



Selected Statistics on Farmworkers (2015-16 Data)

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”), published in 2018 (with data from 2015-2016). 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; as 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 2015-2016.¹ 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.² The NAWS does not count the total 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 75% of farmworkers are immigrants, the overwhelming majority from Mexico. About 29% of farmworkers are United States citizens, 21% are lawful permanent residents and another 1% have other work authorization. Approximately 49% of farmworkers are immigrants who lack work authorization. However, this latter estimate may be low due to a variety of factors.³ Other sources estimate that 70% or more of the workforce is undocumented.⁴ Using

¹ All numbers were rounded to the nearest whole number. The National Agricultural Worker Survey public access data (hereinafter “NAWS” or “NAWS data”), FY 2015-2016, https://www.doleta.gov/naaws/pages/research/docs/NAWS_Research_Report_13.pdf (last visited April 24, 2019).

² 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-labormarkets-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 April 24, 2019).

³ 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

these estimates, roughly 1.1 million to 1.7 million farmworkers are undocumented and roughly 720,000 to 1.2 million farmworkers are United States citizens or lawful immigrants.

Ethnicity and Language

Eighty-three percent of all farmworkers identify as Latino/Hispanic. Six percent of farmworkers identify as indigenous.⁵ Spanish is the most dominant (comfortable) language for 77% of all farmworkers, with 43% of all farmworkers speaking “a little” and 30% of farmworkers speaking no English. One percent of farmworkers reports an indigenous language as the language in which they were most comfortable conversing. Indigenous languages reported by the interviewees in 2015-2016 include the following: Acateco, Amuzgo, Chatino, Chuj, Mam, Nahuatl, Popti, Purepecha/Tarasco, Tlapaneco, and Triqui. These and other languages spoken may be underrepresented in the survey.

Age and Gender

According to the NAWS, the majority of farmworkers are men and just 32% 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, 19% are between 45 and 54 years old, 23% are between 35 and 44 years old, 26% are between 25 and 34, and 18% between 14 and 24 years old.

Time Spent in Agriculture

The majority of farmworkers have spent many years in agriculture, with an average of 16 years in farm work. About 32% of farmworkers have been working in agriculture for more than 20 years, and 26% have been 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 the survey, 42% of farmworkers had been working in agriculture for 10 or fewer years, with 13% working in agriculture for 2-4 years and 5% of workers with one year or less of experience in agriculture.⁶

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 33 weeks of farm work within the past year. Respondents worked an average of 45 hours in the previous week at their current job, with women working 40 hours and men 46 hours.

undocumented; their responses were excluded from the calculations of the undocumented percentage of the population.

⁴ 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-onimmigration-laws/> (last visited April 24, 2019).

⁵ This may be under representative of the indigenous population surveyed by the NAWS given that indigenous individuals may not intuitively understand the ethnicity and race categories used by NAWS. NAWS began including questions about primary childhood language exposure in 2005 to more accurately account for indigenous respondents.

⁶ 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.

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 19% of crop workers in 2015-2016 were migrant workers, compared to 27% in 2007-2009 and 42% in 2001-2002. On average, farmworkers were employed by a single employer throughout the year. However, a worker who is brought to several farms by a farm labor contractor may be considered to have a single employer. 20% of farmworkers surveyed in 2015-2016 were employed by farm labor contractors. The use of labor contractors has been rising; in 2012, one-third of all farmworkers were employed by farm labor contractors.⁷ While the survey reports that 20% of farmworkers were hired through farm labor contractors, this may significantly understate the prevalence of hiring through farm labor contractors.⁸

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

On average, foreign-born workers surveyed first entered the U.S. 18 years before being interviewed. The majority (78%) of foreign-born farmworkers first entered the United States more than 10 years ago, with more than half (58%) first entering more than 15 years ago. A significantly smaller percentage entered the country within the last 10 years: 22% first entered the United States fewer than 10 years before their NAWS interview, and 8% first entered fewer than 5 years before their interview.⁹

Family Status

Fifty-seven percent of farmworkers are married, and 55% 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.¹⁰

⁷ 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 April 24, 2019) (citing University of California Cooperative Extension specialist emeritus Howard Rosenberg for point that “[t]he shift toward hiring seasonal workers through farm labor contractors is not new. ‘(Use of farm labor contractors) has grown from the low 20 percent, to now over 40 percent,’ Rosenberg said, ‘and some people would say that it’s now over 80 percent.’”)

⁸ In the state of California, 55% of the average employment on California farms was supplied by crop support services, which are often farm labor contractors. Furthermore, almost 57% of primary farm workers in California were employed by crop support services, suggesting the NAWS survey samples may include higher shares of workers hired directly by farmers, Philip Martin, “Immigration and Farm Labor: Challenges and Opportunities,”

https://s.giannini.ucop.edu/uploads/giannini_public/dd/d9/ddd90bf0-2bf0-41ea-bc29-28c5e4e9b049/immigration_and_farm_labor_-_philip_martin.pdf (last visited 05/10/2019).

⁹The 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.

¹⁰ 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.

Wages, Income and Poverty

Farmworkers averaged \$10.60 per hour in wages. Piece-rate wage earners, a minority of the workforce, earned \$10.58. Hourly wage earners earned \$10.35.

The average total individual income of farmworkers was in the range of \$17,500 - \$19,999.¹¹ However, this figure includes income that some farmworkers earn from jobs outside agriculture. The average family's total income from farm work is \$20,000- \$24,499. Thirty-three percent of farmworker families had incomes below poverty. 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. The federal poverty level for a family of 3 in 2015 was \$19,790.

Eighteen 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 17% 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

Most farmworkers (53%) have no health insurance, and limited access to health care, making them particularly vulnerable to environmental and occupational health hazards. Seventy-one percent of workers reported that their employer did not provide health insurance or pay for medical treatment for injuries or illnesses suffered outside of work. Only 18% of employers offer health insurance to their workers. 43% received health insurance through a government program (likely Medicaid). Eighty nine percent of workers' children were insured, the vast majority (86%) through Medicaid/government programs.

Workers with health insurance were more likely to have visited a health care provider in the last two years (77% compared to 63%). Insured workers were also more likely to visit a private provider instead of a migrant/community health center. Twenty-six percent of insured workers reported visiting a community health center compared to 45% of uninsured workers. Overall, 34% of workers reported visiting a community health center.

¹¹ The average does not include individuals who had no income for the year being surveyed.