

# Strawberry farms essay examples

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The luscious and red strawberry vivaciously fills displays in neighborhood grocery stores. Dozens and dozens of cartons end up in shopping carts all over the country. The consumer is veiled, and blinded to the reality of all the work involved to make sure those containers are filled with strawberries.

Strawberry farming, though sounds magical, is not all what it seems.

Strawberry farming comes with loads of risk, primarily relies on the weather, and involves a fluctuated amount of labor intensive work. Strawberry farming relies solely on the weather and the fruit itself is so delicate that it is very susceptible to damage. Many strawberry farms, among other farms, escape high cost of labor and risk of capital by hiring migrant workers and 30-60% of intensive labor is done by illegal migrant farmers. Migrant workers make so little a day that they live unhealthy and below the poverty line lifestyles. In Eric Schlosser's article, *In the Strawberry Fields*, he highlights the dark side of farming, specifically strawberry farming by way of extreme low wages to the migrant farmer. This essay will lift the curtain on the problems migrant workers face and suggest solutions to promote fair labor practices to the migrant farmers with the intention that these suggestions will benefit all aspects of the industry and the community.

The first and foremost problem that the migrant farmers face is the illegal immigrant status. The fact that they do not have legal authorization to work in the United States, economical devalues their worth and carries serious potential consequences. They are in a situation where they become vulnerable and practically are desperate. This gives other people and businesses the open door to take advantage, in which they do, by paying them at a much lower wage than what would be paid for a legal immigrant or

citizen. This is a problem because it adds to the population and increases poverty stricken communities and habits. “ Just before sunrise farm workers appear on the streets of Guadalupe, California, emerging from the small houses, backyard sheds, basements, and garages where they spent the night” . Mexico and Central America are beautiful countries and have some of the hardest working people the world has ever seen. The level of hard labor that the Mexican people are able to achieve on a daily basis is extremely admirable. Mexico also has a very profitable agricultural economy so the question as to why the Mexicans flee their own country arises. “ Mexico-US migration is neither a flood nor a war, but a piece of well-ordered machinery that operates in a predictable fashion according to a patterned logic that has been intensively studied and well described by social scientists” .

The second issue that migrant farmer’s face is getting paid below minimum wage. According to Douglas S. Massey’s statement that Mexico and US migration is a pattern; we can safely conclude that it will never just go away. So that brings us to humanity and fairness. The strawberry farming business is volatile and ever changing making it hard to rely on consistent profits; but that doesn’t mean that the workers should be paid less than to live a decent quality of life. No migrant worker should get paid less than minimum wage, illegal or not. The migrant workers call it “ la fruta del Diablo” because they live a life of destitute working to ensure the United States grocery stores have strawberries in the produce section and in their cakes. Most of fruits and vegetables are still handpicked today and are becoming more of a high demand due to healthy habits. It seems a major contradiction to provide

health to consumers while slowly killing their workers with low wage and no health benefits. There has to be some leverage in profit and capital that can account for a higher wage to the migrant worker as well as benefits. They call it “ la fruta del Diablo” for a reason, because this is all a foundation of greed and nothing human or ethical comes from greed. It truly is greed that gets in the way and causes harm and poor living conditions for the vulnerable.

Final problem identified is housing. From the Eric Schlosser’s article, there is a housing crisis, especially with the value of real estate in California.

Schlosser goes on to say that some of the work camps are slums. Will the shepherd take care of his sheep? Doesn’t seem so with the chain linked fences and faded white plaster apartments that house these humans. It’s a catch 22, 30-60 percent of migrant workers are illegal immigrants but yet the farmers need them to profit. Since the farmers are taking advantage of this profit gain, what is Congress doing about it? “ In 1986, it was a crime to be an illegal immigrant in the United States but not a crime to employ one” . The migrant workers come from a culture that is dedicated to hard work and not driven by extreme financial success. Considering their humble approach on life, it shouldn’t be that difficult or expensive to up the ante so they can be appreciated. Eric A. Schlosser states “ A typical room is roughly twelve feet by ten feet, unheated, and occupied by four men. Sheets of plywood separate the steel cots. For \$80. 00 a week, a price that most migrants cannot afford, one gets a bed and two meals a day. I have seen nicer horse barns.”

This pattern of illegal immigration needs to be recognized and acknowledge

as the inevitable and regulations on immigration need to be adhered to so that fair humanity practices occur on a borderless perception. America needs to ask itself, do we really need these workers? Moreover, depending on the answer then ask; can we fairly pay these workers or do we need to send them home? A solution would be to provide fairly to them so they can live a sustainable and respectable life. It is evident that California strawberry farms are profitable. According to Eric Schlosser, strawberries have become the focus of a California industry with annual sales exceeding half a billion dollars. “ No deity that men have ever worshiped is more ruthless and more hollow than the free market unchecked; there is no reason why shantytowns should not appear on the outskirts of every American city” .

It is important to provide a stable and prosperous lifestyle for all workers in a strawberry farm. Another solution is to raise the wage, add health care and offer naturalization to the loyal and good migrant workers. The wage doesn't have to be drastic but just enough to keep them well and with healthcare, they can make sure to work longer and healthier. They should have a program that once a farmer has worked for an extended time, they will receive benefits including healthcare and possibly naturalization. It is pretty evident that California needs low wage workers and fairly obvious that California is extremely plentiful in agriculture and success. Though a volatile market, success will still peak into a good strawberry farmer. What would the farm be without the fruit pickers? If a strawberry farmer cannot take care of their loyal and hard working strawberry pickers, then maybe they should convert the farm into a family operated establishment with family members picking the fruit. Otherwise, America needs to stop with the corrupt wealth

distribution system and ensure that their loyal and hard working employees are well cared for enough that they have access to safe living conditions, health care, food and legalization.

The last solution regarding housing is for strawberry farmer's to upgrade their work camps and provide their hard migrant workers safer living environments. Upgrading the living conditions will not just only benefit illegal migrants but all workers who are hired on during seasonal " at-will" work. Upgrading will also enhance the community. The Mexican and Mixtecs come from a culture that is not driven by finances, so they don't need luxurious living conditions but they do need safe and clean ones. Every human who works hard to provide food for others to nourish their bodies with should be appreciated and taken care of. The fact that anyone would take advantage of their unfortunate circumstance is really immoral. This is a matter of ethics and morality. This is the United States of America and our country values hard work and reaps benefits for doing so. If a company decides to use certain types of workers, illegally, then they should be willing to provide a better way of life. The law has already been laid down. It is illegal to be in the United States without authorization but somehow or another this practice is tolerated in the extent that the farm owners are profiting. In essence, the United States is saying it's ok to pay an illegal immigrant less than minimum wage, as they are here illegally, because there is economic gain off of others suffering. There should be no reason that the United States Immigration Services can't crack down in the state of California on this. But it slides. The treatments of humans are not as important as profit margins. And let's forget that legal migrants and actual American citizens don't have an

opportunity to pick strawberries for minimum wage.

In conclusion, these are the problems and solutions that farmers and migrant farmers face. The free market is really not free. America is really not free.

We as a country stand for freedom yet we outsource jobs to other countries because labor is cheap, tolerate extremely low wages for illegal immigrants and wonder why our country has inhumane suffering. Companies don't want to pay a fair rate because the economy makes it very hard for them to do.

Inflation is higher than it has ever been. College tuition has nearly doubled and the middle class is near the poverty line. When the migrants say Diablo, maybe they really mean Diablo. Overall, the solutions are to not be so driven on money and be driven on morals, values and humanity, especially for those who work hard.

## **Works Cited**

Massey, Douglas S. *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors: Mexican Immigration In an Era of Economic Integration* . New York: Russel Sage Foundation, 2002. Print.

Schlosser, Eric. " In the Strawberry Fields." (n. d.). Web.