

# UFW Marchers Hit Highway

## About 2,000 rally for better wages, amnesty

By **JULIE PETERSON**  
YAKIMA HERALD-REPUBLIC

MATTAWA — Even though she doesn't have to, Petra Torres still does farm work sorting onions at a warehouse near Othello. She also helped organize Sunday's farm-worker march here.

"People ask me why I'm still here, even though I have all my documents so I could work somewhere else," Torres said through an interpreter. "But there are a lot of people who don't have them, and I work so someday they can get their papers the same way I got mine."

Torres, who is from Jalisco, Mexico, was granted amnesty in 1985 and now can work legally in the United States. She joined Arturo Rodriguez, the president of United Farm Workers of America on Sunday, and marched four miles with thousands of people between Desert Aire and Mattawa. Joined by other union supporters, religious and human rights organizations, farm workers from throughout the state rallied in support of higher wages, amnesty, and the right to organize as temperatures soared into the 90s.

"Amnesty is important

because they've risked their lives and left their homeland to do work that no one else wants to do here," said Rodriguez, who is the son-in-law of UFW founder Cesar Chavez. "We're not against employers, but at the same time you have to meet the needs of the families, too."

An estimated 2,000 marchers walked along State Route 243 near the Columbia River, many chanting for amnesty and carrying Mexican and UFW flags. Others carried signs and banners calling for the right to unionize and for enforcement of the North American Free Trade Agreement labor accords.

Along the route, dozens of their supporters provided water to the marchers, including Gilberto Romero, who has lived in Mattawa for 10 years.

In the decade since he came here, Romero said, his rent has more than doubled while the amount he earns for picking apples has gone down. He said he was paid \$9 per bin 10 years ago, and now the bins are larger and he only is paid \$8 per bin.

"This is no good," Romero said. "We're here because the apple prices go up, up, but we go down, down," he said, first point-

ing to the sky and then to the ground.

Many people are demanding better wages this year because pay has gone down for apple harvesters since the last rally was held three years ago, said Guadalupe Gamboa, the Sunnyside-based regional director of the United Farm Workers union.

"The reason the workers are doing this is that unless they protest, their wages go down," Gamboa said. "Growers say they are suffering, but they can't take it out of the workers. When you only make \$8,000 a year, you can't afford to lose any of it."

A wage demand was presented at the rally following the march in the Mattawa park, where hundreds of workers and their families joined the marchers for speeches, food and entertainment that lasted well into the afternoon.

"I knew about Cesar Chavez and was afraid to participate before because I didn't have my papers," Torres said. "I'm still a person that believes there is dignity in our work. A lot of people don't get that respect. But I want to continue the struggle because Cesar Chavez said we can."



GEORGE WAYMIRE/for the Yakima Herald-Republic

**Yesenia Romero of Mattawa waves a UFW flag as marchers head past.**



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**ARTURO RODRIGUEZ**  
UFW president