

COVID AT THE MARGINS

A Discussion Series by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

FARMWORKERS IN THE PANDEMIC: ESSENTIALLY DISPOSABLE



Thursday, August 27 | 12:00 pm ET / 9:00 am PT

Watch at <https://www.facebook.com/presbyhunger>

Or join via Zoom: RSVP at sdoevents@pcusa.org to receive the link

PANELISTS



Antonio Tovar is Executive director of the Farmworker Association of Florida (FWAF), a statewide grassroots organization. Antonio is the Executive Director of the Farmworker Association of Florida (FWAF), a 36-year-old statewide grassroots organization. He has worked there since 2005 as researcher, organizer, and educator. Before moving to Florida in 1998 he worked as a journalist for United Press International covering Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central America. Antonio was born in Mexico City and spent his childhood between the city and his grandmother's farm in Morelos. He studied Rural Development and Community Health at *El Colegio de la Frontera Sur* in Chiapas, Mexico and Anthropology at the University of Florida. Dr. Tovar's activism started in High School as an Electoral Observe. As an undergrad he was Student President for the College of Philosophy, History, and Literature at the University of Guanajuato and the President of Mexicans in Gainesville Student Association at University of Florida. In the labor movement he was the Secretary and Treasurer of the Food Chain Workers Alliance (FCWA); he is a Board member of Florida Immigrant Coalition (FLIC), and the Coalition of Agricultural Workers International (CAWI). He coordinates the

Climate Justice collective at *La Via Campesina North America*, and the South Region at the US Food Sovereignty Alliance. Antonio's activism is complemented with his academic work. He has over 30 academic publications on workers' health and safety with multiple academic partners, he is Fellow at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Interdisciplinary Research Leaders, and a Board member of the Community-Campus Partnership for Health (CCPH). He loves gardening and cooking. Farmworker Association of Florida was previously awarded a grant by Presbyterian Committee on Self-Development of People and Presbyterian Hunger Program.



Kathia Ramirez

Kathia Ramirez was born and raised in Aztlan land, Los Angeles CA, but is very proud of her Zapotec Indigenous roots from Oaxaca Mexico. She has been part of the CATA (Comite de Apoyo a los Trabajadores Agricolas or the Farmworkers Support Committee) team for 6 years. Comite de Apoyo a los Trabajadores Agricolas has been serving the immigrant and farmworker community in Southern NJ, Kennett Square PA and Salisbury MD for the past 41 years. CATA works around Immigration, Worker's Rights and Food Justice. She started as an organizer and now as the Food Justice Coordinator works closely with community members who are interested in bettering our current food system. She also manages the organization's community gardens in each state it works in. She represents CATA and its members in Alliances at the national level working in

solidarity with social movements at the global level to advance Food Sovereignty and Agroecology as an alternative to our Food System. Prior to working at CATA, she was pursuing her Bachelor's in Spanish and Latino Studies at Mount Holyoke College in Western MA. Kathia has served as one of the USFSA- US Food Sovereignty Alliance Northeast Region Co-Coordiators since 2017 and served on the board of the DFTA- Domestic Fair-Trade Association.



Erik Nicholson currently serves as a National Vice President of the United Farm Workers (UFW) where he has worked since 2002. The UFW is the largest and oldest US trade union for agricultural workers. In the United States, almost all farmworkers are immigrant, many lack legal status. To make matters worse, laws enacted to protect workers exclude agricultural workers, including labor laws. As such, in much of the United States, farmworkers do not have a legally binding mechanism that compels employers to recognize a union when a majority of workers so choose. Nonetheless using corporate campaign strategies Erik oversaw three successful union drives at area farms that more than tripled the UFW's presence in the States of Oregon and Washington.

Erik currently directs the UFW's efforts to develop strategies that improve the lives of farmworkers who produce food for US consumers, wherever these workers may be in the world. This work has included the development of the Equitable Food Initiative (EFI), a multi-stakeholder certification and training program focused on farm labor, food safety and environmental stewardship issues <[www. equitablefood.org](http://www.equitablefood.org)>. Erik is Chair Emeritus of the Board and one of the founding members of the EFI. All three major US farmworker unions serve on the board. In addition, Costco, Bon Appetit (a US subsidiary of the Compass Group) and Andrew and Williamson, a large fruit and vegetable grower with operations in California and Mexico serve on the board. In the four years that the EFI has been actively certifying farms, it now has impacted over 50,000 farmworkers employed in 4 different countries and facilitated the additional payment of \$9 million in additional wages to farmworkers.

Erik is also the Chair of the Board of CIERTO, a UFW created non-profit dedicated to the identification, training and dispatch of agricultural workers in a clean and transparent manner. In 2019, CIERTO successfully dispatched over 1600 workers from Mexico to the United States with guest worker visas, ensuring that not a single worker was subjected to recruitment fees or other illegal charges or activities. In fact, the ILO has named CIERTO a best practice for the Americas in its innovative approach to addressing ethical recruitment. 35% of the workers CIERTO recruited were women, breaking with the structural discrimination currently endemic to the US agricultural guest worker program that results in close to 95% of recruited workers being men.

In addition to this work, Erik currently directs the UFW's national campaign to address conditions on dairy farms, an industry that has some of the highest injury and fatality rates in the US. Erik's current work involved convening a nascent group of national and international retailers, along with dairy producers to develop a multi-stakeholder effort to improve working conditions at dairies across the US.

Erik has also overseen a number of regulatory and legislative efforts directed at improving the lives of farmworkers, including leading negotiations in Washington State on a binding set of rules to protect farmworkers from the COVID 19 virus. He also participated in the national negotiations of the Farmworker Modernization Act which passed the House of Representatives late last year.

He joined the UFW in 2002 after working with PCUN, a farmworker union in Oregon, for twelve years. Before that, he worked in Nicaragua from 1987 to 1990 documenting human rights abuses and hosting delegations in the war zone in an effort to stop the US sponsored war in that country.

Nicholson has a B.A. from Duke University and has been a featured presenter at several national and international conferences concerned with immigration and guest workers. He is fluent in Spanish and is based in Richland, Washington.