

Do You Know the Price of Fruits and Vegetables in Your Region?

When you shop for fruits and vegetables, what do you look for?... Are you concerned about where and how they were grown, picked and shipped to the market? Or more about and their



healthfulness and price?

Can you imagine starting your work day at dawn and not ending it until dusk? Many of us can say we do that. But can you imagine it, if it was to work outdoors, with perhaps no shelter from the sun or weather, and no place to take a break or

toilet? Can you imagine doing it with your entire family pitching in, and toddlers and infants in tow?

This is just a slight scenario of a typical day in the life of some migrant farm workers. From young children to grown adults, their lives follow the seasons and the crops—wherever in the country they are growing; and where they are hand-picked. You'd be surprised by how few crops are picked by machines.



In the United States, most vegetables and fruits are picked by hand. For workers, there are daily quotas

depending upon the crop. When they are in season, to earn between \$40 to \$80 a day, a worker must pick 4,000 pounds (2 tons) of tomatoes. And it doesn't end at picking. It includes

packing a truck and then unloading it at a plant.

None of goes home with the worker, the people who pick the crops very often go into the same grocery store as you and I and pay the market price. But in reality, many of them cannot afford to buy the vegetables and fruits they help bring to the market.



In the state of Florida which ranks 4th in production among the agricultural states, the average annual

individual income for a farm worker is between \$11,000 and \$16,000 per family. Their work supports a 28 billion dollar fruit and vegetable industry in the USA. And with pesticide risks, farm work ranks as one of the three most dangerous occupations in the USA. Many workers

suffer from irritations of the nose, throat, and respiratory system from exposure to chemicals and dust in the fields.



Because the work is migratory and seasonal, this life is especially hard on children who move with their family from farm to farm throughout the year impacting the consistency of education and ties to a community. Many children drop out of school because of the frequent moves. Housing, health care, nutrition, and transportation are among the ongoing challenges. And it doesn't just happen in Florida— these are issues encountered by farm workers and their families throughout our nation. There are 5 million farmworkers, including women and children in the United States.

These were just some of the realities shared with members of the Northeast Florida Maryknoll



Affiliates in a presentation by Sr. Sara Proctor, DW. Sr. Sara was invited to share her experience by Sr. Lucy Clynes, DW, Pastoral Associate at Our Lady Star of the Sea Parish, Ponte Vedra, Florida (Diocese of Saint Augustine). Sr Sara has seventeen and a half years of ministry in Hillsborough, County, Florida, (Diocese of St.

Petersburg, Florida) as a Physician's Assistant providing healthcare and social services to migrant workers and in missions across the County. Most of these workers have household incomes less than 200% of poverty level and are without health care coverage and struggle to meet their basic daily needs.



The discussion that followed focused on "what can be done?" It was suggested that paying attention to various legislative initiatives and writing members of Congress locally, state-wide and nationally are the most effective ways of advocating for the human rights of farm workers.

Kind of changes the way you look at the price of fruits and vegetables, doesn't it?