

Joint Testimony on 2020 MSFW Enumeration Profiles Study

March 10, 2020

Good morning Chairman VanWoerkom and Members of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture and Rural Development. I'm Dale Flores Freeman, Migrant Affairs Director, Department of Health and Human Services.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for requesting today's joint testimony. For my part, I will be sharing some information that we learned from our last agricultural worker study as well as what we are expecting to get out of our current study.

SLIDE #2

But first, I would like to share with you and the members of the subcommittee some basic information about agricultural workers. To begin with, it is helpful to think about ag workers as fitting into three types.

The first is migrant ag workers. This group of people is composed of workers who travel more than 75 miles for work. Many of these workers are from other states like Texas or Florida, but increasingly we have workers who come from Mexico or another foreign country through the H2A Immigration program for temporary agricultural workers.

Whether they come from another state or another country, they are here temporarily for agricultural work, primarily in harvest and packing operations, and then return to their home state or country.

The second type of worker is seasonal. They work in agriculture in Michigan, usually for long periods of the year. Although they may work alongside migrant workers, they are different because they can return home each evening. Many seasonal workers were migrant workers who settled down in Michigan.

The third type of worker is year-round. As their name implies, these agricultural workers have year round employment with same employer. Sometimes this is in year round packing operations, but increasingly this is also in dairy operations or meat or cheese processing.

In addition to these distinctions, it is also helpful to know that Michigan has the seventh highest population of agricultural workers.

SLIDE #3

The last time that the State of Michigan contracted for an Ag Worker Enumeration Study was in 2012-2013. This study provided three key pieces of information.

First, it provided county level estimates of migrant and seasonal ag worker populations. This was important for MDHHS and many other agencies because it helped to quantify and locate the numbers of these workers throughout the state. By doing so, we were able to compare the populations of farmworkers that we were serving with those found in the study and we were able to identify areas that may have been underserved.

Second, it provided estimates for the number of family members of these workers. For Health and Human Services, this was important because many of the services that we provide like food assistance and Medicaid are more likely to be needed by ag workers with families than by workers without families.

Third, it provided estimates of children by age group. Various migrant service agencies depend on this information because they provide services directed to children like migrant education and migrant head start.

SLIDE #4

As a result of this 2012-13 study, we found that there were 94,167 migrant and seasonal workers and their dependents. Of this number, 61,564 were migrant workers and their dependents. We also found that there 27,965 migrant children 19 years of age or younger.

SLIDE #5

The 2012-13 study also showed us that the top 5 counties for migrant and seasonal ag workers and their families were Ottawa and Van Buren, both with over 12,000, followed by Oceana, Berrien, and Allegan with 5 to 7 thousand.

Three of the next four counties were Kent, Muskegon, and Newaygo which along with Ottawa are part of Michigan's bountiful fruit ridge.

SLIDE #6

Prior to my presentation, Lee Gonzales went over some of the reasons why a new study was needed. To supplement this, I would like to share with you some of the ways in which this new study will be better than our last one.

In addition to provided updated estimates for migrant and seasonal workers, our new study will show how many H2A workers Michigan has and where they are located.

Because these H2A workers are foreign men, from non-English speaking countries and usually come without their families, their needs are quite different from a migrant worker who has lived in the US for much of his adult life and comes to Michigan with their spouse and their children. Understanding these differences can help us provide better service to each group.

The study will also be expanding our knowledge about seasonal and year round ag workers who are employed in Dairy and food processing jobs.

Another key difference between this study and the 2012-13 study is that it incorporates a sample survey of ag workers to find out more about their needs and experiences. The questions asked will help all participating branches of state government and private agencies to better identify gaps in service and opportunities for improvement.

SLIDE #7

Designing the parameters of the new study could not have been accomplished without the contributions from our state partners at :

- Agriculture and Rural Development,
- Civil Rights,
- Education, and
- Labor and Economic Opportunity

SLIDE #8

As well as our private agency partners at:

- Farm Bureau
- Farmworker Legal Services
- Michigan Primary Care Association
- Telamon's National Farmworker Jobs Program

In conclusion, I would like to thank Chairman Van Woerkom and the Subcommittee Members for today's opportunity.