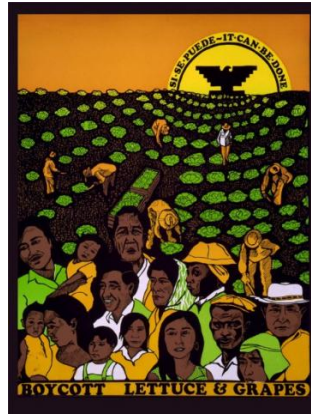




Before Cesar Chavez dedicated his life to helping farm workers get a decent wage, field workers—including children—toiled long hours for unbelievably low pay.

In 1965, a new organization known as the UFW (United Farm Workers), which Chavez helped to co-found, began alerting Americans to unfair practices for workers who picked table grapes. This image depicts a poster entitled “Boycott Lettuce & Grapes.”

Americans did precisely that, causing growers to reevaluate their labor practices.

Curators at the Library of Congress tell us [more about it](#):

On August 22, 1966, the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee (UFWOC), later renamed the United Farm Workers of America (UFW), was formed. The UFWOC was established when two smaller organizations, the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) and the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC), both in the middle of strikes against certain California grape growers, merged and moved under the umbrella of the AFL-CIO.

Under the founding leadership of Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta, the UFW won many labor or civil rights concessions for disenfranchised Mexican-American farm workers, an important aspect of the Chicano movement.

The Chicano movement has been an often-ignored part of the civil rights struggles in the 1960s; it was, nonetheless, a landmark period for the second-largest ethnic minority in the U.S.

Before the rise of the UFW, working conditions were harsh for most agricultural workers. On average, farm workers made about ninety cents per hour plus ten cents for each basket of produce they picked. Many workers in the field were not provided even the most basic necessities such as clean drinking water or portable toilets.

Unfair hiring practices, such as favoritism and kickbacks, were rampant. Seldom were their living quarters equipped with indoor plumbing or cooking facilities.

Through a series of demonstrations, strikes, and protests, the UFW brought these issues to the public's attention. In 1965, one of the first major actions taken by the UFW was to call for a boycott of table grapes, which became a nationwide boycott by 1968.

Several other boycotts against lettuce and strawberry growers were organized in following years. On February 14, 1968, UFW President Cesar Chavez began the first of many fasts in protest of the treatment of farm workers. During this first fast he received a strong letter of support from Martin Luther King Jr. On March 10, he broke the fast with Robert Kennedy at his side.

By June of that same year—1968—both Senator Kennedy and Dr. King had been killed by assassins. The times, for civil-rights leaders, were extremely turbulent and dangerous.

Undeterred, Chavez and his colleagues also tried to protect farm workers from pesticides used in the fields:

Through these dramatic moves the UFW won many important benefits for agricultural workers. It brought comprehensive health benefits for farm workers and their families, rest periods, clean drinking water, sanitary facilities, and even profit sharing and parental leave. The UFW also has pioneered the fight to protect farm workers against harmful pesticides.

This image depicts a time during U.S. history when Americans were encouraged to boycott grapes and lettuce.

The words on the poster—"SI SE PUEDE!"—mean "Yes You Can!" It was one of Cesar Chavez' slogans. Today those words still unite farmworker communities in America, as depicted in this video about migrant workers in Washington State.

Click on the poster image for a better view.

Credits:

Poster of "Migrant workers in lettuce field with UFW symbol and motto in setting sun," produced in 1978 by the Chicago Women's Graphics Collective. Image [online via the Library of Congress](#).

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Chicano-Movement-and-Boycotting-Grapes>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Chicano-Movement-and-Boycotting-Grapes>