

Creating a Stable Workforce for Strawberry Growers

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Summary

Labor has become an increasingly important issue for Florida growers. It is necessary to identify factors that affect workers' decisions to stay on or leave a job. A labor survey was conducted to collect farmworkers' information. This report provides a summary on several aspects that affect workers' labor supply decisions, including work experience, migration patterns, wage rates, job satisfaction and career plans.

Background

The strawberry industry has experienced labor shortages in the last few years, and growers have reported yield losses due to labor shortages. Labor shortages are also driving up labor costs, turnover rate, and, in many cases, making discipline and quality control more difficult. In this situation, it is important to understand workers' needs and level of job satisfaction, as well as their plans as to when they are expecting to leave or quit farmwork. This will help employers identify factors that affect workers' decisions, and then use this information to improve their labor management practices and ensure labor supply.

Methods

We conducted a labor survey in spring 2016 and interviewed 592 Florida strawberry farmworkers, including domestic (480) and H-2A (122) workers. We collected information on farmworkers' demographics, work experience, employment history, wage rates, job satisfaction and career plans.

Results

Work Experience

The survey results show that domestic farmworkers had 9.3 and 2.7 years of farm and non-farm working

experience on average, respectively, while H-2A workers had 1.7 and 0.2 years of farm and non-farm work experience (Table 1).

Migration Patterns

Workers mostly came from Florida (39%), Michigan (21%), North Carolina (13%), California (8%), Georgia (4%) and New Jersey (4%), and approximately the same percentages of workers will go back to these places after the season (Table 2). They worked on tomatoes (32%), blueberries (32%), apples (16%), other vegetables and melons (10%), other farmwork (23%), non-farm work or did not work before the season. Most workers will work on blueberries and tomatoes after they finish strawberries (Table 3).

Wage Rates

Overall, workers receiving salary had the highest median hourly wage (\$11.71/hour), followed by those paid by piece (\$10.00/hour). The median hourly rate was \$9.00/hour. In addition, H-2A workers' overall median wage was \$11.25/hour, higher than domestic workers' wage of \$8.57/hour (Table 4).

Job Satisfaction

Among surveyed workers, 46% of domestic workers and 58% of H-2A workers were satisfied with the current wage; 60% of domestic workers and 86% of H-2A workers were willing to stay with their current employer (Table 5). The major reason for staying with the current employer is that they were satisfied with wage and compensation (Table 6). Only 7.9% of domestic workers were not willing to stay with their current employer because they perceived that wage/compensation was not good, family/relatives

were not here or they could find another job (Table 7).

Career Plans

The results show that 73% of domestic workers and 92% of H-2A workers were willing to do farm work in the future (Table 8). Among those who were willing, 70% of H-2A workers reported that they were expecting to stay in farm work less than 1 year, while 59% of domestic workers were expecting to stay in farm work over 5 years/as long as they are able (Table 9).

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Table 1. Work Experience.

Experience	Domestic Workers	H-2A Workers
Farm work (years)	9.3	1.7
Non-farm work (years)	2.7	0.2

Table 2. Migration among states by farmworkers before and after current job.

States	Before Current Job		After Current Job	
	# of Workers	Percent	# of Workers	Percent
Florida	152	38.5	129	37.4
Michigan	82	20.8	71	20.6
North Carolina	52	13.2	49	14.2
California	30	7.6	23	6.7
Georgia	17	4.3	18	5.2
New Jersey	15	3.8	17	4.9

Table 3. Crops worked before and after current job by domestic workers.

Crops	Before Current Job		After Current Job	
	# of Workers	Percent	# of Workers	Percent
Blueberry	142	2.0	183	41.5
Tomato	144	32.4	130	29.5
Citrus	8	1.8	5	1.1
Apple	69	15.5	45	10.2
Other vegetable/melons	45	10.1	39	8.8
Other farm work	104	23.4	61	13.8
Non-farm work	13	2.9	7	1.6
Did not or will not work	29	6.5	20	4.5
Don't know	-	-	22	5.0

Table 4. Median wages of strawberry workers by payment methods (average wages in brackets).

Payment Type	All workers		Domestic Workers		H-2A Workers	
	# of Workers	Wage (\$/hour)	# of Workers	Wage (\$/hour)	#of Workers	Wage (\$/hour)
Overall	524	9.61[11.44]	411	8.57 [11.26]	113	11.25 [12.09]
Hourly	169	9.00[10.97]	121	8.11 [10.81]	48	11.17 [11.35]
Piece rate	176	10.00[11.98]	147	9.09 [11.83]	29	11.82 [12.72]
Combination	121	9.50[10.44]	94	8.70[10.06]	27	10.70 [11.73]
Salary	10	11.71[14.41]	4	10.83 [11.42]	6	12.12 [16.39]

Table 5. Whether workers are satisfied with current wage and are willing to stay with the current employer.

Wage Satisfaction	Domestic Workers		H-2A Workers	
	# of workers	Percent	# of workers	Percent
Not satisfied	165	39.3	26	23.6
Satisfied	195	46.4	64	58.2
Don't know	60	14.3	20	18.2
Willingness To Stay				
No	35	7.9	3	2.5
Yes	269	60.3	101	85.6
Don't know	142	31.8	14	11.9

Table 6. Reasons to stay with the current employer.

Reasons to Stay	Domestic Workers		H-2A Workers	
	# of workers	Percent	# of workers	Percent
Wage/compensation is good	91	23.6	49	46.7
Family/relatives work here	86	22.3	2	1.9
Housing condition is good	52	13.5	11	10.5
Work load is not heavy	57	14.8	21	20.0
No other jobs	65	16.9	8	7.6
Other	34	8.8	14	13.3

Table 7. Reasons not to stay with the current employer.

Reasons Not to Stay	Domestic Workers	
	# of workers	Percent
Wage/compensation is not good	57	29.4
Family/relatives are not here	45	23.2
Housing condition is not good	7	3.6
Work load is heavy	24	12.4
Already found another job	45	23.2
Other	16	8.3

Table 8. Whether to stay in farm work for future employment?

Continue to Do Farm Work	Domestic Workers		H-2A Workers	
	# of workers	Percent	# of workers	Percent
No	28	6.1	2	1.6
Yes	335	73.3	112	91.8
Don't know	94	20.6	8	6.6

Table 9. Expected time of staying in farm work for future employment.

Expected Time of Staying In Farm Work	Domestic Workers		H-2A Workers	
	# of workers	Percent	# of workers	Percent
Less than 1 year	48	10.5	85	69.7
One to three years	104	22.7	7	5.7
Four to five years	38	8.3	2	1.6
Over 5 years	21	4.6	5	4.1
Over 5 years/ as long as I am able	248	54.0	23	18.9