

My name is Kathy Keesee and I am the Program Coordinator for NOWIA Unete, Center for Farm Worker Advocacy.

Unete has dedicated nearly three decades to serving the agricultural worker community in southern Oregon. Throughout this time, we have played a significant role in advocating for regulations in labor camps aimed at enhancing the working and living conditions for these workers. However, it is important to note that many of these regulations barely offer even the most basic protections. It is likely that many residents of Oregon would be taken aback by the current state of farm labor living conditions.

Our organization has secured funding from the Criminal Justice Commission to provide support for workers in the illegal marijuana industry. One of our roles involves accompanying law enforcement to grows once they have been secured. During these visits, we see the living conditions faced by these workers. Later, we transport the workers to our office, where we offer a range of additional services, including emergency housing, food assistance, and clothing. On the ride back to our office, workers share insights into the hazardous living conditions present at the grows.

We hear reports of significant lack of adequate bathroom facilities and showering options for workers. Access to toilets is restricted to supervisors, while other employees must seek alternative locations to address their needs. Additionally, workers are exposed to hazardous chemicals and are compelled to reside in tents or makeshift housing constructed from 2x4s and black plastic. May I add that these are also conditions from legal grows.

Numerous code violations related to improper electrical setups have been identified. In some cases, workers are required to sleep in hoop houses covered with plastic, posing a severe risk; should the illegal electrical systems malfunction, the plastic could ignite, resulting in serious burns. There have been instances of workers suffering from severe burn injuries.

The environmental conditions in the growing areas are concerning. There are literally miles and miles of plastic from hoop houses and irrigation systems. Additionally, water sources such as streams or creeks that traverse these areas are being contaminated by chemicals and human waste. Workers often have no choice but to use these streams for bathing, as they represent the only available water source.

The potential environmental impact on fish and amphibian life is devastating. Not to mention the homeowners downstream who suddenly find the water table has dropped due to illegal wells being drilled are met by armed thugs when they go to inquire about the water situation.

I can confidently say that the efforts we have made over the past 30 years to enhance the living and working conditions for agricultural workers have been grossly violated at the grow. We are currently facing conditions reminiscent of the 1950s.

We do presentations around the valley about the marijuana industry and we've heard numerous accounts of land owners being offered \$150,000+ cash in a back pack to "rent" their land for a season. It's not uncommon and for that reason I find it hard to believe that landowners don't realize who they are renting to.

I believe that choosing to turn a blind eye to the gross violations of unregistered labor housing should be heavily penalized. \$500 is a joke in a billion-dollar industry. Landowners need to also be made responsible for labor housing violations.

I am including some photos of the conditions.

I fully support passage of HB 3194.

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