

Marylanders for Food and Farm Worker Protection

We must protect the workers who produce our food. Essential workers in Maryland's agricultural industries are highly vulnerable to COVID-19 - they are typically forced to work in close quarters and not provided personal protective gear.

Thousands of migrant workers come to Maryland each year. They often live in overcrowded housing and travel to work side by side in buses and vans. Some employer-provided housing lack potable water, adequate bathing facilities, and even soap.

Similarly, poultry processing workers labor in damp, cold, and poorly ventilated plants. The line speeds force workers to labor in close range. Workers are unable to take needed breaks, and reports of workers wearing adult diapers to get them through shifts are both shocking and revealing of an industry that does not take worker health seriously. At least 570 meatpacking workers have tested positive for COVID-19 in Maryland, and at least six have died as of August. This is likely an undercount because neither the meatpacking companies nor the state have adequately disclosed COVID cases from this industry to the public.

Most agricultural and meat processing workers lack basic employment benefits, such as health insurance, sick leave, and unemployment insurance. Workers who become sick or have to care for a sick relative do not have paid leave to allow them to care for themselves or their loved ones. As migrant and immigrant workers, they support extended families here and abroad on poverty wages and the consequences of missing a day of work due to illness are substantial. Workers, including those on H-2A and H-2B temporary work visas, are hesitant to come forward with complaints about their work sites because they fear they will be terminated or some other type of retaliation. The lack of protections coupled with retaliation forces workers to work in silence.

Language barriers and lack of transportation are obstacles for many food and farm workers when they try to access testing for COVID-19. And, too often, the results are delayed.

The federal Occupational Health and Safety Administration under the Trump Administration has failed to act to protect workers. However, several states, including Virginia, have issued emergency regulations to address the high-risk conditions in agricultural and meat processing facilities and labor camps to help prevent the spread of COVID 19 among employees and their families. As opposed to recommendations or voluntary guidelines, these regulations require employers to implement protective measures at the worksite, and in employer-provided housing and transportation. We urge Maryland to follow suit.

Maryland must take immediate action to prevent further spread of COVID-19 in our poultry and seafood processing plants, among farmworkers across the state, and surrounding communities.

We, the undersigned, on behalf of our thousands of Maryland members call for the protection of Maryland's vulnerable farmworkers, poultry, and seafood processing workers with an Executive

Order or legislation instituting mandatory and enforceable protections for COVID-19 as found here:
<https://bit.ly/C-19protections>

Signed,

Abibiman Foundation

AbibiNsroma Foundation (ANF)

ACLU of Maryland

AFSCME Council 3

Agricultural Justice Project

Alabama State Association of Cooperatives

Alianza Nacional de Campesinas

Alliance for Empowering Rural Communities

Allies of Meat Workers

Animal Outlook

Assateague Coastal Trust

Brighter Green

CATA Farmworkers Support Committee

Casa San Jose

Castanea Fellowship

Cedar Lane Unitarian Universalist Church, Environmental Justice Ministry

Center for Biological Diversity

Center for Food Safety

Center for Science in the Public Interest

Chesapeake Physicians for Social Responsibility

Clean Water Action

Climate Law & Policy Project

Climate Stewards of Greater Annapolis

Compassionate Bay

Concerned Citizens Against Industrial CAFOs

DC Greens

Eat for the Earth

Environmental Working Group
Factory Farming Awareness Coalition
Fair Farms
Fair World Project
Farm Forward
Farm Sanctuary
Farmworker Association of Florida
Food Animal Concerns Trust (FACT)
Food Chain Workers Alliance
Food & Water Action
FOUR PAWS USA
Friends of the Earth U.S.
Green America
Greenbaum Foundation
Greenbelt Climate Action Network
GreenpeaceUSA
HEAL Food Alliance
Humane Society of the United States
The Humane League
Jewish Initiative for Animals
Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future
Lady Freethinker
Main Street Vegan Academy
Maryland Legislative Coalition
Maryland Campaign for Environmental Human Rights
Maryland United for Peace and Justice
Migrant Clinicians Network
MLC Climate Justice Wing
National Family Farm Coalition

Natural Resources Defense Council

National Employment Law Project

Open Markets Institute

Our Revolution Maryland

Prince George's County Food Equity Council

Project Protect Food Systems

ProVeg International

Public Citizen

Public Justice Center

Rural Advancement Foundation International, USA (RAFI-USA)

Rural Coalition

Rural Community Workers Alliance

Rapid Shift

Seeding Sovereignty

ShoreRivers

South Baltimore Community Land Trust

Takoma Park Mobilization

Toxic Free NC

Union of Concerned Scientists

UFCW Local 400

UFCW Local 27

WISE