Farm Labor Contracting in the United States, 1981, by Susan L. Pollack. Agriculture and Rural Economics Division, Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture. Agricultural Economic Report No. 542.

Abstract

About 250,000 people worked for farm labor contractors during 1981 making up 10 percent of all hired farmworkers. Most crew workers (53 percent) were white, 28 percent were Hispanic, and 19 percent were black or of other racial/ethnic groups. Most crew workers lived in the Southeast, North Central Lake States, Southwest, and Lower Pacific Coast regions of the United States. Their earnings averaged $2,772 annually, $1,936 of which came from farmwork. Of the 9,774 people who registered for certification to hire farmworkers for crew work in 1981, 2,557 applied for Department of Labor authorization to transport workers to and from work, and 827 applied for authorization to provide housing for their employees.

Keywords

Farm labor contractor, hired farmworkers, crew worker, noncrew worker, Farm Labor Contractor Registration Act, Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act

Additional Copies of this Report...

can be purchased from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402. Ask for *Farm Labor Contracting in the United States, 1981* (AER-542.). Write to the above address for price and ordering instructions. For faster service, call the GPO order desk at (202) 783-3238 and charge your purchase to your VISA, Choice, MasterCard, or GPO Deposit Account. A 25-percent bulk discount is available on orders of 100 or more copies shipped to a single address. Please add 25 percent extra for postage for shipments to foreign addresses.

Microfiche copies ($5.95 each) can be purchased from the Identification Section, National Technical Information Service, 5285 Port Royal Road, Springfield, VA 22161. Ask for *Farm Labor Contracting in the United States,* 1981 (AER-542). Enclose check or money order, payable to NTIS. For faster service, call NTIS at (703) 487-4780 and charge your purchase to your VISA, MasterCard, American Express, or NTIS Deposit Account.

The Economic Research Service has no copies for free mailing.

EXCHANGE Rec'd
DEC 16 1985

Washington, DC 20005-4788 November 1985

Contents

Page

Summary v

Introduction 1

Legislation 1
Farm Labor Contractor Registration Act 1
Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act 2

Farm Labor Contractors 2
Location 3
Contractor Employees 4
Transportation and Housing 4

Crew Workers 4
Agricultural Activity and Location 5
Demographic and Economic Characteristics 5
Characteristics of Crew Workers by Days of Crew Work 6

Comparisons between Crew and Noncrew Farmworkers 8
Demographic and Family Characteristics 10
Economic Characteristics 10

Implications 11

References 11

Glossary 12

Summary

Crew workers (farmworkers who work for contractors) generally had lower family incomes and lower educational levels than noncrew workers. The 250,000 crew workers, who made up 10 percent of all hired farmworkers in 1981, resided mostly in the Southeast, North Central Lake States, Southwest, and Lower Pacific Coast regions.

This report examines the characteristics of crew workers and noncrew workers in 1981 and looks at the Federal legislation designed to protect crew workers and to control farm labor contractors. It finds that the more days a year a farmworker depends on crew work, the less chance that crew worker has of moving into a more stable, higher paying job.

Other findings of this report include:

- Long-term crew workers (those who worked in a crew more than 75 days) accounted for about 21 percent of all crew workers. They were in the prime working ages of 25-54 years and spent most of the year doing hired farmwork. Minorities made up most of this group; 59 percent were Hispanic, and 19 percent were black or in other racial/ethnic groups. Long-term crew workers had very low educational levels; 87 percent had not completed high school. Their earnings averaged $5,776 in 1981, of which $5,541 was from farmwork. Only 11 percent reported any nonfarmwork in 1981. Their earnings were probably a major source of family income because 67 percent of the workers came from families earning $7,500 or less annually.

- Short-term crew workers (those who worked in a crew fewer than 75 days) accounted for about 79 percent of all crew workers in 1981. They were mostly young and white, and most were students doing farmwork during school breaks. They earned an average of $954 from farmwork in 1981. Short-term crew workers who also did nonfarmwork averaged $2,288 from nonfarmwork. However, their individual earnings were generally not a major contribution to family income. Almost 40 percent came from families with annual incomes of at least $20,000.

- Crew workers, both long- and short-term, were generally younger than noncrew workers and were more likely to be from a minority group. Although they had less education than noncrew workers, half were still in school. Most were young, male, and white. They averaged 70 days doing farmwork, mostly in planting and harvesting grains, vegetables and melons, and fruits and tree nuts. Their earnings in 1981 averaged $2,772, of which $1,936 was from farmwork.

- Noncrew farmworkers averaged more days of farmwork in 1981 and had higher earnings than did crew workers, who had a larger student population. Their earnings averaged $4,470, of which $2,740 was from farmwork.

- Of the 9,774 people who registered for certification to hire farmworkers for crew work in 1981, 2,557 applied for Department of Labor authorization to transport workers to and from work, and 827 applied for authorization to provide housing for their employees. Most contractors resided in the Southeast and Southwest.

Farm Labor Contracting in the United States, 1981

By Susan L. Pollack*

Introduction

Farm labor contracting provides an essential service to the agricultural industry by providing workers to farmers during peak labor demand. Although the media have often reported examples of contractor abuse, little definitive information has been published about contractors or the farmworkers they employ. This report provides information about both groups as well as information about the Federal legislation designed to protect crew workers and to control contractor activities. It suggests how the living and working conditions of crew workers might be improved. Data used in this report are from the U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) Employment Standards Administration and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Hired Farm Working Force Survey. The analysis is based on 1981 data, the most recent available.

Legislation

The seasonal and transient nature of farm labor contract work provides opportunities for abuse by contractors.[1] Workers in a crew are often greatly in need of employment, but unaware of their rights as workers in a job to which they have little attachment. Both workers and farm employers often do not know the contractors with whom they are involved. This situation gives an irresponsible contractor the opportunity to take advantage of both workers and farm employers. Some contractors have been accused of not fulfilling their contracts with employers, withholding workers' payrolls, providing unsanitary housing, using unsafe vehicles to transport workers, and overcharging workers for goods and services which they supply (*4, 5, 10*).[2] In this last case, the worker can easily become indebted to the contractor and then be forced to continue working to repay the debt. There have also been rare incidences of contractors enslaving their workers (*1*). To curb these abuses, Congress enacted legislation to protect both workers and farm employers.

Farm Labor Contractor Registration Act

To supplement an inadequate U.S. farm labor force, the U.S. Government brought in Mexican laborers to do farmwork under the Bracero Program from 1942 to 1962. In 1961, when Congress was deciding whether or not to continue the program, several public and Government agencies expressed concern about its effects on domestic workers (*3*). In regions where the program was strongest, particularly in the West, research evidence showed U.S. farmworkers were underemployed, received low wages, and had poor housing and health facilities (*2, 14*). Congress introduced a series of bills to improve the conditions of American farmworkers. One of these bills was passed as the Farm Labor Contractor Registration Act (FLCRA).

FLCRA was enacted in 1963 to protect migrant farmworkers and farm employers from irresponsible farm labor contractors (also referred to as crew leaders)(*9*). The act as passed and subsequently amended defined a migrant worker broadly as an individual whose primary employment was agriculture or who performed agricultural labor on a seasonal or temporary basis. It defined a contactor as a person who was paid to recruit, solicit, hire, furnish, or transport migrant workers, other than a member of his/her immediate family, for agricultural employment.

The act required all farm labor contractors to obtain a certificate of registration from the Secretary of Labor. However, farmers, processors, canners, ginners, packing shed operators, and nursery workers who personally recruited migrant workers for their own operations were not required to register. FLCRA also excluded full-time or regular employees of the excluded employers, such as farmers, from registering if they engaged in recruiting and transporting workers solely for their employers on an incidental basis. Operators of custom combining, hay harvesting, and sheep-shearing operations were also excluded from registering. Operators of custom poultry operations engaged in marketing, breeding, debeaking, sexing, or health service were excluded from registering if their employees were away from home only during normal working hours. Those who were engaged in any farm labor contracting activity within a 25-mile intrastate radius of their permanent home and for no more than 13 weeks per year were also excluded (*7*).

*The author is an economist with the Agriculture and Rural Economics Division of the Economic Research Service.

[1]See glossary for definitions of terms used in this report.

[2]Italicized numbers in parentheses refer to items in the references at the end of this report.

The legislation and accompanying regulations also set forth rules for contractors to follow and gave the Secretary of Labor authority to investigate violations and to make FLCRA enforceable. Contractors could lose or be refused a Certificate of Registration, and they could be subject to fines and prison terms if they failed to do the following: obtain the appropriate Certificate of Registration before engaging in activities as a contractor, notify DOL of a change in their address, comply with housing and transportation regulations when applicable, carry their Certificate of Registration while engaged in contracting activities and present it to workers and employers upon request, disclose to their workers the working conditions or any arrangements that they had with farm employers, provide workers with written or printed payroll statements, or promptly pay their workers the proper amount owed. Contractors also violated FLCRA if they forced workers to purchase goods and services from a specific person, such as the contractor, or hired undocumented foreign workers.

Agricultural employers also had responsibilities under the provisions of FLCRA. Employers could hire only contractors with valid DOL registration, and they had to maintain payroll records of crew workers or obtain payroll information from the contractor. An operator who violated FLCRA could be denied the services of DOL-registered contractors and worker referral services for up to 3 years.

DOL interpreted FLCRA as requiring some agricultural employers and their employees who transported, supervised, or hired farmworkers to register as contractors. Farm employers questioned this interpretation, causing Congress to reexamine FLCRA.

Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act

Agricultural employers thought that DOL's decision to require some of them and their employees to register as contractors placed an unnecessary burden on them and that it did not improve the labor market conditions of farmworkers. The Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act (MSPA) was enacted in 1983 to replace FLCRA. It defined more specifically who must register as a farm labor contractor with DOL than did FLCRA (*10*). The act specifically excluded farm employers and their employees and farm associations from registering as contractors. MSPA was also more specific in defining those workers covered by the act. It specifically included seasonal as well as migrant farmworkers who worked for crew leaders. FLCRA had included seasonal workers only under its broad definition of a migrant worker.

MSPA defines a farm labor contractor as a person who is paid to recruit, solicit, hire, employ, furnish, or transport migrant and seasonal agricultural workers. However, the act specifically excludes several groups from registration, including all agricultural employers, agricultural employer associations, and employees of employers and associations. Anyone who does farm labor contracting for a farm, processing or seed conditioning establishment, cannery, gin, packing shed, or nursery that is owned or operated by that person or immediate family member is likewise not required to register as a contractor. MSPA excludes small businesses using fewer than 500 worker-days of labor during any calender quarter of the preceding year. The act also excludes common carriers, labor and nonprofit charitable organizations as well as local short-term contracting activities taking place for no more than 13 weeks per year within a 25-mile intrastate radius of the contractor's home or business establishment. It also excludes custom combine and other custom operations excluded under FLCRA.

MSPA provides essentially the same protection for workers as did FLCRA. Farm labor contractors, agricultural employers, and agricultural associations must provide their migrant and seasonal farm employees with complete information on working conditions and on wages and terms of employment and must maintain detailed employment records on their workers. Farm labor contractors who supply housing and transportation for their workers must comply with specific safety and sanitation standards. MSPA forbids these employer groups from violating any terms of working conditions that are made with the seasonal and migrant workers. It prohibits contractors from requiring workers to buy goods and services from specific places of business or people, and it states that hiring undocumented foreign workers is illegal.

MSPA defines a migrant worker as anyone who is employed in agriculture on a seasonal or temporary basis and who must stay away from a permanent residence overnight while employed. A seasonal worker is anyone employed in agriculture on a seasonal or temporary basis, but who does not have to stay away from home overnight to work. Excluded from these definitions are immediate family members of agricultural employers and farm contractors as well as undocumented foreign workers.

The following discussion of contractors and crew workers is based on data collected in 1981 when FLCRA was in operation. More recent demographic and economic data on crew workers relating to MSPA are not available.

Farm Labor Contractors

The data on farm labor contractors are from the DOL's Application for a Farm Labor Contractor Certificate of Registration. The application provides information on contractors such as their locations, the type of work to be performed, the maximum number of workers expected in the crew at any time during the year, and whether or not transportation and housing will be provided for workers while employed by the contractor.

Farm labor contractors provide farm employers with a steady supply of labor and provide workers with a means

of employment. Many agricultural activities are short term and labor intensive, requiring large numbers of hired laborers only during peak seasons. Although most employers hire their own help at these times, some find it easier or more efficient to rely on contractors. Some employers in areas of inadequate local agricultural labor supply or in areas where language barriers complicate hiring rely on contractors to obtain the workers they need.

Employees also rely on contractors to help them find work, to extend the amount of time they can work during the year, and to provide them with transportation and housing when necessary (*8*).

Location

In 1981, 9,774 farm labor contractors registered with DOL to recruit farmworkers (table 1).[3] Most of these contractors (52 percent) were in the Southeast (Standard Federal Region (SFR) IV) at the time they applied for registration; 23 percent were in the Southwest (SFR VI); and 15 percent were in the Lower Pacific Coast region (SFR IX) (fig. 1).

[3] This total includes agricultural employers and associations who were required to register as farm labor contractors under FLCRA. Both agricultural employers and associations and their employees were excluded from registering as labor contractors by MSPA. We were not able to determine the number who registered as contractors and employees of contractors under FLCRA, but who would have been exempted from registering under MSPA.

Table 1—Farm labor contractors and their employees, by region, January 1 to December 20, 1981[1]

Region	Contractors		Contractor employees	
	Number	*Percent*	*Number*	*Percent*
United States[2]	9,774	100	8,582	100
I-New England	8	0	2	0
II-New York and New Jersey	155	2	64	1
III-Mid-Atlantic	150	1	106	1
IV-Southeast	5,048	52	2,608	30
V-North Central Lake States	347	3	1,767	21
VI-Southwest	2,222	23	877	10
VII-Mid-United States	85	1	1,295	15
VIII-Mountain	49	1	55	1
IX-Lower Pacific Coast	1,498	15	1,689	20
X-Northwest Pacific Coast	212	2	119	1

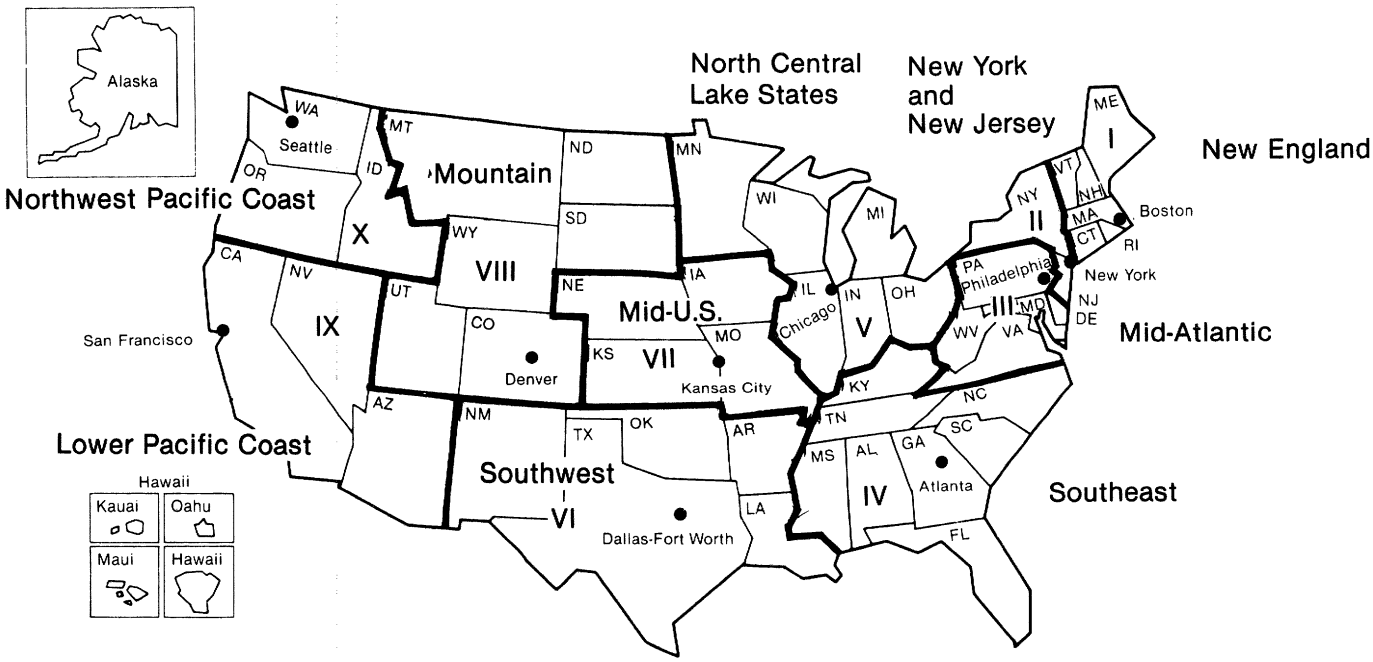
[1]Includes agricultural employees and agricultural associations and the employees who registered as farm labor contractors. Contractor employees are hired to help the contractors recruit and transport workers.

[2]See figure 1 for States included in each region.

Source: (*13*).

Figure 1

Standard Federal Regions



Most of the Nation's contractors are located in these regions because of high concentrations of labor-intensive fruit, vegetable, and melon production which dominates their agriculture. Many farm employers depend on contractors to supply them with seasonal labor for planting and harvesting these crops.

Contractor Employees

Some farm labor contractors hire employees to help them recruit and transport workers. These contractors are required to obtain a certificate of registration from DOL. DOL registered 8,582 employees of farm labor contractors in 1981. Most were in the Southeast (SFR IV), North Central Lake States (SFR V), and the Lower Pacific Coast region (SFR IX) (table 1).

Some regions, such as the North Central Lake States (SFR V) and the Mid-United States (SFR VII), had many more contractor employees than contractors registered. This situation was due mostly to large seed corn, vegetable, and fruit companies in these regions being required to register as contractors and to their employees who transported or recruited workers being required to register as contractor employees (*13*). Under FLCRA, companies that recruited workers for about 6-8 weeks to detassle corn or that recruited workers to harvest vegetables and fruit did not meet regulation exemptions and, therefore, had to register; under MSPA, however, these companies are exempt from registration.

Transportation and Housing

Contractors who transported and housed farmworkers had to receive authorization from DOL to do so. In 1981, there were 2,552 applications for transportation authorizations and 827 applications for housing authorizations (table 2). Most of these applications were from the Southeast (SFR IV) and Southwest (SFR VI), the same regions with most of the registered contractors. Comparing the number of transportation and housing authorizations (table 2) with the number of registered contractors (table 1) shows that only a fraction of the contractors applied for these authorizations. About 26 percent of the contractors applied for transportation authorization; less than 10 percent applied for housing authorizations.

To receive authorization for housing and transporting workers, contractors must have met certain requirements. They must have had proof of vehicle liability insurance or proof of financial responsibility in case accidents occurred and claims were filed. Each vehicle used to transport workers had to be identified and documentation had to be provided to show that the vehicle complied with Federal and State safety and health standards. The drivers of the approved vehicles had to have a valid driver's license and a doctor's certificate showing that they were in good health and capable of operating the appropriate vehicle. Before a housing authorization was granted, the contractor had to identify each housing facility used and to provide DOL with proof that the housing complied with Federal and State safety and health standards. Housing conditions had to be posted at each facility.

The requirements for authorizations for housing and transportation are similiar in MSPA and FLCRA, except that MSPA requires that farm employers who own or operate housing or vehicles to transport workers must also comply with regulations specified for contractors. In fact, this requirement does not differ much from FLCRA because DOL's interpretation of FLCRA would have included these employers as farm labor contractors and they would have had to meet FLCRA's housing and transportation requirements. One other difference between the two acts is that, under MSPA, contractors and employers need not have vehicle or other liability insurance if their workers are covered by State workers' compensation laws. However, employers must still provide liability insurance for transporting passengers who are not employees and for employees not covered by workers' compensation insurance. FLCRA required liability insurance for all workers.

Crew Workers

Little information has previously been available on the characteristics of the crew farm work force because statistical data are lacking. This report provides new data on the economic and demographic characteristics

Table 2—Transportation and housing authorizations, by region, January 1 to December 20, 1981

Region	Transportation authorizations		Housing authorizations	
	Number	*Percent*	*Number*	*Percent*
United States	2,552	100	827	100
I-New England	2	0	2	0
II-New York and New Jersey	55	2	18	2
III-Mid-Atlantic	55	2	14	2
IV-Southeast	1,828	72	609	74
V-North Central Lake States	116	5	31	4
VI-Southwest	351	14	76	9
VII-Mid-United States	26	1	4	0
VIII-Mountain	5	0	7	1
IX-Lower Pacific Coast	102	4	64	8
X-Northwest Pacific Coast	12	0	2	0

Source: (*13*).

of crew workers. These data help shed light on the particular characteristics of crew workers, since this population is not homogeneous.

Data on crew workers are from the USDA's Hired Farm Working Force Survey of 1981. The survey is a supplement to the Bureau of the Census' Current Population Survey (CPS). The CPS is a household survey designed to collect labor force data. The Hired Farm Working Force Survey is conducted every other December. The analysis here contains data when FLCRA was in effect.

To determine if a hired farmworker was also a crew member, the survey enumerators asked survey participants in 1981 if a crew leader or contractor recruited or transported the worker to do farmwork for cash wages at any time during 1981. When workers were identified as crew workers, they were then asked about the number of days of farmwork done while in a crew. The enumerators gathered additional data on the farmworkers' economic and demographic characteristics. They obtained similar information on the characteristics of noncrew hired farmworkers.[4]

According to the Hired Farm Working Force Survey of 1981, about 250,000 farmworkers actually worked for farm labor contractors. They made up 10 percent of the total 2.5 million hired farmworkers in 1981. Some of these workers may have worked in one or more crews during the year.

Agricultural Activity and Location

Farms producing grain, fruits and tree nuts, and vegetables and melons employed most of the crew farmworkers in 1981 (table 3). Twenty-eight percent spent most of their time working in grain production, 24 percent in fruits and tree nuts, and 18 percent in vegetables and melons. These workers were most likely involved in planting, harvesting, or thinning these crops. Most workers in grain production were probably employed by custom combine harvesting operators. Although these operators were not required to register as crew leaders under FLCRA, the workers often identified themselves as crew workers in the survey. Most crew workers were located in the South (SFR IV and VI—30 percent), Midwest (SFR V and VII—35 percent), and West (SFR IX and X—29 percent) where grain, fruit and tree nut, and vegetable and melon production is concentrated.

Few crew workers were located in the Northeast at the time the survey was conducted in December 1981—partly because some crew workers follow crop harvests northward during the summer and fall and return south in December to harvest winter crops. Perhaps a more important reason for the small crew work force in the Northeast is that farmers in this region, particularly apple producers, often rely on temporary foreign agricultural workers (H-2 workers) to harvest their crops. The H-2 workers are not normally included in the survey data because most return to their home country before the survey is conducted in December.

Demographic and Economic Characteristics

Crew workers were mostly white (53 percent), young (67 percent were under 25 years old), and not migrants (table 4). Of the crew workers who were 25 years old and older, 70 percent had not completed schooling past the eighth grade.

Almost half the crew workers spent most of the year in school (table 5). This large amount is due to the large proportion of crew workers under 25 years old. These workers did farmwork during vacations, summer breaks, and after school. About 22 percent spent most of the

Table 3—Region and crop activity of crew and noncrew farmworkers, 1981

Region and activity	Crew farmworkers		Noncrew farmworkers	
	Thousands	*Percent*	*Thousands*	*Percent*
United States	250	100	2,242	100
Standard Federal regions:				
I-New England	4	2	56	2
II-New York and New Jersey	0	0	101	5
III-Mid-Atlantic	3	1	116	5
IV-Southeast	53	21	514	23
V-North Central Lake States	45	18	335	15
VI-Southwest	22	9	362	16
VII-Mid-United States	43	17	226	10
VIII-Mountain	6	3	101	5
IX-Lower Pacific Coast	58	23*	275	12
X-Northwest Pacific Coast	16	6	156	7
Primary agricultural activity:				
Grain	71	28	417	18
Cotton	13	5	102	4
Tobacco	19	7	259	11
Other field crops	19	8	339	15
Vegetables and melons	44	18	263	12
Fruits and tree nuts	60	24*	212	10
Beef	2	2	174	8
Dairy	3	1	166	7
Other livestock	3	1	123	6
Nursery	11	4	64	3
Other	5	2	123	6

*Significantly different from noncrew farmworker rates at the 95-percent confidence level.
Source: (*11*).

[4]For a more complete description of the Hired Farm Working Force Survey of 1981 and of the characteristics of the 1981 workers, see (*6*).

year doing hired farmwork, and 10 percent spent most of their time doing nonfarmwork (fig. 2). Most crew workers did not have a nonfarm job. Crew workers, as a group, spent few days at farmwork, principally because of the large student population. Most crew workers were casual or seasonal workers (spending fewer than 150 days during the year at farmwork).

The most common method of pay at the longest farm job which crew workers held during the year (64 percent) was by the hour. Twenty-one percent of the workers were paid on a piece-rate basis. However, information on piece rate pay scales was not available from the survey data. The average annual earnings for crew workers was $2,772, of which $1,936 was from farmwork (table 6).

About a third of the crew workers came from families with incomes of $20,000 a year or more (table 4). Thus, those crew workers with annual average earnings of $2,772 or less probably contributed relatively little to their family income.

Characteristics of Crew Workers by Days of Crew Work

The characteristics of crew workers differ greatly when examined by the amount of time they spend working in crews (table 7). Short-term workers, those who worked fewer than 75 days in a crew, accounted for 79 percent of all crew workers. Most were students (60 percent), and 75 percent were under 25 years old. Most (61 percent) were white and lived in the Southeast, North Central Lake States, Mid-United States, and Lower Pacific Coast regions at the time the survey was conducted. Thirty-four percent worked in the production of grain, 17 percent in vegetables and melons, and 15 percent in fruits and tree nuts (fig. 3). Of the short-term crew workers, 72 percent were paid by the hour, whereas 13 percent were paid on a piece-rate basis. They had a low

Table 4—Demographic and family characteristics of crew and noncrew farmworkers, 1981

Characteristic	Crew farmworkers		Noncrew farmworkers	
	Thousands	*Percent*	*Thousands*	*Percent*
Total	250	100	2,242	100
Household status:				
Head	72	29*	975	44
Wife	18	7	187	8
Relative	143	57*	994	44
Nonrelative	17	7	86	4
Years of age:				
14-17	95	38*	511	23
18-24	71	29	689	31
25-34	36	14	462	21
35-44	21	8	215	9
45-54	18	7	162	7
55-64	1	1	103	4
65 and over	8	3	100	5
Racial/ethnic group:				
Whites	132	53*	1,692	76
Hispanics	70	28*	257	11
Blacks and others	48	19	293	13
Sex:				
Male	167	67	1,750	78
Female	83	33	492	22
Migratory status:				
Migrant	20	8	96	4
Nonmigrant	230	92	2,146	96
Years of education completed, by all workers:				
0-4	32	13	149	7
5-8	84	33*	472	21
9-11	83	33	690	31
12	34	14*	602	27
13 or more	17	7	329	14
Years of education completed by workers 25 and over:				
All workers	84	100	1,042	100
0-4	27	32	133	13
5-8	32	38	263	25
9-11	6	7	159	15
12	8	10*	300	29
13 or more	11	13	187	18
Family income:[1]				
Under $1,000	9	4	61	3
$1,000-1,999	6	3	44	2
$2,000-2,999	21	9	58	3
$3,000-3,999	10	4	96	5
$4,000-4,999	11	5	85	4
$5,000-5,999	4	2	97	5
$6,000-7,499	34	15	150	7
$7,500-9,999	30	13	235	11
$10,000-11,999	8	3	224	10
$12,000-14,999	7	3	224	10
$15,000-19,999	13	6	289	13
$20,000-24,999	33	14	222	10
$25,000-49,999	38	16	301	14
$50,000 and over	7	3	63	3

*Significantly different from noncrew farmworker rates at the 95-percent confidence level.
[1]Some of those interviewed did not respond to the family income question.
Source: (*11*).

educational level; 78 percent had not completed high school. However, almost half of these workers were between the ages of 14 and 17 years, and many still attended school while doing crew work during their school breaks. Few short-term workers did migrant work.

Table 5—Employment characteristics of crew and noncrew farmworkers, 1981

Characteristic	Crew farmworkers		Noncrew farmworkers	
	Thousands	*Percent*	*Thousands*	*Percent*
Total	250	100	2,242	100
Primary employment activity:				
Hired farmwork	54	22	651	29
Farm operation	0	0	62	3
Other farmwork	0	0	28	1
Nonfarmwork	25	10*	395	18
Unemployed	10	4	77	3
Not in labor force—				
Keeping house	25	10	174	8
Going to school	122	49*	736	33
Other	14	5	119	5
Nonfarmwork:				
Did nonfarmwork	92	37	922	41
Did not do nonfarmwork	158	63	1,320	59
Days of farmwork:				
Fewer than 25	100	40	870	39
25-74	70	28	468	21
75-149	42	17	268	12
150-249	28	11	253	11
250 and over	10	4*	383	17
Days of farmwork worked with a crew leader:				
Fewer than 25	126	51	NA	NA
25-74	70	28	NA	NA
75-149	24	9	NA	NA
150-249	24	10	NA	NA
250 and over	6	2	NA	NA
Method of pay:				
Hourly	159	64	1,232	55
Daily	26	10	289	13
Weekly	4	2	209	9
Monthly	1	0	160	7
Piece rate	52	21*	210	10
Other	8	3	142	6
Days of nonfarmwork:[1]				
All workers	91	100	922	100
Fewer than 25	21	24	153	16
25-74	39	43*	203	22
75-149	12	13	180	20
150-249	13	14	214	23
250 and over	6	6*	172	19

NA = not applicable.

*Significantly different from noncrew farmworker rates at the 95-percent confidence level.

[1]For those who did nonfarmwork in addition to farmwork during the year.

Source: (*11*).

Table 6—Earnings of crew and noncrew farmworkers, 1981

Characteristic	Crew farmworkers[1]	Noncrew farmworkers
	Dollars	
Annual earnings:		
Total	2,772	4,470
Farm	1,936	2,740
Nonfarm[2]	2,446	4,204
Hourly wage[3]	3.58	3.70
Daily wage:		
Total	25.78	24.66
Nonfarm	8.38	11.60

[1]Tests of statistical differences were not made where base was fewer than 50,000 persons.

[2]Nonfarm earnings are for the 25,000 crew and 395,000 noncrew farmworkers who did both farm and nonfarmwork. Nonfarm earnings cannot be added to the farm earnings for the annual total for all farmworkers.

[3]Based on 26,000 crew and 289,000 noncrew workers who were paid by the hour.

Source: (*11*).

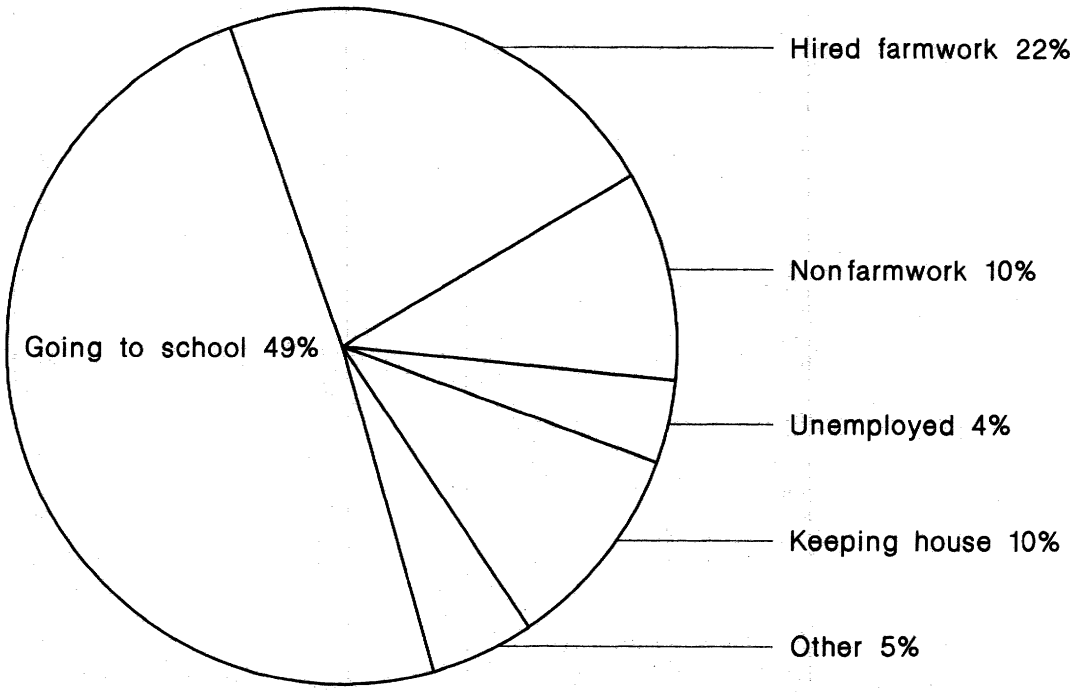
The average annual earnings of short-term workers at $1,929 were only one-third the annual earnings of long-term crew workers (table 8). Almost 50 percent of this group were in families with incomes of at least $12,000 a year, and almost 40 percent were in families with incomes of $20,000 or more. The farm earnings of many short-term crew workers probably did not represent a significant factor in family incomes. However, 35 percent of this group had annual family incomes of less than $7,500. For the families of these workers, earnings from crew work were probably important contributions to family income.

The characteristics of long-term crew workers, those who worked 75 days or more in a crew, differed markedly from those of short-term workers. Hired farmwork was the principal activity for most of these workers during the year. About one-third of these workers were under 25 years old, and two-thirds were 25-54 years old. Therefore, in contrast to the short-term crew workers who were generally relatives of the head of household, under 25 years of age, or students most of the year, most long-term workers were in their prime working years, household heads, and responsible for a major portion of their families' income.

The racial/ethnic mix of this group also differed from that of the previous group. Most long-term workers were members of minority groups, whereas most short-term workers were white. Nearly 60 percent of the long-term workers were Hispanic, and 19 percent were from black or other racial/ethnic groups. (However, there were no significant differences between the number of blacks and others in the two worker groups.)

Figure 2

Primary Employment Status of Crew Workers, 1981



Source: (15).

At the time of the survey, 55 percent of the long-term workers were in the Lower Pacific Coast region, and 26 percent were in the Southeast. Fifty-eight percent worked primarily in fruit and tree nut production, and 21 percent worked in vegetables and melons on their longest farm job. Long-term workers depended more than short-term workers on employment in the labor-intensive crops, particularly fruits and tree nuts. Because of the favorable climate in the Lower Pacific Coast and Southeast regions, some fruits and vegetables are produced for longer periods than in other regions, providing these workers with more days of farmwork than they might find elsewhere. Nevertheless, one-quarter of these workers did some migrant farmwork during 1981.

Half the long-term workers were paid on a piece-rate basis, and one-third were paid by the hour. In contrast, 72 percent of the short-term workers were paid by the hour, and only 13 percent were paid on a piece-rate basis. These differences were caused primarily by the types of crops with which they worked. Payment on a piece-rate basis is a more common practice in harvesting fruits and vegetables than in other types of farm employment. Long-term crew workers were more likely to work harvesting fruits and vegetables than were short-term workers.

Long-term workers had low educational levels. Only 13 percent of this group had completed high school. This low level of formal education may limit this group's ability to improve their economic situation without further education or training.

Long-term workers averaged $5,776 in 1981, which was significantly more than the earnings of short-term workers (table 8). Of this total, $5,541 came from farmwork. Almost 50 percent of the workers in this group came from families with incomes between $6,000 and $10,000 a year. Another 34 percent came from families with even lower incomes. Based on their average earnings and their family incomes, long-term crew workers contributed far more to family income than did short-term crew workers.

Comparisons between Crew and Noncrew Farmworkers

Crew workers and noncrew workers shared many characteristics. Most workers in both groups were young and white. Many were not in the labor force for most of the year, either because they went to school or kept house. Thus, most workers in both groups spent only a short period of the year doing farmwork. However, there were significant differences between crew and noncrew farmworkers.

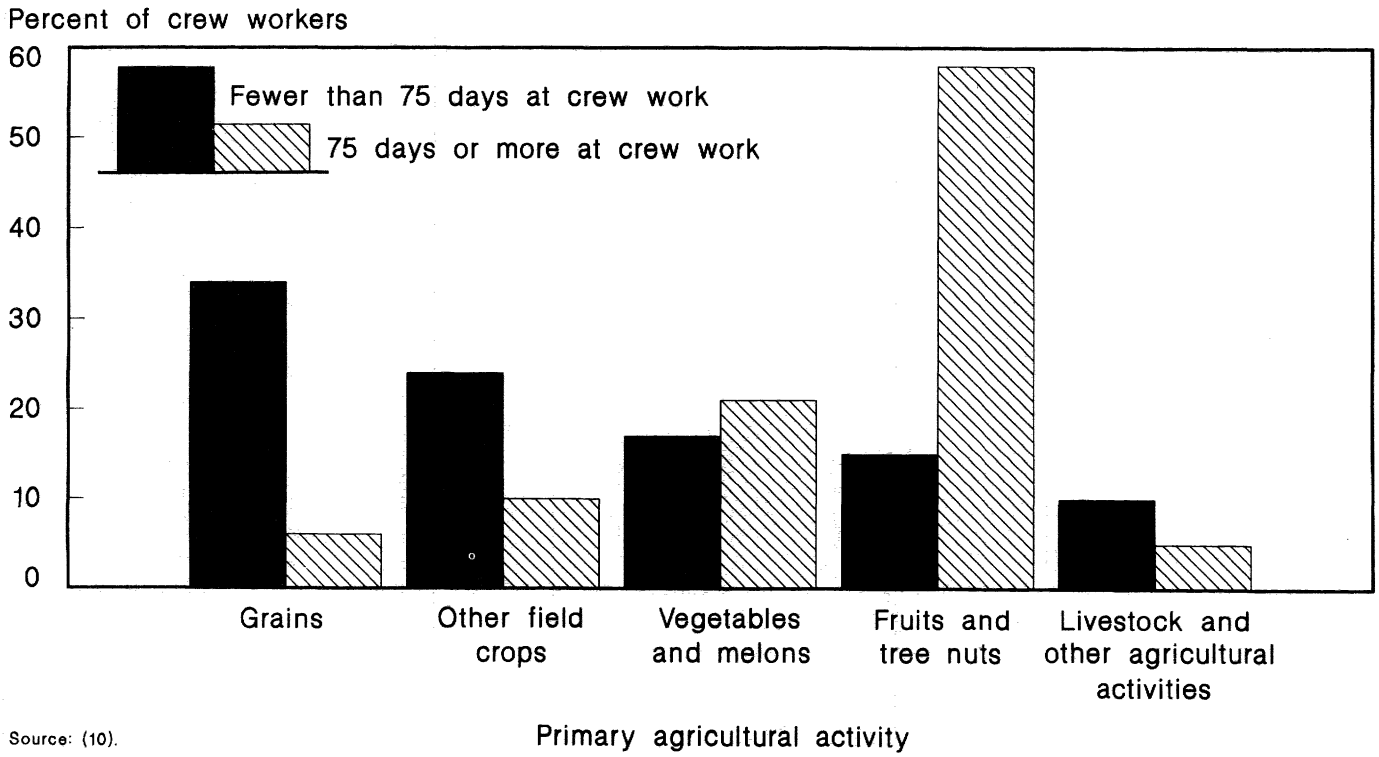
Table 7—Characteristics of crew workers, by days of crew work, 1981

Characteristic	Short-term (worked fewer than 75 days at crew work)		Long-term (worked 75 days or more at crew work)	
	Thousands	*Percent*	*Thousands*	*Percent*
Total	196	100	53	100
Standard Federal region:				
I-New England	4	2	0	0
II-New York and New Jersey	0	0	0	0
III-Mid-Atlantic	3	1	0	0
IV-Southeast	39	20	14	26
V-North Central Lake States	45	23*	0	0
VI-Southwest	21	11*	1	1
VII-Mid-United States	40	20	3	6
VIII-Mountain	3	2	3	5
IX-Lower Pacific Coast	29	25*	29	55
X-Northwest Pacific Coast	12	6	3	7
Method of pay:				
Hourly	141	72*	18	34
Daily	20	10	6	11
Weekly	4	2	—	—
Monthly	0	0	1	2
Piece	25	13*	27	50
Other	6	3	1	3
Primary employment activity:				
Hired farmwork	13	7*	41	77
Nonfarmwork	24	12	0	1
Unemployed	10	5	0	0
Not in the labor force—				
Keeping house	25	13	0	0
Going to school	118	60*	4	8
Other	6	3	8	14
Nonfarmwork:				
Did nonfarmwork	86	44	6	11
Did not do nonfarmwork	110	56	47	89
Years of age:				
14-17	91	46*	4	7
18-24	57	29	14	27
25-34	20	10	15	29
35-44	13	7	8	15
45-54	8	4	10	18
55-59	0	0	0	0
60-64	1	1	0	0
65 and over	6	3	2	4
Racial/ethnic group:				
Whites	120	61*	12	22
Hispanics	39	20*	31	59
Blacks and others	37	19	10	19
Migratory status:				
Migrant	7	4	12	23
Nonmigrant	189	96	41	77
Primary agricultural activity:				
Grain	67	34*	4	6
Cotton	13	7	0	0
Tobacco	16	8	3	5
Other field crops	17	9	2	5
Vegetables and melons	33	17	11	21
Fruits and tree nuts	29	15*	31	58
Beef	2	1	0	1
Dairy	3	1	0	0
Other livestock	3	2	0	0
Nursery	11	5	0	0
Other	2	1	2	4
Years of education completed by all workers:				
0-4	20	10	11	21
5-8	56	29	28	52
9-11	76	39	7	14
12	28	14	6	11
13 and over	16	8	1	2
Days of farmwork:				
Fewer than 25	99	50*	0	0
25-74	70	36*	0	0
75-149	21	11*	21	40
150-249	6	3*	22	41
250 and over	0	0*	11	19
Household status:				
Head	44	22*	28	53
Wife	14	7	3	6
Relative	129	66*	14	26
Nonrelative	9	5	8	15
Family income:[1]				
Less than $1,000	1	1	8	19
$1,000-1,999	6	3	0	0
$2,000-2,999	17	9	4	8
$3,000-3,999	8	4	2	4
$4,000-4,999	11	6	0	0
$5,000-5,999	3	2	1	3
$6,000-7,499	20	10	14	33
$7,500-9,999	23	12	7	16
$10,000-11,999	8	4	0	0
$12,000-14,999	7	4	0	0
$15,000-19,999	13	7	0	0
$20,000-24,999	30	16	3	7
$25,000-49,999	34	18	4	10
$50,000 and over	7	4	0	0

— = Estimate was fewer than 500. *Significantly different from long-term crew worker rates at the 95-percent confidence level.
[1]Some of those interviewed did not respond to the family income question.
Source: (*11*).

Figure 3

Primary Agricultural Activity, by Days of Crew Work, 1981



Source: (10).

Demographic and Family Characteristics

Hispanic workers made up a larger proportion of crew workers than noncrew farmworkers; 28 percent of crew workers were Hispanic compared with 11 percent of noncrew workers (table 4). In both groups, however, whites still made up the largest racial/ethnic group. The proportion of blacks and others in the two groups did not differ significantly.

Crew workers were concentrated in the Southeast, North Central Lake States, Mid-United States, and Lower Pacific Coast regions (table 3). Noncrew farmworkers were likely to be in the Southeast, Southwest, and North Central Lake States. Significantly more crew workers than noncrew workers were in the Lower Pacific Coast region. The larger proportion of crew workers in this region may partially explain why more crew workers than noncrew workers were employed in fruit and tree nut production. The Lower Pacific Coast region, which includes California, is a major production area for these commodities.

Table 8—Average earnings, by days of crew work, 1981

Characteristic	Short-term (worked fewer than 75 days at crew work)	Long-term (worked 75 days or more at crew work)
	Dollars	
Annual earnings:		
Total	1,929*	5,776
Farm	954*	5,541
Daily wage:		
Farm	24.96	28.77

*Significantly different from the long-term crew worker rates at the 95-percent confidence level.
Source: (*11*).

Crew workers were more likely to be relatives of household heads and to be between the ages of 14 and 24 years. Noncrew workers, however, were more likely to be household heads.

Crew workers had less education than noncrew workers. Only 21 percent had finished high school, whereas 41 percent of noncrew workers had completed twelfth grade. These differences in educational level were similar to the differences for workers 25 years old and over. Of this latter group, only 23 percent of the crew workers and 47 percent of noncrew workers had finished high school.

Economic Characteristics

Almost 50 percent of the crew workers were students, and 10 percent did mostly nonfarmwork during the year

(table 5). In comparison, 33 percent of the noncrew farmworkers were students, and 18 percent primarily did nonfarmwork throughout the year. Within both groups, about 25 percent primarily did hired farmwork throughout the year.

Most workers in both groups worked fewer than 75 days at farmwork in 1981, but overall crew farmworkers worked fewer days. They averaged 70 days of farmwork, with 15 percent of crew workers working 150 days or more. However, because 28 percent of noncrew workers spent 150 days or more at farmwork, noncrew workers as a group averaged 101 days.

Both groups earned substantially less than U.S. nonagricultural private-sector production workers, who earned a yearly average of $13,270 in 1981.[5] However, the total earnings of crew workers were only 62 percent of the earnings of noncrew farmworkers (table 6). Annual earnings for crew workers were $2,772; for noncrew workers they were $4,470. Crew workers earned $1,936 from farmwork, and noncrew workers earned $2,740. Crew workers had lower earnings primarily because they worked on farms fewer days, and fewer had nonfarm jobs compared with noncrew workers.

Implications

Noncrew workers were generally better off than crew workers in 1981. Farmworkers, other than crew workers, had higher educational levels and came from families with higher incomes. These disparities increased as the crew workers' dependence on crew work increased. Crew workers who spent most of their days working in a crew were generally of prime working age, were household heads, had low levels of education, and came from families with low incomes. Many of these workers have little chance of moving into more stable, higher paying occupations. Their economic situation often forces them to depend on farm labor contractors to insure them of job opportunities. These people may be more susceptible to irresponsible contractors who work outside the law.

FLCRA and MSPA were important steps in helping to improve the working conditions of those farmworkers who work for farm labor contractors. Fines and prison sentences were made an integral part of the legislation to deter contractors from abusing those who work for them. However, to further prevent abuses as well as to improve conditions, these workers (especially the long-term crew workers who do hired farmwork for most of the year) need more education and training. These advantages would broaden their farm and nonfarm opportunities and would help them better understand the labor laws which protect them.

[5]Based on average weekly earnings in (*12*).

References

(1) Charns, Alex. "Slaves are Free at Last in North Carolina; Farmers, Migrant Workers at Odds," *The Washington Post,* Aug. 23, 1983.

(2) Current, Tom, and Mark M. Infante. "...and Migrant Problems Demand Attention." Salem, OR: State of Oregon, Bureau of Labor, 1959, pp. 82-89, 111, 143.

(3) Goldberg, Arthur J. "Statement before the Select Labor Subcommittee, House Committee on Education and Labor on Migratory Farm Labor Legislation." May 9, 1961.

(4) Henry, Neil."The Price of Vegetables, *"The Washington Post,* Oct. 15, 1983.

(5) _____ . "A Wretched Reality of Life in the Fields," *The Washington Post,* Oct. 12, 1983.

(6) Pollack, Susan L., and William R. Jackson, Jr. *The Hired Farm Working Force of 1981.* AER-507. U.S. Dept. Agr., Econ. Res. Serv., Nov. 1983.

(7) Polopolus, Leo. "An Interpretation of the Crew Leader Registration Law." Staff Paper 133. University of Florida-Gainesville, Institute of Food and Agricultural Science, Sept. 1979.

(8) Sellars, Walter, Jr. *Direct and Contract Hiring of Seasonal Farm Labor.* SB-478. U.S. Dept. Agr., Econ. Res. Serv., Feb. 1972.

(9) U.S. Congress, House of Representatives. Farm Labor Contractor Registration Act of 1963, as amended, U.S. Department of Labor, Employment Standards Administration, Wage and Hour Division. WH Publication 1389. May 1979 (revised).

(10) _____. Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act. H.R. 7102. Submitted by Carl Perkins, Committee on Education and Labor. House Report, 97th, Congress, 2nd Session, Report No. 97-885, Sept. 28, 1982.

(11) U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. "The Hired Farm Working Force Survey." Unpublished data.

(12) U.S. Department of Labor. *Employment and Earnings.* May 1983.

(13) _____, Employment Standards Administration. Data on the number of farm labor contractors and farm labor contractor employees in the Mid-United Sates and the North Central Lake States. Telephone conversation with Ruth Barrett, Department of Labor, Nov. 1984.

(14) Wirtz, W. Willard. U.S. Department of Labor News Release. Dec. 19, 1964.

Glossary

Age: Based on the person's age on the last birthday.

Agricultural association: Any nonprofit or cooperative association of farmers, growers, or ranches incorporated or qualified under applicable State law, which recruits, solicits, hires, furnishes, employs, or transports any seasonal or migrant agricultural worker.

Agricultural employer: Any person who owns or operates a farm, ranch, processing establishment, cannery, gin, packing shed, or nursery, or who produces or conditions seed, and who recruits, solicits, hires, employs, furnishes, or transports any seasonal or migrant agricultural worker.

Crew worker: Persons recruited or transported to a farm by a farm labor contractor or crew leader to do farmwork for cash wages.

Days of hired farmwork or nonfarmwork: Days on which any hired farmwork or nonfarmwork was reported. The work may have been for all or only part of a day.

Earnings from farmwork and nonfarmwork: Total cash wages or salary received for farmwork or for nonfarmwork. Estimates of earnings include neither the value of perquisites received in connection with farmwork nor the value of fringe benefits received in connection with nonfarmwork.

Education completed: Derived from the combination of answers to questions concerning the highest grade of school attended by the person and whether or not the grade was finished. Questions on educational attainment apply only to progress in graded public, private, and parochial elementary and high schools, whether day schools or night schools. Thus, schooling is that which may advance a person toward an elementary school certificate; a high school diploma; or a college, university, or professional school degree. Schooling in other schools was counted only if the credits obtained were regarded as transferable to a school in the regular school system.

Family income: As defined in this study, represents the combined total money income of the family head plus the income of all the head's relatives 14 years of age and over who were family members at the time of the survey. Family income includes wages and salaries, net income from business or farm, pensions, dividends, interest, rent, social security payments, and any other money income received by members of the family during the 12-month period prior to the interview.

Farm labor contractor: Any person, other than an agricultural employer, association, or employee of an agricultural employer or association, who for money or other valuable considerations paid or promised to be paid, recruits, solicits, hires, employs, furnishes, or transports any migrant or seasonal agricultural workers.

Farm labor contractor employee: Persons who perform farm labor contracting activities solely on behalf of a farm labor contractor holding a valid Certificate of Registration and not as independent farm labor contractors who would be required to register in their own right.

Farmwork for cash wages or salary: (1) Work done on any farm for cash wages or salary in connection with the production, harvesting, threshing, preparation for market, or delivery to market of agricultural products; (2) work done off the farm for a farmer by farmworkers, such as trips to buy feed, seeds, or fertilizer, or to handle other matters involved in running the farm business; (3) repairs of farm buildings and machinery, for example, performed by a hired farmworker when done along with the type of work specified in (1) and (2) above; and (4) management of a farm enterprise for cash salary.

Not included as farmwork for cash wages or salary are: (1) work performed by farm operators on their own farms, or "exchange" work between farmers; (2) work done exclusively for "pay in kind"; (3) work done without pay on a family farm by a member of the farm operator's family (a small regular cash allowance is not considered as farm wages); (4) nonfarmwork performed on a farm, such as building a farm structure, drilling a well, hauling agricultural products to market by commercial trucker, or performing domestic service in the home of a farmer; and (5) custom work such as spraying, threshing, and combining when a person is paid a combined rate for the use of equipment and labor.

Hired farmworkers: Persons 14 years old and over in the civilian noninstitutional population of the United States at the time of the survey who did any farmwork for cash wages or salary at any time during the year, even if only for 1 day.

Major crop or livestock activity: Information on crop or livestock activity was derived from the question, "What crops or livestock did _____ work with most on the farm where he or she worked the greatest number of days in 1981?" Categories of response included grains, tobacco, cotton, other field crops, vegetables and melons, fruits or tree nuts, beef cattle, dairy, other livestock, nursery or tree crops, and other.

Migratory status: Migratory workers are those who (1) left their home temporarily overnight to do hired farmwork in a different county within the same State or in a different State with the expectation of eventually returning home, or (2) had no usual place of residence and did hired farmwork in two or more counties during the year. Nonmigratory workers are those who (1) did all their hired farmwork for the year in the same county in which they lived, (2) made a permanent move from one county to another during the year (even if they did hired farmwork in both counties), or (3) commuted daily across the county or State line to work and returned home each night.

Noncrew workers: Persons doing farmwork for cash wages, but neither recruited nor transported by farm labor contractors.

Primary employment status: Information on the primary employment status of hired farmworkers during the year was derived from the question, "What was _____ doing most of 1981—working, keeping house, going to school, or something else?" If the initial response was "working," the kind of work the person was doing most of the year was determined. "Hired farmwork" was recorded if most of the person's work was farmwork for cash wages or salary. "Other farmwork" was recorded if most of a person's working time was spent operating a farm (as a tenant, owner, or share cropper) or as an unpaid family farmworker. "Nonfarmwork" was recorded if most of a person's working time was spent operating a nonfarm business, working in a profession, working without pay in a family nonfarm business, or working for pay (or pay in kind) in any nonfarm activity (such as manufacturing, trade, construction, and domestic services). For persons who did not report "working" as the primary activity, information was obtained on what they were doing most of the year. "Looking for work" (unemployed) was reported for persons who spent most of the time without employment but who were looking for a job. "Keeping house" was reported for persons who spent most of the time doing their own housework. "Going to school" was reported for persons who spent most of the time during the year going to school. The category "other" was reported for persons who spent most of the time at some activity other than those named above.

Racial/ethnic group: Refers to division of the population into three mutually exclusive groups—whites, Hispanics, and blacks and others. "Ethnic origin" was determined for this report by asking respondents their origin or descent. The answer to this question may produce results somewhat different from results based on inferred ethnic identification using such characteristics as country of birth of persons or their parents language spoken in the home, or surname. "Hispanic" includes all Mexican, Mexicano, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American, or other Hispanic origin. "Black and other" includes blacks and other groups such as Indians, Chinese, Japanese, and others not of Hispanic origin. For simplicity of presentation, these groups are termed whites, Hispanics, and blacks and others.

Region: Hired farmworker data are presented in the report by the 10 Standard Federal Regions. The States included in each region are: **Region I** - Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont; **Region II** - New Jersey and New York; **Region III** - Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia; **Region IV** - Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee; **Region V** - Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin; **Region VI** - Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas; **Region VII** - Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska; **Region VIII** - Colorado, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming; **Region IX** - Arizona, California, Hawaii, and Nevada; **Region X** - Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington.

Seasonal agricultural worker: Persons employed in agriculture on a seasonal or other temporary basis and who are not required to be absent overnight from their permanent place of residence.

Work classification: Casual workers—persons who worked fewer than 25 days at farmwork. Seasonal workers—persons who worked 25-149 days. Regular workers—persons who worked 150-249 days. Year-round workers—persons who worked 250 days or more.

☆U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE: 1985-490-920:20185-ERS

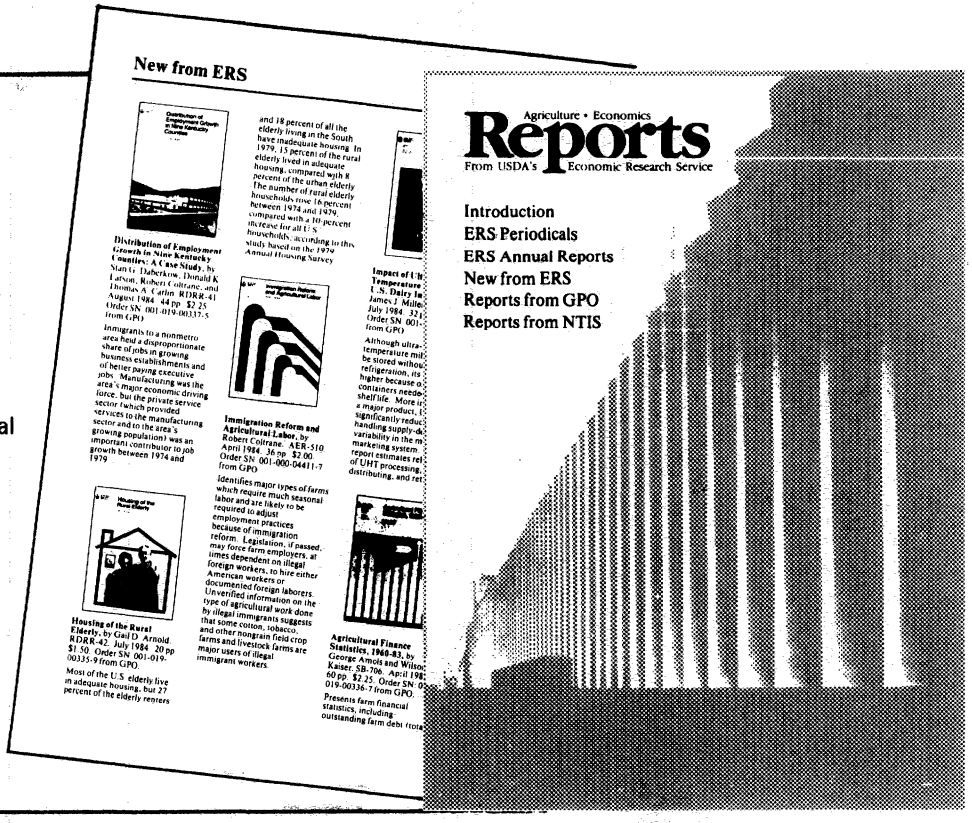
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
ECONOMIC RESEARCH SERVICE
1301 NEW YORK AVENUE, N. W.
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20005-4788

OFFICIAL BUSINESS
PENALTY FOR PRIVATE USE, $300

BULK RATE
POSTAGE & FEES PAID
USDA
PERMIT NO. G-145

Stay ahead with the latest market information--

Subscribe now to **Reports**

Reports catalogue brings you, several times a year, descriptive listings of new publications from ERS.

To get on our free mailing list, send your name and address to:
Reports, EMS Information, USDA
1301 New York Avenue, N. W.
Room 237
Washington, D. C. 20005-4788