



## Selected Statistics on Farmworkers

This memo highlights key facts regarding farmworkers based on the most recent data from the U.S. Department of Labor’s National Agricultural Workers Survey (“NAWS”). The NAWS provides an economic and demographic portrait of crop workers and workers engaged in support activities for crop production at their workplaces.

The survey encompasses workers on farms and in orchards, greenhouses and nurseries, which include the majority of nursery products, grains, and field crops, as well as all fruits and vegetables. However, it does not include workers in all types of agricultural production; it excludes livestock, poultry, and fishery employees. Although the survey covers a variety of farm jobs, including some supervisors, it excludes administrative staff and mechanics. The NAWS does not survey workers who hold H-2A temporary agricultural guestworker visas. This memo is primarily based on data from the surveys conducted in fiscal years 2013-2014.<sup>1</sup> Where additional information appears, the source is noted.

### Total Population of Farmworkers

There are an estimated 2.4 million farmworkers laboring on our nation’s farms and ranches, cultivating and harvesting crops and raising and tending to livestock.<sup>2</sup> The NAWS does not count the number of crop workers or other farmworkers in the United States

### Immigration Status and Nationality

The farm labor workforce is a predominantly immigrant workforce. According to the NAWS, approximately 73% of farmworkers are immigrants, the overwhelming majority from Mexico. The survey states that about 31% of farmworkers are United States citizens, 21% are lawful permanent residents and another 1% have other work authorization. Approximately 47% of farmworkers are immigrants who lack work authorization. However, this latter estimate may be low due to a variety of factors.<sup>3</sup> Other sources estimate that 70% or more of the workforce is undocumented.<sup>4</sup> Using these estimates, roughly 1.1 million to 1.7 million farmworkers are

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<sup>1</sup> All numbers were rounded to the nearest whole number. The National Agricultural Worker Survey public access data (hereinafter “NAWS” or “NAWS data”), FY 2013-2014, [https://www.doleta.gov/agworker/pdf/NAWS\\_Research\\_Report\\_12\\_Final\\_508\\_Compliant.pdf](https://www.doleta.gov/agworker/pdf/NAWS_Research_Report_12_Final_508_Compliant.pdf) (last visited October 15, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Philip Martin, J. Edward Taylor, *Ripe with Change: Evolving Farm Labor Markets in the United States, Mexico, and Central America*, available at <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/ripe-change-evolving-farm-labor-markets-united-states-mexico-and-central-america>). *See also*, Philip Martin, *Hired Farm Labor*, *Choices*, 2nd Quarter 2012, <http://www.choicesmagazine.org/choices-magazine/theme-articles/immigration-and-agriculture/hired-farm-workers> (last visited October 18, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> Undocumented farmworkers may not feel comfortable answering this question accurately or may choose not to participate in the survey due to fear. Respondents who did not answer this question may be undocumented; their responses were excluded from the calculations of the undocumented percentage of the population.

<sup>4</sup> *See e.g.*, Alfonso Serrano, *Bitter Harvest: U.S. Farmers Blame Billion-Dollar Losses on Immigration Laws*, *TIME* (Sept. 21, 2012), <http://business.time.com/2012/09/21/bitter-harvest-u-s-farmers-blame-billion-dollar-losses-on-immigration-laws/> (last visited October 18, 2018).

undocumented and roughly 720,000 to 1.3 million farmworkers are United States citizens or lawful immigrants.

### **Ethnicity and Language**

Eighty percent of all farmworkers identify as Latino/Hispanic. Spanish is the most dominant (comfortable) language for 74% of all farmworkers, with 43% of all farmworkers speaking little (30%) or no (27%) English.

### **Age and Gender**

The majority of farmworkers are men; just 28% of farmworkers are female.

Farmworkers' average age at the time of this survey was 38 years old. Fourteen percent of farmworkers are 55 or over, 18% are between 45 and 54 years old, 24% are between 35 and 44 years old, 27% are between 25 and 34, and 18% between 14 and 24 years old. Ten years ago, in 2001 to 2002, the labor force was somewhat younger: just 19% of farmworkers were 45 or older and 61% were under 34.

### **Time Spent in Agriculture**

The majority of farmworkers have spent many years in agriculture, with an average of 16 years in farm work. About 30% of farmworkers working in agriculture for more than 20 years and 29% working in agriculture between 11 to 20 years. A significant percentage of agricultural workers have also entered the farm labor market relatively recently. At the time of their survey, 40% of farmworkers had been working in agriculture for 10 or fewer years, with 12% working in agriculture for 2-4 years and 4% of workers with one year or less of experience in agriculture.<sup>5</sup>

### **Seasonality and Working Hours**

Due to the seasonal nature of the work on many crop farms, the large majority of crop workers do not work year round even if they work for more than one farm in a single year. Farmworkers averaged 35 weeks of farm work in the past year. They worked an average of 44 hours per week, with women working 38 hours and men 46 hours.

### **Migrant Workers**

A decreasing number of farmworkers are "migrant workers," meaning that they traveled "at least 75 miles during a 12-month period to obtain a farm job." Only 16% of crop workers in 2013-2014 were migrant workers, compared to 27% in 2007-09 and 42% in 2001-2002. On average, farmworkers were employed by a single employer throughout the year. However, farm labor contractors, an employer who brings a crew of workers to several farms during a year, can count as a single employer. The use of labor contractors has been rising; in 2012, one-third of all farmworkers were employed by farm labor contractors.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Note that time spent in agriculture is not a proxy for number of years residing in the U.S. According to 2011-2012 NAWS data, only 11% of undocumented workers had worked one year or less in agriculture. Of the 11%, 51% had entered the U.S. before 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Philip Martin, *Farm Labor and H-2A* (April 15, 2014) (unpublished document available upon request). Reports in California indicate that there is a continued shift towards hiring through farm labor contractors. See "*Shift toward hiring through farm labor contractors continuing*," Jeannette E. Warnert, ANR News Blog, <http://ucanr.edu/blogs/blogcore/postdetail.cfm?postnum=6721> (last visited October 18, 2018) (citing University of California Cooperative Extension specialist emeritus Howard Rosenberg for point that "[t]he shift toward hiring

### **Year Foreign-Born Farmworkers First Entered the U.S.**

The majority (75%) of foreign-born farmworkers first entered the United States more than 10 years ago, with more than half (55%) first entering more than 15 years before the date of their NAWS interview. A significantly smaller percentage entered the country within the last 10 years: 25% first entered the United States fewer than 10 years as of their NAWS interview in 2013-2014, and 8% first entered fewer than 5 years before their interview.<sup>7</sup>

### **Family Status**

Sixty-three percent of farmworkers are married, and 57% of farmworkers have children. Some parents have children who reside outside the household, including outside the country. Sixty-four percent of spouses who live in the U.S. are employed: 29% do non-farm work and 34% do farm work.<sup>8</sup>

### **Wages, Income and Poverty**

Farmworkers averaged \$10.19 per hour in wages. Piece-rate wage earners, a minority of the workforce, earned \$11.57. Hourly wage earners earned \$9.71.

The average total individual income of farmworkers was in a range of \$15,000 - \$17,499.<sup>9</sup> However, this figure includes income that some farmworkers earn from jobs outside agriculture. The average family's total income from farmworkers is \$20,000- \$24,499. The federal poverty level for a family of 3 in 2014 was \$19,790.

Thirty percent of all farmworkers had a family income below the federal poverty line. However, because the survey results did not include dependents living outside of the United States, this number may not completely reflect the number of families living in poverty.

Sixteen percent of workers stated that they or someone in their household had received food assistance (SNAP) in the previous 2 years; however, farmworker use of public assistance has historically been low and many families that are eligible may not be participating in the SNAP program. Only 18% of workers reported that a member of their household participated in WIC (the special supplemental nutrition program for women, infants, and children).

### **Health Insurance and Health Care**

Only 35% of farmworkers reported that they had health insurance. Of these insured workers, 31% received employer-provided health insurance and 37% received health insurance through a government program (likely Medicaid). Few employers (14%) offer health insurance to their workers. Eighty nine percent of workers' children were insured, the vast majority (82%) through Medicaid/government programs.

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seasonal workers through farm labor contractors is not new. "(Use of farm labor contractors) has grown from the low 20 percents, to now over 40 percent," Rosenberg said, "and some people would say that it's now over 80 percent.")

<sup>7</sup> The year of first entry does not indicate continuous residency. Some farmworkers may have traveled outside of the country in between the years prior to being interviewed.

<sup>8</sup> Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number. Therefore, there is a discrepancy between the sum of percentages for spouses who do non-farm work and farm-work and the percentage for the spouses who are employed in farmworker or in non-farm work,

<sup>9</sup> The average does not include individuals who had no income for the year being surveyed.

Workers with health insurance were more likely to have visited a health care provider in the last two years (79% compared to 54%). Insured workers were also more likely to visit a private provider instead of a migrant/community health center. Twenty percent of insured workers reported visiting a community health center compared to 41% of uninsured workers. Overall, 32% of workers reported visiting a community health center.

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