Citrus Harvest Fatality File

Death in The Fields

Jaime Nuño-Sanchez joked with the crew as they waited to pick lemons at a citrus grove in Southern California's sunshine-draped Coachella Valley.

It was his first day back from a summer break – his first after 30 years of picking fruits and vegetables in the valley. In fields stretching for 200 miles to the Mexican border, thousands of farmworkers gather to pick or plant half a billion dollars worth of crops – lemons, table grapes, peppers, dates, oranges, onions.

The owners of the Thermal lemon grove where Nuño-Sanchez was headed sell crops to Wonderful Citrus, one of the largest citrus distributors in the United States.

Around 10:30 a.m. on Sept. 21, a crew that included Nuño-Sanchez and his wife began picking from a row of trees at the back of the grove, not far from where a supervisor had set up shade and water to comply with California's heat illness prevention standards.

Temperatures hovered around 90 degrees, but the humidity made it feel like 105.

Forty-five minutes into the shift, Nuño-Sanchez, 48, sat down in a shaded area, saying he didn't feel well. Supervisors asked if he wanted to go to Centro Medico Oasis, a nearby clinic, but he declined and said he was fine. He asked for water.

Minutes later, he collapsed.

One picker, who could speak English, called 911. A supervisor jumped into a pickup and sped to Highway 86 to wait for a fire truck and paramedics. When they arrived, he led them to the last lemon tree in the grove, tucked away off a dirt road near Avenue 78 and Fillmore Street.

Paramedics tried to revive Nuño-Sanchez, but it was too late.

The father of three **died on the field at 12:35 p.m.**