

# The Michigan Farmworker Project

Improving Working and Living Conditions for Michigan Farmworkers amid the COVID-19 Pandemic

## **Summary**

The Michigan Farmworker Project conducted by University of Michigan School of Public Health researchers, found that farmworkers (migrant, seasonal, and H-2A)—considered "essential workers"—faced challenging working and living conditions that are critical to address during the COVID-19 pandemic. Efforts to limit COVID-19 risks in this population require an evidence-based, multifactorial approach that involves workers, employees, and stakeholders. We recommend that enforcement actions be taken to ensure compliance with COVID-19 protection and mitigation guidelines instead of reliance on self-compliance. Recommendations should be provided to farmworkers regardless of their legal status.

#### What did the researchers do?

The Michigan Farmworker Project (MFP) was conducted in the Summer of 2019 as a communityengaged qualitative study that aimed to provide a deeper understanding of the complex working and living conditions of migrant and seasonal farmworkers in the state of Michigan. With stakeholders, we discussed their current knowledge, experiences and barriers to the adoption of the 15 recommendations made by the Michigan Civil Rights Commission of 2010 and 2019 in response to the Report on the Conditions of Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers in Michigan. We also sought to understand gaps in service provision and recommendations from farmworkers themselves to address their current working and living conditions from the perspective of farmworkers and stakeholders who provide services directly to farmworkers health, legal, outreach, and educational services. We conducted 55 in-depth interviews (with 19 female farmworkers, 15 male farmworkers and 21 key stakeholders) in various rural areas of Michigan.



### **Purpose**

This diagram describes preliminary findings from the Michigan Farmworker Project and highlights the challenging working and living conditions that Michigan farmworkers face, which may be exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic. We present recommendations to improve working conditions, worker safety, and the overall well-being of Michigan farmworkers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### The Michigan Farmworker Project Research Team

- Principal Investigator: Alexis Handal, PhD, MPH, Associate Professor, Department of Epidemiology
- Co-Investigator, Senior Study Coordinator and Field interviewer: Lisbeth Iglesias-Ríos, PhD, MPH, Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Department of Epidemiology
- Co-Investigator: Marie O'Neill, PhD, Professor, Department of Epidemiology and Department of Environmental Health Sciences
- Co-Investigator: Paul Fleming, PhD, Assistant Professor, Department of Health Behavior and Health Education
- Research Assistant: Mislael Valentín Cortés, MPH, MSW



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### What's happening?

#### Working conditions Psychosocial conditions **Health conditions** Living conditions Limited access to proper hygiene Prejudice and differential attitudes - Crowded living conditions in housing Limited or no access to healthcare and crowded working conditions and treatment against workers based on race and ethnicity - High prevalence of chronic medical - Physically and mentally demanding Housing provisions are very minimal Retaliation from growers and and often shared by multiple - Little or no protective equipment contractors (e.g. threats to report occupants Inability to purchase or afford the farmworkers to immigration - Minimal information and education - Substandard and unhygienic living enforcement) - Poor mental health and need for conditions in some agricultural labor - Threats and reprisal if workers complain about health, safety, and - Low decision-making power about mental health services work and living conditions offered to working conditions - Poor quality of drinking water at labor camps and in the fields Environmental exposures (i.e. pesticides, chemicals, & extreme weather conditions) High risk for COVID-19 infection and health complications What can **Public Health & Healthcare** Promoting a Healthy & Safe Access to Essential Needs Working Environment be done? Consistent action plan of safety and Deploy mobile health units for Ongoing information about COVID-19 testing and monitoring workplace prevention of COVID-19 in More access to soap and clean native language Identify health care organizations in water in camps and worksites labor camp regions and verify Social distancing measures in all eligibility, fee for services, access to areas and provide enhanced PPE medical interpreters, and type of Free and regular testing and treatment medical services provided 15+ day paid sick leave - Provide social-distanced living Provide effective ventilation among arrangements Employers, contractors, and growers living and working quarters should not retaliate against sick - Families should have their own living Enforcement to ensure compliance workers with sanitation requirements in unit instead of sharing units agricultural labor camps and in fields Employers, contractors, and growers should not use as leverage to hire H2A workers and discriminate against workers with children, women, and U.S. based workers. Prevention & mitigation of potential COVID-19 effects

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