



MODERN-DAY SLAVERY

A PALM BEACH POST SPECIAL REPORT • PART 1

With fake names, fake Social Security cards and few rights, migrant farm workers stay invisible in plain sight.

USED AND ABUSED



Staff photos by GARY CORONADO

A grueling day's work awaits these field hands: Migrant farm workers living in Lake Worth ride a bus along Boynton Beach Boulevard to pick peppers on a farm west of Florida's Turnpike in

unincorporated Palm Beach County. Sun-baked, sweat-drenched work performed by laborers such as these puts fresh produce on our tables. This scene plays out hundreds of times a day in Florida.

Working to pay off smuggling debts, some migrants are locked up at night.

Unscrupulous labor contractors regularly cheat migrants out of their pay, sometimes charging exorbitant fees for food and transportation.

Five of the most notorious slavery cases since 1997 happened in Florida — three of them involved Palm Beach County and the Treasure Coast.

The brutal reach of slavery in Florida extends to rape and forced prostitution.

Illegal migrants must buy fake or stolen Social Security numbers to work in the fields. Taxes collected on \$375 billion in wages for workers with mismatched Social Security numbers now sit untouched in a special fund.

Despite federal regulations, some workers do not get pesticide training and do not have access to drinking water and toilets on the job.

Migrants often live 10 to a room in unfurnished trailers in our cities, trying to save money to send home to destitute families.



Close to the soil: Field hands cut endive, preparing it for packing during November's harvest in Palm Beach County. The lettuce is shipped principally to northern states. To get the crop out, farmers and citrus growers often rely upon undocumented workers supplied by labor contractors.

Farm workers — both legal and illegal — say they have been held under lock and key by their employers.

PAGES 2, 3



Migrants sleeping 10 to a trailer wire wages home to Mexico and Guatemala. Their day ends just as it begins — on a bus packed with workers.

PAGES 6, 7

Among women laborers, many victims of sexual assault never report it, fearing Immigration will be contacted.

PAGE 11

