**[FJLaw] H-2A Workers Rise Up due to Preventable Illness and Death of Co-Worker in Washington State**

Northern Washington Farmworker's Complaints of Headaches Went Ignored
Before His Death, Colleague Claims
<http://www.thestranger.com/slog/2017/08/07/25333857/northern-washington-fa>
rmworkers-hospitalization-sparks-protest-this-weekend-he-died

Honesto Silva Ibarra, 28, was a married father of three from Mexico who
worked in Washington on a temporary agricultural visa, according to fellow
worker Barbaro Rosas, 30. Rosas had known Ibarra for a little more than a
month before his colleague became sick with headaches in the field, he
says.

The last time Rosas heard from Ibarra, he had gone to a local clinic in
Bellingham after attempting to tell his supervisor about his headaches and
trying to buy a plane ticket home. But Rosas said that their supervisor,
an employee of Sarbanand Farms in Sumas, Washington, ignored Ibarra and
made him go back to work. Later, he collapsed, according to Community to
Community Development, an immigrant rights nonprofit.

Today, Haborview Medical Center and the King County Medical Examiner's
Office confirmed that Ibarra was treated at Harborview, and then passed
away over the weekend.

Ibarra's illness, Sarbanand Farms' response, and other complaints about
workers' treatment launched a one-day strike from 70 farmworkers last
Friday, Rosas told The Stranger through a translator. When The Stranger
spoke with Rosas on the phone today, he did not yet know his colleague was
dead. Rosas spoke to us outside the Whatcom County Courthouse, where
immigrants rights activists held a protest in solidarity with the
Sarbanand farmworkers.

"We're aware of the situation," Norm Hartman, a public relations
professional representing the farm, said of the work stoppage. "It's a
labor issue. We do not comment on such matters. We hope it can be
resolved." Hartman did not immediately respond for a request for comment
on Ibarra's death.

According to the Whatcom County Assessor's Office, Sarbanand Farms is
under a Limited Liability Corporation registered by Baldev Munger, a
California-based man who oversees a number of blueberry farms with his
brother, Kable Munger. The farm sits right outside Sumas city limits, near
the Canadian border.

Here's how Rosas described Ibarra's treatment at Sarbanand, via translator
and activist Maru Mora Villalpando:

We were working in the fields and it was really hot. He started having
headaches. He reported back to the supervisor. He was ignored by the
supervisor. He couldn't take it anymore so he went back to his cabin to
rest. Then the supervisor went to the cabin and made him go back to work.
And when the shift ended the next day, he went back to work also still
with headaches. And the weather was hotter that day. He told again the
supervisor how he felt. Again the supervisor ignored him in his request.
He went back to his cabin. He couldn't take it anymore. And he asked the
manager for a favor: to take him to the airport because he wanted to go
back to his family. This staff person responded by saying he couldn't take
him because that would mean abandoning the work.
Rosas said that Ibarra attempted to go to the airport on his own to get a
flight, but found that his visa had expired and that he couldn't buy the
ticket. Then, Rosas said, Ibarra went to a local clinic in Bellingham.
When Rosas and other workers asked for a report on Ibarra, they were told
that he had arrived for dehydration, Rosas said. "Then he was taken to
another place in Seattle," Rosas said. "And then we got some reports back,
maybe yesterday, that he was still there."

A spokesman for the Whatcom County Sheriff's department said deputies
responded to a "disturbance" at the farm on Saturday evening, but would
not elaborate.

The King County Medical Examiner's office confirmed today that Ibarra
died, stating his death was not under investigation-meaning that it was
not considered unexpected or suspicious. Harborview Medical Center also
confirmed that Ibarra had been treated over the weekend, but did not give
more information on his condition.

After Rosas and other Sarbanand workers stopped work on Friday, they say
they were fired on Saturday at around 11 in the morning. Rosas said he and
the other workers who went on strike had showed up to work again on
Saturday, but were separated from the rest of the workers and told they
were fired.

Rosas said he and the other workers had been living in farmworker housing,
but were told they could not stay. Now, Rosas said, the 70 workers are
living in tents on a sympathetic community member's property, unable to
work because of their expired visas.

Rosas, who is also married and has a baby in Mexico, said he has been
coming to work in Washington state for six years, but has never
experienced conditions like those at Sarbanand farms. He said the food
lacked nutrition and was very oily, and that he was charged $12 per day
for meals. Since starting work on July 2, Rosas said he has made $1,600,
or $320 a week.

A spokesperson for Washington State Labor and Industries, which
investigates worker rights complaints, did not immediately respond to The
Stranger's request for comment.