

PROVIDING
VOCATIONAL
REHABILITATION
SERVICES TO
MIGRANT AND
SEASONAL
FARMWORKERS



A Booklet for Vocational
Rehabilitation Counselors

Berkeley Planning Associates

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WHY A GUIDE TO SERVING FARMWORKERS?

Many different kinds of workers with disabilities can benefit from vocational rehabilitation (VR) services, including farmworkers. Farmwork is one of the most dangerous and injury-prone occupations. As a result, many farmworkers become disabled during their work. In addition, farmworkers can become disabled by chronic health problems or non-work-related accidents or injuries. Berkeley Planning Associates (BPA) recently conducted a survey of service use among farmworkers with disabilities and found that only 1% had used vocational rehabilitation services, and the vast majority had not even heard of VR (BPA, 1997). This low utilization rate is due in part to the barriers that farmworkers face in using social services, such as poverty, transiency, and cultural differences. These barriers must be addressed by programs that wish to serve this population.

Many VR counselors are unsure of how to serve farmworkers and until now little information has been available to help them (Conley, 1995). However, special VR projects for farmworkers have successfully served this population, and many methods developed by these projects can be implemented in regular VR programs. Lessons from the experiences of some targeted projects form the basis of the recommendations in this booklet.

BPA prepared this booklet under a grant from the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, to increase access to vocational rehabilitation services among farmworkers with disabilities. We also developed a booklet with information about disability-related services (including VR) for health care workers who serve farmworkers and disabled farmworkers themselves. (See the "Resources" section for information about obtaining this booklet.) However, we knew that just giving more information to farmworkers would not guarantee increased access to VR services. We hope that by giving VR counselors information about farmworkers and ideas for serving this population, the VR program will be better able to address the needs of farmworkers with disabilities.

Who Should Read This Booklet?

Many VR counselors think that because they have never had a farmworker for a client, that none are in their service district. However, there are farmworkers in almost every state, either living there year-round or working there for some months of the year. The largest concentrations of farmworkers are in states with large agricultural areas in the southern United States, such as California, Arizona, Texas, Florida, and North Carolina. Being aware of the needs of

disabled farmworkers in the VR process is especially important for counselors in those states. However, any counselor whose service area includes rural areas probably has potential farmworker clients, and can benefit from the knowledge in this booklet.

In any given year, about 10-12 states receive special VR funds to develop demonstration projects to serve farmworkers, under Section 312 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act. These states often subcontract with community-based organizations that are knowledgeable about farmworkers, whose staff help guide the farmworkers through the VR process. We hope that the workers in Section 312 projects will share this booklet with the counselors in their local VR offices, to help them learn more about the clients that the Section 312 projects recruit and serve.

What Is in This Guide?

This guide contains background material about farmworkers, including information about their characteristics, working conditions, types of disabilities, and views of disability. We describe the barriers faced by farmworkers when using social services, and give suggestions for addressing those barriers, so that VR counselors can work successfully with farmworkers with disabilities.

WHO ARE FARMWORKERS?

Farmworkers are the people who plant, nurture, and harvest the foods we eat every day. They are hired by growers (i.e., farmers who own the land) for wages to perform certain tasks, often through the intermediary of a farm labor contractor. There is, however, no one definition of "farmworker." Usually the term refers to those who work in fruits, nuts, and vegetables, but can also include workers in nurseries, field crops (such as cash grains), tree farms, and livestock production. Often programs refer to "migrant and seasonal farmworkers," and those terms are usually defined as follows:

- **Migrant farmworkers** travel away from their homes and stay away overnight to work. Sometimes whole families migrate together, or a group of unrelated people (usually men) might migrate together. Research has shown that there are generally two kinds of migrants: (1) "follow the crop" migrants who move from place to place for short-term work within the United States, usually in one of three "migrant streams," and (2) "back and forth" migrants, who travel from their homebase (either in this country or abroad) to one place in the US—for example, migrants

from Texas might move to a particular town in North Dakota or Minnesota for the season. The three major migration patterns known as "migrant streams" are generally defined as the Western, Midwestern, and Eastern streams (see Figure 1). Migrants start from "homebase" states of California, Texas, and Florida (and from across the border in Mexico, Central America, or Puerto Rico) and move north as planting, cultivation, and harvesting workers are needed. National data show that approximately 42% of all farmworkers are migrants (Gabbard et al., 1994).

The Rehabilitation Act defines farmworkers as...

Migratory agricultural worker means a person who occasionally or habitually leaves his place of residence on a seasonal or other temporary basis to engage in ordinary agricultural operations or in services incident to the preparation of farm commodities for the market in another locality in which he resides during the period of such employment.

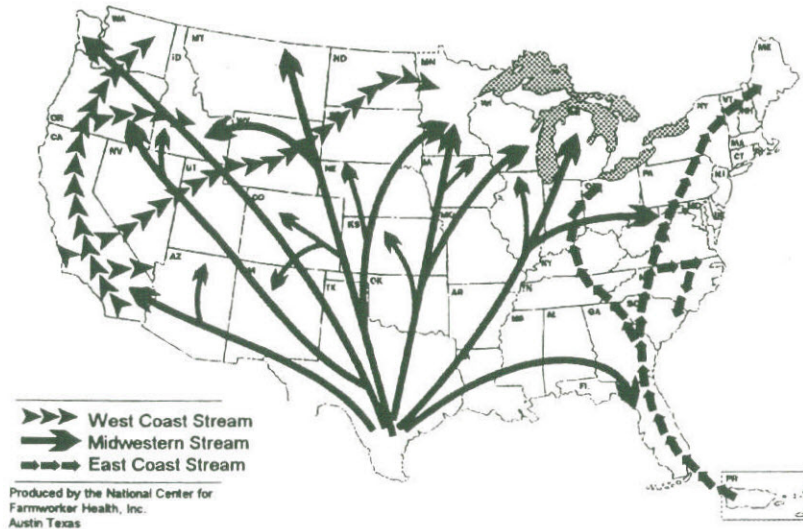
Seasonal farmworker means a person who on a seasonal or other temporary basis engages in ordinary agricultural operations or in services incident to the preparation of farm commodities for the market within daily commuting distance from his place of normal residence.

- ☛ **Seasonal farmworkers** are those who do not work year-round, and often refers to those who work in one location rather than migrating. Therefore, this term excludes hired hands on farms who live and work there full-time, and most livestock and nursery workers. Sometimes programs use the term "seasonal farmworker" to refer only to those who do not migrate, but most generally it can include migrant workers, most of whom only work seasonally. During the rest of the year, seasonal farmworkers may do non-farmwork, be unemployed, or live in another country with lower living costs (e.g., Mexico).

The VR program does not require counselors to distinguish between "migrant" and "seasonal" farmworkers. The distinction is to some degree arbitrary, especially in homebase states, because farmworkers may be receiving services at their permanent homes, even if they travel away from home to do farmwork during part of the year.

Most people who identify themselves as farmworkers have grown up doing that kind of work or come from a farmworker family. For many, being a farmworker is more than just an occupational classification; it is an identity and a lifestyle. Long-term farmworkers are only part of the population; for many others, farmwork is something that they do when they first immigrate to this country, and then they get other jobs. (Those with higher levels of education are especially likely to say that they do not intend to stay in farmwork.) Therefore, some of the farmworker population consists of long-term workers, and another portion continually turns over as workers with better prospects are replaced by new immigrants.

Figure 1
MAJOR MIGRATORY SYSTEMS FOR
FARMWORKERS IN THE U.S.



Characteristics of Farmworkers

Doing research on farmworkers is hard, because they move around and live in untraditional households. One of our best sources of information about farmworkers comes from the National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS), conducted annually since 1988 by the Department of Labor. (To find out more about the NAWS, see the "Resources" section at the end of this booklet.) This survey interviews a national representative, random sample of workers employed in seasonal agricultural services by sampling work sites. According to the NAWS (Mines et al., 1997), farmworkers in 1994-95 had the following characteristics:

- ▶ Four out of five farmworkers (80%) were **men**.
- ▶ About 70% of all farmworkers were **foreign-born**. Of these, 94% were born in Mexico and 5% were born in other Latin countries. The remaining foreign-born workers came from the Caribbean, Asia, and other countries. Thus, most farmworkers are Hispanic.
- ▶ Of the 30% who were **US-born**, 60% were non-Hispanic whites, 32% were Hispanic, and 8% were non-Hispanic African-Americans. The US-born farmworkers were much less likely to be migrants, and more likely to be women.

Contrary to the common perception that all farmworkers are illegal immigrants, in fact the majority are citizens or have work authorization.

- ▶ About three out of five adult farmworkers were **married**, but 40% of married farmworkers were living away from their spouses or their children while doing farmwork. One half of married male farmworkers lived apart from their wives, while only 9% of married female farmworkers lived apart from their husbands.
- ▶ Male farmworkers were much more likely than females to be in living situations with only unrelated individuals. Many of these unrelated groups lived in labor camps.
- ▶ The Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 legalized a very large group of farmworkers, some of whom stayed in agricultural work and some of whom moved into other occupations. Newer workers who replaced those who left farmwork are less likely to be working without legal documentation. In 1994-95, however, **only 37% of the total farmworker population had no work authorization.**
- ▶ There is an extreme surplus of farmworkers, so most are **unemployed** for much of the year. Even in the peak month of July, less than three-fifths of farmworkers were employed at farmwork. The oversupply of farmworkers keeps wages low and makes farmwork attractive only to those who have no other options.

The data show that over time, the farmworker population in this country has become increasingly Latino and male, and that many are recent immigrants with low levels of education and limited English language proficiency. However, there are still parts of the country in which a substantial proportion of farmwork is done by native Anglos (in the Midwest and Plains states) and African-Americans (in the Southeast). Other pockets of non-Latino farmworkers include Haitians in Florida, Southeast Asians in California, and Native Americans in the Dakotas.

WHY FARMWORKERS NEED VR SERVICES

Farmwork is the second most dangerous occupation in the US, after mining. Farmworkers suffer from occupational injuries that can be disabling, such as: falls, loss of limbs, heat stress, dehydration, dermatitis, eye problems, and pesticide poisoning. Farmworkers seldom have paid sick leave, and economic pressures make them reluctant to miss work to have occupational injuries or illnesses treated unless the condition is so severe that it prevents them from working.

The difficulties encountered by farmworkers are unique to their occupation. These include mobility, multiple employers, impoverished and physically challenging working and living conditions, uncertain access to health care, and the problems created by having few, if any, community ties. These conditions come together to create a kind of disenfranchised citizen—an orphan group within our country for whom no one wants to take responsibility.

(NACMH, 1995, p.1)

Studies of farmworker health have shown that this population's health status resembles that of workers in underdeveloped nations (Dever, 1991). Many chronic and severe health conditions common among farmworkers are disabling, such as: diabetes, hypertension, chronic urinary tract infections, parasitic infections, respiratory infections and tuberculosis, arthritis, anemia, and musculoskeletal injuries due to constant physical labor. Dental health is severely compromised by limited access to oral health care.

Few rules govern child labor in farmwork, and children as young as age ten can legally do farmwork. Thus, farmworker children are often exposed to the same risks of occupational injuries as adults. Even when they do not work in the fields, children may play there while their parents work, leaving them vulnerable to pesticide poisoning and accidents from farm machinery.

Farmworker children are thought to suffer from higher rates of birth defects (due to maternal and paternal exposure to pesticides) than the general population, although limitations in research data have made it difficult to support this conclusion (Wilk, 1986). In addition, farmworker children suffer from high rates of asthma and chronic otitis media, which leads to hearing losses. These children may or may not be identified as needing special education and, eventually, VR services.

Farmworkers often live in conditions that contribute to and exacerbate their health problems. Housing, especially for those who migrate, is poor to nonexistent. When it exists, it often lacks inside running water, electricity, or heat, has poor water quality and inadequate wastewater disposal, insect and rodent infestations, no laundry facilities, and is likely to be overcrowded. Conditions in the fields often contribute to poor health, with a lack of hand washing and toilet facilities, little access to safe drinking water, and unsafe use of pesticides.

Although we would expect a population with extensive health problems to be well-represented among disability service users, research shows that few farmworkers use these services. The NAWS found that only 4% of the households surveyed had received Social Security pension or disability benefits in the two years before the survey (Mines, et al., 1997). Twice as many US-born farmworkers received these benefits, but even among this group, the rate was just 7%. (This finding is influenced by the fact that the NAWS surveys *working* farmworkers; however, the questions asked about anyone in the household.) Many other reports have shown

that farmworkers are less likely to receive the income support and health care benefits to which they are entitled (GAO, 1992).

BPA's survey of farmworkers with disabilities also showed a low level of service utilization. Only 1% of the adults surveyed had received VR services, and only a third of the respondents had even heard of the service, making it the least-recognized service among the 20 we asked about. We also asked about income support payments, and more of the adults in our sample received disability benefits, with 17% reporting that they received SSI or SSDI. Low utilization of SSDI is often due to the fact that farmworkers' income is not reliably reported by their employers, resulting in a lack of an income record on which to base benefits. Given the poverty experienced by most farmworkers, however, we would expect that they would be eligible for SSI. Since the BPA survey sought out farmworkers who had health conditions that had caused them to change the type or amount of work they performed, and thus would have a high likelihood of eligibility for benefits, these income support and VR service utilization rates are very low.

TYPES OF DISABILITIES AMONG FARMWORKERS

There has been very little data about disabilities among farmworkers. In 1996, BPA conducted interviews with a nonrandom sample of about 200 adult farmworkers with disabilities in six states. The sample was 100% Latino (91% considered Spanish to be their primary language, and 58% spoke English poorly or not at all). Their average age was 39 years, and the average age they began doing farmwork was 18 years; 62% were male.

A functional definition of disability was used in the survey. Disability was defined as a health condition that caused people to reduce the type or amount of farmwork they performed. The primary disabilities among study respondents were back problems and other musculoskeletal and physical disorders, followed by diabetes, visual impairments, and neurological disorders (BPA, 1997). Many disabling conditions reported by respondents were chronic medical conditions (such as diabetes, arthritis, or hypertension) or consequences of those disorders (e.g., visual impairments and amputations because of diabetes).

Some disabilities appeared to be under diagnosed or under reported by farmworkers in our study. For instance,

substance abuse was not identified as a disability by any respondent, although it is known to be a problem in the farmworker community and the literature shows that many farmworkers turn to alcohol and other drugs as a way of dealing with the stress of discrimination, traveling, and being away from social support systems. Mental retardation was another condition that tended not to be identified among the farmworkers in our study, possibly due to a lack of special education services in Mexican schools, and confusion between literacy and intelligence issues in US schools. While visual disorders were identified by many respondents, only a few reported hearing disorders. Rather than suggesting a lack of hearing disorders among farmworkers, this could just mean that hearing disorders are less disabling than other conditions for persons doing field work.

Although the BPA study did not seek out persons who had specifically been disabled by farmwork, 66% of the adult respondents identified farmwork as the cause of their disabilities, and the average age of the onset of their disabilities was 32 years. Nearly all (87%) expected the disability to continue for at least a year. When asked to rate their physical health status, 92% rated it as either "poor" or "fair."

VIEW OF DISABILITY AMONG FARMWORKERS

VR counselors know that dealing with becoming disabled is difficult for almost anyone, and farmworkers are no different. Persons experience "culture shock" when they enter the world of disability—especially if a catastrophic event such as an accident or injury causes the disability. Farmworkers may be faced with dealing with an array of Anglo doctors who do not speak their language and speak "medicalese," which is hard to understand even for native English speakers.

Already immigrants to one different culture, farmworkers may have difficulty understanding disability culture, and have no idea that there is an independent living movement or an array of assistive devices for persons with disabilities. Indeed, these things may not be available or useful in rural areas (using a wheelchair on dirt roads is difficult, and finding advocacy groups or personal assistance services in rural areas can be hard). Farmworkers are often very isolated from other people with disabilities, and their cultural beliefs may imply that something is wrong with the spirit of the disabled person, leaving them isolated within their communities. Entering rehabilitation may isolate them still

further—for instance, if it includes getting clean and sober, they may lose the important social connection that drinking or using drugs often provides (especially among Latino males).

Even when disability grows out of a more gradual exacerbation of a chronic condition, it may be hard for farmworkers—especially male heads of households—to admit that they can no longer do things. They may think that they have failed their families and will be dependent on others, rather than developing a revised vision of what they can contribute.

As members of cultural minority groups, many farmworkers may also carry beliefs that nonminority VR counselors may find hard to understand. Since many farmworkers are Latinos, we can look to the Hispanic culture for an example of how their belief system might differ. The National Advisory Council on Migrant Health described it this way:

Hispanic culture views illness differently from Anglo culture. While the mainstream culture regards illness as an impersonal and blameless event—the result of germs or fate—the traditional Hispanic culture regards illness and health as being connected to harmony between the natural and the supernatural. Thus, an individual's illness reflects on his or her relationship with the community and with God, and a system of folk medicine has developed to restore harmony to the body and the spirit when these relationships somehow become unbalanced.

(NACMH, 1995, p. 22)

The very concept of “disability” is not a clear one for many farmworkers. For instance, farmworkers may not understand that one can have a disability and still work. One researcher interviewed 15 farmworkers in Wisconsin who had chronic health conditions that resulted in (often severe) functional limitations (Treviño, 1996). However, none of her respondents considered themselves disabled, because they continued to work (although some had reduced the amount or type of work they did). To them, being disabled meant not being able to work at all, and being totally dependent on others.

The holistic view of health and the black-white view of disability may make it difficult for farmworkers to accept the “disabled” label. The notion that a person who can no longer do farmwork can be “rehabilitated” by some process is often a foreign concept, as well. VR counselors should not

assume that the language of disability and rehabilitation is familiar, and should find ways to explain these concepts in terms that the farmworkers in their areas can understand. Given the strong work ethic among farmworkers, an emphasis on helping people get back to work (at their old job or in a new one) is the most likely avenue to acceptance.

When VR counselors respect the cultural traditions of the farmworkers who become their clients, they can be truly of service. For example, a Latino farmworker might want to leave the country for the Christmas holidays to visit family, and will suspend training or other rehabilitation activities during this time. Or farmworkers may visit their own culture's traditional healers as well as participating in mainstream medical treatment. Counselors who see these activities as part of a cultural tradition, rather than instances of noncompliance, will have a better chance of helping their clients become successfully rehabilitated.

BARRIERS FACED BY FARMWORKERS

Below we discuss some characteristics of farmworkers and their work that make it difficult for them to use social services such as VR. Understanding these barriers can help VR counselors design better services for this population. The next section of this booklet gives detailed suggestions for addressing these barriers.

Poverty

Farmworkers are the poorest group of workers in the U.S. With a median annual household income between \$7,500 and \$10,000, over three-fifths of farmworker families live below the poverty line, even when many members of the family work. While poverty per se does not prevent individuals from using VR services, the very poor often use available services less because they have fewer resources to support their rehabilitation (e.g., savings, alternative career plans), and poverty compounds other barriers such as poor education and lack of transportation. Working with the whole family to develop a plan for replacing lost income due to disability is an important part of working with farmworker clients.

Low Educational Attainment

Farmworkers as a group are among the least educated groups of workers. Research shows that the median education level of farmworkers is eighth grade, with a lower

median for foreign-born workers (Mines et al., 1993). If they are new immigrants, farmworkers may not have even completed grade school in their native countries. Children in farmworker families may miss school for part of the year if their families migrate, or they are kept out of school to work in the fields or to take care of younger children while their parents work. (However, most farmworkers have high educational aspirations for their children, and try very hard to give them the opportunity to graduate and have a better life.)

Poorly educated individuals are less likely to be literate (in any language). They are thus less likely to be aware of available services and their eligibility for them, less adept at navigating service systems, less able to cope with forms and reports, and less empowered to advocate for themselves. Advocating for farmworkers with low literacy can help these individuals obtain the services for which they are eligible. Contracting with service providers whose programs are geared to this population can help disabled farmworkers obtain the basic skills they need to train for new work.

Lack of Vocational Skills Outside of Agriculture

Many farmworkers have no occupational experience outside agriculture. This, combined with low educational attainment and low literacy skills, often makes it difficult for them to conceive of working in alternative occupations, and reluctant to enter vocational training. Contracting with vocational providers who serve farmworkers and gear their programs to this population can increase the chances that a long-term farmworker will successfully enter a new occupation.

Transiency

Migrant farmworkers are transient by definition, and all farmworkers move more often than the general population to pursue work or better living conditions. Establishing eligibility and pursuing VR services can be time consuming processes, making it very difficult for farmworkers to complete. Helping farmworker families settle out of the migrant stream can help the person with the disability participate in VR services.

Lack of Effective Transportation

Farmworkers often live near their work, which means they typically live in rural areas. It can be a long distance to the nearest VR service provider. Families may have only one car and depend on that to transport the family members to work in the fields, tremendously complicating access to social

services for any individual worker. Individuals migrating without their families often travel in groups transported by labor contractors, with no access to their own transportation to social service providers. Providing transportation can help farmworker clients participate in VR services.

Culturally / Linguistically Different

Most farmworkers are immigrants and/or from ethnic minority groups. They often speak Spanish or another non-English language as their first language. A lack of fluency in English and a culturally different background are common and serious barriers faced by farmworkers in using VR services. Hiring bilingual staff or providing translation services can address this barrier.

Distrustful of Government

Most farmworkers are immigrants, both documented and undocumented. They often come from countries where government officials are not trusted to serve the poor well. Even when farmworkers are citizens or have work authorization, they often have family members or friends who are here without authorization, which makes them wary of contact with any official who might report to the INS. Farmworkers may avoid social service agencies that are not known by them to be friendly to farmworkers. Co-locating VR counselors in farmworker service agencies can help overcome distrust.

HOW TO WORK EFFECTIVELY WITH FARMWORKERS

Below, we present ideas for overcoming the barriers that farmworkers face to using VR services.

Learn About the Characteristics of Local Farmworkers

Farmworkers are a diverse group. By learning about the characteristics of farmworkers in their areas, VR programs can better target outreach and services. For instance, do the farmworkers migrate through the area, live there for a three or four-month season, or live there all year round? Do they consist mostly of families or mostly of individual men traveling together? Are they mainly Mexican or Mexican-American, or are they from other areas? Do they work for a few large growers or many small ones?

VR counselors can contact local social service organizations serving farmworkers to find out more about the farmworkers in their areas.

Learn About and Develop Connections with Local Farmworker Services

Many rural areas have an organization of social service providers that coordinates services to farmworkers (e.g., a Migrant Council). Attending this organization's meetings can help VR counselors learn about and develop connections with local farmworker service providers. Another possibility is to find an agency that receives funding from a variety of sources to provide diverse services (e.g., job training, child care, housing assistance) to farmworkers under one roof. If there is no single agency or organization in the area, try to visit individual service providers (e.g., Migrant Health Center, JTPA Section 402 program, Migrant Head Start, Migrant Education, Catholic Charities or other religious organizations doing outreach to farmworkers) and find out more about their services and clients. Very often these providers are already serving farmworkers with disabilities, and will be glad to learn that there are services that VR can offer to their clients. In some states, these agencies form partnerships with local VR offices. In Colorado, for example, a VR counselor goes into the field with the local health center mobile unit. In addition, this counselor is out-stationed at the health center one afternoon each week. Thus, although the VR counselor is not bilingual, he can effectively provide VR services through the help of bilingual health center staff.

Reach Out to Farmworkers

Farmworkers are not likely to approach an agency that they do not know or trust. VR agencies must do targeted outreach to make their services known to the farmworker community. Farmworkers may be wary of persons representing government agencies, so dressing casually and taking a personal interest in people's stories will help establish rapport. Because farmworkers have such a strong work ethic, emphasizing that VR can help them get back to work or continue to work is a good way to gain their trust. Bilingual and bicultural counselors are the best people to do outreach, but if that is not possible, counselors can educate themselves and take a member of the community with them when visiting places where farmworkers live, worship, or shop. Always ask permission from the grower to visit labor camps on private land.

Co-locate VR Staff at Farmworker Service Agencies

One way to conduct outreach to farmworkers without traveling to their homes or places of work is to spend time in a social service agency where many farmworkers are already being served. For instance, a VR counselor could have a scheduled day (e.g., every other Friday) at a local migrant health clinic. While there, the counselor could talk to farmworkers with disabilities about the possibility of enrolling in VR services. By being on site at a trusted agency, the VR counselor gains instant credibility with the farmworker population. Medical records for disability determination are readily available, and health center staff are available to help with translation if needed.

Recognize That Many Farmworkers Want to Stay in Farmwork

VR counselors may view farmwork as difficult, backbreaking, low-status work, and wonder why anyone would continue doing it, given the chance to train for an alternative occupation. However, many farmworkers are not willing or able to undertake training for a new career, due to age, literacy level, or temperament. Rather than seeking retraining, they may use VR services to obtain medical or surgical services (e.g., hernia repair or back surgery) that will help them return to farmwork. These farmworkers probably will not want to participate in a complicated assessment and goal-setting process. Respecting the wishes of farmworkers who want a quick return to farmwork can contribute to successful rehabilitation outcomes.

Provide or Broker Translation Services

Farmworkers often face formidable language barriers when trying to use social services. Terms such as “disability” and “vocational rehabilitation” are not easily translated into Spanish, the dominant language of farmworkers. Having bilingual staff is the easiest way to provide services in clients’ languages. However, hiring translators is also an option. By having translators available, the VR agency is much more likely to attract, retain, and succeed with farmworker clients.

Provide or Broker Transportation Services

Lack of transportation can be a barrier to farmworkers who want to use VR services. Never assume that transportation is readily available to the farmworker client—ask whether coming to the office is a problem, especially after the initial appointment. When possible, VR counselors should take their services to the client. In rural areas where public transit

is not available, explore whether paratransit or taxi services are available, and make them available as part of the IWRP. In Georgia, for example, VR is moving toward having *all* VR counselors spend the vast majority of their time in the field. To support this goal, VR is equipping staff with pagers, cellular phones and mobile fax machines. These changes both increase the flexibility of the services VR offers and support VR counselors in their role as advocates.

Consider the Whole Family

Farmworker families often travel and work together as a group, as a matter of financial and social necessity. Even when farmworkers are not migrating, cultural beliefs and family ties make it difficult to serve one person without taking into account the whole family structure. Unlike Anglo families, which usually value independence and support each individual's striving to follow his or her own path, many farmworkers come from a culture that values solidarity and deference to the wishes of elders, especially the father. Therefore, a father may continue to work, even while in pain from a back injury, because to take time off for rehabilitation and retraining would prevent him from supporting his family. A mother with a disability might find it hard to participate in VR services because she must be with the family to provide child care and homemaking services, even while on the road, and because her husband may object to her learning a skill that would require that she work away from the family. In a similar vein, parents may object to the idea that their disabled unmarried adult child would participate in training for a non-farmwork career, though the child is likely to be less attached to farmwork, both financially and psychologically.

VR counselors should consider the dynamics of the family when planning services. Try to meet with the whole family, if possible, and ask what their expectations are for the disabled family member. The goal may be to help the person with the disability move back into farmwork as quickly as possible, and that everyone is united in this desire. In other cases, especially when the disability is sudden and permanent (as with a physical disability caused by an accident or injury), the rehabilitation needs of the person with the disability will serve as an impetus for the family to "settle out" of farmwork—that is, to stop migrating and find work in one place. For some families (especially in homebase states) this may mean that some family members will continue to do seasonal farmwork near home, and for others, it may mean that several family

members will need assistance finding new kinds of work. In these cases, VR counselors should call on their knowledge of other farmworker services in the community, to help other family members get the training they need.

Contract With Vocational Training Providers That Serve Farmworkers

The low educational levels of many farmworkers make it difficult to find training resources for them. Also, many adult farmworkers view giving up their accustomed work, no matter how undesirable and unstable, as risky and infeasible, claiming that they cannot learn another occupation. However, farmworkers *can* learn other work, and organizations in many rural areas already provide vocational training to farmworkers, usually with funding from the JTPA Section 402 program. (See the "Resources" section for information about contacting the JTPA program in your area.) These organizations understand the needs of farmworkers and often offer both basic skills and vocational skills training to help farmworkers return to work quickly. Some programs even offer stipends and help buy equipment or uniforms needed for new work. Many of these organizations are willing to subcontract with VR agencies to provide training to farmworkers with disabilities, especially when VR will pay for disability-related accommodations, such as an interpreter for a deaf client or a personal assistant for someone with a mobility impairment. In Dade County, Florida, for instance, VR offers its farmworker clients day care and transportation services through a special partnership with the local JTPA Section 402 program. These support services can be critical to the success of the VR process.

Follow Up

The VR process is often a long and complicated one. Farmworkers may not understand why they must wait to hear whether they are eligible for services before writing an Individualized Written Rehabilitation Plan, or even what a plan is, or why it is needed. Similarly, farmworkers may have a hard time understanding why some services are not immediately available. They may take the normal pauses in the process as a signal that they will not be served. It is important to make sure that farmworkers understand that the rehabilitation process will not be finished in one visit. Therefore, the VR counselor should proactively contact farmworker clients and inform them about the next steps in the process. Because many farmworkers are from poor households that do not have phones, this follow up contact may have to be in person.

Assist Farmworkers in Obtaining Needed Non-VR Services

Farmworkers often face tremendous discrimination. The mainstream culture often perceives them as "illegals" who look and sound different, rather than as hardworking people who help bring food to our tables. As members of ethnic minority groups, many with low educational attainment and lack of English skills, farmworkers often need assistance in negotiating the social service system and obtaining the services for which they are eligible. VR counselors can help disabled farmworkers get connected with health care services and income support payments from the Social Security Administration, obtain adaptive equipment, and learn about organizations like Independent Living Centers and other disability support services. Farmworker families may also need assistance in obtaining mainstream services, such as AFDC, Food Stamps, or housing assistance.

RESOURCES

The best way to find out about farmworkers is to talk to farmworker service providers in your local area. Unfortunately, no national resource exists for farmworkers with disabilities. Below, we list the national office in charge of the VR Section 312 VR programs, and national resources on farmworkers, farmworker health, and other services.

■ VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICE PROJECTS FOR MIGRATORY AGRICULTURAL WORKERS AND SEASONAL FARMWORKERS WITH DISABILITIES

Office of Developmental Programs
Rehabilitation Services Administration
Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services
U.S. Department of Education
202-205-8292 (voice)

This office can tell you whether there is a special VR project serving farmworkers in your state, and how to contact that program.

■ AGRABILITY PROJECTS

The AgrAbility National Training Program, established in 1991, provides nationally-coordinated training, technical assistance, and information exchange. The national program is carried out cooperatively by Purdue University's Breaking

New Ground Resource Center and the National Easter Seal Society. AgrAbility resources are devoted to supporting state AgrAbility projects and assisting individuals with disabilities in agriculture. The Breaking New Ground Resource Center has more than 50 disability-related resources, manuals and publications available for promoting independence for farmers, ranchers, and agricultural workers with disabilities.

In 1997, there were 18 AgrAbility Projects serving 19 states (mostly Midwestern and upper plains states). Each AgrAbility Project involves a state Cooperative Extension Service, a disability service organization, and other rural interests in collaborative activities with a common goal of helping farmers, ranchers, and agricultural workers with disabilities continue in their chosen occupation. Some state programs have more of an emphasis on services to farmworkers than others. Call the national number to see if there is a program in your state.

For more information, contact the Breaking New Ground Resource Center at 1-800-825-4264 or the National Easter Seal Society at (202) 347-3066. Or visit the AgrAbility web site at:

<http://aben.www.ecn.purdue.edu/ABEN/Extension/BNG/agrabilityproject.html>

■ MIGRANT HEALTH BRANCH

Bureau of Primary Health Care
Health Resources and Services Administration
Department of Health and Human Services
4350 East-West Highway, 7th Floor
Bethesda, MD 20814
301-594-4303 (voice)

The Migrant Health Branch is the unit of the federal government that provides funding and policy for the Migrant Health Centers. It also funds the National Advisory Council on Migrant Health, and participates in the U.S. Interagency Committee on Migrants.

■ **NATIONAL CENTER FOR FARMWORKER HEALTH, INC. (NCFH)**

1515 Capital of Texas Highway South, Suite 220
Austin, TX 78746
512-328-7682 (voice)
512-328-8559 (fax)
World Wide Web site: www.ncfh.org

Funded by the Migrant Health Branch, NCFH supports a national network of migrant health centers through the creation, collection and distribution of resources. It maintains a Resource Center, provides Technical Assistance to health centers, and publishes the "Migrant Health Newslines," a bi-monthly newsletter. Call to obtain basic information about farmworkers, receive their publications list, or to be placed on the mailing list for the newsletter. This organization can also tell you the location of the nearest migrant health center.

NCFH also publishes another dissemination product developed under the grant that produced this booklet. Called *When A Farmworker Has A Disability: A Guide for Providers with Handouts for Patients*, it was developed for staff of migrant health centers and other service providers who have little training in making referrals to disability-specific services or organizations. Copies are available for \$7.00 each.

■ **MIGRANT CLINICIANS NETWORK (MCN)**

5524 Bee Caves Road, Suite I-1
Austin, TX 78746-5246
512-327-2017 (voice)
512-327-0719 (fax)

MCN provides mechanisms for networking among health providers in migrant health centers. The Network encourages continuity of care, uniformity in clinical procedures and protocols, enhanced provider retention and collaboration, and migrant-specific recruitment and orientation. It publishes an occasional monograph series.

■ **ASSOCIATION OF FARMWORKER OPPORTUNITY PROGRAMS (AFOP)**

1611 N. Kent St., Suite 910
Arlington, VA 22209
703-528-4141 (voice)
703-528-4145 (fax)

The Department of Labor, through the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), funds programs that serve farmworkers, under Section 402 of the legislation. These grants are federally-administered and usually go to community-based organizations that have experience working with farmworkers. Call AFOP to find out contact information about the JTPA Section 402 program nearest you.

■ **FARMWORKER JUSTICE FUND (FJF)**

1111 9th Street, NW, Suite 100
Washington, DC 20036
202-776-1757 (voice)

FJF is a litigation and advocacy organization based in Washington, DC, that represents migrant and seasonal farmworkers around the nation. It publishes a newsletter, the "Farmworker Justice News," with information about legislation that affects farmworkers.

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Oakland, CA 94610

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