



Campaign for Fair Food Discussion Guide

Legendary journalist Edward R. Murrow's *Harvest of Shame* is among the most famous television documentaries of all time. Richly photographed and arrestingly poignant, this exposé on migrant farmworkers aired on CBS the day after Thanksgiving in 1960. The report resonated deeply for a nation unfamiliar with such brutally honest depictions of living conditions that, as Murrow remarks, "wrong the dignity of man."

Fifty years later, the Campaign for Fair Food is bringing fairer wages and more humane labor conditions to Florida's fields through a historic alliance of farmworkers, consumers, growers, and retail food industry leaders. While the transition to a more just Florida tomato industry is finally underway, much remains to be done to ensure a future of dignity and respect for the workers who plant and pick our nation's fruits and vegetables.

Screen the 20-minute compilation of excerpts from *Harvest of Shame*. Follow with a short contemporary piece from the CIW Films DVD (available for free by request at workers@ciw-online.org). Conclude with a discussion about the films and Campaign for Fair Food.

Discussion Questions

- What images did you find most striking in the films?
- What similarities and differences did you notice between migrant farm labor fifty years ago and today?
- One grower in *Harvest of Shame* stated, "We used to own our slaves. Now we just rent them." What does this imply about the legacy of chattel slavery in relation to migrant farm labor?
- In 1960, farmworkers earned \$900 per year (\$6,630 adjusted to 2010 dollars). Today, farmworkers earn around \$10,000 per year on average. Why have farmworkers' annual earnings remained so meager despite skyrocketing food industry profits?
- What are the root causes of farmworker poverty? What is the role of the retail giants such

as Publix and Wal-Mart? What solutions to farmworker poverty stem from this analysis?

- What are some of the factors that spurred a transition from a predominantly African American workforce to a Latin American and Caribbean immigrant workforce?
- At the conclusion of *Harvest of Shame*, a chaplain remarks, “Perhaps we think too much in terms of charity... and not in terms enough of eliminating poverty.” What does this mean to you?
- How can consumers and farmworkers organize for a more just food system? What are ways that we can support the Campaign for Fair Food locally?

Contemporary Facts & Figures

- Florida tomato pickers earn an average of 45 cents per 32-lb. bucket of tomatoes, a rate that has not risen significantly since 1978. As a result, workers today have to pick over twice the number of buckets per hour to earn minimum wage as they did in 1980. At today’s piece rate, workers have to pick over 2 ½ tons of tomatoes just to earn the equivalent of Florida minimum wage for a 10-hour workday.
- In a January 2001 letter to members of Congress, the U.S. Department of Labor described farmworkers as "a labor force in significant economic distress," citing farmworkers' "low wages, sub-poverty annual earnings, [and] significant periods of un- and underemployment to support its conclusions.
- As a result of exclusion from key New Deal labor reform measures, farmworkers do not have the right to overtime pay, nor the right to organize and collectively bargain with their employers.
- In the most extreme conditions, farmworkers are held against their will and forced to work for little or no pay, facing conditions that meet the stringent legal standards for prosecution under modern-day slavery statutes. Federal Civil Rights officials have prosecuted seven slavery operations involving over 1,000 workers in Florida’s fields since 1997. One federal prosecutor called Florida “ground zero for modern-day slavery.”
- The U.S. supermarket industry had over \$550 billion in sales in 2009.

Additional Resources

- Coalition of Immokalee Workers | www.ciw-online.org
- Student/Farmworker Alliance | www.sfalliance.org
- Interfaith Action of Southwest Florida | www.interfaithact.org
- Just Harvest USA | www.justharvestusa.org
- Alliance for Fair Food | www.allianceforfairfood.org
- Florida Modern-Day Slavery Museum's [accompanying booklet](#)
- [Fair Food bibliography](#)