

# THE BOUNTY OF FOOD: THE POVERTY OF HEALTH

THE CALIFORNIA ENDOWMENT  
CEO TASK FORCE ON AGRICULTURAL WORKER HEALTH

2001



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THE CALIFORNIA ENDOWMENT

REPORTED BY



The Tomás Rivera  
POLICY INSTITUTE

## *Message from the Chairman*

Dear Dr. Ross:

It is with great pleasure that I provide you with the final report and recommendations of The California Endowment's CEO Task Force on Agricultural Worker Health.

Undoubtedly, the deplorable health, working and living conditions of such a vital segment of our population - and state economy - has been ignored for too long a period of time. We have the opportunity to accomplish something that would be truly historic, and we are proud to have made a contribution to your efforts to turn the dark pages of history for the California agricultural worker to new chapters marked by respect and good health for themselves and their families.

It is our firm belief that the public policy and programmatic recommendations presented in this report will provide you with the groundwork needed to develop strategies to make lasting improvements in the lives of these workers. We are hopeful that the diversity of perspectives represented on the Task Force has produced ideas that will yield meaningful and even profound consequences.

In my many years of public service, I have worked with few groups exhibiting the commitment and dedication that members of this Task Force demonstrated. Most remarkable was the fact that 22 people were able to reach consensus on such a wide range of issues in only three months.

On behalf of the Task Force members, I commend you and the members of The California Endowment's Board of Directors for your leadership and commitment in taking on such an enormous and complex challenge.

Thank you for giving all of us the opportunity to play a role in this historic and critical endeavor.

Yours Truly,



Hon. Esteban E. Torres  
Member of Congress (retired)



## CEO TASK FORCE ON AGRICULTURAL WORKER HEALTH

### Task Force Members

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# CEO TASK FORCE ON AGRICULTURAL WORKER HEALTH

A Report by The Tomás Rivera Policy Institute

## PROLOGUE

This report presents the final recommendations of The California Endowment's CEO Task Force on Agricultural Worker Health. This Task Force was created to help advise and guide The Endowment in the development of future grant-making strategies to address the distressing health and living conditions of the state's one million seasonal and migrant agricultural workers and their families.

The findings of a previous landmark study, "Suffering in Silence: A Report on the Health of California's Agricultural Workers," reveal that the vast majority of these workers are at serious risk for life-threatening chronic diseases caused by inadequate nutrition, and have little or no access to medical or dental care.

This report, which was conducted by the California Institute for Rural Studies (CIRS) provides the most comprehensive health survey of agricultural workers completed to date.

As a result of this sobering data, The Endowment brought together experts in the field of agricultural worker health, and convened this Task Force to develop recommendations for improving the health status of this population.

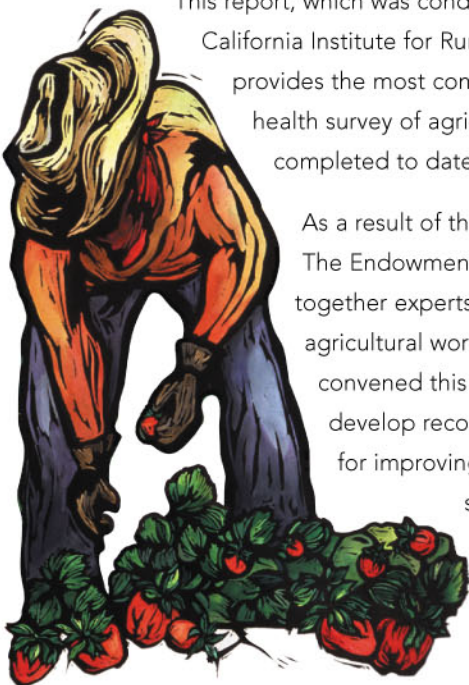
Individuals on the Task Force

ranged from academics, health center directors, clinic physicians, growers, state elected officials, advocates, and health department directors.

Throughout their deliberations, Task Force members unanimously agreed that the lack of access to health care, and the health conditions faced by this population, was critical and pervasive and could not be permitted to continue. As such, the Task Force firmly believed that achieving lasting solutions will require sustained commitment and dedication of effort by everyone from policy-makers, to growers, to labor contractors, to the agricultural worker families themselves. This report contains specific programmatic and policy-related recommendations for The Endowment and others to consider.

Guiding the development of these recommendations were several important themes that emerged from these deliberations:

- ✚ The sense of urgency to take immediate action to address the health problems of California's agricultural workers and their families;
- ✚ The needs of agricultural workers must be returned and maintained to a prominent place on the public policy agenda;
- ✚ The need for more "champions" to provide needed visible and credible leadership to develop responsive solutions;
- ✚ The need to establish a collaborative and binational focus and linkage with the appropriate government agencies and communities in the United States and Mexico to jointly address the health needs of migrant agricultural workers.





## Public Policy Recommendations

In addition to being charged with the primary responsibility of making concrete grant-making recommendations to The Endowment, Task Force members were also asked to develop specific and targeted public policy recommendations that, if implemented, could have a positive impact on the state of agricultural farm worker health. The Task Force suggested two sets of policy recommendations – those affecting farm workers and their dependents specifically, and others that target the underserved population in California generally.

### Farm Worker-Specific Policy Recommendations:

✚ Seek and identify federal, state and county funding to increase farm worker points of access to public programs.



✚ Create a mechanism to reserve some of the tax/social security contributions of farm workers for a health insurance program.

✚ Institute a binational collaborative effort with appropriate Mexican organizations and officials to address the health education issues. Specifically target three of the sending communities in Mexico: Zacatecas, Jalisco and Michoacan. Promote HEP outreach in a national and binational manner that also promotes increasing coverage and making it portable. Because of the importance of the home community, HEP outreach should begin in Mexico in consultation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Health, and the Office of Migrant Affairs.

✚ Establish state mandated Farm Worker Health Commissions within each county that is determined to be of need. The commission would be the local county clearinghouse for all agricultural worker funding and programs. A possibility would be to expand California's AB 2306.<sup>4</sup>

✚ Increase and ensure long-term funding commitments (federal, state and county) to the farm worker housing endowment covering the development of new housing and improvement of existing housing and living conditions.

✚ Eliminate barriers to improving farm worker housing and living conditions through changes to code enforcement law, planning and zoning laws, fair housing, anti-NIMBY laws, and eliminate the inconsistencies between smart growth and environmental policies and through improvements to existing farm worker housing programs.

<sup>4</sup> AB 2306. Assemblymember Dean Florez. 24 February, 2000. Under existing law, the California Rural Health Policy Council in the California Health and Human Services Agency is established to improve access to, and the quality of, health care in rural areas. This bill would require the State Department of Health Services to review and survey the extent to which agricultural workers and their families utilize those public health programs for which they are eligible, in order to provide improved delivery of services to the families of agricultural workers. The bill would specify the components of the survey, require the department, in conducting the survey, to ensure the full participation of entities that provide services to agricultural workers, and require the department to report the survey results to the Legislature on or before March 1, 2001, and to submit an implementation plan based on those results to the Legislature on or before December 31, 2001.



¥ Formulate policies and programs designed to provide immediate relief and improvements in current enforcement of occupational health and safety laws in agriculture.

¥ Develop a statewide policy that targets agricultural employers who have a pattern and practice of violating occupational health and safety laws. This would include/require improvements in record keeping, regulations of farm labor contractors and employers, and civil/criminal penalties.

¥ Incorporate a comprehensive program for providing, evaluating, and monitoring policies regarding occupational safety and health services. Ensure that the information provided by federal, state and local publicly funded entities are culturally and linguistically appropriate and understandable by the intended recipients of such services and materials.

¥ Simplify applications for Healthy Families and Medi-Cal by reducing length to one page.

¥ Eliminate or reduce the three-month waiting period for Healthy Families coverage.

¥ Maintain a central registry of insurance information accessible to all insurance providers (private, public and nonprofit).

¥ Promote cooperation with the California Department of Education to standardize nutritional programs for school children and encourage healthy snacks offered at schools. Try to end the “marketing of disease.”

¥ Work with television and radio networks to begin a series of public service announcements (PSAs) aimed at promoting health education and prevention programs among agricultural workers.

## General Policy Recommendations:

¥ Increase the supply of California rural medical personnel by allowing international medical graduates to practice in the United States. Resolve the international medical graduate (IMG) issue through federal legislation.

¥ Encourage state policy makers to: (a) fund and develop policies that will increase outreach and access to health care by those who are eligible for public programs; and (b) develop a health care solution for those who are not eligible for public health care services.

¥ Increase state and federal funding for the rural community health infrastructure.

¥ Increase state and federal funding for prenatal care programs.

