Executive Summary of the Program
Between the 10th and 16th of July 2020, two staff members from the Latino Community Fund (LCF Georgia) engaged in a landscape and needs assessment journey in South Georgia. The effort was carried out in collaboration with a local student and former agricultural worker Ulyssa Soto that served as a navigator and liaison.

LCF Georgia decided to spend time in South Georgia after several concerning reports of COVID-19 ravaging communities of workers with illness, desperation, debt and death. Efforts to connect with local organizations to provide PPE, food and financial assistance to the agricultural workers there were unsuccessful, therefore we decided to visit the area and better inform emergency relief, programming and explore opportunities for organizing and civic engagement.

The week-long visit confirmed what had been reported to us unofficially. Workers in South Georgia experience terrible effects from the Coronavirus pandemic and the financial and medical complications that come along with it.

The team documented the living conditions of many individuals, directly provided financial assistance previous screening and engaged in public education around virus mitigation, civic participation and health services rights. The financial packages were divided into $500 and $1000 bundles. A total of $17,500 were distributed to 31 families in that time period.

Some of the learnings from the effort include:
- The community in South Georgia continues to be isolated from investments and organizing efforts by community agencies.
- Language access, literacy, transportation challenges and abject poverty are overwhelmingly present in the region.
- Churches and markets are still the main sites where people congregate however due to COVID-19 many of these locations are no longer available as gathering spaces.
- Agricultural workers live in unsanitary conditions without minimum housing standards.
- LCF Georgia team did not encounter a single health worker, community organization or any effort to support individuals in need during its trip.
- Fear was present in every community member LCF Georgia team engaged with. Fear of law enforcement, fear of employers, fear of repercussions, fear of debt, fear of death.

Impact of the Program
LCF helped out 31 families, giving them a total of $17,500 and over 350 individuals by providing them with masks and hand sanitizer and masks. LCF Georgia distributed flyers with important COVID related information, the Do’s and Don'ts during a pandemic to help maintain a safe society and minimize damage. Special education and navigation on how to deal with medical
Bills were provided clarifying the documentation that individuals need to provide the health centers / hospitals. In addition to agricultural workers, LCF Georgia provided Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs) to a number of construction workers in the area that requested it.

**Locations Visited**
Warner Robins  
Tifton  
Ty Ty  
Omega  
Moultrie

**Farms:**
Rodriguez Harvesting  
JJ Harvesting  
Southern Valley  
Sun Belle  
Patrick Farms  
Brothers Farms

**Learnings & Findings**
1. **Isolation and Divestment**
South Georgia is beyond the metropolitan region and is unfortunately an area that is overwhelmingly forgotten by funders and underserved by community organizations. In the absence of resources, community members have looked to churches for relief. However, the churches have limited means and struggle to answer this call despite their best efforts. Patchy internet and cellular service, unreliable access to technology, and long distances with rigid transportation options predispositions the community to alienation. This has made COVID prevention particularly hard because of an association with the virus and the city of Atlanta. Many community members see the virus as too far away to affect them and consequently do not take it as a serious threat.

2. **Lack of Public Education in General and COVID-19 Mitigation Efforts**
Our LCF team members were oftentimes the first source of reliable information on COVID-19 education and prevention. Efforts were made to visit churches starting in Middle Georgia to conduct information sessions around mask use and social distancing. Over 250 masks, hand
sanitizers, and flyers were distributed to the churchgoers on Saturday and Sunday. The weekends are also when farmer workers are allowed to come into town in school buses to cash in their checks for the week and take care of personal matters like laundry and shopping. The LCF Georgia team was able to meet workers as they stepped down from the buses and provided them with informative flyers, masks, and sanitizers, along with quick public education talks. This lack of information extends beyond the pandemic, many workers were worried about Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents despite their H2A visa status, unaware of medical services available for undocumented immigrants, and the precautions around sending their children back to school. The team was able to answer the questions to the best of their abilities but several immigration-related questions remained pending. No other organizing or civil rights organizations were seen, present or available to these workers during this trip.

3. Access to Health Services
Many workers in South Georgia do not have health insurance and have steep medical bills piling up between $150k-$300k. This reality and word of mouth to neighbors and colleagues make them reluctant to go to the hospital if there is a medical complication. A lack of clarity from hospitals and their immigration policies has also made community members fearful of visits. This is an issue for several reasons- if they do not go to the hospital when they experience COVID like symptoms, they are more likely to spread it to other members of the community. Due to the nature of the virus being more vicious for people with pre-existing medical conditions, they are more likely to have a harder time if they contract the virus because the chances of them having gone to the doctor for those pre-existing medical conditions is low as well. During the visit, our team members met a woman named Carmen who is a cancer and COVID survivor and who was suffering from pneumonia. Despite her age, she lived alone and could not afford her bills which forced her to keep working in the field. Our LCF team members were able to provide her with emergency assistance to ease her recovery. LCF also proceeded to contact the billing offices of regional hospitals in the area to gather clarity on the financial assistance programs they offered. Thanks to these efforts, LCF was also able to provide community members with medical contacts and a copy of financial aid applications. No advocates of health rights organizations were identified or present during this trip.
4. **Literacy, digital literacy and connectivity**

Through the connection of local students and farmworkers, LCF Georgia team was able to help schedule visits with families who needed aid. The initial visits to families created an opportunity for referrals from within the local community. Challenges to complete standard online forms including uploading copies of bills, disclosing number of dependents, etc created immense barriers for these individuals to request much needed financial support. In-person and paper applications had to be processed so LCF Georgia team was able to help explain questions to individuals.

5. **Unhealthy and Unsafe Housing**

Households often comprise of large extended families with several relatives sharing close living quarters due to income limitations. H2A live on camps with tight spaces with bunkbeds, unsanitary and poor living conditions. Both these scenarios are especially worrisome during a pandemic. Agricultural employers employ contractors to find workers to farm on their fields, these contractors were responsible for providing reasonable living quarters, medicine, and PPEs. The employers do not check the contractors' negligence and the workers end up being disadvantaged. LCF Georgia was able to provide PPEs and medicines that the workers didn’t have. No housing rights organizations or advocates were identified in the area.
6. Fair Wages and Compensation
Workers are unable to secure or receive a living wage from the team observations. Workers had to find additional jobs to be able to afford basic living expenses such as rent. Workers are forbidden from wearing watches during their shifts and transportation is also controlled.

7. Transportation Barriers
H2A workers rely on sponsored transportation from their employers and are not able to move freely. If someone falls ill and needs to be taken to the hospital, they need to ask someone else who has a vehicle. Several workers who need to cash in their checks take a bus that is only driven by one worker who takes a certain route—this is inconvenient for many people who need to get to the bank to pay for weekly expenses.

8. Fear Permeates Workers Lives
Fear is an element of daily lives for some of them: they are scared to go to hospitals because of the bills, their streets are often patrolled by police instilling anxiety for especially those who are undocumented. The high level of police brutality particularly towards people of color is astoundingly high, almost normalizing such behavior. This makes people even more wary to report such crimes due to the lack of consequences. People infected by COVID are scared to warn other community members out of fear of ostracism, they are even more worried about their employers and contractors finding out because they will get
fired with no warning. With things opening up, people are starting to be charged rent again making job security a very important thing right now, even if the job isn't well paying. Parents are also worried about sending their children back to school, if they fall ill they may infect other family members, especially the elderly.

**Conclusion**

LCF Georgia sees consistent divestment in South Georgia as a critical issue that prevents effective organizing and support from community-based organizations.

A comprehensive organized effort to have consistent effort in South Georgia should be front and center in every conversation with funders. As noted above, the findings of the week-long trip impact across a wide range of issues:

- Labor law
- Civil rights
- Immigration rights
- Fair housing
- Fair representation
- Children's rights
- Access to healthcare

LCF Georgia has committed to hire 4 individuals to provide outreach, navigation, public education and direct financial assistance to H2A workers and all agricultural workers directly affected by COVID-19 and poverty at-large until the end of October.

It is our intention and objective, to expand this role into consistent staff of the organization and embed civil rights, public education and civic participation education as part of our relief efforts.

Significant investment of dollars, time, and talent are required to ensure our fellow workers in the area are seen, respected, treated with dignity and to realize their civil and human rights.