

# Rural Migration News

## Blog 294

AUGUST 2022

### California NAWS 2015–20

DOL's National Agricultural Workers Survey interviewed 3,582 California non-H-2A crop workers over four years, 2015-19, almost 900 a year. California crop workers are aging, settling in one place with one farm employer, and are half unauthorized. Their personal incomes averaged \$2,000 a month from farm earnings of about \$600 a week for 35 to 40 weeks a year. Most California crop workers want to continue to do farm work as long as they can.

The California NAWS profiles mostly workers who are hired directly by growers and who are performing non-harvesting jobs when interviewed. For the past decade, more workers have been brought to California farms by nonfarm employers such as farm labor contractors than were hired directly; a higher share of FLC than direct-hire employees harvest crops. Harvest workers may also be younger and more migratory than the workers who are employed in pre-harvest tasks and who operate equipment and who predominate in the California NAWS.

#### Demographics

The California NAWS found that the state's crop workers were 70 percent men who were an average 40 years old; a sixth were 55 or older.

Almost two-thirds of California crop workers were married, and almost 60 percent were parents. Those with minor children had an average two such children living with them; 30 percent had three or more minor children.

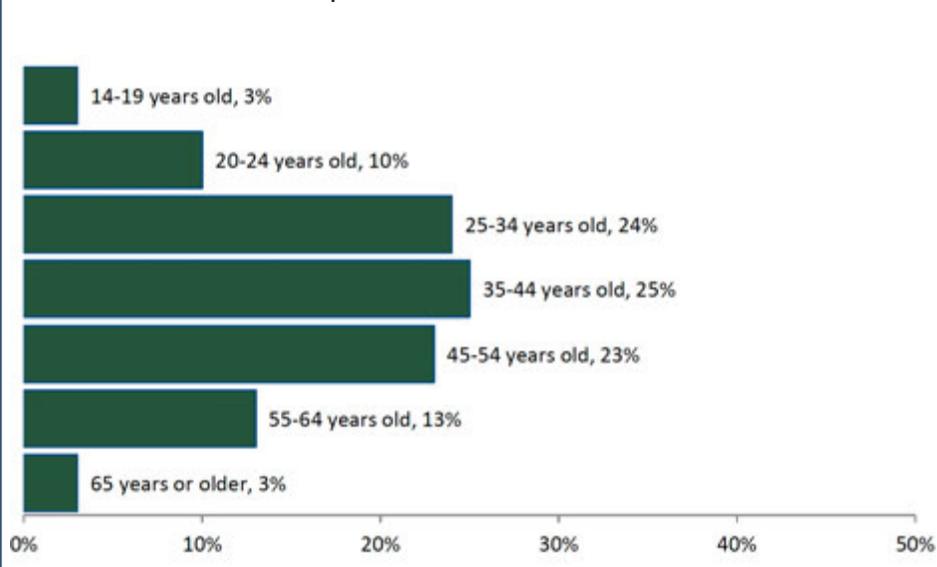
Almost 85 percent of California crop workers were born in Mexico and 80 percent were in the US at least 10 years.

California crop workers had an average eight years of schooling. Almost 90 percent said that Spanish was their primary language; only three percent reported an indigenous language. A sixth said that they can speak and read English well, but 70 percent could not speak any or much English, and three-fourths could read little or no English.

Half of the California workers were unauthorized, 30 percent were legal immigrants, and 20 percent were US citizens.

An eighth of California crop workers migrated, and these migrants typically commuted between homes in Mexico and one California residence, where they had one farm employer. Less than five percent of California crop workers were migrants who lived in the US and had at least two US farm jobs at least 75 miles apart or had a home base in the US and traveled at least 75 miles from that base to do farm work.

Over 80% of California Crop Workers were 29 to 54 Years Old



Farm work is like nonfarm work for over 90 percent of California crop workers, meaning that almost all crop workers live off the farm where they work and commute to their farm jobs by car or truck. Two-thirds of crop workers rented housing from someone other than their employer, 20 percent lived in homes owned by themselves or a family member, and 10 percent lived in employer-provided housing.

Authorized workers and those in the US for more years were most likely to live in single family homes. Three fourths of crop workers lived within 24 miles of the farm where they worked.

### Employment

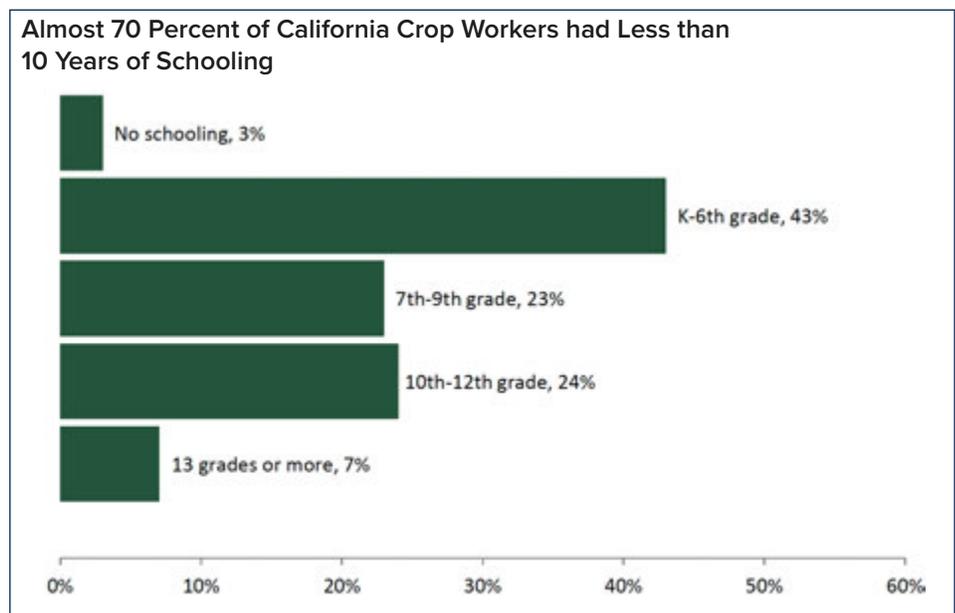
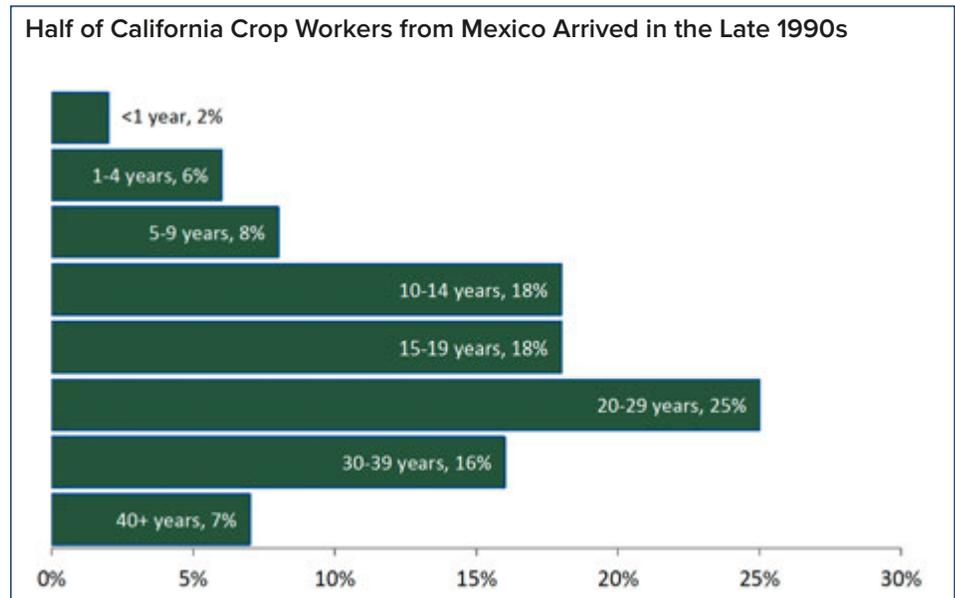
Over 70 percent of California crop workers were employed directly by farm operators; almost 30 percent were employed by FLCs. Over 70 percent found their current farm job via friends or relatives.

When interviewed, 93 percent of the crop workers were employed in FVH commodities, including:

- 54 percent in fruits and nuts
- 25 percent in vegetables and
- 14 percent in horticulture and nursery commodities.

Only 23 percent of California workers were harvesting when interviewed, while 33 percent were in technical production tasks such as pruning, irrigating, and operating equipment, 25 percent were in pre-harvest tasks such as thinning and weeding, and 19 percent were in post-harvest activities such as packing. Migrant workers and FLC employees were most likely to be in harvesting jobs.

Over 85 percent of California workers worked for hourly wages, and they worked an average of 47 hours during the week before being interviewed. Piece rate work-



ers averaged 44 hours during the previous week, while workers who were paid hourly wages averaged 48 hours.

Over the 2015-19 period, California crop workers earned an average \$12.13 an hour, including \$11.61 per hour for workers paid hourly wages and \$14.87 an hour for workers earning piece rates. Hourly earnings were highest for harvest workers who have more years of experience with their current employer.

The California minimum wage was \$9 in 2015, \$10 in 2016, \$10.50 in 2017, \$11 in 2018, and \$12 in 2019

for employers with 26 or more employees, suggesting that California crop workers earned more than the state's minimum wage.

Almost 30 percent of California crop workers received a cash bonus in addition to wages, which was a holiday bonus for most of those who received a bonus.

California requires all farm employers to provide workers compensation insurance to cover the cost of workplace injuries and illnesses and unemployment insurance to provide benefits to laid off workers. However, unauthorized workers are

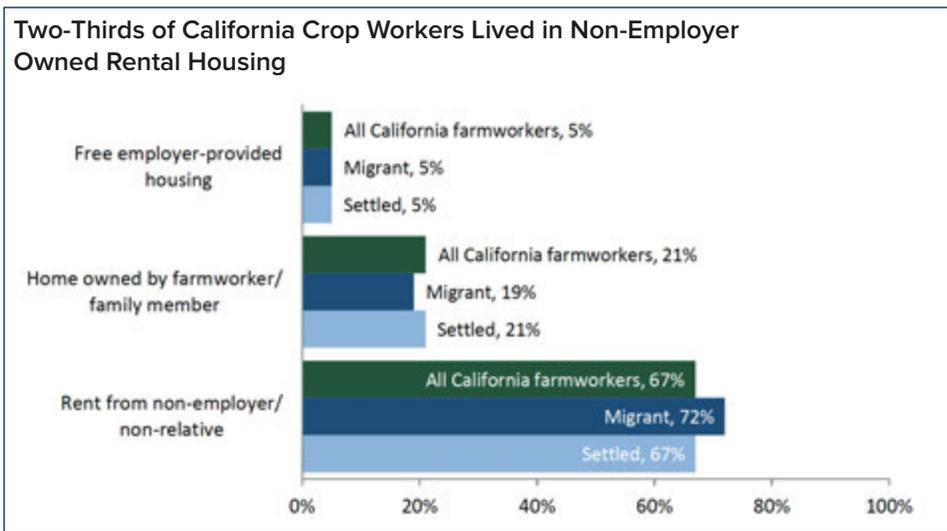
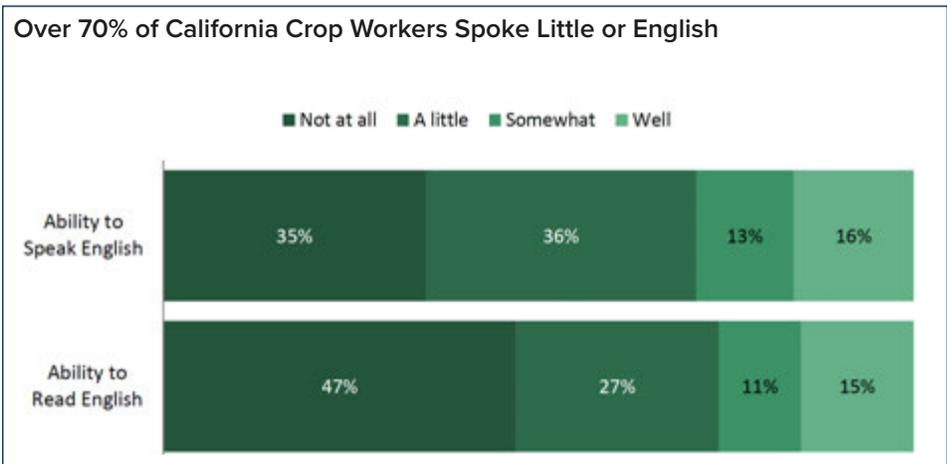
not eligible for UI benefits. When asked if they had WC and UI benefits, over 80 percent of authorized workers said yes. Few unauthorized workers thought they had UI benefits, but three-fourths of the unauthorized reported WC coverage. A third of workers reported health insurance for off-the-job injuries.

Three fourths of California crop workers had one farm employer during the previous year; a quarter had two or more farm employers. California crop workers did farm work for an average 37 weeks or 225 days in the previous year, and over 80 percent plan to continue to do farm work for at least five more years. Unauthorized workers averaged 247 days of farm work during the previous year, equivalent to 49 five-day weeks; migrant workers averaged 167 days, equivalent to 33 five-day weeks.

Half of California crop workers had parents who did US farm work, including an eighth whose parents were currently doing US farm work. Unauthorized workers were most likely to say they plan to continue to do farm work as long as possible.

Many farm jobs are seasonal. California crop workers averaged 37 weeks of farm work, and most crop workers were in the US without farm work or abroad during the other weeks. A sixth of crop workers also had nonfarm jobs, most often maintenance and repair jobs or jobs in animal agriculture. When asked why they left these non-crop jobs, two thirds gave a personal reason and one third reported being laid off or fired.

California crop workers had personal incomes of about \$2,000 a month or \$20,000 to \$25,000 a year between 2015 and 2019, with family incomes about \$5,000 a year more. Three fourths of California



### 1/3 of CA Crop Workers were Performing Technical Tasks when Interviewed, Including Pruning, Irrigating, and Operating Equipment

Primary Task at Time of Interview	All California Farmworkers	Employed by Grower	Employed by Farm		
			Labor Contractor	Migrant Farmworkers	Settled Farmworkers
<b>Pre-harvest</b>	25%	26%	23%	24%	25%
<b>Harvest</b>	23%	21%	28%	32%	21%
<b>Post-harvest</b>	19%	18%	24%*	15%*	20%
<b>Technical Production</b>	33%	36%	25%	29%	33%

### Harvest Workers in FVH Commodities had the Shortest Work weeks

Crop	Pre-Harvest Tasks	Harvest Tasks	Post-Harvest Tasks	Technical Production Tasks
<b>Field Crops</b>	55	57	57	59
<b>Fruit and Nut Crops</b>	43	43	47	46
<b>Horticulture</b>	54	46	66	45
<b>Vegetable Crops</b>	48	49	43	56
<b>Miscellaneous Crops</b>	46	43	46	49

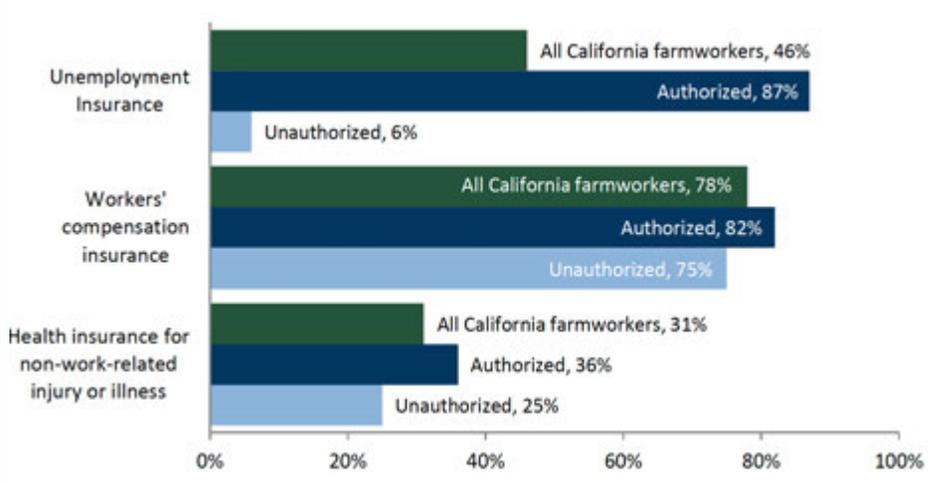
**Piece Rate and Harvest Workers with Experience had the Highest Hourly Earnings**

Farmworker Characteristic	Average Hourly Wage
All California farmworkers	\$12.13
Paid by the hour	\$11.61
Paid by the piece	\$14.87
Paid combination hourly wage and piece rate	\$19.55 <sup>a</sup>
Salary or Other	\$18.09
With current employer 1 to 2 years	\$11.55
With current employer 3 to 5 years	\$11.96
With current employer 6 to 10 years	\$12.25
With current employer 11 or more years	\$13.02
Performed pre-harvest tasks at time of interview	\$11.71
Performed harvest tasks at time of interview	\$12.86
Performed post-harvest tasks at time of interview	\$12.16
Performed technical production tasks at time of interview	\$11.93

**Holiday Bonus was the Most Common Extra Compensation for the 30% of Workers who Received a Bonus**

Type of Bonus <sup>a</sup>	Percent of California Farmworkers That Received a Bonus
Holiday bonus	56%
End-of-season bonus	24%
Incentive bonus	17%
Bonus dependent on grower profit	5%
Other type of bonus	<sup>b</sup>

**Over ¾ of Workers had WC coverage, But Only Authorized Workers had UI Benefits**



crop workers reported that they owned or were buying a US asset such as a vehicle or house. A quarter of California crop workers had family incomes below the poverty line.

Farm employers contribute some or all of the cost of social security, UI, and workers compensation, and their employees who qualify are eligible for benefits under these programs. Only 20 percent of California crop workers reported that someone in their household

received a benefit from a contributory program during the previous two years, typically UI benefits for authorized workers who were laid off. By contrast, almost two-thirds of California crop workers reported that someone in their household received a benefit from a means-tested or needs-based program during the previous two years, with Medicaid the leading benefit.

The Latino health care paradox is that new arrivals from rural Mexico are often healthier than Mexican-born workers who have been in the US for longer periods. Among California crop workers, spouses (67 percent) and children (91 percent) were more likely to have health insurance than crop workers (58 percent) themselves. Of the workers who had health insurance, government was the major provider, followed by the worker's farm employer. Government was also the major provider of health insurance for farm worker spouses and children.

**Perspective**

The NAWS interviews workers while they are doing farm work, and obtains data on the demographics, employment, and earnings of non H-2A workers who are employed on the state's crop farms.

The average employment of California's 9,200 crop farms (NAICS 11) ranged from a low of 130,000 in January 2020 to 180,000 in June 2020, a peak-trough ratio of 1.4. The average employment of the 3,700 California crop support establishments (1151) ranged from 170,000 in March 2020 to 255,000 in May 2020, a peak-trough ratio of 1.5; 40 percent of crop support establishments are FLCs. The average employment of the 1,500 FLCs (115115) ranged from 110,000 in April 2020 to 170,000 in June 2020, a peak-trough ratio of 1.6.

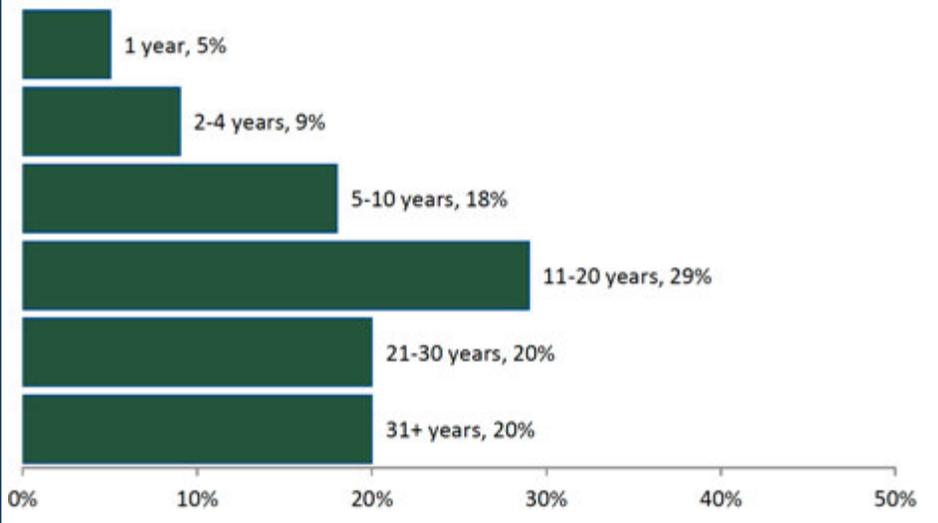
Average weekly wages were \$800 in 2020 for workers hired directly by crop employers and \$600 for employees of FLCs.

The NAWS finds what most observers see, viz, an aging, settled, and half unauthorized workforce. However, because NAWS interviewers are visiting farms throughout the year, they may find fewer of the workers who are brought to farms for a short period, such as employees of FLCs who are brought to farms to harvest crops

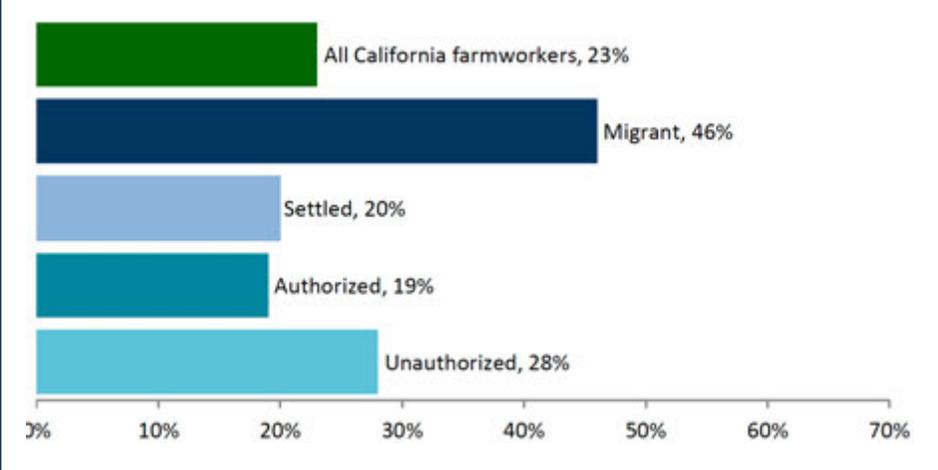
**California Crop Workers Averaged 37 Weeks of Farm Work; Unauthorized Averaged 41 Weeks**

Farmworker Characteristic	Average Weeks of Farm Work in Previous 12 Months
<b>All California farmworkers</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Migrant</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Settled</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Authorized</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Unauthorized</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>U.S.-born</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Foreign-born</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>14-17 years old</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>18-24 years old</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>25-50 years old</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Over 50 years old</b>	<b>38</b>

**2/3 of California Crop Workers had More than 10 Years of U.S. Farm Work Experience**



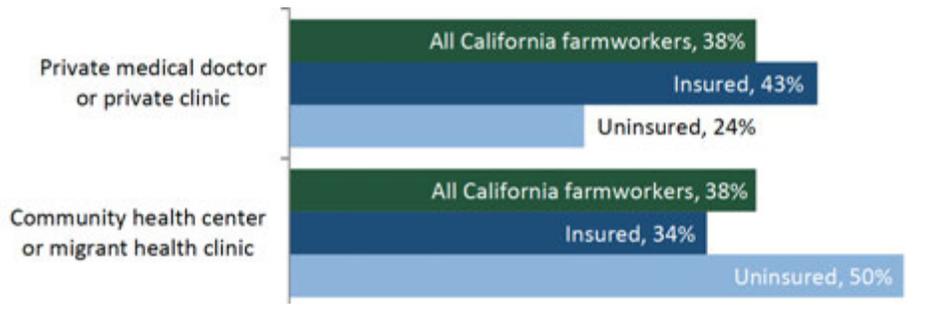
**1/4 of all California Crop Workers, and 1/2 of Migrants, had Below-Poverty Level Incomes**



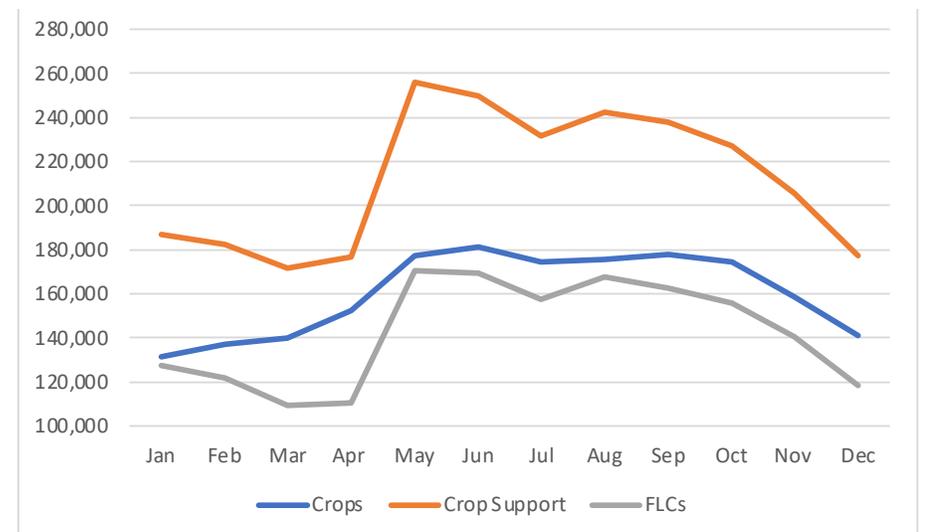
**20% of California Crop Workers Received Earned Benefits (UI);  
63% Received Means-Tested (Medicaid)**

Contribution- and Need-Based Programs Utilized	Percent of California Farmworkers
<b>Any contribution-based program</b>	<b>20%</b>
UI	17%
Disability	2%
Social Security	3%
<b>Any need-based program</b>	<b>63%</b>
Medicaid	52%
Public health clinic	16%
SNAP	16%
WIC	16%
Welfare (general assistance) or TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families)	3%

**Insured Crop Workers were More Likely to Use a Private Medical Doctor or Clinic for Health Care, While Uninsured Workers were More Likely to Use a Government-Funded Clinic**



**California Ag Employment Varied by Month, and Most for FLCs, in 2020**



**Appendix:** The appendix reports the number observations in various cells between 2015 and 2019. For example, some 2,757 workers were employed directly by growers when interviewed, compared with 825 who were employed by FLCs. The 2,007 workers who were employed in fruits and nuts dwarfed the 775 employed in vegetables and the 526 employed in horticulture, while the 1,391 who were employed in technical jobs such as pruning was almost twice the 750 harvest workers.

Variable	Variable Description	Variable Level(s)	Number of Observations	Estimate (Percentage or Mean)	Standard Error	95% Lower Confidence Limit	95% Upper Confidence Limit	Relative Standard Error
FLC	Employer is a farm labor contractor	Employer: Grower, nursery, packing house	2,757	72%	3.8%	64%	79%	5%
FLC	Employer is a farm labor contractor	Employer: Farm labor contractor	825	28%	3.8%	21%	36%	14%
D30	How current job was obtained	Applied for the job on my own	854	23%	1.6%	20%	26%	7%
D30	How current job was obtained	Recruited by a grower/his foreman	160	4%	1.0%	2%	6%	23%
D30	How current job was obtained	Recruited by farm labor contractor/his foreman	79	2%	0.4%	1%	2%	24%
D30	How current job was obtained	Referred by the employment service, welfare office, labor union, other means	48	1%	0.2%	1%	1%	20%
D30	How current job was obtained	Referred by relative/friend/workmate	2,437	70%	2.1%	66%	74%	3%
CROP	Primary crop at time of interview	Field crops	190	5%	1.1%	2%	7%	23%
CROP	Primary crop at time of interview	Fruits and nuts	2,007	54%	3.7%	46%	61%	7%
CROP	Primary crop at time of interview	Horticulture	526	14%	3.5%	7%	21%	25%
CROP	Primary crop at time of interview	Vegetables	775	25%	3.5%	18%	32%	14%
CROP	Primary crop at time of interview	Miscellaneous crops	84	b	b	b	b	54%
TASK	Primary task at time of interview	Pre-harvest	987	25%	2.2%	21%	29%	9%
TASK	Primary task at time of interview	Harvest	750	23%	2.7%	17%	28%	12%
TASK	Primary task at time of interview	Post-harvest	451	19%	3.1%	13%	26%	16%
TASK	Primary task at time of interview	Technical	1,391	33%	2.8%	27%	38%	9%
D04	Number of hours worked the previous week at current farm job	Average	3,492	47	1.32	45	50	3%

## References

DOL. JBS-ETA. 2022. California Findings from the National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS) 2015–2019: A Demographic and Employment Profile of California Farmworkers. <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ETA/naws/pdfs/NAWS%20Research%20Report%202015.pdf>

To subscribe to RMN blogs, send email to [ruralmigrationnews-subscribe@primal.ucdavis.edu](mailto:ruralmigrationnews-subscribe@primal.ucdavis.edu)

More at: <https://migration.ucdavis.edu/rmn/>