

FARMWORKERS, from page 5

Since the program started, OSHA has issued 317 heat-stress related violations to Oregon employers. Of those, 38 violations were on farms. That's not counting any violations that may stem from the agency's nearly 80 open investigations so far this summer. Of the farms that were inspected, 64 percent were in compliance.

Portland-based Northwest Workers' Justice Project, which provides legal resources to immigrant workers in the region, has convened a coalition charged with improving standards for low-wage workers across the state.

This coalition, Safe Jobs Oregon, is hoping Oregon OSHA will create new heat-stress regulations at the end of its data collection this fall, said the coalition's coordinator, attorney Kate Suisman.

"At that point, if they don't decide to make their own rule, we and a few other groups will petition for rulemaking," she said.

While undocumented workers and guest workers are able to file workers compensation claims and collect benefits when they are injured on the job, Suisman said they typically don't seek compensation.

"What often happens, as soon as the worker is released back to work, they are told there is no more work for them," she said. "It's just known that if you make a claim, you will lose the job."

She said for farmworkers who live in housing provided by their employer, and who may also be in Oregon on guest worker visas, the fear of retaliation is even greater.

While the labor housing on Thomsen's Orchard may be a bit cramped, the senator said he offers it to his workers free of charge.

Oregon farmworkers who are left to find their own housing often find few options when they enter local rental markets.

A recent survey of 310 farmworkers across six regions of Oregon revealed that in addition to challenges related to immigration

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**-ARTURO RODRIGUEZ
UNITED FARM WORKERS**



PHOTO BY EMILY GREEN

status, lack of rental history and language barriers, farmworkers are faced with being priced out of Oregon's tight rental markets given their low wages, according to a report from Oregon Housing and Community Services released in January.

"These conditions are exacerbated during peak harvest seasons. Many Farmworkers are forced to share crowded housing conditions because of cost and lack of options. Farmworkers are sharing homes or apartments with other families. Many rely on hotels, garages, and live three or four people to a room. Farmworkers have moved away from areas with agricultural work for lack of housing options," stated the report.

When the agency's director, Margaret Salazar, spoke about these findings at the Farmworker Housing Conference, she said in Oregon, the lack of affordable housing is contributing to farm labor shortages.

Increased U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement raids aren't helping either.

Ramón Ramírez, former director of Oregon's farmworker union, Pineros y

Campeños Unidos del Noroeste (PCUN), called the labor shortage and U.S. immigration policies a potential threat to national security when he spoke at the conference.

He pointed to the early 2017 ICE raid in Woodburn, which is home to many farmworkers, and ICE's employment verification audit of Canby's Kendal Floral as drivers of fear among Oregon's agricultural employees.

Federal immigration policy is affecting every link in the food chain, said Ramírez, from growers and pickers to grocers and restaurants.

"When we put the food supply in our country in danger, that is a national security question," Ramírez said.

If Oregon voters pass Measure 105 this November, effectively repealing the state's sanctuary status law that prevents local law enforcement from using resources to enforce federal immigration laws, it will likely exacerbate farm labor shortages across the state.

Since the time of Cesar Chavez's leadership, fear and uncertainty permeating immigrant communities has forced an evolution in United Farm Workers' advocacy strategies, said Rodriguez.

"The reality is that probably 95 percent, if not more, of the workers today in agriculture are immigrants," he said. "That wasn't the case back in 1993. And the reality also is that they don't have access to legal status, and that number just continues to grow – and it becomes more and more difficult for farmworkers without legal status to be able to survive here."

Rodriguez said that inevitably, anytime farmworker unions attempt to improve the situation for farmworkers in California, Oregon or Washington, employers argue that any changes will be too expensive and will destroy the industry.

"And agriculture, at least in the state of California, has continued to thrive throughout the years," he said. "Somehow they figure out one way or another."

The impact on food costs to consumers has been a popular argument against raising wages for farmworkers over the years, but Rodriguez said that's a myth that's been disproven with numerous studies. All you really have to do is look at the numbers, he said.

An average strawberry picker, for example, will pick about 100 flats of berries a day, with 12 pints in each flat. In season, assuming each pint sells for about \$3, that's \$3,600 retail, explained Rodriguez.

What the worker is paid for each pint is nothing compare to the retail price consumers pay, he said.

Agriculture labor economist Philip Martin told the National Geographic in 2016 that if farmworker wages were raised to match a \$15-an-hour minimum wage, the average American shopper would pay just \$20 more per year.

A transcript of Street Roots' interview with United Farm Workers President Arturo Rodriguez is available at news.streetroots.org.



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