

# The Occupational Health Status of Unauthorized Immigrant Farm Laborers

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## Overview

Analysis of associations between immigration status and occupational health. Although the Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing industry is the sector with the largest proportion of immigrant workers, many of whom lack authorization for U.S. employment, there are only two cross-sectional, occupation-based health surveys that have reported on the immigration status of workers: the National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS) and the California Agricultural Workers Health Survey (CAWHS). The NAWS finds a majority of U.S. crop farm workers lack authorization for employment. The data here and in a recent publication report occupational health findings from the CAWHS (Villarejo D & McCurdy SA, *J Agric Safe Health*, 2008, 14(2):135-146).

## Methods

The California Agricultural Workers Survey (CAWHS) was a statewide, multi-stage, cross-sectional household-based survey among randomly selected hired farm laborers during 1999. The CAWHS sample comprises 969 face-to-face interviews with a participation rate of 83%.

## Results

Tables 1 - 4 compare responses from foreign-born participants who said they were undocumented with those who indicated they were documented. Approximately 7% of male participants and 8% of female participants declined to disclose their immigration status.

As compared with workers who said they were documented, for both males and females, undocumented workers were:

- More likely to have worked fewer years in U.S. agriculture;
  - Less likely to work for a farm employer who offered health insurance.
- As compared with men who said they were documented, male undocumented workers were:
- Less likely to have ever mixed, loaded or applied pesticides in the U.S.
  - Less likely to operate machinery at their job;
  - Less likely to be knowledgeable about state-mandated workers compensation insurance;
  - More likely to have employer-provided drinking water and toilets.
  - More likely to live in severely crowded housing, often with five or more unrelated persons.
- As compared with women who said they were documented, female undocumented workers were:
- Less likely to have received Federally-mandated pesticide safety training.

## Conclusions

Most undocumented farm laborers in the sample were younger and less experienced than documented workers. Associated with this lower job status, male undocumented workers were less likely to operate machinery, or work with pesticides. Overall, undocumented farm laborers had less training in occupational safety and were less likely to know of their rights to workers compensation insurance.

Undocumented workers had less access to health care and health insurance, were more likely to be unaccompanied by family while working in the U.S., and more likely to live in severely crowded conditions than documented workers.

**Table 1 – Job Characteristics, Male Immigrant Farm Laborers California, 1999, N = 551**

Characteristic	Documented (n=372)	Undocumented (n=179)	p-value
Years U.S. farm work (median)	16	5	<0.001
Last pay/week (1999\$, median)	\$350	\$290	0.280
Employer offers health insurance	22%	12%	0.003
Mix/load/apply pesticides in U.S.	24%	12%	0.003
Pesticide safety training-EVER	64%	55%	0.178
Operate machinery at job	55%	23%	<0.001
Eligible for workers comp?	57%	28%	<0.001
Employer provides drink water	76%	90%	0.004
Employer provides toilets	81%	93%	0.002
Work injury – prior 12 mos.	6%	6%	0.903



**Table 2 – Job Characteristics, Female Immigrant Farm Laborers California, 1999, N = 292**

Characteristic	Documented (n=217)	Undocumented (n=75)	p-value
Years U.S. farm work (median)	9	5	0.018
Last pay/week (1999\$, median)	\$275	\$250	0.592
Employer offers health insurance	11%	3%	0.014
Mix/load/apply pesticides in U.S.	1%	0%	0.405
Pesticide safety training-EVER	57%	43%	0.027
Operate machinery at job	6%	4%	0.514
Eligible for workers comp?	46%	36%	0.184
Employer provides drink water	94%	95%	0.892
Employer provides toilets	95%	96%	0.819
Work injury – prior 12 mos.	2%	1%	0.612



**Table 3 – Personal and Housing Characteristics Male Immigrant Farm Laborers, California, 1999, N = 551**

Characteristic	Documented (n=372)	Undocumented (n=179)	p-value
Age, years (median)	39	27	<0.001
Years in U.S. (median)	19	6	<0.001
Unaccompanied by family	28%	68%	<0.001
No health insurance	69%	87%	<0.001
Doctor/clinic visit - NEVER	25%	45%	<0.001
Non-relatives share dwelling	31%	58%	<0.001
5+ unrelated roommates	8%	24%	<0.001
Extreme crowding (>2.5 per room)	26%	38%	0.005

**Table 4 – Personal and Housing Characteristics Female Immigrant Farm Laborers, California, 1999, N = 292**

Characteristic	Documented (n=217)	Undocumented (n=75)	p-value
Age, years (median)	38	29	<0.001
Years in U.S. (median)	14	7	0.003
Unaccompanied by family	12%	29%	<0.000
No health insurance	66%	89%	0.009
Doctor/clinic visit - NEVER	8%	24%	0.010
Non-relatives share dwelling	24%	51%	0.004
5+ unrelated roommates	6%	20%	0.004
Extreme crowding (>2.5 per room)	26%	29%	0.578