

Texas Farmworker Enumeration Project

*A report prepared for the
National Migrant Referral Project*

Luis F. B. Plascencia
Miguel Ceballos
Robert W. Glover

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Center for the Study of Human Resources

L. B. J. School of Public Affairs
The University of Texas at Austin
107 West 27th Street
Austin, Texas 78712
(512) 471-7891

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Texas Farmworker Enumeration Project [and] Supplemental
comments on the revised migrant estimate for Texas
University of Texas at Austin

PREFACE

This study of the farmworker population in Texas was made possible by a grant from the National Migrant Referral Project to the Center for the Study of Human Resources. The study is part of an effort by the Office of Migrant Health, Public Health Service, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, in collaboration with regional and state health associations, to develop individual estimates of the farmworker population in key states by different researchers with varying methodologies.

The aim of the Texas Farmworker Enumeration Project was to develop estimates of the number and distribution of agricultural workers and their dependents in each of the 254 counties in Texas. Estimates presented in this report are based on analyses of several sets of administrative records, other studies and their methodologies, and published secondary data sources. Primary survey research, though advantageous and urgently needed on the policy issue of farm employment, was not possible due to the resource constraints under which the project operated.

Our work would not have been possible without the generous assistance on the part of numerous individuals and organizations. The cooperation of the following organizations was especially noteworthy: the migrant health clinics in Texas, Motivation Education and Training, Inc., Texas Association of Community Health Centers, Texas Department of Agriculture, Texas Education Agency, and Texas Employment Commission. Of the many individuals that contributed to this project, all of whom we thank, we like to convey our special thanks to the following individuals : Frank Acosta, Karen Batory, José Camacho, Beltrán Chavez, Frank Contreras, Brian Craddock, John Kruse, Joyce Thomas, and Bob Treviño.

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Lastly, and most importantly, we wish to express our sincere appreciation to E. Roberta Ryder, Executive Director of the National Migrant Referral Project, who patiently guided the project and made our contribution possible; and to the migrant clinic directors who kindly shared their expertise and knowledge with us.

Finally, it should be noted that the National Migrant Referral Project, The University of Texas at Austin, L.B.J. School of Public Affairs, nor the Center for the Study Human Resources necessarily endorses the views or findings of this study.

SUMMARY

Farmworkers in the United States, despite their important historical and current contribution to our standard of living, remain a poorly known occupational group. Outside of those that focus their professional attention on advocating for, organizing, serving, or researching issues related to them, their status and role in the nation's labor market are not well understood. They remain a forgotten workforce.

Their economic and social conditions have improved some in the last fifty years. However, in relative terms they still remain at the bottom of the economic ladder. As was stated by a Brownsville, Texas resident to the President's Commission on Migratory Labor in 1951, "they neither belong to the land, nor the land belongs to them."

Projections of fewer farmworkers in the nation and reductions in federal funds for migrant programs have heightened concern over the implications of these trends among service providers and policy makers. Both are concerned about the effective utilization of funds and availability of services to farmworkers, as well as the need to base allocation decisions on reliable estimates of the farmworker population.

The passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986, also drew the immediate attention of farm employers to the availability of domestic agricultural workers. Projections of fewer domestic farmworkers and the unavailability of undocumented farm labor meant that farm employers would have to assess the options of further mechanizing their operations, seek to import agricultural labor, or adopt practices that would encourage the employment of domestic farmworkers.

SUMMARY (cont.)

Projections of fewer farmworkers and subsequent reductions of funds for migrant programs have real impacts on the well-being of farmworkers. For example, reductions in federal funds for migrant health programs create the potential of further rationing of critical health care services to members of farmworker households. For a population that already is involved in one of the most hazardous occupations due to chemical and mechanical hazards, and in poverty, such rationing will have long term impacts on their well-being. Ultimately, neither the farmworker, migrant health clinics, nor society benefit from an unhealthy population.

Farmworker children, who may already be suffering from malnutrition, untreated childhood illnesses and uncorrected early problems of hearing and vision, will likely experience diminished opportunities over their lifetime due to hampered development and poor school performance. The current absence of incentives to address the health care needs of farmworkers can be reversed. Although there is obviously a cost to this, the long-term cost of not addressing this are much greater.

The aim of the Texas Farmworker Enumeration Project was to develop estimates of the size and geographic distribution of migrant and seasonal farmworkers and their dependents in each of the 254 counties in Texas. Estimates presented here are based on analyses of several sets of administrative records. Primary survey data collection or field validation of our estimates were not possible due to the resource constraints of the project.

In addition to presenting these estimates, the report also includes discussions of the definitional and other problems in studying agricultural labor markets, the trends in agricultural production and employment, and participation in the three major

SUMMARY (cont.)

migrant programs -- Migrant Health, Migrant Education, and the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) program for farmworkers.

A special analysis is included on a sample of 500 participants in the Section 402, Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers Program under JTPA.

The report presents the estimate of 513,731 farmworker individuals in Texas in 1987. This includes wage and non-wage earners, and adults and children. Moreover, the study calculated that of this total, 289,436 farmworkers were migrants (56.34%) and 224,295 were seasonal farmworkers (43.66%).

The following are some of the highlights presented in the report:

- • Estimation of the number of farmworkers is beset by problems such as (a) limited comparability of administrative records, (b) lack of standard definitions of key concepts such as "farmwork," (c) fluctuating nature of agriculture, (d) varying methodologies in national and state data collection efforts, (e) limited data collected on agricultural labor markets, (f) bias on the part of researchers toward urban labor markets, and (g) lack of consensus on whether the collection of accurate farm labor data is the primary responsibility of the U.S. Department of Labor or the Department of Agriculture.

- • Lower projections of the number of farmworkers may be partly due to our inability to accurately measure the movement between agricultural and non-agricultural employment among farmworkers, rather than the absolute abandonment of agricultural employment.

- • Agriculture is of vital importance in Texas. The State ranks 2nd in agricultural production; 1st in the production of close to 20 major commodities; and 1st in number of farms and ranches.

SUMMARY (cont.)

- • Agriculture in Texas has experienced several significant changes: (a) over half of the farms in 1945 no longer existed in 1982; (b) the average size of a farm has almost doubled since 1945 (from 367 to 710 acres); and (c) there has been a greater concentration farm land into large, corporate farms.

- • Texas ranks 3rd in use of agricultural workers (behind California and Florida).

- • Texas has been a historical supplier of farm labor for the nation. Trough this process, other states transfer human capital costs to Texas; in other words, Texas subsidies agricultural production in other states.

- • U.S. farm employment (all individuals reporting a farm occupation) has dropped from 13.6 million in 1910 to 3.7 million in 1980. It is estimated that the nation's farm employment has declined from 3.7 million in 1980 to 2.7 million in 1986.

- • Between 1978 and 1982, the Census of Agriculture estimated that Texas lost 64,219 farm labor jobs. Farms that employed 10 or more workers experienced the largest percentage drop (30.6%).

- • Migrant programs in Texas have experienced declines in the number served: (a) between 1983 and 1987, a total 8,916 fewer farmworkers were served by migrant health clinics --a 17.6% drop; and (b) in migrant education, 28,000 fewer students were reported between 1982 and 1987 -- an 18% decline.

- • Among participants in the JTPA, Section 402 Program, (a) 83.8% were Hispanic; (b) 39.6% were migrants; (c) males constituted 53.4%; (d) among migrants, 98.5% were Hispanic; (e) participants averaged 16.1 to 18.2 days of farmwork; and (f) only 24.2% of the participant's household members had performed farmwork in the previous calendar year.

- • The extension of Unemployment Insurance to agriculture is resulting in increases in the number of covered employers and covered farmworkers.

individuals in the State in 1987.

Formula for Total Farmworker Population:

1. Total Number of Agricultural Employers:

We estimated the proportion of employers/producers in the State based on the midpoint difference between the modified USDA list of producers (10,595) and the covered agricultural employers reported by the Texas Employment Commission (2,187). The conservative midpoint (6,391) was used as a way of controlling possible counting of producers that showed crop and acreage codes and had agricultural products, but may not have actually employed farmworkers. The estimated number of agricultural employers is 25,980. This State estimate was calculated on the basis of the proportion of covered employers represented in the 21 counties out of the total number of covered employers in the State: 24.6%. The same 21 counties also accounted for 24.2% of the total number of farm jobs reported in the 1982 Census of Agriculture.

• • 25,980

2. Average Agricultural Employment:

This is the estimated average number of workers employed by agricultural employers. It is based on the annual average employment in agriculture for covered employers (8,893 covered employers and 76,473 agricultural workers) in 1987: 8.6 workers.

• • 25,980 x 8.6 = 223,428

3. Turnover Rate:

In order to address the common occurrence of more than one worker holding the same job in a given period of time, we sought to incorporate a factor that would account for the complex turnover of workers within agriculture. It is a complex issue because of the limited knowledge that we have about this. Researchers know it takes place but we do not know the variations across crops and time.

In their excellent work on the citrus industry in Texas, for example, the researchers noted that there were at least 2 or 3 workers for each job, and document how in two seasons the proportion of available workers changed from 4:1 to 2:1 (see Hicks et al. 1976; and Webb 1975). In the same study it was also pointed out that in some citrus groves there was as much as 46% turnover among the pickers, despite the short seasons; and as high as 30% in non-farm firms. In addressing this issue, Lillesand used a factor of 1.25; Rural America used a factor of 1.3. In this report we selected the factor of 1.2. Due to the importance of migration for Texas farmworkers and importance of non-farm work as a subsistence strategy, we assumed that this would decrease the redundancy (surplus) of farm labor and thus the turnover would be lower than 2, but higher than 1. In order to remain consistent with the conservative estimate on the number of farm employers, we used a slightly lower rate than the one used by Lillesand.

$$\bullet \bullet \quad 223,428 \times 1.2 = 268,114$$

4. Employment Duplication:

Like the aforementioned labor market issue, not much is known about employment duplication across crops and its variance in time. This factor deals with the occurrence of the same worker working for more than one employer in a given period of time. In the Texas citrus study, the investigators reported that 52.4% of the sample of farmworkers have worked for the same employer during their working years (ibid). The Rural America report used the conservative estimate of 25%. In the absence of concrete data on employment duplication in agriculture in Texas, we selected what appeared to be a reasonable estimate -- 25%. What this factor says is that approximately one-fourth of farm jobs reported for a given period of time include a worker that has already been counted at another farm job.

$$\bullet \bullet \quad 268,114 \times .25 = 67,029$$

5. Total Employed Farmworkers/Wage Earners:

The duplication in employment is subtracted from the previous total. The result is the estimated number of total wage earners.

$$\bullet \bullet \quad 268,114 - 67,029 = 201,085$$

6. Non-Married/Unattached Farmworkers:

Estimate based on calculation of 32.4% non-married ("single") farmworker wage-earners, based on MET data:

$$\bullet \bullet \quad 201,085 \times .324 = 65,152$$

7. Married Farmworker:

Estimated number of married wage earners (67.6%).

$$\bullet \bullet \quad 201,085 - 65,152 = 135,933$$

8. Non-Wage Earners:

Our calculation of the number of non-wage earners in farmworker households is based on an estimate of 4.8 household size and 1.5 wage-earners (3.3 dependents). The literature on household size, wage-earners, and dependents shows considerable variation. Household size has been reported as ranging from 3.2 to 6.65. The following is a sample of some of the reported sizes: 6.65 for migrant farmworkers (Lillesand 1977); 6.3 (Juarez-Lincoln Center 1974); 5.84 (GOMA 1976); 5.57 (Briody 1985); 5.5 (Menefee 1941); 4.8 for Rio Grande Valley colonia residents (TDHS 1988); 3.4 for Hispanic households (U.S. Census) and 3.2 for sample of JTPA participants discussed above. Similar variations have been reported for wage earners in the household and number of dependents. The number of wage earners has ranged from 1 to 3.1 (Menefee 1941); and number of dependents has spread from .3 (Trotter 1987) to 4.65 (Lillesand 1977). Within South Texas border counties the average number of children ever born in 1980 ranged from 3.4 to 3.8 (Chan et al., 1987). In these same counties, in 1970 the number ranged from 3.58 to 4.76 children (ibid). Because of the number of

farmworker households in the Texas Department of Human Services survey of Rio Grande Valley colonia residents (45.5%), we chose to use the household size reported in that survey. For number of wage earners we assumed that there is a principal wage earner and a second wage earner that contributes part of the time (i.e., 1.5 wage earners). Consequently, we estimate the average household has 3.3 dependents.

9. Total estimate of family household members:

$$\bullet \bullet \quad 135,933 \times 3.3 = 448,579$$

10. Total Farmworker Household Members:

$$\bullet \bullet \quad 448,579 + 65,152 = \underline{513,731}$$

The result of our methodology is presented in Table 4.2. The total number of 513,731 was distributed by county on the basis of the individual county proportion of migrant students in statuses I and II (current agricultural farmworkers). Migrant and seasonal farmworker distributions are based on the average proportion of both groups in the MET database and in the Migrant Health data. This step was taken in order to balance two biases; the bias in the MET data toward seasonal farmworkers and the bias in the health data toward migrant farmworkers. The result was a distribution of 56.34% migrant and 43.66% seasonal farmworkers.