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7 Apr. 2022

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SPAN 370

Hasta que el cuerpo aguante

In Central California, the Salinas Valley is known as the salad bowl of the world. Most of the fruits and vegetables on our table come from this land; a fertile land that offers abundance and quality. Driving down Highway 101, green and brown lines run before our eyes that extend until they touch the horizon, but there are also people who bend down to pick the vegetables from the ground under the intense sun of summer. “Fresh Product,” says the package, yet the person who made sure to remove all impurities from the fruit fell to the ground, victim of dehydration and exhaustion. But everything is fine. Law says there was shade provided at 20 ft away, five-minute breaks, and a cup of water. If that is enough, then “why are the people who sustain our lives and our health through the production of fresh fruits and vegetables so invisible, so neglected, and so burdened by disease and suffering?” (Saxton 163.)

Most of the agricultural labor force in the United States is composed of immigrants from Mexico and Central America, a lot of them are exploited because of the language barrier, “lack of legal status, fear of law enforcement, and lack of social connections” (Figueroa-Jahn 72.) Due to the nature of the work they perform and the vulnerabilities mentioned before, field workers are exposed to a high risk of heat-related diseases, sometimes resulting in death. Central California has been the place where some of these deaths have occurred and keep occurring. “Over the past 10 years — during a period when state regulators lowered temperature limits that trigger workplace protections from 85 to 80 degrees — nearly four dozen California workers died from

heat stroke and other heat-related illnesses" (Edwards and Margolis.) The majority of these cases occurred in the Central Valley, however, there may be more cases, but the state does not have a system to properly record them, thus why we do not hear about field workers fainting from heat stroke in the Salina Valley. Conducting interviews with field workers from Salinas and Gonzales, I was able to find those lost records, cases of negligence by companies that keep their workers picking fruit and vegetables under high temperatures until one of them can no longer take it.

“Cuando llega a temperaturas de esa altura [above 100°F]... no hacían nada, nada más traernos agua con hielo. La única razón que nos paraban era si alguien se desmayaba” said Néstor, strawberry picker at Salinas. “No se preocupan por uno, hasta que lo encuentran tirado entre los surcos... El año pasado, una persona de otra cuadrilla que estaba cerca de donde yo andaba se desmayó en uno de esos días. Creo que fue algo grave porque vino la ambulancia a recogerla, pero ya no supe qué pasó después” said Herminio, lettuce cropper at Gonzales. “La sombra no alcanza para todos, y de todas maneras se siente el aire caliente y no ayuda mucho” said Anahi, blueberry picker at Salinas. “Trabajamos todo el día en el solazo, pero no podemos quejarnos, ¿Qué le vamos a hacer? Hay que sacar el cheque del día, si no ¿Con qué vamos a pagar los biles?” said Moises, lettuce cropper at Gonzales.

In the minds of many people, there may be the question of who can work under such conditions? Necessity moves the hands and feet of these workers, what option do they have? They need the money they earn by the hour. The question should not be, what changes do we make to law to ensure their safety during the intense sun of summer? They should not be working during those days to begin with. A company's profit should not be before the health and safety of the people who do the job. “There is an urgent need for non-capitalist alternatives to current agribusiness labor and harvest management models that are, in the long run, socially,

economically, and ecologically unsustainable (Saxton 164.) Current regulations such as water, shade and rest are not enough to ensure the safety of field workers. The best solution would be to cancel work during days where temperature rises over 100°F since those days occur three or four days a year in the Salinas Valley. It is understandable why some of these workers would prefer not to stop and get the earnings of the day, in that case, early morning and late evening schedules would be the answer to avoid working when the heat is the meanest, which is around 12:00 pm to 2:00 pm (Edwards and Margolis.)

Inspired by Caravaggio's painting, *The Entombment of Christ*, I want to portray what can happen when current regulations are violated through a very dramatic painting to show why it is important to make corrections to the current regulations and enforce these changes.

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