

NATIONAL FARMWORKER

National Farmworker Fact Sheet

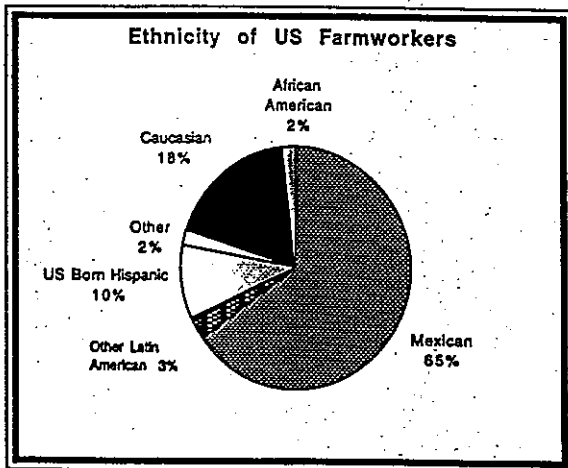
Who are Farmworkers?¹

A migrant farmworker is an individual whose principal employment is seasonal agriculture; migrant farmworkers follow agricultural crops from state to state and live in temporary housing.

A seasonal farmworker is an individual whose principal employment is agricultural labor but is a permanent resident of the community and does not move into temporary housing when employed in farm work.

Demographics²

- * There are 3-5 million migrant farmworkers in the US.
- * The proportion of foreign-born workers rose from 10% in 1989 to 70% in 1995.
- * Over time, the farmworker population has become increasingly male (now 80%). In the late 1980s, 25% of farmworkers were women; by the mid-1990s, the percentage had dropped to 19%.
- * 2/3 of farmworkers are younger than 35 and almost 1/5 are in their first year of farm work.



Families and Living Arrangements²

- * 3/5 of adult foreign farmworkers are married and have children; most of these workers live and work separately from their spouses and children.
- * 56% of all farmworkers live with non-relatives; the percentage is higher for foreign-born farmworkers.
- * Most of the workers that live exclusively with non-relatives occupy labor camps, often provided by the employer.

Income and Poverty²

- * Over 3/5 of farmworkers are poor, and this is increasing. The median income from farm work is between \$2,500 and \$5,000. 75% earn less than \$10,000 annually.
- * Only 25% of farmworkers have non-farm work earnings. The median personal income from farm work and other work sources combined is between \$5,000 and \$7,500.
- * Few farmworkers have assets. About half (49%) own a vehicle and about 1/3 own or are buying a house or trailer in the US.
- * Green card holders (Legal Permanent Residents), citizens and people with other work authorizations earn \$5,000-\$10,000 more than undocumented workers, who earn between \$2,500 and \$5,000.
- * Women earn less doing farm work than their male counterparts: the median income for female farmworkers is \$2,500-\$5,000, while the median income for male farmworkers is \$5,000-\$7,500.
- * Despite their poverty, few farmworkers use social services. About 100,000 foreign-born eligible farmworker households have been excluded from each of the major programs such as food stamps, Medicaid and WIC due to legislation passed by the 104th Congress.

Legal Status²

- * The Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 gave legal status to more than 2.5 million Mexican immigrants, many of whom were farmworkers.
- * The proportion of undocumented farmworkers rose quickly as the newly legalized population left farm work for other occupations and brought their undocumented families to the US. In the 1994-1995 period, 37% of farmworkers were undocumented, up from 7% in 1989.

HOW DO FARMWORKERS GET HERE?

> Guestworker (H2) Program

An extension of the Bracero program of the 1940s, the Guestworker, or H2, program was created by the US government to address a perceived labor shortage. The H2A program refers specifically to agricultural work.

H2 workers are temporary foreign workers who are imported by the US government from Latin American & Caribbean countries to work for a specific period of time. H2 workers cannot apply for Legal Permanent Residency & can only work for the employer who applied for their visa. Over 10,000 Mexicans came to North Carolina alone as Guestworkers in 1999.

Specific standards have been established to regulate housing conditions, wages, hours worked and compensation for injuries. However, farmworker advocates are fighting for stricter regulations and better enforcement of the standards.

> Other Documented Workforce

Many immigrant workers who arrived before 1986 were granted amnesty by the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA). This meant they were able to stay in the US legally. Some stayed in farm work and others moved on to other professions. Some documented farmworkers were granted political asylum from their countries or are children of workers who gained legal status. Other farmworkers are Latin American, Caucasian and African-American citizens of the US.

> Undocumented Workforce

Many farmworkers immigrate to the US without authorized documents, lured by crew-leaders or the promise of better wages. Border crossing is very dangerous and expensive—some coyotes (border smugglers) charge thousands of dollars to assist willing migrants.

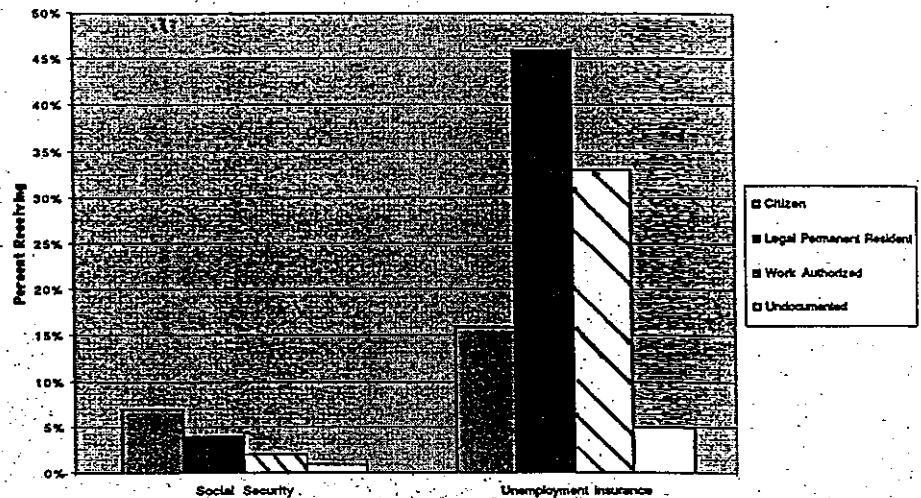
Others enter the US on temporary work or tourist visas and stay after their visas expire. Despite the risk, thousands of workers (mostly unaccompanied men) cross back and forth every year to provide income for families in Mexico.

FARMWORKER

Health Profile of Farmworkers and their Families

- ◆ Farm work is the second most dangerous occupation in the United States.¹
- ◆ Farmworkers suffer from the highest rate of toxic chemical injuries of any workers in the United States.¹
- ◆ Farmworkers suffer higher incidences than other wage-earners of heat stress, dermatitis, influenza, pneumonia, urinary tract infections, pesticide related illnesses and tuberculosis.³
- ◆ Infant mortality rates are considerably higher among migrant farmworkers.⁴
- ◆ Children of migrant farmworkers have higher rates of parasitic infections, malnutrition and dental disease. Children of migrant farmworkers are less likely to be fully immunized than other children.³
- ◆ Few, if any, migrant farmworkers have health insurance, and very few are covered through Medicaid.¹
- ◆ Substandard farmworker housing conditions lead to increased prevalence of lead poisoning, respiratory illnesses, otitis media and diarrhea.⁵
- ◆ Barriers to receiving health care include lack of transportation, hours of clinic operation incompatible with agricultural work hours, cost of health care, limited or no interpreter service, and frequent relocation in order to seek farm work.¹

Use of Social Insurance Programs, by Legal Status ²

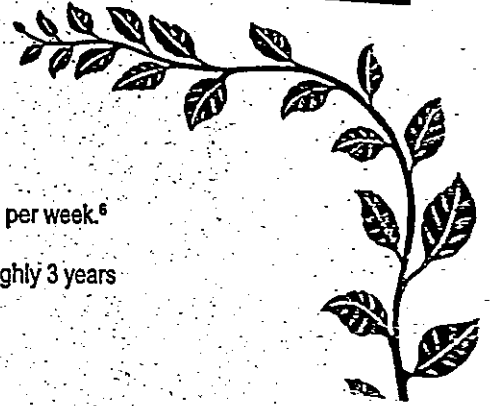


Health Legislation Affecting Farmworkers

- ◆ 1987 - Field Sanitation Standards
Requires only growers who employ more than 11 workers to provide toilets, potable water and hand washing facilities in the fields.
- ◆ 1995 - Worker Protection Standards
Requires that growers do the following: display basic health and safety information, ensure that workers have received pesticide safety training, and restrict workers' access to fields during and after pesticide applications for a Restricted-Entry Interval, with warnings informing workers to stay out of the area.

PROFILE

Education Profile of Migrant Children



- ◆ 30% of Latinos drop-out of school before graduation.⁷ In 1994, a study showed that 60% of migrant students drop-out of school (down from 90% in the 1970s).⁸
- ◆ By the time a migrant child is 12 years old, he/she may be working in the fields between 16-18 hours per week.⁶
- ◆ The average migrant child may attend 3 different schools in one year. For many children it takes roughly 3 years to advance one grade level.⁶

Legislation Affecting Farmworker Children

- ◆ The 1982 US Supreme Court Case, *Plyer v. Doe*, ruled that all children have access to public education and that a student cannot be denied because of her/his immigration status. It is against the law to refuse to register a child because she/he does not have a birth certificate or social security number.
- ◆ In July of 1999, California's Proposition 187, which denied undocumented children the right to educational and health services, was ruled unconstitutional.
- ◆ The Family Education Rights and Privacy Act prohibits schools from providing any outside agency—including the Immigration and Naturalization Service—information from a child's file exposing his/her legal status without parental consent.



Profile of Labor Laws Affecting Farmworkers

- **1935 - National Labor Relations Act**
This act protects workers who organize into unions to bargain collectively, but excludes farmworkers and domestic workers.
- **1935 - Social Security Act**
This act excluded farmworkers, denying them unemployment, old-age, and disability benefits. In 1950, the law was amended to include many agricultural workers.
- **1938 - Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA)**
Employers are required to pay at least the minimum wage, but farmworkers were excluded until 1978. Farmers owning small farms are still not required to provide farmworkers with minimum wage. Farmworkers are also excluded from receiving overtime pay. In addition, agriculture is the only industry that allows workers under the age of 16 to work; the FLSA sets 12 as the minimum age for farm work.
- **1963 - Farm Labor Contractor Registration Act**
This requires all farm labor contractors to register with the federal government, keep appropriate wage records and provide accurate information to workers regarding promised employment.
- **1976 - Federal Unemployment Tax Act**
Requires employers to pay a tax for which workers may benefit in case of unemployment. This act includes only farmworkers employed on large farms (10 workers or more per year).
- **1983 - Migrant & Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act (MSAWPA)**
Farmworkers must receive written statement of wages earned, hours worked and housing of farmworkers must meet health and safety standards.

Profile of Farmworker Organizing Efforts

- **United Farm Workers (UFW)**
<http://www.ufw.org>
The UFW, based in California, was founded in 1962 by Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta. The UFW organized the on-going California Table Grape Boycott, as well as the Strawberry Workers' Campaign whose motto is "Five Cents for Fairness."
- **Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC)**
<http://www.iupui.edu/~floc/>
Baldemar Velasquez founded FLOC in 1967 in Toledo, Ohio. FLOC advocates three-way bargaining agreements between farmworkers, farmers and processors. FLOC successfully conducted a boycott of Campbell Soup products in Ohio (1979-1986). A boycott of NC based Mt. Olive Pickle products was called in March of 1999 and is on-going.
- **Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste (PCUN)**
<http://www.pcun.org>
80 treeplanters & farmworkers in Oregon founded PCUN in April 1985. They organized a boycott of all NORPAC, Flac-r-pac & West-pac Products in 1992. PCUN won a boycott victory of Gardenburger products in the spring of 1999.



Sources

- 1 The Farmworker Health Alliance, NC Farmworker Factsheet
- 2 National Agricultural Workers Survey, USDOL, April 1997
- 3 National Center for Farmworker Health
- 4 Public Voice for Food and Health Policy, 1989
- 5 National Advisory Council on Migrant Health, 1993
- 6 David Bell, "The Nation's Invisible Families Living in the Stream," MEMO
- 7 *Children of La Frontera*, ERIC
- 8 http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed423097.html

STUDENT ACTION WITH FARMWORKERS

ABOUT SAF

Student Action with Farmworkers is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization whose mission is to bring students and farmworkers together to learn about each other's lives, share resources and skills, improve conditions for farmworkers, and build diverse coalitions working for social change. SAF accomplishes its mission by coordinating summer internships and providing year-round opportunities for direct service, community education, advocacy and community and labor organizing work.

Resources:

- * **Resource Library:** SAF's library contains books, videos, a slide show and articles about farmworker issues, agriculture, organizing, documentary work and more. Materials are loaned for three weeks at a time.
- * **Into the Fields: Mobilizing Students to Work with Farmworkers on Campuses and in Communities (\$15.00):** This comprehensive manual includes step-by-step suggestions for coordinating educational events about farmworkers on your campus and information about starting internships with farmworkers.
- * **Academic course syllabi and reading materials:** SAF has conducted academic classes in the past on farmworker issues and would like to share the materials to assist campuses in starting similar courses. Also available in Spring 2001, look for a Textbook on farmworker issues.
- * **"From the Ground Up:"** SAF publishes three newsletter issues per year; each issues focuses on a different farmworker subject, such as pesticides, organizing etc.
- * **"College Choices Guide/ Guía de Elecciones de Universidades:"** This guide gives basic information about entering college and lists scholarships available to migrant farmworker students.
- * **List serve:** Subscribe to SAF's email list serve and you can receive weekly updates on farmworker issues and legislation. To subscribe, send the word "subscribe" in the body of your email to farmworkers-request@duke.edu
- * **Web-page:** Check out SAF on-line! <http://cds.aas.duke.edu/saf/>

For more information or if you are interested in any of our resources, please contact the SAF office.

National Programs:

- * **"Into the Fields:"** SAF coordinates summer internships with NC and SC farmworker agencies for college students attending school in the Carolinas and students of farmworker families.
- * **"Sowing Seeds for Change" Symposium:** SAF sponsors a conference for students, faculty, farmworkers and farmworker advocates. The conference is held in a different city in the US or Canada annually.
- * **"Intern Referral Service":** SAF produces a directory of agencies all over the country describing their intern and volunteer needs, so that students can match their interests and experiences to an agency near them.
- * **Campus and Agency Trainings:** SAF conducts trainings across the United States on educating your campus and community about farmworkers; developing an internship program with local farmworker organizations; grassroots fundraising and more!

FARMWORKER WEBSITES (look inside for union sites)

National Agricultural Workers Survey Results
<http://www.dol.gov/dol/asp/public/programs/agworker/report/main.htm>

ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools
<http://www.ael.org/eric/>

National Center for Farm Worker Health
<http://www.ncfh.org/index.html>

Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs
<http://www.afop.org>

Catholic Migrant Farmworker Network
<http://cmfn.org>

National Clearinghouse of Guestworker Legislation
<http://www.crlaf.org/gworkers.htm>

