

Title: Enhancing the Attractiveness of Work in the Agri-Food Sector: Rights, Safety, and Inclusion

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Topic: The sustainability of the agri-food sector depends on its ability to attract and retain a diverse workforce. In California, a major agricultural hub, the sector depends on migrant labor and faces issues like physically demanding work, insecure contracts, wage gaps, poor healthcare access, and unstable housing. In contrast, in Global South like Nepal, agricultural labor is mostly informal, seasonal, and family-based. Agricultural work in many regions in Nepal is characterized by weak labor protections, low social recognition, and high levels of vulnerability for women and youth. Despite differences in scale and regulation, both contexts struggle to make agricultural work dignified, safe, and socially and economically attractive. This working group will explore how policies, workplace practices, and social support systems can improve the attractiveness of agricultural work for local and migrant workers, with a focus on comparing structural challenges and innovative solutions between California and the Global South like Nepal.

Aims: Key areas of focus include strengthening workers' rights and socio-economic security, such as fair pay, access to benefits, and retirement systems in California, and expanding basic protections for informal and seasonal workers in Nepal. Health and safety are central in both regions, requiring enforcement of occupational standards and provision of personal protective equipment in California, and improving training, infrastructure, and accident prevention mechanisms in the Global South. Housing and living conditions strongly affect labor attractiveness, from poor employer housing in California to poverty and migration-related challenges in Nepal. Equity and inclusion must be prioritized by creating meaningful opportunities for youth and women, improving conditions for seasonal and migrant laborers, and ensuring dignity and recognition for all agricultural workers. The aim of this working group is to foster dialogue among researchers, policymakers, and practitioners on transforming agricultural work into a more attractive and sustainable career choice. The group will generate comparative insights and highlight innovative practices by bringing together perspectives from California and Nepal. It will also identify systemic barriers and co-develop policy and practice recommendations. The group also aims to stimulate future collaboration through joint publications, shared data, and follow-up projects to better understand how to attract and retain agricultural workers across regions.

Format: The working group will be organized in two sessions, each lasting 1.5 hours. The first session will feature short presentations of academic research and case studies from California, Nepal, and other Global South contexts that provide evidence on strategies to improve the attractiveness of agricultural work, ranging from policy reforms to grassroots worker well-being initiatives. The second session will use a participatory format, combining roundtable discussions and a world café method, where participants will collectively explore potential solutions, exchange experiences, and build synergies across regions. The working group aims to provide a space for critical reflection, mutual learning, and the development of concrete recommendations to enhance the attractiveness of work in the agri-food sector by blending formal presentations with participatory dialogue.