

Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers in Michigan: From Dialogue to Action

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ABSTRACT

This report profiles farm-labor use patterns in Michigan and the benefits of farm labor to Michigan agriculture and rural areas. It also profiles the migrant and seasonal farmworker population in the state, identifies pressing issues and problems, and suggests ways to stabilize the agricultural labor market. The report finds that in 1997, 96,000 hired and contract farmworkers were hired on 40% of all of Michigan's 46,000 farms. Farmworker employment is concentrated in the larger farms and in the southwestern part of the state. The overwhelming majority of farmworkers are of Mexican origin. Michigan's hired farmworkers did better than other farmworkers in the country, but still reported weekly earnings equal to 69% the earnings of U.S. wage and salary workers. Migrant farmworkers had weekly earnings equal to 57% that of wage and salary workers. Housing and health continue to be major concerns of the migrant and seasonal farmworker populations. Other concerns include immigration issues, discrimination, wage complaints, employment disputes, access to service programs, and others. As is the case nationally, Michigan's agricultural labor market trends point to an oversupply of agricultural labor, with a larger proportion of undocumented workers. The report concludes with recommendations for stabilizing this workforce, including: 1) Extending the same protections afforded all working people under existing state labor laws and regulations; 2) Enforcing state labor laws more effectively and improving farmworker access to the justice system; and 3) Promoting better wages, benefits, and working and housing conditions to attract and stabilize the agricultural labor force.