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Farmworker Food Insecurity and the Production of Hunger in California

Sandy Brown and Christy Getz

This chapter takes as its point of departure an apparent contradiction of contemporary U.S. agriculture, namely, that those who produce our nation's food are among the most likely to be hungry or food insecure. For those familiar with farmworker communities, this irony comes as little surprise. Yet the lived realities of farmworkers are, more often than not, rendered invisible to the vast majority of people who rely on their labor for sustenance. In an effort to address this seeming paradox, the chapter explores the concept of food security with respect to California's agricultural workforce.

Data from the Fresno Farmworker Food Security Assessment (Wirth, Strochlic, and Getz 2007) provide the basis for our analysis. Beyond simply revealing the prevalence of food insecurity and hunger however, we consider how and why this situation has come to be and, perhaps more important, why it persists despite California's highly productive and profitable agricultural landscape. In this sense, food security is more than an individual or household condition to be scientifically measured, but rather a lens through which to consider the highly unequal, uneven dynamics of global agricultural production, trade, and consumption.

Food security, as defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, means having access at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members. It is but one measure of the vulnerability experienced by farmworkers in their daily lives, albeit a critical one given that food is essential to human survival and, at an international level, widely recognized as an inalienable right. We argue that this vulherability has been systematically constructed within the political economy of agrarian capital accumulation, immigration politics, and coliberal trade policy. Our goal is to expose the material relations that produce hunger. By choosing the term produce we emphasize that in a world of agricultural surpluses hunger is the result not of natural

processes but rather of unequal power relations and resource access. Given this perspective, in this chapter we do not lament what people do or do not eat. Instead, we approach questions about a broader set of inequities and, indeed, injustices that characterize contemporary food provisioning within and beyond California.

Our approach to illuminating farmworker food security challenges, and situating them within a broader sociopolitical context gives us impetus to question the power relations underlying the social relations of capitalist food production. Given that a majority of farmworkers in the United States today are immigrants from rural Mexico, we explore the neoliberal domestic policies and international trade regime that privilege corporate agribusiness over small farmers in Mexico, forcing many off their land. Many of these same farmers then find themselves working as wage laborers on the U.S. side of the border, within the same agrifood regime that rendered it impossible for them to sustain their families through small-scale farming in Mexico. It is this paradox that leads us to ponder why some people remain hungry no matter how far from home they travel in search of sustenance.

While our empirical point of departure considers the food security status of farmworkers within the United States, the concept of food security, as deployed by domestic actors, has largely sidestepped a structural analysis of hunger. The result has been a focus on feeding hungry people, rather than altering the production relations and modes of governance that underpin food insecurity. In contrast, the burgeoning global food sovereignty movement posits the right of peoples to define their own food and agriculture systems, rather than being subject to the constant cycles of poverty, hunger, and migration, dictated by international market forces.

Producing Hunger, Constructing Vulnerability

At the height of United Farm Workers' (UFW) organizing, the admonitions of union founder Cesar Chavez that "the food that overflows our market shelves and fills our tables is harvested by men, women, and children who often cannot satisfy their own hunger" called attention to the marginalized position of agricultural labor in California's farm fields (National Farm Worker Ministry n.d.). The union's struggles to improve agricultural wages and working conditions mobilized white, middle-class urban consumers to support a primarily immigrant workforce, in particular through union-led boycotts (Frank 2003; Ganz 2000). Yet signifi-

cant improvements in farmworkers' material conditions have failed to materialize and food insecurity and hunger remain widespread within farmworker communities.

While the reasons for the marginalization of agricultural labor are complex and contingent upon specific sociohistorical contexts of particular moments in California history, we argue that the central dynamic shaping labor relations and workers' livelihood struggles has been the development of a regime of agrarian accumulation based on capital-intensive production and the persistent devaluation of agricultural labor (Henderson 1998; Mitchell 2007; Walker 2004). While the often-violent marginalization of farm labor was not inevitable, the productive forces and social relations of agricultural production evolved together to make California the nation's breadbasket where farmworkers often struggle to feed themselves and their families. The chapter engages a political economy framework to understand how this devaluation of agricultural labor has been achieved through the social and political construction of a vulnerable, and therefore exploitable agricultural working class.

Of course there are many measures by which one might assess the effects of this devaluation, from poor physical and mental health (Cason et al. 2003; Villarejo et al. 2000) and lack of access to health care and affordable housing (Bradman 2005; Housing Assistance Council 2005), to unsafe and debilitating working conditions, pesticide exposure (Harrison 2008; Reeves, Katten, and Guzmán 2002) and low annual earnings, long hours, and unstable employment (Bugarin and Lopez 1998). Perhaps the most striking evidence of farmworkers' devalued position is the decline in real wages over the past several decades. Between 1975 and 1995 real wages fell at least 20 to 25 percent (Rothenberg 1998; Villarejo and Runsten 1993). While few comprehensive studies of agricultural wages have been conducted, and though accurate figures are difficult to estimate, a study by Kahn, Martin, and Hardiman (2005) utilizing California Employment Development Department data illustrated the stagnation. Between 1991 and 2001, annual agricultural worker earnings remained at \$8,500 for direct-hire workers and \$5,000 for workers employed by farm labor contractors, representing a 32 percent decline in inflation-adjusted dollars during the period (Ibid.).2 These low annual earnings are due, in part, to the fact that unlike many occupations, farmworkers do not enjoy year-round employment or stable work schedules. According to the National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS), farmworkers average 190 days, or 34.5 weeks of employment per year. And one California study estimates the average number of hours at 1,000

per year, about half the hours of full-time employment in other industries (Martin and Mason 2003). 3

The lived realities of farmworkers stand in stark contrast to a consistent expansion of California's highly productive and profitable agricultural landscape. While farmworker incomes have declined, the value of agricultural products has continued along a trajectory of expansion begun in the nineteenth century. Between 2002 and 2007 alone, California's agricultural sales increased 32 percent, from \$25.7 billion to \$33.9 billion (USDA 2007). In Fresno County, where almost one-half of surveyed farmworkers are food insecure at some point during the year (Wirth, Strochlic, and Getz 2007), agricultural sales increased by 32 percent, from \$2.8 billion to \$3.7 billion over the same period. Given these statistics, workers' loss appears to be capital's gain.

Indeed, California growers have developed many mechanisms for addressing a fundamental challenge to capital accumulation in agriculture, namely the difference in *production time*, the time that elapses between the planting and harvesting, and the actual *labor time* needed to plant, tend, and harvest a crop (Henderson 1998; Mann and Dickinson 1978). While agricultural employers invest in labor power (workers' wages) insofar as it is needed for production, workers must invest in their own reproduction (food, housing, etc.) year-round. As Mitchell notes: "The solution to the problem of the reproduction of labor power in California has been precisely to assure that it is not reproduced, but instead is continually replaced" by new groups of immigrant workers (2007, 567).

Farmworkers have been recruited so as to ensure an oversupply and are systematically denied citizenship and workplace rights, due to their status as indentured servants, guest workers, contract laborers, and, increasingly, undocumented immigrants, facilitating growers' management of the "turnover time" problem. As Mitchell also suggests, "To put this in the starkest terms: the tenuous nature of making the desert bloom, to say nothing of the exceptionally high capital costs meant that the reproduction of capital—and of course the reproduction of the agricultural landscape—required driving to as low a point as possible the cost of reproducing the labor that plants and picks the desert-blooming capital" (2007, 573).

It is precisely because of workers' vulnerability that agribusiness interests have expanded investments in capital-intensive inputs, such as irrigation, machinery, seed and stock, fertilizers, and pesticides.

Throughout its hundred and fifty year history, California agribusiness has relied on a variety of mechanisms to ensure that farmworkers remain

marginalized, including (1) state intervention in labor relations, primarily through immigration and labor policy, (2) the ideological construction of a racialized agricultural working class that has systematically been denied claims to better wages and working conditions, and (3) the continued availability of new groups of immigrant workers to valorize the agricultural landscape (Almaguer 1994; Daniel 1981; Galarza 1964; Makja and Makja 1982; McWilliams [1939] 1969; Mitchell 1996; Weber 1994). The production relations that characterize California agriculture today have been forged over a long history, involving local growers and transnational agribusiness interests, state and multilateral institutional actors, and modes of governance that privilege capital over labor and corporate agribusiness over small farmers in the developing world.

Today, California farmworkers hail primarily from Mexico, where the imposition of neoliberal policies has exacerbated livelihood challenges for small farmers, or *campesinos*, and led to increased northward migration (Polaski 2004; Barry 1995). Understanding the dynamics of agricultural production and the social reproduction of farm labor in California today (of which food and nutrition are clearly essential components), thus requires connecting geographies of poverty and inequality across international boundaries (cf. Mitchell 2007), from Fresno, California, to the southern Mexican states of Chiapas and Oaxaca.

The devaluation of farm labor has been, at least in part, achieved because of the invisibility of farmworkers within the material and ideological landscapes shaping California's political economy. If the basic structures of exploitation in agricultural production remain unchanged it is because they go largely unnoticed. Throughout California's history immigrants have essentially been acknowledged as a (criminal) "other" at the same time that they have been erased as value-producing workers. This invisibility is true, not only within the popular imaginary, but also within the realms of activism and academia. Unlike the UFW's consumer boycotts, contemporary alternative food movements direct surprisingly little attention to farm labor issues (Allen et al. 2003). Even where initiatives attempt to address hired labor standards, the focus has been on private voluntary programs as opposed to public regulation and collective action to promote farmworker protections and rights (Brown and Getz 2008; Getz, Brown, and Shreck 2008). The resurgence of interest in food and agriculture among academic and popular writers has likewise overlooked the role of hired labor in agrifood production, preferring to celebrate all forms of resistance to the conventional food system and to

promote agrarian visions of small-scale family farms (Guthman 2004; Harrison 2008). Despite the fact that 85 percent of the labor required to produce California's field crops and livestock is performed by hired labor (Villarejo et al. 2000, 8), "the world of the worker or farm-labor activist rarely surfaces in writings about food and agriculture" (Garcia 2007, 68).

In the United States, research and activism focused on food security issues similarly overlook questions of agricultural production relations, in particular the farm labor question. The community food security movement has developed to incorporate a diverse set of both actors, from anti-hunger activists to public health practitioners, and goals, from food access and urban gardens to farmer support programs. Food security is defined as "the access for all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life," wording which is widely accepted worldwide by public and private actors focused on issues of poverty and hunger (FAO 1986). Proponents rightly argue that this framework allows for a more nuanced understanding of food access and deprivation, one which takes into account the nutritional content and/or quality of food, rather than just quantity (e.g., caloric intake). However, the domestic community's food security movement has been critiqued for its focus on local selfempowerment and a "do-it-yourself," voluntarist (and often antistate) approach, which eschews structural critiques (Allen 1999).

In contrast the concept of food security as it is used internationally, refers to issues such as building production capacity, promoting autonomy and self-determination with respect to food supply, reducing vulnerability to international market fluctuations and political pressures, and attaining reliability, sustainability, and equity (FAO 1986). More recently, in response to new, trade-driven notions of food security, another movement has emerged to promote food sovereignty rather than food security. The food sovereignty movement, comprising a network of NGOs, demands the removal of agriculture from the international trade system, which they deem to undermine, not support, food security for millions by allowing rich countries to maintain agricultural subsidies while forcing poor countries to dismantle farmer supports (Lee 2007).

Food sovereignty actors deploy the concept of food security to support smallholder or peasant production, local and sustainable agricultural practices, and farmworker rights through agrarian reform and other national and regional policies (<www.foodsovereignty.org>). Specifically, the food sovereignty and global peasants movement, La Via Campesina, calls for access to adequate food a matter of "simple justice," pointing

out that the political-economic relations and governance structures that have increased food insecurity also lie at the root of the mass human migration taking place on a global scale, a fact that has brought many of the farmworkers in question in this study to California in the first place.

In practice the food sovereignty movement has focused much more heavily on small farmer issues while sidestepping issues of wage labor in agriculture, which we view as vital to understanding the persistence of vulnerability and hunger for California farmworkers. In the following section we explore findings from a study conducted in Fresno County, which suggest that farmworkers are indeed at heightened risk of food insecurity and hunger. We then link the question of food security to a more in-depth analysis of the dynamics underpinning vulnerability.

California Farmworkers: Hunger in the Nation's Breadbasket

Methodology

With respect to hunger and nutrition, little research has been conducted that explicitly addresses the agricultural workforce, although several recent studies suggest that farmworkers experience particularly high rates of food insecurity (Harrison et al. 2007; Quandt et al. 2004; Villarejo et al. 2000; Weigel et al. 2007). To address this lack of attention to farmworker communities, the University of California at Berkeley conducted the Fresno Farmworker Food Security Assessment (FFFSA) in collaboration with the California Institute for Rural Studies. The assessment included a survey of 454 farmworkers, as well as focus groups with farmworkers. A Farmworker Food Security Taskforce was formed to advise the assessment project and to ensure that information generated would be useful to Fresno-based organizations with a stake in farmworker food security issues.4 Coauthor Christy Getz was the principal investigator of this two-year assessment. In the rest of this chapter, in addition to citing data and findings from the FFFSA, we draw on coauthor Sandy Brown's extensive ethnographic fieldwork with farmworkers on California's Central Coast.

The FFFSA is based on the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Household Food Security Survey Module, supplemented by a variety of questions related to food access and food assistance program utilization, employment and income, housing, family composition, age, education, remittances, period of residence in the United States, documentation, and migratory status.⁵ A team of surveyors conducted the assessment in

person in five areas of Fresno County that have high concentrations of agricultural workers. The survey sample included 394 native Spanish-speaking agricultural workers. In addition, the survey was administered in Mixteco, to a subsample of sixty indigenous farmworkers for whom Mixteco was their native language. Mixtecos are the fourth largest indigenous group in Mexico and one of the fastest-growing and most marginalized farmworker populations in California. In an effort to capture seasonal variability in farmworkers' experiences with respect to food security and hunger, half of the surveys were conducted during the summer and half in the winter of 2005.

While efforts were made to capture a diverse sample of farmworkers and while the survey's overall demographic profile is in fact quite similar to that of farmworkers at the state level, as reported by the National Agricultural Workers Survey (U.S. Department of Labor 2003), the sample was primarily a convenience sample in one county, and is therefore not representative of all farmworkers in all regions of the state. Although geographically concentrated in one region, data from the Fresno study illuminate a persistent reality facing California's agricultural labor force, that of hunger and lack of access to quality, nutritious food. In this section we consider findings from the assessment, some of which were published by the California Institute for Rural Studies (Wirth, Strochlic, and Getz 2007). In order to present a broader overview of the socioeconomic status of agricultural workers, we supplement the food security data with additional relevant information on agricultural production, employment, wages, and workforce demographics.

Any effort to measure food security presents significant methodological challenges, particularly with respect to marginalized populations. First, the selection of a representative sample that allows one to make inferences about the larger agricultural workforce is quite difficult, due to regional variation in production relations and the instability of farmworkers' living and working situations. Even workers who do not officially migrate to follow the crops often live in temporary or informal housing and move frequently. As a result, studies that attempt to enumerate farmworkers and to measure their levels of food security likely do not capture a significant percentage of the agricultural labor force (Bugarin and Lopez 1998; Wirth 2006).⁷

Second, the process of scientifically defining and statistically measuring food insecurity as an individual or household condition hardly lends itself to an analysis of hunger as a collective, social problem related to the broader dynamics of food production, distribution, and governance.

Although the USDA's core module was developed as a tool for "community empowerment," measurement always happens at the individual or household level. Making the individual/household the *unit of measurement* poses the danger this will also become the *unit of analysis* driving policy prescriptions, thus avoiding the political economic structures underpinning highly inequitable systems of food provisioning. Indeed, much attention has been devoted to the need for education and outreach aimed at teaching people how to manage resources and to make "appropriate" food choices.⁸

In 2005, when the assessment was conducted, the USDA was still using hunger as part of its food security continuum. However, the USDA abandoned the term in 2006, arguing that it would achieve better measurement of the social condition, termed food security, rather than the physiological condition of hunger. We agree with Allen's (2007) analysis that this "innocent statistical realignment" in the name of scientific rigor "eliminates a crucial rhetorical weapon of the weak—the word hunger in their fight against injustice" (22). Our motivation for maintaining the term hunger in the analysis presented here is twofold. First, it allows us to maintain continuity in communicating assessment findings. Second, and most important, it signifies an acknowledgment that hunger is not simply an individual physiological condition (as the USDA argued when it dropped the term), but rather is produced through material, social processes. Indeed, the focus on scientific rigor in measurement risks obscuring the broader contexts and material processes underlying food deprivation.

Background and Geographical Context

California's hired agricultural labor force is by far the largest in the nation, due in large part to the state's preeminence in labor-intensive fruit and vegetable crop production. Farmworkers are almost exclusively immigrants, the vast majority of whom are from Mexico. As mentioned earlier, the fluidity of the workforce and seasonality of work mean that workers often shift worksites, performing different tasks for different employers even over short time periods, making accurate enumeration of the overall workforce difficult As a result, estimates of the total number of agricultural workers living and working in California vary widely. The U.S. Census of Agriculture's official count (USDA 2007) is approximately 450,000. However, traditional census data have been found to undercount farmworkers (CRLA 2001; Sherman 1997), meaning that actual numbers are likely much higher. Martin and Mason

(2003) estimate that there are 800,000 to 900,000 individuals filling the equivalent of 350,000 full-time agricultural jobs and Kahn, Martin, and Hardiman (2005) found that, in 2001, California agricultural employers reported 1.7 million distinct Social Security numbers, or roughly 2.8 workers per year-round job in California.

Situated within California's San Joaquin Valley, Fresno County lies in the heart of the nation's breadbasket, making it an important setting for this type of research. First, it is the most productive farm county in the United States, with farm sales of over \$3.7 billion in 2007 (USDA 2007). Second, it is by all accounts home to the largest farmworker population in the nation. Even conservative estimates place the population at some 52,727 workers. By way of comparison, the second-ranking California agricultural county, neighboring Kern County, counted 29,283 farmworkers (USDA 2007). The likelihood that these figures undercount the actual farmworker population notwithstanding, Fresno County remains the undeniable leader in terms of overall agricultural workforce.

Fresno is also one of the most food insecure and poorest counties in California, with 20 percent of the population living at or below the federal poverty level (Harrison et al. 2007; U.S. Census Bureau 2008). Given that agricultural wages are among the lowest of any occupation (Bugarin and Lopez 1998; Martin and Mason 2003), it is not surprising that Fresno County and, indeed, the entire San Joaquin Valley are home to some of the poorest Californians. Agriculture is San Joaquin Valley's largest private employment sector, accounting for 20 percent of employment (compared with 5.8 percent statewide) and fully half of California's farmworkers live and work in the region (Great Valley Center 2005; USDA 2007). Throughout the valley, poverty and food insecurity rates are consistently higher than the statewide average (Harrison et al. 2007). Not surprisingly, the valley also boasts one of the highest degrees of income inequality in the country (Doyle 2008).

Findings

As might be expected, FFFSA results show that respondents were more likely to experience food insecurity and hunger than the overall lowincome population of Fresno County (Wirth, Strochlic, and Getz 2007; Harrison et al. 2007). Within the study sample, 34 percent of respondents were classified as food insecure and 11 percent as food insecure with hunger. As mentioned previously, in 2006 the USDA replaced these categories with low and very low food security (Allen 2007). The California Health Interview Survey (CHIS), a statewide study that focuses

on health status and access that includes a section on food security, corroborates the finding that those who reported working in "farming, forestry, and fishing" in Fresno County reported being unable to afford enough food at higher rates than the general low-income population, 55 percent compared with 36 percent (UCLA Center for Healthy Policy Research 2009).9 Interestingly, CHIS data reflect a higher prevalence of food insecurity than the Fresno Farmworker Food Security Assessment: 55 percent compared with 45 percent.

Inconsistencies in the limited available data notwithstanding, the finding that approximately half of the farmworker households surveyed are, in USDA parlance, unable to access enough food for an active, healthy life, should be viewed as nothing short of astonishing, particularly given its occurrence in the most productive agricultural region in the United States. In the words of one farmworker, "Something is wrong in the system. We are farmworkers, harvesting all day produce for others, and we get home and our family doesn't have enough food to eat" (Fresno Metro Ministry 2005).

The FFFSA found that income, documentation and migratory status, and food stamp use are related to food security status. Not surprisingly, income was by far the strongest predictor of food insecurity and hunger. The average monthly income for those classified as food secure was \$762. For respondents categorized as food insecure without hunger, incomes declined to \$542 and plummeted to an average of \$319 per month for those classified as food insecure with hunger (Wirth, Strochlic, and Getz 2007, 11).

Another key finding from the FFFSA suggests that documentation of work authorization affects food security levels. The study found that, when controlling for income and other variables, farmworkers without documentation were more likely than those with legal residence or citizenship status to be food insecure, 55 percent compared to 34 percent (Wirth, Strochlic, and Getz 2007). Undocumented workers represent an increasing share of the agricultural labor force. The National Agricultural Workers Survey estimates that 53 percent of U.S. farmworkers lack authorization to legally work in the United States. However 99 percent of newcomers, a growing share of the agricultural workforce, lack such authorization (U.S. Department of Labor 2003). It is worth noting that these figures are widely considered to be conservative estimates, given that many undocumented workers are unlikely to self-identify as lacking work authorization.¹⁰ In the following section we discuss the political construction of documentation and "illegality," highlighting the role of

immigration policy and politics in maintaining farmworker vulnerability and keeping agricultural wages low. Here we simply note the correlation between food insecurity and documentation status found in the FFFSA.

Farming's seasonal ebbs and flows are an enduring reality of agricultural production. Given their shorter tenure in the United States and precarious socioeconomic and juridical status, undocumented immigrant workers are more likely to have difficulty finding work and fewer resources with which to mitigate the destabilizing cycles of seasonal employment. In addition to the more predictable seasonal ebb and flow of agricultural production, farmworker incomes can be affected by more extreme weather and production conditions, such as floods, freezes, and the loss of crops due to agricultural pests, which can delay and even end work in the fields (Bugarin and Lopez 1998).

Given high levels of variability in labor demand, some workers have adopted follow-the-crop migration strategies in order to earn enough money to support themselves and their families. Although migrant workers comprise a smaller percentage than might be expected, only 12 percent of California's total agricultural labor force (U.S. Department of Labor 2003), the FFFSA found that this group of workers was more likely to experience food insecurity and hunger (55 percent food insecure) than those who do not migrate (43 percent food insecure) (Wirth, Strochlic, and Getz 2007). As with undocumented workers, incomes for this group of workers are likely to be less stable than for nonmigrants. Furthermore, changing residence means that they may find themselves in new locations where they are unfamiliar with existing support networks and resources for accessing affordable food or emergency food assistance.

Due to a lack of legal status, undocumented farmworkers are at further risk of hunger because they are ineligible for critical public safetynet programs, including the food stamp program. Within the FFFSA sample, even those who were eligible (due to legal status and income) often declined to enroll and only 48 percent of eligible respondents used the program. Some suggested that they declined to enroll due to fears about jeopardizing their immigration status, while others cited a lack of information about program requirements (Wirth, Strochlic, and Getz 2007). Such anxieties extend well beyond eligibility for public assistance programs and resonate with the broader climate of fear in which farmworkers operate. In the following section we discuss the sociohistorical role of immigration policy and the politics of backlash, which have long shaped immigrants' experiences in the United States, from a denial of

labor and human rights to violent repression within communities and

Finally, because Mixteco migrants from southern Mexico represent the most rapidly increasing share of the agricultural labor force, the UCB study included a subsample of this population, the results of which were not incorporated into the study's findings (n = 60). It is estimated that 20 percent of California farmworkers are indigenous, based on the proportion of farmworkers that come from states within Mexico with large indigenous populations (Wirth 2006, 42). The fact that Mixteco immigrants are more likely to be recent immigrants, and thus undocumented and migrant farmworkers, places them at increased risk of food insecurity and hunger. Respondents in this group were found to experience much greater swings in income between summer and winter months. Overall, they experienced no food insecurity during the summer but significantly higher levels during the winter months (76 percent food insecure and 48 percent hungry) (Wirth 2006, 82). While this data are considered to be preliminary and exploratory, it speaks to the changing character and implications of Mexico-United States migration. In the following section we consider how the shifts within the agricultural labor force reflect the undermining of food security in rural Mexico due to neoliberal trade policy, in particular the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement.

Situating Farmworker Food Insecurity

If, as the data presented earlier suggests, farmworkers are at particularly high risk for food insecurity and hunger, and if, as the data also suggest, this increased risk is linked to broader political and economic insecurities, additional questions then emerge about how and why the current situation has come to be. In this section we move beyond the specific issue of measuring food (in)security, to pose a set of questions about the development of the contemporary agrarian social order, which we argue relies on the consistent devaluation of farm labor to fuel capital accumulation. To do this we consider the political economic construction of agricultural labor relations and the vulnerability of a racialized immigrant workforce, the contours of which have been constituted over California's long history of agricultural development.

Mapping the conditions underpinning farmworker vulnerability requires a consideration of dynamics that extend well beyond California's farm fields to broader agrifood commodity systems, state regulatory

spaces, and the sociohistorical processes of uneven development operating at multiple scales. Indeed, on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border, questions of food access and hunger play heavily into these dynamics. Indeed, many U.S. farmworkers find themselves facing hunger and the impetus to migrate as a result of diminishing livelihood opportunities in their primary sending country, Mexico. As domestic reforms and international trade agreements push Mexico's small-scale agricultural producers, or campesinos, out of production, many are increasingly pushed northward, only to become hired farmworkers in California and, more and more, throughout the United States.

California's Racialized Agricultural Working Class

From its inception, California agriculture has developed according to the logics of accumulation and competition. California growers acted, not as subsistence farmers or petty commodity producers, but rather as agrarian capitalists, pioneering the industrial farming technologies and flexible labor relations, which have made California agribusiness so profitable and which today prevail throughout the country. A historical lack of precapitalist farming (and hence, noncapitalist farmers) precipitated the development of an agrarian social order based on wage labor relations, one which has been solidified through the employment of a primarily immigrant workforce (Walker 2004).

In the previous sections, we discussed the challenges of seasonal variability in agricultural production and the fact that farmworkers have born the brunt of these burdens through low wages and unstable employment, often accompanied by food insecurity and hunger. Here we consider in further detail the strategies utilized by California growers to attenuate the gap between labor time and production time, through the maintenance of a vulnerable workforce.

Since the late nineteenth century, successive waves of immigrants have been recruited and expelled to meet growers' shifting needs for labor in the fields. Throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, different ethnic groups, including Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos, and Mexicans, have been slotted into a detailed division of labor tied discursively to concepts of racial difference (Henderson 1998). Although not present in the more common, celebratory versions of California's agrarian past, scholars have documented the often-violent process by which California's agricultural working class was formed, through the recruitment of successive waves of new immigrants and the expulsion and exclusion of groups that resisted exploitation (Almaguer

1994; Daniel 1981; McWilliams [1939] 1969; Mitchell 1996; Weber 1994).

Alongside the development of the material conditions of California's productive and profitable agrarian accumulation regime, namely technological innovation, capital improvements, and constantly devalued labor, ideologies of racial difference were also being constructed. This ideological framework has served to legitimize repressive labor practices and the systematic denial of rights for the agricultural workforce (Almaguer 1994; Henderson 1998). During moments of labor militancy or in cases where particular groups began moving into positions of ownership, growers were the first to mobilize racial backlash within rural communities (Almaguer 1994; Daniel 1981). More recent rounds of anti-immigrant backlash against a primarily Mexican workforce recall the historical role of racism in legitimating the exploitation and exclusion of immigrant workers.

If the experience of immigrant farmworkers has gone largely unnoticed by the vast majority of the U.S. consumers who benefit from their labor, exploitive production relations and poverty-level wages have not always been achieved without a fight. Class struggle in the fields became increasingly protracted during the early decades of the twentieth century (Daniel 1981; McWilliams [1939] 1969; Mitchell 1996). But it was not until the end of the Bracero Program in 1964 that the United Farm Workers Union (UFW) made major inroads organizing farm labor. During the 1970s, the UFW turned its attentions to the political arena, winning passage of the Agricultural Labor Relations Act (ALRA) in 1975. This created new opportunities for farmworkers' collective action, leading to improved wages and working conditions in the fields over the following decade (Wells 1996).

However, agribusiness interests worked to ensure that the union's efforts would not deliver sustained improvements. Strategies included sourcing labor through third-party farm labor contractors, in order to avoid acting as direct employers; making modest improvements in the fields to undermine the UFW's demands; and direct retaliation against workers who attempted to organize, as well as other forms of unionbusting. Additionally, a rightward political shift during the 1980s led to the failure of the ALRA to achieve its promise of facilitating worker organizing.

Vhion

The Politics and Policy of "Othering"

Through high levels of class solidarity (higher than that seen among workers) across multiple scales of production and commodity categories,

growers have been particularly effective at mobilizing the state to promote and protect agribusiness interests. National, state, and local governments have, from the outset, subsidized processes of land privatization and distribution, development of massive drainage and irrigation systems, and technical assistance through the land grant universities (Hundley 2001; Kloppenburg [1998] 2004). Public policy has also served as an important tool for managing labor relations and labor flow, primarily to the benefit of agricultural employers (Daniel 1981; McWilliams [1939] 1969; Schell 2002).

The significance of border and immigration politics in mobilizing anti-immigrant sentiment and undermining the bargaining power of farmworkers cannot be overstated. Immigration policy has historically served as a mechanism, not only for managing labor flow, but also for actively producing an "other," in this case a labor force that can be viewed as undeserving of the rights and benefits afforded citizen workers and that can be scapegoated during periods of economic downturn. This marginalization has relied on the mobilization of ideas, not only of class, but also of ethnic or racial difference, often couched in a framework of nationalism (Andreas 2000; Nevins 2002). Accordingly, immigration policies have excluded particular groups at various points in history, from the Chinese Exclusion Acts of 1883 to 1886, when seven of every eight California farmworkers were Chinese (NFWM n.d.) and Japanese internment during World War II, to the mass deportation of Mexican immigrants during the Great Depression and Dust Bowl era.

Through immigration policy, as well as a variety of exemptions to federal labor laws, based on notions of "agricultural exceptionalism," the state has intervened to secure a labor force for growers and to maintain its vulnerability (Makja and Makja 1982). 12 Central to the history of California agriculture is the Bracero Program (in place from 1942-1964), which brought five million Mexican workers to the fields while denying them basic rights (Calavita 1992; Galarza 1964). Throughout the Bracero period, Mexican nationals continued to enter the United States without work authorization and when the program ended the flow of undocumented immigrants increased substantially. In 1986, the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) sought to reduce the presence of unauthorized immigrants in the United States by allowing agricultural workers to apply for legal status, legalizing approximately 1.1 million farmworkers, who then moved out of agriculture and were replaced by new undocumented entrants (Martin and Mason 2003).

Since IRCA, federal immigration policy has focused almost exclusively on enforcement. Particularly striking in the current scenario is the significant public investment in enforcement technologies (border fences, detection equipment, and detention facilities) and labor (increased border patrol and other personnel to conduct workplace raids, and the stationing of National Guard troops at the border). Such techniques essentially continue to provide state-sponsored tools for employers to marginalize or eliminate recalcitrant workers. From the Clinton-era "Operation Gatekeeper," which led to a massive investment in increased border personnel and the construction of a border wall, onward, U.S. administrations have shifted to these more punitive and intrusive forms of public intervention. The events of September 11, 2001, provided new justification for the expansion and augmentation of punitive rules and programs, ensuring that the climate of fear produced through state activities will continue to keep immigrant farmworkers vulnerable into the indefinite future. 13

The ethnic and class dimensions of anti-immigrant sentiment are both embodied in and obscured by the nationalist discourse over immigration and border policy (Nevins 2002). While perhaps more subtle than during periods of Chinese exclusion, Japanese internment, and the Bracero Program, the racist and classist content of anti-immigrant sentiment continues unabated. As Nevins points out, "one cannot have the national without the racialized alien" (Ibid., 157). This has generated a political context in which the immigrant workforce that valorizes California's agricultural landscape lacks rights to be present in the country, much less to take advantage of the labor rights and public supports afforded U.S.-

Yet, despite recent efforts to further criminalize immigration, immigrant laborers continue to enter the country. Current estimates place the population of undocumented Mexican nationals in the United States at 12 million, or some 9.5 percent of the current Mexican population, and 2.4 million in California, with an additional half million Mexicans entering the United States annually. This expanded wave of Latin American migration is the result of dispossession and deteriorating economic opportunities at home due to global austerity measures and trade rules, a reality that is disregarded in much of the U.S. immigration debate.

Uneven Development and Neoliberal Trade Policy

The contradictions of farmworkers' lack of access to sufficient quantities of nutritious food extend well beyond the U.S. border into the sending

countries of these primarily immigrant workers. Given the makeup of California's agricultural workforce, this reality requires a consideration of the dynamics shaping livelihood struggles in rural Mexico. With diminishing livelihood opportunities at home, a growing number of people are migrating northward, to cities within Mexico and to the United States, where they work in low-wage industries such as agriculture. Ironically, many of the rural Mexicans who leave the countryside to work in the fields of U.S. agribusiness are *campesinos* who have lost their ability to farm and with it their food security (Barry 1995). Indeed, hunger is at the center of the processes of displacement and migration, which drives farmworkers to the United States in the first place.

Such displacements are a widespread sociohistorical phenomenon, compelled by centuries of uneven development and asymmetrical relationships between the United States and Mexico. At the same time that Mexico's campesinos have been "pulled" into U.S. agricultural jobs, they have been pushed off the land through international and domestic policies. However, the neoliberal reforms of the 1980s and the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) have accelerated these trends. Beginning in the 1980s the Mexican government undertook a massive restructuring of its economy, implementing a series of neoliberal reforms demanded by the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and the United States, and shifting from import substitution strategies to an export orientation. The project included: the privatization of parastatal agencies; the rolling back of safety net programs; liberalization of trade rules and markets; privatization of communal landholdings distributed through earlier agrarian reform programs; and ending tariffs on food imports and small farmer supports, including ending price guarantees on corn, the country's most fundamental subsistence crop (Barry 1995). Based on ethnographic research within Mexico following the withdrawal of price support for corn, López (2007) found discussions about aguantando hambre, or enduring hunger, to be commonplace.

The Mexican state thus abandoned its regulatory role in the agricultural sector and shifted financial support from small-scale subsistence farming to production of cash crops for agro-export (McMichael 2000). The enactment of NAFTA further compromised subsistence agriculture, in particular by requiring the elimination of restrictions on the import of U.S. corn, the price of which was approximately 30 percent below the average Mexican cost of production, due to higher productivity levels and subsidies maintained by U.S. growers (Polaski 2004; Ulrich 2006). Marginal producers had accounted for 25 percent of the production of

Mexico's most important crop (Barry 1995). These are the very farmers who are now being forced out of production and into the northward migration flow. By 2002, over 1.3 million jobs had been lost in the agricultural sector (Polaski 2004). Given the central role that small farmers have played in feeding Mexico, their loss raises serious questions about the future food security of the country. Such developments, playing out on a global scale, gave rise to the international food security movement, and ultimately to the food sovereignty movement.

As immigrant farmworkers living and working in the United States struggle to meet their own needs, they send money home to their families who are struggling in the same light. Despite a precarious position in U.S. society, immigrant workers provide an indispensible source of income to 21 percent of Mexican families, amounting to almost \$24.3 billion per year (Orozco 2007). Increases in remittance flows since trade and market liberalization are striking: from \$1 billion in 1982 and \$9.8 billion in 2002 (Polaski 2004). While remittances amount to only 3 percent of the total Mexican GDP, they constitute a much greater percentage for rural Mexican communities, up to 50 percent in some communities in the southern states of Oaxaca and Chiapas.

With respect to the broader context of food security and remittances, an FFFSA focus group we conducted in 2005, of unaccompanied men living in a California farm labor camp, yielded illustrative findings. When asked "have you ever had to send so much money home to Mexico that you haven't had enough left over to eat?" the universal response was no. The words of one participant illuminate as clear an understanding of the food security question as the "science" on which so many studies are based: "If you don't eat, you die."

Conclusion

In this chapter we have reviewed existing data on farmworker food insecurity and offered an explanation of how and why food insecurity and hunger are experienced by farmworkers. We do not suggest that this vulnerability is based on any inherent lack of ability for farmworkers to sustain themselves and their families. Instead, we have attempted to analyze this data in the context of the structural inequalities faced by farmworkers on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. The fundamental point is that food insecurity is produced by the global economic system in which the domestic dynamics of food production are embedded. Food (in)security is thus a lens for understanding broader processes of

exploitation and inequality under capitalism. Our story extends beyond on-farm production relations and the immediate practices of agricultural employers to the broader circuits of political-economic governance, which shape the experiences of agricultural laborers on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border and which, more often than not, heighten food insecurity. Nor is the story confined to United States-Mexico relations, but rather everywhere that people grow and eat food.

The problematic issues of food access and deprivation require an understanding that the undocumented immigrant farmworkers must be both invisible, due to their "illegal" status, and visible, in order to resist exploitation. Understanding food insecurity also necessitates a consideration of the relationship between activities of the state, including national governments' immigration laws, labor regulations, and social policies, and the international trade regimes that have privileged transnational corporate interests over smallholder agriculture. Finally, understanding food insecurity demands an analysis of the paradox of farm labor within domestic and global food production.

Since Cesar Chavez's call for "a revolution of the poor seeking bread and justice," both have continued to be denied to millions worldwide, largely as a result of the contradictions of food provisioning based on capitalist social relations. We view attempts to measure the food security status of particular groups, such as farmworkers, as critical to the process of illuminating these contradictions. However, they can only do so if they are considered within the broader contexts discussed herein. By connecting questions of food security to the underlying dynamics that produce hunger and hunger-induced migration, we hope to contribute to the opening up of more productive discussions about food security in farmworker communities.

Notes

- 1. Although the 1974 UN World Food Conference proclaimed people's inalienable right to freedom from hunger, the United States has never adopted this position (Allen 2007).
- 2. Mitchell (2007) cites the California Employment Development Department's decision to stop collecting wage information and the rise of the contract labor system as evidence that wage declines may actually be greater than official statistics suggest (also see Bugarin and Lopez 1998; Wells 1996).
- 3. While California's minimum wage increases during 2008 and 2009 nominally increased median hourly wages, to \$8.70 per hour statewide and \$8.63 for Fresno County in the first quarter of 2009 (State of California Employment

Development Department 2009), seasonal variation limits farmworkers' annual incomes and contributes to food insecurity and hunger. Furthermore, workers earning piece-rate wages, based on the quantity of produce harvested as opposed to the number of hours worked, do not realize any direct benefit from minimum

- 4. The taskforce included farmworker advocates, farmers, hunger and nutrition advocates, food assistance program representatives, health care providers, nutrition educators, and members of local nonprofits and service providers.
- 5. The USDA defines food security as "access by all members at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life . . . [including] at a minimum the ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods [and] assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways" and the U.S. Census Bureau uses the core module to measure this condition at the individual and household level. Households are categorized as having (1) high, (2) marginal, (3) low, or (4) very low food security (previously food insecurity with hunger) (Nord, Andrews, and Carlson 2008).
- 6. The five California survey sites were: two urban Fresno zip codes (93702 and 93706), two rural towns (Huron and Parlier), and one farm labor camp (Five
- 7. Examples of such surveys include the U.S. Census, National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS), the U.S. Census Food Security Supplement, and the California Health Interview Survey. Because the Fresno study was conducted in person it may capture groups of farmworkers not included in surveys that focus on households with stable residences.
- 8. Food writers such as Michael Pollan, Anna Lappé, and Marion Nestle have devoted much attention to providing advice for readers concerned with the conventional food system. For a critique of sustainable agriculture actors' focus on the individual food choices of low-income people and people of color see
- 9. The California Health Interview Survey (CHIS) is a telephone survey conducted by the University of California Los Angeles Center for Health Policy Research in 2001, 2003, 2005, and 2007. The data are publicly available at http://www.chis.ucla.edu (accessed May 12, 2009). The project defines low income as less than 200 percent of poverty level. Unless otherwise noted all CHIS figures are at the 95 percent confidence interval.
- 10. The United Farm Workers suggest the figure may be as high as 85-90 percent
- 11. The Food Stamp program is the largest of the federal food assistance programs, designed to mitigate food insecurity through subsidies for private food purchases to legal permanent residents and citizens in low-income households below 130 percent of the federal poverty level (Harrison et al. 2007). While undocumented immigrants are not eligible for food stamps, their U.S.-born chil-
- 12. This includes exemption from the Wagner Act, National Labor Relations Act (of 1935), minimum wage and maximum hours laws, child labor restrictions,

and OSHA, Although California adopted the Agricultural Labor Relations Act to give farmworkers collective bargaining rights, it has been only mildly effective in the face of grower backlash and given the broader governance structures, which keep farmworkers vulnerable.

13. New measures include: the passage of legislation by Congress aimed at prosecuting U.S. citizens and legal residents who assist undocumented immigrants as felons, authorization of the construction of 700 additional miles of wall along the U.S.-Mexico border, increases in workplace raids and human rights violations in detention centers, and requiring some employers to utilize new and problematic instant verification systems to determine work eligibility.

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III

Will Work for Food Justice