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Strengthened Federal Worker Protection Standards Applauded & Welcomed by Groups

Farmworker, labor, and environmental health advocates praise EPA for much needed protections

The updated Agricultural Worker Protection Standard, released today by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), received immediate praise from dozens of farmworker, labor, public health and environmental organizations.

The new WPS establishes a minimum age of 18 for pesticide handlers; increases the frequency of worker safety training from once every five years to every year; improves the content and quality of worker safety trainings; provides new rules on decontamination and personal protective equipment; and improves the quality of information that workers receive about the pesticides that have been applied at their workplace.

The amended WPS includes new provisions to protect farmworkers and pesticide applicators from exposure to pesticides. "These changes are an important step in the right direction and will help protect the health of farmworkers and their families from pesticide overexposure," noted Amy K. Liebman, MPA, MA, Director of Environmental and Occupational Health for Migrant Clinicians Network.

"Today we can say that most of the same rules that have protected other American workers from dangerous cancer- and birth-defect causing pesticides are finally going to protect farm workers under the new EPA regulations," said Giev Kashkooli, vice president for United Farm Workers. "Is it ever too late to do the right thing? It's been a long time coming, but it has come today and we are honored to have worked with a great coalition to help make it happen."

"The final rule includes vital improvements that we hope will result in greater awareness among farmworkers of the risks they face, stronger protections from exposure, and ultimately, fewer pesticide-related injuries, illnesses, and deaths among farmworkers and their family members," said Virginia Ruiz, Director of Occupational and Environmental Health at Farmworker Justice.

“Farmworkers deserve parity in protections and nothing less and I am heartened to say that this standard brings us closer to justice for some of the most vulnerable workers in the nation and in our community,” said Andrea Delgado, senior policy representative with Earthjustice. “Given the conditions and barriers they face, farmworkers doubted their ability to influence urgently needed protections, this standard will give them renewed hope in decision makers and in our democratic process.”

"While we celebrate these hard-won improvements in the WPS, the real win will be getting the new rules implemented in the fields," says Margaret Reeves, PhD, Senior Scientist with Pesticide Action Network. "We'll now be turning our attention to both EPA enforcement and the state agencies to be sure these stronger rules really do protect farmworkers."

“Important provisions on medical monitoring were absent in the updated WPS; nonetheless, the rules represent an improvement in the protection of agricultural workers across the US,” noted Liebman. “We look forward to partnering with the EPA to assure swift implementation and strong enforcement of these new rules.”

Farmworkers have been on the front lines of occupational exposure to pesticides for decades, and many have suffered acute and chronic symptoms from close contact with toxic pesticides in the fields. "Many times, I saw [my parents] come home light headed or with blisters on their hands from the exposure to pesticides, and it was frustrating not being able to do anything," said Selena Zelaya, the 19-year old daughter of two farmworker parents in Central Florida. “Farmworkers bring food to our table. I am grateful that EPA has finally taken steps to protect them. We owe it to them to protect them and have strong laws to ensure their well-being."

“This standard will give farmworkers renewed hope in our democratic process and in the political will to protect the most vulnerable. As advocates and organizers, we know that policy making in the beltway is only as valuable as its ability to be impactful for the most affected and a resource for community-based organizations,” said Andrea Delgado, Senior Legislative Representative for Earthjustice. “To ensure the new protections reach the fields and the communities where they are needed most, and in a language that workers can understand, the priority will continue to be bilingual outreach and engagement in close collaboration with our partners in the farmworker, labor, and Latino community.”

It has taken more than 20 years for the Worker Protection Standard to be updated and revised, but farmworkers, advocates, health providers and residents of rural communities hope that EPA’s improved rule leads to real improvements in workplace safety for agricultural workers.

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ABOUT OUR ORGANIZATIONS

[California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation](#) is a non-profit organization providing legal services and policy advocacy for California's rural poor in the areas of labor, housing, education, health, worker safety, pesticides, citizenship, immigration, and environmental justice. Contact: Anne Katten, (916) 446-1765.

[Coming Clean](#) is a national environmental health collaborative of 200 organizations working to reform the chemical and energy industries so they are no longer a source of harm. Contact: Eric Whalen, (971) 998-8786.

[Earthjustice](#) is a non-profit environmental law organization that wields the power of law and the strength of partnership to protect people's health, to preserve magnificent places and wildlife, to advance clean energy, and to combat climate change. Contact: Andrea Delgado, (202)797-5240.

[The Farmworker Association of Florida](#) is a statewide, grassroots, community-based, non-profit, farmworker membership organization with a 32-year history of building power among farmworker and low-income rural communities to work for social, economic, political, workplace, health and environmental justice change to improve the living and working conditions of farmworkers in Florida and around the country. Contact: Jeannie Economos, (407) 886-5151.

[Farmworker Justice](#) is a national, non-profit advocacy and education organization that works to improve working and living conditions for migrant and seasonal farmworkers and their families. Contact: Virginia Ruiz, (202) 800-2520.

[Migrant Clinicians Network](#) is a national organization that serves over 10,000 health care professionals and promotes health justice for the mobile poor through practical solutions at the intersection of poverty, migration, and health. Contact: Amy Liebman, (410)599-5493.

[Toxic Free NC](#) is a statewide non-profit organization, based in Raleigh, North Carolina, whose mission is to engage North Carolinians in the transition to a toxic free society through initiatives that promote human and environmental health. Contact: Preston Peck, (919) 833-1123

[PAN North America](#) is one of five regional centers worldwide working to create a just, thriving food system. We link local and international consumer, labor, health, environment and agriculture groups into an international citizens' action network. Together, we challenge the global proliferation of pesticides and defend basic rights to health and environmental quality. Contact: Devika Ghai, (510) 788-9020.

[United Farm Workers](#) was founded in 1962 by Cesar Chavez, the United Farm Workers of America is the nation's first successful and largest farm workers union currently active in 10 states. The UFW continues to organize in major agricultural industries across the nation.