

FLOC AND NCGA RENEW LABOR CONTRACT



FLOC supporters celebrate the renewal of the historic labor contract with NCGA, covering some 7,000 agricultural "guest workers" in North Carolina.

Long-time FLOC supporters remember when the second set of farm labor contracts were signed in the Midwest. The renewal of a contractual relationship signaled a commitment by all sides to work together to guarantee worker rights and to increase productivity. Over the years, cooperative working relations between FLOC workers, growers, and agricultural processing corporations have steadily developed, to the benefit of all.

In 2004, the **Farm Labor Organizing Committee** AFL-CIO and the **North Carolina Growers Association** signed historic labor contracts covering some 7,000 H2A "guest workers" and 800 growers in the South. This historic agreement provided important new rights and protections for "guest workers" coming to the U.S., including a *grievance procedure* which guarantees worker's voice at the work site. Other provisions include freedom from retaliation for filing a grievance, no terminations without just cause, the right to receive visitors in camps, compensation for the day of an injury, a medical leave with the right to return to the same job, a paid bereavement leave, and a half-day off for religious worship.

In February, FLOC and the NCGA renewed this contract, which furthers the rights and protections of these workers. New features include:

- Workers are now able to apply for jobs through the union based on their seniority. This "bid" process is a major step in bypassing the corruption in the recruitment process that has abused and extorted workers who want to come to work in the U.S. legally.
- Workers do not have to pay any recruitment fees, including fees for visa interviews and transportation to their work site in the U.S. This provision institutionalizes a previous court decision, and is designed to bypass the corruption in the recruitment process, since it eliminates all exchanges of money in Mexico. (Previously, workers had to pay \$346 in visa and transportation fees and up to \$2,000 in bribes and extortion to be recruited for work in the U.S., usually at 20% interest a month.)
- Time limits in the grievance procedure have been established to facilitate faster resolution of problems.
- A procedure has also been established to facilitate greater cooperation in filing and processing worker compensation claims for on-the-job injuries.
- The NCGA and FLOC have also agreed to collaborate to bring more growers under the labor contract, to the benefit of both growers and workers.

These contacts between FLOC and the NCGA are historical in being a model **transnational labor agreement**. The inclusion of provisions concerning recruitment of workers in their home country opens the door for more progress in realizing the self-determination and human rights of workers as labor migration increases around the world.

FLOC looks forward to continuing relations with the NCGA and its growers in finding ways to benefit all sides in the production of agricultural products.