

Prompt: Why are farm workers important in Georgia?

Not too long ago, I had a clear plastic carton filled with bright red strawberries sitting in the back corner of my fridge. When I quickly glanced at the carton, I did not think about the person who first touched them. In fact, when we look at a plastic carton of strawberries, the first sensation that typically registers in our mind is the sweet crisp taste of the fruit, and not the person who very likely suffers from chronic lower back pain having picked fruit for more than a decade. I sit here knowing that whether the produce in my fridge is the carton of bright red strawberries, or what might now be stale lettuce, they were once in the hands of someone with a different story than mine; the story of a person filled with blatant exploitation and lack of recognition.

Prestige, power, and privilege. These are the three criteria that must be met for having an “important” career as deemed in today’s society. If we were to hypothetically take a sample of a hundred random people across the U.S. and ask them to list a high-ranking job, the responses received will most likely be “president,” “CEO,” or something similar; very rarely will the answer be a farmworker as it fails to meet the criteria. As a result, farm workers are largely ignored in various dialogues and are treated with disrespect; these outcomes are fueled by blatant racism and xenophobia.

In assigning importance, there is a second detrimental narrative here as well. Capitalism today wants us to believe that farmworkers are important to Georgia because of the services they provide or put another way, profits made from pain; that because farm workers help feed Georgia, that alone warrants importance. While farm workers do provide an invaluable service to us in making sure food is accessible to those with means, it is critical to look beyond what the numbers tell us, beyond what farm workers provide for us. It is extremely easy to forget that

behind every produce item at the grocery store, there is a person with lived experiences and worth. A person fighting a system that was not built with them in mind, fighting to make sure their families are taken care of, and fighting for themselves. To state more clearly, farmworkers are important because they help feed us but above all else they are important because of their perseverance, strength, and humanity. I want to emphasize, however, that these individuals should not be subject to situations that call for being more resilient than most. It's inhumane. Situations that range from low paying wages and threats of deportation to human trafficking. The way society treats farm workers is not up to par with what it should be. It is time we not only say farm workers are important but believe it. It's time we start giving room for their voices and see a red fruit not for what it is but what it means.