



FARMWORKER STUDY

[Covid19-farmworkerstudy.org](https://Covid19-farmworkerstudy.org)

# ESSENTIAL VOICES: FARMWORKER EXPERTISE ON THE ONGOING IMPACT OF COVID-19

Phase 2 Findings presented by the Oregon Covid-19 Farmworker Study

February 2022

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Ecotrust



## FARMWORKER STUDY

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# Who are the farmworkers featured in this report?



**31% Indigenous Farmworkers (15)**



**ALL FARMWORKERS WERE GIVEN PSEUDONYMS**

# Overview

- **Essential workers: The Critical Importance of Their Work vs. Dehumanization**
- **COVID-19 at Home and Work: Lack of Protection, Enforcement, and Communication**
- **Surviving COVID-19**
- **Economic Precarity: The Ongoing Crises of Farmworker Wage Loss**
- **The Normalization of the Care Crisis**
- **Food (In)Security + Access to Resources**
- **Trusted Information Sources + Language Barriers**
- **Wildfires + Messages to Elected Officials**

# **Essential workers: The Critical Importance of Their Work vs. Dehumanization**



**Pedro, Mam Speaker, Onion Farmworker, Deschutes Basin:**

**“There are times when the weather is better, we work more at ease. But there are times like this summer. When the heat, you feel that you can’t work anymore, but you have to endure because you work out of necessity. And in the summertime, in wintertime, we work. Sometimes we also feel the cold, but we work because it is the most important thing. One has to work...we don’t get used to it, but we do it in order to live. ”**



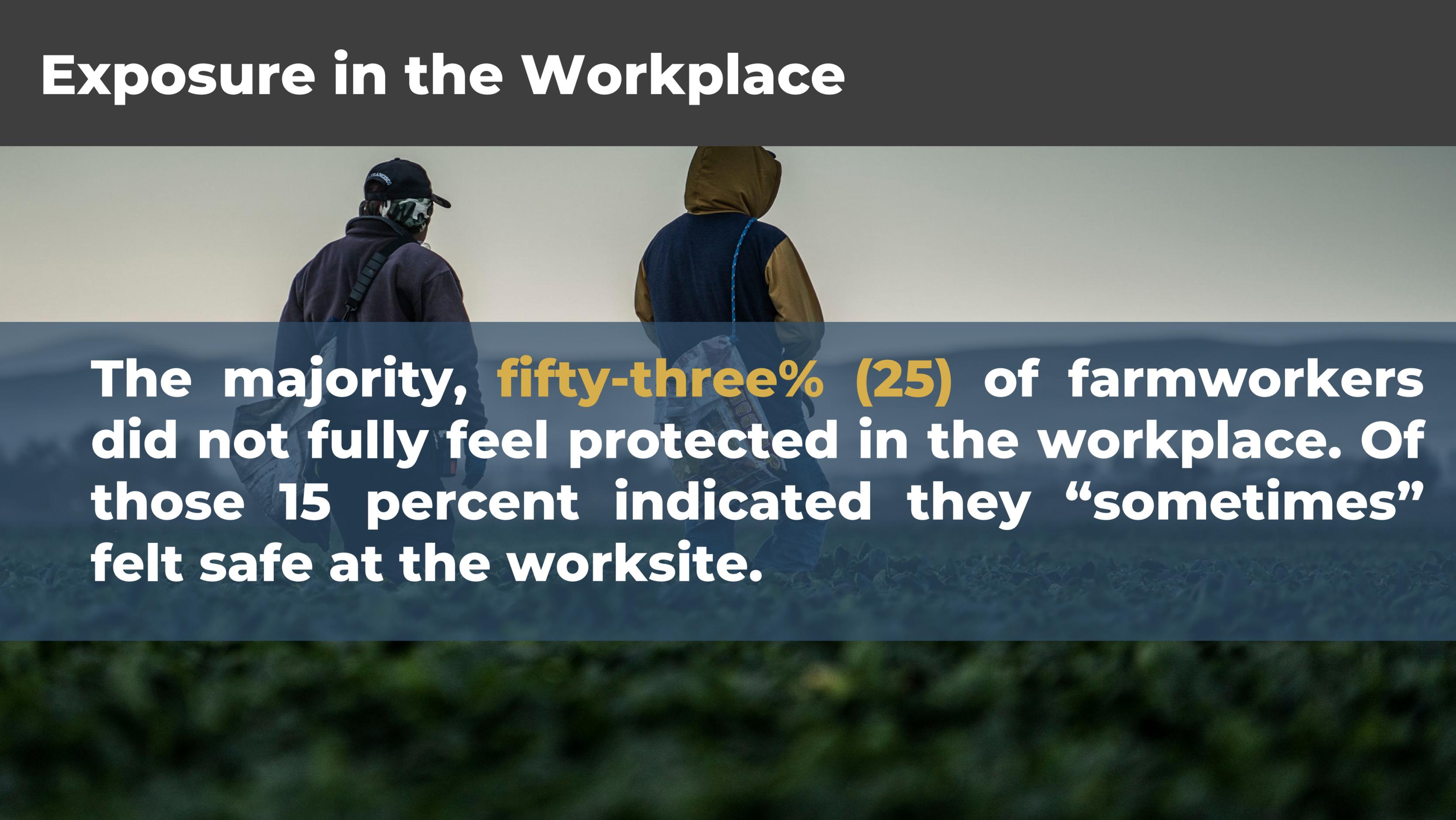
# **COVID-19 at Home and Work: Lack of Protection, Enforcement, and Communication**

**PRESENTED BY ANABEL HERNANDEZ-MEJIA, RESIDENT LEADERSHIP COORDINATOR  
FARMWORKER HOUSING DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION (FHDC)**



**F A R M W O R K E R  
H O U S I N G  
D E V E L O P M E N T C O R P O R A T I O N**

# Exposure in the Workplace

A photograph of two farmworkers from behind, standing in a field. The worker on the left is wearing a dark cap, goggles, and a dark jacket. The worker on the right is wearing a brown hooded jacket and carrying a bag. The background is a bright, hazy sky over a field of crops.

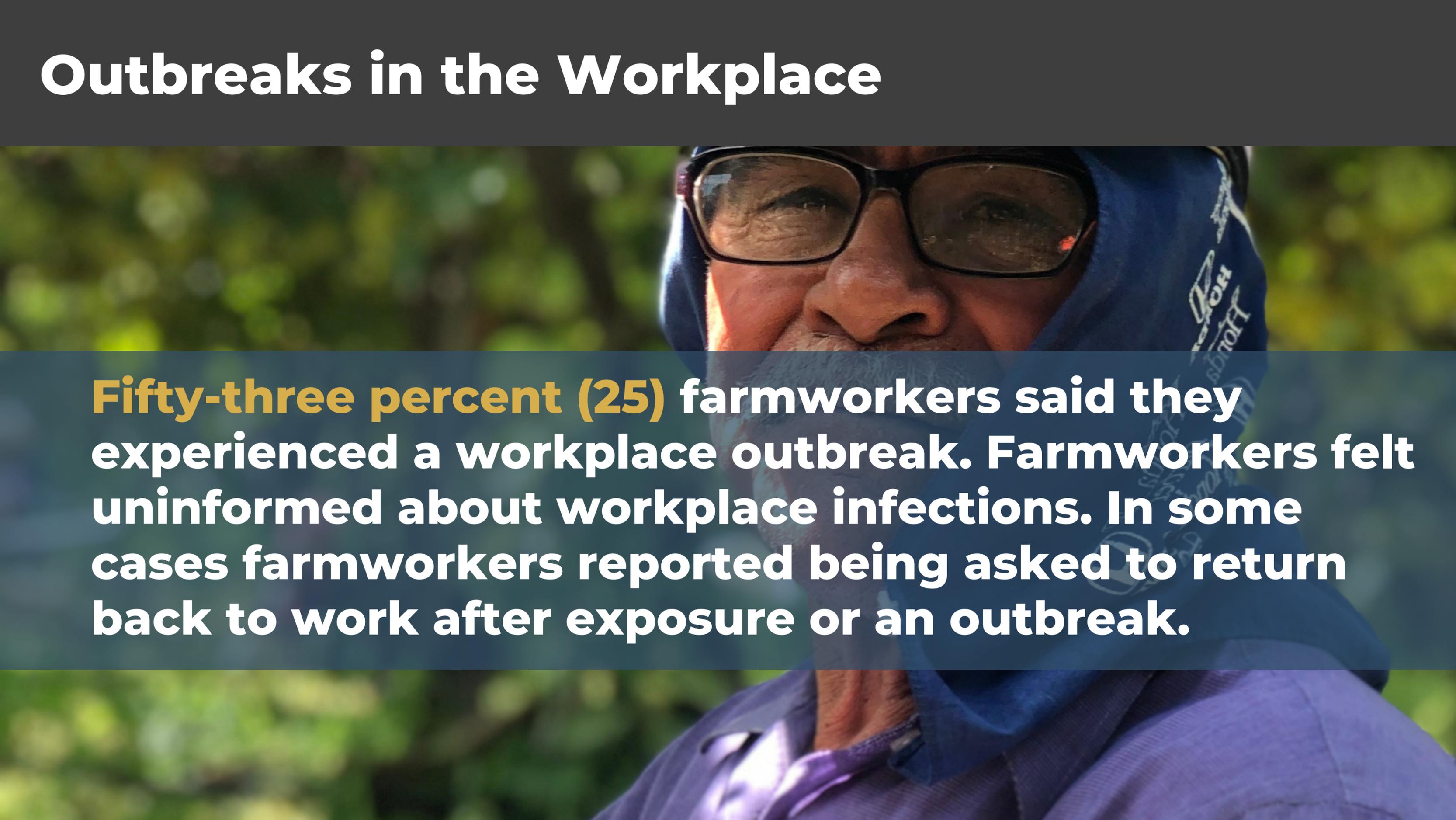
The majority, **fifty-three% (25)** of farmworkers did not fully feel protected in the workplace. Of those 15 percent indicated they “sometimes” felt safe at the worksite.

# Farmworkers in the Workplace

**Elva, Mixteco Speaker, Age 40, Forestry, North Coast and Lower Willamette Valley:**  
“Good, they give us trust and it gave us security at work. She told to keep your distance. There are the masks, faucets to wash our hands, and disinfectants, chlorine and everything. In the field we have a table, a microwave, everything is clean because I am in charge of cleaning all that, taking out garbage, taking out recycling, I do all of that. So he told me, everything is here, you have to keep everything clean, and he gave us everything for that.”

**Nadia, Mixteco Speaker, age 49, Farmworker, North Coast and Lower Willamette Valley:**  
“They do not care that we are close. They do not follow the rules, six feet apart as it should be. They do not give us masks. They gave us a meeting, about wearing a mask and be away from others. But the job is to be close. Sometimes they put us close when we put the cabbage. They don't care if you get sick or infected. No, if you want to work. They don't care much what we say.”

# Outbreaks in the Workplace



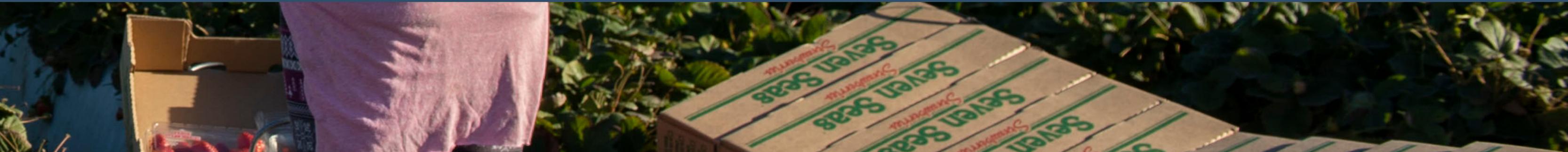
**Fifty-three percent (25)** farmworkers said they experienced a workplace outbreak. Farmworkers felt uninformed about workplace infections. In some cases farmworkers reported being asked to return back to work after exposure or an outbreak.

# Outbreaks in the Workplace

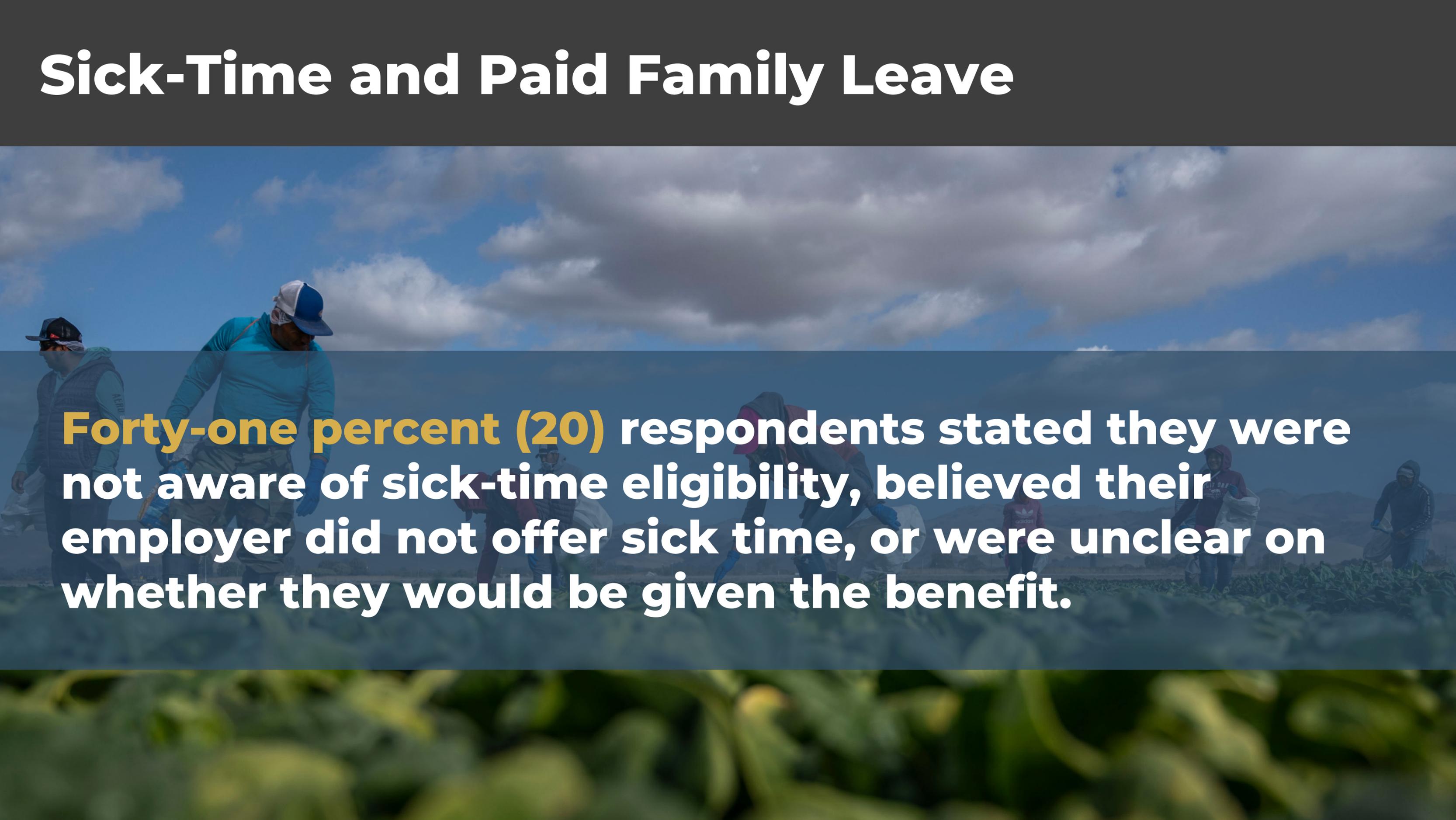


**Gloria, Age 37, Packing House Worker, Deschutes Basin:**

**“Well, 60 came out infected, plus the infected throughout the week. They gave me a test, but I did not come out positive. I told them I am not going to work because my child has asthma. I'm afraid they're going to get sick. Then they asked if I had any symptoms. I said, no. [They said] “Then you have to come to work.” I said NO. By law I hear that if there are infections we must quarantine. Several of us got informed. We also called the Clinic, the one connected to the packing house. I wanted to give myself a break for my children, by they didn't want to give it to me.”**



# Sick-Time and Paid Family Leave

A group of agricultural workers in a field under a cloudy sky. The workers are wearing various work clothes, including jackets, hats, and gloves. They appear to be engaged in manual labor, possibly harvesting or tending to crops. The background shows a vast field with rows of plants and a blue sky with scattered white clouds.

**Forty-one percent (20)** respondents stated they were not aware of sick-time eligibility, believed their employer did not offer sick time, or were unclear on whether they would be given the benefit.

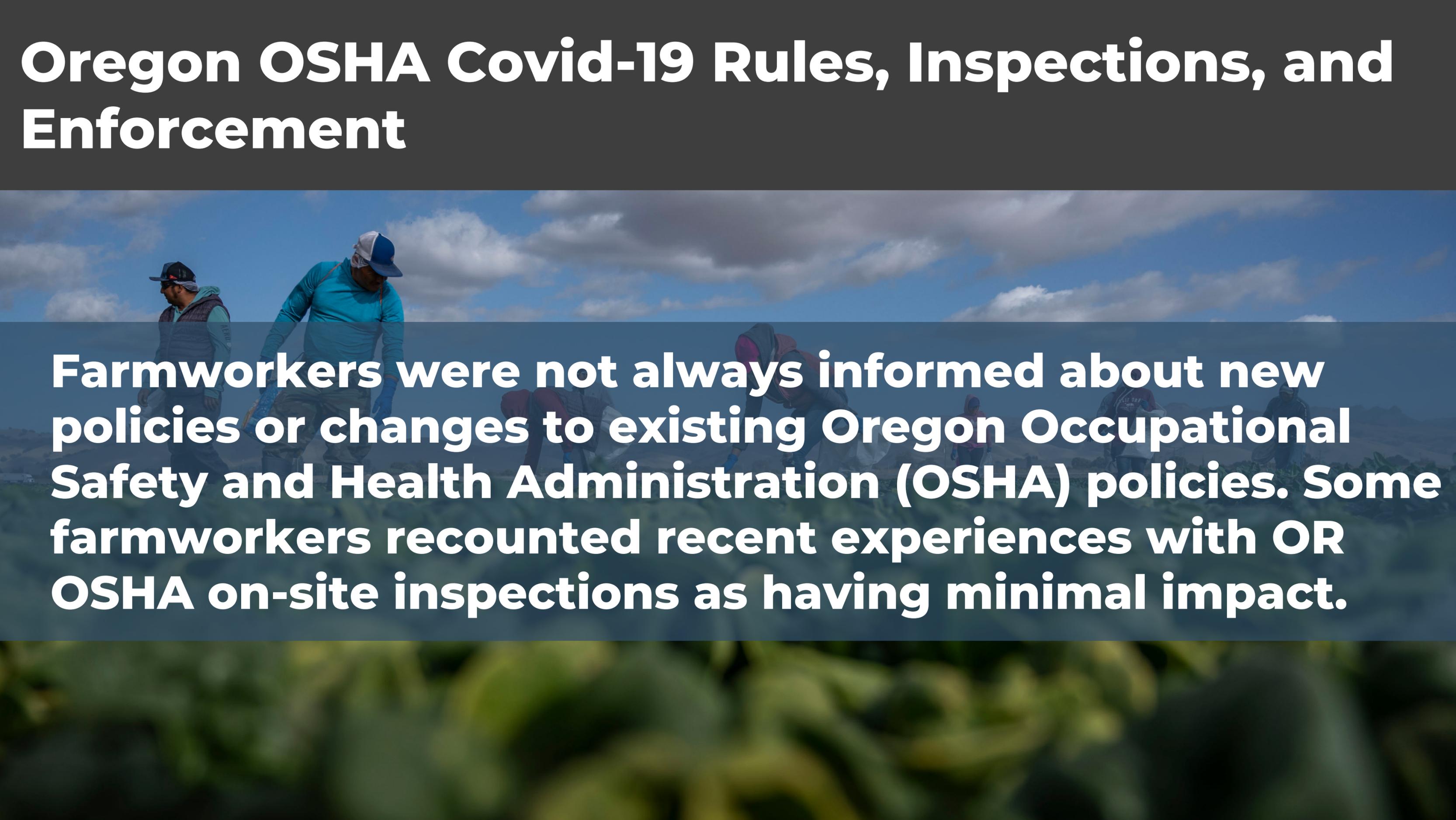
# Sick-Time and Paid Family Leave



**Amelia, age 47, Nursery Worker, North Coast and Lower Willamette Valley:**  
"If you go home and take the test and you come out positive, well, they do pay you. I said, "if I stay at home and I don't come out positive, they won't pay me my days that I am going to be home and what am I going to do?" So, I stayed to work and, well, I walked with my precautions, I walked in my mind that if I had symptoms or something like that, well, I was going to tell them."



# Oregon OSHA Covid-19 Rules, Inspections, and Enforcement

A photograph of farmworkers in a field, overlaid with a semi-transparent blue box containing text. The workers are wearing various clothing and hats, and some are wearing face coverings. The background shows a blue sky with scattered clouds and green foliage in the foreground.

**Farmworkers were not always informed about new policies or changes to existing Oregon Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) policies. Some farmworkers recounted recent experiences with OR OSHA on-site inspections as having minimal impact.**

# Oregon OSHA Covid-19 Rules and Inspections/Enforcement



**Chano, Age 33, Nursery and Packing House Worker, North Coast and Lower Willamette Valley:**  
"One day we were working on the side of the road. We were planting trees. Like 50 of us. Someone called to the agency that handles that. They [Oregon OSHA] arrived and saw a lot of people without a mask. And they themselves said that since it was outdoors, if they didn't have masks, there was no problem. Then they just checked the restrooms and counted how many restrooms there were."

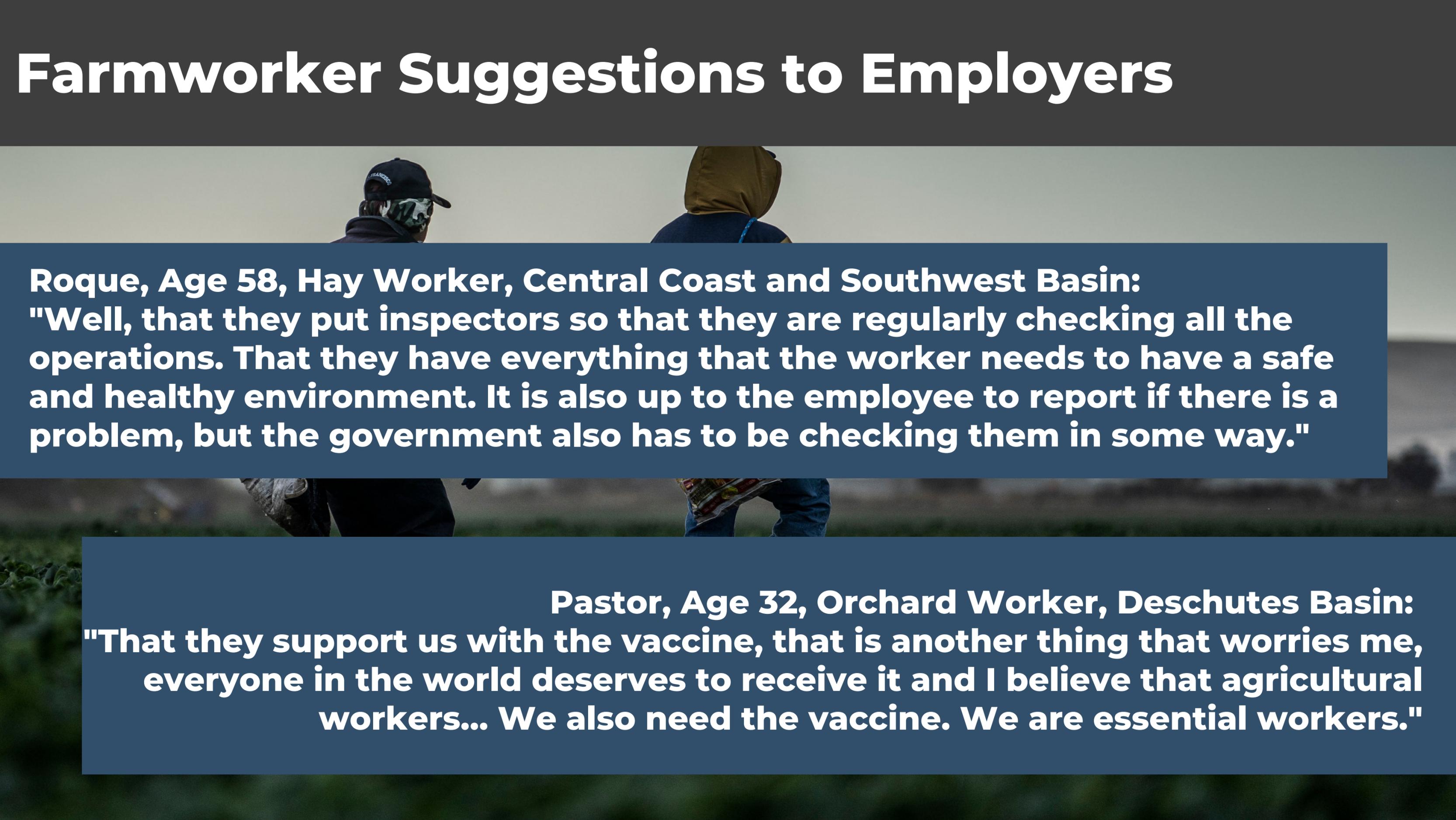


# Oregon OSHA Covid-19 Rules and Inspections/Enforcement

**Nadia, Mixteco Alto Speaker, Age 49, Farmworker, North Coast and Lower Willamette Valley:**  
**“They [Oregon OSHA] came but they haven't done anything. They ask people... The supervisor there asks workers. [The workers say] “everything is fine, everything is fine.” The truth, they have not done anything. They asked me and another lady if we speak Spanish and we told her no. Everyone is in favor of the company, they didn't do anything. We don't have a kitchen, we eat in the car.”**



# Farmworker Suggestions to Employers



**Roque, Age 58, Hay Worker, Central Coast and Southwest Basin:**

**"Well, that they put inspectors so that they are regularly checking all the operations. That they have everything that the worker needs to have a safe and healthy environment. It is also up to the employee to report if there is a problem, but the government also has to be checking them in some way."**

**Pastor, Age 32, Orchard Worker, Deschutes Basin:**

**"That they support us with the vaccine, that is another thing that worries me, everyone in the world deserves to receive it and I believe that agricultural workers... We also need the vaccine. We are essential workers."**

# Surviving COVID-19

PRESENTED BY DOLORES MARTINEZ, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT  
EUVALCREE



# COVID-19 Infection

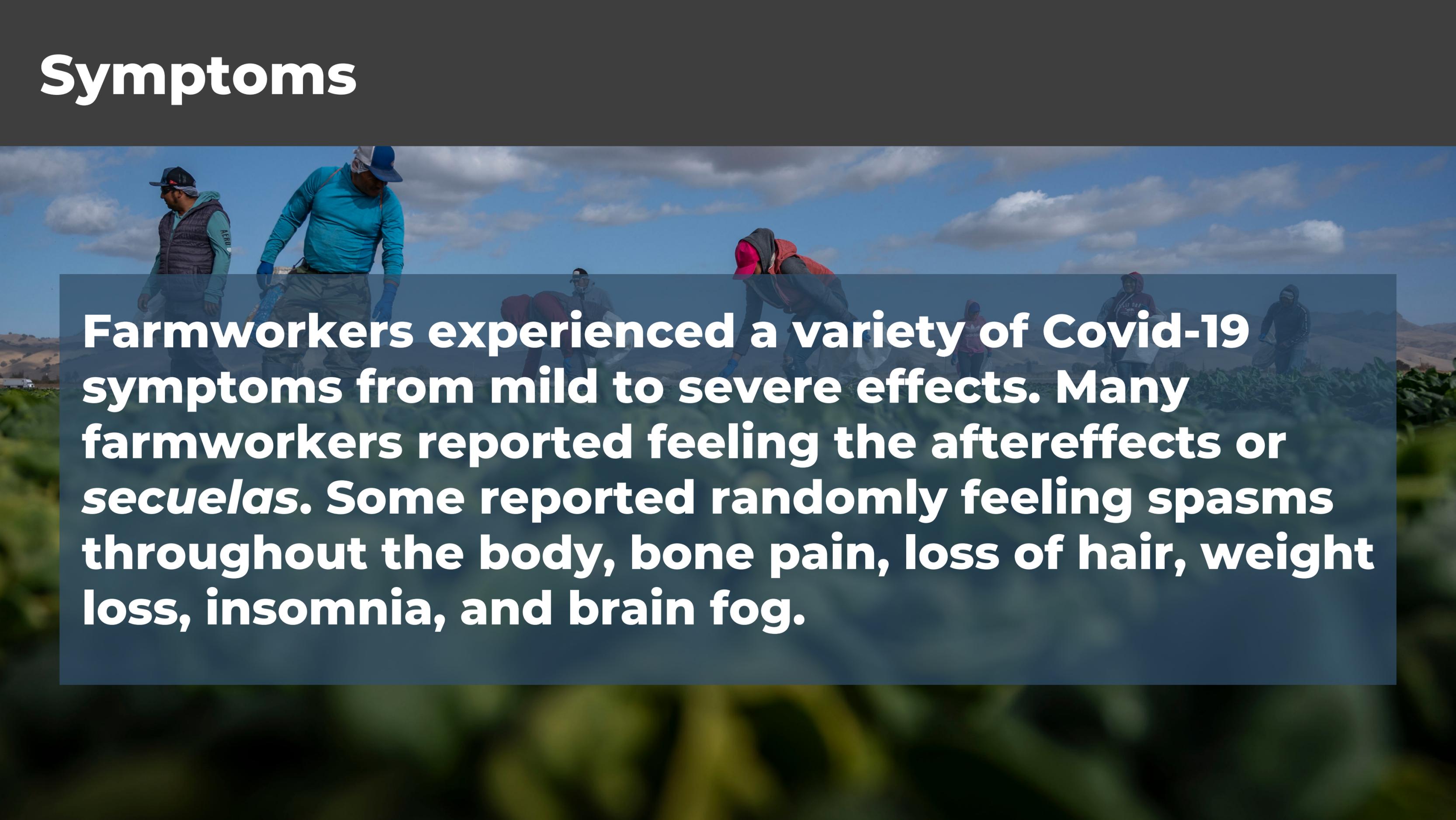
**52% Tested Positive**  
**38% Had Not Been Infected**  
**10% Did Not Disclose**

**NEARLY ALL FARMWORKERS NOTED MULTIPLE FAMILY MEMBERS, FRIENDS, COWORKERS, AND ACQUAINTANCES HAD BEEN INFECTED AT SOME POINT.**

# Covid-19 Testing, Results, Contact-Tracing

- Most people **(69%)** took at least one Covid-19 test at some point prior to their interview.
- The majority of people reported waiting between 2-4 days for test results. Others reported waiting up to 8 days.
- Test results were typically communicated verbally to employers.
- Farmworkers were not fully aware of the purpose behind contact tracing.

# Symptoms

A photograph of several farmworkers in a field, likely harvesting crops. They are wearing various work clothes, including jackets, hats, and gloves. The background shows a blue sky with scattered clouds and a hilly landscape.

**Farmworkers experienced a variety of Covid-19 symptoms from mild to severe effects. Many farmworkers reported feeling the aftereffects or *secuelas*. Some reported randomly feeling spasms throughout the body, bone pain, loss of hair, weight loss, insomnia, and brain fog.**

# Quarantine

**Not all farmworkers had adequate space to quarantine when there was an infection in the household. Still, farmworkers reported creative solutions to isolate an infected household member in a bedroom. Some farmworkers had the help of their family to do the caring work while they recovered. Others were not so lucky, particularly farmworkers that run single-parent households. Mothers reported stress and difficulty caring for themselves and their children, especially when experiencing less mild to severe symptoms.**





**Alejandra, Age 52, Packing House Worker, Deschutes Basin:  
"What worries me is getting infected at home, because I live in a  
very small place and share the same bathroom with the whole  
family. And well, psychologically people are affected and also  
economically, because when that happens, you also stop working  
and then you have certain expenses for your home or your  
expenses you need."**



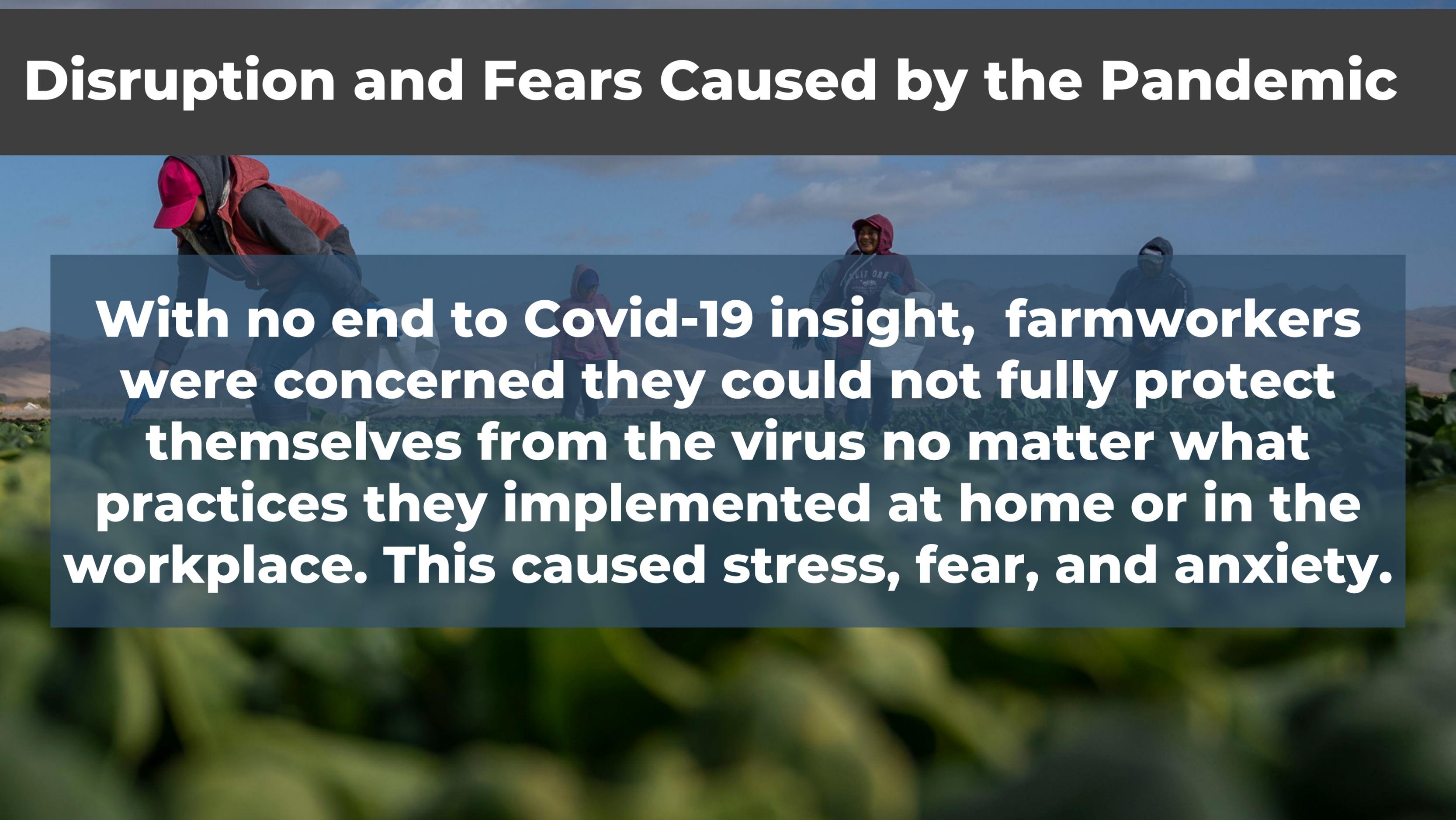
# Vaccinations



**Elena, Age 46, Nursery Worker, Central Coast and Southwest Basin:**  
"If they [farmworkers] are healthy, what they send will be healthy, and if they, some of them do not have their vaccines or they can't secure them, well, they become sick. Then it would be nice if farmworkers were essentially procured for their vaccine. Well, even better if everyone was provided free vaccines. We are essential workers. Because we expose ourselves more than anyone else. We feed the United States with obstacles, such as the pandemic, low pay, the fires, and we work with the fire, and we cannot take off our masks due to the pandemic. "



# Disruption and Fears Caused by the Pandemic

A photograph of farmworkers in a field, overlaid with a semi-transparent blue box containing text. The workers are wearing various clothing, including jackets and hats, and are engaged in agricultural work. The background shows a vast field under a clear sky.

**With no end to Covid-19 insight, farmworkers were concerned they could not fully protect themselves from the virus no matter what practices they implemented at home or in the workplace. This caused stress, fear, and anxiety.**

# **Economic Precarity: The Ongoing Crises of Farmworker Wage Loss**

**PRESENTED BY SANDRA MARTIN, COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE COORDINATOR  
BIENESTAR**



# Reasons for Loss of Wages

- **Staying home to care for themselves or their family members**
- **Workplace outbreaks**
- **Work closures**
- **Laid-off**
- **Fluctuating work hours**
- **Working in less stable jobs**

# Economic Precarity

**Conchita, Mam Speaker, Blueberry Worker, North Coast and Lower Willamette Valley:  
"Like us who are working in the fields, we are hardly earning much. We are just covering all the rent, water, electricity bills. When the pandemic came, or when there were fires, it also affected us. I say, it would be recommendable that they help us. Although we do not have papers here, but we also need help, because we all want to eat, and we all have the need."**



# The Normalization of the Care Crisis

PRESENTED BY SANDRA MARTIN, COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE COORDINATOR  
BIENESTAR



# Child Caring Responsibilities and Anxieties

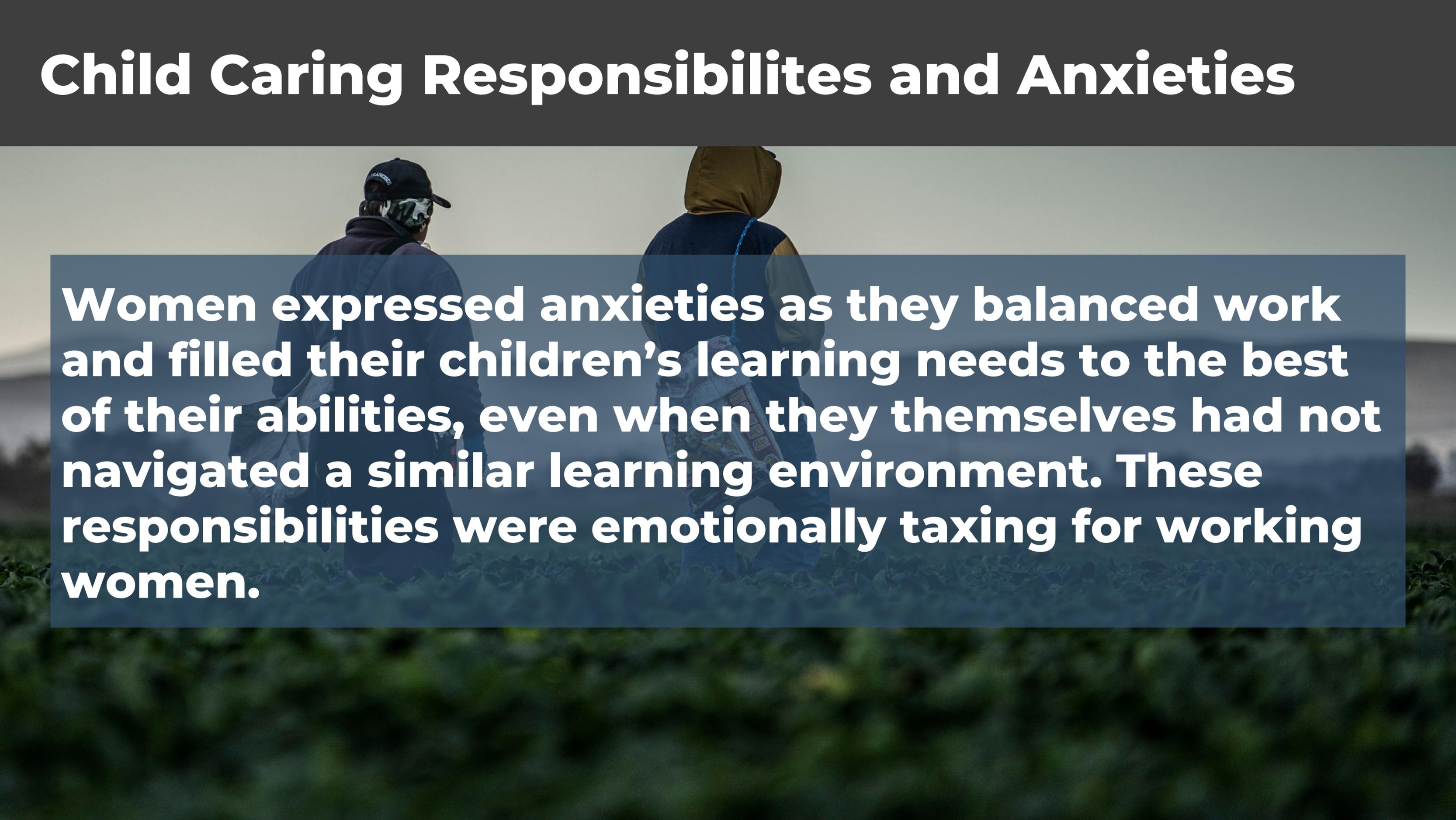
**Working fewer hours often led families to make stringent economic calculations. Some decided a parent should stay home, typically the mother. Farmworkers mentioned it did not make fiscal sense for families to pay the flat rate of childcare, usually \$20 a day when they did not work their full hours.**

# Child Caring Responsibilities and Anxieties

**Gloria, Age 37, Packing House, Deschutes Basin:**

**"No. There is no childcare. I [applied for] help with childcare because the truth is I pay for a babysitter and work these days doesn't work out with Covid-19. The cheapest [for a babysitter] was \$15 for my girl and \$20 for my boy. In other words, it's \$35 a day and I work three days. Imagine, it's \$105. And right now they are paying us about \$13.61 an hour and that is what I told them. It doesn't come out, and I tell him if I earned \$400, which it isn't because with all the deductions, I'm going to pay \$105 for babysitting. How much am I going to keep? Then apart [money] for gas and everything."**

# Child Caring Responsibilities and Anxieties

A photograph of two people standing in a field of green plants, possibly a farm. The person on the left is wearing a dark jacket, a cap, and a mask. The person on the right is wearing a blue and yellow jacket and a hood. The background is a bright, overcast sky.

**Women expressed anxieties as they balanced work and filled their children's learning needs to the best of their abilities, even when they themselves had not navigated a similar learning environment. These responsibilities were emotionally taxing for working women.**

# Child Caring Responsibilities and Anxieties

**Nadia, Mixteco Speaker, age 49, Farmworker, North Coast and Lower Willamette Valley:  
“I am a single mother, and since the pandemic began, well, my son got depression and I try to get him out. They were helping him at school. The school was closed. I have been battling with my son so that he would come out of it on his own, I have to help him to not get depressed. He was very afraid of the disease. He was suffering every day because I was going to work. He tells me that he is very afraid that I would get sick”**

# Medical Attention



**Farmworkers worried about accessing in-person medical attention, especially for their family members with existing medical conditions.**

# Medical Attention



**Amari, Vineyard Worker, Central Coast and Southwest Basin:  
"What I would like them to add back is WIC. They treated us for  
Women Wellness treatments. Those services have already been  
taken away from us. They gave us a Pap Smears, and breast exams."**



# Food (In)Security + Access to Resources

PRESENTED BY TIMOTHY HERRERA, PHD CANDIDATE AND SITE COORDINATOR AND RESOURCE NAVIGATOR  
HUERTO DE LA FAMILIA



# Food (In)security



**Thirty-eight percent (18)** households responded that they had gone hungry at some point during the pandemic. The majority of farmworkers revealed they were taking many more steps to secure their food primarily due to the loss of wages, insufficient work hours, and pay.

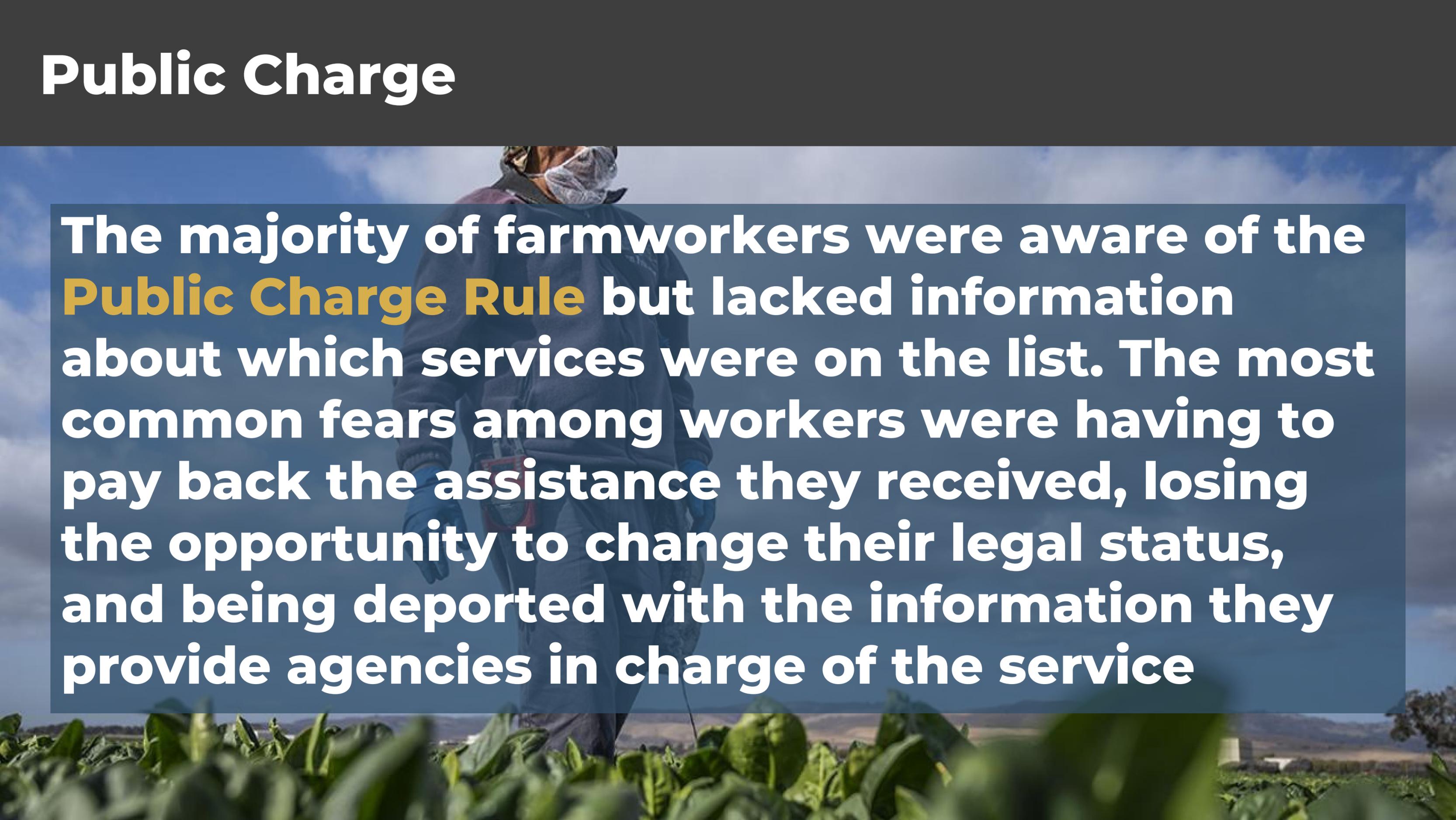
# Food (In)security



**Elena, age 46, Nursery work, Central Coast and Southwest Basin:  
“For food, too, I navigated. I didn't have anything to eat. Well.. I bought the most basic things which were beans, rice, potatoes. With that we ate, he bought Maseca to make tortillas at home, because, well, not to buy.”**



# Public Charge

A farmworker wearing a dark protective suit, a white face mask, and blue gloves is standing in a field of green leafy plants. The background shows a clear blue sky with some light clouds. The worker is holding a tool, possibly a spray wand, and appears to be engaged in agricultural work.

The majority of farmworkers were aware of the **Public Charge Rule** but lacked information about which services were on the list. The most common fears among workers were having to pay back the assistance they received, losing the opportunity to change their legal status, and being deported with the information they provide agencies in charge of the service

# Public Charge



**Alejandra, Age 52, Packing House, Deschutes Basin:  
We were in a process and in need at the time, but they said that public charge. So we stopped asking for stamps. Maybe it will affect. It makes me sad because many people have children and assume that a single salary is not enough for food, or for other expenses.**



# Resources, Support, and Overcoming Barriers

**Popular relief programs include the Oregon Worker Relief Fund, Quarantine Fund, rental support, and food boxes. Farmworkers looked to schools for support with free or reduced lunch programs, technology and those with children also made use of EBT and WIC. At the county level, farmworkers used utility bill assistance. They also cited faith-based organizations as critical sources of support as well as peers for information about resources.**

# Trusted Information Sources + Language Barriers

PRESENTED BY VALENTIN SANCHEZ, COMMUNITY EDUCATOR  
OREGON LAW CENTER



# Trusted Information Sources

- **Community-Building Organizations (CBOs)**
- **Formal media sources and community radios**
- **In some cases public health institutions & public officials**
- **Peer information from social media, in-person, community circles, churches, stores, and *promotoras* linked to a non-government organization**
- **In a few cases, employers were cited**

# Language Barriers

A photograph of several farm workers in a field, likely harvesting crops. The workers are wearing various work clothes, including jackets, hats, and gloves. The background shows a blue sky with scattered white clouds and rolling hills in the distance. The foreground is filled with green, leafy plants.

Our Phase 2 Study registered **three new Mesoamerican Languages** bringing our total to **29** documented languages.

# Language Barriers



**Susana, Mam Speaker, age 48, Potato, Tree Fruit, and Nut Harvester, Deschutes Basin:  
"I don't know where to find or I don't know where the office is. Yes.  
For example, finding someone who can speak English, Spanish and  
Mam who could help us, who could explain in mam would be better  
to understand how things are and that is a support for us who are  
from Guatemala."**

# **Wildfires + Messages to Elected Officials**

**PRESENTED BY KATHY KEESEE, CO-DIRECTOR  
UNETE**



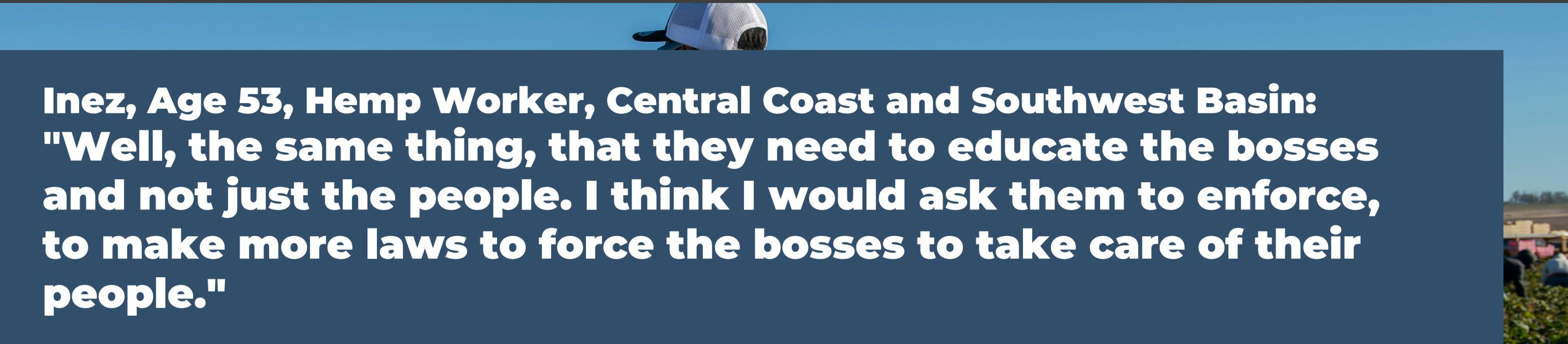
# Wildfires and Climate Change

**Most farmworkers said they worked two to three days during the fires before they were sent home. Few farmworkers said they were given a special KN95 mask by their employer. Most farmworkers said they used their usual Covid-19 coverings.**

# Wildfires and Climate Change

**Inez, Age 53, Hemp Worker, Central Coast and Southwest Basin:  
"The first few days, when I looked at the smoke, it made me feel my heart...it gave me a lot of anxiety and I started looking to see where it came from. Did they already call 911? I still saw smoke. 911 already knew that something was burning. That will never go away, it will always be in my head. Well, I didn't lose much in the wildfires. It was clothes, mostly personal, nothing with value that I can recover. Either way, I still don't have where to live. What do I want, if I have no where to put it"**

# Messages to Elected Officials



**Inez, Age 53, Hemp Worker, Central Coast and Southwest Basin:  
"Well, the same thing, that they need to educate the bosses  
and not just the people. I think I would ask them to enforce,  
to make more laws to force the bosses to take care of their  
people."**



**Bianca, Age 42, Berry Harvester, North Coast and Lower Willamette Valley:  
"I think we would all be happy if they gave us the documents we  
need to work in different jobs, with more benefits. Because what  
you work in the field has no benefits. If you have your papers in  
order they give you benefits for tomorrow or the day after."**

# Messages to Elected Officials

**Angel, Purépecha Speaker, Age 44, Nursery Worker, North Coast and Lower Willamette Valley:  
"That they take into account the indigenous people. We are also human we need more support, including assistance. Information for well-being and to prevent diseases or so we can be prepared for when a disaster may come."**



**Luz, Age 54, Strawberry Harvester and Forestry Worker, North Coast and Lower Willamette Valley:  
"That everyone be vaccinated, everyone, including minors, because we are all at risk of becoming infected with this disease. It is the safest thing. I think that would be it, that they force us to vaccinate."**

**FOR A FULL LIST OF POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS PLEASE VISIT OUR  
WEBSITE AT  
[WWW.COVID19FARMWORKERSTUDY.ORG](http://WWW.COVID19FARMWORKERSTUDY.ORG)**

**Recommendations are proposed by members of the OR COFS Policy and Action Committee: CASA of Oregon, UNETE, Oregon Human Development Corporation, Centro Cultural de Washington County, Columbia Riverkeepers, Euvalcree, Farmworker Housing Development Corporation, Unidos Yamhill County, Bienestar, and PCUN.**



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Covid19farmworkerstudy.org

# THANK YOU

Phase 2 Findings presented by the Oregon Covid-19 Farmworker Study

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Photo Credit: Hector Amezcua, UC Davis