



IUF : UNITING FOOD, FARM & HOTEL WORKERS WORLDWIDE

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IUF COVID-19 DEMANDS : AGRICULTURE

The COVID-19 pandemic highlights the frailty of our food system, at the heart of which lies the absence of decent work for the vast majority of those around the world working in agriculture. Border closures and emergency containment measures threaten the incomes and livelihoods of agricultural workers, their health and safety and those of their family members. Workers living and working on plantations, on farms of all sizes, in orchards, greenhouses and packing stations risk exclusion from necessary public health and social security measures. Migrant workers are at high risk. Trade union rights are often restricted or repressed; few agricultural workers are covered by collective bargaining agreements. Only 5% of workers in agriculture have any access to a labour inspection system or legal protection of their health and safety rights.

The United Nations' International Labour Organization (ILO) has developed international standards (see below) to protect the rights, the livelihoods and the health and safety of agricultural workers.

This document provides a set of trade union demands for protecting agricultural workers and saving lives in the fight to contain the spread of COVID-19.



BECAUSE AGRICULTURAL WORKERS ARE ESSENTIAL TO FOOD SECURITY, THE IUF CALLS ON GOVERNMENTS, EMPLOYERS AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS TO IMPLEMENT THE FOLLOWING MEASURES TO PROTECT WORKERS IN AGRICULTURE AND THEIR FAMILY MEMBERS.

Employer-provided housing must have:

- Sufficient potable water, sanitation facilities and ventilation.
- Sleeping, eating and sanitation facilities must respect effective physical distancing measures.
- Soap, clean water, disinfectant and other sanitary supplies must be available at all times and conform to international recommendations for containing the spread of COVID-19.
- Information on hygiene and sanitary measures must be prominent, accessible and available in languages understood by workers.
- Communication facilities including emergency hotlines must be available at all times.

Access to Medical Services

- All workers and family members, including seasonal and migrant workers, and regardless of their residence status, must be guaranteed access to properly equipped medical facilities and free medical services, including testing and treatment.

Income Protection and Social Security

- Remuneration for agricultural workers must be immediately improved in recognition of the essential service they provide.
- At a minimum, existing agreements on wages and payment must be enforced.
- Where such agreements do not exist, workers must be guaranteed pay which ensures a living wage for workers and family members, to be determined through negotiations with the relevant trade union organizations.
- The reorganization of work to mitigate the spread of the virus cannot serve as a pretext for reducing payment.
- All workers, including seasonal and migrant workers, and regardless of their residency status, must have the right to paid sick leave/special leave, accident insurance and disability compensation.

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Transport

- Employer-provided transport to, from and within workplaces must be organized to respect physical distancing.
- Transport vehicles must be regularly disinfected and transport workers adequately protected.

Workplace Safety

- All workplace stations must be organized to respect physical distancing and necessary protection measures, including the proper use of personal protective equipment.
- Workers on the job must have sufficient access at all times to potable water, sanitation facilities and all necessary protective clothing, disinfectants etc.
- Information on their location, distribution and proper use must be accessible to all workers in all work situations in a language they understand.
- The distribution and use of equipment, tools and necessary supplies must respect all recommended safety measures, including regular disinfecting.
- Workers must be able to exercise their right to remove themselves from unsafe situations at the workplace without fear of loss of income, employment or eviction.
- Special attention must be paid to ensuring women workers' rights: their right to income protection and social security, maternity protection, post-natal care, proper protective equipment and protection from sexual harassment.

Health and Safety

- Joint union-management workplace health and safety committees are essential to ensure that all hygiene and safety measures are correctly applied and that workers are not placed at heightened risk through speedup, piece rates, reduced staffing and corner-cutting. Women workers should be represented on these committees.

Coordinated Action

- At national level, these measures must be jointly promoted, implemented and monitored by competent government authorities, employers, and the relevant trade union organizations. Retailers, food processing companies and processors of agricultural commodities must commit to their effective implementation.
- The United Nations' ILO, FAO and WHO must advocate at international level for strong measures to protect agricultural workers' health and safety. Through their national offices, they must engage governments and assist them to implement these demands.



Conventions of the United Nations' International Labour Organization provide a concrete guide to action by governments based on internationally agreed standards.

Convention 110 – Plantations covers:

- protection of the rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining
- payment of wages
- provision of adequate medical services for workers and their families
- provision of adequate housing
- paid leave
- provision of goods and services on plantation at fair and reasonable prices, for the benefit of the worker
- maternity protection, paid maternity leave and protections for nursing mothers
- mandatory labour inspection

For a fuller elaboration see the accompanying

Recommendation

Convention 184 – Safety and Health in Agriculture covers:

- protection of agricultural workers' health and safety by eliminating, minimizing or controlling hazards in the agricultural working environment
- participation in the application and review of safety and health measures
- selection of safety and health representatives and representatives in safety and health committees
- right to remove themselves from danger resulting from their work activity
- right for temporary and seasonal workers to receive the same safety and health protection as permanent workers
- inclusion in social security and health insurance schemes comparable with those of workers in other sectors
- protections around the use of machinery, the handling, transport and application of materials including agrochemicals
- protection of women workers

For a fuller elaboration see the accompanying

Recommendation 192

Labour Inspection

- Governments should seek to monitor and enforce on a regular basis compliance with the above measures through properly resourced and trained labour inspectors.

Emergency Relief

- Governments must provide emergency relief for rural areas where border closures and the loss of markets have plunged agricultural workers into overnight destitution and essential services have collapsed. Appropriate measures to stimulate and support local food production must also be adopted.