

Migrant Agricultural Ombudsman Report 2002



*Prepared for the Ohio General Assembly by the
Office of Workforce Development,
Ohio Department of Job & Family Services*

Section 3733.49 of the Ohio Revised Code mandates the annual Migrant Agricultural Ombudsman Report. This report summarizes the 2002 migrant farm worker season and makes recommendations to improve the conditions of farm workers in Ohio. For more information, contact Benito Lucio, Monitor Advocate and Migrant Agricultural Ombudsman, at 1-800-282-3525, or Michael Hock, Targeted Services group, 614-995-1743, both in the Office of Workforce Development. Additional information is on our website at www.state.oh.us/odjfs/agriculture.

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**Migrant Agricultural Ombudsman Report 2002 -
Ohio**

Features of the 2002 harvest season

- 1. Fresh market crops were down.**
- 2. Fresh market tomatoes were up.**
- 3. Jobs in nurseries increased.**

The 2002 harvest season for migrant farm workers in Ohio experienced a decrease in fresh market vegetable acreage by 29,570 acres, down 10% from 2001. Fresh market tomato acres harvested increased from 900 acres to 6,700 acres. Yield increased to 370 cwt. per acre, up 12% from 2001. Likewise, production increased by 27% to 2.48 million cwt. in 2002 up by 27% from 2001. Price per cwt. was \$36.00, down \$1.90 from 2001. The lower price and increased production resulted in a total farm value of \$89.2 million, up 21% from last year. With the exception of bell peppers and fresh tomatoes, Ohio vegetable growers produced less cabbage, onions, pumpkins, sweet corn, and squash in 2002. Squash, sweet corn, pumpkins, and cabbage prices were up, while bell peppers, onions, and fresh tomatoes were down. Ohio's strawberry growers harvested 1,300 acres in 2002 and total farm value remained unchanged from 2001 at \$4.83 million. Production of tomatoes decreased by 9% in 2002 to 149,630 tons. Acreage harvested increased to 6,300 acres, up 100 acres from 2001. Total farm value decreased by 9% from 2001 to \$12.1. Cucumber production decreased to 28,700 tons, down 2% from last year. Acres harvested decreased 300 acres. Total farm value decreased 6% from 2001 to \$10.3 million. Employment opportunities for migrant labor continued to increase in nurseries and landscaping. Migrants worked in landscaping and on sod farms. There has been a labor shortage of local workers in the last five years and migrant labor has been filling their void.

These data and more can be found on the Ohio Agricultural Statistics Service website <http://www.nass.usda.gov/oh/>

The migrant labor supply

1. Labor was in good supply.

2. Earnings were good.

The overall labor supply in 2002 was good compared to 2001. Because of all the employment opportunities in nurseries the migrant farm worker population increased to 14,529 slightly more than in 2001. We estimate that in 2002 there were 14,529 migrant workers in the state, 410 more than in 2001. There was also an increase in the number of workers over 14 years of age from 11,793 compared to 11,008 in 2001. The composition of the workers with respect to nationality is 90% Mexican, 3% African American, and 7% other. Approximately 70% of the workforce does not have legal status in the United States. The 2002 harvest season was profitable for many Ohio migrant workers. We estimate they earned 5% to 10% more than last season.



3. Migrants worked state-wide

County	Persons	14 & older	Families	Camps
Allen	55	45	5	0
Ashtabula	350	350	35	3
Brown	35	35	0	0
Butler	400	245	40	0
Champaign	180	130	30	1
Clark	410	255	25	2
Clinton	15	10	1	0
Columbiana	72	52	9	2
Crawford	12	12	2	1
Cuyahoga	385	295	15	0
Delaware	80	58	10	1
Darke	195	160	20	5
Erie	245	185	15	5
Fairfield	115	75	4	1
Franklin	445	375	34	0
Fayette	44	36	2	0
Fulton	395	285	75	5
Gallia	20	20	0	0
Greene	35	25	4	1
Hamilton	425	275	50	0
Hancock	70	50	8	1
Henry	395	290	60	4
Huron	1630	1120	185	11
Knox	12	10	2	1
Lake	1125	850	60	6
Licking	55	55	2	1
Lorain	550	410	30	2
Lucas	235	170	30	4
Madison	2	2	0	0
Mahoning	90	75	15	1
Marion	95	75	8	0
Mercer	115	85	9	0
Miami	215	170	28	2
Muskingum	16	16	0	1
Ottawa	995	875	65	18
Putnam	470	985	75	5
Sandusky	2415	1975	475	28
Scioto	16	12	3	1
Seneca	610	475	125	8
Stark	605	525	105	9
Washington	50	50	0	0
Williams	225	145	35	3
Wood	525	450	85	9
Total	14429	11793	1781	142

Making Ohio competitive for migrant workers

- 1. Migrant workers are extremely important**
- 2. Relations with Texas, Florida & Mexico are key**
- 3. Our bilingual website helps**
- 4. Outreach staff gives assistance to growers and workers alike.**

Migrant workers contribute significantly to Ohio's agricultural economy, which is currently the number one industry in the state with well over \$200 million in sales. Ohio's migrant population is willing to perform work that most local workers won't because the nature of the work is typically demanding and temporary. Furthermore, the pay is lower than most other service jobs, medical benefits are not offered, and the work hours are long. We forecast there will be a continuous need for migrant labor in the coming years. With more jobs in the service sector, local labor that traditionally performed agricultural work has turned to air-conditioned work environments rather than having to work under the hot summer sun. The migrant labor force is crucial to Ohio's agricultural economy.

Texas and Florida and the country of Mexico continue to supply the majority of Ohio's migrant workers. "Meet and Greet"

Our bilingual website is
<http://www.state.oh.us/ODJFS/agriculture/>

meetings in these respective states, during the off-season, between migrant and migrant workers have been instrumental to marketing the website and its valuable content. Growers benefit from our website by posting their most current job opportunities and keeping the community up-to-date on the status of their crops. We have received inquiries from Mexican natives who indicated they found out about us from our website. Efforts of the Ombudsman and outreach staff to maintain a website has been instrumental in keeping the state competitive for migrant labor by sharing employment information on the Internet for migrants.

Outreach staff from the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services also maintain close communications with crew leaders by providing them with updates on needs and connecting them with Ohio growers.

Contact our outreach staff using the information on the web at
http://www.state.oh.us/ODJFS/agriculture/Outreach_Staff.pdf

Our accomplishments helped workers & growers during the 2002 season. We

1. Continued to improve our agricultural website.
2. Established an e-mail "listserv" on Hispanic and migrant labor issues for statewide and nationwide advocates.
3. Established a more stable workforce through use of our website and our competent outreach staff, resulting in less of a work shortage in 2002.
4. Assisted in providing over 7,000 employment transactions of migrant farm workers in Ohio.
5. Assisted in educating Ohio advocates and government officials of the issue of migrant undocumented workers.
6. Conducted 19 Housing Inspections through the H2-A Program
7. Developed a proposal [funded at the end of the 2002 season] to provide help from faith-based partners to link migrant farm workers and their families with the one-stop career centers in Northwest Ohio. These centers operate under auspices of the Federal Workforce Investment Act.

Worker housing in 2002

- 1. No complaints**
- 2. Housing quality is improving**

We received no housing complaints last season. This does not mean that we don't have any problems. We still encounter problems with over-crowding and general maintenance, such as torn screens, insufficient hot water, etc. Often times, these problems are brought to the camp operator's attention, and he/she usually addresses them immediately.

In 2002, there were 142 licensed migrant labor camps. This includes all of the housing facilities licensed under the H2-A program. Housing conditions continue to improve, especially the housing provided to H2-A workers. Funding from the Department of Development's matching grant program to help growers upgrade or construct new housing was cut off due to budget constraints. Of the 142 migrant camps, well over 70% of these facilities have benefited from this program.

Issues for the 2003 season and beyond in Ohio

Immigration issues create a difficult dilemma in being able to secure migrant labor in the future. As the State of Ohio continues to utilize migrant labor, it is important to recognize that **an estimated 70% of the migrant workforce is undocumented** and working in Ohio with fraudulent documents such as BCIS (Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services), green cards and Social Security numbers.

These are the basic essentials required to apply for the BCIS I-9, the Employment Verification Form, which gives migrants permission to legally work in the U.S.

Verifying Social Security numbers has become a priority in the last few years. Ohio's agricultural economy will suffer dramatically if the migrant labor workforce is no longer available. In 2002, many employers received letters from the Social Security Administration indicating that some of their workers had mismatched names and numbers. When this happens the employer must notify the workers of the situation and instruct them to go to the nearest Social Security Administration Office for a second verification. In most cases, the workers do not go because they know they have fraudulent social security numbers. Consequently, the employer has no other choice but to terminate the worker in question. This will become a trend in the future as the Social Security Administration plans to continue to track mismatched numbers and requests second verifications.

More work needs to be done on immigration issues. We face a severe worker shortage for skilled agricultural jobs. Traditionally in Ohio, we have had an abundant migrant labor workforce coming from Texas and Florida. Most of them were second-generation Mexican immigrants whose children did not continue the migrant stream, but rather chose to pursue an education. Consequently, this left a huge void in migrant labor needs, and opened the door for undocumented workers to replace the previous workforce. This change occurred approximately 7 years ago. It is important to note that **employers' demands are the primary reason for the flow of undocumented workers.** Agriculture is not the only industry that depends on migrant workers. Statewide, we see a large number of undocumented workers in construction, fast food, landscaping, nurseries, and other industries. These industries are also finding less U.S. workers to fill vacant positions, mainly because of strenuous work conditions and low pay. More than likely, the current agricultural community will be competing for these types of jobs in the future.

Undocumented workers are at great risk: most who come to the U.S. endure long and dangerous paths to get here. Recent media attention has highlighted this. Ohio needs to recognize the presence of this significant undocumented labor force. Efforts should be made to encourage the legislators to address the issue and make it so that such a vital workforce can legally work in the U.S.

Recommendations

1. **Continue improvement to the website** in order to provide migrant workers and advocates with valuable information. Ultimately, the website will be 100% bilingual (Spanish/English).
2. **Do more work with processors** so that we can assure them that the migrant advocates and growers are committed to working together to establish a stable migrant labor workforce. Re-instatement of funding from the Department of Development's migrant housing grant program (\$250,000 per year), if Ohio is to remain a competitive migrant labor state (a migrant survey conducted in 1996 by the Advocates for Basic Legal Equality in Toledo concluded that housing was the number one issue that migrant workers considered before coming to Ohio).
3. **Improve Federal employment authorization of seasonal workers**, by which all undocumented migrant farm workers who have worked in U.S. agriculture in the last two years are given employment authorization to work seasonally in the U.S. Most undocumented workers interviewed by the Ombudsman have indicated that their primary interest is to get a seasonal employment permit to work in the U.S. The majority of undocumented workers interviewed does not want to remain in the U.S., but rather want to return to their country of origin after completing their jobs.

Respectfully submitted,

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