



HUMAN
RIGHTS
WATCH

TEENS OF THE TOBACCO FIELDS

Child Labor in United States Tobacco Farming



Teens of the Tobacco Fields

Child Labor in United States Tobacco Farming

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SUMMARY AND KEY RECOMMENDATIONS



A tobacco field in North Carolina.

Photographs by Benedict Evans for Human Rights Watch



“With the money that I earn, I help my mom. I give her gas money. I buy food from the tobacco [work] for us to eat. Then I try to save up the money so I can have my school supplies and school stuff like clothes and shoes.”

—“Elena,” age 16

Elena G., a tall 16-year-old girl, lives in a mobile home in eastern North Carolina with her mother, three sisters, two brothers, and nephew. Since she turned 12, she has spent her school summer vacations working long hours as a hired laborer on tobacco farms in several nearby counties.

Human Rights Watch first interviewed Elena in May 2013 for a report on hazardous child labor in United States tobacco farming. At the time she was just shy of 14, and about to begin her second summer working in tobacco farming. In July 2015, Human Rights Watch interviewed her again. Some things had changed: Elena had finished her first two years of high school. But in at least one fundamental way, things were very much the same; she was still spending her summers working in tobacco fields.

“I don’t feel any different in the fields than when I was 12,” she told Human Rights Watch. “I [still] get headaches and ... my stomach hurts. And like I feel nauseous.... I just feel like my stomach is like rumbling around. I feel like I’m gonna throw up.”





"Elena," a 16-year-old tobacco worker in North Carolina outside her mobile home.



“Danielle,” 16-year-old tobacco worker in her backyard in North Carolina.

“When I got hired, nobody asked my age. They didn’t care. They just wanted people to work.”

—“Danielle,” age 16

While these symptoms could describe a range of illnesses, they are consistent with acute nicotine poisoning, an occupational illness specific to tobacco farming that occurs when workers absorb nicotine through their skin while having contact with tobacco plants.

Each summer, children like Elena work on tobacco farms in the United States, where they are exposed to nicotine, toxic pesticides, extreme heat, and other dangers. In 2014, several tobacco companies and growers groups adopted new policies banning children under 16 from employment in US tobacco farming.

These policy changes are an important step, but they leave some children unprotected. International human rights law prohibits all children under 18 from doing hazardous work. Certain tobacco companies’ policies draw a line at 16, restricting work by children younger than 16, but allowing 16 and 17-year-old children to work in tobacco farming. This distinction is inconsistent with international standards and unsupported by scientific evidence on adolescent growth and development.

The findings presented in this report build on previous research that Human Rights Watch conducted in 2013, documenting hazardous work by children on US tobacco farms.¹ Human Rights Watch did not seek to monitor implementation of new industry policies or conduct a comprehensive evaluation of how conditions may have changed for child tobacco workers since 2013. Rather, for this report, Human Rights Watch aimed to investigate the effects of tobacco farming on a specific population—16 and 17-year-old children—excluded from protection due to gaps in tobacco industry policies and the US legal and regulatory framework.

Teenage children, even 16 and 17 year olds who may have reached adult size, remain in an important developmental stage where they are particularly vulnerable to the harms posed by exposure to toxins like nicotine and pesticides, and may be less likely to take the health and safety precautions that adult workers would take in the same environment.

¹ Human Rights Watch, *United States-Tobacco’s Hidden Children: Hazardous Child Labor in United States Tobacco Farming*, May 2014, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/05/13/tobaccos-hidden-children/hazardous-child-labor-united-states-tobacco-farming>.



"Sofia," a 17-year-old tobacco worker, in a tobacco field in North Carolina. She started working at 13, and she said her mother was the only one who taught her how to protect herself in the fields.



Gloves used by “Sofia.” She told Human Rights Watch that she has to purchase her own protective gear.

“None of my bosses or contractors or crew leaders have ever told us anything about pesticides and how we can protect ourselves from them....When I worked with my mom, she would ... like always make sure I was okay....Our bosses don’t give us anything except for our checks. That’s it.”

—“Sofia,” age 17

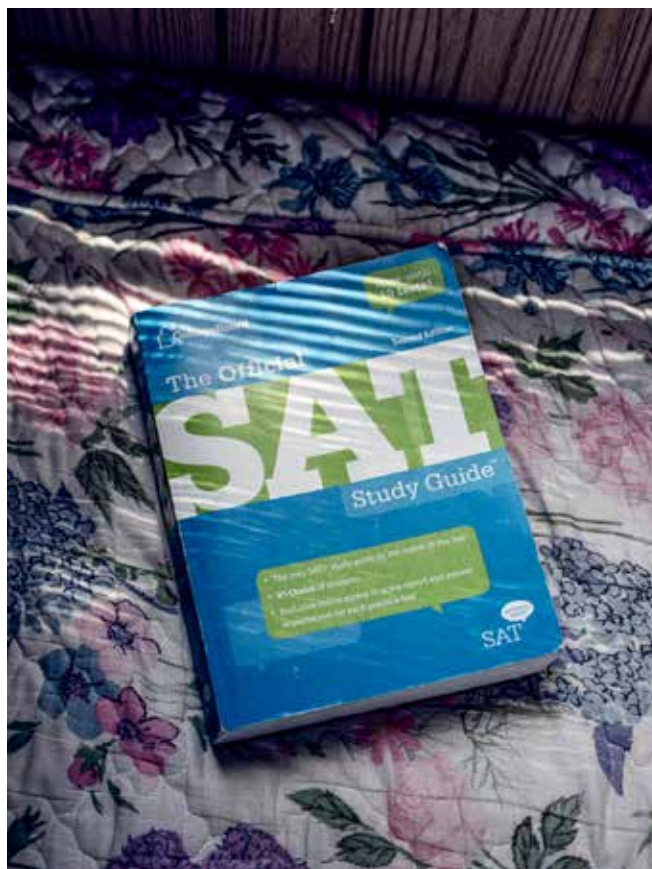
In July 2015, Human Rights Watch interviewed 26 children, ages 16 and 17, who worked on tobacco farms in North Carolina that summer. Almost all of the children interviewed—25 out of 26—said they experienced sickness, pain, and discomfort while working. Most children interviewed experienced the sudden onset of at least one specific symptom consistent with acute nicotine poisoning while working in tobacco farming in 2015, or after returning home from working in tobacco fields, including nausea, vomiting, headaches, dizziness, and lightheadedness.

Many children also reported either working in or near fields that were being sprayed with pesticides, or re-entering fields that had been sprayed very recently. A number of children reported immediate illness after coming into contact with pesticides.

Under international law, a child is anyone under the age of 18. International labor standards state that children under 18 should be prohibited from hazardous work, defined as “work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children.”²

“I’ll be graduating [high school] next year. Then I’ll be off to college—the first one in my family to graduate high school and go to college. Hopefully.”

Based on our field research, interviews with health professionals, and analysis of the public health literature, Human Rights Watch has concluded that working in direct contact with tobacco is hazardous to children, including 16 and



A study guide belonging to “Sofia.” She told Human Rights Watch she has been taking practice tests for the SAT, a standardized test used for college admissions in the US.

17-year-old children, and that no child under age 18 should be permitted to do such work because of the health risks.

Tobacco companies do not bear the sole responsibility to protect child tobacco workers. The US government has utterly failed to protect children from the dangers of tobacco farming. As a result, it remains legally permissible for children at age 12 to be hired to work unlimited hours outside of school on a tobacco farm of any size with parental permission, and there is no minimum age for children to work on small tobacco farms or tobacco farms owned and operated by family members.

² International Labor Organization Convention Concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor (Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention), adopted June 17, 1999, 38 I.L.M. 1207 (entered into force November 19, 2000), ratified by the United States on December 2, 1999, art. 3.

“Sofia” on a dirt road near her home in North Carolina. She said she trains for the cross-country team after working 50 to 60 hours a week in tobacco farming.





"Alejandro," a 17-year-old almost six-foot-tall, has been working in tobacco farming since he was 14. He told Human Rights Watch he often loses his appetite while working in the fields, a symptom associated with nicotine exposure.



“You don’t feel like eating ... Sometimes when I eat, I don’t know, my stomach don’t take it.... And then the food that I eat makes me feel sick.”

—“Alejandro,” age 17

“Alejandro” in the living room of his family’s mobile home in eastern North Carolina. “I work in tobacco to help my mom pay some bills,” he said.

The US government has acknowledged the risks to children of work in tobacco farming,³ but has failed to change the US regulatory framework to end hazardous child labor in the crop. The US government and Congress should take urgent action to change US laws and regulations to protect all children under 18 from hazardous work in tobacco farming.

³ United States Department of Labor, Wage and Hour Division, “29 CFR Parts 570 and 579: Notice of Proposed Rulemaking and Request for Comments: Child Labor Regulations, Orders and Statements of Interpretation; Child Labor Violations—Civil Money Penalties: Employment in Tobacco Production and Curing” in Federal Register, vol. 76, no. 171 (September 2, 2011) pp. 54864-54865, <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2011-09-02/pdf/2011-21924.pdf> (accessed October 9, 2015); Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), “Recommended Practices: Green Tobacco Sickness,” March 2015, <https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3765.pdf> (accessed September 30, 2015).



“Sara” (left) and “Susana,” 16-year-old twin sisters who worked together on tobacco farms in 2015, sit in their bedroom in the clothes they wear to try to protect themselves in tobacco fields. They described working near areas where pesticides were being applied.



“I feel dizzy, very dizzy because the smell is unbearable. It’s very strong and my stomach begins to feel stirred. I feel as if I am going to faint right then and there from the smell.”

—“Sara,” age 16

“We are just working ... and the worker is on the tractor spraying almost very close to us. But they don’t take us out of that area. They don’t even warn us that it is dangerous. Nothing. We are just working and we cover ourselves well because the smell is very strong, and we get sick with the smell of that spray.”

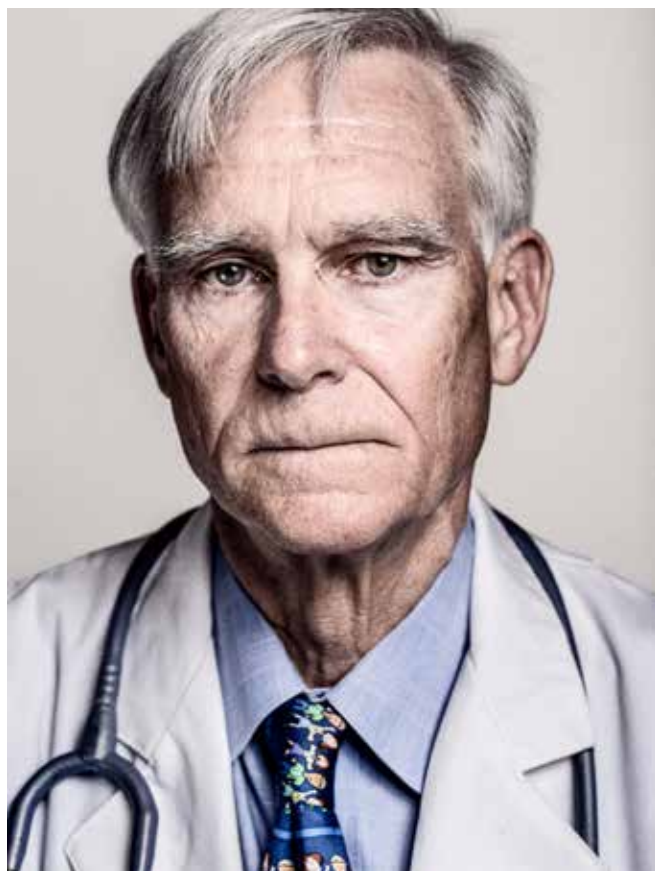
—“Susana,” age 16

“We leave here at 5 a.m. and get there at 6 a.m. We get back at 6 or 7 p.m. I usually don’t eat until 10 or 11 [a.m.], and the smell [of the tobacco] and an empty stomach, you can’t hold it in. You vomit. It happened to me a couple days ago.”

—“Victor,” age 18



“Victor,” an 18-year-old tobacco worker who started working in tobacco farming when he was 15.



Dr. David Tayloe, Jr., a pediatrician in North Carolina.

“Green Tobacco Sickness is all about exposure of the skin to green tobacco.... And so the nicotine that’s on the plant, in the plant, gets secreted out the pores of the plant, can be absorbed by the skin of a human being. And the nicotine can make you sick.”

—Dr. David Tayloe, Jr., pediatrician

“When you first eat and start working it hurts in your stomach. It’s hurting. You feel like you need to throw up.”

—“Matthew,” age 16



“Matthew,” a 16-year-old tobacco worker, outside the mobile home where he lives with his family.



Dr. Sara Quandt and Dr. Thomas Arcury are faculty at Wake Forest School of Medicine.

Although most companies purchasing tobacco in the United States have policies that offer more protection than US law and regulations, none have policies sufficient to protect all children under 18 from the hazards of work in tobacco farming. Tobacco companies should ensure that their child labor policies explicitly state that all work in which children come into direct contact with tobacco is hazardous and prohibited for children under 18.

“Children are not small adults.”

—Dr. Sara Quandt

“If we think about children as children, because that’s what they are, we’re putting them to work in the nation’s most hazardous industry: agriculture. We’re putting people who are not only biologically immature, but behaviorally immature and asking them to work with adults. We’re putting them into a situation in which they are exposed to pesticides, they’re exposed to machinery and sharp tools, they’re exposed to the heat.”

—Dr. Thomas Arcury

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

TO THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS

- Enact legislation prohibiting children under age 18 from engaging in hazardous work on tobacco farms in the United States, including any work in which children have direct contact with tobacco in any form.

TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

- Issue an executive order or take other regulatory action to prohibit hazardous child labor on tobacco farms in the US, including any tasks where children have direct contact with tobacco in any form.

TO THE US DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

- Revise the list of agricultural jobs deemed to be “particularly hazardous” for children to include any tasks where children have direct contact with tobacco in any form.

TO TOBACCO PRODUCT MANUFACTURERS AND TOBACCO LEAF MERCHANT COMPANIES

- Adopt or revise global child labor policies to prohibit hazardous work by children under 18, including any work in which children have direct contact with tobacco in any form.
- Establish regular and rigorous internal and third-party monitoring in the supply chain, including through unannounced inspections at the time of year, time of day, and locations where children are most likely to be working.

TO THE INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION

- Develop clear, implementable guidance regarding the hazards of tobacco farming for children without delay. Urge states and companies to prohibit all children under 18 from tasks involving direct contact with tobacco in any form.
- Allow a range of different types of experts to contribute meaningfully to the tripartite process on hazardous child labor and occupational safety and health in tobacco growing.

Methodology

Human Rights Watch conducted field research for this report in eastern North Carolina in July 2015. Human Rights Watch interviewed 33 children, ages 13 to 17, who worked on tobacco farms in North Carolina in 2015, 18 boys and 15 girls. Of those, 26 were 16 or 17 year olds. Five of the children interviewed were also interviewed by Human Rights Watch in 2013.

In addition, Human Rights Watch interviewed nine other individuals, including parents of farmworker children, tobacco growers, health experts, and outreach workers. In total, 42 people were interviewed for this report. This report follows extensive research by Human Rights Watch in 2013 on hazardous child labor in United States tobacco farming.¹

Human Rights Watch identified interviewees through outreach in farmworker communities, and with the assistance of a nongovernmental organization serving farmworker families. Some individuals approached declined to be interviewed.

Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish, based on the interviewee's preference. Human Rights Watch interviewed most children individually, though some children were interviewed in pairs. When possible, Human Rights Watch held interviews in private, though in a few cases, interviewees preferred to have another person present. No interviews were conducted in the presence of workers' employers.

Human Rights Watch informed all interviewees of the purpose of the interview, its voluntary nature, and the ways in which the information would be collected and used. For interviews taking place during mealtimes, Human Rights Watch provided modest meals. Human Rights Watch did not provide anyone with compensation in exchange for an interview. Participants gave oral informed consent to participate and were assured anonymity. All names of children and parents have been changed to protect their privacy, confidentiality, and safety, and to protect them from potential retaliation.

¹ In 2013, Human Rights Watch interviewed with 141 children who reported working on tobacco farms in four US states—North Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia—in 2012 or 2013. Human Rights Watch also interviewed 46 other individuals, including parents, adult farmworkers, health experts, outreach workers, lawyers, and others. For a detailed description of our methodology, please refer to: Human Rights Watch, *Tobacco's Hidden Children: Hazardous Child Labor in United States Tobacco Farming*, May 2014, pp. 22-23.

All the accounts reported here, unless otherwise noted, reflect experiences children had while they were working on tobacco farms in 2015.

Children interviewed reported working on tobacco farms in 12 counties in North Carolina. Most children worked for farm labor contractors or subcontractors, and a few children worked directly for tobacco growers. Some children worked for one employer, while others worked for more than one employer. In total, the children interviewed worked for at least 18 different growers or farm labor contractors in eastern North Carolina.

Many of the children could not identify the owner of the farm on which they worked, and Human Rights Watch could not determine the companies that purchased tobacco from the farms where children reported working. We are unable to assess the implementation of any specific tobacco company's child labor policy.

However, Human Rights Watch found children under 16, as well as 16 and 17-year-old children, working on tobacco farms in North Carolina in 2015, suggesting that the problem of younger children working has not been completely resolved.

Human Rights Watch did not use a random sampling method, and the children we interviewed may not be representative of the broader population of child tobacco workers in North Carolina or other US states. However, the hazards and conditions Human Rights Watch documented in 2015 are consistent with those documented in our 2013 research. Based on the patterns and similarities we observed in our field research, we believe that these hazards and conditions may be present on many US tobacco farms.

I. Child Tobacco Workers

The child tobacco workers interviewed by Human Rights Watch for this report were largely of Hispanic ethnicity. Many children we interviewed were United States citizens, and others were born outside the United States. Regardless of the immigration status of children, the parents of most children interviewed for this report were living in the US without authorization.

Most children were enrolled in school and worked in tobacco farming primarily or exclusively during the summer months, although a few children had dropped out of school. All of the children interviewed worked as hired laborers on tobacco farms in North Carolina; none worked on farms owned or operated by their own families. They reported doing a range of tasks on tobacco farms in 2015, including planting seedlings, weeding, uprooting and repositioning tobacco plants, “topping” (breaking off large flowers that sprout at the tops of tobacco plants), and removing “suckers” (nuisance leaves that reduce the yield and quality of tobacco).

Why Children Work

Children said they worked to help support their families. Elena G., for example, told Human Rights Watch, “With the money that I earn, I help my mom. I give her gas money. I buy food from the tobacco [work] for us to eat.... Then I try to save up the money so I can have my school supplies and school stuff like clothes and shoes.”²

Marta F., a 34-year-old farmworker and mother of five, told Human Rights Watch why her 17-year-old daughter, Sofia F., works in tobacco farming:

[She] had to start working, since I was alone and I didn’t have support from my partner. She had to work for herself, to buy her own school supplies....Having [her] working helps. It helps us. It helps because she buys things for the kids—clothes, shoes—for her young siblings and for school as well.³

² Human Rights Watch interview with Elena G., 16, Lenoir County, North Carolina, July 20, 2015.

³ Human Rights Watch interview with Marta F., 35, Lenoir County, North Carolina, July 22, 2015.

Some children said they worked in agriculture, as opposed to other sectors, because they had limited English language skills or lacked work authorization.

Working Conditions

The children interviewed for this report described working in similar conditions as the child workers interviewed by Human Rights Watch in 2013. Most children worked 11 or 12 hours a day on tobacco farms. Some children worked six days a week, while others worked fewer days. Almost all children described fatigue and exhaustion after working long days in tobacco fields.

The experience of Jasmine S., 16, was typical among the children interviewed by Human Rights Watch: “The hours were really, really long.... We would work from 7 a.m. to whatever time they said. Usually it was like 7 p.m. It was far to get to the field. We’d get home late, like 8 or 9 p.m.... I worked all week, except Sundays.”⁴

All children reported having opportunities to take breaks while working, usually three times a day, including an hour break for lunch. Almost all children said they were paid between \$7.50 and \$8.50 an hour, usually in cash. Very few children reported problems with their wages.

Hiring

Some children said they were asked their ages when they were hired. For example, Briana G., a 16-year-old worker, told Human Rights Watch, “This year they have [asked my age] because now there’s inspection. They asked if I was 16. I really don’t know [why] because I haven’t seen them inspect. The lady, my boss, asked me if I was 16.”⁵

Sixteen-year-old Matthew C. told Human Rights Watch he was not asked his age in the past, but, in 2015, he was told he had to be 16 to work in tobacco farming: “It’s new. Last year, I [worked when I was] was 15. This year, they are more and more strict.” Matthew understood the change to be due to the health risk for children: “If many farmers get kids

⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Jasmine S., 16, Lenoir County, North Carolina, July 16, 2015.

⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Briana G., 16, and Jorge G., 14, Lenoir County, North Carolina, July 16, 2015.

to work, they pass out because they're too little. So they say you have to be 16 or 17 to work this year.”⁶

Other children said they were not questioned about their age. Danielle R., a 16-year-old girl in 11th grade, worked on tobacco farms with her grandmother in 2015. She said, “When I got hired, nobody asked my age. They didn’t care. They just wanted people to work.”⁷ Eliceo F., 16, has been working in tobacco farming since he was 14, and said he had never been asked about his age, including when he was hired to work in 2015. “I think anybody can just go,” he said.⁸

Human Rights Watch did not interview employers to determine whether they attempted to verify the ages of children at hiring. This was beyond the scope of our research.

⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Matthew C., 16, Lenoir County, North Carolina, July 15, 2015.

⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Danielle R., 16, Wayne County, North Carolina, July 22, 2015.

⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Eliceo F., 16, Wayne County, North Carolina, July 16, 2015.

II. Health and Safety of 16 and 17-Year-Old Child Workers

Nearly all of the 16 and 17-year-old children interviewed—25 out of 26—reported feeling sick while working in tobacco farming in 2015, or after returning home from working in tobacco fields, with nausea, vomiting, headaches, dizziness, skin irritation, or respiratory symptoms.

With a few exceptions, those who reported feeling sick experienced the sudden onset of at least one specific symptom consistent with acute nicotine poisoning while working in tobacco farming in 2015, or after returning home from working in tobacco fields, including nausea, vomiting, headaches, dizziness, and lightheadedness.

Some children also experienced a loss of appetite or recurrent sleeplessness, also symptoms associated with nicotine exposure.⁹ In some cases, the symptoms they reported could be linked to or exacerbated by pesticide exposure or working in conditions of high heat and high humidity without sufficient rest, shade, and hydration.¹⁰

Similarly, many of the children interviewed described exposure to pesticides while working in tobacco farming in 2015. Children reported either working in or near fields that were being sprayed with pesticides, or re-entering fields that had been sprayed very recently. These children often said they could smell, feel, or taste the chemical spray. A number of children reported immediate illness after coming into contact with pesticides.

All 16 and 17-year-old children said they suffered while working in extreme and unrelenting heat on tobacco farms in 2015 with little access to shade. Children did report consistent access to water. Many children reported pain from engaging in repetitive motions. Children said they had inconsistent access to toilets, and many experienced discomfort while waiting long periods of time before relieving themselves.

⁹ See, for example, Thomas A. Arcury, Sara A. Quandt, and John S. Preisser, “Predictors of Incidence and Prevalence of Green Tobacco Sickness Among Latino Farmworkers in North Carolina, USA,” *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, vol. 55 (2001), p. 818; Thomas A. Arcury, Sara A. Quandt, et al., “The Incidence of Green Tobacco Sickness Among Latino Farmworkers,” *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, vol. 43, no. 7 (2001), pp. 601-602.; Thomas A. Arcury, Sara A. Quandt, et al., “High Levels of Transdermal Nicotine Exposure Produce Green Tobacco Sickness in Latino Farmworkers,” *Nicotine & Tobacco Research*, vol. 5 (2003), p. 315.

¹⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Dr. Thomas Arcury, director of the Center for Worker Health at Wake Forest School of Medicine, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, May 20, 2013.

Detailed information on the health effects of tobacco farming can be found below in Chapter III. “Health Risks for Children Working in Tobacco Farming.”¹¹

Nausea, Vomiting, and Loss of Appetite

Teenage boys and girls described nausea, vomiting, and loss of appetite while working on tobacco farms, or after returning home from a day of work.

Ines R., a 17-year-old girl with long straight hair, works on tobacco farms with her parents and her younger sister. She told Human Rights Watch that she got violently ill in the night after a day of work topping tobacco in July 2015. “At work, I was feeling kind of sick, like something was wrong with me,” she said. “And then, in the night, that’s when everything started.” She told Human Rights Watch she experienced nausea, vomiting, and a headache:

This painful stomachache hit me. It was so strong that I was crying at night. My mom was going to take me to the emergency room, because I was feeling really bad. And I started puking. I think I threw up three or four times that day. It was so painful.... I didn’t really feel good the whole entire day, and I was sick for like three days. I had an awful headache.¹²

Briana G., 16, has five brothers and five sisters, and works in tobacco farming to earn extra money for her family. She told Human Rights Watch she vomited while working on a tobacco farm in 2015: “Because of the plant, the liquid it has, if it gets in your mouth, you taste something. It makes you throw up. I threw up. I was like in the middle of the field. I was sitting down, and I started throwing up.”¹³

Alejandro M., a 17-year-old boy almost six-feet-tall, has been working in tobacco farming since he was 14. He told Human Rights Watch he often loses his appetite while working in the fields. Holding a slice of pizza in his lap while taking his lunch break after a morning of work in the tobacco fields, he said, “Like right now there’s this pizza, but I’m not even

¹¹ See below, Chapter III. “Health Risks for Children Working in Tobacco Farming,” p. 21.

¹² Human Rights Watch interview with Ines R., 17, and Jane R., 15, Wayne County, North Carolina, July 18, 2015.

¹³ Human Rights Watch interview with Briana G., 16, and Jorge G., 14, Lenoir County, North Carolina, July 16, 2015.

hungry for it, you know?”¹⁴ He added, “Most of the time you don’t feel hungry when you get out at lunch.... You don’t feel like eating.” He said he sometimes felt nauseous at work after trying to eat: “Sometimes when I eat, I don’t know, my stomach don’t take it.... And then the food that I eat makes me feel sick.”¹⁵

In an interview with Human Rights Watch, 16-year-old Matthew C. described how he felt while working on a tobacco farm in 2015: “When you first eat and start working it hurts in your stomach. It’s hurting.... You feel like you need to throw up.”¹⁶

Headaches, Dizziness, and Lightheadedness

Many 16 and 17-year-old children reported headaches, dizziness, and lightheadedness while working on tobacco farms in 2015.

Juan R., 17, migrated to North Carolina from Honduras with his brother in 2014 to join his parents and younger siblings. He enrolled in a public high school, and he told Human Rights Watch, “When I’m on summer vacation, I need my money, so I work in tobacco.... I buy the things I need, my clothes. I help my mom.” He said he suffered a severe headache and dizziness while topping tobacco in 2015: “The sun was really strong one day, and I just felt dizzy because of the lack of water. I was dizzy, nauseous, and I got a headache.... [It happened] three weeks ago. It was at like 10 in the morning. We were there cutting the flower when I started to feel bad with a bad headache.”¹⁷

Sixteen-year-old Fabiana H. started working in tobacco farming at 13. In 2015, she worked with a large crew of workers, including many children, and sometimes she felt sick. “It’s been hot and my head started hurting,” she said in an interview with Human Rights Watch. “I took Tylenol, but it wouldn’t go away. I was taking off the flower. One time I remember, it was bad. It lasted like an hour. When the sun is hot, you start getting dizzy and sweating. It feels bad.”¹⁸

¹⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Alejandro M., 17, Wayne County, North Carolina, July 17, 2015.

¹⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Alejandro M., 17, Wayne County, North Carolina, July 23, 2015.

¹⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Matthew C., 16, Lenoir County, North Carolina, July 15, 2015.

¹⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Juan R., 17, Pitt County, North Carolina, July 19, 2015.

¹⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Fabiana H., 16, Lenoir County, North Carolina, July 15, 2015.

Eliceo F., 16, told Human Rights Watch he felt suddenly ill while removing weeds around tobacco plants in June 2015: “I was feeling like I was going to pass out. It happened about a month ago. I was pulling out weeds. I felt like lazy, like lightheaded. I got a headache and a little bit dizzy. It only happened one time this year, but it’s happened to me before, like last year, when I was working in tobacco [fields].”¹⁹

Susana and Sara N. are 16-year-old twin sisters who worked together on tobacco farms in 2015. Susana, the more talkative of the two, told Human Rights Watch how she and her sister felt while working, “We feel dizzy, suffocated from the sun, tired, and weak.” Sara said she suffers sickness in the fields more often than her sister.

She told Human Rights Watch about one day when she felt particularly ill while topping tobacco: “I got really dizzy from the heat. I was exhausted. I was taking off the flower. It was at like 1 p.m. I left, and I drank some water and some Gatorade. They told me to get out [of the row] and wait until I felt better.... I felt like I was going to vomit.” Talking about the same incident, she later said, “That day, I was fine, when suddenly I became dizzy. Everything started spinning. My stomach began to ache very badly.” While topping tobacco on a different day in 2015, Sara suffered similar symptoms: “I suddenly felt a very strong headache. I felt really weak, and I didn’t want to work anymore.”²⁰

Sleeplessness

A few children reported difficulty sleeping after working in tobacco fields, a symptom associated with nicotine exposure. Seventeen-year-old Ines R. told Human Rights Watch she routinely wore three layers of shirts to cover herself when working in tobacco fields. She explained, “If I don’t use those shirts, I can’t sleep in the night.”²¹

Elena G., 16, described a similar feeling: “It’s only during the summer when I’m working.... I don’t really get sleepy... I try to sleep and I just can’t.” Human Rights Watch asked if she thought it was related to anxiety, and she said, “No, having to go to work doesn’t really make me anxious.... I’m just not tired I guess you could say.”²²

¹⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Eliceo F., 16, Wayne County, North Carolina, July 16, 2015.

²⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Susana N., 16, and Sara N., 16, Lenoir County, North Carolina, July 17, 2015.

²¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Ines R., 17, and Jane R., 15, Wayne County, North Carolina, July 18, 2015.

²² Human Rights Watch interview with Elena G., 16, Lenoir County, North Carolina, July 20, 2015.

Skin Irritation

Some 16 and 17 year olds reported itchy or burning skin or skin rashes that they attributed to their work on tobacco farms in 2015. Human Rights Watch interviewed Jared W., a 16-year-old tobacco worker, on the front steps of his family's home in eastern North Carolina. He said, "I'm itching. I get like little bumps, mostly on my arms. It's from the tobacco."²³

Esteven O., a 17-year-old boy who started working in tobacco farming at age 12, told Human Rights Watch, "You get burned and sweaty, and when you wipe your face, it feels like a rash. It burns."²⁴

Alejandro M., 17, had a similar experience: "I get itchy. If you don't wear long sleeves, if it touches you, it'll itch you the rest of the day."²⁵ He added, "It burns and it's itchy sometimes. Like your face feels itchy... [and you get] the chemicals on your hand, and when you scratch your face, then your face burns."²⁶

Sixteen-year-old Javier M. reported similar symptoms while working on tobacco farms in 2015: "It feels itchy sometimes, and it burns your skin if it's wet."²⁷

Respiratory Symptoms

Some children said they experienced respiratory symptoms while working in tobacco fields, including coughing, sneezing, and difficulty breathing. A few children said they felt they could not get sufficient air while working in fields of tall tobacco plants. Sixteen-year-old Derek P. told Human Rights Watch he has trouble breathing when working in tobacco farming: "It's because the plants are high. When they're low, you can breathe, but when they're high you can't breathe." He told Human Rights Watch that he is 5 feet 11 inches tall. "The plants are about the same height as me," he said.²⁸ Sofia F., 17, described a similar feeling, especially when she felt she needed to work quickly: "If you're behind [on the

²³ Human Rights Watch interview with Jared W., 16, Lenoir County, North Carolina, July 15, 2015.

²⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Esteven O., 17, Lenoir County, North Carolina, July 16, 2015.

²⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Alejandro M., 17, Wayne County, North Carolina, July 17, 2015.

²⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Alejandro M., 17, Wayne County, North Carolina, July 23, 2015.

²⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Javier M., 16, Lenoir County, North Carolina, July 15, 2015.

²⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Derek P., 16, Greene County, North Carolina, July 19, 2015.

work], and you're going really fast, you're trying to catch up, you lose [your] breath and you're like trying to get enough air, but you don't feel like it's enough."²⁹

Pesticide Exposure

All but a few of the 16 and 17-year-old children interviewed for this report described being exposed to pesticides while they worked on tobacco farms in North Carolina in 2015. Most of these children said that they saw tractors spraying pesticides in fields where they worked or in adjacent fields, and reported that they could smell, feel, or taste the chemical spray as it drifted toward them.

A few children also reported entering tobacco fields that had very recently been sprayed with pesticides. A number of children reported immediate illness after coming into contact with pesticides, including headaches, nausea, dizziness, lightheadedness, difficulty breathing, itching and irritation of the nose and throat, sneezing, salivating, and burning and watering of the eyes. Most children said they had never received education or training about the dangers of pesticide exposure. Many reported that they were not even notified prior to pesticide applications on or near the fields where they were working.

Human Rights Watch interviewed 17-year-old Juan R. in his front yard while his younger siblings played nearby. He described feeling sick while working near spraying in 2015:

I was there cutting the flowers, and the tractor was on the other side [of the field], but when the wind blew, there was a strong smell.... We always have the same reaction when they're spraying—with nausea, dizziness—because it's so strong. You can't handle it.

When asked how far he was from the tractor, he pointed across the street, saying, "It was close. We were in one field, and just across the way, was the field. We could smell it."³⁰

Sixteen-year-old Hannah W. told Human Rights Watch she got very sick when someone applied pesticides from a tractor in a field where she was working in 2015:

²⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Sofia F., 17, Lenoir County, North Carolina, July 21, 2015.

³⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Juan R., 17, Pitt County, North Carolina, July 19, 2015.

That's when I got sick, when they sprayed that thing. They sprayed the pesticides. I felt dizzy and felt like throwing up. I was sick from 11 [a.m.] to 2 [p.m.]. I sat out then went back to work.... It was in the same field where we were working, where we had already gone [to remove flowers and suckers].³¹

Jeffrey R., also 16, has been working in tobacco farming since age 13. He said he saw a farmer applying pesticides from a tractor in 2015: "The farmer, when we were close to his field, he was spraying. Sometimes we'd be working in the next field over. I'd cover my nose. It smelled like something strong.... It made it a little hard to breathe. Like you have something in your throat."³²

In an interview with Human Rights Watch at her family's home in eastern North Carolina, Fabiana H., 16, said she sometimes saw a tractor spraying in an adjacent field while she worked in 2015:

[It's] not the field we're in, but the one beside it [where they spray]. It smells like stinkbugs. It's like I can smell all that and my head starts hurting. When you smell it, you taste it, and it's not the same when you breathe. It's hard breathing. We put rags in our faces so you can't smell it. We use rags, like bandanas, to cover our face.³³

"The smell is so strong," said 16-year-old Briana G., who worked on tobacco farms with her cousin in 2014. "It smells like Clorox. I could just smell it today. I was in one field, and they were spraying in another." She reported nausea after coming into contact with pesticides through drift. "I feel like throwing up," she said.³⁴

Sixteen-year-old Susana N., and her twin sister Sara, also described working near areas where pesticides are being applied:

³¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Hannah W., 16, Wayne County, North Carolina, July 18, 2015.

³² Human Rights Watch interview with Jeffrey R., 16, Lenoir County, North Carolina, July 16, 2015.

³³ Human Rights Watch interview with Fabiana H., 16, Lenoir County, North Carolina, July 15, 2015.

³⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Briana G., 16, and Jorge G., 14, Lenoir County, North Carolina, July 16, 2015.

We are just working ... and the worker is on the tractor spraying, almost very close to us. But they don't take us out of that area. They don't even warn us that it is dangerous. Nothing. We are just working and we cover ourselves well because the smell is very strong, and we get sick with the smell of that spray.... I personally feel dizzy. With the spraying in addition to the heat, one does get dizzy and with the urge to vomit. Because sometimes I just feel the need to spit, I feel my mouth is very bitter.

Sara reported similar symptoms: "I feel dizzy, very dizzy because the smell is unbearable. It's very strong and my stomach begins to feel stirred. I feel as if I am going to faint right then and there from the smell."³⁵

Heat

All 16 and 17 year olds interviewed reported working in extreme and unrelenting heat on tobacco farms in 2015. "You feel the heat inside your body," said Alejandro M., a 17-year-old who started working in tobacco farming with his mother when he was 14:

You feel like your head is hot.... At 1 [p.m.] it's when it starts, like, you start to feel like mad because it's just hot. You can't stand it. But you still keep going.... whenever you're working in the heat, it feels like you're weak. Like your head starts kind of like moving, you start feeling dizzy.³⁶

Sixteen-year-old Eduardo M., who recently migrated to North Carolina from Mexico, described a similar feeling: "It makes you weak because you're working all day under the sun. That's what gets me. I feel really weak. The work is not difficult, or easy, it's the heat that gets us."³⁷

Repetitive Motions

The teenage children interviewed by Human Rights Watch described performing prolonged repetitive motions for extended periods of time, including working bent over at the waist or

³⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Susana N., 16, and Sara N., 16, Lenoir County, North Carolina, July 17, 2015.

³⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Alejandro M., 17, Wayne County, North Carolina, July 23, 2015.

³⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Eduardo M., 16, and Ricardo D., 16, Wayne County, North Carolina, July 17, 2015.

crawling on hands and knees to remove weeds or uproot plants, and reaching above their heads and twisting their wrists to top tobacco plants and remove suckers.

Children reported pain and soreness after engaging in repetitive motions. Esteven O., 17, who has been working in tobacco farming since he was 12, told Human Rights Watch, “My arms were sore. I’m short, and the plants were tall. And if you’re suckering, your back and your feet will be sore from all that walking.”³⁸ Sixteen-year-old Jeffrey R., who works in tobacco farming with his mother, had a similar experience: “Your feet get tired. I get pain in my shoulders. Sometimes the plants are kind of tall and I have to stretch my arm.”³⁹

Briana G., also 16, told Human Rights Watch she experienced pain when “bending down to get the burned leaves out of the bottom of the plant.” She explained, “You have to bend down, and sometimes your back is hurting.”⁴⁰

Inconsistent Access to Toilets

Several of the children reported that there were toilets on some of the farms where they worked in 2015, and Human Rights Watch observed portable toilets on some tobacco farms while doing field research for this report. However, most children interviewed said that they lacked access to a bathroom while working at some point in the 2015 season.

They described discomfort from refraining from using the toilet, and embarrassment from trying to figure out how to relieve themselves at work. Human Rights Watch interviewed 17-year-old Ines R. along with her younger sister. Ines said, “I have to wait. It’s embarrassing. Especially because we’re girls, we’re not the same as guys, we need more privacy.... We work with different people. Some take restrooms out there, and some don’t.” When asked how she coped with working on farms where there wasn’t a restroom, she said, “I don’t know, it just isn’t comfortable, and especially when you’re on your days [menstruating]. It’s one of the worst things a girl has to go through.”⁴¹

³⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Esteven O., 17, Lenoir County, North Carolina, July 16, 2015.

³⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Jeffrey R., 16, Lenoir County, North Carolina, July 16, 2015.

⁴⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Briana G., 16, and Jorge G., 14, Lenoir County, North Carolina, July 16, 2015.

⁴¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Ines R., 17, and Jane R., 15, Wayne County, North Carolina, July 18, 2015.

Lack of Workplace Protections

Though all children worked in environments where they were exposed to toxic substances, extreme heat, and other dangers, most children interviewed by Human Rights Watch said they had never received any health education or safety training regarding the dangers of work in tobacco farming.

A handful of children said that their employers provided them with gloves or garbage bags to wear to protect themselves in the fields. No children were provided with water-resistant clothing, which is recommended by the United States Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to protect tobacco workers from exposure to nicotine.⁴² Only one child reported having access to a suitable handwashing facility with soap at work.

Most children interviewed said they had not received any information about the hazards of pesticides or how to protect themselves and their family members from harm. For example, Alexa R., a 16-year-old worker, said her employers failed to notify workers when they would apply pesticides. “They wouldn’t even tell us when they sprayed it,” she said. “We’d just get in the field and have to figure it out ourselves.”⁴³

Sofia F., 17, has been working on tobacco farms since she was 13, and trains for the cross-country team in the evenings after work. She said her mother was the only one who taught her how to protect herself in the fields. “None of my bosses or contractors or crew leaders have ever told us anything about pesticides and how we can protect ourselves from them.... When I worked with my mom, she would take care of me, and she would like always make sure I was okay. ... Our bosses don’t give us anything except for our checks. That’s it.”⁴⁴

When asked if they had been trained on how to protect themselves from the nicotine in the plants, most children said they had never even heard of nicotine poisoning or Green Tobacco Sickness.

⁴² Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), “Recommended Practices: Green Tobacco Sickness,” March 2015, <https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3765.pdf> (accessed September 30, 2015), p. 2.

⁴³ Human Rights Watch interview with Alexa R., 16, Greene County, North Carolina, July 19, 2015.

⁴⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Sofia F., 17, Lenoir County, North Carolina, July 21, 2015.

Very few children were provided with personal protective equipment by their employers. The experience of Jared W., 16, was typical among the children interviewed by Human Rights Watch in 2015: “You have to get your own gloves,” he said. He told Human Rights Watch that he brought a plastic garbage bag from home to use as a rain suit: “I use a bag. I put it over my clothes. It covers my chest, but my hands and arms get sticky and wet. It’ll get dry when the sun comes out, but it stays sticky for a long time.”⁴⁵

Almost none of the children interviewed said they had access to a place to wash their hands with soap. “There’s no place to wash our hands,” said Fabiana H., 16. “Just in the shop [at lunchtime]. Or if we stay in the field for lunch, we have the water bottles and we wash our hands with them.” She said there was no soap at her worksite. She described her hands on a typical work day as, “Dirty and like they have a nasty taste when you’re about to eat. It’s sour and just nasty, that taste.”⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Jared W., 16, Lenoir County, North Carolina, July 15, 2015.

⁴⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Fabiana H., 16, Lenoir County, North Carolina, July 15, 2015.

III. Health Risks for Children Working in Tobacco Farming

Tobacco farming in the United States poses significant risks to children's health and safety, due to both the nature of the work and the circumstances in which it is carried out. Children working on US tobacco farms are exposed to nicotine, toxic pesticides, and extreme heat. Personal protective equipment could reduce the risks of nicotine and pesticide exposure, but can greatly increase children's risk of suffering heat-related illnesses. In addition, tobacco farming requires workers to engage in prolonged repetitive motions, which can lead to long-term and chronic pain, especially for children.

Nicotine Exposure

Public health research has shown that tobacco workers absorb nicotine through their skin while handling tobacco plants. Studies have found that non-smoking adult tobacco workers have similar levels of nicotine in their bodies as smokers in the general population.⁴⁷

In the short-term, absorption of nicotine through the skin can lead to acute nicotine poisoning, called Green Tobacco Sickness.⁴⁸ The most common symptoms of acute nicotine poisoning are nausea, vomiting, headaches, and dizziness. Some tobacco workers also report sleeplessness and loss of appetite together with other symptoms of nicotine poisoning. The poisoning generally lasts between a few hours to a few days. While rarely life-threatening, severe cases of nicotine poisoning can lead to dehydration and require emergency treatment.⁴⁹ Children are particularly vulnerable to nicotine poisoning because of their size, and because they are less likely than adults to have developed a tolerance to nicotine.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Individual variation would be expected based upon the use of personal protective equipment, season, and contact with tobacco, and abrasions on the skin, as well as other factors. Natalie M. Schmitt, Jochen Schmitt, Dimitris J. Kouimintzis, and Wilhelm Kirch, "Health Risks in Tobacco Farm Workers—A Review of the Literature," *Journal of Public Health*, vol. 15, (2007), p. 255.

⁴⁸ See, for example, Thomas A. Arcury, Sara A. Quandt, and John S. Preisser, "Predictors of Incidence and Prevalence of Green Tobacco Sickness Among Latino Farmworkers in North Carolina, USA," *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, vol. 55 (2001), p. 818; Thomas A. Arcury, Sara A. Quandt, et al., "The Incidence of Green Tobacco Sickness Among Latino Farmworkers," *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, vol. 43, no. 7 (2001), pp. 601-602.; Thomas A. Arcury, Sara A. Quandt, et al., "High Levels of Transdermal Nicotine Exposure Produce Green Tobacco Sickness in Latino Farmworkers," *Nicotine & Tobacco Research*, vol. 5 (2003), p. 315.

⁴⁹ Thomas A. Arcury, Sara A. Quandt, et al., "The Incidence of Green Tobacco Sickness Among Latino Farmworkers," *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, vol. 43, no. 7 (2001), p. 602.

⁵⁰ Robert H. McKnight and Henry A. Spiller, "Green Tobacco Sickness in Children and Adolescents," *Public Health Reports*, vol. 120 (November-December 2005), p. 604.

The long-term effects of nicotine absorption through the skin have not been studied, but public health research on smoking suggests that nicotine exposure during adolescence may have lasting consequences on brain development.⁵¹ The prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain responsible for executive function and attention, is one of the last parts of the brain to mature and continues developing throughout adolescence and into the early 20s.⁵² The prefrontal cortex is particularly susceptible to the impacts of stimulants, such as nicotine. Nicotine exposure in adolescence has been associated with mood disorders, and problems with memory, attention, impulse control, and cognition later in life.⁵³

Dr. Sara Quandt, professor of Epidemiology and Prevention at Wake Forest School of Medicine, explained some of the findings and limitations of existing research on nicotine exposure in an interview with Human Rights Watch in July 2015:

We really don't know what the long-term effects of Green Tobacco Sickness or nicotine poisoning are. We've not followed farmworkers or even tobacco farmers to know what the [long-term] effects are. ...We know from studies of other forms of nicotine exposure—either in smoking or in animal studies, laboratory studies—...that nicotine has an effect on the nervous system, particularly in young people, in developing organisms. What it does is to essentially reset parts of the brain. So there's an effect on the developing nervous system, so that we later on see differences in behavior, some issues with mental illness like anxiety and depression, in individuals who have been exposed, particularly early [at early ages] to nicotine.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Natalia A. Goriounova and Huibert D. Mansvelder, "Short- and Long-Term Consequences of Nicotine Exposure during Adolescence for Prefrontal Cortex Neuronal Network Function," *Cold Spring Harbor Perspectives in Medicine*, vol. 2, no. 12 (2012), pp. 1-14; Jennifer B. Dwyer, Susan C. McQuown, and Frances M. Leslie, "The Dynamic Effects of Nicotine on the Developing Brain," *Pharmacology & Therapeutics*, vol. 122, no. 2 (2009), pp. 125-139; United States Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Surgeon General, "The Health Consequences of Smoking—50 Years of Progress: A Report of the Surgeon General," Atlanta: US Department of Health and Human Services, 2014, <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/reports/50-years-of-progress/50-years-of-progress-by-section.html> (accessed September 28, 2015), p. 126.

⁵² Jay N. Giedd, "Structural Magnetic Resonance Imaging of the Adolescent Brain," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, vol. 1021 (2004), pp. 77-85.

⁵³ Sara A. Quandt and Thomas A. Arcury, "Health Effects for Children of Working in Tobacco Production" (paper prepared for the Eliminating Child Labor in Tobacco Growing (ECLT) Foundation, July 2014), pp. 1-2. On file with Human Rights Watch.

⁵⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Sara Quandt, professor, Epidemiology & Prevention, and Thomas Arcury, professor, Family & Community Medicine, Wake Forest School of Medicine, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, July 24, 2015.

Pesticide Exposure

Tobacco production in the US involves the application of a range of toxic chemicals to protect the crop from pests and promote optimal growth of leaves.⁵⁵ Several pesticides commonly used during tobacco farming belong to two chemical classes, organophosphates and carbamates, both of which are neurotoxins.⁵⁶

The US Government Accountability Office (GAO) explains that pesticides in these classes, “act on the nervous system to prevent the normal flow of nerve impulses to muscles that control both voluntary movement, such as walking, and involuntary movement, such as breathing and heart beat.”⁵⁷

Pesticides enter the human body when they are inhaled, ingested, or absorbed through the skin. Tobacco workers may be exposed to pesticides by being sprayed in the fields or through drift, when a pesticide applied in one area spreads to adjoining areas through the wind.⁵⁸ Workers may also suffer chronic exposure through contact with residues remaining on plants and in soil.⁵⁹

Pesticide exposure is associated with acute health problems including nausea, dizziness, vomiting, headaches, abdominal pain, and skin and eye problems.⁶⁰ Exposure to large

⁵⁵ Thomas A. Arcury and Sara A. Quandt, “Health and Social Impacts of Tobacco Production,” *Journal of Agromedicine*, vol. 11, no. 3-4 (2006), p. 75; Natacha Lecours, Guilherme E. G. Almeida, Jumanne M. Abdallah, Thomas E. Novotny, “Environmental Health Impacts of Tobacco Farming: A Review of the Literature,” *Tobacco Control*, vol. 21 (2012), p. 192.

⁵⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Thomas Arcury, professor, Family & Community Medicine, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, May 20, 2013. According to the EPA, pesticides in these classes affect the nervous system by disrupting the enzyme that regulates acetylcholine, a neurotransmitter. James R. Roberts and J. Routt Reigart, “Chapter 5: Organophosphate Insecticides,” in *Recognition and Management of Pesticide Poisonings*, 6th ed., eds. James R. Roberts and J. Routt Reigart (Washington, DC: Environmental Protection Agency, 2013), http://www2.epa.gov/sites/production/files/documents/rmpp_6thed_ch5_organophosphates.pdf (accessed November 25, 2015), pp. 43-55; James R. Roberts and J. Routt Reigart, “Chapter 6: N-Methyl Carbamate Insecticides,” in *Recognition and Management of Pesticide Poisonings*, 6th ed., eds. James R. Roberts and J. Routt Reigart (Washington, DC: Environmental Protection Agency, 2013), http://www2.epa.gov/sites/production/files/documents/rmpp_6thed_ch6_carbamates.pdf (accessed November 25, 2015), pp. 56-62..

⁵⁷ United States Government Accountability Office, “Pesticides on Tobacco: Federal Activities to Assess Risks and Monitor Residues,” GAO-03-485, March 2003, <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d03485.pdf> (accessed November 21, 2013).

⁵⁸ For detailed description of the risks associated with pesticide drift, see: Thomas A. Arcury and Sara A. Quandt, “Pesticide Exposure among Farmworkers and Their Families,” in *Latino Farmworkers in the Eastern United States: Health, Safety, and Justice*, eds. Thomas A. Arcury and Sara A. Quandt, (New York: Springer, 2009), p. 109.

⁵⁹ Sara A. Quandt and Thomas A. Arcury, “Health Effects for Children of Working in Tobacco Production.”

⁶⁰ Linda A. McCauley, W. Kent Anger, Matthew Keifer, Rick Langley, Mark G. Robson, and Diane Rohlman, “Studying Health Outcomes in Farmworker Populations Exposed to Pesticides,” *Environmental Health Perspectives*, vol. 114, no. 6 (2006), p. 953.

doses of pesticides can have severe health effects including spontaneous abortion and birth deformities, loss of consciousness, coma, and death.⁶¹ Long-term and chronic health effects of pesticide exposure are well documented and include respiratory problems, cancer, depression, neurologic deficits, and reproductive health problems.⁶²

Children are uniquely vulnerable to the adverse effects of toxic exposures as their brains and bodies are still developing.⁶³ In particular, many pesticides are highly toxic to the brain and reproductive health system,⁶⁴ both of which continue to grow and develop during adolescence.⁶⁵

While pesticides are applied to many crops cultivated in the United States, tobacco workers may be at especially high risk for pesticide exposure given the nature of work. The manual labor involved in US tobacco farming requires workers to have extensive contact with tobacco leaves. Tobacco plants are planted very close together, and workers often spend extended periods of time working in rows of densely planted tobacco plants, brushing up against leaves.

If the plants have been treated with pesticides, workers may suffer greater exposure to these pesticides than they would while performing agricultural work in other crops treated with pesticides.⁶⁶ In addition, jobs where workers directly handle pesticide-treated plants—such as topping or harvesting leaves by hand—can increase exposure, particularly in the absence of effective protective gear and handwashing.⁶⁷

⁶¹ Thomas A. Arcury and Sara A. Quandt, “Pesticide Exposure among Farmworkers and Their Families,” p. 106.

⁶² Linda A. McCauley, W. Kent Anger, Matthew Keifer, Rick Langley, Mark G. Robson, and Diane Rohlman, “Studying Health Outcomes in Farmworker Populations Exposed to Pesticides.”

⁶³ Catherine Karr, “Children’s Environmental Health in Agricultural Settings,” *Journal of Agromedicine*, vol. 17, no. 2, (2012), p. 128.

⁶⁴ James R. Roberts and J. Routt Reigart, “Chapter 21: Chronic Effects” in *Recognition and Management of Pesticide Poisonings*, 6th ed., eds. James R. Roberts and J. Routt Reigart (Washington, DC: Environmental Protection Agency, 2013), http://www2.epa.gov/sites/production/files/documents/rmpp_6thed_ch21_chroniceffects.pdf (accessed November 25, 2015), pp. 212-238.

⁶⁵ Catherine Lebel and Christian Beaulieu, “Longitudinal Development of Human Brain Wiring Continues from Childhood into Adulthood,” *Journal of Neuroscience*, vol. 31, no. 30 (2011), pp. 10937–10947; Medline Plus, “Adolescent Development,” US National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health, updated January 27, 2013, <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/002003.htm> (accessed September 28, 2015).

⁶⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Sara Quandt and Thomas Arcury, July 24, 2015.

⁶⁷ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Dr. Thomas Arcury, director of the Center for Worker Health at Wake Forest School of Medicine, February 24, 2014.

Heat

In the United States, tobacco is cultivated in extremely hot and humid climates. Working long hours in extreme heat can place children at risk of heat stroke and dehydration, particularly if they do not drink enough water and they are wearing extra clothes to protect from sunburn and exposure to nicotine and pesticides. Children are more susceptible than adults to heat illness.⁶⁸

A public health survey of 300 tobacco workers in 2009 found 40 percent suffered symptoms of heat illness.⁶⁹ The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in a review of heat-related fatalities among crop workers in the United States, found that from 1992 to 2006, “a total of 68 crop workers died from heat stroke, representing a rate nearly 20 times greater than for all US civilian workers.”⁷⁰

Protective Equipment Insufficient to Eliminate Risks

Though protective equipment may help mitigate the absorption of nicotine and pesticide residues through the skin, rain suits and watertight gloves would not completely eliminate exposure to these toxins and would greatly increase children’s risk of suffering heat-related illnesses.⁷¹

In an interview with Human Rights Watch, Dr. Thomas Arcury of Wake Forest School of Medicine explained, “We know that [it] decreases your risk for nicotine poisoning if you wear a rain suit. At the same time, you are working in ... 90-degree [Fahrenheit] temperatures in a rubber suit, so then you have to be really concerned about heat stress and dehydration.”⁷²

⁶⁸ Ibid. See also: Jeffrey R. Bytowski and Deborah L. Squire, “Heat Illness in Children,” *Current Sports Medicine Reports*, vol. 2, no. 6 (2007), p. 320 (noting that children are more susceptible than adults to heat illness because of “greater surface area to body mass ratio, lower rate of sweating, and slower rate of acclimatization”).

⁶⁹ Maria C. Mirabelli, Sara A. Quandt, Rebecca Crain, Joseph G. Grzywacz, Erin N. Robinson, Quirina M. Vallejos, Thomas A. Arcury, “Symptoms of Heat Illness Among Latino Farm Workers in North Carolina,” *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, vol. 39, no. 5 (2010), pp. 468-471.

⁷⁰ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), “Heat-Related Deaths Among Crop Workers – United States, 1992-2006,” *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, vol. 57, no. 24 (2008), p. 651.

⁷¹ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Dr. Thomas Arcury, February 24, 2014. See also, Thomas A. Arcury, Sara A. Quandt, et al., “A Clinic-Based, Case-Control Comparison of Green Tobacco Sickness among Minority Farmworkers: Clues for Prevention,” *Southern Medical Journal*, vol. 95, no. 9 (2002), p. 1010, and Natalie M. Schmitt, Jochen Schmitt, et al., “Health Risks in Tobacco Farm Workers—A Review of the Literature,” *Journal of Public Health*, vol. 15, (2007), p. 258.

⁷² Human Rights Watch interview with Sara Quandt and Thomas Arcury, July 24, 2015.

As a result, Human Rights Watch has determined that there is no practical way for children to work safely in the US when handling or coming into direct contact with tobacco in any form.

Repetitive Strain Injuries

Tobacco farming often requires workers to engage in prolonged repetitive motions for extended periods of time, putting them at risk of musculoskeletal disorders. According to the US Department of Labor, musculoskeletal disorders account for nearly one in four non-fatal agricultural occupational illnesses and injuries in the United States among adult and child farmworkers.⁷³ The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health has found that children are especially vulnerable to repetitive motion injuries because their bodies are still developing.⁷⁴ The impacts of repetitive strain injuries may be long-lasting and result in long-term health consequences, including chronic pain and arthritis.⁷⁵

⁷³ Email from Shane Stephens, economist, Bureau of Labor Statistics, US Department of Labor to Human Rights Watch, December 13, 2013. Data on nonfatal injuries and illnesses involving days away from work in the crop production industry for 2012. On file with Human Rights Watch.

⁷⁴ National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), “NIOSH Alert: Preventing Deaths, Injuries and Illnesses of Young Workers,” no. 2003-128, July 2003, <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2003-128/pdfs/2003128.PDF> (accessed September 28, 2015), pp. 1-2.

⁷⁵ Kermit G. Davis and Susan E. Kotowski, “Understanding the Ergonomic Risk for Musculoskeletal Disorders in the United States Agricultural Sector,” *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*, vol. 50 (2007), pp. 501-511.

IV. Children Are Not Adults

Physically, developmentally, and socially, children are different from adults, and these differences leave them uniquely vulnerable to the harmful effects of working in tobacco farming.

Younger children are smaller in size than adults, and have a greater body surface area to body mass ratio, meaning they have more skin relative to their body size through which they absorb nicotine, pesticides, and other toxins.⁷⁶ Children also have faster metabolic rates than adults, and consume more water and food, and breathe more air, pound for pound, than adults.⁷⁷ As a result, when nicotine or pesticides are present in the environment, children may suffer greater exposure to these toxins than an adult would in the same environment.

Children also have more years of life remaining than adults, meaning more time to suffer long-term health effects that develop over time.⁷⁸

Teenage Children's Vulnerability

Children under 18, including teenage children who may look fully-grown and physically mature, still remain in a critical stage of development as their nervous systems and reproductive systems are maturing.⁷⁹ Exposure to toxins during these critical years can have lasting impacts on children's growth and development.

Studies have shown that the brain, particularly the prefrontal cortex, continues developing throughout adolescence and into young adulthood.⁸⁰ The Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Young Adult Development Project explained the significance of the prefrontal

⁷⁶ Elaine A. Cohen Hubal, Linda S. Sheldon, Janet M. Burke, et al., "Children's Exposure Assessment: A Review of Factors Influencing Children's Exposure, and the Data Available to Characterize and Assess That Exposure," *Environmental Health Perspectives*, vol. 108, no. 6 (2000), p. 476.

⁷⁷ Catherine Karr, "Children's Environmental Health in Agricultural Settings," *Journal of Agromedicine*, vol. 17, no. 2, (2012), p. 128.

⁷⁸ Sara A. Quandt and Thomas A. Arcury, "Health Effects for Children of Working in Tobacco Production."

⁷⁹ Elaine M. Faustman, Susan M. Silbernagel, Richard A. Fenske, et al., "Mechanisms Underlying Children's Susceptibility to Environmental Toxicants," *Environmental Health Perspectives*, vol. 108, no. Suppl 1 (2000), pp. 13-21.

⁸⁰ Jay N. Giedd, "Structural Magnetic Resonance Imaging of the Adolescent Brain," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, vol. 1021 (2004), pp. 77-85.

cortex: “The cluster of functions that center in the prefrontal cortex is sometimes called the ‘executive suite,’ including calibration of risk and reward, problem-solving, prioritizing, thinking ahead, self-evaluation, long-term planning, and regulation of emotion.”⁸¹

The National Institute of Mental Health described the brain development that takes place during the teenage years:

A clue to the degree of change taking place in the teen brain came from studies in which scientists did brain scans of children as they grew from early childhood through age 20. The scans revealed unexpectedly late changes in the volume of gray matter, which forms the thin, folding outer layer or cortex of the brain. The cortex is where the processes of thought and memory are based.... While the details behind the changes in volume on scans are not completely clear, the results push the timeline of brain maturation into adolescence and young adulthood. In terms of the volume of gray matter seen in brain images, the brain does not begin to resemble that of an adult until the early 20s....

The scans also suggest that different parts of the cortex mature at different rates. Areas involved in more basic functions mature first: those involved, for example, in the processing of information from the senses, and in controlling movement. The parts of the brain responsible for more ‘top-down’ control, controlling impulses, and planning ahead—the hallmarks of adult behavior—are among the last to mature.⁸²

Children, even at ages 16 and 17, are less mature than adults, and may not be well-equipped to navigate or challenge dangerous situations at work, particularly when adults are in control. Research has shown that teenage children feel less vulnerable to harm, and

⁸¹ Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Young Adult Development Project, “Brain Changes,” undated, <http://hrweb.mit.edu/worklife/youngadult/brain.html> (accessed October 9, 2015).

⁸² National Institute of Mental Health, “The Teen Brain: Still Under Construction,” 2011, http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/the-teen-brain-still-under-construction/index.shtml?utm_source=LifeSiteNews.com+Daily+Newsletter&utm_campaign=2cofa956ob-LifeSiteNews_com_Intl_Full_Text_12_18_2012#pub5 (accessed October 13, 2015).

do not take the same safety precautions as adults, even when they have received the same training.⁸³ Studies have found adolescent children take more risks than adults, in part due to ongoing development of the prefrontal cortex.⁸⁴ Dr. David Tayloe, a pediatrician in eastern North Carolina, told Human Rights Watch:

There's no question that things are moving so much faster during adolescence than they do later in adulthood. And so you have this opportunity to influence the development of this brain that's changing.... Scientists are sure that the development of the brain during adolescence exceeds that of adults.... We know that the part of the brain that controls our emotions is in high gear during adolescence. And we're banking on the development of the cerebral cortex, which is the upper part of the brain that actually allows us to control our impulses and emotions, so that we actually can make it through adolescence and into adulthood.⁸⁵

A 2001 report by the Center for Health Communication at the Harvard School of Public Health summarizes the particular vulnerability of teenage children: "If there is any one bottom-line message that emerges from the analysis of research on adolescent and parenting tasks, it is that teenagers are vulnerable. They are still growing—their bodies, their brains, and their capacity to think, feel, relate, and work."⁸⁶

The brain is not fully mature at age 16.⁸⁷ Human Rights Watch's examination of the scientific literature could not find any evidence to suggest that children's vulnerability to harm from toxins like nicotine or pesticides changes at 16. On the contrary, the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recently commented on the particular

⁸³ Mary K. Salazar, Marie Napolitano, Jennifer A. Scherer and Linda A. McCauley, "Hispanic Adolescent Farmworkers' Perceptions Associated with Pesticide Exposure," *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, vol. 26, no. 2 (2004), pp. 146-166; Laurence Steinberg, "Cognitive and Affective Development in Adolescents," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, vol. 9, no. 2 (2005), pp. 69-74.

⁸⁴ Laurence Steinberg, "A Social Neuroscience Perspective on Adolescent Risk-Taking," *Developmental Review*, vol. 28, no. 1 (2008), pp. 78-106.

⁸⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Dr. David T. Tayloe, Jr., Goldsboro Pediatrics, Goldsboro, North Carolina, July 20, 2015.

⁸⁶ A. Rae Simpson, "Raising Teens: A Synthesis of Research and a Foundation for Action," Project on the Parenting of Adolescents, Center for Health Communication, Harvard School of Public Health, 2001, http://hrweb.mit.edu/worklife/raising-teens/pdfs/raising_teens_report.pdf (accessed October 13, 2015), p. 65.

⁸⁷ Massachusetts Institute of Technology Young Adult Development Project, "Brain Changes," undated, <http://hrweb.mit.edu/worklife/youngadult/brain.html> (accessed October 9, 2015).

vulnerability of teenage children in justifying its decision to ban all children under 18 from handling pesticides:

EPA recognizes that adolescents' bodies and judgment are still developing. While studies have not demonstrated a clear cut off point at which adolescents are fully developed, literature indicates that their development may continue until they reach their early to mid-20s. EPA also agrees that research has shown that adolescents may take more risks, be less aware of the potential consequences of their actions on themselves and others, and be less likely to protect themselves from known risks.⁸⁸

Caution in the Face of Uncertainty

Though research on the possible long-term effects of children's work in tobacco farming is limited, tobacco companies have acknowledged the potential harms to children of certain types of work in tobacco farming through policies to restrict some children's work. A number of scholars have invoked the "precautionary principle" to call for action in the face of uncertainty on a range of public health and environmental protection issues.⁸⁹

The precautionary principle has been set out in the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development as: "Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures."⁹⁰ By this principle, gaps in scientific evidence on the harms of certain aspects of children's work in tobacco farming should not be used as a reason to delay taking cost-effective preventive action to protect children from the plausible threats to their health posed by work in the crop.

⁸⁸ United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), "Pesticides; Agricultural Worker Protection Standard Revisions," September 28, 2015, http://www2.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-09/documents/agricultural_worker_protection_standard_revisions.pdf (accessed September 30, 2015).

⁸⁹ See, for example, David Kriebel, Joel Tickner, Paul Epstein, et al., "The Precautionary Principle in Environmental Science," *Environmental Health Perspectives*, vol. 109, no. 9 (2001), pp. 871-876; Joseph F. Gonzales, Neal D. Barnard, David J.A. Jenkins, Amy J. Lanou, Brenda Davis, Gordon Saxe, and Susan Levin, "Applying the Precautionary Principle to Nutrition and Cancer," *Journal of the American College of Nutrition*, vol. 33, no. 3 (2014), pp. 239-246; Knut Ringen, Philip J. Landrigan, Jeffrey O. Stull, Richard Duffy, James Melius, and Melissa A. McDiarmid, "Occupational Safety and Health Protections Against Ebola Virus Disease," *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*, vol. 58 (2015), pp. 703-714.

⁹⁰ Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, adopted June 14, 1992, U.N. Doc. A/CONF.151/26 (vol. 1), 31 ILM 874 (1992) principle 15.

Policymakers and the tobacco industry should consider the overwhelming evidence of the dangers to children of pesticide exposure and heat illness, and the potential long-term risks of nicotine exposure, rather than delaying action due to limitations in existing research.

A 2004 report by the World Health Organization, entitled “The Precautionary Principle: Protecting Public Health, the Environment and the Future of our Children,” states:

Debate about the precautionary principle is partly a response to the recognition of the severe social and economic costs of not taking precautions. Millions of children worldwide have suffered from neurological damage, diminished mental capacity and thus the ability to make a living as a result of exposure to lead from smelters, in paint and in petrol. Tobacco [products], asbestos and numerous other agents provide ample evidence of the high costs associated with waiting for convincing proof of harm. These cases exemplify the failure of science and policy to prevent damage to health and ecosystems and the resulting impacts on health and the economy.⁹¹

There are both ethical and practical limitations to conducting research on the health effects of tobacco farming on children. Given the dangers of the work and the special vulnerabilities of children, an experimental study of the health effects of tobacco farming on children would be unethical.

In practical terms, an observational study of long-term effects of work in tobacco farming would take years, or decades. Dr. Sara Quandt and Dr. Thomas Arcury with Wake Forest School of Medicine explain the challenges posed by studying this issue:

Research is also limited by the length of time between exposures and some significant outcomes, such as cancer and neurodegenerative diseases. Following a large enough sample with well-characterized exposures for long enough to be able to detect negative health outcomes is rarely possible.⁹²

⁹¹ This report mentions tobacco in the context of children’s use of cigarettes and other tobacco products, not tobacco farming. World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe, “The Precautionary Principle: Protecting Public Health, the Environment, and the Future of Our Children,” 2004, http://www.asser.nl/media/2227/cms_eel_96_1_book-precautionary-principle-protecting-public-health-the-environment.pdf (accessed September 30, 2015), p. 2.

⁹² Sara A. Quandt and Thomas A. Arcury, “Health Effects for Children of Working in Tobacco Production.”

V. International Standards

In recognition of the potential benefits of some forms of work, international law does not prohibit children from working.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, which the United States has signed but not ratified, states that children have a right “to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child’s education, or to be harmful to the child’s health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.”⁹³ In addition, the International Labour Organization’s (ILO) Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention, which the US has ratified, requires countries to prohibit certain types of work for children under age 18 as a matter of urgency, including work that is likely to jeopardize children’s physical or mental health, safety or morals.⁹⁴

As a state party to the Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention, the US is obligated to take immediate and effective steps to ascertain what forms and conditions of child labor in agriculture violate the convention and then eliminate them.⁹⁵ Far from acknowledging the dangers of agricultural work to children and taking these appropriate steps, the United States by law permits children to engage in such labor, including on tobacco farms, with fewer restrictions than children working in other industries. The ILO’s Committee of Experts has, on multiple occasions, strongly urged the US government to take measures to protect the health and safety of children working in agriculture.⁹⁶

Although the US government has the primary responsibility to respect, protect, and fulfill human rights under international law, private entities, including businesses, also have

⁹³ Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), adopted November 20, 1989, G.A. Res. 44/25, annex, 44 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 49) at 167, U.N. Doc. A/44/49 (1989), entered into force September 2, 1990, art. 32. The United States signed the CRC on February 16, 1995.

⁹⁴ International Labor Organization Convention No. 182 concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor (Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention), adopted June 17, 1999, 38 I.L.M. 1207 (entered into force November 19, 2000), ratified by the United States on December 2, 1999, art. 3.

⁹⁵ Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention, arts. 1, 4, 6, and 7.

⁹⁶ International Labour Organization (ILO) Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEAR), “Observation: Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182) - United States (Ratification: 1999),” adopted 2012, published 102nd ILC session (2013), http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:13100:0::NO:13100:P13100_COMMENT_ID:3057769:NO (accessed January 17, 2014).

internationally recognized responsibilities regarding human rights, including workers' rights and children's rights.⁹⁷

All businesses should have policies and procedures in place to ensure human rights are respected and not abused, to undertake adequate due diligence to identify and effectively mitigate human rights problems, and to adequately respond in cases where problems arise. The United Nations "Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights," which the UN Human Rights Council endorsed in 2011, reflect the expectation that businesses should respect human rights, avoid complicity in abuses, and ensure that any abuses that occur in spite of these efforts are adequately remedied. They specify that businesses must exercise due diligence to identify, prevent, mitigate, and account for the impact of their activities on human rights.⁹⁸

The Children's Rights and Business Principles, developed by United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the UN Global Compact, and Save the Children, and launched in March 2012, encourage businesses to contribute to the elimination of child labor in all business activities and business relationships. To accomplish this, businesses are encouraged not only to adopt child labor policies and due diligence procedures, but also to work with governments, social partners, and others to promote education and sustainable solutions to the root causes of child labor, including through programs to support youth employment, skills development, and job training opportunities for young workers.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 16 (2013) on State Obligations Regarding the Impact of the Business Sector on Children's Rights, U.N. Doc. CRC/C/GC/16, (2013), para. 4.

⁹⁸ UN Human Rights Council, "Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations 'Protect, Respect and Remedy' Framework," 2011, http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/GuidingPrinciplesBusinessHR_EN.pdf (accessed October 13, 2015). The UN Human Rights Council endorsed the Guiding Principles in resolution 17/4 of 16 June 2011: "Human Rights and Transnational Corporations and Other Business Enterprises," Resolution 17/4, A/HRC/17/L.17/Rev.1; UN Human Rights Council, "Mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the Issue of Human Rights and Transnational Corporations and Other Business Enterprises," Resolution 8/7, A/HRC/RES/8/7; UN Human Rights Council, "Human Rights and Transnational Corporations and Other Business Enterprises," Resolution 17/4, A/HRC/17/L.17/Rev.1.

⁹⁹ United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), UN Global Compact and Save the Children, "Children's Rights and Business Principles," 2012, http://www.unicef.org/csr/css/PRINCIPLES_23_02_12_FINAL_FOR_PRINTER.pdf (accessed September 30, 2015).

VI. United States Government's Failure to Protect Child Tobacco Workers

The United States government has long failed to protect children from the dangers of tobacco farming. Federal labor law allows farmworker children to work longer hours, at younger ages, and in more hazardous conditions than all other working children, and US laws and regulations have no special provisions to restrict children's work in tobacco, despite the documented dangers of the work.

The Fair Labor Standards Act, the federal law governing the employment of children, treats agricultural work fundamentally differently from work in any other sector. There is no minimum age for a child to begin working on a small farm with parental permission.¹⁰⁰ At 12, a child can work for any number of hours outside of school on a farm of any size with parental permission,¹⁰¹ and at 14, a child can work on any farm without parental permission.¹⁰² In all other sectors, 16 is the standard minimum age for most jobs, and younger children can work only in certain jobs for limited hours.¹⁰³ At 16, children working in agriculture can do jobs deemed "particularly hazardous" by the US secretary of labor, while in all other sectors it is necessary to be 18 to do hazardous work.¹⁰⁴

Members of Congress have repeatedly introduced legislation to eliminate the disparities in protection between child farmworkers and other working children, but the measures have never been brought to a vote.

¹⁰⁰ United States Code, Title 29—Labor, Chapter 8—Fair Labor Standards, Sec. 213. Exemptions, <http://uscode.house.gov/browse.xhtml>, (c)(1)(A). A "small farm" is one which did not employ more than 500 man-days of agricultural labor (or about 7 workers) during any calendar quarter of the preceding year.

¹⁰¹ United States Code, Title 29—Labor, Chapter 8—Fair Labor Standards, Sec. 213. Exemptions, <http://uscode.house.gov/browse.xhtml>, (c)(1)(B).

¹⁰² United States Code, Title 29—Labor, Chapter 8—Fair Labor Standards, Sec. 213. Exemptions, <http://uscode.house.gov/browse.xhtml>, (c)(1)(C).

¹⁰³ Children ages 14 and 15 can work in certain limited jobs, such as cashiers, stocking shelves, or washing cars, in retail or food service stores, and in gas stations but only for limited hours: up to 40 hours in a non-school week; up to 18 hours in a school week; up to 8 hours on a non-school day; and up to 3 hours on a school day.

¹⁰⁴ United States Code, Title 29—Labor, Chapter 8—Fair Labor Standards, Sec. 213. Exemptions, <http://uscode.house.gov/browse.xhtml>, (c)(2).

In 2011, the US Department of Labor proposed regulations to update the list of hazardous occupations in agriculture prohibited for children under age 16. The new rules would have prohibited children under 16 from “all work in the [*sic*] tobacco production and curing,”¹⁰⁵ except on family farms, but the Labor Department withdrew the proposed regulations in 2012 in response to opposition from some groups representing agricultural interests.¹⁰⁶

Since the regulations were withdrawn, the Labor Department has made no effort to reintroduce them, or pursue new regulations to protect children from hazardous work on tobacco farms.

On August 26, 2014, Human Rights Watch submitted formal complaints to the Labor Department’s Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regarding concerns with four states’ implementation and enforcement of the Field Sanitation Standard, which requires that farmworkers be provided with drinking water and accessible toilet and handwashing facilities.¹⁰⁷ OSHA indicated on March 20, 2015 that it was initiating a formal investigation that would take 90 days.¹⁰⁸ At time of writing, OSHA has not reported its findings to Human Rights Watch.

In March 2015, the secretary of labor and the director of the White House Domestic Policy Council convened a meeting to discuss how to address the problem of child labor in tobacco farming. The meeting was attended by representatives of tobacco growers groups, tobacco product manufacturing companies, leaf supply companies, and nongovernmental organizations, including Human Rights Watch.

¹⁰⁵ US Department of Labor, Wage and Hour Division, “29 CFR Parts 570 and 579: Notice of Proposed Rulemaking and Request for Comments: Child Labor Regulations, Orders and Statements of Interpretation; Child Labor Violations—Civil Money Penalties: Employment in Tobacco Production and Curing” in Federal Register, vol. 76, no. 171 (September 2, 2011) pp. 54864-54865, <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2011-09-02/pdf/2011-21924.pdf> (accessed October 9, 2015).

¹⁰⁶ US Department of Labor, Wage and Hour Division, “Child Labor Regulations, Orders and Statements of Interpretation; Child Labor Violations—Civil Money Penalties. Withdrawal of Proposed Rule,” Federal Register vol. 77, no. 103, May 29, 2012, <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2012-05-29/pdf/2012-12954.pdf> (accessed October 9, 2015).

¹⁰⁷ Human Rights Watch submitted complaints regarding the operation and administration of the State Occupational Safety and Health Plan in the Region III state of Virginia, and the Region IV states of Kentucky, North Carolina, and Tennessee. Letter from Human Rights Watch to MaryAnn Garrahan, regional administrator, Region III, Occupational Safety and Health Administration, August 26, 2014; Letter from Human Rights Watch to Teresa Harrison, acting regional administrator, Region IV, Occupational Safety and Health Administration, August 26, 2014. On file with Human Rights Watch.

¹⁰⁸ Letter from Doug Kalinowski, director, Directorate of Cooperative and State Programs, Occupational Safety and Health Administration to Human Rights Watch, March 20, 2015.

On the same day, OSHA and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health jointly issued a bulletin on preventing Green Tobacco Sickness (GTS).¹⁰⁹ The bulletin recommends steps employers should take to protect the health of tobacco workers, and states, “Children and adolescents may be more sensitive to chemical exposures, more likely to suffer from GTS, and may suffer more serious health effects than adults.”¹¹⁰

In April 2015, Senator Richard Durbin (D-Ill.) and Representative David Cicilline (D-R.I.) introduced legislation to prohibit children under 18 from working in direct contact with tobacco. At time of writing, the bill has not been brought for a vote in either house of Congress.

In September 2015, the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced long-awaited changes to the Agricultural Worker Protection Standard, the federal regulations aimed at protecting farmworkers from pesticide exposure.¹¹¹ For the first time, the EPA’s Agricultural Worker Protection Standard will ban children under 18 from handling pesticides and re-entering fields where pesticides were recently sprayed and entry is restricted. The new rules will also require pesticide safety training for workers every year, rather than every five years, expand training content, improve the protective equipment used in the fields, and mandate better record-keeping.¹¹²

The changes to the Worker Protection Standard marked the first regulatory action taken by the US government to protect 16 and 17-year-old child farmworkers, who otherwise are permitted to do work classified as particularly hazardous to children.

¹⁰⁹ “Labor Secretary Announces Bulletin on Preventing Green Tobacco Sickness,” Occupational Safety and Health Administration News Release, March 27, 2015, <http://www.dol.gov/opa/media/press/osha/OSHA20150520.htm> (accessed September 30, 2015).

¹¹⁰ Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), “Recommended Practices: Green Tobacco Sickness,” March 2015, <https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3765.pdf> (accessed September 30, 2015).

¹¹¹ US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), “Revisions to the Worker Protection Standard,” September 28, 2015, <http://www2.epa.gov/pesticide-worker-safety/revisions-worker-protection-standard> (accessed September 30, 2015).

¹¹² US EPA, “Pesticides; Agricultural Worker Protection Standard Revisions,” September 28, 2015, http://www2.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-09/documents/agricultural_worker_protection_standard_revisions.pdf (accessed September 30, 2015).

VII. Tobacco Industry Steps to Address Child Labor

Before publishing our 2014 report on hazardous child labor in tobacco farming, Human Rights Watch shared our research findings and recommendations with 10 companies that purchase tobacco from the United States, including eight manufacturers of tobacco products (Altria Group, British American Tobacco, China National Tobacco, Imperial Tobacco Group, Japan Tobacco Group, Lorillard, Philip Morris International, and Reynolds American), and two leaf merchant companies (Alliance One International and Universal Corporation). Nine companies responded. Human Rights Watch subsequently met and further corresponded with executives of these companies.¹¹³ While all expressed concerns about child labor in their supply chains, at the time we published our 2014 report, these companies' approaches to child labor varied widely, as detailed in that report.¹¹⁴

Since we published our 2014 report, a number of tobacco companies and growers groups have taken additional steps to address child labor, as described below.

When preparing this report, Human Rights Watch again sent letters to each of these companies,¹¹⁵ presenting the findings of our 2015 research and posing questions about their most current policies regarding work by children under 18 in tobacco farming. Eight companies responded.¹¹⁶ Several important recent developments in company policies and industry-led initiatives are summarized below, along with an analysis of each company's current policy framework.

Some companies also shared information about their efforts to implement their policy commitments and monitor for child labor or other human rights problems in their supply chains. Human Rights Watch did not analyze the quality and effectiveness of each company's monitoring efforts, as such analysis was beyond the scope of our research. We

¹¹³ Only China National Tobacco did not respond to Human Rights Watch's letters or repeated attempts to secure a meeting with company executives.

¹¹⁴ Human Rights Watch, *Tobacco's Hidden Children: Hazardous Child Labor in United States Tobacco Farming*.

¹¹⁵ Human Rights Watch sent letters to: Altria Group, British American Tobacco, China National Tobacco, Imperial Tobacco Group, Japan Tobacco Group, Philip Morris International, Alliance One International, and Universal Corporation. In June 2015, Reynolds American acquired Lorillard. Lorillard is now a wholly-owned subsidiary of Reynolds American. "Reynolds American Completes Acquisition of Lorillard and Related Divestitures," Reynolds American Press Release, June 12, 2015, <http://www.reynoldsameric.com/About-Us/Press-Releases/Press-Release-Details-/2015/Reynolds-American-completes-acquisition-of-Lorillard-and-related-divestitures/default.aspx> (accessed September 30, 2015).

¹¹⁶ Copies of the company responses to Human Rights Watch can be found in a web annex to this report, available at <http://hrw.org/node/284122>.

recognize that there may be gaps between the companies' stated policies and compliance and enforcement on farms.

Human Rights Watch has also engaged with tobacco growers groups in North Carolina and Kentucky, and has been involved in dialogue regarding child labor and labor rights through two multi-stakeholder initiatives, as detailed later in this chapter.

Changes Since Human Rights Watch's 2014 Report

- Altria Group (Altria) and Reynolds American, the two largest US-based tobacco product manufacturing companies, each announced publicly that they would prohibit the hiring of children under 16 on tobacco farms in their US supply chains.
- Reynolds American stated that it prohibits all children under 18 from engaging in hazardous work on farms in its supply chain, as defined by the US regulations, which legally apply only to children under 16.
- Alliance One International (AOI), one of the world's largest leaf supply companies, prohibited the hiring of any workers under 16 in the US.
- AOI and Universal Corporation (Universal) stated that their US operations adhere to Philip Morris International's (PMI's) child labor requirements, following a change in PMI's leaf purchasing model in the US.
- British American Tobacco (BAT) and Imperial Tobacco Group (Imperial), the two-largest UK-based tobacco product manufacturing companies, for the first time specified to Human Rights Watch the tasks they define as hazardous work prohibited for children under 18 anywhere in their supply chains.
- Two of the largest tobacco growers associations in the US—the Kentucky-based Council for Burley Tobacco and the Tobacco Growers Association of North Carolina—independently issued statements calling on their member growers not to employ children under 16 in tobacco farming.
- The members of the Eliminating Child Labour in Tobacco Growing (ECLT) Foundation, an industry-supported initiative based in Geneva, signed a joint pledge of commitment to combat child labor and to eliminate all forms of child labor within tobacco-sourcing chains.
- The International Labour Organization (ILO) and the ECLT Foundation entered into an agreement to develop global guidance on hazardous child labor in tobacco growing.

Tobacco Manufacturing Companies' Current Policies

Increasing Alignment Among Some Companies

Each company's current policy concerning child labor in the US and globally is outlined below. There appears to be increasing alignment in the policies of several leading international tobacco companies contacted by Human Rights Watch regarding the minimum age to work and the specific tasks that constitute hazardous labor in tobacco farming. For BAT, Imperial, PMI, and AOI, these policies apply to their global supply chains, including in the US. As noted above, Universal implements the standards established in PMI's global policy in the US, as well as in some other countries.

While Japan Tobacco International (JTI) is implementing the more protective child labor standards in its Agricultural Labor Practices policy in a number of countries around the world, it does not implement the policy in its US operations, only requiring growers to comply with US law. Of the companies that responded to Human Rights Watch, JTI is the only company that is not implementing a policy in the US that offers greater protection to child workers than US law and regulations.

BAT, Imperial, JTI, PMI, AOI, and Universal all have agricultural labor practices policies that prohibit children under 18 from performing hazardous work, defined as: harvesting, topping, suckering, operating vehicles or machinery with moving parts, using sharp tools in movement, handling and applying crop protection agents (pesticides) or fertilizers, carrying or lifting heavy loads, working at heights, working long hours, and working in extreme temperatures.¹¹⁷ None of these companies make exceptions for children working on family farms.

JTI and BAT make exceptions for 16 and 17 year olds to perform hazardous work, if such work is permitted by local legislation and if children are given training and protective equipment, as detailed below.

BAT, Imperial, JTI, PMI, AOI, and Universal also now have nearly identical policies concerning the minimum age to work, consistent with International Labour Organization

¹¹⁷ Some companies also specify working at night. Japan Tobacco International (JTI)'s policy also includes operating powered farm tools, exposure to excessive noise, vibration or dust. For more detail, see citations referenced in company sections below.

(ILO) Convention No. 138. The policies prohibit work for children younger than the age for completion of compulsory schooling, and in any case, not younger than 15 (14 in developing countries), except light work by children ages 13 to 15 (12 to 14 in developing countries). If local legislation is more protective, then the more protective standard should prevail. All of these companies except JTI specify that 13 to 15 year olds are limited to light work on family farms. JTI's policy states, "Children from the age of 13 can do light work in accordance with local legislation, provided that it does not involve tobacco growing."¹¹⁸

Altria Group

In December 2014, Altria Group—parent to three US tobacco companies, including Philip Morris USA, the largest cigarette company in the US, and the manufacturer of brands such as Marlboro, Basic, L&M, Parliament, and Virginia Slims—announced that it would “establish a minimum age for employment at 16 years of age,” for all of its contracted growers in the US. Altria would also require “parental/legal guardian consent for those under 18 who wish to be hired to work on the farm.”¹¹⁹ Prior to this change, the company deferred to US labor law for the minimum age to work, allowing children as young as 12 to work unlimited hours outside of school on any farm, with no minimum age for children to work on small farms. Altria's new child labor requirements exclude “family members” of the farm owner or operator.

Altria has not apparently made any changes to its policy regarding hazardous work for children working on farms in its supply chain, although the policy remains more protective than US law. The company prohibits tobacco workers under 18 from performing hazardous work as defined by the US secretary of labor's list of hazardous occupations. Under US law, these tasks are prohibited only for children under 16 in agriculture.¹²⁰ The US hazardous work list, however, lacks any provisions to protect children from the risks of handling tobacco.

Altria states that it monitors for child labor through assessments asking if a grower has hired any worker under 18, as well as a pilot project to include worker interviews involving

¹¹⁸ Japan Tobacco International, “Agricultural Labor Practices 2014,” 2014, http://www.jti.com/files/9314/1052/2789/JTI_Agricultural_Labor_Practices.pdf (accessed November 12, 2015).

¹¹⁹ Letter from Linwood Sykes, director, Leaf Procurement, Altria Client Services, to Human Rights Watch, December 11, 2014.

¹²⁰ Letter from Linwood Sykes, October 29, 2015.

questions regarding a worker's age and whether the worker's own children are employed on the farm.¹²¹

British American Tobacco

British American Tobacco is a leading global tobacco company with products sold in over 200 markets and has more than 200 tobacco product brands in its portfolio, including Pall Mall, the third largest cigarette brand in the world.¹²² BAT owns a 42 percent stake in the US tobacco manufacturing company Reynolds American.¹²³

BAT's child labor policy prohibits work by children under 15, except for light work by children ages 13 to 15 on their family farms, or in the case of training programs by a "competent authority."¹²⁴ The company bans hazardous work for children under 18, and in an October 2015 letter for the first time detailed to Human Rights Watch which tasks constitute hazardous labor under BAT's child labor policy, as noted above. BAT clarified that its policy defines hazardous work as "including, but not restricted to harvesting, topping and suckering - because [these tasks] may involve exposure to Green Tobacco Sickness (GTS)," and accepts that "where suitable precautions take place to mitigate GTS," 16 and 17-year-old youth may work, provided that they "have safety training and appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) provided by the farmer prior to commencing work."¹²⁵ BAT noted that there is no standard definition of hazardous work in the tobacco industry, and is engaged in an international multi-stakeholder initiative to reach such a definition. See more below in "Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives."¹²⁶

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² British American Tobacco (BAT), "Who We Are," undated, http://www.bat.com/group/sites/UK__9D9KCY.nsf/vwPagesWebLive/DO52ADCY (accessed November 12, 2015); BAT, "Our Brands," undated, http://www.bat.com/group/sites/UK__9D9KCY.nsf/vwPagesWebLive/DO52ADK2?opendocument (accessed November 12, 2015).

¹²³ Reynolds American was formed in 2004 by a merger between two US cigarette companies: the Brown & Williamson Tobacco Corporation, previously owned by BAT, and R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company. BAT, "Our History – A Timeline," undated, http://www.bat.com/group/sites/UK__9D9KCY.nsf/vwPagesWebLive/DO52ADGE?opendocument (accessed November 12, 2015).

¹²⁴ Letter from Simon Cleverly, group head of corporate affairs, British American Tobacco, to Human Rights Watch, October 30, 2015.

¹²⁵ Email from Scott Brodie, senior external relations manager, Legal & External Affairs - Corporate Affairs, British American Tobacco, to Human Rights Watch, November 18, 2015.

¹²⁶ Ibid. See more below, "Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives," p. 50.

In an October 2015 letter to Human Rights Watch, BAT stated that it had “prioritised the independent review of our supply chain in the US this year.” BAT monitors its supply chain through the Social Responsibility in Tobacco Production Program (SRTP), which is used by other tobacco manufacturing companies, including Imperial. BAT relies on SRTP self-assessments prepared by leaf suppliers, on-site reviews of all leaf suppliers over a four-year cycle, and visits to tobacco growers contracted by the suppliers. BAT did not specify the terms of reference of the monitoring, including whether audits include interviews with workers, and whether audits take place during times of the year when child tobacco workers are most likely to be engaged in work.¹²⁷

China National Tobacco

China National Tobacco has not responded to multiple letters sent by Human Rights Watch since 2013 and has not provided any information about its policies and procedures regarding child labor.

Imperial Tobacco Group

The UK-based Imperial Tobacco Group operates in more than 160 countries worldwide and manufactures major cigarette brands, Davidoff and Gauloises.¹²⁸ Imperial reports a “total Group market share” of 13.3 percent.¹²⁹

Imperial follows ILO standards concerning the minimum age for work.¹³⁰ In line with ILO standards, the company emphasizes that work should not interfere with education. Imperial also bans hazardous work for children under 18, which it specified for the first time in an October 2015 letter to Human Rights Watch to include: harvesting, topping, and suckering; operating machinery with moving parts; using sharp tools in movement;

¹²⁷ Letter from Cleverly, October 30, 2015.

¹²⁸ Imperial Tobacco Group, “About Us,” undated, <http://www.imperial-tobacco.com/index.asp?page=2> (accessed November 12, 2015); Imperial Tobacco Group, “Our optimised portfolio,” undated, <http://www.imperial-tobacco.com/index.asp?page=33> (accessed November 12, 2015).

¹²⁹ Imperial Tobacco Group, “Preliminary Results for the 12 Months Ended 30 September 2015,” November 3, 2015, <http://www.imperial-tobacco.com/index.asp?page=56&newscategory=18&year=2015&newsid=2171> (accessed November 12, 2015).

¹³⁰ Letter from Kristy Green-Mann, head of Corporate Responsibility, Imperial Tobacco Limited, to Human Rights Watch, October 26, 2015. The International Labour Organization (ILO) Minimum Age Convention (Convention No. 138) identifies a possible exception in developing countries for children ages 12-14. In all other cases, the convention establishes the age for children to engage in light work as 13-15.

handling or applying fertilizers and pesticides; carrying heavy loads; working at heights; working long hours; and work in extreme temperatures. Tasks that children under 18 may perform outside of school and up to eight hours per day include transplanting, weeding, and sorting dried tobacco leaves.¹³¹ Imperial stated that it supports a “universal definition of hazardous work for children under 18 that is specific to tobacco growing,” and supports the ECLT and ILO initiative to develop this standard.¹³²

Imperial, like BAT and other tobacco companies, currently relies on the SRTP program for monitoring. Imperial noted the current development of a Sustainable Tobacco Program, which will be a “robust, comprehensive and focused” global program to assess suppliers in four areas: “Crop, Environment, People and Facility.” Imperial stated that it believes this “enhanced and agreed global program will help to alleviate the assessment burden on suppliers and better unify standards.”¹³³

Japan Tobacco Group

Japan Tobacco Group describes itself as “a leading international tobacco company with operations in over 70 countries” and produces brands including Winston and Camel.¹³⁴ Japan Tobacco International (JTI), responsible for the group’s international operations, has an Agricultural Labor Practices policy (ALP) that follows the ILO conventions regarding the minimum age for children to work, however the policy is not currently being implemented in the US.¹³⁵

In the US, JTI requires its growers to comply with standards known as the US Tobacco Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) Program, which includes agricultural labor practices, but only as defined by US law.¹³⁶ Regarding child labor, the US Tobacco GAP Program requires growers to: “Follow all relevant contractual and legal requirements concerning the regulations on child

¹³¹ Letter from Green-Mann, October 26, 2015.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Japan Tobacco Group, “Annual Report FY2014, Year Ended December 31, 2014,” 2014, http://www.jt.com/investors/results/annual_report/pdf/annual.fy2014_E_all.pdf (accessed October 5, 2015) p. 4.

¹³⁵ Japan Tobacco International, “Agricultural Labor Practices 2014,” 2014, http://www.jti.com/files/9314/1052/2789/JTI_Agricultural_Labor_Practices.pdf (accessed November 12, 2015).

¹³⁶ Letter from Maarten Bevers, vice president, Global Leaf, Corporate Affairs and Communications, Japan Tobacco International, to Human Rights Watch, October 27, 2015. For more on the US GAP, see: US Tobacco GAP Manual, undated, <http://www.gapconnections.com/GAPC%20Book/Guidelines.pdf> (accessed November 12, 2015).

labor,” and advises growers to review federal and state laws governing the employment of children under 18 in agriculture.¹³⁷ As such, growers may employ children at the age of 12 for unlimited hours outside of school on a farm of any size, and children younger than 12 may be employed on small farms. Children at age 16 would be permitted to perform hazardous work, as defined by US regulations, which do not restrict children from handling tobacco.

Regarding monitoring, JTI stated in a letter to Human Rights Watch, “In the United States, where farming techniques are advanced and our growers have little need for frequent support visits by JTI farming experts, we intend to implement a rigorous auditing program. We are also now working to further enhance Industry GAP and its auditing process.”¹³⁸ In a later communication to Human Rights Watch, the company said, “We seek such enhancements, with the aim to have an agricultural labor standard using a meaningful auditing process in the US that is comparable with the individual ALP standards industry players have in other parts of the world.”¹³⁹

JTI has undertaken a gradual rollout of its Agricultural Labor Practices (ALP) policy in a number of other countries around the world, with the aim to cover 100 percent of growers, including those contracted by third parties by 2019. The initial countries of implementation are mainly in Africa.¹⁴⁰ JTI aims to include the US by 2019, through “enhanced labor standards in the US Industry GAP and its auditing process.”¹⁴¹

Under its ALP implemented in some countries outside the US, JTI prohibits children under 18 from doing hazardous work and considers a number of tasks hazardous including, “Handling wet green tobacco leaves and harvesting, topping and suckering of tobacco.” Under the policy, 16 and 17-year-old children may perform hazardous work “if permitted by local legislation, their health, safety and morals are fully protected, and they have received adequate training on performing such tasks.”¹⁴² JTI believes that 16 and 17-year-

¹³⁷ US Tobacco GAP Manual, pp. 16-17.

¹³⁸ Letter from Bevers, October 27, 2015.

¹³⁹ Email from Maarten Bevers, vice president, Global Leaf, Corporate Affairs and Communications, Japan Tobacco International, to Human Rights Watch, November 13, 2015.

¹⁴⁰ Letter from Bevers, October 27, 2015.

¹⁴¹ Email from Bevers, November 13, 2015.

¹⁴² Japan Tobacco International, Agricultural Labor Practices 2014, 2014, http://www.jti.com/files/9314/1052/2789/JTI_Agricultural_Labor_Practices.pdf (accessed October 5, 2015), p. 7.

old children should not be excluded from “activities that contribute to their development and to the welfare of their families. This kind of work provides them with skills and experience, and helps to prepare them to be productive members of society during their adult life.”¹⁴³

Previously, JTI’s Agricultural Labor Practices (ALP) policy published in 2013 specified that in case of a conflict between the ALP and local legislation, local legislation would prevail. In a September 2014 letter to Human Rights Watch, the company clarified that “the highest standards of protection should always be applied for both growers themselves and those who work for them. We have improved the language of our ALP to make this totally clear.”¹⁴⁴ The most recent version of Japan Tobacco Group’s ALP states, “In case of difference between the ALP and local legislation, the highest requirement shall apply, provided it is fully compliant with local legislation.”¹⁴⁵

Philip Morris International

Philip Morris International describes itself as “the leading international tobacco company, with six of the world’s top 15 international brands.”¹⁴⁶ Philip Morris International has had since 2011 the most detailed child labor policy of the companies approached by Human Rights Watch, including prohibiting children under 18 from most of the hazardous tasks on tobacco farms, and has consistently made this information publicly available.¹⁴⁷ PMI’s policy on minimum age for work follows ILO Convention No. 138.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴³ Letter from Bevers, October 27, 2015.

¹⁴⁴ Letter from Ryoko Nagata, senior vice president, Corporate Social Responsibility, Japan Tobacco Inc., to Human Rights Watch, September 12, 2014.

¹⁴⁵ Japan Tobacco International, Agricultural Labor Practices 2014, 2014, http://www.jti.com/files/9314/1052/2789/JTI_Agricultural_Labor_Practices.pdf (accessed October 5, 2015), p. 3.

¹⁴⁶ Philip Morris International, “About Us,” undated, http://www.pmi.com/eng/about_us/pages/about_us.aspx (accessed September 30, 2015).

¹⁴⁷ Letter from Miguel Coleta, director, External Labor Policies, Philip Morris International, to Human Rights Watch, November 2, 2015; Philip Morris International (PMI), “Agricultural Labor Practices Code,” undated, http://www.pmi.com/eng/media_center/company_statements/documents/alp_code.pdf (accessed September 30, 2015).

¹⁴⁸ Philip Morris International, “Agricultural Labor Practices Code,” undated, http://www.pmi.com/eng/media_center/company_statements/documents/alp_code.pdf (accessed October 5, 2015); Letter from Coleta, November 2, 2015

Effective April 1, 2015, PMI transitioned “from directly purchasing tobacco through contracts with US growers to purchasing through two suppliers,” AOI and Universal.¹⁴⁹ The change to PMI’s leaf purchasing model required AOI and Universal to follow PMI’s Agricultural Labor Practices Code (ALP), including its child labor policy, on all US farms from which they purchase tobacco. PMI conducted ALP training for the suppliers’ staff and contracted growers, and provided an information toolkit on hazardous activities per PMI policies and other information, among other activities to facilitate the implementation.

PMI said that its approach to monitoring for child labor and the other standards and principles of the ALP code involve “collection of farm profile information and follow-up farm visits,” as well as third-party monitoring.¹⁵⁰ Through monitoring in 2015, PMI identified 60 child labor incidents in its US supply chain, mainly in Kentucky, involving children on family farms who were potentially doing hazardous work such as topping or harvesting. PMI reported that these cases were addressed through follow-up visits and “suggesting other opportunities for the farmer’s children to be involved in the family business without engaging in hazardous work.” PMI also reported a few instances in which hired children performed hazardous work, prompting an immediate follow-up visit to discuss ending the practice and the “business consequences of not doing so.”¹⁵¹

Reynolds American

In December 2014, Reynolds American—parent to several companies, including R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company (R.J. Reynolds), the second-largest US tobacco company, and producer of Newport, Camel, and Pall Mall cigarette brands—announced a new child labor policy similar to that of Altria Group.¹⁵² The policy requires that contracted growers not employ children under 16; children ages 16 and 17 may be employed with written

¹⁴⁹ “Philip Morris International Inc. Announces New U.S. Tobacco Purchasing Model,” Philip Morris International News Release, November 5, 2014, http://www.pmi.com/eng/media_center/press_releases/pages/philip_morris-international-inc--announces-new-u-s--tobacco-purchasing-model.aspx (accessed September 30, 2015).

¹⁵⁰ Letter from Coleta, November 2, 2015; Letter from Jennifer P. Goodale, vice president, Contributions and External Labor Policies, Philip Morris International, to Human Rights Watch, February 4, 2014

¹⁵¹ Letter from Coleta, November 2, 2015.

¹⁵² Tripp Mickle, “Reynolds American, Altria Set New Policies for Young Field Workers,” *Wall Street Journal*, December 12, 2014, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/reynolds-american-altria-set-new-policies-for-young-field-workers-1418425372> (accessed September 30, 2015).

permission from a parent or guardian and if they receive safety training and appropriate personal protective equipment. Reynolds American also requires that all children under 18 refrain from engaging in hazardous work as defined by the US secretary of labor's list of hazardous occupations.¹⁵³ Children who work on farms owned by their family are exempt from this policy.¹⁵⁴

Previously, Reynolds American did not have a specific child labor policy, and stated to Human Rights Watch that it addressed child labor by requiring its contracted growers to comply with national law.¹⁵⁵

Reynolds American explained its current policy in a letter to Human Rights Watch, stating, "We believe that workers 16 years of age—old enough to be entrusted with a driver's license—are old enough to understand GTS [Green Tobacco Sickness] and other risks and act responsibly to stay safe, if they receive the proper training and equipment" and noted that, "in prohibiting the employment of youth under 16, we are significantly more restrictive than the government agencies charged with protecting worker safety."¹⁵⁶

Reynolds American stated that the results of third-party audits conducted in 2011-2012 and 2014, "found only four of 507 audited growers employed non-family workers under 18." The company acknowledged that, "Audits are subject to certain limits. They speak to conditions on an audited farm at the time of the audit, and cannot characterize conditions on unaudited farms."¹⁵⁷ Reynolds American did not provide Human Rights Watch with details on the methodology used for its audits.

Tobacco Leaf Merchant Companies

Alliance One International and Universal Corporation are the world's largest tobacco leaf merchant companies, supplying unmanufactured tobacco to the largest tobacco

¹⁵³ Letter from Tripp Wilson, vice president, Corporate Sustainability and Commercial Equity, RAI Services Company, to Human Rights Watch, October 30, 2015.

¹⁵⁴ Reynolds American, "Supplier Responsibility: Audits and Assessments – Tobacco Supply Chain," undated, <http://www.reynoldsameric.com/default.aspx?SectionId=odda245f-oc83-4e0f-892e-e84c642037ef&LanguageId=1> (accessed September 30, 2015).

¹⁵⁵ Letter from John S. Wilson, III, vice president, Corporate Sustainability and Commercial Equity, RAI Services Company, to Human Rights Watch, February 28, 2014.

¹⁵⁶ Letter from Wilson, October 30, 2015.

¹⁵⁷ Letter from Wilson, October 30, 2015.

manufacturing companies in the world. AOI and Universal have committed to adhere to Philip Morris International's Agricultural Labor Practices Code (ALP) and monitoring program, including third-party monitoring, in their US operations, effective April 1, 2015. The child labor requirements under PMI's ALP are described above.

Alliance One International

AOI has publicly announced that it “prohibits hazardous work for youth under the age of 18 under any circumstances” in its global supply chain, including in the US. To implement this policy, AOI uses a “non-exhaustive list of potentially hazardous tasks as examples to guide [tobacco] growers,” requires growers to adhere to national laws concerning hazardous work, and, in the absence of specific laws, will “work with growers to help them determine which tasks on their farm could be considered hazardous.”¹⁵⁸ With regard to its US operations, AOI stated in a letter to Human Rights Watch that because the US is an economically advanced country, its minimum age to work for hire in the US is 16.¹⁵⁹ This requirement exceeds PMI's policy of a minimum age of 15.

With regard to monitoring, AOI reported that it visited 100 percent of its contracted US flue-cured tobacco growers at least three times in 2015, and at time of writing, was waiting for the results, as well as results from expanded third-party audits, which included confidential farmworker interviews. According to AOI, “Instances of hazardous child labor are not widespread within our grower base.”¹⁶⁰

Universal Corporation

Universal stated that it has “adopted and implemented PMI's Agricultural Labor Practices (ALP) program for all our flue-cured and burley tobacco growers in the United States,” and implements “the same ALP program and policies in other countries as well,” though it did not specify which countries.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ Letter from Pieter Sikkel, president and chief executive officer, Alliance One International, to Human Rights Watch, October 30, 2015. See also: Alliance One International, Child Labor Policy, November 12, 2015, <http://www.aoisustainability.com/index.php/commitment/child-labour-policy/> (accessed November 30, 2015).

¹⁵⁹ Letter from Sikkel, October 30, 2015.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Letter from H. Michael Ligon, vice president, Universal Corporation, to Human Rights Watch, October 29, 2015.

Universal stated that it monitors ALP code compliance through farm visits to verify grower information as well as “corresponding records and documentation,” and that Universal personnel identify risk factors for child labor and other labor concerns. Universal reported that it will add bilingual personnel for some farm visits in 2016 and meet directly with more workers to help “to identify and address potential labor issues.”¹⁶²

Tobacco Growers Associations

In July 2014, the Council for Burley Tobacco, a Kentucky-based association representing approximately 5,000 tobacco growers in Kentucky, Tennessee, Indiana, and Ohio, approved a resolution stating, “We do not condone the hiring of anyone under the age of 16 for work in tobacco anywhere in the world.”¹⁶³ Rod Kuegel, president of the Council for Burley Tobacco, told Human Rights Watch in an email, “It is our position that workers under 16 years old should not be employed in tobacco production not only in the US but worldwide.”¹⁶⁴

In October 2014, the Tobacco Growers Association of North Carolina, which represents more than 2,300 tobacco farmers in North Carolina and neighboring states, issued a policy stating that, “Tobacco growers and farm labor contractors should not employ workers younger than 16 years of age for work in tobacco, even with parental permission.” The policy recommended that employers “be cautious about employing 16 and 17-year-old workers in tobacco” to ensure that they perform only non-hazardous tasks. In issuing the policy, the association stated, “While we do not believe that tobacco fields are inherently unsafe for qualified persons who receive proper training and personal protective equipment, we recognize that there are particular risks associated with working in tobacco.”¹⁶⁵

Both the Council for Burley Tobacco and the Tobacco Growers Association of North Carolina stated that their policies did not apply to children working on family farms.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Council for Burley Tobacco, “Council Update August 2014,” August 2014, <http://www.councilforburleytobacco.com/#!2014-update/c19m2> (accessed September 30, 2015).

¹⁶⁴ Email from Rod Kuegel, president, Council for Burley Tobacco, to Human Rights Watch, September 2, 2014.

¹⁶⁵ Tobacco Growers Association of North Carolina, “TGANC Policy Position on Child Labor,” October 1, 2014. On file with Human Rights Watch.

Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives

Several key tobacco industry groups have continued to discuss child labor and labor rights through the Farm Labor Practices Group (FLPG), a North Carolina-based multi-stakeholder initiative. The group includes several leading tobacco manufacturers and leaf merchants,¹⁶⁶ along with tobacco grower representatives, the Farm Labor Organizing Committee, the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility, and US Department of Labor representatives. Following a meeting in April 2014, FLPG members formed a working group on child labor.

In December 2014, the members of the Eliminating Child Labour in Tobacco Growing Foundation (ECLT Foundation),¹⁶⁷ an industry-supported multi-stakeholder initiative based in Geneva, signed a joint pledge of commitment to combat child labor and to eliminate all forms of child labor within tobacco-sourcing chains.¹⁶⁸ The pledge states, “ECLT Foundation Board members respect and recognize the principles and rights enshrined in the ILO Conventions and Recommendations on child labour.”

The pledge marked the first time members of the tobacco industry agreed jointly to abide by international labor law, which prohibits hazardous work by children under age 18, and sets a minimum age of 15 (14 in developing countries) for employment. Under the pledge, ECLT members also agreed to provide for legitimate processes of remediation for child labor, and to advocate for and support strong national regulatory frameworks on child labor.¹⁶⁹

In May 2015, the International Labour Organization and the ECLT Foundation announced that they had “entered into an agreement in order to develop global guidance on hazardous child labour and occupational safety and health in tobacco growing.” According

¹⁶⁶ Altria Group, Japan Tobacco Group, Philip Morris International, Reynolds American, Alliance One International, and Universal Corporation.

¹⁶⁷ Members include Altria Group, British American Tobacco, Imperial Tobacco Group, Japan Tobacco Group, Philip Morris International, Alliance One International, and Universal Corporation, among others.

¹⁶⁸ Eliminating Child Labor in Tobacco Growing (ECLT) Foundation, “ECLT Foundation Board Members Sign Pledge to Align and Reinforce Members’ Policies and Practices in Combatting Child Labour in Tobacco Growing,” December 10, 2014, <http://www.eclt.org/news-item/message-eclt-foundation/> (accessed September 30, 2015).

¹⁶⁹ ECLT Foundation, “ECLT Foundation Board Members Pledge of Commitment,” signed September 18, 2015, <http://www.eclt.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/ECLT-Foundation-Members-Pledge.pdf> (accessed September 30, 2015).

to the ILO, “The global guidance will examine the nature and conditions of hazardous child labour in tobacco growing. It will promote tripartite action to ensure that children do not perform this work, and will support decent employment opportunities for young people between the minimum working age and the age of 18.” The guidance is expected to be finalized in 2017.¹⁷⁰

¹⁷⁰ “ECLT Foundation and ILO Sign Agreement to Combat Child Labour in Tobacco,” International Labour Organization (ILO) News Release, May 26, 2015, http://www.ilo.org/pardev/partnerships/public-private-partnerships/WCMS_371395/lang-en/index.htm (accessed September 30, 2015).

VII. Gaps in Protection

Through the policy changes and actions outlined above, tobacco industry actors and multi-stakeholder groups have taken some important steps aimed at protecting the youngest child workers from danger on tobacco farms. With the exception of China National Tobacco and Japan Tobacco International, the largest companies purchasing tobacco in the United States require US tobacco growers with whom they contract to ensure significantly greater protection to child workers than US law and regulations. Despite this progress, tobacco companies' child labor policies leave some children vulnerable to harm.

Though international standards prohibit hazardous work for children under age 18, and there appears to be increasing alignment by some multinational companies regarding work that should be considered hazardous in tobacco farming, the tobacco industry still lacks a clear, implementable industry-wide definition of what constitutes hazardous work for children.

The process initiated by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Eliminating Child Labour in Tobacco Growing Foundation (ECLT Foundation) seeks to address this gap by developing authoritative guidance on hazardous work for children under 18 in tobacco farming, but the process will take several years. In the meantime, children continue to get sick and suffer while working on tobacco farms in the US, and tobacco growers, who typically supply tobacco to more than one company, are left to negotiate between multiple, often different sets of child labor standards.

In addition, in the absence of changes to US law or regulations, the policy actions taken by the industry have no enforcement mechanisms other than voluntary monitoring by the companies themselves or third party auditors, which may not be sufficient to detect child labor. The US legal and regulatory framework still allows children as young as 12, and in some cases younger, to work on tobacco farms, with no special provisions to protect them from nicotine poisoning or other hazards of tobacco farming.

US law also excludes agricultural workers from the protections of the National Labor Relations Act. Agricultural workers do not have the right to organize and collectively

bargain with their employers under US law.¹⁷¹ Although all of the companies contacted by Human Rights Watch state that they support freedom of association and the right to collectively bargain for workers in their supply chains, at time of writing none had contracts with associations of tobacco workers. Respecting the right to freedom of association is crucial for addressing the poverty frequently underlying child labor.

Nearly all of the children interviewed by Human Rights Watch in 2013 and 2015 reported that they worked in tobacco to provide income for themselves and their families. Parents of child workers said that their children's minimum wage earnings helped to supplement meager family incomes. Immigrant farmworkers are an especially vulnerable workforce. Most farmworkers are foreign-born, and many are unauthorized immigrants.¹⁷² Some of the children interviewed for this report, and most of the children's parents, lacked authorization to live and work in the US. For many families, immigration status contributed to their vulnerability at work.

The US government, Congress, and the tobacco industry should take urgent steps to eliminate hazardous child labor in US tobacco farming for all children under 18.

¹⁷¹ United States Code, Title 29—Labor, Chapter 8—Fair Labor Standards, Sec. 152. Exemptions, <http://uscode.house.gov/browse.xhtml>. As a result, agricultural workers can be fired for joining a labor union or engaging in collective action against an employer.

¹⁷² For a detailed discussion of the vulnerability of immigrant farmworkers, see: Human Rights Watch, United States - *Cultivating Fear: The Vulnerability of Immigrant Farmworkers in the US to Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment*, May 2012, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2012/05/15/cultivating-fear/vulnerability-immigrant-farmworkers-us-sexual-violence-and-sexual>, pp. 15-19.

IX. Full Recommendations

To the United States Congress

- Enact legislation prohibiting children under age 18 from engaging in hazardous work on tobacco farms in the United States, including any work in which children have direct contact with tobacco in any form.
- Amend the Fair Labor Standards Act to apply the same requirements to children working in agriculture as already apply to all other working children.
- Eliminate the exclusion of farmworkers from the National Labor Relations Act and acknowledge that, like all other workers, they have the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining.
- Enact immigration legislation that would reduce the incidence of serious abuses of immigrant workers' rights, including a program of earned legalization for unauthorized farmworkers already in the US.

To the President of the United States

- Issue an executive order or take other regulatory action to prohibit hazardous child labor on tobacco farms in the US, including any tasks where children have direct contact with tobacco in any form.
- Urge the US Department of Labor to revise the list of agricultural jobs deemed to be “particularly hazardous” for children to include any tasks where children have direct contact with tobacco in any form.

To the US Department of Labor

- Revise the list of agricultural jobs deemed to be “particularly hazardous” for children to include any tasks where children have direct contact with tobacco in any form.
- Vigorously investigate child labor in tobacco farming, including through unannounced inspections at the time of year, time of day, and locations where children are most likely to be working.

- Vigorously enforce occupational safety and health regulations to ensure farmworkers have access to drinking water, toilets, and handwashing facilities.

To the US Environmental Protection Agency

- Ensure vigorous and meaningful enforcement of the Worker Protection Standard and related pesticide regulations to protect children from occupational and take-home pesticide exposure.

To Tobacco Product Manufacturers and Tobacco Leaf Merchant Companies

- Adopt or revise global child labor policies to prohibit hazardous work by children under 18 without exceptions, including any work in which children have direct contact with tobacco in any form.
- Establish regular and rigorous internal and third-party monitoring in the supply chain, including through unannounced inspections at the time of year, time of day, and locations where children are most likely to be working. Engage qualified and experienced monitors who are fluent in the languages that workers speak, and trained in child labor and labor rights. Include private, confidential interviews with workers, as well as growers, as components of inspections. Make the results of internal and third-party monitoring public.
- Enhance collaboration with farmworker families, federal and local governments, the International Labour Organization's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), nongovernmental organizations, organized labor, and other stakeholders to provide children with alternatives to work in tobacco farming, including age-appropriate and accessible educational and employment opportunities and alternative sources of income.
- Develop an international industry-wide standard to prohibit hazardous work for children under 18 on tobacco farms, including any work in which children have direct contact with tobacco in any form.
 - In the absence of such a standard, each company should nevertheless implement its own independent policy prohibiting hazardous work for children under 18 on tobacco farms, including any work in which children have direct contact with tobacco in any form.

- Adopt or revise comprehensive agricultural labor policies to protect the health, safety, and human rights of workers employed on tobacco farms, in line with international law and the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.
- Guarantee the rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining for all workers employed on tobacco farms.
- Establish a meaningful and effective complaint mechanism whereby workers are able to submit complaints about any concerns about labor, safety, or other violations without fear of repercussions.

To Tobacco Growers Associations

- Adopt or revise child labor policies to prohibit hazardous work by children under 18, including any work in which children have direct contact with tobacco in any form.
- Expand education of tobacco growers regarding child labor prohibitions and the health risks to children of work in tobacco farming, including nicotine exposure, pesticide exposure, extreme heat, and other occupational health and safety issues.

To the International Labour Organization

- Develop clear, implementable guidance regarding the hazards of tobacco farming for children without delay. Urge states and companies to prohibit all children under 18 from tasks involving direct contact with tobacco in any form.
- Allow a range of different types of experts to contribute meaningfully to the tripartite process on hazardous child labor and occupational safety and health in tobacco growing.

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(left) A portable toilet in a tobacco field in North Carolina. Teenage children interviewed by Human Rights Watch reported inconsistent access to bathroom facilities while working on tobacco farms.

(front cover) A 16-year-old tobacco worker standing in a tobacco field in North Carolina wearing her work clothes. "I don't feel any different in the fields than when I was 12," she said. "I [still] get headaches and ... my stomach hurts. And like I feel nauseous.... I just feel like my stomach is like rumbling around. I feel like I'm gonna throw up."

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TEENS OF THE TOBACCO FIELDS

Child Labor in United States Tobacco Farming

Each year, children work on tobacco farms in the United States, where they are exposed to nicotine, toxic pesticides, and other dangers. The US government has failed to protect children from hazardous work in tobacco farming. Since 2014, some tobacco companies have prohibited the employment of children under 16 on farms from which they purchase tobacco. These policies are an important step forward, but they exclude 16 and 17-year-old children.

Teens of the Tobacco Fields: Child Labor in United States Tobacco Farming is based on interviews with 26 children ages 16 and 17, as well as parents, health experts, and tobacco growers. It builds on Human Rights Watch's 2014 report on hazardous child labor in tobacco farming, *Tobacco's Hidden Children*, and documents the dangers of tobacco farming for 16 and 17 year olds. Most teenage children interviewed suffered symptoms consistent with acute nicotine poisoning. Many also reported working in or near fields that were being sprayed with pesticides and becoming ill.

Several tobacco companies prohibit children under 18 from many hazardous tobacco farming tasks, but none have policies sufficient to protect all children from danger. Teenage children are particularly vulnerable to the harmful effects of the work because their brains are still developing. Nicotine exposure during adolescence has been associated with mood disorders, and problems with memory, attention, impulse control, and cognition later in life.

Human Rights Watch calls on tobacco companies and the US government and Congress to take urgent action to ban all children under 18 from hazardous work on tobacco farms.