

Chapter 2: About Farmworkers

DEFINITIONS

The North Carolina Farmworker Health Program embraces the definitions used by the Bureau of Primary Care, the US Department of Labor, and the US Department of Agriculture. These definitions can be used to determine eligibility for services.

Agricultural work refers to farming in all its practices, such as...

- The cultivation and tillage of the soil
- The production, cultivation, growing, and harvesting of any commodity grown on, in, or as an adjunct to or part of a commodity grown in or on the land
- Any practice (including preparation and processing for market and delivery for storage or to market or to carriers for transportation to market) performed by the farmer or on a farm incident to or in conjunction with an activity previously mentioned

Agriculture includes cultivating or harvesting crops on or in the land, and/or are preparing crops for market or storage. Crops include fruit and vegetable field crops, Christmas trees and wreaths, orchards, nurseries and greenhouses, harvesting of wild plants, and reforestation.

Migrant farmworkers are individuals who are required to be absent overnight from a permanent place of residence for the purpose of seeking employment in agricultural work and who have been so employed within the last 24 months. Migrant farmworkers may travel from other states "following-the-crop" or come from other countries as a guest worker with an H-2A contract or documented families.

The H-2A Agricultural Program under the U.S. Department of Labor makes available temporary visas under the H-2A Agricultural Program to allow farmers who anticipate a shortage of domestic workers, to bring non-immigrant, foreign guest workers legally to the United States to perform agricultural work for a season. North Carolina is by far the largest user of this type of temporary agricultural visa with over 8,000 H-2A workers. In 2011, the state Employment Security Commission reported 9,050 workers.

To learn more about the H-2A Agricultural Visa Program visit the US Department of Agriculture website at <http://www.usda.gov/oce/oce/labor-affairs/affairs.htm>

Seasonal farmworkers are individuals who are employed in agricultural work but do not move from their permanent residence to seek agricultural work. They may also have other sources of employment during the non-agricultural season.

Crew leaders are individuals who work independently to recruit workers from other countries or states to work as farm labor; some farmworkers come with and work for a crew leader. These individuals often serve as a middleman between the farmworker and the farmer, providing transportation, labor, housing, and other services for a fee. Crew leaders must have a

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license to employ farmworkers. Those found violating labor or housing regulations, if reported, will lose their license.

The North Carolina Growers Association is one of the oldest institutions to bring H-2A workers to the state. In recent years, more entities like the Growers Association are emerging to provide workers to North Carolina farmers. Migrant farmworkers who work for the same grower year after year may bring family members and friends, as the labor needs demand.

Farmworker Facts

American farmers depend upon migrant and seasonal farm workers to aid in production and harvesting of crops, which has historically been a mobile, temporary, low-wage labor workforce. The U.S. Public Health Service estimates a total of 3.5 million agricultural workers in the United States. In North Carolina, population estimates range from 100,000 to 300,000 agricultural workers, making it fifth in the nation with the largest population of migrant and seasonal farm workers according to “The Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker Enumeration Profiles Study, North Carolina” (2000) by Alice Larson.

Migrant and seasonal farmworkers contribute to North Carolina’s economy by providing affordable labor working in a variety of crops from the coast to the piedmont to the mountains.

Migrant farmworkers usually travel to and from southern and northern states within an agricultural stream. They may have their home based in one of the southern states and move north. They may also come from other states like California, Texas, and Florida and/or come from other countries such as Mexico, Guatemala and Haiti.

AGRICULTURAL STREAMS

The United States is divided into three sections to coordinate the areas of agricultural production – the western stream, the mid-western stream and the eastern stream.

The Western stream goes through California (the state which employs the most farmworkers and has the longest growing season), into Oregon and Washington.

The Mid-western stream starts in Southern Texas and goes in several directions. Those who follow harvests start in Texas, travel to the Great Lakes Region or to the Rocky Mountain area and the Northern Pacific, often looping back through the Panhandle.

The Eastern stream starts in Florida, following local crops up the coast into states such as Georgia, Virginia, Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Michigan and Maine. North Carolina is part of the Eastern stream.

AGRICULTURAL SEASONS

Spring - Migrant workers begin arriving in North Carolina in the spring as early as April or May to cultivate peppers, cucumbers, and other vegetable crops in the Eastern part of the state and stay

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as late as November. Near the coast, migrant workers harvest strawberries starting in early April to until mid May.

Summer – Tobacco is harvested during the summer months, primarily in the Piedmont region of the state. Vegetables, including snap beans, cabbage, green peppers, cucumbers and tomatoes, are grown in some parts of the Western mountain area. Some of these crops require migrant labor for plant setting and pruning as well as harvesting. Work begins in June and may not end until September. Near coastal North Carolina, blueberries, cranberries and blackberries are picked from mid May to late July.

Fall - The apple harvest in Western North Carolina begins in late August and continues through October.

Year-round - Christmas trees are grown in the most mountainous counties in the state. Migrant and seasonal laborers do pruning and resetting of trees. This production requires as much as ten months of labor. Nursery workers who are either migrant or seasonal also qualify for services under the NC Farmworker Health Program.

DEMOGRAPHICS

There is no centralized data on farmworkers in North Carolina. Several different organizations have data about agriculture, farming, and farmworkers. Program coordinators may have to contact these organizations independently to get data about farmworkers in their area.

- **North Carolina Farmworker Health Program (NCFHP)** has data about farmworker served through their contract sites.
- **North Carolina Employment Security Commission (NCESC)** has information regarding the number of farmworkers working in North Carolina.
- **North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (NCDA&CS)** has data regarding agricultural work and pesticides in North Carolina.
- **North Carolina Department of Labor (NCDOL)** keeps a list of registered labor camps on their website.
- **North Carolina Growers Association (NCGA)** has a profile of H-2A guest workers.

See Appendix III: Farmworker Organizations and Websites for links to the above agencies.

Gathering accurate data on farmworkers is difficult due to their mobile lifestyle. However, many researchers have made attempts to gather and document information on farmworkers, mostly at the national level. One such reliable source is the National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS) provided by the US Department of Labor. To see data from the most recent edition of NAWS, visit <http://www.doleta.gov/agworker/naws.cfm>.

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Health Issues

Migrant farmworkers suffer mortality and morbidity rates greater than any other group of people in the United States. Dental disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, infant mortality, tuberculosis, invasive carcinoma, parasitic infections, and lack of childhood immunizations are health conditions that are of particular concern to the farmworker.

Mental health conditions such as depression are another concern among farmworkers that may be related to isolation, economic hardship or weather conditions which can hamper work. Some farmworkers are vulnerable to substance abuse that can be related to poverty, stress and lack of mobility or recreational opportunities.

Occupational health: According to the U.S. Department of Labor, agriculture is the third most dangerous industry in the United States. Conditions at work can result in:

- **Unintentional injuries** such as cuts, falls, burns, and back strain/musculoskeletal injury. Motor vehicular injuries are also great concern, particularly since it is one of the leading causes of death for this population. Injuries may occur while farmers are transporting workers and/or while workers are driving farm equipment.
- **Heat stress and heat stroke** from exposure to extreme temperatures and sun without access to ample and safe drinking water.
- **Contact dermatitis, respiratory problems, and eye irritation** caused by natural fungi, dusts, poisonous plants, and pesticides.
- **Dehydration, parasites and urinary tract infections** resulting from a lack of safe drinking water. Farmworkers may wash or drink from ponds or irrigation ditches contaminated by pesticides, chemical fertilizers or organic wastes. This exposes them to potentially harmful chemicals and waterborne parasites.
- **Chemical exposure** from contact with pesticides. In 1994, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) instituted Worker Protection Standards, designed to safeguard farmworkers from pesticides while working in the fields. For more information on Worker Protection Standards (WPS), visit the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) website at <http://www.epa.gov/pesticides/health/worker.htm>

The North Carolina Farmworker Health Program focuses on providing health screenings and education on the following common health concerns for farmworkers in North Carolina:

Priority Level (Tier 1)	Secondary (Tier 2)
Crop-related illnesses such as Green Tobacco Sickness	Diabetes
Heat illness, such as sun exposure and dehydration	Domestic violence
Pesticides	Emotional Health and Well-being
	Immunizations
	Motor vehicle safety

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HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases Oral Health, particularly for children and adolescents Clinic services, particularly information about and how to access	Musculoskeletal health Pre-conceptual and pre-natal health Family planning
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Social Service Needs

Farmworkers and their families may experience a multitude of challenges to accessing social services that may be available to them. Many farmworkers live in poverty, earning low wages and residing in substandard housing. They may need assistance with housing, food security, childcare, legal assistance and other social services. Transportation is a need due to many farmworker families not owning a vehicle and living in isolated, remote areas. Because of the existing demands on outreach staff, they are encouraged to focus on social needs that have a direct effect on the health of farmworkers and their families. Outreach staff is encouraged to use good judgment and follow a case management plan when determining service delivery.

Farmworker Resources

Migrant Hotlines - Some national organizations host hotlines for migrant farmworkers to inform them of resources available in their area. North Carolina hosts a hotline, the CARELINE, to provide information to Spanish-speaking community members.

Program staff is encouraged to contact these hotlines to become familiar with their services and to assure their program's information is included and/or up to date.

These hotlines are:

Call for Health, 1-800-377-9968

North Carolina Careline, 1-800-662-7030

The North Carolina Family Health Resource Line, 1-800-367-2229

Health Services- President Kennedy signed the **Migrant Health Act** into law in 1962. It was established to authorize the provision of primary and supplemental health services to migrant and seasonal farmworkers. It is funded under the Public Service Act and administered by the Bureau of Primary Health Care within the United States Department of Health and Human Services. Farmworkers may also be eligible of Medical Assistance Programs, such as Medicaid, Medicare, and Health Check/Health Choice. Eligibility will be dependant on their income and legal status.

Community and Migrant Health Centers are funded through the Migrant Health Program to provide comprehensive primary health care to migrant and seasonal farmworkers and their families. There are more than 100 clinic sites in 41 states and Puerto Rico. These clinics are integrated with hospitals and other health and social services existing in the area.

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Rural Health Centers provide access to primary care in areas federally designated as medically underserved and/or as having shortage of health professionals. They are certified to receive funding from Medicaid, Medicare, and other medical assistance programs. These clinics may be a non-profit organization or a privately owned health center.

Migrant and/or Farmworker Voucher Programs exist at the national, state, and local levels. The overall mission is to promote the health of farmworkers and their families and to provide high quality and comprehensive care to a high risk, mobile population with unique health and social needs. These programs are evaluated to ensure well-managed systems of care with strong administrative and clinical components to increase the access and availability of primary care services. They also promote communication with other programs serving farmworkers by sharing research data on farmworker health issues and by identifying locations of health centers throughout the nation.

The North Carolina Farmworker Health program (NCFHP) is a state-level program located in the Office of Rural Health and Community Care that works with community and migrant health centers, rural health centers, health departments, and non-profits through contracts and fee-for-service reimbursement to provide health services for farmworkers in North Carolina.

Health Departments are good sources for preventive health services such as immunizations, screening and treatment of communicable diseases such as tuberculosis, family planning, WIC, breast and cervical cancer screening, and environmental health services.

Urgent Care Centers and/or Hospitals are a source for immediate care needs.

Educational Programs - Migrant Head Start and Migrant Education are programs that assist migrant families with school enrollment and academic achievement. Some schools provide ESL program for adjusting to or transitioning into the state from other countries. Community Colleges may also offer migrant families ESL and GED programs. Some community colleges provide pesticide training and certification.

Advocacy Groups - There are several organizations in the state and the nation that advocate on behalf of farmworkers on a variety of issues, primarily for labor and housing rights. A few such organizations in North Carolina are the **Farmworker Advocacy Network** (a consortium of several organizations representing various sectors), **the North Carolina Justice Center**, **the Farm Labor Organizing Committee**, and **Student Action with Farmworkers**.

See Appendix III for a more comprehensive list of farmworker organizations and websites.