



STATE OF WASHINGTON
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

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WA Human Rights Commission Resolution in Support of Farmworkers in Sunnyside, Washington

WHEREAS, the Washington State Human Rights Commission believes that all workers are entitled to fair, livable wages, benefits, and safe working conditions free of discrimination; and

WHEREAS, farmworkers are the backbone of our economy, contributing immeasurably to our communities in the Yakima Valley, Central Washington, and beyond, producing billions of dollars in agricultural goods annually, especially in the state's vital fruit, vegetable, and mushroom industries; and

WHEREAS, according to the U.S. Department of Labor, over 55% of farmworkers in the United States, including Washington, experience unsafe working conditions, lack proper protective equipment, and are often exposed to harmful chemicals; (1)

WHEREAS, farmworkers, especially in Washington, are disproportionately from immigrant communities, with nearly 70% identifying as Hispanic or Latino, often facing language barriers and systemic discrimination in accessing essential services and protections; (2)

WHEREAS, the United Farm Workers (UFW) has a long history of advocating for the rights and protections of farmworkers, ensuring they have fair, livable wages, safe working conditions, and the respect they deserve; and

WHEREAS, farmworkers in Sunnyside have raised serious concerns about their working conditions and treatment at a local mushroom farm, including reports of unsafe conditions and violations of workers' rights; (3)

WHEREAS, farmworkers in Sunnyside have been fighting for the right to unionize for over a year and have faced several barriers, including employer intimidation and systemic challenges, all while continuing to work to support their families; (4)

WHEREAS, historically, farmworkers endure inhumane treatment, low wages, and unsafe working conditions, and data from the Washington State Department of Labor & Industries (L&I) shows that agricultural workers experience significantly higher rates of workplace injuries than other sectors in the state; (5)

WHEREAS, unsafe working environments expose farmworkers to health risks, such as heat-related illnesses and pesticide exposure, without the necessary protections, with studies showing farmworkers are up to 20 times more likely to suffer from heat stress-related illnesses compared to the general workforce; (6)

WHEREAS, many farmworkers lack access to translators, legal support, and other essential resources needed to protect their rights, resulting in systemic barriers to justice and fair treatment in the workplace; (7)

WHEREAS, supporting the UFW's fair labor rights campaign aligns with the Commission's commitment to equity, justice, fair labor practices, and the overall health and prosperity of the community.

WHEREAS, Ostrom Farms, now operating as Windmill Farms in Sunnyside, Washington, has been the subject of numerous complaints from farmworkers concerning unsafe working conditions, low

wages, and barriers to unionization, highlighting ongoing systemic issues that violate the rights and dignity of agricultural workers in the region;

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NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT PROCLAIMED, that we, the Washington State Human Rights Commission, commit to advocating for the rights and dignity of all farmworkers in Central Washington;

BE IT FURTHER PROCLAIMED, that we urge employers to engage in good-faith negotiations with the UFW to address the concerns of their workers and ensure fair treatment in accordance with state labor laws;

BE IT FURTHER PROCLAIMED, that we call for the establishment of fair wages, safe working conditions, and access to essential resources, such as translators and legal support, for all agricultural workers;

BE IT FURTHER PROCLAIMED, that we encourage community members to engage in awareness campaigns to support farmworkers and all workers in Washington State, recognizing their invaluable contributions to our economy and society;

BE IT RESOLVED, that we will partner with UFW and other labor organizations to ensure our farmworkers are protected and that any violations of labor rights are promptly addressed;

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Washington State Human Rights Commission will work in partnership with relevant regulatory bodies and labor organizations to provide remedies to reported discriminatory practices in unsafe environments.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we will initiate outreach campaigns to inform the public about labor issues, the rights of farmworkers, and the ways the Commission can help protect those rights;

IN CONCLUSION, we reaffirm our commitment to supporting the well-being and rights of the farmworkers in Sunnyside and Central Washington, urging all community members to stand in solidarity with them.

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NOW, BE IT FURTHER ORDERED, that copies of this resolution be transmitted to:

Governor Jay Inslee,
Attorney General Bob Ferguson,
The Washington State Department of Labor & Industries (L&I),
United Farm Workers (UFW),
Washington State Labor Council, and
The City of Sunnyside.

Submitted to the Washington Human Rights Commission by Human Rights Commissioner Chelsea Dimas and Hân Trần, September 26, 2024.

Revised and approved in open meeting September 26, 2024.

Sources for Supporting Data:

1. <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/agriculture>
2. <https://www.doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/OccupationalHealth/AgriculturalWorkers>
3. <https://ufw.org/category/news/>
4. <https://ufw.org/>
5. <https://www.lni.wa.gov/safety-health/safety-research/files/2019-fatalities.pdf>
6. <https://www.osha.gov/heat-exposure>
7. <https://columbialegal.org/farmworker-rights/>