



## Selected Statistics on Farmworkers

This memo highlights key facts regarding migrant and seasonal farmworkers based on 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 secretaries and mechanics. The NAWS includes questions about immigration status and reports on workers regardless of immigration status, except that it does not report on the characteristics of workers who hold H-2A temporary agricultural guestworker visas. This memo is primarily based on data from the surveys conducted in fiscal years 2011-2012.<sup>1</sup> Where additional information appears, the source is noted.

### Total Population of Farmworkers

The NAWS does not count the number of crop workers or other farmworkers in the United States. There are an estimated 2.5 million farmworkers laboring on our nation’s farms and ranches, cultivating and harvesting crops and raising and tending to livestock.<sup>2</sup>

### Immigration Status and Nationality

According to the NAWS, approximately 48% of farmworkers lack work authorization. However, this estimate may be low due to a variety of factors.<sup>3</sup> Some sources estimate that as much as 70% or more of the workforce is undocumented.<sup>4</sup> Using these estimates, roughly 1.2 million to 1.75 million farmworkers are undocumented and roughly 750,000 to 1.3 million farmworkers are United States citizens or lawful immigrants. According to the NAWS, about 33% of farmworkers are United States citizens, 18% are lawful permanent residents and another 1% have other work authorization.

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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 2011-2012, <http://www.doleta.gov/agworker/naws.cfm> (last visited July 14, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Philip Martin, *Farm Labor and H-2A* (April 15, 2014) (unpublished document available upon request). See also, Philip Martin *California Ag Employment: 2014* <http://migrationfiles.ucdavis.edu/uploads/cf/files/2014/04/22/martin-california-ag-employment-2014.pdf> (last visited July 16, 2014).

<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> 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 7/6/14).

The farm labor workforce is a predominantly immigrant workforce: according to the NAWS, approximately 71% of farmworkers are immigrants. The majority of immigrant farmworkers in the NAWS – 95%— were from Mexico, 3% were from Central America, and 2% from other countries.

### **Ethnicity and Language**

Seventy-six percent of all farmworkers identify as Latino/Hispanic. Spanish is the most dominant (comfortable) language for 70% of all farmworkers, with 57% 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.

Twelve percent of farmworkers are 55 or over, 17% are between 45 and 54 years old, 25% are between 35 and 44 years old, 29% 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 about 35% of farmworkers working in agriculture for more than 15 years and 20% working in agriculture between 11 to 15 years. A significant percentage of agricultural workers have also entered the farm labor market relatively recently. At the time of their survey, 49% of farmworkers had been working in agriculture for 10 or fewer years, with 17% working in agriculture for 2-5 years and 13% of workers with one year or less of experience in agriculture.<sup>5</sup>

### **Seasonality**

Due to the seasonal nature of the work, the large majority of crop workers do not work year round even if they work for more than one farm in a single year. On average, about 84% of farmworkers work more than 60 days a year; 77% work more than 90 days; and only 60% work more than 180 days.

### **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.” For 2011-2012, 17% of crop workers are 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, an employer can be a farm labor contractor who brings a crew of workers to several farms during a year. 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. As of their interview, 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 11/4/14) (citing University of California Cooperative Extension specialist emeritus Howard Rosenberg for point that “[t]he shift toward hiring seasonal

### **Year Undocumented Farmworkers First Entered the U.S.**

The majority (59%) of undocumented farmworkers first entered the United States more than 10 years ago, with more than a quarter (27%) first entering more than 15 years before the date of their NAWS interview. A significant percentage entered the country within the last 10 years: 41% first entered the United States fewer than 10 years as of their NAWS interview in 2011-2012, and 13% first entered fewer than 5 years before their interview.<sup>7</sup>

### **Family Status**

The majority of farmworkers are married with children. Fifty-eight percent of farmworkers are married. 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>

Fifty-four percent of undocumented farmworkers are married. Eighty-two percent of spouses of undocumented farmworkers live in the U.S. while 18% live abroad. Roughly 65% of undocumented farmworkers are parents. Forty-nine percent of undocumented farmworkers live in a household with children under 18. Some parents have children who reside outside the household, including outside the country.

### **Income**

The average total individual income of farmworkers is \$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 \$17,500- \$19,999. Family income has not increased from the level indicated in the FY 2008-09 data.<sup>10</sup> The federal poverty level for a family of 3 is \$19,790. Twenty-five 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. Fifteen percent of workers stated that they or someone in their household had received food stamps 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.

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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.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.