

CALIFORNIA'S FARM LABOR MARKET in the 21st Century

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The Demand Side

- CA agriculture produced about \$43.5 billion of crops and commodities in 2011; total value increased to \$44.7 billion in 2012. About 2/3 was from fruit, vegetables, horticultural crops and nuts.
- CA produced about 52% of all of U.S. production of fruits, nuts, and vegetables.
- CA employs over one-third of the U.S. hired farm workforce.
- Labor-intensive crops: about 20-40% of total production cost is labor.

Increase in Labor-Intensive Crops

Crop/Acreage 2000

- Blueberries: 1,900
- Raspberries: 2,000
- Strawberries: 27,600
- Cherries: 20,000
- Mandarins: 9,000
- Pomegranates: 5,000
- Fresh market beans: 5,400
- Sweet corn: 22,000

Acreage 2012

- 4,700
- 5,400
- 38,500
- 31,000
- 38,000
- 30,000 (2011)
- 9,200
- 33,800

Acreage Changes, 2000-20012

- Crop/acreage 2000
 - Romaine lettuce: 39,000
 - Chili peppers: 4,400
- Reductions
 - Raisin grapes: 235,000
 - But all grapes: 803,000
 - Peaches (all): 65,000
 - Nectarines: 36,500
 - Asparagus: 37,800
 - Cantaloupes: 55,500
 - Honeydews: 20,000
- Acreage, 2012
 - 66,500
 - 7,100
 - 200,000
 - 793,000
 - 47,000
 - 25,000
 - 11,500
 - 36,900
 - 10,500

Nut Crops—bearing acreage in 2012

- Almonds: 790,000
- Pistachios: 178,000
- Walnuts: 245,000

- = 92% of U.S. production

CA AG Employment

- According to the CA EDD, the annual average employment in CA ag in 2010 was about 380,000. In 2011, it was estimated to be about 395,000.
- Employment is seasonal: peak is about 460,000 in June and low of 300,000 in January.
- The peak-trough ratio of 1.5 has declined somewhat due to growth in year-round production of fresh fruits and vegetables, and increases in nut crop production.
- Average employment rose by 5% between 2010-2012; up 7% for farm labor contractors during this time period.

Demand is Fairly Constant

- Demand for seasonal labor has been reduced due to mechanization and other labor-saving innovations—e.g. Round Up Ready cotton, reductions in overall acreage, mechanical grape harvesting for raisin, wine grapes, and task facilitator. But “easy” ones have been done—harder for fresh fruits and vegetables
- Demand has increased due to increased plantings of labor-intensive crops, organics.
- Net: not much change predicted, unless labor supplies decline substantially.
- Major drivers for immigrant labor supplies
 - Immigration policy or lack thereof.
 - Economic conditions and job opportunities in Mexico
 - Mexico’s declining birth rate and agricultural employment.

Unions and California Ag

- 1975—Agricultural Labor Relations Act
 - Provided farm workers with the right to organize, be represented by labor unions, and bargain collectively over the terms and conditions of employment
- UFW currently has about 3,000-4,000 active members; contracts with wineries, vegetables, mushrooms, berries and fresh tomatoes. UFCW also has contracts with dairies and wineries.

Recent Activities under the ALRA

- Elections
 - 4 certification elections in the past 2 years or so—UFW was certified in two of the elections, not certified in one election, and the Teamsters were certified in the remaining election.
 - 2 de-certification elections; both pending investigation of ULP's, election objections and challenged ballots.
- ULP activity
 - In FY 2012-13, 135 ULP charges were filed, and 26 ULP complaints were issued. From July 1, 2013-Dec. 31, 2013, there were 77 charges filed and 16 complaints issued. In the previous 4 fiscal years, the number of charges averaged 103/year and complaints averaged 21/year.

ALRB activities

- Most current activity is Mandatory Mediation and Conciliation on pre-2003 certifications
- Much litigation—MMC is being challenged, administratively, in superior courts, and in appellate courts.
- During FY 2012-13, the board issued 19 decisions and 63 administrative orders. During the July 1, 2013-January 31, 2013 period, the Board issued 9 decisions and 39 administrative orders. This compares to an annual average of 7 decisions and 19 administrative orders between FY 2008 and 2011.

Summary

- Demand for ag labor is pretty constant
- Supply is highly uncertain
- “Push factors”
 - Lower birth rate in Mexico
 - Improving job opportunities in Mexico
 - Fewer young people are entering agriculture in Mexico
- “Pull factors”
 - “Great Recession” reduced demand for labor, particularly in construction. As construction rebounds, there may be more labor market competition.
 - Ag demand may decline due to drought, climate change, crop switching and mechanization/technological advances.

Summary continued

- If farm labor markets continue to tighten, conditions will be more favorable for organizing.
- A new/expanded guest worker program could go either way for organizing
 - Workers who have the legal right to work in the U.S. may be more amenable to organizing
 - But, government regulations of the terms and conditions of employment for guest workers might leave little for a labor organization to offer the workers.

The future?

- Decreased push from Mexico + increased border enforcement + e-Verify (?) + increased inspections + state immigration laws (not in CA) – no AgJOBS or other viable guest worker program = ?????
- Future largely depends on government **action** or **inaction**.