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Unseen Hands: The History of Migrant Workers

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Introduction

Have you ever taken the time to consider where your fruits and vegetables come from; who picks them; what they earn; or even how they are treated? Is becoming a vegetarian really more ethical than eating meat? Animal rights might be an important topic for many vegetarians, but do people realize the inhumane conditions faced by farm laborers themselves? What about the human rights of these workers?

Historically, agriculture has served as one of the most important industries to the United States, providing millions of people with affordable, healthy food. Over the centuries, we have depended on hired hands, neighbors, African Americans, poor Anglos, and slaves to tend to the foods that all Americans depend upon and yet so many take for granted. Today, there are an estimated 3 million farmworkers in the

United States; nearly 72% of them are foreign born, 68% being from Mexico. Each summer, thousands of migrant workers flock to Indiana to plant, cultivate, and harvest millions of dollars in crops, but do the inhabitants of the region realize the amount of work migrant

light on the history and importance of farmwork in America. We then transition into the demographic history of South Bend Latino settlement. Next, we will focus on their living conditions as well as the legislation that is in place that ineffectively ameliorate these conditions.

After thoroughly examining migrant farm work as a whole, we will narrow the focus to South Bend in particular. We will then discuss the work of local advocates through a series of interviews. In addition, we will

Distribution of Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers

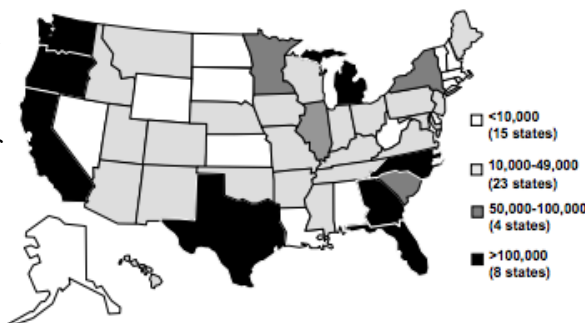


Image courtesy of Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured

farmers put in; the hazards that come with the job; or the low wages they are unethically paid?

The purpose of this project is to further explore migrant farming in the United States, taking particular interest in the population of South Bend and the South Western Michigan area. To do this we will first shed

highlight several success stories involving migrant farmers around the South Bend area. Finally, we will conclude with possible recommendations that could ultimately lead to a better life for these migrants and their families.

Background

Since the beginning of our country's history, we have relied on farm hands, as they have been an essential part of our nation's economy and development. At first, our country's small family farms relied on family, hired hands, neighbors, and slaves. With the growth of the use of factory-made agricultural machinery came a corresponding increase in the need for cash among farmers. The new need for fast cash helped to encourage more commercial farming, which in turn meant large scale farming in order to produce crops for sale. Commercialization of products goes as far back as cotton plantations, where the African and African American slaves were the ones doing this work, working to clothe and feed the Anglo migrants. Large scale commercial farming became very favorable for agribusiness, but the smaller farms were left at a disadvantage since they did not operate on such a grandiose level. Due to the success of large farms, family farmers were displaced and pushed into migrant and seasonal wage labor on larger plantations, since their own farms could not keep up with the growth of commercial farming and the new monocrop culture. In the 1850s there was more necessity for seasonal farming due to new machinery, farming methods and herbicides, advancements in transportation, and refrigeration, all leading to an increase in crop production. The increase in crop production then led to lower wages and irregular work performed by these migrant families who were left little

choice in their work due to discrimination by race, educational level, and immigration status. By 1900 larger scale farming was a necessity, and because of this, the farm work-



Image courtesy of Migrant Clinician

ing population shifted to African Americans; poor Anglos; and, newly arriving immigrants from Europe, China, Japan, and Mexico.

In 1917 the demand for immigrant labor increased again when the US entered into World War I. As a result of the war, there was a greater need for food, but the US had an increased shortage of agricultural laborers. Due to this

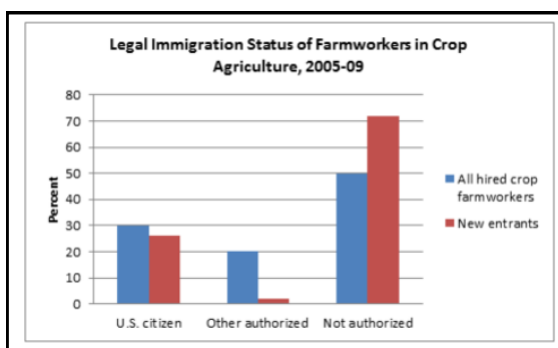


Image courtesy of Univision

great demand, the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1917 was passed, establishing the legal basis for the importation of 73,000 Mexican Workers. After World War I, however, the need for cheap labor intensified once again as African Ameri-

can and White sharecroppers began to migrate elsewhere due to the increase in mechanization of farms with the shift to agribusiness. The sharecroppers, forced off their land, then decided to either move north to work in the factories or became migrant workers. This then led to another increase in immigration from Mexico because more cheap labor was required to keep up with the continuation of the monocrop commercial farm system.

Then disaster struck: the Great Depression. With the Great Depression, the agricultural economy worsened leading to a Mexican repatriation in which more than 40,000 Mexicans were deported, some of them American citizens. The need for Mexicans in our labor force, however, once again increased when the US entered World War II. At this time (1943), the US enacted the Bracero Program, which continued until 1964. This program allowed for the importation of Mexican workers to help out as farmworkers. After the end of the Bracero Program in 1964, employers began to turn to the H2 visa program to fill temporary labor needs. During the time of the Bracero Program, the US labor force still had a lot of native workers. For example, as is illustrated in the *Harvest of Shame* documentary by Edward Murrow, which came out in 1960, many of these farm-working families were white. Nowadays, this is drastically different, as the majority of our agricultural laborers are Mexican born.

Migrant Agricultural History in Northern Indiana

A report about Indiana migrants published in 1974 highlights the history of migrant labor in the area. It states that every summer, around 18,000 migrant farm workers came to Indiana to pick asparagus, cucumbers, mint, peas, potatoes, strawberries, tomatoes, orchard fruit, seed, corn, and melons. Their harvest profits earned around \$26,000,000 annually for the state. Although this report was from 1974, migrants have been coming to the region ever since the United States entered World War I to help replenish the labor force after many men had to leave to go to war. At this time, the US Department of Agriculture imported as many as 21,000 Mexican workers to come to the Midwest to help with harvesting crops. A lot of the workers who came directly to South Bend were originally from Texas; however, later on more migrants would come directly from their countries of origin and settle in South Bend. These original settlers were first from Texas because they were part of what is called a “migrant stream” that had its roots in Texas.

Even when the war ended, the contractors continued to recruit Mexican and Mexican American workers for their cheap labor because the men who were returning from the war were seeking jobs elsewhere. Then during World War II there was another spike in migrant farmers to Indiana when the Federal Emergency Farm Labor program brought workers to the area through directing them to the migrant stream that led them here or through direct importation from Mexico. Within this migrant stream, Indiana is seen as a “footpath” (Cardenas 16) since it is between Ohio and Michigan, both of which offer more lucrative agricultural jobs. Conversely, in Indiana, as in the country as a whole, there was a shift from agricultural to manufacturing industries.

Mr. Federico Thon—a former Notre Dame student originally from Puerto Rico, who then settled in South Bend about 50 years ago, served as liaison to the Hispanic community of South Bend, and is now a business man—describes the Latino community of South Bend in an interview. He describes the settlement of Mexican laborers in the area, first talking about the arrival of the Mexican-Americans in the 1940s and 1950s into South Bend to work, primarily in the mint fields. In doing so, he



Image courtesy of Planet Matters and More



Above is the migrant stream farmworkers tend to follow every season. As illustrated, many, if not all, migrants come to the Midwest from Texas.

Image courtesy of National Center for Farmworker Health

refers to the “Texas” community, as Mr. Jose Juaréz, a local Latino leader who has done a lot of work in community organizing, would call it. When asked if these workers came here looking for a stable and already established job, Mr. Thon describes how this group of laborers, who were primarily Mexicans working in the mint fields, initially would come and go. Eventually, some of them began to stay and establish their families here and have now found success, such as becoming the owners of restaurants and the chief of firemen. (*“Iban y venían, muchos de ellos iban y venían pero varias familias grandes empezaron a quedarse. Y esta gente yo diría que son gente especialmente mexicanos que trabajaron en las fincas de menta y muchos de ellos se movieron hacia adelante, uno de ellos es el dueño del restaurante este chico, y otro es chief de los bomberos.”*) He then talked about some of the main founding families in the South Bend area being the Rodriguez, Salazar, and Buenos families.

Mr. Thon continued to describe migrant labor in South Bend and how it changed in the 1970s and 1980s. During these years, the workers started coming more to work in factories and less to work in fields. This helped the establishment of Latinos in South Bend since now the people were working here year round instead of just seasonally. Now, not only were Mexican Americans coming to South Bend for work from Texas but also from California (like the Arrellanos—see section on successes) and Mexico. Thon tells us that nowadays the migration to South Bend from Mexico has really slowed down due to the fear of deportation that the migrants are living in and rumors that banks will do things such as steal all of the migrants money. Mr. Jose Juaréz also highlights the different communities of Latinos living in South Bend, saying that there are three levels of community in the population of South Bend: pioneers (people who were already living here), immigrants from Texas, and then the more recent arrivals from Mexico whether they be documented or not.

What Kind of Lives Were Migrants Living

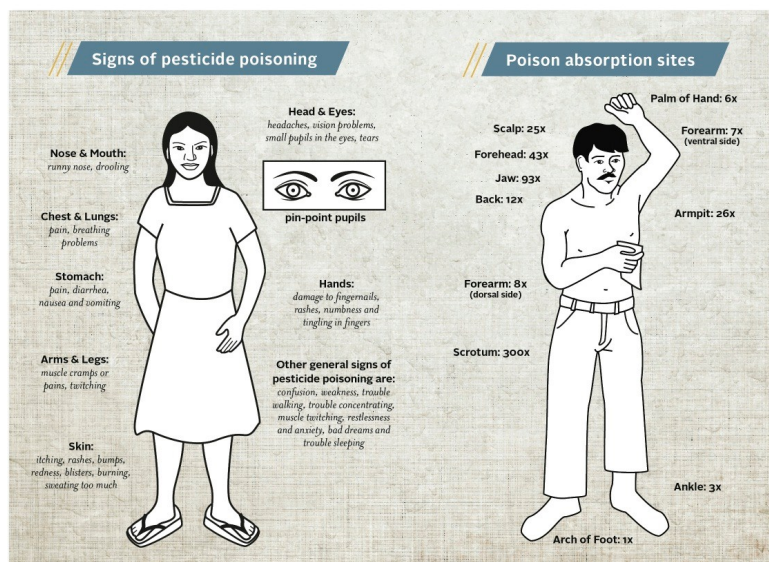
According to the National Safety Council, agriculture is one of the most hazardous industries in the United States in terms of accidents to its laborers. While laboring in the fields, many migrant farmworkers are exposed to severe health and safety problems. Some of the most common health concerns these migrant workers encounter are: internal and external body damage associated with pesticide exposure, infectious disease, skin disorders, heat stress, poor sanitation, traumatic injuries, reproductive complications, poor nutrition, and lack of medical resources. For most migrants, however, health issues are just one of many obstacles they must face. Lack of employment benefits, low wages, unjust working conditions, housing issues, and the irregularity of the work are a few of the other difficulties that make life as a migrant worker much harder to endure.



Photo courtesy of Elephant Journal

Pesticide Poisoning and Injuries

Injuries play a considerable role in the risks posed by farm work. Some of the most common and dangerous among these injuries is caused by the pesticides farmers spray in order to fend off insects, animals, plants and fungi. Each year in the U.S., nearly 1.2 billion pounds of pesticides are used in fields across the country, negatively affecting an estimated 300,000 farm workers. Farm workers can be harmed by pesticides in one of two ways: they can be poisoned (caused by pesticides that harm internal organs or other systems inside the body) or injured (caused by pesticides that are external irritants.) Pesticide exposure results from numerous happenings: direct contact with crops; transfer from hands while eating; direct spraying; indirect spraying (drifts with the wind); or, bathing/drinking contaminated water. While some pesticides are more harmful than others, it is safe to say that no pesticide is harmless, especially if a person is exposed to it long enough. Extended exposure can lead to a plethora of injuries including, but not limited to: blistered or cracked skin, change in skin color, irritated eyes, temporary or permanent blindness, development of asthma, paralysis, heart block, complete body shock, and in some cases even death.



Source: North Carolina Department of Labor.
Different parts of your body absorb pesticides differently. The skin on your forehead, for example, is 43 times more absorbent than the skin on the arch of your foot. Or, if the same amount of pesticide were to fall on your forehead and your foot, the pesticide would enter your body 43 times more rapidly through your forehead than through your foot.

This figure shows how different parts of the body absorb pesticides in different ways. For example, the skin on your back is 12 times more absorbent than the skin on your foot.

Image courtesy of North Carolina Department of Labor

What Kind of Lives Were Migrants Living, *Cont.*

Poor Nutrition

One of the most prevalent health concerns for migrant farmworkers in today's society is poor nutrition, which is awfully ironic considering these are the people that pick our "healthiest" fresh foods. Studies conducted on migrants across the U.S. have shown that diabetes, high blood pressure, and anemia occur at higher rates among migrant farmworkers than they do among Americans in general. Simply put, these health issues are a result of poor diet and irregular visits to the doctor. Studies have also shown that migrants were much healthier before coming to America. Why is that? Some argue that this is, in part, due to the availability of fast food combined with the abundance of processed foods that are high in fats, sugars, and carbs. Furthermore, migrants ironically do not have access to fresh fruits, vegetables, and healthy protein.

Reproductive complications

For migrant women, reproductive complications tend to be a common health concern. Poor nutrition, dehydration, and pesticide exposure are all factors that contribute to the heightened risk of premature birth, growth retardation, and abnormal postnatal development that are commonly found among these women. The prevalence of such birth deformities has been a developing problem among migrant farmers for the last several decades. Moreover, the infant mortality rate for migrant farm working women nearly doubles that of the national average.

Traumatic Injuries

Traumatic injuries are another major health concern within the migrant community. Fractures and sprains commonly occur due to the constant stress migrant farmers place on their bodies. Perpetual kneeling and bending over, heavy lifting, rapid repetitive motions, and working with their hands above their shoulders can all lead to serious problems with tissues and joints, ultimately slowing down the rate in which the migrants work.



*Mural by Gilda Monreal at the
Agricultural Workers Alliance (AWA)
Support Centre in Leamington, ON*

Infectious Disease

Infectious disease is another common health problem migrant farmers regularly encounter. The increased rate of infectious disease is, in part, due to the harsh conditions in which migrants must work and live. Migrants must work in extreme heat, cold, or rain, leaving them more susceptible to viruses. With an increased risk for contracting viral, bacterial, and parasitic infections, farmworkers are nearly six times more likely to have tuberculosis than the general population, and eleven to fifty-nine times as likely to have a parasitic infection—which, if not treated correctly, can lead to anemia or malnutrition. Furthermore, as a result of limited toilets in the fields coupled with rigorous working conditions that promote chronic urine retention, migrant farmworkers are at greater risk for urinary tract infections. Chronic infections or colonization typically result due to the retention weakening and stretching bladder walls.

What Kind of Lives Were Migrants Living, *Cont.*

Irregularity of the Work

One of the many insecurities that comes with migrant farm working is the irregularity of the work. Constantly moving to new, strange places, migrants face variability in employment availability, payment integrity, weather conditions, and crop maturation. Additionally, migrant farmworkers are often employed by subcontracting crew leaders. It is not uncommon for these subcontractors to promise a certain wage at the time of recruitment and then fail to pay the agreed upon amount later on. It is also common for crew leaders to pay the employees in cash, leaving them without any proper receipt or documentation for their work.

A Sample Workday for a Florida Tomato Picker

4:30 AM: Wake up. Prepare lunch in your trailer.

5:00 AM: Walk to the parking lot or pick-up site to begin looking for work.

6:30 AM: With luck, a contractor will choose you to work for him for the day. The job may be 10 miles to 100 miles away. Board the contractor's converted school bus to go to the fields.

7:30 AM: Arrive at fields and begin weeding or simply waiting while the dew evaporates from the tomatoes. You are usually not paid for this time.

9:00 AM: Begin picking tomatoes – filling buckets, hoisting them on your shoulder, running them 100 feet or more to the truck and throwing the bucket up into the truck – all for a token worth, on average, 50 cents. Work fast because you must pick 2.5 tons of tomatoes in order to earn minimum wage today. This may or may not be possible depending on the time of year and quantity of tomatoes on the plants.

12:00 PM: Eat lunch as fast as you can, often with your hands soaked in pesticides. Return to work under the smoldering Florida sun.

5:00 PM (sometimes much later, depending on the season): Board bus to return to Immokalee.

Between 5:30 and 8:00 PM: Arrive in Immokalee and walk home.



Image courtesy of Washington Post

Unjust Working Conditions

Although migrant farmers put in more work than most, they still rank among the highest economically deprived people in the U.S. According to the National Agriculture Workers Survey, nearly 23% of migrant families reported to be below national poverty guidelines, a result of improper pay by employers. It is not uncommon for employers to detract from the number of hours migrants have put in—either for lunch or other reasons. It is also not uncommon for employers to fail to hold true to their agreed-upon hourly wage. In addition to low wages, migrant farmworkers lack many of the benefits granted to most employees in other industries. Rarely having access to worker's compensation or disability compensation benefits, migrant farmworkers are at a clear disadvantage in today's society.

Migrant Farmworkers: Median Annual Income

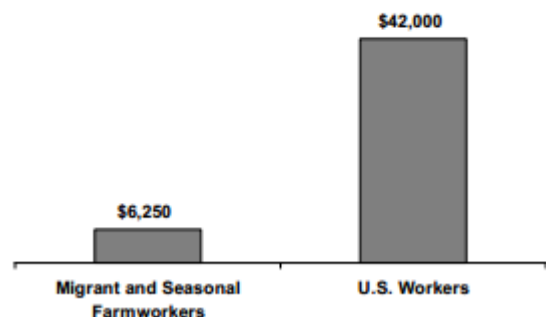


Image courtesy of Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured

What Kind of Lives Were Migrants Living, *Cont.*

Housing

In order to attract migrant workers for harvest season, agricultural employers typically offer free or reduced cost housing. However, the housing that most employers provide is substandard, creating undesirable living conditions for the workers and their families. One of the most problematic housing conditions migrants face is overcrowding. Studies done by the Housing Assistance Council have showed that 61% of the migrant farmers in Michigan live in overcrowded quarters. Most of these overcrowded quarters also have poor sanitation. It is not uncommon for migrant camps to lack clean water and provide little access to proper bathrooms, leaving migrants susceptible to viruses and bladder infections.

Although administrations such as Occupational, Safety and Health work hard to prevent the aforementioned living conditions, they still persist, and unfortunately, there is not much migrant farmers can do about it. If migrants were to complain about their living conditions, they not only risk the threat of losing their jobs but also their residence.

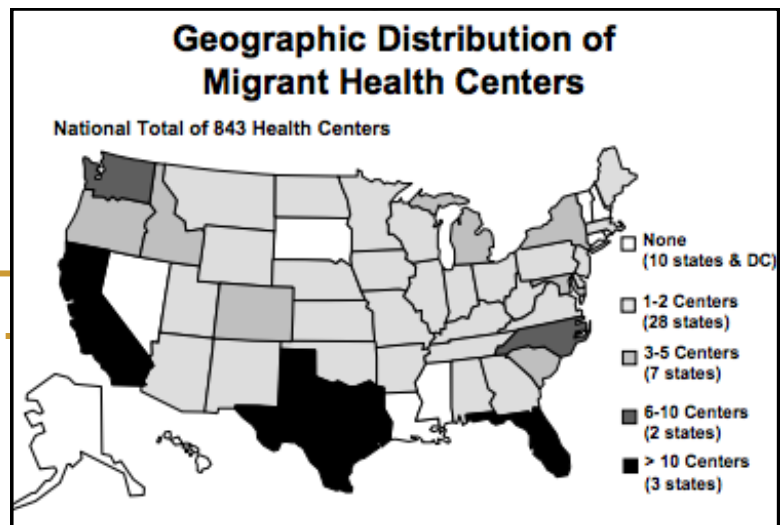
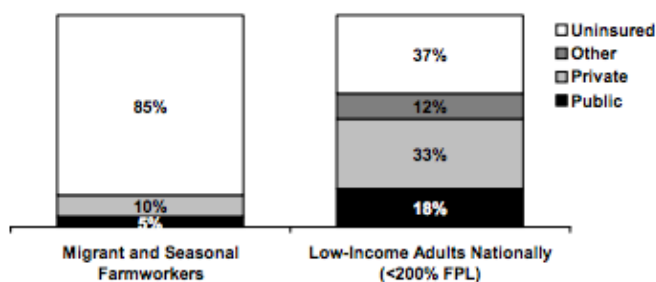


Image courtesy of Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured

Limited Access to Health Care

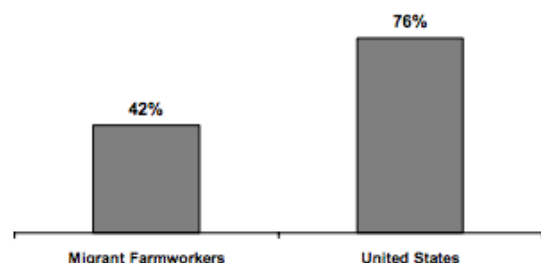
What happens to those who have diabetes yet cannot afford medication? For the majority of migrants this is a very real situation. There are a handful of barriers that migrants encounter when it comes to health care. These obstacles truly impair migrants' access to health care and include: language barriers between health care providers and migrants; threat of job loss for taking off work; lack of insurance and transportation; and, limited clinic hours. For those migrants who do seek a doctor, it is not uncommon for them to miss follow-up appointments, ultimately putting the patients back at square one.

Migrant Farmworkers: Health Coverage for Adults



Migrant Farmworker Families: Utilization of Health Care

Percent of pregnant women that sought care during the first trimester of their pregnancy:



Legislation

Over the years, the United States has implemented a wide-range of labor laws in order to improve the lives of American workers. Yet not every labor law has benefitted the agricultural worker as much as other workers. As you will read below, several laws excluded agricultural workers entirely, ultimately making life for migrants even more burdened.

Below are short descriptions of different legislative acts that are applicable to the migrant farmworker population. The first three are examples of legislation that excluded the migrant farmworkers while the next several are acts in place that benefit them.

1935: National Labor Relations Act

U.S. Congress passed this act in attempt to diminish labor-related obstructions to the free flow of interstate and foreign commerce. The National Labor Relations Act provides employees with the basic right to organize into trade unions, where they can collectively bargain with management for better pay, working conditions, and job benefits. This act did not apply to agricultural workers, however, leaving migrant farmworkers vulnerable without this government protection.

1938: Fair Labor Standards Act

In order to guarantee minimum wage and overtime pay to American workers, Congress passed the Fair Labor Standards Act in 1938. This act ensures that time and a half is paid for any work over 40 hours a week. Record-keeping and child labor provisions are also included in this act. However, much like the National Labor Standards Act, agricultural workers were excluded from this law. It was not until 1973 that this law also applied to agricultural workers.

1950s: Federal Employment Tax Act

The Federal Employment Tax Act requires employers to pay both a federal and state unemployment tax. This unemployment tax money provides workers who have lost their job payments of unemployment compensation. Similar to the two aforementioned acts, the Federal Employment Tax Act excluded agricultural workers. It was not until 1976 that this law also applied to agricultural workers. However, even then it only applied to workers employed by a large farm (ten or more workers.)

1952: Immigration and Nationality Act

Otherwise known as the McCarron-Walter Act, the Immigration and Nationality Act establishes the different types of visas and conditions required for those traveling to the United States. Moreover, the act grants temporary, nonimmigrant workers (H-2A visa holders) the right to provide seasonal agricultural labor for those employers who cannot find U.S. workers to fill the job.

1963: Farm Labor Contractor Registration Act

Shortly after the airing of *Harvest of Shame*, Congress held a series of hearings, which ultimately lead to the first piece of legislation that focused on farmworkers. Regulating the activities of farm labor contractors, the Farm Labor Contractor Registration Act requires all contractors to register with the U.S. Department of Labor. The contractors must keep wage records as well as provide accurate information to workers regarding promised employment.

Legislation, *cont.*

1970: Occupational Safety and Health Act

The Occupational Safety and Health Act assured that employers must provide their employees with safe and healthy working conditions. More specifically, the act states that employers who have eleven or more employees that conduct hand labor operations in the field must provide those employees with drinking water, a toilet and hand-washing facilities within a reasonable distance.

1983: Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act

Arguably the most important piece of legislation passed for the migrant farmer is the Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act (MSPA). This act ensures that employers pay each migrant worker on time and the appropriate amount that is owed; keep payroll records for three years; discuss—and eventually comply with—the terms and conditions of employment at the time of recruitment; and, ensure that housing and transportation meet federal and state safety regulations. The most important feature of the act was the joint employer provision, which made the farm labor contractor equally responsible with the agricultural employer for compliance with MSPA obligations. As a result of the MSPA, Migrant farmers won many lawsuits, which ultimately lead to enmity towards the Legal Services Council (LSC). The negative reaction against LSC made it so that the council was no longer able to assist non-U.S. citizens or residents.

1986: Immigration Reform and Control Act

Passed by Congress in 1986, the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) was one of the first major revisions of immigration laws in the United States since the Immigration and Nationality Act. Prohibiting employers from hiring illegal immigrants, IRCA requires employers to complete the Employment Eligibility Verification Form, verifying the identity and employment eligibility of hired employees. Moreover, the act applies stricter enforcement of immigration laws, which the Immigration and Naturalization Service is responsible for implementing. As a result of IRCA, there is very little advocacy for the majority of farm workers, considering most are undocumented immigrants.

1995: Worker Protection Standards for Agricultural Pesticides

Worker Protection Standards was created in order to protect against pesticide poisonings. Growers must provide workers with basic health and safety information and ensure that workers know how to use the pesticides correctly. Along with providing proper training, growers must also restrict access to fields after pesticides have been applied.



Image courtesy of Community Alliance

Organizations and People that Advocate for Migrant Farmworkers

FLOC (Farm Labor Organizing Committee)

FLOC first began to take shape in the 1960s, when a small group of migrant workers in Ohio decided to come together to fight for their rights. Although slow moving at the beginning, FLOC now has a membership of tens of thousands of migrant farmworkers nationally. This group has two different main principles:

“1. Farmworkers need a voice in the decisions that affect them: allowing workers to form a union and collectively bargain with their employer is the only way to address the huge imbalance of power and provide an effective structure for self-determination.

2. Bring all parties to the table to address industry wide problems: Multi-national corporations have created a supply system that enriches its executives at the expense of those who work in the fields. These corporations have the wealth and power to change the harsh realities that many farmworkers face. FLOC seeks a structure where all those in the system work together to solve problems: corporations, growers, and farmworkers. Historically, this is the only solution that has made a real difference in farmworkers' conditions and lives.”



Melody Gonzales (right) is a Notre Dame grad who was a key player in the campaign for fair food against McDonald's

CIW (Coalition of Immokalee Workers)

The Coalition of Immokalee Workers is a human rights organization most commonly known for its campaign for fair food, although it also has new movements in the fields of human trafficking. The CIW is worker based, meaning that it is made up of the workers who are mainly from Immokalee, Florida, a small migrant community in Southwestern Florida. The CIW frequently organizes protest marches against local grocery stores and larger food providers in order to ask them to help the farmworkers earn a living wage and fair labor conditions. Every spring break, a group of Notre Dame students head down to Immokalee so they can better learn about the experiences of migrant workers. This group usually works closely with the CIW while they are there.



Image courtesy of Gainesville Catholic Worker

Student Farmworker Alliance



Image courtesy of Student Farmworker Alliance

The Student Farmworker Alliance is a national organization of students who work with the CIW to help to promote better working conditions for farmworkers in the fields today. This group is based in education, action and developing leadership. They organize open areas of speech between farmworkers and students so they can share their experiences with each other and gain knowledge about different populations. This allows students to join with farmworkers in campaigns for better wages and working conditions, and also focuses on developing the leadership skills of students involved. This organization has been successful in many of their campaigns with the CIW including fair food agreements with Taco Bell, McDonald's, Burger King, Whole Foods, and Subway.

More Advocates and Organization

Dolores Huerta

Dolores Huerta is a woman who tirelessly fought for better social and economic situations for farm workers. Part of her efforts included the founding of the Agricultural Workers Association in 1960 as well as cofounding the United Farmworkers Alliance with Cesar Chavez in 1962. She continued her fight for the rights of farmworkers even further, winning the Ellis Island Medal of Freedom Award (1993) and the Eleanor Roosevelt Award (1998).

Cesar Chavez

César Chavez founded the National Farm Workers Association, which later became the United Farm Workers, in 1962 with Dolores Huerta. The movement did not take off right away, however, since there were very few union members paying dues. Regardless, Chavez continued to work tirelessly, and in 1970 California grape growers signed a contract with the union. Chavez also led a major march from Delano to Sacramento in 1966 in order to ask the state to allow farm workers to organize under an official union so that they could bargain and receive better treatment. This was the beginning of “La Causa”. Chavez dedicated his life to La Causa, going on many hunger strikes to try and prove his point and struggle for justice through nonviolence.



Image courtesy of the Cesar Chavez Student Center

Fred Arroyo

Born in Michigan, Fred Arroyo is a Puerto Rican author who writes about his own experience growing and working in the fields of the Midwest, especially in Niles, Michigan, and South Bend, Indiana. His work serves as a voice offering the reader an opportunity to understand the rural experience of his own life as well as the lives of many other Latinos in the area. Although he grew up working in the fields with his father, he has become quite successful in the literary world and has published a novel, *The Region of Los Names* and also a collection of short stories titled *Western Avenue and Other Fictions*. Although he did not “superar” in the same way that the other local examples did by converting into the owners of the land instead of the workers, he managed to gain success through his writing.

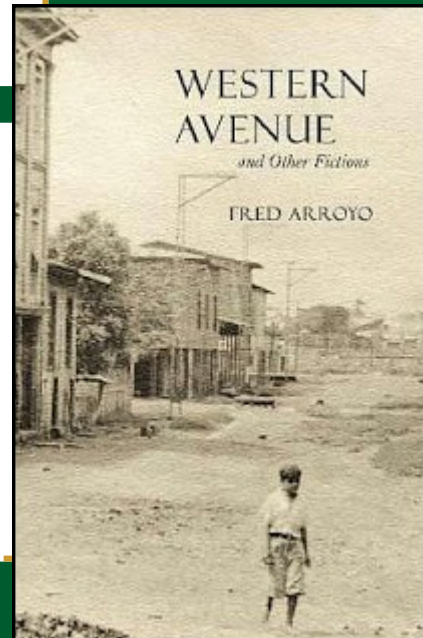


Image courtesy of LaCasa Inc.

LaCasa

LaCasa is a not for profit organization that was founded in 1970, aiming to improve the housing conditions of migrant farm workers in Goshen, Indiana. Still active today, the organization not only provides housing help but also offers different educational and social services. It focuses not only on Goshen but also reaches out to migrant workers in Elkhart County.

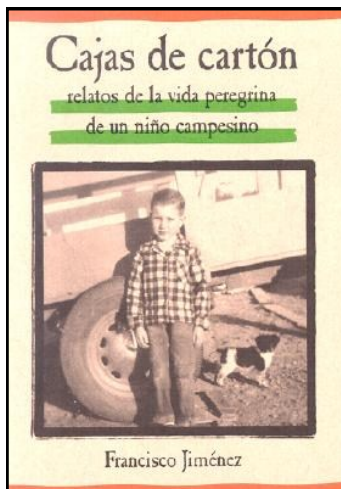
Images of Farmworkers in Media and the Arts

Harvest of Shame

This documentary by Edward Murrow first came out on Thanksgiving Day in 1960. It highlighted the lives of the migrant farm workers in America, interviewing many of the workers and talking to them about their families. It showed the actual living and working conditions of many of these workers. Interestingly, the majority of these workers were white and African American. This contrasts with the *Harvest of Shame Revisited* that the CIW made about migrant farmworkers today, the majority of which are Mexican or of other Latin American descent.



Image courtesy of Frank W. Baker



A photo of the book *Cajas de Carton* by Francisco Jimenez

Cajas de Carton by Francisco Jimenez

This book is about the child in a migrant farm working family. I think that this would be interesting to include in addition to our interviews with Becky Ruvulcaba (See page 13) because her parents were also migrant farm workers. The book highlights the life of a boy as he migrates with his family as they are working all throughout California. It details his school experiences as well as his day-to-day experiences as a Mexican. Since his loyalty was primarily to his family and to their work, he could not go to school until the picking seasons were over. As soon as he was able to go to school, he felt great relief, and the reader is able to see his inner child come through. Throughout the book, the reader sees how being part of a migrant working family in a way deprives the children of being children. The name of the book refers to moving so much: he always talks about packing everything up in the cardboard boxes in the car.

H-2 Worka by Mutabaruka

This song is about Jamaican guest workers in Florida. This song touches on many of the issues regarding the working conditions of migrant laborers in the United States today. It talks about how the worker is “working for your meager dollar bill” and how he is pleading the listener not to take him for granted. He asks if slavery still exists and begs the issue of individual human dignity of the worker by saying that he has dreams just like you. This is a really unique representation of the worker since it is told through the voice of someone who sounds as though they are from Jamaica, so it gives the idea of “giving a voice” to the worker a whole new meaning. Through listening to this song, one is provided with the opportunity to really see the humanity of the worker and is called to be conscious of the hands that touched one’s food before he or she did.

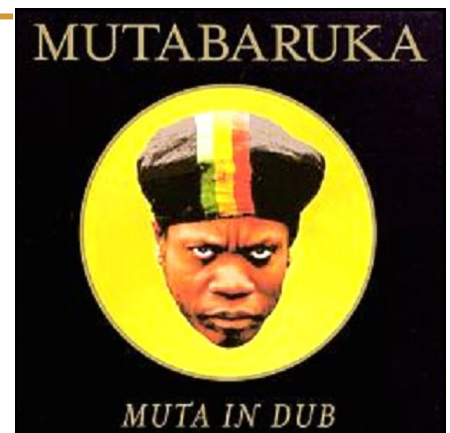


Image courtesy of Reggae Discography
Blog by Marco Weststar

Harvest of Shame Revisited

This is a clip put out by the CIW that is meant to reflect Edward R. Murrow’s documentary, *Harvest of Shame*. In this clip, one is able to observe the transformation of the migrant working population from the time that Murrow released this documentary. The CIW focuses on the mostly undocumented Hispanic work force that exists today giving the viewer an inside look into the lives, working conditions, and wages of these workers.

Local Success Stories of Migrant Workers



Image courtesy of Arellano's Farm Website

Recently there has been a shift in the Hispanic population and their relationship to farm work. In the past, as we have examined, the Hispanic population in the Midwest was largely employed as farm hands; however, in more recent times, the Hispanics are becoming the farm owners. According to an article in USA Today, “Women and Hispanics have long played a significant role in farming, but often in supporting jobs from picking crops and milking cows to bookkeeping. But an aging population, the surge in Hispanics in every corner of the country and Americans’ growing fascination with organic foods are propelling more women and Hispanics into owning and managing farms” (Nassar). This phenomenon is happening country wide; however, there are specific “success stories” of our neighbors both here in South Bend and in southwest Michigan that show us how Hispanics are overcoming their roles as workers on these farms.

Armando Arellano

Armando Arellano migrated from Mexico to the US twenty-one years ago. He first moved to California and then to Elk Grove Village, Illinois, cooking cakes, pies, and muffins in both places. Like many other immigrants in Chicago, after a few years he took advantage of the opportunity to move to southwest Michigan, where he would return to his more rural roots. “In southwest Michigan, where Mexicans were long relegated to migrant work, Arellano is among a growing number of Mexican immigrants who are buying the blueberry farms that thrive in the region” (Martin). In this case, Mr. Arellano shows us how the population that was primarily employed as migrant workers in the past is now overcoming this status as worker and becoming the owners of small farms in the region, as well as nationally. Mr. Arellano arrived in the area as a migrant worker and now owns a fruit stand as well as blueberry, apple, tomato, and strawberry farms.



Image courtesy of Arellano's Farm

Felipe Llerena

Felipe Llerena is the Texas born son of migrant farm workers—as is very common in the migrant population in the South Bend and southwest Michigan area—currently living in Bangor, Michigan. He and ten brothers and sisters now own about eight hundred acres in the area. His father worked in the migrant stream from Texas to Minnesota before moving to Indiana and finally to southwest Michigan. His family then put together all their money to buy twenty acres of land and a farm house, later buying the farm where their father worked. Llerena now owns five acres of blueberry fields and is also a liaison to migrant workers for the local school district. His brothers own other large amounts of farm land, serving as testaments to the success of the children of migrant workers in the region.

Rebecca Ruvalcaba

Becky Ruvalcaba was born in South Bend, Indiana, to a migrant worker family. Her mother was a seasonal worker, while her father was a migrant worker who worked in the stream coming from Texas. Growing up, the culture of being a migrant working family was present in Becky's life. She worked for a summer in the fields which she says really changed her life. The farm that her parents worked on really promoted education, and that played a big part in the foundation of the lives of Becky and her siblings. They all have had professions in education in some way. In fact, Becky used to be the director for the local agency La Casa de Amistad (a Latino community center) and is now working towards a graduate degree at Notre Dame.



Image of La Casa de Amistad courtesy of Goshen College

Conclusion and Recommendations

The population of migrant farm workers is a hard working group of individuals who have contributed much to the history of agricultural success in the United States. Our country has a long history of employing these people to aid in increased agricultural production. However, shamefully, we do not treat these people as they deserve. They often go unseen, ignored by the millions of people who benefit from the literal fruits of their labor. They are exploited for that labor and made to live in terrible conditions, just so people can get cheaper food.

Considering that the majority of contemporary migrant farmworkers in the U.S. are Latino or of Latin American origin, in order to better their lives, we must first deconstruct ideas of national barriers and realize that all people are exactly that: people. We must think about the fact that we are dependent on these people to help sustain our country's agricultural business and treat them as essential players in our economy, instead of simply taking advantage of them.

This is exactly where the importance of this research brief comes in. By making people more aware of the conditions of migrant workers in the United States, they can begin to take into consideration ideas of ethical eating and the hands that touched our food before ours. By raising awareness about these issues, it is possible that our society will start to hold farm contractors more accountable for the living conditions and wages of the migrant hands they employ. It is important to bring light to the work of different advocate groups to the general population that might not have been tuned in to this kind of work before, so that over time, public opinion can change, leading to a change in the lives of the migrant workers.



Image courtesy of New Canadians Center

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