

Portrait of a Laborer

Indigenous Farmworkers in
Santa Barbara County



Central Coast
Environmental Health
Project (CCEHP)
Summer 2006

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by Eric Cárdenas, Director
Central Coast Environmental Health Project
(CCEHP)

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The authors alone bear responsibility for any factual errors. The recommendations are those of the Central Coast Environmental Health Project and do not necessarily reflect the views of those who provided editorial or technical review.

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Executive Summary

Portrait of a Laborer: Indigenous Farmworkers in Santa Barbara County, is a study of local farmworkers who have immigrated to California's Central Coast, primarily from southern Mexico. These laborers comprise a significant number of our local agricultural workforce, yet often go unnoticed. Living in cramped quarters with their family or co-workers, they take the lowest paying jobs, but quietly, and significantly, contribute to the region's largest and most profitable industry.

This assessment is meant to provide a basic framework from which to better understand these workers. It is based off of the collection of 447 surveys, of which 64% of respondents were Oaxacan, 31% were non-Oaxacan Mexican, and 5% were from other Latin American countries. The assessment captures facets of day to day life including employment, family, and basic health information, and serves as a tool for those who provide services to, or employ, these individuals.

Highlights of Findings

- Forty-eight percent (48%) of respondents identified *Mixteco* as their indigenous language but did not elaborate further regarding which *Mixteco* dialect. Eighteen percent of respondents identified *Mixteco Bajo* as their indigenous language, 9% indicated *Mixteco Alto*, 7% indicated *Zapotec*, and 7% indicated *Triquis*.
- Ninety-five percent (95%) of Oaxacans lived in rental housing, 5% owned homes, and none lived in housing provided by their employers.
- More than half of all Oaxacan fieldworkers worked in strawberries.
- Yearly income for 2/3 of Oaxacan workers surveyed was \$12,000 or less.
- Males were 2.6 times more likely to travel to find work than females.
- Nearly 2/3 of Oaxacan men and women said they had received training on pesticide safety in the workplace, but only 57% of men and 62% of women said they understood the information.



Stoop Labor by Mike Eliason, courtesy of Santa Barbara News Press, 2005

- Forty-two percent (42%) of Oaxacan respondents reported seeing teenagers working in the fields often.
- Ninety-one percent (91%) of Oaxacans reported that they had no health insurance for themselves, while only 7% of Oaxacan children were covered by some form of health insurance.
- The three issues of concern cited most frequently by Oaxacan, immigrant laborers were a) Lack of adequate income, b) Health insurance/health concerns, and c) Concerns over immigration status/residency.

Recommendations

A combination of increased outreach, educational resources, better and more consistent training, and increased housing options would alleviate many of the day to day problems encountered by farmworkers as a whole. While this is true, closer attention must be paid to those indigenous workers who now occupy the lowest rung on the agricultural ladder, and without whom the industry as we know it would not be the same.

Eighty-three percent of Oaxacans worked in agriculture, a majority of which identified with an indigenous culture. Of these workers, 54% worked in Santa Barbara County's highest grossing commodity crop— strawberries.

Background

Portrait of a Laborer: *Indigenous Farmworkers in Santa Barbara County* provides a profile of farmworkers who reside and work in Santa Barbara County, focusing specifically on the Santa Maria Valley. We hope that the findings and recommendations in the following pages will lead to better living and working conditions for the thousands of farmworkers in this region, all of whom play a critical role in our economy and our fabric of life.

At the state level, if California were an independent nation, its economy would rank as the eighth largest economy in the world, with a \$1.55 trillion Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2004.¹ California's single largest industry is agriculture, which in 2004, according to the California Department of Food and Agriculture, resulted in a "record high net income of \$32 billion in direct farm sales."²

At the local level, agriculture ranks as Santa Barbara County's top producing industry, with over \$997 million in Gross Product in 2005, a 10% increase in gross values from 2004.³

Record production at the local and state

levels was made possible by the hands of California's approximately 800,000 farmworkers, who toil day after day in harsh working conditions for little pay.

Specifically, our assessment seeks to highlight characteristics of *indigenous* farmworkers, that is, those workers who consider themselves of indigenous ancestry. These individuals often speak an indigenous language, come from small, rural villages in Mexico and the rest of Latin America, and are among a rapidly growing segment of California field laborers. In the Tri-County area of the South Central Coast, many indigenous workers come from the rugged state of Oaxaca in southern Mexico, characterized by mountains, valleys, jungles, rivers and coastal zones, as well as a variety of cultural traditions, foods, people and political dynamics.

For the purposes of this report, we compare Oaxacan respondents to their Mexican born, non-Oaxacan counterparts. Because a majority of Oaxacan respondents indicated indigenous descent, the terms *Oaxacan* and *Indigenous* are sometimes used interchangeably.



Migrant Van by Len Wood, courtesy of Santa Barbara News Press, 1999

A group of Mixtec farmworkers heads for Burlington, Washington, a 19 hour drive, to pick cucumbers near the Canadian border.

Northern Migration

In their book, *Indigenous Mexican Migrants in the United States*, Jonathan Fox and Gaspar Rivera-Salgado state that Oaxacan villagers first began leaving their home pueblos in the 1930's, looking for work within the city of Oaxaca, the state of Veracruz, and Mexico City. Eventually, their search took them north to Sinaloa, northern Baja California, and ultimately, to California, Oregon and Washington.⁴

“Oaxacan migration,” state Fox and Rivera-Salgado, “took off by the end of the 1980's with the extensive incorporation of Zapotecs in urban services and Mixtecs in farm labor- often in the most difficult and lowest-paid jobs.” By 2000, indigenous migrants from southern Mexico made up nearly 11% of California farm labor.⁵

Environmental Health

CCEHP has approached this assessment of indigenous farmworkers in the Santa Maria Valley from an environmental health perspective. The following excerpts from *Rachel's Democracy & Health News*, provide an excellent background on what it means to have healthy communities from both a physical and social perspective.⁶ This definition includes the overall state of one's environment.

Health and Environmental Health: Expanding the Movement

by Peter Montague

...The U.S. Institute of Medicine (IOM) defines the mission of public health this way:

“to fulfill society’s interest in assuring conditions in which people can be healthy.”

The preamble to the constitution of the World Health Organization (WHO, July 22, 1946), defines health as “a state of complete well-being, physical, social, and mental, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”

The WHO constitution also defines health as a basic human right: “The enjoyment of the highest standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition.” This is consistent with Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, which says, “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his/her family, including food, clothing, housing, and medical care.”

The World Health Organization defines “environmental health” as “those aspects of human health, including quality of life, that are determined by physical, chemical, biological, social, and psychosocial factors in the environment. It also refers to the theory and practice of assessing, correcting, controlling, and preventing those factors in the environment that can potentially affect adversely the health of present and future generations.”

The three things that most concerned Oaxacan workers were money (rent, food, employment), health access and health insurance, and immigration issues (fear of deportation, discrimination).

In Santa Barbara County, a majority of farmworkers live in the northern part of the County, comprised of the cities of Lompoc, Santa Maria, Cuyama and Guadalupe, with a majority living and working in Santa Maria. This region is characterized by a high Latino (Mexican) population, increasing growth pressures, and vast agricultural acreage. As is true in agricultural communities across the country, farmworkers often face the harsh realities of living in a foreign land.

According to Dr. Manuel Salmeron, Medical Director at the Community Health Centers of the Central Coast, “An immigrant brings a set of problems common to everyone, plus we have to deal with language and racial barriers, immigration issues, lack of adequate personal and governmental support systems. Additionally, many of the jobs that we take increase the potential for exposure to environmental toxins and contaminants, injuries and extreme environments... These, combined with sub-optimal training, supervision and equipment (protective and otherwise) greatly increase the risk of illness, substance abuse, domestic violence and depression.”⁷

The overall state of health or wellbeing of farmworker populations and communities can be negatively impacted in many ways, causing a decrease in the standard of living and a decrease in overall environmental health.

This assessment is meant to shed light on the significant “silent” workforce that helps sustain Santa Barbara County’s agricultural industry while providing options that will improve the environmental health of our community. It offers insight into where farmworkers of indigenous descent were born, their native languages and education levels, the size and locations of their families, employment and housing histories, income levels, and health status. We hope that this information will serve as a tool for positive change and unite us with our neighbors and each other.

Methodology

At the beginning of 2005, CCEHP began efforts to develop a set of survey questions that would provide a general demographic profile of the population in question. To accomplish this, CCEHP collaborated with UCSB's Institute for Social, Behavioral, and Economic Research (ISBER), the Public Health Departments from Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties, the Mixteco Health and Education Literacy Project (MIHELP) in Ventura, and the Coalition for Sustainable Transportation (COAST). All agencies either had previous experience developing survey instruments similar to what CCEHP was proposing, and/or had conducted research on immigrant farmworking populations. This collaboration was critical in the development of the survey tool.

After developing the survey, CCEHP recruited a group of ten volunteers who were trained to administer a survey with their peers. Volunteers were identified from their participation with community groups and involvement in community events centered around farmworkers. All volunteers were from farmworking backgrounds, all spoke Spanish, six spoke Mixteco and one spoke Zapotec. Training sessions were held

to familiarize volunteers with the survey, CCEHP objectives, and standard survey protocol. Volunteers were rewarded for their efforts with a small stipend for every twenty completed surveys they returned.

Our fifty-nine question survey was administered by these volunteers between the months of January and March 2005. They collected surveys from a variety of locations throughout Santa Maria, Ca., including the CCEHP office, homes of individual workers, stores frequented by farmworkers, and in some cases, areas adjacent to agricultural fields. Those who agreed to answer survey questions were given a \$5 gift certificate to a local market. Santa Maria was chosen as the focus of our survey because most farmworkers in the region live in Santa Maria. Furthermore, our volunteers often relied on ride shares and carpooling to get from location to location, making survey collection more difficult in areas outside of Santa Maria/Guadalupe.

In approximately three months, 447 surveys were collected. CCEHP staff then proceeded to enter data into a database created by graduate student Kat Grace of the University of California, Santa Barbara's (UCSB) Geography Department. The

process of data entry took approximately eight months due to the length of the survey, the number of surveys collected, and the limited number of volunteers.

Layout, translation, review, and final revisions were made from December 2005 to Spring 2006.

Limitations

This assessment should be used as a general demographic “snapshot” of the indigenous farmworking population in Santa Barbara County, and in particular, the Santa Maria Valley.

Mexican migrants are a hard to reach population and our methodology addressed

capturing a cross-section of a convenient sample. This approach has many limitations, but given the lack of data in this population, our research is a valuable introduction for other, more formal research to follow.

The implementation strategy was innovative in having the interviewers/recruiters be part of the target peer-group. However, these volunteers had received little formal education and none spoke English. Furthermore, the survey was not administered in Mixteco. This is a non-written language, and it encompasses many different dialects that may be considerably different from one another. Therefore, it is likely there were issues in standardization of administering the survey, in explaining particular questions, and ultimately in capturing data uniformly.



Tenant Farmers by Rafael Maldonado, courtesy of *Santa Barbara News Press*, 2004

These Mixtecs rented a plot of land to grow Oaxacan corn on the outskirts of Santa Maria.

General Demographics and Findings

The total population of Santa Barbara County according to the 2000 U.S. Census was approximately 399,347. Of this population, 77,423 lived in Santa Maria. In 2000, Hispanics/Latinos made up 59.7% of Santa Maria's population, while American Indians accounted for 1.8%. This latter figure includes any individual from North, Central, or South America with any tribal affiliations. For the purposes of this report, 61.5%, or 47,615 individuals in the region were either *Latino* or of *Indigenous Ancestry* in 2000. According to Jonathan Fox and Gaspar Rivera-Salgado, a new term, *Hispanic American Indian*, emerged out of U.S. Census 2000 answers where individuals identified themselves as both *American Indian* and *Hispanic*.⁸

Fox and Rivera-Salgado place Santa Barbara County's *Hispanic American Indian* population at 2,649, but acknowledge that these numbers are only suggestive due to traditional undercounts in migrant communities.^{9, 10} It is difficult to determine the exact number of indigenous farmworkers that live in a particular County or region for many reasons. These include the historical lack of appropriate census categories in which to place indigenous workers, the

migratory nature of farmworkers, and the lack of home residence addresses.

While estimates vary regarding the total population of indigenous farm workers in Santa Barbara County, numbers between 10,000 and 15,000 are the most frequently cited at the local level, with a majority of those being of *Mixteco* ancestry. The *Santa Barbara NewsPress* has put the number of Mixtecs at "more than 10,000."¹¹

What follows are some of CCEHP's findings regarding this growing population, followed by a summary and set of recommendations.

General Characteristics

Note: Our total sample of Oaxacan respondents is 288. However, not everyone answered all the questions. Except where the entire sample is referenced, the following percentages are based on the number of respondents answering a particular question.

- The average age of *all* respondents surveyed was 29.5 years old
- The average age for Oaxacan immigrants upon arriving in the U.S. was

19.3 years old, while the average age for non-Oaxacan Mexican immigrants was 20.8 years old.

- Sixty-four percent (64%) of 447 survey respondents were Oaxacan, 31% were non-Oaxacan Mexican, and 5% were from other Latin American countries. Of non-Oaxacan Mexicans, 22% were from the State of Guerrero, 17% were from Michoacan, 14% were from Jalisco, and 47% came from 16 other states. (See Figure 1.)
- Immigrants arriving from Oaxaca who indicated their home region came from the districts of Juxtahuaca (28%), Huajuápam de León (13%), Putla (9%), Silacayoápam (8%), and Tlaxiaco (4%). (*Note: This information was obtained by reviewing answers that listed 'pueblo,' 'localidad,' and/or 'distrito of origin.'*)
- When asked what language they spoke in the home, 65% of Oaxacans said they spoke Spanish, while 35% spoke an indigenous language in the home. However, 166 Oaxacan individuals, or 58% of our total sample, identified their indigenous language, regardless of whether or not they spoke it in the home. Of these, *Mixteco Bajo* was the most common, with 18% of respondents claiming it as their indigenous language. Interestingly, 48% of respondents said *Mixteco* was their indigenous language but did not elaborate further regarding which *Mixteco* dialect. Nine (9%) of Oaxacan respondents indicated *Mixteco Alto* as their indigenous language, 7% indicated *Zapotec*, 7% indicated *Triquis*, and 11% indicated “other.” (See Figure 2.)
- When asked if they could understand spoken Spanish, approximately 6% replied that they could not, which suggests that even most indigenous speakers could understand at least some Spanish.

- Oaxacans are statistically less likely to read Spanish or English than their non-Oaxacan counterparts. Sixty-eight percent of Oaxacans surveyed said they could read Spanish, while 86% of non-Oaxacans said they could read Spanish. Seven percent (7%) of Oaxacans said they could read English, while 14% of non-Oaxacans said they could read English.
- Fifty-one percent (51%) of Oaxacans had never returned to Oaxaca. Thirty-nine percent (39%) had returned between one and four times, and 9% had returned five times or more. CCEHP did not ask about immigration status.
- Oaxacans had an average of 5.7 years of formal education, compared to 7.4 years for non-Oaxacan Mexicans. (*Note: This information was received in a variety of formats and is not reflected in our data set.*)

Family Characteristics

- One hundred sixty-three Oaxacan respondents, or 59%, were married, while 90, or 32%, were single. Men were more likely to be single (39%) than women (25%). Conversely, 65% of women were married, while only 52% of men were married. The average age for married Oaxacans was 30 years old, while single Oaxacans averaged 24 years of age.
- Of our total sample, a vast majority of Oaxacans (94%) have family remaining in Oaxaca, with 71% responding that their parents still live there. Sixty-six percent (66%) have siblings, while 32% have children, in Oaxaca.
- An average of 2.8 children was reported by Oaxacans having at least one child.
- Household size averages 2.2 bedrooms, with 265 respondents, or 95%, living

in rental housing. Only 5% own homes, and none live in housing provided by their employers. The findings for non-Oaxacan Mexicans are identical, with 5% owning a home, 95% renting, and none living in employer-provided housing. (See Figure 3.)

- On average, throughout the year, the fewest number of Oaxacans residing in one home was 6.8 people, while the greatest number was 7.5. The average length of time living at their current residence was 21.5 months, while their average time living in or around Santa Maria was 50.4 months.

Employment and Income Characteristics

- The most common form of employment for all respondents was fieldwork. Of our total sample, 83% of Oaxacans worked in agriculture, while 70% of non-Oaxacan Mexicans worked in agriculture. Other jobs reported included cleaning or service industries.
- Of Oaxacan fieldworkers, 54% worked in strawberries, 12% worked in broccoli, 6% worked in grapes, 6% worked in lettuce and the remaining percentage worked with various other crops. In comparison, 23% of non-Oaxacan Mexicans worked in strawberries, 12% worked in broccoli, 7% worked in lettuce, and 4% worked in grapes. Other crops that Oaxacans worked in included celery, squash, chiles, and tomatoes/tomatillos. (See Figure 4.)
- Of our total sample, 35% of Oaxacan respondents said they travel out of the region to find fieldwork. Of those who elaborated further, 64% said they leave the City of Santa Maria, 20% said they leave the state, and 11% said they do both. Males were 2.6 times more likely to travel to find work than females.
- Yearly income for most Oaxacan workers (65%) is \$12,000 or less. Fifteen percent (15%) of workers reported earning 0-\$5,000, 27% reported earning \$5,000-8,000, and 23% reported earning \$8,000-12,000. Only 15% reported earning more than \$12,000. A significant percentage did not know, or did not state, their income. In comparison, 56% of non-Oaxacan Mexican workers earned \$12,000/year or less, with 29% reporting earning more than \$12,000/year. In the case of both Oaxacans and non-Oaxacan Mexicans, 83% said their income levels were “not enough.” (See Figure 5.)
- At the time of the survey, 48% of our total sample of Oaxacans had sent money out of the U.S. in the last month, while 62% had sent money in the last year. A majority of this money was sent to parents (23%), followed by children (7%). Of those individuals who elaborated further, 45% reported sending money on a monthly basis, while 38% said they sent money on a yearly basis. 17% reported never having sent money back to their country of origin.
- Of those sending money back to Mexico, 15% reported sending \$100, 30% reported sending \$200, 32% reported sending \$500, and 23% reported sending “other” on a yearly basis.
- Forty-two percent (42%) of Oaxacan respondents reported seeing teenagers working in the fields “often,” 30% reported seeing teenagers in the fields “sometimes,” and 28% reported “never” seeing teenagers in the fields.
- Sixty-two percent (62%) of Oaxacan men and women said they had received

training on pesticide safety in the workplace. Of women who had received training, 62% said they understood the information, 26% said they understood the information “a little bit,” and 12% said they did not understand the information. For men, 57% said they understood the information, 28% said they understood the information “a little bit,” and 15% said they did not understand the information. (See Figures 6a, 6b.)

- Gender does not appear to play a role in determining whether or not an individual has received training on pesticide safety. However, Oaxacans were less likely to receive training than non-Oaxacans.
- Thirty percent of Oaxacan women and 35% of Oaxacan men believe they have been exposed to some level of pesticides in the workplace.

Day Care in an RV by Spencer Marley, courtesy of Santa Barbara News Press, 2005



While families head to work in the fields, at least one family member usually stays home to take care of the children.

- Of our entire sample of women, these percentages reported having access to the following supplies:
 - 84%- Clean water
 - 76%- Soap
 - 76%- Portable bathrooms
 - 68%- Paper towels
- Of our entire sample of men, these percentages reported having access to the following supplies:
 - 86%- Clean water
 - 85%- Portable bathrooms
 - 78%- Soap
 - 77%- Paper towels
- Only 20% of women and 24% of men reported having all of these available at every work location.

Health Characteristics

- When asked about recent health problems, 20% of Oaxacan respondents reported general ailments. However, when asked if they ever felt ill after working in or near agricultural fields, 38% of Oaxacan women and 42% of Oaxacan men reported feeling ill.
- For Oaxacan men, the following symptoms were the most commonly reported:
 - 24%- Headaches
 - 20%- Sore muscles
 - 19%- Back problems
 - 17%- Eye/Ear Problems
 - 16%- Foot problems
 - 15%- Sore throat
- For Oaxacan women, the following symptoms were the most commonly reported:
 - 25%- Back problems
 - 23%- Headaches
 - 21%- Sore muscles
 - 13%- Rashes
 - 13%- Eye/Ear Problems
 - 11%- Foot Problems

- The highest percentages of Oaxacan workers indicating acute health problems were strawberry workers (24%) and broccoli workers (28%). While 24% of lettuce workers also indicated acute health problems, the numbers of respondents are low enough to be considered statistically insignificant. Of those who indicated health problems, the most frequent complaints came from Oaxacan strawberry workers, 44% of whom indicated headaches as their symptoms.
- Ninety-one percent (91%) of Oaxacans reported that they had no health insurance for themselves, compared to 84% of non-Oaxacans who reported having no health insurance for themselves.
- Oaxacan families lacked health insurance more often than their non-Oaxacan counterparts. Seventy-eight percent (78%) of Oaxacan women and 87% of Oaxacan men reported having no health insurance for themselves or for their family, while 72% and 74% of non-Oaxacan women and men, respectively, reported the same for their families.
- Of the few Oaxacans who reported having health insurance, 55% utilized public health clinics for health services. Of those without health insurance, 46% (96 individuals) utilized public health clinics, while 10% (21 individuals) went to *Sobadoras*, (traditional healers) who commonly use massage as a main method of treatment.
- Only 7% of Oaxacan children were covered by some form of health insurance. Of these, 94% were covered by Medi-Cal.

Other Issues and Concerns

The following issues were listed as main concerns by both groups (Oaxacans, non-Oaxacans) when asked the following: What are the three things that most concern you as an immigrant worker?

1. Driver's License: Lack of access

Oaxacan group: 54/183 (30%)

Non-Oaxacan group: 54/108 (50%)

There is a statistically significant difference between these two proportions (Oaxacans less frequently identified "Driver's License" as a concern).

2. Immigration Issues: Fear of Deportation, Discrimination

Oaxacan group: 57/185 (31%)

Non-Oaxacan group: 49/108 (45%)

There is a statistically significant difference in immigration worries between the two groups with Oaxacans identifying this as a worry less than Non-Oaxacans.

3. Health/Insurance: Lack of Access

Oaxacan group: 75/185 (41%)

Non-Oaxacan group: 36/109 (33%)

There is no statistical difference between these two groups (indicating that the proportions of people worried about Health/Insurance are statistically equivalent).

4. Money: Rent, Employment, Food

Oaxacan group: 150/185 (81%)

Non-Oaxacan group: 83/109 (76%)

There is no statistical difference between these two proportions.

5. Family: Health, Immigration status, Education

Oaxacan group: 33/185 (18%)

Non-Oaxacan group: 8/109 (7%)

These are statistically different. Oaxacans more frequently cite 'Family' as an issue of concern.

Figure 1. Respondent's area of origin

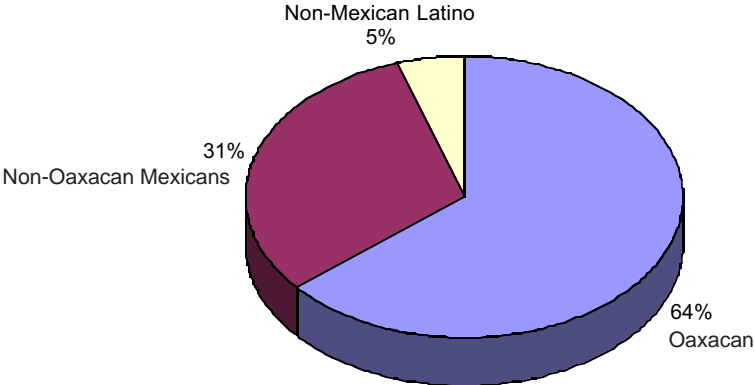


Figure 2. Indigenous language of Oaxacans

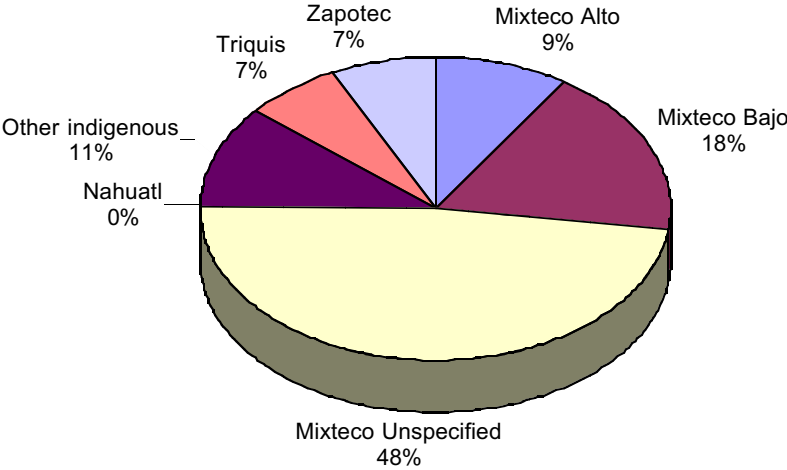


Figure 3. Housing

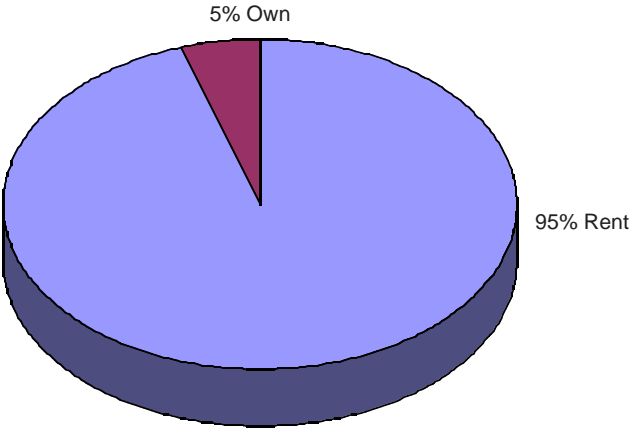


Figure 4. Crops worked by Oaxacan field workers

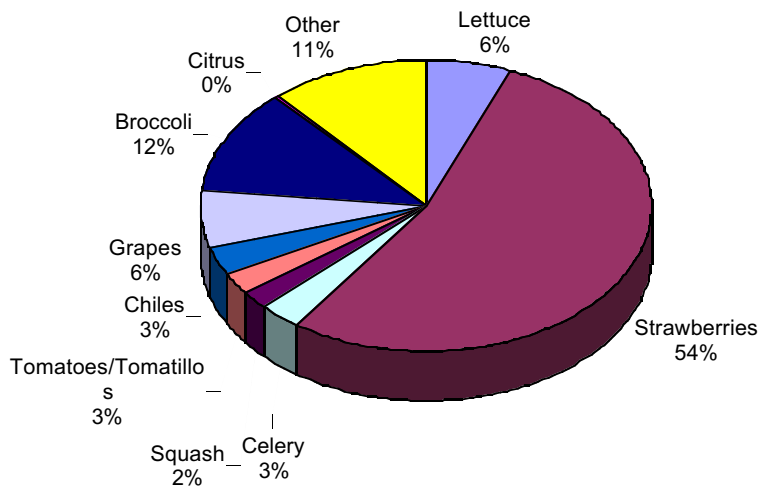


Figure 5. Immediate family income

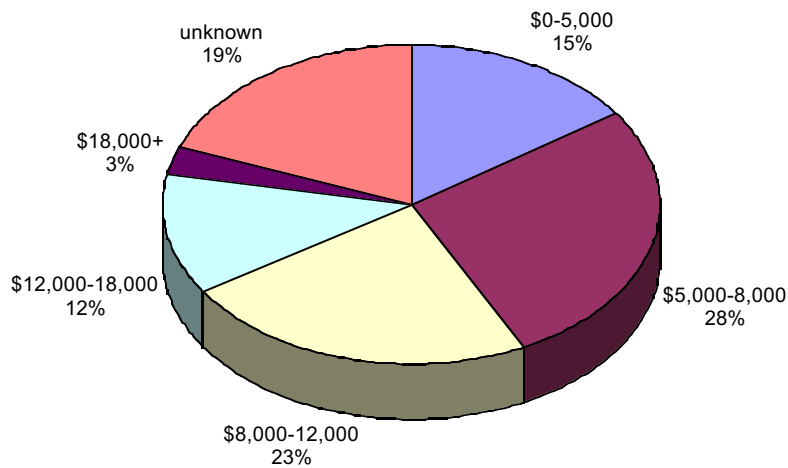


Figure 6a. Understanding of pesticide information (men)

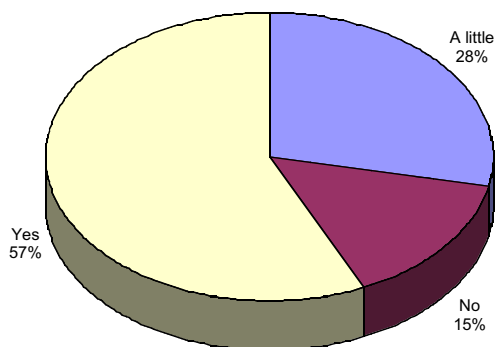
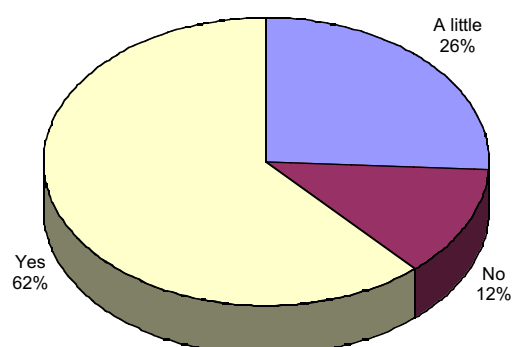


Figure 6b. Understanding of pesticide information (women)





Mixtec Picker by Spencer Marley, *Santa Barbara News Press*, 2005

Arriving as immigrants to work and live in the United States, Oaxacan farmworkers face barriers of language, culture, race, residency and more.

Results Summary: Profile of a Oaxacan Farmworker

As seen in the statistics in the preceding pages, Oaxacan farmworkers face many obstacles as residents living on the Central Coast. Arriving as immigrants to work and live in the United States, they face barriers of language, culture, race, residency and more.

Based on our findings, a typical Oaxacan farmworker (male or female) in Santa Maria and surrounding regions:

- Is 28 years old and has been in the United States 5-10 years.
- Most likely understands spoken Spanish and can read some Spanish too, but does not read or understand English.
- Speaks Mixteco as a native language.
- May have returned to Oaxaca since moving to the United States.
- Lives with a partner and five others in a 2 bedroom house/apartment and has lived there for two years.
- Lives in rental housing.
- Works in strawberries, earning less than \$12,000 per year.
- Sometimes complains of headaches after working in or near the fields.
- Has received basic training on pesticides and pesticide safety, but only partially understands the information presented.
- Lacks health insurance for himself and for family members, including children.
- Visits public health clinics for medical purposes, and every so often, visits a traditional healer (Sobadora/ Curandero) for treatment and/or massage.
- The three issues of greatest concern as an immigrant laborer, in order, are:
 - a) Lack of adequate income
 - b) Health insurance/health concerns
 - c) Concerns over immigration/ residency status

Recommendations

CEHP would like to offer recommendations that we feel will benefit local, indigenous farmworkers. In those cases where some of our recommendations are already being implemented, we recommend increased attention to that specific area. These recommendations are intended to be addressed by the community as a whole, not by any one group, and should serve as a starting point for continued dialogue and action.

Health Insurance and Access

Better access to health resources is needed.

Low wages and lack of health insurance among area farmworkers make obtaining health services difficult.

Many communities provide free basic health screenings to farmworkers, some via mobile health units. In Santa Barbara County, the Community Health Centers of the Central Coast provide a free mobile

health program using federal funds targeted at low income and farmworker populations. Basic services *and* access to prescription medicines are available. Ventura County Public Health has a program that offers free screenings for diabetes, blood pressure, HIV, Body Mass Index and fat. Though services provided are basic, increased funds could increase the scope and availability of these efforts.

Specific recommendations to address health insurance and access include the following:

- Service agencies should increase outreach efforts to farmworkers highlighting local and state health insurance programs that farmworkers are eligible for, and encourage them to apply.
- Agencies that offer health information or services should increase collaboration with other community groups that work with farmworkers in order to better publicize existing health outreach efforts.
- Farmworkers' children may qualify under a variety of health programs

more readily than their parents. Service agencies must work to proactively promote these programs and make them accessible. Santa Barbara County's First 5 "Healthy Kids" program is an example of an innovative program aimed at providing health insurance to the children of low income families.

- Foundations and funding agencies should increase funds to expand existing health programs such as those carried out by the Community Health Centers of the Central Coast. Specifically, increased funds could expand the scope of existing services while helping to target new populations (ie. Mixtecos) as they emerge.
- The Santa Barbara County Public Health Department should consider a mobile health program targeting indigenous farmworkers, either as an expansion of services or in conjunction with others, such as Community Health Centers of the Central Coast.
- Agencies of all types must make a proactive effort to assure interested farmworkers that health services and insurance programs are available, regardless of citizenship status, and that preventative treatment is more effective than treatment *after* an illness.
- Health agencies and clinics should hire translators/interpreters to assist indigenous patients in obtaining appropriate medical care. Santa Barbara County's Public Health Department has begun to offer classes for people interested in becoming medical interpreters.
- Local health agencies should have the names and numbers of local, traditional healers such as *sobadoras* and *curanderos* on hand. Establishing a relationship with these healers could benefit those seeking treatment for various ailments.

- Health clinic and hospital staff should be well versed in recognizing, treating and reporting pesticide related illness, or suspected illness.

Workplace Safety and Pesticides

Workplace safety and pesticide education must be prioritized by all employers.

Although mandated by law, some employers are failing to adequately train their farmworkers. When training is provided, it is not always understood by workers. Trainings and educational resources are especially needed for Mixteco workers who may not speak Spanish and have little access to information and resources.

Specific recommendations to address workplace safety include the following:

- County Agricultural Commissioners (CAC) should begin a program to train indigenous interpreters in pesticide safety and provide these contacts to growers in order to conduct language-appropriate trainings. CAC should also work in conjunction with community groups who are offering this service.
- The Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) has produced a series of pesticide training videos in Mixteco. CAC should advertise the availability of these to growers and to the public through new and existing marketing materials.
- Periodic radio interviews on Spanish radio stations by CAC staff can increase farmworkers' awareness of their role as an agency and also encourage farmworkers to call CAC when they have questions or concerns.

- Farmworker-oriented community resource centers and social service providers, as well as existing farmworker housing complexes (eg. Los Adobes de Maria, Riverview Homes), should work closely with groups who offer free workshops on financial management, health/health access, immigration issues, labor rights, and pesticides.

Farmworker Housing

Local efforts and statewide/federal legislation aimed at providing affordable farmworker housing must be encouraged.

Non-profit organizations such as the Rural Communities Assistance Corporation exist that have partnered directly with growers to provide temporary housing for seasonal workers and permanent housing for long term residents. Locally, Los Adobes de Maria and River View Town Homes in Santa Maria (People's Self Help Housing) are existing examples of permanent housing for area farmworkers, but more is needed. A process to create more farmworker housing is currently underway in Ventura County through the Ag Futures Alliance Farmworker Housing Task Force. Most recently, the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors has considered increased housing for the poorest of the County's residents.

Specific recommendations to address farmworker housing needs include the following:

- Growers should identify local community agencies that can partner with them to help provide housing options for their workers.
- Farmworker advocacy organizations and service providers should work to

identify parcels of land that could be considered for farmworker housing (*employer-provided*). To the extent that this is already happening, growers or developers should further support such efforts.

- Community-wide efforts that assist the public in learning about the importance of providing housing to area farmworkers must be promoted. These can include meetings between growers, farmworkers, elected officials and members of the public, the screening of educational videos that highlight success stories in other agricultural regions, and the formation of a Farmworker Housing Task Force.
- Community groups and the public should publicly support efforts at the local and county level to increase the number of affordable/farmworker housing units in their communities.

Income Inequality

Steps to address the glaring discrepancy between wages earned and work performed by farmworkers are essential for overall community health and quality of life.

Frequently mentioned concerns related to income include housing costs, health insurance costs, wages, and food costs.

Specific recommendations to address income inequality include the following:

- Increase wages for farmworkers.
- Local businesses should consider a *farmworker discount program* aimed at local farmworkers. This system could provide farmworkers with discounted rates for goods or services, such as health services, food purchases, etc. when they shop with participating businesses.

Forty-nine percent of Oaxacans indicated *work* or *employment* as the thing they enjoyed most about living on the Central Coast.

The second most common answer was *climate*, at 10%.

- Employer-provided housing, reduced rental costs for farmworkers, and an increase in the number of low income housing units would help offset the hardships caused by low wages, and should be encouraged.
- While family ties and cultural traditions will continue to necessitate the flow of money from local farmworkers to Oaxaca and other parts of Mexico, farmworkers should be encouraged to take a small percentage of their incomes and save it for day to day necessities, as well as emergencies.

For all of the recommendations above, it should be emphasized that culturally appropriate resources and information is imperative for anyone who works with, or provides services to, indigenous farmworkers. Sensitivity must be taken when addressing issues such as health, immigration status, labor concerns, and others. By working with interpreters, or individuals who have established relationships with indigenous workers, service providers and government agencies will be much more effective at reaching their service goals and will more readily gain the trust of their targeted service population.



Arriving Home by Len Wood, courtesy of Santa Barbara News Press, 1999

In contrast to the 1930's, when most fieldwork was done by men, roughly half of the strawberry pickers in the Santa Maria Valley are women.



Strawberry Picker's Hands by Mike Eliason, courtesy of Santa Barbara News Press, 1999

It is CCEHP's hope that the information in this report helps illustrate the day-to-day lives of indigenous farmworkers in Santa Barbara County, and that it will assist service providers, health advocates, government agencies, foundations, and employers as they respond to the needs of this growing population.

Endnotes

1. World Bank: *World Development Indicators* database, 2005.
2. CDFA: *California Agriculture -Highlights*, 2005.
3. Santa Barbara County Agricultural Commissioners Office, *2005 Crop Report*.
4. Jonathan Fox and Gaspar Rivera-Salgado, *Indigenous Mexican Migrants in the United States*, p. 9, Regents of the University of California, Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies and the Center for Comparative Immigration Studies at University of California, San Diego, April 2004.
5. Ibid.
6. Peter Montague, "Health and Environmental Health: Expanding the Movement," *Rachel's Democracy & Health News*, issue #843, Feb. 23, 2006.
7. Dr. Manuel Salmeron, Medical Director at the Community Health Centers of the Central Coast, interview March 13, 2006.
8. See Note 4.
9. See Note 4.
10. See Note 4.
11. *The Santa Barbara NewsPress*, "The Price of Corn," Oct. 3, 2004.



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