Marylanders for
Food and Farm Worker Protection

We must protect the workers who produce our food. Essential workers in Maryland's agricultural industries are highly vulnerable to COVID-19 - they are typically forced to work in close quarters and not provided personal protective gear.

Thousands of migrant workers come to Maryland each year. They often live in overcrowded housing and travel to work side by side in buses and vans. Some employer-provided housing lack potable water, adequate bathing facilities, and even soap.

Similarly, poultry processing workers labor in damp, cold, and poorly ventilated plants. The line speeds force workers to labor in close range. Workers are unable to take needed breaks, and reports of workers wearing adult diapers to get them through shifts are both shocking and revealing of an industry that does not take worker health seriously. At least 570 meatpacking workers have tested positive for COVID-19 in Maryland, and at least six have died as of August. This is likely an undercount because neither the meatpacking companies nor the state have adequately disclosed COVID cases from this industry to the public.

Most agricultural and meat processing workers lack basic employment benefits, such as health insurance, sick leave, and unemployment insurance. Workers who become sick or have to care for a sick relative do not have paid leave to allow them to care for themselves or their loved ones. As migrant and immigrant workers, they support extended families here and abroad on poverty wages and the consequences of missing a day of work due to illness are substantial. Workers, including those on H-2A and H-2B temporary work visas, are hesitant to come forward with complaints about their work sites because they fear they will be terminated or some other type of retaliation. The lack of protections coupled with retaliation forces workers to work in silence.

Language barriers and lack of transportation are obstacles for many food and farm workers when they try to access testing for COVID-19. And, too often, the results are delayed.

The federal Occupational Health and Safety Administration under the Trump Administration has failed to act to protect workers. However, several states, including Virginia, have issued emergency regulations to address the high-risk conditions in agricultural and meat processing facilities and labor camps to help prevent the spread of COVID 19 among employees and their families. As opposed to recommendations or voluntary guidelines, these regulations require employers to implement protective measures at the worksite, and in employer-provided housing and transportation. We urge Maryland to follow suit.

Maryland must take immediate action to prevent further spread of COVID-19 in our poultry and seafood processing plants, among farmworkers across the state, and surrounding communities.

We, the undersigned, on behalf of our thousands of Maryland members call for the protection of Maryland's vulnerable farmworkers, poultry, and seafood processing workers with an Executive
Order or legislation instituting mandatory and enforceable protections for COVID-19 as found here: https://bit.ly/C-19protections

Signed,

Abibiman Foundation
AbibiNsroma Foundation (ANF)
ACLU of Maryland
AFSCME Council 3
Agricultural Justice Project
Alabama State Association of Cooperatives
Alianza Nacional de Campesinas
Alliance for Empowering Rural Communities
Allies of Meat Workers
Animal Outlook
Assateague Coastal Trust
Brighter Green
CATA Farmworkers Support Committee
Casa San Jose
Castanea Fellowship
Cedar Lane Unitarian Universalist Church, Environmental Justice Ministry
Center for Biological Diversity
Center for Food Safety
Center for Science in the Public Interest
Chesapeake Physicians for Social Responsibility
Clean Water Action
Climate Law & Policy Project
Climate Stewards of Greater Annapolis
Compassionate Bay
Concerned Citizens Against Industrial CAFOs
DC Greens
Eat for the Earth
Environmental Working Group
Factory Farming Awareness Coalition
Fair Farms
Fair World Project
Farm Forward
Farm Sanctuary
Farmworker Association of Florida
Food Animal Concerns Trust (FACT)
Food Chain Workers Alliance
Food & Water Action
FOUR PAWS USA
Friends of the Earth U.S.
Green America
Greenbaum Foundation
Greenbelt Climate Action Network
GreenpeaceUSA
HEAL Food Alliance
Humane Society of the United States
The Humane League
Jewish Initiative for Animals
Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future
Lady Freethinker
Main Street Vegan Academy
Maryland Legislative Coalition
Maryland Campaign for Environmental Human Rights
Maryland United for Peace and Justice
Migrant Clinicians Network
MLC Climate Justice Wing
National Family Farm Coalition
Natural Resources Defense Council
National Employment Law Project
Open Markets Institute
Our Revolution Maryland
Prince George's County Food Equity Council
Project Protect Food Systems
ProVeg International
Public Citizen
Public Justice Center
Rural Advancement Foundation International, USA (RAFI-USA)
Rural Coalition
Rural Community Workers Alliance
Rapid Shift
Seeding Sovereignty
ShoreRivers
South Baltimore Community Land Trust
Takoma Park Mobilization
Toxic Free NC
Union of Concerned Scientists
UFCW Local 400
UFCW Local 27
WISE