

*The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your field are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty.*

*James 5:41*

Our country has long benefitted from immigrant workers who contribute necessary skills and labor for our communities and economy. All workers benefit from the enforcement of health, safety, and wage-and-hour laws, as well as the right to peacefully organize. Employers should be held accountable to abide by labor protections and standards for all workers, regardless of immigration status. As people of faith, we seek policies that decrease immigrants' vulnerabilities to exploitation and reduce unfair and discriminatory hiring and firing practices.

Since the 1940s, two guest worker programs have brought low-wage immigrants to the United States for temporary agricultural and non-agricultural work. Unfortunately, these programs give guest workers a very restrictive immigration status and have inadequate workplace protections.

Recognizing that many guest workers have experienced extreme exploitation and abuse, sometimes akin to human trafficking, we call for faithful and robust enforcement of workplace protections regardless of immigrant status. It is immoral for our nation to benefit from the labor of individuals who contribute to our economy while preventing them from being fully part of our society.

### Core values

- Equal rights and equal treatment of all workers
- Employers should not be able to threaten workers with deportation
- Workplace enforcement that eliminates exploitation of workers
- Workers should be allowed to organize

### The faces of immigration



Antonio came to the U.S. from Guatemala to earn money to support his family back home. He worked for 3 years in the food court of a federal building in Washington, D.C., where he cooked, cleaned, and cashiered. The minimum wage in Washington was \$8.25/hour. However, he was paid \$6.50/hour for the first year, and \$7/hour for the second year. Antonio recalls, "I worked 59 hours per week, but was never paid for the hours I worked overtime. When I asked for a raise, my boss said that making \$6.50/hour was good enough for a Latino like me. My immigration status had never been an issue before I spoke up and participated in a strike. I then was detained by immigration officials." From Good Jobs Nation, [goodjobsnation.org](http://goodjobsnation.org).

Teresa is a farm worker who left Oaxaca when she was four and began working in the fields when she was eight. Now at 32, she is totally disabled by arthritis as a result of the work. Teresa recalls, "I had to work out of necessity. I started working in the United States at 14 in California and in Washington state....Sometimes the foremen would...tell us to work faster or we would be fired....Another experience I had is that owners would pay us with a check that doesn't have funds....That happened three times. After [doing this work] for five years...everything changed. I kept working, but then I was diagnosed with arthritis when I was just 22 years old." Teresa has since used money she earned working in the fields for medical care, yet her health has not improved. From Stories from the Field, a collaboration between Farmworker Justice and photojournalist David Bacon. See more stories at: [www.farmworkerjustice.org](http://www.farmworkerjustice.org). Copyright 2013 Farmworker Justice.



## How do our faith principles inform our policy recommendations?

**Ensure robust implementation of existing U.S. labor and employment laws**, including the *Fair Labor Standards Act*, the *National Labor Relations Act*, and their state equivalents. Conduct better work site monitoring, create more robust enforcement mechanisms, and increase awareness about U- and T-visas. Provide sufficient resources to Department of Labor to identify and provide redress for exploitation, and to hold employers accountable.

**Untie workers from particular employers to reduce vulnerability to exploitation and ensure freedom of association for all workers, including guest workers.** To ensure workers – including farm and other guest workers – fully realize their rights and can access meaningful justice, it is essential to remove employers' ability to threaten workers with deportation by ensuring job portability. Workers should also be able to effectively exercise their labor rights, form unions, and bargain collectively without fear of intimidation, retaliation, or retribution from employers.

**Afford all workers access to permanent lawful status, meaningful opportunities to apply for citizenship, and the ability to live lawfully with their families in the United States.** Without this ability, migrant farm workers and other guest workers will be a permanent underclass in our society, a social group that creates and prepares the food we eat but can never sit at the table. Undocumented farm workers should have a chance to earn lawful status by meeting certain work requirements, and the H-2A agricultural program should be revised to help employers fill critical shortages in agricultural positions.

**Reform the electronic employment verification (E-Verify) system.** The E-Verify program has proven detrimental to migrants, employers, and U.S.-citizen employees alike. It has led to increased discrimination and unfair hiring and firing practices. E-Verify reform should include privacy protections, allow workers to contest and have remedies for erroneous non-confirmations, and shift the burden to the U.S. government to prove that an individual is ineligible to work, rather than requiring an individual to disprove non-confirmation. Mandatory expansion of the current E-Verify program would lead to more problems, particularly in the absence of increased rights and protections for immigrant workers.

*And O my people! Give just measure and weight, and do not withhold from the people the things that are their due.*

*Quran 11:85*

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**NEARLY 17% OF THE WORKFORCE**

Are foreign-born workers

**85% OF FRUITS AND VEGETABLES**

Produced in the U.S. are hand-picked by farmworkers

**\$2 TRILLION**

The approximate total immigrants added to the U.S. GDP in 2016

**2:1 RATIO**

Immigrants start businesses at twice the rate of native-born citizens