

Fitting The Pieces Together: An Examination of Sources Related to Farmworker Housing

© Housing Assistance Council, 1996

Permission is granted ONLY to nonprofit community-based organizations to reproduce and/or adapt this document, and only for their own use.

This document best viewed using Netscape Navigator, with a monitor resolution of 800 x 600.

I. Introduction

They are essential, but invisible; mostly documented workers and citizens, but believed by many to be illegal; hardworking people, but viewed as undeserving. They are the hundreds of thousands of migrant and seasonal farmworkers who do the hard work of planting, tending and harvesting many of the crops that Americans expect to find at their grocery stores reasonably priced and unblemished. Because migrant and seasonal farmworkers move, because they are poor and because they are often from "minority" cultures, their concerns often receive low priority in the attention of the public and of social service and regulatory agencies. Standards of housing, working conditions and services established for other workers legally do not apply to them or fall through the cracks of enforcement.

All kinds of sources, from anecdotal and newspaper accounts to sophisticated research reports, put housing at or near the top of any list of farmworker needs. Accounts tell of third world housing conditions including shacks in disrepair, terrible overcrowding and sanitary conditions, or no housing at all. They tell of health effects of poor housing contributing to the short life spans of migrant and seasonal workers. They tell of uneven enforcement of codes regulating housing and sanitation. They tell of local resistance to building new housing. They tell of workers without real housing choices.

This report focuses on the housing needs of migrant and seasonal farmworkers. It considers some of the difficulties in studying the farmworker population. It summarizes and analyzes several studies on the national, state, and local levels that provide information about farmworkers and their housing. Other issues related to housing are discussed. Finally, the report makes recommendations for further farmworker housing research. An annotated bibliography is appended.

[Back to table of contents](#)

Summary: What the Pieces Show

The existing studies that provide information about farmworker housing report on different populations, use different methods, and gather information on different topics. These variations, as well as problems in counting or surveying farmworkers, are discussed in some detail in later sections of this paper, as are the reports from which the following summary is drawn:

Although they are inconsistent in some ways, existing studies do provide pieces that can be

fit together to form a general picture: farmworkers, particularly migrant workers, and their families have great housing need, although that need has not yet been quantified at the national level. The data do show clearly that the farmworker population is sizable, largely Hispanic, largely young, and largely earning very low incomes. The types of housing available for migrants vary widely from place to place. Indications are that much of it, both employer-provided and in local off-farm housing markets, is in poor condition, and that much of the non-employer-provided housing is not affordable. Estimates of need made to date therefore call for large numbers of units to be produced or rehabilitated.

The number of farmworkers nationwide has been estimated at anywhere from 800,000 (the annual average calculated by the Current Population Survey) to 2.5 million (the estimate of the Commission on Agricultural Workers). When family members are added, the farmworker population needing housing is higher. Providing sufficient housing for migrant farmworkers means providing more than one unit per worker or worker household, because each can be expected to spend parts of the year in more than one place. Ultimately, then, specific needs determinations must be made on the local level, and national estimates that include intentional overcounts of migrating workers are more useful than straightforward counts. The Migrant Health Program's *Atlas* and the Migrant Legal Services' Migrant Enumeration Project provide such national estimates, although their figures differ widely as well: the *Atlas* estimated nearly 4.2 million migrant and seasonal farmworkers and family members were present throughout the United States in 1990, while the Migrant Enumeration Project estimated migrants and their dependents at just over three million in 1993. *

The best estimate available for the relative proportions of migrant and seasonal workers in the farm labor force nationwide is that of the National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS), which calculated that in 1993 migrant workers comprised 42 percent of the farm laborers working with crops. State-level studies indicate wide variations in the migrant/seasonal composition of the labor force in different parts of the country. Only about 14 percent of apple workers in New York and Pennsylvania in 1991 lived in the area year-round, whereas 78 percent of farmworkers surveyed in California in 1990-1991 said they were not willing to travel beyond daily commuting. California's warmer climate may be assumed to provide a significantly higher proportion of year-round jobs.

Studies' findings on the characteristics of the farmworker population vary widely as well. For example, NAWS reported that 40 percent of farmworkers in 1989-1991 were born in the United States, while only 25 percent of the New York and Pennsylvania apple work force were born in this country. In contrast, fully 92 percent of farmworkers in California were born in other countries. The vast majority of migrant farmworkers studied by NAWS were in the United States legally: 74 percent in 1991. NAWS data indicates, however, that the proportion of undocumented workers has increased slightly, from 17 percent of migrants in 1989 to 23 percent in 1990 and 26 percent in 1991. Similarly, 73 percent of apple workers in New York and Pennsylvania had legal work status in 1991.

Researchers analyzing Current Population Survey data for 1993 have reported, without specifics, that hired farmworkers sampled by the CPS were more likely to be young, male, and Hispanic and to have limited education than other wage and salary workers. Other studies provide more detailed demographic information. The median age of farmworkers nationwide is 31 and in California 32, according to the NAWS. Unauthorized workers in

California were the youngest part of that population. Only 16 percent of the farmworkers in the country were aged 45 or older, compared to 25.6 percent of the entire U.S. labor force.¹

The proportion of Latino/a persons in the national farmworker population appears to be increasing, although it varies geographically. Nine-tenths of farmworkers in California were Hispanic in 1990-1991. In a more broadly defined population of farmworkers in Michigan in 1991, just under one-third of the workforce was reported to be Hispanic men travelling without family members.

A majority of farmworkers are married -- 58 percent of those surveyed by NAWS nationwide, and two-thirds in California -- but many migrants travel alone. Nationally, NAWS found that 40 percent were accompanied by children, spouses or parents while working. This proportion rose to 60 percent in California, according to NAWS, but in New York and Pennsylvania only 16 percent of the predominantly migrant apple workers were joined by family members. This difference could be partly explained by the fact that nearly one-fifth of the New York and Pennsylvania workers studied were admitted to the U.S. temporarily under a program that did not allow them to bring their families. In addition, more family members might be found in California because of southern California's position as an entry point and the beginning of the Western migrant stream, as well as the greater possibilities for settling out in California because the agricultural work season is longer there. Not surprisingly, when seasonal workers (those who do not migrate) are included the proportion accompanied by family members is much higher. The vast majority -- 88 percent -- of farmworkers living in off-camp housing in one survey in Oregon lived with family members.

Farmworkers' ability to find decent housing for themselves and their families is complicated considerably by their low and irregular incomes. NAWS found that almost half of all farmworkers had incomes below the poverty line. Incomes were even lower for migrant workers, whose median annual income from 1989 to 1991 was \$5,000, and for undocumented workers, more than three-quarters of whom earned less than poverty-level wages. The most recently arrived workers may have the lowest incomes; Mixtecs newly arrived in California from Mexico were found in 1989-1990 to earn less than other agricultural workers in the state.

Employer provision of housing for farmworkers varies around the country, and seems generally to be decreasing. One set of NAWS data indicated that less than one-third of farmworkers received housing from their employer, and most of that employer-provided housing was for single workers only. A different NAWS report concluded that those most likely to have housing provided by an employer were migrants and those in the eastern United States except for Florida. The National Agricultural Statistics Service found an even smaller proportion of its survey population -- 19 percent -- received housing as a benefit in July 1994, and in California NAWS reported that only 18 percent of farmworkers' employers provided housing. Employer-provided housing is more common in areas where most farmworkers are migrants, such as Michigan and the apple-growing areas of New York and Pennsylvania. Even in those areas, however, there are not enough employer-provided units to house all workers and their dependents.

Numbers of units alone do not explain the adequacy of employer-provided housing. Much of

the on-farm or labor camp stock is substandard. In 1980, the National Farmworker Housing Study found that employer-provided housing tended to be in buildings 20 or more years old, consisting mostly of single-family detached units but with about one-quarter dormitory style units. The quality of migrant camps varied widely in 1980, but a majority of the units nationwide lacked heat, plumbing, or laundry facilities, or were overcrowded. More recent studies have confirmed that these problems still exist alongside decent housing. CASA of Oregon found only 8 percent of camp units in that state were in very good condition. Studies in Michigan, in New York/Pennsylvania, and among California's Mixtec population did not quantify the extent of housing problems, but described seriously dilapidated buildings, inadequate sanitation, overcrowding, and -- in Pennsylvania -- a focus on production of new units for year-round residents rather than migrants.

There is much less information available about off-farm housing. Even carefully designed research such as the 1980 national study and the CASA of Oregon statewide study has found it difficult to locate and examine local rental units occupied by farmworkers as a distinct subset of the local population in agricultural areas. CASA found that although just over one-third of the privately owned farmworker housing in Oregon was in very good condition, units in very poor condition were almost as common. Almost 40 percent of units were seriously overcrowded, with more than four persons per bedroom. Mixtecs in California, particularly single men, lived in even more crowded conditions.

Overcrowding may be caused by the simple unavailability of enough units for the number of workers needing housing, and by workers' need to share the costs of housing among numerous people to make it affordable. Even where housing is available, either off-farm or on, apparently the cost often exceeds workers' abilities to pay, although there is remarkably little data on housing costs. In Oregon the average rent for off-farm private rental units was found to be \$187 for a one-bedroom unit and \$291 for three bedrooms. In Michigan, employers charged an average of \$40 per month for utilities even when they did not charge rent, and units in the private market averaged \$154 per month. Farm labor contractors in California who provided housing charged up to \$80 per week, although this fee may have included meals. By contrast, apple growers in New York generally provided free housing.

Fit together, these studies demonstrate there is a tremendous need nationwide for additional housing units, and for rehabilitation of existing units, for migrant and seasonal farmworkers. There is no national data appropriate to update the National Farmworker Housing Study's 1980 estimate of 756,196 units needed, and that estimate included labor camp units only. There is no reason to believe the need is any less in 1994, particularly when the need for appropriate off-farm units is taken into account. In fact, the National Advisory Council on Migrant Health in 1993 recommended the production of 10,000 farmworker housing units per year for ten years.

A definitive up-to-date determination of housing need cannot be made based on these studies, however. Such a calculation would have to include the type and location of units or other assistance (such as rental assistance) needed. Many factors besides the size of the population and the conditions of existing units must be taken into account to establish the overall housing need of farmworkers. For example, as noted above, migrant workers live in more than one place every year. In addition, advocates and government agencies hoping to improve migrant housing conditions may wish to consider whether different balances should

be struck for housing single migrants than migrants with families, and for housing single seasonal workers than seasonal workers with families. Some of these factors are examined in greater depth later in this report.

[Back to table of contents](#)

DEVELOPMENT OF MIGRANT AND SEASONAL FARM LABOR

Most vegetables and fruits, especially for the fresh market, require manual farmworker operations in production, harvest, packing, and processing, often in seasons lasting only a few weeks. For example, strawberries are a fragile fruit, ripening in a season of a few weeks annually, that must be picked very carefully, with cap on for the fresh market, with cap off for the processed market. Strawberry pickers must also train the vines and remove rotting fruit in order to protect their continuing productivity. Other field crops, nuts, trees, vines and many fish farming operations also require hand labor. This specialized work is both monotonous and very hard on the body. Much of the work is done in the heat of summer -- U.S. agriculture employs 70 percent more farmworkers in September than in January -- but some extends into other seasons as well.

Farm labor jobs are diverse and can use entry-level skills. Because farm work does not require language proficiency, it has often served as the first employment for new immigrants and for members of language-minority groups in the United States. Because it is hard, physical labor done in difficult working conditions, persons with other opportunities usually leave farm work as quickly as possible. At varying times in the past, persons of European, African and Asian descent provided much of the seasonal farm labor in the United States.

Early in United States history, most farms were small, and few seasonal workers were needed by any given farmer, especially in the first-settled Northeast. Plantations in the antebellum South used slaves for seasonal work. After the Civil War, newly freed slaves moved into sharecropper situations, and large plantations were divided into smaller holdings. In the Midwest and West, homestead laws encouraged land ownership. Midwestern farms were usually owned and operated by single families, and diversified crops and livestock spread tasks over the year. Such farms used little additional hired seasonal labor. Dry land conditions east of the Rocky Mountains led to grain and livestock operations. Grain threshing crews moved north with the harvest season, and livestock ranchers hired hands, most of whom were unattached men who were housed in bunkhouses on the ranches. California's Spanish heritage included large estates that needed hired workers. The rich land of its valleys first produced field grains, but fruit and vegetable crops also thrived there.

When railroads opened markets for fresh produce in the East, labor-intensive fruits and vegetables became more profitable in the West and the South. Development of food processing technologies also increased the market for fruits and vegetables. In all parts of the country, increased mechanization and loss of farms in the Depression of the 1930s pushed the trend toward larger and more specialized farms that used more seasonal labor. This trend has continued to the present time.

In eastern and southern states, hired laborers, including new immigrants of all ethnic groups, once comprised most of the migrant and seasonal labor force. In the West, Chinese men and

Filipinos, first hired to build railroads and work in mines, were recruited for agricultural work. Mexican workers flowed across the border into the United States, first with little government attention. Immigration laws in the 1920s aimed to retain the ethnic balance of an earlier age, but temporary worker programs for Mexicans were used because of labor shortages during World War II and in the following years.

More recently, Mexican-Americans and persons from Mexico, Central America or Caribbean islands have supplied most of the migrant seasonal farm labor in the United States. Many have a home base from which they start the season of production and harvest, and to which they return when possible. California, Texas, Puerto Rico and Florida are the most common U.S. bases, but many other states serve as home base for at least a few. Some workers, called cyclical migrants, return to another country and retain their citizenship there. There is a constant flow of workers across the border from Mexico and Central America, including many who are undocumented. While Mexican workers formerly were almost all Spanish-speaking, recently they have included increasing numbers whose language is one of the indigenous Indian languages, a situation which has complicated communication.

Members of these groups were hired because they had no choice other than to do hard field work for very low pay. Employers were able to pay so little because the labor protection legislation created in the Depression era specifically excluded farmworkers from its provisions. The combination of laws, immigration status, frequent moves for work, language and cultural barriers has made migrant farmworkers especially vulnerable to exploitation.

Migrant agricultural labor has developed three general migrant streams, illustrated by [Table 1](#). During the harvest season, migrant workers follow job opportunities, traveling in three general northward streams, but in individual patterns related to crop preferences and expected work. The eastern stream starts in Puerto Rico and Florida and moves up the eastern seaboard through the Carolinas and Maryland into Pennsylvania, New Jersey and New York. The Midwestern stream begins in Texas and fans out to the north, reaching Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota, but with some workers going into the more eastern and more western states as well. The western stream begins in Mexico, California and Arizona, moving up to Oregon and Washington. There is some crossover among the streams. Some migrants work each year for certain growers, some are individually recruited by growers or farm labor contractors, and some travel without job assurances. Increasingly, some migrants "settle out" in upstream states, where they may continue to do agricultural work or may obtain training and work in jobs outside of agriculture.

The patterns of these seasonal streams blend together the needs of many separate crops. These patterns are used to anticipate program staffing and service needs of farmworkers. However, individual workers follow their own choices, so streams do not track exactly where a given worker can be found or how many workers will come to a particular place.

[Back to table of contents](#)

DEFINITIONS

Definitions Used in This Study

The terms used in this report require definition. Every national study of farmworkers

reviewed here uses its own terms, or its own definitions of common terms, thus complicating the comparison of data from different sources. There are some generally accepted usages, however. The term "farmworkers" refers to hired laborers, not to farm owners or their family members who do farm work. "Hired farm work," a term used in some data sources, includes on-farm work for wages or salary in producing, harvesting, delivering agricultural commodities and managing a farm. It usually does not include work that is exchanged between farmers, work done by family members, machine custom work or nonfarm work done on a farm.²

This paper focuses on "migrant" and "seasonal" farmworkers. In general, seasonal farmworkers do farm crop or harvest work that is temporary, but recurring year after year. This work is sometimes generally called seasonal agricultural services (SAS) and the workers SAS workers, but this report attempts to avoid this general use of "SAS" because the term is also used under the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA) to refer to seasonal work with specific crops. Other sources may use the term more narrowly or more broadly. Seasonal workers may be local workers (in the same county or 50 miles or less from home) or migrant workers who travel far enough so that they cannot return home on a daily basis. It is this temporary nature of farm work in many locations that makes it very difficult to find and pay for housing of acceptable quality. Migrant farmworkers may travel intra- or interstate, or internationally, to do farm work, and may or may not have a permanent home or home base location.

The specific definitions used in each study, and the specific information gathered, depend on the purpose for which the study was prepared. Thus, some studies included information about family members dependents) who do not do farm work, while others counted only the actual farmworkers themselves. Some programs are provided only for persons who are citizens and/or legal documented workers, so some studies excluded undocumented workers or those with temporary admission to the United States. Some programs are available only to persons working on certain kinds of crops, so some studies excluded persons working in particular types of agriculture or livestock operations.

This report sets forth the specific definitions used in each study reviewed, but in its discussion and recommendations it uses the terms more loosely, in their general senses as described above. It emphasizes migrant farmworkers because their housing needs are complex: they need housing in multiple locations, often for short periods of time. The situations of seasonal farmworkers, in contrast, are similar to those of other very low-income persons.

Special Programmatic Definitions

None of the studies reviewed here focused on the precise populations served by two of the most important national assistance programs for farmworkers: the Section 514/516 Farm Labor Housing program of the Agriculture Department's Rural Housing and Community Development Service (RHCDS, formerly the Farmers Home Administration or FmHA) and the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) Section 402 training program. Therefore the data discussed below cannot be used to determine precise need or eligibility for RHCDS or JTPA assistance.

The JTPA Section 402 program provides employment training opportunities for anyone

fitting the definition of "migrant farmworker" as "a seasonal farmworker who performs or has performed farmwork during the eligibility period (any consecutive 12-month period within the 24-month period preceding application for enrollment) which requires travel such that the worker is unable to return to his/her domicile (permanent place of residence) within the same day."³

The Section 514/516 housing program is the only federal housing program restricted to farmworkers and their families, although farmworkers are eligible for benefits under many other federal housing programs as well. Section 514/516 housing is available to anyone who meets the program's "domestic farm laborer" definition as a person who receives a substantial portion of his or her income performing farm labor employment (not self-employed) in the United States, Puerto Rico, or the Virgin Islands and either is a citizen of the United States, or resides in the United States, Puerto Rico or the Virgin Islands after being legally admitted for permanent residence. Legally admitted temporary workers and undocumented foreign workers are not eligible. Farm labor includes services in connection with cultivating the soil or raising or harvesting any agricultural commodity; or in catching, netting, handling, planting, drying, packing, grading, storing, or preserving in its unmanufactured state any agricultural or aquacultural commodity; or delivering to storage, market, or carrier for transportation to market or to processing any agricultural or aquacultural commodity. This range of eligible work is broader than that of many other definitions, although the categories of eligible persons doing that work are narrower. RHCDS does include one category omitted from most studies, however: retired or disabled farmworkers may remain as tenants in 514/516 housing if initially eligible.

[Back to table of contents](#)

ISSUES RELATED TO COUNTING FARMWORKERS

A variety of factors make the migrant and seasonal farmworker population difficult to count or survey. Each of the studies reviewed in this report is subject to errors caused by at least some of these factors, and therefore may be flawed.

The most obvious problem in counting migrant farmworkers is their mobility. They move from job to job, state to state, even across national lines. They may or may not have a permanent address. In their temporary job locations, they may live in a labor camp, on their own or doubled up with relatives or other workers in a local housing unit, or they may be entirely homeless. Workers may be elsewhere on the day a census or survey is taken -- at work, in transit to another job, doing something other than farmwork. Conversely, if a survey is taken over a period of time, workers may be surveyed in more than one place (in San Diego County one week and in Yuba County the following week, for example). Missing or double-counting one worker in a survey intended to count an entire population (such as all farmworkers in California) creates an undercount or an overcount. Missing or double-counting one worker in a sample study intended to count only some individuals representative of the entire population is problematic as well, since missing one representative omits everyone that individual would have represented, and double-counting one representative double-counts everyone represented. Thus, unless an entire data collection effort is done on a single day or unless careful procedures are followed to identify and track individuals, the mobility of the farmworker population means that farmworkers

may be either undercounted or overcounted.

A second limiting condition is that many migrant or seasonal farmworkers do not speak or read English, or even Spanish. They may misunderstand questions or choose not to respond to either written questionnaires or surveyors. Unless questions are formulated and translated in culturally sensitive ways, they may be misunderstood or be offensive. Language barriers can leave people unaware of the purpose or importance of the information asked. Recently, greater numbers of Latino/a workers speak only indigenous Indian languages, and communication with them may be especially difficult. Language barriers may prevent responses or lead to inaccurate responses.

Third, persons who do not have legal status to work in the United States may go to great lengths to avoid exposing their status, and have learned to distrust and hide from anyone who might ask questions, even when they are assured the information will not be used against them. Even persons who have legal documentation may be suspicious of officials and people who ask questions. To protect themselves or others, they may avoid census takers and surveyors and thus may not be counted. Similarly, employers, who may be penalized for hiring undocumented workers, often try to conceal workers. Farmers or farm labor contractors may discourage workers from responding truthfully, or at all. It is not uncommon for employers to deny outsiders access to labor camps and fields. For all these reasons, data gathering techniques that rely on contacting individual workers usually miss some part of the population.

Some types of survey design simply do not work well for the farmworker population. Those that are based on contacting household units may entirely omit persons who live in unconventional housing such as farm labor camps, grower sheds, garages and crude shelters in parks and under bridges. Mail surveys do not reach people without addresses. If people are in transit, household surveys will not reach them. Workers do not always have the information that researchers would like to know (such as total household income for the entire previous year), and questions asked may produce no data or incorrect data. Further, long working days may mean that farmworkers have neither the time nor the energy to respond to survey questions. Research studies can be designed very carefully to overcome these barriers, but usually this makes the work more costly.

Particular programs that serve farmworker populations may survey workers at the time of contact or through program records. Their data may be useful for the purposes of those programs, but will not be representative of the whole population for other purposes. Therefore some of the available data on farmworkers is not useful for housing programs.

With these constraints, it is difficult to accomplish either an accurate count of workers and housing, or to draw a true random sample for statistical analysis. All the studies included here have some limitations because of these issues. Users of the data need to be aware of the limitations, and choose the sources least flawed for their purposes.

[Back to table of contents](#)

AVAILABLE FARMWORKER DATA

National Studies

Despite the difficulties inherent in counting migrant and seasonal farm laborers, a number of existing studies do contain some information about the numbers of these workers and about their circumstances. All these studies have limitations for understanding housing needs, but when they are pieced together, as in the summary section of this paper, above, a picture begins to emerge. Major national sources are summarized in [Table 1](#) and are discussed below.

National Farmworker Housing Study

The most recent national study of farmworker housing was prepared in 1980 in response to Public Law 95-557, which directed the Secretary of Agriculture to study migrant and seasonal farmworker housing in the United States.⁴ The resulting National Farmworker Housing Study commissioned under the Carter Administration was completed under but not published by the Reagan Administration and is now out of date. It remains important, however, because, unlike other national studies of farmworkers, it focused on housing and estimated the amount and cost of the unmet need. Its on-site inspection of the quality of farmworker housing is unique among national studies. The often low quality of farmworker housing described in this study has been repeatedly and recently corroborated in state and local studies (some of which are summarized below) and in news articles from around the country.⁵

Project staff interviewed government and nongovernment officials, then did field investigations of over 1,200 camp and non-camp housing sites in 63 counties out of the total 900 counties nationwide that had seasonal and migrant workers, using a stratified probability sample. Farmworkers were defined broadly as "temporary workers hired to do seasonal agricultural work." Researchers based their population calculations on estimates by the U.S. Employment Service, modified to include non-working family members and to correct for unemployment and data collection limitations. The study estimated there were 1.9 million seasonal workers (permanent residents of the area where they work) and dependents, and 800,000 migrant workers and dependents, nationwide. Since migrant workers need temporary housing in every place they live while they are working away from their home base area, researchers estimated population, housing supply, and resulting housing demand for each state rather than for the nation as a whole. Data gathered from the sample counties was used to derive the state level figures.

Camps were defined as employer-related housing of any structure type and other publicly or privately owned grouped housing with common-use facilities. Non-camps included local units from the rural rental housing stock. Researchers gathered information on indicators of housing quality, cost to farmworkers, and racial and ethnic composition of occupants, as well as on the supply of migrant farmworker housing.

This study found that most migrant camps were at least 20 years old, and many were small -- three buildings or fewer. Most buildings were detached, single-family-style dwellings, but about one-fourth of the housing was dormitory style. Only about three-fourths of the buildings had heat and plumbing, while nearly all had electricity. Laundry facilities were found in only about 20 percent of the camps. In general, migrant housing had considerably less plumbing, heat, interior finish and space than the seasonal housing studied. Relative

isolation of camp housing was measured by distance to selected services; only 60 percent were three miles or less from the nearest town.

There was considerable variation in the structural quality of camp housing, but nationally almost half the camps had at least one building where residents were exposed to wind and rain by large holes or cracks in the structure. Overcrowding was common as well. Nationally, 62 percent of camps exceeded their legal capacity. Only in California was occupancy found to be at or below the capacity norm. Except along the West Coast, camps had no more than an average of 75 square feet of living space per person, well below acceptable norms for conventional housing.

Because of difficulties in identifying non-camp housing occupied by farmworkers rather than by persons doing other kinds of work, the study focused on camp housing and did not attempt to estimate numbers of non-camp units existing or needed. It was unable to collect some other types of useful information as well. For example, household interviews were banned in order to avoid interfering with the 1980 Census, so researchers had to collect all information by observation only, and therefore could not effectively determine household income or amounts paid for housing.

To estimate farmworker housing need, this study used only the capacity of farmworker camps and only the needs of migrant farmworkers. These limitations were necessary because of sampling difficulties, the generally short supply of rural rental housing, and the impossibility of identifying seasonal workers and non-camp units as distinct parts of local populations and local housing stocks. The estimate considered the existing supply of housing in farm labor camps, determined numbers of units that were adequate or needed rehabilitation, and calculated the unmet housing demand. The study also estimated categories of demand based on family composition and home base or in-stream need. Total unmet demand was estimated to be 756,196 units nationwide. The study figured that the cost of meeting this demand by rehabilitation and new construction would be over \$2 billion.

While the National Farmworker Housing Study was completed many years ago and was subject to certain methodological problems, its calculation of nearly 800,000 migrant camp units needed remains the only systematic determination of national farmworker housing need. There is no reason to believe the need identified in 1980 has decreased over the years; indeed, the state and local studies described below indicate that both camp and non-camp housing still suffer serious problems.

National Agricultural Workers Survey

The National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS), undertaken annually by the U.S. Department of Labor, is the most complete and current national survey of farmworkers. It provides some very limited housing data, but not of the scope included in the 1980 National Farmworker Housing Study. It focuses on a different part of the farmworker population than the 1980 study, using terminology and definitions not equivalent to those of other studies or farmworker assistance programs.

Before 1992, NAWS included only currently employed workers performing Seasonal Agricultural Services (SAS), a concept that encompasses work with most nursery products, cash grains, field crops and fruits and vegetables, but not work in silage or crops exclusively

for animal fodder. Since 1992, it has covered persons working in all crops. NAWS researchers have determined that the change in coverage had no significant effect on the data.

The NAWS survey includes field packers and supervisors, but not mechanics or secretaries. It includes several categories of workers: 1) U.S. citizens (by birth or naturalization), 2) foreign nationals who have become U.S. legal permanent residents (green card holders), 3) workers granted temporary residency through one of IRCA's legalization programs, 4) other work-authorized foreign nationals and 5) unauthorized workers, including all foreign nationals not granted work authorization by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS).⁶

NAWS provides information on the characteristics and work patterns of crop workers. It is the only annual survey to focus on this population, and is designed to be representative of them. NAWS annually interviews a stratified probability sample of over 2,000 farmworkers representing 12 USDA-designated agricultural regions. The sample is drawn by contacting a random sample of employers. Workers are interviewed away from their work site and are asked for a variety of demographic, employment and earnings information. NAWS is a rich source of this information from which proportions of characteristics of the farmworker population can be extrapolated. It is a small sample, and subject to the limitations of small sample size. Because of the small sample size, the data cannot be analyzed at the state level for most states; California is the only state for which NAWS has published a detailed report. NAWS does not estimate numbers of workers. It does provide information about the proportion of workers who are accompanied by families at the work site.⁷

Information about farmworkers' housing is limited to three questions on type and location, and does not include quality or dollar cost. It is summarized below and is presented more fully in Appendix B. Methodological problems limit the usefulness of the three questions asked. Its response categories for the housing questions may lead to confusion and flawed results. Some of the findings based on these questions must be discounted. For example, in contrast to many studies and the preponderance of anecdotal information, the NAWS housing data from 1992 to 1993 show less than 1 percent homeless, a proportion too small for statistical reliability in this study.

In data gathered in 1992 and 1993, 29 percent of NAWS respondents reported getting their housing from their employer, either free or with a charge, while 46 percent reported renting from someone other than their employer. Workers in the eastern part of the United States (not including Florida) and migrants were more likely to have their housing provided by their employer. Data published in 1993 indicated that 22 percent of farmworkers used employer-provided housing, 19 percent for themselves only and just 3 percent for themselves and their families.⁸ Seventy percent of the 1992-1993 sample reported living off-farm in housing neither owned nor administered by their employer. Nonmigrants, those with higher incomes and workers in the west were more likely to live off farm in housing neither owned nor administered by their employer.

Twenty-one percent of the sample reported that they owned the home they were living in while working for their current employer. Fifty-nine percent reported that they lived in a house. Nonmigrants, those accompanied by family and those in the western part of the U.S.

(plus Florida) were more likely to live in a house.

While NAWS researchers have not published a study focusing on housing, each year they have produced a report emphasizing some particular aspect of the NAWS data. These published reports provide useful information about the farmworker population including, for example, an indication of IRCA's effect on the farm labor force. IRCA included special provisions for the legalization of farmworkers who had done agricultural work for 90 days between May 1985 and May 1986. Because IRCA made employers responsible for hiring legal, work-authorized persons, it had been hoped that its effect would be to stabilize the labor market and reduce illegal immigration. Right after passage, immigration numbers seemed to stabilize, but recent data show that instead the effect has been an increase in undocumented workers and a thriving market in false documents.⁹ In 1989, 17 percent of migrant farmworkers reported being undocumented, but this increased to 23 percent in 1990 and 26 percent in 1991.¹⁰ By 1993, an abundant supply of workers had destabilized the market and pushed real wages and living conditions downward.¹¹

Another NAWS report summarized data collected in 1989, 1990 and 1991. It reported that 40 percent of respondents had been born in the United States. Median age of the workers was 31, and only 11 percent were 50 or older. Fifty-eight percent of the workers were married, but only 40 percent were accompanied by children, spouses or parents while working. Nearly half of all the farmworkers interviewed had incomes below the poverty line, while fully 77 percent of the undocumented workers lived in poverty.¹²

A 1994 NAWS report analyzed the migrant worker portion of the sample, defining migrant workers as persons who traveled more than 75 miles to obtain a job in agriculture, without regard to specific crossing of geographic boundaries. Median annual income for these migrant workers was only \$5,000 for the sample interviewed from 1989 to 1991. They did more than half the short-term jobs and comprised 42 percent of the farm labor force. To estimate the number of migrant SAS workers, this study began with an estimate of 2.5 million farmworkers nationwide calculated by the 1993 U.S. Commission on Agricultural Workers, a special commission established under IRCA to evaluate the law's effect on agriculture. Of the 2.5 million total, NAWS researchers estimated that 1.6 million workers perform Seasonal Agricultural Services, and then figured the absolute number of migrant SAS workers in the U.S. at 670,000.¹³

Current Population Survey

Some additional periodic information about farmworkers is available from the Current Population Survey (CPS) conducted by the Bureau of the Census for a variety of purposes, including for employment information used by the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the U.S. Department of Labor. The CPS reports employment information in standard occupational categories, so it can identify different kinds of farm work, from field hands to managers, but is not concerned with housing data and does not collect information about workers' families.

Each month a sample of about 57,000 households in all 50 states is interviewed. The data is reported at the national level. As a sample survey, the CPS is subject to its small size limitations and to sampling error. Because it is a household survey, it is likely to undercount migrants. Researchers who have used its data say they believe it undercounts Hispanics. It

misses young farm laborers as well, because employment information is published only for persons age 16 and older. It has the advantage, however, of collecting data frequently.

Researchers aggregating CPS occupational category information have concluded that the 1993 CPS counted an annual average of 803,000 hired and contracted farm laborers, but this figure concealed very high peaks of employment during harvest times. These researchers determined that CPS data showed hired farmworkers were more likely to be young, male, Hispanic and have limited education than other wage and salary workers. ¹⁴

Hired Farmworker Reports

Through 1987, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service (ERS) produced regular reports on the agricultural work force, using CPS data. ERS defined hired farmworkers as persons aged 14 and over who had done farm work for cash wages or salaries at any time during the previous year. For analysis, it divided hired farmworkers into four categories: 1) casual workers, who did less than 25 days of farm work per year, 2) seasonal workers, who worked from 25 to 149 days of farm work per year, 3) regular workers, who worked from 150 to 249 days and 4) year-round workers who did farm work more than 250 days per year, ¹⁵ or into two categories, those who worked less than 150 days and those who worked 150 days and more. These categories did not correspond to the general concept of seasonal farmworkers as those who work for some part of the year, and did not distinguish migrant farmworkers from non-migrants. ERS reports included more types of farm work than some other definitions.

These categories did not correspond to the general concept of seasonal farmworkers as those who work for some part of the year, and did not distinguish migrant farmworkers from non-migrants. ERS reports included more types of farm work than some other definitions.

In 1987, ERS reported that about 7.7 million people worked on U.S. farms at some point during the year, and about 2.5 million persons were hired farmworkers. Under the ERS definitions based on number of days worked, 35 percent of hired workers were casual workers, 33 percent were seasonal workers, and 32 percent were regular and year-round workers. Information on demographics such as race, on regional location and on employment and earnings were reported for hired workers, as well as for farm operators and unpaid farmworkers. The data did not identify migrant workers, and the report warned that it was a better count of domestic workers than of aliens working in the United States. ¹⁶

This series of reports has been discontinued, although the CPS data on which they were based is still available.

Farm Labor Reports

The National Agricultural Statistics Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture produces quarterly reports on farm labor by state and region, using yet another set of definitions. Hired workers include field workers, livestock workers, supervisors and other workers (those who do agricultural work not included in most other definitions, like bookkeepers and pilots). This is a broader definition than most for seasonal farmworkers with respect to the types of work included. Unlike most definitions, however, this one omits workers hired by

"crew leaders." They are termed "service workers," and the NASS *Farm Labor* reports provide data separately for them. NASS does not identify migrant workers separately.

NASS data is obtained by contacting samples of farm operators, so probably undercounts workers employed by farm labor contractors. The reports estimate a relative sampling error of between 10 and 20 percent. These reports do not give demographic characteristics of the workers or housing information. Since the information is gathered from employers rather than workers, it may be more likely to include those undocumented workers who would avoid enumerators. NASS's advantage is its frequency of data collection, but it is subject to sampling limitations.

NASS's *Farm Labor* reports provide numbers of workers, hours worked, wages and type of work for hired, self-employed and unpaid workers. They separate figures for those expected to be employed more or less than 150 days. During the week of July 11-17, 1994, a total of 1,047,000 hired workers and 341,000 service workers were identified. The hired workers earned an average of \$6.21 per hour; national average wages for service workers were not reported. Housing was provided as a benefit to 19 percent of all hired workers; no comparable information was reported for service workers.¹⁷

Census of Population and Housing

The decennial Census of Population and Housing conducted by the U.S. Bureau of the Census is intended to be a complete national enumeration of persons and households, but at present does not provide any clear data on farmworker housing. Its sample count does ask respondents' occupations, but methodological problems limit its usefulness for studying farmworkers.

The Census contacts households to obtain information. It uses the mail to contact people initially, so can omit persons who do not have an address. The 1990 Census did attempt to contact homeless persons, but the Census Bureau has admitted that the resulting count is not accurate. Those who are contacted, by mail or otherwise, are asked to fill out a written questionnaire. As noted above, written surveys are unlikely to be successful with persons with poor literacy or English language skills, a description that includes many in the largely Latino/a farmworker population. Census questionnaires and follow-up visits were available in Spanish in 1990, but were not distributed as widely or available as easily as necessary.

Those who do receive and respond to Census forms may receive either a short form, intended to be answered by every household in the country and therefore resulting in a "100-percent count," or a long form that includes additional questions and in 1990 was collected from a sample of about 17 percent of households. The long form includes questions about income and about occupation in the week immediately before Census Day, April 1. Since this is a low point of the year for seasonal farm work, many of the workers are either doing some other work or out of the country at Census time, and are not counted as agricultural workers. The long form questions about current or most recent job activity ask for the employer, kind of business, kind of work and duties. The Census Bureau then records this in various reports related to standard occupational classifications (the same categories used by the CPS), leaving it to the user to select the occupational codes that most closely match the user's needs. The Census does distinguish between farm and off-farm self-employment annual income, but does not separate farm from off-farm annual wage

income, so it impossible to tell if farm work is the principal occupation of a wage earner.

For these reasons, and others related to a general rural undercount, the Census is widely regarded as seriously undercounting farmworkers. Department of Agriculture researchers have determined that the 1990 Census counted 1,099,000 persons who could be considered hired farmworkers under the broad definition used in USDA's ERS *Hired Farmworker Reports*,¹⁸ but this figure is probably too low. Also, no figure on farmworker dependents is available in published Census information.

It is unfortunate that these methodological problems limit use of using existing Census data to study migrant and seasonal farmworkers because the Census is conducted nationwide and on a single day (although follow-up visits take several months), giving a point-in-time enumeration. The Census collects a great deal of information about demographic, housing and economic characteristics that could be helpful in determining needs of farmworkers and their dependents. It collects information such as race and ethnicity, language spoken, level of education, household composition, income, and availability of transportation to work.

Census data on housing is limited, however. It includes figures on the cost of housing and the proportion of income spent for housing, but it does not collect much information about housing quality. The long form includes questions about presence of plumbing facilities, presence of kitchen facilities, and overcrowding, but none about physical housing defects such as leaking roofs, exposed electrical wiring, lack of heat, or the like. This information gap is compounded by the fact that plumbing and overcrowding data are reported for occupied units only, while kitchen data are reported only for total units, including both occupied and vacant units. Seasonal farm labor camps are not likely to be occupied on April 1 in most of the United States.

More information on physical housing defects is reported by the American Housing Survey (AHS), conducted every two years by the Census Bureau and the Department of Housing and Urban Development and thus also providing more timely data than the decennial Census. The AHS has limitations as well, however. Its focus is the housing unit, rather than the household. While it includes quality, cost and age of the structure, and does report age, sex and some racial information about householders, it does not aggregate information by employment of the householder, so cannot currently be used to learn about the housing situations of migrant and seasonal farmworkers. Also, because it is a sample, it is subject to sampling errors.

For the same reason, AHS data can be aggregated only for large geographic areas. The AHS provides data for the entire United States, for urban/rural and metropolitan/nonmetropolitan areas nationwide, and for four major regions of the country (Northeast, Midwest, South and West). The Census, on the other hand, collects data for small geographic units, so it provides information about the occupants of individual states, counties, and even very small towns.

Migrant Health Program Atlas

Another recent estimate of the number of farmworkers in the country, and their dependents, was prepared by the Migrant Health Program of the Public Health Service of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in *An Atlas of State Profiles which Estimate Number of Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers and Members of Their Families*.¹⁹ The

Atlas compiled information from 41 states and Puerto Rico in which there is Migrant Health Program activity. Its purpose was to provide estimated numbers of workers and dates of activity to facilitate planning for services and to evaluate the extent to which Migrant Health programs are reaching their target population.

The Migrant Health Program serves both migrant and seasonal workers and their families. Section 329 of the Public Health Service Act defines a migratory agricultural worker as an individual whose principal employment is in agriculture on a seasonal basis, who has been so employed within the past 24 months and who establishes a temporary abode for the purpose of that employment. A seasonal agricultural worker is an individual whose principal employment is in agriculture on a seasonal basis and who is not a migratory agricultural worker. Agriculture is interpreted to exclude those working in the fishing, lumber, dairy, cattle or poultry industries and those working in food processing unless the processing is performed on a farm in conjunction with production, cultivation, growing, and harvesting of a commodity grown on the land. The exclusion of off-farm processing is significant, because much processing is seasonal work done by migrant workers. Also, some kinds of processing are done sometimes on the farm and sometimes elsewhere. Persons doing essentially the same work, therefore, may not have equal program eligibility.

Noting the difficulties of counting transient populations, definitional problems and the lack of a comprehensive and reliable national source of regularly updated quantitative information on migrant farmworkers, the *Atlas* was based on estimates from each state of how many migrant and seasonal farmworkers were present there. Methods for reaching those estimates varied by state, but followed generic parameters. For each state, major crops using migrant and seasonal farmworkers were located geographically by the expected seasonal dates and numbers of workers (demand for labor) needed in each place. Crops were grouped into three categories: fruits and nuts, vegetables and field crops. Data were gathered in 1987 to 1989. Adjustments were made to the individual state profiles for consistency because the methods differed.

The *Atlas* presented the populations of migrant, seasonal and total farmworkers, including family members, for each county in the states for which information was provided. Aggregate national tables were also included. The estimation procedure calculated numbers of workers needed in multiple locations, so the 4,171,419 population total intentionally overcounted individuals. Persons who worked in more than one location, and their families, were counted in each location they were estimated to work. The *Atlas* presentation did not separate workers from nonworking dependents. One would need to go back to the individual state sources for that data.

Because the Migrant Health Program does not have a housing component, the *Atlas* did not include housing information. Its count could be useful in estimating housing need, however, when supplemented with information from other sources about housing actually available in specific areas. Migrant workers and their families need housing in all the locations where they work, so the intentional overcount presented does reflect the size and location of the population to be housed.

Migrant Enumeration Project

A study done for Migrant Legal Services (MLS) programs in 1993 expanded the Migrant

Health Program *Atlas's* methodology to estimate numbers of workers in all 50 states.²⁰ Migrant Legal Services help protect the rights of migrant workers who often are disadvantaged in claiming their legal rights because of their migrancy. The program is interested in the numbers of workers and their dependents in each location where they are employed so that Migrant Legal Services can allocate resources appropriately.

The MLS Migrant Enumeration Project defined as a migrant anyone who, while employed in seasonal agricultural labor during the last year, could not return to his/her normal residence at night. Seasonal activities included: 1) hand labor, 2) grading, sorting, packing or processing agricultural produce, 3) working in nurseries or greenhouses or 4) tree planting and thinning. Seasonal work in fishing, dairies, poultry or eggs or working with other animals was excluded. Migrants could be interstate, intrastate or home-based.

The MLS's Migrant Enumeration Project used the formula
$$DFL = W \times S$$

$$DFL = W \times S$$

where DFL means demand for labor

A = crop acreage

H = hours needed per acre of the crop

W = work hours per farmworker per day during peak activity

S = season length for peak work activity

Results from NAWS were used to estimate what percent of migrants were accompanied by family members by labor region and the number of dependents in such households. This procedure yielded a combined estimate of the total national migrant labor pool and dependents in 1993 at 3,036,432. California had the most, 700,233, followed by Texas, Florida, Washington and Michigan. The project's report did not list separate figures for workers and dependents. Like the *Migrant Health Atlas*, the Migrant Legal Services enumeration overcounted persons by counting jobs in multiple locations. It provided no information besides the numerical estimates.

Selected State and Local Studies

Oregon The state of Oregon has gross farm sales of over \$2.6 billion annually in a wide variety of agricultural commodities including fruits, nuts, vegetables and specialty crops. More information is available about the housing conditions of Oregon's estimated 150,000 seasonal farmworkers and family members than in many states. Recent studies there included a statewide survey of labor camp housing and an unrepresentative sample of non-camp housing in 1990, a 1993 sample of employers and workers in one of the state's primary farming regions, and a 1993 point-in-time census of farmworkers and their families in a single county.

The first, a 1990 housing survey conducted by CASA of Oregon under contract with the Oregon Housing Agency in response to a legislative mandate, is one of the few statewide studies of farmworker housing.²¹ It included measurements of quality as well as quantity. CASA found 382 labor camps of employer-provided housing in 13 counties, and was refused access to 26 of those camps. About 4 percent of the units in the 356 camps surveyed

were in very poor condition. Only about 8 percent were equipped with all of the facilities required by the Oregon Occupational Safety and Health Division Code and were rated as in very good condition. The surveyed camps had capacity for 11,689 persons, but when CASA used known occupancy information to extrapolate probable actual occupancy it determined there were likely to be 20,500 persons living in these camps.

CASA reported that "although there is evidence that the housing is occupied by many more persons than it has the capacity to house legally, it is apparent that the vast majority of farmworkers and their families do not live in labor camps." Like the 1980 National Farmworker Housing Study, however, CASA faced methodological problems in sampling off-camp housing, so its sample was not necessarily statistically representative. The study surveyed private rental housing in six counties, and included 1,469 units occupied by 8,971 farmworkers, 88 percent of whom were living in families. Of these units, 83 percent were apartments or houses, and 14 percent were mobile homes. Surveyors found overcrowding and disrepair. Thirty-nine percent of units had more than four persons per bedroom, and 27 percent of units were in very poor condition. Only 35 percent of units were rated in very good condition. CASA concluded that their findings suggested "widespread noncompliance with the Oregon Residential Landlord and Tenant Act."

Average rent for off-camp housing was \$187 for a one-bedroom unit, \$267 for a two-bedroom unit and \$291 for a three-bedroom unit. Compared to the low incomes typical of farmworkers (NAWS found that half of all farmworkers earned less than \$7,500 per year, and half the families had incomes below the poverty level, even though most families had more than one worker), these rent levels are burdensome and encourage doubling up of farmworker families.

Further information about farmworkers in one of Oregon's important farming regions was provided by a case study conducted for the U.S. Commission on Agricultural Workers in 1993, which included surveys of 87 employers and 144 workers in four crops in the Willamette Valley and the Hood River Valley.²² About half of Oregon's farms are in the 10 counties of the Willamette Valley, where there are 29,233 farm jobs. This study was focused on the specified crops, but gave overall information about agriculture in the Willamette Valley. It included survey data, secondary data sources and qualitative methods in order to describe the farm labor force in particular crops and a particular area.

The case study found a prevalence of workers returning year after year to the same operations, and linked that phenomenon with the prevalence of owners who are also farm managers. When owners are also managers they are likely to have closer relationships to their workers and may recruit them directly, rather than contracting for labor through a third party.

This study examined housing as a labor benefit, without considering its quality, and found wide variation among growers. Housing was provided to workers (including year-round workers) by 6 percent of employers in nursery crops, 16 percent of employers in Christmas trees, 65 percent of strawberry growers and all of the pear orchard owners. These differences were not linked to wages, as average hourly wages were reported at \$4.85 in the nursery industry, \$5.67 in Christmas trees, \$5.59 in strawberries and \$7.76 in pears.

Different, but consistent, types of information about farmworker housing in one Willamette

Valley county were obtained by a local study.²³ Recognizing the importance of farm labor to their agricultural industry, Marion County formed a task force that identified two areas for action. First, researchers conducted a point-in-time census to determine actual numbers of farmworkers and their families. Volunteers were recruited and a public information campaign explained their purposes. Direct counts were made by visiting registered labor camps, the Migrant Education Program, homeless shelters, parks and areas under bridges twice during the year. Although the process had statistical flaws, it could be deemed reasonably accurate.

In June, Marion County's census counted 9,188 adults and 2,570 children. By November, the population had dropped 34 percent, to 5,720 adults and 2,998 children. These numbers can be compared with labor camp capacity in the county, as identified by the CASA study, of 1,268 persons. Clearly, most migrants must find housing in the private market, or go unsheltered. But it would be difficult for any small housing market to absorb several thousand persons for short periods of time.

This kind of special count is possible only with a large and well-organized volunteer effort, or ample funding, so it probably can be done only in some local areas. The effort itself, however, adds popular credibility to the numbers and focuses public attention on the farm labor population. It could be used to aid acceptance of farm labor housing and services in the community.

A second project identified by the Marion County task force was to provide more housing and demonstrate development of unique types of grower-provided farm labor housing under the county's temporary farmworker housing ordinance, which relaxes housing code standards for units occupied six months or less during the year. This ordinance allows only farmers, not farm labor contractors, to operate farmworker housing. Six types of housing were used, ranging from tent-like structures on platforms similar to temporary housing used by the forest service, at a total development cost of \$1,250 per housed worker, to manufactured homes costing \$5,500 per occupant to develop, to permanent, multi-use structures costing \$5,000 per occupant. As a result of this project, housing for 120 additional unaccompanied workers was provided in the county. Growers were frustrated by the number of agencies that were involved and that the rules kept changing during the process of development. The size of septic systems required was also an issue; the state environmental quality agency wanted capacity for year-round occupancy, an added cost that was waived only with special monitoring provisions.

Michigan

A 1993 study for the Commission on Agricultural Workers found variations in farmworker housing in southwestern Michigan like those in Oregon, including a significant proportion of labor camp units in very poor condition.²⁴ Michigan is a major user of both migrant and seasonal farmworkers, especially for fruits and vegetables. It attracts workers from both the Midwest and Eastern migrant streams. Because there are multiple crops, it is possible for workers to piece together an extended season of work within the state. This far north on the migrant stream, availability of housing can be an important incentive.

The Migrant Health Program's *Atlas* estimated Michigan's total migrant and seasonal

population of farmworkers and their dependents as 67,227, while the Migrant Legal Services estimated the migrant labor pool and dependents at 159,668 persons. Like the varying national counts summarized above, this discrepancy illustrates the difficulty of obtaining a definitive count.

The 1993 Michigan study gathered data from interviews with farmers, farmworkers, crew leaders and informed observers in Berrien and Van Buren Counties. It described that area of southwestern Michigan as one dominated by small farms with mixed crops. The traditional labor force there, families based in Texas who returned regularly, is being replaced by unaccompanied Hispanic males (now 28 percent of the work force), often coming from Florida.

Employer-provided housing was found to be the norm in this area, and there were few affordable alternatives. The quality of farmworker housing varied tremendously, with one quarter of the labor camps providing, according to the report, "shockingly sub-standard living conditions."²⁵ The four basic types of housing found were trailers, cabins (shacks), motel-style apartments and detached housing. The worst housing was found to be provided by the largest producers (more likely larger camps with capacity for 100 or more, and housing more single workers) and by farm labor contractors. In the larger camps there were problems with sanitation and the physical quality of the structures and there were social problems growing out of overcrowding and poor facilities. The study's authors described life in smaller camps as similar to that in Mexican villages or in Texas colonias.

Further, housing that once was provided free now usually carried a utility fee or rental charge. The mean monthly charges were found to be \$40 for employer-provided, rent-free housing, \$119 for a family paying rent to their employer and \$154 for a family in public migrant housing. Some of the employers who charged rent did so to recover some costs of recently built good housing. Pickle producers estimated that the cost of providing housing amounts to 20 to 30 percent of their labor costs.

This study did not use measurements of housing quality or of capacity relative to labor force size. Researchers did, however, conclude that the highest priority need in the southwest Michigan region is a program to provide decent housing for family migrants. Here again, observed need seemed to exceed quantified data. Nevertheless, a review of state housing documents from Michigan found very little reference to migrant and seasonal farmworker housing. One report acknowledged that housing for migrant farmworkers is "limited or non-existent," and that seasonal farmworkers form a large part of the rural poor.²⁶

New York And Pennsylvania

Like the labor force in southwestern Michigan, the apple work force in New York and Pennsylvania is mixed and changing. Three primary production areas, the mid-Hudson Valley, western New York and south central Pennsylvania, were studied for the Commission on Agricultural Workers.²⁷ Twenty-five growers and 80 workers were interviewed, as well as knowledgeable observers.

The workers came from Mexico (28 percent), Jamaica (28 percent), the U.S. mainland (25 percent) and other Central American and Caribbean birthplaces. Thirty-one percent were

citizens, 23 percent were green card holders and 19 percent were non-immigrant alien workers in the H-2A program of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. (Most of the H-2As worked in the Mid-Hudson Valley.) Only about 14 percent lived in New York or Pennsylvania year round. Over 40 percent each were U.S.-based migrants or returned to other nations. Eighty-four percent were traveling without families; H-2A workers must travel without families.

This study found that 89 percent of the workers lived in grower-provided housing. Labor camps were small, on-farm clusters of houses, trailers and dormitories. Under the H-2A program, employers are required to provide free housing, inspected by the U.S. Department of Labor. Researchers were told that inspections of non-H-2A labor camps were more lax than those of the H-2A camps. The report described the housing as varying "from grim to quite acceptable," but did not include quality measures. Fifty-six percent of farmworkers questioned said their housing was better than other farmworker housing they had seen.

Affordability apparently was not a problem. Free housing was reported as the norm among New York apple growers, while Pennsylvania growers often charged a modest fee for housing.

Most recently built housing in Pennsylvania was dormitory style. Farmers Home Administration farmworker housing loan and grant programs were being used to build, buy or remodel units in the area, but they were mostly for year-round housing despite the relatively larger number of migrant workers. The study did not compare numbers of units available to total demand in order to estimate need, however.

Because these apple-growing areas are close to urban areas, housing may be more subject to scrutiny, and workers may have more alternatives than in other areas. The relatively small sample and the sampling frame used may not be fully representative of the whole apple labor population, and certainly not of all the migrant and seasonal labor in New York and Pennsylvania. It is also possible that the active involvement of farmworker advocates like the nonprofit Rural Opportunities, Inc. helped to encourage better conditions for the housing here than in other places the farmworkers work.

California

California employs more farmworkers than any other state, but little data is available on the housing conditions of its farmworker population. A NAWA report was published on California farmworkers, but did not provide housing data. A recent study of one segment of the state's farmworker population -- Mixtecs from Mexico -- confirmed the existence of serious housing problems in California, and illustrated some of the problems faced by any group of new immigrants to this country.

California leads the nation in value of agricultural production and is the largest home base state for migrant workers. Its size and its location adjacent to Mexico and at the base of the Western stream make the state a starting point of farmworker trends. Its border with Mexico provides a constant source of new immigrants, and 92 percent of its crop workers report that they were born outside the United States.²⁸ Its climate and soils can produce high-value, labor-intensive fresh and specialty crops that have been an increasing part of the state's agricultural production. Large farms that hire many workers dominate California agricultural

production.

Attempts to count farmworkers in California have yielded widely varying figures. Since new workers with or without documentation come into the state regularly across the Mexican border, and since agricultural labor is often the entry occupation for new immigrants, it would be virtually impossible to provide an exact count of the farmworker population. In 1986, the California Employment and Development Department reported 214,500 hired farmworkers.²⁹ In 1990, California Unemployment Insurance data showed an annual average of 424,000 agricultural employees,³⁰ but this average masks peaks during harvest times. The Migrant Health Program estimated 426,831 migrant farmworkers and dependents in California and 935,703 seasonal workers and dependents, a total of 1,362,534.³¹ Under the Special Agricultural Worker (SAW) legalization program of IRCA, 700,000 applicants reported a California address.³²

The NAWS survey (whose California sample was large enough to prepare a separate state report) found that workers in California were young, with a median age of 32 years.³³ U.S. citizens had the oldest average age, and unauthorized workers the youngest. Nine out of ten were Hispanic, and two-thirds were married. Sixty percent of the workers were accompanied by family members. One-half of all California farmworkers earned less than \$10,000 per year. They were not necessarily migrants: 78 percent said they were not willing to travel beyond daily commuting. Only 18 percent lived in employer-provided housing, and less than 10 percent got this housing free for themselves or for their families. Among those who worked for farm labor contractors, 20 percent got their housing from their employers, but these were likely to be among the least settled workers.

Some of California's worst housing conditions, along with other problems, are experienced by Mixtecs from the region around Oaxaca, Mexico. They arrive in California after first doing agricultural work in northwest Mexico. In many ways they illustrate the dynamics of the insertion of a new ethnic group into the agricultural labor force. They come from very poor areas where human rights abuses have been documented by international agencies. Because they are unfamiliar with U.S. standards and not empowered to complain, and because they are an indigenous people who often do not speak English or Spanish, they can be exploited by farmers and farm labor contractors.

A 1990 California study that used ethnographic, survey and historical data showed that the Mixtec workers were at the bottom rung of the agricultural labor force ladder, and often accepted the worst wages and working conditions.³⁴ This study included a survey of 131 Mixtecs in California, which found that, in comparison to a similar sample of California agricultural workers, Mixtecs had lower wages and more different jobs, and paid their employers more for transportation to work. Eight percent were homeless, 39 percent lived in labor camps and 53 percent lived in rental rooms, apartments and houses. The privately run labor camps in which some of them live were described as

crowded, dilapidated, dorm-style structures where it was not uncommon for a hundred men to share a few outhouses and showers, insufficient kitchen facilities, and generally unsanitary conditions . . . Those living in town in rental housing were not much better off. Many small rural towns have become

farmworker enclaves, characterized by run-down housing, capital flight, and other features associated with inner-city slums. During the peak season for farm work, rooms are rented to as many farmworkers as can fit on the floor. It is common to see fifteen or so men sleeping in a garage filled with bunk beds, or on the floor covered with cardboard in lieu of mattresses.

In addition, makeshift encampments were estimated to house from 5,000 to 14,000 migrant workers in San Diego County alone.

[Back to table of contents](#)

Related Issues

This section explores a number of factors that may help explain why many farmworkers currently experience poor housing, and may need to be taken into account in future work on this issue. These factors have been alluded to in the above and other studies, but not researched methodically.

Local Rental Housing

Seasonal farmworkers, who commute to their work but are not employed in farmwork year-round, need year-round housing for themselves and their families in a single community. Finding decent, affordable housing is difficult, however, as some of the studies summarized above make clear. Most seasonal farmworkers have very low and irregular incomes, and most rural communities have little rental housing.

Migrant farmworkers face even worse problems in local housing markets. As studies such as those performed in Oregon and California demonstrate, migrant workers who do not have employer-provided housing -- especially workers accompanied by families -- usually look to the local private rental market. Local rental stocks are not available for brief, large influxes of renters, however. (For that reason, the 1980 Farmworker Housing Study omitted private rental housing stock in its unmet needs calculation.) This gap between supply and demand enables owners to charge high rents, requiring many individuals to share units in order to afford them, or forces migrants into literal homelessness. It is often difficult for any low income renter to pay damage and advance deposits.

An additional complication in farmworkers' use of off-farm housing is the not-in-my-backyard (NIMBY) syndrome. Local residents often raise strong objections when farmers or (usually nonprofit) developers plan to build new housing, especially for migrants.³⁵ Their biases may be based on discrimination against persons whose race or ethnicity and income are unlike their own or on the mistaken perception that all farmworker housing is overcrowded, noisy, and in poor condition. Their objections may force cancellation of projects, or cause expensive conditions to be placed on permits. In some towns developers have had to sue for permits that were denied because of bias. A farmer who wishes to remain on good terms with his or her neighbors is unlikely to fight them to house workers.

Despite these problems, local rental markets cannot be ignored in measuring and meeting farmworkers' housing need. Unless and until a policy determination is made that housing

should be set aside specifically for farmworkers, and the funding to carry out such a policy is provided, along with legal means to overcome local discrimination, farmworkers will reside in privately owned local market rental housing.

Family Well-being

Traveling together has both positive and negative effects on families. It keeps family members together. However, it interrupts children's education. (This may be somewhat offset by programs of the Migrant Education Program, including Headstart.) In many locations, there is not sufficient day care, and parents must bring children along to the fields where they may be exposed to the heat of the field, pesticides and lack of sanitation, and may do farm labor. In inadequate housing, children may be exposed to diseases related to poor sanitation and housing conditions. Treatment of illness and injuries may suffer the interruptions inherent in the migrant lifestyle.

The southwest Michigan study shows that growers who provide family housing encourage workers to migrate as families. Housing for unaccompanied workers is less expensive to build than family housing, however, and is currently more common in farm labor camps. In some areas, dormitory-style buildings that sleep many workers in large rooms, or even sheds, are the only housing available. Studies in Michigan and California have found that such housing is usually overcrowded and often has problems with worker unrest and disease. Large-room dormitories are not good housing for single workers, and are impossible for family life.

Family life is severely disrupted if workers travel alone but, at prevailing wage rates, even getting back home to family during the off season may be too expensive for unaccompanied workers. Return trips are particularly expensive for undocumented workers (who need to go through complex channels). Although some growers believe that family workers are a more stable work force, NAWS has reported that workers unaccompanied by families are becoming more common. This research did not locate any studies that documented family preference.

Policy decisions regarding housing for migrant farmworkers and their families must take into account these issues of family well-being that are closely related to housing. Some have argued that the best policy would be wages and housing programs sufficient to allow nonworking family members to live in home base areas, where they can be part of stable communities, year round.³⁶

Farm Labor Contractors

The role of farm labor contractors (FLCs) must be understood and included in farmworker housing policy. One entry into the farm labor market is through FLCs, who contract with producers to recruit, manage and pay employees directly. Since the passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, which held employers responsible for hiring only legally documented workers, use of the contractors has increased. Such use has been viewed as a way of relieving farmers of duties and responsibilities because the workers become employees of the FLC, although some recent enforcement efforts have held that growers cannot dodge their responsibilities so simply.³⁷

Some farm labor contractors have large operations, involving more than 100 workers. Others are small operators. Many were once field workers themselves, and have ties to networks that allow them to recruit new immigrants. They provide a valuable service of matching workers with jobs. In California, one of four workers in peak season was reported to work for a farm labor contractor.³⁸

FLCs must be licensed with the U.S. Department of Labor. Their license must state if they provide housing (which should be inspected) or other services like meals. Nationwide, less than 10 percent of FLCs are licensed to provide housing. Some promise housing as a recruitment incentive. A study of farm labor contractors in five major agricultural counties for the California Employment Development Department found that 11 percent provided housing with weekly charges ranging from \$12 to \$80, with some of these including meals. Other services provided included tools, transportation and check cashing.³⁹

The farm labor contractor system is particularly apt to abuse workers.⁴⁰ News items frequently tell of dangerous modes of transportation, failure to pay Social Security taxes, payment of less than minimum wages (in violation with their contracts with growers), very poor and overcrowded living conditions and control that may amount almost to penal servitude. Where housing, meals and other services are provided, workers may be overcharged and kept in debt to the contractor. There are not enough inspectors to enforce even the minimal labor standards applied to farmworkers, and workers often do not feel able to complain. Most studies (including those in California, Michigan, New York and Pennsylvania) that include farm labor contractors find that the housing they provide is among the poorest quality. NAWS and other studies have shown that workers employed by FLCs are among the newest immigrant entrants, with the fewest language skills and least support system to object to abusive treatment.

It is difficult to study the living conditions for these FLC employees, however, because all parts of the system tend to resist contact with researchers, outsiders and inspectors. Data sources like the farm labor studies of the U.S. Department of Agriculture that contact farmers may not capture information about workers who are employed by FLCs.

Health Concerns

A number of the poor health conditions suffered by farmworkers are directly attributable to, or worsened by, poor housing. Overcrowding, lack of plumbing or basic sanitation, lack of insulation or heating, lack of cooking or laundry facilities, broken windows and rodent infestation are followed by respiratory infections, gastrointestinal diseases, skin diseases, and emotional distress. Although policies have been established to deal with poor health conditions, studies show clearly that such conditions still exist, even in licensed camps.

In addition, harmful pesticide exposure remains a major concern for farmworkers. Exposure is most likely to occur in the fields, but it becomes a housing problem when housing is located near fields, and when washing and laundry facilities do not allow adequate clean-up. Children are especially vulnerable to the effects of pesticide exposure.

The hard physical labor, poverty, working and living conditions, exposure to pesticides and

lack of sanitation and health care combine to make the working life of seasonal farmworkers short. As noted above, NAWS in 1991 reported that only 16 percent of farmworkers were 45 years old or older, compared to 25.6 percent of the national labor force. When older workers leave field work, they are often disabled and without income resources. A Housing Assistance Council study in 1985 found that older and retired farmworkers' housing was reported to be poor or very poor in 80 percent of states.⁴¹ New Although there is no comprehensive national report of the health status of hired farmworkers, health professionals sometimes estimate workers' life spans to be about 20 years shorter than that of the general population.⁴²

Closing camps because of bad health conditions is not necessarily a solution, however, because that action may mean that no housing at all is available and affordable where it is needed. Usually, attempts are made to bring up the standards of existing camps, if responsible management can be found. Some areas, like Marion County, Oregon, have experimented with various types of grower-provided housing, which provide alternatives at varying costs.

Using data from its own sources, and after extensive hearings, the National Advisory Council on Migrant Health made expanded appropriations for the construction and subsidy of farmworker housing its first recommendation. It called for a Memorandum of Agreement between the United States Departments of Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, and Agriculture, as well as the Farmers Home Administration, to provide support for construction and Section 8 subsidies for farmworker housing. It recommended construction of 10,000 units per year for the next 10 years (although its report does not explain what method was used to derive that figure).⁴³

The Producer Perspective

Consideration of growers' perspectives is important in attempts to improve farmworker housing. Farmers have long participated in provision of housing for their workers. Provision of housing has been a recruitment and management device. Farmers also are a powerful voice in agricultural policy development.

In the past, growers provided housing for seasonal and migrant workers in labor camps of uneven quality.⁴⁴ Sometimes the buildings were converted chicken coops or sheds, and sometimes they were barracks-like buildings, into which were stuffed as many workers as the farmers needed. Water, cooking and sanitary facilities were often overwhelmed by demand. Some farmers provided good facilities, but their quality deteriorated quickly under the strain of overcrowding.

As was found in the Oregon, Michigan, New York and Pennsylvania and California studies discussed above, farmers still supply housing in many places. However, much of the grower-provided housing stock is now quite old.⁴⁵ Small farmers who are also farm operators may be close to the workers and provide some minimum level of humane treatment. The Michigan study found housing and working conditions at such small farms to be among the better on-farm conditions.⁴⁶ On-farm housing, however, usually is available only when there is work on that farm. Loss of a job for any reason also means loss of housing, so workers are especially controlled by their employer.

In California, employer-provided housing has been reported to have decreased by as much as 75 percent over the past ten years.⁴⁷ This phenomenon is probably occurring in other areas as well, for a variety of reasons. Agricultural production is a highly competitive business, with low profit margins and subject to the uncertainties of weather and markets. Even small additional costs may cause an enterprise to lose money, and good housing is costly. Some farmers object to being held responsible for their employee housing, because employers in other industries are not. Small farmers, especially, find dealing with multiple health and safety regulations burdensome, with the result that most are not investing in new or improved housing. Enforcement is spread so thinly as to seem capricious, with some well-intentioned farmers being penalized while others "get away with" terrible violations. For them, the burden of housing regulation is in addition to increasing regulation by increasing numbers of agencies of all aspects of farming. Some agricultural leaders, therefore, encourage farmers to get out of the business of supplying housing. The fact that housing can help attract workers is not important to growers in the current surplus labor market. Therefore, farmer resistance to supplying housing is one of the realities that has kept the quantity and quality of farmworker housing very low.

Nonprofit Development of Farmworker Housing A key policy question in improving farmworker housing is who should be responsible for providing such housing. Entities other than growers can have a positive role in providing affordable housing for farmworkers because the housing they develop is not dependent on a particular employer or crop. Nonprofit organizations have emerged as important developers of low-income housing in much of the rural United States. Because of the cost of producing housing, such projects are economically feasible primarily in areas where the work season is fairly long and the project income stream therefore relatively steady. Therefore most of the housing constructed recently has been built as year-round housing for seasonal farmworkers (many of whom meet the income qualifications of assisted housing programs not created specifically for farmworkers). Nonprofit organizations have also developed some housing for migrant workers.

No national enumeration of housing developed and or managed by nonprofits for migrant and seasonal farmworkers has been made, but the numbers are far from meeting the need. Some good quality farmworker housing has been developed using RHCDS's Section 514/516 loan and grant program, the only national source of funding dedicated to farmworker housing. The Housing Assistance Council calculates that a total of 28,059 units have been produced using Section 514/516 funds since the program's inception in 1962, including units produced by nonprofits, farmers and for-profit developers.⁴⁸

In short, nonprofits are a potentially useful alternative source of housing for farmworkers, but studies have not addressed their role. Nonprofit organizations with development and management capacity exist in some agricultural areas but not in others. Data is needed about the extent and effect of their role in providing farmworker housing. Factors that make for their success should be studied.

[Back to table of contents](#)

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite numerous anecdotal accounts across the nation and the years, migrant and seasonal farmworkers and their housing have received little systematic attention. Most of the national farmworker studies available did not intend to gather housing data. Although pieces of housing-related information can be gleaned from them, all leave important gaps, and much more work is needed to find the additional pieces to fill those holes.

The overall picture that emerges from the existing pieces is one of very low-income working people, about one-fifth to one-third of whom can live in housing provided by their grower or farm labor contractor employer. The majority seek housing in private markets usually unprepared for seasonal peaks of demand. A few find housing in government or nonprofit housing. There is not enough capacity to serve the whole population, especially in some locations where migrants work. Most, though not all, of the housing that is available is of low or very low quality. Overcrowding is common, and sanitary conditions range from good to very poor.

Most of the numbers fail to convey the shocking quality of housing that farmworkers are sometimes forced to accept because of their low incomes and the lack of short-term rental housing available to them. Many migrant workers simply are homeless between jobs and even while working in some areas. They live under bridges, in vehicles, in caves and cardboard boxes.

Two distinct sets of recommendations for further research emerge from this review of existing studies. First, as imperfect and incomplete as the existing national studies are, they document clearly a vast unmet need. We do not have to know whether the 1980 calculation of nearly 800,000 labor camp units needed nationwide should be revised in 1994 to one million units or to 500,000 units, and we do not have to know what precise number of non-camp units is needed, in order to know that farmworker families in Oregon are living in dilapidated buildings, that single Mixtec workers in California are crowded into garages, and that large numbers of farmworkers around the country live below the poverty line. Policy decisions can be made immediately to improve farmworker housing, and improvements can be begun, even without better data. Several policy-related pieces of research might be useful to inform such policy decisions. (The recommendations below are presented in no particular order of priority.)

1. Factors that make for success in siting and operating farmworker housing should be determined and publicized. Examples of successful local farmworker housing programs should be compiled. Local nonprofits and local governments need samples on which to base their plans for improving local conditions. Success stories can also be useful in combatting local NIMBY objections based on ignorance about farmworkers as neighbors.
2. The participation of nonprofits, growers, farmers, and grower associations in developing and operating farmworker housing should be examined. The number and location of such housing units should be determined, along with their condition, community acceptance, and success at meeting factors identified by research under Recommendation 1.
3. Current farmworker housing programs tend to focus on the needs of families,

but the NAWS surveys indicate the proportion of unaccompanied males in the farm labor force is increasing. The advisability of a shift in programmatic focus toward housing single workers in the migrant stream should be studied. Research on this point should include consideration of issues such as the types of services needed for single worker or family housing, and community attitudes towards each kind of housing.

4. The link between housing and the health of farmworkers and their families should be studied longitudinally and in depth. The costs of treating illness caused by unhealthful housing should be estimated.

5. The link between housing and the educational success of children of farmworkers should be studied.

6. Instructions about conducting reliable local studies of farmworker housing conditions and needs should be compiled to improve the use of existing resources. Decisions about local policies (including, perhaps, the adoption of ordinances such as the Marion County, Oregon, building code's special provisions for part-year housing) may depend on the existence of demonstrable need. Applications by local governments, local nonprofits, and growers for funding assistance under state and local programs as well as national programs like HOME and Section 514/516 must include proof of local need.

7. Standardized definitions of "farmworkers," "seasonal farmworkers," and "migrant farmworkers" should be developed and used by all federal programs concerned with farmworkers and their dependents. Such definitions should be broad so that, for example, assistance and research are not restricted to persons currently doing farm work or to persons with permanent work authorization.

8. Legislation at all levels of government -- federal, state, and local -- should be strengthened as necessary to prevent discrimination against migrant and seasonal farmworkers in all respects, including by local opponents of farmworker housing development. Existing anti-discrimination legislation should be enforced vigorously.

The second set of recommendations emerging from this review is aimed at producing better national data on farmworkers, their housing conditions, and their housing needs. Such data would be useful to those making decisions about appropriate funding levels for existing housing programs, about development of new programs and new partnerships with the varied governmental and private entities concerned with farmworker housing, and about linkage between housing and supportive services for farmworkers and their families.

9. While a number of these recommendations focus on national data-gathering efforts, it must be emphasized that farmworker housing need can be met only if the need is defined by location. Data should indicate not only what number of units is needed nationwide, or even what number is needed in Oregon, but also that a specific number of units is needed in Marion County during specific months for families of a specific variety of sizes, and a specific number during (perhaps different) specific months for single persons (taking into account the

like the Current Population Survey and the Census.

13. Farm labor contractors should be included in surveys that contact farmers for information about farmworkers.

14. States should be required to include farmworkers' housing needs in comprehensive state housing planning documents such as Consolidated Plans prepared for the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Some information can be gleaned from current state Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS) reports, but a 1993 analysis showed that only 15 states mentioned farmworkers as special needs populations, most with little detail.⁴⁹

15. State and federal farmworker housing efforts should collect and use information currently available through state occupational safety and health agencies, which license and inspect farmworker housing, and state employment agencies, which oversee registered employers.

[Back to table of contents](#)

fact that probably some of the single workers are men and some women).

10. Survey protocols should take account of the problems discussed above that are inherent in studying the farmworker population. For example, surveyors should speak the language of the population being surveyed, should have time available to assist persons who do not read, and should be able to locate and allay the fears of persons who do not wish to answer official questions. These considerations make studies more time-consuming and expensive than simple household questionnaires, but those additional resources should be made available in order to obtain useful data.

11. Existing enumerations should provide better identification of farmworkers and their characteristics. It might seem desirable to undertake a new nationwide study, or to add a farmworker sample to the American Housing Survey (see page 22), to quantify the existing supply of farmworker housing, the existing demand for it, and the gap between supply and demand. The cost of either study, however, might be prohibitive, and the necessary data can be gathered by improving existing ongoing studies instead.

a. NAWS housing questions on housing type and arrangements should be clarified and expanded to provide more useful data, such as physical quality of housing units, amounts paid for housing and their relationship to income, and number of persons sharing rooms and facilities.

b. For example, question 32 of the U.S. Census long form should be changed to separate farm wage income from other wage income so that seasonal farmworkers could be identified in the off season when the Census is conducted.

c. Additional changes to the decennial Census are needed to take advantage of its unique position as the only national point-in-time study and the only national study generating data that can be reported for geographic areas smaller than states. Better techniques must be available to find homeless persons, including migrating farmworkers, for inclusion in the Census. Better data on physical housing quality should be included. Varied types of seasonal units that are vacant on April 1 should be identified separately, so that vacant farm labor housing is not combined with vacant hunting cabins and luxury vacation homes, as is currently the case. At the same time, so long as the Census is conducted on April 1, it cannot be the perfect vehicle for gathering data on farmworkers. Since that is not peak season, and since a portion of the farmworker population (both with legal work status and without it) is not based in this country, it must be assumed that many farmworkers are not in the country to be counted on Census Day.

12. A standard occupational classification for seasonal agricultural work should be developed, consistent with the definition developed under Recommendation 7 above, with a separate category for migrant workers. This would enable researchers to identify farmworkers consistently in the data provided by sources

Fitting The Pieces Together: An Examination of Data Sources Related to Farmworker Housing

©Housing Assistance Council, 1996

Permission is granted ONLY to nonprofit community-based organizations to reproduce and/or adapt this document, and only for their own use.

This document best viewed using Netscape Navigator, with a monitor resolution of 800 x 600.

ENDNOTES

¹ U.S. Department of Labor, *Findings from the National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS) 1989, A Demographic and Employment Profile of Perishable Crop Farm Workers* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Program Economics, Research Report No. 2, 1992), p. 13; Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1990* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce, 1990).

² L. Whitener, *Counting Hired Farmworkers: Some Points to Consider* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, Agricultural Economic Report No. 524, 1993), p. 2.

³ Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs, *Partnerships: Helping Migrant Farmworkers Help Themselves, An Examination of the Employment, Training and Support Services Provided to Migrant Farmworkers During Program Years 1985 and 1986 by the Job Training Partnership Act, Title IV, Section 402 Grantees* (Washington, D.C., 1988), p. 7.

⁴ InterAmerica Research Associates, Inc., *National Farmworker Housing Study: Study of Housing for Migrant and Settled Farmworkers* (Rosslyn, Virginia: unpublished study for the Farmers Home Administration, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1980).

⁵ Migrant Education Programs in Loudonville, New York periodically publishes *Migrant News/Views*, a collection of newspaper articles from around the country. A sample of recently published items about farmworkers' poor housing conditions includes: Kathleen Beeman, "HUD May Ease Pressure on Migrant Housing," Tampa, Florida *Tribune*, March 12, 1994; Mike Di Marco, "Four Counties Join to Improve Farm Housing," Gilroy, California *Dispatch*, January 28, 1994; Editorial, "City Must Continue to Pursue Migrant Worker Housing Issue," Deming, New Mexico *Headlight*, January 11, 1994; Editorial, "County Must Tackle Migrant Housing Woes," Palm Springs, California *Desert Sun*, April 8, 1994; Editorial, "Rejection of Migrant Housing is Troubling," Fargo, North Dakota *Forum*, September 23, 1993; Wendy Fullerton, "Inspectors Find Rats, Hazardous Wiring, Plumbing," Ft. Myers, Florida *News-Press*, March 10, 1994; Jeanette Hyduke, "Scarce Migrant Housing Fuels Inquiry: Closure of Camp Puts Damper on Harvest," Riverside, California

Press-Enterprise, March 7, 1994; Kathy Kreiger, "Camp Owner, Attorneys at Odds Over Repairs," Santa Cruz, California *Sentinel*, February 20, 1994; Jim Reeder, "Towey Critiques Migrant Camps," The Palm Beach, Florida, *Post*, April 26, 1994; Sheila Sanchez, "County Examines Housing Needs of Farm Workers," Provo, Utah *Herald*, November 19, 1993.

⁶ U.S. Department of Labor, Research Report No. 2.

⁷ U.S. Department of Labor, *Findings from the National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS) 1990, A Demographic and Employment Profile of Perishable Crop Farm Workers* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Program Economics, Research Report No. 1, 1991), p. 1.

⁸ U.S. Department of Labor, *U.S. Farmworkers in the Post-IRCA Period, Based on Data from the National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS)* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Program Economics, Report No. 3, 1993), p. 35.

⁹ Report of the Commission on Agricultural Workers (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, O-332-456:Q-3, 1993); D. Villarejo and D. Runsten, *California's Agricultural Dilemma: Higher Production and Lower Wages* (Davis, California: California Institute for Rural Studies, 1993); C. Zabin, M. Kearney, A. Garcia, D. Runsten, and C. Nagengast, *A New Cycle of Poverty: Mixtec Migrants in California Agriculture* (Davis, California: California Institute for Rural Studies, 1993).

¹⁰ U.S. Department of Labor, *Migrant Farmworkers: Pursuing Security in an Unstable Labor Market* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Program Economics, Research Report No. 5, 1994), p. 19.

¹¹ U.S. Department of Labor, Research Report No. 3, p. 1.

¹² *Ibid.*, Chapter 1.

¹³ U.S. Department of Labor, Research Report No. 5, pp. 2 and 31.

¹⁴ V. Oliveira and L. Whitener, "A Review of Hired Farmworker Data Sources" (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, 1994, unpublished).

¹⁵ S.L. Pollack and W.R. Jackson, Jr., *The Hired Farm Working Force of 1981* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, Agricultural Economic Report No. 507, 1993).

¹⁶ V.C. Oliveira and E.J. Cox, *The Agricultural Work Force of 1987: A Statistical Profile* (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, Agricultural Economic Report No. 609, 1989).

¹⁷ National Agricultural Statistics Service, *Farm Labor* (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Agriculture, August 16, 1994).

¹⁸ Oliveira and Whitener.

¹⁹ Migrant Health Program, *An Atlas of State Profiles Which Estimate Number of Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers and Members of Their Families* (Rockville, Maryland: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, Health Resources and Services Administration, Bureau of Health Care Delivery and Assistance, Migrant Health Branch, 1990).

²⁰ A. Larson and L. Plascencia, "Migrant Enumeration Project" (Washington, D.C.: Migrant Legal Action Program, 1993).

²¹ Ken Pallack, *Oregon Farm Labor Housing Survey* (Newberg, Oregon: CASA of Oregon, under contract with Oregon Housing Agency, 1991), p. 1.

²² R. Mason, T. Cross, and C. Nuckton, "Agricultural Industries in Oregon Nursery Crops, Christmas Trees, and Strawberries in the Willamette Valley and Pears in the Hood River Valley," *Appendix I: Case Studies and Commission Reports Prepared for the Commission on Agricultural Workers, 1989-1993* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993).

²³ Marion County Migrant Labor Task Force, "Temporary Farm Worker Housing Project: Marion & Polk Regional Strategies" (Salem, Oregon: Oregon State University Extension Service, 1993).

²⁴ Edward Kissam and Anna Garcia, "The Changing Composition of Southwest Michigan's Farm Labor Force," *Appendix I: Case Studies and Commission Reports Prepared for the Commission on Agricultural Workers, 1989-1993* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993), pp. 297-368.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 355-356.

²⁶ Senate Human Resources and Senior Citizens Committee, *Housing in Michigan, Low Income and Senior Citizen Families in Crises* (Lansing, Michigan: The Senate Human Resources and Senior Citizens Committee, State of Michigan, 1988).

²⁷ D.S. North and J.S. Holt, "The Apple Harvest Labor Market in New York and Pennsylvania," *Appendix I: Case Studies and Commission Reports Prepared for the Commission on Agricultural Workers, 1989-1993* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993).

²⁸ U.S. Department of Labor, Report No. 3, p. 5.

- ²⁹ J. Palerm, *Farm Labor Needs and Farm Workers in California 1970 to 1989* (Santa Barbara, California: California Development Department, California Agricultural Studies, University of California, 1991), p. 15.
- ³⁰ *Appendix I: Case Studies and Research Reports Prepared for the Commission on Agricultural Workers, 1989-1993, to Accompany the Report of the Commission* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993), p. 831.
- ³¹ Migrant Health Program.
- ³² Villarejo and Runsten, p. 19.
- ³³ U.S. Department of Labor, Research Report No. 5, p. 2.
- ³⁴ Zabin et al.
- ³⁵ Housing Assistance Council, *Overcoming Exclusion in Rural Communities: NIMBY Case Studies* (Washington, D.C.: Housing Assistance Council, 1994); "Rejection of Migrant Housing is Troubling," Fargo, North Dakota *Forum*, September 23, 1993; "Farmworker Housing Complex Expanding," Marysville-Yuba City, California *Appeal Democrat*, May 29, 1994.
- ³⁶ T. Dunbar and L. Kravitz, *Hard Traveling: Migrant Farmworkers in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Ballinger Publishing Company, 1976).
- ³⁷ L. Schuchman, "Ruling Won't Derail Enforcement of Farm-labor Laws, Official Says," Palm Beach, Florida *Post*, May 18, 1994.
- ³⁸ Villarejo and Runsten, p. 26.
- ³⁹ Agricultural Personnel Management Program, Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources, "Farm Labor Contractors in California" (Sacramento: Labor Market Information Division, California Employment Development Department, 1992).
- ⁴⁰ Zabin et al.
- ⁴¹ Housing Assistance Council and National Task Force on Older Farmworkers, *After the Harvest: The Plight of Older Farmworkers* (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Retired Persons, 1990).
- ⁴² Dunbar and Kravitz, p. 69.
- ⁴³ National Advisory Council on Migrant Health, *1993 Recommendations of the National Advisory Council on Migrant Health* (Rockville, Maryland: Bureau of Primary Health Care, 1993), p. 9.

⁴⁴ Dunbar and Kravitz, pp. 79-86.

⁴⁵ InterAmerica Research Associates, Inc., p. 16.

⁴⁶ Kissam and Garcia, p. 358.

⁴⁷ Villarejo and Runsten, p. 35.

⁴⁸ Housing Assistance Council staff have kept a running tally of dollars spent and units produced for FmHA/RHCDS programs every year, using figures provided by FmHA/RHCDS. Recent figures on numbers of units produced using the Section 514/516 program have been obtained from staff in the agency's Multi Family Housing Division and from AMAS Reports.

⁴⁹ C. Fiering, D. Meyer-Flanagan, and S. Pittman, *Lessons from State CHASes: The First Year* (Washington, D.C. and Columbia, Maryland: Low Income Housing Information Service, and The Enterprise Foundation, 1993).

Footnotes

* Some of this difference might be attributable to the *Atlas's* inclusion of seasonal workers (those who do farmwork for part of the year but do not travel to the area for work) in addition to migrant workers and dependents, while the Enumeration Project included only migrants and dependents. Differences in methodology seem to play a greater role in creating the disparity, however. If the estimates were consistent, all the *Atlas's* figures would be higher than, or at least equal to, those reported by the Enumeration Project. This is not the case, however. For example, the *Atlas* estimated 67,227 migrants, seasonal farmworkers, and dependents in Michigan, while the Enumeration Project calculated there were 159,668 migrants and dependents there.



Fitting The Pieces Together: An Examination of Data Sources Related to Farmworker Housing

© Housing Assistance Council, 1996

Permission is granted ONLY to nonprofit community-based organizations to reproduce and/or adapt this document, and only for their own use.

This document best viewed using Netscape Navigator, with a monitor resolution of 800 x 600.

Appendix A

Annotated Bibliography: Sources With Information on Farmworker Housing

Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs. 1988. *Partnerships: Helping Migrant Farmworkers Help Themselves, An Examination of the Employment, Training and Support Services Provided to Migrant Farmworkers During Program Years 1985 and 1986 by the Job Training Partnership Act, Title IV, Section 402 Grantees*. Washington, D.C.: Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs.

This was the report of a survey of Job Training and Partnership Act (JTPA) Section 402 program grantees to examine services provided to migrants who accepted full-time employment and "settled out" of the migrant stream. Data were provided voluntarily by Section 402 grantees on 5,229 individual migrants, and anecdotal information was obtained from the Section 402 grantees. The information was not representative of all migrants, nor of those served by JTPA. This report provided good information on those settling out, and distinguished between those settling out in the four major home base states (Texas, California, Florida, Puerto Rico, where over half settled out) and 30 other states. Most of those who settled out upstream did so in the Midwest. Questions on housing were asked, but not all Section 402 grantees kept that information, so that information was even less representative. The largest percentage of supportive services provided was for housing assistance. The association concluded that housing services will be essential to settling out.

Agricultural Personnel Management Program, Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources. 1992. *Farm Labor Contractors in California*. Sacramento, California: California Employment Development Department, Labor Market Information Division.

Previous experience, involvement in other businesses and other services provided by farm labor contractors were studied. Farm labor contractors averaged 8.7 months per year in labor contracting. Fifteen percent of them also operated rental housing. Only 11 percent provided housing, with weekly charges ranging from \$12 to \$80, some of which included meals.

Commission on Agricultural Workers. 1993. *Appendix I: Case Studies and Research*

Reports Prepared for the Commission on Agricultural Workers, 1989-1993. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993 O - 332-460: QL 3.

This separately bound appendix included 10 case studies and eight research reports prepared by different researchers for the Commission. Each provided detail about selected crops, farmers and workers. Every case study had a section on housing, but their completeness varied. Methods used included historical, ethnographic and survey research.

Commission on Agricultural Workers. 1993. *Report of the Commission on Agricultural Workers, November, 1992.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office: 1993 O - 332-456: Q 3.

Agri-business members formed the majority on the U.S. Commission on Agricultural Workers (CAW). Its report contained a statement of the history and structure of U.S. agriculture, described agricultural workers, evaluated the effects of legalization of the agricultural work force -- especially post-IRCA -- and made recommendations. The report used a Department of Labor estimate that 50 percent of seasonal agricultural services workers are short-term (six weeks or less). Only one page discussed housing, stating that "the Commission believes that housing seasonal farmworkers is a critical step to developing a stable and committed labor force. Housing must thus be addressed more realistically and effectively" (p. 137). The report asked that the Farmers Home Administration be more actively involved and that housing standards be reviewed to be more realistic. This report included references, a glossary and a chronology of immigration legislation.

Dunbar, T., and L. Kravitz. 1976. *Hard Traveling, Migrant Farm Workers in America.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Ballinger Publishing Company.

This book discussed migrant workers, four states who use migrant workers, labor conditions, labor camps, legal rights, the effects of migrancy on children and agribusiness. The authors concluded that a migrant agricultural labor force is necessary, but that federal policy should grant to migrant workers the same rights and protections afforded other workers. They advocated that federal policy should deal with migration, unionization, pesticide controls, education and vocational opportunity and health care; that wages should be forced up; and that children should be educated and allowed to grow up in communities. Although the book is dated, especially in regard to immigration, much of the material applies as well today.

Echaveste, M. 1994. *Statement of Maria Echaveste, Head of Delegation, United States of America to the Commission on Security and Cooperation at the Human Dimension Seminar on Migrant Workers.* Warsaw, Poland.

Echaveste's statement used the population range of 1 to 2.5 million migrant farmworkers in the U.S. It acknowledged major health, education and housing problems.

Gabbard, S., E. Kissam, and P. L. Martin. 1993. *The Impact of Migrant Travel Patterns on the Undercount of Hispanic Farm Workers*. Washington, D.C.: Paper presented to *Research Conference on Undercounted Ethnic Populations*, U.S. Bureau of the Census, May 6, 1993.

This paper reviewed the national data on farmworkers, the Census undercount of farmworkers and the role played by migration in the undercount. It reviewed the Census of Population, the National Agricultural Worker Survey and recent ethnographic studies. Using a "meta-analytic strategy," it showed that the undercount has a number of components. Migrant farmworkers are traveling on April 1, Census Day. They are part of a transnational population which is distanced by linguistic and social characteristics from mainstream population. This analysis focused on "seasonal and agricultural services" (SAS) workers as defined by the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA) because this definition corresponds closely to the concept of migrant and seasonal farmworkers. The paper compared a number of existing case studies, with special detail for California, then discussed components of undercount: 1) migration, 2) total household omission, 3) partial household omission and 4) mis-identification. This study did not attempt to say much about specific demographic characteristics relating to housing needs, except as related to the kinds of households missed. It provided a good discussion of undercount weaknesses of major studies.

InterAmerica Research Associates, Inc. 1980. *National Farmworker Housing Study: Study of Housing for Migrant and Settled Farmworkers*. Rosslyn, Virginia: unpublished study for the Farmers Home Administration, U.S. Department of Agriculture.

This report of a comprehensive national study of farmworker housing was never released by the Farmers Home Administration. It used a stratified probability model to select for examination existing camp and non-camp farmworker housing and estimated supply, demand and cost of producing farmworker housing. Included were details of conditions and costs for each state. It found an unmet demand of about 800,000 units. Policy recommendations included procedural items and a call for additional funding. It is a unique source, useful for baseline numbers and possible methods for future studies.

Housing Assistance Council. 1986. *Who Will House Farmworkers?: An Examination of State Programs*. Washington, D.C.: Housing Assistance Council.

This report described current federal government policy and explored what some key agricultural states were doing to improve farmworker housing. It declared that federal intervention is warranted because of farmworkers' poverty and mobility. Texas, Michigan, North Carolina, Illinois, Washington, Florida, Oregon, New York, Colorado, Maryland, Virginia and California were included.

Housing Assistance Council. 1992. *Who Will House Farmworkers?: An Update on State and Federal Programs*. Washington, D.C.: Housing Assistance Council.

This update highlighted initiatives since the 1986 Housing Assistance Council report, including those in Virginia, Ohio, Florida, Minnesota, Washington, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, California and Oregon.

Housing Assistance Council and the National Task Force on Older Farmworkers. 1990. *After the Harvest: The Plight of Older Farmworkers*. Washington, D.C.: American Association of Retired Persons.

U.S. Census and Agricultural Work Force data, a survey of state farmworker organizations and case studies were used to examine the situations of older farmworkers. They were found to be among the poorest of the poor, usually not covered by Social Security and forced to retire early because of hard work and health problems. Their housing was found to be very poor. Some culturally sensitive housing designs were proposed. The study noted that retired farmworkers are eligible for Farmers Home Administration (now Rural Housing and Community Development Service) farmworker housing programs.

Johnston, G. W. 1985. *Results Summary, 1985 Agricultural Employer Housing Survey*. Unpublished report by a University of California Cooperative Extension Personnel Management Farm Advisor.

This study surveyed agricultural employers in California for their opinions about current and future trends of farm labor housing. Participants were 754 farm employers, half of them San Joaquin Valley fruit/nut growers. Although half of respondents hired less than 50 workers each year, together they hired more than 18,000 year-round workers and 75,000 seasonal workers. Eighty percent reported hiring the same workers each year, and 43 percent provided farmworker housing. Distinctions were made for year-round versus seasonal and family versus single-worker housing. Smaller growers and those in southern California were found to be more likely to provide housing. Some 3,000 units included in the study housed approximately 16,000 workers. High costs and regulations were reported to plague growers.

Larson, A.C., and L. Plascencia. 1993. *Migrant Enumeration Project*. Washington, D.C.: Migrant Legal Action Program.

The purpose of this project was to estimate migrants and dependents in every state and Puerto Rico for use by Migrant Legal Services programs. Although researchers first planned to revise and update the *1989 Migrant Health Atlas*, the final approach incorporated and expanded the *Atlas's* basic demand for labor methodology. The project estimated jobs, not individuals, and was not concerned about duplication within or across states. This report included a state-by-state listing with a total of 3,036,432 workers and dependents. These numbers considerably overcounted actual persons, but have some relevance to

housing need because workers need housing in multiple locations.

Lepkowski, James M. 1991. Sampling the Difficult-to-Sample. *The Journal of Nutrition*, Vol. 121, No. 3.

This article is useful as a discussion of methodology for reaching the hard-to-survey, such as migrant farmworkers. The survey method is aimed at inferences about the whole population, rather than specific subgroups. Researchers may specifically exclude some subgroups in order to be more accurate about the rest. Since it is difficult and costly to reach some subgroups, the author called for better specification of goals. This paper reviewed methods of sampling the difficult-to-sample. The author suggested three specific strategies that can be used, and noted that it is hard to control investigator bias in nonprobability sampling. He used a concept of "elusive populations," who are rare in the general population or difficult to locate, enumerate or interview.

Maryland Governor's Commission on Migratory and Seasonal Farm Labor. 1993. *Annual Report*. Baltimore, Maryland: Maryland Governor's Commission on Migratory and Seasonal Farm Labor.

This report described the work of the Maryland Commission and the departments and agencies that work with farmworker issues in the state. It included special interests, problems and concerns for each area. A detailed listing of migrant camp statistics for the state makes this report unique among state publications.

Migrant Health Program. 1990. *An Atlas of State Profiles Which Estimate Number of Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers and Members of Their Families*. Rockville, Maryland: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, Health Resources and Services Administration, Bureau of Health Care Delivery and Assistance, Migrant Health Branch.

While this report did not deal with housing, it was a compendium of 41 state-by-state maps (profiles) that indicated locations, crops and numbers of jobs that were the basis of its numerical estimates for the migrant and the seasonal farmworker populations. The *Atlas's* numbers included both workers and dependents, and were duplicated wherever there were jobs. The profiles were based on information submitted by states. National totals were included. The *Atlas's* primary purpose was for planning by Migrant Health Centers, but it would be useful for identifying locations and approximate numbers of migrant farmworkers for other services as well.

Minnesota Housing Finance Agency and Minnesota Human Services. 1990. *Minnesota: Report of the Migrant Farmworker Housing Task Force*. St. Paul, Minnesota: Minnesota Housing Finance Agency and Minnesota Human Services.

This state report described the circumstances of the estimated 12,000 to 15,000 migrant farmworkers in Minnesota, who work in sugar beets, sweet corn and asparagus. Especially in the Red River Valley, relatively little housing is provided. Aid to Families with Dependent Children/Emergency Assistance were routinely used to make vendor payments to a motel or landlord because migrant families arrived without housing or assured work. Four options were described: 1) continue as is, 2) expand state migrant housing, 3) use FmHA programs more or 4) increase grower-provided housing. The first option seemed to be preferred by the Task Force because of the short season and the difficulties of producing and managing migrant farmworker housing. It is unusual for a report to conclude that simply relying on welfare benefits may be the best option for housing arriving families.

National Advisory Committee on Migrant Health. 1993. *1993 Recommendations of the National Advisory Council on Migrant Health*. Rockville, Maryland: Bureau of Primary Health Care.

This set of recommendations was based on testimony, previous recommendations and Advisory Committee discussions. Their underlying assumptions included that farmworkers are employed, contributing working poor, deserving access to safety net programs, and that their low level of access to health care is a failure of the system to accommodate migratory work patterns. The first recommendation recognized the lack of housing as a crisis and called for construction of no less than 10,000 new units per year for the next 10 years. The fourth recommendation dealt with family issues, and called for projects to strengthen families to include farmworkers specifically. This report made the direct link between housing and health. It stated that living and working conditions were getting worse, but did not cite any quantitative studies on which that conclusion was based.

National Advisory Committee on Migrant Health. 1993. *Under the Weather: Farmworker Health, A Compendium of Farmworker Testimony Before the National Advisory Council on Migrant Health*. Rockville, Maryland: Bureau of Primary Health Care.

This publication was a heavily edited version of the testimony that was used to develop the recommendations cited above. It included a section on housing with poignant quotes.

Oliveira, V., and L. Whitener. 1994. *A Review of Hired Farmworker Data Sources*. Washington, D.C.: unpublished paper for the Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The authors reviewed eight data sources for analyzing hired farmworkers. Criteria for inclusion were that they provided data at the national level, used a statistical survey for estimating to generate data, have been collected on a regular basis and have been available to the public. Included were establishment surveys (which do not provide demographic characteristics of the workers) and household surveys (which do have demographic and employment information

on workers and their families, but have all the problems of elusive populations). This discussion is very helpful in understanding issues relating to farmworker counts.

Palerm, J. V. 1991. *Farm Labor Needs and Farm Workers in California 1970 to 1989*. Santa Barbara, California: California Agricultural Studies, California Employment Development Department.

This study used an ethnographic research method with a three-stage interview of individuals and their families to explore the formation of Mexican and Chicano enclaves in California and the agricultural forces that were contributing to this settlement. Examples of those forces were changes in the labor picture and consequences of IRCA. The author said that the stereotypical models of migration and settlement no longer hold. People are not nomads without home bases, and permanent settlement is not necessarily urban. Palerm categorized workers as: 1) old immigrants who hold positions of importance, were able to settle down in a rural agricultural environment and now are active members of the community, 2) middle immigrants, who are products of the Bracero program, serve as a base for new immigrants from their home communities and often travel and remit earnings to Mexico, 3) new immigrants, who are young to middle age and were migrants but have tended to settle in enclaves, and 4) recent immigrants who are a hodge-podge group defying easy characterization.

Pallack, K. 1991. *Oregon Farm Labor Housing Survey*. Newberg, Oregon: CASA of Oregon, under contract with Oregon Housing Agency.

One of the few comprehensive studies of farmworker housing by a state, this report included both employer-provided housing and non-employer-provided off-camp housing. Researchers visited 356 camps with legal capacity of 11,689 persons and 1,469 non-camp units. Sixty-two percent of employer-provided housing was occupied by families. More than two-thirds of the off-camp housing had three or more persons per bedroom. The researchers related the conditions to state and federal standards.

Pindus, N., F. O'Reilly, M. Schulte, and L. Webb. 1993. *Services for Migrant Children in the Health, Social Services, and Education Systems: Final Report*. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute.

The purposes of this report were to identify the needs of migrant children, to examine how these needs were being met in selected sites, and to identify successful models of service intervention. It included a useful list of acronyms and described the population and service needs of children. A major section dealt with service integration and service delivery issues, providing an operational definition and conceptual framework of a continuum from fragmentation to one integrated system. More than most, this report made the link among services. It noted that every site studied had significant inadequacies in transportation, mental health and substance abuse treatment and housing, stating that "the shortage of housing and the substandard quality of some of the housing available poses health risks, impedes the ability of migrant children to

learn, and limits the accessibility of other services needed by migrant farmworkers" (p. 30). This report also noted that service organizations found greater cooperation from growers when less adversarial positions were assumed, a fairly obvious but often ignored point.

Taylor, J., and D. Thilmany. 1992. California Farmers Still Rely on New Immigrants for Field Labor. *California Agriculture*, Vol. 26, No. 5.

The authors noted that "there is a widespread perception among workers and worker advocates that many farm labor contractors (FLCs) abuse the workers they hire and undermine farm labor markets. If this image of FLCs is accurate and if IRCA does not succeed in forcing all farm employers to adjust to a more legal workforce, FLCs will continue to destabilize the farm labor market" (pp. 3-4). They studied California unemployment insurance data, using a matched five-year time series on a random sample of 3,792 individual farmworkers, and found FLC workers to have significantly lower earnings and fewer quarters of work with their current employer than non-FLC workers. They concluded that IRCA was not effective at curtailing the supply of new immigrant labor to agriculture, that use of FLCs increased, and that agricultural employment has become less stable.

Select Committee on Aging, U.S. House of Representatives, One Hundred Second Congress. 1991. *The Status of Federal Laws Affecting Our Nation's Farmworkers: A Staff Report*. Washington, D.C.: Committee Publication No. 102-829.

This report described federal laws governing farmworker conditions. Two federal laws, the Wagner-Peyser Act and the Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act (MSAWPA), regulated farm labor housing standards. The Wagner-Peyser Act, as applicable to farmworkers, required farm operators to meet minimum housing quality requirements before they were able to use the federal-state employment service system to recruit farm laborers from distant areas. MSAWPA required farm operators to have their housing certified in order to be occupied by farmworkers. Farm operators were merely required to request an inspection of farmworker housing at least 45 days before the scheduled occupancy, but were permitted to use such housing if no inspection was made within that time period.

MSAWPA, the applicable law for labor contractors, did not apply to contractors who obtained workers for a family business, settled small-scale contractors or any small farm business which uses less than 500 worker-days of agricultural labor in any calendar quarter. The National Labor Relations Act excluded farmworkers. The Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA) covered field worker safety, but private applicators were not required to keep records of pesticide usage. The Environmental Protection Agency estimated that each year agricultural employees suffer 20,000 to 30,000 acute illnesses and injuries from pesticide exposure. Federal transportation laws covered driver qualifications and vehicles, but not employee transport. The Fair Labor Standards Act ensured minimum wage, but excluded small employers (those using less than 500 worker-days per quarter), local piece-rate workers, and

piece-rate workers under 17. This report showed some of the major loopholes in laws governing working conditions and housing for farmworkers.

U.S. Department of Labor. 1991. *Findings from the National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS) 1990, A Demographic and Employment Profile of Perishable Crop Farm Workers*. Washington, D.C.: Office of Program Economics, Research Report No. 1.

This was the first in a series of reports providing information on farmworker characteristics and work patterns as found in the annual National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS). It described the 2,115 randomly selected U.S. agricultural workers performing seasonal agricultural services during fiscal 1990. The sample included workers in 72 counties (in 25 states) representing distinct agricultural regions, and was conducted in four cycles. Only employed workers were interviewed. Findings showed that SAS workers were mainly young, male, Hispanic and immigrants. Most had low levels of education and did not speak or read English. Although most were married, two in five lived away from families while performing SAS work. U.S.-born workers were more likely to reside with their families (72 percent vs. 47 percent). One-half had incomes below poverty level, earning a median hourly wage of \$4.85. Most spent four months per year not working. This report had no information on housing.

U.S. Department of Labor. 1991. *Findings from the National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS) 1989, A Demographic and Employment Profile of Perishable Crop Farm Workers*. Washington, D.C.: Office of Program Economics, Research Report No. 2.

This report presented findings on the NAWS sample of 2,526 perishable field crop workers interviewed during fiscal year 1989. Interviews were conducted in five languages, and were in workers' homes or in sites selected by them. The SAS labor force was mostly young, male, Hispanic and immigrants. Most had work authorization. The average worker in this sample spent more than half of the year doing SAS work, and would be willing to do more, but not to migrate for it. Three-fourths planned to continue doing farm work indefinitely. About 90 percent worked directly for the producers, and the other 10 percent worked for FLCs. This report included no information on housing.

U. S. Department of Labor. 1993. *California Findings from the National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS), A Demographic and Employment Profile of Perishable Crop Farmworkers*. Washington, D.C.: Office of Program Economics, Research Report No. 3.

Because of the NAWS sample size, the data can be aggregated for only a few states. California is the only state for which a separate state report has been published. Of the 4,739 interviews conducted in 1990 and 1991, 1,844 were conducted in nine counties of California. Ninety percent of the workers interviewed were foreign-born, two-thirds had been in the U.S. longer than

eight years, two-thirds were married and six of ten lived with a spouse, child or parent while employed in farm work. Spanish was the primary language for 88 percent. In California, 78 percent of farmworkers said they were unwilling to migrate for more work. One-third currently worked for farm labor contractors. Nearly one-half the families had incomes below the poverty level, even with multiple workers in the household.

U.S. Department of Labor. 1993. *U.S. Farmworkers in the Post-IRCA Period, Based on Data from the National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS)*. Washington, D.C.: Office of Program Economics, Research Report No. 4.

This report analyzed data collected by NAWS in interviews of over 7,200 SAS workers in 1989, 1990 and 1991. It found the farm labor force to be increasingly reliant on Latin American immigrants in all areas of the United States. Most farm work was done by workers who patched together a living based on agricultural labor, rather than by casual laborers. Nationwide, it found no evidence that workers of any legal status group were leaving agriculture. Labor supplied to agriculture increased over the three years, but farm wages, working conditions and income remained low and had deteriorated for some. Most of the workers who were over 50 were U.S.-born, unlike the younger workers. FLCs were found to retain workers less effectively than other employers. Overall, 22 percent of workers used employer-provided housing, 3 percent in family housing and 19 percent in housing for themselves only. Farm labor contractors provided housing to three quarters of their workers, but those who got "free" housing were found to earn less and to be less apt to receive other benefits. This report introduced the idea of "Latinization regions." The West and Florida were described as the established Latinization region, having received substantial Latin American migration for two generations or more. The rest of the country was described as the new Latinization region. It tends to have shorter agricultural seasons and fewer semi-skilled jobs. The new area may be in a transitional stage, with increasing use of Latino/a workers.

U.S. Department of Labor. 1994. *Migrant Farmworkers: Pursuing Security in an Unstable Labor Market, Based on Data from the National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS)*. Washington, D.C.: Office of Program Economics, Research Report No. 5.

This was the first NAWS report to study separately migrant farmworkers, defined as those who travel more than 75 miles to obtain a job in agriculture. Noting that there is no universally accepted estimate of U.S. farmworkers, it used the Commission on Agricultural Workers' estimate of 2.5 million farmworkers as a benchmark, then calculated that NAWS represents 1,600,000 who work with crops. The NAWS finding that 42 percent of farmworkers were migrants translated into 670,000 migrant workers in the United States. These workers patched together short-term jobs, some following the crops and others working in one location, but traveling to a home base in the off season. Some used both of these strategies. This study found that almost all migrants were immigrants or the U.S.-born children of immigrants, mostly Latino/a. While 74 percent were found to have legal work authorization, the number of

undocumented workers was found to be increasing. The report identified three stages: international migration, U.S.-based migration and then settlement, though many did not follow this pattern. This report found that the vast majority of migrants only managed a marginal living from farm work. Fifty-seven percent of the individuals and 73 percent of their children under 14 lived in poverty. The established farm labor system produces labor surpluses and transfers costs to the workers. This report did not discuss migrant housing.

United States General Accounting Office. 1992. *Hired Farmworkers: Health and Well-Being at Risk*. Washington, D.C.: United States General Accounting Office, GAO/HAD-92-46.

The focus of this GAO report was on health, using the terminology of hired farmworkers and migrant farmworkers. It listed selected federal laws that protect or assist hired farmworkers. Appendix I, "Hired Farmworker Housing," quotes the 1980 National Farmworker Housing Study (showing unmet demand of 800,000 units) and more recent data for California, Oregon and Washington. These data showed hired farmworker housing capacity for less than 30 percent of the annual number of workers in those three states. The report cited grower disincentives including cost, administrative problems and local opposition that have created a trend, spanning the last two decades, toward agricultural employers' discontinuing the provision of housing. Barriers to farmworkers finding housing in the local private housing markets were found to be a lack of rental units, rent deposits, credit checks and the short term of rental. Federal funding for farmworker housing had fallen from \$68.7 million in 1979 to \$22.0 million in 1990. Most states did not offer financial assistance for development and operation of farmworker housing. California, however, operated state housing centers that provided housing, in 1988, for 12,324 persons. California, Florida, Ohio, Oregon and Virginia were reported to have farmworker housing programs, which offered financial assistance to groups that constructed or rehabilitated housing.

United States General Accounting Office. 1989. *Immigration Reform: Potential Impact on West Coast Farm Labor*. Washington, D.C.: United States General Accounting Office.

This study used a stratified sample of growers from the Department of Labor's ES 202 files and Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) codes. Very small growers were not the focus of this study. Information was gathered by telephone interview. Agencies and organizations were also contacted by a mail survey. This report was primarily about real or potential labor shortages post-IRCA. It gave a description of that legislation. It noted that farmers might reject using H-2A laborers because of the need to provide housing. The appendices included a description of West Coast labor-intensive agriculture, a description of the 14 counties reviewed and a section on migrant farmworker housing. A housing appendix gave authorized housing capacity and work force numbers, citing capacity at about two-thirds of farmworker population. The report cited housing costs at \$624 to \$1,170 per occupant per season.

Villarejo, D., and D. Runsten. 1993. *California's Agricultural Dilemma: Higher Production and Lower Wages*. Davis, California: California Institute for Rural Studies.

Agricultural production and the farm labor market were discussed for the highest production state in the nation. Large farms dominated, and even small farms often were not run by their owners. Hired labor did most of the work, and immigrants made up the vast majority of workers. This report included a description of the tiered layers of organization of large farm labor contractors, where crew leaders play a dominant role for the workers. Other issues of concern discussed briefly were job safety, health, social services, housing, gender discrimination and organization of workers.

Zabin, C., M. Kearney, A. Garcia, D. Runsten, and C. Nagengast. 1993. *A New Cycle of Poverty, Mixtec Migrants in California Agriculture*. Davis, California: California Institute for Rural Studies.

This thorough study used ethnographic, historical and some survey research to describe the current conditions and historical context, both in Mexico and California, of the wave of ethnic replacement being experienced by Mixtec farmworkers in California. It explained how Mixtecs were being used to undermine farmworker gains, and were subject to some of the worst living and working conditions, including nonpayment of wages. The Mixtecs were described as a truly transnational work force which has formed organizations to deal with their issues in both countries.

[Back to table of contents](#)

Fitting The Pieces Together: An Examination of Data Sources Related to Farmworker Housing

©Housing Assistance Council, 1996

Permission is granted ONLY to nonprofit community-based organizations to reproduce and/or adapt this document, and only for their own use.

This document best viewed using Netscape Navigator, with a monitor resolution of 800 x 600.

Appendix B

Housing Questions From National Agricultural Workers Survey

The English versions of the three questions about housing included in NAWS are reproduced below as they appear on the NAWS questionnaire.

D33 While you are working for this grower/contractor, what type of arrangement do you have for your living quarters? [DO NOT READ CHOICES. MARK ONE RESPONSE.]

1. I receive free housing from my employer. I PAY NO RENT (pay only a nominal fee for utilities not counted as rent)
2. I AND MY FAMILY receive free housing from my employer. I pay no rent, I only pay a nominal fee for utilities
3. I pay for housing provided by my employer. I pay directly or through wage deduction.
4. I receive free housing provided by the government, a charity, or other non-work related institution. (I PAY NO RENT. I pay only a nominal fee for utilities.)
5. I pay for housing provided by the government, a charity, or other non-work related institution
6. I (or family member) own the house
7. I rent from non-employer
8. I am homeless
97. Other Specify: _____

D34 In what type of living quarters do you live? [READ CHOICES. MARK ONE RESPONSE.]

1. House

2. Flat or apartment
3. Room in hotel, motel, etc.
4. Room/bed in rooming/dormitory/boarding house
5. Mobile home or trailer (fixed/trailerparks)
6. Vehicle (car/recreational vehicle (RV)/campers) not fixed in any specific park or lot)
7. Homeless (lives outdoors with no fixed shelter)
97. Other Specify: _____

D35 Where are your living quarters located? [READ CHOICES. MARK ONE RESPONSE.]

1. Off farm (property not owned/administered by employer)
2. Off farm (property owned/administered by employer)
3. On farm
4. Other Specify: _____

Summary of Findings from National Agricultural

Workers Survey (NAWS), 1992-1993

There were almost 3,000 respondents to each of the three housing questions in 1992-1993. Because of the sample size, at least 500 respondents were needed in any row or column of cross tabulations for statistical reliability.

Thirty-five percent of the sample reported family incomes of less than \$5,000, 26 percent reported incomes of \$5,000 to \$9,999 and 38 percent reported incomes of \$10,000 and over. Forty-nine percent of the sample was drawn in what NAWS identified as the traditional Latinization region, Florida and the western part of the United States where seasonal farmworkers have traditionally been predominantly Latino/a.

Question 33 asked about type of arrangements for living quarters while working for this grower/contractor.

Of the whole sample, 29 percent reported getting their housing from their employer, either free, with a utility fee or rented. Forty-six percent reported renting from someone other than their employer. Twenty-one percent (but not quite enough for reliability) reported that they, or a family member, own the house they live in.

There were marked differences in type of living arrangements among groups within the sample.

Forty-four percent of the migrant workers obtained their housing from their employer, while only 17 percent of nonmigrants did so.

Almost equal numbers of migrants, 46 percent, and nonmigrants, 47 percent, rented from someone other than their employer.

Only 6 percent of migrants reported living in a home they own while working for this employer, as compared to 32 percent of nonmigrants.

Twenty-nine percent of those accompanied by family obtained their housing from their employer, compared to 28 percent of those not accompanied by family. Those accompanied by family were more likely to own the home they were living in while working for this employer (24 percent), compared to those who were unaccompanied (14 percent), and were less likely to rent (43 percent of those accompanied, compared to 53 percent of those unaccompanied).

Only very small differences were found in living arrangements during the current job among those with differing family incomes.

Marked differences were found in living arrangements by Latinization area. Employer-provided housing was far more frequent in the east. Forty-one percent of those in the nontraditional Latinization area had employer-provided housing, as compared with 16 percent of those in the traditional Latinization area, Florida and the western United States.

Question 34 asked about the type of living quarters in which workers lived at the time of the interview.

Of the whole sample, 59 percent reported currently living in a house. This was the only category with enough respondents for statistical reliability.

Fifty-two percent of the migrant workers reported currently living in a house, compared to 64 percent of the nonmigrants.

Sixty-one percent of those accompanied by their family reported living in a house, compared to 53 percent of those not accompanied by family.

Proportions of those living in a house were similar in all family income groups.

Those in the traditional Latinization region were more likely to live in a house, 65 percent, than those in the more newly Latinized area, 54 percent.

None of the other seven response categories had enough respondents for statistical reliability. Less than 1 percent reported being homeless while on the current job. The category that would seem closest to a farm labor camp was termed "Room/bed in rooming/dormitory/boarding house," but this choice might be misunderstood. The category of "Vehicle (car/recreational vehicle

(RV)/campers) not fixed in any specific park or lot)" could include a wide variety of circumstances.

Question 35 asked about the location of living quarters.

Of the whole sample, 70 percent reported that their living quarters were off the farm, not administered by their employer, and 28 percent lived either on- or off-farm, but in quarters administered by their employer.

Eighty percent of nonmigrants lived in housing not owned or administered by their employer, compared to 56 percent of migrants.

Almost equal percentages of those accompanied by family, 71 percent, and those not accompanied, 69 percent, lived in quarters not owned or administered by their employer.

Those with higher family incomes were slightly more likely to live in quarters not owned or administered by their employer (57 percent of those with family incomes less than \$5,000, 70 percent of those with family incomes of \$5,000 to \$9,999, and 78 percent of those with incomes of \$10,000 or more).

Those in the traditional Latinization area were more likely to live in quarters not owned or administered by their employer (84 percent) than were those in the nontraditional Latinization area (57 percent).

Resource Id # 5644

Fitting The Pieces Together: An Examination of Sources Related to Farmworker Housing