



POULTRY WORKERS

The Public Health Service Act provides the definition of migratory and seasonal agricultural workers for health center grantees, and includes those working in aquaculture and animal production provided the patient meets the guidelines for being a migratory or seasonal worker. The Uniform Data System Manual, the reporting mechanism for all health centers, states “For both [migratory and seasonal] categories of workers, the term agriculture means farming in all its branches as defined by the OMB-developed North American Industry Classification System (NAICS), and includes seasonal workers included in the following codes and all sub-codes within: 111, 112, 1151, and 1152”, removing a previous exclusion of animal production workers.¹

This change increases the potential number of agricultural worker patients a Health Center may serve, and this subpopulation of agricultural workers has a unique set of social, economic, and occupational health risks and disparities.

WORKER DEMOGRAPHICS

- There are approximately 250,000 poultry workers, and processing occurs in 174 factories in the US.²
- The production and processing of poultry is a process largely controlled in the US by a small number of corporations relying on contracted farmers and growers. The workers who hatch, raise, transport, slaughter, and process poultry are racially and culturally diverse but universally vulnerable to labor abuses and health and safety hazards.^{3,4}
- Poultry workers are employed in a “3-D” job: one that is dirty, demanding, and dangerous.⁵
- Relatively little has been documented on the ethnic composition on poultry workers at each node in the food chain, with the most research focused on those who work in processing and on those catching chickens and transporting them from small farms to large processing plants. It is estimated that about half of poultry processing workers are Latino, half are women, and a quarter do not possess legal documents to work in the US. “Chicken catchers” may be more likely to be male, Latino, and undocumented.

The map below is a heat map demonstrating the concentrations of poultry grower and processor locations in the USA, with red areas possessing greater numbers of poultry businesses.



LABOR CONDITIONS

- Poultry workers at each link of the production chain earn low wages and work long shifts, often 12-14 hours. Chicken catchers earn an average of \$92 per day for a 12 hour shift, and even poultry growers live in poverty: 71% of poultry growers have annual incomes below the federal poverty limit.⁶
- Chicken catchers are particularly vulnerable to wage and hour violations, as they are generally paid for the completion of catching a set number of birds, and will not be paid for overtime.⁷
- The poultry processing has an annual turnover rate of 100%.⁸
- Poultry workers labor at both a high intensity and speed: A team of 7-10 chicken catchers will catch 30,000-60,000 chickens in one shift, and poultry processing workers may process up to 140 birds per minute.^{9,10}
- Personal protective equipment (PPE) is often not provided by employers, despite frequent worker exposure to chemicals, blood, feces, mold, endotoxins, and sharp cutting tools.¹¹
- Labor organization and worker empowerment are major issues in the poultry industry: abuse has been widely documented, and threats of deportation and retaliation were found to be common.^{12,13} Workers who are injured on the job may face employers who refuse to pay for workman's compensation, medical bills, or sick leave. The Southern Poverty Law Center's report documented that 20% of 302 workers surveyed were not allowed to take bathroom breaks when needed, among other violations of basic humane working conditions.¹⁴

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH

- Every year, 100 workers die and 300,000 workers are injured in the US poultry industry.¹⁵
- The non-fatal injury rate among workers in poultry and egg production as reported by the Occupational Health and Safety Administration is 5.8 injuries and illnesses per 100 workers, which is 1.5 times higher than the average for all U.S. workers.¹⁶
- A research study in 2012 found that 42% of 284 poultry processing workers had evidence of carpal tunnel syndrome.¹⁷
- Poultry workers experience of elevated risk to many injuries and diseases due to the workplace exposures and hazards, including:
 - Cumulative trauma disorders, such as carpal tunnel syndrome from repetitive motion^{18,19}
 - Musculoskeletal injuries from heavy lifting, falls, & machinery accidents
 - Lacerations from knives²⁰
 - Skin infections such as onychomycosis and tinea pedis from exposure to chemicals and poultry fluids²¹
 - Asthma & respiratory conditions from ammonia, dust, and chemicals²²
 - Mental health stress resulting in depression, substance and alcohol abuse²³

¹ Bureau of Primary Health Care, Health Resources and Services Administration. (2013). BPHC Uniform Data System Manual 2013. Retrieved from <http://bphc.hrsa.gov/healthcenterdatastatistics/reporting/2013udsreport.pdf>

² Southern Poverty Law Center & Alabama Appleseed Center for Law and Justice. (2013). Unsafe at these speeds. Retrieved from http://www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/downloads/publication/Unsafe_at_These_Speeds_web.pdf

³ Marín, A., Grzywacz, J., Arcury, T., Carrillo, L., Coates, M., & Quandt, S. (2009). Evidence of organizational injustice in poultry processing plants: Possible effects on occupational health and safety among Latino workers in North Carolina. *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*, 52(1). Doi: 10.1002/ajim.20643

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Agricultural Worker Factsheets are published by the National Center for Farmworker Health, Inc. 1770 FM 967, Buda, TX 78610, (512) 312-2700. This publication was made possible through grant number U30CS0 9737 from the Health Resources and Services Administration, Bureau of Primary Health Care, and its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of HRSA.