

**TESTIMONY
OF
ROY REYNA**

**BEFORE THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON
HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR AND PENSIONS**

APRIL 15, 2008

Introduction

My name is Roy Reyna. I have worked in Florida's tomato fields for more than 25 years. I started off as a tomato picker and today I work as a farm manager for Grainger Farms in Immokalee, Florida.

My Mexican-born father was also a farm worker and we would travel as a family to many different areas around the country to pick fruits and vegetables. I love working in the fields because every day we are putting American tomatoes on the tables of our nation's families.

Issue

I am here before this Committee to share with you my perspective on the working and living conditions of farm workers in Immokalee. In my 25-year history of working in Florida's tomato fields, I have never seen slavery or any situation where someone was forced to work against their will.

All of our roughly 90 to 100 employees in Immokalee voluntarily work for us during our season, which runs from November through May. They choose to work with our company during the season because we pay them a fair wage, offer very inexpensive housing and treat them with dignity and respect.

Without satisfied workers, no one would pick our tomatoes and our farm would be out of business. That's why it's really important for us to create an atmosphere of trust between us. As a former tomato picker, I completely understand the importance of earning then maintaining that trust.

As you know, farm work is hard work. Tomatoes have to be hand picked. I also recognize that many workers want to be rewarded with more money if they work harder. For that reason, we will offer our harvesters an incentive by paying them 50 cents per bucket of tomatoes they pick during the harvest.

Their hard work is definitely rewarded, as it is common on our farm to see a tomato picker earn \$125 for five hours of picking tomatoes. That's \$25 per hour.

If Mother Nature doesn't cooperate with us on a certain day, we still try to do something for our workers. Again, we want them to be happy.

I receive personal satisfaction when my workers thank me for giving him the opportunity to earn money I know will help him and his family. Most of our farm workers send their money home to Mexico while some will want to have a permanent life here in the United States.

As you know, there are lots of challenges in the community of Immokalee. I wish the area had better housing and services for its residents. Our company owns brand new, government-inspected housing so that our workers have a clean place to live.

At the end of the day, we want our workers to have the best possible experience with us so they will return the following season. It's a mutually beneficial relationship. We need each other so we can feed our nation.

I appreciate the opportunity to present our position on these issues.