

Guadalupe Felix

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FARM LABOR ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The theme I am about to present is of utmost importance and of great interest not only to us farmworkers, but also to our families and to those of the entire nation. I am happy to have this forum because your presence, opinion and support is fundamental to the protection of our lives.

I want to express an urgent call to you as responsible members of this pesticide regulatory commission and ask you:

- 1) What are you doing to establish adequate rules and regulations for the correct application of pesticides?
- 2) Are there rules to follow to assure application using adequate safety equipment?
- 3) Where are the orientation programs and prevention programs that teach applicators and workers about toxic levels?
- 4) What are you doing to prevent pesticide-related illnesses such as: asthma, leukemia, allergies, hepatitis? Most of the time we workers are ignorant of the fact that our illnesses come from the abuse and misapplication of pesticides in the fields where we work so hard to earn our living.

Our people's work in the fields is very valuable but what many ignore or choose not to know is that day by day, year by year, harvest after harvest, our health deteriorates.

That leads to the most important question which probably will remain unanswered: Why should housing, medication, and all other types of aid be denied to the farmworker in most cases (of work-related pesticide illnesses)? I don't believe there are any programs established with respect to our health - to protecting us from pesticide-related diseases.

My hope is that we will finally achieve the right to be valued for what we are - people qualified to work in the fields - people with a

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present and a future.

In addition to the terrible weather conditions that afflict us in our work of harvesting the crops, we experience endless problems - the most serious of which directly affects our health - the pesticides..

The chemicals are called by various names - but for us, they are simply bottled death .

In the long or short term - it's the same for us.

The pesticides most used in the fields are: chlorides, phosphorates,

When their use goes uncontrolled, the effects for us from one or the other is the same.

We know these pesticides can be absorbed on contact or by breathing.

We know it penetrates the skin through the pores, the hands, through sweat, clothes, shoes, etc.; enters the blood stream quickly, and unfortunately can't be eliminated, but is stored in the liver and from there causes invisible damage.

Farmworker symptoms include: reddened face and eyes, headaches, digestive problems, nausea. ~~Breathing pesticides causes symptoms' of chest pains, breathing difficulties, headache, vomit.~~

These symptoms are dangerous because the farmworkers confuse them with a cold or distress caused by food, but don't realize the sickness is caused by poison.

It's hard because the pesticide is accumulated with the passage of time, and farmworkers aren't aware of being sick until they already have a disease such as cancer, and it's too late - causing a very painful death.

My experience in the fields is that although we haven't finished picking the last row, the grower begins spraying the first rows already picked, and there we are - working and breathing the poison carried by the wind towards us - innocent, tired workers, deprived of adequate protections..

--And who is monitoring this?

---Does the commission go occasionally to the fields to monitor pesticide application?

-- Do you inspect what type of chemicals is being used?? - what protective apparel is provided; the frequency of application?

-----the re-entry times between application and harvesting?

Many times the fruit smells of pesticides when we are picking it.

On an ordinary ^{work} ~~wok~~ day, the farmworker has to pick and at the same time discard the rotten or over-ripe fruit.

Before discarding fruit, the worker often takes a bite and can consume as many as 15-20 strawberries daily - with a little white cap of poison on them.

That's not counting how many times during the day the workers' hands, covered with poison, touch our eyes, wipe sweat from our face, or put our hands to our lips to smoke.

Our clothes carry the poison - often we women go home and begin to cook the meal without changing clothes, or go to daycare for the baby, contaminating the child.

All this because of the lack of adequate programs to orient workers to the dangers of pesticides.

At the end of the work day, tired farmworkers drink one or two beers - mixing liquor with the pesticides - actually doubling the damage caused by the pesticides within the body.

And so I ask again---

Where is the Environmental Protection Agency?

This is a big question in the fields.

What are you doing to prevent this?

Ladies and Gentlemen of the EPA ---

Go to the fields - become involved in this problem that afflicts us...

To whom are we important?

Where are you when we need you?

You must find a means that is less harmful to the worker, without regard to the cost, since life must be more important than Money.

Those that apply the pesticides must be informed of the toxins in each one, and see that poison for what it is, and not just the monetary gain that will result.

It is of vital importance that we unite our strength and courage to insist that companies that produce the pesticides; those that buy them; those who apply them, are conscious of the effects.

Those that use them have their reasons - and it is solely to protect the crop.

It would be a catastrophe to lose a crop to an epidemic of insects, such as it is lost in a freeze or other natural catastrophe; but it is also of utmost importance to maintain the balance between what is necessary to prevent an epidemic and what is harmful to the worker and to the consumer

That balance is extremely important. I believe it is the most important.

Because, Ladies and Gentlemen, you can't play with our health.