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STATEWIDE FARMWORKER HOUSING SURVEY NOW UNDERWAY

The Washington State Farmworker Housing Trust has launched what may be the most ambitious survey of farmworker housing and health care needs ever attempted in Washington state. In recent weeks, teams of bilingual interviewers armed with clipboards and survey questionnaires have fanned out across rural Washington with the goal of completing 2,400 surveys that represent a complete cross section of the state's agricultural workers.

The Trust, which raised the funds needed to complete the survey, is a nonprofit organization created in 2003 through the efforts of U.S. Senator Patty Murray. The Trust works to unite the agricultural community in support of increased funding for farmworker housing. The 16-member Board of Directors is comprised of leading growers, farmworker advocates, rural housing providers and other community stakeholders.

The survey is intended to give farmworkers a voice in the Trust's campaign to overcome the serious shortage of housing for the state's estimated 187,000 farmworkers. The 84-question survey focuses mainly on housing, but will also provide information on farmworkers' health care needs and engagement in community activities.

"The farmworker survey is a critical part of our work," said Mario Villanueva, Director of the Diocese of Yakima Housing Services organization and the Trust's President. "We can't solve the housing shortage without really understanding the farmworker's perspective. This survey will meet that need."

To reach all parts of the state and all types of farmworkers, the Trust has organized survey teams of experienced outreach workers from community health centers and other organizations that serve farmworkers. The teams are supervised and trained by Applied Survey Research, a professional research firm, which is guiding the survey and compiling the results. The teams are based in Wenatchee, Omak, Quincy, Othello, Sunnyside, Toppenish, Pasco, Bellingham and Centralia.

Interviews are being conducted during the peak seasons for the most important crops in each of Washington's major agricultural counties. Interviews began during the bulb harvest in Skagit County in late April, then moved to Central and Eastern Washington during the asparagus harvest. The next focus will be on cherry workers. The last interviews are expected in late October during the apple harvest.

The survey team members are easily recognized by their white shirts with a bright green logo. They are contacting workers at sites the farmworkers frequent during their off-hours, such as grocery stores, laundromats and soccer fields. Participants are randomly selected for interviews. Those who complete the 30-minute survey receive a prepaid phone card in appreciation for their time.

The survey results will be available in early 2007 on the Trust's Web site:

www.farmworkerhousingtrust.org/

Funding for the survey is provided by the Trust, with contributions from the Marguerite Casey Foundation, the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation, the Enterprise Foundation, the Washington State Housing Finance Commission, Washington Mutual Bank, Fannie Mae, the Community Health Plan of Washington, the Washington Association of Migrant and Community Health Centers, and Warden Family Housing, LLC. The Skagit County and Douglas County Commissions also contributed funding for the survey from a grant secured from the Washington State Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development.

The Washington State Farmworker Housing Trust has already been successful in helping to increase public funding for farmworker housing. In 2005, the legislature doubled the spending goal for farmworker housing from \$4 million to \$8 million a year, and created a new infrastructure matching fund to encourage growers to add or upgrade on-farm housing. In the 2006 session, the legislature added another \$3 million for farmworker housing as part of a \$21-million "Home Security Fund."

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