

Farmworker of the Year Winners Announced

*María Bárbara Reséndiz Martínez and
Jesús Gutiérrez Manuel Share Historic
2026 Award*

WASHINGTON, DC, UNITED STATES, June 15, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- In a historic first for the [Farmworker of the Year Award](#), two exceptional leaders have been named winners of the 2026 honor: María Bárbara Reséndiz Martínez of GoodFarms and Jesús Gutiérrez Manuel of Stemilt Growers, recognized for their extraordinary impact on their teams, workplaces and the future of agriculture.



María Bárbara Reséndiz Martínez, 2026 Winner,
Farmworker of the Year Award

Presented by [Equitable Food Initiative](#) and The Packer, the Farmworker of the Year Award celebrates the people whose skill, resilience and leadership drive the fresh produce industry forward every day. Now in its third year, the award continues to grow in prestige, drawing nominations from across the Americas and spotlighting stories of innovation, mentorship and service that too often go unseen.

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*Lori Taylor, Founder and CEO
of The Produce Moms*

Farmworker of the Year webpage traffic in 2026 climbed more than 97% year over year, and active user engagement increased nearly 140%, reflecting growing industry enthusiasm for recognizing farmworker leadership and achievements.

This year's winners were selected by an independent review panel representing retail, sourcing, advocacy and produce industry leadership. The panel, which included Emily Fragoso from MIXTEC Group, Jane Kuhn from Once Upon a Farm, Lori Taylor from The Produce Moms and Jeff Cady from Tops Friendly Markets, submitted their top 10 nominations ranked in order of preference. EFI then applied the Borda Count method to determine the final winner, which ultimately resulted in a tie.

"I am delighted that this year's review of nominations resulted in a tie between two winners, because all of the nominees and finalists deserve to be named Farmworker of the Year," said LeAnne Ruzzamenti, EFI's director of marketing and communications. "María Bárbara and Jesús each represent a different but equally powerful story of leadership in agriculture. Both have earned deep respect from their coworkers and companies through their commitment to excellence, innovation and supporting the people around them."



Jesús Gutiérrez Manuel, 2026 Winner, Farmworker of the Year Award

María Bárbara began her agricultural career as a strawberry picker and, through years of hard work and leadership, became a crew foreman at GoodFarms. Over her 20 years in agriculture, she has become known as a trusted leader who works alongside her crew, advocates for collaboration and approaches every challenge with fairness and determination. Her colleagues describe her as a bridge between the field and the consumer — someone who deeply understands the sacrifices, teamwork and care behind every harvest.

Jesús has built an equally inspiring career defined by innovation, mentorship and service. Over 15 years in agriculture, he has advanced from harvester to crew leader while earning recognition for his leadership, safety expertise and commitment to worker well-being. A licensed nurse with multiple safety certifications, Jesús is widely respected for combining operational excellence with genuine care for his coworkers and their families. He received 12 separate nominations from individuals across multiple organizations, reflecting the extraordinary impact he has had throughout the industry.

"I was struck by a clear theme of innovation and adaptability across the nominations," said Jane Kuhn, senior director of strategic sourcing and sustainability for Once Upon a Farm. "It is inspiring to see individuals growing alongside the industry, bringing a sophisticated, systems-level perspective to everything from weeding rows to managing complex technology."

This year's finalists also reflected the extraordinary breadth of talent, leadership and dedication found throughout the agricultural workforce. Selected from a highly competitive pool of nominations, this year's finalists included:

- Magaly Alfaro Ávalos, NatureSweet
- Isaías Lepes Arredondo, Zirkle Fruit Company for Rainier Fruit
- Rogelio Nabor Martínez, Blue House Farm

Together, this year's finalists represent decades of experience, leadership and commitment to the people and communities behind agriculture.

"The stories shared in this year's nominations underscore the incredible expertise required to bring fresh, high-quality food to our tables," said Lori Taylor, founder and CEO of The Produce Moms. "We owe a debt of gratitude to these workers, and it is an honor to help recognize their contributions through this award."

The Farmworker of the Year Award was created to elevate farmworker voices and recognize the essential role farmworkers play in producing safe, high-quality food while strengthening agricultural communities. As the program continues to expand, the goal is that the award serves not only as recognition but also as a reminder of the expertise, humanity and leadership present throughout the produce industry every day.

More information about the Farmworker of the Year Award and this year's finalists is available at equitablefood.org/FWOY.

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