

THE **EDIBLE**
SCHOOLYARD
PROJECT

STRAWBERRIES AND LABOR

Summary: In this lesson, students examine an infographic on strawberries and labor that shows the connections between strawberry growing, production, and immigration policies. Next, they choose from a list of topics explored in the infographic and complete a close read.

Time: 30-40 minutes.

Teacher Notes:

- The reading level of this lesson is best for upper-middle school age and high school age students.
- This lesson is primary text based. Check out the lesson, [Making Sense of What We Read](#) for helpful suggestions for textual analysis.
- The “READ” and “DISCUSS” sections of this lesson plan can be used as talking points or as a script to introduce activities.
- The “READ” section of this lesson may feel a little dense to some students without the proper support. We suggest the following strategies for supporting students to engage fully with the text:
 - Instruct students to find a quiet place to sit and encourage them to observe their surroundings before and after they read. This helps them engage with their surroundings in a different way and can also support their engagement with the text.
 - Assign sections of the reading as a [jigsaw](#): Assign each small group a different topic, and then have groups report back to one another after they have finished reading.
 - Remind students that the [Talk to the Text](#) or [T4 strategy](#) can be used when reading texts to help track their thoughts, questions, and reactions to a text. In these strategies, students write notes and ask questions in the margins, underline words, and use symbols to react to the text.



STRAWBERRIES AND LABOR

Teacher Notes Continued:

- Consider reading the article aloud and having students take notes as they listen. It might be helpful to stop frequently as you read to write down keywords, phrases, or ideas on chart paper. Take your time through the reading and ask your students their thoughts along the way.
- See Doyne et al. (2011) in our reference section to learn more about teaching with infographics.
- This lesson was developed for Edible Schoolyard Project's [Understanding Organic](#) curriculum and is part of the extension inquiries.

References:

Doyne, S., Ojalvo E. H., Schulten, K. (2011, April 8) *Data Visualized: More on Teaching With Infographics*. Retrieved from <https://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/04/08/data-visualized-more-on-teaching-with-infographics/>

Strawberries and Labor Infographic (2020). *The Edible Schoolyard*. Retrieved from https://edibleschoolyard.org/sites/default/files/EdibleSchoolyardProject_Infographic.pdf

Text to Text (n.d). Facing History. Retrieved from https://www.facinghistory.org/sites/default/files/TexttoText_handout_v.final_.pdf

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STRAWBERRIES AND LABOR

DISCUSS OR WRITE: Look over the information presented in the [Infographic on Strawberry and Labor](#) and answer the following questions.

- What did you find interesting? What did you notice about the infographic?
- Why is California's temperate climate perfect for growing strawberries? How does temperature affect strawberries?
- Why are strawberries such a labor intensive-crop?
- What is the Bracero program?

READ: Read about **ONE** of the following topics explored in the infographic. Use the [Says Who?](#) Chart worksheet to complete a close read.

- The Bracero Program (pages 2-3)
- Labor Conditions in Strawberry Fields (pages 4-6)
- Food Justice Certification (pages 7-8)

DISCUSS OR WRITE: Complete a **3, 2, 1** to answer questions about the reading.

- What are **THREE facts, phrases, or ideas** discussed in the text?
- What are **TWO things you found interesting** about the text?
- What is **ONE question** you have after reading the text?

REFLECT AND CONNECT:

Using your [Circles of Connections](#) worksheet to answer the following questions:

- How does what I learned about strawberries and labor connect to my life, my community, and beyond my community?
- How does this information add to my beliefs and understandings about organic?

The following piece is excerpted from *Braceroarchive.org* (n.d). It has been shortened and adapted for this lesson

Bracero Program

The Bracero Program grew out of a series of bi-lateral agreements between Mexico and the United States that allowed millions of Mexican men to come to the United States to work on, short-term, primarily agricultural labor contracts. From 1942 to 1964, 4.6 million contracts were signed, with many individuals returning several times on different contracts, making it the largest U.S. contract labor program. An examination of the images, stories, documents and artifacts of the Bracero Program contributes to our understanding of the lives of migrant workers in Mexico and the United States, as well as our knowledge of, immigration, citizenship, nationalism, agriculture, labor practices, race relations, gender, sexuality, the family, visual culture, and the Cold War era.



The Bracero Program was created by executive order in 1942 because many growers argued that World War II would bring labor shortages to low-paying agricultural jobs. On August 4, 1942, the United States concluded a temporary intergovernmental agreement for the use of Mexican agricultural labor on United States farms (officially referred to as the Mexican Farm Labor Program), and the influx of legal temporary Mexican workers began. But the program lasted much longer than anticipated. In 1951, after nearly a decade in existence, concerns about production and the U.S. entry into the Korean conflict led Congress to formalize the Bracero Program with Public Law 78.

The Bracero Program was controversial in its time. Mexican nationals, desperate for work, were willing to take arduous jobs at wages scorned by most Americans. Farm workers already living in the United States worried that braceros would compete for jobs and lower wages. In theory, the Bracero Program had safeguards to protect both Mexican and domestic workers for example, guaranteed payment of at least the prevailing area wage received by native workers; employment for three-fourths of the contract period; adequate, sanitary, and free housing; decent meals at reasonable prices; occupational insurance at employer's expense; and free transportation back to Mexico at the end of the contract. Employers were supposed to hire braceros only in areas of certified

domestic labor shortage and were not to use them as strikebreakers. In practice, they ignored many of these rules and Mexican and native workers suffered while growers benefited from plentiful, cheap, labor. Between the 1940s and mid 1950s, farm wages dropped sharply as a percentage of manufacturing wages, a result in part of the use of braceros and undocumented laborers who lacked full rights in American society

Under this program, Mexican workers, many of whom were rural peasants, were allowed to enter the United States on a temporary basis. Between 1942 and 1964, the year the program ended, it was estimated that approximately 4.6 million Mexican nationals came to work in the U.S. as braceros.

Many laborers faced an array of injustices and abuses, including substandard housing, discrimination, and unfulfilled contracts or being cheated out of wages. Nevertheless, the impact of the Bracero Program on the history and patterns of migration and settlement in the United States remains an important area to explore and assess, particularly in the contexts of civil rights, social justice, and Latino history in the United States.

Bracero Program and Strawberry Fields

The program did not give workers any control of labor incentives but provided farm owners with unprecedentedly cheap labor. And of course, unions and labor protections were not allowed at this time. The strawberry industry specifically benefited from the Bracero Program because migrant workers were forced to work positions deemed “unattractive” to domestic workers. Because these laborers were working for so little pay, the precedent that farm laborers should be paid low agricultural wages was set. This mindset continues today, as farms in California continue to meet their labor demands by using workers willing to accept pay rates lower than their domestic counterparts.

References:

About. (n.d). *Bracero Archive*. Retrieved from <http://braceroarchive.org/about>

Teaching (n.d) *Bracero Archive*. Retrieved from <http://braceroarchive.org/teaching>

Contextualizing Forced Labor in the Strawberry Industry. (2018, March 5). *The Ohio State University*. Retrieved from <https://u.osu.edu/osuhtblog/2018/03/05/contextualizing-forced-labor-in-the-strawberry-industry/>

The following piece is excerpted from *In the Strawberry Fields* by Eric Schlosser which originally appeared in *The Atlantic* in 1995. It has been shortened and adapted for this lesson.

Labor Conditions in Strawberry Fields

When the sun rises from behind the coastal range, crews of thirty assemble at the edges of huge fields and start picking strawberries, slowly making their way down the long furrows, hundreds of men and women bent over at the waist, grabbing fruit with both hands. In the early-morning light it looks like a scene out of the distant past, the last remnant of a vanishing way of life—and yet nothing could be further from the truth.

Twenty years ago, there were about 800 acres of strawberries in the Santa Maria Valley; today there are about seven times that number. The strawberry is one of the most labor-intensive row crops. It is risky and expensive to grow. On the same land outside Guadalupe where family farms raised dairy cows not long ago, strawberry farms now employ thousands of migrant workers. Most of these migrants are undocumented immigrants¹ from Mexico, a fact that helps explain not only California's recent strawberry boom but also the quiet, unrelenting transformation of the state's rural landscape and communities.



Philip L. Martin is a professor of agricultural economics at the University of California at Davis and one of the nation's foremost authorities on farm-labor demographics. According to his estimates, during the 1920s there were some two million migrant farm workers in the United States. During the 1940s there were about one million. And during the early 1970s, when Cesar Chavez's labor-organizing drive among migrant workers was at its height, there were only about 200,000. Then the number began to climb. Today it is

¹ In the original article, the author wrote the phrase "illegal immigrants." The Edible Schoolyard has changed every instance of that phrase to "undocumented immigrants" for a few reasons. First, the term "illegal" is misleading and implies criminality and guilt. Second, the phrase illegal is dehumanizing and is used to discriminate against immigrants and people of color.

impossible to gauge the size of the migrant workforce with any precision, among other reasons because so much of it is composed of undocumented immigrants. Martin believes that 800,000 to 900,000 migrant farm workers are now employed in the United States. And not only are there far more migrants today but they are being paid far less. The hourly wages of some California farm workers, adjusted for inflation, have fallen 53 percent since 1985. Migrants are among the poorest workers in the United States. The average migrant worker is a twenty-eight-year-old male, born in Mexico, who earns about \$5,000 a year for twenty-five weeks of farm work. His life expectancy is forty-nine years.

Agriculture is still California's largest industry, and the fastest-growing and most profitable segment of California's farm economy—the cultivation of high-value specialty crops—has also become the one most dependent on the availability of cheap labor. Nearly every fruit and vegetable found in the diets of health-conscious, often high-minded eaters is still picked by hand: every head of lettuce, every bunch of grapes, every avocado, peach, and plum. As the demand for these foods has risen, so has the number of workers necessary to harvest them. Of the migrants in California today, anywhere from 30 percent to 60 percent, depending upon the crop, are undocumented immigrants. Their willingness to work long hours for low wages has helped California to sustain its agricultural production—despite the loss since 1964 of more than seven million acres of farmland. Fruit and vegetable growers in the state now rely on a thriving black market in labor—and without it more farms would disappear. Undocumented immigrants, widely reviled and depicted as welfare cheats, are in effect subsidizing the most important sector of the California economy.

The rise of the strawberry industry is in many ways emblematic of changes that swept California agriculture during the 1980s. The strawberry has become the focus of a California industry whose annual sales exceed half a billion dollars. American farmers now receive more money for fresh strawberries each year than for any other fresh fruit grown in the United States except apples. And strawberry pickers are not only the poorest migrants but also the ones most likely to be undocumented immigrants. During the recent strawberry harvest I spent weeks traveling through three regions in California where the fruit is commercially grown, meeting workers, farmers, academics, and farm-labor activists. My trip took me through the Santa Maria Valley, where rural poverty has recently become entrenched and where cruel sharecropping arrangements have trapped farm workers under mountains of debt; through the area around Watsonville

and Salinas, where about half the state's strawberries are grown and where this year's heavy rains made many hard lives even harder; and through northern San Diego County, where the needs of farmers and real-estate developers increasingly conflict, and where a migrant workforce lives in Third World shanty towns within throwing distance of expensive suburban homes. In the strawberry fields of California, I believe, one may find answers to many of the pressing questions raised by immigration [reform advocates,] along with some ethical questions that are much more difficult to resolve.

References:

Schlosser, E. (November, 1995). *In the Strawberry Fields*. The Atlantic. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1995/11/in-the-strawberry-fields/305754/>

What is Food Justice Certification?

You're standing in the grocery store aisle. Everywhere you look there are labels making all kinds of claims. When you pick up that "certified" item at the grocery store, we know you're wondering: Does this label really mean anything?

A certification system is only as meaningful as the "truth" behind its label.

The Food Justice Certification standards guarantee just working and living conditions for all agricultural and food and fiber system workers and just financial returns, equity, and fair pricing and contracts for farmers, their families, and other food businesses. AJP holds the Gold Standard for domestic fair-trade certification.

In 1999, a group of stakeholders, disappointed that the proposed U.S. National Organic Program's standards did not address the people involved in organic agriculture, developed standards for the fair and just treatment of the people involved in organic and sustainable agriculture.



The Agricultural Justice Project standards for fair trade and social justice in the food and fiber system are based on the Declaration of Human Rights, the conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the experience of stakeholders including: farmers, farmworkers, farm labor organizations, organic farming associations, manufacturers, retailers, and other participants in the food and fiber system in North America.

Principles: All workers have the right to safe working conditions, just treatment, and fair compensation and all farmers have the right to fair, equitable, transparent agreements and pricing

*Food Justice Certification is a label based on high-bar social justice standards allowing participation by every link in the food & fiber chain from **farm to table**.*

What does the Food Justice Certification program address?

- Rigorous environmental requirements for biodiversity, soil health, and animal welfare through application of Organic Certification standards
- Third-Party certification
- Highest standards for fair and ethical labor and fair trade practices
- [International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements](#) (IFOAM) and [International Labour Organization](#) (ILO) principles of social justice
- Truth in labeling and transparent policies
- Governance by food system stakeholders

Vocabulary:

- **Third-party certification** means that an independent organization has reviewed the manufacturing process of a product and has independently determined that the final product complies with specific standards for safety, quality, or performance.
- **Fair Trade** is a set of business practices voluntarily adopted by the producers and buyers of agricultural commodities and hand-made crafts that are designed to advance many economic, social, and environmental goals, including: Raising and stabilizing the incomes of small-scale farmers, farm workers, and artisans.
- **The International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM)** was founded in 1972, we are the only international umbrella organization for the organic world, uniting a diverse range of stakeholders contributing to the organic vision.

International Labour Organization (ILO). Since 1919 the ILO brings together governments, employers and workers of 187 member States, to set labour standards, develop policies and devise programmes promoting decent work for all.

References:

Food Justice Certification for Farmers. *Agricultural Justice Project*. Retrieved from https://www.agriculturaljusticeproject.org/media/uploads/2017/03/15/2015.1.15.AJP_Introduction_to_Farmer_Practices_for_printing.pdf

Why Food Justice Certified (n.d). *Agricultural Justice Project*. Retrieved from <https://www.agriculturaljusticeproject.org/en/learn-more/>