Rural Migration News summarizes the most important migration-related issues affecting agricultural and rural America. Topics are grouped by category: Rural Areas, Farm Workers, Immigration, Other, and Resources.

Distribution is by email. If you wish to subscribe, send your email address to: ruralmigrationnews-subscribe@primal.ucdavis.edu. Current and back issues may be accessed at: https://migration.ucdavis.edu/

RURAL AMERICA .................................................................................................................. 1
  CALIFORNIA: HOUSING, WATER ................................................................................... 1
  MEAT AND MIGRANTS ....................................................................................................... 4
  LABOR, VIRUS, H-1B ....................................................................................................... 5

FARM WORKERS .................................................................................................................. 8
  CALIFORNIA: VIRUS, OVERTIME ................................................................................... 8
  FLORIDA, SOUTHEAST .................................................................................................... 12
  NORTHEAST, MIDWEST, NORTHWEST ...................................................................... 13
  UFW, ALRB, UNIONS ...................................................................................................... 14

IMMIGRATION ....................................................................................................................... 16
  VIRUS, ASYLUM, POLITICS ........................................................................................... 16
  DHS: CBP, ICE, USCIS ..................................................................................................... 19
  H-2A; H-2B ...................................................................................................................... 22
  CANADA, MEXICO .......................................................................................................... 23
  EUROPE, ASIA ................................................................................................................ 27
  VIRUS, POPULATION, TRADE ....................................................................................... 33

OTHER .................................................................................................................................. 36
  CALIFORNIA: VIRUS ........................................................................................................ 36
  US: VIRUS, TRADE, SUGAR .......................................................................................... 37
  WINE, FOOD .................................................................................................................... 39
  CLIMATE: FIRES, LOCUSTS ........................................................................................... 40

RURAL AMERICA

California: Housing, Water

Salinas has severely overcrowded housing, especially in the three-square-mile Alisal district of eastern Salinas that was annexed in 1963. Some of the high-density affordable condo housing that was built to reduce overcrowding was turned into rental units that house two or three people to a room. Code
enforcement officers are reluctant to enforce laws that limit garage conversions and sheds in backyards for fear of increasing homelessness.

Cities in the San Joaquin Valley have the lowest rents in the state. Rents in most San Joaquin Valley cities including Bakersfield and Fresno, average $1,100 a month in complexes with more than 50 units. In this dataset, San Francisco had the state’s most expensive rents at $3,700 a month.

Some 45 percent of Fresno Unified School District students participate in career and technical training programs, learning about jobs in medical services, manufacturing and truck repair. Technical skills aim to help minority students obtain well-paid jobs, but some fear that many of the skills learned by high-school graduates in career training programs could be made obsolete by automation.

Housing. California has too few houses for its 40 million people. The median price of a home was $556,000 in 2019, when 100,000 more units were built. California has over 150,000 homeless people, including two-thirds who live in tent encampments on sidewalks and other public property.

Housing is expensive to build in part because of high government fees. Land is expensive, and a quarter of the cost of building affordable housing is government fees. Environmental laws allow those who oppose new housing to sue and delay projects, and requirements that new market rate housing include some units of affordable housing act as a tax on new construction and create a lottery for those seeking cheaper housing.

SB 50, which would have overridden the power of local governments to block high density housing near transit hubs, failed in the Legislature for the third time in January 2020. Local governments resisted the loss of their authority over zoning. Some advocates for the poor opposed SB 50, fearing that gentrification near transit hubs would displace tenants.

In the San Joaquin Valley, 40 percent of renters devote more than 30 percent of their household income to rent. One study found that Bakersfield, Fresno and Stockton were among the worst cities in the US to raise families due to poor air quality and poor schools, long commuting times, and high poverty levels.

Bus ridership is falling despite more poor people moving to the suburbs in search of cheaper housing. Analysts attribute fewer bus riders to many factors, including ride-hailing apps, driver’s licenses for unauthorized foreigners, shared bikes and scooters, and more people teleworking. Declining bus ridership reduces frequencies, making it more difficult for those who must take the bus to get to jobs.

The city of Berkeley in July 2019 banned natural gas hookups in new construction in a bid to reduce the use of fossil fuels; some other cities are pushing developers away from gas and oil in residential construction. The “electrify everything” movement argues that the cost of producing electricity from renewables is
declining, and that local housing policies can accelerate the shift from fossil fuels to solar and wind.

There are 70 million structures in the US, and most rely on oil and gas for heating. Most cities that want to reduce fossil fuel use are encouraging electric rather than banning gas hookups.

**Water.** Northern California received no rain in February 2020, and the Sierra snowpack dropped from almost 100 percent of normal in January 2020 to 53 percent of normal in April 2020. The melting Sierra snowpack provides a third of California’s water.

Between 2010 and 2020, California had three of the largest and smallest Sierra snowpacks on record. Ample snowfall in 2018-19 filled many of the state’s reservoirs.

The water level in Lake Mead, the largest reservoir in the Western US, topped 1,100 feet in March 2020, the highest since 2014, due to more snow in the Colorado mountains and water conservation in the seven states that share Lake Mead’s water. Lake Mead peaked at over 1,200 feet of water in 2000.

President Trump in February 2020 signed an executive order relaxing environmental protections so that more water can be pumped through the Delta and into the San Joaquin Valley before it flows into the San Francisco Bay and the ocean. The state of California immediately sued the US Department of Interior to block increased pumping, citing the threat to Delta smelt and other fish.

California’s Department of Water Resources in January 2020 made preparations for an environmental impact study of a 30-mile, 35-foot diameter tunnel to move Sacramento River water 150 feet below the Delta to pumps near Tracy that move the water south via canals. Transporting water under the Delta could reduce the pressure on endangered fish, and allow more water to be sent southward.

The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), a package of three laws enacted in 2014, requires local groundwater sustainability agencies to measure the level of groundwater and ensure that annual pumping does not drain underground aquifers. Local sustainability agencies must file sustainability plans for 43 high-priority basins, and 84 medium-priority basins, that include plans to measure how much water is being pumped from the aquifer by 2020 or 2022. Agencies must ensure the sustainability of the aquifers in their basin by 2042.

Governor Gavin Newsom proposed a $103-billion budget for 2020-21. Two-thirds of general fund revenues are expected to come from the state’s income tax; half of California’s income taxes are paid by the top one percent of taxpayers, about 150,000 households. Some worry that high-income Californians will move out of state, depriving the state of income-tax revenue.

Medi-Cal (Medicaid in California) spends $100 billion a year to provide health care to 13 million poor residents of California, about $8,000 per covered person. A
relative handful of Medi-Cal enrollees account for a large share of spending, prompting Governor Newsom to propose a package of social services for Medi-Cal recipients, from housing to education, in a bid to lower the costs of so-called superusers.

**Meat and Migrants**

Some meatpacking plants closed in April 2020 due to workers falling ill to the coronavirus. Meatpacking workers often work alongside each other on dis-assembly lines, making it hard to avoid contact with fellow workers who may be ill. The $213 billion US meat industry had been expected to produce over 100 billion pounds of meat in 2020, over half beef and pork.

Work in meatpacking plants has often been done by workers with few other options, including recently arrived immigrants. Meatpacking jobs often involve cold temperatures, sharp equipment, fast-moving conveyor belts and hours standing, discouraging US workers with other job options from taking or staying in meatpacking jobs.

Tyson’s Manufacturing Automation Center in Springdale, Arkansas is developing labor-saving devices for the largest US meat processor. Machine vision provides details of animal carcasses as they move down the dis-assembly line, enabling protein suppliers such as Tyson to expand production beyond the record 100 billion pounds of red meat and poultry produced in 2019.

JBS USA is a subsidiary of the world’s largest meat processor, Brazil-based JBS, with 60,000 US employees. The US bought $67 billion worth of pork from JBS USA from the $28 billion fund established to compensate US farmers for the trade war with China, prompting complaints that US taxpayers were supporting a foreign meat company.

Rural America was hit hard by the coronavirus in spring 2020, as the coffee shops, schools and sports, and religious activities that forge social connections closed. Limited hospital capacity contributed to fears that, in the event of an outbreak, the virus could spread quickly.

Some media described a Great American Migration of 2020 as urban residents moved to less densely populated areas during stay-at-home periods. Many city residents moved to second homes in the country or in resort areas, prompting backlashes from local residents who feared that “virus refugees” may bring coronavirus to areas with limited hospital capacity. The experience of working remotely may encourage some temporary migrants to settle in rural areas.

Several states required arriving travelers from New York and nearby states to quarantine themselves for 14 days if they were staying in Alaska, Texas, and Rhode Island. States have broad powers to protect the health and well being of their residents, but may not discriminate against in-state and out-of-state
residents, so that Alaska residents returning from New York must face the same quarantine rules as New York residents arriving in Alaska.

Labor, Virus, H-1B

After adding jobs for 113 consecutive months, employment fell by 701,000 in March 2020 and the unemployment rate rose from a 50-year low of 3.5 percent in February 2020 to 4.4 percent in March 2020. Between 2010 and 2020, the US added 22 million jobs, recouping the almost nine million lost during the 2008-09 recession and more.

The coronavirus quickly reversed economic and job growth. Consumer spending accounts for 70 percent of US economic activity, and as consumers stayed home, spending declined and workers were laid off. Almost 17 million people applied for unemployment insurance (UI) benefits during the first three weeks after stay-at-home orders were issued in mid-March 2020, and the unemployment rate for April 2020 is expected to top 10 percent.

Employers pay a tax of up to five percent on the first $7,000 of their employees’ earnings to fund UI benefits. Since most workers earn far more than $7,000 a year, over half of UI taxes are paid in the first quarter of the year. In 2019, California employers paid $5.9 billion in UI taxes and laid off workers collected $5.5 billion in UI benefits; jobless workers received an average $330 a week for 17 weeks in 2019.

As Americans stayed home, five sectors that employed almost 14 million full-time equivalent workers in 2018 were especially affected: air transportation; performing arts and sports; gambling and recreation; hotels and other lodging; and restaurants and bars. Wages to workers in these five sectors were almost $600 billion or 10 percent of total employee compensation.

The $2.2 trillion Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES), the largest-ever US economic stimulus package, was approved in March 2020 to cushion the effects of the economic shutdown by sending $1,200 checks to Americans with adjusted gross incomes of less than $75,000 and supporting impacted industries such as airlines. Grants to hospitals and forgivable loans to small businesses that keep their employees on the payroll aim to increase the capacity to care for the sick and to reduce unemployment.

The CARES $1,200 per adult and $500 per child payments are limited to those with valid Social Security Numbers. The 4.4 million people with Individual Tax Identifying Numbers in 2015 are not eligible for the payments, nor are US citizen children with unauthorized parents.

CARES also changes UI benefits through July 31, 2020, adding $600 a week to weekly benefits that vary by state. Most states offer benefits of $200 to $500 a week for up to 26 weeks, so that many low-wage jobless workers may receive
higher UI benefits than they were earning in weekly wages. CARES extends state UI benefits that normally last up to 26 weeks for an additional 13 weeks.

President Trump expressed hope that stay-at-home orders could be lifted relatively soon, asserting that the government “cannot let the cure be worse than the problem itself.” Public health experts believe that people should stay at home longer, while some economists argue that returning to normal could prevent a wave of bankruptcies and layoffs.

As the number of coronavirus cases began to level off in April 2020, there was speculation about the shape of the economic recovery and how fast the travel industry, sports, and entertainment would bounce back, that is, how fast would Americans return to mass gatherings with strangers? Economists distinguished between V, U, and L-shaped recoveries, meaning a quick bounce back, a longer spell of high unemployment before recovery, and a long recession.

The V-recession and recovery is based on the notion that the coronavirus is akin to the seasonal flu, and that people will return to work and live as they did before the lockdown. The U-shape anticipates a longer period of high unemployment, years rather than months, but similarly ends with a recovery to a pre-crisis economy. The L-shape imagines a recession that persists, as with Japan’s inability to restart its economy after the bubble burst in 1990.

The cruise industry, which had several well-publicized cases of the virus spreading on ships, is considered a canary in the coal mine for judging a return to normalcy. Carnival is the largest operator, with over 100 ships and nine brands carrying over 12 million passengers a year. A third of cruise passengers are 60 and older, putting them in the highest risk category for infectious diseases. Carnival and other cruise companies that primarily cater to Americans do not qualify for CARES assistance because they are incorporated outside the US and largely exempt from federal taxes. Carnival paid $71 million in US income taxes on revenue of $21 billion in 2019, Royal Caribbean paid $36 million on $11 billion of revenue, and NCL claimed a $19 million refund on $6.5 billion of revenue.

Gig. California’s AB 5 requires firms such as Uber that treated drivers as independent contractors to hire them as employees and pay taxes on their wages. In February 2020, a federal judge refused to enjoin enforcement of AB 5 while a suit alleging that AB 5 was unconstitutional because it singled out app-based technologies worked its way through the courts. Uber and other app-based firms are supporting a November 2020 ballot measure to overturn AB 5.

Some gig workers staged walkouts in March 2020 to protest what they considered low pay for risky work at a time of coronavirus. Instacart, which has 200,000 shoppers who select and deliver groceries, experienced a walk out of some of its gig workers who wanted extra pay; Instacart reported that the walk out had little impact on its ability to deliver groceries. Some workers at grocery stores demanded hazard pay for working when stay-at-home orders are in effect.
Immigration. Immigration is falling; net immigration was less than 600,000 in 2019. Wages for workers with less than a high school diploma are rising, up 10 percent in 2019.

Reduced immigration is a major reason for the rising wages for low-skilled workers; other reasons include higher minimum wages in many states. The occupations that are canaries in the coal mine for the effects of reduced immigration on wages include building-and-groundsmaintenance workers, drywall installers, farm workers and housekeepers, all dominated by low-skilled immigrants.

About 7.6 million of the 11 million unauthorized foreigners in the US are in the labor force. Most are employed in services, where most US workers are also employed. The share of unauthorized workers is highest in agriculture and construction.

H-1B. Employers requested 275,000 H-1B visas for FY21, far more than the 85,000 available. Employers registered their requests on a USCIS web site in March 2020, and USCIS will hold a lottery to determine who receives H-1B visas.

Accounting firm Deloitte was the top applicant for H-1B visas in FY19, winning DOL approval to fill 57,000 jobs with workers than Deloitte hired directly and via contractors providing H-1B workers to Deloitte clients. Qualcomm was second with over 29,000 DOL-approved H-1B jobs. DOL certifies almost all employer requests for H-1B visas, but the USCIS lottery determines exactly who gets H-1B visas, so it is unlikely that Deloitte hired 57,000 H-1B workers.

In March 2020, ATT reportedly outsourced much of its IT work to Accenture, which plans to replace the US workers who were transferred from ATT to Accenture with H-1B visa holders. Some of the transferred US workers, who expect to be pushed out of Accenture over time, complained that ATT did not provide severance pay because they became Accenture employees.

Census. The census in spring 2020 collected data on 330 million US residents. The US added 19 million people since the 2010 census, and the country has become more diverse and older. Texas gained the most residents between 2010 and 2018, adding almost four million, followed by Florida, which added almost three million.

The share of foreign-born residents is expected to top 14 percent in 2020, similar to the immigrant share in 1914. Over half of foreign-born residents are naturalized US citizens.

Americans are becoming more urban: 31 percent live in the 55 metropolitan areas that each have over a million residents, compared with 14 percent who live in smaller cities of 20,000 to 50,000. The median age of US residents is 38, and the share of US residents 65 and older is expected to exceed the share 18 and younger in 2034.
Married couples are half of US households. A quarter of American households have one person, while 20 percent are married couples with children at home.

**Budget.** President Trump proposed a $4.8 trillion federal budget for FY21 that would increase defense spending and reduce spending on safety net programs and foreign aid. US public debt was 80 percent of GDP before the March 2020 stimulus package aimed at combatting the economic effects of the coronavirus.

Trump’s budget projections foresee public debt as a share of GDP falling due to faster economic growth, while the CBO projects public debt rising toward 100 percent of GDP.

The federal government approved an emergency stimulus package in March 2020 that included direct payments to US residents and bailouts for particular industries. One consequence of the virus and stimulus was record federal debt, as the federal budget deficit soared past the previous record $1.5 trillion in 2009. US federal debt, including government debt and debt held by government agencies such as Social Security trust funds, topped $24 trillion in 2020, or more than 100 percent of GDP.

French-born UCB economists Gabriel Zucman and Emmanuel Saez documented rising inequality and recommended a wealth tax on the richest Americans. Zucman and Saez estimate that the top one percent of Americans, fewer than 250,000 people, each have an average $70 million in wealth for a total of 20 percent of all US wealth. Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren proposed wealth taxes to raise $400 billion a year.

Public pension systems, which make payments to 11 million people a month, lost assets as stock prices dropped in March 2020. Most public pension systems do not have enough assets to pay promised benefits, and many embraced risky investment strategies to raise returns. These strategies backfired when the coronavirus fueled a flight to safer investments.

The California Public Employees' Retirement System (Calpers), the largest US public pension system, had over $400 billion in assets when stock markets peaked in February 2020, but lost almost $100 billion in assets as stock markets fell as the virus spread. Many reformers want to reduce pension promises, a move strongly resisted by unions that represent public employees.

**FARM WORKERS**

**California: Virus, Overtime**

The coronavirus changed work and personal lives for most people around the world in March-April 2020. Workplaces and schools closed and people were asked to stay at home to avoid catching and spreading the virus.
Farming and food packing and processing were deemed essential industries, and farm workers were expected to report to work. March is typically the trough month of the year for employment in crop agriculture, except in Arizona and Florida, so the initial effects of the stay-at-home orders were limited.

Farmers expressed concerns about labor shortages due to workers or their families getting sick, some workers staying home to care for children who could not go to school, and barriers to importing H-2A guest workers. There were few initial reports of farm workers testing positive for coronavirus, and tracking data found farm workers and others in agricultural counties continued to move about in March-April as before.

Child-care facilities and schools closed, increasing child-care responsibilities. Half of the crop workers interviewed by the NAWS are parents with an average of two children under 18, although not all crop workers have their children with them where they work.

The Department of State issued over 200,000 visas to H-2A guest workers in FY19. These guest workers were employed for an average six months in the US, so they fill over 10 percent of the million year-round equivalent jobs in US crop agriculture. DOS allowed consular officials to waive in-person interviews for first-time and returning H-2A workers to facilitate their entry.

Farm employers took a number of steps to slow the spread of Covid-19, including taking fewer workers on buses and making several trips, practicing social distancing during rest and lunch breaks, and conducting temperature checks before work starts. Some employers added hand-washing stations and provided education on how to prevent the spread of the virus.

Some employers fear that there may be fewer farm workers due to paid sick leave and more generous unemployment insurance. The Families First Coronavirus Response Act (HR 6201) requires private-sector employers with fewer than 500 employees to provide their employees with up to two weeks of fully or partially paid sick leave for COVID-19 related reasons between April 1 and December 31, 2020.

**Overtime.** AB 1066 is phasing in overtime pay for farm workers by 2022. Large employers must pay 1.5 times usual wages for work in excess of nine hours a day and 50 hours a week in 2020. AB 2956 would create a state tax credit for farm employers equal to the overtime pay they provide to farm workers.

Proponents of state tax credits for overtime pay believe farmers would be more willing to pay overtime wages, which increase farm worker earnings and spending in farm worker communities. They argue that workers would not have to find a second part-time job to obtain more hours of work, since tax credits would encourage employers to maintain current work schedules.

There are limited data on the typical hours worked in agriculture. Both the USDA ALS and the NAWS find that most farm workers were employed 40 to 45 hours in
the week of the survey. Payroll or survey data could indicate how workers were employed particular hours, such as the share of workers employed more than 40, 45, 50, 55, and 60 hours a week, while focus groups with workers could reveal how employers and workers are adapting to 9/50 overtime rules.

Napa. A 2018 survey of over 600 vineyard workers and 50 supervisors in Napa county found that two-thirds of the permanent workers, and 85 percent of seasonal workers, lived outside Napa county, including some who commuted from 100 miles away.

Commuting to work in Napa was a major concern of workers, followed by the dangers of pesticides and other chemicals used in vineyards. Workers also complained of inadequate communication about wages and other personnel policies. Some thought there was too much wage compression, as both new hires and experienced workers earned $15 to $20 an hour. Most workers liked their co-workers and the nature of the work they did.

Seasonality. Average employment in California agriculture rose three percent between 2000 and 2018, from 408,600 to 421,800. Peak employment was 492,000 in September 2000 and trough employment was 313,000 in January 2000, for a peak-trough ratio of 1.6. By 2018, peak employment was lower, 483,499 in June, and trough employment was higher at 345,500 in January, for a peak-trough ratio of 1.4, that is, seasonality at the state level declined over the past two decades.

Agricultural employment has increased and seasonality has decreased because of the changing mix of commodities, as when raisin grapes, which have a short harvest season, are replaced by table grapes, which are harvested over a longer season. Declining seasonality is especially visible in the two leading farm counties, Fresno and Kern.

Fresno county was the state’s largest farming county in 2000, producing commodities worth $3.4 billion, including $640 million worth of grapes, $400 million worth of poultry, and $355 worth of cotton. Most of Fresno’s grapes were from 171,000 acres of raisin grapes worth $365 billion in 2000. Employment in Fresno agriculture averaged 55,000 in 2000, and ranged from a low of 36,600 in March to over 80,000 in September, a peak-trough ratio of 2.2.

By 2018, Fresno’s farm sales more than doubled to $7.9 billion, and the top commodities were almonds worth $1.2 billion, grapes worth $1.1 billion, and pistachios worth $860 million. Raisin grape acreage declined to 80,000, and the value of the raisin crop was $314 million, less than in 2000 even when not adjusted for inflation. Employment in Fresno agriculture averaged 44,000 in 2018, and ranged from a low of 35,000 in March 2018 to over 53,000 in August, a peak-trough ratio of 1.5.

Over almost two decades, Fresno’s agricultural employment fell and seasonality declined as nuts replaced raisin grapes and tree fruits. Trough employment did not change much, but peak employment declined significantly.
Kern county’s agriculture evolved differently. Farm commodities were worth $2.2 billion in 2000, led by grapes worth $440 million, citrus worth $290 million, and cotton worth $225 million; the value of raisin grapes, $82 million, exceeded the value of table grapes, $67 million. Employment in Kern agriculture averaged 43,000 in 2000, and ranged from a low of 33,600 in March to over 63,500 in August, a peak-trough ratio of 1.9.

By 2018, Kern’s farm commodities were worth $7.5 billion, led by $1.5 billion worth of grapes, $1.2 billion worth of almonds, and $1.1 billion worth of pistachios. By 2018, the value of raisin grapes, $128 million, was a tenth of the $1.2 billion worth of table grapes. Employment in Kern agriculture averaged 62,400 in 2018, and ranged from a low of 42,400 in March to over 72,600 in August, a peak-trough ratio of 1.7.

Over almost two decades, Kern’s agricultural employment rose and seasonality declined as table grapes replaced raisin grapes and nuts replaced citrus and cotton in the agricultural economy. Both trough and peak employment rose by about 10,000 a month.

McFarland. McFarland’s Planning Commission in February 2020 blocked the Geo Group’s application to take over two state prisons slated for closure and use them to detain unauthorized foreigners. McFarland’s 15,000 residents include many unauthorized Mexicans who urged city leaders to reject the private immigrant detention facilities. McFarland’s mayor said that McFarland needs Geo’s tax revenue and jobs.

A state law enacted in 2019 bars new private prison contracts, but the Geo-ICE agreement for the 700-bed Central Valley and Golden State prisons was signed before the law took effect. Geo is McFarland’s second-largest employer, after the school district, and Geo promised jobs as well as $2 million a year in taxes and fees.

Opponents argued that an ICE facility in McFarland would mean ICE agents could encounter and detain unauthorized residents. Over 80 percent of the 44,000 foreigners who were detained by ICE in 220 facilities around the US in January 2020 were operated by private contractors.

Cannabis. Some farm workers are switching from seasonal fruit and vegetable jobs to cannabis greenhouses that offer eight-hour days and year-round work.

There were almost 5,000 active cannabis licenses in 2020, including over 1,200 in Humboldt county and over 1,150 in Santa Barbara county. Glass House Farms in Santa Barbara employs 25 workers to care for 500,000 square feet of cannabis. Higher profits in cannabis mean higher wages, at least $15 an hour and better benefits. Workers appreciate not having to work with plants that are sprayed with pesticides.
There are worries in coastal farming areas that more farm workers will move to cannabis farms. Napa county banned cannabis farms, in part so that workers would not move from “wine to weed.”

Moody’s estimates that total US cannabis sales in 2019 were $40 billion, and that legal cannabis is at least 75 percent more expensive than black market or untaxed cannabis. California collected $514 million in state and local cannabis taxes in 2018-19, followed by $362 million in Washington and $302 in Colorado.

Florida, Southeast

Lipman Family Farms, the largest US producer of open-field tomatoes, relies on US and H-2A workers for harvesting. The cost of planting tomatoes for the six major growers is about $11,000 an acre, and the farm price is usually $8 to $9 for a 25-pound box.

Lipman in March 2020 announced steps to limit the spread of coronavirus by having food trucks and check cashing services visit workers at their housing rather than taking guest workers to nearby towns. Many farm employers house four workers per room, raising questions about how they would quarantine sick H-2A workers.

Republican Governor Ron DeSantis supports efforts to require Florida employers to use E-Verify to check the legal status of new hires. Most farmers oppose mandatory E-Verify, and the Legislature in March 2020 agreed to allow employers to use E-Verify or the current I-9 forms to check the legal status of new hires, a setback for DeSantis. Nine states in 2020 required almost all of their employers to use E-Verify to check new hires.

Florida fruit and vegetable growers who compete most directly with imports from Mexico formed DemandAmericanGrown.org to encourage Americans to buy US-grown produce. Florida strawberry growers complain of low labor costs in Mexico. One study estimated that workers in Florida earn an average $2.30 per flat for picking strawberries, while workers in Michoacan earn an average $1 a flat for picking during the longer Mexican picking season.

North Carolina. Scott Farms, which grows sweet potatoes and tobacco in Wilson county, agreed to pay $600,000 to 350 US year-round employees and $175,000 in attorney fees in January 2020 because the US workers were paid less than H-2A workers for packing sweet potatoes and were not paid overtime wages as required.

Since the US workers were in corresponding employment, they should have received the Adverse Effect Wage Rate. Scott Farms in 2015 paid $1.25 million to US workers who did not receive the minimum wage and overtime.
Florida-based FLC SBHLP Inc was debarred from the H-2A program for three years after failing to reimburse H-2A workers for their inbound transportation and failing to provide them with three meals a day when the H-2A workers were employed at five North Carolina farms. SBHLP Inc was ordered to pay 194 workers $224,000 in back wages and was assessed $239,000 in civil money penalties.

**Northeast, Midwest, Northwest**

**Maine.** The growers of 3,800 acres of low-bush blueberries rely on 50,000 hives of honeybees to pollinate their crop in April and May. Some beekeepers said that the coronavirus reduced the number of experienced truck drivers needed to move hives.

**New York.** Since January 1, 2020, farm employers must pay 1.5 times a worker’s normal wage for hours above 60 a week. Many dairy farms that in the past had six 12-hour days or 72 hour-a-week schedules are reducing their work weeks to 65 hours a week in order to limit overtime pay to five hours a week. A three-member board that includes employer, union, and government representation is studying the effects of the 60-hour overtime law.

Four other states, California, Hawaii, Minnesota and Maryland, require some form of overtime pay for farm workers, while 25 states explicitly exclude farm workers from their general labor laws.

**Pennsylvania.** South Mill Champs plans a $115 million, one million square-feet mushroom growing facility in southeastern Pennsylvania that is expected to employ 500 workers. The US had 36 million-square feet of mushroom-growing capacity in 2019, including 40 percent in southeast Pennsylvania. Most growers produce agaricus white mushrooms in compost beds in a six-week spawning, growing, and harvest cycle. US grower revenue for mushrooms was $1.2 billion in 2019.

Grocery chains won $46 million from the 21-member Eastern Mushroom Marketing Cooperative that included South Mill Champs for price fixing. Several mushroom growers went out of business after the settlement.

The Oregon Dairy restaurant and supermarket in Lancaster county opened in 1974, and has become popular with locals and tourists. The Hurst family that owns Oregon Dairy wants to create Oregon Village with 550 housing units, prompting protests from residents who fear that high-density housing in an area of Amish and Mennonite farmers could disrupt long-established ways of life.

Lancaster county has preserved 1,000 farms by paying farmers fair value for their farm in exchange for its remaining agricultural in perpetuity, and the private Lancaster Farm Trust has preserved 1,500 farms in a similar way.
Virginia. Democrats control the state government, and they are proposing to increase the state’s minimum wage from the current federal $7.25 an hour to $15 an hour by July 1, 2025. Farmers fear that higher state minimum wages would raise the AEWR for H-2A guest workers. Tobacco farmer Bob Harris said “We wouldn’t have a tobacco industry if it wasn’t for migrant labor.”

Illinois. Some cities with declining populations are annexing nearby areas to maintain their populations in the 2020 Census. Decatur had 94,000 residents in 1980, but only 71,000 in 2019, prompting Decatur to expand its borders before the January 1, 2020 deadline, angering some new Decatur residents whose taxes will go up. Archer Daniels Midland moved its corporate headquarters to Chicago in 2014, lowering Decatur property values.

Colorado. A Denver Democrat wants the state to replace the words “illegal alien” with “undocumented immigrant” in state laws. President Trump used “illegal alien” several times in his 2020 State of the Union speech, and the US Department of Justice instructed federal prosecutors to use the term, fueling efforts to remove such terms from state and local laws and ordinances. A pending House bill would replace “alien” and “illegal alien” with “foreign national” and “undocumented foreign national” in major US immigration laws.

The Associated Press stylebook has since 2013 stopped using “illegal” to describe people, associating the term only with their actions. Some activists prefer the terms “unauthorized” immigrants or “people who are here illegally.”

Wisconsin. Rural areas have 20 percent of US residents but almost 70 percent of US roads, many of which are in need of resurfacing and repair because of heavier trucks and other equipment that use rural roads. Wisconsin says that the normal life of an asphalt road is 30 years, but many of its rural roads are older than 60 years and have not been resurfaced, forcing weight limits and closures. Patching roads costs less than $20,000 a mile, while reconstructing roads costs over $300,000 a mile.

Idaho. Idaho was the fastest-growing state between July 2018 and July 2019, attracting migrants from California and other states who are seeking lower-cost housing and less congestion. The metro Boise area is rapidly adding residents, which is pushing up house prices. In some suburbs, median house prices doubled between 2019 and 2020.

Washington. A settlement that required Stemilt Ag Services to pay $80,000 to 4,300 Mexican H-2A workers was stopped in February 2020 after Columbia Legal Services intervened and argued that the payment request would be sent by mail to H-2A workers in Mexico, who would likely not receive their mail. Any monies not claimed by the H-2A workers would remain with Stemilt.

UFW, ALRB, Unions
National Farmworker Awareness Week, typically celebrated the last week of March to coincide with the Cesar Chavez holiday on March 31, aims to raise awareness of farm worker issues and concerns. Farm workers were declared essential workers, prompting media stories about the fact that many are unauthorized and live in crowded housing with US-born children.

The UFW in March 2020 called on farm employers to offer 40 hours of paid sick leave to their employees due to the coronavirus, to eliminate the typical 90-day waiting period before newly hired workers are eligible for paid sick leave, and to end the practice of requiring doctor’s notes when absent workers return to work. The UFW, which has about 10,000 members and contracts with 25 to 30 farms, said that farm employers with contracts are responding positively to the challenges posed by the virus.

ALRB. Victoria Hassid, chief deputy director of the state Department of Industrial Relations, was appointed chair of the ALRB in February 2020, giving the board five members.

Premiere Raspberries (formerly Dutra Farms) refused to implement a mediator-developed contract and instead challenged the ALRB’s certification of the UFW to represent its workers. The ALRB in August 2018 ordered Premiere to implement the mediator-developed contract that was the UFW proposal because Premiere refused to participate in mediation. The three-year contract would raise wages by 15 percent, provide health insurance for workers and their families, and grant eight paid holidays.

Premiere, whose berries are sold under the Well-Pict label, appealed the ALRB’s order to the 6th District Court of Appeal.

Unions. Some 10.3 percent of US workers, 14.6 million of 142 million, were members of unions in 2019, the lowest share since 1983. Some 16.4 million workers were represented by unions, meaning that almost two million workers covered by collective bargaining agreements elected not to join the union that negotiated the agreement under which they worked.

Unions are strongest in the public sector, where 7.1 million workers or 34 percent of public employees were union members, and weaker in the private sector, where 7.5 million workers or six percent of private-sector employees were union members.

By occupation, a third of workers in protective services such as police and fire, and a third of teachers, were union members. Only two percent of workers in farming were union members.

Men were slightly more likely to be union members than women, 11 percent compared to 10 percent. About 11 percent of Black workers were union members, compared to 10 percent of white workers, nine percent of Asian workers, and nine percent of Hispanic workers.
Hawaii and New York had the highest union membership rates, with over 20 percent of workers union members, while North and South Carolina had the lowest rates, less than three percent. Unionized workers had higher weekly earnings, almost $1,100, than nonunion workers, $900.

There were 25 major work stoppages involving 1,000 or more workers in 2019, more than the average 15 major work stoppages between 2010 and 2019. Over half of the 425,500 workers who went on strike in 2019 were teachers, who were often on strike for only a few days.

The work stoppage that involved the most work days lost was between General Motors and the United Auto Workers in September-October 2019. Over 85 percent of US work stoppages occur in workplaces with fewer than 1,000 employees, and half are in places with fewer than 100 employees.

The National Labor Relations Board in February 2020 reversed the 2015 Browning-Ferris Industries ruling that made it easier for workers to say they were jointly employed by a franchise and the master brand, as with McDonald’s restaurants owned by franchisees. Browning-Ferris was found to be a joint employer with the staffing firm that provided workers to sort waste in its facility.

The 2020 NLRB rule says that an employer must “possess and exercise substantial, direct and immediate control” over employees brought into a workplace by a contractor to be a joint employer. This means that most of the 7.6 million employees of franchisees cannot consider the master brand to be a co-employer with the franchised restaurant.

Unions say that franchisees are often so tightly regulated by their contracts with master brands that the master brand should be a joint employer.

DOL in January 2020 issued a similar revised joint-employment regulation that generally exempts franchise owners from liability for labor law violations committed by franchisees if the master brand does not supervise the franchisee’s employees and does not determine wages or maintain employee records.

The House approved the PRO Act on a 224-194 vote in February 2020 to allow unions to be certified via card check rather than NLRB-supervised elections and to require employers to provide unions with employee information. The PRO Act, which is not likely to be approved by the Senate, would eliminate state right-to-work laws.

IMMIGRATION

Virus, Asylum, Politics

The coronavirus, which likely originated in a food market in Wuhan in Hubei province in December 2019, changed work and personal lives in the US in March.
2020. Workplaces and schools closed and people were asked to stay at home to avoid catching and spreading the virus.

DHS in March 2020 announced that foreigners who cross the Mexico-US border legally or illegally would be unable to apply for asylum in the US, and Mexico agreed to accept the return of its citizens and Central Americans. Migrant advocates decried the new policy, arguing that it violates US commitments to accept applications from asylum seekers.

Some 60,000 mostly Central Americans who have already applied for asylum are waiting in Mexico for asylum hearings, including some living in tent camps by ports of entry. The Migration Protection Protocols or remain in Mexico program has discouraged Central Americans from applying and pursuing asylum applications. About half of the 60,000 dropped their requests for asylum in the US and elected to stay in Mexico or return to their countries of origin with financial assistance. With US asylum hearings stopped, the Mexican government is encouraging those who are waiting by the border to move to permanent housing.

The US Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit in February 2020 ruled 2-1 that the MPP was unlawful, and issued an injunction to halt the practice of returning asylum applicants to Mexico to await hearings. However, the US Supreme Court overturned the Ninth Circuit’s decision and allowed the MPP to remain in effect.

Asylum. A caravan of several thousand Hondurans began to march toward the US in January 2020. When the caravan reached the Guatemala-Mexico border, the Mexican government allowed migrants to cross the bridge spanning the Suchiate River in groups of 20 and apply for asylum and Mexican work permits.

Most of the migrants wanted to transit Mexico and apply for asylum in the US. Those who tried to enter Mexico illegally were pushed back or detained, a policy praised by the Trump administration and decried by migrant advocates. The Mexican government said that smugglers had “tricked” migrants into believing that Mexico would allow them to pass freely to the US border.

Six caravans of Central Americans crossed Mexico en route to the US in 2018 and 2019.

Central Americans who transit Guatemala to apply for asylum in the US can be returned to Guatemala under the Asylum Cooperation Agreement. Since most Central Americans do not want to apply for asylum in Guatemala, fewer are trying to get into the US. Migrants subject to the ACA are typically flown to Guatemala, where they are informed that they have 72 hours to apply for asylum or can board buses operated by IOM to return to their countries of origin, typically El Salvador or Honduras.

The Prompt Asylum Claim Review (PACR) aims to have migrant families who apply for asylum pass a credible fear test with an asylum officer within 10 days of arriving in the US. If migrants fail to convince the officer that they have a credible
fear of persecution at home, they can be removed. The share of border asylum applicants who passed credible fear tests fell from over 80 percent in 2017 to 40 percent in 2020.

The US returned a Salvadoran gay man to Guatemala, where authorities advised him to apply for asylum in Mexico, according to a suit filed by the ACLU in January 2020. The US has certified Guatemala’s asylum system as “full and fair,” and is providing money to increase its capacity to process asylum applications.

DHS proposed a new regulation that would: (1) prohibit asylum seekers who entered the US illegally from obtaining work permits while they wait for trials before immigration judges and appeals; (2) deny work permits to those who are in the US at least a year before applying for asylum; and (3) require other asylum seekers to wait a year rather than six months before they can apply for a work permit.

Sanctuary. President Trump used the State of the Union address in February 2020 to attack sanctuary jurisdictions, citing cases of foreigners who were released after arrests or convictions for US crimes and went on to commit more crimes against US citizens. Trump frequently tells stories of Americans who were victims of crimes committed by unauthorized foreigners in sanctuary jurisdictions.

DHS in February 2020 blocked additional New York residents from enrolling or re-enrolling in Global Entry and other trusted traveler programs because the state denies the Customs and Border Protection and Immigration and Customs Enforcement agencies access to its DMV database. New York in 2019 enacted a Green Light law that allows unauthorized foreigners to obtain driver’s licenses and does not allow police to detain unauthorized foreigners for ICE.

The US Department of Justice sued California in 2019 and New Jersey in February 2020 for enacting sanctuary laws that limit the cooperation of state and local law enforcement with DHS. A federal judge dismissed most of DOJ’s suit against California over AB 450, which prohibits private employers from giving DHS agents access to employee information without a court order, SB 103, which creates a state system to inspect immigration detention facilities in the state, and SB 54, which limits the interactions of state and local law enforcement agencies with DHS. DOJ has appealed, and hopes that the US Supreme Court will overturn these injunctions.

The Second US Circuit Court of Appeals in February 2020 ruled that the Trump administration could withhold DOJ grant funds from sanctuary states and cities.

Politics. Acting chief of staff Mick Mulvaney in February 2020 told a British group that the US desperately needed more people to fuel economic growth. Foreign-born workers accounted for half of net US labor force growth since 2000, but labor force expansion and the immigrant share of net workforce growth slowed since Trump became president. Mulvaney was replaced in March 2020.
Net immigration was 1.1 million in 2015 and 2016, but fell to 600,000 in 2019. The US continues to “admit” over a million immigrants a year, but falling net immigration means that more foreigners are leaving the US.

Former Democratic presidential candidate Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT) was one of the strongest voices against large-scale immigration and freer trade a decade ago, seeking to protect low-wage US workers. Sanders especially opposed guest workers, arguing that tying foreign workers to a US employer was “akin to slavery.” Sanders in 2011 said that he does “want to see companies utilizing guest worker programs to lower wages for American workers.”

Former Vice President Joe Biden disputes the notion that immigrants take jobs from US workers and lower their wages.

Former Democratic presidential candidate Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) presented dozens of plans she would pursue as president, including increasing the dignity of farm workers and food-chain workers. Warren promised federal collective bargaining rights for farm workers and an end to agricultural exemptions in the Fair Labor Standards Act. Warren accused “Big Ag” of taking advantage of farm and food-related workers, and promised to “protect from deportation any worker exercising federal rights to protest wage theft, workplace discrimination, unsafe working conditions, or other such disputes with an employer.” Warren suspended her campaign in March 2020.

**DHS: CBP, ICE, USCIS**

The number of unauthorized foreigners in the US dropped from almost 12 million in 2010 to less than 11 million in 2020, as fewer new unauthorized foreigners arrived from Mexico and more unauthorized Mexicans left the US.

The number of unauthorized foreigners dropped significantly in California, New York, and New Jersey over the past decade, but rose in Texas from 1.7 million to 1.8 million. Most departures from the US were voluntary, but almost 86,000 unauthorized foreigners were deported from the interior of the US in FY19.

Almost 40 percent of the 11 million unauthorized foreigners arrived after 2010. Two-thirds of these four million post-2010 arrivals, some 2.6 million, arrived legally and overstayed, including many Chinese and Indian citizens.

CBP. Border apprehensions fell over 75 percent from a peak 133,000 in May 2019 to 36,600 in January and 37,000 in February 2020. Apprehensions fell further after March 21, 2020, when CBP was authorized to return unauthorized foreigners, 60 percent Mexicans and 30 percent Central Americans, to Mexico with two hours of being apprehended.

CBP apprehension data include those caught trying to enter the US illegally and persons deemed inadmissible at ports of entry.
About two-thirds of all foreigners apprehended just inside US borders in FY19 were adults and children, 90 percent of whom were from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. The Trump administration ended catch-and-release policies that saw most family units give themselves up to the Border Patrol, apply for asylum, and be released until hearings on their applications.

Remain in Mexico, returns to Guatemala to apply for asylum there, and tougher credible fear interviews mean very few foreigners are released into the US to wait for hearings on their asylum applications.

DHS completed 135 miles of new 30-foot high bollard fencing that cost $1 million a mile in March 2020, and construction continued during the coronavirus lockdown. President Trump in February 2020 said that his administration would “do everything in our power to keep the infection and those carrying the infection from entering our country.”

Many newly fenced areas have a primary and secondary fence, with the area between the fences considered an enforcement zone to apprehend smugglers and migrants. Some smugglers are using ladders on the Mexican side to get migrants to the top of the wall, and then having them use a rope ladder or slide down the fence on the US side.

President Trump requested $2 billion for walls and fencing on the Mexico-US border in February 2020, and announced plans to divert $3.8 billions of Department of Defense funds to build 177 more miles of border wall.

ICE. The Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency arrested 143,000 unauthorized foreigners inside the US in FY19.

In spring 2020, ICE announced plans to step-up efforts to detect and arrest unauthorized foreigners convicted of US crimes, especially in sanctuary cities such as New York and San Francisco where local law enforcement agencies refuse to cooperate with ICE. Agents arrest other unauthorized foreigners they encounter when searching for criminals. DHS reassigned 100 Customs and Border Protection agents to support ICE agents in sanctuary cities. DHS cited the refusal of local authorities to cooperate as the reason for the re-deployment.

In March 2020, ICE announced that it was suspending most interior enforcement except for foreigners convicted of US crimes in a bid to reduce fear among unauthorized foreigners during the coronavirus pandemic. About 20,000 of the 38,000 foreigners being detained by ICE in March 2020 were convicted of US crimes. Advocates want ICE to release detainees to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

USCIS. The US Supreme Court lifted nationwide injunctions and allowed new public charge regulations to go into effect February 24, 2020. US Citizenship and Immigration Services in the US, and the Department of State abroad, can deny immigration visas to foreigners who used or are “more likely than not” to use
Medicaid, housing assistance or food stamps for at least 12 months in a 36-month period. The new regulation does not apply to refugees and is not retroactive.

Previously, foreigners could be denied immigrant visas if they used means-tested cash assistance and were “primarily dependent” on government support.

Past use of in-kind benefits may not affect many applicants for immigrant visas because most foreigners are not eligible for federal welfare benefits until they have worked at least 10 years in the US. However, the revised public charge test may affect future applicants. Half of current applicants for immigrant visas have at least one negative indicator that can be considered disqualifying by adjudicators, including low income, assets, educational attainment, poor English skills, periods of unemployment, and poor health.

USCIS in 2018 predicted that the public charge regulation would encourage 324,000 foreigners now receiving federal welfare benefits to withdraw, saving $2.3 billion a year. Most of those who withdraw from benefit programs are not directly affected by the regulation, but they may live in households with recipients and fear that continued receipt of benefits could jeopardize their applications, as with recent legal immigrant parents who withdraw US citizen children from programs.

The US has been admitting 1.1 million legal immigrants a year. Over 600,000 are already in the US when they receive immigrant visas or green cards and adjust their status to immigrant, while 500,000 obtain immigrant visas at US consulates abroad.

President Trump in January 2020 added six countries to the list whose citizens cannot easily get immigrant visas because of lack of security and cooperation with US authorities. Sudan and Tanzania are barred from the diversity visa lottery. Travel to the US from citizens of Iran, Libya, Somalia, Syria, Yemen and North Korea was restricted in December 2017, and this so-called travel ban was upheld by the US Supreme Court in 2018.

Some 10,000 U-immigrant visas a year have been available to victims of US crimes who aid in the prosecution of their perpetrators since 2000, when the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act was enacted. There were 59,000 U-visa petitions filed in FY18, up from 11,000 in FY09, and over 80 percent are approved. Between FY12 and FY18, two-thirds of U-visa petitions were filed by Mexicans, and almost 80 percent of foreigners requesting U-visas had never been in a legal status in the US.

Victims of US crimes must obtain a certification of victimization and cooperation from a law enforcement agency to file a petition for a U-visa with USCIS. Once approved, the applicant may obtain a work permit while waiting for a U-visa to become available.
H-2A; H-2B

DOL certified almost 258,000 jobs to be filled with H-2A workers in FY19. Agricultural labor contractors were certified to fill 41 percent of the FY19 jobs, up from 12 percent in 2013.

DOS issued 204,800 H-2A visas in FY19, up from 196,400 in FY18, when DOS issued 180,400 H-2A visas to Mexicans (88 percent), 5,300 to Jamaicans (2.5 percent), 3,900 to Guatemalans (2 percent), and 3,600 to South Africans. H-2A workers can be recruited in 84 countries.

DOS in March 2020 waived interviews for returning Mexican workers seeking H-2A and H-2B visas, provided they had a visa within the last four years and no grounds for ineligibility. First-time workers can also skip in-person interviews under some circumstances. President Trump in March 2020 said: “We want them to come in. We’re not closing the border so that we can’t get any of those people to come in...They’re going to continue to come. Or we’re not going to have any farmers.”

USCIS in November 2019 announced that it would no longer consider shepherding to be temporary or seasonal work, ending the practice of admitting H-2A shepherders for 364 days and renewing their visas twice for a three-year stay. After three months at home, many H-2A shepherders returned to the US for another three-year stay. USCIS normally defers to DOL to define temporary and seasonal, which DOL normally limits to 10 months, with an exception for shepherders that dates to the 1950s.

DOL in spring 2020 continued to work on the 83,000 comments received in response to its July 2019 Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) that would, for instance, change the way that the Adverse Effect Wage Rate (AEWR) is determined.

HR 5038, the Farm Workforce Modernization Act, was approved by the House in December 2019, but has not been acted on by the Senate. Some hope that an expected US Supreme Court decision on the fate of DACA by June 2020 will spur Congress to act on unauthorized foreigners bought to the US before the age of 16 and farm workers.

Representative Ted Yoho (R-FL) introduced HR 6083 in March 2020, the Labor Certainty for Food Security Act. HR 6083 would transfer the H-2A program from DOL to USDA and replace the AEWR with a requirement to pay the higher of the state’s minimum wage of 15 percent more than the federal minimum wage of $7.25 or $8.34 an hour. Guest workers could work in any farm job, that is, the current requirement that the need for workers be seasonal would be eliminated.

Under HR 6083, unauthorized workers in the US could pay a $2,500 fine for three-year renewable work permits that would allow them to work only in agriculture; permit holders would have to report their farm employer quarterly at US post.
Rural Migration News

April 2020

offices. The family members of HR 6083 visa holders would be protected from deportation as long as the visa holder continued to do farm work. HR 6083 visa holders and their families would be barred from federal means-tested welfare programs.

HR 6083 requires USDA to study the demand for and supply of farm workers and determine whether there are farm-labor shortages. USDA would also analyze guest-worker employment, including determining the number of guest workers who failed to check in at post offices as required. USDA would also have to develop surveys of farmers to estimate their labor needs, and create an internet employment service through which employers could offer and workers could seek farm jobs.

CDM released the results of a Fall 2019 survey of 100 Mexican workers in Mexico who had been employed with H-2A visas in the US, and reported that all of the workers interviewed had experienced at least one “serious” violation of labor rights, and 94 percent experienced three or more violations.

The report did not tabulate violations in the various stages of the process, recruitment, transportation to the US workplace, employment, housing, and wages in the US, and return to Mexico, but emphasize that many workers paid fees in Mexico to obtain H-2A job offers. The report distinguished between speakers of Spanish and indigenous languages, but not between first-time and repeat H-2A workers; repeat H-2A workers may have reported fewer violations.

Some of the worker-reported violations are objective, such as wages paid in the US, while others are more subjective, such as workers feeling that they were not free to quit their jobs.

H-2B. There are 66,000 H-2B visas available for employers seeking foreign workers to fill seasonal nonfarm jobs, such as those in landscaping and gardening. Employers typically request over 100,000 H-2B visas, prompting Congress to authorize DHS to increase the number of visas available.

In March 2020, DHS announced that it would make up to 35,000 additional H-2B visas available to foreigners who previously held H-2B visas and who are coming to the US to fill jobs that an employer considers critical. At least 10,000 of the additional visas are for citizens of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador. After the coronavirus lockdown, DHS paused the H-2B visa increase.


Canada, Mexico
The US closed its borders with Canada and Mexico to non-essential travelers in March 2020, but allowed the free flow of goods to continue. Mexico in 2019 became the major trading partner of the US, with two-way trade of $615 billion in 2019.

There were 188 million crossings over the Mexico-US border in 2019, including cars, trucks, and buses as well as pedestrians. By some estimates, a million people a day cross the Mexico-US border.

Canada. Canada has the fastest population growth among G-7 countries, largely because of immigration. Canada has 38 million people and accepted 340,000 immigrants in 2019, up from 270,000 in 2015. Another 810,000 temporary permits were issued to international students and temporary workers in 2019, almost double the number issued in 2015.

About 60 percent of Canada’s immigrants include a family member who received at least 67 points for years of education, knowledge of English or French, and have a Canadian job offer. Many of the immigrants who passed the points test first arrived as students or temporary workers and applied for immigrant visas after receiving a job offer from a Canadian employer.

PM Justin Trudeau is struggling with energy policy. Trudeau’s Liberal government imposed a tax on carbon emissions, which gives it a “social license” to approve new mines and pipelines. The $16 billion Teck Frontier project to extract oil from bitumen in northern Alberta was withdrawn in February 2020 amidst controversy over whether the projected number of jobs and government revenues would exceed the environmental harms. The project is unlikely to be built unless oil prices approach $100 a barrel.

Rail traffic came to a halt in February 2020 as Wet’suwet’en hereditary chiefs and their Mohawk allies blocked the tracks in British Columbia and Ontario to protest the construction of a pipeline to take natural gas to a Kitimat, British Columbia plant to liquefy for shipment to Asia. Elected Wet’suwet’en leaders approved the pipeline, which promises jobs, while hereditary chiefs oppose it. Mohawks near Tyendinaga, Ontario blocked east-west tracks in sympathy with the British Columbia protesters.

Mexico. The National Immigration Institute (INM) in January 2020 reported that at least 20 migrant smuggling rings that charged Central American families up to $10,000 each were trying to move migrants to the Mexico-US border. The National Guard blocked a caravan of 3,000 Central Americans on the Guatemala-Mexico border in January 2020, prompting some migrants to turn to smugglers.

Two-way Mexico-US trade reached a record $614 billion in 2019, representing 15 percent of the $4.1 trillion in US trade; the US trade deficit with other countries was $853 billion. Two-way trade with Canada totaled $612 billion, China $559 billion, Japan $218 billion, and Germany $188 billion.
The Mexican economy shrunk 0.1 percent in 2019, as industrial production and investment fell; the economy expanded by 2.1 percent in 2018. Formal private-sector employment rose by 1.7 percent in 2019 and wages increased by more than inflation. Mexico attracted $33 billion of FDI in 2019, about the same as previous years, but domestic investment fell. Agriculture expanded by 10 percent in 2019.

Mexico’s economy could shrink by up to 10 percent in 2020 if the US experiences a severe recession. A third of Mexico’s economy depends on exports to the US, and declining oil prices as well as less tourism and fewer remittances could combine to deliver an economic shock. The minimum wage was raised to 123 pesos ($6.60) a day January 1, 2020.

Mexico’s government debt of 55 percent of GDP is expected to increase as the government tackles the fallout from the virus. The value of the Mexican peso fell 20 percent against the US dollar in March 2020.

The government in April 2020 announced plans to take over the public trusts that finance particular retirement programs as well as science and cultural programs that have assets of $30 billion. There is little unemployment insurance for laid off workers, but workers can withdraw retirement savings from their IMSS accounts when unemployed.

The government ordered large businesses not to lay off their workers, even if they have been ordered to close, and to continue to pay workers who are not reporting to work. Andres Manual Lopez Obrador is resisting calls for a bailout package for large firms, but promised to support small businesses. Over 350,000 workers with formal jobs were laid off between mid-March and mid-April, including 85 percent from firms with more than 50 employees.

Mexico has the lowest government revenue among OECD countries, about 17 percent of GDP, and is financing new rail, port and refining projects by cutting spending elsewhere. President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador doubled old-age pensions, expanded student scholarships and created an apprenticeship program, and plans a unified health care system. AMLO reduced spending on general public services, public order and environmental protection to free up funds for infrastructure projects and the new social programs.

Mexico spends six percent of GDP on education, the same share as in other middle-income developing countries, but teacher salaries in Mexico are three times Mexico’s GDP per capita, compared with two times or less in comparable countries. There have been many efforts to rein in Mexican teacher unions, some of which have contracts that allow teachers to buy their jobs and pass them on to their own children.

There were almost 37,000 homicides in Mexico in 2018, and 34,500 in 2019. AMLO promised “hugs not bullets” to reduce drug-related violence, but in February 2020 tapped the most trusted security force, the Marines, to capture drug leaders. The US believes that much of the illegal methamphetamine
consumed in the US is manufactured in Mexico. Large fentanyl labs suggest that Mexico may have displaced China as the major source of US fentanyl.

Women protested femicide March 9, 2020; over 1,000 women were killed in 2019 because they were women. Mexico’s female labor force participation rate is the lowest among OECD countries, and women earn 30 percent less than men.

Caribbean. Caribbean islands are among the places most dependent on tourism. Fears of coronavirus reduced bookings, leading to layoffs and economic shocks from Cuba to Barbados. Many islands depend on remittances from residents who are abroad; remittances declined as layoffs in the US and elsewhere reduced what was sent home.

Caneel Bay Resort on St John in the US Virgin Islands National Park attracted over 1,000 visitors a month until Hurricanes Irma and Maria in September 2017 destroyed the eco-resort begun by the Rockefeller family. Caneel Bay owner CBI Acquisitions has the right to use park land until 2023, and does not want to rebuild unless the National Park Service, which owns two-thirds of St John, extends its land use rights. Caneel Bay’s relations with long-time employees deteriorated because the resort closes for six to eight weeks each year during hurricane season.

Southwestern Puerto Rico experienced a 6.4 earthquake January 7, 2020, damaging 8,300 homes. Aftershocks continued for weeks, and residents expressed frustration with slow responses to help them repair damaged homes. Over 30,000 people applied for aid to rebuild their homes, but inspectors found many of the houses for which rebuilding aid was requested to be safe, raising concerns about fraud.

Guyana, a country of 750,000 people, expects to benefit from eight billion barrels of offshore oil found by ExxonMobil; production is expected to top 750,000 barrels a day by 2025. There are disputes between the two major political parties, the Partnership for National Unity representing the Afro-Guyanese who dominate among urban residents and the People’s Progressive Party representing ethnic Indians in rural areas, about how to spend oil money. The PNU wants to spend oil money to expand government employment, while the PPP wants to revive traditional sectors, including sugar, rice, bauxite and gold mining. The PNU was declared the winner after elections in March 2020 that foreign observers deemed fraudulent.

Peru is becoming a major exporter of fruits and vegetables, and the completion of new irrigation projects near Olmos in northern Peru is likely to increase exports. Peru is on the verge of surpassing Chile in blueberry exports; northern Peru gets 12 hours of daylight year-round, generating yields of 16 tons per acre compared with 11 tons an acre in the US. Most northern Peru export farms are 1,000 hectares or more, and many are owned or financed by US buyers of table grapes, avocados, asparagus and blueberries. There are no major cities in the area with export agriculture, but a city is being built to house farm workers who earn $12 a day.
Europe, Asia

The Turkish government in March 2020 encouraged Syrian and other migrants in the country to travel to Greece, breaking a March 2016 agreement under which Turkey blocked the exit of migrants in exchange for €6 billion in EU aid to improve conditions for Syrians and other migrants in Turkey. About half of the EU aid has been spent, and 27,000 Syrians in Turkey have been resettled in EU countries since March 2016.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan complained that the EU did not provide enough support for Turkey’s effort to prevent the Syrian government’s takeover of the rebel-held province of Idlib, where a million Syrians were displaced and are seeking to enter Turkey in February 2020.

The Greek government responded by suspending the right to apply for asylum for the month of March 2020, posting troops on the 120-mile Greek-Turkish land border and deporting foreigners who illegally entered Greece. There were clashes on the Greek-Turkish border as police and troops blocked the entry of migrants. Greek ships turned back dinghies trying to reach Greek islands such as Lesbos that are near Turkey’s western border.

In mid-March, the Turkish government began to bus migrants from the Greek-Turkish border back to Istanbul. One EU official called the Turkish government’s bussing of migrants to the border “the first-ever refugee exodus... fully organized by one government against another.”

Turkey more readily grants student and other visas to African and Asian nationals than most EU countries, prompting some to fly to Turkey, travel to Northern Cyprus, and cross the Green Line separating Turkish and Greek Cyprus and apply for asylum in EU member-state Republic of Cyprus.

The European Court of Justice in April 2020 ruled that Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic violated EU law by refusing to accept their share of the 160,000 asylum seekers that were to be distributed from Greece and Italy to other EU member states between 2015 and 2017. The European Commission, which is preparing a new migration agreement, said that the court’s ruling would make it easier to enforce new plans to redistribute asylum seekers.

Europe and especially Italy was the epicenter of the coronavirus in March 2020, prompting governments to order residents to stay at home. Border checks were re-imposed in the 26-member Schengen area, and non-EU citizens were prohibited from entering the Schengen area for 30 days to slow the spread of the virus.
By mid-April 2020, some EU member states started to relax stay-at-home orders. As the number of new coronavirus infections slowed, government goals shifted from saving lives to saving livelihoods.

Six EU member states, Austria, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Italy and Sweden, do not have minimum wage laws. The European Commission in February 2020 proposed that all EU member states have a national minimum wage that is 60 percent of the country’s median or average wage.

Britain. The British government announced that, beginning January 1, 2021, foreigners would have to earn at least 70 points to get a work permit. Points are awarded for having a job offer that reflects individual skills (40 points), speaking English, and being paid at least L25,600 ($33,300) a year, with exceptions to the 70-point threshold in labor shortage occupations such as nursing. Despite employer protests, the government said that reducing the influx of low-skilled foreigners was necessary to raise productivity growth.

Britain’s farm guest worker program was expanded from 2,500 to 10,000 slots for foreign workers, and 20,000 foreign youth are being allowed to work and learn while in the UK under youth mobility arrangements.

The Labor government in 2004 did not restrict the entry of Poles and other Eastern Europeans from countries that joined the EU, leading to an influx of 3.2 million migrants from other EU countries. Some 70 percent of EU migrants now in the UK would not satisfy the new point-based entry requirements.

The UK withdrew from the EU January 31, 2020, but will abide by EU regulations while negotiating an exit agreement expected by December 31, 2020. The UK has undergone several transformations, including the end of empire and the development of a welfare state after WWII, followed by privatization and market-led economic policies in the 1980s. Optimists hope that the UK will emerge as a kind of free-trade entrepôt similar to Hong Kong or Singapore, serving as a springboard to a more regulated EU. Pessimists believe that cutting ties with the EU will slow Britain’s economic growth.

Growth in the 19 members of the EU that use the Euro slowed to zero at the end of 2019 due to strikes in France, political uncertainty in Italy, and less trade that affected Germany. The coronavirus strained ties between the 19 countries that use the Euro in March 2020, as hard-hit Italy and Spain pressed for relief from EU budget guidelines that limit their spending on relief and economic stimulus. Northern European countries believe that heavily indebted southern European countries should have made hard choices to reduce their budgets before the pandemic.

Croatia. The Bosnian-Croatian border is an EU frontline in the battle to prevent unauthorized migration into EU countries. Bosnia makes it relatively easy for foreigners from Afghanistan and Pakistan to enter, encouraging some migrants to enter Bosnia legally and then move to Croatia. Croatian border police reportedly
return migrants to Bosnia without allowing them to apply for asylum. The EU finances camps to shelter migrants in Bosnia.

**France.** The longest transportation strike in modern times ended in January 2020 with a victory for President Emmanuel Macron, whose plan to combine 42 pension plans into one that makes pension payments dependent on points earned over working lives was approved in March 2020. Previous pension systems-based payments on end-of-working-life salaries, and were especially generous to public employees. The strikes forced the government to allow nine special pension plans to continue, including one for ballet dancers.

Macron faced yellow-vest protesters in 2018 and 2019, as people demonstrated first against a fuel tax hike, which was cancelled, and then against social inequality. There were town halls around France that allowed people to discuss their priorities for the government.

Macron is reshaping the French economy and society, moving ahead with policy changes despite protests. The unemployment rate was falling to 8.1 percent early in 2020, more people were employed, and investment rose.

The 67 million French have 3.4 million second homes. Many wealthy Parisians moved to their second homes before the government issued stay-at-home orders in March 2020 to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, raising concerns in some holiday areas that rich migrants would bring the virus with them. Germany, Greece, Spain and other countries also urged residents of large cities to remain there rather than move to second homes where there were fewer health care facilities.

**Germany.** Germans in several cities demonstrated in March 2020 in favor of accepting some of the migrants trying to enter Greece from Turkey. The German government says it will not allow a repeat of 2015, when over a million migrants entered Greece and moved to EU countries to apply for asylum.

Beginning March 1, 2020, non-EU foreigners with skills may enter Germany to accept a job if they speak German; foreigners over 45 must earn at least €3,700 a month in Germany. Non-EU foreigners will receive four-year work permits, and their spouses and children can join them in Germany, but the dependents of skilled foreign workers are not eligible for welfare benefits.

Germany’s population topped 83 million in 2019 due to immigration.

Over a million migrant farm workers enter EU countries each year, including 300,000 who work seasonally in Germany. In Spring 2020, many farmers complained of labor shortages because borders were closed to non-essential travel, so that many of the 30,000 Poles and Romanians who normally harvest 57,000 acres of white asparagus in April-May for the minimum wage of €9.35 an hour were initially blocked from arriving before the German government agreed that seasonal farm workers were essential.
Many Poles work in German agriculture, while Ukrainians are employed on Polish farms. Poland has an estimated 1.3 million Ukrainian workers.

The German government in March 2020 allowed foreign seasonal workers to remain in Germany longer than the normal 90 days, and created an online portal for jobless hotel and restaurant workers to seek seasonal farm jobs. The government soon relented and deemed seasonal foreign farm workers to be essential workers who could enter Germany to work.

Germany has long been powered by coal, but in January 2020 announced that it would stop burning coal by 2038 and provide over $44 billion to help coal-mining regions and power plant operators to adjust. Nuclear plants are to be closed by 2022. The impacts of Germany’s move to limit fossil use may be limited. China consumes half of the world’s coal, and continues to build more coal-fired power plants.

Berlin’s government froze rents on 1.5 million apartments for five years beginning in February 2020 in a bid to slow gentrification. Fewer than 20 percent of Berlin’s three million residents own their homes, and critics of rent control say that rent control will simply slow the building of more housing. The city government promised to construct 60,000 apartments in the next few years.

Greece. Greece has 112,000 asylum seekers, including 41,000 on its islands near Turkey’s western coast such as Lesbos, the Greek island with the most migrants. Many of these migrants have applied for asylum, and some want to leave Greece for other EU member states. In March 2020 the EU offered €2,000 to each migrant on Greek islands such as Lesbos who returned to their countries of origin.

Greeks who were sympathetic to migrants in 2015 are increasingly hostile toward them in 2020, as the economy struggles to recover from a recession that began in 2008, when the unemployment rate was 7.2 percent. By June 2013, the unemployment rate was almost 28 percent before declining to 16 percent in 2020.

Italy. First northern Italy, and later all of Italy, was shut down in March 2020 because of the coronavirus. Schools were closed, sporting events cancelled, and bars and restaurants were ordered to close at 6pm. Italy had the most deaths from Covid-19 in March 2020; 90 percent of those who died were 70 and older.

The Coldiretti agriculture association complained that the 370,000 seasonal workers from Eastern Europe were blocked from entering the country and filling farm jobs.

The Five-Star Movement won the largest share of the vote in March 2018 elections, 33 percent, but some Five-Star politicians left the party in 2020 over disputes about how to turn protest into policy. Five-Star switched from governing with the rightist League led by Matteo Salvini to governing with the center-left Democratic Party in summer 2018. Salvini, who precipitated the crisis that led to a new coalition government, hopes that a pending trial charging him
with endangering migrants when he refused to allow a boat to bring them into Italian ports will revive his popularity.

**Poland.** Poland had about 100,000 foreign residents in 2011, and over three million in 2020, including two million from Ukraine. Citizens of the ex-USSR can work for six months in Poland without visas, and their Polish employers do not have to pay payroll taxes on their wages.

**Spain.** The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in February 2020 ruled that Spain could return illegal entrants to Morocco without allowing them to apply for asylum. Two sub-Saharan migrants entered Melilla in 2014 with a group of others who scaled fences. They were apprehended and returned to Morocco, prompting the ECHR in 2017 to rule that Spain violated the rights of returned migrants.

The ECHR reversed the 2017 ruling in February 2020, stressing that the migrants’ illegal entry into Melilla meant that Spain did not have to allow them to seek asylum before returning them to Morocco, since they were safe in Morocco. Critics of the principle of non-refoulement cheered the ruling, saying that allowing all entrants to apply for asylum fuels smuggling.

**Bangladesh.** In April 2013, over 1,100 garment workers died when the Rana Plaza building that housed several sewing factories collapsed. Clothing brands threatened to stop having clothes sewn in Bangladesh, prompting the government to work with the ILO to improve factory safety and wages and working conditions for garment workers.

Seven years later, Bangladesh has 4,500 sewing factories with about 4.5 million employees, and is second to China in the export of ready-made garments, exporting $34 billion worth of RMGs in 2019. Bangladeshi minimum wage in 2020 is 8,000 taka ($94) a month.

Clothing brands in 2013 began to fund inspectors to check the safety of buildings housing sewing factories. The Bangladeshi RMG industry wants to end this international monitoring and return to government oversight of factory safety. Critics warn that the Bangladeshi government will not be able to assure safe garment factories.

Since Rana Plaza, factory owners have spent more on safety measures, but competition from lower-cost garment factories in Africa limits what they can recover from clothing buyers. Many factory owners are politicians or related to politicians, and critics believe they will pressure government inspectors to avoid requiring needed safety and other improvements. Critics note that subcontractors with informal workplaces have mostly been exempt from the pressure placed on factories to improve safety.

In April 2020, the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association reported that many sewing factories were on the verge of bankruptcy as European and US orders disappeared. Bangladeshi exports of $40 billion in 2019...
including 85 percent ready-made garments. A minimum wage increase in December 2018 reduced garment manufacturer margins, and the cancellation of orders in spring 2020 resulted in hundreds of thousands of layoffs.

**China.** China’s economic growth was 6.1 percent in 2019, raising the country’s GDP to $14 trillion, but growth is expected to slip below five percent in 2020 for the first time in three decades due to coronavirus. Growth peaked in 2007 at 14 percent, and averaged 9.5 percent between 1978 and 2017.

The coronavirus likely originated in a food market in Wuhan in Hubei province in December 2019. Chinese food markets often sell live wild animals, including snakes, birds and rats in so-called wet markets. The virus is believed to have jumped from bats to other animals to people through the wet markets. Within three months, the coronavirus killed over 3,000 people and sickened more than 100,000.

Wuhan, a center of auto and auto parts manufacturing was closed, preventing the 11 million residents from leaving. The Lunar New Year holiday, when factories close as millions of Chinese return to their home villages, was lengthened as airlines suspended service to mainland China.

The coronavirus, named for the crown-like covering of the cell, is similar to SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) that began in Guangdong and killed 774 people and sickened thousands in 2002-03. SARS moved from bats to Asian palm civets to humans. Many observers noted that the reluctance of local officials to report bad news to the central government slowed responses to the coronavirus, just as with SARS in 2002-03. SARS killed about 10 percent of those who caught it; the coronavirus appears to be killing about three percent of those who catch it.

The 1918 Spanish flu, considered the deadliest pandemic, infected a third of the world’s people and killed 50 million.

The spread of coronavirus slowed global economic growth. China’s 300 million migrants, who staff many factories, were ordered to remain home after the Lunar New Year, keeping many factories closed. Most migrant workers are not paid when they do not work, which reduced consumption until factories and offices began to reopen in March 2020.

During the 2002-03 SARS outbreak, China’s GDP was about five percent of global economic output. In 2020, China’s GDP is almost 20 percent of global GDP.

Some 400,000 Chinese students are enrolled in US universities in 2019-20, plus 200,000 in Australia and 120,000 in the UK. Many pay high fees for master’s programs in business; the coronavirus may reduce what has become a lucrative source of income for some universities.

About 14.6 million babies were born in China in 2019, the lowest number since 1961, when less than 12 million were born. The total fertility rate was 1.6, well below the 2.1 needed to maintain a stable population. China ended its one-child
policy in 2016, but births have not rebounded amidst women working for wages and the rising cost of raising children in urbanizing China. If birthrates continue to decline, the pay-as-you-go pension system could collapse.

**India.** The Indian government in March 2020 ordered businesses to close and people to stay home for three weeks to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, displacing many of the 45 million of internal migrants who typically live where they work. When their employers closed, the migrants lost their incomes and housing.

Migrants who tried to take busses or walk to their home villages were often stopped by police who were ordered to prevent travel. One of India’s 36 state and territorial governments, Uttar Pradesh, sent buses to Delhi and other cities to bring migrants home, but most state governments expected migrants to fend for themselves during the lockdown. Police were accused of harassing migrants seeking food.

The government announced a relief package but, with 80 percent of the 500 million strong labor force employed informally, there was little hope that significant aid would reach migrants who are not registered in national labor databases.

**Japan.** There were a record 1.7 million foreign workers in Japan in October 2019, including 418,000 Chinese, 401,000 Vietnamese, and 180,000 Filipinos. Manufacturing employed 483,000 foreign workers, followed by retail trade with 212,000.

**Virus, Population, Trade**

The coronavirus that causes the respiratory disease Covid-19 led to shutdowns of economic activity in China, Europe, North America, and many developing countries. As shutdowns extended from March into April 2020, developing economies that rely on an influx of foreign investment experienced an economic shock.

Since the 2008-09 recession, many developing economies borrowed to expand their infrastructure and productive capacity, increasing their total public and private debt from 70 percent of their GDP in 2007 to 165 percent of their GDP in 2019. Tourist-dependent countries from Thailand to Turkey lost thousands of jobs and millions in revenue as tourists stayed away, while resource exporters such as Chile (copper) or Nigeria (oil) saw a major source of government revenue shrink; oil accounts for 85 percent of Nigeria’s exports and two-thirds of government revenues.

Caribbean islands are some of the places most dependent on tourism, and they were particularly hard hit in spring 2020. After recovering from hurricanes in
2017 and 2018, many hoped that the number of overnight visitors would top 30 million in 2020. However, hotel occupancy was less than 10 percent in April 2020.

Governments in many developing countries did not try to impose stay-at-home policies because most poor people crowded into slums need to work every day to eat. Argentina, where government debt is already 90 percent of GDP, has a new government that is seeking loans to reverse cuts to social programs.

**Population.** The world’s population of 7.8 million is rising unevenly as more people move to cities and the share of the population 65 and older increases. The global population is expected to reach eight billion in 2023, nine billion by 2037, and 10 billion by 2056.

The world’s population increases by 81 million a year, the population of Germany, down from a peak one-year increase of 93 million in 1988. China and India each have 1.4 billion people, but India’s population is growing while China is on the verge of shrinking.

The world will add 2.2 billion people by 2050, half in Africa and a third in Asia, while Europe is expected to shrink by almost 40 million, equivalent to the population of California. In 34 countries, the number of persons 65 and older exceeds the number of children under 15.

Fifty countries including Nigeria are expected to double their populations by 2050, while 20 countries including China, Germany and Japan are expected to have declining populations. Nigeria, which had about half as many people as the US in 2000, could have almost twice as many people as the US in 2050.

The world has 33 megacities, each with more than 10 million residents; there are expected to be 43 megacities by 2030.

The US had 3.8 million births in the year ending in July 2019, and 2.8 million deaths, for natural increase of one million. Net immigration of 600,000 increased the US population to 330 million. Deaths exceed births in several European countries, including Greece, Italy and Spain, and in almost half of the 3,142 US counties.

There are about 275 million international migrants, persons outside their country of birth a year or more, and they include 26 million refugees. International migration is expected to increase due to persisting demographic and economic differences at a time when revolutions in communications, transportation, and rights make it easier to cross borders and remain abroad.

Egypt’s population surpassed 100 million in February 2020, and could reach 130 million by 2030. Egyptian women have an average 3.5 children, increasing the country’s population by a million a year and leading to 700,000 workforce entrants a year. Egypt is mostly desert, so 95 percent of Egyptians live on four percent of the country’s land along the Nile River.
Trade. Advocates of globalization cheered a partial China-US agreement in January 2020 that commits China to buying more US farm commodities and establishes a forum to discuss trade issues, including Chinese government subsidies for state-owned firms and control over the economy. The US had a $320 billion trade deficit with China in 2019, and US tariffs on $360 billion worth of Chinese goods remain in place.

The US wants China to end the practice of requiring foreign firms that invest in China to share their technology with Chinese partners.

The China-US trade dispute, as well as disruptions to supply chains caused by the coronavirus, encouraged more US firms to invest in Southeast Asia rather than China. In Europe and the US, the sense that deep connections with other countries may unleash threats ranging from job-displacing trade to communicable disease may slow the push toward a more interconnected world.

World trade as a share of GDP rose rapidly between the 1970s and the 2008-09 recession as countries embraced freer trade and the global shipping industry became more efficient. One result was a surge in manufacturing in Asia, and the loss of manufacturing jobs in Europe and the US. The World Trade Organization was not prepared to deal with the rise of China and its unwillingness to adhere to trade rules.

Wealth. Knight Frank estimated 513,000 ultra-wealthy people in 2020, including 241,000 in the US; 62,000 in China; 23,000 in Germany; 19,000 in France; and 17,000 in the UK. Ultra-high net worth individuals (UHNWIs) have assets of $30 million or more. There are an estimated 50 million high-worth individuals with assets of $1 million or more.

Isabel dos Santos with $2 billion is considered to be Africa’s richest woman. The daughter of Angolan ex-president José Eduardo dos Santos, who was in power for 38 years, is accused of stealing at least half of her wealth from Angola. Angola exports diamonds and oil, and presidential decrees transferred Angola’s mineral exports to Isabel dos Santos and her husband and their dozens of companies around the world. US-based management and accounting firms reportedly facilitated the theft of Angolan government funds.

Trafficking. The sixth World Day of Prayer, Reflection and Action against Human Trafficking was held February 8, 2020, marking the Roman Catholic Church’s commitment to fight human trafficking. Pope Francis described trafficking as a “real plague that exploits the weakest,” and Rome-based Talitha Kum coordinates the anti-trafficking work of nuns in 92 countries. The ILO estimates that there are 25 million people in forced labor around the world.

East before getting a job at a Texas hospital that allowed her to bring her husband and three children to the US.

About 400,000 of the world’s 1.6 million seafarers are Filipinos. They earn at least $1,000 a month on the world’s ships, 10 times more than they could earn at home.


OTHER

California: Virus

The coronavirus dominated agricultural discussions after Governor Gavin Newsom issued a stay-at-home order in March 2020. Farming and farm workers were exempt as an essential business, and many employers issued letters to their employees certifying their essential employee status.

The major immediate impact of the stay-at-home order was the closure of hotels, restaurants and other outlets that buy and serve produce. Farmers that contracted with food-service firms lost markets for their commodities, encouraging some to find alternative outlets and others to destroy or not plant crops.

The state’s 120 fresh flower growers, who produce 80 percent of US fresh flowers, reported that the cancellation of weddings, meetings, and other events reduced their sales by up to 90 percent (most flowers sold in the US are imported).

Cling peach growers complained of too few workers to timely prune, thin and harvest the 16,000 acres for canned peaches. By some estimates, labor is 70 percent of variable production costs for canning peaches. Peach growers were paid $488 a ton for canning peaches in 2018 and 2019, and canners Del Monte and PCP were slow to sign new contracts with growers in 2020 because there are peaches in storage and cheaper imports are available from China and Greece.

California has 34,000 acres of strawberries in 2020, including 80 percent planted in the fall and harvested in spring and summer. The state’s strawberry acreage has decreased from a peak 40,000 acres, but higher yielding varieties have kept production stable. Meanwhile, Mexico has over 30,000 acres of strawberries, many of which are exported to the US.

The acreage of asparagus in San Joaquin county has been falling, from over 23,000 acres in 2000 to 1,000 in 2018. Rising land prices and labor costs have pushed the production of fresh asparagus abroad.
Sunpreme grapes dry into raisins on the vine, reducing harvest labor costs because the raisins can be harvested mechanically. Planting the Sunpreme variety allows both pruning and harvesting to be done mechanically, lowering grower costs in exchange for upfront investments.

Some 1.8 million hives of honeybees pollinated the state’s 1.3 million acres of almonds in February-March 2020 at a cost of about $200 per hive. A sixth of honeybee colonies, each with about 80,000 bees, die in winter, often in the northwestern or upper midwestern states; 2018-19, a third of honeybee colonies died. About 10 percent of a beekeeper’s income is from honey sales, and 90 percent from growers who pay for pollination services.

Pistachios. California displaced Iran as the world’s leading pistachio producer, accounting for almost half of global pistachio production between 2014 and 2019; another quarter is produced in Iran. Pistachios are alternate bearing, with low yields one year and higher yields the next. California yields are far higher than in Iran, enabling California to out-produce Iran with a quarter of Iran’s 400,000 hectares of pistachio trees.

The country of Georgia is a potential new producer of pistachios. One scenario foresees 100,000 hectares of trees yielding US levels of four tons per hectare and selling the nuts for $9 a kilogram to generate $4.5 billion a year. Yields in Iran are less than two tons per hectare, and the US bans imports of Iranian pistachios. Most California pistachios are the Kerman variety, named for Iran’s major pistachio-growing state.

US: Virus, Trade, Sugar

The coronavirus increased the demand for processed food as consumers stayed home. Beef and cheese prices fell as restaurants closed, and milk prices dropped with school closures. Seven percent of US fluid milk is consumed in school lunch programs, and milk processing plants warned that they may be unable to turn milk into cheese and other products if too many of their employees got sick.

Meanwhile, sales of canned soups, pasta, and frozen foods increased, with firms from Campbell’s to Conagra reporting unprecedented demand. The price of eggs spiked in March from less than $1 per dozen in February 2020 to $3 a dozen in April 2020.

DHS included food and agriculture among the 16 sectors deemed critical to the US economy, along with healthcare, telecommunications, information technology systems, defense, transportation and logistics, energy, water and wastewater, law enforcement, and public works. Farm workers as well as workers employed in firms that produce farm inputs such as seed, equipment and fertilizer, and workers employed to pack, process, and distribute food were deemed critical and exempted from shelter in place orders.
The $2 trillion CARES Act provides $9.5 billion for farmers adversely affected by the virus, and another $14 billion for the Commodity Credit Corporation to buy surplus commodities for distribution to poor residents.

**Projections.** USDA projections of agriculture through 2029 foresee cash receipts from farm marketings rising from $374 billion in 2019 to $418 billion in 2029. Crops accounted for 53 percent of cash receipts in 2019, and are expected to account for 54 percent in 2029. Net farm income of $92 billion in 2019 is expected to rise to $100 billion in 2029.

The value of fruits and nuts, $30 billion in 2019, is projected to rise to $40 billion in 2029. The value of non-citrus fruits is expected to rise from $17 billion to $22 billion, of tree nuts from $10 billion to $13 billion, and of citrus from $3.5 billion to $4.5 billion. The value of fresh vegetables is projected to rise from $12 billion to $16 billion between 2019 and 2029.

US farmers have assets of $3.1 trillion and debt of $265 billion; most of the assets and debt are for real estate. The ratio of debt to assets is rising slightly to 14 percent as Midwestern farmers grapple with money-losing corn and soybean prices of about $3.60 and $9 a bushel. The US government made $28 billion in 2018-19 in payments to farmers who were harmed by the trade war with China, and bought commodities such as pork when exports fell.

**Dairy.** Dairy Farmers of America, the largest milk US cooperative with 14,000 members, agreed in February 2020 plans to pay $425 million for 44 milk-processing facilities of bankrupt Dean Foods. Some farmers worry that reduced competition will reduce the price they receive for milk, while others are relieved that DFA will buy their milk.

Americans are eating more dairy products, primarily in the form of yogurt and cheese rather than fluid milk. Per capita fluid milk consumption fell from 24 gallons per person per year in the mid-1990s to 17 gallons in 2018, despite 21 of the 27 US states with an official beverage naming milk. Sales of plant-based milk, almond, oat and soy, are rising as fluid milk sales decline.

One reason some consumers switch to plant-based milk is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Beef and dairy cows account for 10 percent of global emissions. Almond milk requires half as much water to produce a gallon as fluid milk, and generates a quarter as much emissions.

**Sugar.** The world produces 175 million tons of sugar a year, 45 pounds for every man, woman and child. Brazil is the largest producer, and uses 35 percent of its 29 million metric tons for sugar and converts 65 percent to ethanol. India also produces 29 million tons of sugar a year, and consumes almost all of the sugar it produces. The EU is self-sufficient in sugar, producing and consuming about 18 million tons a year.

Thailand produces 14 million tons of sugar a year, China 11 million tons, the US eight million tons, and Mexico six million tons. India consumes 29 million tons of
sugar a year, the EU 18 million tons, China 16 million tons, and the US and Brazil, 11 million tons each.

About 30 percent of the world’s sugar, 54 million tons, is exported. Brazil exports 19 million tons a year, followed by Thailand, which exports 12 million tons; Cuba produces 1.4 million tons and exports 600,000 tons. Indonesia imports five million tons of sugar, followed by China’s imports of four million tons, US imports of three million ton, and 2.5 million tons each imported by Bangladesh and Algeria.

Wine, Food

Too much wine is chasing too few US consumers. Some 250,000 tons of California wine grapes were not harvested in 2019 due to excess wine in storage from the record 4.5-million-ton harvest of 2018. California growers received an average $790 a ton for 4.1 million tons of wine grapes in 2019, down five percent from the 2018 price.

One rule of thumb is that one percent of the grower price for a ton of grapes should be the average retail price of a bottle of wine made with those grapes. This suggests that the average bottle of wine made from 2019 grapes should sell for $7.90.

Grape prices vary around the state. District four Napa growers received an average $5,800 a ton for their 78,000 tons of wine grapes in 2019, including $3,000 a ton for Chardonnay and $8,000 a ton for Cabernet Sauvignon. District 13 growers around Fresno received an average $300 a ton for their 1.3 million tons of wine grapes in 2019.

California has 590,000 bearing acres of wine grapes, which are at least 30,000 too many for the level of current demand for California wines. One result of California’s wine glut is that the price of Bronco’s Charles Shaw wine was reduced to $1.99 a bottle at California’s Trader Joe stores in 2020. Two-Buck Chuck was introduced in 2002 during an earlier wine glut for $1.99 a bottle, but the price was raised to $2.49 a bottle in 2014, and was higher outside California.

The US had 10,500 wineries in 2019, including 45 percent that produced less than 1,000 cases a year, 36 percent that produced 1,000 to 5,000 cases, and one percent that produced 500,000 or more cases. Given the surplus of wine, many experts are predicting a proliferation of new labels to offer lower-cost wine from wineries that do not want to reduce the price of their established brands.

About 11 percent of wine is sold directly to consumers who visit tasting rooms or who belong to wine clubs as well as retail buyers who purchase from wineries online. So-called DTC wine tends to be more expensive than supermarket wine; two-thirds of the US value of DTC wine in 2019 was from Napa and Sonoma wines.
Stay-at-home orders to prevent the spread of the coronavirus increased sales of alcoholic beverages, especially 1.75 liter-sized bottles of spirits. Online sales of wine and spirits rose, which may presage a shift in purchasing habits. Almost all of the 62,500 US bars, taverns, pubs and night clubs were closed in April 2020.

**Food.** The obesity rate, the share of adults with a body mass index of 30 or higher, topped 40 percent for the first time in 2017-18. Obesity rates vary by race and ethnicity. Half of Black adults are obese, followed by 45 percent of Hispanics, 42 percent of whites and 17 percent of Asians.

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that salmonella bacteria cause about 1.35 million US infections, 26,500 hospitalizations and 420 deaths each year. A third of these cases involve meat, especially chicken, with USDA issuing up to five meat recalls a month after salmonella is detected.

Bill Marler, the lawyer who represented many of the victims of Jack in the Box who were sickened and killed by E. coli bacteria in 1993, petitioned USDA in January 2020 to ban 31 salmonella strains from meat. About 10 percent of chicken pieces are believed to be contaminated with salmonella, which the meat industry says cannot be eliminated at reasonable cost. Marler was a leading voice to persuade USDA to ban E. coli from meat in 1994 and 2011.

Coffee, native to Ethiopia, was first brewed by Sufi monks in Yemen in the 1400s, and spread throughout the Islamic world and to Europe after the Ottoman siege of Vienna in 1683. Employers quickly realized that coffee made their employees more productive, which was explained in 1900 by applying thermodynamics to human physiology, explaining the body as a machine that converts energy from one form to another. Coffee in the 1920s was deemed a stimulant that made humans work better and faster.

**Climate: Fires, Locusts**

Australia had its worst wildfires in decades in January-February 2020. Over 16 million acres burned in New South Wales and Victoria, including two million in the Gospers Mountain fire, which involved several fires combining into a megafire. By comparison, California’s 2018 fires burned two million acres, and the September 2019 fires in the Amazon burned 2.2 million acres.

High temperatures, strong winds and dry forests fuel Australian fires that are often caused by lightning strikes. Australia’s summer fires are some of the largest in populated areas, a contrast to northern Canada and Siberia, where large fires in unpopulated areas are allowed to burn. Smoke from the fires reduced air quality in Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra, and the carbon emissions from the fires approached the total that Australia normally emits in a year. The fires were mostly extinguished by heavy rain in mid-February 2020.
Locusts devoured crops in Ethiopia’s breadbasket in the Great Rift Valley in February 2020 before spreading to East African countries including Kenya. Reasons for the plague of yellow locusts include conflict and climate change. Wars in Yemen and Somalia limit agriculture and allow locusts to breed and travel south from Yemen and west from Somalia. Unusually rainy weather allowed locusts to reproduce easily in Ethiopia and Kenya.

A swarm of 80 million locusts can eat as much as 35,000 people each day, and swarms can travel up to 80 miles a day in search of more food. The insecticide malathion can kill swarms of locusts, but supplies are limited.

Sea levels are expected to rise by a foot or more over the next decades, affecting 600 million people who live in coastal areas affected by tides. Metro Manila became a bowl of 14 million people with some land below sea level due to the over pumping of ground water. The poorest residents live in the coastal areas most affected by high tides, and often lose their informal housing during storms. Many return after floods and rebuild in low-lying areas because areas prone to flooding offer the best combination of low-cost housing and access to jobs.

Sasol’s Secunda coal-to-fuel plant in Embalenhle, South Africa is the world’s largest single source of greenhouse gas emissions, emitting 56 million tons a year. Coal deposits in the province of Mpumalanga encouraged the construction of 11 Eskom coal-fired plants and the Sasol plant. Both Sasol and Eskom are in financial difficulty, making it hard for them to invest in technologies to reduce emissions.

Renewable energy sources will provide 20 percent of US electricity in 2020, double the 10 percent they provided in 2010, as oil, gas and coal struggle to compete. Renewable solar and wind farms have high fixed and low marginal costs, while gas and oil-fired generators also cost money and take time to build, but their operating costs rise and fall with oil prices. The coronavirus slowed residential solar panel projects, but most wind energy projects are in rural areas and continue to be built.