

Hilly McGahan
FLS Legal Intern Summer 2011

I had only been to Michigan once before working with Farmworker Legal Services. Now, after this ten-week internship, I have seen much of the state and from a perspective that few visitors ever experience.

As legal interns with FLS, we made weekly visits to migrant labor camps throughout the state to conduct outreach. In addition to improving my map-reading and navigational skills on the back roads of Michigan, it was also on outreach that I began to fully understand the experience of migrant farmworkers and to appreciate the difficult choices that so many workers must make every day. In deciding whether to report harassment, to file a wage complaint, or even report a housing violation, so many workers must balance their concerns for the well being and safety of their families and their complete reliance on employers with their desire to seek justice and to take action. During outreach at an H-2A camp in July, we explained to several workers that they had the right to receive a full reimbursement of their travel expenses from Mexico to Michigan, which they had not received. One man said to me, "Imagine you are me. That you have pay to get this visa so you can come here to work so you can provide for your family at home. Would you complain if you weren't guaranteed to get your job back? What would you do?"

After this conversation, I realized how important it is to understand and appreciate the full experience of workers and the weight of the decisions they make everyday. I also realized the importance of continued outreach and trust-building with the migrant worker community. When workers do choose to take action and report a violation, they know an organization exists that will take their case seriously and respect the gravity of their situation.

I had an incredible and meaningful summer internship and hope to one day work with attorneys as committed, thoughtful, and energetic as those at FLS.