



FJ EYEOPENER

Volume 2, Issue 3
April 25, 2008

Welcome to Farmworker Justice's electronic newsletter, the FJ EyeOpener, covering recent developments in health-related research and policy relevant to migrant farmworkers in the US. Please feel free to send comments, questions, or suggestions for future issues to the address provided at the end of the newsletter. A PDF version of this newsletter is available at <http://www.farmworkerjustice.org/Health&Safety/resources1.htm>.

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1. Promotora de Salud Program Reaches Out to Farmworker Families in New Mexico

Liebman AK, Juárez PM, Leyva C, Corona A (2007). A Pilot Program Using *Promotoras de Salud* to Educate Farmworker Families About the Risks from Pesticide Exposure. *Journal of Agromedicine* 12(2):33 - 43.

Children's vulnerability to harmful effects from exposure to pesticides due to their developmental status, behaviors, and physiology presents a serious challenge to caregivers in farmworker families. The only source of pesticide safety information that most farmworker families encounter, the federally-mandated workplace pesticide safety program known as the Worker Protection Standard, does not require that information be provided on protecting children from exposure. A number of community-based projects have been developed around the country to fill this informational gap. This paper describes a project conducted in New Mexico to use a

lay health advisor, or *promotora de salud* model to reach farmworker caregivers with the information they need to protect their families.

This project was developed and implemented as a community-based participatory intervention project by the Migrant Clinicians Network (MCN) and three local health and environmental health education outreach organizations. The community-based organizations played prominent roles in designing and implementing the project, and provided the staff who were trained as *promotoras*. The organizations also selected the focal areas for the educational program, which were changes in knowledge about pesticide exposure and children's health. Sixteen *promotoras* made two home visits to each of 273 families. During the first visit, they administered a brief pre-training knowledge assessment and then discussed pesticide safety using the 16-page Spanish language comic book, *Aunque Cerca...Sano* (MCN, 2002), as the teaching medium. The second visit took place within the next four weeks, and again began with a brief knowledge assessment, followed by additional education as needed.

Comparison of a subset of the pre- and post-training assessments documented significant improvements in knowledge of pesticides and other topics presented by the *promotoras*, including that herbicides are also dangerous pesticides; ingestion is an important source of exposure; and the reasons why children are more vulnerable to harmful health effects than adults. They also demonstrated increased awareness of the importance of handwashing, proper laundry handling and bathing after work in protecting children from exposure to agricultural pesticides, and of safe storage of residential pesticides in the home.

While the project partners encountered a number of challenges in implementing this program, such as changes of personnel, the results nevertheless demonstrate the strength of the *promotora de salud* model for teaching about pesticide safety. The structure of this project is particularly appropriate for adoption by clinics or other service organizations with existing outreach components that want to add this important issue to their educational efforts for the farmworker families.

To download free pesticide safety education materials, please visit <http://www.migrantclinician.org/excellence/environmental/pesticides>. For more information on this project, please contact Amy Liebman at aliebman@migrantclinician.org.

2. Rates of Skin Disease High Among Farmworkers in North Carolina

Arcury TA, Feldman SR, Schulz MR, Vallejos Q, Verma A, Fleischer AB, Rapp SR, Davis SF, Preisser JS, Quandt SA (2007). Diagnosed Skin Diseases Among Migrant Farmworkers in North Carolina: Prevalence and Risk Factors. *Journal of Agricultural Safety and Health* 13(4): 407- 418.

While farmworkers are at risk for serious and fatal illnesses or injuries, such as pesticide poisoning or equipment accidents, they are also vulnerable to a variety of less dramatic problems that can have an ongoing negative impact on overall health, thereby affecting ability to work and general quality of life. Skin diseases are a common agricultural health issue, particularly for crop workers. Exposure to heat,

sun, agricultural chemicals, plant materials, insects, and infectious agents can cause a range of skin problems. Only a limited number of studies have been conducted to document the extent of the problem in US farmworkers. The most recent study, conducted in North Carolina, provides evidence that skin diseases are indeed common among agricultural workers.

More than 300 farmworkers participated in this study, each of whom met with researchers from one to five times over a six-month agricultural season. Participants were interviewed about the work they had done during the previous week, and a standard set 10 photographs was taken of the skin on their faces, arms, legs and torso. The photos were reviewed by a dermatologist and rated for presence/absence and severity of disease or lesions using standard telemedicine diagnostic procedures. The most common finding was of infectious skin disease (e.g., fungal or bacterial infections; 78% of participants over the season), followed by inflammatory conditions (e.g., contact dermatitis, acne; 57%), skin trauma (e.g., skin and nail lesions, insect bites; 35%) and pigmentation disorders (e.g., melasma; 19%).

The findings from this study are similar to those found in other studies of skin disease among farmworkers. While it is difficult to definitively establish causation, these skin problems could well be related to the work and/or living conditions of farmworkers. In this study, working in or near fields that had been treated recently with pesticides and living in poor quality housing were both associated with increased likelihood of having inflammatory skin disease. Furthermore, it is very likely that the physical aspects of the work contributed to number of skin injuries. Further research needs to be done to better understand the environmental and occupational conditions that produce high rates of skin disease among farmworkers, and to develop better means of reducing its prevalence.

3. Farmworkers Do Not Enjoy the Same Work Protections and Rights as Other Workers in the US

Grey M (2007). *The Hudson Valley Farmworker Project: Understanding the Needs and Aspirations of a Voiceless Population* (with Emma Kreyche). Annandale-on-Hudson, NY: Bard College Migrant Project. Available for download at <http://events.adelphi.edu/news/farmworkers>.

Most of us know that our nation's farmworkers, who lead difficult lives trying to eke out a living from minimal wages and often extremely poor working conditions, are not covered by the same labor laws that protect the majority of other workers in this country. For example, in the state of New York (as well as most others), farmworkers are not entitled to a day of rest nor to overtime pay. An ongoing debate in New York State over the question of what laws should cover farmworkers, and whether they should be the same as those that cover other workers, prompted the creation of the Migrant Labor Project (MLP) in the Hudson Valley to investigate these questions from the farmworkers' perspective. The MLP conducted 113 in-depth interviews with farmworkers to discover more about the composition of the farmworker population in the Hudson Valley area, their working conditions, and their opinions on these issues.

The study revealed three factors that contribute to making farmworkers more vulnerable to exploitation than other workers. First, workers are discouraged from calling attention to themselves by complaining about their working conditions for fear of deportation and/or job loss (71% of workers interviewed were undocumented; 21% were guestworkers). Second, some workers' intentions to eventually return home reduces their interest in fighting for better job terms. Finally, workers' tend to compare their US jobs to those available in their impoverished home countries, which mitigates their dissatisfaction with US employment conditions. These three factors lessen the likelihood of workers standing up for their rights or asserting themselves in exploitative or abusive situations.

This report highlights a number of concerns of farmworkers in the US that result in their on-going lack of control over their living and working conditions. It contains strong recommendations that would improve farmworkers' well-being, including: mandating overtime pay to reduce workers' economic vulnerability; a voluntary day off each week so that workers can decide for themselves how many days per week to work; and the rights organize a union without being fired and to engage in collective bargaining so that workers can negotiate effectively on their own behalf. These rights, which are afforded to most workers in the US, would go a long way towards improving the lives of farmworkers in this country.

4. Families Living in Farmworker Households Could Benefit From Receiving Targeted Pesticide Safety Education

Rao P, Quandt SA, Doran AM, Snively BM, Arcury TA (2007). Pesticides in the Homes of Farmworkers: Latino Mothers' Perceptions of Risk to Their Children's Health. *Health Behavior & Education* 34(2): 335-353.

While a variety of programs exist to educate farmworkers on the dangers of pesticide exposure and ways to protect themselves, most only address exposure and prevention in the workplace. However, anyone who lives on or near a farm, or in a household with farmworkers, is at risk for exposure via a number of pathways, including drift from nearby fields, residues brought into the home on clothing or shoes, and residential pesticides often used in substandard farmworker housing. These issues are seldom addressed in workplace-oriented safety programs. In order to determine what non-farmworkers living in farmworker households know about pesticides and what information they would benefit from receiving, researchers in North Carolina conducted a set of in-depth interviews with mothers of children under the age of seven living with one or more farmworkers. The purpose of the study was to develop a pesticide safety program tailored to the needs of this at-risk population.

The women in this study demonstrated a limited knowledge of pesticides and their potential hazards despite living with farmworkers and perhaps even having been farmworkers themselves at some point. Direct work-related contact was considered the primary, if not only, source of exposure, i.e., those who do not work in the fields are not at risk. Furthermore, a pesticide's toxicity was thought to be directly correlated with the strength of its odor. If no odor could be detected, either no pesticides were present or they were of very low toxicity. Interestingly, this belief

encouraged an important exposure prevention behavior, washing work clothes separately from family clothes, because the women did not want the smell to transfer to the family's clothes during laundering.

Pesticide exposure was conceptualized by many women in this study as a form of "infection," leading them to expect treatment for exposure to be medication or an injection. Women who viewed exposure as "poisoning" often spoke of the Mexican tradition of drinking milk to purge the system after ingesting dangerous substances. In the case of an actual poisoning, these beliefs could be problematic if they cause an individual to avoid or delay seeking appropriate medical attention for themselves or a family member.

The results of this study were used to inform the development of a health education program specific designed for women with young children living in farmworker households. The curriculum and materials are available in English and Spanish for download free of charge at http://www1.wfubmc.edu/fam_med/Research/Educational/Pesticide.htm.

The *FJ EyeOpener* is an electronic newsletter covering important recent developments in research and regulation on issues affecting the health and safety of migrant farmworkers. It is a joint project of Farmworker Justice and Migrant Clinicians Network, supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration's Bureau of Primary Health Care. Each issue includes summaries of recent articles and reports, as well as advice on using this information to help health professionals, outreach workers, *promotores de salud*, and advocates strengthen their efforts on behalf of farmworkers and their families.

The contents of this publication are solely the responsibility of Farmworker Justice and Migrant Clinicians Network and do not necessarily reflect the official views of the Bureau of Primary Health Care or the Health Resources and Services Administration.

Please send comments, questions or suggestions for topics you would like to see covered to prao@farmworkerjustice.org, or contact Shelley Davis or Pamela Rao, co-authors, at 202-293-5420.

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