



CONGRESSIONAL HISPANIC CAUCUS

116th Congress

August 21, 2020

LEADERSHIP

Rep. Joaquin Castro (TX-20)
Chair

Rep. Ruben Gallego (AZ-07)
First Vice-Chair

Rep. Nanette Diaz Barragán (CA-44)
Second Vice-Chair

Rep. Adriano Espaillat (NY-13)
Whip

Rep. Veronica Escobar (TX-16)
Freshman Representative

MEMBERS

Rep. Pete Aguilar (CA-31)
Rep. Salud Carbajal (CA-24)
Rep. Tony Cárdenas (CA-29)
Rep. Gilbert R. Cisneros, Jr. (CA-39)
Rep. Lou Correa (CA-46)
Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto (NV)
Rep. Jim Costa (CA-16)
Rep. Henry Cuellar (TX-28)
Rep. Sylvia R. Garcia (TX-29)
Rep. Jesús G. "Chuy" García (IL-04)
Rep. Jimmy Gomez (CA-34)
Rep. Vicente Gonzalez (TX-15)
Rep. Raúl M. Grijalva (AZ-03)
Rep. Mike Levin (CA-49)
Rep. Ben Ray Luján (NM-03)
Sen. Bob Menendez (NJ)
Rep. Debbie Mucarsel-Powell (FL-26)
Rep. Grace F. Napolitano (CA-32)
Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (NY-14)
Rep. Lucille Roybal-Allard (CA-40)
Rep. Raul Ruiz, M.D. (CA-36)
Rep. Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan (MP)
Rep. Linda T. Sánchez (CA-38)
Rep. Michael F.Q. San Nicolas (Guam)
Rep. José E. Serrano (NY-15)
Rep. Albio Sires (NJ-08)
Rep. Darren Soto (FL-09)
Rep. Xochitl Torres Small (NM-02)
Rep. Norma J. Torres (CA-35)
Rep. Lori Trahan (MA-03)
Rep. Juan Vargas (CA-51)
Rep. Filemon Vela (TX-34)
Rep. Nydia M. Velázquez (NY-07)

Sunkist Growers
27770 Entertainment Drive,
Valencia, CA 91355

Dear Leadership of Sunkist Growers,

Since the onset of the pandemic, the coronavirus (COVID-19) has threatened the health of essential workers across the country. Those risking their well-being have been actively securing our food supply, safeguarding the health of our communities, and providing invaluable contributions to the American economy.^[1] Foremost among these essential workers of the pandemic are America's farmworkers. Although farmworkers have been classified as "critical infrastructure," many lack essential protections and benefits, putting them and their families at increased risk of exposure to COVID-19.^[2] The high-risk nature of farm workplaces called for early prevention; nonetheless, we are seeing the consequences of inadequate measures being implemented to protect workers.^[3] To respond to this crisis, Congress passed multiple relief packages that included measures to protect workers and provide assistance to growers. We write to you today requesting specific information about how your company is actively promoting worker safety, steps you're taking to prevent any potential COVID-19 outbreaks among agricultural workers, and information on additional federal assistance needed to further protect farmworkers.

Social inequities that have long been prevalent among America's farmworkers have been exposed and widened by the current public health crisis. Deeming farmworkers essential necessitates a duty to protect them with proactive actions. About half of all crop hands in the United States are undocumented immigrants, with growers and laborers estimating that the

^[1] <https://www.epi.org/blog/who-are-essential-workers-a-comprehensive-look-at-their-wages-demographics-and-unionization-rates/>

^[2] <http://www.ncfh.org/msaws-and-covid-19.html>

^[3] <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-07-25/coronavirus-covid-19-farm-workers-san-joaquin-valley>

number may be higher.^[4] According to the Department of Labor's National Agricultural Workers Survey, at least 83% of farmworkers nation-wide are Latino.^[5] Although they help feed the nation, the mean and median income of a farmworker family are \$20,000 and \$24,999, respectively.^[6] Ironically, given that it is their labor that feeds America, many farmworker families suffer from food insecurity, from California¹ to Georgia². Despite their low wages, farmworkers that are undocumented or that are part of a mixed-status household won't be able to receive the direct cash assistance headed to millions of U.S. households. Farmworkers also disproportionately lack health insurance or paid sick leave. This means that many farmworkers simply cannot afford to get sick.

It has been recently reported that many farmworkers have received no government aid and are fearful of relationships and lack communication with agricultural employers.^[7] It is critical that adequate measures be implemented in agricultural operations to provide workers with effective information in a language that they understand. It's also imperative that a transparent work environment be provided that welcomes questions and concerns. Reports also suggest that many farms have failed to work under the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) workplace recommendations.^[8] At times like this, it is important for growers to take additional steps to keep their workers healthy while also advocating for necessary government assistance. Those who plant, harvest, and package our country's food deserve to be properly supported.

In order to work efficiently to protect our farmworkers, we respectfully request that you provide answers to the following questions no later than September 7th, 2020:

1. Congress passed COVID-19 response packages that, among many things, help businesses keep their workforce employed during the pandemic and extend emergency paid sick leave to critical infrastructure workers such as farmworkers. Are you utilizing any CARES Act funding to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the agricultural sector and ensure our food security, including by providing farmworkers with: job security, paid sick leave, hazard pay, improved transportation, living, safe working conditions that include social distancing, personal protective equipment (PPE) and other economic support to help farmworker families meet their basic needs?
 - a. If so, how much money have you spent to directly support farmworkers on each of the aforementioned topics?
 - b. How have you communicated to your workers that they have a right to sick pay under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA)? How many of your workers have used it?

2. Has your company identified any major unmet needs of the farmworker community and what forms of federal assistance would be most helpful in meeting those needs?

^[4] <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/02/us/coronavirus-undocumented-immigrant-farmworkers-agriculture.html>

^[5] <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/OASP/legacy/files/NAWS-Research-Report-13.pdf>

^[6] https://www.doleta.gov/naws/research/docs/NAWS_Research_Report_13.pdf

¹

<http://www.cirsinc.org/phocadownload/assessing%20and%20addressing%20farm%20worker%20food%20security.pdf>

² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3076419/>

^[7] <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/covid-19-farmworkers-among-highest-risk-studies-show/>

^[8] <https://inthesetimes.com/working/entry/22568/COVID-19-farms-pandemic-essential-workers-undocumented-coronavirus>

Throughout the trajectory of this public health crisis, our farmworkers have remained committed to feeding our nation with minimal protection or assistance despite being deemed essential. Protecting farmworkers and their families should be seen as a crucial component to win our fight against this pandemic that has threatened the security of our workforce, the food security and economic foundations of our nation, and taken the lives of over 150,000 Americans. We look forward to receiving a prompt response to our questions and working together to ensure we all take the necessary actions to protect our farmworkers.

Sincerely,



Joaquin Castro
CHC Chairman

Ruben Gallego
CHC First Vice Chair

Nanette Diaz Barragán
CHC Second Vice Chair

Adriano Espaillat
CHC Whip

Veronica Escobar
CHC Freshman Representative

Raul M. Grijalva
Member of Congress

Jesus G. “Chuy” Garcia
Member of Congress

Sylvia R. Garcia
Member of Congress

Filemon Vela
Member of Congress

Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress

Tony Cárdenas
Member of Congress

Jimmy Gomez
Member of Congress

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Member of Congress

José E. Serrano
Member of Congress

Raul Ruiz, M.D.
Member of Congress

Henry Cuellar
Member of Congress

Lucille Roybal-Allard
Member of Congress

Grace F. Napolitano
Member of Congress

Salud O. Carbajal
Member of Congress

J. Luis Correa
Member of Congress

Juan Vargas
Member of Congress

Norma J. Torres
Member of Congress

Linda T. Sánchez
Member of Congress

Debbie Murcarsel-Powell
Member of Congress

Michael F.Q. San Nicolas
Member of Congress