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For Immediate Release

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National Council of Agricultural Employers' (NCAE) Statement on Allegations of Misuse of Farm and Food Worker Relief (FFWR) Grant Funds

(Arlington, VA) It is with great frustration and dismay that the National Council of Agricultural Employers (NCAE) learns once again about allegations of the United Farm Workers (UFW) coercion of vulnerable workers and misuse of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Farm and Food Worker Relief (FFWR) Grant Program. This time the allegations arise from California.

The FFWR program, which began in March 2023, provided one tribal entity and 14 non-profit organizations—including the UFW Foundation—roughly \$670 million to issue relief payments of \$600 to farmworkers to help defray expenses they incurred preparing for, preventing exposure to, and responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Last May, NCAE wrote to the USDA to warn Secretary Vilsack that agents of the UFW Foundation were reportedly informing farmworkers in New York that they must first sign a UFW union authorization card to obtain their FFWR \$600 payment. By coercing workers into signing union cards to receive those funds, these workers now must pay the union 3% of their wages in dues.

“At the time, NCAE shared our concerns with USDA that UFW Foundation agents were targeting New York farmworkers specifically because of a new card check law that allows a union to become the authorized bargaining representative with 51% of the workforce signing a union authorization card. The New York legislature had abandoned the farmworker protections inherent in a secret ballot union election, exposing New York farmworkers to UFW

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shenanigans,” shared Michael Marsh, President and CEO of NCAE. “We stressed that if UFW Foundation or their agents are misleading farmworkers by claiming it is a requirement to sign a union authorization card before UFW Foundation does what it is required to as a grantee under the FFWR program, that is clearly a misuse of Federal funds and should be referred to the Office of the Inspector General to investigate.”

The USDA replied that they would conduct additional training to prevent this type of abuse.

Frustratingly, any additional training that may have occurred has not changed the UFW’s deceitful practices. The allegations we now hear from farmworkers in California are nearly identical to those we shared with USDA 10 months ago.

Once again, UFW organizers are reportedly targeting farmworkers in California—a state with a new card check law.

Once again, farmworkers have expressed, now with 148 written declarations, that they were tricked, lied to, and coerced by UFW organizers into signing a union card to receive the \$600 relief payment for which they were eligible.

Once again, NCAE is asking Secretary Vilsack and the USDA’s Office of Inspector General to investigate these repeated, extremely public allegations of misuse of federal grant funds.

“The purpose of the FFWR grant was to help farmworkers with pandemic-related health and safety costs, not to pad the pockets of UFW. USDA entrusted UFW Foundation with almost \$98 million in funding to issue FFWR payments to farmworkers. Up to 10% of that award can be retained by the organization for administrative costs,” said Marsh. “It is Secretary Vilsack’s duty to ensure those remaining funds reach workers regardless of their union affiliation and without being tricked into joining the UFW.”

NCAE is the national trade association focusing on agricultural labor issues from the employer’s viewpoint.