

History of Justice for Farmworkers Campaign

1988 Working Together Group (WTG), a coalition of farmworker agencies in western New York, is formed.

1991 CITA, Centro Independiente de Trabajadores Agricolas/The Independent Farmworker Center, a farmworker advocacy organization directed by farmworkers is created in Florida, New York, by farmworkers with the help of Rural and Migrant Ministry.

A special task force from Cornell University, called together at the request of Governor Mario Cuomo, issues the report Agricultural Labor in New York State and Implications for Labor Policy. The report calls for the removal of the legislative exclusions that deny farmworkers in New York the same rights and protections as other laborers.

1992 Advocates in eastern New York begin a sanitation code campaign to improve the living conditions in farm camps. The campaign leads the Middletown Times-Herald to carry a spotlight series, which in turn, leads to the creation of a county revolving loan fund. The campaign also creates the foundation for the formation of the Farmworker Advocacy Coalition and Farmworker Advocacy Day.

1993 The Alliance for Farmworker Rights is created in western New York as a vehicle to fight for farmworker justice. The Alliance is made up of agency people and farmworkers. The Farmworker Advocacy Coalition, made up of farmworker agencies in eastern New York is formed.

1994 A small group of farmworkers and advocates testifies before the New York State Senate-Assembly Puerto Rican/Hispanic Task Force on Farmworker Issues co-chaired by Senator Mendez and Assemblyman Diaz.

An aide to a prominent senator is overheard to say; “The Senator doesn’t care about farmworkers - they have no political voice”. . . The seed for Farmworker Advocacy Day (FAD) is planted!

1995 The first FAD, organized by the Farmworker Advocacy Coalition (FAC), is attended by some 150 people from across the state who commit to adding their political voice to the farmworkers. The focus of FAD is to educate the legislators about the existence of farmworkers and to begin to demand the removal of the legislative exclusions. The highlight of the day is a silent procession led by farmworkers through the heart of Albany.

New York State Senate-Assembly Puerto Rican/ Hispanic Task Force on Farmworker Issues releases the report: Separate and Unequal: New York’s Farmworkers. Senator Mendez and Assemblywoman Nolan (Chair of the Assembly Labor Committee) introduce a number of bills calling for the removal of the legislative exclusions and the just treatment of farmworkers. The Assembly then passes two historic bills giving farmworkers the protections of collective bargaining and the right to drinking water in the fields. Unfortunately, the bills die in the Senate.

1996 Working Together Group (WTG) joins FAC in co-sponsoring Farmworker Advocacy Day. Pat Humphries introduces her song A Cup of Cold Water at FAD, which echoes the theme of FAD.

The first farmworker-sponsored legislation in New York's history passes in both the Senate and the Assembly, as farms are mandated to provide drinking water in the fields. Farmworkers fill the Senate gallery for the historic vote.

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany officially joins the movement: Bishop Howard Hubbard addresses FAD, and Barbara DiTommaso of the Diocesan Peace and Justice Commission becomes the legislative liaison for the growing movement.

The New York State Catholic Conference adds the removal of the legislative exclusions to its legislative agenda.

A prayer vigil is held on the outside steps of the Legislative Office Building, as those gathered include acolytes from Episcopal churches. During the afternoon, prayers are offered for each of the legislators.

The Justice for Farmworker's Campaign (JFW) is launched. JFW establishes a year-round, state-wide legislative campaign to remove the exclusions and to improve working conditions for farmworkers.

1997 Over 500 people attend FAD, doubling the previous year's attendance.

After an extensive campaign by FAC and WTG, the New York State Department of Health revises the state sanitary code for the first time in 26 years. The revisions help to improve living conditions in farm camps with more than five people.

Senator Spano (Chair of the Labor Committee) sponsors legislation that entitles farmworkers to the same minimum wage standard as other laborers in New York State.

Senator Mendez gives a rousing send off in Spanish in the Well of the Legislative Office Building to conclude FAD.

1998 The New York State Labor-Religion Coalition's state-wide forty-hour fast, Excluded From Our Tables, attracts tremendous support and widespread media attention. Newspapers across the state publish editorials in support of the farmworker's right to be treated equally. The Fast and the editorials begin to draw the attention of Agri-business. The New York State Episcopal Public Policy Network commits to supporting the farmworkers, and as a result the movement gets its first lobbyist, as Damrius (Demi) McGuire joins JFW.

Bishop Mark Sisk of the Episcopal Diocese of New York addresses the Rally on the steps of the State Museum.

The New York State Senate proclaims April 28th as Farmworker Advocacy Day.

Assemblyman Luster introduces a package of legislation intended to provide farmworkers with healthy and safe work places.

A second historical piece of farmworker-sponsored legislation is passed as farms are required to provide field sanitation.

Farmworkers and their advocates are joined at FAD by many labor leaders as Worker Memorial Day is commemorated.

Farmworkers from across New York gather in Cortland for an historic assembly.

Newly elected President Denis Hughes of the New York State AFL-CIO addresses the rally on the steps of the Capitol at FAD and announces that the just treatment of farmworkers in New York, and their right to collective bargaining, will be one of the top priorities of the NYS AFL-CIO.

Over 1000 people attend FAD in which the on-going participation of youth in FAD fully blossoms as a special education program is incorporated for the first time into FAD. Assemblyman Englebright introduces legislation that would protect farmworkers from pesticide exposure.

The New York Daily News begins an award-winning series of editorials, *The Harvest of Shame*, bringing a powerful voice for justice into the arena. As a result, the Legislature passes a third piece of legislation giving farmworkers the same minimum wage standard as other laborers in New York. As the Governor signs the Bill, the New York State Farm Bureau is commended for their support of the legislation.

Cardinal John O'Connor of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of New York calls for the just treatment of farmworkers and the removal of the exclusions in his Labor Day homily. An historic town meeting, sponsored by President Denis Hughes of the New York State AFL-CIO, brings together the Senate and Assembly Labor Committee chairs, as well as the State Attorney General, to hear testimony from farmworkers in Chester, New York. Farmworkers from across the state gather in Cortland for the Second Annual Farmworker Assembly. At the Assembly, farmworkers set an historic agenda for justice.

2000 Farmworker Advocacy Day continues to attract farmworkers and their supporters from throughout NY State. *The Voice of Farmworkers* is published to commemorate Farmworker Advocacy Day. The journal includes powerful farmworker testimonials and a history of the legislative campaign to date.

2001 Once again, farmworker and allies converge on the capital for Farmworker Advocacy Day. New York State Attorney General Elliot Spitzer, Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver and Senate President Joe Bruno are among those to address the crowd.

2002 The Youth Arts Group (YAG) of Rural and Migrant Ministry organizes a Youth Action Day in Albany. High school and college students join (YAG) in creative action, utilizing street theater and puppetry to educate the public and participate in democracy. Throughout the state, in the communities of Freeport, New Paltz and Fairport, farmworkers and allies march to pressure local legislators to support the Farmworker Fair Labor Practices Act.

Six farm labor contractors from Western NY are indicted in a federal court on charges of forced labor, conspiracy and human trafficking. The virtual enslavement of 41 farmworkers by one of the most powerful farm labor contracting rings in the state galvanizes the movement, as well as the media.

2003 Farmworkers and allies march 330 miles across the state to demand that Senator Bruno use his power as the Senate Majority Leader to push for passage of the Farmworker Fair Labor Practices Act. The "330 Mile March Toward Justice" begins from two locations in New York City and Seneca Falls, converging on Albany and culminating with a much anticipated rally. Total participation in the march and rally

numbers in the thousands. Dolores Huerta, co-founder of the United Farm Workers Union, is among the supporters.

For the first time in the history of the campaign, the Farmworker Fair Labor Practices Act receives Republican sponsorship in the Senate. The lead sponsor of the legislation, Sen. Olga Mendez (R) is joined by eight other Republican co-sponsors, giving the bill majority support in the Senate.