

Human Rights Watch

Children's Rights

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/10/12/us-companies-should-protect-child-tobacco-workers>

Campaign and Advocacy

Help us continue to fight human rights abuses. Please give now to support our work

Poverty No Excuse for Dangerous Child Labor

Margaret Wurth

[Share this via Facebook](#)

[Share this via Twitter](#)

[Share this via WhatsApp](#)

[Share this via Email](#)

[Other ways to share](#)

[Share this via LinkedIn](#)

[Share this via Reddit](#) 

[Share this via Telegram](#)



[Share this via Printer](#)

On Sunday, the *Washington Post Magazine* [published an article with compelling stories](#) of two boys who work on North Carolina tobacco farms to help their families make ends meet. Many parents of child tobacco workers are themselves poorly paid farmworkers. There is no question that the families need the money.

But that is all the more reason why we shouldn't let the United States government and tobacco companies off the hook for this [dangerous child labor](#). Tobacco farming [exposes children to nicotine](#), toxic pesticides, extreme heat, and other dangers that could have long-term consequences on their health. These toxins pose special dangers to children with developing brains and bodies. Child labor can also interfere with schooling and lock children into low-wage, low-opportunity jobs, trapping children in a cycle of poverty.

Over the last three years, I've interviewed more than 100 child tobacco workers and very few of them had received education or training about the dangers of the work or how harmful it could be for them in the long-term. We know much more now than we ever have about the dangers of nicotine, and our public policies should catch up with scientific evidence.

It's the job of policymakers to prohibit children from activities that could harm their health or safety. It's also the job of the companies buying tobacco from US farmers to ensure that there are no human rights abuses in their supply chains.

The *Washington Post Magazine* article brought an important issue to the attention of many readers who probably never knew children too young to legally buy a pack of cigarettes are cultivating and harvesting tobacco in the US. But I fear some readers might have come away believing that child labor on tobacco farms is an inevitable symptom of poverty, and a problem that can't be fixed. Tobacco companies, the Obama administration, and Congress can fix this problem, and the fact that children are suffering harm because they need the money is all the more reason why they urgently need protection.

How US Underfunding Public Housing Harms Rights in New York, New Mexico, and Beyond

United States Lack of Regulation Fuels Crisis of Unaffordable Insulin

[Share this via Facebook](#)

[Share this via Twitter](#)

[Share this via WhatsApp](#)

[Share this via Email](#)

[Other ways to share](#)

[Share this via LinkedIn](#)

[Share this via Reddit](#) 

[Share this via Telegram](#)



[Share this via Printer](#)

Human Rights Watch defends the rights of people in 90 countries worldwide, spotlighting abuses and bringing perpetrators to justice

Get updates on human rights issues from around the globe. Join our movement today.

Human Rights Watch is a 501(C)(3) nonprofit registered in the US under EIN: 13-2875808