



Food Insecurity among Farmworker Families and their Children

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Outline

- Overview of the history of Latino farmworkers in America
- Overview of the current status of Latino Farmworkers in the United States
- Labor issues among Latino farmworkers
- Effects on Latino farmworkers and their children
 - Poverty, education, access to healthcare
- Barriers to food/levels of food insecurity

Definitions

- **Migrant Farmworker**: A person who is required to be absent from permanent place of residence for the purpose of seeking remunerated employment in agricultural work.
- **Seasonal Farmworker**: Person employed in temporary farm work but do not move from permanent residence to seek farm work; may also have other source of employment
- **Food secure**: No reported indications of food-access problems or limitations.
- **Food insecure**: (*low food security*) Reports reduced quality, variety, or desirability of diet. Little or no indication of reduced food intake.
- **Food insecure with hunger**: (*food insecurity with hunger*) Reports multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake.

History of Farmworkers in America



- Forcibly removed from their land following the Mexican-American war of 1846
- Funneled into the U.S. to work on farms during the early part of the 20th century
- This initiated agreement between Mexico and U.S., creating the Bracero Program in 1942
- Granted temporary visas to work in American fields then return to Mexico once finished
- Racism, nationalism and cultural/language relegated them to second class status despite contributions

Status of Latino Farmworkers in America

- Easier to take advantage of
 - Lack formal education/English language challenge for immigrants
 - Average level of education completed: 8th grade among Latinos
 - 38% could not read English at all
 - Lack of citizenship
- Lack of protection from federal labor policies and procedures
 - Impacts the work they do and how
 - *Allows for exploitation*

Labor Issues among Farmworkers



- Agricultural work ranked as one of the most dangerous in the nation
 - Overworked in fields with minimal food/water; extreme heat exposure; limited trainings to protect themselves from pesticides
- Forced to suffer in silence
 - Cultural and language barriers promote this dark side of farm work
- Subpar and overcrowded housing
- Wage discrepancies
 - Not paid what they were promised or wages garnished for housing, transportation or other necessities

Effects on MFW

- Extremely impoverished
 - Family of 5 makes between **\$12,244-\$16,773** per year (Michigan Civil Right Commission, 2010)
 - *Federal poverty level in U.S. for one person = \$12,060*
 - *Federal poverty level in U.S. for family of four = \$24,600*
- Severe health disparities
 - Heart disease, pesticide related illnesses, respiratory ailments, musculoskeletal disorders, etc.
- Mental health issues
 - Depression, bi-polar disorder, mild schizophrenia, alcoholism and substance abuse
- Limited knowledge of health care system, lack of \$\$\$ for basic needs



Child and Healthcare for Migrant Farmworkers in the U.S.

- Have limited access to quality health care
- This often has severe consequences on the children and their overall health and well-being
 - *“... uninsured children have the worst health and poorest access to care, and their parents lack knowledge of and experience with the health programs that are available to them. Studies have concluded that within the United States, Latinos have the highest uninsured rates among all racial and ethnic groups, and of that, one third of U.S. Hispanics are foreign-born.”* (Kilanowski and Ryan-Wegner, 2007).
- Issue confounded by racism and lack of cultural awareness



What does this mean for the children of Migrant Farmworkers ?

- Forced to grow up quickly
 - 400,000 children working agriculture nationwide (Michigan Civil Rights Commission, 2010)
- Limited life expectancy due to migrant lifestyle
- Limits on educational attainment
- Lack of friends own age, limits development*
- Dislocated from social services to meet their needs



Educational Attainment

- Low level of pay = family may need all members to participate in work to make more \$\$\$
- Education interrupted by migrancy
- Children among this population have the highest drop out rate
 - Generally, students that dropout exhibit general dislike of school, lack of involvement in extracurricular activities, low socio-economic status and disrupted home life
 - *Added barriers for children of migrant farmworkers*

Children of Migrant Farmworkers



- Children often go without
 - Healthcare or other social services
- High poverty often means limited food
 - On average, nationally, 21.7% of Latino households food insecure compared to 11.9% of general population
 - *In certain parts of the nation, this number can rise to ½ to 2/3rds of Migrant and Seasonal households* (Wadsworth, et al., 2016).

Food Insecurity Among the General Population

- Adaptive processes and the need for survival
 - Families forced to rely on cheaper and unhealthy foods
- Increased instances of preventable diseases among these families
- Children seen with health issues often found in adults twice their age
- Farm location and size matters


Health Disparities among Children of Migrant Farmworkers

- Farm work life increases health disparities
 - *“The farmworker environment shapes the health-related exposures experienced by women and children. These include factors from agriculture (e.g. pesticides), as well as those resulting from substandard housing (e.g., lead and mold) and from low incomes (e.g., diet)”* (Quandt, 2009).
- Physical and sexual violence among this population increases mental health crises
- Children exhibit high levels of psychosomatic* disorders

Health Disparities among Children of Migrant Farmworkers Cont'd

- Food insecurity contributes to health disparities
 - *Latino children more likely than non-Hispanic white children to not have enough to eat, have iron deficiency, or be overweight (Carter-Pokras, et al, 2007).*
- Households with heightened food insecurity more associated with child being overweight or obese
 - *“The patterns of accommodating food shortages are likely to promote overweight in children. Reducing food variety and increasing consumption of low-cost starchy and sugar-sweetened foods leads to greater caloric intake. Concern that food shortages will occur also leads families to eat more in times of plenty, and there may be a physiological adaptations for feast/famine eating patterns that result in weight gain.” (Quandt, 2009).*
 - Experience health disparities like obesity, diabetes, growth stunting, gastrointestinal diseases
- Less likely to meet USDA Food Guide Pyramid**
- Cheaper foods to stretch-out and made last longer

Recommendations

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- Place policy emphasis on their work and the many contributions they make to society
 - Awareness of labor rights at the workplace
 - Push for federally funded programs to better meet Migrant Farmworkers in obtaining child and health care
 - Create new or support existing programs that aim to assist Migrant Farmworker children obtain education despite migrant lifestyle
 - Culturally sensitive food pantries that target this population
 - Mobile Food Pantry
 - Food drives by the local community
 - More studies on food insecurity among the children of migrant farmworkers
 - Create local food pantries for farmworker communities

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