

# Student Intern Perspectives

## U-Migrant Project



A FINAL PROJECT BY  
U-MIGRANT PROJECT STUDENT INTERNS

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Student Intern Perspectives: U-Migrant Project

# UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Twin Cities Campus

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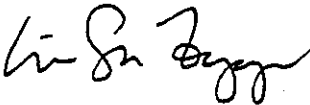
Dear U-Migrant Project Supporter: and "Giving Seeds of Change" Presenter:

Enclosed please find the following collection of essays, *Student Intern Perspectives*, written by U of M students who participated in the University-Migrant Project's 1996 Summer Internship Program. We appreciate the interns' collective effort in sharing their opinions, observations, and research on the experiences of farmworkers in our state. It is our hope that this project will provide information about issues related to the migrant farmworker community and that these observations will stimulate further education, thought and action with regard to migrant farmworker issues in Minnesota. We hope you have a chance to read the report and look forward to your comments regarding it.

It should be noted that the perspectives and findings presented in this report are those of the student interns. This report is not a publication of the University of Minnesota and does not necessarily represent the viewpoint of the University nor that of the U-Migrant Project.

¡Gracias por su apoyo!

Sinceramente,



Lisa Sass Zaragoza  
U-MP Director,



Mark Sinclair  
U-MP Program Associate

Joyce,  
Thank for your presentation  
and good work at Migrant  
Health.  
Mark

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# U-Migrant Project:

## Student Intern Perspectives

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**Rini Templeton - artist and activist - died in 1986 after 20 years of working on behalf of workers' rights and community struggles for self-determination in the U.S., Mexico, and Central America. Having withheld the copyright to her work in the hopes that her art would be used by activists serving causes she supported, her work appears here in the spirit of her life.**

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1995-1996

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# U-Migrant Project: Student Intern Perspectives

*A report by the University-Migrant Project, University of Minnesota*

## *Table of Contents*

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <i>Introduction.....</i>   | <i>1</i>  |
| <i>The Migrant Community in Minnesota.....</i>   | <i>5</i>  |
| <i>Infectious Disease Surveillance Among Migrant Farmworkers in MN.....</i>                        | <i>9</i>  |
| <i>The Importance of Bilingual and Bicultural Staff in Rural MN.....</i>                           | <i>13</i> |
| <i>Brillar Adelante-Shining Through.....</i>   | <i>15</i> |
| <i>Prejudice in My Community.....</i>  | <i>18</i> |
| <i>Chemical Abuse and Migrant Farmworkers: How Little We Know.....</i>                             | <i>21</i> |
| <i>Migrant Farmworkers and the Welfare Residency Requirements.....</i>                             | <i>24</i> |
| <i>Consequences of New Federal Welfare Law for Non- U.S. Citizen Migrant Farmworkers.....</i>      | <i>27</i> |
| <i>Developing Visions for Sustainable Agriculture: Are Migrant Farmworkers' Voices Heard?.....</i> | <i>31</i> |

## *Introduction*

Each year an estimated 20,000 migrant seasonal farmworkers and their families come to Minnesota to work in sugar beet fields, potato fields, forestry, horticulture, on vegetable farms, and to do other agricultural work. Many migrant seasonal farmworkers in Minnesota also work in vegetable canning factories and meat processing plants. Migrant farmworkers come to Minnesota each year from May through September, harvesting and processing sugar beets, asparagus, corn, peas and other crops. The work that migrant farmworkers perform helps to put food on our tables and contributes to making Minnesota's billion dollar farm production and food products processing and manufacturing economy prosper. The majority of migrant farmworkers that come to Minnesota are Chicanos/Latinos of Mexican decent, and are United States' citizens or permanent residents from Texas. Many migrant farmworkers and their families have come to Minnesota to do seasonal agricultural work for many consecutive years as a way to support their families and work toward a better future.

Despite the important contributions migrant farmworkers make to Minnesota's communities and economy, most migrant farmworkers are poorly paid, live in substandard housing and have limited access to educational, legal and health care systems. Many migrant farmworkers and their families find it difficult to access resources and systems that are readily available to most of Minnesota's residents. This is due, in part, to factors including labor abuses, language barriers and discriminatory practices. The migrant farmworkers of Minnesota and other states are among the most underpaid, exploited, and neglected of all workers in the United States.

**The *U-Migrant Project: Student Intern Perspectives* project is a synthesis of observations, research and recommendations by the 1996 U-MP interns about the conditions and challenges that migrant farmworkers and their families encounter in Minnesota. The *U-Migrant Project: Student Intern Perspectives* is based on the interns' experiences working with agencies that serve migrants, interns' research on migrant-related issues and on their knowledge of issues that affect migrant farmworkers in Minnesota and across the United States.**

**We invite you to read *U-Migrant Project: Student Intern Perspectives* with the hope that the observations and perceptions that we have incorporated into this project will provide information about issues related to the migrant farmworker community and that these observations will stimulate further education, thought and action with regard to migrant farmworker issues in Minnesota and across the United States.**

*Note: This not a publication of the University of Minnesota, nor does it necessarily represent the opinions of the university..*

## *Purpose*

The University-Migrant Project grew out of a desire to develop a respectful and responsible relationship between the University of Minnesota, the migrant seasonal farmworkers in Minnesota, and the agencies that serve migrant farmworkers. Concerned Chicano/Latino students, faculty, community members and other interested people met on May 5, 1994 to begin planning a course of action. An advisory board including several former migrants and migrant serving agency representatives was formed to help guide the process.

The University-Migrant Project aims to educate the University of Minnesota community about migrant farmworkers as well as work towards improving conditions for migrants. The University-Migrant Project goals are as follows:

1. To provide University of Minnesota students, staff and faculty with a unique and challenging learning experience centered around migrant realities, particularly in Minnesota.
2. To assist the migrant population in gaining better access to and use of educational, legal, housing and health care resources.
3. To provide information and stimulate respectful and responsible action within the University of Minnesota, and in the community at large, that aims to support migrants and the agencies that serve them.



## *The University-Migrant Project:*

The University-Migrant Project includes the following four components:

### 1. The Migrant Experience in Minnesota Class

This Chicano Studies course is open to upper-level undergraduate, graduate students, and community members. This interdisciplinary course examines a variety of issues that impact migrants' lives from such disciplines as history, public policy, education, public health, sociology, agriculture law, and economics. Through readings, guest speakers, research projects and class discussions, students develop a broad knowledge of issues affecting migrant agricultural workers with a particular focus on Minnesota.

### 2. University-Migrant Project Internship Program

The summer internship program involves an intensive work experience combined with a reflective learning component. Student interns either work with agencies that directly serve migrants or work or do research on migrant-related issues. Students enrolled in the *Migrant Experience in Minnesota* class are eligible to apply to the program. Interns are placed with migrant-serving agencies according to their academic and professional interest and/or skills. University-Migrant Project staff assist some interns with their agency placements and work with others to develop individually-designed research projects or internships. Additionally, during spring and summer quarters, the group of interns meet together for seminars that help prepare them for their summer work experience and then serve as a forum for sharing and analyzing these experiences. Readings, journals and a final project are assigned.

### 3. Farmworker Action Network

The volunteer group is open to University of Minnesota students, staff and faculty as well as community members interested in working on issues related to farmworkers. Through projects such as a newsletter, organizing educational forums, promoting consumer boycotts and actively supporting legislative proposals, volunteers can play a role in helping improve the lives of migrant and seasonal farmworkers.

### 4. Collaborations with University of Minnesota Units and Migrant-Serving Agencies

The University-Migrant Project works with selected schools and colleges within the University of Minnesota to link interested faculty and students to agencies through special joint projects. These projects help address critical needs in the migrant population as well as provide students and faculty with valuable learning opportunities.



### ***University-Migrant Project Internship and Research Program:***

Through internship experiences and research projects, students learn about a part of Minnesota and U.S. history, current and past, that is usually ignored. Participants are challenged to navigate through issues of cultural difference, societal responsibilities and one's own role in social change.

*Past U-MP interns have worked as family service workers, classroom aides, health educators and nurses. Individually-designed projects have included migrant housing resource research for MN Housing Partnership, AIDS/HIV education for migrant-serving agencies, community needs assessment for Migrant Head Start and a migrant health aide program evaluation for Migrant Health Services.*

*1996 U-MP interns worked as family service workers, classroom aides, legal advocates, agriculture research interns, public health research interns, teaching assistants, art instructors, nutrition education assistants, chemical health interns, social work interns, and legislative research interns. They worked for agencies such as Migrant Head Start, Migrant Legal Services, Le Sueur County Extension Service, Migrant Health Services, Migrant Education, Renville County Human Services, and the Chicano/Latino Affairs Council.*



## *The Migrant Community in Minnesota*

### *Definition of Migrant Farmworkers:*

Historically, the term migrant has been used in Minnesota to describe people of Mexican descent predominately from Texas coming to Minnesota to work in the sugarbeet industry and other agricultural work, including vegetable canning factories in the southern part of the state. More recently, however, many have begun to apply the word migrant to include either all low-income Latinos who have recently moved here-be it in the agricultural industry (field and vegetable canning work), meat and poultry processing, or other manual labor jobs in the expanding light manufacturing sector. This lack of a consistent definition has caused confusion in both everyday usage and has important public policy repercussions. The U-Migrant Project began and continues to concentrate on those migrant agricultural workers whose home base is elsewhere (mostly in Texas), who work in the agricultural industry during harvest season.

While there certainly is some overlap regarding the issues facing migrant agricultural workers and other people coming to Minnesota in search of work, it is the unique legal, financial and social situation of a people who move into and out of Minnesota communities year after year and on whom agribusiness is dependent, that is the focus of the U-Migrant Project.

It should also be noted that the word migrant (one who moves) sometimes gets confused with the word "immigrant" (someone residing in a country, but whose origins are from a different country). In the case of Minnesota, the vast majority of migrant agricultural workers are United States citizens or legal permanent residents from Texas.

## *History of Migrant Seasonal Farm Labor in the U.S. and Minnesota:*

*Written by Emily Schug*

The history of Chicano/Latino peoples and migrant seasonal farmworkers in the United States is intrinsically linked to the development of U.S. political, social, and economic society. Development and innovation have depended on an exploitable and cheap source of labor (Gutierrez, 1995). During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the U.S. established policies and practices that sought to systematically suppress wages and draw on Mexican-Americans and Mexican nationals as cheap sources of labor. This systematic exploitation of Mexican-American and Mexican national laborers during this time served as the means by which the U.S. could gain the greatest degree of development with the cheapest source of labor (Horsman, 1981).

The middle of the nineteenth century was marked by the U.S. government's decision to engage in war with Mexico. The U.S. was motivated by its desire to expand and to conquer what was considered an inferior people. There was considerable question about what role the conquered Mexican people would play in the United States' scheme of development after the Mexican War (Horsman, 1981). This question created conflict and disagreement among political analysts, lawmakers, and the American people. The dispute about whether the U.S. should proceed in annexing Mexican territory was "primarily an argument not about territory but about Mexicans" (Horsman, 1981). The prevailing attitude in the United States was that the Mexican people were not suitable to be U.S. citizens or members of U.S. society. Eventually, the U.S. made the decision to annex the most amount of Mexican territory with the least amount of Mexican people.

In the late nineteenth century the U.S. seemed to have accomplished its goal of removing the Mexican presence from annexed U.S. territory, however, at the turn of the century the "resident ethnic Mexican population began to grow at a significantly higher rate" (Gutierrez, 1995). Immigration of Mexicans to the United States increased dramatically during this period. The last two decades of the nineteenth century were extremely significant in that technological and infrastructural advances laid the groundwork for one of the most explosive periods of growth in U.S. history (Gutierrez, 1995). The construction and expansion of the railroads and the expansion of irrigated agriculture were two developments that created increased demands for laborers (Gutierrez, 1995). Employers began to look to Mexico as a source of cheap labor in the late nineteenth century and Mexican immigrants started to fill the increasing demand for "low-skilled, low-wage jobs in the southwestern economy" (Gutierrez, 1995). Mexican workers were recruited to meet the demands for labor that development and innovation had created.

The Immigration Act of 1917 encouraged Mexican citizens with work contracts to enter the country, it exempted them from a literacy test and the eight dollar head tax required of permanent immigrants. This exemption was lobbied by agricultural interests in the Southwest and sugar beet producers throughout the U.S. The recruitment of Mexicans was formalized in the 1918 sugar beet season. Enganchistas (recruiters) were hired and sent to the Mexican border and into Mexico offering dreams of seasonal work, good working conditions and decent pay. Beet companies were successful in convincing the U.S. secretary of labor to continue to apply the 1917 exemption after World War I ended. The beet companies were the catalyst of Mexican families migrating to Minnesota. Mexican migrant workers were the ideal slave-like labor force for the beet companies as they were abundant, did not have an established presence or political voice in the region and could be easily removed with the assistance of the government when no longer needed.\*

The recruitment of Mexican contract workers allowed by the Immigration Act of 1917 halted after the 1920 season due to the post war depression. Recruitment in the mid 1920's far exceeded that after World War I. For the next twenty years the canning of crops on the east coast and in southern California, southern Texas and Florida was carried out primarily by Mexican labor. In 1924 at least six thousand Mexican workers were recruited from Texas and by 1926 the numbers had more than doubled.\*

By 1927 Mexicans made up 75-90% of the total labor force in sugar beet regions, and the U.S. Department of Labor estimated that some 15,000 workers were in the midwestern region (Thomas, 1996). In the 1930's there was a reorganization of the sugar beet industry. With this reorganization came the organization of growers to increase political clout and the expansion of the industry. The commercialized production of fruit in the Great Lakes region, especially Michigan, further increased the demand for migrant labor, as did the expansion of cotton and vegetable industries. By the 1940's an estimated 60,000 migrant workers traveled annually to the Great Lakes Region, many contracted directly by the sugar beet industry (Thomas, 1996).

The years between World War II and the 1960's marked the contractual period of the Braceros. The Bracero program was a labor contract between the United States government and the Mexican government designed to address wartime labor shortages. It allowed tens of thousands of Mexicans to immigrate to perform agricultural labor in the U.S. When the contract period expired in 1964 the majority of workers, never having been naturalized, were expected to return to Mexico. Many had lived in the U.S. for up to twenty years however, and remained as undocumented workers. Today, the United States continues to depend heavily upon the labor of migrant workers, both with and without documentation. It is important to note, however, that the vast majority of migrant agricultural workers in Minnesota are U.S. citizens from Texas. The 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act gave legal immigration status to many farmworkers of Mexican origin already working in the United States (Thomas, 1996). Nationally, 60% of farmworkers are migrants, and 90% of migrants are Chicano/Latino (Thomas, 1996).

\*Paragraphs excerpted from:

Castillo-Morales, L., Shannon Pergament, Debrah Durkin (1995). Into the fields: Examining the consequences of federal laws. *Into the Fields: A Report on Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers in Minnesota*. 1, 5-7. U-Migrant Project

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## *The Migrant Community in Minnesota Today:*

*Written by Emily Schug*

Many migrant workers travel to find work in Minnesota as multi-generational families. Estimates of the numbers of workers that come to Minnesota each year range from 15,000 to 54,000 (including non-working dependents) (Thomas, 1996). The majority of migrant farmworkers in Minnesota come from the Rio Grande Valley in Texas and are of Mexican decent. The vast majority of migrant farmworkers in Minnesota are U.S. citizens or permanent residents from Texas.

Migrant farmworkers in Minnesota work in sugar beet fields, potato fields, forestry, horticulture, on vegetable farms, and do other agricultural work. Many migrant seasonal farmworkers in Minnesota also work in vegetable canning factories and meat processing plants. Migrant farmworkers come to Minnesota each year from May through September, harvesting and processing sugar beets, asparagus, corn, peas, and other crops.

In one study of Midwestern migrant workers, one hundred percent of those surveyed reported earning less than half of the U.S. poverty level wage (Martin, 1988). A typical annual income for a migrant family that travels to Minnesota is between \$8,000 and \$10,000 (Thomas, 1996). Contrary to popular opinion, migrant poverty is not due to laziness, but to low wages, seasonal unemployment, and consistent job insecurity.

Although migrant farmworkers pay taxes, contribute most of their earnings to the U.S. and Minnesota communities in which they work, and are major contributors to local economies through their labor, migrant workers are not counted in the U.S. census and unprotected by most state and federal laws. Migrant interaction with public and private institutions reflects their marginal status.\*

The sugar beet industry in the Red River Valley alone generates an estimated 2,000-3,000 direct jobs and 25,000 secondary jobs in addition to the 5,000-6,000 farmworkers employed in the industry (Thomas, 1996). The sugar beet industry in the Red River Valley in Minnesota is estimated to be worth \$1.5 billion (Thomas, 1996). Minnesota's resident labor force is not large enough or mobile enough to supply all of the labor needed to support the seasonal agricultural economy in Minnesota (Thomas, 1996). Migrant farmworkers contribute significantly to agribusiness in Minnesota and to the economies of the communities in Minnesota in which they work and live.

\* Paragraph excerpted from:

Castillo-Morales L., Shannon Pergament, Debrah Durkin (1995). *Into the fields: Examining the local consequences of federal laws. Into the Fields: A Report on Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers in Minnesota.* 1, 5-7.

### **Sources:**

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Thomas, E. (1996). The migrant community in Minnesota. *Bitter Sugar: Migrant Farmworker Nutrition and Access to Services in Minnesota.* 1, 5-13. MN Food Education and Research Center.

## Infectious Disease Surveillance Among Migrant Farmworkers in Minnesota

*Written by Linda L. Halcon, RN, MPH*

*(Linda worked this past summer carrying out research for Migrant Health Services on the infectious disease surveillance system currently in place for the migrant population.)*

### **Background**

An estimated 15,000 to 18,000 migrant farmworkers reside in Minnesota during the summer months, possibly as many as 53,000 if family members are included. (1) Migrant farmworkers represent a population at increased risk for infectious diseases when compared to the overall Minnesota population. This increased risk is due to the presence of a number of factors in their home and work lives such as lack of access to clean water and sanitation, overcrowded living conditions, occupational exposure to insect vectors and animal borne organisms, lack of access to preventive health care services and nutritional deficiencies.

Available recent literature on infectious diseases among migrant confirms their high risk status. Nationally, migrant farmworkers are estimated to be about six times more likely to develop tuberculosis than the general population. (2) Results of studies on the East Coast indicate that 25 to 48 per cent of migrant farmworkers are infected with TB. (3) (4) (5) Parasitic infections have been found to range in prevalence from 27 to 57 per cent in farmworkers, about 20 times higher than the general U.S. population. (6) Although HIV rates among farmworkers are not fully defined, it is known that Hispanics are disproportionately represented among AIDS patients, comprising 16 per cent of AIDS cases but only nine per cent of the population. (7) No recent studies addressing the most common sexually transmitted diseases, gonorrhea and chlamydia, were found. Results of a 1992 Florida study indicated, however, that eight per cent of migrant farmworker subjects had positive serologic tests for syphilis, much higher than the U.S. population overall. (8)

The literature on infectious disease in migrant farmworkers is notable for its gaps. There is a marked lack of research conducted in the central states, raising questions about generalizability of results to migrant farmworkers in Minnesota. Also, there are many diseases likely to be more common among farmworkers which have not been adequately studied in this population, such as sexually transmitted diseases, vector borne diseases, parasitic infections, and tuberculosis.

### **Purpose of the Project**

Migrant Health Services, a federal and state funded program based locally in Moorhead MN, has overall responsibility for identifying and addressing health problems of migrant farmworkers in the states of Minnesota and North Dakota. This is accomplished through direct service provision and through collaborative efforts with private providers and government agencies. Because of increased vulnerability to infectious diseases in this population and the lack of compiled data on disease incidence and prevalence, Migrant Health Services was interested in reviewing the infectious disease surveillance system currently in place for the migrant population. This project, representing a collaboration between Migrant Health Services and the University of Minnesota U-Migrant Project was conceived in order to begin to assess the effectiveness of current infectious disease surveillance efforts and to identify needs for additional data.

### Surveillance Definition and Objectives

Surveillance "is the ongoing and systematic collection, analysis, and interpretation of health data in the process of describing and monitoring a health event".(9) Objectives of a surveillance system for infectious diseases are to detect and monitor outbreaks, monitor trends in infection, disease and immunization status, and identify contacts or persons in need of preventive therapy where appropriate.

### Process

Information about infectious diseases in migrants was obtained from a variety of public and private providers of health care services to migrant farmworkers and their families. Key providers were identified by Migrant Health Services. Eight of eleven agency representatives contacted were willing to be interviewed, representing four local public health agencies, two private or community clinics, and two exclusively migrant-serving agencies addressing health and education. Questions to providers focused on their agencies' services to migrants and their perceptions of infectious disease problems in migrants. Those interviewed were asked to report their agencies' experience with infectious disease in migrants and to give their subjective impressions of the magnitude and importance of infectious disease problems in the migrant population. This report is, therefore, qualitative. A major limitation of the information obtained is that it reflects only the experience of migrants who have used the services of the agencies contacted, and this may not reflect the experience of the total population of migrants Minnesota.

### Conclusion

There have been no major outbreaks of infectious diseases among migrant farmworkers in Minnesota in recent years, but there have been smaller outbreaks of foodborne illness, vaccine preventable disease and tuberculosis. Although these outbreaks have been effectively and cooperatively addressed by public and private providers along with the state health department, there are several important areas needing attention and improvement, as follows:

- Data on migrant status is collected only by exclusively migrant-serving agencies such as Migrant Health, Migrant Head Start, and Migrant Education. It is not possible, therefore, for most state or other agencies to quantify health problems among migrants. Thus, even though a disease may be identified, it is often not identified as a migrant health problem.
- Although information is often shared between agencies, there is no mechanism of information transfer or sharing of group data in place except individual good will. Also, data management and computer resources vary widely among the agencies, making sharing of data more difficult.
- The ability of the system to detect epidemics depends on local factors such as uniform reporting of disease to the Minnesota Department of Health, communication between local providers, and the availability and acceptability of health care services to migrants in each locality. The ongoing surveillance system would be useful in supplemental studies, but its passive nature precludes drawing any conclusions about incidence or prevalence of disease.
- Epidemics of acute disease are likely to come to the attention of the Minnesota Department of Health through its active/passive reporting system, at which time local control efforts would be implemented. The current system, therefore, is useful in detecting trends for reportable diseases that are likely to come to the attention of the health care system, such as active tuberculosis. For other diseases which may be treated at home or may be asymptomatic, such as foodborne illness or STD's, no accurate morbidity or trend data are available.

In summary, the existing surveillance system for infectious diseases among migrant farmworkers in Minnesota is complex and incomplete in providing incidence or prevalence data or in monitoring trends. It is also difficult to identify risk factors for disease because risk data is not uniformly collected or complete. Following are several suggestions for improving the system.

#### Recommendations for Improved System Operation

- Agencies likely to serve migrant should be required to include migrant status in the demographic information routinely collected. This information, in group format, could then be made available to Migrant Health Services and to the Minnesota Department of Health for ongoing planning purposes.
- Special studies and ongoing studies should be initiated to obtain accurate data on infection and disease rates of migrant farmworkers in Minnesota. Diseases selected for study should be prioritized based on their potential impact on migrant farmworkers and on the general population in Minnesota.
- An additional half time person should be hired by Migrant Health to take responsibility for ongoing infectious disease data collection, education of local providers throughout the state wherever migrant farmworkers reside, and providing disease follow-up to other locations as necessary when migrants move on.
- The Minnesota Department of Health should designate a person as migrant health liaison. This person would work closely with the Office of Minority Health and the Office of Rural Health and would provide leadership in advocating for migrant health at the state level as well as ensuring communication between state government agencies and offices on issues affecting the health of migrant farmworkers.
- Migrant Health Services should assume a leadership role in convening local public health providers serving significant numbers of migrant in order to facilitate joint planning, information sharing and cooperation between counties in serving this population. Ideally, such meetings would be convened at least twice annually, at the beginning and end of the farmworkers' season.

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## The Importance of Bilingual and Bicultural Staff in Rural Minnesota

*Written by Maria Castaño*

*(Maria worked as a Nutrition Education Assistant in Le Seuer County with the MN Extension Service this past summer providing families and individuals with information about food and nutrition. She also served as an interpreter for many families in various arenas.)*

This summer I did an internship for the Minnesota Extension Service as a Nutrition Education Assistant in Le Seuer County for migrant families that participate in the food stamp program. Due to a lack of bilingual and bicultural staff, I had the opportunity to work for the migrant and resident Latino population in other areas such as the migrant school, County Human Services, and the WIC program. In addition to this, I worked one-on-one with migrant families, Green Giant Seneca employees and a local food shelf. The need for bilingual and bicultural staff is increasing every day as the resident Latino population grows. Many migrant farmworkers and food processing workers continue to come to work and more of these families are choosing to settle in this area.

There is a lack of communication between the migrant population and the Anglo population, and as a result, personnel in charge of social and community services are growing frustrated. In turn, the migrant population is experiencing isolation and a sense of rejection. A perfect example occurs within the school system. Due to a lack of bilingual and bicultural staff, limited communication has fostered a feeling of inadequacy on the part of the children at a very early age. At one school presentation, it appeared to me as if one little boy was being treated by the teacher as if he was not smart enough to participate in the class activities, which were being conducted primarily in English. However, when I started my presentation in Spanish his face lit up and he began to participate and even on some occasions when I spoke in English as well.

The parents of these children are affected differently, due to the fact that they cannot communicate or express their views in English, they are unable to participate fully in their children's education. For example the PTA meetings are normally conducted in English which generates a lack of confidence on the part of the parents from the teachers. According to the migrant school's director, the biggest barrier to reaching the children effectively is the lack of involvement of the parents. At one meeting where I did a nutrition presentation in Spanish, there were five parents present. According to the director, this was considered a success.

Another area that this problem is creeping into is the County Human Services where I noticed a sense of frustration among the staff. Migrants arrive to the offices with many questions concerning their rights, both legal and personal. Unfortunately, the staff did not appear to address these questions. In turn this has created a feeling of rejection and of being discriminated against. I ended up doing translations for Human Services, translating documents into Spanish. As I talked to the migrants in their homes or during casual encounters, I could sense their frustration with county services due to the inability to communicate and lack of cultural awareness on the part of the service providers.

My perception of the Human Services staff was that they prefer the status quo remain the same. I did not feel that they had a genuine understanding of how to address these problems. It seems as if they think that it is a once-a-year problem that comes when the migrants arrive in the late spring and summer and goes away when they leave in the fall.

Working on translations for the WIC program as well as helping occasionally to translate for clients, I noticed that all the material was in English. Many migrant families feel frustrated because they cannot understand the contents of the forms. On many occasions they missed appointments because by the time they found someone to translate the information for them it was too late. A case in point is that one of my clients, Maria who had missed every WIC appointment and felt very intimidated since she could not identify with anyone there. She had three small children (two under the age of five and she is expecting another one). Without WIC coupons, she had bought only enough milk for her children and she was very deficient in her calcium intake.

The reality is that the Latino and migrant population in Minnesota is growing at a fast pace. In fact, the Latino population in Minnesota has grown at a faster rate in the last ten years than any other state, according to the latest U.S. census. Much of this growth has occurred in greater Minnesota.

Many of the problems of miscommunication, isolation and cultural ignorance could be addressed by having cultural awareness programs for Anglo service providers and especially by having social service, school systems and other public institutions hire bilingual and bicultural staff. This would help alleviate those feelings of inadequacy and rejection at school. County Human Services would be able to offer better quality services. The community in general would find a way of solving conflicts in a better way because bilingual and bicultural staff would work as a link between the two cultures thereby reducing tensions. It will also help develop closeness among the communities and at the same time give voice to the migrant and Latino population.

*I would like to thank Glenyce Vagness-Peterson and Rose Montanye, MES Nutrition Educators in Le Sueur and Freeborn Counties for their guidance and mentoring during my internship.*

## Brillar Adelante-Shining Through

*Written by Juli Reiten*

*(Juli worked this past summer as a teaching assistant/art instructor at the Moorhead Migrant Education Program.)*

On a hot, humid day in mid July, several hundred people-students, parents, and teachers-gathered in the gymnasium of Thomas Edison School in Moorhead, Minnesota for the annual student talent show that culminates the Migrant Education Summer School. Although the show went on for over two hours and the temperature soared in the packed gym, people eagerly crowded in the doorways to see the kids perform their songs and dance routines. The collage project called Brillar Adelante-Shining Through which I had developed with students in grades one through twelve provided a fine backdrop, but I was concerned that with all the activity, few people would have a chance to look carefully at the wonderful work these kids produced. The next day I was pleased to discover that along with students and teachers, many parents returned to view the art project. Since then, the work has been presented three times in venues in the Fargo/Moorhead area and more showings are planned.

Initially, my internship proposal began as a photography project working with junior high and high school students who attend Migrant Summer School in Moorhead. I had estimated about thirty participants. But in order to justify creating a position for me, Migrant Education requested that I modify the project to include students in grades four and up. As it turned out, I had the opportunity to work with all grades along with the Service Learning teacher so the project changed again to include students in all grades. The challenge became conceiving of a format and finding the materials for approximately 250 participants. So the emphasis of the project changed to art and design as well as photography combined in a collage format. The youngest classes made the sign collage for the project. By class, the rest of the students developed the themes, designs and artwork for their collages and a group of talented and dedicated high school students produced the photography. The finished presentation of ten collage boards, each four feet square, represents the students commitment to developing and completing the project over a six-week period. Most important, it reflects the talents, interests, concerns, and everyday experience of the students. Brillar Adelante serves as a forum in which students talk about their lives - with each other, with their teachers, with their families, and with the larger community. No one could reveal the concerns of these migrant youth better than themselves. My goals for the project were to provide a medium and guidance for this self-expression, to help the students create an artistic presentation of which they could be proud, and to engage them in the creative process. I believe the skills and insights learned through creative endeavors can translate into methods for creative problem solving in other life experiences.

The Moorhead Migrant Summer School program has served migrant families who come to work in the Red River Valley for over twenty-five years. This year, the school as well as Migrant Head Start were housed together at Thomas Edison grade school and the building seemed ready to burst with children, teachers, and support staff. The first few days were quite chaotic as parents registered their children, the kids settled into their classrooms, and the little ones tried to adjust to being away from their families for the first time. My prior teaching experience had been with college and adult students exclusively so I anticipated several challenges teaching young students.

The staff and teachers at Moorhead are a mix of Hispanic and Anglo, fortunately with more Mexican-American and bilingual staff hired each year. Classes are taught in English but many children new in school and their parents speak Spanish primarily. Clearly the parents regarded the school as essential and were deeply committed to furthering their children's education. I met two teachers, both former migrant

farmworkers, who still migrate from Texas. But now they come to help improve the continuity between the students education in Texas and summer school. These teachers exemplify the high level of dedication to providing quality education that I saw in the Moorhead Migrant Education administrators, teachers, and staff overall.

Even teachers or staff with the best intentions, however, may demonstrate forms of racism. The instances that I saw or heard were very few, but it seemed that those persons who exhibited racist attitudes or stereotypical assumptions had no idea that their behavior was racist or perpetuated racism. For example, some teachers expressed the opinion that migrant students exhibited more behavior problems than regular students. I do not presume any expertise on education, but these comments sound like the type of negative myth common in many professions. Unfortunately in this case, the myth harms migrant children directly and undermines their relationship with the educational system. But if some level of accuracy can be attributed to this theory, then teachers and administrators have the responsibility to determine methods to address the issue, including looking at their own attitudes that may contribute to the problem. In the past, Moorhead Migrant Education has provided cultural sensitivity training for teachers and staff. I believe that these people would benefit from and be receptive to additional training through a workshop approach on cultural diversity and in building awareness of the many manifestations of racism. I don't doubt that many educators in the Migrant Education system are fully aware of the problems and strive to develop effective responses to subtle or not so subtle forms of racism. I encourage their efforts because they are needed still.

During a discussion with the junior high class, I had to confront some of my own assumptions, or rather, my inclination not to make them. Students worked out ideas for the collages in journals and rough drafts utilizing both artwork and text. Several of the older students had developed elaborate graffiti styles of writing. Common design elements such as eight balls and the Yin Yang symbol appeared repeatedly in their work. One afternoon, an argument arose between two groups of students, girls on one side, boys on the other. Each group accused members in the other of drawing gang symbols and graffiti. We discussed the idea that graffiti can be generic, not representative of any one group. In fact, graffiti has existed as long as the written word. And even though some graffiti or designs resemble gang work, they may not be at all. Design ideas often spread because they are new and interesting, appealing to kids who like to draw. Finally, the class decided together that they would avoid anything that could be interpreted as gang related. They didn't want to give their audience the impression that they were involved in gangs.

Deciding that I needed to learn about gang-style imagery, I met with the officer expert on the topic at the Moorhead Police Department. He showed me a book with hundreds of photographs of gang graffiti, symbols, gestures, and even styles of dress. I realized that some of the students work resembled the examples. The officer asserted that if the designs included these elements then the artist most likely was in a gang or knew and looked up to someone who was. I thought about this assertion long after leaving the police station. Should I assume that some of the kids I worked with were associated with gangs simply because of what the officer said? It occurred to me that his attitude demonstrated a similar kind of belief in professional myths and assumptions that I saw in some of the teachers who attributed increased behavior problems to migrant youth. The myths and assumptions expressed were based on anecdotes, singular cases, not on empirical or provable evidence. To assert that anyone whose drawings look like gang imagery must be associating with gangs violates the presumption of innocence. Certainly instances of behavior problems at school or indications of gang activity must be addressed. But also, the challenge for all professionals is to identify our own biases that evolve from the type of work we do and consider the effect these assumptions have on those we intend to serve.

Gang imagery didn't seem to be an issue for the high school students who produced most of the photography for the collages. They not only appreciated the chance to learn about photography, they also realized that this was an opportunity to describe migrant experiences to the community where their families work but who know little about them. At the first session we talked about what the subjects of the photographs might be in order to reflect their own perspectives. The students understood the potential content and purpose of the photographs immediately. After that, I focused on technique and composition. I met with them at least twice a week in the evenings for about a half hour before classes started. Considering that these kids worked in the fields all day and then attended school at night, I was amazed at their enthusiasm and dedication to the project. Even though we met for such short but intense learning sessions, they seemed to ingest and apply everything that I taught them. Most important, these students had a vision of what they wanted to say and were committed to expressing their views through the photographs. As a result, they produced a wonderful and telling collection of images. Most defiantly, a work of which they can be proud.

My original proposal was to develop a photography project with high school students who attended Migrant Summer School throughout the region in order to offer a meaningful learning experience and to produce a body of work that could serve to further understanding in the community about migrant experience. For pragmatic reasons, this proposal was modified. The collage project, *Brillar Adelante-Shining Through*, included all grades, is well received, and I consider it to be quite successful. But in some future years, I hope that the original plan will be revived and implemented. The high school students that I worked with demonstrated with the barest minimum in time, materials, and equipment that they have the insight, the talent, and the dedication to create a truly remarkable and enlightening body of work.

## Prejudice in My Community

*Written by Dawn Carter*

*( Dawn worked this past summer as a family service worker for Tri-Valley Migrant Head Start at the Bird Island summer program. Migrant Head Start serves families with children from six weeks to five years old.)*

(The following is a subjective account of the author's personal understanding of the prejudice and racism displayed in the rural communities of Minnesota. The ideas expressed here are based on experiences during an internship with Migrant Head Start as well as the experience of being part of a rural Minnesota community since birth. A further discussion with Father Tony Stubeda influenced some of the content of this article. Father Tony Stubeda is the outreach worker for the Migrant Hispanic Ministries for the Archdiocese of New Ulm. He has worked in the greater MN with the migrant farm workers for over fifteen years and has lived in the area nearly his whole life.)

The White rural communities in greater Minnesota have passed through the last 100 years perceiving ourselves to be very homogenous. Most of the social and economic changes have been slow enough for our communities to feel like very little has changed. Most of our neighbors, family and friends are relatively the same in appearance and there exists a cohesiveness in this sameness. I am not known only by my reputation, but also by my family members and our history in the community. To know every person's history and who they are connected to creates an incredible sense of security in our community. Socially, these public histories provide an effective system that regulates the norms of the community and punishes those who go against those norms. This social system also promotes positive consequences for the neighbor that has always been honest and the kid whose father always pays his bills on time.

Another consequence of such a social system is that our same families tend to monopolize the position of power in the community. The family that has taken care of the needs of the community for generations is likely to be trusted to continue this service and is granted the informal and formal positions of power that enable the process to repeat. This all leads to family names that are old and constant in the community. We enjoy a comfort level that is enjoyed because of the feeling that everyone understands and observes established rules, regulations and histories.

Introduce "outsiders". Any outsider. Any person that we consider a newcomer to the community. If my grandfather did not know their grandfather, they might be considered an outsider. The more different the outsider is, the easier it is to recognize them as an outsider. I have a difficult time trusting an outsider because they do not fit into the social system that I know.

Introduce outsiders that lack political and economic power and who do not stay such as migrant farm workers. They pass through or they are residents of my community for a season but not year-around. I have learned to value consistency, history and life-long commitments in my life and community.

Introduce people whose only commitment to the community that I can see is a commitment to do the work that I, myself, would not do. I don't know how to relate to a person who would work in the sugar beet fields or in the poultry processing factories. I can't imagine what they do for fun and what satisfaction they get out of doing that type of work. I see where they live and how they live. If I socialize with someone who I see working hard all day and still going hungry, then I have to acknowledge the imperfection of the system that I love and praise. I take great pride in this land of opportunity and it is difficult for me to resolve feelings of disappointment in the system that fails other people.

Introduce people who speak another language and look different than me. My discussions with friends and family point out the difficulty in being neighborly to someone that we can not talk to. It feels out of place to me to have the people who look like that walking down the street or living in the house next door. Most of my previous contact with these people have been on TV., movies, or news reports which often built in negative expectations.

I feel that my peaceful well-organized social system is being disturbed and my community is trying to adjust. I want to understand and do the "right thing" but I feel like I don't know enough about the history of the situation or the people themselves to make a difference.

Reality reminds me that the people who I consider "outsiders", like the Mexican-American migrant farm workers, did not sneak up on my community and "invade" all at once. They have been coming to work every summer for many years and have been an essential part of our prosperous agricultural economy. What has changed now is that more of these people are staying in Minnesota to try to create a better life for their families. I can respect that mothers and fathers are staying to benefit their children. I realize that my community has not been unchanged for 100 years but that I have idealized the past in order to justify my feelings about the changes that scare me:

I can not anticipate what will happen to the community I grew up in. I can not anticipate the new traditions and customs that will be incorporated into my community. I do not know how to accept people who seem so different from me but I am uncomfortable thinking of them as less than human. I find it difficult to support acts and words against these people, but I find it even more difficult to deny that I too feel animosity towards them.

During my internship and in conversations with many Anglo community members this summer, I heard feelings of confusion, frustration and hopelessness (like those described above) regarding the situation with the Mexican-American people in these communities. My experiences working with the Mexican-American migrant families in rural Minnesota caused a clash between the two worlds in which I live, one being my study of and work with migrants and the other being the Anglo community I grew up in. On the one hand, I witnessed the prejudicial words and acts directed towards the migrant families that I love. On the other hand, I experienced the acceptance of these harmful words and acts by family, friends and neighbors. There is an accepted environment that hurts the Mexican-American migrant farm workers and the Mexican Americans that settle into these communities. What can be done when feelings are so strong and so ingrained into the mindset of these communities? What are some ways to change this situation?

Dr. Fletcher Blanchard, a psychologist, conducted research on racism and concluded that a few outspoken people can establish a climate discouraging racist acts. An article by Daniel Goleman in the New York Times (7-16-91) describes Blanchard's work and findings and other suggestions for dealing with racist actions and verbalizations. The article is entitled "New Way to Battle Bias: Fight Acts, Not Feelings" The major suggestions include:

- people in authority and positions of influence need to play a crucial role in heading off expressions of ethnic and racial hatred simply by making it very clear that they will not be tolerated.
- people of authority and positions of influence need to speak out against prejudice sincerely and from the heart.



- a variety of experiences should be created in which people of different backgrounds interact. These experiences are most effective if they consist of small groups working towards a common goal and if there are many of these such experiences.
- provide education about groups of people against whom a community may harbor racist feelings. Learn about differences, rather than just searching for the similarities.

Goleman writes that some psychologists believe "... that using pressure from authority figures to keep people who are prejudiced from acting out those biases can, in the long run, weaken the prejudice itself".

I feel that these strategies could be helpful in confronting the racism and prejudice that exists in many rural communities in greater Minnesota. Those in positions of influence and authority can make a difference by not tolerating prejudicial acts or words in our communities. When I, as a person with a good reputation and history in the community, refuse to tolerate racist actions and words (including when my own family, friends and neighbors), then maybe I can influence other to do the same. I also have a responsibility to learn about the people that frighten me so that I can breakdown the stereotypes and myths that fuel my fears and replace my ignorance with appreciation and understanding.

## Chemical Abuse and Migrant Farmworkers: How Little We Know

*Written by Francisco Silva-Craig*

*(Francisco worked as an intern this past summer with the chemical health education program of Migrant Health Services. He assisted with educational presentations at several Migrant Education Programs. Migrant Health Services operates clinics throughout Minnesota and North Dakota for migrant families.)*

"On the edge of the city, you'll see us and then, we come with the dusk  
and we go with the wind."

- Woody Guthrie, Pastures of Plenty, 1936

I feel that this verse expresses how mainstream America views migrant farmworkers. There are approximately 3 million migrant and seasonal farmworkers in the United States, the vast majority of whom are either Chicano or Latino. Most of these workers live, work and suffer in conditions that leave them vulnerable to chemical abuse because of limited access to information and services (Long, 1993).

Research and government assistance for migrant and seasonal farm workers is not matching the epidemic pace of their life struggles, and the pace for addressing the group's chemical health needs is at a standstill. According to Dr. Colgan of the University of Minnesota's Alcohol, Drug and Chemical Education Program (ADCEP): "When looking at a population such as this one, including the problems with unfair housing, inadequate medical care, limited formal education and low wages, the issue of chemical health is on that is looked at as [a situation] that an individual has put him/herself into."

In U.S. society, the tendency is still to blame the individual for chemical abuse. With such a view, it is no wonder that addressing the chemical health needs of migrants is not a high government priority. In all fairness, most people in the U.S. are not well versed in the concepts of risk factors, and are ignorant of how the circumstances and environments of many migrants' lives can put them at "risk" for chemical abuse. These risk factors can include the stress of moving from far-away places in search of uncertain work and housing, the inhumane living conditions for many, the racism and the lack of support outside their own community. This population needs more support in developing new coping mechanisms (i.e. protective factors), in place of chemical use, to help them overcome these risk factors.

Chemicals play an intricate role in the development of these coping mechanisms. The chemical becomes the new tool to help cope with the stresses. Many chemical health professionals say that it is a natural evolution that any group faced with so many obstacles would turn to chemicals to cope (Reid K. Hester and William R. Miller, 1990).

"One can tell when another has been fired or one is furious because they didn't get their paycheck. People can give up and it's well-known, that people who are depressed have a higher likelihood of disease [and mortality rate] than those who do not."

- Plan for the Year 2000, Castro 1990

When looking at the specific stresses that go hand-in-hand with the lives of migrant and seasonal farmworkers, one must consider the extra risk factors that increase stress. Such stresses are not limited to an individual, but instead continue to affect the entire family.

"In the migrant [population], mobility, unemployment, poor health status, underemployment, discrimination and other social ills faced by this group place stress on the quality of interaction between a child and parent."

- Understanding Family Abuse Among Mexican-American Migrants, Becker, 1990

Research shows that parents who do not have another outlet for their stress (besides chemicals) are able to create, even in the most traditionally loving family settings, an environment that spawns multiple social problems, such as conduct disorder, poor social skills and high dropout rates (Egeland). This situation also can breed intergenerational transmission of chemical abuse and other intrafamilial maltreatment. Research has shown that, if untreated, risk factor environmental abuse, such as chemical and physical, is a "school" for children to learn and continue such behavior (Dr. Abuzahave, M.D. 1993).

Little attention has been given to chemical abuse affecting migrant and seasonal farmworkers. If or when it is detected, treatment resources are meager, and, given the lack of cultural considerations, often not very effective.

As I conducted my research on chemical health issues in the migrant population, I found that it is an issue that needs to be focused on because of the multiple connections that chemical abuse has to family crises. For example, according to Antonio Duran of the Migrant Clinicians Network, 80 per cent of family violence in the migrant population nationally is related to chemical abuse (A. Duran, personal communication, 1995). In addition, according to Robert Ryder of the East Carolina University School of Medicine, 63 per cent of domestic abuse in this community is related to chemical abuse (R. Ryder, personal communication, 1995). With these percentages it is fair to say that chemical abuse is an issue to be looked at carefully. As part of my research, I gathered information from journals, books, the Internet, calling local and national organizations and carried out an internship in chemical health education with Migrant Health, Inc., I found that little was known, and that even less was suggested for setting up preventative strategies.

However, more chemical health professionals are starting to see the problem and are starting to write about it and therefor bring it to the attention of others in this field. Unfortunately, the treatment strategies towards this population are those that are used when dealing with urban Chicanos and Latinos who are second and third generation residents in the United States.

Those programs are not applicable to the needs and realities of migrants. For example, we cannot put this group, which travels through many states to work, into a traditional in-patient program. How will they work? In many cases, when in-patient treatment has been suggested for a migrant client, they have been known to leave the state to get another job. Or in some cases they may be in the United States without work authorization papers and fear deportation. What do we do then? Or due to the sunrise to sunset hours that farmworkers labor it's unrealistic to expect them to then go to a group meeting for two to three hours. Where is the time for spending with family? Also, what is seen as a problem by some migrants may not be seen as a problem by others since there are distinct cultures and beliefs within the migrant population.

Since I could not find an answer during my research, I felt that the best route was to look at what migrant Chicano and Latino farmworkers need when it comes to chemical health. What I came up with are some possibilities, and only possibilities, due to the recent awareness of this issue. The three main issues to look at: 1. public health education 2. outpatient (and especially aftercare and relapse prevention). 3. cultural sensitive and specific treatment and counselors trained in these skills.

1. In education, we need to get the word out that drinking is bad when it affects parts of the individual's life. One possible approach could be with billboards and radio spots in Spanish and English that are culturally appropriate. In addition lectures on the dangers of drugs can be done in school although these need to be scheduled during times in the school year when migrant children are present. Another strategy could be a contract with the companies or farmers that their workers must go to at least one free lecture about chemical health. To do this, one must consider scheduling and transportation needs and include this as a worker health training event that farmworkers can get paid for.

According to Sandra Rodriguez, a chemical health educator at C.L.U.E.S in St. Paul, we will have to look at going to the camps, houses and mobile-home parks to conduct presentations on chemical health. Then we will have to look at doing it after work, and having it be no more than a hour long and provide free transportation for families interested in participating.

2. With the main focus of treatment on the outpatient approach, chances of treating migrants are greater, since they are not missing work to participate. Transportation and scheduling needs and culturally-sensitive approaches must be considered. For example, having gender-specific groups would be more effective since in a co-ed group, Chicana and Latina women would be less likely to challenge the men, and the men would be less likely to show weakness. Second, the program should not be referred to as a "treatment" program, but as an educational or support program due to the cultural stigma that "treatment" has. Third, it would be important to cover topics such as education on chemicals, anger, stress management, male/female issues while stressing the role of the client's families throughout and involving them wherever possible. Another approach that might work for some is a moderation program that focuses on changing their attitudes about alcohol and other chemicals. With the aftercare and relapse prevention, a program that follows them back to their homes in Texas or elsewhere and builds a strong support network there would be important.

3. Many of these approaches are based on cultural factors that I had not been aware of. I feel that even if one is from a Latino or Chicano background (as am I) that does not guarantee an understanding of the specific needs of migrants. This population is not just based on ethnic identity, but a unique lifestyle. We need to be sensitive to this and train counselors in this awareness, and design programs that accommodate them.

In working with migrant and seasonal farmworker children this past summer and doing lectures on chemical health for ages 5 through 17 throughout the state, in conjunction with Migrant Health in Moorhead, Minnesota, I found that many teachers and social service professionals viewed the migrant children as "lost causes" because of their environmental risk factors (i.e. poor housing, inadequate medical care, unfair wages and limited education). A number of professionals I came in contact with had a prejudiced view of the migrant children in this regard. They (these professionals) need to better educate themselves about migrants and break down their prejudices.

In the end I see that we need to spend more time in researching what steps to take in dealing with this population. We also need to look at lowering the amount of risk factors that exist with this group. As a start, we need to look at providing adequate housing and health care and fair wages. As for my suggestions, they are steps that can be looked at as starting blocks. Since so little is known, it would be arrogant to think that these hold any validity without further research to substantiate them.

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## Migrant Farmworkers and the Welfare Residency Requirements

*Written by Renee Szudy*

*(Renee interned this past summer at the Chicano/Latino Affairs Council, a government agency whose mission is to advocate for the interests of the Chicano/Latino community in Minnesota. She researched legislative issues related to migrant farmworkers including disaster relief, housing, and public assistance. The Chicano/Latino Affairs Council intends to use the information gathered for a legislative initiative next session to improve conditions for migrants).*

During the 1996 Minnesota Legislative Session, the state legislature passed a substantial welfare reform bill. This bill includes a new residency requirement for AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children), MA (Medical Assistance), GA (General Assistance) and GAMC (General Assistance Medical Care) recipients. The state legislature proposed this legislation with the expectation of dramatic federal welfare reform, which would have eliminated federal laws guaranteeing assistance to families with children and created a system in which states receive federal block grants to design their own programs, rather than carry out the federal AFDC programs. Federal welfare reform was not passed last January, as the state legislature had anticipated, but the State of Minnesota went ahead with its own reform despite this. The new GA residency requirement went into effect as of July 1, 1996, as it is a state-funded program. AFDC, on the other hand, since it is federally-funded, could not be legally enacted until either the federal government granted the state a waiver, or federal legislation granted states the authority to design their own programs. The State of Minnesota Department of Human Services submitted a request for a waiver in March, but federal welfare legislation that provides states with block grants to design and implement their own programs was signed into law by President Clinton in August. The AFDC residency requirements are expected to be enacted by July 1, 1997.

The state legislation imposes a 30-day residency requirement on GA, GAMC, AFDC, and MA applicants. This means that newcomers to our state must wait 30 days before they are eligible for public assistance. An applicant is exempt from this residency requirement if (1) the applicant was born in the state; (2) the applicant was formerly a resident for at least 365 days and is returning from an absence; (3) the applicant came to this state to join a close relative (parent, grandparent, brother, sister, spouse, or child); or (4) the applicant came to this state to accept a bona fide offer of employment for which the applicant was eligible. A county agency must waive the residency requirement in cases of "emergency" or where "unusual hardship" would result from denial of assistance. However, it is important to note that these terms are not defined by state law and the interpretation of them is at the county's discretion.

In addition to the 30-day residency requirement, the new law contains a 12-month residency requirement for AFDC applicants. This means that families who have resided in Minnesota for less than 12 months can receive only a grant amount equal to the AFDC grant amount available in the state that they moved from. If that state has a higher grant level, than the family would receive the Minnesota grant amount. There are no exceptions or exemptions to this law.

### **How will this affect migrant farmworkers in Minnesota?**

Obviously, these new residency requirements will negatively affect migrant farmworkers. The new laws are designed to discourage people from moving to Minnesota solely for public benefits. Migrant farmworkers come to Minnesota to work, not to receive government support, and Minnesota's economy and agricultural industry are dependent upon their labor. However, farmwork is never a sure prospect. The availability of work depends on many factors which include the weather, the choices individual farmers make on whether

to use farmworkers or machines for certain tasks, the effectiveness of pesticides, and the availability of housing close to the worksite. Because of the unpredictability of crops and weather conditions, migrant farmworkers often experience work delays and underemployment during their work season in Minnesota. The scarcity of housing coupled with the prevalence of racial discrimination often forces migrants to pay high rent for inadequate, unsanitary housing. In addition, many families come to Minnesota prior to the planting season in hopes of finding safe and affordable housing so that they can stay and work, and they therefore have no income until the season begins. Requiring migrant families to wait 30 days for help is unfair to these people who come to our state fully intending to contribute to our economy, but who sometimes cannot do so due to circumstances beyond their control. This residency requirement is particularly burdensome for migrants because they are more likely to need assistance when they arrive until they find work.

The 12-month requirement is also problematic for migrants. Because migrant farmworkers reside in Minnesota for the farming season and go home for the winter they will never meet the 12-month residency requirement. Furthermore, allowing migrants to receive benefits only equal that provided by their home state is unreasonable because most are from Texas where both the welfare grant amounts and the cost of living are significantly lower. For example, the Cedillos, a migrant family who worked in Minnesota during the 1995 season, estimate that they spent \$100 per week for groceries in their home state of Texas, but \$150 a week in Minnesota (*Bitter Sugar*, Urban Coalition, 1996).

The allowance for the 30-day residency requirement to be waived by the county welfare agency in cases of "emergency" or "undue hardship" is an inadequate safety net for migrant farmworkers. These terms are not defined by state law, so the decision of whether they are applicable in individual cases would be left up to the given county. Given the discrimination that migrant farmworkers face as Chicanos and Latinos and their lack of social and political power, it is unlikely that they would receive fair consideration in this system. The exemption from the 30-day residency requirement for applicants who come to Minnesota to accept a bona-fide offer of employment is also inadequate because many migrants, particularly the migrants that may need assistance when they arrive, have not secured employment before moving to the state.

#### **What can be done to help migrant farmworkers access public benefits?**

One solution is to amend the legislation with an exemption for migrant farmworkers. The difficulty with this solution is in creating an inclusive, effective definition of migrant farmworker. The Bureau of Migrant Services, State of Wisconsin, is hoping to exempt migrants from Wisconsin's 60-day welfare residency requirement. Wisconsin state law, however, already had a definition of "migrant worker" in 1976 enabling legislation for the Bureau of Migrant Services. The Bureau would need only to include the term "migrant worker" in the exemption. Wisconsin law defines a "migrant worker" as "any person who temporarily leaves a principal place of residence outside of this state and comes to this state for not more than 10 months in a year to accept seasonal employment in the planting, cultivating, raising, harvesting, handling, drying, packing, packaging, processing, freezing, grading, or storing of any agricultural or horticultural commodity in this unmanufactured state" (Wis. Stat. 103.90) Wisconsin's legal definition of "migrant worker" might provide a model for a proposed exemption under Minnesota law.

Another option is to define the terms "emergency" and "undue hardship" in the legislation. This would help prevent county welfare agencies from discriminating against migrant farmworkers. Again, as with defining migrant farmworker, it is difficult to settle on a fair definition.

A third option is to petition the law in court. This would require that the law affect someone first, however. In other words, the legislation would have to harm people to create a case that could then be presented and

decided in court. The Wisconsin 60-day residency requirement was petitioned in court based on the argument that it infringes upon citizens constitutional right to travel. The law was narrowly upheld by the State of Wisconsin Supreme Court.

In conclusion, it is important to note that migrant farmworkers, on the average, earn less than \$8,000 annually, and contribute greatly to our economy. Minnesota's resident labor force is not large and mobile enough, or willing, to supply Minnesota's agricultural industry's demand for long hours of intense labor during the short farming season. Migrant labor is therefore necessary to the viability of the agricultural industry and is a staple in our state's economy, yet this labor is continually exploited and underpaid. Migrants come here to work, not to receive welfare. In fact, despite their extreme poverty, less than 50 per cent of the migrant population use public assistance (*Bitter Sugar*, Urban Coalition, 1996). These workers deserve to be eligible for adequate public assistance.



## Consequences of New Federal Welfare Law for Non- U.S. Citizen Migrant Farmworkers<sup>1</sup>

Written by Ben Casper

*(Ben worked this past summer as a legal advocate for Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services in their Olivia satellite office. Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services provides legal services to migrant farmworkers in Minnesota and North Dakota.)*

On August 22, 1996, President Clinton signed a controversial federal welfare bill, passing into law a set of "reforms" that will have a dramatic, negative effect on millions of lower-income people across America. The new law singles out legal and undocumented immigrants for especially harsh treatment. Though only five per cent of federal welfare recipients are immigrants, cuts in their public benefits will account for 44 per cent of the overall cuts in federal welfare spending (overall cuts are anticipated to be 55 billion over six years). Because the vast majority of migrant farmworkers earn poverty wages regardless of their immigration status, *all* migrants are likely to suffer from the reductions in public benefits. However, the particular severity of provisions targeted at non-citizens ensures that this group of migrant farmworkers will experience much greater and more immediate economic hardship.

The provisions of the welfare law affecting immigrants are very complex and they specify different eligibility rules for different classes of non-citizens. The great majority of migrant farmworkers who are non-citizens are members of one of the following classes:<sup>2</sup>

- I. Legal Permanent Residents (LPR) who became legal residents of the United States *before* the new welfare law went into effect on August 22, 1996;
- II. LPRs who became legal residents of the U.S. *after* the welfare law went into effect;
- III. Undocumented ("illegal") immigrants.

Focusing on these three classes, I will briefly outline how the welfare law affects the eligibility of non-citizen migrants for important benefits programs.

### I. Migrant Farmworkers who became LPRs before August 22, 1996

Legal residents contribute their labor to our economy and pay taxes to our State and Federal governments. Yet despite the efforts of legal residents to "work hard and play by the rules," the new federal welfare law mandates or permits discrimination against them in nearly all public benefits programs. Even LPRs who became residents years before the new welfare law was passed will lose benefits.

#### A. Food Stamps and Supplemental Security Income (SSI)

Food Stamps have long been one of the most important federal public benefits used by migrant farmworkers. A large portion of migrants who work in Minnesota depend on Food Stamps to adequately feed their families. SSI is another federally funded program which provided a guaranteed minimum income to individuals who are disabled, elderly or blind. Unfortunately, this new welfare law **permanently bans LPRs from receiving Food Stamps or SSI benefits**. This restriction became effective on August 22, 1996. Any LPR migrant currently receiving Food Stamps or SSI will continue to receive them until their case comes up for review, at which time benefits should be discontinued. There are two exceptions to the ban on LPR eligibility:

(i) LPRs who are veterans or active duty armed service personnel, along with their spouses and children, may continue to receive Food Stamps and SSI.

(ii) LPRs who can demonstrate 10 years (40 quarters) of work history in the United States will remain eligible for Food Stamps and SSI. An important provision permits LPRs to count work performed by a spouse or parent towards this 10 year requirement. Human Services offices will require documentation of the work history through social security earnings records, tax forms, pay stubs, statements from past employers, or similar records. Given that migrant farmworkers frequently have problems obtaining evidence of their past employment, many who are legally entitled to benefits under this exception may be unable to prove their eligibility.

#### B. Federal Means-Tested Programs (Medicaid, AFDC, and Title XX):

"Federal means-tested" programs include Medicaid, the cooperative federal-state program which provides medical assistance to low income people. State administered programs funded by federal block grants are also federal means-tested, the state programs replacing AFDC and Title XX<sup>3</sup> benefits are examples. Under the new welfare law, the federal government gives states broad discretion to determine eligibility guidelines for federal means-tested programs and the states are not required to exclude all legal residents. Though states have authority to deny LPRs access to federal means-tested benefits, there has been no indication that Minnesota will adopt a policy of total exclusion. Between now and the first half of 1997, Governor Carlson, the Minnesota Department of Human Services, and the Legislature will make key decisions regarding the eligibility of legal residents for these programs. An effective lobbying effort is critical to ensure that the most favorable rules affecting migrants are adopted.

#### C. Minnesota State-Only Benefits

Minnesota has discretion to include or exclude legal residents from benefits programs that are funded by state money only.

## II. Migrant Farmworkers who become LPRs after August 22, 1996

#### A. Food Stamps and SSI

LPRs who become residents after August 22, 1996 are permanently banned from receiving Food Stamps or SSI benefits.

#### B. Federal Means-Tested Programs

While the welfare law gives states discretion to grant federal means-tested benefits to LPRs who became residents *before* August 22, 1996, it includes two provisions that remove this discretion for LPRs to become legal residents *after* that date.

##### (i) Five year prospective bar

The welfare bars new LPRs from receiving any federal means-tested program during the first five years they are in the United States.

##### (ii) Deeming of Sponsor income

When a prospective immigrant applies to become a legal permanent resident, federal law requires that the immigrant have a U.S. citizen sponsor. The sponsor signs an affidavit of support for the immigrant as part of the application for immigration. An important provision in the welfare law will force states to automatically "deem" the income of the sponsor and the sponsor's spouse as belonging to the LPR when determining income eligibility for any federal means-tested program. Again, this rule only applies to LPRs

who become residents after August 22, 1996. In practice, this rule will almost always disqualify the LPR from receiving benefits, since LPR's income combined with the sponsor's income will tend to be a figure in excess of the program income limits. This will be true even for migrant farmworkers. Also, the new rule on deeming sponsor income to the LPR remains in effect indefinitely; it does not end when the five year prospective bar expires. Because both rules apply to the same programs, the deeming rule will effectively prevent new LPRs from qualifying for federal means-tested benefits even after their five year bar has ended.

#### C. Minnesota State-Only Benefits Programs

Minnesota has discretion to include or exclude new LPRs from state-only programs.

### III. Migrant Farmworkers who are undocumented

The new welfare law bans undocumented immigrants from Food Stamps, SSI, and the federal means-tested programs. Undocumented immigrants will be eligible for only a narrow set of benefits including emergency Medicaid, short term non-cash disaster relief, public health immunizations, school meals and some other programs.

Probably the most important change for undocumented immigrants in the welfare law is the new reporting requirement. As a condition of receiving federal block grant money, **states are now required to report any undocumented immigrants to the INS.** The reporting requirements will force Minnesota to change its current practice, as human services offices in our state have not been required to report undocumented immigrants to the INS. Within 18 months, the U.S. Attorney General will develop regulations prescribing how state agencies are to go about verifying the immigration status of all applicants. States will be required to have a verification/reporting program in place within two year after the Attorney General issues the regulations.

#### Conclusions

The above is only an incomplete description of a small part of the new welfare law. No legal conclusions regarding specific individuals should be drawn from this overview. Still, at least two general conclusions appear.

1. Immigration should act as quickly as possible to become U.S. citizens to avoid the harshest effects of the welfare law.
2. All concerned Minnesotans should work together to effectively lobby our state legislature, the Governor and relevant state agencies. The federal law gives these officials broad discretion in determining eligibility criteria for many programs and they will be exercising that discretion over the coming months. Vigorous lobbying is needed to ensure that the best possible eligibility rules for migrant farmworkers are adopted. People should also lobby the federal legislators to repeal the harsh provisions of the new welfare law.

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*I would like to thank Bob Lyman of Migrant Legal Services for his assistance.*

<sup>1</sup> This article was completed October 6, 1996. Readers should be aware that subsequent congressional or executive action could affect the accuracy of this article. Also, just as the new welfare law affects matters of immigration policy, the new immigration law affects matters of welfare policy. Please note that this article addresses the content of the welfare law only.

<sup>2</sup> The welfare law contains more favorable edibility rules for other classes of non-citizens, such as refugees, asylees, and immigrants granted withholding from deportation.

<sup>3</sup> Title XX programs include child-care, in home care for the disabled, and programs to prevent domestic violence and child abuse.

## Developing Visions for Sustainable Agriculture: Are Migrant Workers' Voices Heard?

*Written by Kathryn Clements*

Sugar beet (*Beta vulgaris* L.) production is an important component of the agricultural industry in Minnesota. Each year, producers harvest approximately 400,000 acres of sugar beets, earning 200 million dollars from the crop (MN Agricultural Statistics, 1995). American Crystal Sugar Company and other sugar cooperatives provides economic infrastructure and support for local sugar beet growers, many of whom farm and live in the Red River Valley of Minnesota and North Dakota (Urban Coalition, 1996). The production and processing of beets has become a \$1.6 billion dollar industry, and has become the heart of this local community (Urban Coalition, 1996).

A consistent and invaluable part of Red River Valley sugar beet production is the labor of migrant agricultural workers (Valdez, 1991). Sugar beets are a labor-intensive crop; as such, the industry has long depended on migrants to work the fields each season (Clean Water Action, 1996). Recent studies in the Red River Valley have documented that many of these workers face clearly substandard working and living conditions, including depressed wages, inadequate housing and education, and unsafe and hazardous work environments (Clean Water Action, 1996). More specifically, while working in sugar beet fields, migrant laborers often are not provided toilet facilities, have no supplies of fresh water, and face extended exposure to multiple agricultural chemicals (Clean Water Action, 1996). These conditions are consistent with situations faced by migrant workers throughout the United States (Slesinger, 1992).

Last summer I interviewed several migrant worker families in the Red River valley area regarding working and living conditions, larger community dynamics, and ideas for creating more sustainable and just relationships between migrant workers and the growers of this area of Minnesota and North Dakota. Although I had read of the substandard working and living conditions migrants face, I was still overwhelmed by the stories of these families' lives. The workers I talked with have had a variety of experiences in the sugar beet fields. Some growers provided toilet facilities and pesticide warning and re-entry signs, while most of the growers that these families worked for did not provide the basics. Families talked about struggles to obtain their due wages after completing a job and of their inability to meet living expenses with their earnings from multiple 12-14 hour days in the fields. As well, the workers discussed some of the injuries and illness they have incurred while working, including wounds, dizziness, nausea, heat sickness and convulsions. As with most agricultural labor, they are provided no health insurance, bonuses or retirement plans as part of their contracts.

Although efforts have been made to better these conditions through laws and legislation, community involvement, and worker action, many barriers still exist to their improvement. One of these barriers is lack of adequate research about migrant labor, as well as a lack of communication within agriculture about labor issues, in general, and migrant agricultural workers, in particular. Understanding the interactions of agricultural labor is critical to developing visions of sustainable agricultural development for Minnesota and the world. The University of California, Davis, argues that "... To be more sustainable over the long term, labor must be acknowledged and supported by government policies, recognized as important constituents of land grant universities and carefully considered when assessing the impacts of new technologies and practices" (U-CA, Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Web Page, 1996).

As a student in the University of Minnesota College of Agricultural, Food and Environmental Sciences, I have become part of a substantial movement for a more sustainable agriculture, one which aims to integrate the three goals of environmental health, economic profitability and social and economic equity. I feel

compelled to ask multiple questions to myself and to those developing visions for the future of agriculture, sustainable or conventional. As students of agriculture, farmers, consumers, and workers, do we seek out the voices and lives of migrant workers as integral partners in agriculture and stakeholders in the future? As we develop visions, is social equity emphasized and valued? How do we all depend on migrant workers? How can we better reflect our dependency through wages, housing and other basic human needs? Is it morally OR economically possible, in the long term, to continue to create an agricultural system where migrant laborers are devalued, discriminated against, and ignored? My experiences thus far as an intern at the University-Migrant Project has taught me that currently, social equity is not fulfilled. I worry that this equity is rarely considered seriously as inextricably connected to the future sustainability of agriculture and our communities. I agree with agricultural analyst Patricia Allen as she suggest that "... We need a concept of sustainability that cherishes and respects environment and human beings; one that proscribes the exploitation of people as well as that of nature. Such changes are necessary to redirect sustainable agriculture from a set of narrowly defined practices that will benefit some for now to a transformation that can sustain all of us, both for today and far into the future" (Allen, 1995).

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