

Letter to Governor Cuomo on Behalf of Agricultural and Farmworker Organizations

March 19, 2021

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
State Capitol, Executive Chamber
Albany, New York 12210

RE: Vaccines for Agricultural Workers

Dear Governor Andrew M. Cuomo,

Many organizations representing farmers and farmworkers are united in seeking health and safety protections for the men and women who produce and harvest our food. We strongly urge that those agriculture and food processing workers be included in the next vaccine distribution expansion. As you are aware, the [Centers for Disease Control recommends that agriculture workers be included in Phase 1B](#) of the New York State vaccination schedule. However, they have been excluded. It is imperative that we move quickly to provide eligibility for these essential workers and take steps to overcome the logistical hurdles that may stand in the way of a speedy and successful rollout for this community.

The agriculture and food processing industry in New York consists of thousands of workers who are critical in providing food for all New Yorkers during this global health crisis. Throughout this pandemic, it has been proven how essential these invaluable employees are to our state, including helping to feed low-income New Yorkers through the Nourish NY program. Yet, even though we have seen COVID-19 outbreaks on farms and we know that many farmworkers live in congregate housing, the state has failed to prioritize this group of workers.

We understand the challenges the state is facing due to the limited supply of the COVID-19 vaccine that the state has received, but we must protect these employees as soon as possible. However, the additional 11 million vaccines set aside for farmworkers and other underserved populations through HRSA will allow FQHCs (including the three federally designated migrant health centers in NYS) to access these additional vaccines rather than draw on the state's current allocations. This federal allocation underscores the Biden administration's interest in ensuring that farmworkers are protected against the further spread of COVID-19 among those that provide the necessary labor to ensure the continuity of a safe and efficient food supply system. The need for vaccinations is becoming even more critical as we are rapidly approaching the season when thousands of workers will be traveling to farms to work under federal H2A guest worker visas.

Additionally, there are logistical challenges to vaccinating the agriculture and food processing community. Our community is ready to step up and assist the state in getting these workers vaccinated in any way we can. This includes educating the farmworker community on the vaccines' safety and efficacy and hosting vaccination sites. Our organizations are eager and ready to coordinate with local health departments on the best way to administer the vaccine, particularly on-farms. We ask that the State Department of Health and Department of Agriculture and Markets communicate and coordinate with willing partners to accommodate a successful vaccine process.

We strongly urge agriculture and food processing employees to be included in the vaccine schedule as soon as possible, as they are so essential to all New Yorkers' ability to put food on our tables.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

Alianza Agrícola

Cornell Farmworker Program, Cornell University

Food Chain Workers Alliance

FWD.us

Hispanic Federation

New York Civil Liberties Union

New York Farm Bureau

New York Immigration Coalition

Rural & Migrant Ministry, Inc.

Worker Justice Center of New York

Workers Center of Central New York