

# WINE COUNTRY WORKERS: HOMELESS, JOBLESS & SCARED

California Fires Leave Undocumented Workers with fears of going to shelters and being questioned for their immigration status, Latino workers are facing uncertainty in California: some have lost their homes and jobs in already burnt-out vineyards.

They have lost everything because of the devastating fires raging in California: their home, their work and their peace. But almost none of them is willing to ask for public help or visit an official shelter, much less to talk about their losses, however heartbreaking they may be.

California Latino workers have a greater fear than fire: being deported. As in other natural tragedies, the fires in northern California have made visible what had previously been hidden: a large Latino population, hardworking and vulnerable.

20,000 undocumented workers live in one of the most affected areas, Sonoma County.

"I was so happy with the news last week that things were already being signed so that we could be calmer with immigration issues in California," said Ezequiel Marquez, who has been in the United States for 20 years, referring to the governor's move Californian to turn the state into a sanctuary. "And then the fires that throw everyone out and expose them to danger."

It is believed that many of the people who remain missing after the fires could be undocumented workers in the area who are afraid to go to the authorities and be questioned about their immigration status.

**Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has said all immigration operations in areas affected by the fires have been suspended and state that no arrests will be made in shelters or evacuation centers. Local officials have tried to persuade the population at press conferences that they will be safe and no one will be asked for documents in a shelter.**

One of the people who has chosen not to go to the shelters is Marta Luna, a resident of Santa Rosa and a worker in the vineyards of Sonoma for seven years. Luna was evacuated from Monday of her house and still has not been able to return because it is too far and she is without a car. "Social networks circulate rumors that, although they do not ask for papers in the shelters, there are migration officers dressed as civilians. You do not know if it's true, but as things stand, it could be."

The fear of shelters is such that some undocumented people have preferred to sleep on the beaches rather than go to these facilities.

Others, although they have dared to go to these centers, have not been well received. "You can say what you want, but I am here and in this shelter you can feel the hostility of the military with people who seem to them to have no papers. It does not feel nice," said Emilia, an undocumented resident of Santa Rosa's Fairgrounds, Sonoma.

The ferocious fires in California never occur at a good time, but in a context where the country's immigration policies have hardened. The paranoia among the vineyard workers is such that some even say that the fires were provoked



so that they would have no choice but the shelters and from there, deportation.

"For many of these peasants to lose the house is nothing compared to losing their job or being deported," said Armando Elenes of the Sonoma and Napa Farm workers Union. They have made their living here and are very proud of their efforts and achievements.

On this, Victoria Ruiz, a lawyer for Farm Workers Justice, said that this is not a surprise. Historically, Farm workers in the United States have suffered in silence and do not want to talk or seek help because they are afraid of being expelled or mistreated.

Ruiz clarifies that this does not necessarily mean that they endure ill-treatment, payment or unhealthy conditions in the vineyards, but does mean that many do not know or defend their rights as workers.

During a press conference in Napa, authorities were surprised when some workers asked why they were being called to work in the field if the air quality was so bad and also complained that the safety clothing needed to protect themselves was not being offered. "We already know that safety is not what matters most to them," said Luna.

According to data from the United Farm Workers, about **15,000 Latinos are responsible for growing the grapes of some of the world's most coveted wines, coming out of Sonoma and Napa.** "Many live in the area, but others also come from Stockton or Fremont, neighboring cities. Paying up to \$ 25 per hour at harvest time is a great incentive. In addition, there are many full families dedicated to this," explains Elenes. Most of the vineyard farmers are men (60 percent), but more and more women. Almost all of the workers are Mexicans and not a few are undocumented. The average age is between 35 and 45, an age at which to find work is complicated. But some will have no choice, as the flames have destroyed the vineyards in which they worked. "I was left without my house and neighborhood, and I almost left without a family," said Carlos, the fictitious name of a worker who is 20 years old in one of the Napa vineyards, but who asked not to be identified by his real name. "In addition, I was told that the vineyard where he worked also burned down, so I was also out of work for now."

This year most of the grape harvest, more than 80% , had already picked "The heatwave had caused an early harvest. Now we will have to wait for the new shoots in the vineyards.

"Despite the difficulties that await, some are happy to have kept their lives.

"I know from my sister-in-law that everything about losing the house feels horrible," said Sandra Reyes. "They lived in Coffey Park, an area that was completely devastated. Now she is with us and here we can offer you roof and food. Now we have the opportunity to work and start over."

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## Major Tar Sands Oil Pipeline Cancelled

The long-term future of Canada's tar sands suffered a blow Thursday when TransCanada announced it would cancel a major pipeline project. The decision on the line, which could have carried 1.1 million barrels of crude from Alberta to the Atlantic coast, sets back efforts by energy companies to send more of the oil overseas. Energy East included converting an existing gas pipeline to carry oil as well as building new sections. TransCanada applied to build the project in 2013. The Eastern Mainland project would have built an additional 175 mile new gas pipeline in Ontario.

The Energy East project had slumped through three years of regulatory review. Over that period, the price of oil collapsed, dragging down the prospects for growth in production in the tar sands, which is among the most



expensive and carbon-intensive sources of oil. In a statement, TransCanada said that the decision came after a "careful review of changed circumstances." The company said it expects to write down an estimated \$800 million after-tax loss in its fourth quarter results.

Simon Dyer, Alberta director for the Pembina Institute, a Canadian environmental research group, said darkening prospects for the oil sands doomed the pipeline. "There does not appear to be a business case for the project," he said in an email. Andrew Leach, an economist at the University of Alberta' School of Business, said "the economics have just turned against it entirely."

In 2014, the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers projected tar sands production would more than double to 4.8 million barrels per day by 2030. By this year, that growth forecast had been cut significantly, to 3.7 million barrels per day by 2030. That would still be an increase of about 50 percent from today. The association says Canada's oil industry will need additional pipelines to move that crude, and gaining approval has proved challenging.

Last year, the Canadian government rejected one proposed pipeline while approving expansions of two others—one to the Pacific coast and a second, Enbridge's Line 3, to the United States. Each of the approved projects is meeting significant opposition, however.

In August, Canadian regulators said they would consider the indirect climate emissions associated with the pipeline as part of their review process, assessing risks associated with potential accidents and system malfunctions that could cause oil spills. It also said it would probe the "upstream and downstream" greenhouse gas emissions and the possible impact of the emission reduction targets on the economic viability of the projects. These steps were sure to delay approval, if not doom it.

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