I’m Carly Fox, and I’m an advocate with the Worker Justice Center of New York.

Farm workers are one of the biggest economic engines in this region but they are invisible.

Too many New Yorkers don’t realize that the food they eat, and the profits for farms are made on the backs of farmworkers who are Mexican and Central American immigrants that are vulnerable to exploitation.

But whether or not others see them, they are human beings and they should enjoy some basic human rights.

At a basic level is the right to stay alive. We’re in an industry that is extremely dangerous, where many people work for farm owners who neglect their safety and training. And at the same time there isn’t a protection for workers to come together to try to address those dangers themselves.

Henaro Lopez was 19 and had just started a job, but was set to train an even newer worker. He was teaching how to operate a ski steer when it crushed him. His body was shipped back home.

Or Francisco Ortiz, who was operating a tractor that his wife told us later he had asked the farm owners to fix over and over and over again. They never did, and it ended up leading to his death, leaving a widow and his son in Mexico to fend for themselves.

If Henaro or Francisco if they had had the right to come together with other workers and ask for protective equipment, or the right to say, we’d like to have some trainings on health and safety, I believe it would have made a difference.

In New York, our government and labor law give workers the message that they cannot come together to advocate for their rights.

Like all of us, farmworkers are so excited when they get a new job, to move to a new farm and start fresh. They’re happy to have an income source. But if they try to address any dangers or hardships they face, even heat and running water in their homes where their landlord is their boss, they risk where they live and their jobs.

This leads to tragedy and injustice.

Two women who worked in a potato packing shed in New York were being sexually harassed by their manager. His attitude toward the women permitted an environment that was dangerous for them. And one of the women was raped by a co-worker. With the help of some advocates she made a request that the manager should leave for sexual harassment. Instead she was fired, and the manager is still there.

In New York, advocating for yourself should not be a luxury.

Farmworkers are oppressed into being silent and told not to bite the hand that feeds them. Farmworkers feed all of us, and it’s time for New York to treat them with dignity and respect.