

# Legislation Proposal

*Increasing Migrant Farmworker Transportation*

**MAP**

Mitty Advocacy Project



## Abstract

The United States, and California in particular, depends on the work of migrant farmworkers to feed our nation. The work that goes into this task is physically strenuous and mentally exhausting. Currently, farmworker families are too often trapped in poverty, living in state-subsidized housing and lacking access to everything from decent healthcare to adequate grocery stores. Although the problems that migrant farmworkers face are many and complex, one major issue that can be fixed is the lack of public transportation to and from migrant farmworker housing facilities. The limited public transportation services isolates farmworkers from their surrounding communities and helps perpetuate the cycle of poverty. This issue can be rectified by integrating migrant farmworker housing camps into local public transportation systems.

## Youth Perspective on this Issue

The farmworkers our country depends on for food live in deplorable conditions. The vast majority are barely scraping by on their bills, rarely see their families, and get little relief from their back-breaking work. The very least we owe to the people who feed our state is the freedom and means to easily travel to and from their place of work, their home, and their community. Migrant workers are regularly restricted by a lack of accessible public transportation, indirectly limiting their freedom.

MAP took a trip to Crystal Bay Farm in Watsonville and were shocked to see the level of social isolation that migrant workers were forced into. Oftentimes these migrants lacked a knowledge of their rights and were unable to find more secure job opportunities due to lack of exposure to the rest of society. Many immigrants cannot see a future outside of farmwork for their children because their entire livelihood has been restricted to their camp. Unfortunately, a lack of exposure and an inability to meet others outside of their localized communities have created violent power dynamics where migrants are left at the mercy of their employer.

Our parents always remind us that they want us to succeed and to lead better lives than they did. However, for children of migrant farm workers, creating a better life for themselves than what their parents had is often not an option. We must stand in solidarity to help level the playing field and to allow for all children to have equal opportunity to better their circumstances.

## Catholic Perspective on this Issue

The Catholic Church believes that every individual is entitled to the right to work with dignity. The first principle of Catholic social teaching regarding immigrants and migrants is that people have the right to migrate to sustain their and their families' lives. Every person has an equal right to receive from the earth what is necessary for life: food, clothing, shelter. Moreover, it teaches that every person has the right to education, medical care, religion, and the expression of one's culture. However, in many marginalized immigrant and migrant communities, people instead live in dehumanizing conditions due to discrimination against socioeconomic status through factors such as environmental racism.

We are charged, as a society, to welcome the stranger. Public transportation, educational opportunities, and community life are all options that are currently not fully available to migrant farm workers, although many of us take such resources for granted. This lack of opportunity contradicts the kind of welcoming we should extend to immigrants, thus making it imperative that we rectify this system to properly embody the level of care we should be giving.

## The Problem

- The isolated nature of migrant farmworker housing camps cuts migrant farmworkers off from the outside world, stripping them of their ability to search for other jobs and opportunities, such as participation in adult education programs and ESL classes, and denying them any sort of social mobility.
- Additionally, migrant farmworkers' social isolation compounds the mental and physical health issues already caused by long hours and back-breaking work. It is no wonder that our farmworkers suffer from concerning high rates of depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues.
- Furthermore, as public transportation around migrant farmworker housing camps is so limited, these farmworkers have very little chance to fully integrate into community life, keeping them perpetually "strangers" to the very communities they feed.
- Limited transportation also leads to a lack of educational opportunities for children of farmworkers, keeping immigrant families trapped in poverty for generations to come.

## MAP's Solution

To address these problems, we propose a requirement that every farmworker housing camp have at least one bus stop within a one mile radius. The bus stop would be a part of the closest municipal bus system in order to allow access to the town's center. This bill would use the criterion of "migrant farmworker housing camp" as set by the Office of Migrant Services of the California Department of Housing and Community Development.

### *Fiscal Impact*

According to the Center for Farmworker Families (<https://farmworkerfamily.org>), there are 500,000 to 800,000 farmworkers currently living in California. Bus stops cost about \$10-12 thousand to construct. These stops would also need to be integrated into local public transportation systems. We estimate that this bill would have positive economic effects, as it would allow farmworkers to play a greater economic role in our communities by engaging in consumership. Over time, the return we receive in terms of increased business will be more than the initial investment made in bus stations.