

Organizing For Fair Food: An Analysis of a Campaign to Incorporate Farmworker Rights into the Alternative Food Movement

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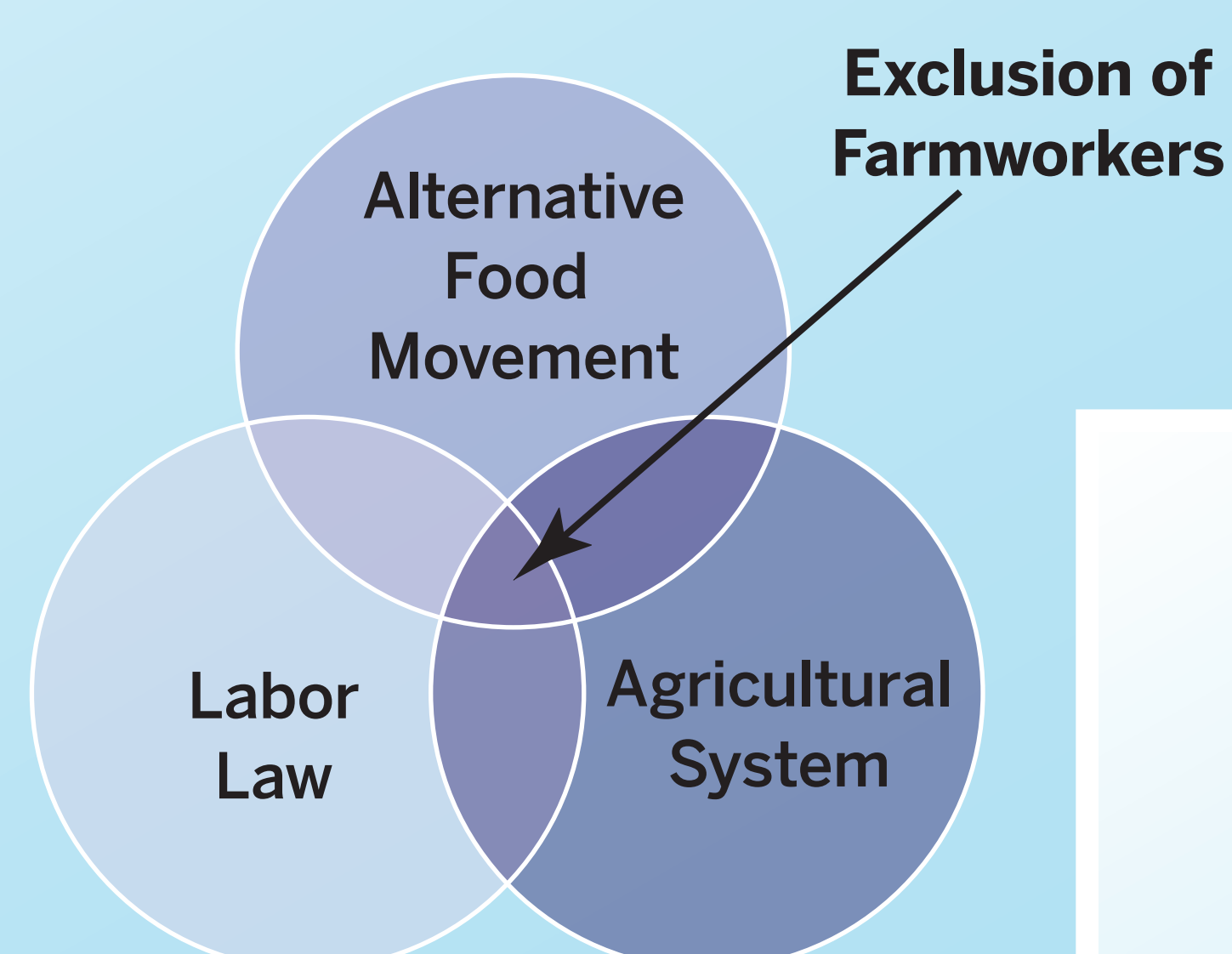
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Background:

The exclusion of farmworkers is codified in national labor law and perpetuated in our agricultural system via:

- Poor living and working conditions
- Lack of basic labor protections in many states
- Trade and immigration policy

Over the past decade, enthusiasm has grown for 'ethical food', but concern for workers has been largely absent from the alternative food movement's promotion of local and organic food, ethical farming and animal practices, and sustainable regional food systems.



In recent years, however, farmworkers' suffering has received attention from influential figures in the alternative food movement, including Mark Bittman and Michael Pollan.

Alternative Food Movement & Food Justice:

"While the popular **alternative food movement** is diverse and has many goals and projects, in general its predominant concerns relate to local and organic food, sustainable farming, industrial food production, obesity, and agricultural policy. **Food justice** similarly addresses these topics, however, in contrast to the popular alternative food movement, it explicitly incorporates analyses and concerns relating to **inequalities within and produced by the food system.**" (Holt-Gimenez & Wang, 2011)

Farmworkers & Health Disparities:

- Agricultural work is the **2nd most dangerous job** in the United States
- Everyday, **243 farmworkers suffer injuries** causing them to lose work
- Farmworkers disproportionately experience: **pesticide exposures, skin disorders, infectious diseases, respiratory problems, hearing and vision disorders, and musculoskeletal injuries**

New York's Justice for Farmworkers Campaign (NYJFW)



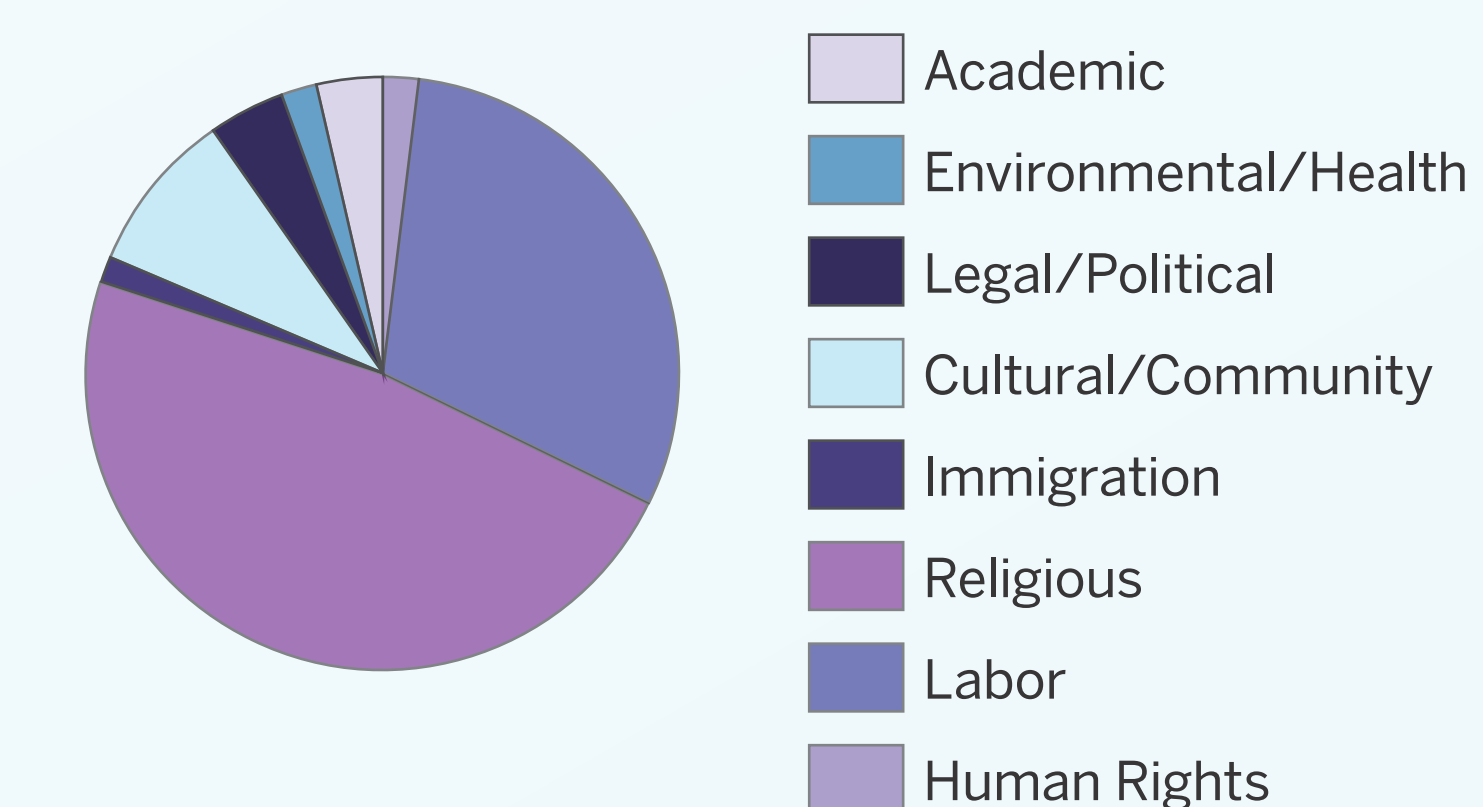
"If you care about sustainability — the capacity to endure — it's time to expand our definition to include workers. You can't call food sustainable when it's produced by people whose capacity to endure is challenged by poverty-level wages."
- Mark Bittman

47,000 = Estimated number of farmworkers and their family members that come to New York each year

15 = Years NY advocacy groups have organized for state legislation to protect farmworkers

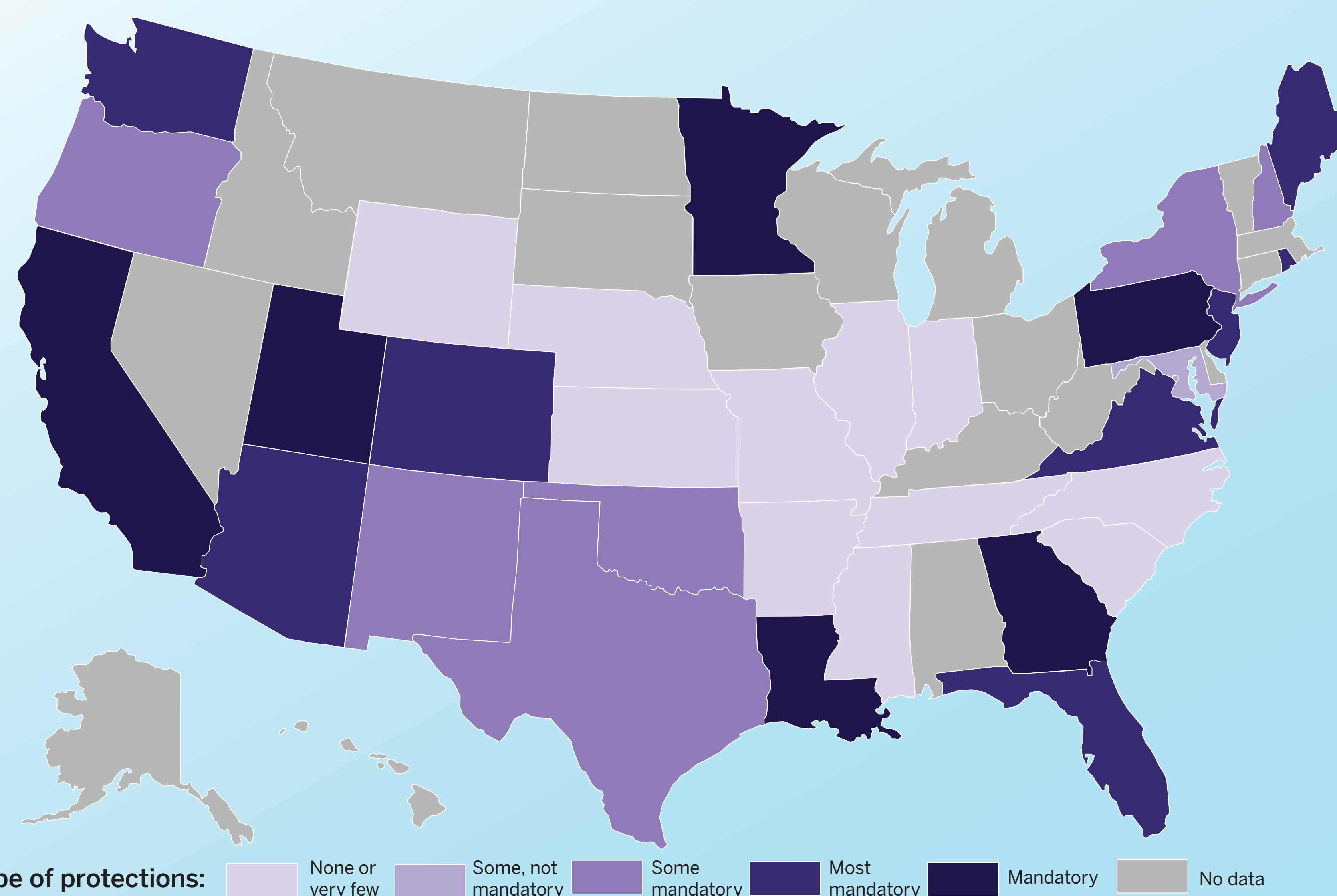
180 = NY organizations that support the Justice for Farmworkers Campaign

NY Justice for Famworkers Campaign Supporters by Sector



Agricultural Worker Protections by State

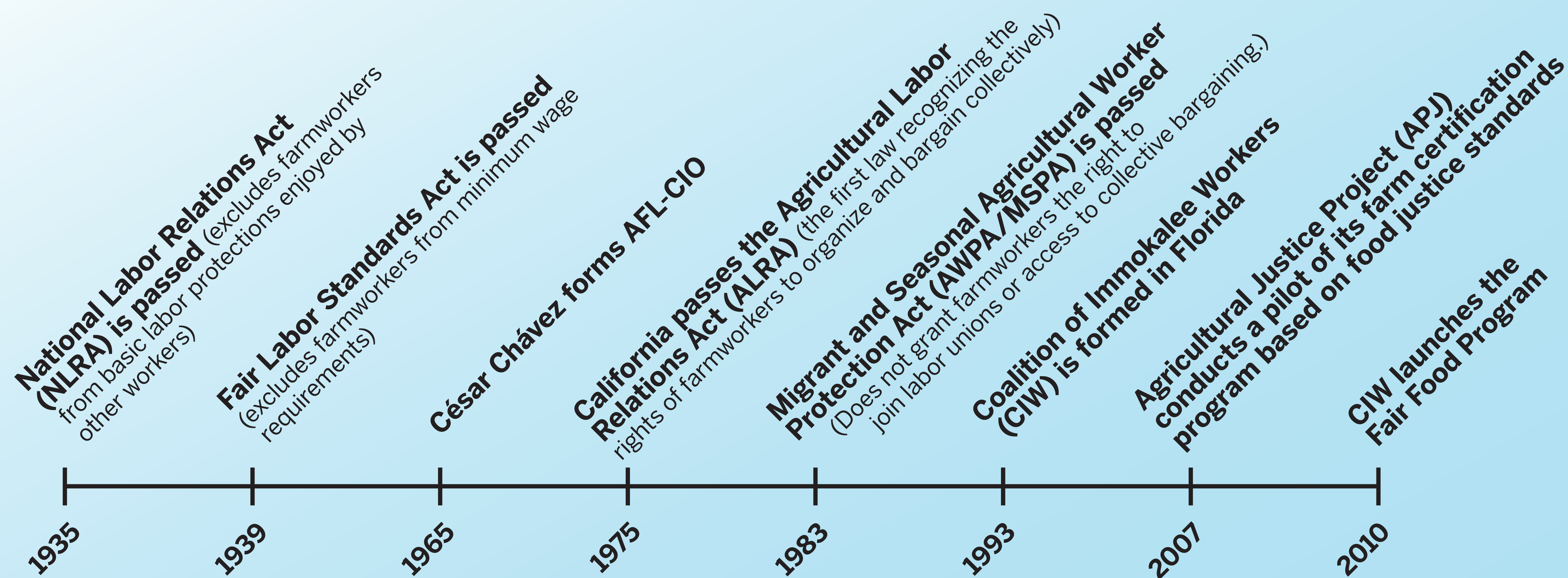
Based on state-level minimum wage, overtime pay, and workers' compensation laws



NYJFW Challenges:

- Invisibility of attention to labor rights in alternative food movement
- Pushback from farmers and industry representatives
- Legislators' apathy or xenophobia – non-US citizens are not part of their constituency, and many constituents would be hostile towards a measure that improves conditions for undocumented workers
- "Downstate" votes needed from Senators:
 - Felder (D)
 - Golden (R)
 - Savino (D)
 - Comrie (D)
- Organizing farmworkers:
 - Restricted geographic mobility
 - Seasonal nature of work makes organizing difficult
 - Fear of getting fired/deported
 - Many have already made great sacrifices
- Divisions within the movement - whether to concede the demand of collective bargaining to get the bill passed

Timeline of Farmworker Rights



NYJFW 2014 Achievements:

- Creation of the New York City Justice for Farmworkers Steering Committee
- Farmworkers Fair Labor Practices Act (FFLPA) passes the Assembly and Senate Labor Committee
- Governor Cuomo's daughter, Michaela Cuomo, writes public letter urging senators to support FFLPA
- Successful multisectoral coalition building

Conclusion:

- New York falls behind several states in supporting labor protections for farmworkers
- Building a fair and just food system requires addressing the structural discrimination of farmworkers codified in labor law
- Better labor protections could have the additional long-term impact of addressing health disparities
- Coalition building across sectors offers a promising strategy for building a broad-based food justice movement that supports farmworkers in addition to local, sustainable, and healthy food

Sources
Holt-Giménez, Eric, and Yi Wang. 2011. "Reform or Transformation? The Pivotal Role of Food Justice in the U.S. Food Movement." *Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts* 5 (1): 83–102. doi:10.2979/racethmulglocon.5.1.83.