



## About César Chavez – Farm Worker, Unionist, Non-Violent Hero, and Visionary

*"It's ironic that those who till the soil, cultivate and harvest the fruits, vegetables, and other foods that fill your tables with abundance have nothing left for themselves." – César Chavez*



César Chavez worked in the fields until 1952, when he became an organizer for the Community Service Organization (CSO), a Latino civil rights group. Along with Dolores Huerta, he co-founded the National Farm Workers Association (later the United Farm Workers union, UFW) in 1962. At its height, the UFW boasted more than 50,000 members – mostly low-income Latino agricultural workers. Under Chavez, the UFW advocated for improved

work conditions for agricultural laborers, including fighting against the exposure of workers to harmful pesticides.

When Filipino-American farm workers initiated the Delano grape strike on September 8, 1965, to protest for higher wages, Chavez eagerly supported them. Six months later, Chavez and the NFWA led a strike of California grape pickers on the historic farmworkers march from Delano to the California state capitol in Sacramento for similar goals. The UFW encouraged all Americans to boycott table grapes as a show of support. The strike lasted five years and attracted national attention.





In the early 1970s, the UFW organized strikes and boycotts – including the Salad Bowl strike, the largest farm worker strike in U.S. history – to protest for, and later win, higher wages for those farm workers who were working for grape and lettuce growers. He fasted to draw public attention. UFW organizers believed that a reduction in produce sales by 15% was sufficient to wipe out the profit margin of the boycotted product.

Chavez undertook a number of “spiritual fasts”, regarding the act as “a personal spiritual transformation”. In 1968, he fasted for 25 days, promoting the principle of nonviolence. In 1970, Chavez began a fast of “thanksgiving and hope” to prepare for pre-arranged civil disobedience by farm workers. Also, in 1972, he fasted in response to Arizona’s passage of legislation that prohibited boycotts and strikes by farm workers during the harvest seasons. These fasts were influenced by the Catholic tradition of penance and by Gandhi’s fasts and emphasis of nonviolence.



Chavez’ public-relations approach to unionism and aggressive but nonviolent tactics made the farm workers’ struggle a moral cause with nationwide support.

The Institute’s beloved former Program Director, Sam Baca, worked closely with César Chavez, and infused the Institute programs with Chavez’ ideals. Sam is quoted as saying ““It’s much more than a union. It’s really a movement for social justice.”

*“We cannot seek achievement for ourselves and forget about progress and prosperity for our community...Our ambitions must be broad enough to include the aspirations and needs of others, for their sakes and for our own.” – César Chavez*

*“Preservation of one’s own culture does not require contempt or disrespect for other cultures.” – César Chavez*

