

# The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996: Implications for Hispanic Migrant Farmworkers

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## ABSTRACT

America's agribusiness employs 1.6 million migrant and seasonal farmworkers who toil for low wages under high risk conditions. Migrant and seasonal farmworkers face high health risks due to labor, geographic, economic, as well as cultural, and sociological factors. For these reasons, many migrant workers rely on federal, state, and community agencies not only for medical and health-related assistance, but also for benefits necessary for their maintenance in daily affairs. However, recent welfare reforms (passed by the 104th Congress and signed into law by President Bill Clinton on August 22, 1996) placed new restrictions on the types of benefits available to both legal and undocumented immigrants. Since a significant percentage of migrant workers are not United States citizens, the new law affects many of them. Parts I and II of this paper include an overview of the Title IV provisions in the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996 and their implications for immigrants' access to federal and state benefits, specifically health care access among migrant farmworkers. Part III provides empirical data, testimony and observations to illustrate the socio-economic background of farmworkers in five Southwest Michigan camps and an assessment of the Act's impact on them.