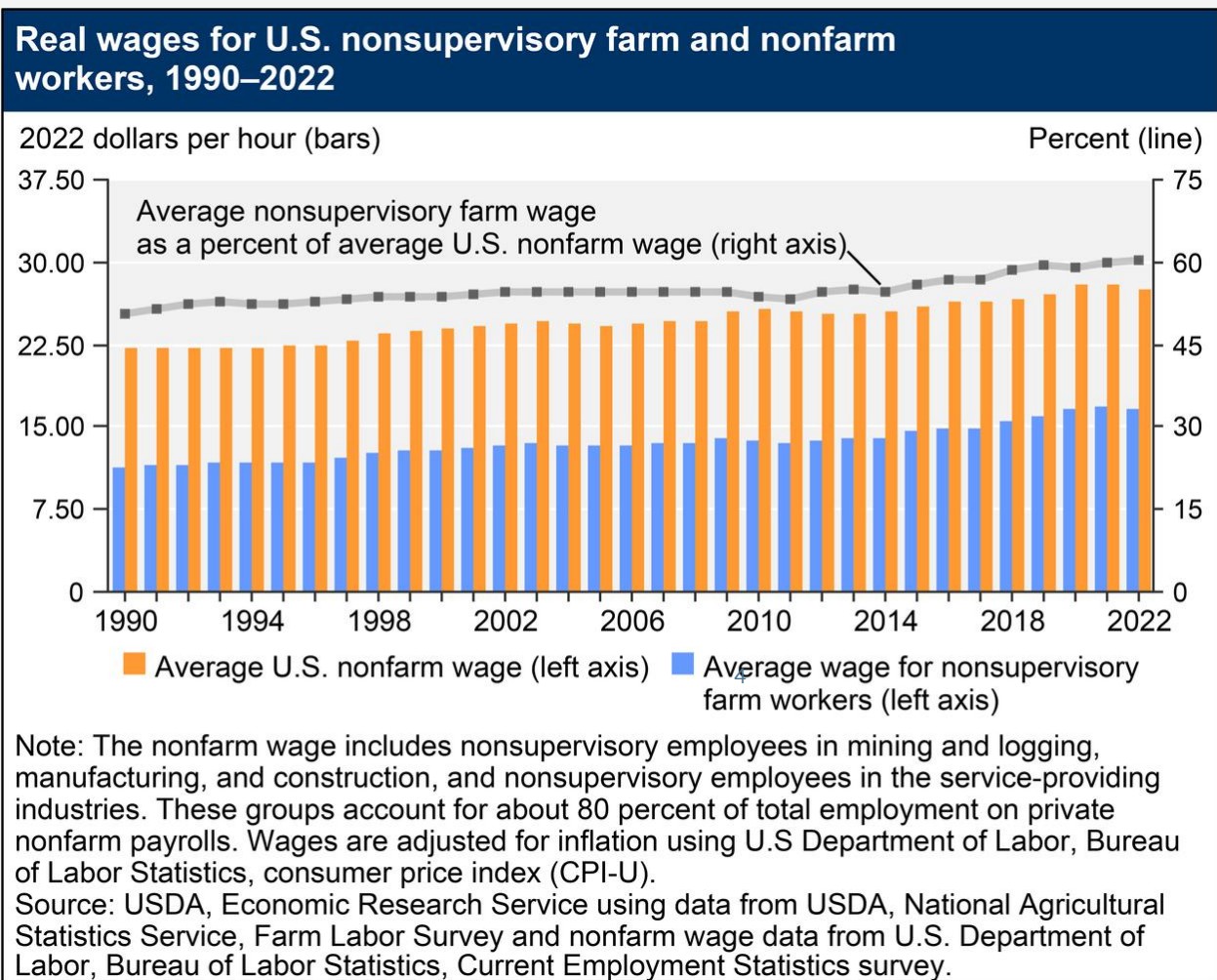


Figure 1

In 2023, the mean hourly wage for farmworkers in Santa Barbara county was \$17.42⁷ they earned a mean annual wage of \$36,244 (EDD Occupational Wages 2023). However, within that same year in Santa Barbara county, nonfarm jobs such as heavy truck drivers earned an hourly mean hourly wage of \$26.76 and construction laborers earned a mean hourly wage of \$25.04 (EDD Occupational Wages 2023).



Heavy truck drivers earned an annual wage of \$55,672, and construction laborers earned an annual wage of \$52,104 ([EDD Occupational Wages 2023](#)). There is a significant difference in the hourly and yearly wages of workers in the agriculture industry as compared to those in other occupations like heavy truck drivers and construction laborers. Despite having many similarities, such as physically demanding duties and irregular work schedules, the earnings of these occupations differ considerably.

In states like California, where labor-intensive agriculture production is concentrated, according to the MIT Living Wage Calculator, covering basic living expenses requires an annual income of \$44,175 for a single adult with no children ([Living Wage MIT](#)).⁸ So, although farmworker wages have slightly increased since 1990, the quality of life remains extremely difficult for many farmworker families. Farmworkers must work to make ends meet but unfortunately, are often not paid enough to afford housing in the same area they work in. As a result, farmworker families are forced to live in cramped apartment units or garage units to make ends meet and pay for basic necessities.

PART IV: COST OF LIVING IN SANTA BARBARA COUNTY & FARMWORKER COMMUNITIES' CURRENT EARNINGS

HOUSING



The Central Coast includes Santa Barbara and Ventura counties, which house one of the largest farmworker communities in the country and consistently rank among the most expensive places to live in the United States. Much of the weather and climate conditions that are beneficial to the harvest of our regional crops are the same conditions that increase the cost of living in our California coastal communities. In Figure 2, a living wage calculation for Santa Barbara county demonstrates how a family of four (with both adults working and two children) should make about \$129,954 per year just to afford to live in this county ([Living Wage MIT](#)). For a single adult in Santa Barbara County with no children, a living wage would be \$32.11. For two working adults with two children, their living wage would be \$36.53.

California employment data shows the average annual pay of a farmworker in Santa Barbara County is \$36,244, or \$72,488 per year for two working parents, about half of the income needed to cover basic expenses for their family ([EDD 2023 Agriculture Worker Wages](#)).⁹ Unfortunately, these numbers account for agriculture workers who have to work all year-round. Many workers earn most of their income during the summer and use those earnings to get by until the next harvesting season. Between 2019-2020, many farmworkers earned an annual income below \$30,000 ([Findings from the National Agricultural Workers Survey \(NAWS\) 2019-2020; p40](#)).¹⁰ This is still a reality for some workers today and for many families, this is not enough to be able to afford a 1-bedroom apartment.

In Santa Maria, the city where most farmworkers live in Santa Barbara county, the median rent as of the writing of this report in March 2024 was \$2,999 per month, according to Zillow ([zillow.com](#)).¹¹



© Photo Courtesy CAUSE



TYPICAL EXPENSES

The table below shows the costs of each basic need that go into estimating the living wage. Like with the living wage, their values vary by location and family size.

	1 ADULT				2 ADULTS (1 WORKING)				2 ADULTS (BOTH WORKING)			
	0 Children	1 Child	2 Children	3 Children	0 Children	1 Child	2 Children	3 Children	0 Children	1 Child	2 Children	3 Children
Food	\$4,382	\$6,460	\$9,690	\$12,879	\$8,034	\$10,001	\$12,880	\$15,704	\$8,034	\$10,001	\$12,880	\$15,704
Child Care	\$0	\$15,338	\$30,675	\$43,344	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$15,338	\$30,675	\$43,344
Medical	\$2,626	\$8,421	\$8,309	\$8,771	\$5,949	\$8,309	\$8,771	\$8,367	\$5,949	\$8,309	\$8,771	\$8,367
Housing	\$28,105	\$36,114	\$36,114	\$48,200	\$31,977	\$36,114	\$36,114	\$48,200	\$31,977	\$36,114	\$36,114	\$48,200
Transportation	\$11,124	\$12,873	\$16,216	\$18,658	\$12,873	\$16,216	\$18,658	\$18,637	\$12,873	\$16,216	\$18,658	\$18,637
Civic	\$3,032	\$5,335	\$6,715	\$7,776	\$5,335	\$6,715	\$7,776	\$7,269	\$5,335	\$6,715	\$7,776	\$7,269
Internet & Mobile	\$2,053	\$2,053	\$2,053	\$2,053	\$2,647	\$2,647	\$2,647	\$2,647	\$2,647	\$2,647	\$2,647	\$2,647
Other	\$4,739	\$8,459	\$8,994	\$12,431	\$8,459	\$8,994	\$12,431	\$11,950	\$8,459	\$8,994	\$12,431	\$11,950
Required annual income after taxes	\$56,059	\$95,051	\$118,764	\$154,113	\$75,274	\$88,995	\$99,278	\$112,774	\$75,274	\$104,333	\$129,954	\$156,118
Annual taxes	\$10,734	\$16,941	\$23,574	\$35,576	\$12,044	\$12,875	\$13,204	\$14,376	\$12,044	\$16,116	\$21,991	\$29,536
Required annual income before taxes	\$66,793	\$111,992	\$142,338	\$189,689	\$87,318	\$101,870	\$112,482	\$127,150	\$87,318	\$120,449	\$151,945	\$185,654

FIGURE 2

Over half of the income of a farmworker family with two full-time adult workers is consumed by rent, highlighting the unaffordability of housing in Santa Maria, an agricultural city. Moreover, according to the United States Census Bureau, in 2022, 52.6% of Santa Barbara county renters make less than \$75,000 annually, and 46.5% of them are paying 30 percent or more of their income for housing ([2022 U.S. Census Bureau](#)).¹² As mentioned above, a single farmworker is making about \$34,300.00, and more than 30% of their income is going to rent. Additionally, about 62% of farmworkers are paying more than 30% of their income towards rent (United States Census Bureau). That barely leaves enough for them to afford other basic necessities.

In the 6th Cycle Housing Element 2023-2031 of Santa Maria, 24% of the population described their work relating to agriculture compared to other job sectors in 2019 ([cityofsantamaria.org](#), A-9).¹³ Santa Maria is the hub of a large agriculture sector within Santa Barbara County, with high housing costs and low wages for farmworkers, who make up a significant percentage of the city's workforce. Because of these low wages, many families resort to crowded living spaces in rental units ([cityofsantamaria.org](#), A-14).

The 2023 report [Farmworker Health in California](#) by UC Merced and the California Department of Public Health found that 25% of surveyed farmworkers in California reported sleeping in a room with three or more people. 29% of respondents said their overall household had six or more people ([UC Merced Farmworker Health 2023](#)).¹⁴ According to the National Agricultural Workers Survey, the most long standing research on farmworkers in the United States, 30% of farmworker households live in overcrowded housing, defined by the Census as having a ratio of more than one person per room. Additionally, the research discovered that families live in extremely poor conditions, with no other option but to remain in these units due to their inability to afford better housing.

25%

The 2023 report "[Farmworker Health in California](#)" by UC Merced and the California Department of Public Health found that 25% of surveyed farmworkers in California reported sleeping in a room with three or more people.

SAMPLE PAY STUB OF A SANTA BARBARA COUNTY FARMWORKER, 2024

Statement of Earnings For: [REDACTED]				Fiddlestix Vineyard [REDACTED]			
Period Begin: 1/14/2024	Company Id: [REDACTED]	Employee Number: 63	Pay Group: 64-Weekly	[REDACTED]			
Period End: 1/27/2024	Division: [REDACTED]	SSN: [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]				
Check Date: 2/1/2024	Department: [REDACTED]	Exemptions: N/A	Exemptions: 8	Federal Additional: [REDACTED]	State Additional: [REDACTED]	Local Additional: [REDACTED]	
Federal Filing: Married Filing Jointly	State Filing: Married One Income	Local Filing: [REDACTED]	Exemptions: 0	[REDACTED]			
Voucher Id: [REDACTED]	Check Amount: \$0.00	Gross Pay: \$981.75	Net Pay: \$895.84	Check Message: [REDACTED]			
EARNINGS				TAXES		DEDUCTIONS	
Description	Rate	Hour	YTD Dollars	Description	Current	YTD	Description
Regular	16.50	59.50	981.75	SOC SEC EE	60.87	167.26	
				MED EE	14.24	39.12	
				CALIFORNIA SDI	12.80	29.68	
Total:				Total:		Total:	
59.50 981.75 163.50 2,697.75				65.91 236.06		0.00 0.00	
CURRENT PERIOD LEAVE ACCRUAL				DISTRIBUTION OF NET PAY			
				Checking	Account: 10000[REDACTED]	Deposit Amount:	895.84

This farmworker is the sole breadwinner for a family of five. He primarily works in picking strawberries, but since it's still winter in January, they have yet to reach the harvesting phase. Therefore, he decided to seek work in the vineyard until April. He makes \$16.50 per hour, which is slightly more than the California minimum wage of \$16 per hour in 2024. However, in the past two weeks, he has been unable to work a full 40-hour week, only managing to work 59.50 hours due to limited work during this rainy season. His gross pay was \$981.75, but after payroll tax deductions for Social Security, Medicare, and California SDI, he is left with \$895.84. Unfortunately, due to his immigration status, he is ineligible to access these benefits no matter how much he and his family need them.

With the limited work hours available and this income, he is expected to earn around \$1,791.68 at the end of the month. However, this is significantly less than the monthly rent of a typical one-bedroom apartment, which means that the farm worker will be unable to make rent payments this month, let alone afford food. This is a harsh reality for many farmworkers across the county. Often, families have to cram into a small apartment with multiple families just to afford a roof over their heads. A family of five will often share a room together so that their income can cover basic needs for the entire family.

Moreover, landlords often require minimum qualifications such as having an income that is 3x the rent, consistent income, and strong credit scores. These serve as obstacles for immigrant and farmworker families to even be considered for a 1-bedroom apartment. Inconsistent seasonal income for farmworkers often peaks during 5 months out of the year, and whatever is earned throughout that period needs to last them through the slower months of work. Farmworker families struggle, and to prevent all of their income from going solely towards rent, they will live with other families, sharing a single kitchen and a single bathroom just to survive.

Housing Insecurity Chart from the Cottage Center for Population Health: **Percentage of adults reporting housing insecurity by demographic group.**

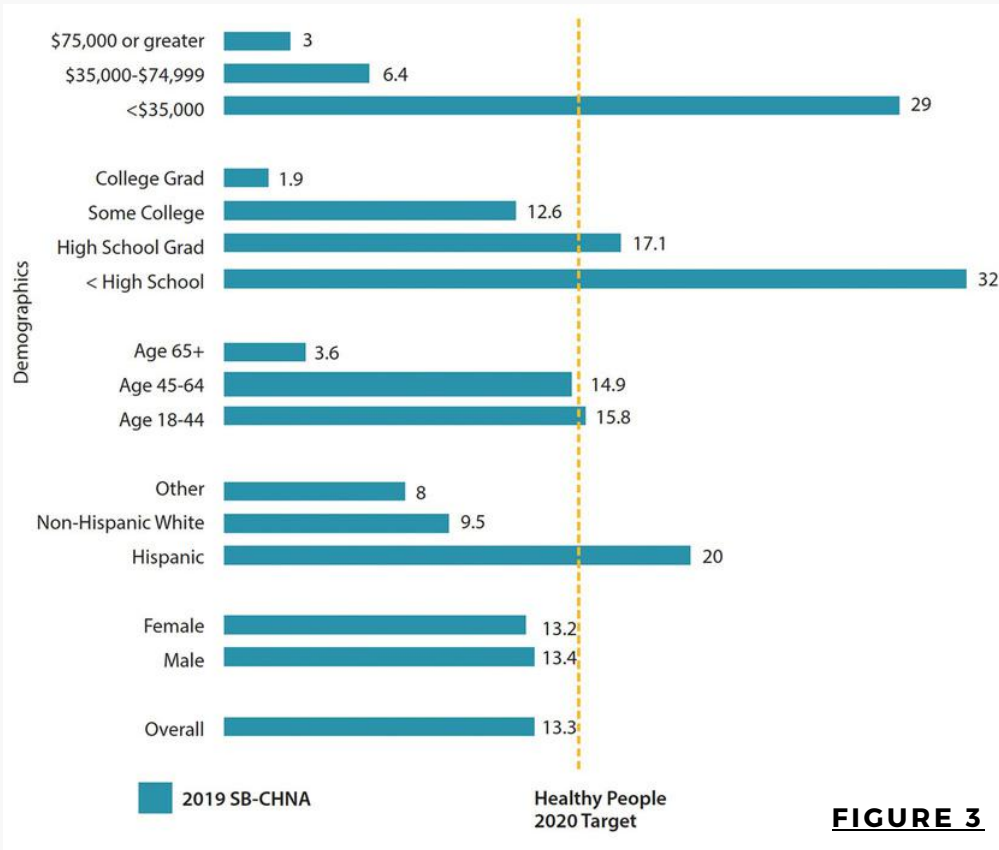


FIGURE 3

**35K
per
year**

In Figure 3, data from the Santa Barbara County Health Needs Assessment shows high levels of housing insecurity among those earning under \$35,000 per year, those with less than a high school education, and Latino individuals. Farmworkers on average earn below \$35,000 per year.

PROFILE OF A FARMWORKER IN SANTA BARBARA COUNTY



Who is a Typical Farmworker in Santa Barbara County?

73% of agriculture workers are immigrant farmworkers and California is one of the states that contribute to “more than one-third of total U.S. agricultural-output value” (FWD.us 2022). In Santa Barbara county, 88% of farmworkers are Latino and 71% are not citizens (Figure 4). Moreover, 84% reported having a high school diploma or less education. Improving wages for farmworkers is one of Santa Barbara county's most important ways to reduce housing insecurity.

Average Age:

The average age of a farmworker is **45 years old**, 1,893 farmworkers are over 60 years of age.

Race/Ethnicity:

88% of farmworkers are **Latino** and for 87% their country of origin is Mexico.

Citizenship Status:

71% of farmworkers are **not citizens**.

Children in School:

70% of farmworkers are have children under 18.

Education:

84% have a high school diploma or less education.

Long Hours:

Almost two out of three farmworkers are working every week and averaging 38 hrs/wk.



Gender:

50% of farmworkers are **male & 50%** are **female**.

FIGURE 4 ¹⁶

HEALTHCARE

According to a recent UC Merced and California Department of Public Health study, 49% of surveyed farmworkers did not have health insurance at some point in the past 12 months. 23% reported delaying needed medical care at some point in the past year. This is consistent with the most recent data from the National Agricultural Workers Survey that found only 48% of farmworkers nationally have health insurance and only 22% of undocumented farmworkers ([UC Merced Farmworker Health 2023](#)).

According to the California Health Care Foundation, “Californians with lower incomes are more likely than those with higher incomes to skip or delay health care due to costs” ([CHCF 2022](#)).¹⁷ Most farmworkers do not receive healthcare insurance from their employers nor qualify for state benefits. Many cannot afford to miss a day of work to address a health concern since they would have to pay out of pocket.

UNINSURED FARMWORKERS

The high costs of an uninsured healthcare appointment are compounded by losing a day of income to be at the doctor’s office. Moreover, many families forego preventative care because they simply do not have the means to afford it, which ultimately can cost them more in the long run when major health issues arise such as musculoskeletal pain, respiratory illness, heart disease, diabetes and more ([NC Farmworker Health Program](#)).¹⁸

Many farmworkers' pay stubs reflect deductions for health and security benefits, but unfortunately, are unable to access it due to their immigration status.



CHILDCARE

The cost of childcare has also continued to increase along with rent and food. The annual cost of childcare depends on the age and needs of your child and whether they will be placed in a Child Care Center or Family Child Care Home. As seen in Figure 5, the care for an infant in a Child Care Center would have a median annual cost of \$19,121 compared to Family Child Care Home, where the median yearly cost would be \$12,309. The costs decrease as the children age but remain one of the most considerable costs in a family's budget.

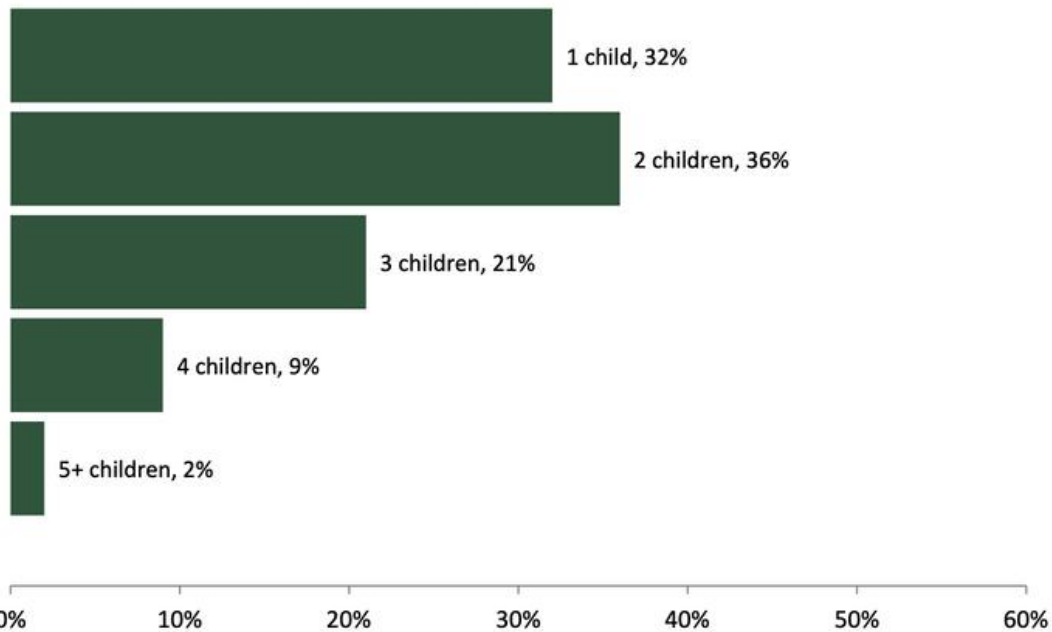
Santa Barbara County		Median Annual Cost	
Type of Facility	Infant	Preschooler	
Child Care Center	\$19,121	\$13,011	
Family Child Care Home	\$12,309	\$10,771	

FIGURE 5¹⁹

According to the National Agricultural Workers Survey, 50% of farmworkers in the US have children living with them. California's farmworker health study found that 70% of surveyed farmworkers lived with children, perhaps due to California's larger share of settled farmworker families as opposed to seasonal migrants or H-2A visa workers compared to other states. California's farmworker survey data shows that the median farmworker household has two children, similar to national data. Figure 6 shows the results of the National Agricultural Workers Survey.

Figure 2.2: Number of Minor Children in the Household of Farmworkers, 2017–2018

Most farmworker parents with minor children had one or two minor children in their household.



Of parents with children under the age of 18, 46 percent had children younger than age 6, 68 percent had children ages 6–13, and 43 percent had children ages 14–17. One percent²⁴ of parents resided with only some of their minor children, and 11 percent lived away from all of their minor children. Migrant parents were nearly four times more likely than settled parents to be living away from all their minor children (40% and 7% respectively).

²⁴ Estimate should be interpreted with caution because it has a RSE of 31 to 50 percent.

FIGURE 6 ²⁰

OF ALL THE FARMWORKERS INTERVIEWED, ABOUT 68% OF THEM ARE PARENTS WITH 1 OR 2 MINOR CHILDREN IN THEIR HOUSEHOLD.

The graph depicts that sixty-eight percent of farmworkers interviewed during this time reported being farmworker parents with one or two minor children living in their household. Many of these families have to go through extreme measures of budgeting to cover the costs of their rent, groceries, and childcare. If there are two children they need care for, childcare costs are doubled while housing and food costs significantly increase. Their current wage is simply insufficient to cover their basic needs.

FOOD INSECURITY

Not only do farmworkers struggle with the costs of housing, accessing healthcare, and childcare, but the very workers who plant, grow, harvest, and pack the food that others depend on across the world are also unable to afford enough nutritious food for their own families to live healthy lives. The UC Merced farmworker health survey found that 19% of California farmworkers surveyed reported very low food security, and 23% reported low food security under standard USDA measures. The National Agricultural Workers Survey shows that only 13% of farmworkers are enrolled in SNAP, and 9% are enrolled in WIC. These federal programs assist low-income families in accessing food ([UC Merced Farmworker Health 2023](#)).



Santa Barbara County's 2016 Food Action Plan notes that while agricultural work is the largest and fastest-growing occupation in the county, farmworkers make up a large share of the county's food-insecure population, with agricultural communities like Santa Maria and Lompoc suffering from the region's highest rates of poverty. One of the core goals of the plan is to "Support fair compensation for all members of the food workforce and increase availability and accessibility to affordable housing to help support their vital role in the regional food system" ([2016 Santa Barbara Food Action Plan](#)).²¹

Various other systematic issues contribute to farmworkers' lack of affordability for basic necessities; however, improving wages is the most critical way to tackle the root cause of meeting farmworkers' economic needs.

PART V: FARMWORKER INJURY AND MORTALITY RATES IN COMPARISON TO OTHER SECTORS

INJURY AND MORTALITY

Farm work is one of the most physically demanding and dangerous occupations. Workers report injuries such as falls from tall ladders while picking fruit from trees, musculoskeletal pain and bone fractures from quickly running through muddy ditches between rows of strawberries, working alongside heavy machinery like large tractors and sharp blades, exposure to hazards like wildfire smoke and pesticides, and exhausting manual labor outdoors with little shade in extreme heat and other harmful weather conditions. Other sectors that are as physically demanding as agriculture labor tend to have higher pay. Construction laborers and heavy tractor-trailer truck drivers have risk factors similar to those of farm labor in their respective occupations. Yet, these sectors receive far higher compensation for these risks.

As shown in Figure 7, farmworkers are more likely to face injury in the workplace than construction workers and have similar injury rates to truck drivers.

Industry Type	Total Recordable Cases
Construction	2.4
Truck Driving	3.2
Farm Labor	4.1

This table has been updated on 8/26/24 to reflect the correct numbers.

FIGURE 7 ²²

*The incidence rates represent the number of injuries and illnesses per 100 full-time workers and were calculated as $(N/EH) \times 200,000$, where
N = number of injuries and illnesses
EH = total hours worked by all employees during the calendar year
200,000 = base for 100 equivalent full-time workers (working 40 hours per week, 50 weeks per year)*



Sectors such as construction have better benefits to offer workers due to a more robust history of unionization. Moreover, higher wages in unionized workplaces also set higher wage standards and expectations even for non-union companies and workers in the same sector.

Workers in “Construction and extraction occupations” and in “Transportation and material moving occupations” have unionization rates around triple that of workers in “Farming, fishing, and forestry occupations” ([bls.gov](https://www.bls.gov), Table 3).²³ An important reason unionization rates are much higher in these industry sectors than agriculture is that construction and truck driving workforces were historically predominantly white and male, facing less discrimination from unions and employers, while farmworkers were historically Black, indigenous, and immigrant, and at times excluded from labor unions. In Santa Barbara and Ventura counties, 99% of farmworkers are people of color, while construction workers are 79% people of color and truck drivers are 72% people of color ([fundforsantabarbara.org](https://www.fundforsantabarbara.org)).²⁴ The historical pattern of industries who were able to unionize and protect workers compared to those who have been historically excluded affects norms of which types of jobs are valued and labor standards to this day. For example, the first multiracial farmworker union was formed in Oxnard in 1903 called the Japanese Mexican Labor Alliance, but it was barred entry into the American Federation of Labor due to racist discrimination.

Today, union construction workers have 34% fewer health and safety violations, as shown in the table above. Construction workers are also more likely to “earn 46% higher incomes and 34% more likely to have private health insurance” ([FCA International 2022](#)).²⁵ As opportunities in professions like building trades, manufacturing, and logistics have opened up to more workers of color, farmworkers increasingly have opportunities to move into jobs that are better paid to compensate for difficult and dangerous labor. This presents a major challenge to the agricultural industry, which must compete with better paid sectors and faces the loss of its workforce if it cannot professionalize and improve wages.

Racial Demographics of Workers

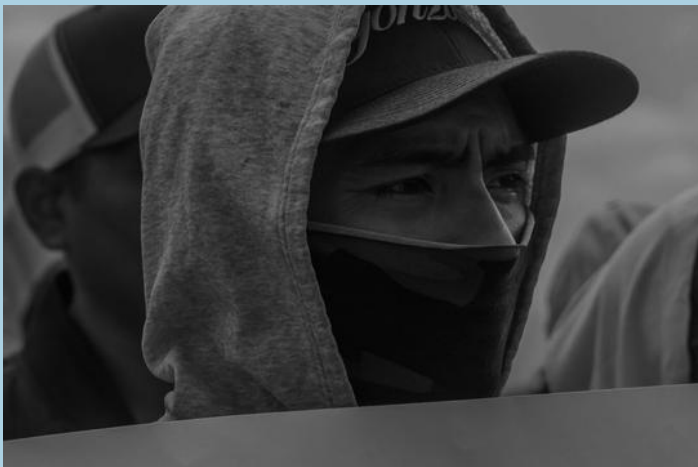
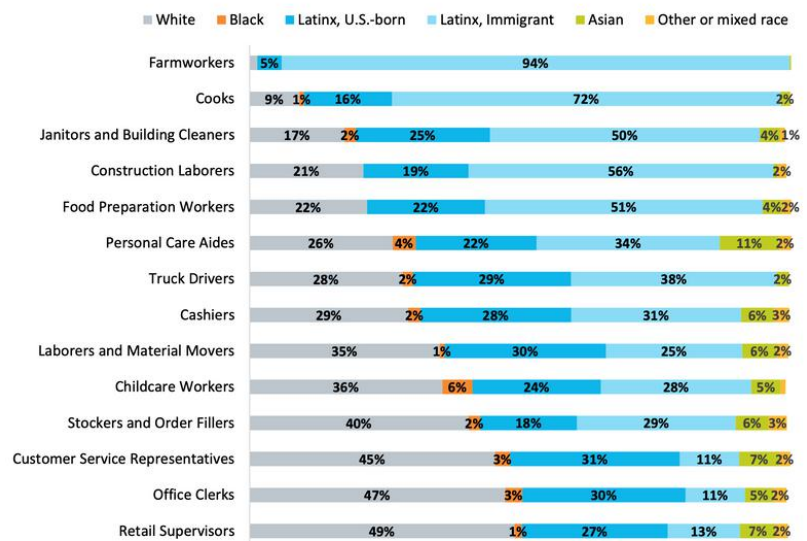


FIGURE 20: FRONTLINE OCCUPATIONS BY RACE, SANTA BARBARA AND VENTURA COUNTIES, 2018



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2018 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Note: Universe includes employed individuals ages 25 to 64. Data represent a 2014 through 2018 average.

Occupational death rates in agricultural work are consistently much higher than comparable jobs, with 23.5 fatal injuries per 100,000 workers in 2022 compared to 14.6 fatalities in truck driving and 13.0 in construction according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics ([BLS:Occupational Injuries 2022](#)).²⁶

Farmworker deaths and injuries are, unfortunately, a common occurrence. In 2020, during Covid-19, many farmworkers were still working and not protected under CDC guidelines. Because of this, many employers neglected the health and safety of workers and have failed to “provide and implement a system,” which resulted in farms and food companies having “the most violations of all the industries” ([Calmatters 2022](#)).²⁷ In Santa Barbara county in 2023, there were two farmworker deaths, both related to poor supervision and training of agriculture equipment usage ([SB Independent 2023](#)).²⁸ In one instance, farmworkers reported they were told to continue working in a Cuyama carrot field alongside the body of their fallen coworker. While farmworkers face injuries and fatal injuries that come with the job, locally they are fighting for better precautions to be put in place and organizing against the normalization of agricultural workers being treated as disposable. In other industries, workers have demanded higher pay as compensation for the safety risks they face, yet farm work has historically been performed by workers whose lives and safety our society has put far less value on. This has resulted in a greater acceptance of risks without compensation.

Many farmworkers are also finding themselves shifting towards less hazardous occupations such as restaurants, domestic work, and hospitality. Though this sector can have similar wages to farm work and often only provides limited hours, it has much lower rates of death and injury and offers better conditions for many farm workers who find themselves entering these service occupations as they get older.

Fatal Work Injury Rates by Occupation in 2022

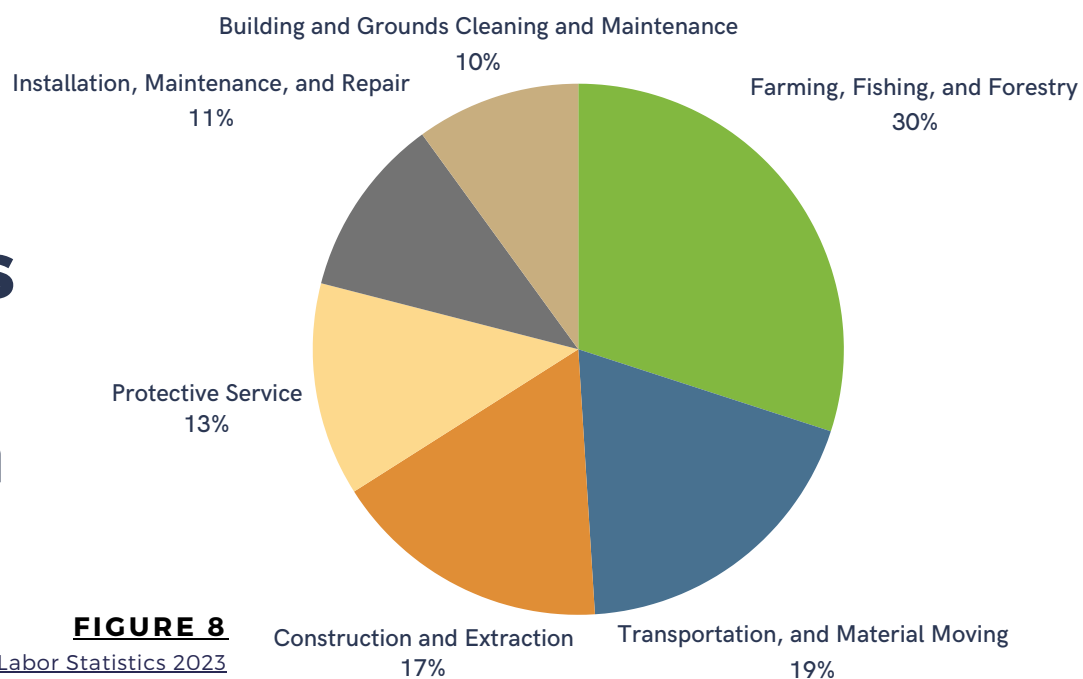


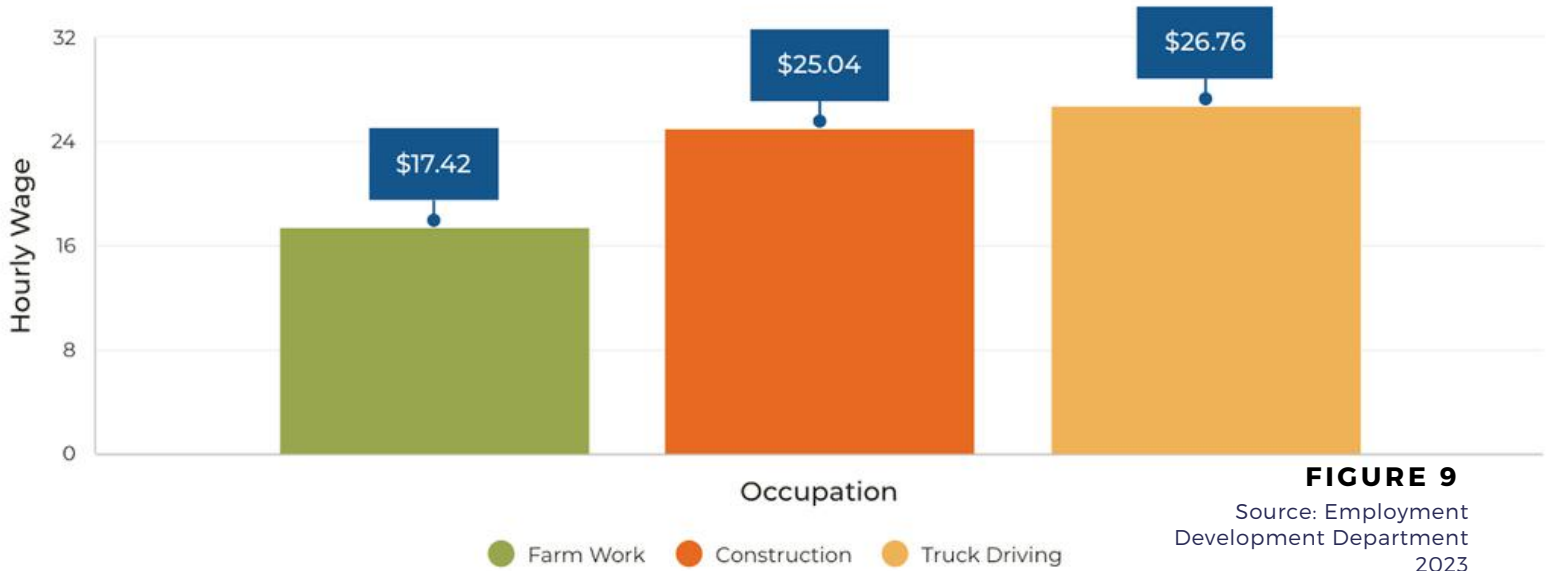
FIGURE 8

Source: [Bureau of Labor Statistics 2023](#)

Comparative Wages

Comparison of Wages for Farm Work and Non-Farm Occupations

Information taken from the Employment Development Department Labor Market Information Division



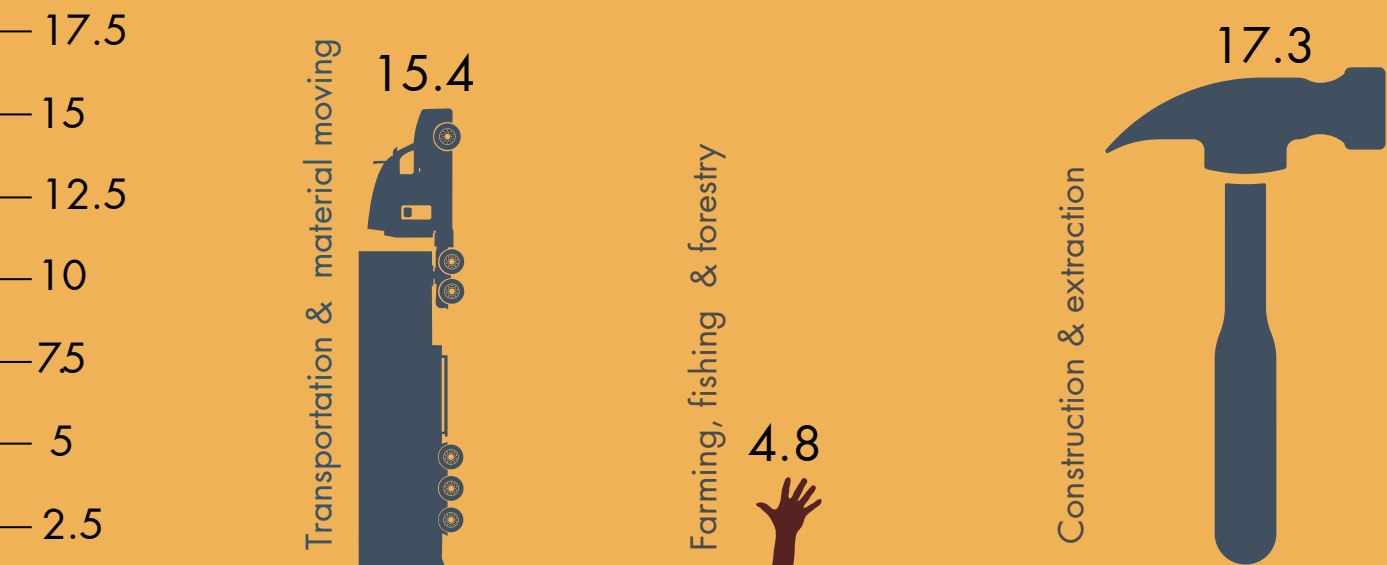
In California, construction laborers and truck drivers are earning a livable wage compared to farmworkers. Construction worker's mean annual wage is about \$52,103 with an hourly wage of \$25.04, while heavy, tractor-trailer truck drivers' mean annual wage is about \$55,672 with an hourly wage of \$26.76 (EDD Occupational Wages 2023). Conversely, farm workers' mean annual wage is about \$36,244, with a mean hourly of \$17.42 (EDD Occupational Wages 2023). These are drastic differences that drive workers away from agriculture towards other opportunities with much higher pay for safer working conditions.

The agriculture industry has historically had less inclusion in labor unions

%

Unionization Rates

Annual Averages of Union affiliation by occupation for 2022-2023



PART VI: AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY: DECLINING IMMIGRATION, AGING FARMWORKERS, AND LABOR SHORTAGES

DECLINING IMMIGRATION AND AGING FARMWORKERS



In the last decade, we have seen a decline in immigration, driven by several factors, including changing demographics in neighboring countries like Mexico and the rise of anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies. As seen in Figure 8, the undocumented population in California began to decline in 2007 (ppic.org, 2023).³⁰

National data also shows a decline in the undocumented immigrant population of 14% from 2007 to 2021 ([Pew Research Center](https://www.pewresearch.org)). Additionally, the [Pew Research Center](https://www.pewresearch.org) has reported a reversal of migration where immigrants travel back across the southern border ([Pew Research Center](https://www.pewresearch.org) 2019).³¹

Moreover, the growth of Mexico's population has decreased; where for most of the 20th century, "Mexico's birth rate remained above six children per woman," but by 1995, the birth rate had dramatically fallen to "three children per woman" (Stanford University 2019).³²

The immigrants that have come to the U.S. to work in the fields are now growing older, and newer generations in Mexico do not feel as inclined to cross the border for a "better life" as job opportunities are increasing in their home country (Stanford University 2019).

Economic Growth in Mexico

Annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Mexico | World Bank National Accounts Data

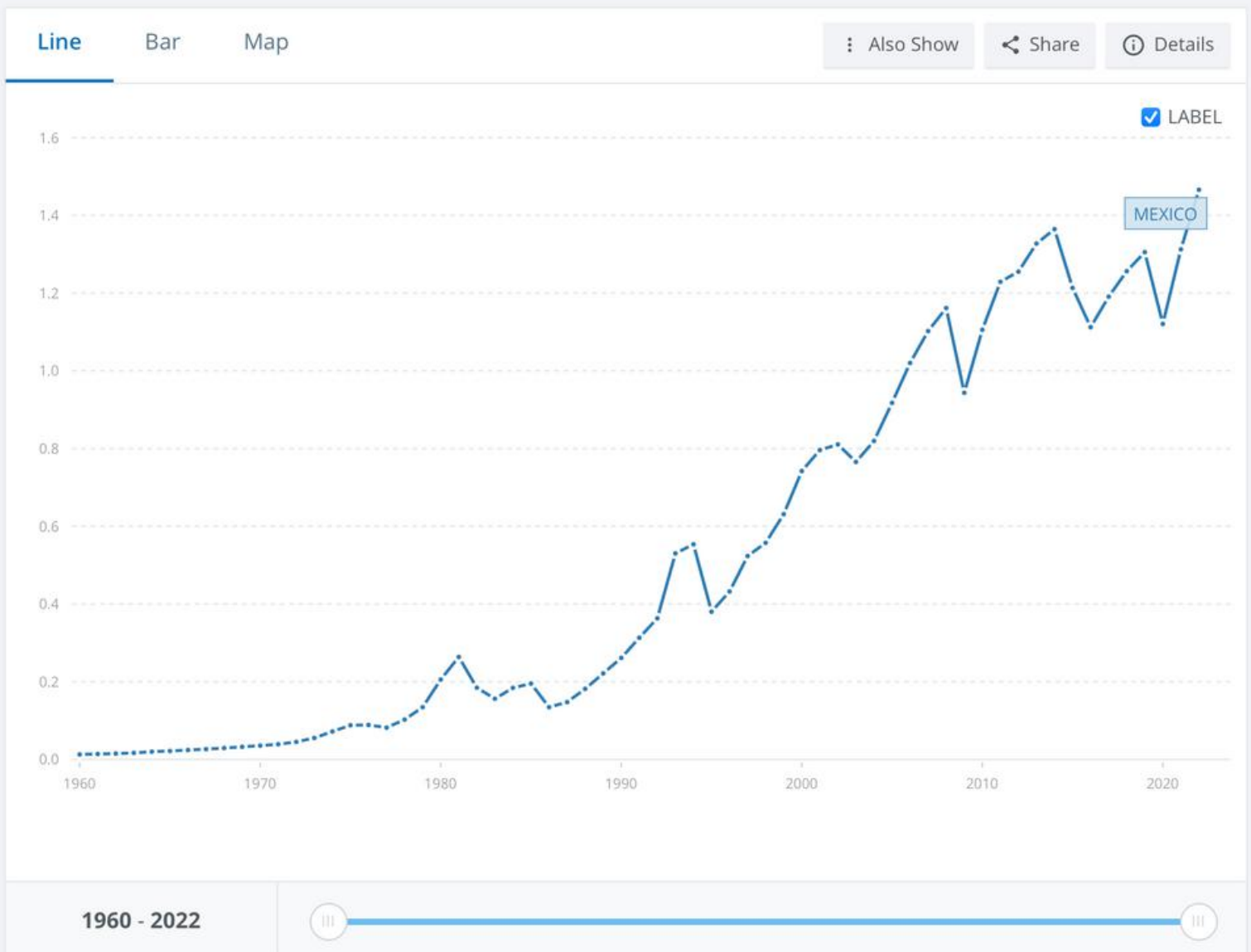
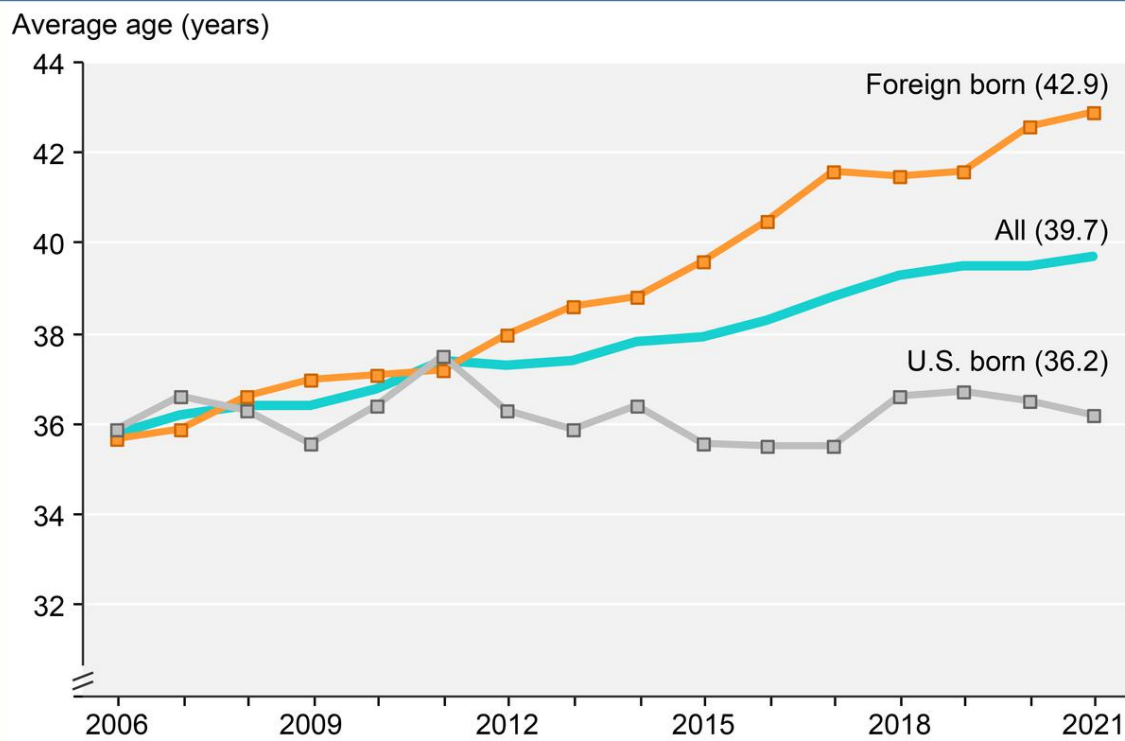


FIGURE 10³³

Many farmworkers are growing in age (Figure 11) and are continuing to work but not as quickly as they did when they were younger. This is having some adverse effects on the agriculture industry because as farm work is wearing down these workers' bodies, they find that farm labor is no longer a viable option for them to continue doing for the rest of their lives.

Average age of U.S. farm laborers/graders/sorters by place of birth, 2006–21



Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, annual American Community Survey.

A MAJORITY OF FARMWORKERS ARE FOREIGN BORN WITH AN AVERAGE AGE OF 42 YEARS OLD. **FIGURE 11** ³⁴



Farmworkers are looking towards higher-paying jobs such as construction and truck driving where they can save up more money to serve as retirement funds since many do not have access to social security. Also, many farmworkers ultimately decide to seek work in hospitality or retail despite similarly low pay, as they reach a point where they can no longer continue to sacrifice their health and put their bodies at further risk.

LABOR SHORTAGE AND H-2A VISA PROGRAM



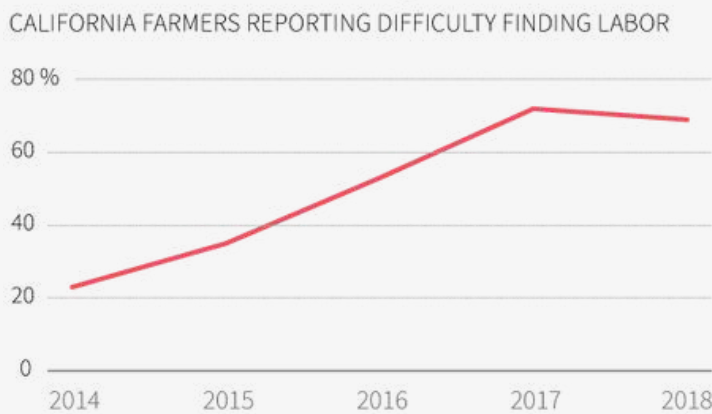
Many growers have turned to alternative measures such as participating in the H-2A Visa Program to address the tightening labor markets. In the last decade, Santa Barbara county has witnessed a surge of H-2A workers, with Santa Maria Valley as one of the top cities in California housing a significant number of H-2A workers across the state ([LA Times 2017](#)).³⁵ Santa Maria is known for its strawberry production and the revenue it brings not only to our county, but our state. The labor intensive nature of this crop which makes automated harvesting difficult paired with a decline of migration, have increased the likelihood of growers utilizing the H-2A program in our region. This program imports foreign workers from many countries, including Latin America, to work in agriculture temporarily during the harvest season before being sent back to their home countries. The H-2A program is a better-regulated descendant of the notorious Bracero program, which ended under the Kennedy administration in the 1960s, preceding the era of rising unionization and wages for farmworkers through the 1970s. In the 1980's, the Reagan administration re-established a guestworker program for agriculture, with some additional protections for wages and housing standards. However, the H-2A program has many of the same features of the Bracero program, with employers providing housing and food and temporary visas tied to employment with no long-term path to citizenship. The power imbalance created by employer control of visas and housing and the isolation and short-term stays of H-2A workers creates an environment ripe for labor violations. According to the report, "Ripe for Reform", 43% of H-2A workers reported not being paid the wages they were promised and that both employers and recruiters of the program would intentionally deceive workers and then compensate with lesser wages upon their arrival ([CDM Migrante](#)).³⁶

Additionally, workers experience limited mobility to perform simple tasks such as grocery shopping, crowded and unsanitary housing conditions, sexual harassment, and verbal abuse, and were even threatened with deportation and job loss in the future if they resigned ([CDM Migrante](#)).

In regard to the working conditions, many workers experience aggressive pressure to work fast, and as shown previously, agriculture is one of the most dangerous industries in which to work. Employers will often neglect care for H-2A workers by not providing workers compensation and will coerce those who are injured to sign a “voluntary” quick waiver as they are no longer useful to them ([FarmworkerJustice.org](#)).³⁷ Despite the abuses workers have experienced and neglectful inspection of working conditions, the H-2A program continues to expand.

As seen in Figure 12, as the labor market tightens, growers are more likely to turn to temporary worker visas to avoid being unable to harvest their crops and losing revenue.

As the Labor Market Tightens ...



Source: *Adapting to Farm Worker Scarcity Survey 2019, California Farm Bureau Federation and UC Davis*

... Farmers Turn to Visa Sponsorship



Source: *Department of Homeland Security*

BILL LANE CENTER FOR THE AMERICAN WEST

FIGURE 12³⁸

“LUPE SANDOVAL, THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE CALIFORNIA FARM LABOR CONTRACTORS ASSOCIATION, CALLS THE GUEST WORKER PROGRAM “A VERY EXPENSIVE, CONFUSING, PROBLEMATIC SYSTEM,” AN ASSERTION SEEMINGLY ECHOED BY MILES REITER, THE CEO OF DRISCOLL’S.”

- [SIERRA GARCIA](#) IN “A ‘CLIMATE OF FEAR’ ACCELERATES EXISTING LABOR SHORTAGES ON CALIFORNIA’S FARMS”
‘...& THE WEST’ BLOG

As seen in Figure 13, more recent data shows an increase in the recruitment of H-2A workers, and this is expected to continue growing. (Castillo 2023).³⁹

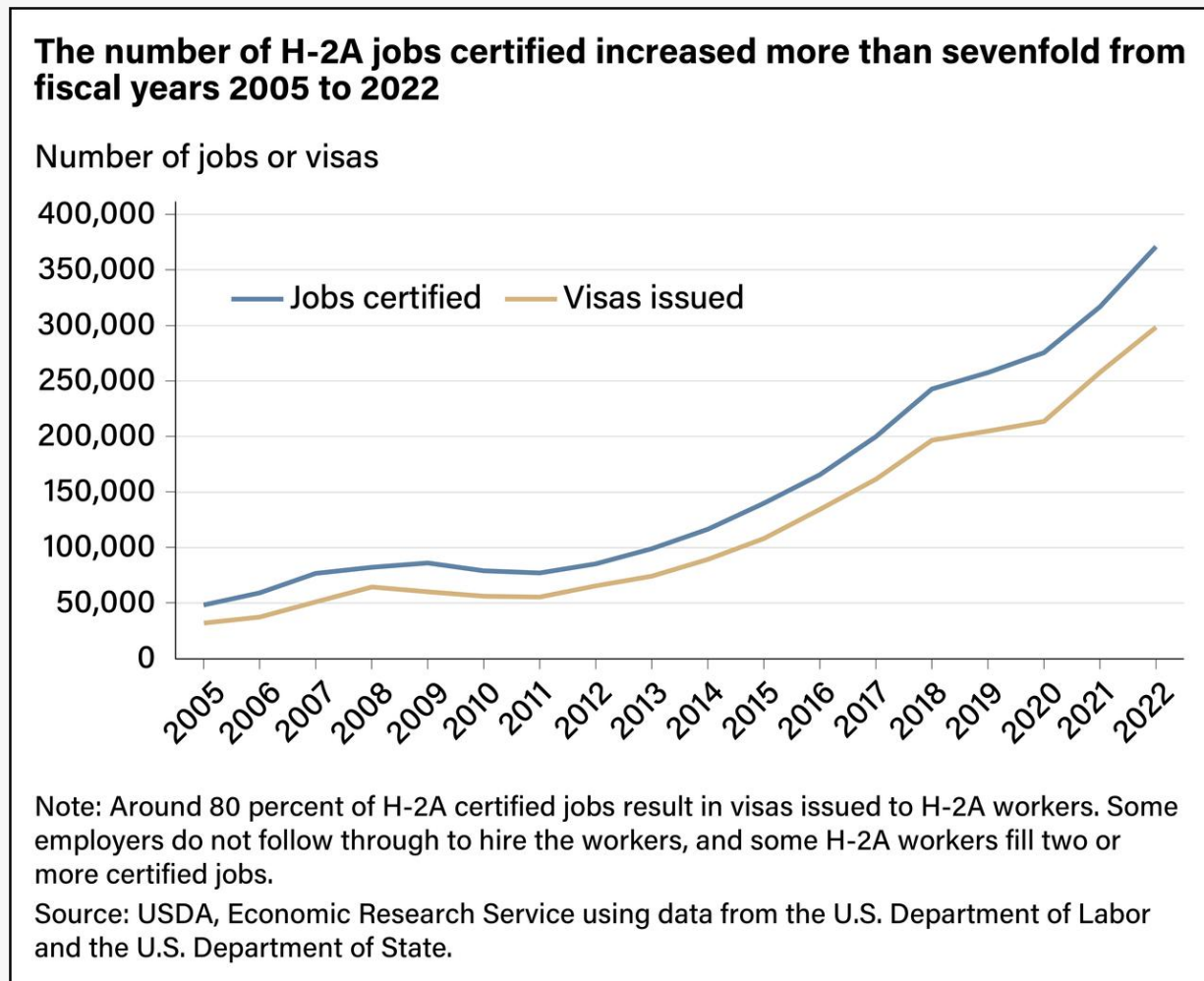


FIGURE 13

Agricultural corporations today are spending large sums of money on using the H-2A program, often at double the cost of domestic farmworkers' wages because of the additional expenses required. A complicated application needs to be filled out for each agricultural worker. Not only do agricultural employers incur the cost of processing and filing, but they also pay H-2A workers a federally mandated wage rate (AWER) of about \$18 per hour. In high-cost areas such as coastal California, the requirements for housing are particularly costly. With the cost of housing, food, and transportation, and hourly wages, employers often pay over \$30 per hour for H-2A workers after all expenses are included. In the last decade, the demand for H-2A visas has tripled (Fwd.us 2022).

The fact that employers are able to cover the extensive costs of H-2A workers' housing, food, transportation and visas demonstrates that they are more than capable of paying higher wages. Any agricultural companies that raised wages for all workers to match the total costs they pay for the H-2A program would likely see an immediate surge of applicants for their open positions.

The H-2A program addresses the immediate needs of the agriculture industry, but it is not sustainable in the long term. Miles Reiter, the CEO of Driscoll's claims that the program is a " 'very expensive, confusing, problematic system.' " (Stanford University 2019).

TYPE OF EXPENSE	COST
Labor Certification	
Processing sole employers	\$100 application fee, plus \$10 per certified worker (not to exceed \$1000)
Non-Immigrant Worker Petition	
Filing fee	\$460
H-2A Visa Application	
Consulate fee	\$190 per worker (worker must be reimbursed in first paycheck)
Border stamp fee	\$6 per worker
Agent fees	Approximately \$100 per worker
Transportation	
Transport from home country to work site	\$400 to \$650 per worker (cost varies depending on the country of origin)
Weekly travel to and from a grocery store and other incidentals	Cost varies
Miscellaneous costs	
Association fees if applicable	\$200
Housing and livable fittings	Approximately \$9,000 to \$13,000 per worker

FIGURE 14⁴⁰



In addition, many growers have decided to transition out of crops that require many workers and have turned to simpler crops that can be prepped and harvested by machines (USDA 2022).⁴¹ Unfortunately, growers have witnessed the weakness of mechanized farming, which has had very limited success in processing fresh fruit. A 2023 USDA report notes, “Mechanizing is difficult for strawberry harvesting because the fruit is delicate and fields need to be re-picked repeatedly without damaging the plants that produce berries for the rest of the season” (USDA 2022). The technology has had many flaws and weaknesses in harvesting quality crops, and the cost of purchasing this crop is higher than many employers can afford. Mechanized strawberry harvesting is relatively new and is likely many years away from widespread adoption, and it is unable to address the immediate issue of how the industry can increase the number of farmworkers to be sustainable.

“MECHANIZING IS DIFFICULT FOR STRAWBERRY HARVESTING BECAUSE THE FRUIT IS DELICATE AND FIELDS NEED TO BE RE-PICKED REPEATEDLY WITHOUT DAMAGING THE PLANTS THAT PRODUCE BERRIES FOR THE REST OF THE SEASON”

PART VII: CROP PRODUCTION, HARVESTING, AND REVENUE



CROP PRODUCTION, HARVESTING AND REVENUE

Crop production has substantially increased in the last decade, and revenue has skyrocketed. According to the USDA Economic Research Service 2023, “about 2/4 billion pounds of strawberries were produced in 2018-2020, an 87 percent increase from 1.29 billion pounds in 2000-2002” (USDA 2023). The majority of U.S. strawberries are grown on the Central Coast, and Santa Maria is one of the largest growing areas. (USDA 2023). Santa Barbara county achieved \$1.9 billion of agricultural production in 2022, a 5.1% increase from the previous year (County of SB 2023).⁴²

12,933 acres of strawberries were harvested in 2022 with a total production of 328, 513 and a total value of \$810,923,000 (County of SB 2023). Fruit & Nut Crops totaled \$988,331,000, and Vegetable Crops totaled \$660,562,000 in revenue. Driscoll’s, a multi-billion dollar privately-held corporation that dominates the global berry market sets the prices that many growers are paid for their crops due to their control of the supply chain from shipping and marketing to the DNA of the most popular breeds of strawberries. In 2023, Driscoll’s ranked among the top 10 sales of all grocery retail brands (The Produce News).⁴³

WAGES & EFFECTS ON CONSUMERS

Farmworkers’ wages could be raised dramatically with minimal costs to consumers if major distributors and retail brands like Driscoll’s paid higher prices for labor-intensive crops like strawberries. Only a small share of what consumers pay in the grocery store for fresh produce ever sees the hands of farmworkers.

“The majority of U.S. strawberries are grown on the Central Coast, and Santa Maria is one of the largest growing areas.”

According to USDA commodity price data (Figure 15), a one-pound package of strawberries is priced between \$1.99-5.99 at retail stores, depending on the supply and demand of the berries, organic certification, and seasonal fluctuations. However, as seen in the calculations below, if farmworkers at the height of harvest season are paid \$2.20 per eight-pound flat, they pick a common pay rate in the Santa Maria Valley, only about 28 cents of each one pound retail container goes to the workers who harvest the crop. These disparities can be even larger in other crops which are less labor-intensive to harvest.

Date	Class	Region	Commodity	Variety	Organic	Environment	Unit	Number of Stores	Weighted Avg Price	Low Price	High Price	% Marked Local
09/01/2023	FRUITS	SOUTHWEST U.S.	STRAWBERRIES		Y		1 lb package	40	5.99	5.99	5.99	
09/01/2023	FRUITS	SOUTHWEST U.S.	STRAWBERRIES				1 lb package	330	2.83	1.99	4.99	

FIGURE 15 ⁴⁴

Research shows a similar pattern exists across the agricultural industry. In fact, “Agricultural labor economist and professor at UC-Davis Philip Martin, predicts that if farmworker wages go up by 47%, household grocery bills would go up just \$21.15 a year, or \$1.76 a month” ([Farmworker Justice](#)).⁴⁵ Agricultural corporations can pay workers a dignified, living wage at a negligible cost to the consumer.

Calculations

\$2.20 per flat

8 boxes of strawberries per flat

$\$2.20 \div 8 = 0.275$ or about 0.28 cents per box goes to the worker

These calculations are simply for 1 flat. A minimum wage worker would have to make 7 flats of strawberries to earn an hourly wage of 15.50. For an 8 hour work day, farmworkers would make an estimate of 56 flats in one day.

HOW MUCH OF THE PRICE OF YOUR BOX OF STRAWBERRIES GOES TO THE WORKERS WHO PICKED THEM?

Farmworkers in areas like the Santa Maria Valley can earn **\$2.20 per flat they pick**

Each of these flats hold **8 one pound boxes** that can each sell to shoppers for **\$2 - \$6**.

On average farmworkers only see about **28 cents** for each box.



That is only **7%** of a box sold at \$4, just a fraction of the fruit of their labor



Farmworkers could earn a living wage similar to their peers in trucking or construction if major corporate distributors like Drisoll's, who dominate the berry market, paid their suppliers as little as 20 cents more per box of strawberries and passed this cost on to the consumer.

Many agricultural employers could improve labor recruitment and retention and save costs by raising farmworkers' wages to a level competitive with other industries, but below the current total cost of H-2A contracts. Farmworkers' work requires a high level of skill and experience with the specific labor of each crop that has been undervalued for too long. For example, preparing strawberries requires soil fertilization, the plastic tape over the beds has the correct spacing distance between each strawberry plant, and each plant is perfectly planted. Any mistakes of having the plant too high, low, or J-shaped can impact the grower's profit the following year. Not only is it important to do the job well, but quickly. Farmworkers demonstrate their diligence, adeptness, and accelerated skill daily in this essential job that feeds the world. They continue to do so rain or shine through global pandemics and natural disasters. The least we owe farmworkers in our communities is to ensure that they reap some of the benefits they continue to sow for the future of our world.

PART VIII: A LIVING WAGE FOR FARMWORKERS

In the past 3 years, we have seen an uprising in farmworkers walking out of their jobs to demand better wages and working conditions, with hundreds of workers self-organizing over half a dozen known strikes, particularly concentrated in the Santa Maria Valley. Often lasting for several days with no support or coordination from established labor unions, many have resulted in employers agreeing to pay higher wages to retain workers. Many farmworkers saw their labor's increased visibility and recognition as essential workers during the COVID-19 pandemic and the high-profile raises won by workers in other sectors through strikes and union bargaining in recent years. For example, in Santa Maria during the pandemic, workers at Rancho Laguna Farms were experiencing wage cuts, unsafe working conditions due to their employer's negligence in following CDC regulations in the workplace, and retaliation in response to workers striking ([Santa Maria Sun 2020](#)).⁴⁶ Workers organized themselves and were successful in their strike, winning a raise from \$1.90 per piece to \$2.10 per piece. In 2021, around 40 workers at HillTop Produce Inc. organized, demanding higher wages since their current rate of \$1.80 per box had remained stagnant for many years and was insufficient to meet the increasing cost of living. Workers again won a major victory in securing a higher pay rate of \$2.10 per piece ([Political Payne 2021](#)).⁴⁷ Within the same year, about 150 workers organized at West Coast Berry Farms and also won a raise for their piece rate ([Santa Maria Times 2021](#)).⁴⁸ In May 2022, workers went on strike J&C Berry Farms, demanding a higher wage.





They successfully raised their piece rate to 10 cents more, which prompted other companies nearby to raise their pay as well voluntarily (KSBY 2022).⁴⁹ In 2023, California had unprecedented storms at the beginning of the year, devastating many families' homes and belongings. Many already struggling farm workers felt that the storms amplified an already difficult situation. This year alone, farmworkers experienced one of the most difficult financial hardships since the recession and pandemic. The winter storms this year deterred crop production, deterred harvest, and, in turn, diminished their income. They started working late in the year and experienced wage theft (Ethnic Media Services 2023).⁵⁰ In response, workers continued to organize strikes. More and more farmworkers are feeling frustrated with the working conditions they experience. They have to work with the little they have to sustain their families until the next harvesting season the following year. These are only a few examples of the most recent strikes. Many farmworkers are increasingly becoming tired of the lack of respect for their labor, negligence of safe working conditions, and insufficient livable wages. Despite being labeled as "essential workers" during the pandemic, farmworkers were often treated as disposable. They have noticed the minimum wage increases of other workers in various sectors, from fast food workers to healthcare workers, and they are observing the labor movements of other sectors, from Amazon warehouses to Starbucks cafes, automobile factories to movie studios. Farmworkers passionately understand that they, too, deserve better treatment.

Although the United Farm Workers (UFW) is far smaller today than at its peak in the 1970s, new legislation that protects and supports farmworkers organizing unions in California promises a reversal of this trend. In the San Joaquin Valley, nearly 300 farmworkers at DiMare Fresh won the UFW’s first union election under new “card check” rules ([CalMatters](#)).⁵¹ Across the West Coast of North America, farmworkers have formed their own independent unions. Pineros Y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste (PCUN) has been organizing in Oregon for many years to expand the rights of workers, including fighting for overtime pay and protection from dangerous working conditions ([Oregon Encyclopedia](#)).⁵² Familias Unidas por la Justicia (FUJ) is a farmworker union that successfully organized “over 500 Triqui, Mixteco, and Spanish speaking workers at Sakuma Bros Berry Farm ([National Farm Worker Ministry 2018](#)).⁵³ Another farmworker movement took place in San Quintin Valley, Baja California, where workers were “protesting low wages and poor working conditions” ([Farmworker Justice](#)).⁵⁴ While unionization of farmworkers is regaining traction across the coast and state, our region specifically still remains without a significant presence of farmworker unions. One way that farmworkers can achieve livable wages is through policies that set higher wages throughout the entire sector, preventing any individual company that raises wages from facing a competitive disadvantage by ensuring that all businesses are on a level playing field. For example, California fast food workers won a wage increase to \$20 per hour through legislation beginning in 2024, and similar legislation will eventually raise healthcare workers’ wages to \$25 per hour across the state ([Ca.gov 2023](#),⁵⁵ [Cal Matters 2023](#)).⁵⁶ In March 2024, voters in Long Beach, CA approved Measure RW, to raise wages for hotel workers to \$29.50 per hour by 2028.



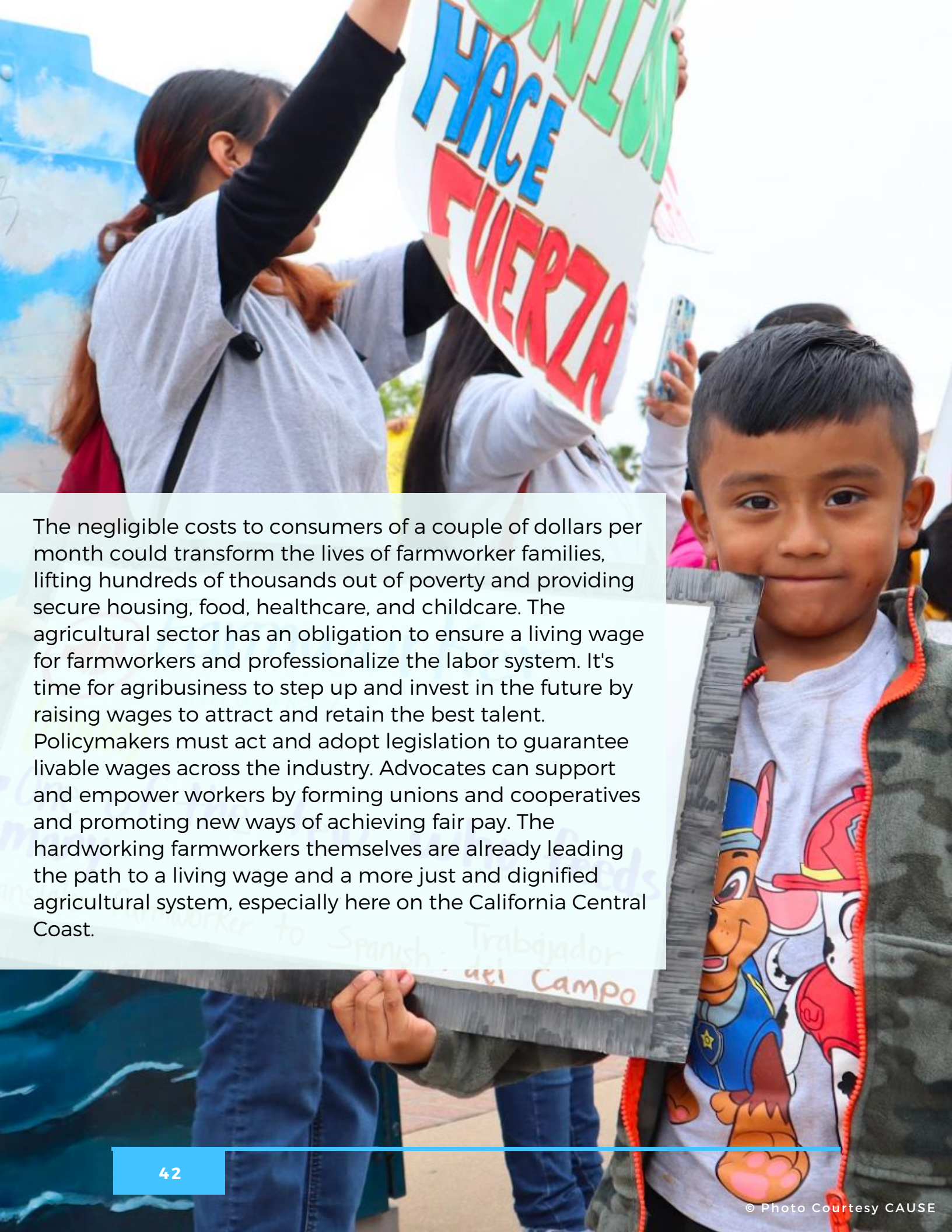
CONCLUSION

All people deserve a living wage that can sustain their families with a roof over their heads, food on their children's table, and care for their bodies and minds. For too long, those who toil in our nation's fields have not been valued because of the color of their skin, leaving them barely surviving on the crumbs of a multibillion-dollar industry's profits.

Farmworkers are an essential part of our communities. Not only do they put food on people's tables worldwide, but they are the foundation of the economy of regions like the Central Coast and states like California. Their difficult, dangerous, and highly skilled labor keeps the agricultural industry running, and the industry's failure to fairly compensate this labor has created a crisis. Farmworkers provide for the world yet can barely provide for their own families on their low wages. A livable wage for farmworkers is the only path forward for the future agricultural industry.



The agriculture industry needs more farmworkers and the H-2A Visa program is a costly Band-Aid, not a long-term solution. Increasing farmworker wages is more sustainable and cost-effective, allowing the industry to draw in more workers to expand and diversify the workforce in the long run. Heavy physical labor with dangerous conditions and seasonal fluctuations requires strong wages that can support a family to attract workers in an industrialized economy. Agricultural work must be properly compensated for the risks that come with the job to be competitive with other sectors, as migrants from regions like Latin America have more and more opportunities in the modern world.



The negligible costs to consumers of a couple of dollars per month could transform the lives of farmworker families, lifting hundreds of thousands out of poverty and providing secure housing, food, healthcare, and childcare. The agricultural sector has an obligation to ensure a living wage for farmworkers and professionalize the labor system. It's time for agribusiness to step up and invest in the future by raising wages to attract and retain the best talent. Policymakers must act and adopt legislation to guarantee livable wages across the industry. Advocates can support and empower workers by forming unions and cooperatives and promoting new ways of achieving fair pay. The hardworking farmworkers themselves are already leading the path to a living wage and a more just and dignified agricultural system, especially here on the California Central Coast.

APPENDIX

1. [Immigrant farmworker and America's food production-5 things to know, FWD.us. \(2022, September 14\)](#)
2. Yeh, A., et al., (2023, September). The Changing Landscape of U.S. Strawberry and Blueberry Markets: Production, Trade, and Challenges from 2000 to 202. Economic Research Service: U.S. Department of Agriculture.
3. [Timeline of agricultural labor in the U.S. NFWM. \(2024, February 15\).](#)
4. Perez, L. (2020, October 15). [Essential and expendable: The rise of agricultural labor and the United farmworkers. National Museum of American History.](#)
5. Martin, P.L. (2004, January). Promise Unfulfilled Why Didn't Collective Bargaining Transform California's Farm Labor Market? Center for Immigration Studies.
6. [Farm Labor. USDA ERS-Farm Labor. \(n.d.\).](#)
7. OEWS Employment and Wages Data Tables. (2023). California Employment Development Department.
8. Living wage calculator. [Living Wage Calculator-Living Wage Calculation for California. \(2024, February 14\).](#)
9. Employment Development Department: Labor Market Information Division. (2023). Agricultural Workers, All Others.
10. Gold, A. et al., (2022, January). Findings from the National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS) 2019-2020. A Demographic and Employment Profile of United States Farmworkers. JBS International.
11. [Santa Maria, CA rental market. Average Rental Price in Santa Maria, CA & Market Trends|Zillow Rental Manager. \(2024, March 19\).](#)
12. Retrieved from https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2022.S2503?_q=renters%20and%20housing%20in%20santa%20barbara%20county.
13. [City of Santa Maria. \(2023, November\). 6th Cycle Housing Element 2023-2031.](#)
14. Brown, P., et al. (2023). Farmworker Health in California: Health in a Time of Contagion, Drought, and Climate Change. University of California, Merced.
15. [Cottage Health, Population Health \(2019\). Cottage Health Community Health Needs Assessment Report, 2019. Santa Barbara, CA."](#)
16. Retrieved from [https://data.census.gov/mdat/#/search?ds=ACS_PUMS_1Y2022&rv=SCHLINDP\(0170\).ucqid&wt=PWGTP&g=795P200US0608301.0608302.0608303](https://data.census.gov/mdat/#/search?ds=ACS_PUMS_1Y2022&rv=SCHLINDP(0170).ucqid&wt=PWGTP&g=795P200US0608301.0608302.0608303).
17. Catterson, R., et al. (2022, January 27). The 2022 CHCF California Health Policy Survey. California Health Care Foundation.
18. [Farmworker Health Facts. NC Farmworker Health Program. \(2023, May 19\).](#)
19. California Child Care Resource & Referral Network. (n.d.). 2021 Child Care Portfolio.
20. Gold, A. et al., (2022, January). Findings from the National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS)
21. Santa Barbara County Food Action Plan. (2016). For healthy people, a healthy economy, and a healthy environment.
22. Retrieved 2022, from https://www.bls.gov/iif/nonfatal-injuries-and-illnesses-tables/table-1-injury-and-illness-rates-by-industry-2022-national.htm#soil_n17_as_t1.f5
23. Bureau of Labor Statistics U.S. Department of Labor. (2024, January). Union Members-2023.
24. Pastor, M., & Vargas, M., et al. (n.d.). Towards a Just and Equitable Central Coast. USC Equity Research Institute.
25. Manzo, F.I., et al. (2022, May 10). The Union Advantage During the Construction Labor Shortage. Illinois Economic Policy Institute.
26. Bureau of Labor Statistics U.S. Department of Labor. (2023, December 12). National Census Fatal Occupational Injuries in 2022.
27. Kalish, L. (2022, July 7). [Study says California employers fail to keep food, farmworkers safe from covid, CalMatters](#)
28. Cruz, R. P., et al. (2023, November 9). [Central Coast organizations speak out on two farmworker deaths in Santa Barbara County, The Santa Barbara Independent.](#)
29. OEWS Employment and Wages Data Tables. (2023). California Employment Development Department.
30. Person, Hayes, J., & Hill, L. (2023, May 15). [Undocumented immigrants in California. Public Policy Institute of California.](#)
31. Pew Research Center. (2019, June 12). [Unauthorized immigrant population trends for states, birth countries and regions. Pew Research Center's Hispanic Trends Project](#)
32. Garcia, S. (2021, September 22). [A "climate of fear" accelerates existing labor shortages on California's farms, & the West](#)
33. [GDP \(current US\\$\)-Mexico. World Bank Open Data. \(n.d.\).](#)
34. [Farm labor. USDA ERS-Farm Labor. \(n.d.\).](#)
35. Mohan, G. (2017, March 25). [To keep crops from rotting in the field, farmers say they need trump to let in more temporary workers. Los Angeles Times. https://www.latimes.com/projects/la-fi-farm-labor-guestworkers/.](#)
36. Centro De Los Derechos Del Migrante, Inc. (n.d.). Ripe for Reform.
37. [No way to treat a guest: Why the H-2A Agricultural Visa program fails U.S. and foreign workers. Farmworker Justice. \(n.d.\).](#)
38. Garcia, S. (2021, September 22). [A "climate of fear" accelerates existing labor shortages on California's farms, & the West](#)
39. Castillo, M. (2022, March 13). [H-2A temporary Agricultural Job Certifications Continued to Soar in 2022. USDA Economic Research Institute.](#)
40. U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2024, January 4). [H-2A Visa Program for Temporary Workers. Farmers.gov.](#)
41. Calvin, L., et al. (2022, July). Adjusting to Higher Labor Costs in Selected U.S. Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Industries. Economic Research Service U.S. Department of Agriculture.
42. [2022 agricultural crop production report: Santa Barbara County, CA - official website. 2022 Agricultural Crop Production Report | Santa Barbara County, CA - Official Website. \(n.d.\).](#)
43. [Driscoll's emerges as one of America's top retail grocery brands. Produce news. The Produce News. \(2023, July 26\).](#)
44. [U.S. Department of Agriculture: Agricultural Marketing Service. \(n.d.\). Weekly Advertised Fruit & Vegetables Retail Prices. Market news - fruit and vegetable - retail reports.](#)
45. [Farmworker justice statement: California and New York Minimum Wage increases will benefit many farmworkers, but more progress is needed. Farmworker Justice. \(n.d.\).](#)
46. Martin, M. (2024, February 21). [Rancho Laguna Farms Workers allegedly faced retaliation for striking. Santa Maria Sun.](#)
47. Payne, P. byJoe. (2021, April 21). [Indigenous farmworkers organize and strike in Santa Maria with help from MICOP. Political Payne.](#)
48. Place, L. (2023, April 4). [Farmworkers with west coast berry strike, join call for higher wages. Santa Maria Times.](#)
49. Dizon, J. (2022, May 3). [Farmworkers in Santa Maria demand higher wages amid rising inflation. KSBY News. https://www.ksby.com/news/local-news/farmworkers-in-santa-maria-demand-higher-wages-amid-rising-inflation.](#)
50. Bacon, D. (2023, June 18). [Strawberry Workers for Justice: EMS. Ethnic Media Services.](#)
51. Foy, N. (2023, November 9). UFW wins first farmworker union vote under new California law. CalMatters.
52. [Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste \(PCUN\). The Oregon Encyclopedia. \(n.d.\).](#)
53. [Familias Unidas por la Justicia. NFWM. \(2018, June\).](#)
54. [Mexican farmworker strike. Farmworker Justice. \(n.d.-b\).](#)
55. [Office of Governor Gavin Newsome. \(2023, September 28\). California increases minimum wage, protections for fast-food workers. Ca.gov.](#)
56. Ibarra, A. B. (2023, October 14). [New California law raises minimum wage to \\$25 for Health Care Workers. CalMatters.](#)



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to extend our heartfelt appreciation to our teams in both CAUSE and MICOP for their dedicated efforts in conducting this extensive research report. This valuable work would not have been possible without their relentless commitment to community organizing, policy research and advocacy.

We also want to give a special recognition to our esteemed community leaders and delegates of Alianza Campesina de la Costa Central for their vigorous contributions as the foundation of this endeavor. Their unwavering determination and willingness to share their testimonies and experiences over the years have laid the groundwork for this report. It stands as a testament to the voices and concerns that farmworkers have long expressed.

We sincerely hope that this report serves as a catalyst for greater awareness and understanding of the invaluable contributions made by our farmworker community. It is our desire that this paves the way for meaningful actions and initiatives aimed at bettering the lives of our community with a dignified and livable wage.



JUSTICIA PARA
LOS CAMPESINOS
Ahora !!!

“All people deserve a living wage that can sustain their families with a roof over their heads, food on their children’s table, and care for their bodies and minds.”

Researchers: Erica Diaz Cervantes, Lucas Zucker, Celeste Rivera, Molly McCoy.

Prepared by: Vanessa Terán, Frank Rodriguez, Erica Diaz Cervantes.

Copy Editors: Genevieve Flores-Haro, Vanessa Terán, Hazel Davalos.

