

FACTS ABOUT NORTH CAROLINA'S MIGRANT FARMWORKERS

Who are Migrant Farmworkers?

A migrant farmworker is someone whose principal employment has been seasonal agricultural labor and has moved into temporary housing to seek farmwork. Agricultural labor means cultivating, harvesting, or preparing seasonal crops for market or storage. Migrant farmworkers may be employed through crew leaders, by contract (H2A), or directly by the farm owner.

A seasonal farmworker is someone whose principal employment is agricultural labor but is a permanent resident of the community and does not move into temporary housing when employed in farmwork. North Carolina has more than twice the number of seasonal farmworkers than migrant farmworkers.



NC FARMWORKER HEALTH ALLIANCE

DEMOGRAPHICS

- North Carolina ranks fifth in the U.S. in number of migrant farmworkers.
- The number of migrant farmworkers and dependents in North Carolina is estimated at 142,144 (Farmworker Legal Services, 1995). Currently, more than 90% of the state's migrant farmworkers are Hispanic (NC Employment Security Commission, 1995).
- There are more than 3,000 farmworker labor camps in the state. Any farm owner or operator providing housing to migrant laborers must register for inspection with the state Agricultural Safety and Health Division of the Department of Labor (NC Division of Agricultural Safety and Health, 1996)

ECONOMIC IMPACT OF MIGRANT LABOR IN NORTH CAROLINA

- Over 85% of the fruits and vegetables produced in this country are hand harvested and/or cultivated (National Center for Farmworker Health).
- Agriculture represents 28% of North Carolina's economy. Each migrant farmworker's labor annually contributes over \$12,000 in profits to North Carolina's agricultural industry (Steve Sutter, NCSU, 1988).
- In North Carolina, migrant laborers plant and harvest tobacco, sweet potatoes, cucumbers, tomatoes, Christmas trees, apples, and many other seasonal crops.
- Migrant farmworkers do not take jobs from local residents but are hired because sufficient local seasonal farmworkers are not available to harvest crops.
- Farmer employers must withhold and pay social security taxes for farmworkers if they employ one or more agricultural workers and pay more than \$2,500 (or \$150 in cash) during the year to any one employee. Farmers are required to withhold federal income taxes from agricultural workers' wages if the wages are subject to social security tax withholding (Migrant Housing Bulletin, NC DOL, February, 1993)
- Migrant farmworkers and their families make a substantial contribution to the income of many local communities because of the food and goods they purchase while working in North Carolina.
- Migrant farmworkers are among the lowest paid workers in the country, and the vast majority of the state's farmworkers receive no fringe benefits. Agricultural labor is exempt from the overtime provisions of the minimum wage laws. Few, if any, migrant farmworkers have health insurance, and very few are covered through Medicaid.
- Most farmworkers in North Carolina are not covered by workers' compensation (NC DOL, 1966).

Resource ID#: 4069

**Facts About North Carolina's Migrant
Farmworkers**

HEALTH RISKS OF MIGRANT FARMWORKERS AND THEIR FAMILIES

•Farm work is classified as one of the most dangerous occupation in the United States and farmworkers suffer from the highest rate of toxic chemical injuries of any group of workers in the U.S. (National Center for Farmworker Health).

•Farmworkers suffer higher incidences of heat stress, dermatitis, influenza, pneumonia, urinary tract infections, pesticide related illnesses, and tuberculosis (National Center for Farmworker Health).

•Infant mortality rates are considerably higher among migrant farmworkers. (Public Voice for Food and Health Policy, 1989). Children of migrant farmworkers have higher rates of parasitic infections, malnutrition, dental disease, and are less likely to be fully immunized than other NC children (National Center for Farmworker Health).

HEALTH CARE RESOURCES IN NORTH CAROLINA FOR FARMWORKERS

•Health services for migrant farmworkers and their dependents in North Carolina are coordinated by the NC Farmworker Health Alliance whose lead agencies are the Division of Health Promotion (919) 715-3119, the Office of Rural Health and Resource Development (919) 733-2040, and the NC Primary Health Care Association (919) 469-5701. These agencies are joined by other organizations concerned with farmworker health issues to plan and coordinate health services for farmworkers on a statewide basis.

•North Carolina has four federally funded migrant health clinics which serve farmworkers. These are Blue Ridge Health Services (704)692-4289 in Henderson County, Tri-County Community Health Center (910) 567-6194 in Sampson County, Goshen Medical Center (910) 267-0421 in Duplin County, and Nash Regional Migrant Health Center (919) 237-9383 in Nash County. Services at these clinics are not free. Patients pay on a sliding fee scale according to their income. More than 60% of the state's migrant farmworkers are in counties outside the service area of a migrant health center.

•Grants to provide primary care services to farmworkers and their families in high need areas are available each year from the Office of Rural Health and Resource Development. These grants are awarded on a competitive basis to local health departments, community health centers, hospitals, and other nonprofit agencies serving farmworkers.

•Local health departments provide services to a large number of migrant farmworker families each year. Each county health department has a designated Migrant Nurse Liaison to coordinate health department services and refer migrant farmworkers to other health resources.

•An average of 2,000 migrant farmworker children are enrolled in the Women, Infants, and Children Special Supplemental Feeding Program (WIC) each month in North Carolina.

•North Carolina is one of very few states to have state funds for migrant health services. These limited funds reimburse private doctors, dentists, clinics, pharmacies, and hospital for essential ambulatory medical and dental services provided to individuals and their dependents that have been employed as migrant farmworkers within the prior 24 months. Migrant farmworkers pay a copayment for services or medical prescriptions received under this program.

published by the NC Farmworker Health Alliance, March, 1996.



NC FARMWORKER HEALTH ALLIANCE