



**Farm Labor Organizing Committee**  
AFL-CIO  
[www.floc.com](http://www.floc.com)

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## URBANO'S SONG



[\(Click to hear Urbano's Song, by Baldemar Velásquez\)](#)

### URBANO'S STORY

Urbano Ramirez was born in Atlixotac, a small indigenous community in the mountains of Guerrero, México. As a child, Urbano had been called "*Sonrisa*" ("Smiley") because he was always in a positive mood. He was known as a polite man who enjoyed playing soccer with fellow townsmen. The 34 year old father of five had been trying to support his family as a carpenter and construction worker, but was able to earn so little that there was little hope for his children, particularly with another one on the way. He told others that he wanted his children to get a good education and have a better life than he had known.

So in May of 2001, Urbano left his familiar surroundings, and headed North to find way to support his family. When he joined relatives in North Carolina, Urbano had great difficulty in finding work, so he decided to go into the fields. His relatives and friends warned him that field work was low-paying, hard, and dangerous, but he felt he had no other choice. So he worked in the fields processing crops that ensures food is on the tables of Americans across the country.

On June 26, Urbano was picking cucumbers in a field at Jake Taylor Farms in North Carolina. He felt dizzy and nauseous, signs of a heat stroke. The field supervisor told him to go rest under a tree, while the crew moved on to a tobacco field. When the workers were loaded onto a bus to go back to the migrant labor camp, the supervisor forgot about Urbano.

When Urbano's relatives and friends didn't hear from him, they went to the migrant camp looking for him. The field supervisor told them that he had left the farm. When they still couldn't find Urbano, they went back to the camp demanding to know where he was. The local sheriff was called, and handcuffed Urbano's brother... but didn't even talk with Urbano's co-workers to learn more about the complaint.

A little more than two months after he arrived in the U.S., co-workers were sent back to the same fields, and found Urbano's decomposing body under the same tree. They were only able to identify him by his clothes.

When FLOC heard about the case, funds were raised to take Urbano's body to be buried back at the family's home in Guerrero, where his family visits his grave every week. FLOC filed a lawsuit against the grower, and Urbano's family was paid \$110,000. While this money ensures his family will be taken care of, Urbano's children now have to be raised without a father, including his youngest son who was born after he left and never knew his father. Baldemar Velásquez, President of FLOC, was moved by Urbano's tragic death and the stories of his family, and wrote a haunting song in English and Spanish about the greed that leads to the invisibility and abuse farmworkers suffer to feed Americans.

**For more information**, please contact:

**Farm Labor Organizing Committee**, AFL-CIO  
1221 Broadway Street  
Toledo, OH 43609  
419-243-3456  
[info@floc.com](mailto:info@floc.com)

## DISCUSSION NOTES

The following questions are designed to stimulate understanding about WHY such cases as Urbano's death can happen, and, more important, **what can be done** to make sure this kind of abuse never happens again.

Good preparation will produce richer discussions. Some common practices include:

- For background on FLOC and the Reynolds Tobacco campaign, review:

[History of FLOC](#)

[FLOC Seeks Justice for Reynolds Tobacco Field Workers](#)

- The emphasis is for people to **discover for themselves** why the FLOC movement is the main effective solution for resolving the tragedies, abuses, and exploitation of farmworkers. When workers have a direct voice in their own conditions, they are in the best situation for dealing with the problems themselves, both in the labor contracts and at the workplace through the grievance procedures. They do not have to rely on someone else's decisions or actions... which are usually in the best interest of those other parties. When people discover for themselves, they are more convinced and are far more likely to act on the basis of what they believe.
- **Print** the first page about *Urbano's Story*, and provide a copy for each participant. Also **PRINT** the statement by Baldemar Velásquez on the [New Campaign in North Carolina](#), and provide a copy for each participant. Other useful materials are also available on the FLOC website at [www.floc.com/](http://www.floc.com/), such as the [Story of FLOC](#), [Immigrant Rights](#), and other topics.
- Before the discussion, determine how much **time** to allow for each question. Consider that discussions usually go over whatever time is allowed, and give 1-2 warnings before each time period comes to an end. When the time period ends, remind everyone about the next question to help them move on.
- If the discussion group **size** is more than about five people, the audience can be separated into small groups for the discussion, and then report back to the larger group.
- For each question, write it for all to see and read it aloud, then ask people to **write down** their individual thoughts, then go around the group and ask each person to share their thoughts. Allow some time for **open** discussion on major ideas before moving on to the next question. The questions can be modified to be relevant to the particular audience, such as church groups, students, etc. Depending on time frames, some questions can be shortened or modified as needed.
- For those who want more information on FLOC, pass around a **sign-up sheet** to provide contact information (mailing address, telephones, and email address). Please send this list to FLOC at [info@floc.com](mailto:info@floc.com) or mail it to us at FLOC, 1221 Broadway St., Toledo OH 43609. You can also ask people to sign up for the **FLOC Supporters** listserve online at <http://www.floc.com/FLOCsignup.htm>.

## **URBANO'S SONG: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. **Why did Urbano come to the United States?** What are the forces that led him to leave his familiar surroundings for a strange new land? What are the impacts on his family left behind? How does Urbano's reasons for immigrating compare to your own family's situation that led to the place where you now live?
2. **Who is responsible for Urbano's tragic case?** Who is immediately accountable for his death? How does Urbano's case compare with other migrant farmworkers? What social and economic structures led to this tragedy? What is *your* role in this system that is responsible for the invisibility, abuse, and exploitation suffered by immigrant workers?
3. **What can be done to ensure that something like this does not happen again?** Why do labor laws for farmworkers set lower standards than for other American workers, and even these are consistently not enforced? What other options are there for addressing the neglect and abuse migrant farmworkers suffer? What changes need to take place in our social and economic structures to ensure migrant farmworkers are treated with respect for the work they do?
4. **How do necessary changes relate to the new FLOC campaign in North Carolina?** How does the FLOC movement impact on the social and economic structures that lead to abuse of farmworkers? How can FLOC's success ensure the ongoing well-being of migrant workers?
5. **What can we do to support the FLOC campaign?** What concrete ways can we help FLOC achieve justice for migrant workers? How can we get others involved in this effort? What collective impact can the efforts of thousands of people in their communities have in changing the social and economic structures that lead to abuse of farmworkers?