

# Food Workers Organizations in the U.S.



Interest in sustainable, local, organic, and healthy food has been growing tremendously in the past couple of decades. And now, due to the work of the Food Chain Workers Alliance, our member organizations, and many allies, concern about the challenges and opportunities facing food workers is growing. With close to 20 million people working in the food system in the U.S. – the largest private sector employer in the country – food workers have a crucial role to play in improving our economy and the food system.

The Food Chain Workers Alliance therefore set out to map all of the organizations in the U.S. that regularly interact with food workers. We also

wanted to use this project to help us see what organizations are carrying out strategic work that we may want to invite into the Alliance.

What do we mean by “regularly interact”? We define this as organizing, providing services for, and/or advocating on behalf of any sector of workers along the food chain. We divided up organizations into four categories: unions, workers centers, advocacy organizations, and service organizations. Based on a review of their website, interviews, and/or our knowledge of the organization, we put them on our map if we found that a major priority of the organization's time and resources is focused on food workers.

**Table 1: Total Number of Local Unions, Workers Centers, Advocacy Organizations, and Service Organizations**

Organization type	Agriculture	Food Processing	Transportation & Distribution	Retail	Food Service	Total*
Union	16	389	223	382	183	802
Workers center	37	10	7	17	29	77
Advocacy organization	28	4	0	3	2	30
Service organization	403	1	0	0	0	403
Total	484	404	230	402	214	1,312

\* These numbers do not reflect a sum of the numbers across a row because some organizations interact with workers from multiple sectors. These numbers include locals, districts, and state affiliates of national/international unions as well as local affiliates/offices of regional and national non-profit organizations.

Source: Food Chain Workers Alliance research

**Findings**

We found a total of 1,312 organizations that regularly interact with food workers. Of those, 802 are unions (these are mostly local or state affiliates of 15 regional, national, or international unions - see below), 77 are workers centers, 30 are advocacy groups, and 403 are service organizations (these numbers include local offices or affiliates of the latter three). We then classified each organization based on the food sector(s) in which they interact with workers. The core food chain sectors that we used are: agriculture, food processing, transportation and distribution, retail, and food service/restaurants.

The majority of the non-profit organizations that we found are service organizations that focus on agricultural workers, while there are only three formal regional unions that represent those workers, likely due to legal restrictions federally and in most states on farmworkers' right to organize into unions. Service organizations provide direct services to workers such as childcare, housing assistance, clinical aid, and language instruction. Many advocacy groups provide direct services as well, but they also provide legal support and political support for good public policies that affect workers.

**Table 2: 15 Unions with More than One Local with Food Workers in the U.S.**

**Agriculture:**

- \* Farm Labor Organizing Committee
- \* Piñeros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste
- \* United Farm Workers of America

**Food Processing:**

- \* Bakery, Confectionary, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers' International Union
- \* Industrial Workers of the World\* (IWW)
- \* International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT)
- \* International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU)
- \* United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE)
- \* United Food & Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW)

**Transportation & Distribution:**

- \* IBT
- \* International Longshoremen's Association
- \* ILWU

**Retail:**

- \* IWW
- \* UE
- \* UFCW

**Food Service:**

- \* American Federation of Government Employees
- \* American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees
- \* IWW
- \* National Education Association\*
- \* Service Employees International Union
- \* UNITE HERE
- \* UE

\* We were only able to find addresses for regional branches of the Industrial Workers of the World and state affiliates of the National Education Association. Therefore, our maps and numbers do not include locals of these two unions.

We found 38 food workers centers - including local affiliates and offices, we found a total of 77. Workers centers do a combination of service and advocacy work as well, but they also have a worker-organizing component. They are member-based organizations that tend to support low-income and immigrant workers who are not already organized by traditional labor unions. Broadly, they work on issues related to policy, worker organizing, public education, and targeted corporate campaigns. Many pay specific attention to workforce development by providing trainings and materials for worker education.



We interviewed a mix of 10 different food workers centers, including a few members of the Food Chain Workers Alliance, to bring attention to the overlapping area of work between labor and food justice. The reason we chose to look at workers centers that primarily work with food

workers is because the focus of the Food Chain Workers Alliance is worker organizing groups. In addition, the work of food workers centers is much less commonly known than the work of unions, but is equally as significant.



All of the organizations that we interviewed are organizing workers in some way. For example, el Comité de Apoyo a los Trabajadores Agrícolas (CATA)



Food, which has improved working conditions for thousands of tomato pickers in Florida. Since 2001, this campaign has won agreements with a number of fast food and food-service giants such as: Taco Bell, McDonald's, Burger King, Subway, Chipotle, Compass Group, and Sodexo. This campaign is continuing into the supermarket industry in which the CIW has already signed agreements with Trader

Joe's and Whole Foods. In the restaurant industry, the Restaurant Opportunities Center (ROC) United recently launched a campaign against Capital Grille and its parent company Darden by filing federal litigation for discrimination and wage theft and organizing monthly protests in New York City, Washington, D.C., Miami, Chicago, and Los Angeles.

or the Farmworker Support Committee helped mushroom workers in southeast Pennsylvania win their own independent union called the Kaolin Workers' Union. The Center for New Community organizes workers to press the Occupational Safety and Health Administration for stronger enforcement of health and safety regulations in meatpacking plants in Missouri. Of the 10 organizations that we interviewed, six are involved in active worker justice campaigns. Three of those are coordinated corporate campaigns. The Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW), along with an alliance that also includes Just Harvest USA and the Student/Farmworker Alliance, has been immensely successful with the Campaign for Fair

Aside from workplace justice campaigns, workers centers are also working to create change through overarching policies. Based on our interviews, we found that eight of the 10 organizations regularly prioritize policy work. Five of those focus on protesting and changing anti-immigrant legislation locally and federally, while others are working on increasing the minimum wage, getting workers paid sick days, and various other local and national issues. For the Northwest Arkansas Workers' Justice Center, immigration policy is one of the focal points of the center because the majority of the members are immigrants from Latin America or the Marshall Islands. In the past, they have lobbied at the state capital in Little Rock and have mobilized their members to protest anti-immigrant state laws. CATA is an organization that focuses on 4 areas: immigrant rights, workers' rights, environmental justice, and housing. On top of advocating for immigrants'



Photo: Forest Woodward

rights, they have also campaigned for a more comprehensive system of certification for fair trade farms and food businesses and have pushed for stricter labor standards within organic agriculture with the Domestic Fair Trade Association. In fact, CATA co-founded the Agricultural Justice Project (AJP) certification program. Efforts like these have strengthened ties between the fight for sustainable food and fair

labor. Brandworkers International provides legal advocacy for workers in the food processing and distribution industries through the Legal Defense-Plus Program. This program has been successful in assisting workers with individual cases

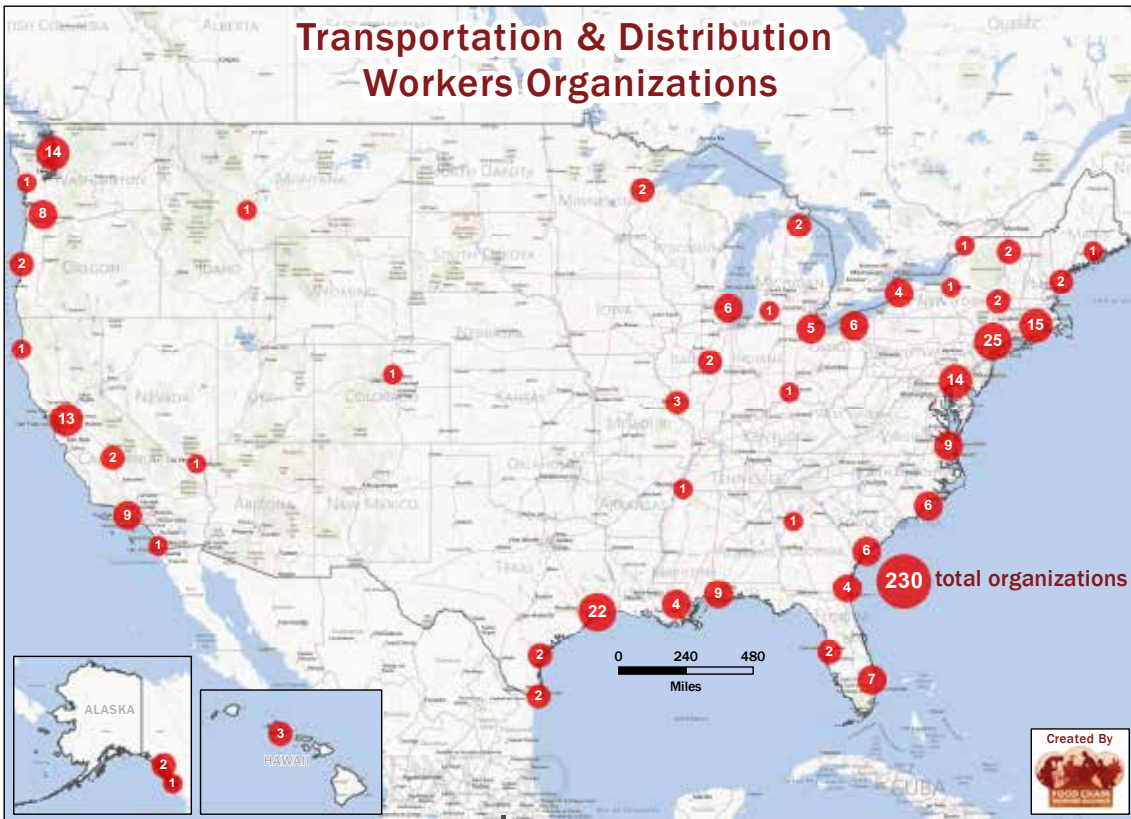


involving workers compensation, unpaid wages, and unemployment insurance issues as well as training workers to deploy class action lawsuits and organize workplace justice campaigns.

All of the organizations interviewed also conduct



various types of public education work as a part of campaigns or for general public awareness. For example, Lideres Campesinas is a farmworkers center mainly comprised of migrant women farmworkers that has developed brochures and performed public theater to educate the public about women's issues at home and at work such as domestic violence, sexual assault, harassment, and human trafficking.



opment. All of the organizations we interviewed provide training for workers to develop their organizing skills and become educated about their rights within and outside the workplace. Migrant Justice, based in Vermont, runs a Human Rights School that offers three training sessions for workers to learn organizing skills to improve their outreach with other dairy farmworkers. A common theme among the organizations that we

They have also created the Campesina Policy Institute to teach female farmworkers ways they can be more civically engaged. The Mississippi Workers' Center for Human Rights is another organization that is working to educate the public to create societal change. They are mainly comprised of African American workers whose workplace struggles have been largely ignored due to systematic racism. They have distributed a total of more than 18,000 "Knowledge is Power" manuals in both English and Spanish and use billboards to spread awareness about workers' issues.

interviewed was the value of the popular education model, which emphasizes worker education and action as important steps to create lasting change. New Labor, a workers center that engages with workers from the food processing,

Another important area of work is leadership development and workforce devel-



transportation and distribution, and service industries, uses this model to train workers through their Latino Occupational Safety and Health Initiative (LOSHI). This program was founded to address the problem of increasing occupational injuries among Spanish-speaking immigrant workers and it has developed materials for workers which can be accessed at [loshi.org](http://loshi.org). Because the program relies on

peer-to-peer interaction for training, LOSHI has developed over 100 worker trainers who have provided health and safety training for over 1,000 workers in New Jersey and across the US. Most of the workers centers have been more focused on leadership development to build their capacity, but ROC United also has a strong workforce development program that stands out in the food system. Through their COLORS Hospitality Opportunities for Workers (CHOW) Institute, ROC trains more than 1,000 workers yearly to help them advance in the restaurant industry. Sixty to 70 percent of those workers get placed in livable wage jobs after participating in the CHOW Institute. In some locations, CHOW is operated in partnership with local community colleges so that graduates can receive college credit for their training. Other organizations besides ROC also expressed interest in doing more workforce development, but are still working on increasing their capacity and resources before doing so.

Six of the 10 organizations have also been connecting their worker organizing campaigns to the broader food justice movement. CATA co-founded the Agricultural Justice Project, a social justice-based certification program that brings together concern for workers' rights, fair relationships between farmers and buyers, the environ-



ment, and much more to create its standards. AJP now certifies farms and other food businesses as "Food-Justice Certified." ROC United is working with food justice organizations in Detroit and New York City to win passage of liquor licensing policies that would give a strike to businesses that do not provide fresh, healthy food or violate employment law – after three strikes, the business can lose its liquor license. CATA and the Center for New Community are members of a national coalition facilitated by the Food Chain Workers Alliance and the International Labor Rights Forum that has developed a model food procurement policy that institutional purchasers of food can adopt and which includes labor standards for workers throughout the supply chain as well as preferences for local and sustainably produced food.

As the food movement continues to grow, food workers organizations are becoming an increasingly important stakeholder in that movement – not only to win justice in the workplace, but to also transform the food system into one that is more sustainable for consumers, communities, and the environment. This report is meant to shed light on the large number of food workers organizations in the U.S. and the crucial work that they do for food workers.

## Non-Profit Organizations that Primarily Provide Services to Food Workers



## Non-Profit Organizations that Primarily Advocate on Behalf of Food Workers





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Thank you to the worker centers interviewed for this report:

- Brandworkers International+ - [www.brandworkers.org](http://www.brandworkers.org)
- CATA – Farmworker Support Committee+ - [www.cata-farmworkers.org](http://www.cata-farmworkers.org)
- Center for New Community+ - [www.newcomm.org](http://www.newcomm.org)
- Coalition of Immokalee Workers+ - [www.ciw-online.org](http://www.ciw-online.org)
- Lideres Campesinas - [www.liderescampesinas.org](http://www.liderescampesinas.org)
- Mississippi Workers' Center for Human Rights - [www.msworkers.org](http://www.msworkers.org)
- Migrant Justice\* - [www.migrantjustice.net](http://www.migrantjustice.net)
- New Labor - [www.newlabor.org](http://www.newlabor.org)
- Northwest Arkansas Workers' Justice Center+ - [www.nwawjc.org](http://www.nwawjc.org)
- Restaurant Opportunities Centers United+ - [www.rocunited.org](http://www.rocunited.org)



Lastly, thank you to all of the food workers organizations that are doing the important work of organizing, providing services to, and advocating on behalf of food workers around the U.S.

You can find the full list of food workers organizations on our website [www.foodchainworkers.org](http://www.foodchainworkers.org), under the “Resources” tab. Considering all of the organizations that interact with food workers, we decided to include only those that prioritize work with workers somewhere along the food chain, but we do recognize that there are many more organizations that interact with some food system workers on a regular basis. If you discover that an organization whose priority work involves food workers is missing from our list, please contact us at [info@foodchainworkers.org](mailto:info@foodchainworkers.org) so we can add it. Thank you.



\* Member of the Food Chain Workers Alliance (FCWA) through the Vermont Fair Food Campaign, a project of the FCWA member UE Research and Education Fund

+Member of the Food Chain Workers Alliance

Photos at bottom of page: Darren Linker, Warehouse Workers United, Ferit Ozergul

## The members of the Food Chain Workers Alliance are\*:

- **Brandworkers International**
- **CATA-the Farmworkers Support Committee**
- **Center for New Community**
- **Coalition of Immokalee Workers**
- **Farmworker Association of Florida**
- **Just Harvest USA**
- **International Labor Rights Forum**
- **Northwest Arkansas Workers' Justice Center**
- **Restaurant Opportunities Centers United**
- **Restaurant Opportunities Center of New York**
- **Rural and Migrant Ministry**
- **UE Research & Education Fund: Warehouse Workers for Justice & Vermont Fair Food**
- **UFCW Local 1500**
- **UFCW Local 770**
- **UNITE HERE Food Service Division**
- **Warehouse Workers United**

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