



**Farm
Labor
Organizing
Committee**, AFL-CIO

Hasta la Victoria!

www.floc.com

FLOC SEEKS JUSTICE For Reynolds Tobacco Field Workers

TOBACCO WORKERS SUFFER IN THE FIELDS



*Tobacco field workers suffer hazardous and demeaning conditions to make big corporations rich.
(See [A Short Tobacco Day](#))*

Urbano Ramirez came to N.C. the mountains of Guerrero to support his family. One of his greatest dreams was that his children be able to go to school. When he told his supervisor that he was feeling sick, he was told to rest under a tree, and was forgotten when the crew left the fields. Two weeks later, his decomposing body was found under the same tree. For more information, see:

- [Urbano's Song](#)
- [Urbano's Song: A Discussion Guide](#)

Imagine the hazards of daily contact with nicotine that is absorbed into your entire body. Nicotine is not only classified as one of the most toxic poisons, but it also raises the body temperature and increases a worker's dehydration. In recent years, six field workers have died in North Carolina tobacco fields, most of them due to heat stroke.

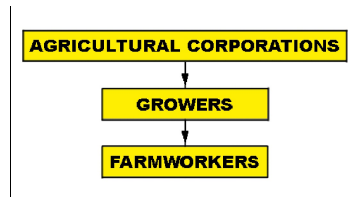
In addition, most of these farmworkers suffer slave-like hardships:

- racism
- long hours of stoop labor in the fields
- harassment in their work
- abject poverty
- staggering debt
- exposure to lethal nicotine and pesticides
- poor health
- miserable housing in labor camps
- denial of basic labor and human rights protections

The most serious problem faced by tobacco field workers is that they have **no voice** in those conditions that impact on their lives. Everyone else makes decisions *for* them, and if they complain about mistreatment or if their productivity declines from tobacco sickness, they can be fired without question.

What chance do these human beings have to fill their potentials in life?

What is the *cause* of this misery?



Big tobacco companies are among the richest corporations in agriculture. They have constructed a *supply system* that benefits themselves, at the expense of those down the line who actually produce their leaf products. They set the prices and terms for the farmers who grow their tobacco, which directly affects the earnings and working conditions of field workers. With their excessive wealth and power, they *could* do something about this situation... but have chosen to ignore this suffering in their drive for greater profits.

RJ Reynolds is one of the largest tobacco corporations, with annual profits of over \$2 *billion*. Reynolds executives, who can receive up to \$60 *million* a year in bonuses, claim to be committed to [corporate social responsibility](#), but their list of "stakeholders" exclude farmworkers at the bottom of their supply chain... and they do not allow for any input from farmworkers themselves or their advocates. Their supply system is *unilateral*, and so that even if the corporation decided to act positively now it can also withdraw any benefits whenever it wants.

What is the *solution* to the abuse of farmworkers?

The FLOC movement seeks to **change the structure** of the system that currently fosters abuse of farmworkers. The large corporations have created a supply system that enriches its executives at the expense of those who work in the fields to produce its basic product. These corporations have the wealth and power to change this structure. As in past campaigns, FLOC seeks a structure where *all* those in the system have an equal voice to their mutual benefit - corporations, growers, and farmworkers. This new structure gives farmworkers a **direct voice** in their own affairs. Historically, this is the only solution that has made a real difference in farmworkers' conditions and lives. (See [History of FLOC](#).)

FLOC CAMPAIGN FOR JUSTICE FOR TOBACCO FIELD WORKERS



Church leaders and FLOC supporters remember the deaths, abuse, and neglect of migrant farmworkers

FLOC President Baldemar Velásquez reminds us that FLOC is "called upon to challenge the deplorable conditions of the broader workforce that remains voiceless, powerless, and invisible to mainstream America."

FLOC represents some 6,000 migrant farmworkers in North Carolina. FLOC and the N.C. Growers Association have provided significant improvements in wages and working conditions for their workers. Most important, these workers now have a **voice** in their own conditions, and are now directly involved in their contractual terms of employment and problem solving in the fields and camps. But there are 150,000 other migrant workers in N.C. who suffer abuse, dangerous working conditions, and low wages. At the 2006 Constitutional Convention, FLOC members voted to initiate a [new campaign](#) to extend human and labor rights to the other farmworkers in N.C.

As always, the focus is on the **farmworkers**, rather than the product. Of those field workers who help produce tobacco leaf for Reynolds, about 20% are already covered by FLOC union protections. FLOC now wishes to extend the same benefits to the other Reynolds field workers in North Carolina.

In September 2007, FLOC President Baldemar Velásquez asked to meet with Susan Ivey, the CEO of Reynolds American Inc., to discuss the conditions of field workers producing its products. Reynolds replied that it saw no reason to meet with FLOC. (See [Velásquez 2007 letter](#).) In November 2008, Mr. Velásquez made another request to Ms. Ivey to meet "to discuss the conditions of farm workers who harvest the tobacco used by your Company." (See [Velásquez 2008 letter](#).) Again, Reynolds refused to even discuss the issues.

At the Reynolds [2009 shareholders meeting](#), top executives imposed strict rules that denied any questions or comments by its own shareholders concerning corporate business and policies, and threw two people out of the meeting who raised points of order about these rules. Even when shareholders' resolutions were considered, strict time limits were imposed on discussions, and the top executives dominated the outcome with their proxy votes. One of the unquestioned business items was that these top executives were shamelessly granted up to \$60 million in bonuses. It was later noted that even a small portion of these bonuses would resolve all of the major conditions suffered by those farmworkers ignored at the bottom who make this wealth possible.

Reynolds has issued a [statement](#) portrays FLOC as attacking Reynolds' record of "social responsibility". FLOC's [response](#) to the Reynolds' statement questions the truthfulness and biases in the corporation's attitudes towards the farmworkers who produce its basic product. FLOC asks us all to examine the structure of Reynolds' agricultural supply system and to consider how this impacts on the working and living conditions of the farmworkers at the bottom.

We invite all concerned to consider what are the most effective **solutions** to resolving farmworkers' conditions. (See [History of FLOC](#).)

WHAT CAN I DO?



FLOC supporters deliver 6,000 postcards to Reynolds Tobacco asking the corporation to meet with FLOC.

(See [FLOC Supporters Call on Reynold to Meet With FLOC.](#))

In the Reynolds struggle, as in former campaigns, it is encouraging to know **we are not alone**. There has always been a broad network of people and groups across the country who make a major difference for those marginalized by society. Big corporations may be rich and powerful, but in the long run the balance has been restored by a critical mass of people who truly believe in the American ideals of justice and equality. When we stand together, how can these rich and powerful resist our collective call for justice?

Want to make a difference? Here are things you can do right now:

- **Keep informed**

Keep checking the [FLOC website](#).

Sign up for the [FLOC List](#) to keep up with our struggle for justice.

Also, check out what Reynolds really stands for at [Reynolds American](#).

- **Write, fax, and/or call Reynolds Tobacco**, and ask them to **meet with FLOC**:

Susan Ivey, CEO
Reynolds American Inc.
401 North Main Street
Winston-Salem, NC 27102-28066
336-741-5000
FAX: 336-728-8973

(Please send a copy to FLOC, 1221 Broadway, Toledo OH 43609
or email us at [FLOC Reynolds Campaign](#) to let us know you contacted Reynolds.

Want to do more?

[Get Involved!](#) (Click for more information.)

For more information on the Reynolds campaign, see:

- [Background on the Reynolds Campaign](#), National Farm Worker Ministry (PDF)
- [FLOC Announces a New Campaign](#) (PDF Sept. 2006)
- [Let Them Not Be Forgotten](#), FLOC President Baldemar Velásquez (PDF Sept. 2007)
- [Farmworker Remembrance](#) (PDF Sept. 2007)
- [A Harvest of Shame](#), FLOC President Baldemar Velásquez, *The Huffington Post* (Oct. 2007)
- [FLOC Marches at Reynolds Tobacco](#) (Oct. 2007)
- [Reynolds 2008 Shareholders Meeting](#) (PDF May 2008)
- [Alternative Reynolds Report 2008](#) (PDF May 2008)
- [Velásquez Letter to Reynolds CEO Susan Ivey](#) (PDF Nov. 2008)
- [FLOC Supporters Call on Reynold to Meet With FLOC](#) (PDF Nov. 2008)
- [Reynolds 2009 Shareholders Meeting](#) (PDF May 2009)

Also, see:

- [Letter from CEO Susan Ivey to Shareholders](#), Reynolds American Inc. (Note the absence of any reference to workers who produce its basic products. Also note how this absence conflicts with Reynold's comments on Corporate Responsibility and the core values of Principles, Creative, Dynamic, and Passionate.)
- [Our Guiding Principles and Beliefs](#), Reynolds American Inc. (Note the absence of principles about the farmworkers who produce its basic product.)
- [Corporate Social Responsibility Report](#), Reynolds American Inc. (Note the exclusion of farmworkers from among its "stakeholders" and the absence of any farmworker voice in corporate policies and practices.)

Thank you! As in former campaigns, it is encouraging to know we are not alone. **Together**, we can make a difference for justice!

Please feel free to contact us at [FLOC Reynolds Campaign](#).

Sample letter to Reynolds American

[date]

Susan Ivey, CEO
Reynolds American Inc.
401 North Main Street
Winston-Salem, NC 27102-28066
FAX: 336-728-8973

RE: Justice for Tobacco Workers

Dear Ms. Ivey,

I am writing to ask you to meet with the Farm Labor Organizing Committee to discuss ways that the migrant farmworkers who help produce your products can improve their conditions and lives.

I am shocked and appalled by the conditions in which these people work and live. There is no justification for workers dying of heat and pesticides in the fields, the squalid housing which they are provided, and the unacceptable discrimination that is reminiscent of slavery in these same fields 150 years ago.

Since Reynolds controls the supply system which benefits the wealth of the corporation and its top executives at the expense of those who work in the fields to supply your basic product, you are the one in the position to resolve the problems of those at the bottom.

FLOC has a long history of working with agricultural corporations and farmers to provide new opportunities for all parties. We call upon you to meet with FLOC and consider solutions that can resolve this issue.

Sincerely,

[name]