

Media Advisory

Migrant Farmworker Awareness Week, March 26 - March 29, 2012

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STUDENTS SEEK GREATER RECOGNITION FOR THE FARM WORKERS WHO FEED OUR COUNTRY

March 26 - 29th

WHAT: “Got Food? Thank a Farm Worker!” is one of the themes of Migrant Farm Worker Awareness Week being held at the University of Guelph, March 26th to 29th. The week, organized by students in their final year of Sociology and International Development Studies, aims to increase awareness of the men and women who grow and harvest our food, as well as their working and living conditions. The event is being held in partnership with the Agriculture Workers Alliance and Students Against Migrant Exploitation, and runs in conjunction with over 100 events in the United States as part of National Farmworker Awareness Week. Through art, films, and a panel discussion, students hope to shed light on farm workers’ efforts to secure just living and working conditions and fair treatment under the law.

The week kicks off Monday at 10 am in the University Centre with an Arts Exposé, featuring beat poetry, singer/songwriters and a photo montage by Vincenzo Pietropaolo. Tuesday is the Canadian premiere of Eva Longoria’s *The Harvest*, a compelling documentary about farm workers in the United States. Wednesday will celebrate the 10th anniversary of the NFB’s *El Contrato*, including a Q&A with director Min Sook Lee and prominent migrant rights activists who feature in the film. The week wraps up Thursday with a panel discussion on migrants in the Canadian food system hosted by the Department of Sociology and Anthropology. Expert panelists from the farming community, the labour movement, and the Ontario government will share their views and take questions from the audience.

WHERE: University of Guelph Campus, 50 Stone Road East, Guelph, Ontario N1G 2W1

Monday Arts Exposé:	University Centre Courtyard, 10am-4pm
Tuesday Film Screening, <i>The Harvest</i> :	Rozanski Hall, Room 102, 5:30-7:30pm
Wednesday Film Screening, <i>El Contrato</i> :	Rozanski Hall, Room 102, 5:00-7:00pm
Thursday Panel Discussion:	Rozanski Hall, Room 102, 5:30-7:30pm

WHO: The week campaign is a collaboration between students in Dr. Kerry Preibisch’s Sociology course “Migration, Inequality and Social Change” and community partners Agriculture Workers Alliance and Students Against Migrant Exploitation.

WHY: Migrant farm workers feed Canadian cities. The majority of our fruits and vegetables are handpicked by farm workers, including the approximately 40,000 men and women working in Canada on temporary visas. Some 60 percent of these migrants live and work in Ontario. While the local food movement rightly brings attention to growers in our community, farm workers remain largely invisible.

Farm work is the fourth most dangerous job in the Canada. Occupational hazards include agrochemicals, machines, poor living and housing conditions, and inadequate hygiene and sanitary conditions. Unsafe transportation, including unsafe farm vehicles and worksite transportation lacking seatbelts is a daily reality for many farm workers. Migrant workers vulnerability to health concerns is amplified by immigration restrictions, such as employer-specific visas that tie them to a particular work site. The vast majority of migrant farm workers are legally prevented from having their families accompany them to Canada, a restriction that encourages them to agree to working long, antisocial hours—on average up to 12 hours a day during peak periods and up to 8 hours per day over weekends. Economic need and huge wage differentials between Canada and their home countries compels many migrants to accept unsafe work and extra hours, or to work when sick or injured out of fear of losing their jobs.

Farm workers are treated differently under the law. Overtime, unemployment insurance, even protection when joining a union are not guaranteed under provincial laws. In Ontario, farm workers are legally prevented from joining a union and engaging in collective bargaining. This differential treatment under the law prompted the International Labour Organization to rule in 2011 that the Canadian and Ontario governments were in violation of human rights.