

Gender and Employment Among Latino Migrant Farmworkers in Michigan

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Working Paper No. 52

August 2000

ABSTRACT

This study investigates Latino farmworkers in Michigan in regard to “occupational cycles,” defined as changes in types of jobs during the year. Data for this study came from a survey of 350 residents of farm labor camps in 12 counties in Michigan. Of labor camp residents, 99% were Latinos (mostly Mexican Americans) and 67% wintered in regions to the south, mostly Texas and Florida. Nearly all women and two-thirds of men lived with family members in households in the labor camps. Statistical tests included cluster analysis and tests of difference of means and proportions including partitioning of chi square and a post hoc test for chi square equality of proportion. Over one-third of study participants had nonagricultural jobs during the preceding year. An unexpectedly high percentage of women had off-farm jobs (42%). The percentage did not differ statistically from that of men (35%). All the jobs were low-paying, but the status of women’s off-farm jobs was higher than that of men’s. Women with off-farm jobs had worked in significantly more states than other women, typically including Texas rather than Florida, in contrast to men with nonagricultural jobs, who tended to have worked in Florida. Education was not related to women’s employment patterns although men with off-farm jobs had significantly more education than others. These findings show that workers in the migrant streams reaching the Midwest are more diverse in employment than expected, and that this complexity characterizes women working in the nonfarm sector as well as men. Furthermore, the position of women migrant workers in generating income for their households is more important than expected.