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Belfast  
LD 357

Please support LD 357

I believe it is unjust to deny some workers the benefits that others receive. We all know the federal minimum wage is not a living wage and it's abjectly cruel to force workers to take it or leave it, especially when there are no other available jobs.

The federal minimum wage is now less than half of Maine's. Partly as a result of these unequal labor standards, Maine farmworkers are roughly 3.4 times as likely as other workers to live in poverty.<sup>1</sup>

MECEP analysis of US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, public use microdata, 2014-2023 ten-year average using the Integrated Public Use Microdata System (IPUMS). Agricultural workers were compared with all private-sector workers in Maine.

Under current Maine law, farmworkers are denied many basic rights most workers take for granted. These include the right to:

- Be paid no less than the state minimum wage
- Receive a pay stub
- Take unpaid rest breaks
- Receive protection from excessive mandatory overtime hours
- Receive overtime pay
- Organize and collectively bargain with their employers
- Engage in concerted activity with coworkers to improve their working conditions

Maine needs to respect and support all of our workers.

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Farmworkers across the US have been excluded from fundamental labor laws for as long as those laws have existed. New Deal legislation passed in the 1930s, including the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), which mandates minimum wage and overtime pay, and the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), which established federal labor law, excluded agricultural and domestic workers. These exclusions were enshrined in law as a way to secure the necessary votes from Southern Democrats at a time when more than half of Black workers were employed in those sectors, a legacy of slavery.

Since then, the Fair Labor Standards Act was amended to require farmworkers be paid at least the federal minimum wage. For many workers, that federal rate of \$7.25 per hour is well below their state's minimum wage. The federal minimum wage is now less than half of Maine's. Partly as a result of these unequal labor standards, Maine farmworkers are roughly 3.4 times as likely as other workers to live in poverty.<sup>1</sup>