



NCFH

National Center for Farmworker Health, Inc.



COVID-19 and H-2A Guest Workers in the Southeastern U.S.

International guest worker experiences in Colquitt County, Georgia and Sampson County, North Carolina

BACKGROUND

International guest workers, primarily from Mexico, have become a critical subpopulation of the U.S. farm labor force. Due to language barriers and a lack of support in navigating U.S. systems and culture, these workers often experience multiple vulnerabilities and barriers to accessing health care in the U.S. As part of a national COVID-19 outreach and vaccination project for farmworkers supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), NCFH has conducted a series of [Farmworker COVID-19 Community Assessments \(FCCA\)](#), which include oral surveys with farmworkers on randomly sampled housing, work, and community sites and in-depth interviews with workers, employers, and farmworker experts. This fact sheet provides a summary of key findings regarding the demographics of 339 H-2A workers interviewed in two FCCA communities (Colquitt County, Georgia and Sampson County, North Carolina), selected aspects of their experiences with COVID-19, and their self-reported uptake of COVID-19, influenza, and tetanus vaccinations. These two communities are highlighted in this fact sheet due to the high number of H-2A guest workers that arrive in the area every year.

DEMOGRAPHICS

- 97% of workers were male and 3% were female.
- 100% of workers were born in Mexico. The top states of origin from Mexico were San Luis Potosi (13%), Veracruz (11%), Nayarit (9%), Oaxaca (8%), and Michoacan (8%).
- 25% of workers reported their race as Indigenous or spoke a Mesoamerican Indigenous language.
- 82% of H-2A workers spoke only Spanish and 18% spoke a Mesoamerican language in addition to Spanish. The top Mesoamerican languages spoken were Zapotec (3%), Nahuatl (2%), and Tsotsil (2%).
- 21% of workers were between 18-25 years old, 68% were between 26-54 years old, and 5% were 55 years of age or older. Six percent of workers did not provide their age. See Figure 1 below.

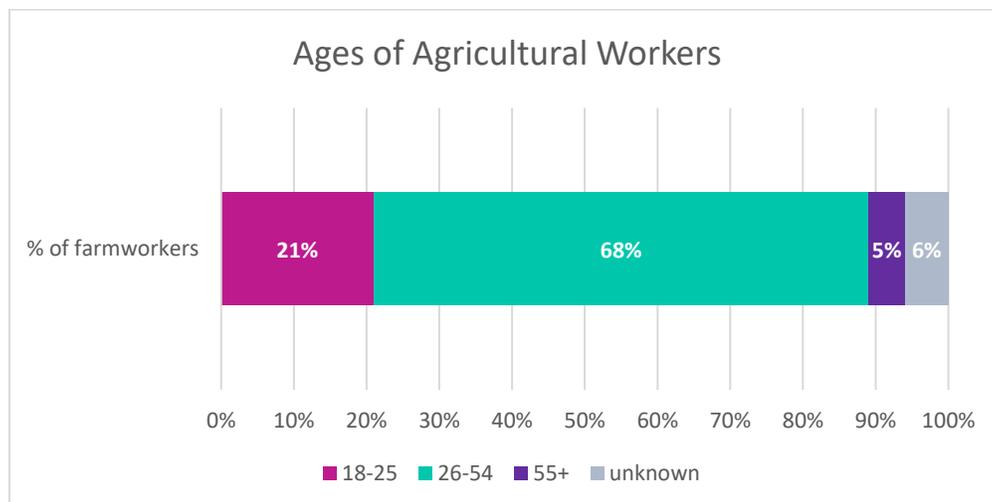


Figure 1: Ages of Farmworkers

EMPLOYER-PROVIDED HOUSING AND TRANSPORTATION IN THE U.S.

- 58% of workers resided in dormitories or barracks, 22% in a trailer, mobile home or RV, 17% in a house, and 2% in hotels. Two percent reported other forms of housing. See Figure 2 below.
- 92% resided in overcrowded housing, with more than one person per room in the housing unit.¹
- 91% of workers commuted to work in labor buses or vans, potentially increasing their risk of exposure to respiratory diseases.
 - Three percent rode to work with a 'raitero', which also usually involves adults from different households commuting together.
 - Other forms of transportation were uncommon, such as walking or riding a bicycle to work (2%) or riding in a personal vehicle with a relative or coworker (1%).

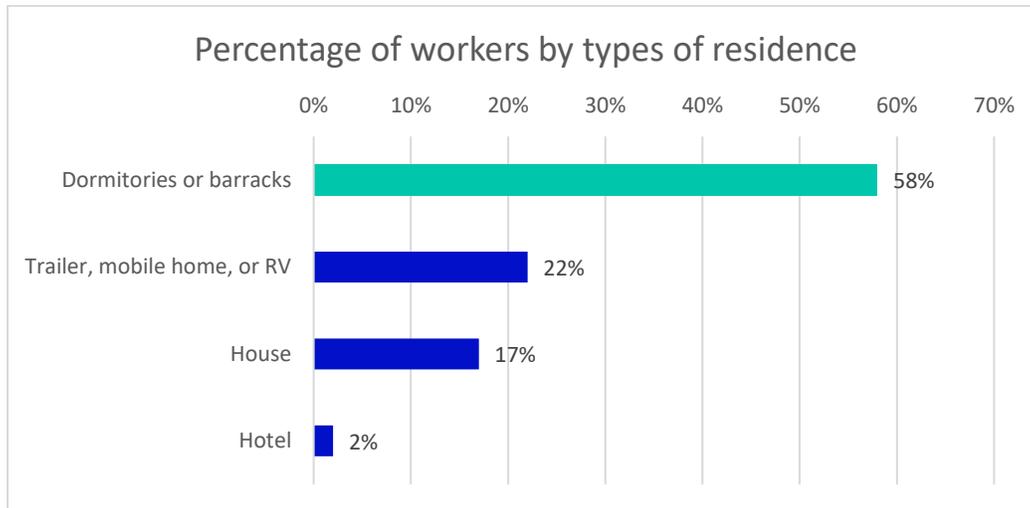


Figure 2: Percentage of workers by types of residence

COVID-19 SAFETY PRECAUTIONS AND TESTING

- 33% of workers did not receive a comprehensive COVID-19 training² in their preferred language at work.
- 78% of workers reported that their employer regularly provided face masks at work.
- 45% had taken a COVID-19 test at least once in the past 12 months.
- More than one in five (22%) workers knew or thought they had COVID-19 at least once.
- 57% of those who had or thought they had COVID-19 were able to isolate from other household members.
- 33% of workers who had or thought they had COVID-19 continued working while exposed or ill.

COVID-19 AND OTHER VACCINATIONS

- 94% of workers had completed their primary series of COVID-19 vaccinations.³
- 41% of workers had also received a booster vaccination for COVID-19.
- 5% of workers had partially completed their primary series and 1% of workers were unvaccinated against COVID-19.
- 35% of workers reported that they had received an influenza vaccine in the past 12 months.

¹ U.S. Census Bureau. Historical Census of Housing Tables: Crowding. Accessed September 12, 2022.

<https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/dec/coh-crowding.html>

² A comprehensive COVID-19 training was defined as a training that included information about how to use face masks, hand-washing, how to isolate if sick or exposed to COVID-19, and physical distancing.

³ As international travelers, H-2A guest workers are required to complete the primary series of an FDA- or World Health Organization-approved COVID-19 vaccine at least 2 weeks before entering the U.S. Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022). International travel to and from the United States. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/international-travel-during-covid19.html>

- 61% of workers reported that they had been vaccinated against tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis in the past 10 years.
- 73% of workers reported that they had been vaccinated against measles, mumps and rubella in their lifetime.

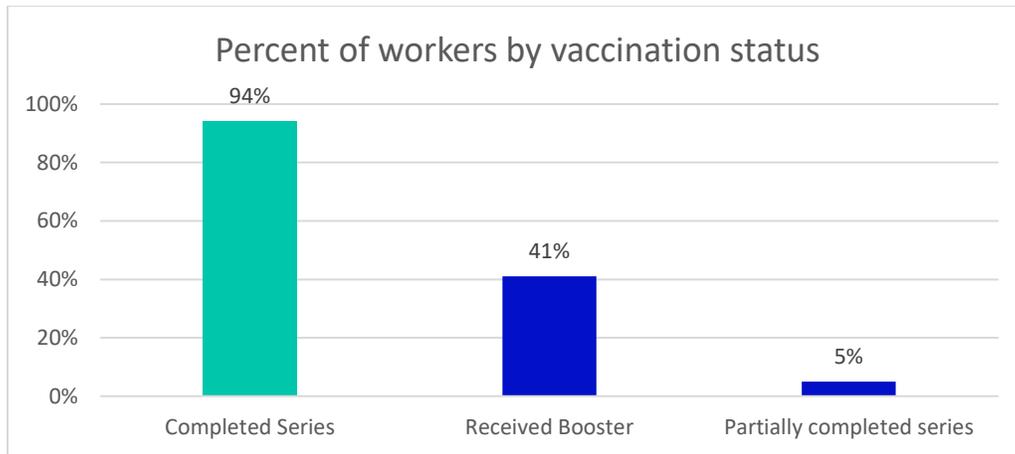


Figure 3: Percent of workers by Vaccination Status