

Resource Id#: 5090

Facts About Children in the Fields



Campaign Fact Sheet



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Problem:

- Agriculture was classified as the most dangerous occupation in the country in 1989 [National Safety Council, *Accident Facts*, 1989] and continues to compete with mining and construction for the dubious honor of being one of the top three most dangerous industries.
- Children are a significant part of the agricultural workforce. Although accurate counts of the farmworker population continues to evade even the best statisticians, United Farmworkers Union estimates that as many as 800,000 children work in agriculture.
- The National Association of Community Health Centers reported in 1991 that 38% of farmworkers consist of women and children under the age of 14.
- Migration from one agricultural work area to another also compounds the problems for the migrant farmworker family. Constant moving, short periods of employment, longer periods of unemployment, income fluctuations dependent upon the crop and crop conditions, and annual disasters all play a part in the disruption of education and economic stability of the migrant and seasonal farmworker family.
- Almost half of all documented farmworkers in this country are U.S. citizens, and the overwhelming majority of foreign-born farmworkers are legal U.S. residents. [National Agricultural Workers' Survey, U.S. Department of Labor]

Impact on Education:

- Children who work in the fields often work during school hours, which deprives them of their right to an

education.

- Long hours and strenuous work take their toll, causing excessive absenteeism. This often results in their being held back in school, getting discouraged with school, and usually, dropping out. 72% of farmworkers served by the JTPA B402 programs had dropped out of school.
- Farmworker children have a difficult time keeping up with their classmates, suffering from extreme fatigue and poor nutrition.
- Due to a disrupted education, farmworker children usually are forced to remain in farmwork, enduring the same substandard working conditions as their parents and grandparents.
- The rate of school enrollment for farmworker children is lower than for any other group in this country. [*Migrant Education: A Consolidated View*, Interstate Migrant Education Council, 1987]
- The dropout rate for migrants is 45%. For the rest of America, the rate is 25%. [Migrant Attrition Project, Testimony before the National Commission on Migrant Education, February 1991]
- Migrant Education programs, K-12 lose approximately half their initial enrollments by the 9th grade. One in ten completes the 12th grade. [U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, *The Education of Adult Migrant Farmworkers*, Vol. 2, January 1991]
- 80% of the adult migrant farmworker population is considered educationally disadvantaged, i.e., functioning at a 5th grade literacy level or less. [US Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, *The Education of Adult Migrant Farmworkers*, Vol. 2, January 1991]
- The average level of education for a farmworker is fifth grade.

Impact on Health:

- The life expectancy for the migrant worker is 49 years, compared to 73 years for the general US population. [Center for Disease Control, 1988]
- Years of working in a stooped position often causes farmworkers to have back and muscle problems as they grow older.
- The infant mortality rate for migrants is 25% higher than the national average. [Interstate Migrant Task Force: Migrant Health, 1979]
- The rate of parasitic infection among migrants is estimated to be 11 to 59 times higher than that of the general US population. [Ortez, J.S., "Composite Summary and Analysis of Hearing Held by the Department of Labor, OSHA on Field Sanitation for Migrant Farmworkers," Docket No. H308, 1984]
- From July 1992 through December 1993, overexertion accounted for approximately 4,500 work-related injuries of adolescents treated in hospital emergency rooms; about 2,500 of these injuries were attributed to lifting. [National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, 1994]
- The primary agents of fatal and nonfatal injuries to children on farms include tractors, farm machinery, livestock, building structures, and falls.

- Children account for about 20% of all farm fatalities.
- 300 children die from farm-related accidents each year and more than 23,500 children are injured. [*The Wall Street Journal*, July 20, 1989]
- At least forty-two children under the age of 15 died as a result of farm-related accidents in California between 1980 and 1989, with approximately four deaths per year for the ten year period. An evaluation of deaths among children not noted as occurring on farms suggested that the actual number of farm-related deaths among children may be 25% greater than was observed. [*UC Agricultural Health and Safety Center News*, University of California, Health and Safety Center at Davis, California, Winter 1993]
- "The EPA regulations for protecting workers against pesticide hazards are based on adult exposure only and give no special consideration to children." [U.S. GAO Report, 1992]
- Children in agriculture are exposed to a range of pesticides each year. Children tend to be more susceptible to pesticides because they absorb more pesticides per pound of body weight and because of their developing nervous system and organs.
- EPA estimates that pesticide exposure causes farmworkers and their families to suffer between 10,000 to 20,000 immediate illnesses annually, and additional thousands of illnesses later in life.
- A recent study found that 48% of farmworker children working in the fields had been sprayed with pesticides. ["The Hidden Cost of Child Labor," *Family Circle*, March 12, 1991]
- Two studies have linked childhood brain tumors and leukemia to pesticide exposure. [*The Occupational Health of Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers in the United States*, Farmworker Justice Fund, 1988]
- A recent study found that in California from 1982 to 1990 there were an average of 1,173 reported illnesses annually related to pesticide exposure. During the same time period, there were a total of 50 fatalities that were classified as being definitely, probably, or possibly related to pesticides. [*UC Agricultural Health and Safety Center News*, University of California, Health and Safety Center at Davis, California, Winter 1993]
- A report in 1990 of migrant children in New York found that more than 40 percent had been sprayed with pesticides. Another 40% had worked in the fields while the fields were still wet.

Impact on Families:

- The average income for a farmworker family is less than \$6,000 per year compared to more than \$28,000 for the average American family. [Center for Disease Control, National Center for Health Statistics]
- Farms with 10 or fewer workers are exempt from providing toilets and drinking water for farmworkers. As a result, one in six farmworkers-adults and children-working in U.S. agriculture lacks access to toilets. For farms with 11 or more workers, even when toilets and drinking water are provided, the facilities only have to be located within one quarter mile of where the workers are working.
- Only 4 states provide full unemployment insurance coverage for farmworkers; in fourteen states, workers' compensation coverage does not apply to farmworkers at all; and in more than half of the states, minimum wage laws do not apply to agricultural employment.
- The federal law regarding overtime pay totally exempts any worker in farming from receiving overtime pay.

States have added little protection in this area for farmworkers.

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