

FINAL REPORT

**Estimation of Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Workers
in Iowa, Kansas, Missouri and Nebraska**

Public Health Service Region VII

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I. PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

The purpose of this research project is to prepare estimates of the migrant and seasonal agricultural worker populations, plus nonworking dependents, for four states: Iowa, Kansas, Missouri and Nebraska. These population estimates contain information about dates of activity and geographic location of workers within each state. These estimates, along with estimates for other states, will be used by the U.S. Public Health Service to plan future health care services for agricultural workers, as well as to allocate some funds for services. To better plan and provide health services for migrant and seasonal agricultural workers, it is necessary to know where workers are usually located, for how long they stay in an area, and whether the workers are accompanied by nonworking dependents such as children and elderly family members.

Funding for this project was received in February, 1988 from the National Migrant Referral Project, Inc., with additional funds provided by the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development in Ames, Iowa. These funds provided for a half-time Research Specialist plus hourly work, travel and office costs. An additional one-third time Research Assistant was funded by the UW-Madison Graduate School for one semester. The project director's time was contributed without funding.

Since these estimates will be used by the Public Health Service, their definition of migrant workers is used here: persons whose principal employment is in agriculture on a seasonal basis, who establish a temporary abode for purposes of employment, and who have been so employed within the past 24 months. This excludes workers in meatpacking and poultry processing because the work is not done on farms. It includes people who hold

non-agricultural jobs as well as agricultural ones, if they define themselves as being principally employed in agriculture.

The Public Health Service definition of seasonal agricultural workers is used as the basis for our estimates of seasonal workers. The definition is very similar to the migrant worker definition, except that seasonal workers do not establish a temporary abode -- they live at home while working.

We define dependents of migrant and seasonal workers as nonworking household members. Thus dependents can be children or adults as long as they are not employed. For example, teenagers in migrant worker households who are employed are counted as workers, not dependents.

1988 was an unusual year for migrant agricultural work in two respects: (1) there was a severe drought over large parts of the nation; and (2) the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 was in effect. The drought had varying effects across the Midwest, hitting some areas and crops much harder than others. In general, the effects of the drought on migrant labor in Iowa, Kansas, Missouri and Nebraska were minimal. In some areas, however, work was delayed due to dry conditions, so workers had to wait for up to two weeks before starting work. In other areas, crops ripened very quickly in the heat, which made the harvest season much shorter than normal. Although employment levels in the four states were not greatly affected by the drought, unemployed workers from states where the drought was more severe increased the numbers of job seekers in some areas.

The Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) allows illegal aliens to apply for temporary resident status until November 30, 1988 if they performed farmwork in the U.S. for 90 days during May 1985 through April 1986 (Population Reference Bureau, 1988). These people are designated as SAWS (Special Agricultural Workers). The effect of this amnesty program on worker

populations is not clear; anecdotal evidence suggests that, in some areas, growers became wary of hiring undocumented workers and looked more to the local labor pool for workers. Others suggest that more workers than usual migrated from Mexico to attempt to get legal status, especially single men. Several people reported an increase in black market documents used to prove legal status. The net result is unknown; it appears that overall, the 1988 migrant labor force is basically similar to that of other years with some minor differences due to IRCA.