



Demographics

According to national reports from the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Labor, there is an estimated 2 to 3 million migratory and seasonal agricultural workers in the United States.^{1, 2} In order to plan, monitor, and evaluate the health status and needs of the agricultural population, demographic information is necessary. Accurately assessing the demographic information of this population has proven difficult over the years due to many factors: a highly mobile lifestyle, limited English proficiency, varying levels of citizenship status, cultural barriers, and difficulties in classifying agricultural workers posed by the peak time and seasonality of the crop production process. For twenty-seven years, the Department of Labor has conducted the *National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS)* to collect information from migrant and seasonal farmworkers (crop workers) in the United States and has been one of the most accurate sources for obtaining demographic information on this group. The NAWS is an employment-based, random survey of the demographic, employment, and health characteristics of the U.S. crop labor force. The information is obtained directly from farmworkers through face-to-face interviews. The NAWS is performed under contract to the Department of Labor, and its information is made available to the public through periodic research reports and a public use data set. Each year, between 1,500 and 3,000 workers are interviewed. NAWS only interviews crop workers, thus information provided within this factsheet does not encompass agriculture workers of other agricultural industries, such as animal production, poultry or aquaculture.

This factsheet highlights recent demographic data from the 2011-2012 NAWS³ results based on a sample size of 3,025 workers.

Birthplace/Ethnicity

- The majority (70.7%) of all farmworkers were foreign born.
 - 64.1% of all farmworkers were born in Mexico
 - 29.4% were from the U.S and Puerto Rico.
- Thirty-one percent of foreign-born farmworkers have spent 20 or more years in the United States. 36% percent have been in the U.S. for 10 to 19 years, and 33% have been here for 9 years or less.
- Forty-eight percent of the crop workers were unauthorized, 33% were citizens, and 19% had work visas.

Age/Family and Gender

- Farmworkers in the United States on average are 37 years of age.
 - 81% percent are over 25 years of age.
 - 7.9% are between the ages of 22 and 24.

- 8.9% are between the ages of 18 and 21.
- 2.3% is between the ages of 14 and 17.
- Seventy-one percent of farmworkers were male and 29% were female
- Fifty-eight percent of farmworkers surveyed were married, 36% were single and 7% were divorced, separated or widowed
- Fifty-four percent of all farmworkers were parents
- Eighteen percent of the farmworker's spouses work on farms within the U.S.

Language and Education

- The following was noted for English speaking ability:
 - 30% speak English "a little"
 - 28% could not speak English "at all"
 - 33% speak English "well"
 - 9% speak English "somewhat"
- The following was noted for their ability to read English:
 - 38% cannot read English "at all"
 - 32% can read English "well"
 - 23% can read English "a little"
 - 7% can read English "somewhat"
- Sixty-nine percent of the farmworkers interviewed spoke mainly Spanish, while 29% spoke English.
- The average level of completed education was the 8th grade:
 - 38% had completed grades 1 to 6
 - 19% completed grades 7 to 9
 - 25% had completed grades 10 to 12

Employment

- Farmworkers surveyed had an average of 15 years in U.S. farm experience.
 - All surveyed had worked an average of 6 years with the same employer
- Forty-eight percent of farmworkers are employed year round, while 38% are employed on a seasonal basis
- Farmworkers worked an average of 44 hours per week and 93% worked five to seven days a week.
 - Farmworkers worked an average of 35 weeks a year
- Ninety percent of farmworkers said they were hired directly, while 10% said they were labor contracted.
- Sixty-three percent of the farmworkers surveyed reported working in the fields, 27% worked in nurseries, 6% in packing houses, and 4% did other types of work.
- The breakdown of the primary crops worked is as follows:
 - 29% worked with fruit and nuts
 - 27% worked with vegetables
 - 24% worked in horticulture
 - 17% worked with field crops
 - 2% reported working in miscellaneous or multiple crops.

- The majority (83%) of all farmworkers are not migratory according to NAW's standard definition of a migrant worker, which is a worker who travels more than 75 miles between two farm jobs or between a farm job and a continual residence during the past year.
 - 17% of farmworkers surveyed were migrants.
 - 10% spent some time abroad with an average of 21 weeks abroad

Income, Benefits and Public Assistance

- The average individual farmworker income ranged from \$15,000 to \$17,499 and the average total family income ranged from \$17,500 to \$19,999:²
 - 25% of all farmworkers had total family incomes below the U.S. government's poverty guidelines.
- Eighty-five percent of farmworkers were paid hourly and 15% were paid either by the piece or a combination of hourly-piece or by salary.
- Only 47% of farmworkers reported being covered by unemployment insurance, 51% said they were not, and 3% did not know.
- A mere 22% of farmworkers reported being covered by employer-provided health insurance.
- Fifty-seven percent of workers did not receive any type of need-based or contribution-based public assistance, while 43% did.

One of the most common and important questions regarding the agricultural population is how many agricultural workers there really are in a particular region, state or in the nation as a whole. Estimating the size of this population is difficult for the same reasons mentioned earlier, related to high mobility, language and cultural differences, and varying levels of citizenship status among others. Fortunately, there are some resources available, including the work of Dr. Alice Larson in the *Migrant and Seasonal Enumeration Profile Studies* and the NCFH population estimation studies, which use methodology, developed in collaboration with JBS International, Inc., Aguirre Division. NCFH's population estimation studies use the best available data and a readily understandable formula to compute the agricultural worker population estimates. More information on both of these resources can be found on the NCFH [website](#).

This project was supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) under U30CS0 9737, Technical Assistance to Community and Migrant Health Centers and Homeless, (\$1,583,856). This information or content and conclusions are those of the author and should not be construed as the official position or policy of, nor should any endorsements be inferred by HRSA, HHS, or the U.S. Government.

¹ *Profile of Hired Farmworkers, A 2008 Update*. Kandel, W, United States Department of Agriculture, 2008.

² *LSC Agricultural Worker Population Estimate Update*. Legal Services Corporation, 2015

³ *The National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS) public access data from FY 2011-2012*.