



## Farmworker Justice Priorities for the U.S. Department of Agriculture

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has failed to be a positive force in the efforts of migrant and seasonal farmworkers to improve their wages and working conditions. While there are some programs, including rural housing, and research efforts that benefit farmworkers substantially, overall the agency has been part of farmworkers' problems, not the solution. The new Secretary of Agriculture and high-level deputies should forge a new direction.

- **Inter-agency policy consultation.** The USDA, when consulted by the White House Office of Management and Budget regarding proposed regulations by the Department of Labor, the EPA or other agencies should communicate with farmworker advocates and take their concerns into account. The USDA should represent all interests in agriculture and stop its tendency to see itself as a policy advocate for employers.
- **Labor Affairs.** The coordinator for labor affairs in the Office of the Chief Economist should be responsible for ensuring fairness in the agency's approach and should reach out to farmworker organizations on a regular basis. The Office of Civil Rights of USDA also should assist in this effort at reducing discrimination against farmworkers as an occupation.
- **Pesticide Research Agenda.** The 2008 Farm Bill contains a new program to study the relationship between cancer and farmworkers' exposure to pesticides; to develop technology for testing humans for pesticide poisoning; and testing sprayed fields for pesticide residues and degradation of the pesticides to determine scientifically the time for farmworkers to re-enter the fields safely. The USDA should collaborate with farmworker advocates and other agencies and Congress to obtain the appropriations needed to carry out these studies and should contract with the National Cancer Institute for this research.
- **NAWS.** The USDA should support the continuation and expansion of the DOL National Agricultural Workers Survey, which is the best single source of demographic and economic data on farmworkers based on effective random sampling of farmworkers. It complements the USDA Farm Labor Survey, which surveys employers.
- **Constructive Dialogue on the Labor Market.** New initiatives aimed at dialogue between farmworkers and agribusiness should be developed to promote a stable farm labor force in accordance with decades of recommendations. Such efforts should include modernization of labor practices, support for state and federal enforcement of wage-hour, pesticide-safety and other laws (to protect workers but also to prevent unscrupulous employers from undermining law-abiding employers through unfair competition), improved wages and working conditions, and reasonable efforts to increase productivity.
- **Healthy Food, Healthy Farmworkers.** The USDA participates in the National Fruit and Vegetable Alliance, which is replacing the "5 A Day for Better Health Program," to "persuade people of all ages, especially moms, that eating more fruits and vegetables does matter because it's a great way to stay healthy." Farmworkers should be offered a role in the multipartite campaign, in which agribusiness groups are active. This campaign should incorporate fair treatment of the farmworkers who produce those fruits and vegetables. Government funding should not promote the sale of produce that is tainted by labor abuses.

Thank you. For more information, contact Bruce Goldstein, Farmworker Justice, [www.farmworkerjustice.org](http://www.farmworkerjustice.org), 202-293-5420.