

Tribute to Farmworkers; Statement on Survivors of Sexual Abuse Beyond Pesticides, March 2026

Like many who have worked in support of the United Farm Workers (UFW) for decades to advance humane and sustainable working conditions—including safety from toxic pesticides, a living wage, and access to health care—for farmworkers who cultivate and harvest the nation's food, we are deeply troubled by the report of abuse by co-founder and president of the union, Cesar Chavez. The staff and board of Beyond Pesticides support and extend a deep sense of empathy to the survivors, and echo the words of Dolores Huerta, a co-founder and tireless leader of the UFW, in honoring the courage of these women.

Dolores Huerta, co-founder of the UFW, in an interview with Pulitzer Prize-winning host Maria Hinojosa of Latino USA [[Democracy Now](#) reporting] [[audio of interview](#)], shared the following: "I just want to say that I think the fact that the women survivors who had this happen to them as they were girls, that they have had the courage to come out. And God knows, I really applaud them so much, because I think their courage is giving—has given me the courage also to be able to come out, because, in many instances, they will want to blame the girls. Some people will try to blame me."

Paulina Gonzalez-Brito, who was an organizer with the UFW, wrote the following in [My experience in the farmworker movement helps me understand Dolores' silence](#) in *Waging Nonviolence*: "As I read of the sexual violence that Dolores Huerta, Ana Murguia and Debra Rojas experienced at the hands of Cesar Chavez and the secret they kept for decades, my heart breaks open. I didn't have to read more to understand why they kept the secret, I knew it in my heart. They were afraid that speaking of it would harm the movement and the fight for farmworker rights. These three women, my sisters in the farm worker struggle, made a sacrifice, but it was the kind of sacrifice they should have never had to make."

We share the knowledge that the movement for farmworker justice is, at its core, centered around people and organizations joining together for the protection and respect of those working in agricultural fields, essential in bringing food to our tables. The power of the movement will forever be rooted in their personal experiences, with women leaders who, as workers, organizers, activists, and supporters, have and continue to speak truth to power, advocating for the most basic of rights through collective action.

We recognize, in the midst of acknowledging the impossible decisions that so many farmworker women have endured, that it will take a continued spirit of collaboration to ensure progress moving forward, knowing that there is still so much to be done.

The campaign for farmworker justice continues:

- As programs and policies remain under attack by the White House, political appointees, collaborators in Congress, and corporate allies in the chemical, agribusiness, and food

industry;

- With the knowledge that continued reliance on hazardous pesticides is an unnecessary and failed strategy for growing sustainable, productive, and profitable crops—accruing most benefits to chemical companies and allied industries; and,
- As the preponderance of sciences captures the dangers farmworkers face from handling pesticides and pesticide-treated crops, as their families live and children attend schools in the path of chemical drift amidst elevated and disproportionate rates of illness.

Motivating the founding of Beyond Pesticides were the experiences of farmworkers and the daily assault of pesticides in their lives. The UFW in the 1970's, with many of Beyond Pesticides' founders, worked to institute comprehensive worker protection standards leading to the adoption of the first federal occupational health standard for farmworkers. Now, we see the transition to organic practices and compatible products remains the most meaningful way to protect workers, their families, and their communities, requiring a societal investment in ensuring basic human rights that intersect with addressing existential threats to public health, biodiversity, and climate.

Farmworkers, knowing firsthand the dangers of pesticides, have always been at the forefront of the call for systemic change, not only to protect themselves but to protect the health of all those who work in agriculture and consume food these essential workers produce. By protecting farmworkers with a shared commitment and societal investment in organic land management as a social good, we can, as a society, address the threats to general public health, biodiversity, and climate to build together, with our shared principles and values, a more compassionate and healthy future.

With deep respect, we urge all to support farmworker organizations and to stand in solidarity with the often unsung heroines of the movement; the incredible women who were, and continue to be, vital to making this collective vision a reality for generations to come.

In the words of the UFW... Si se puede!
The staff and board of Beyond Pesticides

Please see the [following resources compiled by the Dolores Huerta Foundation](#) dedicated to healing, advocacy, and justice for survivors of sexual assault.