After Cesar, Se Puede: An Analysis of UFW Political Advocacy and Farmworker Justice in the 21st Century

Alina Leticia Zárate

Interdisciplinary Studies Field, University of California, Berkeley

ISF 190 Honors Senior Thesis

Dr. Fang Xu and Dr. Christian Paiz

May 2024

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Abstract

Farmworkers consistently make up the most vulnerable labor force in the United States, facing diverse challenges such as dangerous work conditions, exposure to hazardous chemicals, and undocumented status that sit at the intersection of broader labor, immigration, and environmental issues. Farmworker vulnerability and agricultural exceptionalism are defined, constructed, and perpetuated by shifting political, social, environmental, and labor contexts that reconstruct how farmworker justice efforts and advocacy operate. The United Farm Workers of America (UFW) has been the leader of the farmworker justice movement since the 1960s and has played a pivotal role in shaping farmworker justice issues as both a labor union, a political organization, and a social movement. However, few studies have examined the role of the UFW in shaping contemporary farmworker justice struggles since the death of Cesar Chavez in 1993. Using UFW advocacy in labor, immigration, and environmental policy issues in the 21st century as a case study, this thesis employs an interdisciplinary framework to highlight the UFW's major policy reform efforts, analyze diverse strategies and tactics employed to bring about change for farmworkers, and define farmworker justice in the United States. From oral history interviews with UFW leaders, extensive archival research of news and press releases, and political analysis of legislative documents, I demonstrate the need to redefine our understanding of contemporary farmworker justice and our assessment of the role of labor unions in these efforts.

Introduction

In a 2022 New York Times Opinion titled “How Cesar Chavez’s Union Lost Its Way”, Miriam Pawel, a celebrated journalist and independent historian, wrote of the United Farm Workers of America’s (UFW) march from Delano to Sacramento in support of Card Check legislation:

> The energy and public pageantry of the march are a far cry from the struggle for justice in the fields. The symbolism of the U.F.W. president holding aloft her worn-out shoe is not matched by the painstaking commitment required to do what the union has not done in years – organize, rather than exert political pressure to change laws it does not even use.

Pawel’s assessment of the UFW in 2022 as an idle, out-of-touch, and ineffective organization reflects a harsh but all too common narrative of the Union among scholars and the broader public. In the 1960s, the UFW, co-founded by Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta and Larry Itliong, made significant contributions to the Civil Rights Movement by advocating for the rights of farmworkers in the United States. Through their organizing and boycott efforts, the UFW empowered a generation of farmworkers, placed unprecedented pressure on the agricultural industry, and mobilized millions of people around “la causa”. At its height in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the UFW represented thousands of California farmworkers in hundreds of union contracts and successfully sponsored pro-farmworker policy reforms including the banning of the short-handled hoe and the passage of the Agricultural Labor Relations Act of 1975 in the state of California, the first law granting farmworkers the right to form and join a union in the US (Levy, 1975). Despite its extraordinary early success, the 1980s and 1990s proved to be a period of difficulty marked by low union membership, political and legal troubles, and weakened mobilizing power that culminated in Cesar Chavez’s death in 1993. Since then, dozens of books and numerous articles have been written seeking to document the UFW’s demise and crediting its decline to either the political hostility towards labor interests in the 1980s, the structural

instability of the UFW as an organization, or deficiencies in Cesar's own personality and leadership style (Garcia, 2012; Paiz, 2023; Pawel, 2009). Consequently, scholars have largely failed to acknowledge the UFW's existence beyond 1993 and those that do, such as Pawel, do so only to draw comparisons between current efforts and the nostalgic accomplishments of the 1960s, declaring the Union obsolete. Such analyses have created a complacent, but dominant narrative of the UFW and farmworker advocacy in the US that discredits decades of UFW efforts and is founded on an oversimplified and distorted conception of farmworker justice. That being the case, this thesis serves as a direct rebuttal to this scholarship and serves to correct these foundational misrepresentations.

Through an analysis of the UFW's engagement with labor, environmental, and immigration issues through policy advocacy, I present a more complex and inclusive view of the UFW as not simply a labor union, but also a political organization and a social movement that has played a significant role in moving the rights of farmworkers forward in the 21st century. I begin by addressing the need for an interdisciplinary perspective to properly and comprehensively represent the struggles that farmworkers face and the methods for confronting them. I then address the shortcomings of UFW scholars by reframing the 1980s and 1990s as a period of transition rather than decline from which the evolution of the UFW into the 21st century can be understood. The ensuing sections cover the UFW's labor, environmental, and immigration policy advocacy from 1993 to 2022 in detail, addressing the importance of the respective policy issues, highlighting specific policy campaigns and the strategies employed, and analyzing the impact that these policy efforts have had on farmworker lives. My thesis concludes by interpreting the UFW's efforts in the 21st century to introduce a new theoretical framework of

farmworker justice that will allow scholars to better conceptualize and understand contemporary farmworker advocacy.

Literature Review

Farmworkers constitute the most vulnerable population within the US labor force, facing an array of diverse and unique challenges such as dangerous work conditions, exposure to hazardous chemicals, and undocumented status that sit at the intersection of broader labor, immigration, and environmental issues. While the injustices faced by farmworkers have been well documented and studied across numerous disciplines, farmworker justice, which centers around the experience of farmworkers, cannot be accurately understood or defined by any one disciplinary field. Rather, an accurate and comprehensive representation of farmworker justice requires an understanding of how labor, immigration, and environmental policies and structures define, construct, and perpetuate farmworker vulnerability and agricultural exceptionalism. Additionally, an interdisciplinary approach is necessary to interpret how interactions between these structures create the complex web of oppression that farmworkers and farmworker justice advocates resist.

From a labor perspective, the disparities faced by farmworkers stem from the legacy of slavery and the desire of southern farmers to preserve an "exploited, economically deprived non-white agricultural labor force pinned to the bottom of the social and economic hierarchy" after emancipation (Perea, 2011, p. 127). Therefore, in addition to racially explicit forms of discrimination, namely Jim Crow, 'race-neutral' policies that targeted specific industry sectors that employed primarily black and minority laborers created a form of occupational discrimination (Perea, 2011). The labor disparities that resulted from the exclusion of agricultural workers from the National Labor Relations Act of 1935 have persisted to this day in the form of

"agricultural exceptionalism" which emphasizes the fact that agricultural workers have been consistently excluded from nearly every protective labor standard awarded to workers in other sectors. This includes minimum wage standards, overtime pay, workers' compensation, occupational safety and health standards, as well as the right to collectively bargain with their employers (Schell, 2002).

While the origins of farmworker disenfranchisement in the US are inherently racist, shifts within both the agricultural industry and the labor movement have served to further disadvantage this population. Michael LeRoy and Wallace Hendricks (1999) argue in their article "Should 'agricultural laborers' continue to be excluded from the National Labor Relations Act?" that over the past century, US farming has shifted from family farms to agribusiness which allows for greater exploitation from increasingly distant agricultural employers due to issues of immigration status, increased exposure to chemicals and hazards due to changing work conditions, and inconsistencies in collective bargaining rights granted by states. Additionally, fierce attacks on labor unions at the end of the 20th century in which employers utilized various strategies including committing Unfair Labor Practices and hiring anti-union consultants to change, bend, and even break labor laws to avoid union certification have greatly weakened organized labor and severely undermined labor rights for all workers (Windham, 2017). These simultaneous shifts in the American agricultural labor structure, namely the growing imbalance of power within the agricultural industry, alongside weakened labor laws and power in all sectors, have made farmworkers increasingly vulnerable to exploitation and minimized, if not eliminated, the ability to organize and advocate for their labor rights.

The unique conditions farmworkers confront are defined not only by labor standards but also US foreign trade agreements and restrictionist immigration policies that exert considerable

influence on the demographics of worker populations. Immigration policy has been closely intertwined with the US agricultural industry over the past century due to growers' increasing dependency on imported foreign workers to maintain a temporary, migratory, seasonal, low-wage, high-surplus labor force (Taylor & Espenshade, 1987). Here the term 'growers' refers to the majority of large, agricultural landowners that manage agricultural production and employ farmworkers. Guestworker programs have extended agricultural exceptionalism to the realm of immigration policy by heavily subsidizing and ensuring a steady agricultural labor supply while providing minimal protections for the workers themselves (Geffert, 2002). The birth of the H-2A Visa Program in 1986 which, like its predecessor the Bracero Program, ensures that the agricultural industry can import foreign workers, coincided with increased border enforcement that dismantled the circular migration of farm laborers who previously traveled seasonally from Mexico to the US, essentially trapping them in the US and restructuring agricultural labor (Minian, 2018; Salinas, 2018). Additionally, in recent decades, the number of undocumented farm laborers has surged, today comprising 50-90% of the farmworker population. This is due in part to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) which, beginning in 1994, radically altered the price of basic foods in Mexico as local ranchers, unable to compete with US imports, were forced into bankruptcy, causing mass departure from rural farming communities and migration north (Gonzalez, 2006).

The tension between national agricultural labor goals and restrictionist immigration policy highlights a "coherent" contradiction with regard to undocumented and imported farmworkers. Namely, the precarity of farmworkers' unlawful or temporary status paired with the necessity of their labor to complete the harshest low-wage work in the US economy creates a situation in which growers can exploit and mistreat an entire class of workers with near impunity

(Nessel, 2001). Additionally, the undocumented status of farmworkers has been found to not only increase their vulnerability to employer exploitation but also cause them to be disproportionately affected by social, climate, and health risks given the threats they face in their everyday lives and their ineligibility for official forms of relief (Méndez et al., 2020). The liminal legality that the majority of farmworkers face stands to benefit growers in many ways by ensuring a cheap, subservient labor force and reinforcing an already highly imbalanced power hierarchy within the agricultural industry. However, it can also serve to harm grower interests. Immigration enforcement policies, particularly since the creation of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency (ICE), have been found to both decrease the number of immigrants in a target area which adversely impacts agricultural production, farm incomes, vegetable acres, and the number of workers hired (Kostandini et al., 2014). Ultimately, immigration policy is incredibly important for both agricultural productivity and farmworker well-being. However, to date, these policies have largely worked against the interests of farmworker populations, particularly due to the lack of collective bargaining and political power of undocumented workers, and for the benefit of growers while continuing to promote agricultural exceptionalism that contradicts national immigration standards and enforcement.

It is important to also consider the environmental justice perspective of farmworker struggles given that farm labor is a primarily outdoor activity subject to both natural and artificial environmental threats. As Rebecca Berkey (2017) explains in her book *Environmental Justice and Farm Labor,* farmworkers face a series of intersectional social, labor, and environmental issues that contribute to environmental injustice such as pesticide exposure, lack of access to healthcare services, substandard housing, child labor, and unstable employment opportunities among others. In addition to the often hazardous and substandard working conditions that

farmworkers consistently face in the fields, climate change trends promise to exacerbate occupational hazards as environmental changes increase the threat to farmworker health posed by hotter working conditions, increased use of chemical pesticides, and the prevalence of wildfires (Amini et al., 2021; Wan et al., 2021). Additionally, climate change projections concerning heat exposure have suggested that unsafe working conditions will double by the mid-21st century and that the required workplace adaptations to mitigate the health risks posed to farmworkers (i.e. more rest breaks, shorter work days, and protective equipment) would likely require reduced farm productivity, indicating the increasingly unsustainable nature of farm labor (Tigchelaar et al., 2020). Although mechanization of farm labor has been highlighted as a potential solution to the problems climate change poses for the agricultural sector, recent research conducted by Comi and Becot (2023) indicates that current automation efforts have failed to significantly improve environmental resilience or reduce worker exposure to harmful chemicals, equipment, and natural environments. In other words, environmental conditions have significant impacts on workplace safety and farmworker health that exacerbate other forms of farmworker vulnerability and are expected to get increasingly worse as climate change continues to more severely impact the agricultural sector.

Environmental, immigration, and labor approaches to farmworker vulnerability and agricultural exceptionalism provide unique insights into the various sources of oppression that create and maintain farmworker disempowerment. Nonetheless, these disciplinary focuses also serve to silo farmworker experience and the forces that act upon them into distinct realms that obscure the complex interactions between these different struggles. These limitations extend beyond our understanding of the challenges that farmworkers face but also fundamentally misrepresent farmworker resistance and justice advocacy efforts. Some scholars have touched on

the intersectional nature of farmworker vulnerability and advocacy by highlighting the cooperative impacts that labor and environmental advocacy and labor and immigration advocacy can have on furthering each other's interests. Pulido and Pena (1998), for example, highlight how the UFW's role as a farmworker labor union uniquely positioned it to identify and organize around the issue of pesticide use in California fields in the 1960s, allowing it to simultaneously address and advocate on environmental and labor issues. Similarly, the crossroads between immigration law and labor law has been found to increase protections and benefits for immigrant workers while broadening social movement advocacy and worker solidarity outside of the workplace (Griffith & Lee, 2012). Farmworker justice, given the various sources of oppression and intersectional issues that farmworkers face, encompasses all these forms of advocacy. However, few studies have sought to comprehensively define farmworker justice or analyze the role of farmworker justice advocacy in addressing labor, immigration, and environmental issues as they relate to farmworkers in the 21st century.

The UFW is the most prominent and longest-standing advocate for farmworker justice to date in the US. While extensive research has been conducted on Cesar Chavez and the first 30 years of UFW history, the temporal and contextual limitations of these contemporary historical analyses have significantly undermined our interest in and understanding of the impact and influence of the UFW on 21st century farmworker struggles. Historians such as Robert Gordon, Matthew Garcia, Frank Bardacke, and Miriam Pawel have analyzed and critiqued UFW success in advocating for farmworkers, focusing primarily on its early years while haphazardly extending these analyses to the UFW's present day efforts (Bardacke, 2013; Garcia, 2016; Gordon, 1999; Pawel, 2009). As a result, this scholarship fails to sufficiently address the contextual changes, both internal and external, that have occurred in the second half of the UFW's history.

Additionally, the narrow focus of these authors on the UFW's role as a labor union obscures the reality of its impact on farmworker lives by limiting measures of impact solely to union membership. However, as the primary advocate for farmworker rights in the nation, a more complex framework for analyzing UFW impact is required. As Benjamin Sachs (2013) argues, labor unions are one of the most powerful vehicles for lower- and middle-class political organization in the United States and that, therefore, the unbundling of labor law, or, in other words, the formation of political unions which would be barred from collective bargaining but elevate worker voices by advocating for political change would serve to more broadly and effectively benefit worker interests. While the UFW is not officially "unbundled" according to the concept presented by Sachs, the UFW has always been both a union, a political organization, and a social movement that has centered its purpose around improving farmworker lives rather than increasing union membership. As a result, assessing UFW success through traditional metrics applied to labor unions, namely collective bargaining power and union membership, misrepresents the complexity of farmworker justice advocacy and minimizes both the UFW's importance and achievements in the legal, political, and social spheres of farmworker justice.

Over the past 30 years, the UFW has successfully engaged in a myriad of diverse but interconnected issues impacting farmworker lives within the realms of labor, immigration, and the environment at the local, state, and national level despite its dwindled collective bargaining power. Additionally, the UFW has adapted to significant political shifts both internal and external to the organization, employing creative strategies and tactics to construct powerful coalitions and bring about meaningful legislative changes with limited resources. Despite these monumental achievements, few researchers have studied the UFW's role in the farmworker justice movement after the death of Cesar Chavez in 1993 or examined their impact on American

politics as a labor union, a political organization, and a social movement over the second half of their history. Therefore, I seek to modernize our conception of the UFW's role in advocating for farmworkers by (1) highlighting the outcomes of the UFW's political reform efforts in the 21st century, (2) analyzing the UFW's strategies and tactics to engage farmworker communities and bring about change beyond their collective bargaining efforts, and (3) assess UFW political advocacy to define contemporary farmworker justice in the US.

Methodology

This research was undertaken as an extension of my own activism and involvement in the UFW farmworker justice movement as an intern in 2019. During my seven-month internship, I worked in the UFW's legal department, archives, and field offices. Through this experience, I established relationships with many leaders, organizers, legal staff, and farmworkers within the movement and was exposed to the complex inner workings of UFW involvement and advocacy around labor, immigration, and environmental issues that affect farmworker communities in California and beyond. Employing an interdisciplinary historical framework, this research focuses exclusively on the political advocacy of the UFW from 1993 to 2023 and includes three major methodological components: archival research, oral history interviews, and political analysis.

The archival research was based on the digital press release record available on the UFW website (www.ufw.org) and was used to construct a timeline of UFW engagement with public policies at the local, state, and national level as well as analyze the particular tactics, strategies, rhetoric, and coalition building that the UFW employed in their advocacy efforts. The comprehensive UFW digital archive contains every press release that the organization has produced from 1997 to the present. These press releases were reviewed individually for content

related to specific legislation and/or public policy advocacy. This resulted in the compilation of over 450 different press releases which were collected, organized, and coded in a centralized spreadsheet according to a number of different criteria. These criteria include but are not limited to public policy type (i.e. immigration, labor, environmental), the UFW's position on the policy, strategy and tactics employed, coalition members, and policy outcome. Additionally, the UFW press release data was supplemented by news articles from UFW coalition members and third-party news organizations.

Extensive oral histories were conducted with ten current and former members of the UFW leadership team from a range of departments including the UFW Executive Board, the UFW Political and Legislative Team, and the UFW Legal Team. The tenure of the interviewees within the UFW ranged from 10 to 50 years and all remain active in farmworker justice efforts. Eight of the interviews were conducted in person, usually at the home of the interviewee, while two were conducted over zoom. Half of the interviewees were long-time UFW employees who had been part of the movement beginning in the 1970s and had worked closely with Cesar Chavez. These interviews were structured in four parts; the first focused on their induction into the UFW movement and their experiences working with Cesar Chavez, the second centered on the UFW's transition period after Cesar's death in 1993, the third focused on the UFW in the 21st century and its strategic and institutional adaptations, and the final part included general reflections on the UFW and the state of farmworker justice efforts in the US. The other five interviews were conducted with UFW leaders who joined the movement after 1993. These interviews were structured in three parts; first, reflections on their introduction into the UFW movement and their experiences in leadership roles, second, perspectives on strategy, tactics, and changing political, social, and environmental contexts in the 21st century, and third, general

reflections on the UFW and the state of farmworker justice efforts in the US. All interviews were recorded resulting in over 40 hours of oral history testimonies and were transcribed using Otter.ai. The transcriptions were reviewed and corrected by hand and the transcript content was analyzed for key themes using inductive coding methods (Thomas, 2006).

Finally, the political analysis of UFW public policy advocacy was based on legislative and legal documents that the UFW sponsored, contributed to, or was involved in which included drafted and passed bills at the state and national levels, bill veto statements from state governors, legislative summaries, lawsuits, and other related documents. Resulting in a collection of nearly 100 documents, these were used to provide insight into the specific political changes that the UFW was advocating for or against at the local, state, and national level as well as the outcome of the legislation or lawsuits. Additionally, the political analysis was used to identify thematic and temporal trends and strategies related to the UFW's public policy advocacy successes and failures in the 21st century.

Archival research, oral history interviews, and political analyses were taken together to identify, contextualize, and construct a timeline of UFW political engagement from 1993 to 2023, define and analyze shifts in UFW advocacy strategies and tactics, and determine the outcomes and impacts of UFW political advocacy on farmworker communities in California and throughout the US.

The UFW in Transition

While many historians and researchers have written about the UFW and its struggle for farmworker rights, few have attempted to actually define farmworker justice, suggesting that modern conceptions of this topic have been extrapolated from, or at least heavily influenced by the efforts, strategies, and accomplishments of Chavez, Huerta, and the early UFW. The

unprecedented success of the UFW during the 1960s and 1970s was marked by its capacity for mass mobilization and its victory in passing the Agricultural Labor Relations Act of 1975 (ALRA), which gave farmworkers in California the right to collectively bargain. By organizing the country's most vulnerable workers, the UFW reinfused a sense of power and hope in the idea of fighting injustice against farmworkers through labor organizing. Additionally, the mobilization of the farmworker movement created leaders that have gone on to reshape major grassroots, labor, and immigrant rights movements in the 21st century (Shaw, 2008). However, the glorification of the UFW's 1960s and early 1970s successes is sharply juxtaposed with the comparable obsession with its failures in the 1980s. Some historians, such as Miriam Pawel (2009) and Matthew Garcia (2012), attribute the UFW's decline in collective bargaining power and union membership during this period to the flawed leadership of Cesar Chavez and an unsustainable organizational structure. On the other hand, UFW historians like Christian Paiz (2023) have focused on the experiences of rank-and-file union members to place the UFW's struggles into a larger context of reactionary politics that threatened the effectiveness of organized labor on a national scale. However, the fact that all of these historians contend that the 1980s was a period of decline from which the UFW largely vanished as an effective advocate for farmworker rights imposes a rigid framework on farmworker advocacy that obscures the reality of what farmworker justice is and the contributions that the UFW has made to this effort since the death of Chavez in 1993. Therefore, analysis of the UFW's advocacy in the 21st century presents both an opportunity to account for the evolution and adaptation of the organization since Chavez's passing and more accurately define farmworker justice outside of the traditional historical narratives.

To understand what the UFW has become in the 21st century, it is critical to briefly reconceptualize the period from 1980 to the early 1990s as a time of experimentation and transition rather than simply a decline into obsolescence. Labor unions across the United States underwent significant transformations with the rise of social movement unionism in the 1980s as they faced significant internal and external political pressures (Voss & Sherman, 2003; Windham, 2017). During this phase of UFW history, the Union would contend with the blatant undermining of the ALRA by state officials and agricultural lobbyists, its diminished influence with the public as a result of the dismantled boycott, and the considerable violence that was levied against workers attempting to assert their collective bargaining rights in the fields. The death of Rene Lopez, a dairy worker who was shot by his superiors for attempting to vote in a union election in 1983, would cause the UFW to stop filing certification petitions and change strategies. Marc Grossman, Cesar's press secretary, speechwriter, and personal aide during the last 24 years of his life, recounted of that time that, "[Cesar believed] the greatest form of oppression is when you ask people to risk their lives and give their lives for a cause and then can't produce for them". The ineffectiveness of the ALRA and the danger that organizing posed not only to UFW organizers but the workers themselves led Chavez to shift gears back to the boycott, to fast in 1988, and employ a number of other tactics that would ultimately be unsuccessful in winning labor contracts. However, the harsh lessons learned during this time period laid the groundwork for what the UFW would become after Chavez's death.

The fact that enshrining collective bargaining rights for farmworkers in law was not enough to address farmworker needs or overcome political and agribusiness opposition required that the UFW undergo radical internal and external restructuring to be effective while remaining

dedicated to Chavez's vision of improving farmworkers' lives. As Arturo Rodriguez, President Emeritus of the UFW and Cesar Chavez's son-in-law, explained in an interview:

> We felt that burden and that responsibility that, hey, he's no longer here. So don't do things thinking, what would he have done? Do them based on what the realities are now that you face and the situations that we're in and who we're serving and what's going to be best for them. Even if it has to deal with some of the sacred cows. Even if it has to deal with, you know, some of the things that, for whatever reason, Cesar didn't do or couldn't do, or wouldn't do.

Under Rodriguez, the UFW would undergo a number of radical changes that would distinguish a new era in UFW history and significantly impact the types of strategies and tactics that the Union would employ. First and foremost, the UFW would transition from a volunteer-based organization to a professional union with salaried staff in order to institute a structure that would transcend personalities and stabilize the UFW's capacity to advocate and organize. Additionally, the UFW would pivot to a broader engagement strategy that did not rely so heavily on collective bargaining as the primary method for bringing about change for farmworkers. Rather, the Union would increase its engagement with issues pertaining to farmworkers, both labor and non-labor, through public policy advocacy and the employment of political and legal tactics (Sachs, 2013). The UFW's strategic expansion and adaptation after Chavez's death has made the UFW more effective in achieving its primary goal of improving the lives of farmworkers while also addressing changing social, political, and environmental contexts that reflects a complex understanding of farmworker justice beyond a simple labor issue.

Over the past three decades, the UFW has played a central role in not only shaping immigration, labor, and environmental policy at the local, state, and national level but also bringing farmworker needs and experiences to the forefront of policy discussions. In the following sections, I will highlight some of the major policy issues that the UFW has engaged with in the 21st century, analyze the diverse strategies that they have used to bring about political

change for farmworkers, and discuss how the UFW's public policy efforts can help us gain a more interdisciplinary understanding of farmworker justice.

Labor Policy

Labor policy has been one of the longest and most recognizable areas of UFW political engagement. Beginning in the 1960s, the UFW defied national labor norms by organizing California farmworkers and demanding their labor rights. The UFW attacked grower autonomy and the policies that enabled such egregious power disparities by disrupting the state's agricultural economy through strikes, demonstrations, protests, and nationwide boycotts among other actions (Levy, 1975). Through these efforts, the UFW challenged the low wages, poor working conditions, health risks, and mistreatment of workers, making significant strides in its quest for farmworker justice that culminated in the passage of the ALRA. The UFW's hope that the ALRA would allow the Union to address all farmworker needs by protecting workers' rights to negotiate with their employers was crushed in the late 1970s. The mediating power of the Agricultural Labor Relations Board (ALRB) was strategically undermined by the appointment of pro-grower board members and explicit defunding, both of which have led to long, drawn out labor disputes between the UFW and California growers that ultimately serve to benefit grower interests. In other words, the UFW's dependence on the ALRB to arbitrate disputes between farmworkers and growers neutralized its ability to function as a union. However, the success in passing the ALRA and instituting the most progressive farmworker rights laws in the US has left a lasting impact on the UFW's contemporary labor policy efforts and strategies.

Over the past 30 years, the UFW has been persistent in its efforts to institute a number of labor reforms related to both basic labor rights for farmworkers and union functions. The UFW has played a pivotal role in bringing public awareness to the fact that the labor standards that

shape modern perceptions of work including the eight hour work day, the 40 hour work week, rest and lunch breaks, workers' compensation if injured on the job, and the ability to negotiate with an employer do not apply to farmworkers and, therefore, require legislative intervention (LeRoy & Hendricks, 1999). As a result, since 1999, the UFW has helped introduce and lobby dozens of bills and spearheaded numerous actions related to various labor topics including labor vehicle reform, minimum wage increases, secret ballot union elections, and sick pay among others (Sherman, 2020b; UFW, 1999, 2000b). The vast majority of the UFW's labor policy advocacy has been concentrated in the state of California and gradually, depending on their legislative success, expanded to other states and the US Congress.

Compared to other forms of public policy engagement, the UFW's labor policy efforts have been the most targeted and most successful with respect to getting policies through the legislature. Out of 18 UFW endorsed bills introduced to the California State Legislature from 1999-2022, 15 were passed by the state legislature with eight signed into law and seven vetoed by the governor, while only three failed to pass the legislature (Table 1). The UFW's overwhelming success in passing legislation through the California State Legislature paired with the sizable number of vetoes of UFW-sponsored bills points to a specific tension around labor policy reform that places the strengths of the UFW's appeal with California lawmakers and the broader public into direct opposition with the agricultural industry's lobbying power (Lunde, 2021; Resnick, 2020; Rojas, 2021; Wilk, 2021). While the UFW has engaged in a number of labor policy issues, I will highlight their campaigns for overtime pay and union election reforms as two representative examples of both the UFW's overarching labor policy strategy and the labor elements of farmworker justice.

Table 1. UFW-sponsored labor policies 1999-2022

Year	Bill Number	Bill Theme	Outcome
1999	AB 1165	Farm Labor Vehicle Safety	Passed/Signed
2000	AB 2468	Employer liability for illegal actions of contractors	Failed
	SB 996	Workers' Compensation Benefits Increase	Vetoed
2001	AB 423	Contractor fraud enforcement and penalties	Passed/Signed
	SB 1125	Contractor fraud, financial loss recovery for workers	Passed/Signed
2002	SB 1736	ALRB special arbitration	Passed/Signed
2007	SB 180	Secret ballot or majority sign up election	Vetoed
2008	SB 2386	Secret ballot or majority sign up election	Vetoed
2009	SB 789	Secret ballot or majority sign up election	Vetoed
2010	SB 1121	Overtime: remove farmworker exemption	Vetoed
2011	SB 104	Majority sign-up election	Vetoed
	SB 126	Allow ALRB union certification in case of employer violation	Passed/Signed
2012	AB 1313	Overtime: remove farmworker exemption	Failed
2016	AB 2757	Overtime: remove farmworker exemption (phase in)	Failed
	AB 1066	Overtime: remove farmworker exemption (phase in)	Passed/Signed
2019	AB 1783	Construction of farmworker housing	Passed/Signed
2021	AB 616	Vote by mail in union elections	Vetoed
2022	AB 2183	Vote by mail in union elections	Passed/Signed

One of the most blatant disparities between farmworkers and laborers in other sectors is the exclusion of farmworkers from minimum wage and overtime pay standards. Many lawmakers, including Governor Schwarzenegger who vetoed the UFW overtime pay bill SB 1121 in 2010, have maintained that farmworkers must be excluded from overtime requirements due to the temporal, seasonal, and unpredictable nature of farm labor. The UFW, alternatively, has argued that the exclusion of farmworkers from overtime pay after 8 hours a day and 40 hours a week is the legacy of racist policies levied against African Americans in the 1930s that maintains a caste system of farm labor that continues to dehumanize farmworkers today (Perea, 2011; Schwarzenegger, 2010; UFW, 2010a). From 2010-2016, the UFW introduced four separate bills to grant overtime pay to farmworkers culminating in AB 1066, a phase-in farmworker overtime pay bill Governor Jerry Brown ultimately signed into law in 2016 (AB 1066

Agricultural Workers: Wages, Hours, and Working Conditions, 2016; UFW, 2016d). During the overtime pay campaign, the UFW would rely heavily on its legacy to appeal to lawmakers and the broader public. Through symbolic marches and demonstrations on Cesar Chavez Day, 24-hour fasts, the participation of legislators and faith leaders in UFW actions, and direct lobbying of California lawmakers in Sacramento by farmworkers giving up a day's wages, the UFW emulated its historic legacy. By aligning its overtime campaign efforts with the struggle for farmworker rights in the 1960s, the Union was able to garner public support and put pressure on California lawmakers (UFW, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c). The successful passage of AB 1066 marked the beginning of a national campaign for overtime pay for farmworkers given that most states do not provide any overtime pay to agricultural workers whatsoever. The UFW helped successfully pass overtime pay for farmworkers in Washington state and has introduced the Fairness for Farm Workers Act in the US Congress in an effort to extend overtime pay after 8 hours of work to all agricultural workers in the United States (Sherman, 2021b, 2022d).

A second major area of UFW labor policy engagement has been around the ALRA and union election reforms. Since the passage of the ALRA in 1975, the UFW has had to adapt and address efforts to undermine the ALRB's effectiveness and prevent union certification elections. As Mario Martinez, the current General Counsel of the UFW, explained, the Union has advocated for important policies such as mandatory mediation, majority sign-up elections, card check elections, and vote-by-mail for farmworkers in order to combat common anti-union strategies employed by growers. This includes captive audience meetings, worker intimidation, unlawful firings, and surface bargaining, engaging in contract negotiations with no intention of ever signing a contract. In this case, UFW labor advocacy around union election rights is focused primarily on the fair enforcement of labor law for farmworkers. Similar to other labor policy

advocacy, the UFW relies heavily on symbolism and public actions to garner support and put pressure on lawmakers. As Giev Kashkooli, 2nd Vice President of the UFW since 2017, stated in an interview:

> When we organize the public around farmworkers, we see that governors, even though they respond first to Ag business, they also are uncomfortable. We are able to create discomfort that the people who feed us can't always feed their families.

The symbol of Cesar Chavez and the UFW continues to carry significant historic and moral weight that is particularly resonant with the Latinx community and broader public in California. In this way, the UFW generates discomfort and builds public support by simultaneously invoking the image of Chavez when the Union was first founded to directly associate contemporary labor struggles with those of the 1960s and appealing to a broader range of issues related to farmworkers. Therefore, public actions such as marches through the California Central Valley to the state capital, vigils, chain fasts, petitions, and other tactics associated with the early UFW movement allows the Union to promote contemporary labor issues and place significant pressure on lawmakers (Sherman, 2022b; UFW, 2002a, 2002b, 2007d, 2011b, 2011c). Additionally, associating labor reforms to broader farmworker issues such as the need to protect themselves from the dangers of heat and pesticides enables the UFW to build broader coalitions and pull support from organizations, movements, and individuals that do not necessarily have a strong connection to farmworker justice (UFW, 2011a, 2011f). With regard to the passage of pro-union legislation in California, the UFW's have been extremely effective in both assembling public support for farmworker issues but also exposing the power disparities within the agricultural industry through their public policy campaigns. In the case of secret ballot election legislation SB 104 which was vetoed by Governor Brown, the UFW launched a fierce campaign against the governor's decision using symbolic protests such as the 'Oranges of Wrath' and 'Certificate of Grower Appreciation' to highlight grower lobbying power and maintain momentum for future

labor policy campaigns (SB 104 Labor Representatives: Elections, 2011, p. 104; UFW, 2011d, 2011e). These campaigns ultimately culminated in the passage of SB 126 and AB 2183 which would combat employer election violations and allow farmworkers to vote by mail in union elections respectively (AB 2183 Agricultural Labor Relations: Elections, 2022; SB 104 Labor Representatives: Elections, 2011, p. 126).

Labor policy advocacy is central to the UFW's identity and effectiveness in the 21st century. In advocating for standard labor protections for farmworkers and reforms related to union function, the UFW demonstrates both the preservation of its fundamental values and origins in the 1960s and the incorporation of broader strategies and partnerships to address farmworker issues in the 21st century. In California, where the UFW's presence has made the most significant impact over the past 60 years, the Union is able to most effectively capitalize on Cesar's legacy and the way that it resonates with the public by resurrecting old tactics and symbolism to mobilize public support for modern policies. Given its historical legacy, UFW labor policy advocacy is also a uniquely adversarial type of political engagement that places the UFW in direct opposition to major agricultural stakeholders as UFW-sponsored policies overwhelmingly require that growers change their labor practices and makes it more difficult for them to avoid union certification. As a result, the UFW has had to overcome formidable grower lobbying power within California politics, vetoes of important bills, and maintain public support and momentum for farmworker issues. It has done this by not only maintaining awareness of farmworker labor struggles but also expanding the appeal of its labor efforts by building off of its other political engagements to incorporate and address broader environmental and immigration topics that attract diverse coalitions of supporters. Therefore, despite facing substantial challenges, the UFW's strategies have been successful in passing significant labor legislation for

farmworkers on issues like overtime, minimum wage, labor vehicle safety, and union election voting rights, which have begun to change the nature of and laws governing farm labor in California and beyond.

Environmental Policy

Since its founding, the UFW has been a prominent actor in environmental policy reform with a particular focus on issues impacting farmworker health and safety. In the 1960s and 1970s, the UFW played an important role in relating farmworker safety to broader concerns about pesticides shared by environmentalists and consumers (Fingal, 2019). The growing environmental movement during that time presented unique opportunities for collaboration between labor and environmental groups around the issue of unregulated pesticide use. Despite the fact that environmentalism focused primarily on protecting the natural environment and relied more heavily on legal actions to bring about reforms, partnerships between the UFW and environmental groups such as the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) and the Sierra Club aligned farmworkers, environmentalists, and consumers to ban DDT in 1972 (Gordon, 1999; Pulido, 1996; Tompkins, 2016). In the 1980s and early 1990s, the UFW remained very active in pesticide reform, incorporating the issue of farmworker poisonings and the need for a safe food system into the grape boycott in 1985, the "Wrath of Grapes" campaign in 1986, and Chavez's fast in 1988 (Tompkins, 2016). In 1986, the UFW released a short documentary also titled "Wrath of Grapes" in an effort to educate the broader public about the health impacts, including birth defects, of pesticide sprays on farmworker communities in the California Central Valley (Parlee & Bourin, 1986). While often overlooked, advocacy around environmental issues that impact farmworkers has always been a central tenet and strategy of the UFW's larger mission to improve farmworker lives. Over the past 30 years, the UFW has continued to carry on this

legacy, expanding both the environmental issues that it engages with and the partners that it collaborates with to transform the agricultural industry and improve working and living conditions for farmworkers.

Farmworkers, because of the nature of their work and their proximity to the natural environment, face a unique set of challenges and vulnerabilities that can be detrimental to their health and well-being (Berkey, 2017). Unlike labor policy which exacerbates farmworker vulnerability because of its narrow applications, environmental policy and its failure to keep up with rapid industry advancement and a changing climate aggravates already dangerous working conditions and creates new hazards in the workplace. The invention of new pesticides, global warming, and natural disasters as a result of climate change all harm farmworker health and threaten their safety. As a result, the UFW has had to expand its efforts to address arising issues including, but not limited to, pesticides, heat, wildfires, water rights, and disaster relief. Additionally, engagement with environmental policy requires unique strategies and partners. UFW environmental advocacy over the past few decades has shown that, while passing policies to protect worker health and safety is important, effective change for farmworkers also requires putting pressure on institutions such as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the California Division of Occupational Safety and Health (CalOSHA) to actually enforce said policies. Unlike in the 1970s when both the EPA and CalOSHA were in their infancy, governmental institutions in the 21st century serve as both powerful allies and formidable obstacles in environmental policy advocacy. Additionally, a more established environmental justice movement has increased opportunities for solidarity and collaboration between farmworker and environmental organizations (Perkins, 2022; Tompkins, 2016). As a result, UFW environmental policy advocacy centers on raising awareness of farmworker health crises with the

public, the use of legal action, reliance on the expertise of partner organizations, and persistent monitoring of policy enforcement. To demonstrate the unique qualities of the UFW's environmental advocacy and its impact on farmworker lives, I will cover two of the Union's most extensive and consequential campaigns from the past three years: pesticides and heat regulations.

Chemical exposure from pesticides continues to be one of the most prevalent threats to farmworker safety. Pesticides are continually being developed and applied for agricultural purposes with minimal regulatory requirements as producers only need to show that a particular pesticide does not pose an unreasonable risk to man or the environment (Donley, 2019). As a result, the nature of farm work and the unique vulnerability of farmworkers means that they are often exposed to pesticides at a higher rate than other populations in the US and face greater health impacts due to acute exposure, or short term contact with pesticides (McCauley et al., 2006; Salvatore et al., 2008). In other words, farmworkers have often served as society's canaries, informing the broader public of the adverse effects of certain pesticides on human health through their own experiences (UFW, 2010). As Erik Nicholson, former UFW National Vice President from 2008-2020, explained:

> There's nobody testing or looking proactively at what's the impact of a given cocktail of pesticides on a human over time. It's incumbent on us [the UFW] to literally produce the bodies and say 'this person is suffering X because of their exposure' and it's almost impossible to recreate because workers, for the most part, do not have access to what they've been exposed to.

In this statement, Nicholson speaks to the larger issues of pesticide exposure on farmworker populations and the motivations behind the UFW's environmental activism. While most researchers focus primarily on acute exposure, which normally encompasses instances of farmworkers being present in fields or adjacent communities during active pesticide sprays, Nicholson also discusses the overlooked but equally harmful long-term effects of chronic

exposure which farmworkers face as a result of simply being in fields containing pesticide residue. As a result, the UFW's continued involvement in pesticide reform has worked to not only prevent active spraying of pesticides while farmworkers are working and institute no-spray buffer zones around homes and schools but also eliminate the usage of a number of pesticides found to be particularly harmful to human health (UFW, 2007a, 2009b). Since 1997, the UFW has been an active participant in campaigns to ban numerous pesticides including chlorpyrifos, endosulfan, and methyl iodide which have been found to cause symptoms of blurred vision, dizziness, headaches, nausea, vomiting and, in severe cases, convulsions, birth defects, personality changes, and death (Damalas & Koutroubas, 2016; US EPA, 2015). Similar to its efforts in the late 20th century, the UFW's critical contribution to pesticide reform efforts includes highlighting instances of farmworker poisonings and raising awareness with the broader public, particularly consumers, of the adverse effects of pesticide exposure. However, in recent decades the UFW has also expanded its engagement efforts to include serving as a plaintiff in legal cases brought against the EPA and collaborating with broad coalitions of environmental and labor justice organizations.

In the case of chlorpyrifos, a particularly dangerous organophosphate, the UFW has relied on the expertise of environmental groups and partnered with organizations such as EarthJustice, Pesticide Action Network North America, Sea Mar Community Health Centers, Natural Resources Defense Council, and the Teamsters among others to engage in more than a decade-long public campaign and legal fight against the EPA to ban its use (PAN, 2015; Pesticide Action Network N. Am. V. United States EPA, 2008; Sherman, 2017; UFW, 2007b). The campaign involved several court case appeals, the collection of thousands of signatures, public demonstrations, and the simultaneous introduction of legislation to support the ban of

chlorpyrifos (Sherman, 2017b, 2017c, 2019b, 2019c). These efforts led to bans of chlorpyrifos in California, New York, Hawaii, and the European Union including pressuring individual pesticide manufacturers to discontinue the production of chlorpyrifos culminating in the decision by the EPA in 2021 to ban the use of chlorpyrifos on food productions (Sherman, 2020; US EPA, 2024). However, the EPA's decision did not ban the use of chlorpyrifos in non-food products, or any agricultural product not destined for human consumption, even though farmworkers labor in these sectors (Orrantia, 2021). In this way, the UFW's presence in pesticide reform efforts is critical not just in holding government agencies and agricultural employers accountable for necessary health and safety standards but also in representing farmworker interests which are often overlooked or fail to be prioritized when standards are implemented.

Heat regulation standards represent another critical area of UFW environmental policy advocacy in the past few decades particularly due to an increased prevalence in heat-related illness and death among farmworkers. In general, the outdoor nature of agricultural labor which requires that farmworkers be exposed to full sun and hot working conditions along with the fast-paced, piece-rate character of most farm work makes farmworkers increasingly more susceptible to heat stress and 35 times more likely to die of a heat-related illness (Becerra, 2023). Additionally, the lack of regulations to prevent and treat heat illness paired with rising average global temperatures due to climate change has made it more common for farmworkers to encounter temperatures exceeding 100℉, increasing the risk of dehydration and overheating which has made working conditions more dangerous and resulted in hundreds of farmworker deaths since 1992 (El Khayat et al., 2022; Gubernot et al., 2015; Jackson & Rosenberg, 2010; Tigchelaar et al., 2020). Unlike its efforts with pesticide reform, the UFW spearheaded the efforts for heat illness prevention standards beginning in the early 2000s after a series of

heat-related farmworker deaths. The death of Giumarra grape picker, Asunción Valdivia, in 2004 marked a significant turning point for the UFW as Giev Kashkooli, who was the UFW Political and Legislative Director at the time, stated:

> Arturo [Rodriguez] looked at a bunch of us and said, 'Look, we've got to do something about this and we, as a union, haven't done enough'. [...] He challenged all of us in the union to figure out what we could do. [...] We sent a letter to every single grower association and to the employer where Asunción [Valdivia] died and asked them to sit down with us and voluntarily come up with ways to prevent death. No union contract, nothing. Let's just get together and let's talk about it. Not a single employer responded, not a single one. So that's when we understood, okay, [...] we need to fight. We need to try to change policy. [...] So that was a way where we could impact all farmworkers because every farmworker is working out in the heat and, you know, policy was sort of the strongest way to do that.

Despite the fact that the state of California has protected the right to sustenance, water, and shade for cattle since 1872 (California Penal Code 597(b)), prior to the creation of Heat Illness Prevention Standards in 2005, agricultural employers in California were not required to provide shade, water, rest breaks, heat illness prevention training for their employees, or have a protocol for directing emergency vehicles to heat illness afflicted workers in the fields. The severity of heat-related illness for farmworker populations paired with the absence of standards speaks to both a structural lack of regulation that was ill-equipped to prevent deaths as well as a culture of farmworker disposability within the agricultural industry. As Kashkooli indicates, in the case of heat, the UFW recognized the limitations of traditional labor organizing in addressing this issue and took it upon itself to bring about structural changes to the health and safety standards governing farmworker populations and expedite cultural changes through enforcement. From 2005 onward, the UFW has dedicated substantial resources to its Heat Illness Prevention Campaign which seeks to enforce and improve heat-illness prevention standards. This is accomplished through public demonstrations, petitions, testimonies in legislative hearings on heat, filing lawsuits against CalOSHA and other regulatory agencies, and introducing additional

heat illness prevention legislation at the state and national level (Sherman, 2018, 2021b; UFW, 2007b, 2015). Additionally, as Armando Elenes, current UFW Treasury Secretary recounted, the UFW conducted its own heat sweeps searching for heat standard violations to measure the effectiveness of its campaign. Such efforts have radically changed farm labor in California as water stations and shade structures have become more commonplace and begun to extend nationally as the state of Washington issued emergency heat standards for farmworkers in 2022 and the Asunción Valdivia Heat Illness and Fatality Prevention Act was introduced into the US Congress in 2021 (Sherman, 2021b, 2022c).

The UFW's role as a farmworker labor union uniquely positions it to contribute to larger environmental struggles, elevating and representing farmworker interests that are often overlooked in broader advocacy campaigns (Pulido & Pena, 1998). In the years since Caesar's death, the UFW's engagement with environmental policy has expanded and taken on a form of its own, demonstrating the versatility of UFW strategy, tactics, and partnerships to bring about change for farmworkers that fall outside of traditional labor organizing. Unlike its labor policy advocacy, which is primarily led by the UFW and uses symbolism to garner supporters, the Union's environmental policy efforts rely heavily on the expertise and guidance of broad coalitions. It employs not only legislative strategies but also legal tactics to bring about change as government agencies such as the EPA and CalOSHA provide opportunities for legal recourse that do not exist in other types of policy advocacy. Additionally, the UFW's engagement with environmental policy struggles are notably centered on enforcement rather than simply policy changes given that ensuring compliance with new policies is critical to protecting the personal integrity of farmworkers and preventing worker deaths. Worker health and safety is a dynamic issue that is continually evolving due to industry innovation and changing climate conditions. As

a result, it consistently falls to the UFW and partner organizations to identify health and safety issues, advocate for policy changes, and hold employers and the government accountable for enforcing policy changes.

Immigration Policy

Immigration policy has always been a particularly contentious area of UFW engagement due to both changing demographic and political contexts. In the 1960s, the UFW emerged representing primarily Mexican American and Filipino workers in California and was considered hostile to both documented and undocumented migrant workers due to its direct opposition to the Bracero Program which growers consistently used to break union strikes (Bardacke, 2013; Gonzalez, 2006; Levy, 1975). In the 1980s, shifting political contexts changed the landscape of farm labor for both the Union and the agricultural industry at large. The concurrent establishment of the modern H-2A Visa Program and increased border enforcement in 1986 restructured farmworker demographics in the US and the ways in which growers import farm laborers (Geffert, 2002; Salinas, 2018). Additionally, the establishment of NAFTA in 1994 exacerbated demographic shifts from primarily domestic farm laborers to overwhelmingly foreign-born and undocumented workers as foreign trade policy severely undermined the livelihoods of Mexican farmers (Gonzalez, 2006). These changes in who the UFW came to represent in the late 20th century and early 21st century have, consequently, turned the Union into a particularly active and powerful advocate for immigrant rights and immigration policy reform.

Over the past three decades, the UFW has and continues to dedicate considerable time, energy, and resources to its immigration policy advocacy efforts despite the fact that its impact has remained relatively stagnant when compared to other areas of advocacy. This is due to a number of factors including the uniquely complex and polarizing nature of immigration reform

as a policy issue, the negative views held by the public towards undocumented immigrants, and the fact that immigration policy changes must be instituted at the federal level. However, despite these challenges, its poor track record, and internal tensions around how to use its limited resources, the UFW continues to play an integral role in contemporary immigration efforts because of the unique character and importance of this issue. From a logistical perspective, immigration policy is critical because immigration status represents a fundamental vulnerability within the agricultural industry that undermines gains made by the UFW in other areas of farmworker rights and threatens the productivity of the agricultural industry as a whole (Kostandini et al., 2014; Nessel, 2001; Segarra & Prasad, 2024). In other words, the threat of deportation and the inaccessibility of basic government assistance both destabilize the farm labor supply and temper the effectiveness and impact of reform gains made within the workplace. As a result, immigration reform is essential in achieving meaningful changes for farmworkers. Relatedly, immigration has also served as one of the few policy areas on which the UFW and growers have found a common ground and worked together to bring about change indicating the broader importance of reform for agriculture (UFW, 2013c). From a philosophical perspective, UFW engagement in immigration policy is crucial because of its social and moral weight as the most important issue to farmworker communities. As Kashkooli recounts from a conversation on immigration reform with farmworker leaders:

> We brought together a worker committee on immigration. [...] In 2018 we had a big meeting with a group of probably 60 to 80 people and we laid it out. [...] And several of our members basically said, even if it's a less than 1% chance, we should try. It's so important. [...] And then it's like, ok, you say you want it [immigration reform] but that means you're going to lose multiple days of pay to do all these things and people did. So that's why it is persistent, because farmworkers have been willing to sacrifice to try to fight to continue to make it happen.

Kashkooli's statement highlights not only the importance of immigration reform as the top priority for farmworkers as a whole but also the tremendous commitments of the workers themselves to advocate for these changes, all of which fuels the Union's continued advocacy in this area despite low chances of success. Although farmworkers have been leaders in all forms of UFW policy advocacy, the fundamentally humanistic qualities of immigration reform and the devastating impact that current immigration policies have on farmworkers' identities not only as workers but also as people make it an issue that transcends traditional labor disputes. Therefore, given the nuanced and broad jurisdiction of the immigration system, the UFW's immigration policy advocacy efforts have centered primarily on comprehensive immigration reform and preventing changes to the H-2A Visa Program that would further undermine rights for imported and domestic farmworkers, both of which I will address here in more depth.

Every year, the UFW's broad national immigration reform includes endorsing sweeping policy changes to address issues such as amnesty for undocumented workers, deportation relief, and a pathway to citizenship in the form of an Agricultural Job Opportunities, Benefits and Security Act (AgJOBS) or similar bill (Sherman, 2020c; UFW, 2000a, 2013b, 2013d). These advocacy efforts generally involve UFW participation in nationwide immigrant rights campaigns, direct lobbying of political leaders, testifying before Congress, public demonstrations, and protests. Since 2000, the UFW has partnered with hundreds of immigrant rights organizations, labor unions, religious institutions, legal organizations, politicians, and student groups on various mass mobilization efforts including the 'Keeping Families Together', 'We Are Home', and 'A Day Without Immigrants' campaigns (Sherman, 2020d, 2022a; UFW, 2013a). Through these and similar efforts, the UFW has sought to increase the visibility of farmworker struggles, humanize the experiences of undocumented workers, and place pressure

on elected officials to take action on immigration issues. As Areli Arteaga, the UFW's current Political and Legislative Director, explained:

> [The most important issue for farmworkers is] workers' immigration status and, you know, just the impact that that would have in their day to day lives. [...] I think that where it kind of triggers you the most is like, workers wanting to be able to go home for family funerals, the birth of family members in their home country, [...] being able to buy a house at an affordable rate, [...] just these little things that make your life easier by having a social security number. [...] We see it as a way to holistically improve workers' lives. If folks have legal status, they're more likely to come forward and talk about the working issues and labor violations that they confront.

Undocumented immigration status impacts every aspect of people's lives and places substantial limitations on farmworkers, in the workplace and beyond, despite the fact that their labor is essential for the American food system to function. As a result, UFW leaders have sought to highlight this fundamental contradiction, contextualize the plight of farmworkers, and build solidarity across broad coalitions demonstrating both the urgent need and united support for immigration reform. A clear example of these efforts is the UFW's 'Take Our Jobs!' campaign launched in 2010 encouraging Americans to take up jobs as farmworkers. This campaign challenged lawmakers and the broader public to, first and foremost, acknowledge farmworkers and, second, recognize the antithetical reality that the labor required to feed America is done, overwhelmingly, by undocumented immigrants (Flores, 2018; Pitt, 2016; Sherman, 2021c). In other words, in demonstrating the diverging economic and immigration interests within the US, the UFW has worked to slowly shift perceptions of undocumented immigrants from illegitimate job stealers to essential contributors to the American economy who are trapped by an ineffective immigration system. Additionally, the UFW has used other diverse strategies to gain traction on immigration reform, on the one hand, sitting down with agricultural industry leaders and lawmakers to engage in complex conversations about immigration reform and present a more nuanced reality of how immigration impacts agricultural stakeholders while, on the other hand,

engaging in acts of civil disobedience with other social justice organizations to show solidarity with undocumented immigrants and convey the gravity of these policy issues (Sherman, 2017d; UFW, 2013e, 2013f, 2014). Such partnerships promote the visibility and mass mobilization needed to place pressure on lawmakers to take action. Although UFW efforts have not culminated in comprehensive immigration reform despite decades of policy advocacy, the Union has continued to present the impact of existing immigration policies on farmworker communities to the public and push back against derogatory narratives that seek to undermine the humanity and importance of immigrants in the US.

In the case of the H-2A Visa Program, the UFW has been equally persistent but significantly more successful in preventing changes to the program that might undermine farmworker interests than it has been in its efforts to institute sweeping immigration reform. Although the UFW accepts the H-2A Visa Program as a permanent part of the agricultural labor system, the Union has directly opposed proposed changes from grower lobbyists for the past 30 years. This has included rejecting efforts to remove limits on the number of workers that can be imported, extend H-2A visas to year-round industries, eliminate federal regulatory oversight, and reduce wage requirements for workers (Farmworker Justice, n.d.; G. Kashkooli, personal communication, December 6, 2023; Medige, 2004). These proposed changes to the H-2A Visa Program would not only place more power in the hands of agricultural employers but also reduce the already minimal protections existing for H-2A workers and adversely affect domestic farmworkers. The UFW has used a combination of strategies including filing lawsuits against policy changes, directly lobbying of government officials, and testifying before Congress to prevent changes to the H-2A Visa Program (*Agricultural Guestworkers: Meeting the Growing Needs of American Agriculture*, 2017; Sherman, 2019a; UFW, 2009a). Although the UFW has

defended against anti-farmworker policies related to labor, immigration, and the environment, its engagement with the H-2A Visa Program represents one of its longest and most effective efforts to prevent policy change.

Ultimately, the UFW's continued dedication to the issue of immigrant rights speaks to the broad challenges facing farmworkers today and the need for diverse strategies to address them that transcend traditional labor issues. Over the years, the Union has consistently partnered with growers, its traditional adversaries, and UFW leaders have sacrificed their own security to engage in protest and civil disobedience on immigration reform. This demonstrates not only the UFW's growth as a labor union, political organization, and social movement in the 21st century, but the lengths that it will go to respond to the needs of farmworkers. By continuing to advocate for immigration policy reform and joining the broader immigrant rights movement, the UFW humanizes the struggle of farmworkers beyond their mere role as laborers and adapts to fulfill its primary goal of advocating for the workers' most salient needs and working to improve their lives.

The UFW and Farmworker Justice

As an analysis of UFW political advocacy in the 21st century demonstrates, the UFW has not only continued to be an active advocate for farmworker rights since the death of Cesar Chavez but has also made considerable gains for farmworkers during that time. Despite this, leading scholars have largely disregarded the last three decades of UFW efforts and have failed to recognize the value of political change in farmworker advocacy, preferring to associate the struggle for justice in the fields exclusively with labor organizing. Such perceptions of the UFW and farmworker advocacy represent an inability to disassociate the UFW's primary goal of empowering and improving farmworker lives from traditional labor organizing goals. It also

demonstrates a lack of recognition of the unique intersectional characteristics of farm labor that distinguish it from other labor sectors and an antiquated, out-of-date assessment of what the needs of farmworkers are and the diversification of strategies used to effectively bring about change. Additionally, discussions of farmworker struggles have typically been siloed into labor justice, immigrant justice, and environmental justice frameworks which may address particular aspects of farmworker experience but fail to holistically encapsulate the complex and intersectional forces that shape and define farmworker struggles (Berkey, 2017; Milkman et al., 2021; Thompson & Wiggins, 2002). These considerable gaps in the understanding of UFW efforts highlight the shortcomings of existing theoretical frameworks for assessing farm labor advocacy and calls for an interdisciplinary farmworker justice framework to better conceptualize the broad nature of farmworker advocacy struggles and the UFW after Cesar Chavez.

Effectively addressing farmworker struggles has required the UFW to branch out beyond the traditional labor union structure and engage in diverse legal, political, and social battles related to labor, immigration, and environmental issues. It has required the UFW to employ broad advocacy strategies and play numerous roles as an organization including a union, a political advocate and defender, a legal representative, a policy enforcer, and a community leader among others. Finally, the UFW has worked to expand its reach and elevate farmworker issues to the public through the formation of broad coalitions with other organizations. The UFW in its current form represents the deliberate and conscious evolution of the Union by those who have worked to carry Cesar Chavez's legacy forward. In a discussion about defining decisions regarding the structure of the UFW, Arturo Rodriguez explained:

> There was a lot of discussion about it over the years, would we merge with somebody? [...] And you know in the end, right or wrong, I made the decision that we're not merging with anybody. I don't care how difficult it is, how much we have, what we have to do and how much we have to work and everything else. [...] I've seen it, especially within the

> labor movement, [...] you get painted a pretty picture at the beginning [...] but at some point they say, hey, it takes too much money to organize farmworkers. So what have you gained? Now you've lost your independence, you've lost your flexibility, you've lost your ability to really be creative and innovative, and everything else.

In his statement, Rodriguez highlights his decision not to merge the UFW with the Teamsters in the early 2000s, which likely would have led to a stronger overall labor union, because of the commitment to prioritizing farmworkers and the critical importance of independence, flexibility, and creativity in farmworker justice advocacy. In other words, the UFW has previously bypassed opportunities to become a stronger labor union in the traditional sense because such a move was believed to be counterproductive to the UFW's mission and farmworker interests more broadly. In this way, the UFW and their advocacy decisions suggest that the fundamental character of farmworker justice cannot be addressed with traditional trade unionism but, rather, more closely aligns with social movement unionism which extends labor union activism to broader social justice issues (Ross, 2007; Waterman, 1993). The diversity of issues, strategies, and partners that the UFW has engaged with since Cesar's death exemplifies its social movement unionism tendencies and indicates a nuanced understanding of the intersectional forces that impact farmworker lives and well-being outside of labor contracts. In other words, UFW efforts over the past 30 years have been focused on improving farmworker lives not simply through labor organizing but also through broad structural and cultural goals intended to reconstruct the laws and standards that govern farm labor as well as redefine perceptions and treatment of farmworkers by employers and American society at large. Understanding these efforts and, by extension, the UFW as an organization in the 21st century, requires a new, interdisciplinary justice framework that places farmworker experience at its center. Therefore, I propose a comprehensive framework of farmworker justice defined as the social movement to combat vulnerability specific to farmworker populations by legitimizing the presence of farm laborers,

reducing labor rights inequities between farmworkers and workers in other labor sectors, and protecting worker health and safety.

A farmworker justice framework requires that advocates address the systemic labor inequities that have been promoted in the United States as a result of exclusionary and exceptionalist policies pertaining to farm labor. Many of the labor policy issues that the UFW has engaged with such as minimum wage, overtime, workers' compensation, and rest breaks are standards that have long existed for other laborers in other sectors but remain an area of contention for farmworkers (LeRoy & Hendricks, 1999). Therefore, farmworker justice works to apply labor standards equally to all workers and, thereby, reduce farmworker vulnerability. UFW campaigns around wages, rest breaks, safety standards, and even immigration status have contributed to the broader goal of reflecting farmworker equality with other laborers both in the law and workplace culture. In addition to working to provide farmworkers the same rights as other laborers, UFW advocacy demonstrates a further recognition of the unique characteristics of farm labor and farmworker vulnerability that necessitates proactive interventions to ensure the effective implementation of these rights. In other words, institutional protections, law enforcement, and labor organizing are paramount to securing farmworker rights and combating exploitation. For example, while some argue that the UFW's efforts to reform the ALRA stray too far from traditional labor norms, the intersectional vulnerabilities that farmworkers face, the severe inequalities within the agricultural industry rooted in the legacy of slavery, and the physical isolation of agricultural communities makes it uniquely easy for growers to mistreat workers, ignore labor regulations and standards, and sabotage unionization efforts (Halgas, 2004; Luna, 1997). As a result, strong policies to extend labor rights to farmworkers, facilitate union

efforts, and hold employers accountable to their employees is critical to farmworker justice efforts to reduce labor inequities between farmworkers and the rest of the labor force.

Similar to labor inequities, farmworkers often face exceptionally dangerous work conditions with minimal worker protections making worker health and safety a critical tenet of farmworker justice. Lack of protection for farmworkers is a fundamental source of vulnerability that can mean the difference between life and death as it is common for farmworkers to be exposed to hazardous chemicals, be required to work in evacuation zones during wildfires, and even die of heat stroke in the fields (A. Brown, 2020; E. Brown, 2022; El Khayat et al., 2022; Salvatore et al., 2008). In order to address the fundamental issue of farmworker health and safety, the UFW has worked to promote basic labor and immigrant rights such as workers' compensation, health insurance, and grievance processes, while also working to address dynamic and evolving working conditions that threaten farmworker well-being more broadly. By engaging with environmental issues like pesticide use and heat, farmworker justice advocates work to institute policies that reflect the evolving industry and climate conditions that impact workplace health and safety while also holding employers and government agencies accountable for enforcing the new policies (Comi & Becot, 2023; El Khayat et al., 2022; McCauley et al., 2006). The UFW's presence in these advocacy efforts is critical to furthering farmworker justice as farmworker health and safety are rarely prioritized by industry leaders, government agencies, or social movements despite their frontline exposure to health threats and the essential nature of their labor. This fact is consistently reinforced by the delay or failure to institute regulations and protocols to prevent worker death when compared to other industry stakeholders such as consumers (Orrantia, 2021). In other words, farmworker health and safety and farmworker justice efforts in general require structural changes that enshrine protections for farmworkers in

policy and cultural shifts among growers, government agencies, and the public to actively value and protect farmworker life.

Finally, the nature of farm labor in the US inherently leads to the delegitimization of farmworkers as people, laborers, and stakeholders within the agricultural industry. As people, farmworker humanity is undermined by the temporality, disposability, and replaceability of farm labor which is normalized by immigration policies that render them "illegal" despite the essential nature of their labor and is reinforced by poor working conditions that have been known to take their lives (Berkey, 2017; Holmes, 2013; Minian, 2018). As workers, the threat of deportation and minimal labor protections makes it exceedingly complicated to confront and address exploitation, mistreatment, and other labor violations (Griffith & Lee, 2012; Nessel, 2001; Perea, 2011; Segarra & Prasad, 2024). And, finally, as stakeholders in the agricultural industry, farmworker inputs and needs are disregarded and their role is considered to be more closely related to farm implements rather than contributors to the industry, a sentiment that is reinforced by policies such as the H-2A Visa Program (Geffert, 2002; Gonzalez, 2006). In this way, farmworker justice works to combat the various structural and cultural standards that enable an agricultural system to value and protect access to essential labor while simultaneously disregarding the humanity of the people who perform this work. On a structural level, this takes the form of broad labor, environmental, and immigration reforms that legitimize the presence and humanity of farm laborers. Moreover, on a cultural level, the legitimization of farmworkers requires keeping farmworker justice issues in the public eye and empowering workers themselves to advocate and bring about change for their communities. In other words, providing farmworkers with the opportunity to use their voices, legitimize their presence, and defend the value that they contribute to farm work through advocacy is critical to farmworker justice. Areli

Arteaga touched on this in a description of her mother's participation in the UFW's immigration reform efforts:

> I recruited my mom to be one of our spokespersons. [...] We had a demonstration in front of the White House in which we brought together farmworkers that put together the Thanksgiving meal and my mom represented the Idaho potato. And so, in the middle of this conference, she picked up the potato off of the table and she's like 'And with this potato, I feed you all'. And it was this moment of like, wow, that is really…like she found her voice and she found what she was saying.

In this case, the importance of the UFW's policy campaigns extends beyond simply working toward structural changes but in giving farmworkers, like Arteaga's mother, the space to find their voice and affirm their humanity. Through these efforts, the UFW also promotes cultural changes within and outside of the farmworker community by empowering workers and raising public awareness of farmworker issues. It also shows that farmworkers, and their political involvement, are an indispensable part of farmworker justice efforts. Therefore, all UFW political advocacy campaigns have stemmed from the leadership of the farmworker communities that they engage with both within and outside of their union membership. In this way, the UFW has acted as a microphone and provided a platform for farmworkers to advocate for the most urgent struggles coming from the fields. As a result, the UFW's multiple roles as a labor union, a political organization, and a social movement is critical to elevating farmworker justice issues, empowering workers to defend their humanity, and bringing about substantive structural and cultural changes that legitimize the presence of farm laborers in the workplace and in American society.

Conclusion

In all, the UFW's labor, environmental, and immigration policy advocacy efforts over the past 30 years have made considerable strides in improving the lives of farmworkers including but not limited to sweeping heat reforms, overtime pay after 8 hours a day and 40 hours a week,

pesticide bans, new union election laws, and the prevention of changes to the H-2A Visa Program. However, these efforts transcend traditional trade unionism and require a broader conceptualization of the UFW's evolution since the 1980s and its roles as a labor union, a political organization, and a social movement working to improve the lives of farmworkers. Therefore, farmworker justice represents an improved framework for understanding the UFW's efforts since the death of Cesar Chavez that addresses the broad, intersectional forces that contribute to farmworker vulnerability and values the diverse strategies required to bring about substantive change for farmworkers. In other words, broad engagement in the various issues that relate to farmworkers is necessary for effective farmworker justice advocacy. Legitimizing the presence of farmworkers, protecting worker health and safety, and reducing inequities between farmworkers and laborers in other sectors are inextricably linked and must be addressed together to validate farmworker experience and avoid undermining gains made. Finally, the case of the UFW's advocacy after Cesar not only functions to restructure our understanding of contemporary farmworker justice efforts but demonstrates the need for more interdisciplinary approaches to studies of contemporary social justice and labor justice movements in order to adequately assess their role in evolving social, political, economic, and environmental contexts.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, this project would not have been possible without the tremendous support and trust of the United Farm Workers of America. My sincerest thanks to Teresa Romero, Arturo Rodriguez, Armando Elenes, Giev Kashkooli, Irv Hershenbaum, Areli Arteaga, Marc Grossman, Mary Mecartney, Erik Nicholson, and Juanita Valdez-Cox for your honesty and willingness to share your immense knowledge and experience with me. Special thanks to my tío, Mario Martinez, whose example has always been a guiding inspiration in my life. Thank you for your love, trust, and support.

I would also like to express my sincerest gratitude to my mentor, Dr. Christian Paiz, who has fearlessly uplifted my work despite the challenge that it poses to his own (I look forward to your continued mentorship!) and to my mentor, Dr. Fang Xu, who has served as a consistent and encouraging supporter of my research over the past five years. I must also thank the Latinx Research Center and the Charles H. Percy Undergraduate Grant for Public Affairs Research for funding my research endeavors. Additionally, thank you to the UC Berkeley librarians Jennifer Dorner, Sarah Rosenkrantz, and Shanna Farrell for their significant guidance and support throughout the research process and thank you to my ISF 190 peers for their solidarity.

Thank you to my parents, Eloy Zárate and Senya Lubisich, for your love, committed support, and unwavering belief in me. To my siblings Ashley Hernandez, Bahia Zárate, Eloy Antonio Zárate, and Alaia Zárate, thank you for putting up with the way that this project has taken over all of our lives. And lastly, this project is dedicated to the farmworker communities that make our lives possible and their continued struggle for justice in the fields and to Constantino and Leticia. You will always be in my heart.

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