



**The Farmworker
Association of
Florida, Inc.**

Year In Review Newsletter Annual 2024

**Message from the
General Coordinator
by Yesica Ramirez**



What a year! 2024 started out with the Florida state legislative session, in which the Farmworker Association took delegations of community members to Tallahassee every week except one to **speak their truth to lawmakers** on policies of direct impact to them and their families. The last day of the session at the end of March, the legislature voted for **HB 433 – the heat stress preemption bill**, denying heat stress protections for workers by any municipality in the state. This end-of-year newsletter is but a brief glimpse into all of our work over the past year. What 2024 confirmed was the **strength, resilience, determination, and commitment of our FWAFA staff, our communities, and farmworkers across the state.** We go into 2025 united, strong and ready to meet the challenges! In solidarity, we know together, **Yes, We Can! Sí, Se Puede!**



Embracing the Future!

*Elena Contreras, a brilliant daughter of migrant farmworkers in Florida and student at FIU, leads our **Climate Justice Youth group at our office in Homestead.** In its second year, the youth engaged in projects – interviewing workers and family members who work in extreme heat and humidity, an art project, Community Garden workdays, exploring what climate justice means for farmworkers, and a **YPAR (Youth Participatory Action Research project) in partnership with the University of Florida** scheduled to start in 2025. The joy of watching the growth and development of Elena and everyone in the group is immense.*

*Oscar Muñiz and Ana Espino are the youth leaders of our new **Youth Group in Apopka.** Oscar and Ana worked for 2 years on our **USDA Food and Farmworkers Relief Program** where they gained skills and knowledge that propel them in organizing **bi-weekly meetings with local youth** in fun, artistic and **community-building projects and activities**, all while the young people learn about **FWAF and social justice for farmworkers.** We are immensely proud of them all, for they are the future.*

**Growing Justice in Our
Community Gardens**

FWAF maintains four Community Gardens based on **agroecology and food sovereignty** principles and community building and cross-cultural exchanges. Student groups from local universities and high schools, church groups, and ally organizations visit our Gardens to learn about the **roots of injustice** in our agricultural system, and making change through **understanding cultures, ancestral practices, indigenous protection of the Earth**, and deep history. Community members find solace, connection, community and sustenance in gardening/farming together.



“Every minute is a chance to change the world.” – Dolores Huerta

Civic Participation and Civic Engagement

Democracy thrives when people take action! As part of FWAF's civic participation efforts, our staff and volunteers were actively engaged in **voter outreach** in Central Florida from September 12th to November 3rd. During this period, FWAF successfully registered **147 new voters**, distributed and collected **630 signed voter pledge cards** in collaboration with the Hispanic Federation and Florida Rising, and encouraged community members to make their voices heard through voting.



Youth and active FWAF volunteer spokespeople played a crucial role in motivating voter turnout. FWAF identified **6 spokespeople** that gave public testimonies and Sr. **Ann Kendrick** served as a **key influencer**, including participating in a **Facebook Live event** where Sr. Ann highlighted FWAF's resources, such as providing **rides to polling stations**.



To further amplify voter participation, staff and volunteers knocked on or left door hangers at **500 homes**, reminding residents of the importance of voting. Additionally, six FWAF volunteers served as **poll monitors**, assisting voters with general questions and ensuring they reached the correct polling places. **We will be counted; our voices will be heard!**

Our Goal: Climate Resilience for

Farmworker Community

Hurricanes Debby, Helene and Milton hit Florida in quick succession, devastating different parts of the state and wreaking havoc on communities and agricultural crops. From Florida's west coast, through Central Florida and up to the FL/GA border, **farmworkers in rural areas experienced devastation** to housing, downed trees damaging vehicles and roads, loss of work due to crop damage, lack of electricity that caused food loss, and some migrant workers found themselves stranded in North Carolina, temporarily unable to return home to family in Florida.



The Farmworker Association has a 41-year history of doing disaster response and relief work, and this year, **FWAF rose to the challenge once again**. In the immediate aftermath, staff organizers in each of our 5 different areas went out into the field to do **assessments of the storm damage**. We learned the trajectory of the 3 storms hit diverse areas, including and especially, north central Florida and various dispersed areas in central and west FL that had experienced the paths of the tornados. **Years-long coalition building and strong collaborations** between FWAF and allies and partners across the state, and with **thanks to donations from individuals and foundations and ally organizations**, FWAF was able to provide basic supplies and services to affected individuals and families, including food, hygiene products, baby supplies, water, and referrals. We want to **thank Smile Trust's Community Emergency Operations Center**, the **American Red Cross** for serving over 2,200 hot meals, and monetary donations from **Florida Rising, Florida Resilience Alliance, Climate Justice Alliance, Farm Aid, Coming Clean, Holy Trinity Episcopal Church in Clearwater, and Alianza Nacional de Campesinas**.





FWAF Responds to Tragic Fatal Bus Accident involving Watermelon Workers

H2A farmworkers or “guestworkers” are especially vulnerable and encounter marginalization and isolation. On May 14, a tragic bus accident in Ocala, Florida, claimed the lives of eight agricultural workers **on their way to harvest watermelons**, and left at least 40 others severely injured. FWAF staff acted immediately, providing vital support to the victims and their families, maintaining a presence in Gainesville for almost 2 months to offer translation, **Know Your Rights training**, and a protection against exploitation by unscrupulous lawyers and others looking to take advantage of their vulnerable circumstances. FWAF coordinated with local area businesses and agencies to **provide basic food, water, and clothes** to the men, who were unable to work to earn income as a result of the incident.



Our staff held a **vigil** at our FWAF headquarters in Apopka, to honor the lives and in memory of those who died in the accident. In addition, FWAF organized a successful GoFundMe campaign (**sincere thanks to all who contributed!**) and distributed **over \$2913 to each of the workers and/or their families** from the donations.



This heartbreaking event highlights the dangers agricultural workers often face. We **recommit ourselves** to working for a **Just Transition in agriculture** and in our society.

Food and Farmworker Relief Program – FWAF Reaches Over 9700 Farmworkers to Receive COVID Relief Funds

Better late than never! Through a grant from the USDA **Food and Farmworker Relief Program**, FWAF was able to enroll over **9700 farmworkers** to receive **\$600** as part of compensation for farmworkers impacted during the pandemic for things such as having to buy their own PPE, hand sanitizer, etc. Our **incredible team of Organizers and Outreach workers** undertook an extensive effort to reach farmworkers around the state meeting them in our offices, going to their homes, and going to them in their workplaces to offer them this opportunity. While \$600 hardly covers the **hardships many farmworkers faced during COVID** – and continue to face each day – we know that this assistance helped many families and individuals. **We especially want to thank our Area Organizers and our Youth Organizers**, who did an exemplary job, and we are proud to have them on our Team!



“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” – Martin Luther King, Jr.

**Community-based Participatory Research –
Direct Benefits to Farmworkers**

For over 30 years, FWAf has engaged in CBPR health and safety research that is **equitable, collaborative, community-driven and outcome focused**. Results are used to inform our policy **advocacy for improved working conditions for farmworkers**. Current projects include on-going heat stress impacts research with **Emory University**; cumulative impacts on farmworker children in Immokalee with **Florida State University**; and mobile app device for monitoring pesticide and heat exposure with **University of North Carolina Charlotte**. FWAf also assists and/or **collaborates with students in their research projects** for theses, dissertations, and class projects, some who go on to pursue careers in public health or social justice. **Research findings result in direct benefit to farmworkers**, including through science-informed trainings, health screening results, and from policy advocacy work.



Climate Justice is Health Justice!

Climate Justice for Farmworkers! Thanks to a grant from Farmworker Justice, FWAf conducted **heat safety trainings for 1,326 crop and nursery farmworkers** across Central and South Florida, with life-saving information on how to best protect themselves in Florida's extreme heat. FWAf also conducted **pesticide trainings, launched a heat stress safety social media campaign**, and is writing a document to submit to OSHA as public comments along with interviews with farmworker, **advocating for heat stress standards and regulations to protect farmworkers**



Building Power Among Farmworkers and Rural, Low-income Communities Since 1983

***Farmworkers Feed the World
Justice for Farmworkers!***