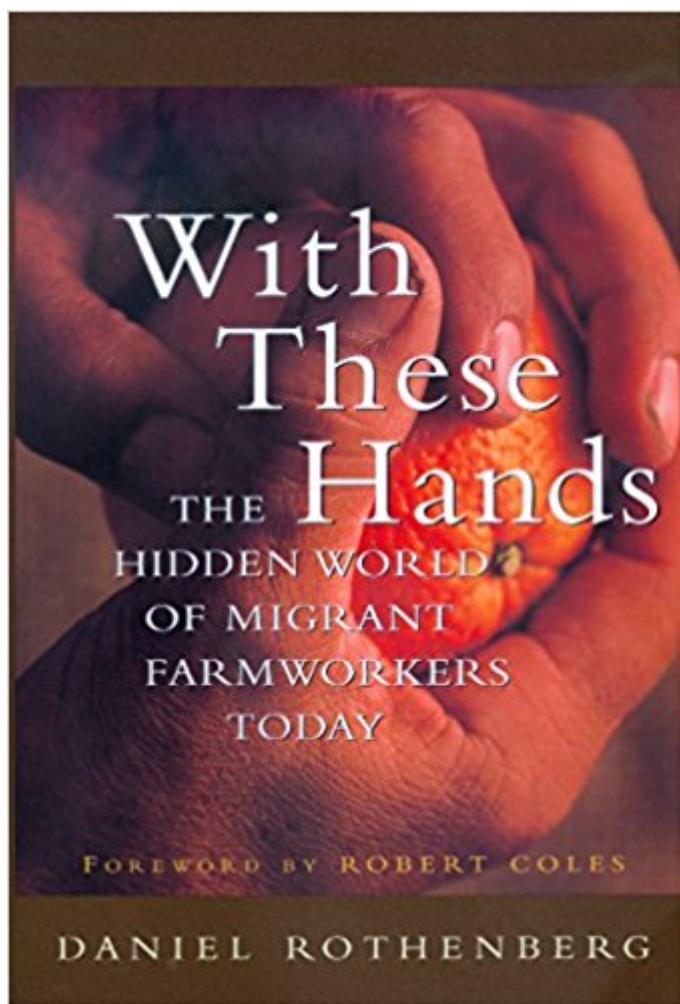


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# With These Hands: The Hidden World Of Migrant Farmworkers Today



## **Synopsis**

With These Hands documents the farm labor system through the presentation of a collection of voices—workers who labor in the fields, growers who manage the multi-billion dollar agricultural industry, contractors who link workers with growers, coyotes who smuggle people across the border, union organizers, lobbyists, physicians, workers' families in Mexico, farmworker children and others. The diversity of stories presents the world of migrant farmworkers as a complex social and economic system, a network of intertwined lives, showing how all Americans are bound to the struggles and contributions of our nation's farm laborers.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

More than 30 years after activists like Cesar Chavez called attention to conditions in California's fields, this remarkable study shows that the grinding poverty and abuse suffered by America's most vulnerable workers remains a national disgrace. Anthropologist Rothenberg, a former outreach worker and paralegal representing farmworkers, has weighed in with an epic account culled from more than 250 interviews conducted throughout the United States and Mexico. Here are cameo portraits of illegal immigrants, political refugees, "fruit tramps," drug addicts held in debt peonage at Southern labor camps ("Everybody knew about the labor camp. The sheriff, the farmers, and the crewleader were all in cahoots," recounts one cocaine user), growers, contractors, human smugglers or "coyotes," migrant children, all of them speaking in their own words. Rothenberg includes unidentified photos, one of the few lapses in a richly textured documentary that evokes

both pity and terror, as when the daughter of a single migrant woman in Florida describes how her mother's boyfriend once sexually abused her and how her mother took violent revenge. Rothenberg's book is clearly an indictment of a farm labor system that, he writes, allows large companies to distance themselves from workers. And those workers, despite changes of the 1960s, continue to struggle against abuses, poor pay and a "special status" that seems increasingly entrenched. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Last year's *The Fight in the Fields*, Susan Fertiss and Ricardo Sandoval's impressive biography of Cesar Chavez, stirred renewed interest in the plight of farmworkers and their movement. Despite Chavez's success at organizing workers nearly 30 years ago, farmworkers' wages have fallen 20 percent or more (accounting for inflation) over the last two decades, and their situation is perhaps worse than ever. Rothenberg is an anthropologist who was an outreach worker and advocate for a federally funded legal services program that represented farmworkers. There he was struck by the eloquence and dignity of the people he met. Determined to document their world, he left his job and began collecting the stories of individual workers. He realized that to paint a complete picture, he also needed to talk to contractors, growers, lobbyists, organizers, coyotes, and others. In all, Rothenberg gathered more than 250 interviews. His goal is to show that farmworkers are "people like the rest of us," and by doing so, make more real the tragedy of their hardships. David Rouse --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"The Poorest of the Invisible Working Poor" could be an alternate title for Daniel Rothenberg's *"With These Hands."* Most of us know migrant farm workers only when one of them breaks the law and get written up in the newspaper. However, just about every piece of produce we routinely select at the supermarket has passed through their hands. I particularly liked the format of Rothenberg's book, alternating factual explanation with monologues by those involved in farm labor. I appreciated the wide variety of viewpoints exposed, not just those of migrant workers, but also of contractors, farmer employers, government officials and labor organizers. Most migrant farmworkers are Hispanic, many of them in this country legally, and some are U.S. citizens from years back. Many others, out of economic desperation, risk their lives sneaking across the U.S./Mexican border to find honest work doing the most backbreaking labor, under the most inhumane living conditions, for the most miserable wages. Their sheer numbers help keep farmworker wages low, but the power of the agricultural lobby has helped maintain the dismal conditions of farm labor since the Depression.

Everyone who eats should read this book. Every politician should read it twice.

I require this book in the Ag Labor class that I teach - but everyone who thinks about our food system, about labor issues, about agriculture, or about immigration should read this book. It is an accurate and honest depiction of the world of migrant labor, based on interviews with workers, contractors, employers, organizers, and others. I cannot recommend this book highly enough. It is well written, moving, and candid. My students - of all political persuasions - have all found it to be an eye-opening and thought provoking book. Many purchase an extra copy so that they can share it with family and friends.

in my graduate class we read book-length ethnographic texts. this one is extremely moving, interviews with farmworkers that reveal the struggles they face. without them, the larger society cannot function, yet they remain invisible. an excellent, excellent book.

This book is the text book of a course I'm study this semester. It focus on the immigrant farm worker. The book I baught is really nice.

This book is very good. It's not short, but I read it in a day -- it was hard to put down. Perhaps half or more of the text is transcribed interviews, and the stories told are exceptional and engaging. Rothenberg deals with farmworkers, growers, contractors, some of the families attached to migrant labor, and a lawyer, lobbyist, doctor, INS officers, etc -- all of several different races and ages, from different regions, including men, women, and teenagers, in the US and in Mexico. As an unemployed person considering migrant fruit-picking as a way to earn money, this book has been indispensable in informing and warning me of the dangers and layout of the industry, and giving me ideas for success. Again, this book is very good, and I recommend it. But I would like to point out what it is not about, as the author does not directly discuss a lot of factors touching on farm labor, about which he could have perhaps given a cursory note (leading the reader to other sources) at the beginning or end. The book does not discuss many "success" stories in agriculture, or what I would consider comprehensive methods of changing the structure of farm labor, though there are some interviews touching on this. The book focuses on fruit and vegetable pickers, making mention of mushrooms, cotton, and sugar cane. It does not discuss the mechanization processes going on across agriculture, crop diversification, or the other forms of work being sought by current generations of migrants to the US (mostly from Mexico). It does not explore the poultry, meat

processing, or food processing and packing industries in general. The book spends a great deal of time focusing on the relations between and tangential to the farmworkers, crew contractors, and growers, but only mentions in passing the commodity market and buyers that primarily drive agricultural pricing. The book does not mention or explore "organic", "local", greenhouse/polyculture/urban, or cooperative production economies. In general the book does not discuss the financial side of farmwork in great enough detail for me, nor does it give a clear enough picture of the substandard, ugly conditions of labor camps, rural rental units, migrant transportation, etc. There are only a few details mentioned in passing about the crops and how exactly they are worked by laborers. Between transcribed interviews, Rothenberg discusses each chapter's focus in a more anthropological and historical manner. Often, the content of an interview is somewhat contradicted or ignored by Rothenberg's own text and generalizations, but that he includes the interview material anyway is very encouraging and much appreciated. The author eventually repeats his own points a few times, but the interviews remain fresh to the end. In general, Rothenberg returns continually to the idea that the most obvious root cause of what's wrong in farm labor is an oversupply of impoverished migrants, encouraged by an uncaring industry, partly through legal and political maneuvering, and always accompanied by underfunded "enforcement" agencies. Constructive, non-governmental alternatives are not discussed, such as those of David Blume, Allan Savory, Bill Mollison, Joel Salatin, the Nearings, Mondragon, Springfield Remanufacturing -- and surely there must be even better cases of farmworkers making living wages out there. The typesetting of this book is above average and makes it very easy to read. The book is somewhat dated, with a research perspective from the early 1990s. A major failure of this book is its lack of citations. The bibliographic "sources" note at the end is appreciated but barely adequate. That said, the real meat of this text is the exceptional interview content, which needs no citations -- read it for these great people and their stories!

I will not sit here and write a long winded review. All I will say is that I highly recommend this book to everyone, no matter which side of the fence you are on in terms of immigration. This book is eye opening. It literally changed my perspective on multiple issues related to the farming industry. Buy it. Read it. Share it.

Read This Book! The book *With These Hands*, is a very accurate depiction of migrant farmworkers today. The author, Daniel Rothenberg, is an anthropologist that spent three years living among workers and getting to know the people who work in the labor camps. He compiled more than 250

interviews to try and gain insight on the numerous hardships that these people face. Many people only hear about migrant workers who get into run-ins with the law, therefore giving these people a stereotypical view of how many of these migrants actually are, and what they go through to make such horrible wages. Every aspect of these farmworkers lives are explored, from wages to the farm labor market to consequences of labor practices. This book is really a reality check to people because of how much these workers have an affect on our lives. People don't stop to think about how all of their fruit products are gathered and how the workers are treated for doing such back breaking work. This book differs from many others that have been written on this same topic because it covers all different angles of migrant farmwork for yesterday and today. A definite two thumbs up!

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