

A call for dignity & respect

Oct 4, 2013 by Pesticide Action Network



This Saturday, immigrants and their allies will be heading into the streets in cities across the country to "[march for immigrant dignity and respect](#)." And with a [new bill](#) in the House of Representatives, policymakers in the Capitol are a step closer to comprehensive immigration reform.

For many farmworkers, immigration reform is long-awaited and critically important. This weekend and beyond, farmworkers are "bringing the fight for immigration reform from Capitol Hill to the richest agricultural fields in the world."

A strong majority of the farmworkers in the U.S. — 80% — are immigrants. And according to [Farmworker Justice](#), more than half of immigrant farmworkers are undocumented. That means at least 1 million farmworkers lack the protections of citizenship to shield them from exploitation in the workplace.

Basic rights & protections are past due

[Farmworkers](#) are the backbone of our agricultural economy. They often work in hazardous, physically demanding conditions. And because farm work isn't covered by [most labor protections](#), many agricultural workers lack basic rights in the workplace.

Current immigration policy keeps many farmworkers pinned in a precarious position, with the threat of deportation making it risky to report on-the-job abuses like wage theft and pesticide poisonings. According to our partners at Farmworker Justice:

Undocumented workers' fear of deportation deprives them of bargaining power with their employers and inhibits them from challenging illegal employment practices. The presence of so many vulnerable farmworkers depresses wages and working conditions for all farmworkers.

Farmworkers perform an essential role in bringing food to our tables. Basic rights and [strong workplace protections](#) are overdue.

Congressional progress?

A call for dignity & respect

Published on Pesticide Action Network (<http://www.panna.org>)

While not perfect, the Senate passed a comprehensive immigration bill this summer that included a roadmap to citizenship for most of the 11 million undocumented immigrants currently in the U.S. The bill also included a fast-track to legal permanent residency for farmworkers. Despite also including a “border surge,” many farmworker groups supported the Senate bill as a hopeful step forward.

Meanwhile in the House, Representative Bob Goodlatte introduced the [Agricultural Guestworker Act](#) in April, hailed by farmworker groups as another in a series of guestworker legislation that promotes on-the-job ["abuse and exploitation."](#)

Until recently, hope for a comprehensive bill in the House seemed slim. But earlier this week, House Democrats broke through the gridlock to introduce a bill with many of the strengths of the Senate bill. Next steps on Capitol Hill remain to be seen, but grassroots pressure for comprehensive immigration reform — including a pathway to citizenship — is mounting.

Today, not tomorrow

Behind each of these big moves in D.C. there are years of creative, diligent organizing from immigrant-led organizations — including farmworker groups. With immigration on legislator's radar this year, many of our partner organizations have shifted into high gear.

Led by the [United Farm Workers](#), the [#FieldFotos](#) campaign has sent photo messages from California fieldworkers to policymakers in Washington. And farmworker movement leaders have used [civil disobedience](#) to drive home their message: we need a comprehensive bill that will take immigration policy in the right direction.

In the days leading up to the action on October 5, UFW is [visiting major California farms](#) to talk with farmworkers about immigration. Their message? “We want immigration reform today, not tomorrow.” Farmworkers shouldn’t have to keep waiting. A fair, just food system includes basic rights and protections for all.

[Take action »](#) Join the national call for dignity, respect and comprehensive immigration reform. [Find an event](#) in your area this weekend.

Source URL: <http://www.panna.org/blog/call-dignity-respect>