



I Am Not a Tractor

A Book Talk and Discussion on Worker-Driven Social Responsibility

The Aspen Institute Economic Opportunities Program | Working in America | February 9, 2018

Background Information

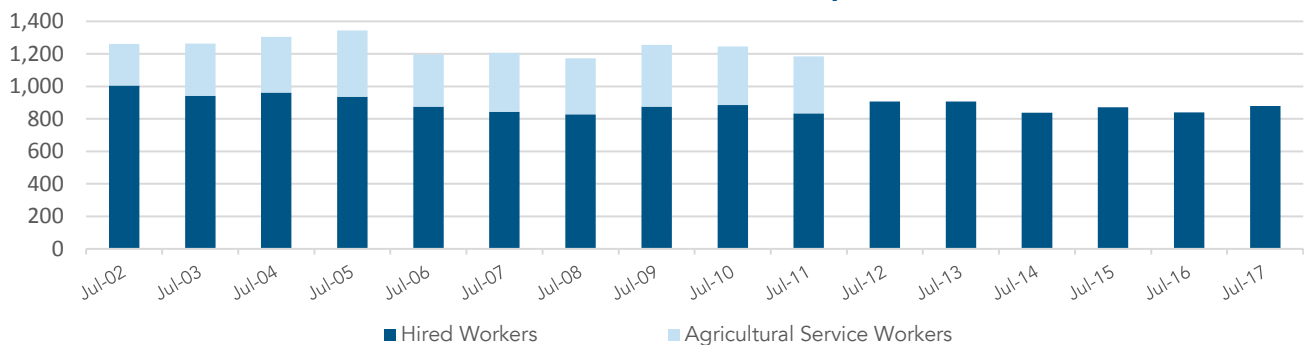
In today's discussion, panelists will explore the challenges facing farmworkers throughout the United States. Additionally, panelists will explore the worker-driven social responsibility model, which has been successfully used by farmworkers, in collaboration with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, to secure increased wages and improved working conditions. How might this model be applied to other industries to improve economic opportunities for low- and moderate-income workers? Below we present background information to inform the discussion.

How many people work as farmworkers in the United States?

This question is surprisingly difficult to answer. The seasonality of farm labor, migration patterns, suspicions of government surveys, budgetary limitations on government surveys, and more have limited the availability and accuracy of data on farm labor.

One of the most cited data sources is the Farm Labor Survey of the USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service. The quarterly survey asks farm operators to estimate the number of people that work on their fields or with their livestock. Until 2012, the survey asked about both the number of hired workers, who are hired by the farm directly, and the number of agricultural service workers, who work on a contract or fee basis. In 2011, the combined total number of farmworkers in the peak summer season neared 1.2 million. Since then, the Farm Labor Survey has only reported on hired workers, limiting our understanding of the total number of farmworkers in the US.

Estimated Number of Farm Workers, 2002-2017

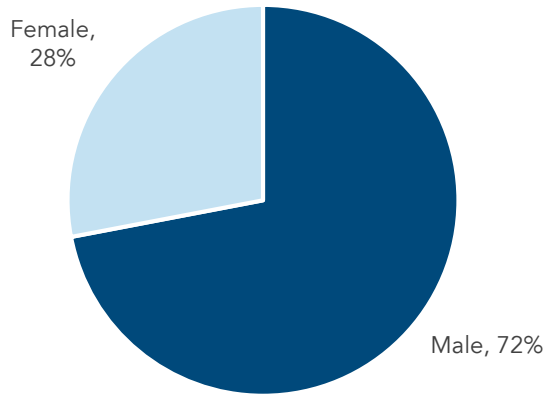


Source: Farm Labor Survey, National Agricultural Statistics Service, 2002-2017

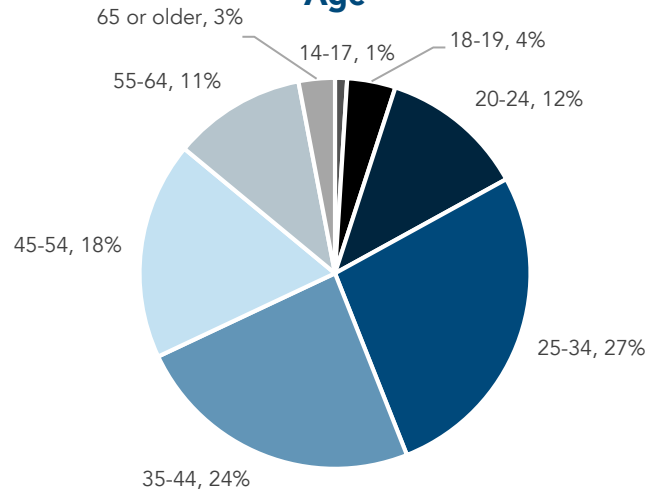
Additionally, the total number of farmworkers in the US could be much higher than the Farm Labor Survey estimates because of underreporting, turnover, and migration patterns. Some estimate the total number could be double the Farm Labor Survey estimates, exceeding 2 million.¹

Demographics of hired crop workers²

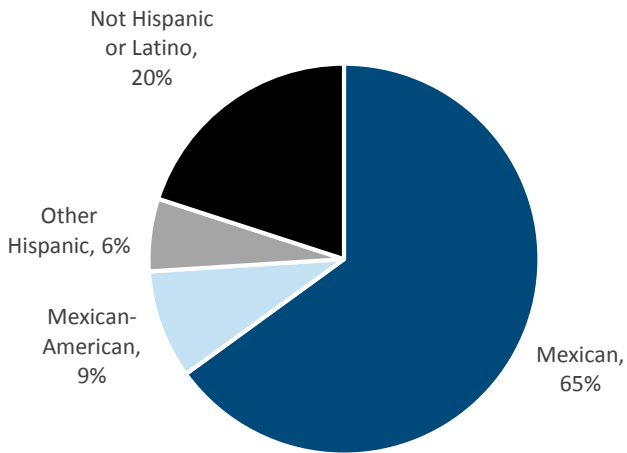
Gender



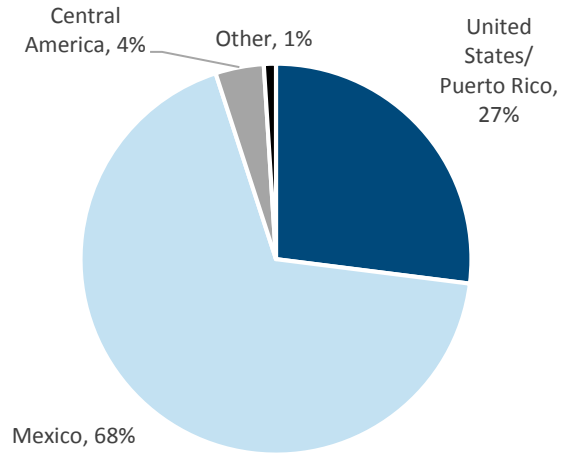
Age



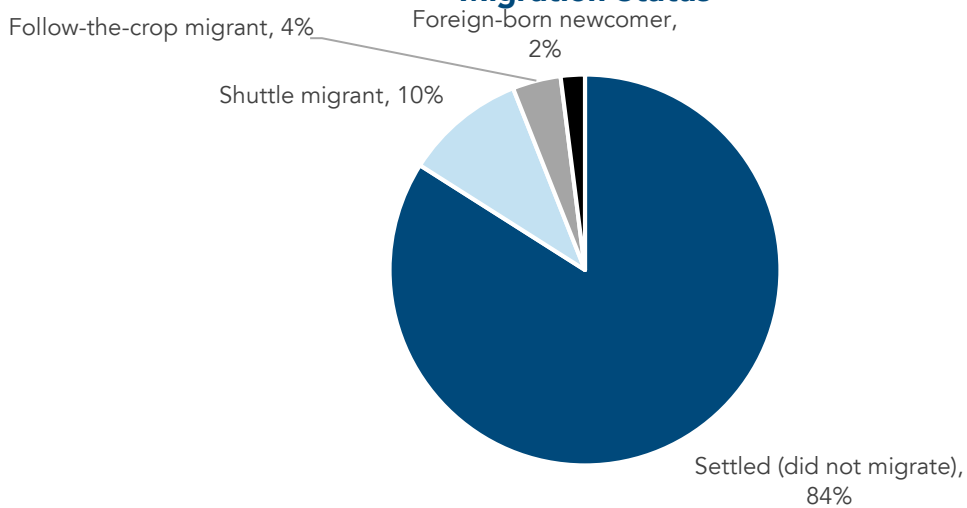
Ethnicity



Place of Birth



Migration Status



A spotlight on working conditions: farmworkers' wages and income

- > Farmworkers experience a number of challenges at work, including low wages, strenuous working conditions, low pay, long hours, and all-too-frequent abuse, mistreatment, and exposure to chemical and other hazards.
- > The National Agricultural Worker Survey (NAWS) reports **average hourly earnings of \$10.19**. However, farmworkers too often are paid far less. Many are paid by the weight of produce picked, causing wages to fluctuate with conditions like weather and time of season.³ Furthermore, farmworkers have historically been subjected to wage theft and even slavery.⁴
- > Harvest seasons limit the number of days that farmworkers can work in a year. NAWS reports farmworkers worked an average of about 200 days in a 12-month period.
- > These factors contribute to the low yearly income of farmworkers. NAWS reports farmworkers **median annual personal income was between \$15,000 and \$17,499, and median annual family income was \$20,000 to \$24,999**.

Key terms for the discussion

Coalition of Immokalee Workers: a worker-based human rights organization located in Immokalee, Florida. The organization was founded through farmworker community organizing starting in 1993.⁵



Campaign for Fair Food: “the campaign launched by the CIW in 2001 beginning with a boycott against Taco Bell. The campaign called for fair wages and safe working conditions for farmworkers and for workers to have a ‘place at the table’ when the Florida tomato industry made decisions that affected their work, pay, and safety.”⁶

Fair Food Program: a program established by the CIW “in 2010 when the Campaign for Fair Food achieved agreements with major retail buyers and producers... The Fair Food Program includes the code of conduct, the “penny-per-pound” Fair Food premium, the Fair Food Standards Council and its audits and 24/7 complaint line, and the CIW’s Worker Education Program.”⁷ For more information, visit fairfoodprogram.org.



Participating buyers include: Walmart, Whole Foods, Ahold USA (Stop & Shop/Giant), Trader Joe’s, Taco Bell, McDonald’s, Burger King, Chipotle Mexican Grill, Bon Appetit Management Co, Compass Group, Aramark, and Sodexo.

Participating growers include: more than 15 farms in Florida, Georgia, Maryland, New Jersey, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia, growing tomatoes, strawberries, and green bell peppers.

Worker-driven social responsibility model: “a new paradigm for protecting human rights in global supply chains, one designed, monitored, and enforced by the very workers whose rights it is intended to protect.”⁸ Beyond the Fair Food Program, the model has also been successfully used in the Milk with Dignity campaign, led by Vermont-based Migrant Justice, and the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh. For more information, visit wsr-network.org/success-stories.

We are grateful to the Ford Foundation, the Prudential Foundation, and the Walmart Foundation for their support of the Working in America series.

¹ Philip Martin and J. Edward Taylor, “Ripe with Change: Evolving Farm Labor Markets in the United States, Mexico, and Central America,” (Washington, DC: Wilson Center and Migration Policy Institute), February 2013, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/RMSG-Agriculture.pdf>.

² National Agricultural Worker Survey, Employment and Training Administration, US Department of Labor, available online: <https://www.doleta.gov/naaws/pages/research/data-tables.cfm>. Data from Fiscal Years 2013-2014.

³ Susan L. Marquis, *I Am Not a Tractor: How Florida Farmworkers Took on the Fast Food Giants and Won*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017), p. 46-47.

⁴ Marquis, *I Am Not a Tractor*, p. 40-41.

⁵ “About CIW,” Coalition of Immokalee Workers, online: <http://ciw-online.org/about/>.

⁶ Marquis, *I Am Not a Tractor*, p. xi.

⁷ Marquis, *I Am Not a Tractor*, p. xi.

⁸ “Frequently Asked Questions: What is WSR?” Worker Driven Social Responsibility Network, online: <https://wsr-network.org/faqs/>.