

# International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations



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## IUF World Food Day Statement October 16, 2020

### *COVID-19 reveals shocking inequalities in global food systems*

The agricultural and food industries are known for precarious employment conditions, low pay and poor health, safety and living conditions. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare to the world the deficiencies and defects in our food production systems in respect of agricultural and food workers, and exacerbated existing inequalities.

Agricultural and food workers put food on our tables every day. The paradox is that these millions of women and men who feed the world often do not earn enough to properly feed themselves and their families. Agricultural workers and small farmers are part of the chronically food insecure, rural poor.

Yet during the COVID-19 pandemic, to ensure food supplies governments have classed food and agricultural workers as essential and across the globe they have worked throughout the pandemic to maintain food supplies. This has often been at the cost of their own health and that of their families and communities. Tens of thousands of workers in meat and food processing plants, and on farms and plantations around the world have been infected with the coronavirus. Many have died.

There can be ***no food security without rights for food and agricultural workers***. Current rights deficits which must be urgently addressed include:

**For agricultural workers:** exclusion from national labour laws and regulations protecting workers in other industries;

**Precarious employment:** being hired and employed through dubious labour contracting arrangements which can end up as forced labour; casual/seasonal/daily employment often with no written contracts; lack of sick pay other basic social protection measures; long and continuous hours of work; a wide range of health and safety deficits. No maternity rights. The precarious work arrangements make women workers more vulnerable to sexual harassment.

**Migrant workers:** an essential part of agriculture and food industries - are particularly vulnerable especially as many work without proper documentation and are hired through labour agents. In addition they often live in makeshift

accommodation in unsanitary conditions or in overcrowded, dormitory-type accommodation.

Ensuring a trade union and human rights based approach for agricultural and food workers, recognising them as essential workers for global food security, has to be the way forward. Agricultural and food workers, including migrant workers, must have their rights guaranteed.

### **So on World Food Day 2020, the IUF insists:**

#### **UN Agencies:**

1. The FAO, ILO and WHO, the UN agencies responsible for food, employment conditions and health must work together to ensure workers in the food and agriculture sectors who are classed as essential have decent working conditions.
2. The FAO, ILO and WHO must include trade unions in the development and implementation of global guidelines to ensure global food security.

#### **Governments:**

1. Because ensuring adequate food supplies is an obligation of governments, governments must work with trade unions and employers to ensure that the food and agriculture sectors can maintain supply without putting the health and safety of its workforce at risk.
2. Governments should recognize the employment risks and the potential extreme economic hardship facing workers. Governments should collaborate with unions and employers to introduce employment and income support measures to mitigate these risks.
3. Governments must provide a properly resourced and trained labour inspectorate for food and agriculture workplaces.

#### **Employers must:**

1. Respect agricultural and food workers' rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining, and negotiate workplace safety protocols with unions.
2. Take urgent measures to ensure that all workers, including migrant workers have access to potable water, adequate space for physical distancing and quarantine, adequate soap, disinfectant and sanitary supplies, guaranteed income, protective equipment and safe transport to and from work.
3. Employ all workers, including temporary and seasonal migrant workers, directly rather than through agencies and provide them trainings in relation to COVID-19 measures.

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The International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF) is an international trade union federation made up of 423 affiliated trade unions in 127 countries representing over 10 million workers.

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#### **References:**

[IUF demands for dealing with COVID-19 in the food and beverage sector](#)  
[IUF demands for dealing with COVID-19 in agriculture](#)  
[IUF demands on equality and COVID-19](#)