

For Immediate Release  
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VT Migrant Farmworker Solidarity Project  
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## **VT Farm Workers End 3 Day Strike in Frustration Workers denounce Mack Farm and file \$4,494.00 back wage claim**

Charlotte, Vermont-November 18-. “We told him we’re not working and we’re not leaving until you pay us,” explained, a 27 year old migrant farm worker woman from San Isidro, Chiapas, Mexico after going on strike last Saturday with her boyfriend and father at Mack Farm in Charlotte.

The workers are owed \$4,494.00 in back wages for the previous months work and since beginning employment there last January they claim the farmer owes them \$8,344.00. “He 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. He owes others who got frustrated and already left the farm,” explained the worker.

The 3 workers ended their 3-day strike on Monday night to stay with friends and were fortunate to find work at another farm within a couple days. They filed a back wage claim with the Vermont Department of Labor yesterday.

### **Background**

On Friday November 12<sup>th</sup>, the VT Migrant Farmworker Solidarity Project received a call from a worker on the farm. She had called months earlier with a similar complaint. On Saturday, after the Solidarity project reminded David Mack that the workers had been promised payment by 12 noon he hung up the phone saying, “This conversation is over”.

On Monday, an anonymous source called the Solidarity Project and shared that when he told a group of unemployed workers there was work at Mack farm one worker replied, “Mack Farm, no way, I’ll never work there again.” It turns out the worker is owed roughly \$3,000.00 from Mac. The Solidarity Project is working with the farm worker community to track him down to help him file a back wage claim.

Today is a National Day of Action Against Wage Theft ([www.iwj.org/index.cfm/national-day-of-action-against-wage-theft](http://www.iwj.org/index.cfm/national-day-of-action-against-wage-theft)) and today the VT Migrant Farmworker Solidarity Project stands with this family to publicly denounce Mack Farm . “We are aware that neither Mack Farm nor any dairy farmer is getting rich right now,” said Natalia Fajardo co-coordinator of the community organizing project at the Solidarity Project. “However, in this well documented case that spans a number of years Mack farm must be singled out for their consistent wage theft.”

Just last year the Solidarity Project received a similar complaint about Mack Farm. Workers were owed thousands of dollars and went on strike. Some of the workers left without being paid and in the process the Solidarity project learned that there were a number of other former Mack

employees who had also left without pay. A clip from the interview they conducted at that time is available on line at: <http://www.vtmigrantfarmworkersolidarity.org/node/7>.

After consulting with a group of anonymous dairy farmers, the Solidarity Project learned that some farmers are aware and concerned about Mack's disregard for workers and fear he makes all farmers look bad. Although, non-payment of workers is not a problem on the majority of VT dairy farms there are a handful of other back wage claims in Vermont that have been or will be filed in the coming weeks after repeated failed attempts to appeal directly to farmers.

"This isn't a simple case of a farmer who falls behind on pay once or twice and negotiates some agreement with workers. This is the way this farm is run. We are hopeful that the farming community might find ways to denounce Mack because he makes other farmers look bad." Farjardo continued, "This is a messy situation. On the one hand dairy farms are going under creating an environment where a handful of employers like Mack are more likely to exploit workers. While on the other hand Gregg Engles, CEO of Dean Foods that controls 70-80% of the Northeast Dairy Market, averages \$21.3 million in compensation packages. Trickle up economics lines the pockets of CEO's and systematically exploits the hard work of both farm workers and farmers. This case is a serious reminder for the urgent need for bold steps in economic, agricultural and immigration reforms."