

# Farm workers: Take our jobs, please!



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By Aaron Smith, staff writer

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NEW YORK (CNNMoney.com) -- Facing growing anti-immigrant rhetoric, the United Farm Workers union is challenging Americans to take their labor-intensive, low-paying farm jobs.

As communities nationwide grapple with tenacious unemployment, migrant workers are often accused of stealing jobs from Americans. The union believes this accusation is without basis, and intends to demonstrate this with a newly-launched campaign called "Take Our Jobs."

"Farm workers do the work that most Americans are not willing to do," said union president Arturo Rodriguez in the announcement of the campaign.

At least half a million applicants are needed to replace the immigrant workforce, so the union has posted an online application for Americans who want to work on a farm.

Through its Web site, at [www.takeourjobs.org](http://www.takeourjobs.org), the union promises to connect applicants with farm jobs in their area.

Since June 24, at least 4,000 people have responded to the application, said Rodriguez. Some are serious responses and others are hate mail. "Only a few dozen have really followed through with the process," he said.

Most applicants quickly lose interest once the reality sinks in that these are back-breaking jobs in triple-digit temperatures that pay minimum wage, usually without benefits, according to the union. Some small farms are not required to pay minimum wage and in 15 states farms aren't required to offer workers' compensation.

Despite the dismal job market in the U.S., where the unemployment rate is 9.5% and 14.6 million people are **out of work**, there

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have been few takers.

state of Arizona to overturn its new

"I think everybody in our society is pretty clear that the least desirable job in the U.S. is being a migrant farm worker," said Rob Williams, director of the Migrant Farm Worker Justice Project. "If someone said to me, 'Here's a hazardous job and there's no worker's compensation,' I'd say, 'No thanks, It's kind of a no-brainer.'"

The Department of Agriculture counts nearly one million farm workers in the United States. According to the Migrant Farm Worker Justice Project, 85% of farm workers are immigrants -- and up to 70% of them are illegal.

Rodriguez, the union president, said the campaign is meant to draw attention to the need for immigration reform, such as the so-called AgJobs bill currently held up in Congress. The bill would grant temporary legal status to immigrants, which would become permanent if they continue to work on farms for a specific period of time.

"If [members of Congress] can't do their job in passing the bill, then they should come work in the fields," he said.

Illegal workers are rich fodder for **anti-immigration** leaders such as Gov. Janice Brewer, R-Ariz., who told reporters in June that the "majority" of immigrants crossing the border from Mexico are smuggling drugs for cartels. The governor also signed into law requirements for state police to "determine the immigration status" of anyone under "reasonable suspicion" of being an illegal alien.

The Justice Department on Tuesday **sued** the

immigration law.

The proponents for migrant farm workers insist that they help, not hinder, the U.S.

Williams said that if people who oppose immigration "got their wish and all the unauthorized people went home tomorrow, we would have a crisis. We wouldn't have anyone to pick the crops, milk the cows, or take care of the Christmas trees."

He added, "It may be the least desirable job, but it's the most important job for all of us, because we all eat."