

Human Rights Watch

Children's Rights

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/06/13/world-day-against-child-labor-us-should-protect-young-farmworkers>

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Lawmakers, Labor Department Need to Act

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As the world marks another [World Day Against Child Labor](#), US leaders should commit to ending child labor at home.

Globally, countries have [reduced](#) the number of children involved in child labor defined as work performed by children below the minimum age of employment or children under age 18 engaged in hazardous work from 245 million in 2000 to 160 million in 2020. Meanwhile, US protections for child farmworkers are as weak as ever.

Under US law, children can work in agriculture from younger ages, for longer hours, and in more hazardous conditions than children working in any other sector. Today, it is legal for 12-year-old children to work unlimited hours on a farm of any size, as long as they have a parents permission and they dont miss school. Children that young cannot legally work in any other sector in the US. In agriculture, children at age 16 can do work considered hazardous by the US Labor Secretary, while in every other sector children must be 18.

Lawmakers in Congress have introduced legislation to close these gaps. The Childrens Act for Responsible Employment and Farm Safety ([CARE Act](#)) would amend US labor law to raise the minimum hiring age in agriculture to 14, and the minimum age for hazardous work to 18, matching the minimum ages for other areas of work.

Another important bill, the [Children Dont Belong on Tobacco Farms Act](#), would prohibit children under 18 from work involving direct contact with tobacco , a toxic crop containing nicotine. Congress should pass both of these bills.

But child farmworkers also need the Department of Labor to take action to provide safer work environments. The Labor Department has the authority to determine which jobs are considered hazardous and off limits to the youngest children working on farms. The list of hazardous occupations in agriculture has not been updated since 1970 and is way too narrow.

Labor Secretary Marty Walsh has repeatedly committed to ending child labor worldwide. At [an event this month](#), he said child labor is, a denial of fundamental human labor rights and its unacceptable. Hes right. And he has the power to do something about it. Secretary Walsh should initiate a new rulemaking process to update these regulations.

Child farmworkers have waited long enough for the basic workplace protections that all other working children have.

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