vinetur

California farmworkers face rising fear and labor shortages amid intensified immigration raids

Undocumented workers report anxiety and economic strain as enforcement actions disrupt agricultural communities and threaten livelihoods

Thursday, July 17, 2025



Every morning before dawn, Alejandra leaves her home in southern California to work in the fields. Her days are marked not only by physical exhaustion but also by a constant fear that has grown since immigration raids intensified across the state. California, known as the agricultural heart of the United States, has seen a surge in these operations, which recently resulted in the death of a Mexican worker.

Alejandra, 39, is originally from Michoacán, Mexico. She holds a degree in business administration but fled her home after drug-related violence claimed the lives of her two brothers. Seeking safety for herself and her five-year-old son, she found work in California's fields. Now, she faces a different threat: the possibility of being detained and deported while working.

The most recent and violent raid took place last week at a farm in Ventura County that grows cannabis, tomatoes, and cucumbers. Federal agents arrested 361 undocumented immigrants during the operation. One man died while trying to escape. This event has heightened anxiety among farmworkers throughout the region.

Alejandra describes how she has grown attached to her work despite its challenges. The fields provided her with stability and helped her avoid depression after leaving Mexico. Each day begins at 3:30 a.m., when she drops her son off at daycare before driving an hour and a half to work. In summer, temperatures often rise above 90 degrees Fahrenheit. During carrot harvests, she spends up to nine hours on her knees because that is how the crop must be picked.

She recalls moments when workers' dignity was ignored. On one occasion, a woman was struck and killed by a truck in the field. Despite the tragedy, supervisors ordered everyone to continue working next to the woman's body for hours.

Javier, who asked not to use his real name for safety reasons, is a foreman at a vegetable farm in Tehachapi, Kern County. He has noticed fewer workers showing up since the raids began. With two decades of experience in agriculture, Javier also lacks legal status and shares the same fears as those he supervises. He believes that people who have worked for years in agriculture deserve legal recognition and protection.

About one million people work in U.S. agriculture, and nearly 40 percent do not have legal immigration status. The full economic impact of recent enforcement actions is still unclear, but growers are already feeling the effects as labor shortages increase due to workers staying home after federal agents appear in their communities.

Teresa Romero, president of the United Farm Workers (UFW), is advocating for legislation known as the “blue card,” which would provide undocumented farmworkers with a path to legal status and allow them to continue working in agriculture. She rejects claims that legalization would drive workers away from farming jobs. According to data from the National Hispanic Leadership Agenda, about 75 percent of farmworkers are Latino.

For Alejandra and Javier, fear has become part of daily life in California’s fields. The uncertainty surrounding their future remains constant as they continue to provide essential labor for one of America’s most important industries.