

**Summary of Findings – FJ Policy Briefing, “*Emerging Issues and Innovative Solutions for Farmworker Communities*”**

**September 20, 2023**

**Washington, DC**

**Moderator: Alexis Guild, VP Strategy and Programs, Farmworker Justice**

**Panelists: Alexia Estrada, Director of Operations, Semillero de Ideas; Flor Martinez, Founder, Celebration Nation; Alejandro Roark, Chief of the Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau, Federal Communications Commission**

***What are some of the emerging issues that impact farmworker communities?***

Farmworkers and their families face numerous issues due to their living and working conditions, including poor health outcomes, wage theft, and displacement due to climate change, among others.

Farmworkers are on the frontlines of climate change. More and more, farmworker communities must work in the haze of wildfire smoke and in soaring temperatures as the weather continues to intensify. These conditions are extremely dangerous for farmworkers who are 35 times more likely to die from heat exposure than workers from other sectors. A [2020 study](#) revealed substantial evidence that extreme heat is a threat to people’s health.

Further, farmworkers are often not informed of these dangerous conditions, nor provided with adequate protections, including personal protective equipment, needed to help ensure their health and safety.

We must continue our efforts to increase public awareness on these issues along with ensuring farmworkers have proper access to local resources such as health centers where farmworkers can receive treatment and information regarding symptoms and prevention.

***What are the short-term and long-term policy solutions to address these emerging issues?***

There is no shortage of policies to help ensure the safety and well-being of farmworkers. There is an urgent need to update and strengthen workplace regulations and standards to prevent the high-rate of injuries, illnesses and deaths faced by thousands of farmworkers each year.

Further, we must create opportunities for citizenship for undocumented workers and reform the H-2A visa program to prevent the mistreatment and exploitation of farmworkers. We must also

prioritize language access for limited English proficient workers. Most U.S. farmworkers speak Spanish as a primary language and a growing number of workers speak Indigenous languages (from Mexico and Guatemala).

Most importantly, farmworkers must be included in these policy solutions. Farmworkers know best what are the needs of their communities and the effective strategies to address those needs.

***Why is a proactive approach in the development of emerging agricultural technologies/AI important for farmworkers?***

Farmwork is skilled labor which was deemed essential during the pandemic. In agriculture, these skills are needed to harvest the fields, ensure quality control, and maintain our food supply. More and more agricultural employers are looking for ways to increase productivity and lower costs while also continuing to meet the needs of consumers.

In this vein, the development of agricultural technologies has the potential to transform agriculture by increasing productivity and lowering costs. While the industry needs these developments it is crucial that these new technologies are used to help improve farmworkers' unsafe and brutal working conditions. The development of these technologies from the onset must also include the agricultural expertise of farmworkers to build sustainable equipment/systems that help ensure a quality, safe and undisturbed food supply.

Agricultural employers must also be proactive, investing in training including the usage, maintenance, and safe practices to ensure that workers are not displaced by emerging technologies. . In turn, farmworkers must have opportunities to learn/get informed on technologies that impact their work. These opportunities must be appropriate for farmworker communities, in languages and formats that are accessible for workers.

***Why is it important that federal funding support access to broadband?***

The geographical isolation of farmworkers is amplified by unreliable access to the internet. In fact, evidence suggests that even larger gaps in internet access exist among migrant and seasonal farmworkers and [rural communities](#) are [less likely](#) to adopt broadband.

Efforts to close the digital divide for all must include rural and farmworker communities who in addition to access also need instruction on use of broadband and other digital tools. By expanding their access, we can empower farmworkers and people in rural areas with timely information on such topics as disaster relief preparedness. We can also inform them of the effects of climate change on their health and safety, and provide updates regarding workplace safety, and emerging immigration policies. The ability to communicate factual information with this

community in a timely manner not only levels the playing for all farmworkers but can also help save lives.

***What are lessons learned so far as you've implemented the Affordable Connectivity Program?***

The federal government has found that there is a lack of awareness about the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) and the vital role it can play in increasing farmworker's access to the internet. However, reaching these communities has been challenging as they often lack access to technologies where more information about ACP can be found. The federal government must continue to work with farmworker serving organizations who can inform these communities of the opportunity provided by the ACP.

***What role can policy advocates and community leaders play to advance digital equity in farmworker communities?***

Farmworker serving organizations are a trusted source of information and service provider among farmworker communities. In this vein, these organizations play a vital role by sharing resources and information with farmworkers on programs such as the ACP. These organizations can also help to identify gaps in information access and devise strategies to increase the understanding and benefits of broadband adoption to farmworkers and their families.