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New Research Shows Child Farmworkers Unprepared for Workplace Dangers

MargaretWurth

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New research published in the <u>American Journal of Industrial Medicine</u> reinforces just how dangerous <u>agricultural work is for children</u> in the United States and how unprepared most are for what they face in the fields.

More <u>US child workers die in agriculture</u> than in any other industry. Every day, <u>33 children are injured</u> while working on US farms. And they receive frighteningly little safety training, making their work in demanding environments even more dangerous.

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Researchers from <u>Wake Forest School of Medicine</u> interviewed 30 child farmworkers, ages 10 to 17, and published their findings in two articles that describe how children are <u>pressured to work quickly</u>, with little control over their hours or the nature of their work.

The children interviewed feared having their pay docked or being fired if they couldnt keep up.

They received little if any safety training. One 14-year-old worker said: When youre chopping with the machete, they say, Oh, be careful, like, to not hurt yourself, but thats basically it.

Children Ive interviewed for Human Rights Watch investigations of child labor in US tobacco farming had similar experiences, working long hours in extreme heat with virtually no safety training.

One 15-year-old child worker told me his mom also a farmworker was hospitalized after being sprayed with pesticides, but even then, his

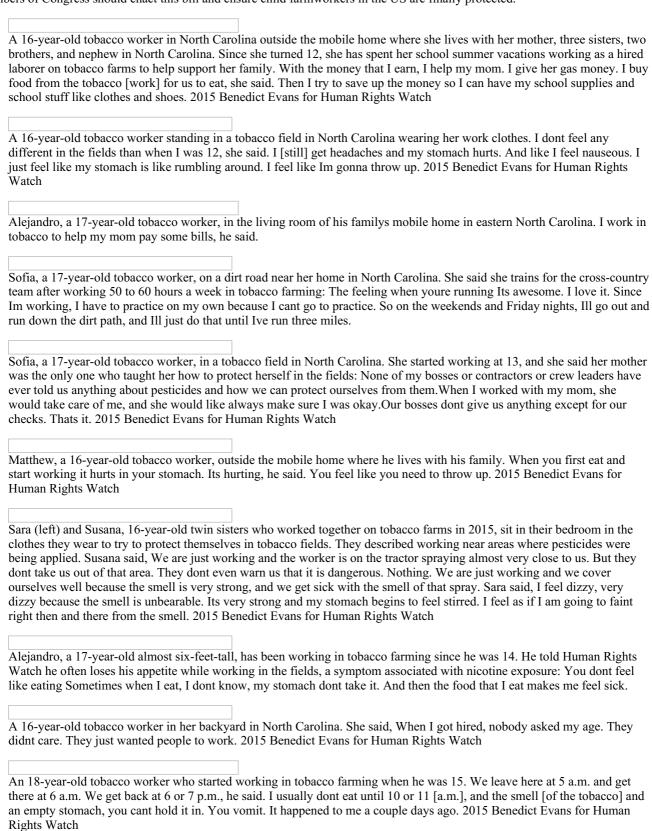
employer never told him how protect himself: He just said, Be careful. Thats all.

Telling a 14-year-old to be careful with a machete, or a 15-year-old to be careful around pesticides, is hardly adequate safety training. Safety training is essential for all workers, but children shouldnt be allowed to do such dangerous work in the first place.

Loopholes in US labor law make it legal for children as young as 12 to work unlimited hours on farms of any size with parental permission, as long as they dont miss school. There is no minimum age for children to work on small farms or family farms.

The new research shows the dire consequences of allowing children to work in such a dangerous sector. But <u>a bill</u> currently in the US House of Representatives would give child farmworkers the same protections as children working in other sectors, limiting their hours and raising the minimum age to begin work.

Members of Congress should enact this bill and ensure child farmworkers in the US are finally protected.



Dr. Sara Quandt and Dr. Thomas Arcury are faculty at Wake Forest School of Medicine. Children are not small adults, Dr.

Quandt said. Dr. Arcury added, If we think about children as children, because thats what they are, were putting them to work in the nations most hazardous industry: agriculture. Were putting people who are not only biologically immature, but behaviorally immature and asking them to work with adults. Were putting them into a situation in which they are exposed to pesticides, theyre exposed to machinery and sharp tools, theyre exposed to the heat. 2015 Benedict Evans for Human Rights Watch

Dr. David Tayloe, Jr., a pediatrician in North Carolina, told Human Rights Watch that, Green Tobacco Sickness is all about exposure of the skin to green tobacco. And so the nicotine thats on the plant, in the plant, gets secreted out the pores of the plant, can be absorbed by the skin of a human being. And the nicotine can make you sick. 2015 Benedict Evans for Human Rights Watch

Gloves used by Sofia, a 17-year-old tobacco worker. She told Human Rights Watch that she has to purchase her own protective gear. 2015 Benedict Evans for Human Rights Watch

A portable toilet in a tobacco field in North Carolina. Teenage children interviewed by Human Rights Watch reported inconsistent access to bathroom facilities while working on tobacco farms.

A tobacco field in North Carolina. 2015 Benedict Evans for Human Rights Watch

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