

Human Rights Watch

Children's Rights

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2010/05/05/child-labor-and-our-groceries>

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When grocery shopping for my children, I often ask myself, "Is this cereal healthy?" or "Are these carrots organic?" But until recently, I never thought to ask, "Did a 12-year old pick these strawberries?"

Child labor is usually portrayed as a problem in poor, distant countries. But hidden in America are hundreds of thousands of children who pick the fruits and vegetables that end up in our grocery stores.

As a researcher for Human Rights Watch, I've spent much of the past year interviewing dozens of children around the country who work in agriculture, often under difficult and dangerous conditions. I spoke with 12-year olds who picked blueberries in North Carolina and oranges in Florida. Some told me they started working in the fields when they were only 7. These kids aren't working on their families' farms or for a few weeks during summer vacation to earn money for an ipod. They're working for 10-hour days, up to six months at a time.

Incredibly, it's perfectly legal in this country for a 12-year old to work 60 or more hours a week in the fields when not in school. And there is no minimum age at all for children working on small farms with their parents' permission. The US has strong child labor laws except when it comes to agriculture. Laws dating back to the 1930's allow children to work in agriculture at far younger ages, for far longer hours, and under more hazardous conditions than children working in any other job. In agriculture it's legal for an employer to have a 16-year old drive a forklift or use a chainsaw, for example, even though these tasks aren't allowed anywhere else until age 18.

Please join me in changing these antiquated laws that put children's health, safety, and education at risk. Agriculture has one of the highest rates of work-related fatalities in the country. Child farmworkers risk pesticide poisoning and high rates of injuries from working with sharp tools and heavy machinery. It is not surprising that children who work long hours in the fields drop out of school at four times the national average. Without an education, many are destined for a lifetime of grueling, low-wage labor.

Poverty plays a large role in pushing these children into the fields. But so do laws that allow employers to hire them and place their futures in jeopardy.

It's time to apply the same rules to child labor in agriculture as to all other jobs. Please contact your representatives in Congress and urge them to support the Children's Act for Responsible Employment (HR3564). This bill will protect all working children equally by setting the same minimum age and maximum hour standards for agriculture that already apply to every other industry in the United States. The bill wouldn't change the rules for children working on their own families' farms.

The CARE Act has the support of the American Federation of Teachers, the National Education Association, the National PTA, the NAACP, and over 80 other leading organizations. However, more public pressure is needed to get action on the bill during this Congressional session.

When I feed my daughters, I don't want to worry about whether the food I'm serving is tainted with child labor. Neither should anyone else.

URGE YOUR CONGRESSPERSON to protect child farmworkers.

Throughout the US, child labor in agriculture is putting children's health, safety and education at risk. Although agriculture is one of the most dangerous occupations in the United States, child farmworkers are exempt from the legal protections granted to all other working children in the US.

The Children's Act for Responsible Employment (HR 3564) would eliminate this dangerous double-standard. Please send the letter below to your Congressperson today.

Letter to Send:

As a constituent, I am writing to ask you to co-sponsor the Children's Act for Responsible Employment (CARE Act, HR 3564). This important bill would help to eliminate dangerous and exploitative child labor in US agriculture.

A new report from Human Rights Watch has found that hundreds of thousands of children, some as young as 7, are working as hired laborers to harvest produce in this country. Unlike for other industries, the law sets no minimum age for children hired to work on small farms and allows children as young as 12 to work unlimited hours on any size farm, as long as they do not work during the hours school is in session.

The exemptions for child labor in agriculture put children's health, safety, and education at risk. Nationally, at least one third of child farmworkers never graduate from high school. Children in the fields risk pesticide poisoning and injuries from sharp tools, and suffer work-related fatalities at more than 4 times the rate of other working youth.

The CARE Act would update US child labor laws by applying the same age and hour standards for children working in agriculture that already apply to all other industries in the United States. It would not affect children working on farms owned and operated by their parents.

I hope that you will give this bill your full support to ensure that our food supply is not tainted by child labor, and that all working children in the United States receive equal protection.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Your Name

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