

# HOUSING CONDITIONS FOR FARMWORKERS



## HAC

## Rural Research Report

More than 1 million people work harvesting fields, farms, and orchards in the United States. Farmworkers, who are often ethnic minorities or immigrants, earn low wages and experience working conditions that hinder their ability to access affordable and quality housing. Farmworker housing conditions are further exacerbated by legal, cultural, and geographic circumstances that often keep this population outside of the mainstream and contribute to their economic marginalization.



Housing Assistance Council

September, 2013

Housing Assistance Council  
1025 Vermont Avenue, N.W.  
Suite 606  
Washington, DC 20005  
202-842-8600 (voice)  
202-347-3441 (fax)  
[hac@ruralhome.org](mailto:hac@ruralhome.org)  
<http://www.ruralhome.org>

This Research Report was prepared by the Housing Assistance Council (HAC). Portions of this Report were excerpted from HAC's report, *Taking Stock: Rural People, Poverty and Housing in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Part of the work that provided the basis for this publication was supported by funding under Cooperative Agreement H-21615 CA with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). HAC is solely responsible for the accuracy of the statements and interpretations contained in this publication and such interpretations do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Government.

The Housing Assistance Council (HAC), founded in 1971, is a non-profit corporation that supports the development of rural low-income housing nationwide. HAC provides technical housing services, loans from a revolving fund, housing program and policy assistance, research and demonstration projects, and training and information services. HAC is an equal opportunity lender.

HAC's mission is to improve housing conditions for the rural poor, with an emphasis on the poorest of the poor in the most rural places.

## FARMWORKERS\*

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 2.5 million people work harvesting fields, farms, and orchards in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Among the poorest groups in the nation, farmworkers earn low wages and experience working conditions that hinder their ability to access affordable quality housing. The condition of farmworkers is further exacerbated by a plethora of legal, cultural, and geographic circumstances that often keeps this population in the shadows of American society and contributes to their economic marginalization.

Farmworkers in the United States have often been ethnic minorities or immigrants. A pattern has evolved over the past few decades: farm work, which involves physically demanding labor, often serves as entry-level employment for new workers, who eventually move out of farm labor and into other forms of employment. They are replaced by others, who go through the same cycle. Economic, political, technological, and national security transitions are changing the landscape of migrant and seasonal labor. 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 one place all year. These developments are creating new and different demands on housing, while the

conditions of substandard, unaffordable, and crowded housing remain unchanged for numerous farmworkers in America today.

Data for farmworkers are generally nonexistent in large-scale surveys and data collection instruments such as the 2010 Census or the American Community Survey. The National Agricultural Workers Study (NAWS) provides some insight into the characteristics of farmworkers in the United States and serves as the basis of information presented in this report. 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 data set.

### SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS

Many factors contribute to the evolution of farmworkers in the United States, but two events of the last decade in particular have had significant impacts on farming and harvesting labor. In the Great Recession 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.

Homeland security concerns in the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks have also shaped farmworker demographics. Before September 11, many farmworkers would work in the United States and visit their families several times a year in other countries. Now, farmworkers and others find it easy enough to exit the United States, but getting back into the country has become much more difficult.<sup>2</sup> Increasingly, farmworkers are remaining in the United States for longer periods or relocating their families to make their work situation less precarious. The circumstances are altering the demographic composition of farmworker populations such that families are now more prevalent than single men.<sup>3</sup>

\*Unless otherwise noted, the figures and statistics in the farmworker analysis come from HAC tabulations of the 2005 to 2009 NAWS data. NAWS provides vital information on the conditions of farmworkers. However, these surveys have distinct limits. The NAWS provides data estimates for active farmworkers only, includes only 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. NAWS conducts surveys, not enumerations, so its data are not as representative as those of the decennial Census. The NAWS does not allow for an estimate of the total farmworker population or households.

Farmworkers in the United States are largely ethnic minorities or immigrants. Approximately 78 percent of all farmworkers are of Hispanic heritage. Much has been reported about how the rapidly growing Hispanic population has impacted the face as well as the economies of many areas of the United States. The Hispanic population increased by 15 million between 2000 and 2010 and now comprises 16 percent of U.S. residents. This growth is equal to four times the amount of the overall population growth in the United States throughout the decade.<sup>4</sup>

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. In fact, 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 percent of unauthorized workers are employed in agriculture.<sup>5</sup>

Fifty percent of the persons engaged in U.S. farm work are legal residents of the United States (30 percent are citizens and 20 percent are legal permanent residents), while the other 50 percent are undocumented workers. While the rate of unauthorized workers has remained consistent at about one-half of the farm worker population over the past decade, an increasing share of immigrant crop workers are naturalizing.<sup>6</sup> The rate of citizen farmworkers increased from 22 percent in 1998 to 30 percent in 2009. Additionally, the share of “mixed status” families among farmworkers is increasing. In 1998 only 4 percent of farmworkers lived in a household with both citizen and unauthorized family members.<sup>7</sup> By 2009, the incidence of mixed-status families among farmworkers had increased to 12 percent.

#### LEGAL STATUS OF FARMWORKERS IS EVENLY SPLIT

Legal Status of Farmworkers, 2005-2009

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

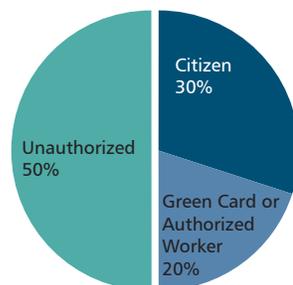


Figure 1

The majority (nearly three-quarters) of farmworkers were born outside the United States, while 27 percent were born in the United States or Puerto Rico. The proportion of foreign born farmworkers is down from 81 percent in 1998. Currently, farmworkers in the United States are predominantly of Mexican descent or are immigrants from Mexico. Seventy percent of U.S. farmworkers were born in Mexico and another 4 percent were born in other Latin and South American countries. Consistent with overall immigration trends and patterns, the Mexican-born farmworker population is down from 77 percent in 1998.

#### FARMWORKERS ARE PREDOMINATELY IMMIGRANTS, AND MOST ARE FROM MEXICO

Farmworker Country of Birth

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

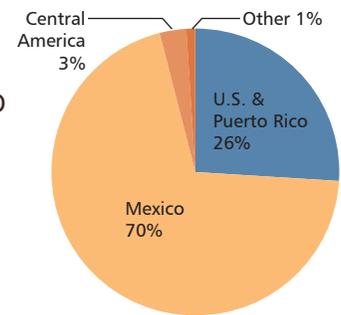


Figure 2

On average, immigrant farmworkers have resided in the United States for 15 years. Residency figures signal a shift in the demographics of farmworkers, with farmworkers now entering the United States earlier and staying in this country longer than was once the case. More than 80 percent of farmworkers entered the United States before 2005. Estimates indicate that in 1988, 27 percent of immigrant farmworkers had resided in the United States for over 15 years. Today more than 40 percent of immigrant farmworkers have lived in the United States for 15 years or more.

Consistent with the nature and physical demands of their occupation, farmworkers are largely adults who tend to be slightly younger than the general population. In 1998 the median age of farmworkers was 31 years, but by 2009 the farmworker median age had increased to 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. While some farmworkers live in a family unit, others travel, work, and live in groups of

single men.<sup>8</sup> The vast majority of farmworkers (78 percent) are males. More than half of all farmworkers are married, but many do not live with their families. Approximately 44 percent of farmworkers' spouses live with them. Likewise 45 percent of farmworkers have children, but only half of those parents live with their children.

## ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

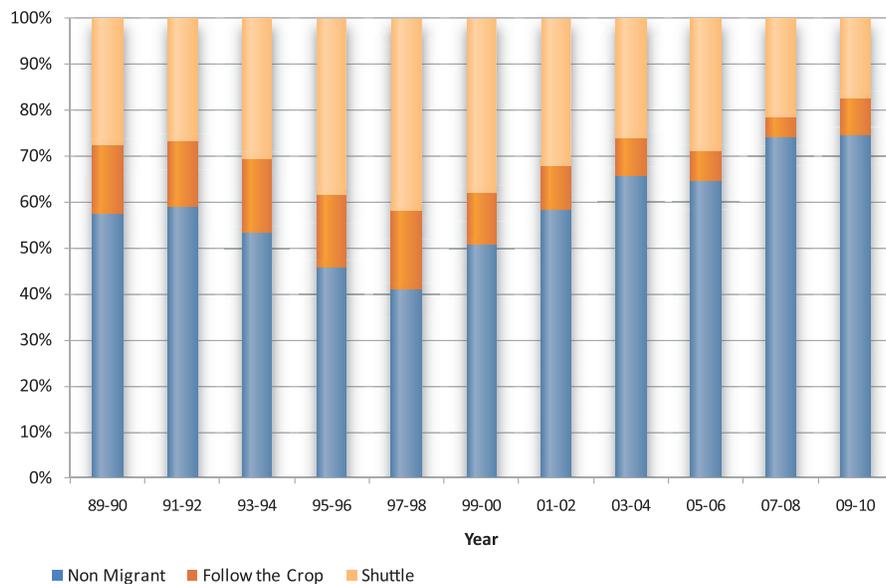
Harvesting crops is largely low-wage employment, but for many, it serves as a stepping-stone into higher paid and better work options. Non-English speaking and undocumented workers are at increased risk of being victims of labor rights violations, and they are the target of anti-immigrant sentiment. Yet, while the economy and mechanization have reduced the need for farm labor, crops are largely still harvested by hand and a substantial number of agricultural jobs still exist in the United States.

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 in past decades. 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.<sup>9</sup>

In recent years, migration patterns appear to have changed. In the past decade, the proportion of migratory farmworkers declined substantially, and by 2009 an estimated 70 percent of farmworkers remained in the same place throughout the year. Increasingly, farmworkers are settling in and traveling shorter distances to work while generally remaining in a specific

### FARMWORKERS ARE BECOMING LESS MOBILE

Farmworker Migrant Worker Status, 1989-2010



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

Figure 3

geographic area. 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 percent of farmworkers were hired by only one farm employer for the year, up from 65 percent in 1998.

An additional 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. While work patterns are changing for this group, many farmworkers still travel to different regions and different states following crop seasons and labor demand. Roughly 30 percent of farmworkers are still considered migrant workers.

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 percent of all households nationally earn under \$20,000 per year.<sup>10</sup> While farmworkers have very low incomes, their average hourly earnings increased nominally and in real terms over the past decade. Yet these income gains do not compare with those gained by nonfarm workers.<sup>11</sup>

Approximately 25 percent of farmworkers have below-poverty family incomes, roughly twice the national rate of poverty. Poverty rates are decreasing for farmworkers, however. In 1998, approximately 46 percent of farmworkers had incomes below poverty level compared to 25 percent today. The reduction is likely related to the greater stability of the labor force. By 2009, farmworkers were working more days of the year, earning higher wages, and living more often in two-income households than in 1998.\*

Despite low incomes and periodic unemployment, most farmworkers do not use public assistance programs. Between 2007 and 2009, an estimated 43 percent of farmworkers accessed need and contribution assistance programs, an increase from the 35 percent 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 – Medicaid; the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children program (WIC); and food assistance.<sup>12</sup>

## FARMWORKER HOUSING CONDITIONS

The shift away from migrant labor toward a year-round workforce as well as the transition of farmworkers into other industries added pressure on housing during the decade. The decrease in farmworker mobility has affected 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 advanced technologies, the stress on rural communities and an inadequate farmworker housing stock remains.

Because of the nature of their employment and working conditions, farmworker housing options are often substantially different from others nationwide in terms of arrangement, costs, and quality. Farmworker housing may be provided by the private market or the employer. Most farmworkers (85 percent) access their housing

through the private market. More than 60 percent of farmworker-occupied housing units are rented and approximately 35 percent are owner-occupied. The private housing market often fails to meet the needs of farmworkers, however. In rural communities, rental housing is not as plentiful as it is in urban areas. Additionally, in many instances rental properties can only be acquired with a security deposit, a credit check, and a long-term commitment, requirements that often conflict with the unique conditions of the farm labor industry.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, because private housing is typically not subject to standards or regulations, units available to farmworkers may be substandard and expensive for farmworkers.

Roughly 13 percent of farmworker housing units are employer owned and, among these, 83 percent are provided free of charge to the workers. The prevalence of employer-owned housing has declined markedly since 1995, when nearly 30 percent 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 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.<sup>14</sup> Increasingly, regulations combined with the costs of administration and maintenance of housing have dissuaded many growers from providing housing to workers.<sup>15</sup>



\*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 percent of all crop workers from NAWS data. If the earnings of these omitted workers were calculated, the share of farmworkers with incomes below poverty level would likely be higher.

**GUESTWORKERS: ARE H-2A VISAS AN IMPROVEMENT TO FARM WORK AND FARMWORKERS?**

Agricultural guest worker or “H-2A” visas have generated increased controversy in the farm labor community over the past decade. The H-2A 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.<sup>16</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup> 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 30,000 H-2A visas are issued for agricultural work annually in the United States.<sup>18</sup>

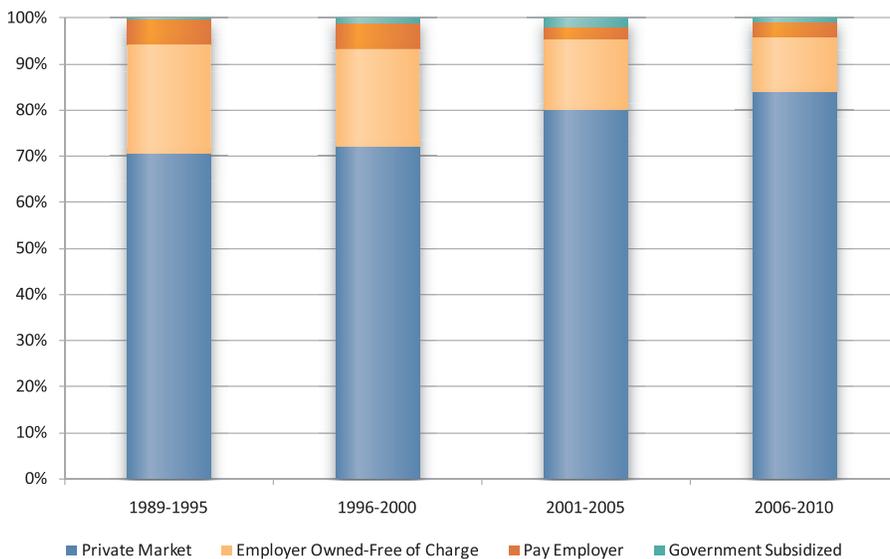
The H-2A program requires employers to provide free housing or pay for workers’ housing. Additionally the housing must be inspected and certified in advance to ensure that it complies with applicable health and safety standards. While these obligations are intended to promote the safety and well-being of guest workers, documented abuses of the program and employees have been reported over the past few years.<sup>19</sup> The remote and rural nature of many facilities housing H-2A 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 H-2A farmworkers.

Farmworker housing may also be categorized as on farm or off farm housing. During the Depression era and after, farmworkers in 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 developments. Since then, growers generally have been less involved in the housing of farmworkers.<sup>20</sup> 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; it is typically of lower quality than off-farm housing.

The vast majority of farmworker housing units (85 percent) are located in off-farm settings, with the remaining 15 percent 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 percent of farmworker housing was off the farm.

**EMPLOYER PROVIDED HOUSING IS ON THE DECLINE**

Farmworker Housing Arrangement, 1989-2010



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

Figure 4

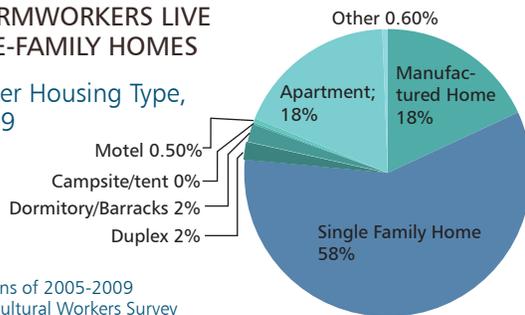
Farmworkers are much more likely to rent their homes than are U.S. residents as a whole. Only one-quarter of farmworkers own a home or manufactured home in the United States, compared to nearly two-thirds of all households in the United States. Forty percent of farmworkers are estimated to own a home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

Farmworkers in the U.S. most commonly live in single-family homes (58 percent), but single-family homes are prevalent throughout the rural U.S. The shares of farmworkers living in apartments and manufactured homes are similar at approximately 18 percent for each. A more telling indicator of the precarious nature of farmwork-

er housing arrangements is the number that live in dormitory or barracks settings (2 percent) and tents, motels, or other housing structures (1 percent).

### MOST FARMWORKERS LIVE IN SINGLE-FAMILY HOMES

Farmworker Housing Type, 2005-2009



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

Figure 5

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. Crowded units include those with more than one person per room (excluding bathrooms). Excluding dormitories and barracks (structures designed for high occupancy), almost 31 percent 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 percent of apartments housing farmworkers and one-half of duplexes contain more than one person per room.

NAWS does not provide detailed information about housing quality or conditions; however, a survey of farmworker housing conditions conducted by HAC in the early 2000s estimated that 17 percent of farmworker housing units were severely substandard and an additional 16 percent were moderately substandard. Farmworkers in manufactured homes were more likely to experience substandard living conditions, with 44 percent of manufactured homes being classified as moderately or severely inadequate.<sup>21</sup>

Substandard and structurally deficient conditions are endemic to farmworker housing; however, they are often exacerbated by crowding or lack of affordability. Approximately 20 percent of farmworker hous-

### THE DUROVILLE QUANDARY

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 is largely inhabited by farmworkers, with an estimated 2,000 to 6,000 migrant workers living in the park’s several hundred manufactured homes.<sup>22</sup> Duroville gained national attention because of its deplorable housing conditions and the legal battles surrounding its continued operation. Duroville residents live in very old mobile homes amidst unsafe and unsanitary conditions including open sewage, hazardous electrical wiring, and packs of wild dogs.<sup>23</sup> In response to numerous health and housing violations, the U.S. Attorney’s Office on behalf of the Bureau of Indian Affairs sought to have the park closed in 2009. A contentious and complicated legal battle ensued. Ultimately, Duroville remained open because closing the park, despite the obvious safety and health concerns there, would displace thousands of extremely poor residents with very few, if any, other viable housing options. While concerned affordable housing advocates and community groups have attempted to remedy the situation at Duroville, no practical or reasonable solution has been achieved as of late 2012, leaving thousands of farmworkers to live in squalor.

While living conditions at Duroville are unthinkable to most Americans, hundreds of other substandard manufactured home parks across the nation 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.



ing units surveyed by HAC were both substandard and crowded. In 11 percent of all units surveyed both substandard conditions and cost burden existed, and 6 percent suffered all three housing deficiencies: substandard, crowded, and unaffordable.<sup>24</sup> These units with numerous serious problems 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.

## ADDRESSING THE NEEDS

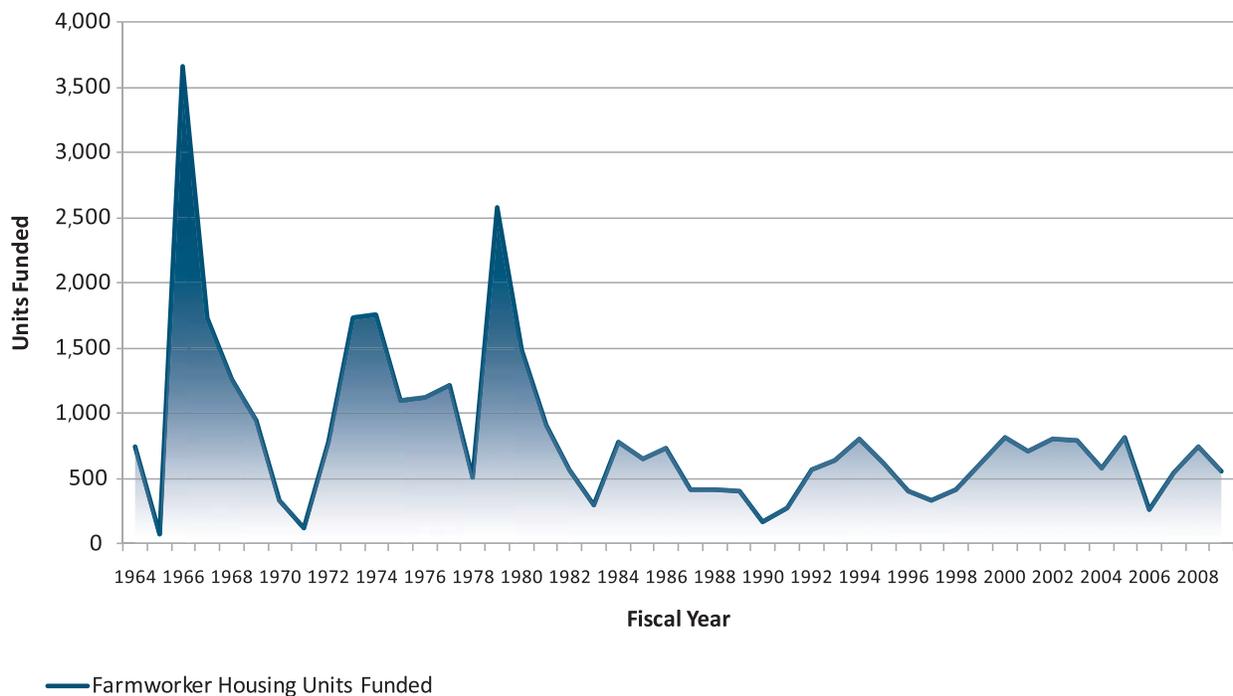
Less than 1 percent of farmworkers are estimated to receive any form of affordable housing assistance from a state, local, or federal government entity. The federal

government has been working to combat farmworker housing problems for more than 40 years through grant and loan programs administered through various federal departments and initiatives. One important farmworker housing resource is the USDA Section 514/516 Farm Labor Housing program that provides funding to buy, build, improve, or repair housing for farm laborers.\* The Section 514/516 program alleviates 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-

### PRODUCTION OF FEDERALLY FUNDED FARMWORKER HOUSING HAS DECLINED

USDA Section 514/516 Farm Labor Housing Program, FY1962 – FY2009



Source:  
HAC Tabulations of USDA Data

Figure 6

\*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.

farm properties tend to include 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.

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 due to inflation. This decline culminates in an aging housing stock with the majority of units over 25 years old.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to federal efforts, recent economic, social, and political developments in the United States continue to change the landscape for farmworkers. While reliable data are scarce, available information indicates that the nation's farm laborers are less mobile,

have more work experience, and are more stable 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. 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.

With the prevalence of crowded, substandard, and unaffordable farmworker housing conditions, an increased investment in housing for farmworkers is critical. This investment should be multifaceted and come from private as well as public sources. 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. Additionally, farmworker housing needs have long outpaced the federal funding offered to improve the housing conditions.



## KERN COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

Kern County's agricultural relevance reaches back to a time when California's Central Valley was an inland sea, which made the San Joaquin Valley a highly fertile agricultural region. The San Joaquin Valley has been referred to as America's Salad Bowl, attracting farmworkers to labor in the productive fields for over a century. Roughly the same size as Massachusetts, Kern County stretches from the agriculture and oil regions of the San Joaquin Valley in the west to the Mojave Desert in the east. Kern County is a metropolitan county and the largest city, Bakersfield, is home to 347,483.

Just outside Bakersfield are small towns whose residents rely on agricultural production for their livelihood. Today, these towns are largely Hispanic but in the past they were occupied by "Okies" who migrated west during the Dust Bowl of the 1930s and inspired John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. Recent demographic changes have moved populations towards larger towns and cities. Hispanics are now the majority population group in Kern County, yet the racial and ethnic segregation noted in past decades has continued and become more drastic. Seventy percent or more of the population in every Kern County town except Bakersfield and one other town consists of a single racial or ethnic group. Nearly 20 percent of the population of Kern County is foreign born and approximately 13.8 percent are non-citizens, including both documented and undocumented persons.<sup>26</sup>

Reflecting national trends, an increasing number of farmworkers are opting to remain in Kern County where farm employment is available nearly year-round. Of the remaining migrants, some travel an established route from southern Texas to Arizona or northern Mexico in the late winter, eventually making their way up through California in the summer and then back again in the fall. Others are skilled in certain crops and follow the harvest around the Valley.<sup>27</sup>

In 2002, the economy in Kern County was largely stable and insulated from swings in the state's economy.<sup>28</sup> While the county weathered the 2001 recession without significant impacts, the 2008 recession hit the area hard. A booming construction industry that lured workers from the fields ground to a halt with the housing collapse and unemployment rates in the area nearly doubled.<sup>29</sup>

Accurate data on farmworker housing conditions are minimal and conditions range widely from homeownership and subsidized rental units to living in garages, campers, cars, and fields. Conditions are particularly poor for undocumented farmworkers who are unable to access subsidized housing units, including those financed by USDA Rural Development (RD), and migrant farmworkers.<sup>30</sup> For farmworkers following the migrant stream, finding decent, affordable housing during their temporary stay in the area can be extremely difficult.

Local practitioners believe that there are more affordable units available to farmworkers now than in past years. However, poor housing conditions are still prevalent among Kern County farmworkers, as are dismal working conditions and low pay. With increasing numbers of undocumented farmworkers, conditions are unlikely to improve because they cannot access many existing subsidized units and face other abuses due to their immigration status.

Numerous organizations are willing to help the people who plant and harvest the country's food, regardless of documentation. Movements are also afoot to make pathways to citizenship more accessible for these workers, but so far there have been no major breakthroughs. In the next decade, Kern County will likely become a majority-minority county as the Hispanic population grows to constitute more than 50 percent of the population. Any changes brought by this demographic shift remains to be seen.

### "LOTS OF WORK, LITTLE PAY": THE FARMWORKER REALITY

In 1984, when Oscar\* began working in the fields as a farmworker, he was able to maintain a family on the hourly wage of \$3.25. Twenty years later, in 2004, Oscar left the fields because wages had failed to keep up with the increasing cost of living. As his mother used to say "mucho trabajo, poco dinero" ("lots of work, little pay"). Today he drives a taxi in Bakersfield and says that a typical farmworker earns a weekly wage of \$300 but often must pay \$600 or more for a monthly rent. Today, Oscar says immigrants are returning to their home countries, disappointed in the promise of a better life in the United States.

\*Name has been changed



## ENDNOTES

1. David A. Strauss, "Farm Labor Housing: An Overview," *Rural Voices* 10:2 (2006): 2-6.
2. Housing Assistance Council (HAC), USDA Section 514/516 Farmworker Housing: Existing Stock and Changing Needs (Washington, D.C.: Housing Assistance Council, 2006).
3. *Ibid.*
4. HAC tabulations of the 2010 Census of Population and Housing.
5. Jeffrey S. Passell, *Unauthorized Migrants: Number and Characteristics* (Washington, D.C.: Pew Hispanic Center, 2005), <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/46.pdf>.
6. Daniel Carroll, Anne Georges, and Russell Saltz, "Changing Characteristics of U.S. Farmworkers: 21 Years of Findings from the National Agricultural Workers Survey" (paper presented at the Immigration Reform and Agriculture Conference, "Implications for Farmers, Farmworkers and Communities," University of California, May 2011).
7. *Ibid.*
8. National Center for Farmworker Health, Inc. (NCFH), *Overview of America's Farmworkers* (2002).
9. *Ibid.*
10. HAC tabulations of the U.S. Census Bureau's 2005-2009 American Community Survey.
11. Carroll et al., "Changing Characteristics of U.S. Farmworkers."
12. *Ibid.*
13. HAC, USDA Section 514/516.
14. Julian Samora Research Institute (JSRI), "JSRI Research Analyzes Farmworker Housing," *NEXO VIII* (1999): 1, 4-7, <http://www.jsri.msu.edu/pdfs/nexo/Nexo%20Fall%201999.pdf>.
15. NCFH, *Overview of America's Farmworkers*; JSRI, *Farmworker Housing*; HAC, USDA Section 514/516.
16. "H-2A Guestworker Program: Introduction to the H-2A Program," Farmworker Justice, January 2010.
17. Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 (INA), as amended (8 U.S.C. §§1101, 1184, and 1188); 20 C.F.R. 655 Subpart B and 29 C.F.R. Part 501.
18. "H-2A Guestworker Program: Introduction to the H-2A Program," Farmworker Justice, January 2010.
19. "Close to Slavery: Guestworker Programs in the United States," Southern Poverty Law Center, dated March 2007, <http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/publications/close-to-slavery-guestworker-programs-in-the-unitedstates>.
20. HAC, USDA Section 514/516.
21. HAC, *No Refuge from the Fields: Findings from a Survey of Farmworker Housing Conditions in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Housing Assistance Council, 2000).
22. Dan Barry, "Beside a Smoldering Dump, A Refuge of Sorts," *New York Times*, October 21, 2007.
23. David Kelly, "The Southland's Hidden Third World Slums," *Los Angeles Times*, March 26, 2007.
24. HAC, *No Refuge from the Fields: Findings from a Survey of Farmworker Housing Conditions in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Housing Assistance Council, 2000).
25. HAC, USDA Section 514/516.
26. Pat Malley, Senior Asset Manager Specialist, Self-Help Enterprises, interview by author, Bakersfield, California, April 25, 2011; Armando Aparicio, Area Specialist, U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development, interview by author, Bakersfield, California, April 26, 2011.
27. Steve Schilling, CEO, Clinica Sierra Vista, interview by author, Bakersfield, California, April 25, 2011.
28. Housing Assistance Council, *Taking Stock: Rural People, Poverty and Housing at the Turn of the 21st Century* (Washington, D.C.: Housing Assistance Council, 2002), 78.
29. Kern County Network for Children, *Report Card 2011* (Bakersfield, California: Kern County Network for Children, 2011), 2; Malley interview.
30. Aparicio interview.



# HAC

## **National**

1025 Vermont Avenue, NW  
Suite 606  
Washington, DC 20005  
202-842-8600  
202-347-3441 FAX  
[hac@ruralhome.org](mailto:hac@ruralhome.org)

## **Southeast**

600 West Peachtree Street, NW  
Suite 1500  
Atlanta, GA 30308  
404-892-4824  
404-892-1204 FAX  
[southeast@ruralhome.org](mailto:southeast@ruralhome.org)

## **Southwest**

3939 San Pedro, NE  
Suite C7  
Albuquerque, NM 87110  
505-883-1003  
505-883-1005 FAX  
[southwest@ruralhome.org](mailto:southwest@ruralhome.org)

## **Midwest**

10100 North Ambassador Drive  
Suite 310  
Kansas City, MO 64153  
816-880-0400  
816-880-0500 FAX  
[midwest@ruralhome.org](mailto:midwest@ruralhome.org)

## **West**

717 K Street, Suite 404  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
916-706-1836  
916-706-1849 FAX  
[western@ruralhome.org](mailto:western@ruralhome.org)

## **Connect**

[www.ruralhome.org](http://www.ruralhome.org)  
[twitter.com/RuralHome](https://twitter.com/RuralHome)  
[facebook.com/HousingAssistanceCouncil](https://facebook.com/HousingAssistanceCouncil)  
[linkedin.com/company/housing-assistance-council](https://linkedin.com/company/housing-assistance-council)