

Hispanic Affairs Project



300 N. Cascade Ave, Suite C-4, Montrose CO 81401
www.hapgj.org (970) 249.4115

H2A-Range Worker: Labor Rights Victory, More Needs to be Done.

Grand Junction, October 31, 2015: Under the pressure from a suit filed in federal court on the part of Hispanic Affairs Project (HAP), the Department of Labor (DOL) rushed to make an official announcement of new regulations that will permit hundreds of sheep herders with H2A visas to receive a salary increase after Nov. 16, 2015, date on which the new rules take effect.

After nine years of documenting systemic labor abuses, HAP, with the support of Towards Justice, a non-profit legal firm focusing on labor law, presented a suit in the name of sheep herders that are members of HAP to immediately increase their salaries. With solid documentation that demonstrated that DOL had violated its own procedures and had disregarded the federal laws regulating the foreign workers, the DOL responded with the publication of the new laws before the previously announced date.

Over the last fifty years these workers had only received a wage increase of \$100 per month, going from \$650 to \$750 monthly on average. In spite of the ranching industry's opposition to the DOL approval of the new rules, as they stated publicly in the media, HAP requested that the laws be respected and that the workers be able to receive improved compensation for the hard work they do. Starting this November 16, the monthly salary will increase to \$993 and then in Dec 15 to \$1,206.

That said, it is disappointing that the rules still don't meet the labor standards that apply to every other industry that employs foreign workers. There is no legal justification for excluding the shepherders from the current federal norms.

While we celebrate this victory, we want to remind those workers that from previous years chose not to put up with the abuses and they escaped from some of the offending ranches and we don't know anything about them; others, might be eligible to receive some migratory protection for victims of trafficking or violence.

We thank the members of HAP, the former and current sheep herders. All who dared to risk visiting the workers at night, on weekends, preventing knowledge of this activity from being brought to the employers' attention, thus preventing harm being done to the workers. We thank allied organizations, the churches and friends that encouraged our mission. We thank our lawyers from Towards Justice. Much needs to be done in order for the laws to be obeyed and for the workers and their families to be treated humanely. "Yes we can!"

More information: Ricardo Perez – ricardo@hapgj.org – 249.4115