

A woman with her hair in a bun, wearing a blue headband, a plaid shirt, and a tan apron, is working in a greenhouse. She is looking down at a plant in a pot. The greenhouse is filled with many other potted plants, and the background shows the structure of the greenhouse.

THE HUMAN COST OF HOUSE PLANTS

Labor Conditions
of Florida's Plant
Nursery Workers

Dēmos, WeCount!, &
Partners for Dignity and Rights

ABOUT THE REPORT

This report is the result of a collaboration between Dēmos, WeCount!, and Partners for Dignity and Rights. Dēmos led on the writing of the report, building from WeCount!'s survey results and worker interviews documenting conditions in South Florida's houseplant industry, and Partners for Dignity and Rights provided strategic guidance at the outset of this project and supports WeCount!'s campaign work.

Dēmos demos.org

Dēmos is a non-profit public policy organization working to build a just, inclusive, multiracial democracy and economy. We work hand in hand to build power with and for Black and brown communities, forging strategic alliances with grassroots and state-based organizations.

WeCount! we-count.org

WeCount! is a non-profit, human rights organization that advocates for better living and working conditions for immigrant workers and families in Florida. Through their new Planting Justice campaign, WeCount! is bringing together plant nursery workers, consumers, and community and faith allies to ensure respect for labor and human rights across the houseplant industry.

Partners for Dignity and Rights dignityandrights.org

Partners for Dignity and Rights (PDR) is a U.S.-based nonprofit organization that works in partnership with communities to build power and advocate for human rights, strengthen public goods, and advance equity and justice in the U.S. and around the globe. For over a decade, Partners for Dignity and Rights has anchored coalitions and campaigns for worker organizations advocating for binding agreements and meaningful enforcement of human rights in supply chains and workplaces. PDR pursues meaningful changes that directly improve people's lives now, and lays the groundwork for transformational change by building a movement for human rights.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The U.S. plant nursery industry, a \$50 billion sector driven by surging demand for houseplants, relies heavily on a workforce that is largely invisible to consumers: women, immigrants, and workers of color who labor under dangerous, low-wage conditions.

Florida—producing nearly 70 percent of the nation’s indoor foliage—illustrates the stark contradictions at the heart of this booming industry. Despite the plant nursery industry’s economic success, workers face systemic exploitation rooted in decades of policy exclusions and racial inequities.

WeCount!, a worker center in South Florida with a large membership of plant nursery workers, conducted a survey of more than 300 plant nursery workers in Miami-Dade County in 2024. Their findings shed new light on the predicament of plant nursery workers.



Survey Results

WORKING CONDITIONS

86%

of respondents **reported accidents or illness on the job**; heat stress, pesticide exposure, and other hazardous conditions were some of the leading causes.

32%+

had no access to water at work, and over 62 percent of those who received water said it was often too **dirty and unsanitary to drink**.

60%+

have never received paid sick or vacation days.

WAGES

\$12.57/hr

Average pay was \$12.57/hour – far **below the \$22.43 living wage** for South Florida.

20%+

reported never **receiving or only sometimes receiving the minimum wage**, and more than a third of surveyed workers reported **receiving their pay late**, another form of wage theft.

HARASSMENT & RETALIATION

50%+

of women surveyed experienced **sexual harassment or discrimination**.

1 in 6

workers **faced intimidation for organizing**, and more than half of workers reported working in nurseries where workers were **fired or retaliated against for exercising their rights on the job**.

Federal and state laws exclude agricultural workers from core labor protections, and recent efforts to secure local heat safety standards have been blocked by industry lobbying and state preemption. Traditional corporate social responsibility programs have proven ineffective, prioritizing public relations over worker rights. Worker-driven Social Responsibility (WSR) programs—pioneered by farmworkers in Florida through the Fair Food Program—have transformed exploitative industries by securing legally binding agreements with major buyers, enforcing compliance through independent monitoring, and centering worker leadership. These programs have delivered measurable improvements in wages, safety, and dignity.

WeCount! and plant nursery workers are launching Planting Justice, a WSR initiative modeled on the Fair Food Program. The campaign seeks binding agreements with major retailers and growers to ensure enforceable standards for fair pay, safe working conditions, and protection from harassment and retaliation. Consumer support is strong for changing the industry: In a recent survey, 96 percent of houseplant buyers said they would avoid buying from retailers and plant nurseries engaged in harmful labor practices.

The plant nursery industry exemplifies the urgent need for systemic change. Worker-driven solutions offer a clear path forward—one that prioritizes human rights, economic justice, and sustainability. By supporting Planting Justice, stakeholders can help transform an industry built on exploitation into one rooted in fairness and dignity.

