



Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

Le Sueur-Waseca Community Health Board

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March 29, 2022

Dear Jobs Committee:

It has been my pleasure to serve on the Committee for the Safety, Health, and Wellbeing of Agricultural and Food Processing Workers (AWWC) with so many partners who deeply care about our agricultural workers. It has been apparent that workers in this industry support the all Minnesotan's food access and quality of life. Unfortunately, many in the field do not benefit equally from the work they do and, as you have likely seen, the COVID-19 pandemic has illustrated these disparities that are long-standing and difficult to correct.

Much hard work and collective thought was put into the recommendations offered in the committee's report, yet we all recognize that even these few things are not enough to level the field for all our neighbors. I fully support all the recommendations, and I'd like to especially highlight the proposal to begin an office of ombudsperson for agricultural and food processing workers.

Too often, fear and misunderstanding prevent our critical workers from asking for the assistance they need, limiting their access to critical resources. An ombudsperson could be a very effective advocate for our workers, linking them quickly to the correct resource in a highly complex system. This model has been used successfully with a variety of other populations to guarantee fair treatment, provide referrals, understand regulations, and help resolve disputes. All are issues that the AWWC has identified as ongoing concerns.

If you have questions regarding the AWWC recommendations, I'd be happy to respond to those questions from a public health perspective. I can be reached at 507-835-0656 or sarah.berry@co.waseca.mn.us. Thank you for your work and for considering the needs of our agricultural workers.

Sincerely,

Sarah Berry
CHS Administrator