

ORGANIZACIÓN EN CALIFORNIA DE LÍDERES CAMPESINAS

Oxnard, California



The Advancing Environmental Justice through Technical Assistance Mini-Grants Program

is hosted by the National Environmental Health Partnership Council with support from CDC National Center for Environmental Health and Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry. In Year 3, five organizations, including [Líderes Campesinas](#), are supported through \$10,000 mini-grants and technical assistance.

MISSION

To strengthen the leadership of farmworker women and girls so that together, they become the bridge that reaches the social, economic and political changes that ensure their human rights. The organization is dedicated to leadership development, outreach and education and technical assistance in issues directly affecting California farmworker communities.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE CONCERNS

- Climate resiliency
- Climate vulnerability
- Wildfires
- Extreme heat
- Air quality
- Pesticides

DESPITE THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS to the \$200 billion agricultural industry, farmworkers remain a low-wage and primarily immigrant population without access to labor, health and social protections. Their disproportionate risk to environmental occupational hazards, coupled with existing social and economic factors perpetuate inequities and their social exclusion. Farmworkers in Ventura County, California, have been repeatedly battered by climate change-related impacts including wildfires and extreme heat. In December 2017, farmwork-

Impacted Populations

Farmworkers in Ventura County, CA

32
years median age



53%
speak only Spanish

96%
born in Mexico

61%
undocumented

An estimated 20,000 of these farmworkers are Mixtecs,

immigrants from an Indigenous group from Oaxaca, Mexico: Mixtecs, many of whom speak only their native language of Mixteco, are often relegated to the most labor-intensive and lowest paid agricultural jobs.



41,600
farmworkers are employed throughout the county's \$2-billion agricultural industry,



\$22,000
average annual salary earned.⁴

In 2015, more than **7,000 female farmworkers worked in Ventura County**. This same year, **female farmworkers faced sexual harassment at a rate 6 times that of men** and **earned \$10,000 less annually** than their male counterparts, according to the Central Coast Alliance United for a Sustainable Economy⁵.

ers in Oxnard were greatly impacted by smoke from the Thomas Fire, the largest fire in the state's history at that time. As public health officials told people to stay inside, many farm supervisors made workers work faster to save strawberries from smoke and ash, failing to provide them with protective masks. In summer 2020, during California's worst wildfire season in modern history when over 4.2 million acres burned across the state, Ventura County farmworkers were required to work through the smoke, ash, heat and ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Continual summer exposure to particulate matter less than 2.5 microns in diameter (PM2.5) from wildfire smoke is especially concerning considering the association between this exposure and increased cardiovascular and respiratory morbidity and mortality.¹ While California now has leading wildfire work safety laws, many local frontline groups who advocated for these laws are still filling the gaps as state officials rarely travel to rural areas to enforce regulations and few resources are set aside for this oversight.

The same problems affect the enforcement of California's leading heat laws. Ventura County's diverse geography, rapid urbanization, and growing agricultural and industrial sectors have resulted in the largest increase in heat (+ 2.6°F) between 1895 and 2018 of any county in the contiguous United States. Ventura County's expected increase in extreme heat days in the coming years presents a massive threat to farmworkers, who die from heat-related causes at 20 times the rate of all other occupations.² Some of the additional protective clothing

worn to protect against the sun or pesticides can even further increase the impacts of these temperatures. With the expected increase in high heat days, pesticide use is also expected to increase as higher application rates are required due to chemical volatilization and pest population changes. Heat stress conditions may also increase farmworkers' physiological susceptibility to pesticide poisoning. A 2017 California Department of Pesticide Regulation report found that 323 farmworkers were sickened by agricultural pesticides that year, a worrying 139% increase from 2016.³

Additional environmental and social inequities impact farmworker health. The Healthy Places Index, for example, shows that census tracts where a large percentage of farmworkers live in South and East Oxnard have some of the highest particulate matter diesel emissions in the state. These areas also have some of the worst mental health, infant birth weights and asthma rates. Access to goods and services like health care, supermarkets and transportation are also extremely low.

GRANT PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

- Implementing the Farmworker-led Response to Emergencies through Simple Audio-based Systems (FRESAS) project to create a linguistically and culturally accessible emergency public health response system for Ventura County farmworkers to address institutional inequities that impact downstream disease, injury and mortality rates
 - ▶ Increasing the number of subscribers to this system
 - ▶ Developing audios and videos about alert systems in different languages to reach a wider range of community members



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- 1 Chen, H., Samet, J.M., Bromberg, P.A. & Tong, H. (2021). Cardiovascular health impacts of wildfire smoke exposure. *Particle and Fibre Toxicology* 18, 2. Retrieved from <https://particleandfibretoxicology.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12989-020-00394-8#citeas>
 - 2 Tigchelaar, M., Battisti, D. S., & Spector, J. T. (2020). Work adaptations insufficient to address growing heat risk for U.S. agricultural workers. Retrieved from <https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/ab86f4/pdf>
 - 3 California Department of Pesticide Regulation (2017). A Guide to Pesticide Regulation in California. California Environmental Protection Agency. Retrieved from <https://www.cdpr.ca.gov/docs/pressrls/dprguide/dprguide.pdf>
 - 4 House Farm Workers. (2022). <https://housefarmworkers.org/about-us/>
 - 5 CAUSE (2015). *Raising Up Farm Workers: Ventura County*. Retrieved from [http://causenow.org/sites/default/files/CAUSE%20Raising%20Up%20Farm%20Workers%20Ventura%20County%20September%202015%20\(2\).pdf](http://causenow.org/sites/default/files/CAUSE%20Raising%20Up%20Farm%20Workers%20Ventura%20County%20September%202015%20(2).pdf)

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