COVID-19

FARMWORKER STUDY

Photo credit: Centro Binacional para el Desarollo Indígena Oaxaqueño

COFS REPORT: EXPERTS IN THEIR FIELDS

Contributions and Realities of Indigenous Campesinos During the COVID-19 Pandemic | October 18, 2021

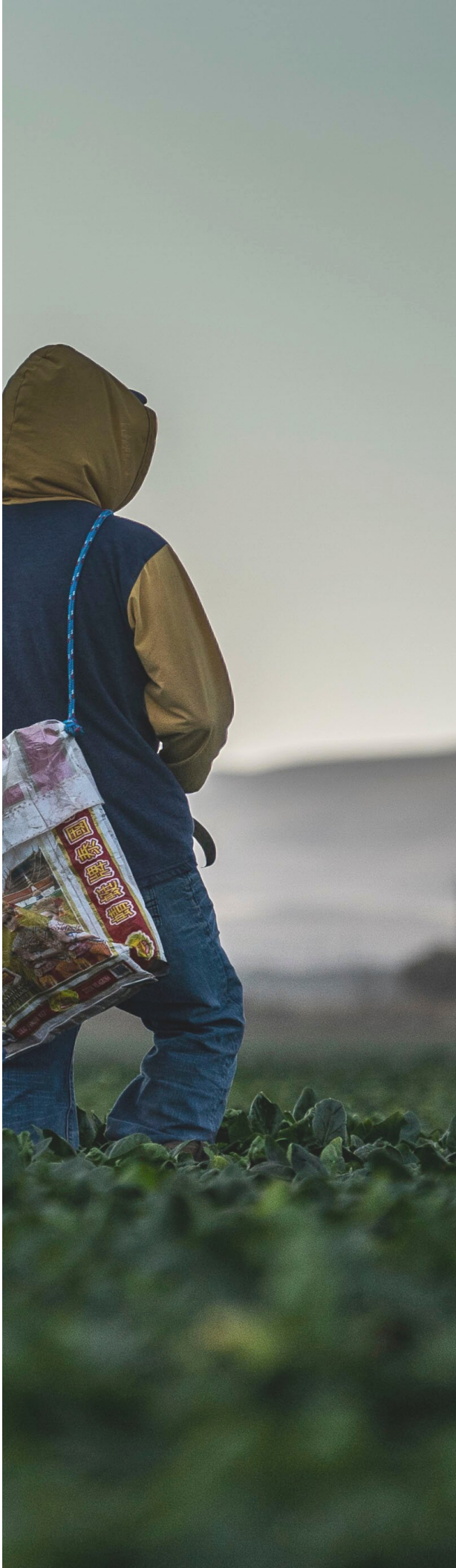
A report prepared by: Binational Center for the Development of Indigenous Oaxacan Communities, Vista Community Clinic, the FarmWorker CARE Coalition, and the California Institute for Rural Studies with support from the COVID-19 Farmworker Study Collective

Covid-19 Farmworker Study

The COVID-19 Farmworker Study (COFS) provides critical missing information on farmworkers' abilities to protect themselves and their families during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study brings together a collective of community-based organizations, researchers and advocates to reveal information that can only be gathered directly from farmworkers who have been working during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We are using two research tools, a phone-based quantitative survey and an in-depth interview, to bring the voices of farmworkers into the public conversation about how to respond to the pandemic. COFS is also a tool for funneling resources (in the form of study funds) to community-based organizations and to workers themselves.

COFS is a collaborative research project facilitated by the California Institute for Rural Studies with participation from a wide group of community-based organizations, researchers and policy advocates. Visit www.covid19farmworkerstudy.org for a full list of project partners and supporters. The study is supported by the UC Davis Western Center for Agricultural Health and Safety, The California Endowment, The California Wellness Foundation, The 11th Hour Project of the Schmidt Family Foundation, and the San Joaquin Valley Health Fund and The Center at Sierra Health Foundation.



This project is being developed by a broad coalition of researchers and community-based organizers from across California, Oregon and Washington.

California Partners

AND A WIDE RANGE OF RESEARCHERS AND PARTNERS:

Dvera Saxton, PhD
Bonnie Bade, PhD
Don Villarejo, PhD
Rick Mines, PhD
Joel Diringer, JD, MPH
Susana Matias, PhD, NST
Gail Wadsworth
Mily Treviño Saucedo, M.S
Heather E. Riden, MA
Michelle Colato-Ochoa
Sarah Ramirez, PhD, MPH

Oregon Partners

AND A WIDE RANGE OF RESEARCHERS AND PARTNERS:

Ronald L. Mize, PhD.
Lynn Stephen, PhD.
Gabriela Pérez Báez, PhD.
Jennifer Martinez, PhD.
Don Villarejo, PhD.
Carlos J. Crespo, PhD.
Timothy M Herrera
Eddie Kasner, PhD.

Washington Partners

AND A WIDE RANGE OF RESEARCHERS AND PARTNERS:

COVID-19
FARMWORKER STUDY

EXPERTS IN THEIR FIELDS: CONTRIBUTIONS AND REALITIES OF INDIGENOUS CAMPESINOS IN CALIFORNIA DURING COVID-19

Contributors to the report include: Oralia Maceda Méndez, Sarait Martinez EdD, Fidelina Espinoza, Deysi Merino González, Bonnie Bade PhD, Sarah M. Ramirez PhD, MPH, Rick Mines PhD, Ildi Carlisle-Cummins, Cristel Jensen, Alondra Santiago, and Dvera I. Saxton PhD

Indigenous language surveyors and interviewers include: Alma Herrera, René Martinez-Mendoza, Eugenia Melesio, Renata Monjaraz, Estela Ramirez,Claudia Reyes López, Edith Rojas, Margarita Santiago, Miguel Villegas, Francisca Ramos, Silvia García, Saraí Ramos, Margarita Santiago, Vialet Jarquin, Eugenia Melesio, Fidelina Espinoza, Leocadia Sanchez, Merced Olivera, Irma Luna

Questions regarding Indigenous Campesinos in California should be directed to Dr. Sarait Martinez (CBDIO).
Questions about the COVID-19 Farmworker Study should be directed to Ildi Carlisle-Cummins (CIRS).

Recommended Citation: Binational Center for Indigenous Oaxacan Community Development, Vista Community Clinic / FarmWorker CARE Coalition, California Institute for Rural Studies, and the COVID-19 Farmworker Study Collective.“Experts in their Fields: Contributions and Realities of Indigenous Campesinos in California during COVID-19.” October 18, 2021.
www.covid19farmworkerstudy.org

Community Partner Interviewers:

Dolores López
Fátima Martínez
Fernando Serrano

Nayamin Martinez
Erica Fernández Zamora

Oralia Maceda Méndez
Miguel Villegas
Fidelina Espinoza

Edith Rojas
Eugenia Melesio
Estela Ramirez

Margarita Santiago
Renata Monjaraz
Alma Herrera

Rene Martinez
Claudia Reyes Lopez

Esther Bejarano
Martha Ponce

Rosalba Garcia
Adela Moreno

Deysi Merino-González
Paola Aracely Ilescas

Experts in Their Fields:
Contributions and Realities of Indigenous Campesinos in California during the COVID-19 Pandemic

A report prepared by: The Binational Center for the Development of Indigenous Oaxacan Communities, Vista Community Clinic, the FarmWorker CARE Coalition, and the California Institute for Rural Studies with support from the COVID-19 Farmworker Study Collective

October 18, 2021

Contributors to the report include:

Oralia Maceda Méndez, Sarait Martinez EdD, Fidelina Espinoza, Deysi Merino González, Bonnie Bade PhD, Rick Mines PhD, Sarah M. Ramirez PhD, MPH, Dvera I. Saxton PhD Ildi Carlisle-Cummins, Cristel Jensen, Alondra Santiago

Indigenous language surveyors and interviewers include:

Alma Herrera, René Martinez-Mendoza, Eugenia Melesio, Renata Monjaraz, Estela Ramirez,Claudia Reyes López, Edith Rojas, Margarita Santiago, Miguel Villegas, Francisca Ramos, Silvia García, Saraí Ramos, Vialet Jarquin, Eugenia Melesio, Fidelina Espinoza, Leocadia Sanchez, Merced Olivera, Irma Luna

Questions regarding Indigenous Campesinos in California should be directed to Dr. Sarait Martinez (CBDIO). Questions about the COVID-19 Farmworker Study should be directed to Ildi Carlisle-Cummins (CIRS).

Recommended Citation: Binational Center for Indigenous Oaxacan Community Development, Vista Community Clinic / FarmWorker CARE Coalition, California Institute for Rural Studies, and the COVID-19 Farmworker Study Collective.“Experts in their Fields: Contributions and Realities of Indigenous Campesinos in California during COVID-19.” October 18, 2021. www.covid19farmworkerstudy.org

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Experts in Their Fields uplifts the voices of Indigenous Campesinos who participated in the COVID-19 Farmworker Study (COFS). COFS conducted surveys with over 300 Indigenous Campesinos during Phase One (May-July 2020) and 14 in-depth interviews with Mixtec, Zapotec, and Triqui language-speaking Campesinos during Phase Two (September-November 2020). The Indigenous and immigrant people who harvest, tend, and pack fresh produce and other agricultural products with great skill, professionalism, and care are rooted in the foodways and agricultural practices of their home communities throughout the Americas. We use the term Campesino, with a capital "C," to honor the occupational and cultural identities of COFS participants. The term "Indigenous," with a capital "I," refers to people who hail from *pueblos originarios* (home communities) in Southern Mexico and Central America where Indigenous languages other than Spanish are spoken, in some cases exclusively. At times, "farmworkers" or "agricultural workers" are used when describing how Campesinos are classified by federal or state agencies or in other kinds of research.

Without Indigenous Campesinos' knowledge, experiences, and insights about the land, crops, and the environment, the multi-billion dollar agricultural economy in California would not function. Indigenous Campesino COFS participants graciously shared their lived experiences during the height of the pandemic, which included: (1) lost hours at work due to pandemic disruptions and unlivable salaries; (2) inaccessible resources including health care, financial assistance, eviction protection, food security, and COVID-19 testing; (3) stress and anxiety over rising costs and severe difficulties meeting basic needs like housing, food, childcare, and bills; (4) fear around contracting COVID-19 and spreading it to children and family members, not having healthcare, and being out of work while sick; (5) parents' concerns about their children's emotional wellbeing and academic progress during the abrupt and under-supported transition to internet-access based online learning.

All of these issues are exacerbated by participants' mixed immigration statuses and the fact that information about health and resources is rarely provided in Indigenous languages or in ways that are accessible to communities. These problems are not new to Indigenous Campesinos, who have been marginalized economically, linguistically, and politically for many years. Despite being proclaimed "essential workers," agricultural workers have faced long-term systematic exclusion from dignified professional status and accompanying health and labor benefits. The situation has worsened for Indigenous Campesinos during the pandemic. They have experienced intensified chronic job and income insecurity, unhealthful and over-crowded housing conditions, stress and fear, and language barriers. Indigenous Campesinos continue to experience harsh and life-threatening circumstances despite the return to normal routines for other members of U.S. society.

COFS partners are mobilizing these research findings to: (1) advocate that county, state, and federal governments develop infrastructures of support and care, and deliver urgently needed resources, direct financial relief, healthcare, testing, vaccinations, and food to farmworkers; (2) highlight policy opportunities that address long-standing, emergent, and ongoing inequalities in Campesino communities; and (3) create educational and outreach tools that support the needs of Campesinos and the front-line organizations serving them.

COFS is facilitated by the California Institute for Rural Studies in collaboration with a team of social science researchers and campesino-serving community based-organizations. For the COFS Indigenous Report, the Binational Center for the Development of Indigenous Oaxacan Communities (Centro Binacional para el Desarrollo Indígena Oaxaqueño, or CBDIO), Vista Community Clinic / FarmWorker CARE Coalition (VCC/FWCC), and Líderes Campesinas contributed with the stories and interviews of Indigenous Campesinos. Social science researchers Drs. Dvera Saxton, Sarah M. Ramirez, Rick Mines, and Bonnie Bade, CIRS Associate Researcher Alondra Santiago, and CIRS Administrative Manager Cristel Jensen and CIRS Director Ildi Carlisle-Cummins facilitated research and analysis in partnership with CBDIO and VCC/FWCC leadership and staff, including: CBDIO Executive Director Dr. Sarait Martinez, Program Director Oralia Maceda Méndez, and Community Worker Fidelina Espinoza, and VCC's Migrant Health Program Coordinator Deysi Merino González. Indigenous surveyors and interviewers include: CBDIO's Alma Herrera, René Martinez-Mendoza, Eugenia Melesio, Renata Monjaraz, Estela Ramirez, Claudia Reyes López, Edith Rojas, Margarita Santiago, Miguel Villegas, Francisca Ramos, Silvia García, Saraí Ramos, Margarita Santiago, Vialet Jarquin, Eugenia Melesio, Fidelina Espinoza, Leocadia Sanchez, Merced Olivera, Irma Luna, and VCC's Deysi Merino González and Paola A. Ilescas. Drs. Sarah M. Ramirez and Rick Mines led data analysis for the COFS Phase One research. A wide group of community based organizations (CBOs), researchers and policy advocates have contributed to CA COFS; visit www.covid19farmworkerstudy.org for a full list of project partners and supporters.

ABBREVIATIONS AND TERMS

CBDIO = Binational Center for the Development of Indigenous Oaxacan Communities (Centro Binacional para el Desarrollo Indígena Oaxaqueño in Spanish)

CBO = Community-Based Organization

CIRS = California Institute for Rural Studies

COFS = COVID-19 Farmworker Study

VCC/FWCC = Vista Community Clinic/FarmWorker CARE (Coordination/Communication, Advocacy/Access, Research/Resources, Empowerment/Education) Coalition

Cal/OSHA = California Division of Occupational Safety and Health

FLC = Farm Labor Contractor

H2A = agricultural guestworkers granted temporary work visas and contracted by growers and farm labor contractors via the U.S. government-sponsored labor program

PEBT = Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer, additional federally-funded food assistance for eligible school-age children during the pandemic

pueblos originarios = home communities of Indigenous Campesinos, usually small *ranchos* (rural villages) or *pueblos* (towns) in the Southern states of Mexico, or in Central America.

INTRODUCTION

> The virus is affecting us 100%.
>
> **--ERNESTO, 41 year old Zapotec Man, San Joaquin Valley**

Experts in Their Fields focuses on the lived experiences of Indigenous Campesinos as told in their own words. Indigenous immigrant Campesinos and their families are important members of California's rural communities. The profound economic, social and cultural contributions to California made by Indigenous immigrant Campesinos have not been fully recognized. They are highly skilled professionals with tremendous food and agricultural knowledge that few others possess. They deserve to live and work with decency and to be treated as human beings and respected members of California and the United States.

This report is the result of long-term relationships and collaboration between community-based organizations the Binational Center for the Development of Indigenous Oaxacan Communities (CBDIO), Vista Community Clinic - FarmWorker CARE Coalition (VCC/FWCC), academic researchers, and the California Institute for Rural Studies. It is the third report to be released by the COVID-19 Farmworker Study (COFS) collective in California. COFS provides critical missing information on Campesinos' abilities to protect themselves and their families during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study brings together a collective of community-based organizations, researchers and advocates to reveal information that can only be gathered directly from Campesinos who have been working during the COVID-19 pandemic. Rather than merely document pandemic suffering, COFS data have been used to create tools for action that support CBO's and Campesinos and to provoke policy and institutional changes.

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, "agricultural workers" were categorized as "essential workers," meaning they were exempt from shelter-in-place mandates and asked to report to work in fields, packing houses, and food processing facilities across the nation. In March 2020, members of the COVID-19 Farmworker Study (COFS) collective started planning to document the impact of the pandemic on Campesino communities in California, Oregon, and Washington so that findings could be used to ask for better protections and resources in these communities.

Previous research with Campesinos in rural California, including with Indigenous language speakers, shows that these communities already endure poverty wages, occupational health and safety hazards, substandard and insufficient housing, food insecurity, language barriers, limited access to resources and supports households, multi-layered health challenges, and exclusions

based on their undocumented or mixed immigration statuses.[1] [2] [3] [4] [5] [6] [7] This neglect also stems from legacies of racism in the U.S. and Mexico and from the extractive labor hierarchies of industrial agriculture that pre-date and will outlast the current COVID-19 crisis.[8] Despite being deemed "essential," Campesinos were not protected from the worst health, social, and economic burdens of the pandemic. Food and agricultural workers experienced significantly higher rates of COVID-19 infection [9] [10] and death [11] than other essential workers.

The COFS findings presented here are at the same time unsurprising and very concerning. The realities Indigenous Campesinos shared are also complex; Indigenous communities have made tremendous contributions to California communities through their strong networks, rich cultural knowledge, and their significant and skilled involvement in the food and agricultural economies.

---

[1] Horton, S.B. *They Leave Their Kidneys in the Fields: Illness, Injury, and Illegality among U.S. Farmworkers*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016.

[2] López, A.A. *The Farmworkers' Journey*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.

[3] Saxton, D.I. *The Devil's Fruit*: *Farmworkers, Health, and Environmental Justice*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2021.

[4] Bade, B. *Sweatbaths, Sacrifice and Surgery: The Transmedical Health Care of Mixtec Migrant Families in California*, Doctoral Dissertation, Riverside: University of California, 1994.

[5] Bade, B. "Farmworker Health in Vista, California," in Richard Kiy and Chris Woodruff (eds.), *Ties that Bind: Mexican Migrants in San Diego County*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publications, 2005.

[6] Villarejo, D. S. McCurdy, B.Bade, S. Samuels, D. Lighthall, D. Williams "Self-Reported Health and Living Conditions for California's Farmworkers: Results from the California Farmworker Health Survey," *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*, 53:387-97, March 2010.

[7] Villarejo, D, B. Bade, D. Lighthall, D. Williams, A Souter, R. Mines, S. Samuels, and S. McCurdy. "Suffering in Silence: A Report on the Health of California's Campesinos." The California Endowment, 2000.

[8] Stephen, L. 2007. *Transborder Lives: Indigenous Oaxacans in Mexico, California, and Oregon*. Durham: Duke University Press.

[9] Lewnard, J. A., Mora, A. M., Nkwocha, O., Kogut, K., Rauch, S. A., Morga, N., Hernandez, S., Wong, M. P., Huen, K., Andrejko, K., Jewell, N. P., Parra, K. L., Holland, N., Harris, E., Cuevas, M., Eskenazi, B., & CHAMACOS-Project-19 Study Team. Prevalence and Clinical Profile of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 Infection among Farmworkers, California, USA, June-November 2020. *Emerging infectious diseases*, *27*(5): 1330–1342, 2021.

[10] Villarejo, D. *Increased Risks and Fewer Jobs: Evidence of California Farmworker Vulnerability During the COVID-19 Pandemic,* 2021. https://cirsinc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Increased-Risks-and-Fewer-Jobs-Evidence-of-California-Farmworker-Vulnerability-During-the-COVID-19-Pandemic-Full-Report.pdf

[11] Riley, A.R., Y-H Chen, E.C. Matthay, M.M. Glymour, J.M. Torres, A. Fernandez, and K. Bibbins-Domingo. Excess death among Latino people in California during the COVID-19 pandemic. *SSM Popul Health*, 2021.

Indigenous Campesinos are rooted to their home communities in Southern Mexico and Central America. Dozens of languages are spoken across these regions, and people possess strong cultural and spiritual customs, foodways, medical practices and healing techniques, agricultural and ecological knowledge and technologies, social and political organization, and trade and migration networks. Without their knowledge, experiences, and insights about the land, crops, and the environment, the multi-billion dollar agricultural economy in California would not function.

This report would not have been possible without the tireless efforts of Indigenous leaders from the COFS' CBO partners CBDIO and VCC/FWCC. CBDIO has a long history in California working to visibilize the unique struggles of Indigenous Campesinos and to achieve dignified housing, living wages, healthcare and other protections for Indigenous immigrants and Campesinos. While the name of the organization refers specifically to Indigenous people from Oaxaca, since the 1990s, the organization has evolved to include other Indigenous-language speaking communities from Mexico and Guatemala, including Amuzco, Mixtec, Zapotec, Triqui, Chinantec, Chatino, Nahuatl, Tlapanec, and Mam, among dozens of others.

The FarmWorker CARE Coalition brings together agencies and CBOs dedicated to improving the living and working conditions of Campesinos and their families in San Diego County through coordination, communication, advocacy, access, research, resources, empowerment, and education. Vista Community Clinic is a migrant health clinic in North County San Diego dedicated to serving migrant and immigrant communities, particularly Campesino families, many of whom live in unconventional housing, lack health insurance, and speak Indigenous languages. VCC and FWCC (henceforth VCC/FWCC) both employ Indigenous and Indigenous-language speaking staff to serve the diverse Campesino communities in San Diego County.

This report intends to instigate change. While California has many worthy labor laws and worker-safety protections on the books, the state is failing Campesinos. For too long, the state has systematically excluded or ignored the needs of Indigenous Campesinos, many of whom speak Indigenous languages exclusively. Many regulations remain un- or underenforced. Not enough effort, outside those made by the Indigenous Campesino-serving CBOs in California, has been made to effectively share important and life-saving information with Indigenous language speakers, particularly during the pandemic. Written information in Spanish and English, web-based and cumbersome dissemination and reporting methods, and ineffective, underfunded, and understaffed educational, enforcement, reporting, and support services render existing Cal/OSHA, county health departments, and federal support services largely ineffective. Indigenous-language speaking communities in California are estimated to make up at least a quarter of all Campesinos in the state, with significantly higher numbers concentrated on the

Central Coast and in the San Joaquin Valley.[12] This report aims to raise awareness of the unique institutional and structural challenges and exclusions Indigenous Campesinos and their families have long confronted that were only worsened during the pandemic. *Experts in Their Fields* also intends to serve as an indicator for the many policy and systematic changes that must take place in order to protect the health and well-being of Campesinos, whose skillful labor sustains the state's $50 billion per year agricultural economy and ensures the flow of the domestic and global food supply chains.

Campesinos do not receive their fair share of these profits. The heart of all labor, living, and health issues continually confronted by Campesinos lies in insufficient salaries that reproduce chronic poverty for them and their families. This is compounded by lack of or exclusion from healthcare coverage, sustained paid sick-leave, options for affordable, safe, and dignified housing, language barriers, and inaccessible or inappropriate resources and supports, all exacerbated by the pandemic. Indigenous communities in California, with their linguistic and cultural uniqueness, are further marginalized by the existing exploitative industrial agricultural system and federal, state and local governments' chronic neglect of rural, immigrant, and Indigenous Campesino communities.

Experts in Their Fields has been created by the collaborative efforts of Indigenous community workers and *promotoras* who have been deeply engaged with their communities throughout the pandemic, researchers affiliated with universities, and CIRS. All Campesinos quoted in this report are identified with pseudonyms, along with their age, Indigenous language, and the region where they work and live in California.

[12] See CRLA's Indigenous Farmworker Report for more information, however this study is over ten years old and no new censuses focused exclusively on Indigenous Campesinos in California have been repeated since then. It is highly likely, as the report notes, that Indigenous Campesinos, as well as undocumented Campesinos more generally, are severely undercounted the U.S. Census and the National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS). http://www.indigenousfarmworkers.org/

Who Are Indigenous Campesinos?

At least since the Bracero era (1942-1964), Campesinos from Indigenous communities in Mexico have been migrating to California to work in the fields and packing houses.[13] [14] [15] [16] Indigenous Campesinos have their own languages, cosmologies, health and healing practices, and beliefs. These are all rooted in Indigenous Campesinos' strong relationships with nature and the Earth that represent accumulated knowledge and practice over hundreds of generations. Long before and up to the arrival of Europeans, the ancestors of today's Indigenous Campesinos built complex societies with highly sophisticated understandings and practices of agriculture, mathematics, engineering, astronomy, literature, poetry, arts, architecture, cosmology, philosophy, medicine, and economic production that are comparable to the achievements lauded for ancient Greek, Mesopotamian, Chinese and Indian civilizations. For many Indigenous Campesinos, Spanish is a second language, while many more communicate in their Indigenous Mesoamerican mother languages exclusively. Most COFS Indigenous Campesino participants hail from the southern regions of Mexico, namely the states of Oaxaca and Guerrero. Interviews and surveys were conducted in the preferred language of each participant.

[13] Loza, M. *Defiant Braceros: How Migrant Workers Fought for Racial, Sexual, and Political Freedom.* Berkeley: University of CAlifornia Press, 2016.

[14] Kearney, M. and D. Runsten *A Survey of Oaxacan Village Networks in California Agriculture.* David Runsten and Michael Kearney. Davis, CA: California Institute for Rural Studies, 1994.

[15] Kearney, M., Zabin, C., Garcia, A., Runsten, D., and Nagengast, C. *Mixtec Migrants in California Agriculture: A New Cycle of Poverty*. Davis, CA: California Institute for Rural Studies, 1992.

[16] Kearney, M., Nagengast,C., and Stavenhagen, R. *Human Rights and Indigenous Workers: The Mixtecs in Mexico and the United States*. Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, Univ. of California, San Diego, 1992. Reprinted in *Neighbors in Crisis: Mexico and the United States*. Daniel G. Aldrich, Jr. and Lorenzo Meyer, eds. San Bernardino: Borgo Press, 1993.

Chart 1: Home states or countries of COFS Indigenous Campesinos

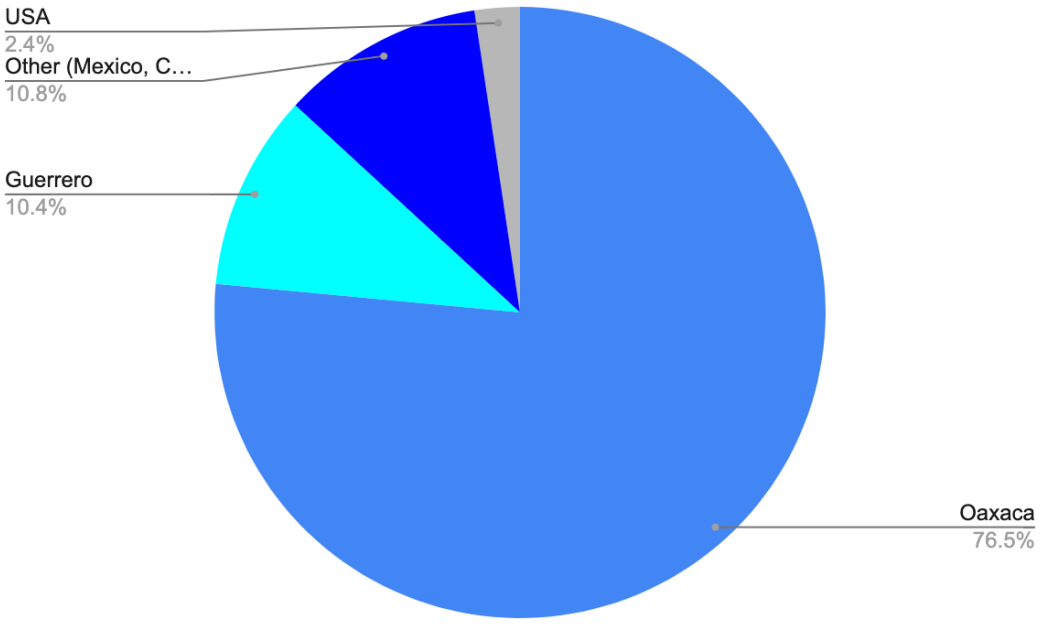
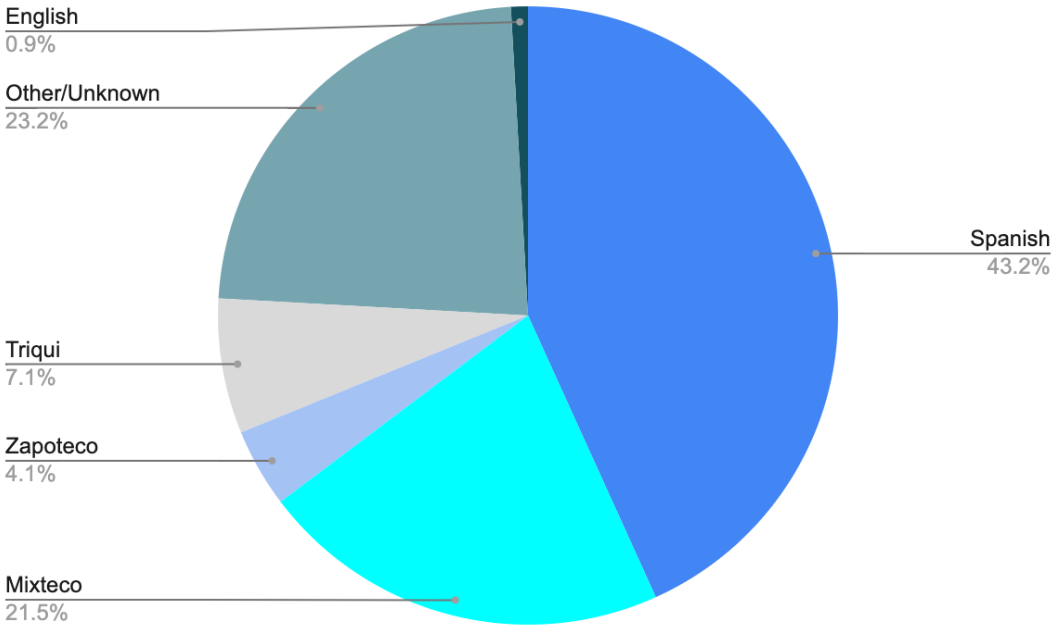


Chart 2: Languages spoken by COFS Indigenous Campesinos during surveys and interviews



Indigenous Campesinos have deep respect for and knowledge of the land. Their expertise and skill in agriculture and food production is rooted in ancestral, sustainable, and subsistence agricultural practices that have been carried on for generations. Indigenous Campesinos have cultivated specialized varieties of corn, beans, squash and chilis, along with native plants, seeds, fruits, and fungi in their communities for thousands of years, creating a legacy of ethnobotanical knowledge and reknowned regional cuisine.[17] Disruptions to these ways of life and patterns of subsistence through forced displacement, the devaluation of Indigenous peoples, state violence, the privatization and appropriation of communal rural lands and resources (water, lumber, minerals), and devastating economic liberalization policies of globalization are some of the reasons why Indigenous Campesinos have migrated to the U.S. over the past forty years.

Today, Indigenous communities from Mexico, Guatemala, and other Central American countries have a significant presence in California's farm fields, migrating between and settling in states like California, Oregon, and Washington in areas with high levels of industrial agricultural production. While almost all people in Mexico and Central America have some Indigenous roots, the majority will not identify as such. Spanish colonization and racism attempted to extinguish Indigenous peoples and practices physically through the spread of disease and campaigns of violence and mass slaughter, and culturally through religious indoctrination, schooling, and commerce in Spanish, appropriation of land and resources, and the social, economic, and political subjugation of Indigenous communities. These efforts were not fully successful, which is evident in the continued thriving existence of Indigenous communities, dozens of languages, cultural and spiritual customs, foodways, medical practices and healing techniques, agricultural and ecological knowledge and technologies, social and political organization, and trade and migration networks.

Mexican and Central American people who identify as Indigenous today have strong cultural and familial ties to their *pueblos originarios*, or home communities, where over sixty languages other than Spanish--including many variants of Mixtec, Zapotec, Triqui, and others--are spoken on a daily basis or exclusively.[18] These languages have existed for thousands of years prior to the colonization of the Americas, are mostly unwritten, and have grammars and structures that differ fundamentally from European languages. Furthermore, community-to-community, there are unique variations of the languages. For example, the Mixtec variants spoken in the Tlaxiaco region of Oaxaca are distinct from the Mixtec spoken by people in communities in the neighboring state of Guerrero. There are over fifty different versions of Zapotec, and three different variants of Triqui. All of these languages are complete with their own vocabularies,

[17] Gonzalez, R.J. *Zapotec Science: Farming and Food in the Northern Sierra of Oaxaca.* Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001.

[18] See this map of Mexico to get a sense of the geography of language diversity in contemporary Mexico: https://community.apan.org/wg/gckn/m/mediagallery/168585?pi431596=6

grammar, and syntax. This diversity is a testament to the strength of Indigenous communities but can also complicate translation and communication efforts.

When Indigenous Campesinos shared their experiences with surveyors and interviewers, they often remarked that they did not go to school or study, that the only thing they know how to do is work in the fields. This self-depreciation is an unfortunate legacy of colonization and the racist debasement and marginalization of Indigenous peoples, their languages, and their knowledge and expertise. Indigenous food and agricultural knowledge is especially valuable to the California growers Campesinos work for, but it is not compensated as such. While Indigenous Campesinos have not always had opportunities to cross into spaces of schooling, without their knowledge, experiences, and insights about the land, crops, and the environment, the multi-billion dollar agricultural economy in California would not function.

Chart 3: Women slightly overrepresent men among COFS Indigenous Campesino Participants

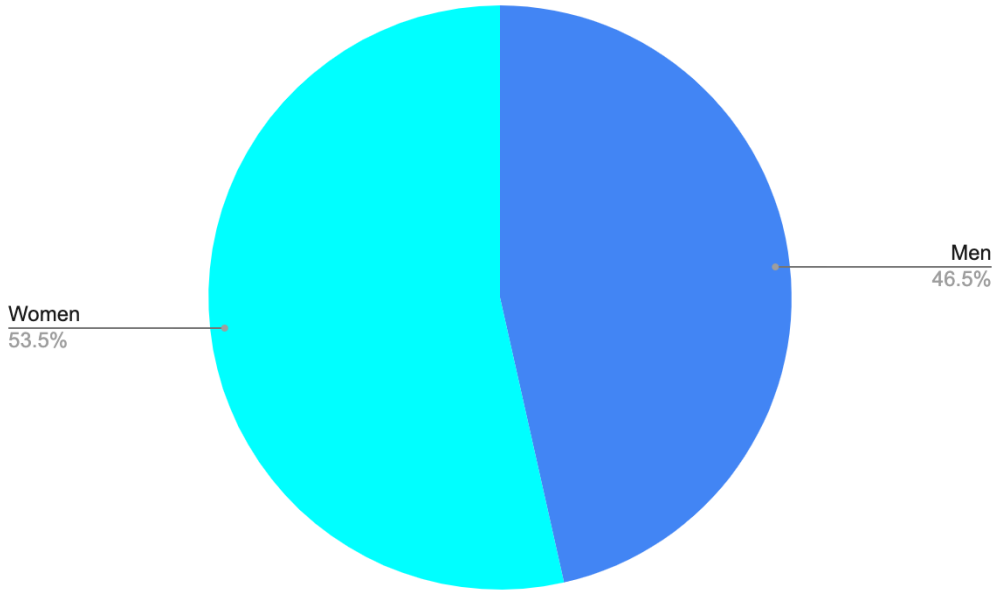


Chart 4: Most COFS Indigenous Participants are between 26 and 49 years old.

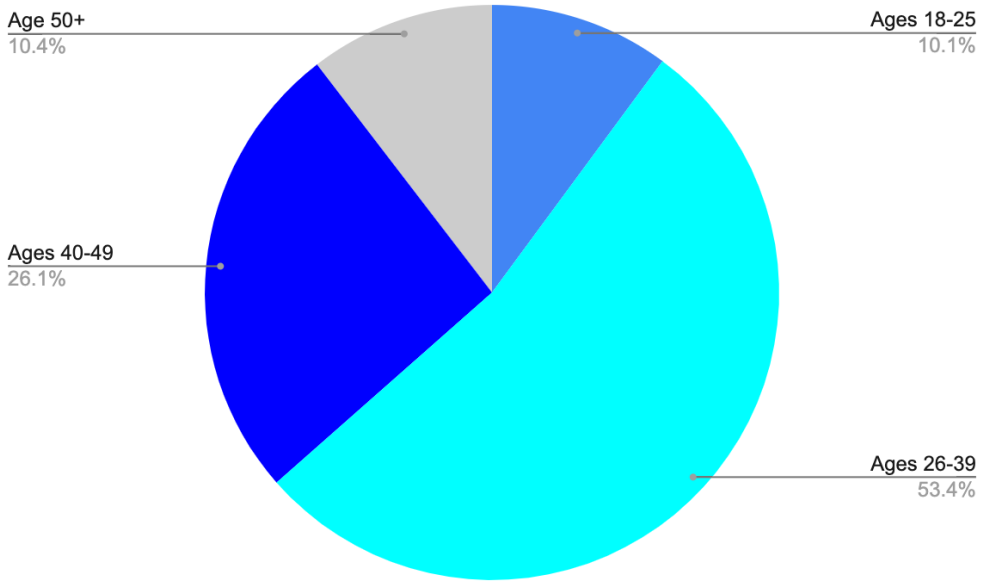


Chart 5: Well over half of COFS Indigenous Campesino participants have been in the U.S. 15 years or longer.

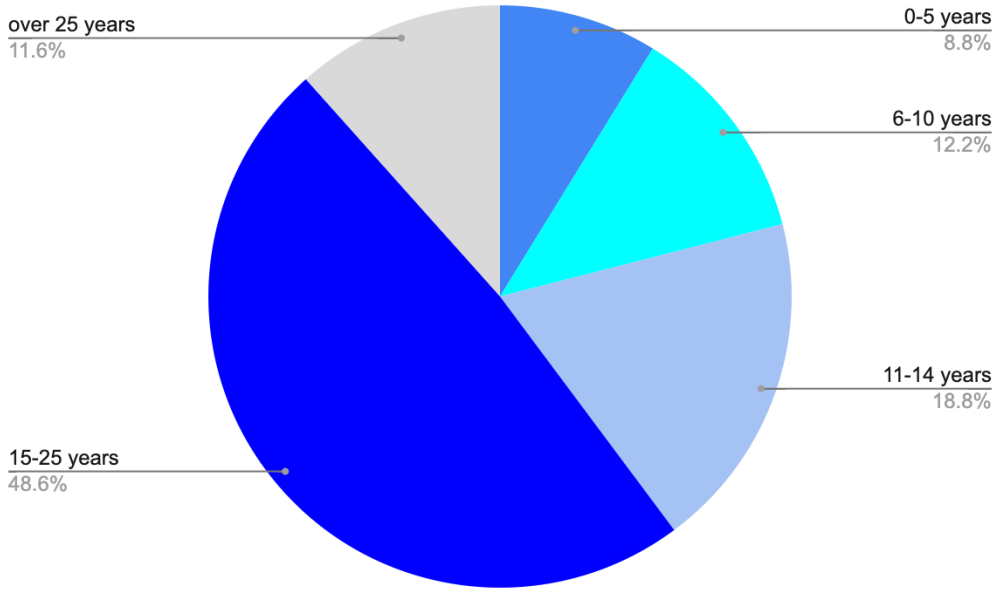


Chart 6: A little over 70% of COFS Indigenous Campesinos have children under age 12.

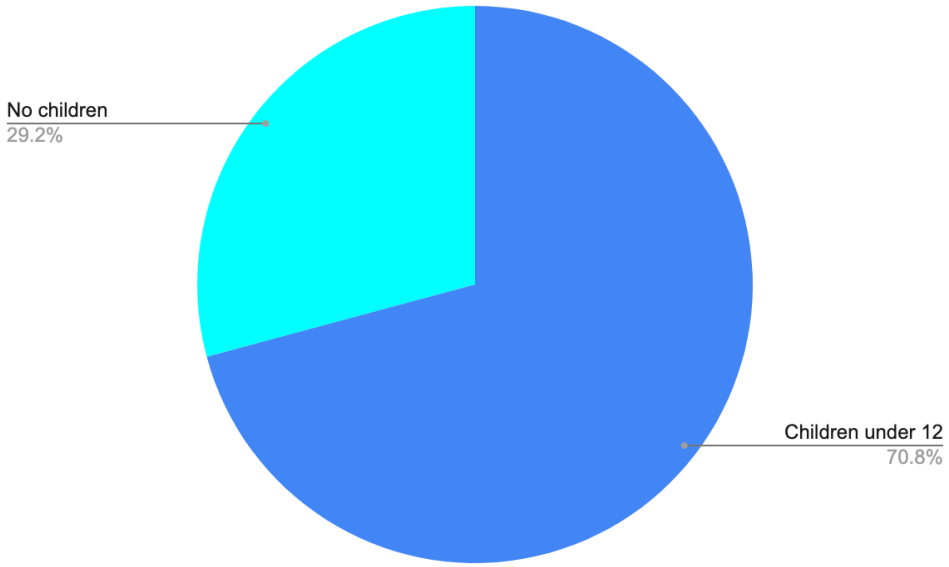
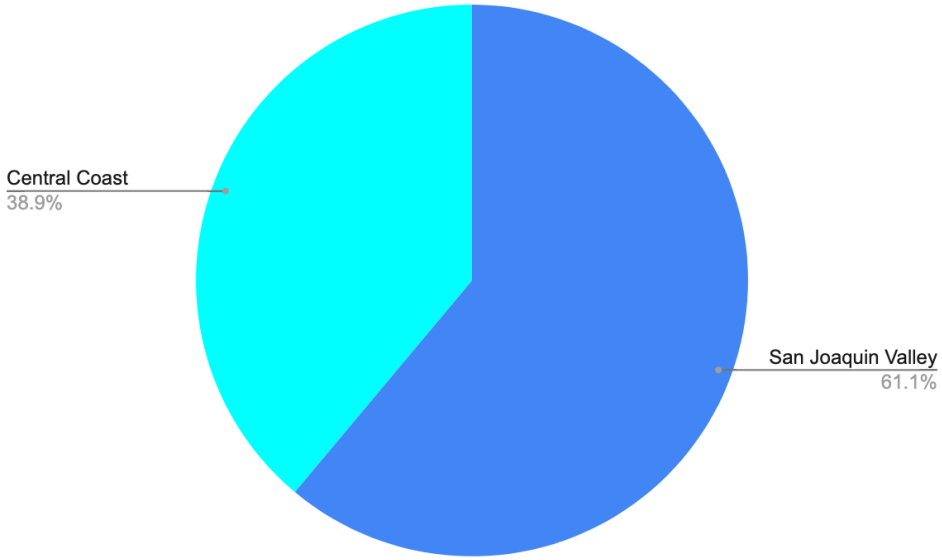


Chart 7: Indigenous Campesino COFS participants live and work in the San Joaquin Valley and the Central Coast of California. Some migrate between these regions for work.



METHODOLOGY

This report is based on the analysis of a subset of data from Phases One and Two of the California COFS; this subset includes Campesinos with Indigenous identities. Phase One of the CA COFS involved a phone survey with 915 Campesinos focusing on their working, living, and health conditions during the early months of the pandemic.[19] Responses were collected between May and July 2020 by a team of 55 trained community outreach staff and *promotoras* affiliated with six campesino-serving CBOs. Surveyors logged responses into Survey Monkey. Responses were then analyzed by CIRS affiliated researchers Drs. Rick Mines and Sarah M. Ramirez using SAS software.

Campesino participants were recruited via CBO networks from five key food producing regions of the state--the San Joaquin Valley, the Southern Desert Region, the South Coast, Central Coast, and North Coast. These areas were selected based on analysis of CA Employment Development Department data on agricultural employment in California.[20] Of the 915 workers surveyed, 329 were identified as Indigenous based on their connection to CBDIO or their self-identification as speakers of Indigenous Mesoamerican languages. Of these 329, 301 surveys were complete enough to include in the data analysis. 16.8% of all 915 Phase One participants spoke an Indigenous language.

CA COFS Phase Two followed up with 62 Campesinos from Phase One to do one-hour-long in-depth qualitative phone-based interviews. These allowed Campesinos to go into more detail about their lived experiences at work, at home, and in their communities during the pandemic.[21] 14 of these interviewees were conducted with Indigenous language speakers. Interviews were recorded in Indigenous languages, and then translated and transcribed into Spanish or English. This poses some challenges as not all concepts in English or Spanish are directly translatable to Indigenous languages, and vice versa. There are some gaps in surveys and interview transcripts as a result of this. The translation and analysis represents the best efforts of the COFS Indigenous Report team and CBOs. Both CA COFS Phases One and Two received Institutional Review

---

[19] Ramirez, S.M., R. Mines, I. Carlisle-Cummins. *Always Essential, Perpetually Disposable: Initial Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on California Campesinos.* California Institute for Rural Studies, August 2020. http://covid19farmworkerstudy.org/survey/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/CA-COFS-Phase-One-Final-Report.pdf

[20] Villarejo, D.M. *California COFS Survey Methods and Demographics*. California Institute for Rural Studies, October 2020. http://covid19farmworkerstudy.org/survey/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/COFS-Demographics-Brief_FINAL.pdf

[21] Bade, B., S.M. Ramirez, and D.I. Saxton. *Always Essential, Perpetually Disposable: California Farmworkers and the COVID-19 Pandemic*. California Institute for Rural Studies, February 2021. http://covid19farmworkerstudy.org/survey/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/COFS-_Phase-Two-Preliminary-Report.pdf

Board Approval from a private firm then called IntegReview (now Advarra). Participants in Phase One received $25 and participants in Phase Two received $50 to compensate them for their time, expertise, and contributions to the study.

The unique research-to-action and collaborative methodology of the COFS study, wherein academic researchers and CBOs work in equal partnership towards goals of social change, distinguishes it from other academic studies. Community partners and Campesinos have been involved in key roles throughout the project's creation, design, implementation, analysis of data, production of results, dissemination of information, and creation of supportive tools and advocacy strategies.[22] COFS community partners have been driven by the urgent need for structural changes to the long-standing exclusion of Campesinos from dignified living, working and health conditions through systematic marginalization, such as persistent insufficient salaries and lack of healthcare coverage.

To date, the results of COFS have generated written reports, social media campaigns, databases, websites, press conferences, meetings with legislators and agencies at the state and federal levels, and educational presentations to healthcare providers, county public health professionals, cooperative extensions, college students, and labor safety offices. COFS findings have also been cited in local policies like the City of Coachella's passage of "hero pay" salary bonuses for essential food workers.[23] Systemic changes, such as re-writing of labor safety regulations as they relate to the pandemic, enforcement of labor violations, provision of health insurance for Campesinos and their family members, and access to essential worker provisions and benefits remain goals of the COFS project.

The long term rapport and trust established between community members and *promotoras*/outreach workers and between researchers and CBO partners was essential to data collection during Phases One and Two. CBDIO conducted surveys and interviews with Indigenous Campesinos, which took place in several different languages including several variants of Mixtec, Zapotec, and Triqui, among others. Since the start of the pandemic, CBDIO's staff has quadrupled in size and includes members of many different *pueblos originarios* (Indigenous home communities). VCC/FWCC and Líderes Campesinas collected a smaller number of surveys and interviews from Indigenous Campesinos. CBDIO staff also put in long hours translating and transcribing Indigenous-language survey results and interviews. Their trusted status in Indigenous communities is vital to the ongoing data-to-action efforts that are

---

[22] For further information on collaborative methodologies and practice, see Bade, B. and K. Martinez. "Full Circle: The Method of Collaborative Anthropology for Regional and Transnational Research." In M.B. Schenker, X. Castañeda, and A. Rodriguez-Lainz (eds.) *Migration and Health A Research Methods Handbook*, pp. 306-326. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014.

[23] City of Coachella, Ordinance 1174 Chapter 5.100 §.040 (2021). Full text available here: https://www.coachella.org/home/showpublisheddocument?id=8130

starting to involve Indigenous Campesinos directly in policy advocacy and systems change work Drs. Sarah M. Ramirez and Rick Mines worked tirelessly to complete the quantitative analysis of Phase One Data, including the Indigenous Campesino Surveys that included hundreds of open-ended responses. Drs. Dvera Saxton, Bonnie Bade, and Sarah M. Ramirez, Associate Researchers Alondra Santiago, Deysi Merino Gonzalez, Paola Ilescas, Erica Fernández Zamora, and Interns Juana Lozano, Claudia Mendoza Chavez, Sandra Torres, and Erika Ventura supported transcription and qualitative data analysis of COFS Phase Two Spanish-language interviews and report writing.

To generate this report, the research team members identified as report contributors collectively reviewed hundreds of open-ended comments made by Indigenous Campesinos during CA COFS Phase One as well as quotes and comments made by Indigenous participants during interviews for CA COFS Phase Two. This community-led approach involved two to three 2-hour meetings per week with Indigenous leaders from CBDIO and VCC/FWCC with researchers to review the data, sort and identify themes, organize quotes and concerns illustrating the prevailing issues, and determine the intent and form of the report. Collaborating Indigenous leaders and organizations have been clear throughout all phases of COFS that their participation is contingent upon generating information that points to lapses in protection of workers and their families and upon transforming this data into strategies aimed at achieving systematic change.

Some limitations of this study include the fact that the majority of participants who spoke Indigenous languages spoke variants of Mixtec, meaning there is less representation of other Indigenous language groups. This is in part the result of the history of immigration and settlement of Indigenous communities in California and also the history of CBDIO. Up until the 1990s, CBDIO worked mostly with Mixtec communities. Because Indigenous language communities like Mixtec, Zapotec, and Triqui are not individual languages but language families that include several regional variants rooted in *pueblos originarios* (home communities), we could only conduct surveys and interviews with individuals who spoke variants that are also spoken and understood by CBDIO staff. A great effort was made on the part of CBDIO to reach out to and engage speakers of Zapotec, Triqui, Mixtec, and Tlapaneco, including more recently arrived Mixtec speakers from Guerrero.

While the report is not inclusive of all Indigenous languages or Campesino communities in California, the report is a testament of skillful coordination, incredible commitment, and the strong relationships CBDIO has cultivated over time across language and geographical boundaries. COFS used a community-based, snow-ball sampling strategy. This was the most appropriate and ethical route to take with the study design to ensure that Indigenous and immigrant Campesinos felt safe participating. A random sample would not have allowed for the intimacy and care needed to engage participants.

A key aspect of the format of this report, in the spirit of community-driven research, is allowing the Indigenous Campesinos who participated in CA COFS Phases One and Two to tell their stories in their own words. Their stories have been translated here from several different Indigenous languages into Spanish, and then into English. Rather than having academic researchers impose their interpretations onto the data, the team intentionally privileges the expertise and insights of partners from CBDIO and FWCC/VCC and the Indigenous Campesinos themselves. The report will close with Indigenous agricultural-worker driven solutions, practical recommendations for workplace safety and health, and demands for justice.

UNLIVABLE SALARIES

> I work, but my wages don't last, because of bills, because of the rent, and so it goes. It doesn't last.
>
> **--HORTENSIA, 44 year old Mixtec Woman, San Joaquin Valley**

> ...Without work I don't know whether to buy food or pay the rent.
>
> **--TIMOTEO, 30 year old Indigenous Man, Central Coast**

Despite being deemed "essential workers" during the COVID-19 pandemic, Campesinos have never received dignified liveable wages for their work. For Indigenous Campesinos, this is exacerbated by rampant racial and gender discrimination and the seasonality of crops, which makes it impossible to have stable income. Many workers commented on having to save already limited wages to get through different times of year when there are not as many agricultural jobs. Even though the agricultural industry often complained of farm labor shortages during the pandemic, Indigenous Campesinos struggled to find enough work to make ends meet, which made them more vulnerable to housing shortages, rent increases and evictions, and food insecurity. For Indigenous Campesino parents, there were internal conflicts over working and risking infecting their entire families, or staying home and caring for children but losing vital income.

Notably, Indigenous Campesinos surveyed during COFS Phase One were much more likely to work for Farm Labor Contractors (FLCs) than non-Indigenous Campesinos. As illustrated in Charts 8 and 9 below, 68% of Indigenous Campesinos worked for FLCs as compared with only 51% of non-Indigenous Campesinos. Employment type is also likely to impact job and income stability since FLCs must compete with one another for jobs from growers. Working in packing houses also affords workers an hourly wage instead of working for a piece-rate of pay. The piece rate will vary per worker depending on how fast they can move and how many boxes, crates, buckets, or flats of produce they can harvest in a day. In their interviews, Indigenous Campesinos explained that work shortages due to supply chain disruptions hurt their households and heightened their many anxieties. Workers and COFS CBO partners also observed that employers cut hours in order to avoid having to pay overtime and other kinds of benefits. Indigenous Campesinos interviewed know they deserve better, and are frustrated by the title of "essential worker" which does not afford them to meet their own, essential, basic needs. As their wages have remained stagnant for years, the costs of living, housing, water and utilities, food, health care, childcare, transportation, and the added expense of household internet for children's schooling, continue to rise exponentially--to the detriment of Indigenous Campesino health and welfare.

Chart 8: Indigenous Campesinos were more likely to work for Farm Labor Contractors than non-Indgenous Campesinos surveyed for the COFS (frequency missing = 8)

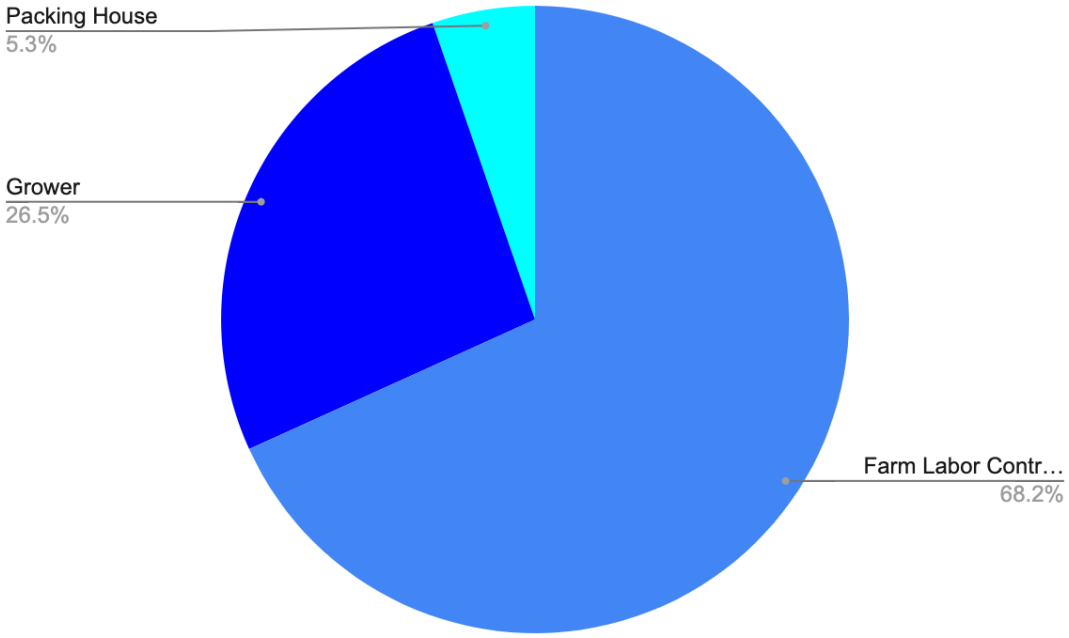
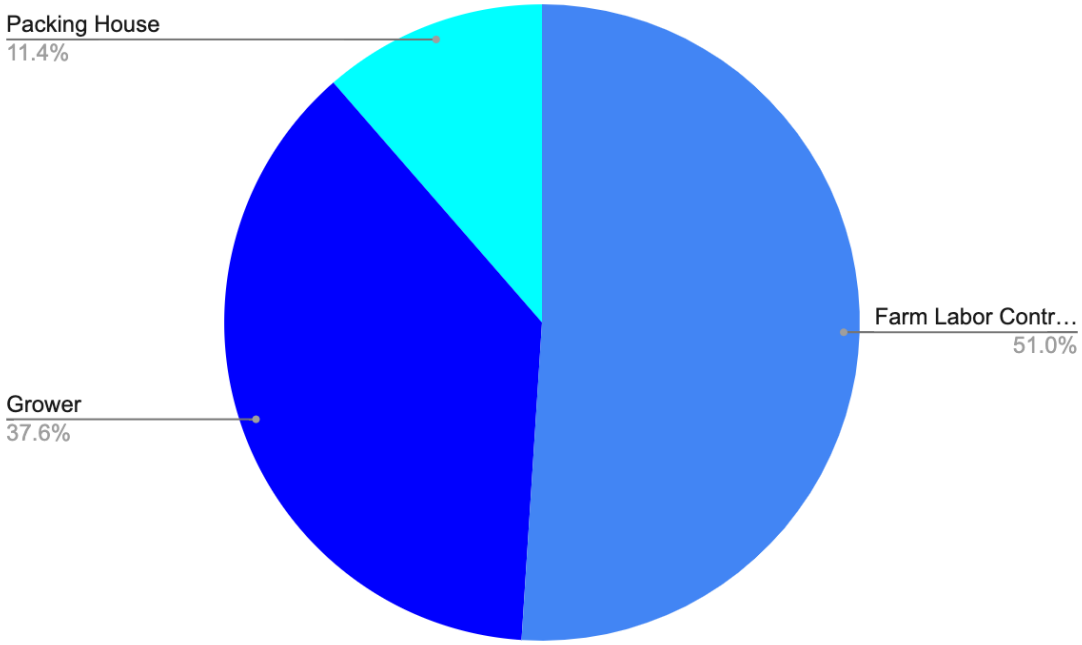


Chart 9: Non-Indigenous Campesinos, by employer type (frequency missing = 51)



Seasonal jobs, unstable income, and precarious workplace conditions made Indigenous Campesinos vulnerable during the pandemic. Reduced hours and wages due to pandemic work stoppages in the fields and packing houses, and mothers leaving the workforce to care for children sheltering and studying in place at home, gutted household incomes and made it harder for Indigenous Campesinos to save up for anticipated seasonal declines in work.

> We work by season. Each job changes every month. Sometimes we pick grapes. When the grapes are finished, we pack raisins in the fields. If they say they are paying by the hour, we go to sweep almonds, to check on the small trees [transplants] that come rolled-up in boxes, or when the season to prune grape vines comes, we prune them…When the season ends, I don't work. We save a little when we work. With that money, we cover expenses such as rent and things we need to buy. When the work season begins, we begin working again. When this month is over, people say the mandarin harvest begins. I do not go because it is heavy work, and they use ladders to harvest the mandarins. In November pruning work begins, we'll go to prune the grape vines.
>
> **--IRMA, 34 year old Mixtec Woman, San Joaquin Valley**

> They don't treat the people well, there is a lot of abuse happening at these work sites. The workers are the most important ones since they are the main ones who work during this time to keep people fed. They are the most affected by the conditions at work, and poorly paid. These jobs don't pay well. The market price for a flat of strawberries is $1.90, for a flat of eight baskets. Every flat weighing 22 pounds, they pay $2.65. Sometimes we don't earn the minimum for this heavy work.
>
> **--LAURA, 18 year old Mixtec Woman, Central Coast**

> We do not work when there is no work. We always save for those seasons when there is no work. In January, February, March and April there is little available work. We saved in June, July, August and September. October and November is when work decreases.
>
> **--ERNESTO, 41 year old Zapotec Man, San Joaquin Valley**

> ...Now we work less hours, the paychecks are meager.
>
> **--PRUDENCIA, 35 year old Mixtec Woman, Central Coast**

> At the packaging house, there are days we work, and it is fewer hours that we work. It has affected me because there are days that we do not work at the packing house. COVID has affected everything for us.
>
> **--LUPITA, 30 year old Triqui Woman, Central Coast**

> And also, they cut our hours at work, because they do not want anyone working more than 6-7 hours in order to not pay full time or overtime…
>
> **--AURELIA, 50 year old Mixtec Woman, San Joaquin Valley**

> I started working in a nursery and it was supposed to last about 6 months, but with this pandemic the work stopped. They laid people off and I was laid off first because I was new. In my home, work is affecting us.
>
> **--ERNESTO, 41 year old Zapotec Man, San Joaquin Valley**

Prior to the pandemic, Indigenous Campesinos were already struggling to make ends meet. The pandemic heightened their stresses over meeting their most basic needs, like housing, food, and childcare, and sometimes put them into debt.

> It is difficult to work in this situation, but we have no choice but to continue. The work is very poorly paid. We make $2.50 per bucket of garlic. It's not worth it because we have to pay $9 every day for transportation to work. Also, childcare is very expensive, they charge $20, and with my income, it's not enough…
>
> **--BELÉN, 31 year old Mixtec Woman, San Joaquin Valley**

> It is difficult to stop working and more so now with the children at home, and the bills do not wait ... There is little work, but yeah, enough to get by. We are in debt, but little by little, we are going to pay the bills and the people we borrowed from for our rent and other expenses for the house. There is no other way, we have to keep working and doing our best.
>
> **--ABRÁN, 48 year old Indigenous Man, San Joaquin Valley**

> During this time it is more difficult. Like, last year I was able to work and this year I haven't. We need to see what we will be spending our money on.
>
> **--FIDEL, 38 year old Indigenous Man, San Joaquin Valley**

> We've had difficulty paying for car insurance, phone bills, internet, and everything else. There is little help for us. Right now everything is expensive, the rent, the internet for our kids and a lot of these are emergencies.
>
> **--NAYELI, 27 year old, Indigenous Woman, Central Coast**

Indigenous Campesinos had few options and few sources of support to assuage pandemic difficulties. Their only option was to keep working, despite hazards and contagious, unsanitary conditions in the fields and packing houses. Heat and wildfire smoke exacerbated this. Unstable

salaries made it difficult for Indigenous Campesinos to make their rents, which also continued to rise.

The pandemic continued to ravage Campesino communities as CARES Act support and rent moratoriums ended--on September 4 and September 30, 2021 respectively--even though the pandemic had not ended. In California, a major housing shortage and market boom made Indigenous Campesinos vulnerable to evictions and homelessness. Farmworker housing was often of poor quality and overcrowded prior to the pandemic and became more crowded as families, friends, and coworkers moved in together to help each other cope. This, in turn, made it hard for Campesinos to follow guidance around quarantining when sick.

> We are forced to work. If we stay at home, where is the money going to come from?
>
> **-- SOLEDAD, 30 year old Mixtec Woman, Central Coast**

> My life has changed, and mainly, the lives of my children as well. Now, my children are cooped up inside the house. My fear is that I will become infected, but my main fear is that my children will contract the virus. I am scared to spread the virus to my children, because I go out and look for work. I am scared to catch the virus and pass it to my children.
>
> **--ERNESTO, 41 year old Zapotec Man, San Joaquin Valley**

> Housing is very expensive. It is difficult to find places to live, now that it's impossible to find something economical. Sometimes they require you to have good credit. When we do not have a credit line or documents, they do not want to rent us, and they charge us more when we have small children. Renting a two-bedroom home costs $2,500. It's a lot for us who work in the fields.
>
> **--ELISEO, 36 year old Mixtec man, Central Coast**

> We need money to pay the rent. The landlords do not wait for you to collect the rent. Because when the first of the month comes, they are already ready to grab the money.
>
> **--ROSARIO, 34 year old Mixtec Woman, Central Coast**

> I wouldn't know what to do if someone in my family got sick because I don't have an extra room... We only live in a trailer, all crowded..
>
> **--NATIVIDAD, 25 year old Triqui woman, Central Coast**

> I worry because I am renting a room where there are a lot of people that can infect me with COVID-19 [...] I worry because I live with lots of other families, and I do not know if they are protecting themselves when they go out.
>
> **--FERMINA, 29 year old Indigenous Woman, Central Coast**

> I am very worried because in July 2020 I will be homeless. The owner of the house notified me that I have to vacate because he is going to remodel the house. Now, I'm looking for a place to rent, but I can't find one. I only have the month of June to find a place to stay with my two children and my mom.
>
> **--CLEMENCIA, 24 year old Triqui woman, San Joaquin Valley**

> I moved to my sister's house so I could make rent, because alone, we couldn't. I moved in with my sister in March [2020].
>
> **--YENEDIT, 25 year old Indigenous Woman, Central Coast**

In addition to housing insecurities, Indigenous Campesinos also shared their challenges with affording and accessing enough food--especially foods that they deemed appropriate to nurture and care for their families--during the first several months of the pandemic. The closure of flea markets and widespread panic-buying had a big impact on Campesinos, who often have to stretch their meager incomes. School closures also exacerbated Indigenous Campesino food insecurity, as workers shared that they had to buy more food since their children were home and eating more. That Campesinos cannot access or afford food is a significant failure of the food system and is by no means limited to pandemic times. It has been and remains difficult for Indigenous Campesinos to access food assistance, such as food banks or school lunch distributions, since the times when these are typically held conflict with work schedules and may be too geographically distant from where workers live.

> ... I'm worried about being out of work. There is not much work because they're not selling as much fruits and vegetables as before. If we do not work, how will we be able to buy our food?
>
> **--HILARIA, 49 year old Zapotec Woman, San Joaquin Valley**

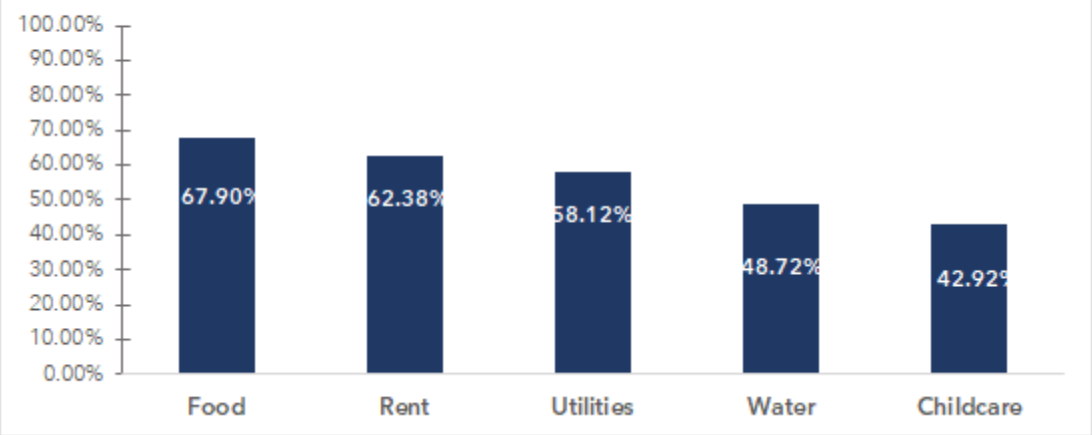
> It became harder for me, because the kids ate more, and I could not afford the extra expenses. Now, I have to go to the stores that are farther away because they are cheaper, and there's not enough staple foods in the nearby stores. On top of all this, the hours at work are reduced.
>
> **--SARAIT, 29 year old Indigenous woman, San Joaquin Valley**

> I don't even know how to explain it to you. When they say "healthy food," it's as if they're saying that we poor folks couldn't eat healthy. I don't know if there are any people from my town who eat well. Yes, we get beans, and what we have is what we eat.
>
> **--IRMA, 34 year old Mixtec Woman, San Joaquin Valley**

For me, it's difficult to go to work or go to the store. Because I have diabetes, I am more vulnerable because of my health.

--ASUNCIÓN, 47 year old Mixtec Woman, Central Coast

Chart 10: Percentage of COFS Indigenous Campesinos who experienced challenges paying for basic needs during the early months of the pandemic (May-July 2020).



Indigenous Campesino families struggled with childcare shortages and the closure of schools, and worried about leaving their children with people outside of their household where they could be exposed to COVID-19. Parents resorted to having one parent (usually a mother, an older sibling, or another female relative) stay home to care for young children. In some cases, older children took on the responsibility of caring for and teaching their younger siblings. Single mothers felt the squeeze intensely. Limited internet access, high costs for spotty service, lack of broadband infrastructure in rural communities, and unfamiliar technologies distributed without accompanying support made matters worse. So, too, did the isolation children experienced. School districts were not prepared or resourced appropriately to support Indigenous language speaking families technologically, educationally, or emotionally. This intensified the digital divide and pre-existing educational disparities for Indigenous Campesinos' children.

I have to work, despite all the fears I have of the disease. I have 6 children to support, and I can't stop working because my husband died in 2015, and I am now responsible for everything. My children stopped going to school. It was difficult to find anyone willing to take care of them; they were scared to let someone into their home because of COVID-19. Besides, paying for childcare for 5 children is a lot of money. Now, I leave them home with great concern because my 14-year-old daughter stays to take care of them because I couldn't find someone to take care of them.

--EUSEBIA, 41 year old Mixtec Woman, Central Coast

I don't know what to do. I have 3 children and my husband left me. I'm worried because I'm alone. I don't have enough money to support my daughters. I am the only one who works and let's say work is not going very well. I would like there to be more help for single mothers.

--ASUNCIÓN, 47 year old Mixtec Woman, Central Coast

It is very expensive to have someone else take care of your children. People are taking advantage of the situation because they say they too run the risk of getting sick, and that is why they increased the price.

--HERIBERTO, 48 year old Indigenous man, San Joaquin Valley

It changed a lot for the kids. For instance, in some cases, children study what they read. You can't learn everything through a computer. You can't learn as much as...now my husband studies with the computer he bought. That's a long time-consuming thing. It's a time consuming thing. He doesn't understand it. There's a lot, a lot that my kids tell me that I don't understand. "Who else can help them?" I'm just telling them to give it their all. What can I tell you? I can't tell you more.

--HORTENSIA, 44 year old Mixtec woman, San Joaquin Valley

We pay $360 a month for childcare. Now that the children don't go to school, it's very difficult for me to help them with homework because we don't speak English and there are things we don't understand.

--ITZEL, 29 year old Mixtec Woman, Central Coast

How can I tell you, like...we take care of our children. To study you have to use the internet, the internet we have is low cost. We ask the school, where can they help the children, so that they can study? We ask, "can't they provide them with the internet?" That's what we tell them. Here in [the area where we live] they gave small boxes [hotspots] for the children to study. At least that's what people say, but we don't know. So we went to ask. [They tell us] "We can't send support. Go where your children go to school and there you can ask … Talk to the internet company that you pay and talk to them so they can help you." That's what they say. The district didn't want to help. We had to invest to have better internet service, so our children could study well. Still, the internet goes out, or when there are too many kids using it, they can't study properly. That's what I'm saying.

--SOLEDAD, 30 year old Mixtec Woman, Central Coast

Chart 11: COFS Indigenous Campesino households with children faced more difficulties meeting basic needs during the pandemic (May-July 2020).

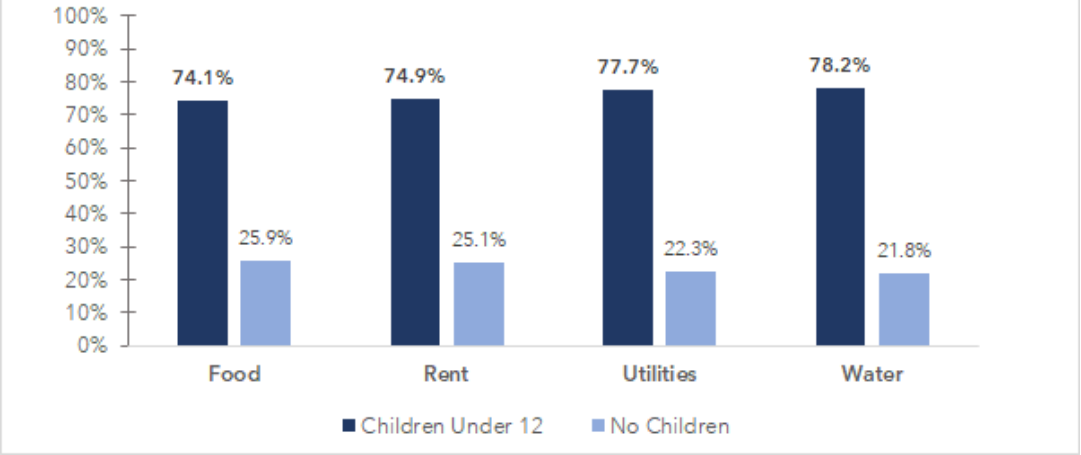
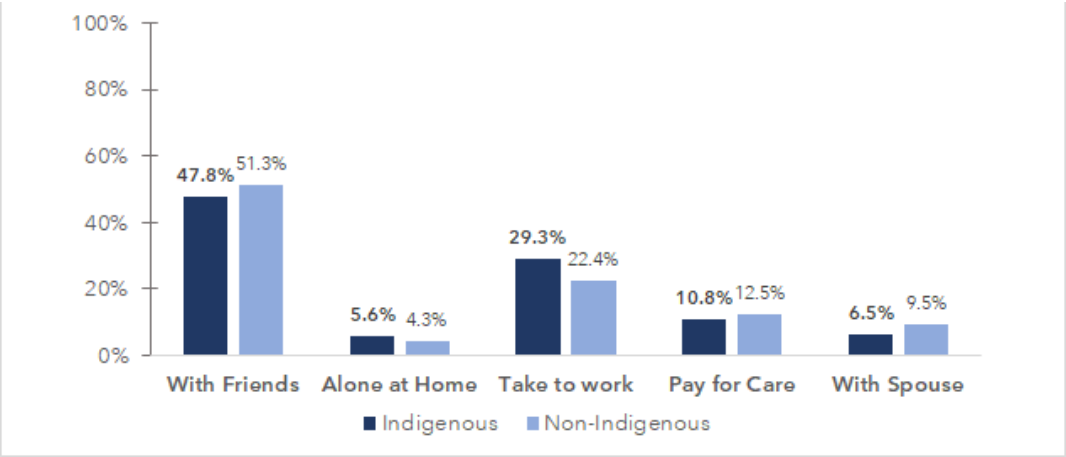


Chart 12: Childcare options for children under age 12, COFS Indigenous Campesinos vs. COFS non-Indigenous Campesinos



Adding to Indigenous Campesinos' pandemic challenges, many faced significant barriers when seeking access to resources and support. Months prior to the pandemic, under the Trump administration, public charge policies alerted undocumented and mixed status households that they would lose opportunities to apply for citizenship if anyone in their households-- even if they were citizens-- had ever relied on any form of public assistance. Citizen children of undocumented Campesinos in California have long been eligible for WIC, EBT, housing support, and state subsidized health care programs. Mixed-status households were excluded from the pandemic-related federal stimulus, and not all undocumented Campesinos in California were able to access the state-sponsored, one-time stimulus. Information about and access to resources are rarely provided in Indigenous languages or in ways that are accessible to communities. Too

many support programs also have burdensome paperwork that many people--let alone Indigenous Campesinos--cannot read and understand. Assistance and emergency support programs often require excessive proof of documentation that Campesinos do not possess. Unlivable salaries combine with these routine and legal exclusions to create impossible situations for Indigenous Campesinos and their families. Many Indigenous Campesinos expressed appreciation for the support they did receive, especially food assistance for their children (e.g. Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer or PEBT), but noted that it fell short or carried too many limitations.

> I would need help to be able to...I had said, like the doctor, we don't have doctors...like, where to go if we get sick with this illness. Like, those of us who are working, they tell us that they can pay us where we work if we catch this illness. So they say. But if you are not working, where can they pay you? Because there is no place where they can pay you... No...I don't know what you're talking about. Like, the help that the government gives. They say they are giving assistance for the pandemic Um...maybe for those who have social security, maybe for those who have been stopped from working [due to COVID] as they are the ones who can apply for it. We don't know about that because there is no information available in our mother tongue. We don't...they talk about assistance, but...uh for food stamps we already know about that. And the other aid, the one they talk about, monetary aid, we don't know. The truth is we don't even know about it, we haven't asked about it if it's already there. But that is all. We don't get any help.
>
> **--SOLEDAD, 30 year old Mixtec Woman, Central Coast**

> Since the virus began, we went to ask for food stamps for the children. My children received the help that the state gave to the students, but it was very little because now the children are at home all day and they need more things. But this assistance was great. The children received this help because they go to school. I mean there isn't enough help for us immigrants. For example, they did not give help to immigrant parents who have children born in the United States. I mean, the government did not help us. I am not saying that they should have helped us 100% or 50%, but at least 40%. Compared to people who have papers, they helped them more. They helped them like 100%. I mean, if they couldn't have helped us, at least help the children. They could have given like $100 or $200 more for the children. Anyway, they didn't give cash but money specifically for the children's food. Just for the food. I submitted an application for help, but they never contacted me or called me back. I don't know what happened. No organization helped me even with rent. In fact, now they have raised my rent.
>
> **--ERNESTO, 41 year old Zapotec Man, San Joaquin Valley**

NEGLECT AND ABUSE AT WORK

For far too long, Campesinos have faced dangerous and hazardous working conditions. It is unsurprising that routine workplace safety concerns came up in survey responses and interviews, even though the questions largely focused on conditions at work amidst COVID-19. COVID-19 simply became another life-threatening hazard. Indigenous Campesinos in the COFS were intensely conscientious about the dangers of COVID-19 and exercised heightened vigilance even though employers did not always take worker health and safety seriously. Basic protections that are covered under California wage and hour, labor, and occupational health and safety laws are routinely ignored, misconstrued, or violated by employers, supervisors, and foreman, or outright violated in agricultural workplaces. Workers' demands that these policies be followed represent the bare minimum of rights and protections they deserve and should be afforded in accordance with the law.

> Sometimes it is really hard, when the ground is slippery, and it is hard for me to keep a healthy distance, but I try my best to keep my distance.
>
> **--ITZEL, 29 year old Mixtec Woman, Central Coast**

> When we have 2 or 3 people working, sometimes they don't even have water for the workers. Also, the bathrooms are very far away and after working 12 to 13 hours, why don't they clean the bathrooms more often? They are very filthy. They want us to work fast every day. But we also get tired. There are many people who are elderly now and sometimes the foreman threatens us because we don't work fast enough. They say that if we don't work faster they are going to fire us.
>
> **--ELISEO, 36 year old Mixtec Man, Central Coast**

> The ladders are broken and they have to be replaced because it is dangerous.
>
> **--OMAR, 42 year old Indigenous Man, San Joaquin Valley**

> I hurt myself two weeks ago, I fell off a ladder. Now they have me cleaning the little weeds around the tree for hours because I can't pick right now because of my hand…and now I am fighting with the workers' compensation insurance company to get help since I am working less.
>
> **--ABELINO, 29 year old Mixtec Man, Central Coast**

> ...I would like them to change the water [because] it tastes very salty when I drink the water. It does not take away my thirst.
>
> **--PRUDENCIA, 35year old Mixtec Woman, Central Coast**

> ...We just want to leave a little earlier. It's getting very hot, 104 degrees.
>
> **--EVERARDO, 26 year old Indigenous Man, San Joaquin Valley**

> There should be a safety measure because now they are using [strawberry harvesting machines], and it is harder. They don't give us enough breaks like they should. The company put in machines, it goes too fast. We can't keep up with the speed at which they go. Also, they don't give us our lunch break, the 30 minutes as it should be, nor the breaks... The bosses don't comply with the rest policy because they don't give us the breaks. They tell us that they are going to pay it, but they don't pay it in the checks. When the check comes, it only has the amount of the boxes we picked. He lies to us.
>
> **--CONSUELO, 39 year old Mixtec Woman, Central Coast**

> Even without coronavirus, we have to change out of our clothes, because pesticides are really harmful to our family and to ourselves.
>
> **--LEONARDO, 25 year old Zapotec Man, San Joaquin Valley**

While eventually the CDC issued guidelines for agricultural workplaces, and California also instated COVID-19-specific protective policies and paid-sick leave, Campesinos experienced inconsistent or lack of enforcement across different worksites. In some cases, COVID-19 protocols as enforced contradicted or conflicted with other rules or practices, especially when it came to distancing in the fields between rows or where workers deposit harvested product and around shade structures, break, bathroom, and drinking water areas. Filthy and insufficient bathrooms and handwashing stations without adequate soap and sanitizers are routine indignities for COFS participants. They also expressed frustration about the insufficient or nonexistent provision of appropriate masks and other protective equipment.

It is troubling that Indigenous Campesinos observed some employers and supervisors interpreting the guidelines very loosely or dismissing them entirely. In some cases, Indigenous Campesinos were shamed or dismissed when they attempted to take care of their health and protect co-workers by staying home or seeking care for illnesses. Indigenous campesinos observed differences in protections and sick leave between different employers. For example, Zenaida noted:

I went to work in the cherries in Stockton in June. They only had two bathrooms there, without water, filthy, they didn't clean them. They didn't keep their distance, they didn't wear masks. When I told the foreman, he told me that Stockton does not have the same regulations as Fresno County. He said they don't have to! They don't care about our health.

--ZENAIDA, 27 year old Mixtec Woman, San Joaquin Valley

Employers sometimes engage in wage theft and evade overtime rules by paying workers in cash, minimizing their hours or piecerates, or forcing them to work under different names so that it appears no overtime is earned. Many Campesinos now must work under multiple contractors seven days a week as well as taking on informal jobs to make ends meet. This also leaves them more vulnerable to COVID-19 exposures that are more difficult to trace. Indigenous Campesinos note that this is a result of the push for productivity above worker health and safety. Some employers did much better than others at following COVID-19 protocols, and those *practicas recomendadas* (recommendations) will be discussed in the Conclusion. Overall, workers felt that their productivity took precedence over their humanity.

...Everybody should wear a mask, the bathrooms should be cleaned every day and if not every hour...There is no soap in the bathrooms...everybody drinks from the same water, everybody touches the faucet and nobody can wash their hands because there is no soap and if there is soap it is because the foreman buys it himself, and everybody touches the same bottle of soap...there is no way to dry our hands...they don't give us masks or anything...they don't do anything.... I worry a lot at work because there are people who are coughing a lot.

--DAVID, 21 year old Indigenous Man, San Joaquin Valley

We are not allowed to bring our own food. At lunchtime, a food vendor arrives to sell food and we all crowd together, most of us take off our masks or bandannas.

--HILARIA, 49 year old Zapotec Woman, San Joaquin Valley

It is difficult to maintain physical distance because of the machinery.

--EFRAIN, 40 year old Indigenous Man, San Joaquin Valley

They don’t give us any equipment to protect ourselves.

--TEODORO, 47 year old Indigenous Man, San Joaquin Valley

I work in the fields, in the table grapes. But before that I was working in covering garlic, but I had a doctor's appointment. My son took me to my appointment, and I went back to

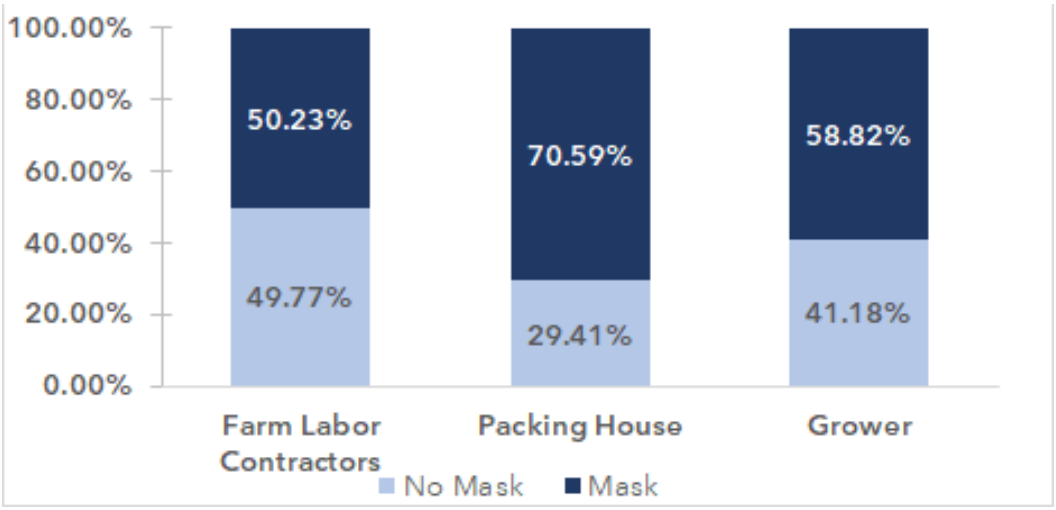
work on the garlic production. But my boss wouldn't let me anymore. He told me that maybe I went somewhere else to work, and I must have surely contracted COVID-19 and just brought it to infect his workers, and they fired me... And I had to wait until they started the grapes (table), that's where I am working now...

--FLOR, 48 year old Mixtec Woman, San Joaquin Valley

They should wear masks, put on gloves, no matter if it's a company or a contractor. They should provide gloves. They should wash their hands when they work. Because when we work, depending on the place, we pass and pass the product when we work. They have yet to get sick. They only tell us: "nothing good is coming," let them at least say, "the disease has affected people," they need to say it. And I think we will all stop working. One place I went to work with a contractor, he wouldn't even give us gloves. "If you want to wear gloves on your hands you have to buy them yourself, otherwise you can work without them." They don't care about you because, "that's how you're going to work." They don't care,

--ROSARIO, 34 year old Mixtec Woman, Central Coast

Chart 13: Provision of masks to COFS Indigenous Campesinos by employer type (May-July 2020)



Feeling safe en route to work also proved difficult for Indigenous Campesinos. Many do not have personal vehicles or drivers' licenses and depend on paid rides (*raiteros*) to get to and from work. Some FLCs require workers to buy rides to work regardless of whether or not the workers may have their own ride. Masking, distancing, and sanitation did not always happen during carpools or were inconsistent, leaving workers to feel devalued despite their "essential" title.

...We can't take people in our car if they don't live in our home, but still people don't respect it and will give a ride to anyone.

--FERNANDA, 41 year old Mixtec woman, Central Coast

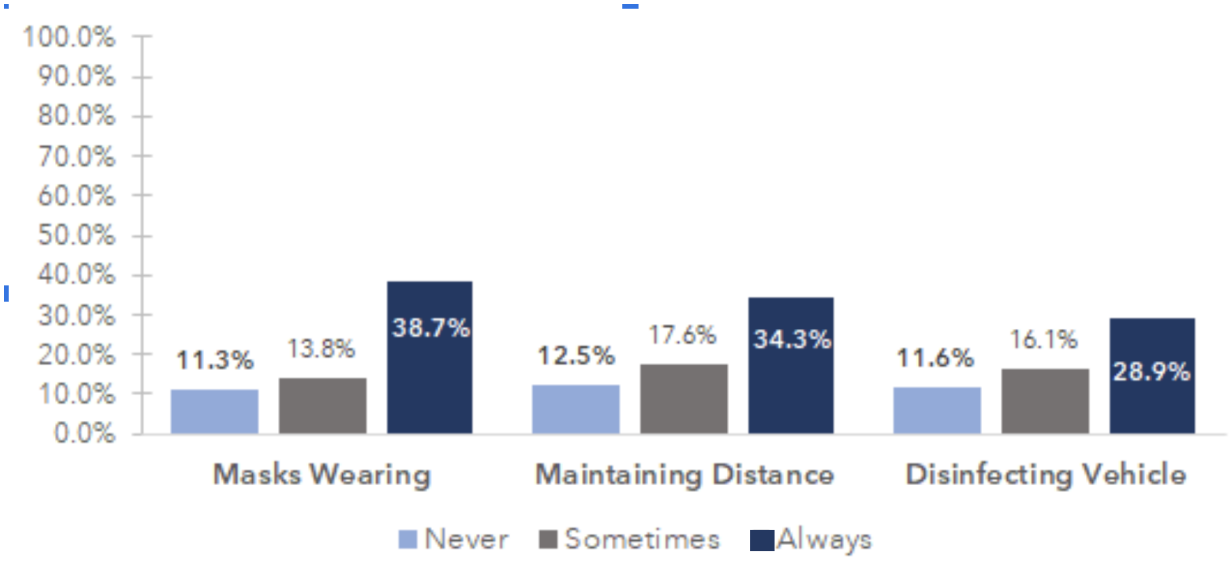
I don't feel safe carpooling to work because of COVID-19, but I have to go because I need to work.

--FERMINA, 29 year old Mixtec woman, Central Coast

The guest workers ride in a 9-person van and none of them wear masks to protect themselves.

--LAURA, 18 year old Mixtec Woman, Central Coast, on guestworkers

Chart 14: Hygiene practices in vehicles reported by COFS Indigenous Campesinos



Indigenous Campesinos feel that more training around and information about COVID-19 is needed at worksites. Several shared that foremen and supervisors sometimes interpreted COVID-19 guidenaces too loosely. Indigenous Campesinos recommend weekly talks and updates about COVID-19 and prevention measures at work so that new employees or visiting contract workers will have the information they need to stay safe. While health information privacy laws prevent employers from sharing specific details about who is sick, workers do have the right to know if they have been exposed. They know that concealing this information puts them, their families, and their coworkers at risk.

He doesn’t take time to talk with the workers. He [the foreman] doesn't notice if the other people are well or not ...We don't know if the bandana protects us.

--SOL, 29 year old Mixtec woman, San Joaquin Valley

The boss needs to tell the foreman to remind everyone regularly. They should have a talk every week with the people because right now it’s like every month.

--DOMINGA, 31 year old Triqui Woman, CENTRAL COAST

At the job where I am working right now, they don't give any information about the coronavirus. When I went to the flea market they did give a bit of information and masks. But where I am now, they only give information on how to do our job, nothing more.

--FLOR, 48 year old Mixtec Woman, San Joaquin Valley

The reason they have not been given face masks, says the interviewee, is because "it is not yet at a dangerous level.”

--JUAN, 29 year old Indigenous man, San Joaquín Valley

Men wear masks and women wear bandanas. There are some coworkers who don't follow the regulations, even though they give us a talk every two weeks.

--LEOCADIA, 28 year old Mixtec woman, Central Coast

They don't tell us anything. Where my husband works is where they said they were going to send [COVID-19] tests, but that was months ago, and I haven't heard anything . They don't give information--I don't really know who has been tested for this disease [...] I don't know about that. Like we sometimes say, like we really don't know and it's true.

--PERLA, 34 year old Mixtec woman, San Joaquin Valley

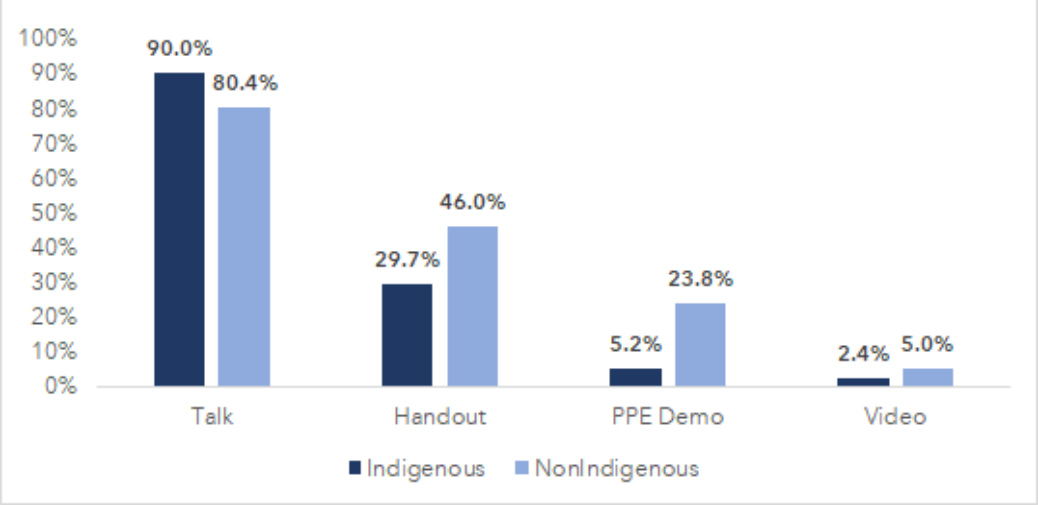
They should give masks to the workers and comply with distancing. When we started to work, they didn't give us the talk because the other workers had already started... [In other words, new arrivals to worksites miss out on the information].

--BELÉN, 31 year old Mixtec Woman, San Joaquin Valley

I would like them to demand that they wear their masks properly. Many people think it is optional and just wear it hanging. [...] They should tell us [at work] when a person tests positive. Why do they hide it? We only find out because the person is no longer on the crew and they start taking our temperature.

--ALMA, 31 year old Zapotec woman, San Joaquin Valley

Chart 15: Type of COVID-19 training offered to COFS Indigenous vs. non-Indigenous Campesinos



While it is laudable that California, unlike other states with large agricultural budgets, started offering COVID-19-specific paid sick leave to Campesinos starting in September 2020 and ending September 2021, many Indigenous Campesinos did not know about it or were denied access to this benefit by supervisor neglect or by overly cumbersome paperwork requirements. Workers worried that if they were sent home from work due to having symptoms or testing positive for COVID-19 that they would not be able to pay their bills. Other researchers have noted that the consequences of not having paid sick leave resulted in many Monterey County Campesinos coming to work sick and/or knowing they had tested positive for COVID-19 for fear of losing income.[24] This represents yet another example where well-intended policies without enforcement and effective outreach fail Indigenous Campesinos. Indigenous participants who were out of work also noted that the policy did not include them.

> If you get the disease, if we don't take care of ourselves...they stop you from working. That's what they say. That is what worries me because if we get sick or if someone gets sick, they fire you. Where we live we pay rents, we pay our debts, and if we rest, how will we manage? There is no help to...support us. That's what we don't know, if we need help, where can we go?
>
> **--ROSARIO, 34 year old Mixtec Woman, Central Coast**

[24] Lewnard, J. A., Mora, A. M., Nkwocha, O., Kogut, K., Rauch, S. A., Morga, N., Hernandez, S., Wong, M. P., Huen, K., Andrejko, K., Jewell, N. P., Parra, K. L., Holland, N., Harris, E., Cuevas, M., Eskenazi, B., & CHAMACOS-Project-19 Study Team. Prevalence and Clinical Profile of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 Infection among Farmworkers, California, USA, June-November 2020. *Emerging infectious diseases*, *27*(5), 1330–1342, (2021). https://doi.org/10.3201/eid2705.204949

[My husband] didn't feel well. And so he went to work. I don't know if he went to the hospital or if he went to the clinic...he went, because they told him "you have coronavirus and you have to stay home for 40 days, shut in, and until then, you can work." That's how they told him. He was home, but when he finished his quarantine, the contractor where he worked didn't pay him for his sick days. They didn't pay him.

--ROSARIO, 34 year old Mixtec Woman, Central Coast

There is also a need for help with the rent, especially in this country. You have to pay for everything. If you don't pay, you get evicted from your home. You need a lot of help when you come out positive because we have a family, children to support.

--HILARIA, 49 year old Zapotec Woman, San Joaquin Valley

HEALTH AND HEALTHCARE

> The cost of living is very high. We need them to provide more help for us essential workers. We run the risk of infecting our family members and we still have to pay more [for healthcare]. It is not fair!
>
> **--HERMINIA, 57 year old Indigenous woman, San Joaquin Valley**

> Due to lack of medical insurance, I wouldn't go to the clinic... For people like us who don't have papers, the bills are very expensive.
>
> **--ELIAZAR, 32 year old Zapotec man, Central Coast**

Campesinos in California are often uninsured or underinsured when it comes to healthcare.[25] 54% of COFS Camepsino participants reported costs, lack of insurance, and/or lack of sick leave as significant barriers that would prevent them from accessing healthcare, even if they were ill. Another 13% of respondents identified fear of government agencies and 8% reported a mistrust of the healthcare system as an impediment to seeking care, fears which preceded and has been exacerbated by the pandemic. In addition to the hazards faced at work, en route to work, and in overcrowded dwellings, COFS Campesino participants expressed anguish and frustration with the high costs of healthcare. They worried what would happen if they were to be hospitalized for COVID-19 and left with massive medical bills. This was especially evident in the stories shared by Indigenous Campesinos. They know that they are essential workers working in dangerous and contagious conditions with little to no support for them when they get sick from COVID-19 or other illnesses or diseases. They also know that their access to programs like Medi-Cal is contingent upon them having legal status. Campesinos who already suffer from chronic conditions, like cancer or diabetes, are even more vulnerable to both contracting and suffering life threatening consequences from COVID-19. Employer-based insurance programs that deduct from Campesinos' already meager salaries are not a good option unless salaries are increased to make this affordable for workers. Otherwise, both preventative and emergency healthcare will continue to be deprioritized for more immediate family needs like rent, food, utilities, and transportation to and from work. Campesinos in the COFS expressed that they would access care for their children who are covered by programs like Medi-Cal.

> When I was diagnosed with cancer, the doctor told me that because of my health, I could not work under the sun. But I have to go to work because if I don't work, I can't make ends meet... I only ask God to protect me because the doctor tells me that in my

[25] Artiga, S., and M. Diaz. 2019. Issue Brief: Health Coverage and Care of Undocumented Immigrants. Kaiser Family Foundation. https://www.kff.org/racial-equity-and-health-policy/issue-brief/health-coverage-and-care-of-undocumentedimmigrants/

condition, it is very dangerous to work. I would like to stay at home with my children, but I cannot. You have to work to earn money because the bills don't wait.

--FLOR, age 48, Mixtec Woman, San Joaquin Valley

There are some people I know who didn't go to the doctor because they don't have health insurance. To go to the clinic or hospital is very expensive. When you go to the hospital without Medi-Cal, they charge a lot. That's why a lot of people don't go. People stay home and it is easier to die from coronavirus at home.

--HILARIA, 49 year old Zapotec Woman, San Joaquin Valley

We don't have enough money. And when we don't have insurance, it's something that worries us because when we get sick there are bills to pay at home plus medicine...we don't have it. We don't have Medi-Cal. We don't even have insurance. Because sometimes when you get sick, you can't go to get treated because you don't have insurance. You don't have the support. They don't want to go to the clinic because of the documentation they ask for... It would be good for us poor people who don't have papers, that they don't ask for them. And if you don't have insurance, you worry about going to the clinic because they just take your money there. When we go, they ask you how much you earn, they ask for your paycheck stub. And they bill you for everything. And they tell you, "This is your bill." They just tell you... The truth is, I tell [my employer], I have been working for many years and then and even now they don't provide insurance. They say, yes there is, but "it's going to take $10 or $30 dollars out of your check every week, if you want to have insurance." So they say. What can we do with insurance? It's okay if we were sick like this every day. Every week they take $10, $30 out of our check ... I don't want them to take it out of my check because my check is already meager, and if they take it out, my check is going to come out to be less. If they wanted to, they could give us social security because we work with them.

--ROSARIO, 34 year old Mixtec Woman, Central Coast

Health insurance is very important. Everyone should have health insurance but because of every situation of every person, sometimes we do not have legal status, we cannot have health insurance, which is very important.

--IGNACIO , 40 year old Mixtec man, San Joaquin Valley

I can't go to the doctor because I don't have health insurance. Going to the doctor is very expensive, and I don't have the money to pay for it. I can barely afford the bare necessities for my family.

--LORENZO, 35 year old Mixtec Man, San Joaquin Valley

We don't go to the doctor because we don't have insurance. We just take our daughter.

--MARIA de JESUS, 30 year old Mixtec Woman, San Joaquin Valley

At least our kids have Medi-Cal, so we think it won't be difficult for them to receive medical attention.

--CORNELIO, 42 year old Indigenous man, San Joaquin Valley

Many Indigenous Campesinos in the study expressed fear about seeking care from hospitals during the height of the pandemic. They did not want to die alone. They did not want to be burdened with exorbitant bills or leave unbearable debts to family members should they die of COVID or another disease. Others worried about contracting COVID in healthcare settings or having to miss work or wait for a long time to access testing. They also weren't always certain that the COVID-19 tests were free of cost, or where to go for testing.

This is a testament to the failure of local and state agencies to provide vital and life saving information to Indigenous communities. Instead, this work was left by default to CBOs like CBDIO and VCC/FWCC, which spend a great deal of time informing Indigenous community members, hosting testing and vaccination clinics, and making people aware of programs like Emergency Medi-Cal, which does cover COVID-19 expenses for the un- and underinsured. Many Indigenous Campesinos do not know about these programs because the information is not available to them in their languages, and the words used to describe things like "quarantine" or "contract tracing" that do not have obvious equivalents in Indigenous languages.

CBDIO and VCC/FWCC are among the few campesino-serving CBOs that employ highly skilled community workers who speak different Indigenous languages. At the start of the pandemic, they did not have sufficient staff or resources to scale up their outreach efforts to the extent needed to fully support Indigenous Campesinos. People want to do the right things to better protect themselves and their families.

I am scared because sometimes the hospital or clinic is full and I am afraid to go with my children to the clinic because we are worried because we feel that they can get infected with this disease. And this is a delicate matter.

--ROSARIO, 34 year old Mixtec Woman, Central Coast

Because there are many like us who do not have insurance, like the indigenous people. There are a lot of us. If we went [for a COVID-19 test], it would fill up a lot [of lines]. We would have to be there for a whole day to get through. That is what they say. But we don't know. We have not gone.

--SOLEDAD, 30 year old Mixtec Woman, Central Coast

I just have emergency insurance and I don't know if that covers [the tests or treatment for COVID-19].

--ABELINO, 29 year old Mixtec Man, Central Coast

Health insurance is very expensive, I don't have MediCal and I don't have the financial means to go.

--ELENA, 41 year old Indigenous Woman, San Joaquin Valley

My health insurance doesn't cover much. I don't know if it covers coronavirus treatments.

--REYNA, 25 year old Mixtec Woman, Central Coast

I want to know where we can get treatment if we were exposed to the virus. What are my options because I recently arrived from Mexico and it has been hard for my daughter and me**.**

--RAMONA, 45 year old Mixtec Woman, San Joaquin Valley

If they know about the information on how we can take better care of ourselves, they should tell us so that we can improve our health.

--IRMA, 34 year old Mixtec Woman, San Joaquin Valley

I don’t know anything about that. No one talks about that, I don’t know anything about health insurance.

--CANDELARIO, 21 year old Triqui Man, Central Coast

Oh it's better, like, when we work they talk to us. Someone reads to us and we understand each other. Like on the radio they broadcast and we listen. Like for example some, while some can read Spanish, we don't understand it well. And that's why on the radio they speak our language and that's how we understand one another.

--SOLEDAD, 30 year old Mixtec Woman, Central Coast

What I want to ask. Ohhh, there are a lot of questions that I can't remember now. What do I want to ask? You [community worker/interviewer] know the information because you give them information. What do you tell them if the [COVID] numbers are going down or if it is still serious, if there are several sick people? Because we do not know. Do you know of any support that can help us? I ask you if you know of any support that can help us. We have no money. I am very grateful to God for the help you give us. There are no jobs to work. We need help. We don't have money to cover the needs we have. We are afraid of the disease, infection rates are increasing. What kind of help is there? I am asking more questions. If there’s nothing, it's ok. If there is no help it's okay. There’s a lot

of things lacking. I don't remember well, I forget some things. Where I work there is a need. The bathroom is not clean. I don't know if that's why people get sick.

--IRMA--34 year old Mixtec Woman, San Joaquin Valley

Indigenous communities have learned to avoid healthcare systems and hospitals due to being un- and underinsured, but they also expressed a lack of faith and confidence in medical doctors. Indigenous peoples' needs are not met well in clinical settings, where healthcare provider attention is rushed, where it is assumed that all brown-skinned people have the same health issues and speak fluent Spanish, and where medicalized racism is commonplace (intentional or not). Phone-based interpretation services are no substitute for on-site Indigenous language interpreters who not only translate but relate to Indigenous patients. Long standing patterns of disinvestment in rural communities further reduce Indigenous Campesinos' access to healthcare. In some cases, the nearest hospital is up to 50 miles away.

I am distrustful about going to the clinic or hospital.

--FERNANDA, 41 year old Mixtec woman, Central Coast

My only concern about going and receiving medical care is access to interpretation. I speak Zapotec Alto, and I don't know if they will be able to give me an interpreter when I go. I'm afraid that language will be an impediment.

--DOLORES, 29 year old Zapotec woman, San Joaquin Valley

My fear is going to the hospital.

--HILARIA, 49 year old Zapotec Woman, San Joaquin Valley

I am afraid and anxious about catching coronavirus and for my family because I no longer have trust in doctors.

--HONESTO, 51 year old Indigenous man, San Joaquin Valley

...I don't have insurance, and I would go to the clinics, but sometimes they don't do not care for us as they should, because they don't treat us well.

--EUSEBIA, 41 year old Mixtec Woman, Central Coast

We need help here in this small town. We can't do much. When we get sick, we have to travel a long way, we go to Bakersfield. This town is very small, it's not big, it's small. The town is small and there is nowhere to go. I'm worried that they won't make a cure for the sickness in case we get sick.

--GERARDO, 35 year old Mixtec man, San Joaquin Valley

Some study participants shared that they coped during the pandemic by relying on family and community networks for support, and through their own cultural knowledge of home remedies. This Traditional Indigenous Knowledge helped people during periods of sparse, confusing, or inaccessible guidance from health officials. Instead of dismissing or disparaging Indigenous coping and healing strategies, they should be valorized, supported, and leveraged during future disasters. Indigenous healing methods, like teas, soups, prayers, and plant-based remedies, helped get people through bouts of COVID-19 and intense periods of stress, fear, and anxiety. Friends and family members distributed food to one another, and they shared information about COVID-19 and resources through well-established and strong community and language networks. Participants expressed their gratitude to community outreach workers and promotoras from CBDIO, VCC/FWCC, and other trusted CBOs for listening to them, helping them, and for conducting this research.

> If we get sick, may God help us to recover. If we go to work or go out now it is easier to get sick because our bodies are weak. If a family member gets sick, the doctors have no medicine. We are going to take remedies that we know. May God help us, may the remedy help us get better. Yes because, if we don't get medicine [...] Yes, they say there is a family member who got sick, it is a family member we know. They tell us not to go out to the store. When we go to work, they tell us to wear a mask. They tell us to take care of ourselves because it is dangerous. [Our family member] got sick with flu and went to the hospital . There they tested her. They said she had COVID. I don't know if it's true that she got sick or not, or if they just told us that. She has recovered.
>
> **--IRMA, 34 year old Mixtec Woman, San Joaquin Valley**

> They say they had it for about a week but they quarantined. They say they recovered by drinking hot tea.
>
> **--SANTIAGO, 43 year old Zapotec man, San Joaquin Valley**

> My dad trusts his grandfather's traditional healing practices more than those of physicians.
>
> **--ESTELA, 18 year old Indigenous woman, San Joaquin Valley**

> Uh...we don't know because...there's nowhere to ask. Because we don't even go to the doctor. If we go to the doctor, like me, if I go to the doctor, it's if I'm pregnant and that's when I go to the doctor. But for us when we have the flu, we go to the store for medicine, but we don't go to the doctor.
>
> **--SOLEDAD, 30 year old Mixtec Woman, Central Coast**

No, I didn't even know how to apply for Medi-Cal, and an acquaintance helped me so that's why I have Medi-Cal to help me with the costs of my illness. I only have Medi-Cal.

--FLOR, 48 year old Mixtec Woman, San Joaquin Valley

The Binational Center for the Development of Indigenous Oaxacan Communities helps us when we need support. They inform us if there is help available. I only trust them because they speak my language and we understand each other well. If we need help, we can't go to another place because we can't communicate with them, we don't speak Spanish, we understand very little, we don't understand well...Fidelina [de CBDIO] was the one who told me where to go to get a free COVID test. We didn't go because I had a bad cold, and I couldn't go. It was her who informed me about the free tests.

--IRMA, 34 year old Mixtec Woman, San Joaquin Valley

My wife and I got sick [with COVID-19], but we didn't go to the doctor. We called a health center and they told us that if we were very sick, we should go to the emergency room, but thank God we didn't have to go. For two weeks we did not go to work, but we are much better now.

--CONSTANTINO, 44 year old Indigenous man, San Joaquin Valley

I go to the Orange Cove clinic...over there, they take care of me, because I have many health problems...from stomach issues and cysts.

--AURELIA, 50 year old Mixtec Woman, San Joaquin Valley

I also receive information from the clinic when I go for appointments. The clinic also leaves us documents that have information about the virus. I trust the Merced clinics the most**.**

--ERNESTO, 41 year old Zapotec Man, San Joaquin Valley

Many rural communities lack broadband infrastructure, which puts monthly internet service financially out of reach. While many school districts, with state and philanthropic funding, provided hotspots and tablets for students to use, schools were not resourced to provide support services to help Indigenous Campesino families and students learn how to use these devices. For households unable to afford the internet, tablets were essentially useless. The digital divide is intensified for Indigenous households due to language barriers and parents' lack of exposure to computers and accompanying online learning software. Indigenous parents lamented that they could not do more to support their children's learning on top of all of the other pressures they faced.

On top of heightened vulnerability to COVID-19, Indigenous Campesinos and their families experienced significant emotional health struggles during the pandemic. Children lost access to extra forms of support that rural public schools often provide, like counseling, peer networks, and after school tutoring. Parents worried about their children's emotional health, as their children exhibited different symptoms of distress, such as loss of interest in activities and school, restlessness, fear, and eating more. Having children at home full time also forced many Indigenous women out of the agricultural workforce, further straining already unliveable salaries. These anxieties have not subsided with the return to in-person learning. One Indigenous father had the prescience to predict that the return to in-person learning without a good plan would put their children at risk. Adults found some relief through spirituality, while others used work in the fields and at home to distract themselves from their many worries. For Indigenous Campesinos, the pandemic is far from over.

> What worries me is that they talk about the children going back to school and if they haven't found the medication or... that they have a protocol, or what they call it, to follow. The children are going to return to school, and no, they are not as careful as we are, who already know a little more, who understand a little more, right? Even though we understand more, we are older, and we see other people who don't care about others and so, if they are sick, they go and get together with others and they are not careful, right?
>
> **--FRANCISCO, 44 year old Mixtec man, San Joaquin Valley**

> The closing of the school affected my child. Because my son was behind in his reading and he stayed after school with the teacher to learn more... so he could advance and read better, but now I see that he is hardly reading anymore.
>
> **--INES , 29 year old Zapotec woman, Central Coast**

> My children are having a harder time now because they can no longer study for 8 hours in school.... Here they only study when I study with them... and for me it has been much more work.
>
> **--NATIVIDAD, 25 year old Triqui woman, Central Coast**

> I'm worried about my son the most...he has a hard time learning things, and he was just learning and now that they stopped school, he is not doing well...we don't have a computer and we don't have internet.
>
> **--VIRGINIA, 35 year old Mixtec woman, San Joaquin Valley**

This has impacted us because my son can't go to school. I am worried about him falling behind. The school provided him with a tablet but I cannot help because of the language barrier.

--SEBASTIÁN, 30 year old Mixtec man, San Joaquin Valley

I have seen that my children are afraid because of the disease. They ask me what the virus is, I tell them it is a disease. I explain it to them and they understand.

--GERARDO, 35 year old Mixtec man, San Joaquin Valley

They are at home...sometimes when we go to the store, we ask them if they want to go, because we know they have been at home all day...he says, my son says, "I'm not going to go, because I don't want to get the coronavirus." That's what he tells me.

--SOLEDAD, 30 year old Mixtec Woman, Central Coast

What I do to feel better is to go to work.

--JAVIER, 43 year old Zapotec man, San Joaquin Valley

I breathe in and breathe out to feel better. Go sightseeing to feel much better and then come back.

--CANDELARIO, 21 year old Triqui man, Central Coast

Well, when I go out to work, I just pray to God to calm my fear. When I am at home, I try to concentrate on making food and taking care of my children. I try not to get scared because I feel it is worse to worry, so I focus on other things.

--FLOR, 48 year old Mixtec woman, San Joaquin Valley

CONCLUSIONS

> We shouldn't have to go to work right now because it's not safe**.**
>
> **--MARIA de JESUS, 30 year old Mixtec Woman, San Joaquin Valley**

Indigenous Campesinos are important members of rural California communities. They are our neighbors, kin, friends, and leaders. They are human beings. They take care of us through their highly skilled and knowledgeable labors in the farm fields and packing houses, tending the land, harvesting fresh produce, and packaging it with care so that we can all eat. They play a critical part in the success of the multibillion dollar food and agricultural industries.

How can we, as a society, ensure that Indigenous Campesinos are not only acknowledged as "essential," but treated as human beings? The work that they do is just as important as other groups of essential workers--teachers, engineers, and healthcare professionals--and they merit the same consideration and professional treatment. There must be standards of care, rights, safety, respect, and pay that reflect this.

As each of the COVID-19 Farmworker Study reports point out, while Campesinos were deemed "essential" at the start of the pandemic, they are not treated as such, and have for too long been excluded from and denied even the most basic rights and protections. Rather than afford the people who feed us citizenship, a living wage, safe and respectful working conditions, healthcare coverage, guaranteed sick leave, retirement plans, access to important information in the languages they speak (and have spoken in California for at least forty years), and equitable educational opportunities for their children, the food and agricultural industry treats Campesinos as disposable. The testimonies of the Indigenous Campesinos who graciously shared their stories with the COFS collective only add to an already copious collection of evidence of neglect and abuse that the California Institute for Rural Studies and others have documented for decades.

Indigenous Campesinos shared that some employers have been more proactive than others about campesino health and safety during the pandemic. Some employers provided protective equipment and increased hygienic standards--these should become routine best practices across the industry, with rigorous enforcement. Doing this would require normalizing cultures of workplace health and safety for the food and agricultural industry and strengthening and enforcing protective policies at the local, county, state, and federal levels. Throughout 2020, temperature checks and symptom screening, masking, and physical distancing helped keep Campesinos safe. Health and safety routines are not unfamiliar to Indigenous Campesinos, many of whom already take steps to protect themselves and their families from pesticide exposure and heat illness. Employers must provide appropriate safety equipment and conduct routine maintenance and cleaning of bathrooms and handwashing stations. Indigenous Campesinos want mandatory enforcement of occupational health and safety measures, and routine verbal and

multilingual education and reminders of safety policies for COVID-19, heat, pesticides, wildfire smoke, and other hazards.

In general, the experiences related by Indigenous Campesinos who participated in the COFS paint a grim picture. The specific pandemic conditions participants described are a part of a much-larger social and political context. Rather than invest in the rural, immigrant, and Indigenous communities who have dedicated their lives to California's agricultural industry, or use the pandemic as an opportunity create permanent cultures of care, or to strengthen occupational health and safety regulations and enforcement, we have seen the agricultural industry resist even temporary rights and protective measures, like paid sick leave, COVID-19 specific workers compensation, hero pay for food workers, and providing masks and other equipment needed to keep people alive and well.

Prior to the pandemic, the industry started shifting towards recruiting and employing H2A guestworkers, many of whom are also Indigenous peoples from Mexico and Central America. H2A workers are hyper-exploitable. Even though there are laws that are supposed to protect them from certain abuses, they are routinely denied many of the minimal rights and protections Campesinos and their allies have long fought for.[26] [27] Even with such laws on the books, the failure of designated agencies to enforce these measures and the neglect of the state to resource and fund the operations responsible for campesino health and wellbeing, heightens the disposability of Campesinos. Increased agricultural industry investment in mechanized harvesting technologies also further devalues human agricultural labor and displaces workers, their families and communities. Both of these so-called solutions, guestworkers and mechanization, ignore and invalidate the contributions of resident immigrants and Indigenous Campesinos, who have risked--and at times lost--their lives to keep people fed during a pandemic. At the same time, these workers are unable to meet their own most basic needs.

Many Indigenous Campesinos migrated in the first place because industrial agriculture appropriated their lands through privatization deals and devalued Indigenous subsistence food and farming livelihoods. In the U.S., Indigenous Campesinos are treated as third-class citizens on the basis of their double racialization--as brown skinned people living in the U.S. and working in the fields earning substandard wages, and as people from Mexico and Central America who are

[26] POLARIS. Labor Exploitation and Trafficking of Agricultural Workers during the Pandemic: A Snapshot, June 2021. https://polarisproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Polaris_Labor_Exploitation_and_Trafficking_of_Agricultural_Workers_During_the_Pandemic.pdf

[27] Centro de los Derechos del Migrante, Inc. Ripe for Reform: Abuses of Agricultural Workers in the H2A Visa Program. 2020. https://cdmigrante.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Ripe-for-Reform.pdf

routinely discriminated against due to their indigeneity.[28] Being undocumented, uninsured, underpaid, and socially unvalued intensifies this and contributes to ongoing political, social, and economic exclusions. Drought, wildfire, COVID-19, and housing shortages make Indigenous Campesinos even more vulnerable.

Indigenous Campesinos present an astute analysis of their circumstances. They are ***experts in their fields***, with intimate knowledge of the land and crops they work. They see how they are systematically dehumanized and excluded from basic rights and protections. They live it day in and day out, and they know that it is not normal, natural, or inevitable. They state in their own words what changes are needed, and that there are other ways of doing things that are possible. What follows are their recommendations, solutions, and demands for change.

1. **Comprehensive and inclusive immigration reform that will benefit essential workers and their family members.**

> Inform the workers about how to stay safe. For many workers, the only thing they're interested in is their jobs, because they need to take care of their families and they don't receive any benefits like the citizens or people with papers. They're the most in need and the most vulnerable in the fields due to their working conditions.
>
> **--ESTELA, 18 year old Mixtec Woman, San Joaquin Valley**

> We, the immigrants, go to work in spite of our fear. We don't even receive economic aid like the Americans do. Apparently, they only care that we do the work and nothing else.
>
> **--EUSEBIA, 41year old Mixtec Woman, Central Coast**

2. **Liveable salaries that are reflective of the fact that California agriculture is a multi-billion dollar industry, with professional benefits, including sick, disability, and maternity and parental leave, retirement plans, and overtime for all campesinos, regardless of citizenship status.**

> You can't make it. Everything is expensive in the stores and we continue to get poorer.
>
> **--ABRAHIM, 39 year old Indigenous Man, San Joaquin Valley**

[28] Stephen, Lynn. *Transborder Lives: Indigenous Oaxacans in Mexico, California, and Oregon.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.

A salary increase, because we're already putting our lives at risk of catching the virus, and we don't have good health insurance. A salary increase is so that we are protected at work and with a raise we could buy the things we need to be a little more secure.

--SAMUEL, age 30 year old, Indigenous Man, San Joaquin Valley

3. **Access to government-funded safety-net, unemployment and emergency and disaster assistance programs that are easy to access, culturally inclusive, and do not have burdensome eligibility requirements.**

I don't see that we are valued by this government. They say there's help, but I don't see it.

--MACARIA, 57 year old Indigenous Woman, San Joaquin Valley

We don't know what other supports exist. We don't leave, we don't know anything. There are people who do receive help, but I don't know how they do it or hear about this help. I heard recently about a program, and I called but they told me that the program had ended. They put me on a waiting list, but nothing. It's been over a month since this happened.

--SANTIAGO, 43 year old Zapotec Man, San Joaquin Valley

What I saw is that people who have papers receive help. Those of us with kids mostly count on the support they get. If those who create programs could give more food stamp support, because they give only a little. The children need help, that they give more help to the children. The help is for them, we don't qualify to get it.

--IRMA, 34 year old Mixtec Woman, San Joaquin Valley

As I already mentioned, work has diminished a lot and I hoped for some help, because they had been talking about support for immigrants, but I feel deceived. I called many times, and no one ever answered, and I don't know what will happen to my family. We had to ask for loads to pay for our expenses, and it's affected me emotionally, the pandemic.

--JUANA, 28 year old Mixtec Woman, SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY

No. There's nothing. As we say, we came to work and we don't have, like what they call help, nothing close to social security, so that they help you a little, right? We don't have this and because of this they don't help us. There's no way they can help us. There are ways that they could help if they wanted to, but there is no help for those of us in these situations, right? Even though we're working. We

have to work all the time, even when it's cold or hot. They never talk about us… There's nothing. There's nothing. We lack, like we've talked about, like we don't know or we don't seek out or we find out sometimes, and because of this we don't go to these organizations. Like just recently I found out that PG&E [Pacific Gas & Electric, California utility provider] also can help sometimes with electric bills. I just found out about this and even this I don't have because I have to look into if I have to apply or how to do it.

--FRANCISCO, 44 year old Mixtec Man, San Joaquin Valley

It's good [the CA stimulus for undocumented immigrants] because it's a little bit of help, right? Because when they ask for a lot of papers, and sometimes when they don't have all the papers they ask for, this is what makes us worried. But before we go looking for them, sometimes one lacks papers and for this reason they don't give you help. But if you have it, you send it in. My husband was able to find a paper from the school, and they sent us $500. And this helped.

--ROSARIO, 34 year old Mixtec Woman, Central Coast

4. **Creation of a new agricultural-worker specific agency that is empowered, staffed, and funded to enforce all agricultural workplace health, hygiene, and safety regulations, including COVID-19 and wildfire smoke guidelines. In its current form, Cal/OSHA is too centralized and does not work for Indigenous Campesinos.**

They should enforce distancing and comply with the rules, because right now they are not enforcing them... Yes, they gave us a talk, and they told us about the dangers, but they are not complying with the rules of social distancing because we are still all together.... I go to work scared because maybe the workers are sick and I have children at home…

--VALERIA, 29 year old Zapotec woman, Central Coast

My opinion is that they can't do anything because no company complies with safety rules. If only the people who supercuts the state did surprise inspections to evaluate conditions at work.

--LAURA, 18 year old Mixtec Woman, Central Coast

I believe the farmers should take COVID-19 more seriously, especially when talking with the workers about the importance of physical distancing.

--VENUSTACIO, 28 year old Indigenous Man, San Joaquin Valley

Don't come to work without a mask, and the boss should provide masks to everyone everyday.

--SOL, 29 year old Indigenous woman, San Joaquin Valley

...We should have shade during our lunchtime, and not be close together during the lunchtime … and they should give new employees more detailed information about coronavirus.

--PORFIRIO, 33 year old Indigenous Man, Central Coast

My recommendation would be for the employers to clean the bathrooms because at work there's a lot of people using the same bathroom. There's a lot of things needed to improve the conditions.

--HILARIA, 49 year old Zapotec Woman, San Joaquin County

They should add more handwashing stations for the crew.

--ORALIA, 32 year old Indigenous woman, San Joaquin Valley

They should have better hygiene, more cleaning, and companies need to be more responsible with their workers.

--GUILLERMINA, 39 year old Indigenous woman, Central Coast

5. **Creation of a network of county-based regional external accountability committees, composed of Campesinos, CBO's, and allies, who can ensure that this new state agency enforces the law to ensure campesinos have safe and healthy work environments and direct lines of communication to those in charge of enforcing health and safety regulations. These committees can advance the grounded solutions offered by Indigenous Campesinos, who know what works and what doesn't.**

At the entrance, there are people taking the temperatures of the workers to ensure that no one is sick, even if it's a flu, the rule is that if someone is sick from flu or anothing thing they can't come to work. The other day they announced that even though the government opened, the bosses told us that we have to keep following the same safety precautions, taking temperatures upon arrival and wearing masks.

--ANAIS, 36 year old Indigenous Woman, San Joaquin Valley

At work, there are people who forget their masks and the checkers have to remind them. They don't have more than 2 to 3 people per row, because here there have been many positive cases of coronavirus. The rule is if you feel sick, stay home, because there have already been a lot of [cases].

--AURELIA, 50 year old Mixtec Woman, San Joaquin Valley

Always cover your face and always use a mask to prevent contagion… when someone is sick, they told us to not show up to work and they gave us the numbers to clinics where we can go if we feel sick.

--RAUL, 32 year old Zapotec man, Central Coast

The farmers and contractors should train the formen about COVID-19 so that the formen train all the other workers about the symptoms of COVID-19. They have to train people about how to protect themselves at work.

--BENITO, 29 year old Zapotec Man, San Joaquin Valley

6. **Access to quality healthcare including emotional health support that is culturally and linguistically appropriate.**

I feel now more than ever the state of California should provide us with health insurance, like complete Medi-Cal.

--MÓNICA, age 32 year old Zapotec Woman, San Joaquin Valley

That there is health insurance for the people who don't have it, like the people who don't qualify because they are undocumented. Because they charge a lot to go to the doctor and I don't have health insurance.

--CONSUELO, age 39 year old, Mixtec Woman, Central Coast

We should be provided with medical insurance. It is hard for us because we are essential workers and many times it is hard for us to find insurance.

--FERNANDA, age 41 year old, Mixtec woman, Central Coast

7. **Guaranteed and increased units of dignified housing, in good and safe condition, with heat and air conditioning, functioning electricity, plumbing, laundry, internet service, and areas for recreation and play, with enough space for everyone in the household, at affordable or subsidized rates for resident Campesinos.**

What I ask for is that they don't keep increasing the rent because we pay a lot, $1,300 for a 2-bedroom. The owner of the house told us that for the moment the rent won't increase because of the pandemic, but after it happened, he said the rent would go up more.

--CONSUELO, age 39 year old, Mixtec Woman, Central Coast

Housing is the most important.

--HILARIA, 49 year old Zapotec Woman, San Joaquin Valley

I am wondering what are the laws protecting tenants from the constant increase of rent. I remember they passed a law saying landlords could not raise the price of rent within a certain amount of time, but now it seems like every 6 months our rent is being increased.

--FAUSTO, 33 year old Mixtec Man, Central Coast

8. **To achieve language justice, all services at workplaces, schools, healthcare, and other settings, must provide interpretation or work with people who can provide interpretation into indigenous languages. We must ensure that Campesinos receive trainings and information about their rights as agricultural workers. COVID-19 and other occupational health and safety information needs to be communicated to Indigenous Campesinos regularly, orally, and in the languages they speak. . State and local agencies must fund and contract with organizations that have the trust of indigenous communities and that have staff who speak their languages.**

Oh it's better like, when we work they talk to us. Someone reads to us and we understand each other. Like on the radio they broadcast and we listen. Like for example some, while some can read Spanish, we don't understand it well. And that's why on the radio they speak our language and that's how we understand one another.

--SOLEDAD, 30 year old Mixtec Woman, Central Coast

I work a lot about not knowing what to do to take care of myself. I don't understand Spanish or English, and I don't know what's going on.

--LORENA, 39 year old Mixtec Woman, Central Coast

Ahh, yes, I want to know about the disease because I don't have information about what this illness is. I don't know what stress is? I don't know, what is a test?

--GERARDO, 35 year old Mixtec man, San Joaquin Valley

When we listen to the radio, when they talk about the COVID-19 illness, we understand very little. I can say to those who don't understand that they ask the Binational Center for the Development of Indigenous Oaxacan Communities so they can help, they need to ask for help. If they're from my community or my family, I will tell them to ask CBDIO because they helped me. They need to ask for help because we don't understand Spanish well.

--IRMA, 34 year old Mixtec Woman, San Joaquin Valley

If there was someone who spoke our language, I would understand and we would go. It's when we don't understand, and this is why we don't know. If there was an office, where they speak Mixtec, the Mixtec language, they could help us help each other, right?

--ROSARIO, 34 year old Mixtec Woman, Central Coast

The talks in our language.

--PAULA, 46 year old Mixtec woman, San Joaquin Valley

There are organizations that are all closed, and they only post papers on the door for you to read in English, they say "you cannot enter." Or they say, "there's a phone number you can call." But, when I dial this number, I have to pass the call to my kids so they can understand. This happens when you can read letters. But there are others who don't know how to read. And how are we going to understand? This is why one doesn't know.

--IRMA, 34 year old Mixtec Woman, San Joaquin Valley

9. **School districts with populations of Indigenous Campesinos need more teachers, counselors, nurses and resources to support children and families. They need staff who speak indigenous languages to effectively communicate vital information. flyers are not an effective method for Indigenous Communities.**

The kids are behind in school and they forget everything... I am frustrated about it...and so is my child... I really wish they could go to therapy after this... We have talked as a family about how to protect ourselves if someone in the house gets sick… Now all the kids are inside, bored...sad because they closed the parks and playgrounds here at the apartment. I understand it's for safety, but my kids don't know what to do anymore… I feel like everything has changed...the restrictions have affected us too...and my son is traumatized…

--AURELIA, 50 year old Mixtec Woman, San Joaquin Valley

10. **The state must do more than distribute technology to students in times of crisis. All students must have access to the internet and other equipment in their homes as a basic right. Indigenous families need additional support to help their children maximize the use of these resources.**

Sometimes I worry because I see my young kids. I would like them to be in a place where they take good care of our children, where they have the internet to study, that is nice. Because at home, when they study, sometimes their computers shut down. The internet is not stable in the house. There is no signal because the

internet is basic. When three or more kids start studying using the internet, it shuts down, so they can't study. And that is what worries me sometimes.

--ROSARIO, 34 year old Mixtec Woman, Central Coast

My daughter's school closed, and we don't have internet or a computer. They just do homework on paper and from time to time, when she has a question, she calls her teacher... My little girl is sad because she likes school.

--MARIA de JESUS, 30 year old Mixtec Woman, San Joaquin Valley