Agriculture and Immigrant Labor in Japan and the U. S.

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Two papers on agriculture and immigrant labor in very different national settings

• Ando and Horiguchi paper:
  – The interesting and revealing but perhaps statistically trivial case of intern trainees in Japanese agriculture

• Martin paper:
  – The economically and politically huge case of immigrant labor in U. S. agriculture
Agriculture in Japan

- 4.9% of workforce in agric, forestry, fishing
- Japan’s small and inefficient agric sector
  - Small plot family farms
  - Most family members on nonfarm payrolls (as in US)
  - Aging owners
    - Which has given rise to concentration of FVH farming through farmland rentals
      - Question: Who is renting this farmland, hiring labor, and growing crops? Corporations or individuals?
      - Rented farmland requires wage labor to cultivate
Japan’s problem with agric. labor supply:
- Japanese will not take farm labor jobs
  - Japan’s chronically low unemployment
- Low availability of immigrant labor in Japan
  - Very restrictive immigration laws
    - Particularly for unskilled labor
    - Day labor problem – holdover from bubble era
  - Cultural premium placed on homogenous “Japaneseness”
The technical intern training program: A case of *honne* and *tatemae*?

- Farms exploiting intern training law in order to bring in unskilled & low-wage foreign labor
  - 70,000 such workers in Japan
    - Out of a foreign workforce of 1M
    - 16,000 in agriculture
      - Heavy reliance on such workers in high-wage Kanto region
      - Paid year-around despite seasonality of work
Questions for Ando & Horiguchi on agriculture and immigration in Japan

- Will the “factory farming” trend in Japan accelerate?
- Will the internal trainee program continue to provide a legal loophole supplying Japanese agric with immigrant/guest workers?
- Or will the limits on entry of unskilled immigrants be relaxed?
  - Farmers a powerful political consituency. Construction, too.
    - Especially the agricultural cooperatives
- More generally, will Japan become more immigrant-friendly?
  - Widely thought necessary for Japan’s survival
    - Low fertility and declining workforce size.
  - Cultural prejudices still entrenched
Martin on immigrant labor in U.S. agriculture

• Portrait of American agriculture
  – 1.4% of U. S. workforce
  – Like Japan, declining family farms
  – Extreme concentration of agric ownership
    • Large “factory farms” dominate FVH agric and hire most farm labor
    • 2.4M agric workers, half immigrants. Indispensable to harvesting.
  – Problems facing immigrant (mostly Hispanic) workforce
    • Low and falling wages
    • Arbitrary terminations
    • Abuse by contractors. Need for standards?
  – But in the longer-term a system that worked?
    • Lax enforcement of laws against undocumented agric workers
    • Schools and gov’t training programs allowed mobility out of agric.
      – Which opens up farm labor opportunities for new immigrants
Questions about U. S. case:

• Will anti-immigrant hysteria & draconian enforcement legislation destroy the immigrant farm labor system?
  – Why not more resistance to such laws from large employers in agriculture, construction, and related industries?
    • Populist tea party sentiment swamping “establishment,” pro-business conservatism
  – As economy improves, anti-immigrant fervor dying down? (happening in Arizona).
    • Prospects for renewed union organizing of agricultural workers?