

# HEALTH POLICY FACT SHEET

## AGRICULTURAL WORKERS

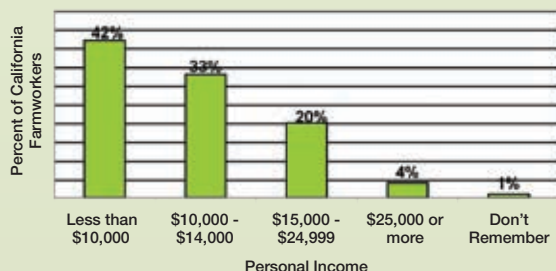


### The Population

#### United States

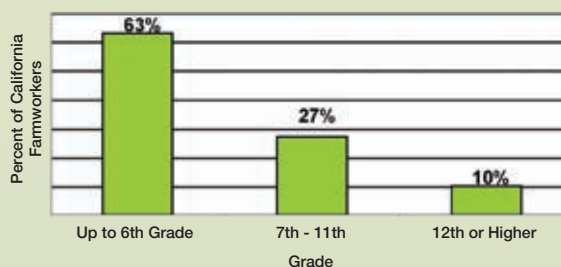
- ▶ U.S. agriculture is a \$200 billion industry.<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ There are over 3 million agricultural and seasonal farm workers in the United States.<sup>2</sup>
- ▶ More than 80% of all agricultural workers in the United States are foreign-born and have spent an average of 10 years in the United States. Of the foreign-born workers:<sup>3</sup>
  - ▶ 95% are Mexican-born.
  - ▶ The average age is 31.
  - ▶ 52% are married; 45% of whom live away from their families (90% of the nonresident families live in Mexico).

Figure 1. Personal Annual Income for California Farmworkers, 2003-2004



Source: Aguirre International, 2005<sup>8</sup>

Figure 2. Highest Grade Completed by California Farmworkers, 2003-2004



Source: Aguirre International, 2005<sup>8</sup>

#### California

- ▶ California produces more than 50% of all major U.S. vegetable crops and 40% of major U.S. fruit crops.<sup>4</sup>
- ▶ California is the top state in value of agricultural products sold: \$25.7 billion.<sup>5</sup>
- ▶ Fresno County is the nation's top county in value of agricultural products sold: \$2.8 billion.<sup>4</sup>
- ▶ Hired workers perform more than 85% of all labor needed to produce crops and raise livestock.<sup>6</sup>
- ▶ Hired farmworkers continue to rank among the lowest-paid workers of 14 major occupational groups and have one of the highest unemployment rates.<sup>7</sup>
- ▶ A recent report based on a 2003-2004 survey of 2,344 California farmworkers found that:<sup>8</sup>
  - ▶ 42% earned less than \$10,000 per year (Figure 1).
  - ▶ 99% were Latino, 95% of whom were born outside the U.S., with 96% coming from Mexico. Of the Mexican farmworkers, 61% were from Michoacán (26%), Guanajuato (14%), Jalisco (11%), and Oaxaca (10%).
  - ▶ 64% were married, but 28% of them did not have their spouses living in the household.
  - ▶ 54% were parents, but 26% lived apart from their children.
  - ▶ 61% had seasonal employment, 20% were employed year-round, and 19% reported being unsure of their type of employment.
  - ▶ 96% spoke Spanish as their primary language. 53% could not speak any English, 57% could not read any English, and sixth grade was the highest median grade completed (Figure 2).
  - ▶ 57% lacked work authorization, 10% were U.S. citizens, and 33% were permanent residents.

### Health Conditions

#### United States

- ▶ Diagnosing and treating tuberculosis in migrant agricultural workers is challenging for many reasons: the need for long-term treatment and preventive efforts, difficulties in maintaining compliance, the need for follow-up, population mobility, fear of deportation, the expense of treatment, and other barriers to health care.<sup>9</sup>

- ▶ Migrant farmworkers experience tooth decay and periodontal disease twice as often as the general population.<sup>10</sup>
- ▶ 16% of all migrant and seasonal farm workers in the nation are women.<sup>11</sup>
- ▶ Data from the Pregnancy Nutrition Surveillance System found that of 4,840 migrant\* women monitored, 52% had less than the recommended weight gain throughout their pregnancies, 6.7% gave birth to low birthweight babies, and 9.9% had preterm births.<sup>11</sup>



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## Health Conditions *continued*

### California

- ▶ In a 2001 study of California agricultural workers:<sup>4</sup>
  - ▶ Almost 1 out of 5 male subjects (18%) had at least two of three risk factors for chronic disease: high serum cholesterol, high blood pressure, or obesity.
  - ▶ 81% of the males and 76% of the females were overweight, as measured by the body mass index (BMI).<sup>\*\*</sup>
  - ▶ More than 1 out of 3 male subjects had at least one decayed tooth.
  - ▶ 4 out of 10 female subjects had at least one broken or missing tooth.
  - ▶ Almost 1 out of 3 men (32%) had never been to a doctor or clinic in the United States or Mexico in their lives.
- ▶ In 2003-2004, 24% of farmworkers surveyed in California reported suffering from at least one musculoskeletal problem.<sup>8</sup>
- ▶ California farmworkers had an elevated risk of leukemia and stomach, cervical, and uterine cancers.<sup>12</sup>
- ▶ A 2002 California study showed that:<sup>13</sup>
  - ▶ 75% of people with tuberculosis were born outside the United States; of those cases, nearly 34% were from Mexico.
  - ▶ Among race/ethnic groups, *only* Latinos experienced an increase in tuberculosis cases in 2002. The number of cases among the Mexican-born increased between 2001 and 2002 from 791 to 812, and they accounted for 24% and 26% of all reported tuberculosis cases in California, respectively.
  - ▶ The incidence of tuberculosis among Latinos—11.2 cases per 100,000 people—was higher than the state average of 8.9.
- ▶ A year 2000 study in California found that 29% of pregnant migrant farmworkers did not seek prenatal care until their second trimester, while 14% waited until the final trimester.<sup>14</sup>

The information presented in this fact sheet was assembled by Xóchitl Castañeda, California-Mexico Health Initiative Director, with the support of the CMHI staff.

This fact sheet was reviewed by Steven P. Wallace, PhD, Associate Director of the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research and Professor at the UCLA School of Public Health.

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\*The racial/ethnic categories surveyed were Latinos (58.4%), Non-Latino Whites (28.7%), Non-Latino Blacks (11.1%), and Other (1.8%).

\*\*Measured using Body Mass Index, a weight:height ratio. BMI is measured using the formula kilograms/meters squared. *Underweight* is defined as a BMI of less than 18.5; *healthy weight*, 18.5 or higher but less than 25; *overweight*, 25 or higher but less than 30; and *obese*, 30 or higher.<sup>15</sup>

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