

UNION OF SAINTS

Agricultural Workers, Worker Dignity, Forced Labor & Human Trafficking

Maine Resource & Community Education Guide

Prepared for the Union of Saints

Purpose: Community education, worker protection, resource referral, and awareness

Location: Maine

We are concerned with exploitation, organized crime, fraud, corruption networks, modern forms of slavery and political groups that may operate within our states. These networks can operate underground and may target unsuspecting or vulnerable people. They may also attempt to influence the political dynamics of a state or community in ways that could harm its residents, particularly its longtime or native citizens.

Such operations may appear completely normal to the average observer while concealing serious misconduct or undisclosed activities. These concerns may be especially relevant in industries where there are significant opportunities for financial profit and where vulnerable workers or individuals may be at greater risk of exploitation.

We are also concerned that public servants, military personnel, law enforcement officers, and others working in homeland security and public service may be targeted when there are significant matters that individuals or organizations may be attempting to conceal. Military veterans, public servants, law enforcement personnel, and homeland security professionals often have specialized training and experience that can give them a trained eye for recognizing irregularities, inconsistencies, and potential corruption where it exists.

For this reason, we believe it is important that public servants and those with relevant professional experience are protected from retaliation, intimidation, or other forms of interference when they identify and report potential misconduct or corruption.

Important Context

1. **Labor Exploitation and Modern Slavery**

Consider whether agricultural workers are being subjected to labor exploitation, coercion, or conditions that could constitute modern forms of slavery.

2. **Recruitment of U.S. Workers**

Determine whether U.S. workers were properly recruited and given the opportunity to work before foreign agricultural workers were hired, as required under applicable H-2A regulations.

3. **Overtime and Working Conditions**

Examine the number of hours workers are required to work, whether overtime applies, and whether workers are being compensated appropriately for the labor they provide.

4. **Labor Rates and Labor Profit**

Examine the actual rate paid to agricultural workers compared with the economic value of the labor they provide, including the farmer's revenue and profit derived from that labor.

5. **Agricultural Practices vs. Political and Security Issues**

Normal, lawful, healthy, and safe farming practices are conflated by activists with forms of information warfare involving the removal of U.S. borders, the abolition of U.S. homeland defense and policing, support for foreign enemies, modern forms of warfare, terrorism, or communist movements.

6. **Legal Immigration vs. Undocumented Immigration**

Legal immigrants have been welcomed into the United States, whereas undocumented immigrants have been asked to leave or obtain lawful status in accordance with U.S. immigration law.

7. **Harboring, Smuggling, and Unlawful Labor**

Consider whether any agricultural employers are knowingly harboring or smuggling workers, or utilizing cheap, coerced, or unpaid labor in violation of U.S. law.

8. **Fines and Enforcement**

No one wants to be fined, but financial penalties can be reasonable and appropriate when laws have been violated. Enforcement should be based on the specific violation and applicable law.

9. **U.S. Employment and Labor Participation**

The employment status of Americans should be examined carefully, including unemployment, labor-force participation, and the availability of Americans willing and able to perform agricultural work under the applicable wages and working conditions.

10. **Distinguishing Agricultural Labor From National Issues**

Mass instrumental migration, dramatic population shifts, claims that the United States should be considered part of Mexico, cartel activity, human trafficking, asymmetric warfare, drug trafficking, activist movements, military targeting, arson, flag burning, and forced cultural assimilation are not remotely the same issue as simply **hiring foreign agricultural workers**.

These subjects should not be treated as interchangeable. Lawful agricultural employment is one issue; unlawful conduct, national security threats, organized criminal activity, immigration violations, and political activists attempting to thwart military activities are separate issues of their own.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Purpose

Why This Conversation Matters

Understanding the H-2A Agricultural Worker Program

Basic H-2A Worker Rights

Recruitment and Worker Vulnerability

Federal Case Study: Multi-State Forced Labor

Federal Case Study: Washington H-2A Workers

Recognizing Potential Labor Trafficking

Maine's Agricultural Workforce System

Maine's Workforce Development Plan

Language Access

What the Union of Saints Can Do

Responding When Someone Asks for Help

National Human Trafficking Hotline

- Community Checklist
- Employment Problems vs. Human Trafficking
- Broader Maine Trafficking Context
- Recommended Union of Saints Approach
- Conclusion
- Sources

1. PURPOSE

The Union of Saints recognizes the dignity of every person who works, lives, and contributes to our communities.

Agricultural workers are an important part of Maine's workforce and food system. This includes Maine residents, seasonal workers, migrant farmworkers, and workers participating in temporary agricultural programs such as H-2A.

Agricultural workers can face unique vulnerabilities related to recruitment, transportation, housing, wages, language, immigration status, geographic isolation, and access to services.

This guide is designed to help the Union of Saints community:

- Understand agricultural labor and the H-2A program.

- Recognize potential labor exploitation and human trafficking.

- Understand basic worker protections.

- Identify recruitment and employment warning signs.

- Connect workers with legitimate Maine resources.

- Promote dignity, transparency, safety, and accountability.

- Provide appropriate referrals when someone may be experiencing exploitation.

This guide does not suggest that agricultural employers or the H-2A program are inherently exploitative. Most agricultural employment does not involve human trafficking.

The purpose is prevention, education, and connection to appropriate resources.

2. The Conversation

Human trafficking can occur in many industries and communities.

Labor trafficking involves the use of force, fraud, or coercion to obtain labor or services.

Agricultural workers may experience additional vulnerabilities because some workers:

- Travel long distances for employment.

- Live in employer-provided housing.

- Depend on employers for transportation.

- Speak limited English.

- Are unfamiliar with U.S. employment laws.

- Are unfamiliar with local resources.

- May owe money connected to travel or recruitment.

- Fear losing employment or housing.

- Fear immigration consequences.

- Are geographically isolated from family and community support.

These circumstances do not automatically indicate trafficking.

They do, however, make accurate information, independent assistance, and trusted community relationships especially important.

3. UNDERSTANDING THE H-2A AGRICULTURAL WORKER PROGRAM

The H-2A program allows qualifying U.S. agricultural employers to employ eligible foreign workers temporarily when there are not enough available U.S. workers to perform the agricultural work.

The program includes specific requirements for employers and protections for workers.

H-2A workers have protections involving areas such as:

Written employment terms.

Wages.

Pay statements.

Transportation.

Housing.

Workers' compensation.

Recruitment-related expenses.

Tools and equipment.

Immigration and identity documents.

Protection from retaliation.

Workers should understand the terms of their employment before beginning work.

A worker should know:

Who the employer is.

What work will be performed.

Where the work will take place.

How much the worker will be paid.

How many hours are expected.

Where the worker will live.

How transportation will be provided.

What deductions may be made.

4. BASIC H-2A WORKER RIGHTS

The following is a general educational overview and is not a substitute for legal advice.

Written Employment Information

H-2A workers must receive information concerning the terms and conditions of employment.

Workers should receive appropriate written information in a language they understand.

Employment information should address important issues such as wages, hours, job duties, housing, transportation, and deductions.

Wages

H-2A workers must receive wages required under applicable H-2A rules and the terms of the applicable job order.

Workers should keep copies of pay statements and records of hours worked.

Recruitment Fees

Workers generally should not have to pay recruitment fees to obtain an H-2A job.

A worker who believes they were improperly charged recruitment fees should seek assistance.

Housing

When applicable program requirements require employer-provided housing, that housing must meet applicable health and safety requirements.

Transportation

H-2A employers have specific transportation obligations, including transportation related to the employment and, in appropriate circumstances, transportation between employer-provided housing and the worksite.

Tools and Equipment

Employers generally have responsibilities concerning required tools, supplies, and equipment.

Identity Documents

Employers may not improperly confiscate or control workers' passports or immigration documents.

Retaliation

Workers have protections against retaliation for exercising protected rights or participating in protected activities.

5. RECRUITMENT AND WORKER VULNERABILITY

Recruitment is one of the most important stages in protecting agricultural workers.

Workers may be promised:

A particular wage.

A specific number of hours.

A particular job.

Safe housing.

Transportation.

Food.

A specific work location.

A particular length of employment.

Problems can occur when the actual job differs significantly from what was promised.

Warning signs during recruitment can include:

False or misleading promises.

Unexplained recruitment charges.

Large debts connected to obtaining employment.

Pressure to sign documents that the worker does not understand.

Failure to provide written employment information.

Misrepresentation of wages or hours.

Threats connected to immigration status.

Refusal to allow workers to ask questions.

Workers should be encouraged to seek independent information before paying money to a recruiter or traveling for employment.

6. FEDERAL CASE STUDY

Multi-State Forced Labor Involving H-2A Workers

The U.S. Department of Justice announced the June 2026 sentencing of Alexander Villatoro Moreno for his role in a racketeering conspiracy involving Mexican H-2A agricultural workers.

According to DOJ, workers were recruited through an agricultural labor contracting company.

Court documents described conduct including alleged:

False promises concerning wages and working conditions.

Excessive recruitment fees.

Debt imposed on workers.

Long hours of agricultural labor.

Underpayment.

Passport confiscation.

Degrading living conditions.

Verbal abuse.

Threats of arrest or deportation.

Isolation.

Threats against workers' families.

The case involved agricultural labor across multiple states.

Villatoro Moreno was sentenced to 70 months in prison.

Why this case matters

This case illustrates that a legitimate employment program can be abused by individuals who use deception, threats, debt, or coercion to exploit workers.

The lesson is not that H-2A employment is inherently exploitative.

The lesson is that worker education, transparency, oversight, and accountability are essential.

7. FEDERAL CASE STUDY

Washington H-2A Workers

In February 2026, the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Washington announced an indictment involving two defendants and 103 H-2A agricultural workers.

According to the indictment, workers were recruited from Mexico with promises involving:

Employment.

Housing.

Food.

Transportation.

Visas.

Predictable work.

Prosecutors allege that some workers arrived and did not receive the promised employment, while others allegedly worked without pay.

The indictment also alleges inadequate food and housing, overcrowded transportation, and efforts to prevent workers from communicating with investigators.

Important Legal Notice

This was an indictment.

The allegations contained in an indictment are accusations and are not findings of guilt. The defendants are presumed innocent unless proven guilty in court.

Why this case matters

The case illustrates the importance of:

Accurate recruitment.

Written employment terms.

Independent access to information.

Safe communication.

Protection from retaliation.

Access to government and community resources.

8. RECOGNIZING POTENTIAL LABOR TRAFFICKING

Not every workplace violation constitutes human trafficking.

A wage dispute, unsafe workplace, housing violation, or other employment problem may be serious without meeting the legal definition of trafficking.

However, certain circumstances may raise significant concerns.

Potential warning signs include:

A worker was promised one job but given substantially different work.

A worker is not paid properly.

A worker owes significant money to a recruiter or employer.

A worker's passport or identity documents are confiscated.

A worker is threatened with deportation or arrest.

A worker is threatened with harm to family members.

A worker is prevented from leaving.

A worker is isolated from family or outside organizations.

A worker is monitored when communicating with others.

Housing is dangerous or severely overcrowded.

A worker is forced to work through threats or violence.

Workers are prevented from communicating with investigators or advocates.

One warning sign does not automatically establish trafficking.

The circumstances should be evaluated as a whole and, when appropriate, by qualified professionals.

9. MAINE'S AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE SYSTEM

Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry

Maine's Farm Labor Link Network connects agricultural employers and people seeking agricultural employment.

The resource provides information concerning:

Agricultural job opportunities.

Maine JobLink.

Career placement.

H-2A workers.

J-1 workers.

Apprenticeships.

Internships.

Employee orientation.

Human-resource practices.

Work agreements.

Employee handbooks.

Workforce development.

Maine DACF also directs employers considering migrant and H-2A workers toward the Maine Monitor Advocate and federal Foreign Labor Certification resources.

Why this matters

The Farm Labor Link Network provides a Maine-based starting point for legitimate agricultural employment and workforce-development resources.

10. MAINE'S WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Maine's 2024–2027 WIOA Unified State Plan, including its PY26/PY27 modification, provides the state's broader workforce-development framework.

The plan identifies eligible migrant and seasonal farmworkers as a population that may face barriers to employment.

It also discusses:

Workforce services.

Training.

Career pathways.

Employer needs.

English language learners.

Language access.

Barriers to employment.

The National Farmworker Jobs Program.

Coordination among workforce partners.

The National Farmworker Jobs Program provides workforce-development services to eligible migrant and seasonal farmworkers and their dependents.

Important connection

Agricultural workforce policy should not focus only on recruiting workers.

A sustainable workforce system should include:

Recruitment → Training → Language Access → Worker Support → Career Development → Retention

11. LANGUAGE ACCESS

Language access is an important component of worker protection.

A person cannot meaningfully understand their rights if employment information is presented in a language they cannot understand.

Maine's workforce plan addresses meaningful access to workforce programs and services for people with limited English proficiency.

The Union of Saints can support this principle by encouraging:

Professional interpretation.

Translated materials.

Bilingual outreach.

Multilingual worker orientations.

Time for questions and clarification.

Culturally appropriate communication.

Community principle

Information concerning a person's employment, safety, housing, or legal rights should be communicated in a way the person can actually understand.

12. WHAT THE UNION OF SAINTS CAN DO

The Union of Saints does not need to become a law-enforcement or legal-services organization to make a meaningful contribution.

Its role can be:

Trust + Education + Connection + Referral

Educate

Provide information about:

Worker rights.

H-2A employment.

Recruitment practices.

Wages.

Housing.

Transportation.

Retaliation.

Trafficking warning signs.

Build Community Relationships

Develop relationships with:

Agricultural workers.

Farmers and agricultural employers.

Maine workforce organizations.

Legal-service providers.

Anti-trafficking organizations.

Faith communities.

Worker advocates.

Community organizations.

Provide Language Access

Make information available in the languages used by the people being served.

Provide Safe Referrals

When serious exploitation is suspected, connect individuals with qualified professionals.

Protect Confidentiality

Workers may fear losing:

Employment.

Housing.

Income.

Transportation.

Immigration opportunities.

Contact with family.

Concerns should therefore be handled carefully and respectfully.

13. RESPONDING WHEN SOMEONE ASKS FOR HELP

If a worker approaches someone within the Union of Saints community, begin with compassion and safety.

Listen

Allow the person to explain what is happening without immediately judging or dismissing their experience.

Ask About Immediate Safety

If someone is in immediate danger, emergency assistance may be necessary.

Do Not Confront a Suspected Trafficker

Confrontation can increase the risk to the worker.

Preserve Important Information

If safe and appropriate, a worker may want to preserve:

Employment contracts.

Pay statements.

Work schedules.

Text messages.

Recruitment communications.

Names of recruiters.

Housing information.

Transportation information.

Records of deductions.

Refer

Appropriate referrals may include:

U.S. Department of Labor.
Maine workforce services.
Maine Monitor Advocate.
Legal-service organizations.
National Human Trafficking Hotline.
Law enforcement when appropriate.
Emergency services when someone is in immediate danger.

14. NATIONAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING HOTLINE

24-Hour Confidential Assistance

Phone: 1-888-373-7888

Text: 233733

TTY: 711

The National Human Trafficking Hotline provides assistance and referrals related to potential human trafficking.

Interpretation is available in more than 200 languages.

If someone is in immediate danger:

CALL 911

The National Human Trafficking Hotline is not a government agency or law-enforcement agency. It provides information, support, and referrals.

15. COMMUNITY CHECKLIST

Before Accepting a Job

A worker should know:

Who the employer is.
What work will be performed.
What the wage will be.
How many hours are expected.
Where the work will take place.
Where the worker will live.
How transportation will work.
What deductions may occur.
Who to contact if something goes wrong.

After Starting Work

Ask:

Am I being paid what I was promised?

Are my hours accurate?
Am I receiving pay information?
Is my housing safe?
Do I have access to food and transportation?
Do I control my identity documents?
Can I communicate privately with people outside the workplace?
Can I seek assistance without being threatened?
Is anyone threatening me or my family?

If Something Feels Wrong

Do not assume the problem is your fault.
Seek independent information and assistance.

16. EMPLOYMENT PROBLEMS VS. HUMAN TRAFFICKING

It is important not to label every employment violation as human trafficking.

Example: Employment Violation

A worker is incorrectly paid.
This may require a wage or employment-law remedy.

Example: Potential Trafficking

A worker is threatened with deportation, has their passport confiscated, and is forced to continue working through threats.
This may raise serious trafficking concerns.

Example: Housing Violation

Employer-provided housing is unsafe or fails to meet applicable requirements.
This may require a housing or labor-law response.

Example: Potential Trafficking

A worker is confined, threatened, monitored, and prevented from leaving employer-controlled housing.
This may raise serious trafficking concerns.

The Key Point

Serious labor violations should be addressed even when they do not meet the legal definition of human trafficking.

17. BROADER MAINE TRAFFICKING CONTEXT

DOJ Maine Sex-Trafficking Case

The Union of Saints' resource collection also includes a July 2026 DOJ case involving a California man indicted in Maine on sex-trafficking and related charges.

This case should be understood separately from the agricultural labor cases.

It involves sex trafficking rather than agricultural labor trafficking.

Its value to this guide is to demonstrate that trafficking can take different forms and that Maine participates in broader federal trafficking enforcement efforts.

As with any indictment, allegations should not be treated as proven facts unless established in court.

18. RECOMMENDED UNION OF SAINTS APPROACH

The Union of Saints can build its community response around five principles.

1. DIGNITY

Every worker deserves to be treated as a human being with inherent dignity, regardless of nationality, immigration status, occupation, or economic circumstances.

2. TRANSPARENCY

Workers should understand the employment they are accepting, including wages, hours, housing, transportation, and other conditions.

3. ACCESS

Workers should have meaningful access to information, interpretation, workforce services, legal assistance, and community support.

4. SAFETY

Workers should be able to seek help without threats, intimidation, or retaliation.

5. ACCOUNTABILITY

Employers, recruiters, contractors, and others who exploit workers should be held accountable through appropriate legal and regulatory channels.

19. CONCLUSION

Agricultural workers are not simply a source of labor.

They are workers, neighbors, parents, family members, community members, and human beings deserving of dignity and protection.

Maine's agricultural economy needs workers.

Workers need safe and fairly compensated employment.

Employers need reliable and lawful ways to recruit and retain workers.

Communities need trustworthy systems for identifying exploitation and connecting people with help.

These goals can exist together.

The Union of Saints can contribute by becoming a place where workers and employers can find accurate information, where concerns are taken seriously, where language and cultural barriers are addressed, and where people experiencing exploitation can be connected with qualified assistance.

EVERY WORKER DESERVES DIGNITY.

EVERY WORKER DESERVES TO UNDERSTAND THEIR RIGHTS.

EVERY EMPLOYER DESERVES A LAWFUL AND STABLE WORKFORCE.

EVERY COMMUNITY HAS A ROLE IN PREVENTING EXPLOITATION.

20. SOURCES

U.S. Department of Justice — Office of Public Affairs

Illegal Alien Sentenced in Multi-State Racketeering Conspiracy Involving the Forced Labor of Mexican Workers

June 9, 2026.

<https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/illegal-alien-sentenced-multi-state-racketeering-conspiracy-involving-forced-labor-mexican>

U.S. Department of Justice — U.S. Attorney's Office, Eastern District of Washington

Two Defendants Indicted for Forced Labor, Victim Tampering, Aggravated Identity Theft, Mail Fraud, and Wire Fraud Involving Yakima and Benton County H-2A Workers

February 23, 2026.

<https://www.justice.gov/usao-edwa/pr/two-defendants-indicted-forced-labor-victim-tampering-aggravated-identity-theft-mail>

Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry

Farm Labor Link Network

Maine agricultural employment, H-2A, J-1, workforce-development, recruitment, and employer resources.

<https://www.maine.gov/dacf/ard/resources/farmlabor/index.shtml>

Maine State Workforce Board

2024–2027 WIOA Maine Unified State Plan — Plan Modification for Program Years 2026 and 2027

Maine workforce-development framework, including information concerning migrant and seasonal farmworkers, English language learners, workforce barriers, language access, and the National Farmworker Jobs Program.

https://www.maine.gov/swb/docs/2026/stateplan/2024-2027_WIOA_Maine_Unified_State_Plan%20-%20PlanModEdits_PY26_PY27_v.2.pdf

U.S. Department of Justice — Office of Public Affairs

California Man Indicted in Maine for Sex Trafficking and Related Offenses

July 23, 2026.

<https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/california-man-indicted-maine-sex-trafficking-and-related-offenses>

U.S. Department of Labor — Wage and Hour Division

H-2A Workers

Information concerning H-2A worker rights and employer obligations, including wages, housing, transportation, employment terms, tools and equipment, and retaliation protections.

<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/workers/h2a>

U.S. Department of Labor — Wage and Hour Division

Fact Sheet #26: Section H-2A of the Immigration and Nationality Act

Information concerning H-2A employer obligations and worker protections.

<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/fact-sheets/26-H2A>

U.S. Department of Labor

Recruitment — Migrant Worker Resources

Information concerning recruitment practices and prohibited recruitment fees.

<https://www.dol.gov/general/migrantworker/recruitment>

U.S. Department of Labor — Wage and Hour Division

Fact Sheet #26B: Disclosure of the Job Order and Notice of Worker Rights under the H-2A Visa Program

Information concerning job-order disclosures and employment terms provided to H-2A workers.

<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/fact-sheets/26b-disclosure-job-order-notice-H-2A>

National Human Trafficking Hotline

Labor Trafficking

Information concerning labor trafficking, forced labor, debt bondage, force, fraud, and coercion.

<https://humantraffickinghotline.org/en/human-trafficking/labor-trafficking>

National Human Trafficking Hotline

Recognizing the Signs

Information concerning potential indicators of human trafficking.

<https://humantraffickinghotline.org/en/human-trafficking/recognizing-signs>

National Human Trafficking Hotline

Get Help

24-hour assistance and referral information.

Phone: 1-888-373-7888

Text: 233733

TTY: 711

<https://humantraffickinghotline.org/en/get-help>

DISCLAIMER

This document is intended for community education, awareness, and resource referral.

It is not legal advice and does not replace advice from an attorney, government agency, qualified worker advocate, or trafficking-service provider.

Information concerning individual cases should be evaluated by qualified professionals.

When someone is in immediate danger, call 911.

When a situation may involve human trafficking, contact the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-373-7888 or text 233733 for confidential assistance and referrals.