

This year I am including some photos (scroll down) of sweet potato harvesters by Peter Eversoll, a photographer of migrant farmworkers that we met when we were in North Carolina discussing pesticide safety and child labor issues with state officials and key farmworker support organizations. If you are interested in his photos of farmworkers and child farmworkers, please contact him at: peversoll@yahoo.com.

On This Thanksgiving Day, Gratitude for the Harvesters

Today, all over our nation, family and friends gather together to share a meal and recognize the good life that America has bestowed upon so many. Since Thanksgiving is as a holiday of gratitude and remembrance, it seems an especially appropriate moment to recognize our country's farmworkers, the one and a half million seasonal laborers who hand harvest the fresh fruits and vegetables that grace our tables.

Farmworkers are the poorest and most marginalized of America's laborers. They earn an average of \$6,500 per year and over two-thirds live in poverty. They have always been recruited from among the most vulnerable members of American society - undocumented immigrants, the homeless, the rural poor - and have consistently been denied the legal protections provided to other workers. To this day, our nation's farm laborers have no right to overtime pay, are denied equal protections for union organizing, and work under special rules that allow children as young as twelve to labor in the fields, despite the fact that agricultural work is one of our nation's most dangerous professions. Farmworkers pass through every region of the country, traveling hundreds if not thousands of miles, crossing state lines and international borders, enduring dislocation and uncertainty to ensure that our supermarkets are filled with fresh produce.

Despite their important contribution to our lives, America's farmworkers remain hidden from view, their struggles unrecognized. Still,

remembering farmworkers on Thanksgiving should not be an exercise in guilt, but rather an extension of gratitude to a class of workers whose hard work enables our prosperity. As consumers, we have a direct, almost visceral, bond with farmworkers. Virtually every vegetable or piece of fruit that we purchase was hand harvested by a farm laborer. While the produce we buy may have been mechanically sorted and packed, super-cooled, chemically treated, waxed, and shipped across the nation, often the last hand to touch the produce we buy was that of a migrant farmworker. Simply by purchasing the lettuce, tomatoes, pumpkins, peppers, sweet potatoes, squash, and apples found on our tables today, we are connected with a hidden world of laborers, a weave of interconnected lives. While we are experiencing a moment of great affluence in our nation, this is also a time of growing divisions between those who control wealth and those who do not. As the more fortunate isolate themselves from those less fortunate, living in different neighborhoods, sending their children to different schools, they know little about the lives of the laborers their world depends upon.

Thinking about those who harvest our food while living in poverty reminds us of the contributions of so many others, whose worlds are similarly hidden from view and whose hands produce the things that surround us. Our society is characterized by enormous material wealth and the almost magical availability of a diverse array of commodities whose production often seems automatic and effortless. In fact, there is a growing divide between those who make things and those who consume them within a global economy where labor-intensive commodities are typically made in foreign countries. Remembering farmworkers encourages Americans to see that production is always a social process, binding people to each other through the circulation of things. The apparent invisibility of production is, in fact, a form of social forgetting, a

politics of glossing over the real structural and economic relations that allow for our high standard of living. It is clear that farmworkers, like all Americans, deserve to earn enough to provide for themselves and their families.

Nevertheless, today, on Thanksgiving, let us not think of our nation's farmworkers simply as a social problem requiring a focused political response, but rather as people whose lives are connected to our own. The tragedy of our nation's farmworkers lies not in their difference from other Americans, but rather in their great and overwhelming similarity. On our nation's harvest holiday, we should honor the harvesters and recognize their presence at our tables.

- Los Angeles Times, Editorial by Daniel Rothenberg, Professor, DePaul University, Author With These Hands: The Hidden World of Migrant Farmworkers Today

See Below for Photos of Sweet Potato Harvesters by Peter Eversoll

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Carol Parker
Certification and Worker Protection Branch Office of Pesticide Programs
(7506P) U. S. Environmental Protection Agency 1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D. C. 20460
(703) 305-6458
(703) 308-2962 fax
Parker.Carol@epa.gov



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peversoll@yahoo.com



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peversoll@yahoo.com



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peversoll@yahoo.com

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