

**COMMENTS ON THE MCFARLAND CHILD HEALTH**

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Between January and April of 1989 a screen to assess health status and health care needs of children in the McFarland area was conducted by the California Department of Health Services. This study was done in response to community concern over a perceived high incidence of childhood cancer. This rural, largely farming community situated in the southern part of the San Joaquin Valley has been stricken with an unexpectedly high number of cancer cases in children under 20 years of age. Between 1975 and 1985, ten cases of childhood cancer were confirmed, while only three would normally be expected for a community of this size. In addition, between 1985 and 1989 three more cases of childhood cancer were diagnosed, including a case of craniopharyngioma, which is considered benign and thus not reported to the tumor registry.

Although no cases of cancer were discovered directly from the study of 1,717 children (one child was subsequently found to have developed cancer on follow-up after the study period), the study had some very important findings as to the health status of farmworker children, and the availability of health care services.

Of the 1,717 children screened, 71% (1,238) were referred for follow-up care. Of the children referred, 24% had anemia, 40% had vision problems, and 36% dental problems. Furthermore, the study found that the rate of immunization of the preschool age children was significantly lower than that for children in daycare centers in other parts of the state. Still to be tabulated and reported on were data on blood lead levels, behavioral assessments, and urine testing results. (Hopefully a restudy will be done subsequently to compare the study population over time).

Additionally, the study went into more detail and was able to correlate the poor health status of the population to poverty, major problems of health care access, and pointed to the lack of adequate supportive services such as WIC, health education, and immunization clinics. The community has a per capita income of \$4,305 (36% of the state designated poverty level). This community of 6,550 supports few physicians. Many residents are forced to travel six miles to Delano, or 25 miles away to Bakersfield for their basic health care. On top of this, only 30% of the population has some kind of insurance coverage, and

only 20% has Medi-Cal coverage. The incidence of untreated dental caries was shown to be inversely proportional to income, with those families earning less than \$25,000 per year being most likely to have untreated tooth decay. Additionally, the Medi-Cal covered families experienced great difficulty in finding dentists that would care for them. A factor pointed out in the study which impacts on health status is the requirement under the Immigration Reform and Control Act that amnesty applicants not be a burden to the county, i.e. not receive benefits for a period of years.

A poll of the families showed that among barriers to receiving health care, cost was the number one concern. This was true even among the insured population, given high deductibles, reimbursement requirements, and non-coverage of routine health care maintenance, and probably also for exclusions for eyeglasses an/or dental services from some of the insurance policies. Also cited high among impediments to receiving health care were long office waits and the distance traveled. These last two barriers were cited more often by the uninsured and Medi-Cal populations than by the insured. Over 70% of the

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Rural California Report is looking for a few good newspaper readers. CIRS saves articles from about 35 newspapers and magazines pertaining to Farm Labor, Ag Land Ownership, Rural Toxics, Poverty, and Farm Businesses. However, we are unable to review and clip a number of other useful newspapers, specifically:

<u>Bakersfield Californian</u>	<u>Fresno Bee</u>
<u>Hanford Sentinel</u>	<u>Indio Daily News</u>
<u>Imperial Valley Press</u>	<u>Los Angeles Times</u>
<u>Madera Tribune</u>	<u>Modesto Bee</u>
<u>Oakland Tribune</u>	<u>Salinas Californian</u>
<u>San Diego Tribune</u>	<u>San Francisco Examiner</u>
<u>San Jose Mercury-News</u>	<u>Stockton Record</u>

If you can help clip, please call us at (916) 756-6555.

**Correction:**

The article "Mixtec Farm Workers in California: Close-up on Living Conditions," in our July issue, contained an error. The sentence, "Oaxaca is the home of the Mixtecs, an indigenous group...who currently comprise the majority of the agricultural work force in California." should read "...who comprise a growing share of the agricultural work force in California, and may now constitute a majority of the agricultural workers in certain areas, such as San Diego County or the Willamette Valley in Oregon."

CIRS's current study of Mixtec farm workers will be completed in Spring, 1991. We plan to estimate their numbers in California at that time. They certainly do not now constitute a majority of California agricultural workers. We regret any confusion this error may have caused.

## SCREENING PROJECT

Merced, California

Medi-Cal population travels to Delano for health care, possibly due to local physicians' not accepting this form of payment as readily.

The McFarland study is very significant and has various implications. First of all, it is one of the few studies of farmworker children on record, and as such serves as a basis for comparing the health status and problems of access to health care for the rural poor, particularly Hispanics, to the rest of society. More such studies should be encouraged, even where cancer clusters are not a consideration. As the study aptly points out in the conclusion, greater outreach efforts for existing services and the extension of services that are generally unavailable should be made available, such as health education, nutrition services, CHDP screens, etc. However, recent developments such as the cutback on WIC food supplementation nationally, and the financial crisis in Medi-Cal and welfare funding in the state of California threaten some of the proposed solutions of the study.

Looking at the issue more broadly, the deplorable problem of dental care access for the poor in general, let alone whether they are rural or not,

and the major barriers to basic health care at all, point to the need for more fundamental changes in how health care is administered in this country. Measures being looked at include extending the national health service corps for providing doctors, dentists, health educators, physicians' assistants, etc. to under-served areas, whether rural or urban. Also being considered are measures to provide universal health coverage in order to prevent some of the access problems pointed out in this study.

What the study shows, primarily by inference, is that there are no currently available physical findings known as yet to point out which children may develop cancer. Follow-up studies may provide clues on this matter.

Lastly, left out of the study because of its timing (before April), were migrant farmworker children, whom one might reasonably expect to be in poor health also. Unknown are the existence or extent of cancer or other major health problems in this population. Since the migrants tend to come back to the same work areas, there could conceivably be good follow-up on parameters measured in this population also. ##

## UC Berkeley and CIRS to Collaborate on Farm Labor Contractor Study

The California State Employment Development Department has awarded the University of California a contract to survey farm labor contractors in a variety of counties throughout the state to gain a better understanding of their business practices and data requirements. The principal investigator is Howard Rosenberg, director of the Personnel Manage-

ment Program for Cooperative Extension. Professor Jeffrey Perloff, of Berkeley, is also collaborating. CIRS will conduct the field work for the study with Suzanne Vaupel serving as project coordinator. Interviews will begin in Imperial County in January and will move from county to county over the following six months. A final report is expected in the fall of 1991.

## New Humanities Project

The California Council for the Humanities has awarded \$51,796 to CIRS to support a new project on Agriculture and the Common Good. The project will feature a photographic exhibit on the social impacts of "mega-farms" by Bill Gillette, professor of journalism at Iowa State University, which will be exhibited in small rural communities throughout the state. A unique feature of the exhibitions will be presentations of works by Central Valley writers of what is sometimes called "the Other California," and a forum to promote discussion of local issues by community members. The project will also develop an academic foundation for discussion of Agriculture and the Common Good at the next "Envisioning California" conference of the Center for California Studies at CSU Sacramento. Trudy Wischemann, former staff member of the Macrosocial Accounting Project at UCD, joins CIRS as project director.

## CIRS Receives Ford Grant

CIRS received a new grant in August from the Ford Foundation for continued support of the Working Group on Farm Labor and Rural Poverty. The grant, for \$225,000 over two years, serves as the core funding for both the research and community outreach efforts of CIRS related to farm labor issues.

Among the projects contemplated over the two-year period are: continued publication of *Rural California Report* and *Semilla*, broadened support for grassroots farmworker organizations throughout the San Joaquin Valley, an expanded program of research fellowships for graduate students and analysis of the impacts of government policies in the farm labor arena.