

ABSTRACT

This report presents that portion of a broader study of horticultural industries in Florida dealing with fruit and nut industries. The focus of the inquiry is upon wage rates paid to seasonal workers, prospective labor supplies, likely impact of the Immigration Reform and Control Act upon the supply of seasonal workers, possible employer actions to deal with inadequate labor supplies, and the ethnic and other demographic characteristics of seasonal field workers in Florida's fruit and nut industries.

The survey design involved questionnaires mailed to approximately 1,400 Florida farmers during the late Spring and Summer of 1988. The overall response rate was 474 questionnaires or 34%. Of the total number of respondents, 152 were from fruit and nut growers or 32% of the total of 474. Less than one-half of the respondents, however, fully completed the questionnaire. Practically all respondents were located in Central and South Florida.

Horticultural growers, particularly citrus growers, utilize a variety of methods for meeting their harvesting and other seasonal labor requirements. For fruit and nut respondents as a whole, 42% hired their seasonal workers directly, while 36% utilized both direct hiring practices and outside farm labor services. The remaining 22% of fruit and nut respondents hired seasonal labor only through labor contractors. There is considerable difference in the patterns of labor recruitment for oranges and grapefruit when compared with strawberries.

Hispanic workers comprise the largest ethnic grouping of seasonal farm workers in the Florida fruit and nut industry with slightly over 60% of the total. Roughly 20% of seasonal workers in fruits and nuts are American Blacks, plus an additional 10% Haitian and other foreign Blacks. Non-Hispanic domestic Caucasians represent less than 6% of the total seasonal workforce.

Almost 80% of the seasonal farm workers on fruit and nut farms in Florida are men, with 20.5% women. This same pattern holds for seasonal orange and grapefruit workers, but 31.4% of seasonal strawberry workers are women.

Hourly wage rates were estimated for several types of job skills. There was a sharp difference between the average hourly wage rate for planting versus the wage rate for harvesting/picking, particularly for oranges and grapefruit. In the 1987-88 season, the average hourly wage rate for planting orange trees was \$3.87 compared with \$5.74 for harvesting oranges, or a difference of \$1.87 per hour. The difference between planting and harvesting wage rates for strawberries, however, was less than \$1 per hour for the 1987-88 season.

Average hourly rates for weeding and hoeing fruit and nut crops are slightly below those of planting. There was only a minor increase in average wage rates for both planting and harvesting hand skills in fruit and nut industries between the 1986-87 and 1987-88 seasons.