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### **Saving Children's Lives on American Farms**

*The Child Labor Coalition Holds a Press Conference on the Proposed Protections (Hazardous Orders) for Children Employed in Agriculture*

**April 19, 2012—Washington, D.C.**—Today, the Child Labor Coalition (CLC) held a press conference to dispel some of the [misinformation](#) surrounding the Department of Labor's recently proposed safety updates to the rules governing child labor in agriculture. The updates would be the first change in 41 years. A panel of experts from the advocacy, education, health and agriculture communities discussed the rules' potential impact on children's health and safety. Testimony was also shared by Catherine Rylatt, the aunt of Alex Pacas, a young man who was killed in the 2010 grain engulfment that killed 14-year-old Wyatt Whitebread.

Ms. Rylatt recounted the details shared with her by a friend of her nephew who survived. She said that as the boys were working to break up the corn, "Wyatt started sinking; he was yelling 'Help me, help me!'" His young coworkers tried to save him. Alex, her nephew, lost his life as well. She went on to note that after the tragedy, "Chris, the 15-year-old who witnessed the death of his 14-year-old friend, kept saying 'I should have stayed; I should have stayed and helped.' He doesn't understand if he had stayed, he would have been dead, too."

Other experts who provided insight on the proposed updates, included: Lorretta Johnson, Co-Chair of the CLC and Secretary-Treasurer of the [American Federation of Teachers](#) (AFT); Norma Flores López, Chair of the CLC's Committee on Domestic Issues and Director of the *Children in the Fields Campaign* at the [Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs](#) (AFOP), and a former child farmworker; Dr. Sammy Almashat, M.D., M.P.H., Research Associate at [Public Citizen](#); and Bruce Lesley, President of [First Focus](#), a national children's advocacy organization.

"The American Federation of Teachers believes that it is our responsibility to educate the 'whole child,'" said Ms. Johnson, who opened the press conference. "This means looking after the well-being of our children, in and out of the classroom. The updates proposed by the Department of Labor are common sense changes that are designed to preserve the safety of children who work on America's farms." That sentiment was echoed throughout the press conference.

"As a child working in the fields, I was exposed to dangerous pesticides and machinery. While I was fortunate not to be seriously injured while working, that is not the case for many," said Ms. Flores López. "That also doesn't mean I'm in the clear. As a farmworker advocate, I know there are many other serious long-term health consequences associated with pesticides that may affect me in the future."

Each of the speakers discussed the hazardous orders from their respective areas of expertise. Agriculture, which is consistently ranked as one of the three most dangerous industries for all workers, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, is especially

perilous for children. In 2010, three-quarters of the children under age 16 who died while working for wages were killed while working on farms.

“From a medical perspective, we know that children are more vulnerable than adults to the myriad hazards encountered on a farm. A child’s mental capacity and judgment is not as fully developed as it is in an adult,” said Dr. Almashat. “As doctors well know, children are not little adults. Their bodies are structured fundamentally differently, leaving them uniquely vulnerable to a number of different hazards.”

The agribusiness and the farm lobby have voiced strong opposition to the protections, resulting in Members of Congress introducing legislation in the House and Senate to block the implementation of the protections. The bills, called "Preserving America's Family Farm Act," are not supported by all in the agriculture community though. In a press release the [National Farmers Union](#), while not comfortable with all aspects of the proposed rules, has voiced support for the Secretary’s efforts to better protect farmworker children. At the end of the press conference, [National Consumers League](#) Executive Director and CLC Co-Chair Sally Greenberg read a statement prepared by Bryce Oates, a grower from Missouri who recently authored a [post](#) with a fellow family farmer Jake Davis, expressing disgust over the untruths being spread about the rules in Footprint Magazine.

“The longer we wait to finalize these protections, the longer kids’ lives are in danger. Children’s safety and well-being must be the number one priority,” said Mr. Lesley. “As children’s advocates, we can accept nothing less.”

**About the Child Labor Coalition**

*The Child Labor Coalition is composed of 28 organizations, representing consumers, labor unions, educators, human rights and labor rights groups, child advocacy groups, and religious and women’s groups. It was established in 1989, and is co-chaired by the National Consumers League and the American Federation of Teachers. Its mission is to protect working youth and to promote legislation, programs, and initiatives to end child labor exploitation in the United States and abroad. A list of the CLC members may be found at [www.stopchildlabor.org](http://www.stopchildlabor.org).*

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