

Human and Civil Rights Award Winner

◆ Migrant Justice ◆

César Chávez Acción y Compromiso Human and Civil Rights Awards



It is a long way from the sun-drenched fields of California's Central Valley, where César Chávez organized, to the dairy farms of Vermont, but shared between them is the common history of advocacy for the rights of immigrant workers. What they have in common is that much of the hardest work is done by immigrant workers.

Migrant Justice is a Vermont-based, worker-led organization that is fighting for the rights and dignity of dairy workers. Vermont's dairy farms are increasingly reliant on migrant workers, especially those from Mexico. These year-round workers live on the farms and do many of the thankless day-to-day jobs such as servicing the milking machines, providing food for and cleaning after the cows. Decent housing, access to transportation in rural areas and quality health care are high on the list of worker needs.

In 2014, Migrant Justice organized a broad coalition to pass state legislation that explicitly prohibits all Vermont police from using public resources for the purposes of immigration enforcement. This law prevents police officers from stopping individuals for the purpose of checking immigration status.

On May 1, 2015, with the help of Migrant Justice, Vermont farm workers announced their Milk with Dignity Campaign, calling on Ben & Jerry's to take responsibility for farm workers' rights abused in its supply chain. The campaign organized 17 different actions at Ben & Jerry's scoop shops across the nation, putting the heat on the ice cream giant. The campaign successfully won a commitment from Ben & Jerry's to enter an agreement to secure the human rights of farm workers within their Northeast dairy supply chain.

The Milk with Dignity Campaign was sparked after Victor Diaz reached out to Migrant Justice. He had endured inhumane working conditions on a farm in the Ben & Jerry's supply chain, and he had long been denied his full wages. Farm workers and allies marched on the farm and won back \$1,800 in stolen wages for Diaz.

Says Victor Diaz: "With every victory we've grown stronger, and the number of people involved in the fight for justice for migrant workers has expanded." Right now, Migrant Justice is negotiating a historic, legally-binding supply-chain agreement with Ben & Jerry's, and then it will shift gears and expand the Milk with Dignity campaign to secure worker rights for thousands of dairy farm workers.

"I continue to be impressed with Migrant Justice's work and leadership to fight for the dignity of all migrant workers, who, for many years lived in the shadows of Vermont's farms," says Martha Allen, Vermont-NEA President. "As our country grapples with the larger immigration discussion, Vermont is one of the few states leading the way thanks to Migrant Justice."