

A Year of Government Delay Adds to Alberta's Harvest of Death

One year and 23 deaths later, the Alberta government continues to exclude farm workers from Health and Safety workplace protections despite public inquiry recommendations

January 28, 2010 — UFCW Canada, the union that has led the campaign for the rights of agriculture workers, is calling on the Alberta government to act without further delay to implement the recommendations of a public inquiry conducted by Justice Peter Barley to include farm workers under provincial workplace health and safety legislation.

"Justice Barley delivered straightforward recommendations that would undoubtedly reduce Alberta farm worker injuries and fatalities," says Wayne Hanley, the National President of UFCW Canada. "What doesn't make sense is that a year later the government continues to drag its feet while Alberta's harvest of death continues."

Exactly a year ago Justice Barley recommended Alberta bring the province's farm workers under the Alberta Occupational Health and Safety Act; implement a farm place safety training and inspection system; and extend the Workers Compensation system to cover agriculture workers.

To date none of those recommendations have been instituted. "One year and 23 deaths later there is no defense to further delay providing Alberta agriculture workers the same workplace safety rights other Alberta workers have," says Hanley, the national leader of the union that in 2003 launched a Charter challenge against Ontario's similar exclusion of agricultural workers from the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA).

In 2006 the UFCW Canada action led to securing OHSA coverage for Ontario agriculture workers.

"It has saved lives and prevented accidents on Ontario farms," says the UFCW Canada leader. "We would urge Alberta to also act, without further delay, to stop the discriminatory exclusion of agriculture workers from basic health and safety protection."

UFCW Canada is Canada's largest private-sector union, and in association with the Agriculture Workers Alliance operates nine agriculture worker support centres across Canada.