



Demographics

More than 3 million migrant and seasonal farmworkers are estimated to be in the United States.¹ In order to plan, monitor, and evaluate the health status and needs of the agricultural population, demographic information is necessary. Accurately assessing the demographic information of this population has proven difficult over the years due to many factors: a highly mobile lifestyle, limited English proficiency, varying levels of citizenship status, cultural barriers, and difficulties in classifying agricultural workers posed by the peak time and seasonality of the crop production process. For twenty-three years, the Department of Labor has conducted the *National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS)* to collect information from migrant and seasonal farmworkers in the United States and has been one of the most accurate sources for obtaining demographic information on this group. The NAWS is an employment-based, random survey of the demographic, employment, and health characteristics of the U.S. crop labor force. The information is obtained directly from farmworkers through face-to-face interviews. The NAWS is performed under contract to the Department of Labor, and its information is made available to the public through periodic research reports and a public use data set. Each year, between 1,500 and 4,000 workers are interviewed.

This factsheet highlights recent demographic data from the 2007-2009 NAWS [results](#).² Where data from the 2007-2009 NAWS was not available, data from the [2005 NAWS report](#) is provided and noted with a citation.³

Birthplace and Age

- The majority (72%) of all farmworkers were foreign born.
 - 68 percent of all farmworkers were born in Mexico
 - 45 percent were from the traditional sending states of west central Mexico, including Guanajuato, Jalisco and Michoacán
 - 20 percent of farmworkers were from the non-traditional sending states of southern Mexico, including Guerrero, Oaxaca, Chiapas, Puebla, Morelos and Veracruz
 - 3 percent of farmworkers were born in Central American countries
 - 1 percent of farmworkers was born elsewhere
- Twenty-nine percent (29%) of foreign-born farmworkers have spent 20 or more years in the United States, 26 percent have been in the U.S. for 10 to 19 years, 19% have been in the U.S. for 5 to 9 years, and 26% have been here for 4 or less years.
- Farmworkers in the United States have an average age of 36. Seventy-six percent (76%) are over 25 years old, 13 percent are between 18 and 21, 9 percent are between 22 and 24, and 3 percent are between 14 and 17.

Gender and Family

- Seventy-eight percent (78%) of crop workers were male and 22% were female.
- Fifty-nine percent (59%) of farmworkers surveyed were married, 35% were single and 6% were divorced, separated or widowed.
- Fifty two percent (52%) of all agricultural workers were parents.

Language and Education

- The following was noted for English speaking ability:
 - 35 percent said they could not speak English “at all”
 - 30 percent said they could speak English “well”
 - 27 percent said they could speak English “a little”
 - 8 percent said they could speak English “somewhat”

- The average level of completed education was 8th grade.
 - 40 percent had completed grades 1 to 6
 - 17 percent completed grades 7 to 9
 - 28 percent had completed grades 10 to 12
 - 9 percent attained some form of higher education

Income and Public Assistance

- The average individual farmworker income ranged from \$12,500 to \$14,999 and the average total family income ranged from \$17,500 to \$19,999.
 - Twenty-three percent (23%) of all farmworkers had total family incomes below the U.S. government's poverty guidelines.
- Forty-three percent (43%) of farmworkers said they, or someone in their household, had used need-based or contribution-based public assistance within the last two years:
 - 23 percent used need-based assistance
 - 12 percent used contribution-based assistance
 - 8 percent used both need and contribution based assistance

Employment

- Forty-two percent (42%) of farmworkers surveyed were migrants, having traveled at least 75 miles within the previous year to obtain a farm job.
 - 35 percent of migrants traveled back-and-forth from a foreign country, primarily Mexico
 - 26 percent traveled only within the United States, of whom:
 - 14 percent traveled to multiple farm locations inside the United States
 - 13 percent traveled 75 miles or more to one location inside the U.S.⁴
- Farmworkers surveyed had an average of 13 years in U.S. farm experience. Thirty-two percent (32%) of farmworkers had 4 or less years of farm work experience, 26% of farmworkers had 20 years or more of farm work experience, 24% had 10 to 19 years of farm work experience, and 18% had 5 to 9 years of farm work experience.
- The breakdown of the primary crops worked is as follows:
 - 35 percent of farmworkers worked in fruit and nut crops
 - 23 percent worked in vegetable crops
 - 20 percent worked in horticultural crops
 - 16 percent worked in field crops
 - 5 percent reported working in miscellaneous or multiple crops
- The majority of farmworkers (69%) found their current job through friends or relatives.
- Eighty-two (82%) percent of foreign-born farmworkers obtained a job the same year that they came to the United States.⁵
- Eighty-eight percent (88%) of agricultural workers said they were hired directly, while 12 percent said they were labor contracted.
- Eighty-three percent (83%) of farmworkers said they were paid by the hour, 11 percent were paid by the piece, and 6 percent were salaried or had other payment methods.
- Farmworkers had been employed with their current farm employer for an average of four and a half years.
- The majority (60%) said that their current job was seasonal and 25 percent said they worked year-round.⁶
- Farmworkers spent, on average, about 66 percent of the year performing U.S. farm work.
 - Mexican-born farmworkers spent 36 weeks of their year working in U.S. farm jobs
 - U.S.-born farmworkers spent an average of 31 weeks working in U.S. farm jobs
 - Workers from Central America were employed in U.S. farm jobs for the most weeks of the year, with an average of 40 weeks⁷
- Farmworkers worked an average of 42 hours per week, 25 percent worked less than 35 hours, 25 percent worked between 35 and 40 hours, 25 percent worked between 41 and 49 hours, and 25 percent worked 50 hours or more.⁸
- When not employed by farm work, farmworkers spent 16 percent residing, but not working in the United States, 7 percent of the year outside of the U.S. and 10 percent of the year in non-farm employment.⁹
- Only 39 percent of farmworkers reported being covered by unemployment insurance, 54 percent said they were not and 8 percent did not know.

- A mere 8 percent of farmworkers reported being covered by employer-provided health insurance, a rate that dropped to 5 percent for farmworkers who are employed seasonally and not year-round.

One of the most common and important questions regarding the agricultural population is how many farmworkers there really are in a particular region, state or in the nation as a whole. Estimating the size of this population is difficult for the same reasons mentioned earlier, related to high mobility, language and cultural differences, and varying levels of citizenship status, among others. Fortunately, some resources are available, including the work of Dr. Alice Larson in the *Migrant and Seasonal Enumeration Profile Studies* and the NCFH population estimation studies, which use methodology developed in collaboration with JBS International Inc., Aguirre Division. NCFH's population estimation studies use the best available data and a readily understandable formula to compute farmworker population estimates. More information on both of these resources can be found on the NCFH [website](#).

¹ Larson, Alice, and Plascencia, Luis. *Migrant Enumeration Study*. Washington, D.C.: Office of Minority Health, 1993.

² Carroll, Daniel, Georges, Annie and Saltz, Russell. *Changing Characteristics of U.S. Farm Workers: 21 Years of Findings from the National Agricultural Workers Survey* (presentation, Immigration Reform and Agriculture Conference: Implications for Farmers, Farm Workers and Communities, Washington D.C., May 12, 2011).

³ *Findings from the National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS) 2001-2002. A Demographic and Employment Profile of United States Farm Workers*. United States Department of Labor, March 2005.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.