FARMWORKERS HOUSING AND HEALTH IN THE UNITED STATES

A General Introduction and Overview[I]

[I] Much of the information in this paper was excerpted from *Taking Stock: Rural People, Poverty, and Housing in the 21st Century.* Housing Assistance Council (Washington DC: 2012).

Introduction

Agriculture is a multibillion dollar industry in the United States and is integral to the health and well-being of the nation. Most Americans enjoy an abundance of high quality food at some of the most affordable prices in the world. The affordability of fresh and unblemished fruits and vegetables comes, in part, through cheap labor undertaken by farmworkers. While no definitive figures are available, approximately 2-to-2.5 million people work harvesting fields, farms, and orchards in the United States.[1] Among the poorest groups in the nation, farmworkers are challenged by low wages, exploitation and discrimination that hinder their ability to access affordable quality housing. The adverse conditions faced by farmworkers are further exacerbated by a plethora of legal, cultural, and geographic circumstances that often keep this population in the shadows of American society and contribute to their economic marginalization.

In large-scale surveys and standard data sources such as the Current Population Survey or the American Community Survey, data on farmworkers are generally nonexistent or unreliable. The National Agricultural Workers Study (NAWS) provides valuable insights into the characteristics of farmworkers in the United States and serves as the basis of much of the information presented in this report.[II] Administered by the U.S. Department of Labor, NAWS is an employment-based, random survey of the demographic and employment characteristics of the U.S. crop labor force. Since 1988, NAWS has been surveying crop workers annually and publishing periodic research reports and a public-use dataset.

Specialized reports and ethnographic studies periodically provide additional insights into different aspects of farmworkers' lives. These are often valuable, but sound policy analysis and program planning requires careful attention to the limitations of each study, i.e., methodology, sub-population studied, and distinctive community context.

Farmworkers in the United States often have been racial and ethnic minorities or immigrants. Farm work, which involves physically demanding labor, often serves as entry-level employment for newly-arriving immigrant workers, some of whom eventually move out of farm labor and into other forms of employment. They are replaced by others, who go through the same cycle.

However, this pattern is changing. Economic, political, technological, and national security transitions are changing the landscape of migrant and seasonal labor. Most farmworkers are still Mexican immigrants who come to work in the U.S. as young adults, but

[II] Unless otherwise noted, the figures and statistics in the farmworker analysis come from Housing Assistance Council (HAC) tabulations of the 2005 to 2009 NAWS data. The public-use NAWS data set includes interviews for FY2010-2012 and selected analyses have been updated to reflect recent changes. NAWS provides vital information on the conditions of farmworkers. However, these surveys have distinct limits. The NAWS provides data for active farmworkers only, includes limited information on the families of farmworkers, and contains virtually no data on the conditions of persons who were farmworkers in the past but have made the transition to other employment or on currently inactive, unemployed, or retired farmworkers. The NAWS sample also includes only crop workers, not livestock workers. Description of the NAWS methodology, the survey instrument, codebook, and public-use dataset are available on the ETA/DOL website http://www.doleta.gov/agworker/naws.cfm

farm work is less often a gateway to other occupations. Over the past decade, an increasing number of farmworkers remain in agriculture throughout their working lives. The mean age of U.S. farmworkers in 2012 is now 38. Farmworkers are remaining in agriculture in part because the educational and skills requirements for non-agricultural jobs are increasing. Today, the farm labor population is more stable, experienced, and less mobile than 10 years ago. Fewer farmworkers are following crops along the migrant streams, instead staying in place all year.

The U.S. farm labor force, whether unaccompanied workers or farmworker families, almost always has been poorly housed, and these developments are creating new and different demands for housing. While the residency patterns of farmworkers is changing, the conditions of substandard, unaffordable, and crowded housing remain unchanged for most farmworkers in America today. This presents a new challenge and opportunity for the communities in which they live, as housing has a direct link to health.

The composition, working, and housing conditions of the U.S. farm labor force vary substantially from region to region and, within regions, from one labor market and crop to another. This can lead local employers and service providers to question the accuracy of national-level estimates. The proportion of indigenous farmworkers in the labor force, for example, is higher along the Pacific Seaboard than in the Midwest while, conversely, the proportion of farmworkers who are U.S. citizens is much higher in the Midwest. The socioeconomic context in which farmworkers live and work also varies greatly from one area to another; for example, California agribusiness relies much more heavily on farm labor contractors than most other states, North Carolina relies more heavily on guest workers than other states, and the proportions of farmworkers living in mobile homes or labor camps varies greatly from one community to another.

Social Characteristics

Many factors contribute to the evolving context of farmworkers' lives in the U.S., but two events of the last decade in particular have had significant impacts. The recent economic recession and the near collapse of some industries, especially the construction sector, interrupted traditional labor transition patterns long associated with farm work. Fewer non-farm jobs are available for farmworkers to move into and an increasing proportion of even "low skill" jobs require fluency in English, basic writing skills, or computer literacy. The burgeoning demand for fresh produce also has increased the availability of farm labor jobs and the duration of the work season, which also affects the need for housing.

Homeland security concerns in the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks have also shaped farmworker demographics. While many farmworkers and family members are citizens and documented and live in the U.S. year round, before September 11 it was possible for farmworkers who lacked permanent status to work in the United States and visit their families in Mexico or Central America each year. Now, it is easy enough to exit the United States, but getting back into the country has become much more difficult.[2] Increasingly, foreign-born farmworkers are remaining in the United States for longer periods or bringing their spouses and children to live with them in the U.S. The lack of immigration reform has made farmworkers' employment and concomitant housing circumstances even more complicated. The circumstances are altering the demographic composition of farmworker

populations such that families are now more prevalent than single men[III].

Farmworkers in the United States are largely ethnic minorities or immigrants. More than nine of ten farmworkers are of Hispanic heritage. Much has been reported about how the rapidly growing Hispanic population has had an impact on the face as well as the economies of many areas of the United States. Nationally, the Hispanic population increased by 15 million between 2000 and 2010 and now comprises 16% of U.S. residents. This growth is four times the rate of the overall population growth rate in the United States throughout the decade.[3] Over the past half century, the impact of Mexican and Central American immigrant farmworkers settling in rural communities has been dramatic, as once-homogeneous communities throughout the U.S. have become ethnically diverse.

Contrary to expectations, however, the increases between 2000 and 2010 in the total Hispanic population and in the numbers of individuals who are undocumented may not be intimately connected to the farm labor population. A recent report by the Pew Hispanic Center challenges the perception that the growing undocumented Hispanic population has found employment primarily in farm labor, estimating that only 3% of the unauthorized labor in the U.S. is employed in agriculture.[4]

About half (52%) of the persons engaged in U.S. farm work are legal residents of the United States (33% are citizens and 19% are legal permanent residents or work-authorized), while the other half are undocumented workers. While the proportion of unauthorized farm labor force has remained consistent over the past decade, a growing share has gained U.S. citizenship.[5] The proportion of farmworkers who are citizens increased from 22% in 1998 to 33% in 2012. Most foreign-born farmworkers come to the U.S. at an early age, so most (about three-quarters) of their children are U.S.-born citizens. The share of "mixed status" families among farmworkers increased from 10% in 1998[6] to 24% in 2009.

More than two-thirds of farmworkers were born outside the United States, while the rest were born in the United States or Puerto Rico. There is a great deal of variation from state to state in the proportion of foreign-born farmworkers in the farm labor force. In California, for example, 96% of all farmworkers were born in Mexico or Central America, while in the Midwestern states many more of the workers are native-born. The overwhelming majority of foreign-born farmworkers are of Mexican origin, but Central Americans continue to make up 2-4% of the farm labor force. While most of the U.S.-born children of Mexican immigrant farmworkers follow different career pathways than their parents, the Mexican-American youth and young adults continue to be a significant sub-population in the farm labor force.

Immigrant farmworkers on average have resided in the United States for 15 years. Residency figures signal a shift in the demographics of farmworkers, with foreign-born farmworkers still entering the United States as teenagers or young adults but staying in this country longer than previously. More than 80% of farmworkers entered the United States before 2005.

Consistent with the nature and physical demands of their occupation, farmworkers largely are adults who tend to be slightly younger than the general population. The median age of farmworkers in 1998 was 31 years, but by 2009 the farmworker median age had increased to

[III] Id.

34 years. The increasing average age of agricultural workers may be influenced by immigration policies and issues that have reduced the number of new nonresident farmworkers entering the United States.

The nature of farm work creates unique household and family dynamics. Most farmworkers live in a family unit, some in complex households that include extended family members, and others (particularly those who are newly-arrived) travel, work, and live in groups of single men.[7] The vast majority of farmworkers (more than three-quarters) are men; but women play an important role in filling some types of agricultural jobs. Over the past several years, the proportion of women in the farm labor force has been slowly increasing. As in other low-income immigrant households, husbands and wives usually both work to make ends meet.

Almost two-thirds of all farmworkers are married, but about one-quarter of these married workers are "unaccompanied"; their spouses and children did not come to the U.S. with them. While about half of the farmworkers in the U.S. are living in households with their children, the vast majority of farmworkers are supporting families with children. More than half of the families with children are very low-income (living below 125% of the LLSIL, or Lower Living Standard Income Level). As might be expected, the families with more children are the poorest.

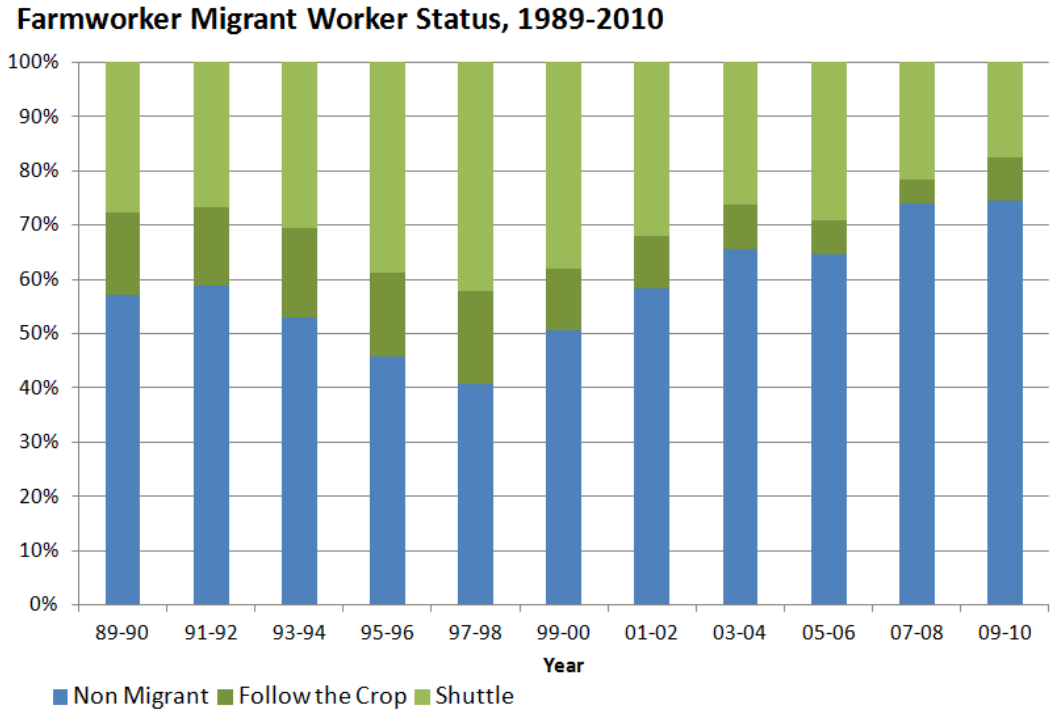
The typical farmworker household consists of a nuclear family of parents and children, but economic necessity often makes it necessary for farmworker families to share housing. While housing arrangements vary greatly from community to community, about one-third of farmworkers live in "complex" households where a single-family house or apartment is shared by multiple families and, sometimes, unrelated co-workers. Although the proportion of unaccompanied male migrants in the labor force is decreasing, there continues to be a substantial population of farmworkers living in crowded all-male households—sometimes labor camp barracks, but, also old motels, mobile homes, apartments, or single-family houses or less formal shelter arrangements.

Economic Characteristics

Harvesting crops is largely low-wage employment but, for many, it also serves as a stepping-stone into more stable employment. Non-English speaking and undocumented workers are at increased risk of being victims of labor and housing rights violations and they often are the target of anti-immigrant sentiment, but these issues are confronted by virtually all farmworkers. The economy and mechanization have reduced the overall need for farm labor, but crops largely are harvested by hand and a substantial number of agricultural jobs still exist in the United States. Changes in production practices appear to be increasing the amount of farm labor devoted to pre-production tasks (such as soil fumigation or transplanting) as well as post-production. From 2007 to 2012, the number of U.S. farms reporting hired labor expenditures increased by 17%, producers' labor expenditures for directly-hired labor increased 23% and contract labor by 44%, greatly outpacing inflation for the period.

One sign of greater stability in the farmworker population is increased work experience. In 2009, the average farmworker had 13 years of experience in farm labor, up substantially from an average of eight years of farm work reported in 1998; about one-quarter of the farm labor force consists of middle-aged workers who have worked 20 years or more in agriculture.

Figure 1: Farmworkers are Becoming Less Mobile



Source: HAC Tabulations of 1989-2010 National Agricultural Workers Survey

Historically, migration has been an element of farmworker life. A pattern of traveling to a particular geographic area to harvest crops for a temporary period was common. Under this framework, migrant farmworkers were categorized according to one of three migration streams: East, Midwest, and West. During the winter months, migrant farmworkers typically resided in their home-base communities in California, Florida, and Texas, or in Mexico or other Central American and Caribbean nations. They traveled along the respective streams to perform farm work.[8]

In recent years, migration patterns have changed. In the past decade, the proportion of migratory farmworkers declined substantially. Currently, the largest ongoing migration stream is along the Eastern Seaboard, as a result of high levels of winter labor demand and scarcity of summer work in Florida. This makes migration "up the stream" an important part of the East Coast farm labor scene.

Increasingly, farmworkers are settling into local communities and traveling shorter distances to work while generally remaining in a specific geographic area. By 2012, an estimated 86% of farmworkers lived in the same place throughout the year. The number of farmworkers reporting only one farm employer in the past year has increased in the past decade. In 2009, as many as 81% of farmworkers worked for only one farm employer for the year, up from 65% in 1998.

While work patterns are changing, a good number of farmworkers still travel to different regions of a state or to different states following crop seasons and labor demand. Although there are complex definitional issues regarding ways to define migrancy, it appears that only about one out of five farmworkers, most of them relative newcomers to U.S.

agriculture, are migrants.

Farmworkers are among the poorest populations in the country. In 2009, approximately half of all individual farmworkers earned $16,250 or less annually. To put these income levels into perspective, only 18% of all households nationally earn under $20,000 per year.[9] While farmworkers' average hourly earnings have increased nominally and in real terms over the past decades, these gains do not compare with those gained by non-farm workers. In addition, the rate of gain has slowed substantially during the past five years, and increased at about half the rate of inflation from 2007-2012.

Approximately one-quarter of farmworkers have below-poverty family incomes; this is roughly twice the national rate of poverty. Poverty rates are decreasing for farm workers, however; in 1998, approximately 46% of farmworkers had incomes below poverty level compared to 25% today. The reduction is likely related to the greater stability of the labor force. Families with children are much poorer than the overall farmworker population; close to half of these farmworker family households continue to live below the poverty level.

By 2009, farmworkers were working more days of the year, earning higher wages, and living more often in two-income households than in 1998.[IV] Farmworkers' economic progress is uneven; the recent recession seems to have slowed their wage gains and resulted in less work. This is a valuable reminder of the constant uncertainties faced by farmworkers as market conditions or weather impact production. Many farmworkers in California's San Joaquin Valley, the region of the state most seriously affected by the 2012 drought, for example, are finding less work than those who have settled in a local community.

Despite low incomes, persistent under-employment, and periodic seasonal unemployment, most farmworkers do not use public assistance programs. An estimated 43% of farmworker families utilized public assistance programs between 2007 and 2009, an increase from the 35% who used these services between 1998 and 2000. While contribution-based assistance such as unemployment insurance has remained constant, there has been a more marked increase in need-based assistance, such as Medicaid the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children program (WIC); and food assistance.[10]

Farmworker Housing Conditions

Farmworker housing conditions and needs vary by type, location, tenure and condition. Migrant farmworkers often reside in formal or informal labor camps, RV and mobile home parks, old motels, vehicles, campgrounds, in fields, under tarps or in barns and tool sheds. Seasonal and year round farmworkers, and farmworkers and their families, often reside in dilapidated rental housing and substandard mobile home parks. Farmworkers who are fortunate enough can benefit from the federally and state subsidized housing programs that provide decent, affordable homeownership and rental housing.

[IV] Farmworkers who did not have prior calendar year income are not included in the poverty estimates produced by the NAWS. This stipulation eliminates about 15% of all crop workers from NAWS data. If the earnings of these omitted workers were calculated, the share of farmworkers with level incomes below poverty would likely be higher.

Housing conditions for farmworkers and their families historically have been substandard, whether in typical rental housing or in formal and informal labor camps, mobile home parks, camp grounds, open fields, parked cars, tool sheds, barns, and other makeshift shelter arrangements. During the past decade, the shift away from migrant labor toward a more year-round workforce added pressure on housing. The decrease in farmworker mobility has contributed to the cultural diversity and economic development of the communities in which they live, while also adding to the strain on housing. Whether the shift in farm labor has been the result of the economic downturn, an increase in the temporary visa workforce or changing production practices, the stress on rural communities and an inadequate farmworker housing stock has continued to increase. The communities in which farmworkers and their families live often must contend with other deprivations such as the lack of a decent or sufficient water supply, inadequate septic systems, no streetlights or sidewalks, and fundamentally inadequate municipal services that other communities take for granted as basic necessities.

The nature of their employment and working conditions means that farmworkers' housing options – in terms of arrangement, costs, and quality – often are substantially different from others' options. Farmworker housing may be provided by the private market or by the employer. Most farmworkers (85%) access their housing through the private market. More than 60% of farmworker-occupied housing units are rented and approximately 35% are owner-occupied. The private housing market often fails to meet the needs of farmworkers. Rental housing is not as plentiful in rural communities as it is in urban areas. Rental properties frequently can be acquired only with a security deposit, a credit check, a utility deposit and sometimes a long-term commitment – requirements that often conflict with the unique conditions of the farm labor industry.[11]

Income from farm work has seasonal fluctuations that can make rental or homeownership in the private market more difficult. Where private rental housing is available, health and safety standards in private rental housing are often subject to lax enforcement, so units available to farmworkers may be substandard and too expensive. Formal and informal labor camps or other shelter arrangements are often unregulated or poorly regulated. Although such housing might be provided in exchange for work rather than rent, it may be inconvenient or of poor quality. Farmworkers fear retaliation, in employment and/or housing, should they complain or seek help from authorities to remedy substandard conditions.

Only about 13% of farmworker housing units are employer owned. Among these, 83% are provided free of charge to the workers; however families are often charged for utilities. The prevalence of employer-owned housing has declined markedly since 1995, when nearly 30% of farmworker units were owned by the employer. In many states, employer-provided housing is regulated to some degree for health and safety reasons, thus possibly benefiting workers whose other housing options are not subjected to scrutiny. Employer-owned housing is not without problems, however. A situation with an employer as a landlord may compound an already asymmetric relationship. Some farmworkers may be uncomfortable complaining or making suggestions regarding housing to their employer.[12] Increasingly, regulation, combined with the costs of administration and maintenance of housing, has dissuaded many growers from providing housing to workers.[13]

In situations where migrant workers' employers are farm labor contractors, employer-

provided housing is very often problematic. In the Eastern Migrant Stream, in large measure because farmworkers must rely on farm labor contractors for transportation and housing as well as for employment, there have been a number of cases where farm labor contractors were holding workers in conditions of indentured servitude in isolated labor camps. Although less common, similar problems have also been documented in some areas of California (e.g. the Sacramento River Delta). Problems stemming from farm labor contractors' role in housing workers in isolated areas have also been a particular problem for farmworkers working in reforestation.

Guestworkers: How does the growth of the H-2A program affect farmworker housing?

Agricultural guest worker or "H2A" visas have generated increased controversy in the farm labor community over the past decade. The H2A temporary foreign agricultural worker program allows agricultural employers to hire workers from other countries with temporary work permits to fill agricultural jobs for less than one year.[14] The temporary work visas can only be issued once an employer documents a labor shortage of U.S. citizens who are unwilling or unable to perform the task.[15] Under the program, employers must compensate workers with prevailing wages and guarantee minimum work hours. The guest worker program has grown substantially over the past few decades and approximately 70,000 H2A visas are issued for agricultural work annually in the United States.[16]

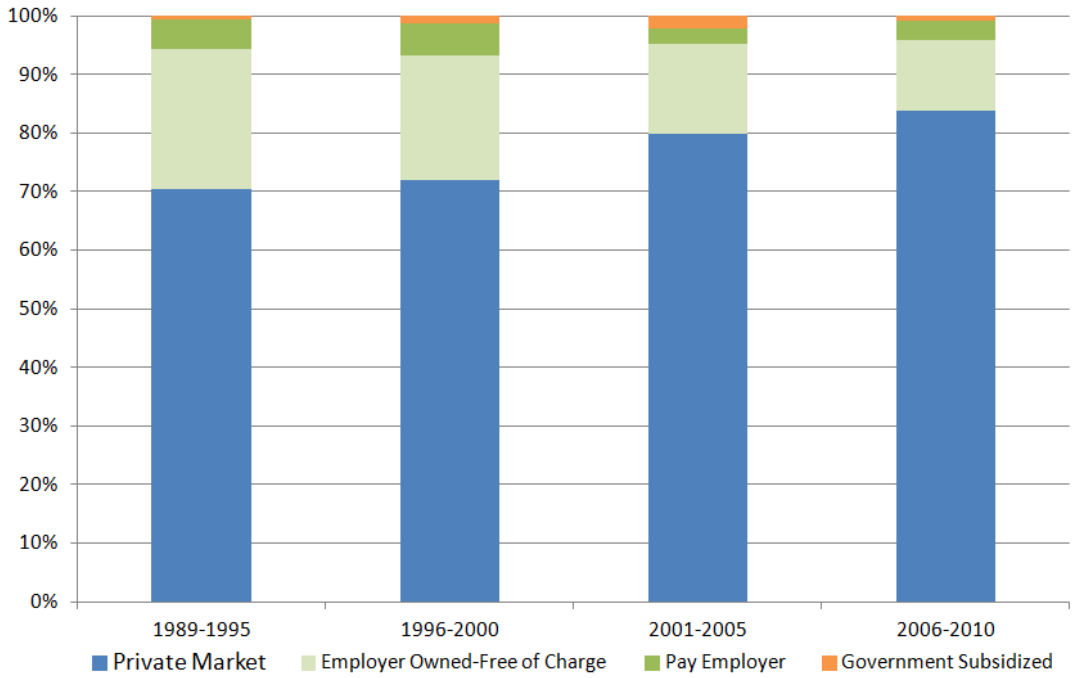
The H2A program requires employers to provide free housing or pay for workers' housing. The housing must be inspected and certified in advance to ensure that it complies with applicable health and safety standards. While these obligations are intended to promote the safety and well-being of guest workers, documented abuses of the program and employees have been reported over the past few years.[17] Again, the remote and rural nature of many facilities housing H2A workers contributes to the potential for abuses by employers. Additionally, with the considerable growth in workforce visas, competition for housing options, which are scarce in many communities, has grown between guest visa holders and non-H2A farmworkers. Furthermore, since employers who wish to hire H2A workers cannot be certified unless their housing is inspected and certified, the agencies inspecting housing face pressure from H-2A employers to prioritize their inspections, sometimes at the expense of timely inspections of other farmworker housing.

Farmworker housing may also be categorized as *on-farm* or *off-farm* housing. During the Depression era and after, farmworkers in the many parts of the country were housed predominately by growers in large on-farm tent camps. After public outcry about deplorable living conditions in the 1960s and 1970s, however, laws and regulations were enacted to ban these makeshift camps. Since then, growers generally have been less involved in the housing of farmworkers.[18] Today, on-farm housing, while much improved from past decades, often only affords the most basic arrangements (such as simple concrete barracks or older manufactured homes), typically of lower quality than off-farm housing.

Figure 2

Employer Provided Housing is on the Decline

Farmworker Housing Arrangement, 1989-2010



Source: HAC Tabulations of 1989-2010 National Agricultural Workers Survey

The vast majority of farmworker housing units (85%) are located in off-farm settings, with the remaining 15% of farmworker housing units located on a farm. The number of on-farm housing units has been in decline over the past few decades. Prior to 1995, estimates indicated that 75% of farmworker housing was off the farm. It is important to recognize the diversity and huge disparities in quality of off-farm housing. In some agricultural communities, farmworker housing is dispersed throughout a town and is quite similar to the accommodations of other low-income community residents (although typically more crowded); in others, farmworker housing has been concentrated in the neighborhoods with the most decayed infrastructure, giving rise to rural ghettoes.

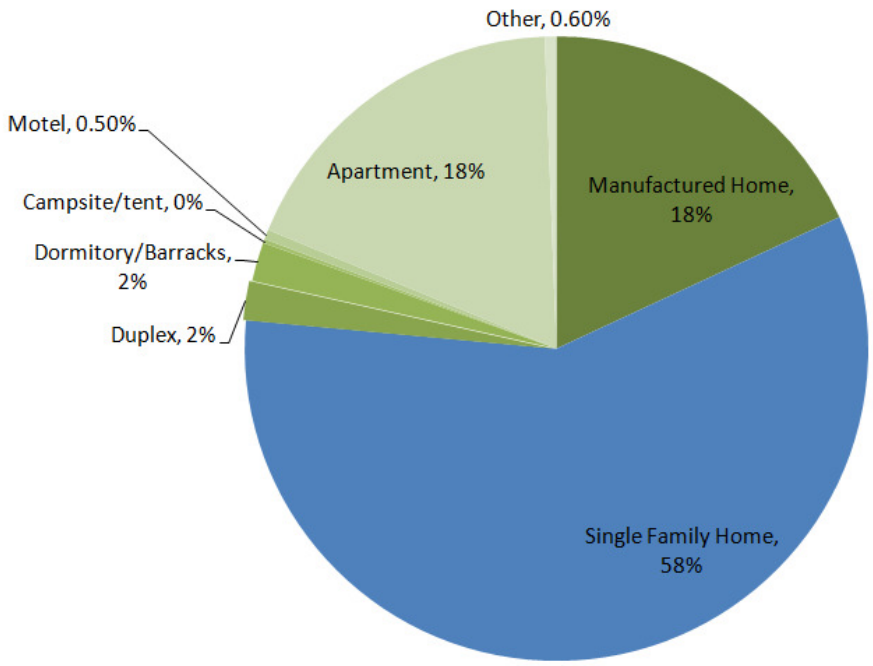
Farmworkers are much more likely to be renters than are U.S. residents as a whole. Only one-quarter of farmworkers own a home in the United States, compared to nearly two-thirds of all households in the United States. Forty percent of farmworkers are estimated to own a home in another country, however.

Single-family homes, prevalent throughout the rural U.S., are home to the majority (58%) of farmworkers in the U.S. Fewer live in apartments (18%) and manufactured homes (18%). A more telling indicator of the precarious nature of farmworker housing arrangements is the number of farmworkers who live in dormitory or barracks settings (2%) and tents, motels, or other housing structures (1%).

Figure 3

Most Farmworkers Live in Single-Family Homes

Farmworker Housing Type, 2005-2009



Source: HAC Tabulations of 2005-2009 National Agricultural Workers Survey

Farmworkers cope with a spectrum of housing problems, including costs that do not fit their incomes, substandard quality, and the need for short-term housing during temporary work. Farmworkers often face crowded housing conditions as a result of their low incomes and high housing costs. One definition of crowding is more than one person per room (excluding bathrooms). Excluding dormitories and barracks (structures designed for high occupancy), almost 31% of farmworkers live in crowded conditions. This figure is more than six times higher than the national average. While a substantial portion of farmworker housing units are crowded, the incidence of crowding is even greater in some types of housing. More than 40% of apartments housing farmworkers and one-half of duplexes contain more than one person per room.

A survey of farmworker housing conditions conducted by HAC[V] in the early 2000s estimated that 17% of farmworker housing units were severely substandard and an additional 16% were moderately substandard. Farmworkers in manufactured homes were more likely to experience substandard living conditions, with 44% of manufactured homes being classified as moderately or severely inadequate.[19]

[V] NAWS does not provide detailed information about housing quality or conditions.

Substandard and structurally deficient conditions are endemic to farmworker housing; however, they are often exacerbated by crowding or and lack of affordability. Approximately 20% of farmworker housing units surveyed by HAC were both substandard and crowded. In 11% of all units surveyed, both substandard conditions and cost burden existed, and 6% suffered three housing deficiencies; they were substandard, crowded, and unaffordable.[20] Though containing numerous serious problems, these units often were home to children. In addition to high housing costs, crowding, and substandard housing, farmworkers also encounter unique environmental hazards related to housing, particularly exposure to pesticides in homes near fields.

How Many More "Durovilles" Are There in the U.S.?

Typical Duroville home

The Desert Mobile Home Park (commonly referred to as "Duroville," named for its owner) is an infamous manufactured home community located in California's Coachella Valley on the Torres Martinez Indian Reservation. This community was largely inhabited by farmworkers, with an estimated 2,000 to 6,000 migrant workers living in the park's several hundred manufactured homes.[21]

Duroville gained national attention because of its deplorable housing conditions and the legal battles surrounding its continued operation. Duroville residents resided in very old mobile homes amidst unsafe and unsanitary conditions, including open sewage, hazardous electrical wiring and packs of wild dogs.[22] In response to numerous health and housing violations, the U.S Attorney's Office on behalf of the Bureau of the Indian Affairs sought to have the park closed in 2009. A contentious and complicated legal battle ensued, and after many years Duroville was finally closed in 2013. Most of Duroville's residents have been relocated to Mountain View estates, a newly developed community of modern manufactured homes funded with public and private resources.[23]

Mountain View Estates

While Duroville has been closed, hundreds of other substandard manufactured home parks across the nation continue to serve as a primary source of housing for farmworkers. These old manufactured home parks are emblematic of the challenge many farmworkers face in finding decent housing in the private market.

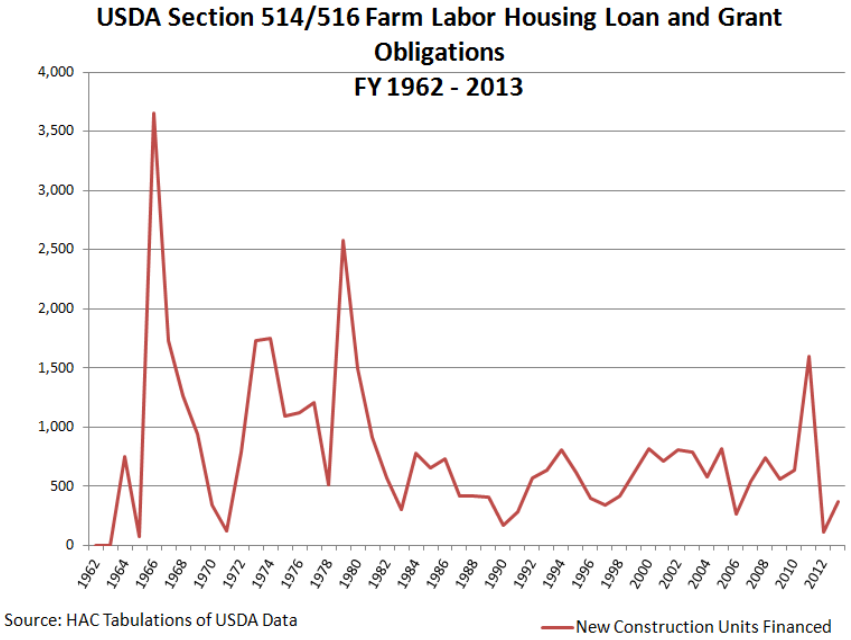
Federal Investment in Farm Labor Housing

Less than 1% of farmworkers are estimated to receive any form of affordable housing assistance from a state, local, or federal government entity. For more than 40 years, the federal government has been working to combat farmworker housing problems through grant and loan programs. One important farmworker housing resource is the USDA Section 514/516 Farm Labor Housing program, which provides funding to buy, build, improve, or repair housing for farm laborers.[VI] This program addresses some of the barriers farmworkers face in finding safe, decent housing, such as high levels of poverty, the lack of affordable rental housing and the inability to sign a full-year lease.

Slightly fewer than 800 USDA Farm Labor Housing properties encompass more than 14,000 units located across the nation. While many USDA projects are employer-managed and located on-farm, the majority of the 514/516 units are located off-farm because off-farm properties can support many more units than on-farm projects. Off-farm housing is located primarily in the West and in the states of California, Florida, and Texas.

Figure 4

Production of Federally-Funded Farmworker Housing Has Declined



[VI] A number of other federal programs address farmworker housing problems, such as the Department of Labor's Migrant and Seasonal Housing program, HUD's Rural Housing and Economic Development Program/Rural Innovation Fund, and HUD's HOME Investment Partnerships program, as well as the Low Income Housing Tax Credit.

Despite moderate increases in overall funding, the development of new units of Section 514/516 Farm Labor Housing has been steadily dropping over the past 25 years. This decrease in housing unit development may be due partially to the fact that development funding has not kept pace with rising development and construction costs. This decline culminates in an aging housing stock, with the majority of units over 25 years old.[1]

Recent economic, social, and political developments in the United States continue to change the landscape for farmworkers. Today, farmworkers live in poverty at more than twice the national rate and are six times more likely to live in crowded homes than are others across the nation. While reliable data are limited, available information indicates that the nation's farm laborers are less mobile, and are more often settled in local communities than 10 years ago. While most of these developments are generally positive, the social, economic, and housing conditions that many farmworkers experience are still precarious.

As discussed in subsequent papers here, farmworker housing conditions are linked in many diverse ways to the overall health of farmworkers and their families. With the prevalence of crowded, substandard, and unaffordable farmworker housing conditions, an increased investment in housing for farmworkers is a critical component in a public health response to farmworker well-being.

This investment should be multifaceted and come from private as well as public sources. Farmworker housing needs have long outpaced the federal funding offered to improve the housing conditions. The agricultural industry, from local growers to multinational corporations, has a responsibility to ensure that an integral element of its workforce is appropriately compensated, housed, and protected.

An important consequence of farmworkers' decreasing migrancy, coupled with their continuing poverty and economic instability as seasonal work ebbs and flows, is that the stakes are higher every year, not just for farmworkers, but for the local communities in which they live. Overall community well-being will be determined by the types of neighborhoods which evolve. Sound farmworker housing policy will be a crucial component of sound community health policy.

Notes

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[13] NCFH. *Overview of America's Farmworkers*; JSRI, *Farmworker Housing*. East Lansing, Michigan; HAC. *USDA Section 514/516*.
[14] "Farmworker Justice. H-2A. *Guestworker Program: Introduction to the H-2A Program.* January 2010.
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