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## Migrant Workers: The True Cost of Farm Labor in the U.S.

By Megan Evans and  
Kim Schuh, Contributing  
Writers

As the crisp, cool air of autumn rolls in, the scent of pumpkin-spiced lattes, candles, and soap make their brief, annual appearance. The question arises, just where exactly do pumpkins come from? And not only pumpkins, but where exactly does all of our food come from? Migrant workers continue to work diligently to harvest crops so that we may continue to enjoy the simple pleasures that autumn brings. Migrant workers' efforts must not go unnoticed, and as consumers, it is important to have a basic understanding of who harvests our food. It is no surprise that farmworkers' jobs include cultivating and harvesting agriculture; however, what may come as a surprise to many are the various conditions that they endure, including working extremely long hours in hazardous labor conditions for relatively low pay in an unfamiliar environment. While there are some farms that uphold suitable working and living conditions, it is also important to note that majority of the working and living conditions are similar to the ones explained in this article.

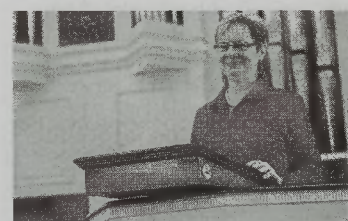
According to a book called *The Human Cost of Food*, a significantly higher amount of work-related injuries have been reported in the agricultural industry than any other industry due to the relentless and pressing physical demands of agricultural labor, including operating heavy machinery, performing backbreaking tasks, and carrying overweight loads in 100 degree heat. Migrant workers endure these challenges while only being allotted two fifteen-minute water breaks and a thirty minute lunch break on a ten to twelve hour shift and while being exposed to pesticides and other harmful substances, which have both short-term and

## Phenomenal Women

By Jenna Curia, Staff Writer

This semester, the School of Arts and Humanities is exploring a Woman Warriors series that focuses on the idea of who a woman warrior is, what she aspires to do, and how she sees the world. After discussing the theme of woman warriors with several faculty members and students, an obvious favorite came to mind: Dr. Kelly Morris Roberts, associate professor of English. When asked about the influential women warriors in her life, she accolades Meredith's own Dr. Betty Webb. "I had several mentors all the way throughout my childhood and young adulthood who always developed the best in me. Another was my mother, who taught me to value each and every human being and to pursue service to something far greater than yourself." Women warriors, according to Roberts, inspire us to "embrace every opportunity that we've been given and value every person and experience in life." Roberts specializes in autobiographical reflection because of her passion for helping students value their lived experiences through writing.

Coincidentally—or maybe not—another faculty member credits a long line of Meredith women warriors as key to the understanding of how this series has played out in her own life. Dr. Jo Allen is a graduate of Meredith and a woman



Dr. Betty Webb  
Photo courtesy of Dr. Kelly Roberts

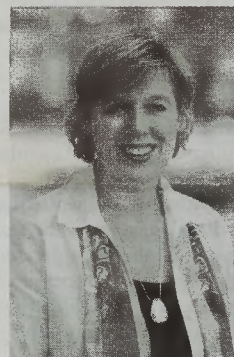
long-term effects on workers' health.

The exposure of pesticides and other harmful chemicals yields immediate reactions including nausea, vomiting, dizziness, headaches, rashes, and burns, as well as long-term reactions including cancer, sterility, reproductive risks and potential birth defects for the babies of pregnant women. The lack of knowledge and awareness of the dangers from the workplace serve as contributing factors to such health and safety risks. The US Environmental Protection Agency enacted the Worker Protection Standards of 1992 to protect farmworkers from potentially dangerous exposure via training and provide workers with information regarding the dangers. But oftentimes, most farmworkers receive little or no training.

Child labor also raises ethical concerns. According to the article "Protecting Children from Pesticides: Information for Parents," pesticide exposure among children remains

warrior, whose accomplishments qualified her long before she came back to Meredith as its first alumna president. Allen attributes her strength to the competent women coming from a line of her own vital mentors. Allen states that "many think you can only have one mentor, but it really *does* take a village of different people in different areas at different times to establish leaders." She credits the same professor, Dr. Betty Webb, while recalling a moment during her freshman year at Meredith when Webb, her faculty advisor, proclaimed that her young student had a real flare for writing. "That moment changed everything," according to Allen, and she earned a bachelor's degree in English to prove it.

Allen shares that her mentors have woven in and out of her life at different times, but she knows she



Dr. Kelly Roberts  
Photo courtesy of herself  
can always pick up the phone and call them. "Those are the relationships that I hope students find at Meredith, because in my opinion, it's going to be women who change the world." She defines woman warriors as people who "do not confuse strength with meanness

a growing concern and provides a greater risk for children because their internal organs are still developing and maturing. Oftentimes, children work alongside in the fields with their parents or play in the fields while their parents are at work because proper childcare is not affordable. Children as young as 12 years old are legally permitted to work in agriculture outside of school hours with parental consent. It is common for children to typically work between 10 to 12 hours per day while also attending school full time. Many children work during the summer, before and after school hours, and on the weekends to make money to help financially support their families.

These poor working conditions and risk of poor hygiene serve as a breeding ground for the spread of copious diseases among workers. While growers are required to provide housing for migrant workers, housing is subpar and overcrowded, thus also contributing to the spread

or hardness. I want to be stronger without becoming hard, cruel, or heartless... and I have to maintain my sense of humor. When people get hurt or embarrassed, it's easy to feel like it's a big deal in the moment. But being a woman warrior means knowing what to apologize for, what to remedy, and what to learn from and just let go. Women warriors not only know their strengths, but they work their strengths, and we have to be able to make mistakes without dragging ourselves under. Resilience is key to being a warrior."

Dr. Sarah Roth, dean of the School of Arts and Humanities explains that "Everyone has her own ideas about what it means to be a woman warrior. This year, we are exploring the topic of women warriors from multiple angles - visual art, performing arts, humanities, and social sciences. We're encouraging students to join in the conversation around campus by sharing their own thoughts on women warriors through expression boards in the library, an essay contest, and participation in the many events that the Arts & Humanities departments will be hosting throughout the year." Additionally, Roberts recommends these memoirs, fiction, and biographies that provide a great deal of thought behind the essence of a "woman warrior."

*Educated: A Memoir* by Tara Westover

*Unbowed: A Memoir* by Wangari Maathai

*Sing, Unburied, Sing* by Jesmyn Ward

*The Glass Castle* by Jeanette Walls

*The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* by Rebecca Skloot

*Finding the Game* by Gwen Oxenham

of diseases. Farms are located in rural areas, often physically isolating workers. Workers often have limited or no means of transportation except when their employers drive them to the store or laundry mat. According to *The Human Cost of Food*, when migrant workers do get injured or sick, they do not seek care until it is absolutely necessary and by then it is too late because of fear of missing work and not getting paid and/or not receiving health care coverage.

In addition to working long hours and being exposed to hazardous conditions, migrant laborers receive relatively low pay with no overtime due to the fluctuation of demand time for workers based on weather conditions. When Hurricane Florence hit North Carolina earlier this month, farm laborers worked endless hours to prepare for the hurricane by gathering the crops that were deemed adequate enough