



TO: House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water
FR: Ira Cuello-Martinez, PCUN
RE: Support for HB 3124

April 3, 2023

Chair Helm, Vice Chair Hartman and Owens, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Ira Cuello-Martinez and I am the policy and advocacy director at PCUN, Oregon's Farmworker Union. At PCUN, we work to empower farmworkers and working Latinx families to improve their working conditions through community building, organizing, and policy advocacy.

We support HB 3124, the drought package, the Bipartisan Drought Relief and Water Security Package (BiDRAWS), and specifically the inclusion of the following provision:

4-3: Safety Net Resources for Disaster Relief of Agricultural Workers.

This provision set aside \$10 million for direct payments to farmworkers who lose income due to drought-related issues such as heat or smoke.

Over the last few years, farmworkers have been facing an increase in extreme weather conditions such as deadly heatwaves, wildfires, and unhealthy air quality. As extreme heat and wildfires become more common in Oregon, agricultural workers are forced to choose between working in dangerous conditions or losing out on a paycheck. In the summer of 2021, we witnessed an Oregon farmworker, Sebastian Francisco Perez, die from cardiovascular and respiratory failure caused by heat exhaustion and dehydration.¹ This is unacceptable.

Fortunately, the Oregon legislature passed a \$100 million drought relief package in December 2021 and allocated \$10 million to farmworkers who lost income due to these extreme

¹ Two Oregon businesses whose workers died during heat wave fight state fines
<https://www.oregonlive.com/business/2022/05/two-oregon-businesses-whose-workers-died-during-heat-wave-fight-state-fines.html>

conditions.² We appreciate the legislature's initiative to provide additional relief to agricultural workers who do an essential job in our state.

With a reinvestment of \$10 million to the Climate Change Fund through HB 3124, we are protecting the workers who face the most risks posed by the climate crisis. The dangers of the climate crisis are not evenly distributed. Many agricultural workers are immigrants, Indigenous, Latinx, and low-income. Prioritizing relief to the members of our communities who are most impacted is key to developing an equitable response to climate disasters. This is a cornerstone of environmental justice. Agricultural workers do essential work that feeds and supports our entire state, and they need safe workplaces and fair pay.

Workers should not have to put their life and health at risk to make ends meet and support their families. No farmworker should ever lose their life because of their work. We urge you to vote in favor of HB 3124 with the \$10 million investment into the Climate Change Fund for farmworkers who lost income due to heat or smoke.

Ira Cuello-Martinez
Policy and Advocacy Director
PCUN

² Senate Passes Drought Relief Package to Support Rural Communities
<https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/senatedemocrats/Documents/PR%20-%20SB%20892%20Drought%20Relief%20Package.pdf>