



Farmworkers Have Always Been Essential

While the COVID-19 pandemic has been difficult for everyone, essential workers have been hit especially hard. Farmworkers are some of the most impacted, as they cope with the pandemic on top of the many systemic injustices already embedded in our food and farming system.

Before the pandemic, farmworkers routinely dealt with hazardous working conditions, from limited protective equipment when applying pesticides, to hard labor in the hot sun with limited access to shade and drinking water, to crowded living quarters—often far from family.

COVID-19 has added another layer of hardship. Farmworkers lack protective gear like masks and hand sanitizers or hand-washing facilities, face crowded transportation to fields, and endure other situations that make social distancing hard to maintain. In addition, farmworkers are often reluctant or unable to get medical help or take time off work to protect themselves and their community when they fall sick.

Demanding emergency support

Nationally, groups like United Farm Workers (UFW) have taken the lead on advocating for farmworker protections during the pandemic. PAN has joined UFW and many partners in calling for adequate sick leave, hazard pay and transfer of relief funding to farmworker communities. The Migrant Clinicians Network has released comprehensive information on farmworker challenges and recommendations for protecting the health and well-being of this community during the pandemic.

And Senator Elizabeth Warren and Representative Ro Khanna introduced an “Essential Workers Bill of Rights” to ensure that all

essential workers are adequately protected and supported during this public health crisis—and beyond.

In California, PAN and our partners at Californians for Pesticide Reform (CPR) have shifted our work to prioritize support to farmworkers across the state during the pandemic.

CPR has been at the forefront of providing direct assistance to farmworker families in the Central Valley and Central Coast—helping to distribute some of the \$4 million set aside for relief funding by the San Joaquin Valley Health Fund. CPR Organizer Angel Garcia has worked with a number of young community leaders in Tulare to distribute approximately \$36,500 of this emergency assistance to farmworker families.

Twelve other organizations around the state, including our partners at the California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation

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Black Lives Matter and So Does What We Do Next

PAN's Minnesota Organizer Willa Childress sent the following note to our supporters in the state the week after the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, in the midst of the resulting wave of protests against police brutality and racial injustice. Dismantling systemic racism is central to PAN's work, and we commit to being a visible ally and taking public positions not only on oppression within the food system, but also within the broader social justice movement. These words from Willa reflect her experience of the recent events that have catalyzed demands for racial justice across the country—demands that reflect organizing work that has been ongoing for many years.

It has been a long week in Minnesota.

Last week, we all were gutted and outraged by the news that George Floyd was killed when a Minneapolis police officer knelt on his neck for nearly nine minutes. Since then, we've seen an outpouring of grief and widespread calls for justice in Minnesota and now in every U.S. state and around the world. Here in Minneapolis, I've watched the awful, violent response by the police and intense militarization of my city. I've also seen moment after moment of beautiful organizing, peaceful demonstrations, disruptive calls for action, and a community taking care of each other.

I'm sending care and strength to all of you as communities across Minnesota continue to show up to protests, distribute food and supplies to those who need it, organize neighborhood safety plans, and stand in firm solidarity with calls for justice led by Black leaders. I hope you all are getting enough sleep and taking care of yourselves.

These have been confusing times, too, as each day brings a bunch of new media stories to sift through—many of them saying completely opposing or overly dramatized things. For those living further from the Cities, it's hard to track what's going on. Still, I've been so inspired to see folks bringing supplies from many miles away, including farmers organizing vegetable distribution for those without food access.

In my years working at PAN, I've been impressed by the way our team approaches strategizing and visioning on two different scales. There's our long-term vision for what a sustainable, just food system looks like and then there are the immediate steps we need to put into place to get there. Even with years of practice, it sometimes feels like we're so entrenched in a system of corporatized and extractive agriculture that we can't imagine our way out of the system that we're stuck in.



I used to feel that way about policing, too. Living in Minneapolis, I've witnessed so much harm caused by the police in my own neighborhood over the past few years, and yet our system of policing here has remained rigid, well-funded, and heavily armed.

And yet... systems do change, sometimes suddenly. In the last week, an immense uprising has revealed that a long-term community vision—defunding, deconstructing, and above all disarming police—is within our reach. Suddenly, city leaders are considering significant changes to policing that would leave all of us safer and better cared for.

From our official organizational statement:

School districts are considering community safety crews as an alternative to campus policing, and some politicians have pledged to work with the Black community toward real reforms. As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., noted more than 50 years ago:

"The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright day of justice emerges."

There's a job for everyone in this fight for justice.

If you're struggling to figure out how to plug in, consider organizing with a few of your neighbors/friends to take on a fundraising project, attend protests together, get food donations to those on the frontlines, and have conversations about racism with your loved ones.

PAN's work to create healthy, just food and farming systems for all is ongoing, and we know dismantling systemic racism is central to that work. Thank you for being in this work with us. —

Sustain PAN's Work Give Monthly

When you join PAN as a Sustainer, you become part of a vital group that donates each month to fund grassroots science, collaboration with frontline communities and policy change.

We rely on consistent support from Sustainers to work towards a healthy, fair and resilient system of food and farming.

Become a Sustainer today by going to www.panna.org/give-monthly.



Why It's Hard to Grow Healthy Food for You

by Rob Faux, Iowa farmer and PAN communications associate

My wife Tammy and I operate our small, diversified farm in Tripoli, Iowa, with the goal of producing healthy food for local outlets. Our motivation for establishing Genuine Faux Farm was rooted in our desire to work with nature as we care for the people in our local communities.

We knew farming would be difficult, and that there are numerous challenges that come with the job. We're willing to face the natural risks, as well as the economic uncertainties, but the biggest threat to our farm's survival has been a surprise: off-target application of pesticides.

Chemical misapplications — food growers lose

In 2012, a spray plane flew over a neighboring field applying a combination of pesticides. I was outside working when the plane roared directly overhead. I felt drops of liquid as it passed by, and I realized we were about to experience one of our worst fears.



Photo: Genuine Faux Farm

The plane took multiple passes over half of the farm, failing to turn off the spray on each pass. The high tunnel, our most productive field, our poultry flocks, and a native area we treasured as pollinator habitat were all in the flight path.

We reported the event to the Iowa Pesticide Bureau and our organic certifier. We secured testing and found that our vegetable crops were contaminated, so we destroyed all of the crops in the spray zone. We moved the poultry out of the spray zone and opted not to sell eggs for three months, destroying those as well. I sought medical attention for breathing problems in the days that followed, and noticed that I was getting sunburned easily.

This event encouraged me to think hard about this problem, and I have come to a few conclusions.

This is about food safety: The vast majority of pesticides listed for use on row crops are not intended for fruits and vegetables. Drift from commodity crops onto food crops puts food growers into an untenable position. Most farms, like ours, are concerned about the well-being of their customers and would not offer contaminated products. The only real choice that can be made is to destroy the crop.



This is about worker safety:

Our farm hires seasonal employees from nearby high schools and colleges. If there is a chemical application nearby and the wind is heading our way, we pull our workers out of the field. If we're lucky, we can move to another location on the farm. If not, the work simply does not get done. Again, the only real choice is to protect our people.

This is about environmental impact: Our farm relies heavily on the services nature provides. Our pollinators are an important workforce that needs to be paid with appropriate habitat and food sources. Our crops do best in healthy soils with a diverse microbiome to support proper growth. The continued over-use and off-target applications of pesticides are negatively impacting the environment in which we grow your food.

We still want to grow food for our community

Despite everything, Tammy and I still intend to grow quality food for people in our surrounding communities. But farms like ours need help if we are to survive. Here are few specific ideas:

1. Make it easier for farmers to test for pesticides on food crops.
2. Provide tools for efficient drift reporting.
3. Encourage pesticide applicators to communicate with neighbors.
4. Increase penalties to provide disincentives for improper applications.
5. Build a future where farmers do not rely on chemical-intensive agriculture.

To read Rob's full blog, visit www.panna.org/healthy-food.

ABOUT PAN PAN works to create a just, thriving food system, working with those on the frontlines to tackle the pesticide problem — and reclaim the future of food and farming. One of five regional centers worldwide, PAN North America links local and international consumer, labor, health, environment and agriculture groups into an international citizens' action network. Together, we challenge the global proliferation of pesticides, defend basic rights to health and environmental quality, and work to ensure the transition to a just and viable food system.

(CRLAF), have been designated by the state government to distribute COVID-19 disaster relief assistance to immigrants.

State governments must step up

We've also collaborated with farmworker groups and other partners across California to press policymakers in Sacramento to meet the following urgent needs during the pandemic:

- **Adequate personal protective equipment.** Farmworkers need adequate protection, including gloves, masks and facilities for hand-washing and water in the fields.
- **Social distancing in the fields and transportation.** Many farmworkers report that they are forced to work in groups of 20 or more with minimal focus on maintaining necessary distance. Transportation to the field must also provide the adequate prescribed social distancing.
- **Expanded healthcare access and testing.** Due to their immigration status, many farmworkers are hesitant or unable to access healthcare or COVID-19 testing. The state should ensure better communication with farmworker communities to make sure they're covered for healthcare related to COVID-19 and associated testing and treatment.
- **Safe, stable and affordable housing.** Crowded housing conditions with multiple families residing in close proximity to each other can exacerbate the spread of COVID-19. Adequate housing should be provided which allows farmworker



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families to maintain social distancing guidelines. There should also be a statewide halt on evictions of farmworker families.

As this crisis so clearly shows, farmworkers are—and have always been—essential workers.

We hope the joint efforts of Congress, state governments, public interest groups, community leaders and farmworker advocates will help alleviate the economic and health impacts of COVID-19 for farmworkers across the country, and lay the groundwork for the improved working conditions and livelihoods these essential workers deserve. —

PAN supporter Joe Keon writes about environmental impacts on our health. Here's his story.

More than 20 years ago when I was researching my book about reducing breast cancer risk, PAN staff made their archive of studies available to me. I was so impressed by what I learned about the organization that our relationship has flourished ever since.

I've seen enough science to be convinced that pesticides present a serious public health risk. My vote is for a sustainable future that protects everyone from exposure to harmful pesticides, whether they be agriculture workers, food consumers, or children schooled in areas with chemical drift.

The work of advocating for a safe, sustainable, and just food system is complicated—requiring the collaboration of scientists, agriculture and labor groups, activists, staff, interns, and volunteers. I'm so grateful that PAN continues to take on this critically important work.

PAN's persistent leadership is moving us toward a better food system.

— Joe Keon



Joe hosted a house party to celebrate PAN's 35th anniversary last year with (L to R) PAN Organizer Medha Chandra, longtime supporter Peggy Keon, author Mark Schapiro, Executive Director Kristin Schafer and Joe.

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