Abstract
This oral history traces the life and work of farm worker advocate Melinda Wiggins, currently in 2014 the executive director of the Durham, North Carolina-based Student Action with Farmworkers. Melinda grew up in the Mississippi Delta to working-class parents and her grandparents were sharecroppers. Melinda left the Delta to attend Millsaps College and later Duke Divinity School, where she explored different types of advocacy work including homelessness before turning to farmworker rights. In this interview, Melinda reflects upon her own development as an activist, as well as the specifics of farmworker advocacy work in North Carolina and the South.

Key Terms
Leflore, Mississippi
Greenwood, Mississippi
Phillipstwon, Mississippi
Supreme Electronics
Mississippi Delta
Sky Lake, Mississippi
Tom Rankin
SAF – Student Action with Farmworkers
Millsaps College
Jackson, Mississippi
John Quincy Adams
Duke Divinity School
Durham, North Carolina
St. Louis, Missouri
HUD – U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
Washington, DC
Jackson, Mississippi
SAF’s Into the Fields Internship
Episcopal Farmworker Ministry
Newton Grove, North Carolina
Forged Under the Sun
United Farm Workers
FLOC – Farm Labor Organizing Committee
Indyweek
FAN - Farmworker Advocacy Network
H2A program
North Carolina Growers Association
North Carolina Department of Labor
Regina Luginbuhl
Adelante Education Coalition
El Pueblo
AFL-CIO
United Food and Commercial Workers
Smithfield's
NC House Bill HB904
NC Migrant Housing Act
Mount Olive Pickle Boycott
Bill Bryan
NC Senate Bill 707
AMY TREY: Hello Melinda.

MELINDA WIGGINS: Hello.

TREY: To start with a basic question, can you tell us your name, your age, and your birthplace?

WIGGINS: Sure. My name’s Melinda Wiggins, I’m 44, I was born in Leflore County, Mississippi.

TREY: Can you describe Leflore Mississippi?

WIGGINS: Perhaps. That was one of the hard questions I said. Yeah, I grew up...it’s a very rural, small community. The town that most things happen in Leflore County is Greenwood. So that where I went to school, where my family worked, where we went to church, but I actually lived outside of the town in the county, in I don’t even know what it is, a pueblo, village or something called Phillipstown, which is just a community of about four or five hundred people. Outside...at the time when I was growing up Greenwood had about twenty thousand so very rural, very agricultural, not much happening in terms of a young kid. It’s perspective, yeah, in terms of fun things.

DELP: Can you spell “Phillipstown” for us?

WIGGINS: Yeah, it’s spelled like Phillip’s town, with a “p-h.” But they call it “Phillipston”.

TREY: So how did you spend your childhood? Can you reminisce a bit?

WIGGINS: Sure. I think I had a good childhood. I loved living in the country actually because I love animals. And living on a farm means you get to have every animal there is an I did. I had cats—your stereotypical cats, dogs, chickens, turkeys, horses, cows, but I also had some unique animals like a pet deer and rabbits, quails, pigeons...the list goes on. So it was beautiful landscape. I liked being outdoors a lot. We had a huge family garden, about an acre, so I worked in the garden with my family. Yeah, I liked being outside. So that was nice. I have a huge extended family. I grew up as an only child but I have a huge extended family so I spent a lot of time with cousins. My grandmother took care of me when I was a kid because my parents worked and she took care of a lot of grandkids so even though I
grew up in the country in the isolated area. I was around a large community. My family is very tight knit. There were a lot of family gatherings. Every excuse you can think of. We all would get together for a potluck at someone’s house and eat and play. So I have very positive memories for most of my childhood. Things were different in high school. It was a little hard. My dad left home. So my mom and I were by ourselves for most of the time. And it changed things a lot because I was very close to my dad. So him not being around was hard. So high school pretty much sucked. I didn’t see him very often. He didn’t come to any of my events or things at school. We kind of grew apart. We now probably have somewhat of a troubled relationship because of that time. So before that, very fun, very fond memories. Really close knit family. My immediate family did a lot of things together. But then after that it got a little harder.

DELP: How would you describe your relationship with your mom?

WIGGINS: My relationship with my entire family is pretty good. I mean there is a reason I live here and my entire family is still in Leflore County and they are still in the Mississippi Delta. My mom in particular...my parents love me to no end. They are very loving and affectionate and supportive. And I felt very fortunate...like I felt like my parents always told me...they were very supportive of me doing what I wanted to do and really visioning something bigger than what I had experienced or what my family had experienced. Growing up working class, they really felt like school, education was the way out. So my mom is...she would give her life for me, to the end of her days do whatever I need. At the same time that same high school time was pretty tough for us. She and I had some difficult time together because I felt like she was not standing up for herself in the relationship with my family and I got very angry for that. So we had some trying times. I wanted her to be strong and telling him where he could go, and she didn’t, she accepted him back. Many times. So yeah, we kind of had a difficult time there. But I’ve chosen to stay in a relationship with my family and with my parents, including my dad, and we’ve patched our relationship a little bit. But overall they are very supportive in terms of me. Not necessarily in terms of what I do. That’s all another story. Which I’m sure we’ll get to.

TREY: So you mentioned that your parents were both working while you were younger. Can you describe what their profession was, what they would do every day?

WIGGINS: Yeah, my dad was an is a mechanic. He’s been a mechanic for about 55 years. Before that he worked in the fields. He dropped out of school when he was in sixth grade. He was the oldest of his family. They had
ten kids, two of which died, but still he was the oldest of eight and expectations were that he would support the family. So at a very young age he had to start working in the fields, and as soon as he could get out of the fields he did. He did some grocery store work. A lot of my family works in the grocery store but that wasn’t really his thing. So he was good at cars, he loved cars, so he started working on cars. [0:06:31] And aside, one really fun part of my childhood was going to racecar…my dad was a racecar driver, so going to races. Every weekend of my childhood for like half the year, every year, we went to drag races. It was totally fun. Total white, working class kind of…somewhat red neck…type of community. But I loved it. It was very close knit. So he’s always been a mechanic in my eyes. He’s struggling right now because he’s done with it, he’s sick of it. But he doesn’t have other options. He doesn’t have retirement. So he has to keep working. But he’s really…almost every conversation I have with him he talks about just being done of work. [0:07:18] My mom works in a factory. She’s worked in the same for close to 50 years now. It’s called Supreme Electronics. It’s an electronic factory where they make a lot of meters for cars, vehicles, and airplanes. So really tedious electronic work. So they worked full time, they worked very hard, they didn’t get paid very much. So I think my whole working class analysis and fairness for workers comes from hearing them every day, seeing them every day and not get very much. We struggled financially when I was a kid. We never went without food. But we didn’t have a lot of things and, you know, bill collectors called. We went bankrupt at one point. There were just a lot of financial difficulties. And I didn’t understand it because they worked. And they worked very hard. And they still weren’t able to make ends meet. Pretty typical, a lot of working class people who don’t make a living wage. [0:08:34] And the one thing, god, my parents have said this to me so many times, they’re like, “Get a job with benefits! Whatever you do, get benefits! Get retirement, get health insurance.” Because they didn’t have those things. And now they’re old, they are 73 and 75 and they can’t retire. They have no retirement. They are both still working. They work four days a week, both of them. So almost full time still. I think they shared a working class analysis but being in a conservative community they didn’t feel…or they didn’t sort of, collectively organize, or think about making change. They were sort of like, this is our lot in life.

DELP: [0:09:22] How would you describe the demographics of your community?

WIGGINS: Leflore County as a whole and the Mississippi Delta as a whole is majority black. Was and is. My community that I grew up in, it was majority white. It’s a very segregated community so I grew up in a, you know, white family, white church, white school. My family is very racist and so the school I was zoned for—because I lived in the country—was 99 percent black and
they would not send me there. So even though they are financially struggling, they got on some crazy payment plan to send me to a private white school. So my community growing up was very much white. And so I saw a lot of...I think it was one of the things that I started questioning, probably in high school. Before that I didn’t. [0:10:16] I was taught to be racist, particularly towards African Americans. Even being working class and working alongside...my parents worked alongside African Americans, there was still this sort of race trump card that people played. And somehow saying you’re better than someone else because of race. Even when you can have the exact same life in every other way. So that didn’t jive with me so much with the teachings that I was also taught by my family and by the church around love everyone, respect everyone, we’re all treated equal, we’re all treated in the image of God. All those same things didn’t really...it was mixed messages. A lot of mixed messages. So I think...I knew about race from a very early...you can’t grow up in the Mississippi Delta without being aware of your whiteness or your privilege or your racism. And there aren’t a lot of supports to challenge that there. I think, thank god, in college I did have some support from professors and peers that allowed me to walk down a different path. But otherwise, it’s a very insular community. Not much comes in, in terms of ideas and support and challenges to the way these have always been. [0:11:38] So I found it hard in high school to even think differently, to question anything that I was being taught. I remember I won some silly award for some poem that I wrote in high school about race issues. And I found it—I don’t know when, I was cleaning out something at my home—and found this—it’s a really bad poem. But it sort of was interesting because it shows I was struggling with things and sort of questioning things, but I certainly didn’t know how to talk about so I was writing about it. I think I had to read the poem publicly and I was like, oh god, what have I done, right? I just revealed my own challenge to my community and my family and now have to share in this public way. I was nervous about that. About going against their teachings.

DELP: How else would you describe yourself when you were younger?

WIGGINS: [0:12:34] Well, being an only child I think...you know, I was fairly independent. I grew up alone a lot. I learned to occupy myself. I spent a lot of time, like I said, with animals. I have a very strong, I think, spiritual relationship with animals now based on spending time with them. I read a lot, being in the country, being alone, being there...I had to...my parents were...I had to do a lot of that by myself. And I developed a fondness for reading. I think it’s part of the reason I did well in school. For me books were and are sort of an entre to other people and other worlds and other beliefs. Through reading is where I started learning that people think differently than this community. It was my only outside information. I
devoured books and just really felt like it was really taking me other places. And I with that developed a really curiosity for difference, for okay, this isn’t all there is in the world. And this may not be the way I want to be. I was pretty spunky, I am now. I had lots of nicknames that I’ll not share with you but that reveal that I was a little—what’s the right word?—I was fairly vocal. I was pretty playful. I had a little attitude.

TREY: [0:14:30] So you mentioned a little bit about how your family would take you to church...how did that influence you in the way that you studied or can you elaborate on the conflicts between that and what you saw in your community?

WIGGINS: Yeah, I love church. I think one of the other things about my...as a child...I can go crazy over things...I can really obsess over some things pretty deep. I went pretty deep in the church, as I have with SAF and social justice now. For me it was a community of people. I’m an extrovert, and spending a lot of time alone in the country I craved those group opportunities, those group settings. So for me church was a place to talk to people or a place where lots of people come together and we get to connect and talk and do stuff. And I was so damned bored—I’m probably not supposed to curse in this but—oh well—that I wanted to do stuff. And sometimes the church provided things. I mean it wasn’t always the most exciting but for small town stuff it was...stuff, something to do, hanging out with my peers or whatever. So I loved church. I was really into church, I was really into church camp. I went every summer to church camp. Loved it. Got to do things differently. Got to be away from my family, explore some new things. [0:15:54] And you know...I’ve had to come to terms...I grew up Pentecostal. So very evangelical, right wing, Christian. There were things that were hard about that. And when I left the Delta, I thought I was also leaving the church. Or the Pentecostal church. I ended up coming to divinity school and really coming to terms with Pentecostalism in a whole different way. It was pretty...unforgiving in many ways. Pentecostalism is very black and white, right and wrong. You do this, you don’t do this. There wasn’t a lot of room for challenge in that environment. At the same time it was very loving and the community was really strong. I feel like I understood what a community was, could be from that experience. Because people helped each other out. It was a poor community. Most of it was my family or fourth, fifth cousins or whatever, related in some way. It was a very close knit community. People really cared about each other. That was nice to see. People were not selfish or self interested. It was a community to support each other. [0:17:21] And I am really into things you can’t understand, and that you can’t explain. For me the world is full of that. And for me the church provided some guidance on how to understand that or how to be with it, not even to understand it. How do you live in a world where you can’t
understand everything? And how do you relate to that? So Pentecostalism has a bit of mysticism and honors the concept of we may not be able to understand everything that happens. And there’s some things greater than anything we’ll ever be able to understand. And I love that stuff. And I also—I can’t believe I’m talking so much about animals, but—we’ll go there—I think that beings, all beings...there’s something spiritual about human beings, about animal beings, about our relationship to each other. Certainly as humans but also with animals also. And I think that Pentecostalism certainly doesn’t teach all this but I went there with it. It allowed me to think about how you relate to each other, to humans, to animals, and also the earth. What does it mean to be in right relationship with your community? And what does your community mean? And for me, it allowed me to go broad with that instead of narrow. So the narrow teachings, I sort of took the frame and was like—hm. This is an interesting frame that feels right to me.

TREY: [0:18:56] So is that the reason why you left the Delta, and came to Duke? To explore (indiscernible).

WIGGINS: The Delta is pretty...I get a little claustrophobic. In tight space...the Delta is claustrophobic to me. There’s things I love about it but for the most part I feel pretty stifled there. I feel like in the community I grew up in it’s very close-minded. Their approach to difference or new is fear. And that’s not how I feel about things. Just sort of forget the academic thoughts or the cerebral things, just in terms of feelings, I’m very intuitive. And I don’t feel afraid from difference or from change or from something I haven’t experienced. It’s more exciting to me. I’m more interested than fear. So when I’m there, there’s this sort of constant, “you should be afraid of that, you should be afraid of that, you should be afraid of that.” So I had to get out. I feel like, physically, I just had to leave. My family had told me to get out. I feel like, physically, I just had to leave. My family had told me to get out. I feel like they don’t really...I don’t think they knew the repercussions of that. They said get out get an education, go, don’t suffer the way have, we think there’s something better for you. We’re sacrificing so you can have something different. I don’t think they thought that meant I was going to move away and never go back. And there was a point where I said I was going back. For many, many years. I just think I couldn’t say I’m never going back yet. I just felt that obligation. But I’m not going back. I mean I don’t think I can. I shouldn’t say I’m not, you should never—who knows what will happen. But I don’t intend. To go back anymore. Other than for visits. It’s stifling. Yeah.

DELP: [0:20:58] Before we move out of the Delta,

WIGGINS: I’m out, man.
DELP: Can you speak a little bit more about your family’s particular connection to agriculture? You mentioned that your family had been a sharecropper and that you’ve had animals around your whole life, so what was that connection to farming?

WIGGINS: Yeah, I grew up on my grandparents’ cotton farm. Both my parents’ families were in agriculture and they were both sharecroppers. My mom’s family did sharecropping. They moved from eastern Mississippi, close to Alabama, the hills, to the Delta, really not far from where we live now. I actually visited the homestead—really close to where my mom was born—when I was visiting for Christmas. We were going to Sky Lake, this area that’s a huge bald cypress virgin forest that had been discovered that actually Tom Rankin told me about. And I was telling my mom because I’ve decided every time I go home I’m going to do one thing fun at least. So I was like, “we’re going to go to this virgin cypress forest, it’ll be beautiful.” I was telling my mom, she was like, “oh yeah, your grand grandparents are buried there.” So we went there, it was about twenty minutes from where I grew up and we passed by a little gravel road and my mom’s like, “I was born down that road.” So they moved to the Delta but then they were actually relocated to the area where I lived through a program in the 30s for sharecroppers who were able to buy land. So my grandparents were able to stop moving and working on other people’s land and they got a loan from the government to buy this hundred plus acre farm. And my grandmother...when my grandfather died, which was right before I was born, my grandmother continued to manage the farm, lease the land. She leased to a local farmer. My grandmother is passed now and so the four children own the land and so I grew up on that land, practically within a stone’s throw of the cotton field. Literally in the middle of the cotton field. It’s very contentious right now about what we do with the land, because my grandmother sort of wielded her power beyond the grave by saying that all four children either had to sell or either had to keep. The land. Well two children live on the land. My mom and my uncle both live there. They don’t want to sell the land that they live on. The other two children don’t there want to sell it. So it’s an interesting family dynamic. So I knew more about that farm than I knew about their experiences before that. I knew the farmer who leased the land, I knew the planting season. We would have to come inside when they were spraying pesticides. It was sort of these things that were just part of the normal cycle. Every year I knew when cotton was going to bloom, I loved when cotton in bloom. It’s beautiful. The cycle of cotton was sort of the cycle of our life there. My mom would tell stories of working in the fields when she was a kid. She never...she wasn’t born when they were sharecropping. She was born when they had settled. And she was the baby, so she would always just tell stories, tell jokes about how she didn’t have to do much work. So that was sort of the narrative I
heard. Like, “Yeah it’s hard, but she doesn’t really know, she didn’t really have to pull her weight in cotton.” The family hired...or my grandparents hired African American day laborers to work alongside my family because they needed more labor than they had children. They don’t really talk about that much. My grandparents lived in a sharecropper home. I found out fairly recently. [0:25:04] A couple of years ago when I was reading an oral history of that community, of Phillipstown, that African Americans had been displaced because of this program. So it was sort of this redistribution of land program where two hundred communities were created like Phillipstown, where people were able to buy land and stop being sharecroppers. But in the process other people were displaced. So that land—it’s very interesting—that land, there used to be Native Americans living there, and then there were slaves—it was a plantation there that was broken up. One plantation was divided among fifty families so my family was one of those fifty that got a piece of land. But then these white sharecroppers were able to move in, and the black sharecroppers were displaced. So even though my grandparents lived in a pretty crappy sharecropping home, I don’t know what happened to those workers who were moved out. So that’s kind of the things I’ve know about them, but other than sort of the process of being and knowing what happens in an agricultural community and season, I didn’t know about what came before until I started working at SAF. [0:26:15] And I have gone back and back and back and back and asked more and more and more questions. With my dad it’s very hard to get information. I think he just had a harder time. He was a kid. I just think it was a rough time. And he will hardly talk about it. He’ll mention that they worked on this person’s farm or this person’s farm. The last couple of times that I’ve been home I think he’s not doing well health wise, and so he’s thinking about the end of his life. And he has said he wants to take me to the plantation where he worked on for the most of his time, which is pretty close to where he lives now. And I didn’t know...I’ve gone down that road a million times and I didn’t know that’s where he worked because he doesn’t talk about it. So I think it was two years—two Christmases ago—he was like, I want to take you to that plantation. The place where he lived isn’t there but the big house is there still. People still live in it, it’s been renovated. And I don’t know...It’s kind of interesting, I don’t know if it’s in response to me asking about him working in the fields, or if there is something significant that happened there that he wants to share. He hasn’t really said. But I know very little about his experiences working in the field other than it was hard, he didn’t like it, he was a kid. He feels like he missed out, I think, because of that experience.

DELP: [0:27:40] So, what was the transition like, moving to North Carolina?
WIGGINS: Lord, I didn’t even visit before I came. One of the things about being working class is, like my parents said, you apply to the school that you want to go to, because it’s expensive to apply. So for college and grad school I applied to one school and thank god I got in. I had gone to Millsaps, a small college in Jackson, Mississippi, and I didn’t know what I wanted to do when I got out of school. I had studied political science. I’d really been politicized in college. My professors, one of them was from Africa, and it was anti-apartheid movement going on then, I got involved with that on campus. My other professor had been very involved with the civil rights movement. He was blacklist during the civil rights movement. They were pretty instrumental in helping me learn, re-learn, un-learn, all kind of things about the history of civil rights in the Delta and throughout the world, really. And that professor whose name is John Quincy Adams, no lie, political science professor. He said, “have you ever thought of divinity school?” And I was like, “nope.” Not at all because I knew I didn’t want to be a minister. I knew I didn’t want to work in a church setting. But he knew that I was spiritual and that I come from a religious community and just thought that I might look into it. [0:29:23] There’s a lot of social justice work that people of faith are involved in and that some divinity schools sort of facilitate, or harbor. Duke isn’t necessarily one of them, no offense, but it was the one I decided to go to because I wanted to stay in the southeast. I do feel committed to the South. I feel like the South gets a bad rep sometimes, and I feel like the South doesn’t get enough of a bad rep sometimes. I’m Southern. I feel committed to what needs to happen here. So I wanted to go to a university in the South, I wanted a divinity school that was connected to a major university— that kind of narrows it tremendously. Believe it or not Duke was the cheapest. I don’t know if they still do this, but at the time, they paid half of my tuition. They pay half of Duke students’ tuition. So I went for half price. So it was an easy decision, because I was paying for myself, and knew I would have to take out loans or whatever. So I came un-seen. I drove…when I came to Duke was when I was moving in to Durham. [0:30:40] The divinity school is a fairly conservative divinity school. If I had to go to divinity school now I wouldn’t go there. If I had to do it again I probably would considering where I was coming from. I was in a transition phase. I was still struggling with my experiences with Pentecostalism. I was still trying to figure out a lot of things. So I think it was probably the best place for me at the time because it’s pretty mainstream. But it allowed to move just a little bit, a little bit different areas. I got involved with some social justice work on campus. Got involved with the LGBTQ group in the divinity school. Got involved with Student Action with Farmworkers. [0:31:30] Before SAF, I had started working with homeless people. And that’s kind of what I was considering...I didn’t know what I was considering doing, but I thought I wanted to work with homeless communities. Housing has always been pretty important to me, I think because so many of my
family members live in really unsafe, poor housing. It’s been an issue I’ve wanted to affect in some way. So working with homeless people was an interesting step coming from a rural community where there’s not many homeless people. I started going to cities. Part of it was trying to get out of the Delta and get out of a rural community, so I did every internship under the sun that would take me to a different city. And I ended up working with homeless people, which I did here in Durham too when I first started at Duke. So quite different. I had had some experiences in a couple of cities. [0:32:25] You know Durham’s not that big a city, and I had lived in a couple of larger cities, but it’s quite different than the Delta. I like Durham because it does have a large African American population. I do feel like in comparison to some of the other places around here and some of the other cities that I lived in. I feel like there’s a...it feels very working class in some ways in Durham. Certainly you can go to places in Durham where you don’t. But there’s some grittiness and working class feel that felt comfortable to me. And once you find a work path, a path that’s sort of bringing in all your everything—your belief system, your family connection, your academic studies—it felt it was easy to stay here. Oh and I also found my significant other but...another reason.

TREY: [0:33:28] So would you say that...can you describe one your experiences working with the homeless people and that internship? If you could just go over what you did, what that experience was like, if that was what transitioned you from your theological background and your studies to working with social justice?

WIGGINS: Yeah, I’m trying to think of my first experience...when I was in college I was in Jackson, Mississippi, so in the capital, and there’s a fairly large homeless population there. And I probably got involved through some service project there. I’m trying to remember. I used to serve...I know I used to go to the local soup kitchen and serve meals. And that’s where I just kind of started talking to homeless people. After that I sought out programs that were a little bit different that the day shelter kind of approach. Most of my internships were with longer term kind of options for folks, where people could live in a setting for three or six months. Something that also incorporated some training and some...job training or skill-based training to try to transition people out. [0:34:48] I love connecting with people and I really...I think it was one of the times when I started to think about folks that are considered mentally ill. Quite a lot of homeless folks face different mental illnesses. And I think the...there was one woman that I remember in St. Louis who I didn’t know, I think she was mentally ill, we had a very good relationship, it was a wonderful woman, Gena, she...I just remember at some point during the summer someone told me, “you know she’s crazy” sort of flippantly. And I was like, “no, I didn’t know...” And it was pretty
powerful to start thinking about, well, what does that mean, right? I’m supposed to think about her differently, I’m supposed to relate to her differently, I can’t be her friend anymore? Because we had started going to church together. We had crossed some professional bounds probably. But you know, it sort of helped me think about, again, some of the same questions I had been struggling with about how do you relate to other people? And so what if there’s this difference. And how do really relate to people who we consider different? Or really, not even different is the right word—less than. [0:36:27] So again, it was like, okay, because she is mentally ill, she’s not the same as us. She can’t have the same conversations or contribute in the same way. And it was really hard for me. Just coming to grips with, “Oh. So this is the way the world works.” It was a reminder of the way things were in the Mississippi Delta. Right? Here I was in St. Louis, this progressive place, the city, and all of a sudden there’s just a different group that some how are less than—and then you just fill in the blanks. So then you treat them different. You talk to them differently. The thing I feel like I experienced that summer, and certainly it’s not the same with all homeless people, but this woman was exceptionally giving. She used to do things like...we had a homeless shelter which she lived in, and we also had a food pantry and a clothing pantry there. She used to pick out clothes for me. She would volunteer and help. She would pick out things she thought would fit me and look nice and she would give them to me as gifts. I mean, just things that that. And she and I had incredibly intense political conversations about the world and what was going on. [0:37:51] So I think that experience...and I just had a lot of intimate conversations with homeless people. And I felt like they had a pretty good perspective on the world and how things could be and how we could relate to each other better that wasn’t part of the larger conversations around those issues. The thing it started making me think about is the point of view from those who are most affected. Why aren’t homeless people determining what’s needed for homeless people. So it just created a thought pattern that I’ve taken forward. How are the folks who are most affected be involved with the decisions that are made. It’s the same as my parents. My parents were not involved in decisions that affected their workplace at all. Nothing. They decided nothing about their work. African Americans in the community where I group up in—very little say, even though they’re the majority. Very little say over decisions that affected them in that community. Homeless people, very little say. So I think it was just one more block on this thought pattern about...that folks most affected should be involved with decisions that affect them. And what are we so afraid of when we don’t do that?

TREY: [0:39:13] So you mentioned about how this is pushing you towards a certain thing you want to do in the future, a certain path you want to take. So how would you say you acted on this? So how did you want to transform
or translate your experiences so that you could do more in the future after your master’s degree at Duke Divinity school? Did you have an idea?

WIGGINS: I don’t know if I did. The one thing that I did know was that I couldn’t do direct services. Because working in a homeless shelter, it felt like a lot of Band-Aids on the problem, and I didn’t really see any systemic change. So the other it started helping me think about are…was, just sort of, what’s causing this? Why is there a homeless population? Why is there a need for this? So it was pushing me a little bit beyond service. I think a lot of young people…or in my experience I got connected to issues initially through service. Like you do community service, you do volunteer stuff, whatever. And so it was one of those moments like many folks have, which is you start to think about that model and critique that model. And think about am I having any change here? Are we addressing the root causes of this problem? [0:40:39] So I think it pushed me...I don’t know...at that time I had no idea that I was going to work with farmworkers. I didn’t know what farmworkers were. I didn’t know they were still working in the fields by then. But I did start looking at, okay, how do people think about systemic change? And where is there work that addresses systemic issues? I can’t run a shelter. I knew that. It was very...lord, I don’t know how people do it. It’s very trying too, just in terms of you seeing the issues not resolved and folks not able to get out of the stream. So I did explore government. Then I did an internship at HUD in the homeless division in Washington, D.C. And I learned that I never wanted to work with a bureaucracy. That was a fun one to try on. So I thought, “Government, right? Government’s the way! Work that way!” And when I was there, I remember my project was about homelessness prevention because all the things I’d learned about homelessness was, one of the way to really address this was to prevent homelessness. Once people get homeless, it’s very, very difficult for them to transition back out. I found some startling statistics—I don’t know what it is now, this was a long time ago, but—that all the funding that was going to homelessness was going to Band-Aid services. Less than five percent was going to prevention. So it was also just again thinking about systemic issues and how little we spend or focus or look at that. So I think it pushed me in that direction, more than exactly what I was going to be doing.

DELP: [0:42:21] So how did you first become involved with SAF?

WIGGINS: I did the internship. SAF’s internship. When I was a student people still flyered. I don’t know if that’s still the way. There was no electronic means at that point. I saw a flyer on Duke’s campus about the Into the Fields Internship. And frankly, I didn’t really believe there were still people working in the fields because in the Mississippi Delta, even though I grew up on a farm, everything’s mechanized there. There aren’t folks
working in the fields there anymore. Cotton is mechanized, has been for a really long time. So I looked into it out of curiosity. I’d studied a little Spanish. All the staff at SAF now joke that we wouldn’t be accepted into the internship should we apply right now. The qualifications and the competition is such that...it was good I was in on the early, I was in the first class before there was a lot of competition for the program. I worked down in Newton Grove, pretty close to where you’re (to DELP) from, a little bit farther east, with the Episcopal Farmworker Ministry. So it was interesting because it combined some church-related work. One of my projects was to research what people of faith in North Carolina were doing with farmworkers. Was there any response to an increase of Spanish-speaking farmworkers in their community? And I was also helping folks with immigration applications. So I was educated pretty quickly about issues facing with immigrants and the whole application process, to adjust your status.

DELP: [0:43:56] We have a couple of photos that we...

WIGGINS: Uh oh.

DELP: ...collected from the archive. We’d like you to maybe scroll through them and see if maybe there’s one that sticks out to you and evokes a memory. If not, you can just hand the computer right back to me.

WIGGINS: Okay.

DELP: I’ll take it back right after you look at the photos on the screen.

WIGGINS: You want me to just scroll them all or just comment as I go?

DELP: You can pick one maybe that you’d like to mention.

WIGGINS: Good times. Yeah, you know, I’m forgetting this woman’s name. And I’m going to have to go back and look at it. She authored, co-authored, a book called Forged Under the Sun. A woman farmworker who was interviewed and the interviewer, she co-authored this book. I got a chance to meet her. I read the book, it’s just part of learning about issues. Got a chance to meet her because SAF used to put together regional symposiums. We’d go to different parts of the country and bring students together from part of that region to learn about farmworker issues, share what they were doing. And somehow...I think I got in touch with this woman because I was so moved by her book and she came and spoke to one of these students at these conferences. [0:45:53] I think the book was so powerful. It was in many ways. I think partly because she was a woman and she was very vocal in the movement, in what she named was a very sexist movement, in terms
of the farmworker movement. And being a woman organizer who worked with United Farmworkers and FLOC and all the major unions and feeling put down within her own movement. She’s also an artist and poet and wrote some amazing poetry about her experiences working in the field. And she’s also very spiritual. I think she’d probably identify as a liberationist, which is how I identify also. And she also writes about the movement from her spiritual place. And she was just amazingly powerful. I think I identified with it because she was working class, she was a worker, she was a woman, she was vocal, and... [0:46:59] I think being a feminist I thought I would also working with women more. And the majority of farmworkers are men. I work with a lot of young women, so I definitely mentor and connect with them. I think that’s one thing I thought and I think perhaps working with homeless women—I mostly worked with women—I thought, “I’m going to work with women.” So I think she was just a powerful example of how you can work within a larger movement that may not be all women and still be a feminist, still call attention to the issues that women face, or the issues that patriarchy adds on top of all the other ‘isms’ that farmworkers have to face. But I really just had an affinity. And I think its exemplary of...I’m a relationship-based person, as most people are, but I seek them out. I think process and relationships are as important as the end result, as important as what we’re trying to get. For me it’s both and, not either or. Certainly I want huge change within the industry. But I also want to build relationships and have strong, respectful relationships with folks along the way. I just felt a strong, powerful connection to her.

TREY: [0:48:21] How did you end up staying with SAF? You mentioned that for the year that you had the summer internship in 1993, you had the experience of working with farmworkers. Do you think that that’s what really committed you to Student Action for Farmworkers?

WIGGINS: I think sometimes that the universe just puts things together for you. I think I had just been going toward this path. And then when it was there I just said yes. This is where I am supposed to be kind of thing. Because I was so...I felt so drawn to it because again, people’s stories. Some people that I met that summer working with SAF, talking with farmworkers about their situation. And then there was SAF. I think the really good thing we do is we contextualize it all for folks. So then I was also learning how this was part of a long narrative in our country and in the South and for me in the Delta of how we’ve produced our food and how we’ve treated workers. And how we’ve treated people of color. [0:49:43] And I felt like this is my story and I have both an obligation to some—I don’t really love that term, but I haven’t found a better one—but, you know, I have benefitted from all the things that our agricultural system continues to portray, present that exploits people very directly. I mean I grew up on a plantation. It
feels...yeah, I can’t go there and not know how deeply my privilege has taken me away from that story. So there is that. Obligation is not quite right. But I just feel like I have a strong sense of fairness and I have a strong belief in equality and dignity in the workplace. And I was just pretty overwhelmed by what I learned and saw in terms of what’s happening to agricultural workers.

TREY: [0:50:56] Can you describe one moment particularly...

WIGGINS: From that summer?

TREY: Yeah. Or is there anything that resonated with you that summer? Or not that summer specifically, just any time working with the farmworkers?

WIGGINS: Well I think that summer...there’s experiences that I’ve had that are both with migrant workers that are here on a temporary basis to work in the fields, and the other powerful experience that I’ve had since that’s kept me in this, is a lot of relationships with students from farmworker families. The direct outreach...that summer I remember one house we visited actually with a woman who lived there alone with her kids. She was working in the fields and taking care of her kids and she lived right in the middle of the cotton—it wasn’t cotton, tobacco fields!—so I feel that there was this affinity there. She’s working to care of her kids and there’s no place for her kids to go when she’s working. We went there and had a lovely exchange with her that wasn’t about a complaint she was going to file or something she was going to change. It was just this human interaction, just like you would have with any other person. She’s offering pretty much food and drink she doesn’t have to share, and she’s pretty open with what her problems are though, with what’s going on. I think the experience was powerful...I connected with her daughter. Kids like me. I think it’s because I’m little, they think I’m little, I think. So her daughter and I had a little connection. [0:52:51] But again, I reflect a lot on experiences and it wasn’t anything monumental. It wasn’t like she told this incredible crazy exploitative example. It was a normal example of what farmworkers face every day. It was a routine example of abuse. It wasn’t anything egregious. But it was the routineness of it and her demeanor and sharing it with us that had such a powerful effect on me. Because I was like, for her this is her daily work. Just like I remember my parents. If I told you some of the things they’ve experienced, you’d be like, you got to be kidding me. But for them it’s just like, this is it, this is part of it, I got to do this for my family, this is just the way it is. Telling you now to get it off of my chest, I’m not doing anything about it. I can’t risk. Just sort of the routineness of exploitation, and when workers get to that place where they’ve lost some hope of changing it. That I think effected me.
TREY: [0:53:55] Can you describe the living conditions that she experienced and her working conditions?

WIGGINS: Well for her...she lived in a unique situation...well, I shouldn’t say that. I’ve been to so many farmworker housings, they’re all different. She lived in a house. It was a two-room house. She didn’t have a bathroom inside. There was a kitchen area and a living and bedroom area together. It was a really, really old farmhouse just on the side of the road. Not good water. That was a problem she was experiencing, having clean water. So she and her children shared a living space and had a kitchen area.

DELP: [0:54:46] Why do you think it’s important to work with students?

WIGGINS: I’ve had really powerful instances of working with students. I think college students are at a unique period. And we work with middle and high school kids also. I think right around that high-school college age a lot of people are exploring. They’re answering those big questions: what do I want to do with my life? What do I want to be? You start to really question things you were taught. You start to explore a little bit on your own. I just think they are in a unique position to go down different paths. I don’t know how much students are getting in terms of the training we provide for their schools or in their college or university setting. And I feel like they are still open too. They are in this space of learning, wanting, yearning for information and for opportunities and stuff. So part of what we do is give them a particular reading of their agricultural history, and particular understanding of racism and classism in the South, and a positive venue for affecting change that can connect to their career. So all of a sudden they can think of it as a path that can build on what they are wanting to do or studying, but can also be a little different than what their families’ expectations, but not too far off. [0:56:36] I don’t know that I know. I love working with that age group. I don’t know why. I think I enjoy the dialogues that they are willing to have. We work with a lot of first generation college students who I feel like I can identify with in terms of how they are relating to their families. And the struggles that they are dealing with in terms of what does it mean to be the first generation in her family to go to college. And how that’s everything your family wants, and how that’s going to lead you to have some separation between you and your family. It’s going to lead you down a path of being distant from your family. I have a lot of those conversations with them.

TREY: [0:57:24] So as executive director of SAF, are you responsibilities supervisory, or do you still get the chance to talk to farmworkers? You mentioned talking to students. What is your position right now?
WIGGINS: It’s changed a lot over the years, but I’ve always been able to connect directly with workers and the students. I prioritize that I go to all the students training and go to on outreach to visit workers every year. So that’s a part of my work. It’s not my primary work. But I want to know...I need to know everyone that are SAFistas. We have the unique opportunity to have so many students that are from farmworker families. So even the relationships with them...for many of them they would be working in the fields if they weren’t doing our internship. So it’s so near to them that their perspective is also unique. I also do supervise my co-workers, and provide mentorship and support for them. I interact with the board of directors. A lot of what I do is fundraising. I make sure I resources to pay people. All of our programs for young people are paid so that we can ensure that farmworker students can participate. I do a little bit of the finances, managing the finances. So it’s a little bit of different things, which I like.

(break in interview)

DELP: [0:59:01] So, welcome back. We know that SAF uses a lot of documentary and theater and those kinds of programs. How do you use those programs, and what makes them effective in your work?

WIGGINS: We used documentary as a way to try to...actually, going back to what I said before, making sure workers’ voices are part of the conversations around impacting what affects them in their workplace. A lot of times workers can’t and don’t and aren’t able to speak directly to their employers or their employers’ employers about their conditions because they are afraid or just don’t speak the same language or are intimidated and know that they would have repercussions if they did. So doing documentaries provides them with a little bit of a safer way to share their stories, talk about the issues that they are facing, and for us to use that in larger campaigns, advocacy campaigns or educational campaigns with the larger public to try to garner support. So that’s really the way we use documentaries. Just to make sure that Workers are able to tell their stories and then just like you’re asking me they can choose how we use it, what we do with them. Theater has been a really powerful tool also, we’ve actually created a number of theater pieces from documentary stories, using people’s stories to then create a piece. But we use theater as a way to support workers to support workers to start thinking about and practicing making change in the workplace. We use a popular theater– Theater of the Oppressed method- where workers get to act out or practice scenarios that they want to address. And the idea is it gets a little easier if you practice or you think about solutions or act out solutions to your situation. They have been a good way to build relationships with workers but also to support workers to make change. And we’ve seen some, it’s not overwhelming,
change in this work is slow and sometimes seems incremental, but we’ve seen as a result of some of that work, workers making formal complaints about their housing or making formal complaints about not getting paid correctly for wages when I don’t think without that practicing and without feeling like they were supported, they would have done that.

DELP: In an interview with Indyweek, you stated that one of SAF’s biggest issues is a lack of resources and you mentioned this early as well. What kind of resources is the organization lacking and how do you cope with the lack of these resources?

WIGGINS: [1:02:16] Well it’s hard to make systemic changes with limited resources: money, people, time. As the fundraiser for SAF it’s probably on my mind more than others I feel the responsibility to raise the resources in order for my colleagues and students to get paid for their work and it’s hard. Raising funds for advocacy and organizing work is difficult. It’s not like we are turning money away because we have so much. So it is - what did I say in Indy?

DELP: You just said SAF’s biggest problem is a lack of resources

WIGGINS: I think it’s because it never goes away it’s a continuous- yeah, I fundraise every week, I fundraise all the time. It’s like you finish one year and you have to start over. It’s not like we have an endowment or a sugar daddy somewhere that is definitely going to come through. It’s just a continuous process of asking and or writing grants or asking individuals, or submitting proposals to get it, so it’s a continuous piece. I don’t know if that is our biggest problem, the biggest problems are probably the corporations and anti-immigrant and pro-grower lobbyist. I mean the opposition is probably our biggest real barrier to change. In my job description world, it is resources, in the visionary world of how do we really make change for farmworkers, there is huge, huge opposition to the work, that is well funded.

DELP: What are your strategies for continuing the farmworker movement? How do you see progress being made?

WIGGINS: [1:04:31] I mean the one thing that I love about SAF that I think reflecting back on the work doing with homeless shelters that I felt wasn’t quite fulfilling is that we try to work on multiple levels. So there is one aspect of it which is there are immediate needs right now with farmworkers. We try to connect farmworkers to resources. So there is a huge need for access to health care for instance and we try to facilitate that. So some direct health services: transporting workers to the clinics, making appointments, interpreting for workers at the clinics. So, one is the direct
service piece. But at the same time we are able to work on the systemic way in terms of advocacy and organizing; so supporting farmworkers who are organizing into a farm labor union, or doing community organizing in their area if they are settled out, and also trying to support legislative change. There is huge problems in the law in terms of lack of protection for workers. So we have again both and perspectives of. There are immediate concerns and needs and let’s try to connect people with those resources and let’s think of long term and what needs to change. And part of that is the way is the agricultural system is structured and where the power lies and where farmworkers are not involved in decision making. And the other is around what’s on the books in terms of laws and protections and lack thereof.

TREY: Can you explain the power system you mentioned just now? The agribusinesses and how they function?

WIGGINS: [1:05:01] Yeah, that’s a big question too. In the day to day way of looking at it, workers have pretty much no control over their living or working conditions. They are not involved with deciding what work they do, when they do it, how much they are paid. There is a lot of control that their individual employer has in their day to day lives, so that is one aspect of control. The employer is working with a crew leader or contratista, a middle person, really determines really every day things for workers that can be really- what can it do- it’s just like if you have to ask someone for a ride to the grocery store, you have to ask someone for permission to make a call to your family. There is that kind of control, that sort of daily control, and then on top of that there is a huge agribusiness system that is vertically integrated where you got corporations that are controlling the employer that is then controlling the worker. And so that system in terms of workers having little control over their lives is reminiscent of slavery in terms of living on someone else’s land, working for someone else, being dependent on someone else for food, transportation, your livelihood. That level of control is that I am referring to.

TREY: Can you tell me a little bit about how this plays out in North Carolina and specific circumstances that are relative to just the region around here and what SAF works with?

WIGGINS: I don’t know if I totally understand.

TREY: Just, would you like to talk about local issues in terms of what goes on with the farmworkers here?

WIGGINS: [1:08:15] Yeah, in North Carolina, it is typical than in other states in many ways in terms of the majority of farmworkers here live in
employer provided housing on a growers land, many work for-by the bucket, but they are paid by the piece- they are not paid in hourly wage so it creates a lot of work demand on how fast they work, which again the faster they work the more prone they are to injury, the more tired they are. It leads to all kinds of things. Many of them are undocumented and so are not able to have the legal permission from the US government to work so that creates a sense of fear for a lot of workers. It means that they are very unlikely to complain about even the smallest problems much less any egregious abuse because they have a fear of being deported. As I mentioned earlier most of the farmworkers here are young men traveling without their families.

[1:09:31] North Carolina has very a long growing season and we have a lot of crops that farmworkers work in. It’s one of the reasons why we have such a large population here, is that folks can work here 9-10 months in the year, you can actually work in the fields in North Carolina. There are a lot of different industries. Tobacco is what the majority of farmworkers work in, although here is a lot of cash crops here. There is a lot of discrepancies in terms of how workers are treated based on whether they have documents or not or whether they have been coming back for periods of time or whether they are men or women. In terms of all the ones that you can imagine being worse; if you’re a woman, if you are undocumented, if you are young, in terms of being treated differently. There is some advantage in North Carolina; there are a lot of resources for farmworkers in North Carolina because there is a lot of farmworkers. There is actually a lot of support and we also have one of the only farmworker labor unions in the country. If you think the general population is not unionized, look at farmworkers and it is even fewer are organized.

[1:10:46] Part of the reason, it’s certainly not the only reason, is that farmworkers are not protected from organizing. They are exempted from the law that farmworkers that says if a worker is organized and gets fired they can get their job back. Farmworkers can’t. If they unionize, if they associate with others in the workplace, they get fired and they have no redress to get their job back. There are certainly other reasons why farmworkers find it difficult to organize, all of the control I mentioned earlier, and there is certainly a lot of abuse in the system. Being a migrant workforce, being an undocumented workforce, there is a lot of barriers for workers coming together to ask for change. So things are very difficult for farmworkers here and there is a lot of support for farmworkers here.

**CHRISTINE DELP**: [1:11:38] Why did you create FAN?

**WIGGINS**: I didn’t create FAN, I was part of-
DELP: You were credited to-

WIGGINS: Things get done that way. So just note if you are in a director’s position you get credited for a lot of things didn’t do and that you were a part of, so to set the record straight. I was part of SAF when invited other farmworker groups to come together to talk about some systemic issues. We realized we didn’t have enough resources to really tackle some of these systemic changes. And we worked really well, we had been working for a long time with some other organizations in North Carolina. We invited them to come around to start talking about some of those issues. A couple of the issues we came together to talk about, one of them was around the H2A program, the guest worker program in North Carolina. There were some serious problems with that program, there still are. But at the time, this was a little over 10 years ago, they had been denying certain groups access. The North Carolina Growers Association, which is the association that brought and still brings the majority of farmworkers through the H-2A program to North Carolina, had been denying Legal Aid, FLOC, and some SAF interns access to the workers. So they had drawn some hard and fast lines about who was able to access workers and who was not. And they also were putting some propaganda out about FLOC and Legal Aid, saying particularly Legal Aid wanted to destroy the H-2A program. Essentially intimidating workers, saying don’t talk to these groups about your rights. That was one of the areas where several of us groups had been doing some individual advocacy on that issue and we decided to find out what else other groups are doing and is there a way to be more strategic and actually join forces against the Grower’s Association and have a bigger impact. And another issue we brought people together to talk about was housing.

[1:13:55] We had found that the North Carolina Department of Labor which is in charge of enforcing the migrant housing act here in this state, was not in our opinion doing a good job. There were a couple of instances where farmworkers had made complaint about their housing, which is really hard to make a formal complaint with a government agency about the housing, they had done it, and the Department of Labor didn’t even go out to inspect the housing, so they didn’t do what we thought they should have done in terms of response. Well, I’ll tell the funny story with that which is SAF put out an action alert against the Department of Labor for this, we asked people– we gave people – Regina Luginbuhl who is in head of the Ag. Safety and Health division of the Department of Labor, in charge of the housing, we them her direct number out and she started getting calls from all over the country and she was not happy at all. We just asked people call the Department of Labor and ask why they don’t respond to workers complaints– this is what they’ve done. She was furious. I don’t think I’ve ever had any- well there are a couple more growers who have been mad at me- but she’s up there in the
top 5 of people who have blessed me out for something we’ve done or for something she’s disagreed with. So she called me up really in order to hang up on me, called me up, yelled at me, hung up on me, very furious.

[1:15:23] Especially because -this is what she was mad at- which why it is telling. She was mad that people in other states knew about it. She wasn’t mad that we were calling her out-she wasn’t concerned that the workers didn’t get a response, she wasn’t concerned for the right reasons. She was concerned that people knew that they might not be doing a good job. It’s like do a good job and you don’t have to worry about it. Long story too, we invited some folks to come talk about these issues and think about can we be more strategic, can we work together on this. And the groups that came decided that we should keep meeting, we learned a lot from each other in terms of what we’re doing. We think there is need for some concerted effort, unified effort, around some advocacy pieces here. Let’s keep meeting. And FAN grew out of that. But the reason that I wanted to do it is because I cared about systemic change and realized that we couldn’t do it alone so let’s have conversations with other groups and figure out can we do anything collectively.

DELP: [1:16:33] I’m not accrediting you with this either.

WIGGINS: Well I might have done it-

DELP: Maybe you did! So what about Adelante education coalition? How did that start and what was your role in that?

WIGGINS: It was fairly similar actually, it was around the same time. A couple of us, a couple of organizations that work with Latino youth, immigrant youth, had been working on an in-state tuition bill. And SAF got involved with that because a number of farmworker youth that we work with were undocumented and wanted to go to college and couldn’t access college at out of state rates. So they came to us saying we got to do something, we need to change the law around this issue, starting with just investigating what that means. I had contact with the legislature who introduced the first in-state tuition bill and had been on advisory team with him, I’m going to lose his name.

[1:17:34] For a year were on this group together and I kept educating him about farmworkers, he kept saying to me, let me know if you want to do anything in legislature, let me know. So after a year I was like okay we want you to do something in legislature, will you introduce this tuition equity bill? He cared a lot about education he was the first in his family to go to college, so agreed to put it forward. But it didn’t go so well, it didn’t move forward.
We got it introduced two years later and it even went worse in terms of the backlash. The first time we introduced it was very quiet, it didn’t move forward but we didn’t get a lot of backlash. The second time was very public and the governor at the time came out in support, or former governor. It was really big, it was one of the first anti-immigrant public responses that was really negative. One of our partners got death threats over this issue. We realized we needed to have a little bit better cohesion in terms of working together on this issue.

[1:18:46] So we again brought the folks who had been working on this bill together and invited some other groups who work on Latino and immigrant issues to talk about that advocacy. But also there was a real yearning for people to share resources and what was going on in different parts of the state and who knows the answer to this or who has a resource on this. And so, it really developed into something a little bit, we didn’t plan what it was going to be, but it ended up being this group of just resource sharing, of let’s get to know each other, let’s try not to duplicate resources, services, or material creation, and let’s try to be strategic about advocacy. They both developed very organically. We did, once we realized with FAN and Adelante that there was the intention to become a coalition, to be a group of people, we spent quite a lot of time with both of them actually in getting to know each other. We did a lot just to have the members build trust, get to know each other, get a sense of who they were, before we did another public campaign with either group. And I did have something to do with that, because it is very hard to work on campaigns together if you don’t have those relationships.

TREY: [1:20:16] Immigration laws usually, they affect Latinos and those make up a large proportion of farmworkers. How do you see the effect of the bill you just mentioned on people you work so often with?

WIGGINS: With the tuition equity bill?

DELP: Can you describe the bill also?

WIGGINS: Well, there have been multiple bills. It hasn’t been the same bill very time. The tuition equity piece is trying to allow undocumented students to pay in state tuition rates if they can prove they have been residents in North Carolina for a certain period of time.

[1:21:00] The idea behind it is a lot of immigrant youth came here when they were young. Children have been in North Carolina all their lives, we’ve invested in their education, and there comes this point in their life when they graduate from high school where it is like too bad we’re done, you’re not
actually a resident of the state, we’ve forgotten that you’ve lived here 12 years or however long you’ve lived here. The idea is just to equalize this law, to make students who are actual residents pay the same rates as other residents of North Carolina. A lot of farmworkers are undocumented immigrants, with regards of larger immigrant debates and conversations that have happened, SAF has tried to play a particular role in that in terms of bringing labor issues. There are a lot of other groups whose mission is solely on immigration issues and work and that is not ours. We of course have to be involved with that conversation and that work but we try to bring the labor piece. We try to comment on the guest worker program when there is one or how will this particularly affect farmworkers or in this case undocumented students. How does the immigrant bill, debate, or dialogue happening affect our constituents?

DELP: There have been a lot of successful and unsuccessful protests in the history of the farmworker labor movement can you describe any that are really significant to you within the time that you’ve been working at SAF?

WIGGINS: Yeah, one I’ve been thinking recently was the first protest I ever went to in 1993 and it was a protest around driver license. And I’ve been thinking about it because there is conversation around driver license again. Of course undocumented folks are not eligible for license in North Carolina anymore, they used to be several years ago but not anymore. There was a very contentious bill introduced last year around driver’s license because it provided some good and some bad things all in the same bill and it created a lot of tension in the larger immigrant rights community because some groups supported it and some people were against it.

[1:23:24] And it’s just very telling in terms of what is going on in this movement in that people are not on the same page, groups are not on the same page, individuals are not on the same page. It makes it very hard to move forward because there is not a united front. I’ve been thinking about this drivers license bill because I got word this morning that Republican legislature is considering forward this driver license bill this year in the short session, not very much time. It brings up all these questions: what is this bill going to be about, and is it going to have some good and bad, again a divider among immigrants and groups who work with immigrants. But my first protest was outside the Department of Motor Vehicles office in Raleigh because a lot of folks in rural North Carolina were getting discriminated against at local DMV offices. If they spoke Spanish they were told they could not get a license. Even if they brought an interpreter they were told they were not allowed to take the test and could not drive in North Carolina. So that was my first protest actually, was around access based on the DMV
discriminating Latinos, Spanish speakers. What was your question? I don’t know if I answered your question.

DELP: You did, a significant protest.

WIGGINS: I think it was significant because it was twenty years ago and we hadn’t resolved this issue. It was significant in the sense of how long this work takes and it was significant because it was about discrimination and there continues to be discrimination by this agency, and by our legislatures, and by our state, of discriminating against people of their race and language and ethnicity, really.

[1:25:20] North Carolina is one of the states that has had a fairly large increase in its Latino population in the last 20 years. Depending on when you look at the statistics we’re kind of up at the top in terms of numbers of increase. With that there has been a lot of backlash, a lot of the same feelings that my community in the Mississippi Delta expressed in terms of fear, and I think that the right wing has done a great job of lifting up and putting more backing to that fear of “yes you should be afraid, you should be afraid of those Latino immigrants”.

[1:26:07] There is a number of right wing political groups that are operating in North Carolina, many of them have been designated as hate groups, many of them are funded by national hate groups, and national organizations that are funneling money into some specific states where there is a large influx of Latinos. And that’s another group that is getting funding here in terms of, specifically in, North Carolina. There is the civitus group, there is the John Locke Foundation, and there are several national anti-immigration groups that have got arms here or are feeding newspaper stories here, blogs here, materials here. It’s actually has been growing over the last 10 years, I think it is the Southern Poverty Law Center has done a lot of documentation on this, that has listed all the hate groups that are actively operating in the south, and you can look up which and they can tell you, which groups are doing what, where.

[1:27:10] I think the death threats that I mentioned were particularly over the Tuition Equity bill specifically and El Pueblo is the group that got the brunt of those, and it was partly because they were out public. This is partly what led to the coalition, it was because El Pueblo got the credit for the bill, and they also got all the negative impact even though it was a coalition of folks working on it. It also led us to have the discussion about “oh god we do have to be more united” because one group can’t be out there getting the credit or getting the brunt of this negative. The director, there was one point, there was a point where she had to leave the house in terms of feeling
afraid. I’ve had a plenty of weird and threatening emails and letters and calls but nothing I would consider a death threat. Very recently, you guys might have seen it, one of these groups targeted SAF and so maybe two weeks ago, a week ago, a national blog group posted an article about SAF in response to the AFL-CIO event that we hosted here.

[1:28:32] Basically what a lot of groups do is they look at where you got your funding, and if you get any government funding, then they automatically say “this group is using government funding to do lobbying, this group is using government funding to undermine government’s good work, this group is using taxpayer money to help undocumented immigrants.” Which of course the article was inaccurate in terms of how we used resources, but it is still out there, they put out there that material. And they rally people. They rally people, they cause people to have questions about groups, they lead them down that fear path, they fuel the fire for people to feel like somehow their jobs are going to get taken away. Around the access to college it is that “my kid is not going to get to go to college because an undocumented immigrant is going to be in their place”. I had so many legislatures say that, well if we pass this bill that person is going to take my kids spot. There is this belief in limited resources and opportunities, and if these people come in and take them, I don’t get them. It’s an either or mindset that is toxic. I don’t know what more you are thinking or if ya’ll want to follow up.

TREY: [1:30:04] How do you think that SAF will change the landscape of this, are there any bills that you are supporting right now, specifically to do with labor and farmworkers, which of these legislatures specifically.

WIGGINS: It is difficult right now to make any change in terms of labor or legislative change. FLOC’s got a campaign going right now to organize tobacco workers, we’re hopeful that is going to move forward, it has been years in the making and they are trying to fight one of the biggest tobacco companies in the world, R J Reynolds. We’ve seen labor unions do this before. They are never tackling a corporation that doesn’t have power. They are always up against corporations that have a lot of power and resources, and tends to use resources to fight organizing no matter what, even if they have organized plants in other places.

[1:31:12] We saw this with United Food and Commercial Workers and their campaign here. Smithfields had unionized workplaces, processing plants in other states, and they still spent so much time and resources fighting this one particular plant to get organized. So it’s not about resources really. It’s like why don’t you use those resources to pay workers more? Why are you going to hire this huge consulting form to do this whole media strategy? It’s
about control. It’s always been about power and control. It’s never been about- I shouldn’t say it’s not about money- but it’s really about who is going to decide, who is going to make decisions here. The companies want to keep that. They don’t want the basic premise that I believe in, that I started with, that workers should have a say in the decisions that affect them, they should have a say in their workplace.

[1:32:10] We just saw this recently in Tennessee which is an even more interesting twist in terms of the autoworkers losing that election, and it wasn’t, although I don’t believe, supposedly the company was neutral, but the politicians got involved and put out all this anti-immigrant stuff so when it came time for the election the workers didn’t vote for the union. So what we’ve got is a climate, an anti-union, an anti-worker, anti-immigrant, anti-progressive climate that seemed to have gotten stronger lately in North Carolina- I’m beginning to wonder if I should go back to Mississippi- because it’s really looking a lot more like Mississippi in terms of reactionary, in terms of fear based responses.

[1:33:04] What we’re going do is keep putting forward pro worker and pro-immigrant legislation. Believe it or not we have a few Republicans who are interested in tuition equity either this year or next year. Now they’re not doing it out of the goodness of their heart. Politics is politics and people do it for votes and all kind of reasons. There is an interest in some folks in getting the Latino vote and being willing to enact some legislation that’s what they think they can give away in order to get certain votes. So it’s going to be interesting to navigate. We’ll continue to introduce tuition equity, continue to introduce pro worker legislation.

[1:33:53] Our worker legislation has included everything from bathroom breaks for poultry workers since they are currently not required, to shade and some heat stress codes for farmworkers so that they are not in the fields when it is dangerously hot and they are susceptible to heat stroke, to equalizing the child labor laws making sure children not as young as 10 are required to work in the fields. We’re going to continue pushing forth a progressive agenda. I think if nothing else it creates it makes people respond, communicate with us, and have to think about it. As far as worker organizing, I am really hopeful that workers are able to, that field workers are able to move forward and get a contract with R J Reynolds, or get a 3 way contract, we’ll see what progresses. There has been progress with that campaign, it has been slow but there is progression in that direction. We just heard that United Food and Poultry Workers has been organizing Mount Air poultry workers down east so there is a new labor campaign with food processing workers. I’m also hopeful that there will continue to be that, in the last 10 years there has been a move from the majority of food
processing in the Midwest to the southeast so things are ripe here and I feel like if United Food and Commercial Workers can get a couple of wins with food processing workers in North Carolina, that they’ll be able to move forward and continue down that path.

[1:35:37] So, landscape affects strategy but it doesn’t affect vision. We still have the same vision. We still have to represent and we still have to go forward with our vision, just how you get there and what you do in response to when things are more or less crazy- that changes, but the work doesn’t really change in terms of what we’re about. We’re not going to all of a sudden not be for tuition equity because we can’t get a bill through. I mean the youth that we work with are like “no way!” Last year we couldn’t get our republican to sponsor it so we knew it wasn’t going to get passed. They were like “we want a bill, we want this in the legislature” we’re like okay we’ll get a democrat to sponsor it, we’ll introduce the bill. They were like “we need a bill, we need a bill introduced.” A lot of times it’s the affected community, their time frame is different sometimes than organizations, and sometimes you have to decide that you respond to that because that’s the right thing to do, not because you’re going to win. We’re not going to win all these things this year, but we’re still going to speak out in support of them, we’re still going to try to get some pro-worker bills introduced.

TREY: Do you have any names?

WIGGINS: Names of what?

TREY: Names of bills.

WIGGINS: The session doesn’t start until May so there are no bills right now. Well actually, the instate tuition bill that was introduced last year, HB904, is still alive but it won’t move forward because it was introduced by Democrats.

DELP: When we did our research on this, there were some definite success stories that really stood out, for example, the Mount Olive Pickle campaign and in 2007, I believe, the Migrant Housing Act, can you speak a little about some of the successes and what can you learn from those successes in moving forward?

WIGGINS: [1:38:07] And I would say, those are both examples of campaign successes and I want to add a process cut success, because again we think of our work in terms of process and product. There are different ways of organizing and SAF tends to focuses more on process based organizing, woman based organizing, mujerista based organizing, it is a more community organizing approach than campaign based approach, we mix the
two, but in terms of organizing and organizing models and what we lift up as success, it is important for us to lift up the process based successes.

[1:38:55] Both the Mount Olive Pickle campaign and Migrant Housing Bill were campaigns were two campaigns, two limited success campaigns but successful. With FLOC’s campaign, it was longer than people talk about. Most people talk about the boycott years and that was really the shorter part of the campaign. SAF got involved with this with that campaign in the early 90s it was actually one of the first things we did as an organization before FLOC was present. We did the research for them to determine if they should come to south because they hadn’t worked in the south before, and they were trying to figure out, what’s different in the south? What can we learn? What’s going on there? We did some of the research about what companies, what fields, what were the conditions of pickle workers, and provided that information just to help them determine next steps. And then there were many years of organizing workers and we had SAF interns working on that campaign, doing everything from going door to door to farmworker camps, telling people about the union, asking them about their conditions, signing them people up but also still doing research. FLOC, it is very hard to know about agricultural companies, there are so many things that are not public, we had students doing everything- they were driving around following pickle trucks to find out which growers sold to whom because the workers don’t know, sometimes they are not aware of their employer’s name. They may not know what county they are in. They are brought here and they are often dropped off. They have very limited information about where they are and who they work for. They don’t know what company the grower is selling pickles to, so we were driving around trying to find who is selling to whom, which growers were connected to which companies. So for years and years that was the work of the campaign, it wasn’t public, there wasn’t anything for the consumers to do. It was doing all of that on the ground stuff. So I think that is a lesson learned in terms of going forward; is that the boycott years or the public campaign is a part of it.

[1:41:19] Things have shifted tremendously in terms of labor organizing in the last 30 years. The corporate campaign is a fairly new phenomenon in terms of labor organizing. Before that, there wasn’t this market research and who buy to whom and what shareholders, and who is RJ Reynolds doing business with and let’s target them; that’s a relatively new strategy in terms of the history of labor organizing but it’s one that a lot of labor unions use now and that FLOC has used successfully. With Mount Olive, that's one learning – there is a lot of groundwork and behind the scenes that happens – I think another thing with that campaign is there were a lot of workers who were engaged with that campaign early on. FLOC was able to hire a few
workers to be organizers. They were just, workers that were willing to tell their story and speak up and that made that really powerful.

[1:42:20] The other thing, I have a lot of memories from that campaign, we were very involved with it, we used to engage with the CEO of Mount Olive also. We used to take students directly to Mount Olive, and they would take us to the plant and have a dialogue with the CEO. The reason we used it was partly to pressure them, just again saying “hey we are supporting FLOC, you need to talk to FLOC, you need to negotiate with FLOC”, but it was also to give students the experience of talking with the enemy. We had demonized Bill Bryan to no end; part of it was just to complicate things a bit, and to make us come to terms, face to face, with this enemy. Partly because Bill Bryan is one of the nicest, charming people you will ever meet. So it’s very interesting when the enemy is so charming and nice and feeds you and welcomes you. So it creates some ethical conflicts which I think are healthy for students to struggle with. A lot of times the “enemy” is not who you think or what you think, and if you don’t know them, how are you going to figure out a strategy that works with them.

[1:43:49] So it was I think a helpful tactic in the overall strategy in having these side meetings, of course with FLOC’s knowledge and we’re telling FLOC everything you say, it was all in the open, it wasn’t outside of the FLOC strategy. But I think it was a powerful learning experience too in terms of knowing your opposition, and your opposition. I think it has actually helped in a lot of the presentations I do with the public because we walk into every kind of space. We go into a lot of classroom and settings not where people have decided to come to our presentation, there is a lot of opposition even in that, when we’re doing a presentation. I feel like, knowing my family and knowing all their opposition to my work, it helps me to better understand where people are coming from, not that I agree with them, but I believe in respecting your enemies and being respectful to those you are in opposition with. Again, process for me is important, I don’t need to an oppressor, to someone that I disagree with.

DELP: So, you’ve hinted to it a couple times. Let’s briefly go back to personal. How do your family and your community react to your work?

WIGGINS: [1:45:21] I don’t know that they truly know what I do. My grandmother, who was a good Pentecostal woman, used to tell everybody that I was a missionary to farmworkers, my dad cannot probably tell you the name of Student Action with Farmworkers. My family’s understanding probably goes as far as they think they know I am helping people, and they think I am trying to make things better for a group of people, and for that they are okay with. The part that they are not okay with, they don’t
understand, why I am supporting a primarily Mexican, undocumented workforce.

[1:46:12] They have negative stereotypical views of that community so there is a lot of things that we don’t discuss about my work. They are supportive of me and not totally understanding or supportive of my work. I mean I get my class analysis from them so I think they believe in workers’ rights but they are in such a conservative community they haven’t really acted too much in a collective way on their rights. I will tell you one short story where I knew I was my mothers’ daughter, I guess that’s the way to say it. My mom was harassed at work at one of the factories she works with, and she called me for advice, so I knew she knew I was doing something with workers’ rights. So she told me about what had happening and what she should do, and the guy, her supervisor had been doing it for a while. He had been yelling mostly, it wasn’t sexual harassment to toward her, really creating a hostile environment for no reason, she was doing her work. The funny thing is the one thing that threw her over the edge was when he slammed his hand on the desk and took the Lord’s name in vain. He said “Goddamnit Shirley” and said something; that’s when she called me. And it was causing her a lot stress, she was very nervous, she started having a lot of health problems because she didn’t want to go to work, she was getting yelled at every day. And so I got her in touch with a labor attorney and we talked about some things in terms of what she could do, in terms of what does her workplace have, personnel policies, employee handbook, anything that you can use to file a complaint against him. I ask her, has he done this with anyone else, and she says “yeah he does it with all these women” and I say “okay why don’t you write a letter, I can read it, and I can have a labor attorney read it, and if you can remember anything from him doing it to other people too.” And she says “Oh, I’ve been writing it down every time I’ve seen him yell at another person. I have a log.” And I was like “oh my god mother, you are amazing”. And so she had been documenting his yelling, come to find out she had made a formal complaint, come to find out two other, three other women came forward, he had actually been sexually harassing a couple of them, he got fired. There is something in my family about fairness of workers, and about you should be treated with fair and with dignity in the workplace, and so for that, I think they are right there with me.

TREY: So do you see this also in the farmworkers you work with in North Carolina, do they understand their rights in terms of what they can argue for, what they can request from their employers?

WIGGINS: [1:49:26] It’s interesting, I feel like I’ve had more experience with workers feeling like they have more rights than they have. A lot of
farmworkers have this sense of *El Norte* being promise land, being the good place, having, believing that they have certain human rights protections, and I’ve heard workers use that language. So they have this understanding of human rights, and they think they have those rights when they work in the fields in North Carolina, and the reality is that they don’t, for the most part. U.S. does not sign almost any of the international human rights laws that cover migrants or agricultural workers, nor do our U.S. labor laws offer those protections for farmworkers. So they actually have a little bit of a warped understanding of, they think they have more rights than they do. The thing that one of the big roles of our student interns is to do Know Your Rights Training and say here are your rights and here are your avenues for change, making sure that people understand all the different avenues that they have so they can make a more informed decision of what they want to do.

[1:50:39] But, even, it’s just there is, their work is so precarious, their lives are so precarious, that it is hard to support them to act. We certainly, every year we have great examples of people standing up for themselves. I believe people resist in ways that we may not traditionally think of as resistance. I think sometimes what our interns and students want, they are looking for revolution. Part of what we share with them is that workers know they are being exploited. You’re not going to go out to fields and tell a worker, “oh you know you’re being exploited?” They know what they are doing with, they are aware. And I feel like sometimes the students think that “if I only share this with them they will revolt, there is going to be a walkout and a strike, there will be this momentous action.”

[1:51:47] 95% of the time that’s not the reaction that workers take, I won’t say choose because I don’t think there is a lot of choice that they have. But they resist, my god, they resist. You get little bits of stories of the ways workers resist. They are a little slow picking that day, or they take a longer break than they are supposed to. You know, people resist. It’s not what we want in terms of the big picture, systemic change, revolution, everything today, but workers are aware they are being exploited, they are aware that they want to be treated with dignity and respect, they think they have more rights than they do, they have a sense of general human rights and that they deserve those and they resist in the ways that they can.

DELP: Referring to another written piece that you did-

WIGGINS: Lord, you all did some research.

DELP: Part of the job. Recently in 2013 you wrote an editorial in response to senators killing bill 707 in regards to farmworker child labor laws. And I
know this has been central to farmworker issues, these issue with child labor. What really motivated you this time to write this editorial?

WIGGINS: I didn’t write the first draft. Again, full disclosure, all times people are asked to pen stuff that they don’t write. We had a guest writer who was doing some writing for us. But, the child labor issue is important to workers, and we had just done some community meetings with workers, we were asking about their concerns, and specifically thinking about what concerns have a legislative impact that we make sure are in on our agenda. At this one camp, there weren’t any young guys there, and their number one issue was child labor. I just remember thinking of that in terms of, it pisses me off that children can work in fields, that the labor laws are not the same for agricultural workers, it’s one of the most dangerous occupations in the country and we have young kids working it? I think it upset me so much that workers were saying this is their number one issue, it doesn’t even affect them.

[1:54:33] They ranked some of their issues, housing was a big concern that they had and they hadn’t been paid correctly and so those were issues too. But their number one issue, the thing they said if you had to choose one thing to work on, was child labor. And I was like okay, and I don’t think people know, so it is all those things. It pisses me off that workers are concerned about this and I don’t think the average person knows this. I feel like every time I say that in a public presentation, that children as young as 10 can work legally in the fields, someone’s mouth drops in the audience. There are people in the audience who have no clue. So it is partly that, just getting awareness out there, still a big need.

DELP: Okay, we’re running out of time. What is your ultimate vision for farmworkers in the south?

WIGGINS: [1:55:31] Oh lord. Well my vision is partly unique to farm work but really it’s about all workers. I come to this work because of workers issues, because I believe all working class people, workers should be paid a living wage with full benefits. And I believe strongly that manual workers should be honored and respected and treated with dignity in the workplace. My vision is pretty simply that. That I hope for a time in my life, in the world, in the south, in the delta, where workers are really treated with dignity and for me that means a lot of things. It means that they are paid well and I can’t tell you how furious I get when I look at CEO salaries of corporations and see how many thousands of times they make more than the lowest paid employee in their company. And to think that they think they deserve it. So the idea that someone works more or better or harder and somehow deserves 5-10 thousand times more than another human being
who is also working, is to me, the most preposterous, unethical, immoral, unjust thing there can ever be. I’ve advocated for a maximum wage in this country, I feel strongly about the redistribution of wealth and that as a society we should put our values, well my values, put values into the law that are really about taking care of the community, that are not individualistic and personal but are about community driven, I just don’t think that professional work and or corporate level jobs should be honored and paid in the way that they are. And again, I don’t know how we as a society can think that someone deserves so much more than another working person who contributes to the same corporation. You can’t tell me anything that will make that make sense to me.

DELP: Is there anything you would like to add to this interview that you think is important?

WIGGINS: [1:58:12] Well just to add that is my vision for, I think farmworkers for me is a particular vision for me, because of our history of slavery and racism in the country. For me if we can get it right with farmworkers I feel like it will go a long way with other workers. It is one of the reasons why I feel like I am committed to that work, because of the long history. I feel like it is the basis of the capitalism in our society that has led to unfairness for all other workers. It is root for me.

DELP: Thank you.

WIGGINS: Thank you all. Just getting going man, what is up?
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<td>0:33:28 – 0:39:12</td>
<td>Melinda reflects on the process of working with the homeless in her discernment of her role in advocacy work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:39:13 – 0:42:20</td>
<td>Melinda remembers her early years working as an intern at SAF.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Content</td>
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<tr>
<td>0:43:56 – 0:48:20</td>
<td>Melinda participates in photo elicitation, chooses a photo of a female farmworker advocate and author, and talks about feminism in the farmworker movement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:48:21 – 0:50:55</td>
<td>Melinda discusses how she was drawn to SAF, reflecting on her personal narrative and sense of privilege and justice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:50:56 – 0:54:45</td>
<td>Melinda describes a particular farmworker woman who she interacted with her first summer as a SAF intern that has remained in her memory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:54:46 – 0:57:23</td>
<td>Melinda talks about working with students at SAF.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:57:24 – 0:59:00</td>
<td>Melinda describes the duties of her current position at SAF.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:59:01 – 1:02:15</td>
<td>Melinda describes the use of documentary work by SAF.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:02:16-1:04:30</td>
<td>Melinda mentions challenges in advocacy work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:04:31 – 1:05:00</td>
<td>Melinda talks about immediate and long term services that SAF provides.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:05:01 – 1:08:14</td>
<td>Melinda talks about the lack of farmworker control in their personal lives.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1:08:15 – 1:09:30</td>
<td>Melinda talks about North Carolinian farmworkers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:09:31 – 1:10:45</td>
<td>Melinda continues to talk about North Carolinian farmworkers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:10:46 – 1:11:37</td>
<td>Melinda talks about lack of farmworker protection to organize.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:11:38 – 1:13:54</td>
<td>Melinda explains a few issues that led to the formation of FAN.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:15:23 – 1:16:33</td>
<td>Melinda talks about Regina Luginbuhl.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1:16:33 – 1:17:33</td>
<td>Melinda talks about the development of coalitions such as Adelante.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1:17:34 – 1:18:45</td>
<td>Melinda continues to talk about the development of coalitions such as</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time Range</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>1:18:46 – 1:20:15</td>
<td>Melinda continues to talk about the development of coalitions such as Adelante.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:21:00 – 1:23:23</td>
<td>Melinda explains how immigrant issues affect farmworkers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:25:20 – 1:26:06</td>
<td>Melinda talks about negative perceptions of Latino immigrants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:26:07 – 1:27:09</td>
<td>Melinda talks about right wing political groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:27:10 – 1:28:31</td>
<td>Melinda talks about the need for coalitions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:30:04 – 1:31:11</td>
<td>Melinda describes short term goals and the current political climate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:31:12 – 1:32:09</td>
<td>Melinda talks about United Food and Commercial Workers’ campaign.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:32:10 – 1:33:03</td>
<td>Melinda talks about Tennessee autoworkers’ election.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:33:04 – 1:33:52</td>
<td>Melinda talks about pushing a progressive agenda in legislature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:35:37 – 1:38:06</td>
<td>Melinda emphasizes SAF’s vision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:38:07 – 1:41:18</td>
<td>Melinda talks about SAF’s role in the Mount Olive Pickle campaign.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:43:49 – 1:45:20</td>
<td>Melinda talks about knowing the opposition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:45:21 – 1:46:11</td>
<td>Melinda talks about her family’s opinions about her work at SAF.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:46:12 – 1:49:25</td>
<td>Melinda talks about her mother’s negative workplace experience with her employer.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1:49:26 – 1:50:38</td>
<td>Melinda talks about farmworkers’ perceptions of their rights.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:50:39 – 1:51:46</td>
<td>Melinda continues to talk about farmworkers’ perceptions of their rights.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Event Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>1:54:33 – 1:55:30</td>
<td>Melinda continues to talk about farmworker child labor issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:58:12 – 1:59:01</td>
<td>Melinda continues to talk about her vision for farmworkers in the south.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>