Immigrant Farmworkers in New York State: Issues and Challenges

Immigration Reform: Implications for Farmers, Farm Workers, and Communities
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The Cornell Farmworker Program

Brings together CU’s faculty, staff, extension professionals, graduate and undergraduate students to engage in research, education and extension based on farmworker needs.

**Mission:** The Cornell Farmworker Program is dedicated to improving the living and working conditions of farmworkers and their families. We also seek recognition for farmworkers' contributions to society and their acceptance and full participation in local communities.

**Vision:** The CFP envisions a state and nation in which farmworkers receive equal protection under law, earn a living wage, live in comfortable housing, are safe and healthy, receive due respect as workers and as individuals, and participate fully in their communities.
The importance of farmworkers in the NY State Economy
Agriculture In New York State

- Agriculture is a $3.6 billion industry in NYS
- Apples - 2nd in US
- Cabbage - 2nd in US
- Dairy - 3rd in US
- Grapes - 3rd in US
- Pears - 4th in US
- Tart Cherries - 4th in US
- Sweet Corn - 4th in US

- 25% of the land in the state is farmland – 35,600 farms
CFP Research Priorities

- Farmworker needs assessment
- Immigration concerns among farmworkers and enforcement patterns in NYS
- Farmworkers’ perceptions on cultural understanding and community interactions
- Public perceptions of immigrant farmworker contributions
- Farmworker opportunities for career advancement and retention
- Opportunities for NYS Fair Trade apples
- Farmworkers’ understanding of pesticides/chemicals used in Ag.
- Farmworker Demographic research
Interviews with Farmworkers

- Motivation for doing farmwork
- Migration process
- Work satisfaction
- Family
- Living conditions
- Community relations & social life
- Access to services
- Knowledge of pesticides/on-farm chemicals
- Education
- Economic contributions & remittances
- Future aspirations
Farmworkers’ Priorities Identified

- Desire for more information about immigration processes/laws
- On-farm English language instruction
- More opportunities to interact with local population and to learn about US culture and etiquette.
- Increased understanding of health care services and other support agency functions and procedures
- Improved access to banking, shopping, educational services, childcare
- Desire for advancement within agriculture
- Additional training in agricultural production and farm safety
Farmworker Views on the Impact of Immigration Enforcement

- Widespread fear to leave one’s home
- Separation of children and parents - mixed status
- Detainees unable to talk directly with family members about what has or will happen
Frequently lack passports or other legal documents from one's home country.
Inability to pay for such documents.
Risk of detention to travel to NYC to obtain documents.
Insufficient knowledge about how to navigate the legal system

Limited knowledge about state and federal laws

- minor driving infractions lead to referral to immigration officials
- little/no familiarity with immigration attorneys
- difficulty in locating detainees
- vulnerability - high legal fees, court intermediaries transportation fees
- bail - $5,000.00
Immigration Enforcement and Social Isolation

- Perception that local community members view all farmworkers as undocumented and potentially dangerous
- View all community members as potential allies of law enforcement officials
- Activities such as shopping, visiting schools, sports events, attending religious services may put them at risk
- Farmworkers/latinos who collaborate with law enforcement in the hopes of receiving legal status
- Discontinuation of important social and cultural events (baptisms, birthdays, religious events) due to potential for a raid
New Yorkers’ Views on Undocumented Farmworkers
Figure 4. Based on your own opinion and experience, how do you believe undocumented farmworkers impact local communities?

Figure 1. Based on your own opinion and experience, how do you believe undocumented farmworkers impact local communities?

Figure 3. Based on your own opinion and experience, how do you believe undocumented farmworkers impact local communities?

Top reasons given in positive responses

Figure 2. Based on your own opinion and experience, how do you believe undocumented farmworkers impact local communities?

Top reasons given in negative responses

What should happen to undocumented farmworkers in New York State with a good work history?

- Be given a temporary work permit: 52%
- Be offered a path to legal citizenship: 33%
- Be deported to their home country: 15%
CFP Extension- On-Farm Emergency Planning Workshops

Workshop topics include:

Discussions of state and federal regulations as they relate to farmworkers.

**Spanish language skits that provide information about ways to respond if detained by a law enforcement official.**

Assistance for parents who wish to assign guardianship for their children

Overview of the purpose and process for assigning power of attorney

Role playing exercises about how to respond to emergencies such as a car accident, farm accident, or an immigration detention.

Information on health, education, legal, and other services for farmworkers.

Discussions about farm safety concerns.

Based on farmworker feedback, the CFP is developing new audiovisual extension materials to address new topics, and is training farmworkers to conduct these workshops.
For More information

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