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Sustainable Agriculture: With or without Labor

Chesapeake Foodshed Network Coffee Talk Webinar

October 7, 2016

Resource Experts: Jessica Culley & Leila Borrero Krouse

[Additional Q&A \(not asked during the webinar\): answers below from Jessica Culley](#)

1. What can be learned from examples of when farmworkers have successfully organized for better wages and fair labor conditions?

There are several lessons that can be learned from examples of farmworkers organizing for better wages and labor conditions. One is that farmworkers have organized, are organizing and will continue to organize. We have the history of the UFW to look at and the importance of the grape boycott to their success. Consumer support was critical, but the effort to keep workers organized was not sustained. Today we have the inspirational story of Familias Unidas por la Justicia, an independent union of berry pickers in Washington state to keep in mind. More than 500, mainly indigenous workers, sustained an organizing drive over more than 3 years - engaged consumers up and down the west coast in a boycott of Sakuma Farms and their corporate partner, Driscoll's, to pressure the company into collective bargaining.

I think we've also learned that farmworkers have to be creative when organizing. The efforts of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers is a contrast to organizing for a traditional union contract. We have yet to see what the long term impacts on workers and the industry will be from the corporate code of conduct, but the short term impacts have been considerable. What these efforts have in common is a commitment to engaging the farmworker community in the leadership and structure of the program and in building their participation in the continual role of monitoring compliance (with contracts, codes of conduct, standards etc).

2. How have the farmworker populations you work with changed over time, and have your resources or programs had to change in response?

When CATA began as an organization in the 1970's the majority of the workers in our region were from Puerto Rico. Today, while there is still a portion of Caribbean workers, the majority are from the south of Mexico and Central America, many of whom are indigenous and most of

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whom are undocumented. While certain adaptations have been made to our work, the conditions impacting the workers have remained sadly very consistent, and the approach of the organization has always been to actively engage workers in dialogue about how to change these conditions. While there have been some changes in programming, our approach remains the same - as we believe that all communities need to be engaged and commitment to building something new!

Questions Answered during the Coffee Talk

- 1. What do you see as the role of policy in building support for sustainable ag for both those target groups (farms and farmworkers)?***
- 2. What recommendations do you have for building bipartisan support around these issues, particularly in a time when political issues are becoming more and more polarized?***
- 3. How can I (as a member of the food justice movement) help bring awareness and engagement with farm workers' rights and current treatment? I feel like there is a lot of people, power, and money fighting for good, sustainable food and access to such food for all people--- which could and should be backing workers rights, but seems to have disappeared within the discussions even race/food justice discussions.***
- 4. I want to believe that CIW Fair Food Campaign and similar consumer-driven certification schemes, but I am starting to get skeptical, after two years focusing on just a few companies (Wendy's, Publix, etc.). I very much want to see an organization working on POLICY SOLUTIONS, that will allow a level playing field for small and large farms. I just think better legal worker protections are needed, rather than simple fair labor certification schemes, which are driven by consumer choice.***
- 5. Are you working with Migrant Justice and their Milk with Dignity campaign?***

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6. I have tremendous respect for the work of CATA. Though I have been confused/concerned about the certification vs. the platform created by CIW.

Participant contributions

- UFW just worked hard to pass the overtime pay for farm workers in CA!**
- Ben and Jerry's have signed!**

- Corporations have the ability to make swifter changes than legislation many times**
 - In response to the last point: I think swift solutions are not always long-lasting, large-impact solutions. It is all part of the puzzle to social change, though.**

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