

— conversations on —

FOOD JUSTICE

A series hosted by
Share Our Strength and Food & Society at the Aspen Institute

SUMMARY TO ACTION REPORT SESSION #9

SESSION DESCRIPTION

On January 13th, 2022 Share Our Strength, in collaboration with Food & Society at the Aspen Institute, hosted the latest edition of the **Conversations on Food Justice** Series “Keeping Americans Fed: The Power and Exploitation of Immigrant & Migrant Farming Communities” featuring speakers, Greg Asbed, Pakou Hang, Emma Torres, Mily Treviño-Sauceda, and moderator Russell Contreras. The panel discussed the social, economic, and structural barriers that exploit immigrant and migrant farmworkers and push families to the margins. We also heard about the people and organizations who are forging a new vision for an agricultural industry that values the land and the people who tend to it and examined why improving the conditions of farmworkers should be a legal, economic, and moral imperative for all of us.

FEATURED PANELISTS

Greg Asbed

Co-Founder, Coalition of Immokalee Workers/Fair Food Program



Greg Asbed is a co-founder of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) and a principal author of the CIW's Fair Food Program and the Worker-driven Social Responsibility (WSR) model, a breakthrough, worker-driven approach to verifiable corporate accountability recognized by observers from the United Nations to the White House for its unique effectiveness in combatting forced labor, sexual violence, and other human rights violations prevalent in agriculture. He coordinates relations among farmworkers, global food retailers (including Walmart, Whole Foods, McDonald's, and Sodexo), and agricultural industry leaders in the development, implementation, and expansion of the Fair Food Program's innovative rights standards, worker education processes, and market-backed enforcement mechanisms. Mr. Asbed also heads up the CIW's communications efforts and is a lead strategist in the CIW's national consumer movement. His work includes consulting with other industries and worker organizations, both nationally and internationally, on the adaptation of the FFP and the WSR model to other contexts, including the dairy industry in Vermont and the apparel industry in Bangladesh and Lesotho. Mr. Asbed is a 2017 MacArthur "Genius" Fellow and received the 2015 President Medal for Extraordinary Efforts in Combatting Human Trafficking, the 2014 Clinton Global Citizen Award, and the 2013 Roosevelt Freedom From Want Medal on behalf of the CIW. He speaks English, Spanish, and Haitian Creole fluently, and spent 18 seasons harvesting watermelons across the Southeastern United States. Follow Coalition of Immokalee Workers on Twitter @fairfoodprogram

Pakou Hang

Community Activist & CO-Founder/Former Executive Director of Hmong American Farmers Association.



Pakou Hang is a community activist and leader. She serves as the Chief Program Officer for Vote Run Lead, an organization that trains women to run for public office in the United States. Prior to Vote Run Lead, she co-founded and served as the Executive Director for Hmong American Farmers Association, a nonprofit that worked to promote Hmong farmers and build intergenerational and community wealth. Pakou graduated from Yale University and has a Masters in Political Science from the University of Minnesota. She is a recipient of the prestigious Hubert H. Humphrey Public Leadership Award, the Paul and Daisy Soros Fellowship for New Americans, the Bush Leadership Fellowship, and the Marshall Memorial

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Fellowship, which strives to bolster trans-Atlantic relations. She also served on the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's Citizen's Board, the Minneapolis Food Council, and the Saint Paul Farmers Market Board of Directors. Learn more about the efforts of Hmong American Farmers Association by following them on Twitter @hafafarmers

Emma Torres

Founder & CEO, Campesinos Sin Fronteras



Emma Torres, MSW, is the founder and the Chief Executive Officer of Campesinos Sin Fronteras, a community-based 501 c3 grassroots organization serving farmworker families in the border communities of Yuma County, Arizona. A former migrant farmworker herself, Ms. Torres has more than thirty-three years of public health experience as a migrant health advocate, she holds a master's degree in Social Work and is a UCLA Johnson and Johnson Health Executive Program Graduate. Ms. Torres is one of the pioneers of the Arizona Community Health Worker/Promotora program starting the first CHW program in Arizona in 1987. She has been a strong proponent and advocate of the CHW model as one of the most effective strategies in reaching and serving the low-income

Hispanic and migrant farmworker population. In 2003 and to the present, Mrs. Torres holds a presidential appointment to the US/Mexico Border Health Commission representing the State of Arizona. Follow Campesinos Sin Fronteras on Twitter @campesinosinfronteras

Mily Treviño-Sauceda

Executive Director & Co-Founder, Alianza Nacional de Campesinas, Inc



Mily Treviño-Sauceda is the Executive Director & Visionary/Co-Founder of Alianza Nacional de Campesinas, Inc. She is also known as the founder of the farmworker women's movement in the U.S. since the late 80s. Born in Bellingham, Washington to a migrant farmworker family. She is the third of ten children. She worked in agricultural fields since age eight; in her teenage years became a union worker organizer with the UFW in the 1970s. She organized youth groups through her church. As a single mom, she raised her son "Humberto." Mily co-founded "Mujeres Mexicanas," 1988; Líderes Campesinas, 1992, the first state-based farmworker women's unique grassroots organization advocating on behalf of campesinas. Was the Executive Director of Líderes Campesinas for over 12 years and became President of Emeritus. In 2011, she co-founded Alianza Nacional de Campesinas, the first national grassroots-based farmworker women's organization. Earned her Masters in Social Sciences: Rural Development, Capacity Building, Women's Leadership, and Oral History. She sits on numerous national boards and advisory councils. Her numerous awards include "100 Heroines of the World," 1998. "Sister of Fire" Award, 2003. The Ford Foundation & NYU award "Leadership for a Changing World," 2004. People Magazine recognized her twice, 2006. Líderes Campesinas honored her 30+ year's distinguished leadership, 2009 & 2018. Cesar Chavez Legacy Award, 2015 & 2018. A Laureate Prize for Women's Creativity in Rural Life, 2016 by World Women Summit Foundation; Novo Foundation's Fourth Cohort of the Movement to End Violence, 2017; the "Ingenuity Award: as Social Progress" by Smithsonian, 2018, and best embody the spirit and work as a Feminist of The Frederick Douglass list of 200, in 2019; Visionary Voice Award by NSVRC, 2019. Follow Alianza Nacional de Campesinas on Twitter @campesinasunite

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Russell Contreras

Reporter, Justice and Race, Axios



Russell Contreras is the Race and Justice Reporter at Axios covering the policies and agencies at the heart of the administration of justice and how it impacts people of color. He is also the co-author of the Axios Latino newsletter — a partnership with Axios and Telemundo. Before coming to Axios, he was a member of the race and ethnicity reporting team at The Associated Press. He’s worked for the Boston Globe and the Albuquerque Journal. A graduate of the University of Houston in History and English, Contreras later attended Columbia University’s School of the Art where he earned an MFA in nonfiction creative writing. He is currently working on a book

about JFK and Latinos. He lives in Rio Rancho, New Mexico. Follow Russell Contreras on Twitter @RussContreras

SUMMARY AND KEY TAKEAWAYS

Immigrant and migrant farmworkers play a critically important role in putting food on our nation’s tables, making up an estimated 73% of the agricultural workforce in the United States today. Despite this outsize role in shoring up the national food supply, food insecurity is endemic in the migrant farming community: one recent study of Georgia farmworkers found that 63% of migrant and seasonal workers surveyed struggled to feed themselves and their families, and another in Northern California revealed that farmworkers—particularly those that are undocumented—depend on emergency food as their main food source. The National Agricultural Workers Survey published in 2018 by the US Department of Labor found that 71% of farmworkers reported an annual salary of less than \$30,000 per year¹. Wages this low make it difficult for farmworkers to afford sufficient and healthy food. The US does provide social safety net programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), but farmworkers face difficulty in accessing these programs. Immigration status, misinformation, lack of transportation, geography, and unstable living arrangements, pose as barriers to accessing food assistance.

Immigrant and migrant farmworkers face extraordinary barriers to economic mobility, and they are often rendered invisible by institutions with the power to address unequal and exploitative working conditions. Undocumented workers—who make up approximately 50% of the farm labor workforce—are particularly vulnerable, as they live under the constant threat of arrest and family separation, all while working in extremely difficult and oftentimes dangerous conditions that have only been made more so by the COVID-19 pandemic and the ravages of climate change. The pandemic has greatly disrupted the food supply and supply chains. Farmworker roles are essential to our food supply but workers are unable to shelter in place, face higher occupational hazards, and low health insurance rates. In tandem with the pandemic farmworkers also experienced heatwaves and wildfires, which have drastically changed the landscape of farming. As panelist Pakau Hang noted, climate change exacerbates uncertainty, and every year more and more farmers are leaving because of heat and pollution making it unbearable to work. In areas like Arizona, it

¹ Data from the 2017-2018 National Agricultural Workers Survey. NATIONAL CENTER FOR FARMWORKER HEALTH. (2021). Retrieved January 19, 2022, from <http://www.ncfh.org/naws-fact-sheet.html>

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is not uncommon for temperatures to reach 100 degrees but they are seeing temperatures upwards of 125 degrees.

The conditions farmworkers experience is unjust. With undocumented farmworkers making up a large majority of the farm labor workforce, they are not protected by US labor laws². They live in an environment of fear and uncertainty. Panelist Emma Torres explained that workers don't have the security of a home. Panelist Mily continued, "There are no health benefits for farmworkers. There's no medical plan, so if they get sick, they face housing issues or work issues, farmers are not even part of the Fair Labor Act". Female farmworkers face greater disparities, they earn less than male co-workers, and often experience harassment, assault, and rape. There is no way for farmworkers to report the abuses they are facing every day. If they speak up, there is fear of not having a job the next season and threats of immigration showing up where they live. Panelist Greg Asbed spoke about the gridlinefarmworkers' constant and persistent feeling of powerlessness in their work and its contributions to mental health challenges.

The US provides an H-2A visa program for Temporary Agricultural Workers as a way for immigrants to legally perform short-term farm labor². In the fiscal year 2020, approximately 275,000 workers were granted visas, up roughly 17,000 from the previous year, but this only accounts for 4% of the farm labor that is needed³. This is not nearly enough and the policies around the application and use of these visas are challenging. Policies need to be addressed to protect workers from abuses, discrimination, and food insecurity. As consumers, we play a huge role in controlling the food system. We live in a food world where we value profit over people. We need to use our purchasing power and our right to vote to advocate for farmworkers who deserve justice. Without ameliorating these injustices, we risk a failed food supply.

RESOURCES

Article: [Farmworkers, Most Undocumented, Become 'Essential' During Pandemic](#)



Immigrant field workers have been told to keep working despite stay-at-home directives, and given letters attesting to their "critical" role in feeding the country.

Documentary: [Harvest of Shame](#)



In this CBS News Production broadcast from 1960, Edward R. Murrow points out the plight of migrant farmworkers in America. Topics range from the harsh living conditions, endless travel, low wages, and poor opportunities for their children.

Report: [Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker Food Insecurity: Prevalence, Impact, Risk Factors, and Coping Strategies](#)



In the United States, nearly 15% of the general population is considered food insecure; ethnic minorities, particularly Latinos, experience disproportionately higher rates. Food insecurity is particularly endemic among the migrant and seasonal farmworker population. This article systematically reviews current knowledge related to the prevalence of food insecurity among migrant and seasonal farmworkers. The impact, risk factors, and coping strategies of food insecurity are also presented.

² FWD.us. (2021, November 12). *Immigrant farmworkers and America's food production - 5 things to know*. FWD.us. Retrieved January 18, 2022, from <https://www.fwd.us/news/immigrant-farmworkers-and-americas-food-production-5-things-to-know/>

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The authors argue for targeted social work efforts at mezzo- and macrolevels and make recommendations aimed at the prevention and amelioration of food insecurity.

Article: [Meet the Workers who put Food on America's Tables- but Can't Afford Groceries](#)



Undocumented immigrants are doing the backbreaking farm work that keeps the US food system running but struggle to feed their families

Article: [How much would it cost consumers to give farmworkers a significant raise?](#)



A blog post by the Economic Policy Institute explores how much it would cost for each household in America to give farmworkers a more livable wage.

Article: [Immigrant Farmworkers and America's Food Production: 5 Thinks to Know](#)



For decades, immigrant farmworkers have helped feed America. But the agriculture industry faces a chronic labor shortage that has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the conditions for and rights of farmworkers and their families must be improved. The critical importance of farmworkers, including undocumented immigrants, has never been clearer. Modernizing the temporary visa program, and establishing a pathway to citizenship for long-term undocumented agricultural workers, is urgently needed to protect farmworkers and their families and ensure the future of America's essential agriculture industry.

Article: [Who Feeds the Farmworkers?](#)



Immigrants and migrant workers are overwhelmingly the people responsible for getting food from fields onto American plates. When they don't make enough money for their food, communities create solutions.

CALL TO ACTION LIST

People often ask, what is the next step? If there is a right way to take the step, or if there is a formula. There is not, but we can all do something. Individual actions suggested by the panelists include the following:

- Consumers are powerful in the food market system. Support the farmworkers by purchasing your food from co-operatives or farms. To find your local community-supported agriculture (CSA), check out [Local Harvest](#).
- Demand more justice for farmworkers. Hold elected officials at every level accountable for supporting immigration rights, labor laws, and better protections for immigrant and migrant farmworkers.
- Get involved! Partner with organizations, like the [Fair Food Program](#), to advocate for farmworker justice or help farmworkers register to vote.

We hope you will continue the conversations in your organizations and your community! Please do not hesitate to let us know how you are keeping the conversations going or if you have thoughts or topics you would like to hear in the future. Reach out to us at foodjustice@strength.org Learn more about the initiative at <https://www.shareourstrength.org/conversations-on-food-justice>

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Share Our Strength is ending hunger and poverty – in the United States and abroad. Through proven, effective campaigns like No Kid Hungry and Cooking Matters, we connect people who care to ideas that work.

<https://www.shareourstrength.org>



Food & Society at the Aspen Institute brings together public health leaders, policymakers, researchers, farmers, chefs, food makers, and entrepreneurs to find practical solutions to food system challenges and inequities. The common goal is to help people of all income levels eat better and more healthful diets—and to enjoy them bite by bite.

<https://www.aspeninstitute.org/programs/food-and-society-program/>