



United States Farmworker Factsheet

Farmworkers are some of our nation's most vital workers, as their labor enables us to enjoy high quality, low-cost, fresh fruits and vegetables all year round. Despite farmworkers' economic and cultural contributions to the communities where they live and work, they continue to be the some of the lowest paid, least protected, and unhealthiest workers in the United States.

Overview of Farm Work

Agricultural labor includes planting, cultivating, harvesting and preparing crops for market or storage.¹

Migrant farmworkers travel from place to place to work in agriculture and move into temporary housing while working; seasonal farmworkers work primarily in agriculture, but live in one community year-round.¹

Farmworkers are usually employed by farm owners or by "crew leaders," who serve as intermediaries between growers and workers.

The H2A program allows foreign "guestworkers" to perform seasonal farm work under a temporary work visa designed for agricultural workers in the United States.

“Every time we sit at a table to enjoy the fruits and grain and vegetables from our good earth, remember that they come from the work of men and women and children who have been exploited for generations.”

Cesar Chavez, Co-Founder, United Farm Workers

Farmworkers Demographics

There are two to three million farmworkers in the United States.²

The states with the highest farmworker population are California, Texas, Washington, Florida, Oregon, and North Carolina.³

Nearly 80% of farmworkers are male, and most are younger than 31.⁴

Most farmworkers are married and/or have children; yet almost six out of ten farmworkers live apart from their immediate family members.⁴

Of farmworkers in the United States, 75% were born in Mexico.⁴

According to a 2005 survey, 53% of farmworkers are undocumented (without legal authorization), 25% are United States citizens, and 21% are legal permanent residents.⁴

Immigrant farmworkers often leave their home countries to seek a better life for their families. Immigration to the United States has increased notably since the 1994 signing of NAFTA,⁵ a free trade agreement that has driven over two million Mexican farmers out of business.⁶

“Agricultural Exceptionalism”

Farmworkers were excluded from nearly all of the major federal labor laws passed in the 1930s. Some of the laws have been amended to include workers on large farms, but exemptions remain in the following laws:

Labor organizing: Farmworkers were excluded from the National Labor Relations Act of 1935, which protects workers acting collectively to form unions.

Minimum wage: The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 (FLSA) originally excluded all farmworkers, and was amended in 1978 to mandate minimum wage for workers on large farms only.

Overtime pay: The FLSA has never been amended to provide overtime for farmworkers, and only a few states have passed laws requiring it.

Child labor laws: The FLSA sets 12 as the minimum age for farm work, not 16 as in other jobs.



