

## Washington State Leads the Way to Greater Farm Worker Safety



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As a direct result of striking farm workers' efforts, Washington State has taken progressive steps to strengthen America's food chain by approving new laws mandating stronger protections for agricultural workers. On May 28, 2020, Governor Jay Inslee announced new [protections](#) that require agricultural employers to:

- provide all workers with personal protective equipment at no cost,
- ensure physical distancing or barriers between workers when distancing is not possible,
- place hand-washing stations at regular intervals among workers, and
- implement sanitation and distancing on employer-provided transportation.

The new protections for Washington State farm workers take effect June 3<sup>rd</sup>. They apply to orchards, farms, dairies, fruit and vegetable packing houses, and employer-provided transportation and housing; they do not apply to meatpacking plants or other food processing facilities.

The new protections follow a [lawsuit](#) brought against the state by three unions on April 15<sup>th</sup>. Union lawyers argued that the coronavirus pandemic had produced over 500 infections among farm workers in the Yakima Valley agricultural region alone. When the lawsuit was filed, agricultural workers had the highest infection rate and second-highest number of cases in Washington State.

Striking workers alleged they were not provided with adequate Personal Protection Equipment (PPE), hazard pay, or other protections from the spread of Covid-19. A representative from the United Farm Workers said at the press conference announcing the new requirements that they “go a long way in addressing many of the issues that farmworkers have consistently raised with us, and for that we are deeply grateful,” according to a report from the [Seattle Times](#).

Adequate protections for the health and safety of America’s farm workers, including seasonal workers and migratory agricultural workers operating under the federal H2A program, are critical to the strength and integrity of the nation’s food supply chain. Those protections also help flatten the COVID-19 curve and protect communities from viral contagion.