



THE HUMAN IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE

CASE STUDY

UFW Foundation






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Farm workers have long borne witness to climate change. Ask a farm worker, especially someone who has toiled in the fields for decades, and they'll tell you what climate change looks like. Precipitation patterns have changed. The soil quality has changed. The harvesting season has changed. There are more pests and increased pesticide use, requiring farm workers to wear additional protective equipment that exacerbates their risk for respiratory and heat stress. And extreme heat has forced farm workers to work harder and faster to keep food from rotting.

Major agricultural regions, from California to Georgia, are now experiencing extreme heat waves with record-high temperatures. Farm workers are 35 times more likely to die due to heat-related causes than any other occupation. Between 1992 and 2016, extreme heat killed 783 of U.S. workers and seriously injured nearly 70,000 of them. And heat-related risks are increasing. Today, the average farm worker is exposed to 21 days of excessive heat each year, and that number could rise to 39 days a year if global temperatures rise by 2 degrees Celsius.




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A Multifaceted, Intersectional Approach

“When we talk about climate mitigation and resilience, people focus on the resilience of crops, of land and soil, of livestock. What about the workers that we rely on to harvest and cultivate our food?”

Diana Tellefson Torres
Executive Director, UFW Foundation



With deep roots in the farm worker movement, the UFW Foundation, was founded to advocate for policies that protect farm workers, with the goal of providing tools to enforce these policies and support to realize their own agency. The organization engages farm workers in systemic change and empowers them to advocate for more equitable policies. The UFW Foundation looks at the needs of farm workers holistically to determine policies that will protect them and ultimately improve their lives. That’s why their work sits at the intersection of workers’ rights, immigrant justice, racial justice, and climate justice.

Since 2006, UFW Foundation has mobilized farm workers and their organizations around major policy issues, including immigration reform, pesticide protections, heat standards, hazard pay, and other worker protections.

In addition to advocating at the national level, UFW Foundation focuses on California, Washington, Oregon, Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, and Colorado and is expanding to other parts of the country. Organizing farm workers is an extremely challenging undertaking due to their mobility as seasonal workers, long work hours, and precarious immigration status. Nearly three-quarters of agricultural workers in the U.S. are immigrants, and

about half do not have work authorization. Consequently, many are afraid to speak up for their rights due to fears of intimidation or retaliation, particularly immigration consequences like detention, deportation, and other forms of family separation.

Storytelling is central to UFW Foundation's advocacy and empowerment strategy, including in climate justice. "We need to uplift stories centered on farm

workers' knowledge of how climate change has been impacting the land, the produce, and the health and safety of those who put food on our tables," says Diana Tellefson Torres, Executive Director. "The climate change narrative must speak to the human impact." To this end, UFW Foundation trains and supports farm workers to speak out about their lived experiences, including testifying in Congress.

Farm workers can die today or tomorrow, because they don't have protections against the level of heat that we are experiencing. This is really a life and death situation now, not 10 years from now and not 20 years from now."


Diana Tellefson Torres
Executive Director, UFW Foundation





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Groundbreaking Climate Impact Policies



**“Lack of legal status is a
fundamental barrier to the
rights of farm workers that
we’re trying to eliminate.”**

Diana Tellefson Torres
Executive Director, UFW Foundation

In their advocacy work, UFW Foundation speaks out about climate change as one of the drivers behind heat and other environmental problems impacting farm workers. They have testified about how heat, as a result of climate change, is putting the lives of farm workers at risk. Additionally, they have spoken out about the impact climate change has had with respect to wildfires that have become common during heat season in California and the Pacific Northwest, impacting rural farm worker communities.

In 2005, the UFW Foundation’s sister organization, the United Farm Workers (UFW), won support in California for the nation’s first comprehensive standards for protecting farm and other outdoor workers from heat, including the provision of water, shade, rest periods, and training to identify heat illness. However, the lack of enforcement of the law continued to cost the lives of farm workers.



A decade later, the UFW Foundation strengthened those rules and mechanisms for enforcing them, after settling a lawsuit that included establishing a system where farm workers can confidentially report heat violations through the organization and a mandate that California OSHA provide a timely response and conduct a thorough investigation.

UFW Foundation is currently advocating for these protections at the federal level through the Asunción Valdivia Heat Illness and Fatality Prevention Act of 2021, which was named after a farm worker who died of heat stroke in 2004 after toiling without breaks in 105-degree temperature. If passed, this act would provide safeguards not only for farm workers but also other indoor and outdoor



workers impacted by extreme heat in the workplace. While UFW Foundation maintains a strong focus on heat, pesticides, and other workplace hazards, its number one focus is immigration reform. *“Lack of legal status is a fundamental barrier to the rights of farm workers that we’re trying to eliminate.”* says Diana Tellefson Torres, Executive Director, UFW Foundation.

The lack of immigration status undermines the ability of workers we represent to raise concerns about anything, whether it’s heat or sexual abuse.”

Diana Tellefson Torres
Executive Director, UFW Foundation



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Leveraging Technology to Enforce Policies

**The laws in the books are
not the laws in the field.”**

Erica Lomeli Corcoran

Systemic Change Director, UFW Foundation

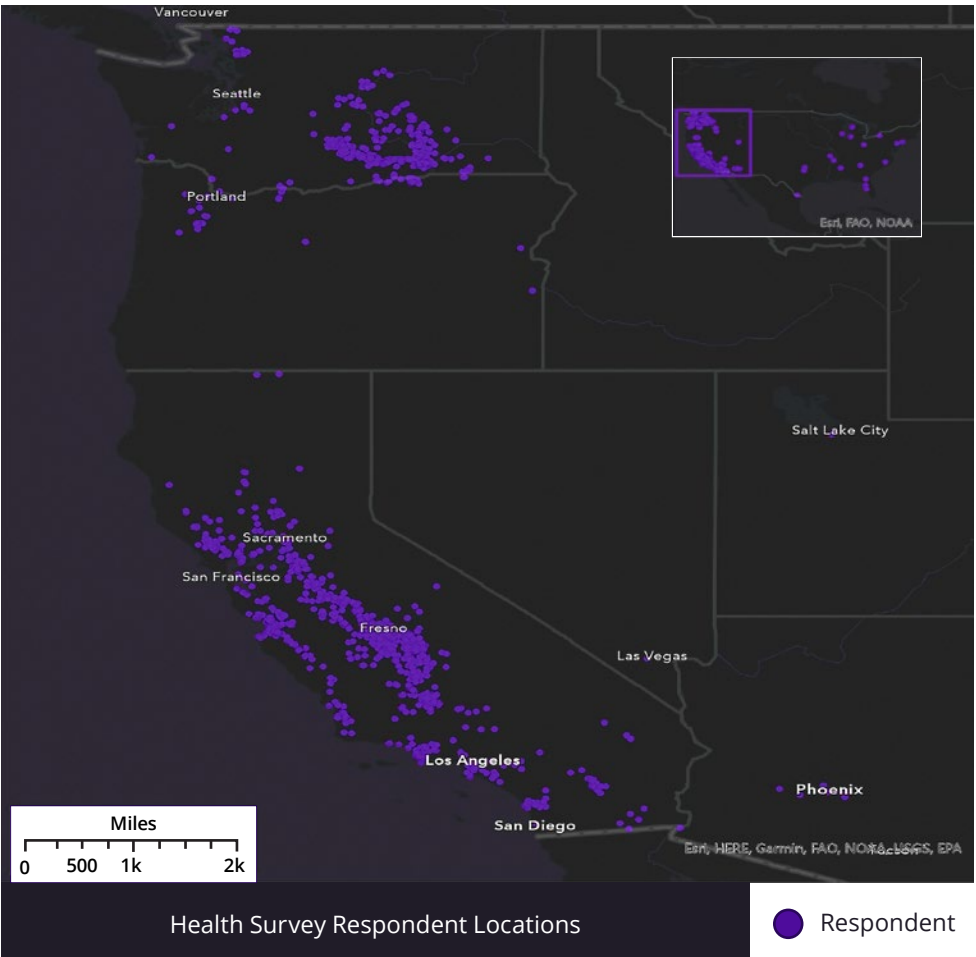
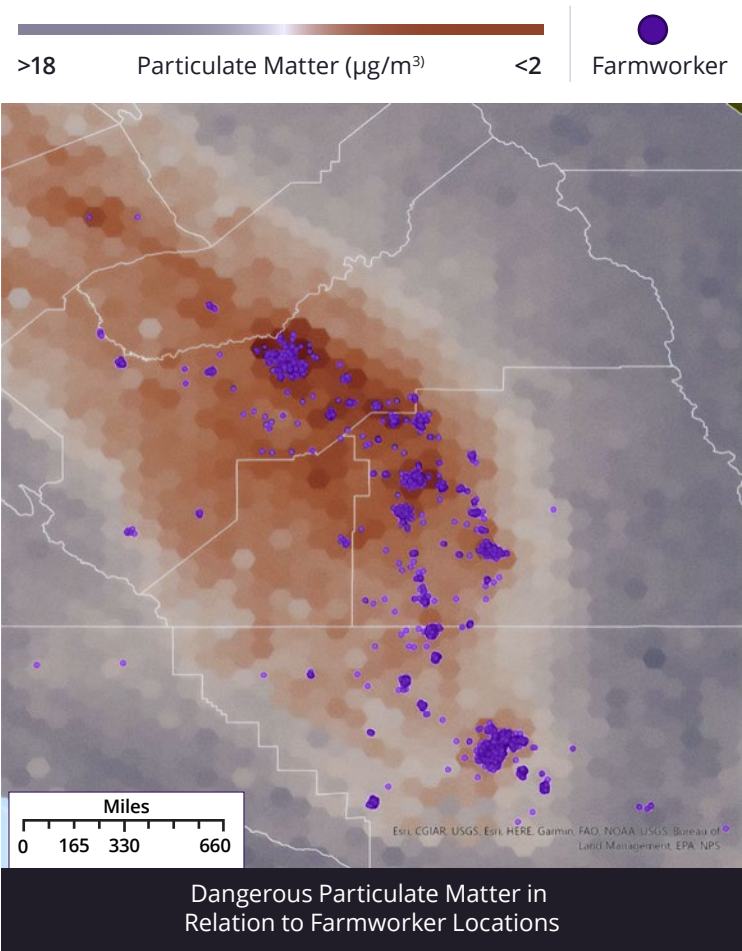
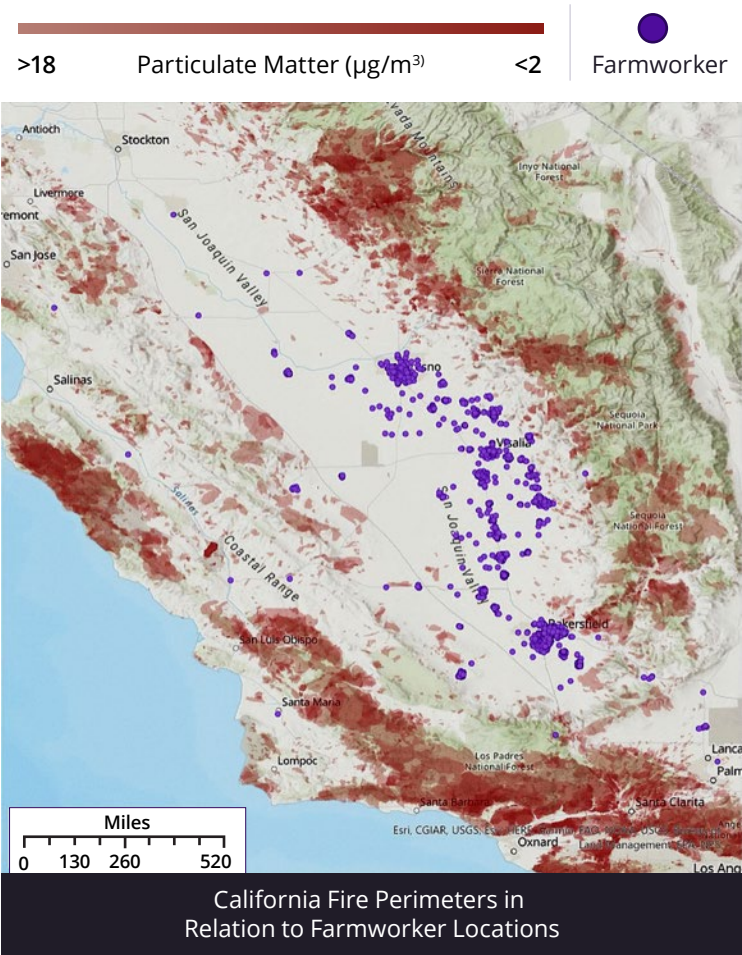
In parallel with advocating for better policies to protect farm workers, UFW Foundation educates its members about their rights and provides them the tools for enforcement. UFW Foundation uses digital platforms, including Facebook and text messaging, to share information and engage with 100,000 subscribers, including over 40,000 self-identified farm workers, the majority of whom are Spanish speakers. In addition to promoting workers' rights, UFW Foundation has used the text message program to contact farm workers during the pandemic, letting them know about food distributions and vaccination clinics near them. Additionally, the texting program has allowed UFW Foundation research team to collect data from farm workers on a variety of issues; the most recent survey focused on heat protections in the fields. Lastly, the research team has been using geolocation tools to map out findings, which gives UFW Foundation critical information about the needs of farm workers.



UFW Foundation is also utilizing WhatsApp's geolocation tools to help farm workers, especially those who are in remote areas or working in isolation, provide their precise location when filing claims. "It's crucial for inspectors to go immediately after a violation has happened. A crew could be working in this field today, but tomorrow, they might be 20 miles away from that location," says Erica Lomeli Corcoran, Systemic Change Director, UFW Foundation.

In 2021, UFW Foundation established a call center that allows workers from anywhere in the country to file a workplace violation claim. These technology tools have been essential in reaching and supporting farm workers who tend to work in remote locations with limited access to resources and services.

Additionally, UFW Foundation is developing its own digital platform based on block-chain technology that will establish a digital community to inform, engage and provide services to farm workers through their smart phones. Through this initiative, 50,456 farm workers were able to register for emergency relief events in advance via their smart phones; staff and volunteers then verified the individuals when they arrived at the event. The organization plans to launch the farm-worker facing mobile app in 2022.



A survey conducted by UFW Foundation in December 2020 found that 75% of the 14,653 self-identified farm worker respondents did not have health insurance and 13% had never been to a doctor for a health check-up.

This is a density map demonstrating the location of all respondents.

Photographs by [David Bacon](#).



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