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Migrant Farmworkers in South-Central Minnesota: Farmworker-Led Research and Action for Change

by Victor Contreras, Jaime Duran, and Kathryn Gilje

Each year, 20,000 to 35,000 migrant agricultural workers come to Minnesota to work in farm fields and food processing plants. Migrant families typically spend April through November in Minnesota, and often return to the state to work with the same farmers or companies year after year. The vast majority of migrant workers in Minnesota are permanent legal residents of the United States from the border region of southern Texas and northern Mexico.

Farmworkers were initially recruited to work in Minnesota's sugar beet industry during the 1920s and 1930s. *Enganchistas* (recruiters) traveled to southern Texas and northern Mexico to recruit migrant workers to the Red River Valley region of northwestern Minnesota, where farmworkers worked in all aspects of sugar beet production, including planting, thinning, weeding, blocking, and harvesting. Today, mechanization and the increased use of pesticides have reduced the number of jobs for migrant workers in the sugar beet industry. However, farmworkers are increasingly recruited to work in other regions of the state, including southeastern and south-central Minnesota. Most farmworkers in south-central Minnesota work in agricultural field labor, in vegetable cultivation and processing, in horticulture, and in forestry.



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In 1997, CURA's U-Migrant Project and Communitarity Program, in cooperation with the University of Minnesota Extension Service, sponsored a survey of migrant farmworkers in south-central Minnesota. In the pages that follow, we describe the design and method of the initial farmworker survey and summarize the results of that research. We then discuss the subsequent formation by migrant workers of Centro Campesino (Farmworkers' Center), a membership-based advocacy group intended to create long-term, institutional changes that promote equity and justice in Minnesota farmworker and non-farmworker communities. This article is written in the spirit of generating discussion, awareness, and positive social change related to the issues facing migrant farmworkers in south-central Minnesota.

Purpose and Methodology of the Research

The initial survey research project was initiated to better understand the issues facing migrant farmworkers in south-central Minnesota, and to lay the groundwork for actions aimed at long-term change and improvement in the lives of migrant families. The study design was based on participatory research methodologies. Specifically, researchers followed the principles of the participatory rural appraisal (PRA) and activist participatory research (APR) approaches.

The PRA approach was initially developed in the 1980s. The main principles of PRA include building respect among researchers and research participants, and empowering research participants through access to and ownership of shared community knowledge generated by the research. Researchers, in turn, must examine their cultural biases and preconceptions in order to avoid drawing inaccurate or biased conclusions from the research. Information is continuously gathered from research participants in the community until visible patterns in thinking begin to emerge. The data gathered using this approach are descriptive in content, and represent a collection of ideas about the lives and experiences of the participants.

APR methodologies are based on the work of Brazilian popular educator and researcher Paulo Freire. Main principles of APR applied in this work include ensuring that the local people being surveyed manage the research process,

recognizing that the role of the outsider is as a facilitator of the research process, and ensuring that local participants direct any actions or change resulting from the survey. The data gathered are qualitative in nature, and a wide variety of approaches are used by APR teams, including community dialogues, oral histories, and semi-structured one-on-one conversations.

Both the PRA and APR philosophies are particularly well suited to learning about the complex problems facing people who are involved in agriculture and live in rural communities. Both approaches identify local communities as the owners of the information gathered, and as the appropriate initiators of any subsequent action that stems from the research.

Under the direction of a veteran farmworker, a multidisciplinary team of volunteer researchers loosely employed PRA and APR methodologies to conduct a survey of migrant agricultural workers in Minnesota. To develop and implement the survey, University of Minnesota staff and other consultants with backgrounds in agricultural science and education were teamed with migrant community members who had backgrounds in health, organizing, and community service. Researchers learned about PRA and APR methodologies through reading materials, training sessions conducted by the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture, and faculty mentoring by members of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction and Department of Agronomy and Plant Genetics at the University of Minnesota. CURA supported a portion of research costs for the survey. Researchers volunteered many hours of time and many miles of travel to complete the work.

The community members who participated in the research work and live in the south-central region of the state from April through November. Survey team members engaged in in-depth conversations with farmworkers in various public places in Minnesota, including churches, restaurants, supermarkets, and migrant housing camps. The primary researcher traveled to Texas border communities to talk with farmworkers who regularly come to southern Minnesota each year to work. One-on-one conversations were held in Spanish with each participant, and conversations were structured around a series of 24 questions developed by the research team. Researchers recorded the

details of the conversations by hand on an open-ended questionnaire form. In all, researchers conducted conversations with 180 migrant agricultural workers. Participants did not receive payment or other compensation for their participation.

Results for each question were then entered into a computer database, and the data were examined for patterns of similarity and difference. The research team analyzed the responses to each question, and determined the percentage of community members who responded similarly to the question. Once results were compiled, the research team held a series of community meetings to discuss and analyze the outcomes of the study and to decide what action should be taken based on the results. During these meetings in 1998, farmworkers who had participated in the research suggested that the group form an organization that would advocate for farmworker members and work toward long-term changes in housing, working, and living conditions. As a result, Centro Campesino was born.

The Experiences of Migrant Farmworkers in South-Central Minnesota

This section summarizes the responses of the 180 migrant farmworkers who participated in the research. The topics discussed by these workers included where they live when not working in Minnesota, agricultural companies' recruitment practices, housing and work conditions, the contributions farmworkers make to Minnesota communities, and the general experiences of migrant farmworkers.

Nuestros Hogares: Where Do Minnesota's Migrant Farmworkers Live during the Off-Season? The majority of the migrant workers who participated in the research project live in Texas and Mexico during the months when they are not working in Minnesota. More than half of the families have their permanent residence in the Texas border towns of Eagle Pass, Mission, or Del Rio. Approximately one-fourth of the families come from Mexico. The majority of farmworkers who come from Mexico are from Reynosa or Saltillo in the states of Tamaulipas and Coahuila. The other families come from a variety of states other than Texas. Figure 1 summarizes these results.

Migrant families drive an average of 1,800 miles one-way to work in Minnesota. Undeniably, the economy of

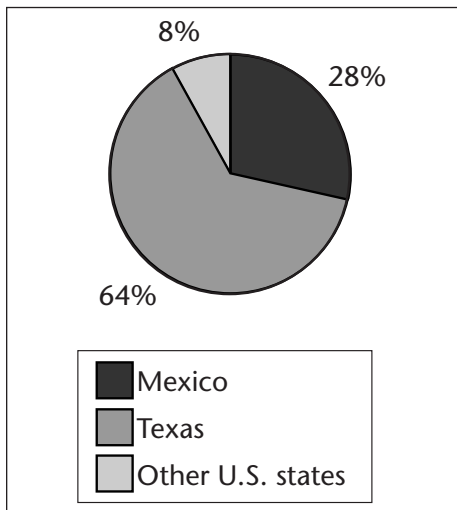


Figure 1. Primary Residence of Minnesota's Migrant Farmworkers during the Off-Season

southern Texas contributes to the willingness of many migrant workers to drive such a long way for work. The minimum wage for farmworkers in Texas is set at \$3.35 an hour. As Arturo Rodriguez, president of the United Farmworkers of America, has observed,

Unemployment and poverty in the Rio Grande Valley of south Texas is among the highest in the country. While the national unemployment rate is around 4% and it is low in Texas overall, it ranges between 14% and 16% in the largely agricultural and Mexican-American south Texas counties, according to state figures. When workers who don't file for unemployment benefits are considered, joblessness in south Texas jumps to between 25% and 30%.

Contratistas, or crew leaders, determine who comes to Minnesota for farm work. Crew leaders are hired by agricultural companies and industries to recruit the majority of workers hired in Minnesota each spring. Crew leaders are most often the negotiator with Minnesota farmers seeking employees, and are typically from farmworker communities with their permanent residence in southern Texas. Most recruit from communities near where they live. Of the migrant farmworkers who participated in the study, 91% were hired to come to Minnesota by a crew leader, usually the same person year after year. The main advantage to farmworkers hired by a crew leader is their connection to Minnesota employers and access to housing in a company-owned

migrant camp. One of the disadvantages of being hired by a crew leader is that farmworkers are not afforded the opportunity to negotiate for their specific position within a company. Crew leaders often provide their employers with a list of the people they recruited; employers return the list with each worker assigned to a particular job. Among migrant farmworkers who participated in this study, 78% said that they would prefer not to be hired by a crew leader and would like to deal directly with employers.

The potential for abuse in the labor contracting system is high. A 1994 Department of Labor Study found that farmworkers who were employed by crew leaders are more likely than those who were not to be forced to pay for their equipment (45% vs. 16%), and for food, rides, or housing (34% vs. 14%). Crew leaders frequently misrepresent jobs and benefits to potential workers. They have significant power over workers because they decide who gets which job, and they often manage migrant housing. If a farmworker has an argument with a crew leader, the worker might not be hired the following year.



Despite federal and state labor laws, the potential for abuse of the labor contractor system is high. Survey participants reported that crew leaders frequently misrepresent jobs and benefits, pay workers late, take generous cuts of workers' pay, and—in some cases—leave Minnesota still owing workers money.

When migrant farmworkers work in the fields, crew leaders are usually in charge of managing the payroll. They are often late with pay, and in some cases crew leaders leave Minnesota still owing workers money. They often take a generous cut of workers' earnings. When migrants work for a processing company, they usually receive their payments directly from the company. All of the participating farmworkers preferred to be paid directly by the company rather than via the crew leader. Luz del Carmen Flores, a Centro Campesino board member, explains,

It is not fair that we risk our lives on the road to come to Minnesota when they contract us. They offer us work, and when we arrive in Minnesota, there is not much work and they pay us the same that we make here in the Valley. If we go as contracted workers, they should guarantee at least 40 hours of work. We struggle to get here. When I saw Minnesota for the first time, I was well received. We had traveled to Georgia as migrants and the pay was very low. We asked for a just pay raise, and they fired us from that company. And we think that Minnesota is a state of hope, but we have the fear that if one day we ask for a raise in any company in Minnesota, the same thing will happen to us here in Minnesota and we will be fired.

El Viaje de Texas a Minnesota: The Trip from Texas to Minnesota. On average, migrant farmworker families who participated in this survey spend \$140 in fuel for the trip from southern Texas to Minnesota, and \$15 per person for food. The majority of workers in this survey chose to drive their own cars for the trip. Because families spend three to five months in Minnesota, and because the rental housing units in which they live are unfurnished or only minimally furnished, families must bring with them linens, kitchenware, window curtains, air conditioners, clothing, and other items.

The trip from southern Texas is a 30- to 40-hour drive. Although the drive is long, none of the farmworkers surveyed stopped in a hotel to rest because they could not afford the expense. Families generally drive the trip straight through, stopping only for gas, food, or emergencies. A worry for many families is that someone will get sick during the trip.

Arriving late to Owatonna means risking the loss of a job or prearranged housing, so in the event of illness, families will seek a doctor's evaluation and then continue the trip to Minnesota.

Upon arrival in Minnesota, farmworkers reported, the ambience is one of happy reunion with friends, who in some cases have not seen each other since the previous year. At the end of the season, the majority of migrants surveyed return to their permanent residences with all of their belongings.

Los Campos: Farmworker Housing Camps in Southern Minnesota. The majority of the migrant farmworkers who participated in this survey arrive in Minnesota with housing prearranged in one of the migrant worker camps. Many workers in other regions arrive in Minnesota with no prearranged housing. The workers participating in this survey make arrangements for housing during the winter when they sign a contract with a crew leader in Texas.

Only 4% of the workers surveyed find the migrant camps comfortable. Of those surveyed, 78% mentioned problems with the restrooms in the camps, and 27% were concerned about the quality of the water. Other problems that were mentioned included the lack of screens in the windows, the extreme heat inside the housing units during the day, the lack of hot water available for use inside individual housing units, and the lack of accessible public telephones

in the camps. Others noted that housing camps are located far from municipal services such as libraries, hospitals, health clinics, courthouses, and schools.

Some camps feature communal restrooms with toilets, sinks, and showers. Farmworkers reported that early in the season, everything works in the restrooms. However, two or three weeks later, sewer problems often begin to appear. On busy days, the sewage water from the toilets reenters the restrooms through the drains on the floor. At the end of factory shifts or fieldwork, workers usually shower. The shower drains often become blocked, and the restrooms flood.

During Minnesota summers, insect pests are abundant. Many housing units have torn window screens or, in some cases, no screens at all, so it is necessary for residents to keep their windows shut to prevent pests from entering. The lack of screens and the need to keep windows shut prevents workers from ventilating their homes on hot summer days, and results in oppressive conditions inside the units.

Finally, farmworkers noted that in some camps, there is only one public telephone available for use. Because anywhere from 35 to 100 workers live in each camp, survey participants noted that it is not uncommon to wait in line for more than an hour to make a telephone call during the afternoon or evening.

Figure 2 identifies various housing changes suggested by farmworkers who participated in the survey. Most suggested that housing units should have their own private restrooms, and that hot, drinkable water should be available inside each housing unit. Many also noted that the problem of extreme heat inside the housing units during the summer could at least be partially solved by fixing window screens, allowing residents to ventilate their houses. Survey participants also suggested that fans or air conditioners be installed. Many families bring their own.

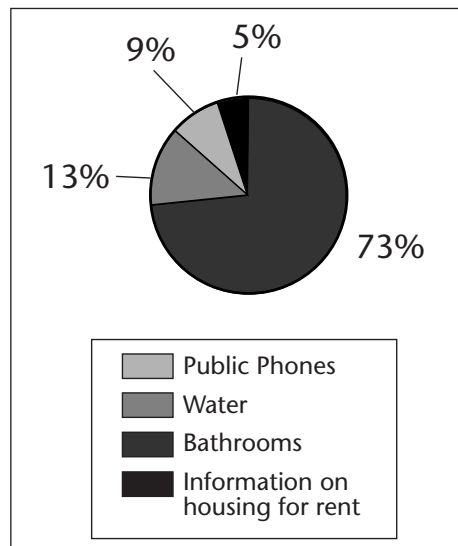


Figure 2. Changes to Housing and Living Conditions Suggested by Farmworkers Participating in the Survey



Most of the survey respondents live in a migrant camp during their stay in Minnesota. Fewer than 5% of survey respondents reported that the housing units in these camps were comfortable, with the lack of private restrooms, lack of hot water, poor-quality drinking water, and extreme heat during the summer among the chief problems cited.

Looking for Housing: When Space in the Camps Is Not Available. In towns across Minnesota, migrant farmworkers arrive in April to begin work without previously having arranged for housing. Finding a temporary place to live for three to four months is difficult in a small city. Some farmworkers who were surveyed noted that after arriving in Minnesota, they had to sleep in their trucks for several nights before they found housing.

Affordable seasonal housing is almost impossible to find in many Minnesota communities. The majority of migrants without prearranged housing reported living in rooming houses, where they rent one or more rooms and share the common areas in the building with the rest of the residents. Other families are able to rent an entire house, and usually split the rent with another family or group of friends. People who cannot find a place to live after the first few weeks



Many migrant worker camps have communal restrooms that all residents must share. In addition to the inconvenience and lack of privacy characteristic of these facilities, substandard plumbing and poor sewage systems cause frequent problems. On busy days, shower drains often become clogged, and sewage water from the toilets reenters through floor drains, flooding the restrooms.

often ask to stay with relatives or friends for the rest of the season. Some families move on and leave their jobs to find a community or state where housing and work are both available.

Los Trabajos: What Do Farmworkers Think about Their Jobs? Upon arrival in Minnesota, the majority of surveyed migrant farmworkers work in the fields 8 to 10 hours a day, seven days a week, picking rocks or performing other planting-related jobs. Later in the season, many migrants work in vegetable canning plants that operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week, from early July until late October or early November. Workers typically work 12-hour shifts, six to seven days a week.

The vast majority of farmworkers surveyed thought that the jobs they work are difficult. In the fields, perhaps the hardest and most frequently mentioned job was picking rocks. Farmworkers walk through the fields with a bag over their shoulder collecting rocks they find on the surface. This is done to prevent damage to the machinery that will be used for fieldwork throughout the season.

Workers also described their jobs as low paying. Only 2% of the migrant farmworkers who participated in the survey answered that seasonal canning factories pay a fair wage. Workers in the factories perform a range of tasks, including feeding produce into machines and moving canned produce to storage

areas. Workers explained that the strongest workers usually get these higher paying jobs, while women and older people earn lower salaries for other jobs.

Of the workers who participated in the survey, 8% think that farmworkers in south-central Minnesota are paid a fair wage. The average wage for field workers among those surveyed was \$5.50 an hour. Field jobs that paid more than \$5.50 an hour were rare. The Farmworker Justice Fund reports that approximately 60% of migrant farmworkers in the United States earn incomes under the federal poverty line, and 73% of migrant children live in poverty.

Few of the workers surveyed felt confident they would be able to find another job if they left their current employment. The majority said that they did not know if it was possible to pursue other employment if they did not like their current job, but they were unwilling to try because of the risk of losing their housing. The camps where farmworkers live usually belong to the company, so if a person loses their job, they will likely lose their housing at the same time.

When asked about dangers in the fields, the majority of migrant farmworkers surveyed mentioned exposure to pesticides and other chemical products while they are working. Dehydration and sun exposure were also commonly mentioned. When asked about the risks associated with factory

jobs, noise and hazards related to heavy-machinery operation were most frequently mentioned.

When asked if they would get paid if they had to leave their job due to an accident or illness caused by the job, only 3% of workers answered yes. Another 8% said that they would not get paid if they had to leave their job for health reasons. The remaining 89% did not know what the policies of the company were regarding health- or injury-related leaves.

Overall, 98% of the migrant workers surveyed felt that their employers have the ability and resources to improve workers' quality of life, but have chosen not to do so.

How Minnesota Benefits from Migrant Farmworkers. The majority of those surveyed noted that the work of farmworkers helps to support Minnesota's agricultural sector, and is necessary for the economy. One respondent commented, "Of course! Why else would they bring us here every year?" Another noted that "Migrant workers are the only source of temporary hand labor in peak production months to the farmers and food processing companies in the area." When discussing how Minnesota companies benefit from migrants, 70% of the respondents thought that the farmers and food processing plants in the area benefit from their hard work. Some noted that migrant farmworkers are the only people willing to perform the jobs offered in the food processing plants. Others suggested that the main benefit that factories and farmers receive is cheap labor.

General Experiences in Minnesota. When asked about the good things related to coming to Minnesota, 93% of the workers mentioned the jobs that are available. The remaining 7% answered that they like to come to the region during the summer to be close to friends and relatives. As for problems, 53% of the migrants answered that transportation was the biggest problem they encountered in Minnesota. There is no public or private transportation system available for workers to travel from their houses to their jobs. Of the migrant farmworkers who participated in the survey, 65% are native Spanish speakers and do not speak English fluently. Nearly one-third (30%) of those surveyed see the language barrier as the biggest problem they face while they are living in Minnesota, and more than half would like to have interpreters available to facilitate communication with their bosses.



Migrant farmworkers were initially recruited to work in Minnesota's sugar beet industry during the early part of the twentieth century. Today, farmworkers in south-central Minnesota work in farm fields, processing plants, and nurseries, and help to grow and process a wide range of meat and vegetables. Here workers at a processing plant in Owatonna wait for a truck to arrive at the loading dock.

One-fourth of the migrant farmworkers who participated in the survey reported experiencing social discrimination, racism, or isolation while living in southern Minnesota. Some of the families felt discriminated against by landlords when looking for a place to live. Others reported feeling uncomfortable walking down the streets of rural cities because of negative reactions from some year-round community members.

Research to Action: Founding Centro Campesino

Of the migrant farmworkers who participated in the research survey, 87% were interested in creating an association that focuses on the needs of migrant farmworkers. This overwhelming indication of support resulted in the creation of Centro Campesino (Farmworkers' Center) in fall of 1998 during community discussions about the results of the research survey. The creation and incorporation of Centro Campesino was a response to the problems experienced by migrant farmworkers in Minnesota.

During the summer of 1999, two committees directed the work of the fledgling volunteer farmworker organization. The committees initially focused on childcare and educational opportunities for farmworker youth and children, primary concerns of migrant families in the region. Parents organized a cooperative childcare program, and negotiated with an employer for use of a unit in

each camp for the babysitting program. Members of the committees organized a petition drive and a dialogue with the company concerning wages and housing conditions. That summer, farmworkers received a wage increase and some improvements in conditions. At the end of the 1999 harvest season, committee members developed a strategic plan for the organization under the training and guidance of Baldemar Velasquez (president and founder of the Farm Labor Organizing Committee) and other consultants. A small group of farmworkers stayed in Minnesota during winter 1999–2000 to build the organization and raise money.

Since June 2000, over 120 farmworkers have joined Centro Campesino as members. The first board of directors was elected during the general members' assembly in August 2000, and the organization has formally established itself as a nonprofit corporation.

Philosophy and Priorities for Change. Centro Campesino was founded by and for migrant farmworkers with the purpose of establishing community and creating a powerful migrant farmworker and rural Latino/Latina voice in Minnesota. Centro's mission is to improve working conditions and the quality of life for migrant workers and year-round Latino/Latina residents in the region. The organization is built on the philosophy that organized communities of

migrant farmworkers in Minnesota and their allies must work together to change institutional structures that inflict poverty and oppression on migrant communities. As board member Lidia Sanchez Limón explains,

We come here to work and are faced with much injustice. The reality is that nobody does anything to change the situation. We see that our rights are violated in all respects. This is one of the reasons that we have united in this organization, Centro Campesino. Through Centro, we are being heard and are acting together. I am proud of being in Centro Campesino because I am living my values and those of my community.

Centro Campesino addresses issues that impact farmworkers' daily lives, including unfair recruitment and payment practices, low wages, dangerous working conditions, access to affordable and culturally appropriate childcare, healthcare, lack of affordable and comfortable housing, discrimination, and lack of access to Minnesota's educational system. The organization's current priorities, as established by its



Centro Campesino was established in 1998 as a volunteer farmworker organization in response to the problems experienced by migrant farmworkers in Minnesota. Since June 2000, over 120 farmworkers have joined the organization. Pictured here are Centro Campesino cofounders Victor Contreras (left) and Jaime Duran.



Centro Campesino's mission is to improve working conditions and the quality of life for migrant workers in south-central Minnesota. The organization's current priorities include community daycare facilities, educational programs, leadership development, improved wages, safer working conditions, and increased affordable housing. Here a group of migrant workers participate in an English as a second language (ESL) class taught by Kathryn Gilje of Centro Campesino.

board of directors, include community daycare facilities, youth educational programs, English classes, citizenship classes, physical and mental health, leadership development, immigration reform, improved wages, better housing conditions, safe working conditions, and increased availability of affordable seasonal housing in south-central Minnesota. Jaime Duran, community organizer, explains his involvement with Centro Campesino:

The enthusiasm to work in Centro Campesino is because I have been a migrant farmworker for 18 years, and I know all the sacrifices that migrant people have made; and though I haven't gone to school, I have the knowledge of what it is to be a migrant. All of my family has worked and struggled to have a better life, and now that we are working with Centro, not only are we fighting for our families, but for all migrants in general. We have come to understand that this struggle is not anything easy, but we will continue, with everyone's support and the help of God.

Centro Campesino works to achieve long-term changes through popular education, peer training, leadership development, and community organ-

izing, and relies on the intertwined values of faith, hope, justice, and solidarity to achieve its aims. As cofounder Victor Contreras observes,

Our members make us strong. Our foundation is our commitment, our values, our culture, and our community. We are united to improve the laws and living conditions, to guarantee human rights and social justice. We work from the base of respect and dignity of our work since we are the ones who work so hard, year after year, so that there may be food on the plates of Minnesotans.

Implications and Lessons Learned

We have learned many lessons from this research process and from the formation of Centro Campesino. The following are recommendations for policy makers, community-based organizations, researchers, and Minnesota rural communities based on our experiences:

Further research in migrant farmworker communities must directly involve farmworkers in the inception, development, and implementation of the research project, and in the ownership and use of the data. The lack of easily accessible, basic information on migrant farmworkers is a barrier for many organizations, agencies, and

municipalities attempting to address issues facing farmworker communities because government bodies and agencies in the United States require substantiated, well-documented information in order to justify action. Despite this lack of information, migrant farmworkers often report feeling "studied to death." Many of the farmworkers we interviewed had previously participated in research conducted by private organizations, public service groups, or university researchers, and some were reluctant to participate in our survey because past research has resulted in few concrete changes in the lives of migrant families.

Whether or not they recognize it, researchers develop relationships with the communities they research, and impact future opportunities for researchers to engage in conversations or research with that community. If the research experience is negative or results in few changes, a community might understandably close its doors to future research. Consequently, migrant farmworker research should be based on the interests and concerns of migrant communities. Researchers must make a commitment to engage these communities in a genuine dialogue that results in empowerment, action, and change. Community-based research that involves community members in all stages of research development and implementation is best suited to such an outcome.

A common and flexible definition of migrant agricultural workers that is honored across agency, county, school district, city, and state boundaries must be established. Of great frustration to many migrant families and advocates is the lack of consistent terms for and definitions of migrant agricultural workers across jurisdictional and agency lines. Families are frequently allowed entry into programs or offered services based on different (sometimes contradictory) qualifying definitions. Indeed, in some counties, the school system, health system, legal system, social services system, city, and child-care programs all have different definitions of who migrant farmworkers are, what "they" qualify for, and what "they" do not. This lack of consistency creates significant frustration in migrant communities, and makes documentation and research almost impossible. With no common definition of who is a migrant agricultural worker, those seeking change are hard-pressed to provide data to support important

community-based policies or initiatives designed to help migrant families.

Livable and affordable housing must be made more available in rural Minnesota. Mainstream news sources currently bemoan the depopulation of rural Minnesota, and the end of an era of family-based businesses and agriculture in the region. This painful transition is difficult for all to endure. However, many people are moving to rural Minnesota, and many more are interested in living in rural towns and cities throughout the state. One significant problem these people face is the lack of affordable housing, which is almost impossible to find in many rural areas. The living conditions in existing affordable housing often leaves much to be desired. Efforts to develop livable affordable housing are crucial to assist new residents in moving to rural Minnesota.

Encourage safe jobs that pay a wage on which families can comfortably live. Hand-in-hand with affordable housing is a salary that allows migrant farmworkers to pay the rent and the bills, maintain a united family, and improve their family's quality of life. Families need jobs that are safe, and that provide adequate compensation for work-related injuries. Already on the books are two legislative tools that could make this goal easier to accomplish, and Centro Campesino recommends increased enforcement of these workplace safety and workers' compensation laws. In addition, migrant farmworkers should have federal protection for collective bargaining and the right to organize.

Translate agency and service materials into Spanish, and encourage second and third language acquisition

for everyone. There are a dearth of materials and services available in Minnesota in Spanish. Many agencies, organizations, and communities do not provide Spanish-language materials, and do not have bilingual/bicultural staff or translation services. A new appreciation and support for multiple cultures seems to be arising in the United States, and it is now more widely recognized that culture, religion/spirituality, and language are interconnected in ways that are very painful and often detrimental for people to unweave. Centro Campesino supports non-English speakers learning English through English as a second language (ESL) classes in order to survive and defend themselves in Minnesota. At the same time, we encourage non-Spanish-speaking individuals and communities to learn Spanish, and provide services and materials to residents in their native languages.

Encourage cross-cultural dialogue and an inclusive approach to community development in Minnesota. Cultural misunderstanding causes many unintentional community problems. We could all benefit from a better understanding of dominant cultural structures in the United States, and the many ways that culture impacts our actions and decisions. An inclusive approach to community decision making—one that acknowledges existing power imbalances in the United States, and the unearned access and control that many European Americans enjoy—is critical to the development of communities that encourage the participation and respond to the needs of all their members.

Victor Contreras has been a migrant agricultural worker for 17 years in states throughout the United States. He has been working in Minnesota agricultural production and food processing for the past nine years. In 1998, Mr. Contreras led the research survey discussed in this report, and he is a cofounder of Centro Campesino.

Jaime Duran has been a migrant agricultural worker in Texas, Michigan, and for 11 years in Minnesota. His agricultural work has included hand labor such as detasseling, weeding, and producing fruits and vegetables, as well as managing tractor and machine operations and supervising a cotton crew for 13 years. Mr. Duran has also worked in reforestation, and has monitored wild turkey populations in several states. He was a member of the founding board of directors of Centro Campesino, and now works with Centro as a community organizer.

Kathryn Gilje has worked with community-based social change organizations in Minnesota and Michigan for 10 years. She most recently worked with the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy on issues such as ecolabeling, marketing sustainable agriculture, and farmworker justice. Ms. Gilje's experience is in group facilitation and grassroots organizing, and she has an academic background in agricultural science. Ms. Gilje is a cofounder of and community organizer with Centro Campesino.

This article is based on an initial report of the survey research written by Pablo Celi. The authors gratefully acknowledge the support of Gloria Contreras, Eva Duran, Lisa Sass Zaragoza, and Fred Smith.

For More Information or to Get Involved

For more information about this research or about Centro Campesino, contact Victor Contreras, Jaime Duran, or Kathryn Gilje by mail at Centro Campesino, 104 Broadway Street West, #208, Owatonna, MN 55060; by phone at (507) 446-9599; or by e-mail at migrante@rconnect.com.

Centro Campesino manages an e-mail news and announcement service that provides weekly updates on farm-

worker organizing activities throughout the United States. To join this list, e-mail your request to migrante@rconnect.com.

Centro Campesino welcomes "Amigas/Amigos," non-farmworker members of the organization who work in various ways to support the organizing efforts of member farmworkers. Contact Centro Campesino for more information.