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## Farmworkers with Families

### Part 2 of 4: Immigrants and the Community

by

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#### ***What is the Issue?***

America's hired farm workforce has changed considerably in the last decade, largely a consequence of large numbers of Mexicans coming to the United States to work, especially in agriculture. There has also been a growing tendency of farmworkers to settle in rural communities together with their immediate family. Often these workers no longer migrate from place to place following the agricultural harvest. Instead the farmworkers and their families put down roots and begin to become integrated into the social and economic life of the community. *But how and to what extent does this community integration occur? How do these foreigners who have little familiarity with American culture become integrated into the community?* Answers to these questions have practical importance to farmers interested in retaining their workforce, service providers working to improve farmworker well-being and communities interested in helping the new residents contribute to community development.

Previous studies have shown that farmworkers who have family with them are more likely to settle in the U.S. This report focuses on farmworkers who have family in

the U.S. and how they gain access to the things they need to live in the community, including friendships with Americans who can help them become integrated into the social and economic life of the community.

#### ***What are the Highlights?***

\* The ethnic composition of the agricultural work force has changed in the last decade. Currently, Hispanics/Latinos are the predominant ethnic group. Most of the Latinos are of Mexican origin, and Mexicans comprise 80 percent of farmworkers nationwide, and 95 percent in this study. The presence of Mexicans in New York agricultural labor force started to increase steadily in the early nineties.

\* Mexican origin workers in our study have been working in the United States an average of 6 years, 80 percent are male, half report being married and are on average, 30 years old. Educational attainment of farmworkers is relatively low, with an average of 6.5 years. Approximately a third reported they could understand and/or speak English.

\* More farmworkers in New York are staying in the area year-round, and many have family living with them.

\* Approximately 60 percent of the workers reported having family in New York. About 30 percent have a wife and/or children living in the U.S., and these workers have different characteristics than others.

\* Workers with immediate family (i.e. a spouse and /or children) present have been in the U.S. longer, are more likely to be married, are about 4 years older, and have completed slightly more schooling.

\* Workers with immediate family present have higher language proficiency than others. Sixty percent said they could *understand* English compared to 29 percent of others, and about half said they could *speak* English, compared to 23 percent of others with no family present.

\* Those with family present are very self-reliant in meeting various needs. For example, about two-thirds of those with family present reported that on their own they had obtained drivers license, opened a bank account and applied for citizenship.

\* Farmworkers with family who also had English language skills were more self-reliant in meeting some needs. A higher proportion of workers who could read and write in English applied for a driver's license, opened a bank account, applied for a work permit or citizenship, and were able to find a non-farm job on their own.

\* The ability to establish friendships with other groups in the community improved with language skills. More than half of those who could read and write in English reported having American friends.

\* Those with families present who had established friendships with Americans in the community were twice as likely to have

received help in participating in social and community activities such as going to church, playing sports, finding a school for their children and attending festivals or parties, all of which provide opportunities to become more integrated into the life of the community.

### ***How was the project conducted?***

To help us understand the factors that both promote and limit the integration of immigrants into rural communities, we chose five New York agricultural communities in different economic and social contexts that have relied heavily on hired farm labor. Each community has a minority population of some significance and a history of immigrant farmworkers settling there. Our qualitative data are drawn from interviews with key informants and focus groups with foreign-born farmworkers. We also conducted focus groups with white non-immigrant residents in the communities. Key informants included political, business, and religious leaders; police and school officials; farmers; and nongovernmental social service providers. The quantitative data are from a survey of farm workers. Details on our data and their collection are provided in the full report which can be viewed at [www.rnyu.cornell.edu/poverty\\_and\\_social\\_inequality](http://www.rnyu.cornell.edu/poverty_and_social_inequality).

