Farmworker Health

COVID-19 and Beyond

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Campesinos Sin Fronteras
Our mission is to create practical solutions at the intersection of vulnerability, migration, and health.

We envision a world based on health justice and equity, where migration is never an impediment to well-being.
A Force for Health Justice

- Cutting Edge Programming
- Resources and Dissemination
- Advocacy and Policy
- Research and Knowledge Mobilization
- Clinical Support and Capacity Building
Michigan's asparagus harvest seemed to go well, then the COVID-19 outbreaks came.
“Essential” workers

- Farmworkers
- Meat, Chicken and Seafood processors
- Dairy workers
COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Immigrants and other people of color the most.

- Hispanic or Latinx in comparison to White, Non-Hispanic
  - 1.5 x Cases
  - 2.3 x Hospitalization
  - 1.1 x Death

Source: CDC, 03/2022
1 Million Farmworkers Infected with COVID-19

Food and Agriculture Vulnerability Index
Purdue University
Social Determinants of COVID-19 Mortality

In rural counties (n=2826), counties with more non-English speaking households and more farmworkers had significantly higher levels of mortality, as did counties with higher levels of poverty and more residents over the age of 65.

Fielding-Miller et. al October 2020
CHAMACOS COVID-19 Study

• 1107 farmworkers in CA
• 4-fold higher SARS-CoV-2 test positive fraction among farmworkers
• Both household and workplace exposures associated with infection
• Those who spoke Indigenous languages at home, had lower levels of formal education, and lived in rural communities had a higher prevalence of infection
  • Disparities even within this very low-income population
2020 - Farmworkers receive Hispanic Heritage Heroes Award
Blame workers

• “Home and social conditions” cause of meatpacking outbreaks

• “Living Circumstances in Certain Cultures”

• “They go to work in school buses and they’re all packed in there like sardines.”
Farmworkers

“You hear the job that we do is essential, but you realize as a worker you are not treated as essential. You are treated as dispensable.”

Gerardo Reyes Chavez, Coalition for Immokalee Workers
Public Health Policy v. Worker Benefits

- No Paid Sick Leave
- Limited Testing
  - Few requirements
- Limited PPE
- Housing
- Transportation
“We’re seeing the impact when you don’t have [sufficient] regulations, and [workplaces] are unprepared.”

Dr. Eva Galvez, Virginia Garcia Health Center
National Labor Relations Act 1935

- No federal protection for agricultural workers to bargain collectively
- Some states have legalized collective bargaining by agricultural workers
Fair Labor Standards Act 1938

- No minimum wage requirement for small farm employers
- Overtime exemption for all agricultural employees
- Child labor permitted
Farmworker Exceptionalism

- Workers’ compensation
- Few OSHA standards to protect farmworkers
  - Water and sanitation, 1987
  - Only farms with 11 workers or housing
- EPA not OSHA - Pesticides
Economic Impact
Food Insecurity
Mental Health
Climate Crisis
Natural Disasters
November 16, 2020
10:40 p.m. EST
Near the town of Haulover, Nicaragua
155 mph
Category 4 Hurricane
Hunger - Deepening food crisis contributing to migration

- Guatemala 6th highest chronic malnutrition rate in the world
- Acute cases double from 2019 to 2020
- Failed harvests linked to climate change
  - Natural disasters and floods
Drought
Wildfires
Extreme heat kills more people than hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, and lightning combined. As climate change becomes more severe it is predicted that heat-related deaths will increase substantially.
Farmworkers are 20 times more likely to die from heat related illness than other workers.
Before and During COVID-19 many risks remain the same:

- Crowded housing
- Transportation
- Pesticide and chemical exposure
- Injuries
- Infectious disease
- Carbon monoxide poisoning
- Chronic illnesses
Vulnerabilities

- Cultural and language differences
- Low-wage
- Inherent dangers and health risks of occupation
- Immigration status
- Migratory lifestyle
- Lack access to health care, insurance or financial resources
- Lack of regulatory protection
Partnerships

- Workers
- Community Health Centers
- Employers
- Other Community Based Organizations
- State and Local Health Departments
Farmworkers and COVID-19: Community-Based Partnerships to Address Health and Safety

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See also Borrelli and Kapadia, p. 1366, and the Social Justice for Marginalized Communities section, pp. 1466-1472.

As COVID-19 spread rapidly throughout the United States, among the populations most disproportionately affected were those on the front lines of the food system, the majority of the estimated 2 million farmworkers in the United States, who have worked through the pandemic as “essential workers” to ensure the functioning of our food systems, are Latino, immigrant, and those with low incomes, nearly half lack authorization to work in the United States. Despite their essential status, farmworkers were left vulnerable to COVID-19 because of the lack of workplace protections overlaid with numerous occupational and social factors. Amid the pandemic, however, new partnerships and community initiatives between farm employers and clinicians, advocates, and public health authorities serving farmworkers made unprecedented efforts to support the health and safety of farmworkers and their families in the absence of sufficient government response.

Farmworkers and their families are frequently subject to overlapping and amplifying occupational and social stressors, which can affect their health and increase their risk of COVID-19. Farmworkers lack many of the basic occupational protections afforded to other workers, which may affect the farmer, but intensify the lack of protection and poverty and health among farmworkers. Farmworkers have been historically excluded from basic labor laws, such as the right to organize, minimum wage, and paid sick leave, although they are covered by state law. Without these protections, farmworkers and their families are more likely to be sickened by COVID-19. Without these protections, farmworkers and their families are more likely to be sickened by COVID-19.

Additionally, farmworkers have been systematically excluded from health and safety regulations that are afforded to other workers. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration, for instance, is prohibited from using federal funds for occupational safety enforcement or farm employees. Regardless of whether or not farmworkers and their families are exposed, many of our nation’s farmworkers are unprotected, placing them and their families at risk of acquiring COVID-19.

Lessons Learned

Long history of agricultural exceptionalism reared its ugly head during COVID, furthering disparities and injustices.

Core regulations and policies focusing on farmworker health and safety must be strengthened.
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