

For Immediate Release
Erik Nicholson: 509-578-6475

Survey of 250 Farmworkers from across Washington State shows underemployment, reduced earnings and increased expenses driven by climate related issues, threatening the viability of the State's agricultural workforce

Interviews with farmworker respondents available upon request

The cumulative impact of climate related factors: heat, smoke, and drought have resulted in the underemployment of Washington's domestic farmworkers, reducing their earnings, increasing living expenses and negatively impacting their health. These are the high-level results of a survey of 250 farmworkers from across central and eastern Washington conducted by Semillero de Ideas. [The full report is available here.](#)

95% of workers said that climatic conditions such as heat, drought, and smoke have negatively impacted the availability of work. 82% reported their income has diminished by \$500 a month, with 41% stating their monthly income has decreased by a \$1000 or more.

As a result, over 80% of respondents shared they have reduced if not eliminated putting money aside for the days and weeks they can't work. **Taken in the entirety, these trends are pushing Washington's domestic farmworker community to the verge of collapse.**

"Having money set aside is the difference between a farmworker family eating and going hungry," said Erik Nicholson, Semillero de Ideas Executive Director. "Most farmworkers do not qualify for any social services. Agriculture is by definition seasonal, and Washington farmworkers are year-round residents. Having money to get through the days and even weeks and months when there is no work is critical to farmworker survival. With these findings, we're deeply concerned that Washington's farmworkers may be on the verge of no longer being able to afford to work in agriculture," said Nicholson,

Farmworkers are struggling to find full time employment.

"Before, thinning apple flowers lasted two weeks or more, now it's over in less than 10 days. The cherry harvest also finishes faster. With the heat, smoke and drought, I've lost about 25 hours of work per month," said survey participant Maria Gutierrez.

Jesus Pinocho, who also participated in the survey shared; "When it's too hot, the fruit gets damaged. The cherries bleach and the apples burn, this means they're worth less.



I've lost between \$2500 and \$3000 a month during the periods of extreme heat, between fruit that's not good to pick and the hours they cut back. What's more, we spend between \$100 to \$200 a month to have air conditioning going in our houses day in and day out. This means we save less and don't buy the things we need, like clothes for our children."

In addition to cutting back on clothes for their children, farmworkers shared that they've cut back on medicine and medical treatment and are buying less food for their families.

Extreme heat and smoke-filled air make agricultural work even more dangerous. While there are state regulations mandating additional safety measures, 38% of workers reported employers are not complying with these requirements. 53% of workers reported having smoke related health impacts, while 64% of workers shared they had experienced heat related symptoms in the last twelve months.

Survey respondents called on both growers and the state government to do more to address these challenges.

"The issues farmworkers identified are serious, they impact workers' health and the economic viability of their families," said Josefina Luciano, co-founder of Semillero de Ideas and a longtime Washington State farmworker. "While the state government and industry all have important roles to address these challenges, workers can't wait around hoping others will take action. With the support of Semillero de Ideas, workers are coming together in teams to use their knowledge and expertise to innovate tools and processes that can mitigate at least some of these challenges."

Workers are not content to simply wait for others to take action. They want and need relief now. Semillero de Ideas is now working with teams of farmworkers to identify best practices and new approaches to better mitigate the climate related challenges the survey identified. The organization will soon be launching an open call for farmworkers to participate in an innovation challenge focused on developing impactful interventions to mitigate climate related impacts.

Semillero de Ideas conducted the survey with funding from Washington's Climate Commitment Act to better understand the impacts of climate change where farmworkers live and work. This is the second time the organization has engaged farmworkers about this issue; the findings from the first survey were published in the [Washington State Department of Agriculture's Climate Resiliency Plan](#) last year.

Semillero de Ideas is a Washington State based non-profit that fosters farmworker-led innovation in agriculture. The organization partners with farmworkers from across Washington and Mexico to create impactful, cost-effective solutions that make agriculture better for all, workers and growers.



The Climate Commitment Act supports Washington's climate action efforts by putting cap-and-invest dollars to work reducing climate pollution, creating jobs, and improving public health. **Information about the CCA is available at www.climate.wa.gov.**

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