



## Making Food Fair

**A documentary accounts working conditions of farm workers and those who advocate fair farm-labor practices.**

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Courtesy Rick Nahmias The Fair Food: Field to Table documentary raises awareness about farm-worker conditions as well as encourages consumers to find out how the food they purchase is produced. To many consumers in the U.S., the food industry is an abstract concept. When asked where their chicken or their tomatoes come from, many promptly reply, "The grocery store."

But for others, the idea is more vivid. When they think of the food on their table, they think of the farms where the food was harvested and the workers who toiled in labor to grow that food. Instead of a black abyss containing a food-generating machine, they see a specific person. However, in many cases in the country, that image is a bleak one.

According to the creators of the Fair Food Project—the California Institute for Rural Studies in collaboration with writer and photographer Rick Nahmias—about 2.5 million U.S. farm workers receive an income of about \$11,000 per year, a wage that hasn't risen in the past 30 years and is about half the 2009 poverty line for a family of four.

The project's three-part online documentary, Fair Food: Field to Table, takes a look at the reality of farm workers from three different perspectives. In the first part, the documentary shows the nearly slave-like working conditions and the substandard living environment that a lot of farm workers endure. The second part takes the perspective of farm owners who are working to enforce fair labor standards and cultivate a communicative relationship with farm workers. It shows how these practices not only benefit the workers, but also the farm's productivity. The final part chronicles the advocates whose mission is to change the farm and food industry to focus on consumer consciousness of farm labor practices.

Although it's a short 20 minutes, the documentary gives an introduction to the plight of farm workers and leaves the viewer wanting to do more—and that's exactly idea the creators had in mind.

"There are so many harsh exposés on farm workers—and rightfully so—but very little for people who wanted to go to the next level," said Nahmias, who served as the documentary's creative director.

This documentary, he said, offers opportunities to people who want to affect change and also looked at farms that have a positive relationship with farm workers. It is an education tool aimed to raise awareness among student and university groups, purveyors of produce for large corporations, and corporate responsibility organizations.

According to Nahmias, a great place for people advocating fair food to start is the local farmers' market.

"Have dialogues with the farmers about payment, housing and conditions for farm workers and let them know you care," he said.

He also suggested those who work at large companies with cafeterias to find out where their food is sourced from and look into how to bring "fair food" to the table.

In addition to being shown online, Fair Food: Field to Table will be shown at the EcoFarm conference Jan. 20 to 23, 2010, in Pacific Grove, Calif., as well as other conferences and universities around the country.

To view the documentary or to learn more about farm worker issues, visit the Fair Food Project's website.