



For decades, California farmworkers' hard work has helped to feed the people of the United States. The lettuce in our salads, the grapes in our fruit bowls, and the almonds in our snack mix are just a few of the products that farmworkers harvest day after day. Despite the important role they've played in supplying us with fruits and vegetables, farmworkers have been mistreated by their employers throughout history.



## WORKING CONDITIONS

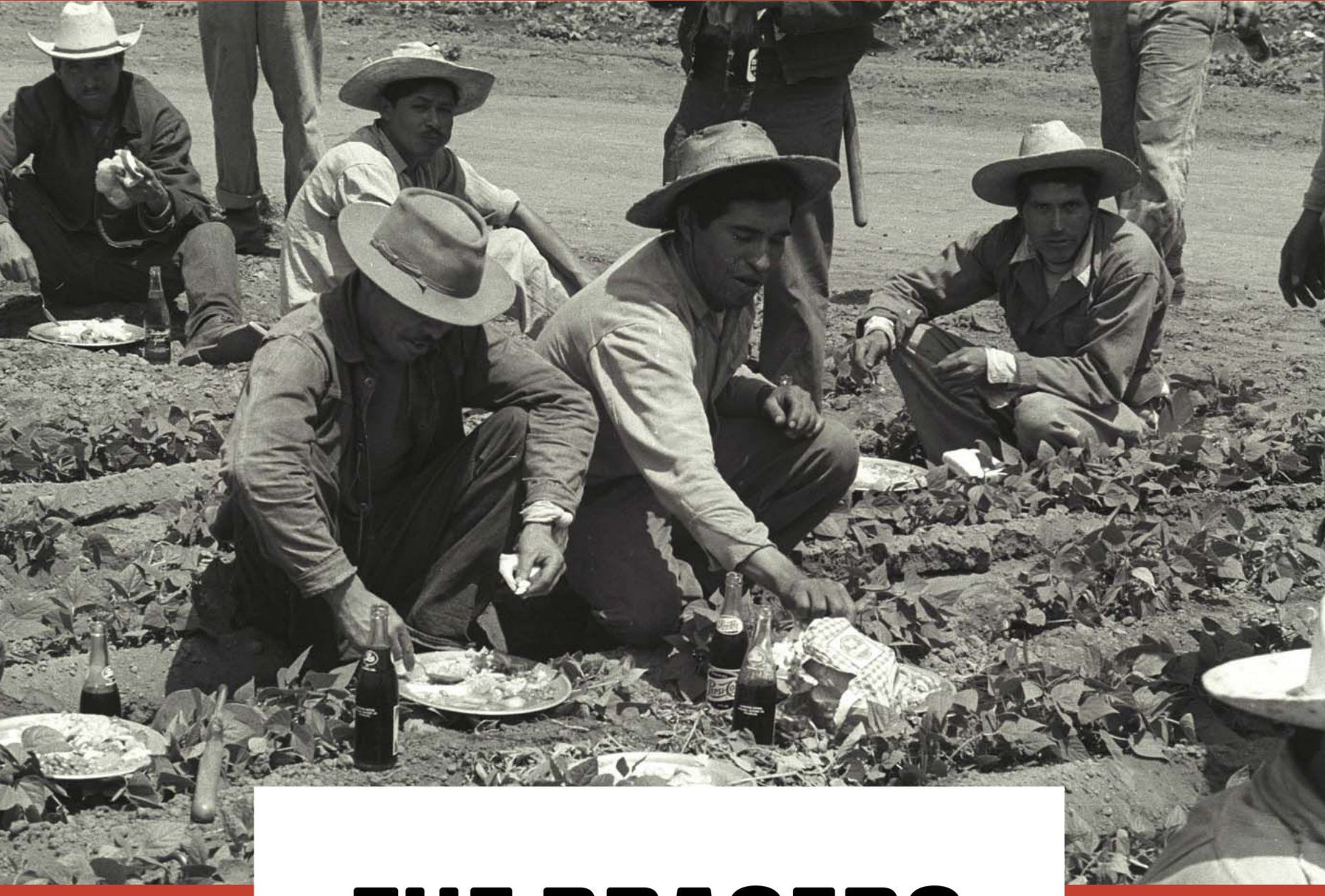
Before the 1960s, most U.S. farmworkers endured poor working conditions and lacked opportunities to speak for their rights. Growers forced them to work long hours in the heat and for low pay. Farmworkers often lived in mosquito-filled metal shacks without plumbing. At one ranch, the growers made all farmworkers drink from the same cup. At other ranches, workers were subjected to physical and sexual abuse.



### Mexican Workers Wanted in October

Farmers and orchardists in Washington state have placed orders for approximately 6000 imported Mexican workers for the month of October, according to reports sent to

Figure 14. A description of the demand for Mexican laborers (Source: Northwest Farm News, September 9, 1943).



## THE BRACERO PROGRAM

The **Bracero Program** created additional tension among farmworkers. The program started in 1942 to address a labor shortage caused by World War II, and Congress made it official nine years later with the signing of **Public Law 78**. It allowed laborers from Mexico, known as **braceros**, to work on U.S. farms and receive lower wages.



Growers were only supposed to hire braceros if they couldn't find domestic laborers—but growers knew they'd make more money if they paid workers less, so they often hired braceros anyway. Growers treated braceros just as poorly as the farmworkers they'd replaced. They worked in dirty, hazardous conditions and were exposed to toxic pesticides.







# KEY FIGURES & ORGANIZATIONS

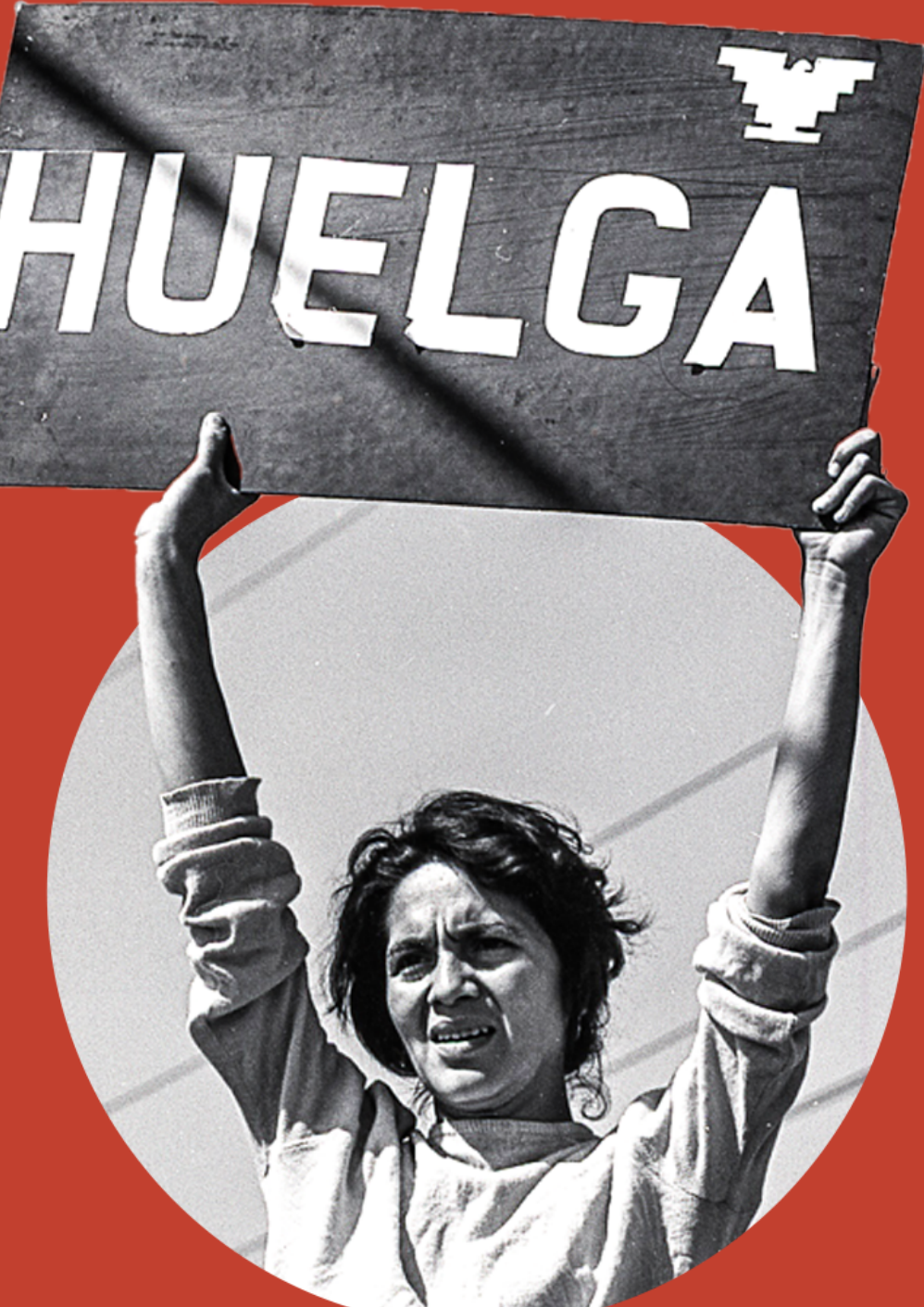


Over time, farmworkers realized they'd need to organize into groups called **unions** to receive better treatment from their employers. As members of a union, they could work together to organize **strikes**, during which they would refuse to work until growers agreed to give them fair treatment and better pay.

Early on, two of the most successful unions were the **Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC)** and the **National Farm Workers Association (NFWA)**. Larry Itliong, Dolores Huerta, and Cesar Chavez were three union leaders who played important roles in the movement to protect farmworkers' rights.

## Larry Itliong

Itliong left the Philippines as a teenager and worked at a cannery in Alaska, where unsafe conditions led to an accident in which he lost three fingers. He also was a farmworker in a few other states before settling in California. After the AWOC was founded in 1959, Itliong served as one of its leaders.

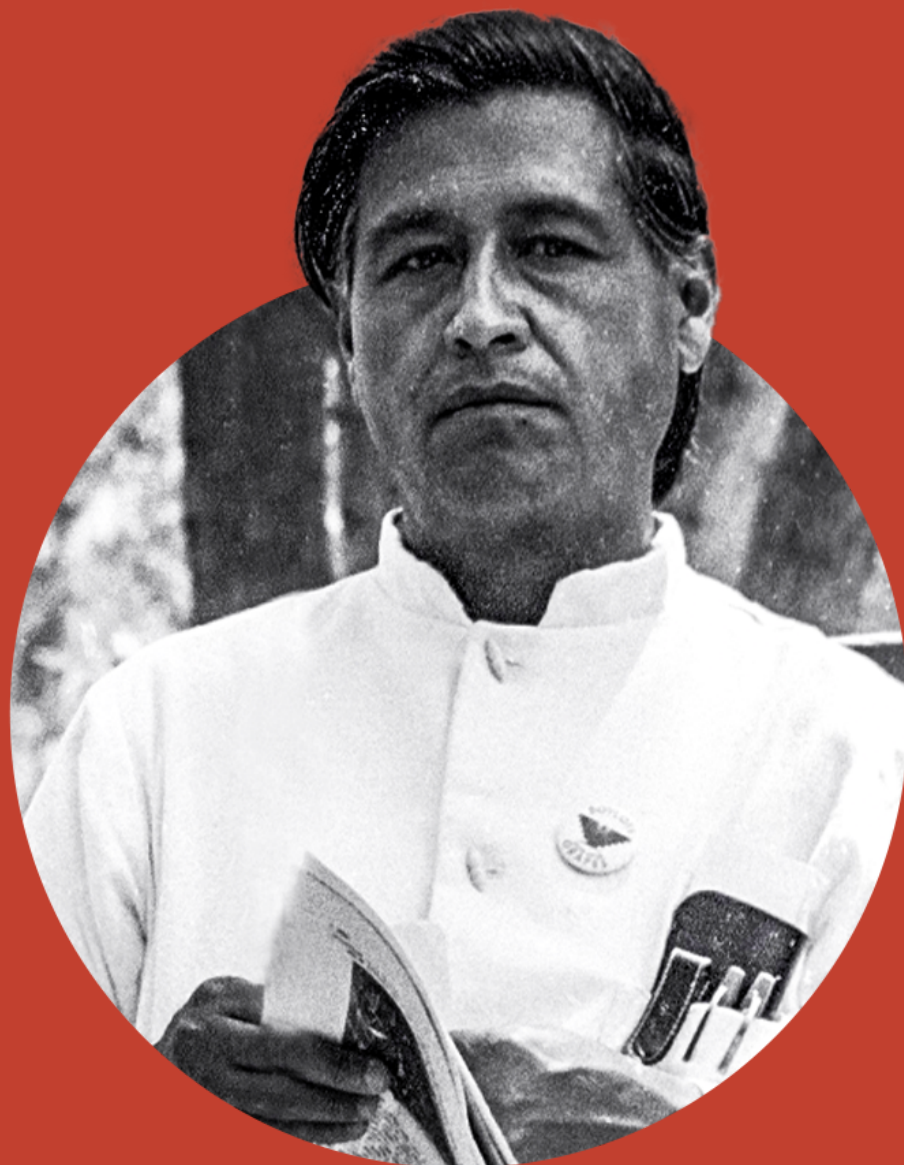


## Dolores Huerta

Huerta was born in a small New Mexico mining town. Her father had served as a lawmaker, and her mother had been a community organizer. They passed on to her a passion for helping those in need. She held leadership positions in both the AWOC and NFWA. Huerta coined the saying, "¡Sí, se puede!," which in Spanish means, "Yes, we can!," and it became a rallying cry for activists.

## Cesar Chavez

Chavez was the son of Mexican-American farmworkers and grew up in poverty in Arizona and California. As a farmworker, he was subjected to growers' mistreatment and decided to work with others to bring it to an end. He and Huerta co-founded the NFWA in 1962. When some workers became frustrated and wanted to respond with violence toward growers, Chavez used a nonviolent tactic that put his own life at risk. He went on a hunger strike, during which he fasted for 25 days and lost 35 pounds, until the workers agreed not to use violence. He also led a march more than 300 miles long in support of farmworkers.





# DELANO GRAPE STRIKE



The **Delano Grape Strike** was one of the most important strikes started by farmworkers' unions. Itlong and the AWOC began the strike on September 8, 1965, after grape growers in the area surrounding Delano, California, refused to increase pay and improve working conditions at their farms. Within about a week, the NFWA had joined the strike. The farmworkers, most of whom were Filipino and Latino, vowed to work together and use nonviolent tactics to secure their rights. The next year, they merged their unions to create a stronger union, the **United Farm Workers (UFW)**.



To encourage farmworkers to keep the strike going, Chavez, Huerta, and Itlong organized a series of marches throughout the area. Striking workers who protested on farms or joined the marches were sometimes attacked by growers, who tried to run them over with cars or spray them with poisonous chemicals.

**"THERE'S BLOOD ON THOSE GRAPES"**

BOYCOTT non-UFW GRAPES LETTUCE and GALLO WINE

UNITED FARM WORKERS OF AMERICA—AFL-CIO

**Support the Farm Workers**

can your family live on less than \$1800 a year ?

**DON'T BUY CALIFORNIA GRAPES**

CALIFORNIA TABLE GRAPES WERE PICKED BY PEOPLE WORKING 10 HOURS A DAY IN THE FIELDS WITH NO BREAKS AND NO TOILETS. EVEN IF EVERYONE IN THE FAMILY WORKS, THE FAMILY CAN ONLY EARN \$1600 - \$1800 A YEAR. THE FAMILY IS FORCED TO GO ON WELFARE WHILE THE GROWERS EARN MILLIONS. TO HELP FARM WORKERS GET OFF WELFARE AND GET A LIVING WAGE AND DECENT WORKING CONDITIONS THROUGH RECOGNITION OF THEIR UNION, DON'T BUY CALIFORNIA TABLE GRAPES.

**Talk To Your Grocer**

Ask him not to sell any California Grapes until the Grape Growers sign contracts with Cesar Chavez's United Farm Workers Organizing Committee, AFL-CIO.

**N.A.A.C.P.** 948 Market Street - Suite 703 San Francisco, California 94102 (415) 986-6992

Another nonviolent strategy used during the Delano Grape Strike was a boycott, which occurs when consumers avoid buying products from a company that is mistreating people. The goal is for employers to keep losing money until they're forced to change their policies to address the strikers' needs. During the Delano Grape Strike, farmworkers lined up in front of grocery stores to convince shoppers not to buy grapes. As more people around the country realized workers on Delano's grape farms were suffering, shoppers agreed to stop buying Delano grapes until workers were treated fairly.

## OUTCOMES

The strike and boycott lasted five years. In 1970, Delano grape companies finally signed union contracts to give farmworkers



better pay



health benefits



some protections against pesticide exposure

Although the UFW's efforts have improved working conditions on U.S. farms, many farmworkers are still mistreated today. In recent years, for instance, California farmworkers have had to remain in the fields without protective gear while breathing in wildfire smoke from nearby areas. As long as farmworkers continue to be mistreated, the UFW and other farmworkers' unions exist to support farmworkers and advocate for their rights.







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