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Farmworker Women Speak Out

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Farmworker Justice Fund, Inc., Washington, D.C.

Farmworker Women Speak Out



*Priorities and Policy
Recommendations
to Improve the Lives of
Farmworker Families*

"As women of color, we are a minority, and that is the first strike against us. And as farmworker women, that is a second strike against us. The first thing we need to do is to share with our sisters that this is not what we deserve in life. [We] deserve the absolute best."

Hazel Foxman, Fort Pierce, Florida

FARMWORKER JUSTICE FUND, INC.
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Founded in 1981, FJF is a national nonprofit organization that works to improve the living and working conditions of migrant and seasonal farmworkers through administrative monitoring and advocacy, litigation, technical assistance, and public education. FJF focuses on wages and working conditions, women's issues, immigration rights, access to legal services, and occupational safety and health, with an emphasis on pesticides.

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"We farmworkers, we are the ones that work hard to feed the nation."

MARTA SALINAS, Grover Beach, California

Purpose of the Report

Board member and Arizona farmworker Catalina Broyles raised the issue at every board meeting: the Farmworker Justice Fund (FJF) should be devoting more time to the special concerns of farmworker women, whose voices were going unheard.

Who better than FJF to bring farmworker women from around the country together to talk to each other—and to decisionmakers. The problem was coming up with the money to turn Broyles' recommendation into a reality. Finally, in 1991 FJF raised funds to organize the first-ever national conference of farmworker women, and the Farmworker Women's Health Project was born.

As determined at that founding conference, the project's initial goals were to:

- provide farmworker women from across the country with a forum for discussing their concerns and developing an action agenda to address them;
- supply farmworker women with information and technical assistance about issues that concern them, as well as skills development in areas ranging from leadership to lobbying;
- work toward establishing a national network of farmworker women; and
- make farmworker women more visible to the general public, national policymakers, and funders.

From the beginning, the project has been animated by the belief that farmworker women themselves must identify the issues the project will address and the strategies they will use to tackle those problems. FJF's role is to provide women with the information, technical assistance, and leadership development skills they need to define their goals, overcome barriers, and succeed at the tasks they have set themselves—not to determine or control the direction of their work.

This report describes the events and outcomes of four meetings at which farmworker women identified issues and developed specific policy recommendations: the March 1991 founding conference; the first meeting of the project's steering committee in March 1993; and two conferences in 1994 on farmworker women and AIDS, one in California and another in Texas. The recommendations from all of these conferences are presented under "Conclusions and Recommendations" (pp. 19-22).

In addition to these meetings, the report highlights a host of other activities project members have engaged in over the past three-and-a-half years, including speaking at conferences, testifying before policymakers, seeking leadership positions on policymaking bodies, and forming farmworker women's groups in their own communities.

But this document aims to do more than report on meetings and list policy recommendations. Too often, the only voices policymakers and the public hear are those of representatives of agribusiness, pesticide manufacturers, and others who benefit from the exploitation of farmworkers.

Here, it is farmworker women who speak. This report is compiled largely from their words—drawn from cassette tapes and minutes recorded at various meetings and from written materials prepared by farmworker women—and it is punctuated by their quotes.



John Ortved

Catalina Broyles, (left)
FJF board member,
and founder of
Farmworker Women's
Health Project.

Farmworker Women in Agriculture – An Overview

More than one-fourth of the estimated 2.5 million migrant and seasonal farmworkers in the United States today are women.¹ Overwhelmingly women of color, farmworker women do nearly every kind of farm labor on every kind of farm. They work on vegetable farms and in orchards, vineyards, packinghouses, nurseries, and greenhouses. Women hoe, thin, weed, prune, and harvest fruit and vegetable crops. They sort, grade, wrap, and pack fruits and vegetables, pot and tend ornamental plants, and dip ferns in pesticide baths and then wrap them for shipment. Some move irrigation pipes or apply pesticides (although these better-paying jobs are usually reserved for men).

Farmworker women routinely receive less pay than men for the same work. (The average annual income of farmworkers is \$6500.²) Employers frequently attribute and give women's earnings to the male head of the household as a way of meeting federal or state minimum wage requirements. By listing a couple's or family's wages under one worker's name in their account books, employers can make it appear as if they are paying the legal minimum or more. In reality, workers may be earning as little as one or two dollars an hour. When social security benefits and payments they earn are credited solely to men (if the benefits are credited at all), farmworker women retire from years of hard work with no financial cushion.

Farmworker women are subjected to sexual harassment, assault, and rape by crewleaders and male workers. (Crewleaders are paid by growers to recruit, transport, house, and supervise farmworkers.) Women report that crewleaders often demand sexual favors in return for giving them places on work crews—and on the buses that take them to the fields.

Employed in the most dangerous occupation in the country, farmworker women daily face a daunting array of threats to their safety and health. They must cope with unsafe and unsanitary living and working conditions that include pesticide exposure, long hours at repetitive tasks without breaks, substandard housing in migrant labor camps, and lack of toilets and drinking water in the fields.

Pesticide exposure can cause poisoning and even death, and chronic effects such as cancer, birth defects, infertility, and menstrual dysfunction. Repeating the same motions, such as sorting fruit or cutting vines, for hours at a fast pace leads to crippling repetitive trauma disorders. Inadequate toilet facilities in the field leave women more susceptible to urinary tract infections which, when contracted during pregnancy, have been linked to increased risk of miscarriage, premature labor, and neonatal death.

Farmworker women lack access to crucial information such as how to obtain and use birth control and how to protect themselves from sexually transmitted diseases like AIDS. The threat of AIDS especially is increasing. Recent studies show that the rate of HIV infection among migrant and seasonal farmworkers may be as much as ten times the national rate.³ The reasons are many, ranging from migrants' constant mobility; prostitution and intravenous drug use in farm labor camps, especially where men travel without their families; and the use of a common needle to inject family members with vitamins or antibiotics. (Self-injection is common in Latin America, where antibiotics are sold over the counter.) Currently, few AIDS prevention programs target farmworker women.

"Agriculture is a \$2 billion a year industry in the State of Florida. What is forgotten is the people that harvest for that industry."

HAZEL FILDASIAN,
Fort Pierce, Florida

Farmworker women have trouble obtaining routine health care for themselves and their families. Most lack medical insurance, information about low-cost or free health care or social services in communities they migrate to, and more often than not, access to medical facilities. Underfunded and understaffed, federally funded migrant health centers currently serve only 12 percent of farmworkers nationwide. Even in medical emergencies, hospitals routinely turn away farmworker women and their families who lack money or health insurance. The result is that many farmworker women and their children continue to suffer—and even die from—preventable or treatable health conditions.

"When the Chernobyl nuclear plant blew up, everybody in the world stopped what they were doing and turned their attention to Russia. [They] realized that the people, the children, were going to suffer a great illness, a great tragedy that would persist for generations. It seems to me that a crisis of no less importance is happening to us in the fields."

Soledad Martinez, Hollister, California

These and other concerns of farmworker women have gone largely unheard, both in their communities and among networks of farmworker activists. In part that is because the leadership within the farmworker movement is largely male and has paid scant attention to the unique problems of farmworker women. In part it is due to the realities of life for farmworker women. Many cannot read or write in English—and sometimes in their native language. Frequently they are isolated, living in remote rural areas, dependent upon their husbands or crewleaders for transportation.

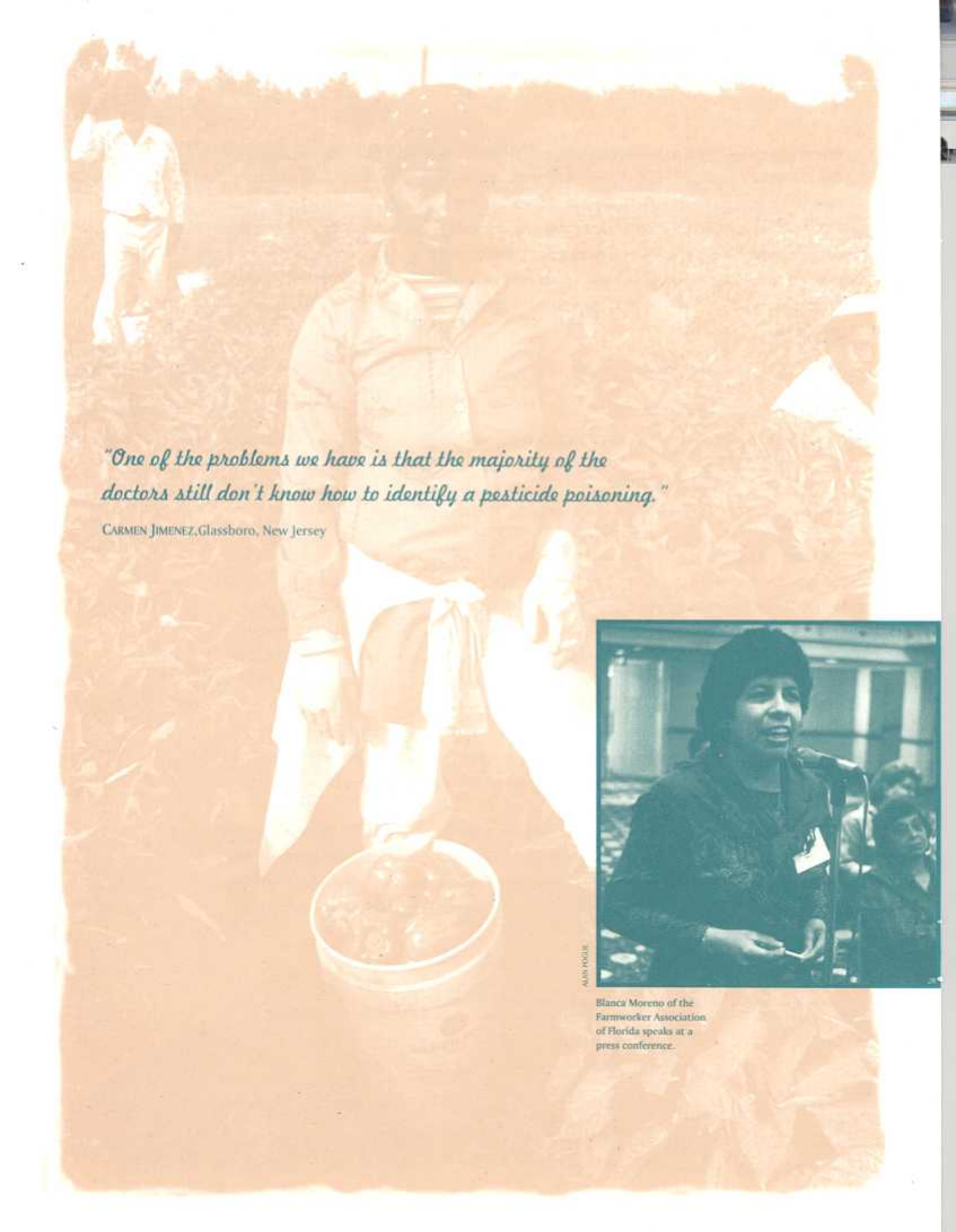
Farmworker women report that it is hard for them to speak out within their communities. Some who want to speak out say they feel intimidated at the thought of addressing largely male groups. Women who do get involved in organizing report being shunned or gossiped about in their communities by men and women both.

To address their concerns, farmworker women need repeated opportunities to work together. They need information and technical assistance. Equally important, they need the chance to build the self-esteem and leadership skills required to advocate for and achieve change. As this report shows, through the Farmworker Women's Health Project women are getting much of the help they need.

Footnotes:

- 1 U.S. Department of Labor, *Migrant Farmworkers: Pursuing Security in an Unstable Labor Market*, Research Report No. 5, May 1994.
- 2 U.S. Department of Labor, *U.S. Farmworkers in the Post-IRCA Period*, Research Report No. 4, March 1993.
- 3 National Commission to Prevent Infant Mortality, *HIV/AIDS: A Growing Crisis Among Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker Families*, December 1993.

strongest pillar in every aspect of life."
Gloria Sanchez, El Paso, Texas



"One of the problems we have is that the majority of the doctors still don't know how to identify a pesticide poisoning."

CARMEN JIMENEZ, Glassboro, New Jersey



ALAN POUL

Blanca Moreno of the Farmworker Association of Florida speaks at a press conference.

Farmworker Women's Health Project Founding Conference—1991

Once the decision was made to organize a national conference of farmworker women, FJF contacted dozens of farmworker organizations, unions, and activists in local communities to identify women to invite to the gathering. We strove to assemble a diverse group of women that would reflect the multi-hued face of today's agricultural labor force.

We set up a planning committee of farmworker women, FJF staff, and trainers that worked out the details of the agenda in a series of conference calls. In selecting trainers to lead workshops and other activities, we looked for current or former farmworkers or women who had worked with farmworkers and were knowledgeable about workshop subjects, such as leadership development and AIDS.

Knowing that women who planned to attend the meeting spoke several different languages (Spanish, English, and Haitian Creole among them), planners arranged to borrow enough headsets and microphones to allow for simultaneous translating—a difficult job handled admirably by bilingual trainers. To make sure everyone who wanted to attend the meeting was able to come, FJF paid women's travel expenses and provided them with a stipend to compensate for lost wages.

THE PARTICIPANTS

The 47 farmworker women who arrived in San Antonio on Saturday, March 1, 1991, included Latinas (Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Salvadoran), African Americans, Haitians, and Hmong. They represented nine states (Arizona, California, Florida, New Jersey, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Washington) and Puerto Rico, and ranged in age from teenagers to grandmothers.

Their experience in agriculture was vast, from tending and harvesting fruits and vegetables such as lettuce, chili peppers, grapes, blueberries, and oranges to working in plant nurseries, ferneries, and packinghouses. But they also were organizers and members of farmworker unions, board members and outreach workers for migrant health centers and legal services agencies, and volunteer educators in health promotion programs. Rounding out the group of 62 were workshop leaders, keynote speakers, funders, and FJF staff. (See Appendix 1 for list of participants.)

CONFERENCE ACTIVITIES

The conference formally opened on Sunday afternoon with a three-hour workshop on leadership development. Along with identifying and honing the women's leadership skills, the session was designed to build cohesion among the group. In one exercise, trainers asked the women to organize themselves into 12 groups, based on the month of their birth. Each group was asked to come up with a description of itself in relation to that month. Working together, the women produced and performed imaginative interpretations of that assignment. Some wrote poems, others penned songs; one group even formed a conga line to convey its message.

Whatever the format, the same feelings came through in all 12 presentations: exhilaration, shared purpose, energy, resolve. The exercise helped to transform a collection of subdued and nervous strangers into a group of confident, animated, purposeful women, eager to get down to



ALAN POLES

A toilet seat and portable water cooler make effective props during a workshop on pesticides and field sanitation.

More than half the conference participants gather for a group photo before heading home.



ALAN POOL

work. The exercise gave these women a glimpse of what they could accomplish through working together and a sense of the power and self-confidence that comes from taking a risk—and achieving results.

That first workshop set the tone for the rest of the conference. Farmworker women's excitement and confidence grew as they got to know each other and discovered that they faced many of the same challenges in their families, in their communities, and in the fields, and as they realized they had allies with whom they could work toward common goals.

Participants spent most of Monday in workshops focused on three topics identified by the conference planning committee: AIDS, pesticides, and immigration. Each workshop—in which everyone participated—began with an educational session followed by an extensive discussion period during which the women shared their own experiences and ideas for change.

Starting late Monday and continuing into Tuesday, the women synthesized what they had discussed. Through group techniques such as brainstorming and visualization, participants then generated a list of 33 priority needs that they agreed would form the basis for their national action agenda. Their priorities fell into four broad categories: children and family issues, health, workplace issues, and empowerment. (See Appendix 2 for a complete list.)

Also on Tuesday, farmworker women began to identify specific concerns within each priority and recommend strategies for how to address them. Given time constraints, the women decided to focus on four of the 33 needs—child care, pesticides, housing, and health—agreeing to tackle other priorities at future meetings.

In other conference activities, participants heard from two keynote speakers, Sonia M. León Reig, an associate director in the Bureau of Primary Health Care, U.S. Public Health Service, and Sandra Martinez, director of Community Leadership Programs in the Office of Texas Governor Ann Richards. Both speakers urged farmworker women to take on leadership roles in their communities by serving on boards of directors of migrant health centers and other organizations, and by pressing government officials to uphold laws designed to protect farmworkers.

"This time together with the other women gave me a 'shot in the arm' to continue and want to speak out politically for the farmworkers. It was good and at the same time heartbreaking to hear the injustice that is still being done to us." CONFERENCE PARTICIPANT

On Sunday night, singer-songwriter Tish Hinojosa, a native of San Antonio, treated the women to a rousing performance of songs in Spanish and English that included "Something in the Rain," a song about the devastating effects of pesticides on farmworkers.

NEXT STEPS

To carry on the work begun at the conference, participants decided to elect a steering committee. They agreed that women from each of the nine states represented at the conference and Puerto Rico would choose a delegate from their state by mail ballot. They asked FJF staff to oversee the election as well as to act as a support and technical back-up center for the Farmworker Women's Health Project, carrying out administrative, organizing, publishing, training, and fundraising functions to help farmworker women reach their goals.

The meeting's final day featured a press conference and an evening reception at which Texas funders got to meet the farmworker women.

At the press conference, Dotsey Mays of Apopka, Florida, announced a five-point plan for future action agreed to by the farmworker women:

- "We will reconvene to continue our work."
- "We will put pressure on federal and state officials to address the 33 needs we have identified."
- "We will establish a steering committee to set priorities and formalize our organization."
- "We will attend other conferences to spread the word."
- "We will take this information to our friends and communities."

With that charge to themselves, the women returned home to begin work.

Steering Committee Meets in Washington, D.C.—1993

During 1992, farmworker women who attended the San Antonio conference elected their state delegates to the steering committee, and FJF raised funds to enable the steering committee to meet.

Communicating by conference calls, members of the committee agreed to meet in Washington, D.C., from February 27 through March 2, 1993. Their goals were to rank priorities identified at the founding conference, develop strategies for tackling them, and then meet with national policymakers.

Well before the farmworker women arrived in Washington, project staff helped them draw hometown media attention to the upcoming meeting, the work of the Farmworker Women's Health Project, and local issues facing farmworker women. In addition to giving the women valuable experience in dealing with the press, these efforts generated stories in some of the women's communities, both before and after the steering committee meeting.

STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Elected Delegates:

Arizona —	EMMA TORRES
California* —	LETICIA MARAVILLA & MARINA MACIAS
Florida —	BLANCA MORENO
New Jersey —	MARGARITA DIAZ
Ohio —	VICENTA VELASQUEZ
Oregon —	IRMA DE ANDA
Pennsylvania —	PANG X. SIBIRATHASUK
Puerto Rico —	CARMEN JIMENEZ
Texas —	TRINI GAMEZ
Washington —	DORA BARRERAS

Appointed Members:

CATALINA BROYLES
HAZEL FILOXIAN

Due to several tied ballots, two delegates were chosen.

SETTING PRIORITIES

The women devoted the first half of the four-day meeting to finalizing the issues on which the Farmworker Women's Health Project would work, at least initially, and developing an action agenda. They decided to target six issues: pesticides, wages and working conditions, health care, housing, child care, and education. In selecting which issues to focus on, steering committee members relied heavily on the results of the survey that project staff sent to everyone who attended the founding conference. Participants were asked to choose six of the 33 priorities identified in San Antonio that they thought required immediate attention.

Committee members then drafted position papers, whose issues and recommendations would provide the framework for meetings with federal agency officials and members of Congress during the second half of the

meeting. To further help the women prepare for these meetings, FJF Executive Director Michael Hancock explained the workings of Congress and federal agencies.

In other work during the first two days of the meeting, the women also formalized the structure of the steering committee, creating three officer positions and three committees to address the priority needs.

In contrast to the much larger 1991 founding conference, the smaller group format gave the 13 farmworker women more time to talk with each other—about their history, their families, their current activities, and their vision for the project. Members of the committee also found time to enjoy themselves, gathering on Monday night at a popular Peruvian restaurant where they ate, laughed, danced, and listened to singer Brenda Lee Bonano, who in her other life works as a program assistant at FJF.



LAKE DOTY

Farmworker women express their solidarity at a Congressional reception on Capitol Hill.



LAKE DOTY

Oregonian Irma de Anda, with daughter Cristina, is interviewed by a television reporter after a press conference announcing introduction of legislation to strengthen a key farmworker labor law.



MEETING POLICYMAKERS

On Monday and Tuesday, steering committee members took their message to policymakers. They met with California Democrats George Miller and Howard Berman—two members of Congress committed to protecting farmworkers' rights, visited the offices of their own Congressional representatives, and briefed officials of four federal agencies: the Departments of Labor (DOL), Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and Health and Human Services (HHS), and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

"Children are more vulnerable. There was a case where a pesticide applicator came home after applying pesticides but without taking off his protective equipment. His little girl wanted to hug her Papa, and she ran to him and hugged him around his legs. The contact made her collapse, and she died some hours later." MILD TRIVISO-SALCEDO, Pomona, California

■ At HUD, the women told officials about the need to make decent housing available—and affordable—for all migrant and seasonal farmworkers. Despite having been assured of an enthusiastic reception by HUD staffers who arranged the meeting, the women left the meeting bitterly disappointed. After 15 minutes, officials informed the women that they were in the wrong agency and should take their concerns to the Farmers Home Administration, part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture that funds farmworker housing. (Since that meeting, Henry Cisneros, who replaced Jack Kemp as HUD secretary, has appointed a special assistant for farmworker housing and has asked Congress for \$100 million dollars to develop farmworker housing.)

■ At EPA, the women told scientists and Occupational Safety Branch staff about being poisoned by pesticides and the trouble they and their co-workers have in getting medical care. They described worksites whose water supplies are contaminated by pesticides and farmworker housing constructed on former pesticide dumpsites. Farmworkers need to know what pesticides they are being exposed to at the worksite, the women told EPA officials, and how to protect themselves. The women stressed the essential role EPA can play in promoting the development of nontoxic alternatives to chemical poisons and the need to strongly enforce pesticide laws.

EPA officials said they anticipated that worker protection regulations scheduled to go into effect in 1994 would ameliorate or solve some of the problems raised by the women, and they expressed interest in holding more meetings.

■ The focus of the women's meeting with a representative of the Migrant Health Program (part of HHS) was the crying need for health care for farmworkers and their families. The women outlined problems with migrant health centers, chief among them the shortage of doctors and outreach workers and lack of access: farmworkers often have no way to get to the clinics, many of which in any case have limited hours.



Steering committee members confer during a meeting with California Congressman Howard Berman. From left to right, Marina Macias, Carmen Jimenez, and Dora Barreras.

EMILY NOTTNER

■ At DOL, the farmworker women met with officials from throughout the agency, including from the Wage and Hour Division, Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), Employment Service, Women's Bureau, and Office of the Assistant Secretary for Policy. The women urged officials to take steps to end abuses by employers and crewleaders, which include the failure to pay minimum wage, sexual harassment, and unsafe transportation of workers to the fields. Growers must be made legally and financially responsible for unlawful actions by the crewleaders they hire, the women said, and DOL must beef up its enforcement of the federal minimum wage law and field sanitation regulations. DOL officials promised to explore ways of improving enforcement to ensure growers' compliance with federal labor laws.

TESTIFYING BEFORE THE HELSINKI COMMISSION

On Monday afternoon, the farmworker women spoke at a briefing organized by the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Helsinki Commission. This was one of a series of briefings on U.S. migrant farmworker issues held by the Commission during 1992 and 1993 for Congressional staff and the general public. The Commission's mandate is to monitor human rights in all 53 member countries, including the United States.

Five steering committee members participated in a panel at the briefing—Emma Torres of Yuma, Arizona, Leticia Maravilla from Coalinga, California, Trini Gamez from Hereford, Texas, Hazel Filoxian from Fort Pierce, Florida, and Catalina Broyles of Litchfield Park, Arizona. All the women contributed during the discussion that followed. (Everyone's comments appear in the Commission's May 1993 report, *Migrant Farmworkers in the United States*, available from the U.S. Government Printing Office.)

"We have contractors who force workers to ride in vans that have no seats, no safety belts. One in particular—Willie Lee Simmons—in 1991 forced 11 workers into a van en route to work at a horticultural job. These men were forced to sit on boards thrown across cinder blocks. A rock truck ran a stop sign and broadsided the van. It flipped about four times. Those blocks and those boards were like missiles. Four of those 11 men died. The other seven were severely injured."

HAZEL FILOXIAN, Fort Pierce, Florida

MEETING THE PRESS

On Tuesday morning, steering committee members joined Congressmen George Miller and Howard Berman at a press conference to introduce federal legislation designed to put more teeth into the basic farmworker labor law—the Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act. Dora Barreras of Sunnyside, Washington, and Hazel Filoxian underscored the need for the bill by describing abuses by crewleaders—including cheating workers out of wages, housing them in filthy conditions, and transporting them to the fields in unsafe vehicles. Marina Macias from Caruthers, California, emphasized the value of the bill's child care provisions. She gave chilling accounts of children being run over and killed by tractors in California vineyards while their mothers picked grapes.

Once the formal presentation ended, most reporters stayed to interview the women. Stories featuring them appeared in English and Spanish print and broadcast media.

WRAPPING IT UP

The four-day meeting culminated Tuesday evening, with a reception for the women on Capitol Hill sponsored by seven Democratic members of the U.S. House of

Representatives: William D. Ford of Michigan; Californians George Miller, Howard Berman, Maxine Waters, and Lucille Roybal-Allard; Carrie Meek of Florida; and Leslie Byrne of Virginia. Advocates from Washington-based health, women's, Latino, and human rights organizations attended, as did Congressional staff and government officials.

The high point of the reception, and perhaps of the meeting, occurred when the steering committee members stood in a semicircle before the assembly and applauded themselves. The gesture dramatically symbolized their pleasure and sense of satisfaction in their accomplishments.

HIV/AIDS Conferences in California and Texas—1994

AIDS is now growing more rapidly in rural than urban areas, and the fastest increase in new cases is among women and children of color. As became clear at the 1991 founding conference of the Farmworker Women's Health Project, farmworker women are eager for information on how to protect themselves and their families.

Responding to that concern, the project raised money to sponsor two conferences devoted exclusively to farmworker women and AIDS. Conversations with farmworker women leaders led to the decision to hold one meeting in California and the other in Texas. Besides being home to large numbers of farmworkers, California and Texas both have grassroots farmworker women organizations (whose creation was inspired by the 1991 founding conference of the Farmworker Women's Health Project).

The California meeting, held in February in the Salinas Valley, was organized by Millie Treviño-Sauceda, coordinator of the statewide Farmworker Women's Leadership Project (which is sponsored by the California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation), with help from the advisory committee of farmworker women and CRLA community outreach workers Claudia Gálvez, Gloria Hernandez, and Rosa Saucedo. Some 40 Latina farmworker women and trainers convened in San Juan Bautista for the three-day conference.

More than 30 Latinas from Texas, New Mexico, and Mexico attended the one-day AIDS meeting in El Paso, Texas, in April. The conference was put together by Alicia Marentes, Gloria Salcedo, and Lorenza Primero, founders of a women health promoters' committee within the El Paso-based Border Agricultural Workers Project.

Members of both organizations were eager to learn more about HIV infection and AIDS. Members of the Texas group were also excited by the prospect of participating in a meeting organized exclusively by and for farmworker women. (The California leadership project had held numerous community meetings and a statewide meeting in 1993.) For women raised in a culture where their needs and interests always come last, it was a heady experience to discuss issues of AIDS education and policy, while their *husbands* cooked the meals and took care of the children.

The conferences were designed to educate farmworker women about HIV/AIDS, identify local needs for education and services as well as existing resources in their communities, and elicit recommendations that the federal government could use to develop model education and prevention programs. With help from women physicians and health educators on hand at both meetings, women farmworkers learned about the HIV virus and AIDS: what they are, symptoms of AIDS, how HIV is spread, and how to prevent infection, including the proper use of a condom.

Farmworker women reacted to what they learned by vowing to do a better job of educating their children about sex than their parents had done with them. At the same time, participants acknowledged the taboos within the Latino culture that make it hard for women to discuss sex and AIDS prevention with their children—much less with their husbands. As one woman in Texas put it, men's attitude toward the Latina is generally "Cállate y aguántate." "Shut up and put up with it."

Margarita Canadá addresses participants at the AIDS conference in El Paso, Texas.



COURTESY MARGARITA CANADÁ

"In our area, the Latino man says, 'First me, then me, and finally me.' The woman feels that she's only there to cook him beans and wash his pants."

Gloria Saucedo,
El Paso, Texas



Maria "Caca" Carmona of Coachella, California, joins in the discussion about farmworker women and AIDS.

CLAUDIA GALVEZ

"Sometimes the man comes home drunk and forces the woman to have sex. If the woman tries to get the man to use a condom he says, 'Who are you running around with?'" GLORIA SALCEDO, EL PASO, TEXAS

If they know or suspect that their husband or partner has multiple sex partners or is an IV drug user, the women said, they know they are at risk for getting infected with the HIV virus. Yet if they ask him to use a condom, they fear that he will accuse them of being unfaithful or of not trusting him. Often the reaction is more severe. Everyone at both conferences knew a woman who, after asserting herself, had been beaten, thrown out of her house, refused financial support, or deserted.

If the spread of HIV among farmworkers is to be slowed, said participants, men as well as women need to be educated about the disease and how to prevent it—and to share what they have learned with other men in their communities.

Both conferences ended with a pledge from the women to use what they had learned to help reduce the spread of HIV in their communities. Just weeks after the February conference, for example, California women from Coachella, Imperial, and Olivehurst met with the directors of their migrant and community health centers to plan community education events about AIDS. Staff from the Farmworker Women's Health Project, who attended both meetings, promised to seek additional funds to implement the women's recommendations and establish demonstration projects.

Taking Action, Speaking Out—1991-94

Inspired and energized by their experiences at the San Antonio conference, farmworker women have sought every opportunity to pursue the goals they defined in 1991. With technical and financial assistance from FJF, they have held a steering committee meeting (discussed elsewhere in this report), addressed national and international conferences, testified before federal and state policymakers, broadened their network, and obtained leadership positions on national and local advisory boards. Additionally, women from California and Texas returned home from San Antonio and organized their own grassroots farmworker women's projects. This work is described below.

PARTICIPATING IN NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES

At conferences and workshops around the country, farmworker women have told their stories to public and agricultural health specialists, migrant health clinicians, federal and state policymakers, and social service providers. They have shared their concerns, the efforts they are making to address them, and their need for solidarity and support. Project staff have arranged and/or served as moderators at many of these sessions, a sampling of which is listed below.

- In November 1991, **Blanca Moreno** and **Antonia Trejo** from the Farmworker Association of Florida, headquartered in Apopka, and **Vicenta Velasquez** and **Berna Romero** from the Farm Labor Organizing Committee in Toledo, Ohio, spoke to public health professionals about farmworker women's occupational health concerns at the annual meeting of the American Public Health Association in Atlanta.
- In May 1992, **Maria Ramirez** was part of a panel on rural women at an international symposium on agricultural medicine in Saskatoon, Canada. She talked about depression and isolation among farmworker women and her work as a health promoter with The Healthy Family program (La Familia Sana) in Hood River, Oregon.
- In February 1993 and March 1994, **Hazel Filoxsian** of Fort Pierce, Florida, participated in national forums about health care reform in Washington, D.C.
- In February 1994, Californians **Frances Guzman** from Oxnard, **Leticia Maravilla** from Coalinga, **Martha Moreno** from Madera, and **Marta Salinas** from Grover Beach, as well as steering committee member **Irma de Anda** from Oregon, participated in a government-sponsored health and environmental justice conference in Washington, D.C. Speaking before health researchers and federal policymakers, including EPA Administrator Carol Browner, the women described pesticide poisonings, contaminated neighborhoods that are making families sick, and dangerous working conditions. Later, farmworker women joined other community leaders of color in making policy recommendations to the federal government.

MEETING WITH AND TESTIFYING BEFORE POLICYMAKERS

Meeting with and testifying before state and federal policymakers gives farmworker women the chance to speak directly to people with power over their lives. At the same time it gives policymakers the chance to hear from and talk to the women—often for the first time—whom their decisions affect.

"I feel like I was in a deep hole in the ground—hidden. And this experience has lifted me up to the light. People noticed me."

EVA ESPINDOLA
Colusa, California

"I was very scared to speak in public. I had never done it. But God gave me the strength to do it. And I'm glad that I worked through this. I want to do this again and I want to see that other women have the chance to do what I have done."

IMELDA GARCIA,
Yuba City, California

■ In March 1991, Hazel Filoxian testified before a subcommittee of the Judiciary Committee of the U. S. House of Representatives against attempts to restrict the ability of legal services attorneys to effectively represent farmworkers.

■ In March 1993, Pang X. Sirirathasuk of Upper Darby, Pennsylvania, visited the office of her congressman, Curt Weldon (R-PA), to talk about the urgent need for health care reform. She shared her own family's experience with catastrophic illness to show the devastating financial and personal effects of being uninsured.

■ In August 1993, Emma Torres of Yuma, Arizona, testified before the Arizona Rural Health Care Task Force about health care issues affecting farmworkers.

BROADENING THE NETWORK

Putting farmworker women in touch with each other and with national policymakers, trainers, and funding sources is an important role for the Farmworker Women's Health Project. The project also has alerted national organizations, journalists, university researchers, and policy-makers to the work of farmworker women and their organizations.

■ The project has used a bilingual newsletter to share news about the women and their activities.

■ The project has linked farmworker women in California, Florida, and other parts of the country with Dr. Rachel Rodriguez, a farmworker researcher and domestic violence expert at the University of Colorado. The goals were to obtain training for farmworker women in how to deal with domestic violence and to ensure that they play a leadership role in Rodriguez's efforts to form a national farmworker women's domestic violence task force.

■ In Washington, D.C., FJF has raised farmworker issues in national coalitions of women's and health groups, including the Campaign for Women's Health and the Every Child by Two childhood immunization campaign.

PURSUIING LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

One of the ways for farmworker women to make their voices heard is to serve on governing boards and advisory councils of government agencies, migrant and community health centers, and national and community organizations. Women are taking the initiative to seek these positions, and the project has alerted them to openings and recommended them to fill slots.

■ Hazel Filoxian, Emma Torres, and Teresa Sandoval of Imperial, California, are among the farmworkers who serve on the National Advisory Council on Migrant Health, the body that advises Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala about farmworker health.

■ Carmen Jimenez, of Glassboro, New Jersey, is a member of the board of directors of the East Coast Migrant Health Project, based in Washington, D.C.

■ Sharon Brown of Wachula, Florida, serves on the board of both the East Coast Migrant Head Start Project headquartered in Arlington, Virginia, and the North Carolina-based Student Action with Farmworkers.

PROVIDING SUPPORT TO GRASSROOTS FARMWORKER WOMEN'S GROUPS

The Farmworker Women's Health Project provides technical, fundraising, and other assistance to two grassroots farmworker women's organizations whose creation was inspired by the 1991 national conference in San Antonio: the statewide California Farmworker Women's Leadership Project and a health promoters' committee in El Paso, Texas—part of the Border Agricultural Workers Project.

■ In 1993, we arranged for U.S. Department of Labor Wage and Hour Administrator Maria Echaveste to be a keynote speaker at the California group's first annual statewide conference. Ms. Echaveste grew up in a farmworker family in California.

■ In 1994, the project secured funding from the federal government used by the California and Texas groups to mount conferences on farmworker women and AIDS. We also provided conference planners with technical assistance and educational materials on AIDS in Spanish. (These two conferences are described in the previous section.)

■ During the 1994 Migrant Health Conference in Seattle, the project director introduced Alicia Marentes of El Paso, Texas, to one of the keynote speakers, HHS Health Care Financing Administration official Dr. Robert Valdez. Marentes alerted him to cases where farmworker women and their family members had been refused emergency care at federally funded hospitals in El Paso for lack of money or insurance coverage, or had been prematurely released with serious consequences to their health. Dr. Valdez promised to look into the specific cases and report back.

■ California farmworker women have received seed money from the National Coalition Against the Misuse of Pesticides (NCAMP) to conduct pesticide education in their communities. Project staff had notified Farmworker Women's Leadership Project coordinator Millie Treviño-Sauceda about the availability of funds.



LAUREN O'NEILL

Hazel Filoxian of Florida talks with Senator Edward M. Kennedy about health care reform and crewleader abuses.



With a portrait of Cesar Chavez as backdrop, Alicia Marentes (left) from Texas and Teresa Sandoval from California talk with HHS official Dr. Robert Valdez.



EARL DOTTER

Farmworker women meet with Congressman Howard Berman (D-CA).

"The crux of the problem, where we need to start making some impact, is how do men and women communicate with each other."

EVA DOMINGUEZ, Vineland, New Jersey

Conclusion and Recommendations

As this report and their own words show, farmworker women have the spirit and drive to overcome the barriers that confront them—political, cultural, practical, and personal—and to improve their lives and those of their families. The Farmworker Women's Health Project will continue to help them in their struggle.

The project's specific plans for the future can be summed up in one word, more. More women from more states involved; more meetings, locally and nationally; more contact with state and federal policymakers; more speaking engagements at national and international conferences; more technical assistance to grassroots farmworker women's groups; more networking with other organizations; and more seats on policymaking bodies.

The project also will continue to aid farmworker women as they pursue the policy recommendations they have developed so far. Aimed at government policymakers, growers, and farmworkers themselves, those recommendations are listed here alphabetically by subject area.

AIDS

- Create effective AIDS education and prevention programs aimed at farmworker women and men.
- Hold AIDS conferences for men.
- Train more farmworker women as community health promoters and AIDS educators.
- Require growers and crewleaders to provide farmworkers with educational materials about AIDS.
- Provide AIDS education materials in Spanish and in other languages.
- Provide AIDS prevention information in dental clinics.
- Teach children about AIDS and drugs at school, starting at the elementary level.
- Train parents how to talk to their children and spouses about drugs, alcohol, sex, and AIDS so they are able to set aside their embarrassment and myths from their culture and talk more openly.
- Create directories of health and social services—including information on AIDS testing and other services—for farmworkers in their home communities and in the communities where they migrate.
- Hold community meetings to call attention to the drug problem and the connection with AIDS.
- Give talks about AIDS in schools and at work.
- Get tested for the AIDS virus.
- Develop a medical referral network, which includes AIDS services, for migrant farmworkers.
- Provide more government funding for health clinics and health educators in farmworker communities.
- Provide AIDS testing free of charge.
- Create AIDS support centers in farmworker communities for AIDS survivors, and their families and friends.
- Establish community recreation centers to provide sports and other activities for farmworker youth as alternatives to gangs, drugs, alcohol, and sex.
- Establish rehabilitation centers in farmworker communities for drug addicts.
- Require growers to provide more hygienic conditions in the fields and labor camps.
- Encourage businesses—especially those that target young people, such as cigarette and beer companies, video arcades, and X-rated movies—to fund AIDS prevention programs.
- Require the Immigration and Naturalization Service to give information about AIDS services to persons who have tested positive for the HIV virus as part of their immigration application.

"The migrant health centers should work together to develop a system so that if a farmworker was poisoned by pesticides [and seen at one clinic], later on another clinic that sees that farmworker will know what illness he has and why."

EMMA TORRES,
Yuma, Arizona



Grading
carrots by quality
and size.

HEALTH

- Ensure that migrant and seasonal farmworkers are covered under any national health care reform plan.
- Ensure that health care benefits migrate with farmworkers, across state lines.
- Establish and fund more migrant health centers.
- Promote broader participation of farmworkers on boards of migrant health centers.
- Strengthen enforcement of state and federal laws that protect farmworker health.
- Hire and train more health promoters/outreach workers to work in farmworker communities.
- Document health problems and collaborate with health care providers to produce data to substantiate the need for services.
- Develop health promotion and prevention programs to inform farmworker families about such issues as alcoholism and childhood and sexually transmitted diseases.
- Provide farmworkers with information about free health services.
- Ensure that health care providers are sensitive to farmworker communities and their different cultures.
- Provide preventive health services such as prenatal care, and Pap smears and mammograms for cervical and breast cancer prevention.
- Provide health services for elderly farmworkers.
- Provide health services for the migrant homeless.
- Provide farmworkers with access to medical specialists such as occupational medicine physicians and obstetricians.
- Require migrant health centers to post notices of clinic hours and board meetings in workers' native languages.
- Use mobile health units to travel to the fields to reach workers.
- Provide migrant and community health centers with up-to-date medical equipment.
- Encourage drugstores and pharmaceutical companies to donate drugs and medical equipment to farmworker clinics.
- Require migrant health centers to maintain weekend and evening hours.
- Require migrant health centers to give farmworkers a copy of their medical records so that they have them when they seek medical care in other clinics.
- Provide free transportation to migrant health centers and other health clinics open nights and weekends.
- Create multipurpose centers to provide both health care and social services to farmworkers and their families.
- Use medical students to make home visits in farmworker communities as part of their training.
- Create incentives for physicians and nurses to serve the farmworker community.
- Require employers to teach first aid for injuries and poisonings that occur in the field.

HOUSING

- Educate the public about farmworker housing conditions and homelessness through the media, press conferences, photo documentation, and videos.
- Build safe and decent housing that is available and affordable for all migrant and seasonal farmworkers—families as well as individuals.
- Develop welcome centers so when migrant workers and their families come to a new area they have a place to bathe, sleep, and get education, health care, and work referrals.

- Keep labor camps open until the season is over.
- Provide government funding for farmworker housing.
- Encourage private efforts to build farmworker housing.
- Prohibit the building of farmworker housing on toxic dumpsites.
- Enforce existing laws that set minimum standards for farmworker housing.
- Conduct regular inspections of existing housing to make sure that it is in good condition. Fine employers who provide substandard housing.
- Prevent racial discrimination by zoning boards that refuse to locate migrant farmworker housing in cities and towns.

PESTICIDES

- Provide farmworkers with information, education and training in their native language about pesticides to which they are exposed and how to protect themselves from those pesticides.
- Guarantee farmworker right-to-know by federal law.
- Use a variety of ways to reach farmworkers—such as radio, television, videos, and cassette tapes.
- Educate pregnant farmworkers because of dangers to the unborn child.
- Provide adequate training and protective equipment to pesticide applicators.
- Require employers to post pesticide information—including first aid information in case of poisonings—where farmworkers can see it and in languages they understand.
- Develop crop sheets (that give pesticide usage information) and give them to farmworkers.
- Educate employers and crewleaders about pesticides.
- Educate medical personnel about the symptoms and treatment of pesticide poisoning.
- Provide proper medical care to farmworkers poisoned by pesticides.
- Require the development and use of safe alternatives to toxic pesticides.
- Encourage universities and other research institutions to conduct research about farmworkers and pesticides, and widely circulate the findings.
- Beef up enforcement of existing pesticide laws and regulations; where necessary, pass stronger laws.
- Conduct prompt and thorough investigations of known or suspected cases of farmworker pesticide poisonings, and punish violators.
- Develop coalitions with consumer and environmental groups and others to pressure for pesticide reform.

WAGES AND WORKING CONDITIONS

The U.S. Department of Labor should:

- Enforce the Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act (AWPA).
- Make growers responsible for AWPA violations committed by the farm labor contractors (crewleaders) they hire.
- Investigate and punish crewleaders/growers who overcrowd their vans and trucks or drive while under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- Investigate and punish crewleaders/growers who give workers false information about working conditions and the terms of employment, such as wages and duration of employment and whether housing is provided.

"There has got to be a rapid system of documenting pesticide poisonings, because otherwise [officials] will say, 'Only three cases of poisoning in this area? What are you complaining about if there are 25,000 farmworkers in the area?'"

MILLIE TREVERO-SAGUETA,
Pomona, California



Hops worker,
Washington State.

NANCY BURGESS

"As a reviewer assessing [pesticide] exposure, this meeting with the farmworker women was a beneficial reminder that people are affected by the [pesticide] labels we approve and the regulations we enact. [These women's] courage and conviction astound me."

MARY CLOCK, EPA Biologist

- Investigate and punish growers/crewleaders who violate the minimum wage law.
- Investigate and punish crewleaders/growers who overcharge farmworkers for food, lodging, and other necessities, or who sell drugs or alcohol without a permit.
- Investigate and punish crewleaders/growers who commit acts of violence against farmworkers.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) should:

- Investigate and punish crewleaders/growers who violate health and safety laws and regulations.
- Enforce federal laws requiring proper field sanitation. Investigate and punish violators, e.g., those who provide workers with drinking water in containers that have not been cleaned between uses or that once contained pesticides.
- Put more federal inspectors in the fields and packinghouses.
- Increase penalties levied against growers and crewleaders who violate OSHA laws and regulations.
- Provide farmworkers with information about occupational hazards.

Appendix I

Participants in the 1991 National Farmworker Women's Conference

ARIZONA

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- JACKIE CARRERO (TRAINER)
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- MARIBEL CORTEZ (TRAINER)
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- MARGARITA DIAZ (TRAINER)
CATA
- EVA DOMINGUEZ (TRAINER)
Casa PRAC
- MARA DOMINGUEZ (TRAINER)
HYPE/Casa PRAC
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Casa PRAC
- AMERICA HERNANDEZ
CATA
- CARMEN JIMENEZ (TRAINER)
CATA
- EVELYN MALAVE (TRAINER)
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- MARGARITA MERCADO
CATA
- JOANNE SOLIS (TRAINER)
Casa PRAC

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FLOC

OREGON

- IRMA DE ANDA
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El Niño Sano
- CARMEN RAMIREZ
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- MARIA RAMIREZ
El Niño Sano

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Appendix II

Farmworker Women's Priority Needs and Issues for a National Action Agenda

Developed at 1991 Founding Conference

CHILDREN AND FAMILY

- Child care, including day care for school-aged children
- Lack of adequate housing; substandard conditions
- Domestic violence
- Child labor and child abuse in the fields
- Leisure time in labor camps—need for activities other than drinking
- Teen education about AIDS, drug abuse, etc.
- Discrimination and abuses in the school system
- Drop-outs

WORKPLACE

- Pesticides
- Field sanitation—Availability and identification of drinking and handwashing water and portable toilets; risks to health when these facilities not available
- Transportation—who provides it and safety
- Employer and crewleader abuses
- Labor violations—e.g., illegal wage deductions, not providing workers' compensation, and not reporting Social Security contributions

- Enforcement of labor laws—e.g., the Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act
- Drug and alcohol abuse by workers at the worksite
- Sanitary needs—provision of sanitary napkins, tampons, and condoms at the worksite as well as at public places like restaurants

HEALTH

- Women's health—in general and including gynecological problems; female problems as a result of exposure to pesticides
- Health care—for the family, the individual worker, and migrants
- Health promotion within farmworker communities—health care providers not reaching farmworkers
- Nutrition—at home, in the fields, and in the schools; lack of access to food stamps and long waiting lists to get interviewed; problems with infant formulas obtained under the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program making children sick
- AIDS—information, education, and awareness among the farmworker community
- Mental health—depression
- Financial resources—Medicaid, Medicare, MediCal; government accountability so funds targeted for farmworkers are used accordingly
- Outreach education for information and referral; need for more outreach workers

EMPOWERMENT

- Becoming formally organized
- Participation of the whole farmworker family
- Dealing with *machismo*
- Women's development
- Self-esteem
- Discrimination against women
- Gathering data on migrant workers to influence policymakers
- Public education campaign—develop political awareness about farmworker issues, including women and children
- Role of religion as a support system



Potting plants at a Florida nursery.

Acknowledgments

FJF sincerely thanks the following people for their support of our Farmworker Women's Health Project: FJF board member and project founder Catalina Broyles, for her creativity and defense of farmworker women's rights; within the U.S. Public Health Service, Health Resources Administration: Maria Lago and Joan Holloway of the Programs for Special Populations Division, for funding the AIDS conferences; Dr. Aaron Favors and the Maternal and Child Health Bureau, for their commitment and financial support for the national conference and this report; and Sonia M. León Reig, Associate Director of the Bureau of Primary Health Care, for her continued interest and support.

Thanks to: Kathleen M. Stanley and Rose Holden of the national Rural Community Assistance Program, Inc., for their belief in the project and support throughout; Patrick Hogan, formerly with the Office of Migrant Education, U.S. Department of Education, and Helen Kavanagh of the Migrant Health Program, for their help and encouragement; Sister Adela Gross of the U.S. Catholic Conference for hosting the steering committee during their meeting; and Barbara Portee of the Bert and Mary Meyer Foundation and Richard B. Aikin of Collier Health Services for funds and advice.

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Most important, FJF thanks all the migrant and seasonal farmworker women with whom we have worked and continue to work on this project. The leadership, passion, intelligence, energy, cooperative spirit, and humor they bring to their fight for justice are an inspiration. It is an honor to work with and learn from them.

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The National Rural Community Assistance Program (RCAP) is the oldest nonprofit organization in the United States providing training and on-site technical assistance on small community drinking water supply, wastewater treatment, resource protection, solid waste disposal, housing, economic development, and related environmental health and rural development issues. Since 1969, RCAP's mission has been to empower and assist people in small, rural communities to improve their quality of life—especially those living in disadvantaged areas and communities with Native American, migrant and seasonal farmworker, and other minority or underserved populations.

RCAP's Migrant Environmental Services Assistance (MESA) Program assists rural migrant and community health centers and other local organizations to address the environmental health needs of migrant and seasonal farmworkers. Through the MESA Program, RCAP provides technical and other non-financial assistance nationwide. MESA projects address special farmworker needs in the areas of drinking water, wastewater treatment, housing, field sanitation, and occupational health and pesticide safety.

For more information about RCAP or MESA, contact: Kathleen M. Stanley, Executive Director, RCAP, 602 South King Street, Suite 402, Leesburg, VA 22075; (703) 771-8636.

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