



Farmworkers Document Abuse & Propose Solution: Milk with Dignity!

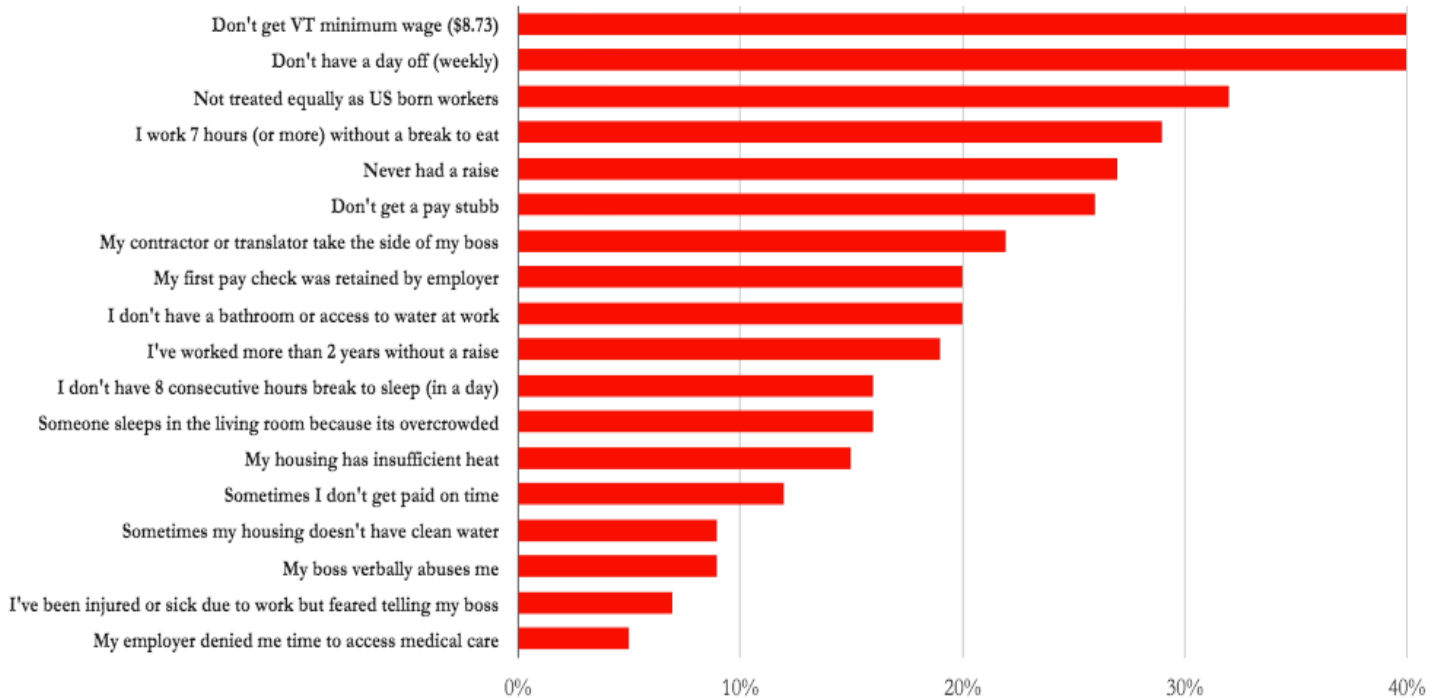
Since 2010, Migrant Justice has documented farmworker stories, struggles, and denial of rights through interviews, surveying hundreds of farmworkers, organizing monthly community meetings, and running a hotline that was launched in June of 2011 to support workers enduring human and worker rights abuses. We first documented some

of these injustices in a film called *Silenced Voices*, which told the story of one worker, José Obeth Santiz Cruz, who was killed while working on a farm in Fairfield, Vermont when his clothes were caught in a 'gutter scraper' without proper safety protections. His winter clothes were wound so tight around him he was strangled to death. Obeth's death was the spark that led to the creation of Migrant Justice and many of his family and community members were Migrant Justice's first leaders.

In 2014, Migrant Justice farmworker leaders designed and completed a [survey](#) with 172 dairy farmworkers across the state of Vermont to collect up-to-date detailed information about the working and living conditions that dairy farmworkers face on a daily basis. We interviewed 172 dairy workers (approximately 10% of the population) in Addison County (43.6%), Franklin County (30.2%), the NEK Region (11%), Central Vermont (5.2%) during the months of June and July 2014.

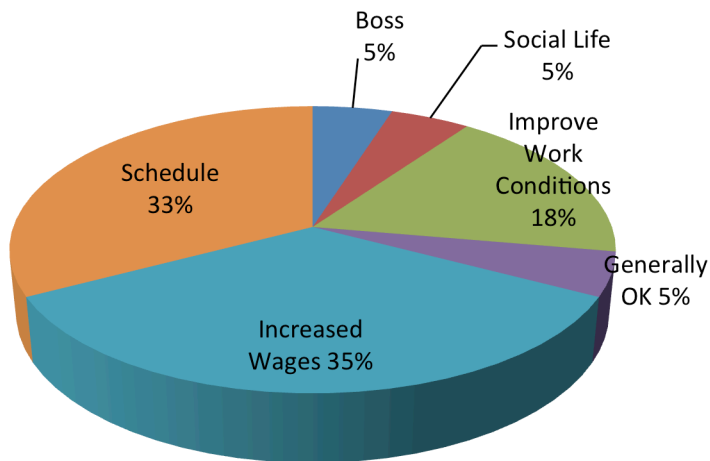
1) Have you had any of these problems?

Have you had any of these problems at work?



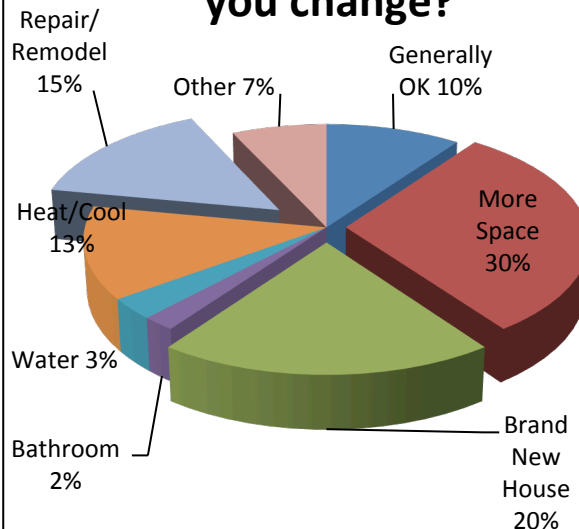
These results are broadly representative of the population of approximately 1,200 to 1,500 migrant farmworkers on Vermont dairy farms. The injustices faced by Vermont dairy farmworkers are often in violation not only of existing labor and housing laws, but more fundamentally of basic human rights principles. Additionally, it also important to note that farmworkers are excluded from many fundamental rights under the law including the right to the Vermont minimum wage.

2) If you had the power to improve your job so that it was more fair and dignified, what would you change?



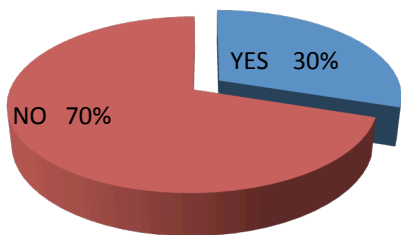
Note: Nearly 1/2 of those who said "schedule", specifically said "a day off" and the next most common responses in order were "less hours" followed by "paid vacations".

3) If you had the power to improve your housing so it is more fair and dignified, what would you change?



As the above graph also demonstrates, 40% of farmworkers receive less than VT minimum wage, which at the time of the survey in June 2014 was \$8.73 but has since increased to \$9.15 per hour as of 2015 so it is safe to assume the number has grown. Furthermore, on average, farmworkers work 60-80 hours a week, and 40% have no day off. Additionally, 30% of workers report that they have overcrowded housing and a combined 35% consider their housing to be either in need of major repairs or say that housing is so substandard a brand new home is needed. In addition the survey determined that 30% of workers have suffered from a workplace injury or work related illness. In addition the survey determined that 30% of workers have suffered from a workplace injury or work related illness.

4) Have you been hurt, had an accident or health problems due to work?



Knowledge of this denial of dignity led Migrant Justice to launch a workers' rights hotline back in 2011. We have since struggled to keep up with demand. In our first year, Migrant Justice worked on 46 cases. Of these first cases, 52% involved stolen or late payment of wages, totaling approximately \$17,625.00. One group of workers who were owed over \$8,000 in back wages recounted, "[the boss] is always late with pay and sometimes pays us half of what he owes us, sometimes the checks bounce, and sometimes he gives us nothing at all. Then he tries to run you from the farm".

While we have had success in resolving hotline cases, there are countless rights abuses that go unreported or that cannot be remedied under current circumstances, including the exclusion of farmworkers from many state and federal labor laws. The Milk with Dignity Campaign recognizes that we cannot solve these problems as isolated cases.

It is with an understanding that these conditions are intolerable that farmworkers launched the Milk with Dignity Campaign!