

# LATINA FARMWORKER HEALTH

Institute for Latino Studies | University of Notre Dame | Student Research Briefs

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Image 1. Latina farmworkers picking strawberries. Photo courtesy of National Center for Farmworker Health, Inc.

## Introduction

Farmworkers are essential to the United States. Not only are they and their labor crucial to the U.S. economy, but also to getting food on the tables of American families. The federal government deems farmworkers critical to securing and sustaining the country’s food supply as well as the food exported globally, yet farmworkers face some of the harshest working conditions and limited worker protections (Matthew et al., 2021). Their labor has been compared to modern slavery as many farmworkers work for low wages and long hours, and they are controlled in several silent ways.

To explain further, most farmworkers find themselves with limited choices regarding where to work as many are undocumented, come from generations of family employed in farmwork, or face little job opportunity outside of farmwork

(Saxton, 2021). Unfortunately, farm labor contractors take advantage of many farmworkers' lack of employment options through "wage theft, gendered and racist antagonism, and threats of firing or deportation" to subjugate and control farmworkers in the fields (Saxton, 2021, 76). In addition to the verbal and emotional abuse they endure, farmworkers must work in an environment that places them at risk for physical harm. Specifically, farmworkers must undergo pesticide exposure, difficult physical labor such as bending over repeatedly, and harsh weather conditions such as extreme heat. To make matters worse, farmworkers also endure poor living conditions such as overcrowded and unmaintained housing and lack of clean drinking water.

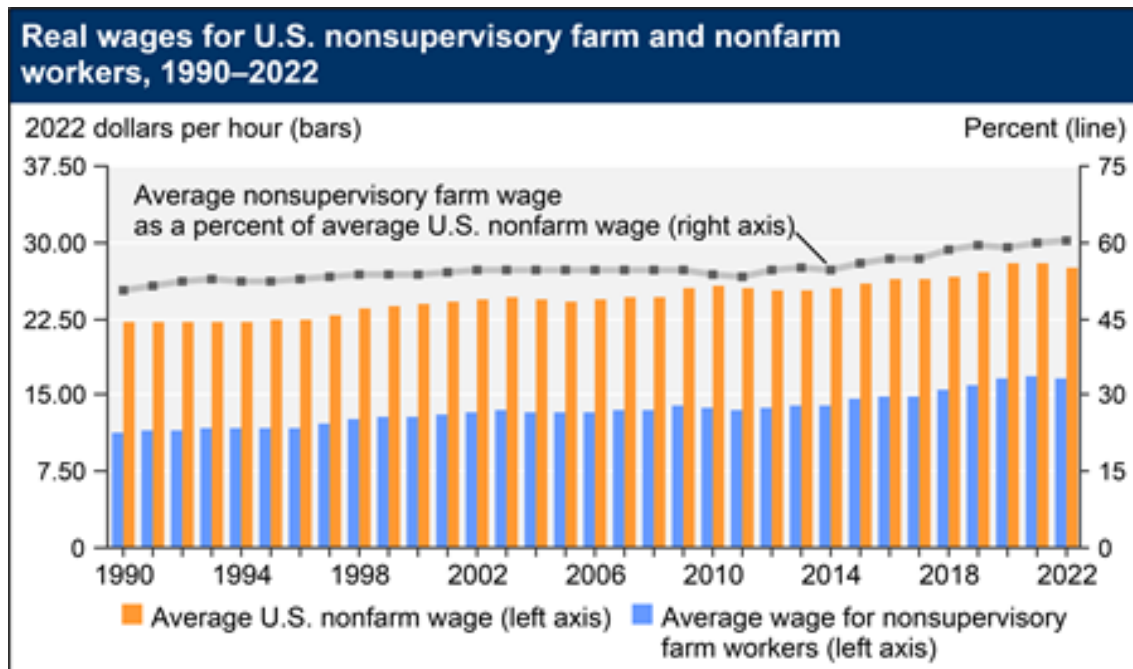


Figure 1. This graph compares the change in wages for nonsupervisory farmworkers, nonfarm workers, and the average hourly wage for all workers. In the US. Nonsupervisory farmworkers include those who work in the fields picking fruits and vegetables and do not manage or supervise any other farmworkers. This graph highlights how much lower wages are for nonsupervisory farm workers compared to nonfarm workers despite the longer hours and physically demanding labor of farmwork. Graph courtesy of the USDA Economic Research Service.

In 2020, 34% of farm laborers were female and the majority of these female farmworkers were and continue to be Latina (NCFH, 2022). In general, there is a lack of awareness that Latina women work in the fields alongside men as stereotypes of farmers usually depict white, male farmers and Mexican, male farmworkers. Women, especially Latinas, and their work seem to go unnoticed and ignored despite the fact that these farmworkers face the same cruel working and living conditions as male farmworkers, which have unignorable effects on their health. Several health disparities exist among the Latina farmworker population. As women, they face greater risks of sexual harassment, assault, and rape (MHP Salud, 2023). Latina farmworkers have greater stress and anxiety compared to employed and unemployed non-farmworkers. They have reported misusing prescription medication to cope with the inhumane housing conditions and the physical and emotional abuse endured on the farm and have avoided healthcare services due to lack of information, lack of access to health care, fear of deportation, and belief in alternative medicine such as visiting a cultural healer or using herbal remedies (Sandberg et al., 2018; Kanamori et al., 2022).

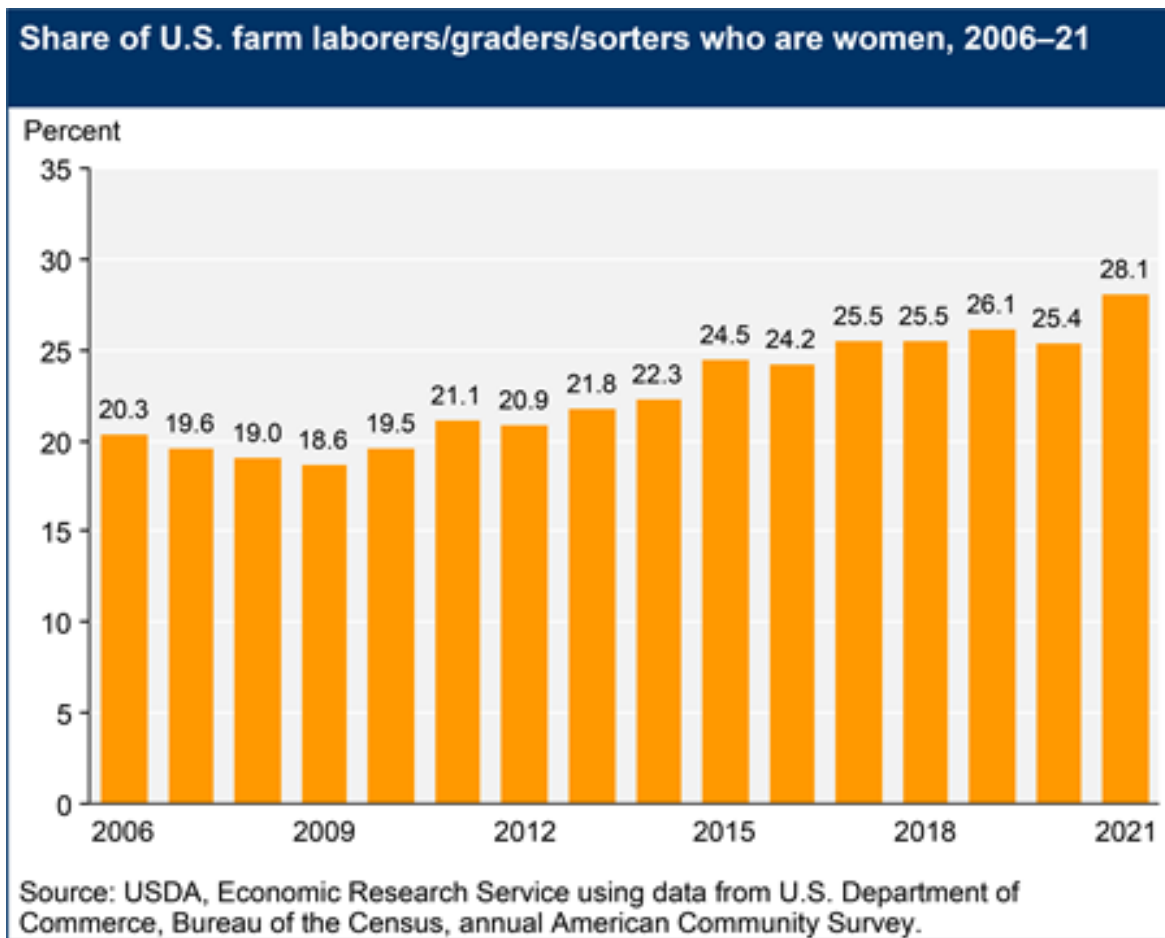


Figure 2. This graph demonstrates the growth in the number of women in farmwork from 2006 to 2021. Since the data was from U.S. governmental departments, it is important to note that these numbers may not account for undocumented female farmworkers. Therefore, they may be an underestimate of the true number of women in farmwork. Graph courtesy of USDA Economic Research Service.

## Research Brief Purpose

Even though the number of Latinas in farmwork has been increasing in the past few years, there are gaps in knowledge of gender-related experiences and health risk factors (Curl et al., 2020). The purpose of this research brief topic is to analyze, understand, and advocate for the specific health disparities among Latina/Hispanic female farmworkers including mental health, sexual violence, and physical health. It is important to increase awareness about the working conditions and health disparities that exist specifically in the population of Latina farmworkers who, with men, provide the majority of the food on our tables. More importantly, Latina farmworkers are human beings and deserving of protection, equal rights, and equitable treatment. The Latina farmworker population should also be aware of the health risks that arise from their working conditions and treatment due to their gender, social class, etc. With more awareness, greater advocacy and positive change for this underserved population can be achieved. This research brief aims to address the disparities that arise

from the intersection of gender (and race/ethnicity, social class, and citizenship status) and farmworker health and highlight current and potential future interventions.

## History of Latina Farmworkers

Throughout the growth and expansion of the US, farmers and farmworkers have been considered essential for sustaining the nation, but farmworkers have not been treated as invaluable. In the early 1900s, the US's industrialization necessitated large-scale commercial agriculture for economic growth. Then, both world wars placed a higher demand on and desire for migrant farmworkers, especially Mexican laborers. Despite this increase in demand, the Great Depression in the 1930s caused farmers to reduce farmworker wages which catalyzed a farmworker strike (Weber, 1989). This strike was mainly organized and carried out by Mexican workers, and Mexican women were especially crucial (Weber, 1989). They coordinated the camp kitchen, took care of children, marched in the strikes, handed out food and clothing, and attended and participated in strike meetings (Weber, 1989). It wasn't until the 1950s that domestic and foreign migratory labor were investigated by two Presidential Committees, which revealed poor social, economic, health, and educational conditions of farmworkers. Then in the 1960s, these conditions were exposed publicly through a documentary titled *Harvest of Shame*. In response to the publication of the *Harvest of Shame*, the Farm Labor Contractor Registration Act (FLCRA) of 1963 was passed to require farm labor contractors to be certified through the U.S. Department of Labor (FLRCA, 1964). Additionally, the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee and the National Farm Workers Association led strikes against growers in California to raise awareness about the unequal treatment of farmworkers and advocate for change, leading to the creation of the Migrant Health Act and the development of the Migrant Health Program.

The Migrant Health Program, now headed by the Migrant Health Branch in the U.S. government, started off as the Migrant Health Unit. This program allocates funding, promotes inter-agency cooperation, communicates information, and supervises the health status of migrant farmworkers through migrant health centers (NCFH, n.d.). Several other laws have been passed since then to protect the rights of farmworkers such as the Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Workers Protection Act of 1983, which replaced the FLRCA and required farm labor contractors, agricultural employers, agricultural associations, and providers of migrant housing to meet minimum standard in regard to wages, housing, transportation, disclosures, and recordkeeping (U.S. Department of Labor, n.d.).

Despite these positive legislative changes, Latina farmworkers today continue to endure poor working and living conditions. Currently, approximately 75% of farmworkers are Latino migrants, about one third of farmworkers are female, which includes graders and sorters, and the majority of female agricultural laborers are Latina (Castillo et al., 2021; U.S. Department of Agriculture, n.d.). Only 17% of farm supervisory roles such as managers, inspectors, and supervisors are female, meaning that Latina farmworkers work in highly male-dominated spaces (U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, 2023). Because Latina farmworkers constitute the minority of non-

supervisory and supervisory roles in agricultural labor, they experience high rates of gender discrimination in a variety of ways such as sexual harassment and fewer job promotions (MHP Salud, 2023; National Farmworker Ministry, 2018). Additionally, while it is difficult to measure immigration status among the farmworker population, it is estimated that about 45-50% of farmworkers are undocumented, and 37% of these undocumented agricultural workers are female (Castillo et al., 2021; Rosenbloom, 2022). Immigration status is a big factor that impacts the health of many Latina farmworkers. Being undocumented deprives many Latina farmworkers of rights such as federal aid, legal assistance, and health programs like health insurance (Castillo et al., 2021). Along with these deprivations, undocumented Latina farmworkers face gender discrimination and live with the fear of being deported (Castillo et al., 2021). Therefore, Latina farmworkers are a particularly vulnerable population.

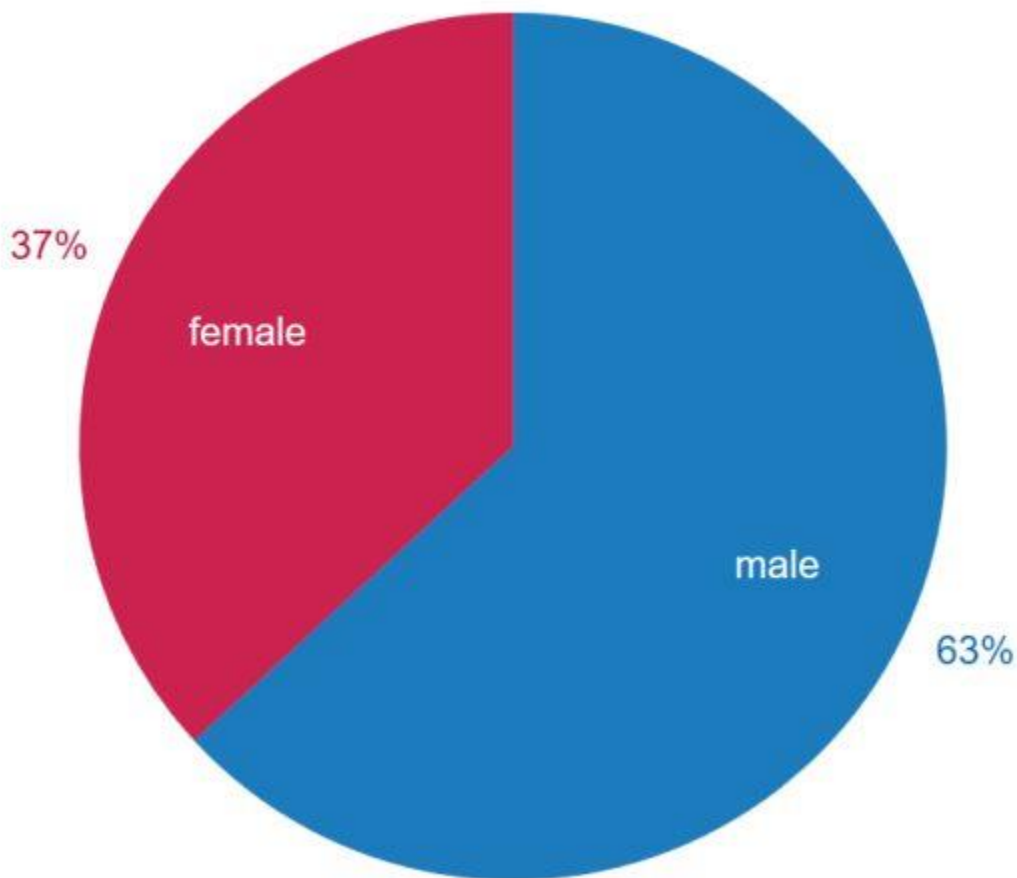


Figure 3. This pie chart shows the distribution of female and male undocumented agricultural workers. Graph courtesy of the Center for Migration Studies of New York.

## Physical Health Risks of Farmwork

There are many types of physical health risks that are associated with farmwork, specifically for Latina farmworkers. This research brief will focus on musculoskeletal injury, pesticide-related illness, and heat-related illness,

## Musculoskeletal Injury

Due to the labor intensive and physically demanding nature of agriculture, many Latina farmworkers face great risk of musculoskeletal injury. Women can spend their days bent over or kneeling to pick fruits and vegetables, carrying heavy loads of produce, or climbing ladders to pick fruit off of trees, which can all cause musculoskeletal disorders and injury (Quandt & Arcury, 2020; Castillo et al., 2021). Additionally, specific risks are associated with the type of produce being picked. For example, farmworkers who collect tobacco expose themselves to the risk of absorbing nicotine through their skin, which can lead to Green Tobacco Sickness (Quandt & Arcury, 2020). Green Tobacco Sickness is a type of poisoning that causes nausea, vomiting, headaches, muscle weakness, and dizziness (Fotedar & Fotedar, 2017).

Given the uncomfortable postures and repeated motions that Latina farmworkers must partake in to complete their job, many of these women feel pain in their muscles, but especially in their backs. The story of an undocumented woman named Armanda was highlighted in anthropologist Dvera Saxton's book, *The Devil's Fruit*, which described Saxton's research on and accompaniment with farmworkers in the strawberry fields located in the Pájaro and Salinas Valleys of the Central Coast in California (2021). Armanda's job was to wash freshly harvested strawberries which involved carrying 30 to 60



Image 2. Farmworker women packaging lettuce. Photo courtesy of UC Davis Center for Agricultural Health and Safety

pounds of unevenly filled crates of produce to dunk them into a tub of bleach-laced water.

Then, she had to pick up these now even heavier crates and place them on a rack to dry. She would do this work five or six times a week up to 10 hours a day.

Consequently, this repetitive and strenuous motion led to chronic pain in her back which made it difficult to bend

over. When she told her boss, Chuck, about her back injury, he simply told her to take an ibuprofen and cursed at her in broken Spanish. She continued to work despite the pain for fear of losing her job. Due to financial limitations, Armanda avoided going to the doctor, but ultimately her pain became too

grave. Her boss told her to get care from a local nonprofit clinic on her own time, which had to be outside of the 10 hours she would have to work during the day. When she went to the clinic, the doctor performed very few evaluations and prescribed her some muscle relaxants. The same was done for her husband who also experienced a back injury. This is a story that is common for many Latina farmworkers. Pain is dismissed when you're treated as someone who is thought of as replaceable if you can't get your job done well enough or fast enough. Furthermore, her immigration status limited her options for quality healthcare and her ability to take legal action against these subpar working conditions and treatment.

As demonstrated by Armanda's story, farm work poses great health risks. In fact, farm workers face a greater risk of injury compared to workers in any other industry in the U.S. (Snipes et al., 2017). Several studies have found that farmworkers experience high rates of back, shoulder, and upper extremity disorders such as epicondylitis and rotator cuff syndrome (Castillo et al. 2021). Approximately 33% to 69% of these injuries are not reported and 42% to 50% of Latinx farmworkers do not seek medical treatment for their injuries even though they've experienced this persistent pain, as evidenced in Armanda's story (Snipes et al., 2017).

Farmwork poses an additional risk for pregnant agricultural workers. As commonly experienced by farmworkers, pregnant farmworker women often feel pressured by their farm labor contractors and financial necessity to keep working despite feeling pain and injury (Snipes et al., 2017). For example, Angelita Hernandez, who had been a migrant farmworker since the age of five, was working in the fields when she began to leak amniotic fluid in her second trimester of pregnancy (Snipes et al., 2017). Her doctor prescribed bed rest to avert future complications, but her leave of absence request was answered with a threat that she and her husband would be fired if she continued to take time off. For fear of losing her job, she continued to work until her doctor mandated that she stay in the hospital for a week and a half. Even then, her boss continued to call and threaten job loss, so she went back to work. These conditions put a mother's life and her child's life at risk.

### **Pesticide-Related Illness**

More than one billion pounds of pesticide active ingredients are used every year in U.S. agriculture to augment crop yield and meet the nation's food production demands (Castillo et al., 2021). This

### **Pesticide Take-Home Exposure Pathway**

*Pesticide Take-Home Exposure Pathway:* "when workers who have applied or come into contact with pesticides carry pesticides into the home on their clothing or shoes, potentially exposing other household members" (Castillo, 2021). Farmworkers face the additional risk of spreading pesticide exposure to their family members. Therefore, it is extremely important to follow regulations regarding pesticide use and wear protective garments when coming into contact with pesticides whether that be on plants or produce.

extensive use of pesticides puts farmworkers at greater risk of illnesses that result from exposure to pesticides. Pesticide drift is “the movement of pesticide dust or droplets through the air at the time of application or soon after, to any other than the area intended” (United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), 2023). Through pesticide drift, pesticides, and the dangerous chemicals they are composed of, can be spread to farmworkers in nearby fields, homes, schools, playgrounds, wildlife, plants, and bodies of water (U.S. EPA, 2023). Additionally, many farmworkers do not receive adequate training on how to safely handle pesticides, and Latina farmworkers particularly receive ill-fitting protective clothing (Castillo et al., 2021; Curl et al., 2020). Sometimes these women do not even know if the fields they are working in have been sprayed with pesticides, causing a serious concern (Curl et al., 2020). All these factors may lead to an increased exposure to pesticides and higher risk of pesticide-related illnesses, which is supported by studies that have found that women working in agriculture had double the prevalence of acute pesticide poisoning compared to men (Curl et al., 2020). Some of the short-term effects of pesticide exposure include nausea, headaches, shortness of breath, and seizures, while the long-term risks are chronic illness, cancer, and neurological disorders (Greenfield, 2021).

Additionally, Latina farmworkers may be at higher risk for disruption and damage to their reproductive system. Specifically, epidemiological studies have found that “exposure to pesticides has been associated with menstrual cycle disturbances, reduced fertility, prolonged time-to-pregnancy, spontaneous abortion, stillbirths, and developmental defects,” which could possibly be due to the derangement of the female hormonal function (Bretveld et al., 2006; 1). Araceli Ruiz is an example of how pesticide exposure can impact pregnancy and child development. Her son has experienced physical developmental delays, asthma, and digestive disorders which doctors have confirmed are a direct consequence of pesticide exposure in utero (Greenfield, 2021).

## Heat-Related Illness

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Latina farmworkers experience elevated risk of heat-related illnesses as they endure prolonged heat exposure while working in the fields (Castillo et al., 2021). Heat-related illnesses happen when the body can no longer regulate its own temperature and remains dangerously high (CDC, 2022). It can lead to heat exhaustion and heat stroke, which can cause lifelong disability or death (CDC, 2022). “The combination of heat, humidity, direct sun exposure, physical exertion, and the long sleeves and long pants of protective clothing places workers at risk for heat illness even when environmental temperatures are not extreme” (Quandt & Arcury, 2020, 47). Since most farm workers are paid by the pound or by the hour, they have limited time to eat or drink water and stay adequately hydrated (Holmes, 2007). These conditions pose an additional risk for dehydration and subsequently heat-related illnesses (Holmes, 2007). Farmworkers report just eating “a piece of fruit, [drinking] Ensure (a meal replacement shake), soda, Gatorade, or energy drinks to get through the day without feeling sick,” which is not enough nutrition to sustain oneself with all the physically exhausting labor (Saxton, 2021, 81). Additionally, due to biological factors such as higher body fat percentage and lower aerobic power, women are three times more likely to be heat intolerant compared to men (Kazman et al., 2015). As a result, women are especially vulnerable to heat-related illness (Kazman et al., 2015).



## Health Disparities Among Latina Farmworkers

Unfortunately, due to gender inequalities, health disparities exist among Latina farmworkers. They are especially vulnerable when it comes to sexual violence, mental health, substance misuse and abuse, and access to healthcare.

### Lack of Access to Healthcare and Other Social Determinants of Health

Lack of access to healthcare is a serious problem among farmworkers as only 56% of farmworkers report having health insurance (MHP Salud, 2023). Latina farmworkers in particular find it difficult to access healthcare due to the long hours demanded from their job (Curl et al., 2020). As mentioned in the preceding sections, many Latina farmworkers are undocumented and therefore, do not have access to health insurance. Even with documentation, Latina farmworkers may still not be able to afford health insurance (Feldman, 2009). Additionally, Latina farmworkers may not have the transportation to reach a healthcare facility, or they may fear the U.S. medical system (Feldman, 2009). In order to receive care, many Latina farmworkers only have the option of receiving care from free clinics or community health centers, which sometimes still require fees that may be too costly (Farmworker Justice, n.d.). These clinics and health centers unfortunately do not offer the same quality of care as that of hospitals. They are often underfunded, doctors are overworked, and many rely on volunteers or residential students, which makes it very difficult to provide consistent, quality care. Doctors provide minimal examinations and dismiss a patient's pain as seen with Armanda's case mentioned previously (Holmes et al., 2007; Saxton, 2021).

### Sexual Violence

The gendered organization of farm labor puts women at high risk for sexual harassment and assault. Systemic oppressions such as race and ethnicity, immigration status, and gender all intersect with one another to influence who works in supervisory or manager roles within agricultural work. As a result, 83% of farm managers, inspectors, and supervisors are male and the majority are White (not Hispanic) (U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, 2023). Latina farmworkers are frequently given the least desired and lowest-paying jobs ((National Farm Worker Ministry, 2018). Additionally, they are usually the first ones to be laid off, and they are not given many opportunities to advance in the labor organization (National Farm Worker Ministry, 2018). Working in a predominantly male space puts women at higher risk of sexual harassment and sexual violence

### Social Determinants of Health

According to the World Health Organization, social determinants of health are the non-medical factors that influence health outcomes (n.d.). They are "the conditions in the environments where people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age that affect a wide range of health function, and quality-of-life outcomes and risks.

There are five main categories: economic stability, education access and quality, health care access and quality, neighborhood and build environment, and social and community context (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.). Examples within these categories include safe housing, transportation, racism, discrimination, violence, education, income, access to nutritious foods, polluted air and water, and language and literacy skills.

The confluence of these external and social factors can greatly impact Latina farmworkers' health.

(MHP Salud, 2023). A study that interviewed Latina farmworkers found that 53% of Latina farmworkers who reported sexual harassment also described experiences of unwanted sexual attention that ranged from inappropriate and offensive physical or verbal advances to sexual imposition, and rape (Waugh, 2010). According to an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission lawyer reporting on the conditions of a farm in California stated, “We were told that hundreds, if not thousands, of women had to have sex with supervisors to get or keep jobs and/or put up with a constant barrage of grabbing and touching and propositions for sex by supervisors” (National Farm Worker Ministry, 2018). To try and protect themselves from men, women wear more clothing, which potentially puts them at higher risk of heat related illness (Waugh, 2010).

There are many barriers to confronting this abuse as many Latina farmworkers barely make enough money to make ends meet and many are undocumented. This makes it very difficult to pay for and report to legal services that would help them fight for the justice they deserve. Additionally, many Latina women feel they cannot speak up for fear of deportation (National Farm Worker Ministry, 2018). Many undocumented farm working women are mothers to children, and so the fear of separating from them also prevents them from reporting the sexual violence they endure (National Farm Worker, Ministry, 2018).

## Mental Health

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Latina farmworkers face several struggles when it comes to mental health. In a study of Latina Farmworkers in North Carolina, Latina farmworkers had the greatest stress and anxiety compared to other Latina manual workers and those not employed (Arcury et al., 2018). Another study examining the well-being of Latina farmworker found that women who worked a nonstandard shift, which can be common in agricultural work, had greater stress and depressive symptoms (Arcury et al., 2015). Their higher stress and anxiety have been associated with gender roles and expectations. In addition to their physically demanding labor and long hours, Latina farmworkers are expected to complete household responsibilities and raise children (Curl et al., 2020). The unequal distribution of domestic labor adds extra stress and anxiety for Latina farmworkers, resulting in poor mental health.

## Substance Misuse and Abuse

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Due to the accumulation of domestic and farmwork labor that most Latina farmworkers are expected to complete, some women turn to substance misuse and abuse as a form of coping. In a study analyzing the relationship between alcohol use and prescription medication among Latina seasonal farmworkers, some Latina seasonal farmworkers used prescription medication without a prescription to overcome stressors such as poverty, poor living conditions, exploitation, parental issues, financial problems, and discriminations, and to help them sleep (Kanamori et al., 2022). Additionally, some women described using alcohol to cope with immigration stress, discrimination, work-related stress, relationship stress, and to help them sleep and relax (Kanamori et al., 2022). This study demonstrates how a lack of access to health care results in a lack of access to sedatives and sleeping pills through a doctor’s prescription. Therefore, Latina farmworkers must rely on alcohol and other prescription

drugs obtained without a prescription through their social network to fall asleep or to cope with the struggles of working on a farm as a woman.

## Analysis and Discussion: The Role of Gender

Gender discrimination and societal expectations play a significant role in Latina farmworker health. The majority of the world is built on a patriarchal system where women are thought to be inferior to men (Saxton, 2021). As a result, women have been forced to partake in subservient roles such as being a housewife. As women, Latina farmworkers are expected to balance household responsibilities such as making dinner, cleaning the house, and raising children with agricultural work (Curl et al., 2020). This is something men do not have to worry about as much because the patriarchy endorses those men be providers and work for the family. This unequal sharing of domestic responsibilities has resulted in greater stress and anxiety among Latina farmworkers. As discussed previously, women must work on a farm dominated by men not only in the fields but also in administrative roles. This makes it hard for women to stand up for themselves and be understood by their bosses who fail to acknowledge the discrimination women face as farmworkers. Additionally, women face an extremely high risk of sexual harassment and abuse at work along with racist and classist discrimination. When Latina farmworkers finally decide to receive healthcare after avoiding it due to financial and job limitations, their pain is often dismissed. It is undeniable that the accumulation of gender, race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and immigration status discrimination contribute to negative health outcomes for Latina farmworkers.

## Activism and Intervention



Image 3. Dolores Huerta. Image courtesy of the National Women's History Museum

Although Latina farmworkers experience many health disparities, there are people and organizations who have in the past and are currently advocating for and supporting these women.

### Dolores Huerta and César Chávez

Dolores Huerta and César Chávez are both inspirational leaders who fought for farmworker's rights. Huerta grew up with parents who were activists for workers' rights and civil rights. Although her parents divorced while she was young, her mother continued to be a strong influence on Dolores's aspiration for equal rights (Michals, 2015). She developed a passion to address the social issues of agriculture when she was a teacher to farmworker children who came to school hungry (Michals, 2015). She co-founded the Stockton chapter of the Community Service Organization where she met César Chávez (Michals, 2015). Together,

Huerta and Chávez founded the National Farm Workers Association which then became the United Farm Workers' Union (Michals, 2015). Huerta's boldness and driving force to advocate for agricultural workers' rights was an example for all, and it shocked many people as she defied the feminine stereotypes and expectations of being passive and obedient as a woman (Pierce, n.d.).

The UFW organized and led peaceful protests, strikes, and several produce boycotts to bring about attention and awareness to the essentiality of farmworkers and the inhumane working conditions they do not deserve but still experience (Pierce, n.d.; Michals, 2015). Huerta and Chávez's advocacy for higher wages and safer working conditions, such as the elimination of pesticides and implementation of unemployment and healthcare benefits for farmworkers, led to the California Agricultural Labor Relations Act of 1975 (Michals, 2015). This legislation permitted farmworkers to create and participate in unions and negotiate for better wages and conditions (Michals, 2015).

### ***Líderes Campesinas***

In 1988 in the Coachella Valley, many women experienced violence in the fields and in the home due to immigration status, lack of formal education, and abusive work conditions (Líderes Campesinas, 2023). A group of women who called themselves "Mujeres Mexicanas" assembled to raise awareness about their rights and help women find resources for support. Then these women started to find funding to become a state level non-profit organization now known as Líderes Campesinas (Women Farmworker Leaders). They've helped create programs for domestic violence, HIV/AIDS prevention and support, and vaccination campaigns after the pandemic. Recently, they've led campaigns to decrease pesticide poisoning, increase access to healthcare, eliminate oil and gas projects in communities of farmworkers, and empower women who are survivors of domestic violence (Líderes Campesinas, 2023). Today, Líderes Campesinas is an interconnected organization of around 500 women extended throughout 14 local chapters in California's agricultural areas (Greenfield, 2021). They create and distribute pamphlets that depict the dangers of pesticides and the health issues caused by pesticide exposure. Additionally, they build community among other Latina farmworkers to spread more information on the health risks of farmwork among women. Since many Latina farmworkers are undocumented, may not have received formal education, or have been accustomed as women to think their ideas are unimportant, Líderes Campesinas creates a safe space for women to feel supported and validated through shared experiences (Greenfield, 2021).

#### **Additional Information about the Fair Food Program**

*Worker-to-worker education:* The CIW organizes worker-to-worker education sessions at all the farms who participate in the Fair Food Program. Farmworkers who work for CIW have developed the curriculum, and those who teach the sessions are trained beforehand. They educate other farmworkers on their rights and how to protect themselves under the Fair Food Code of Conduct. Workers learn how to identify abusive practices in order to help prevent them from happening in the first place.

## Coalition of Immokalee Workers

The Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) is a “worker-based human rights organization internationally recognized for its achievements in fighting human trafficking and gender-based violence at work” (CIW, 2020). CIW was co-founded by Laura Germino and Greg Asbed in 1993 (National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, n.d.). They have two large programs: The Fair Food Program and the Anti-Slavery Program.

1. *Fair Food Program*: This program is a partnership between farmers, farmworkers, and retail food companies that pledges humane wages and working conditions for farmworkers around the country (Fair Foods Standard Council, 2023). Participants in the program, the growers and buyers, agree to carry out the Code of Conduct, which is a list of all the protections for farmworkers in the program. These protections include fair wages and hours, freedom from retaliation, and health and safety precautions (Fair Foods Standard Council, 2023).

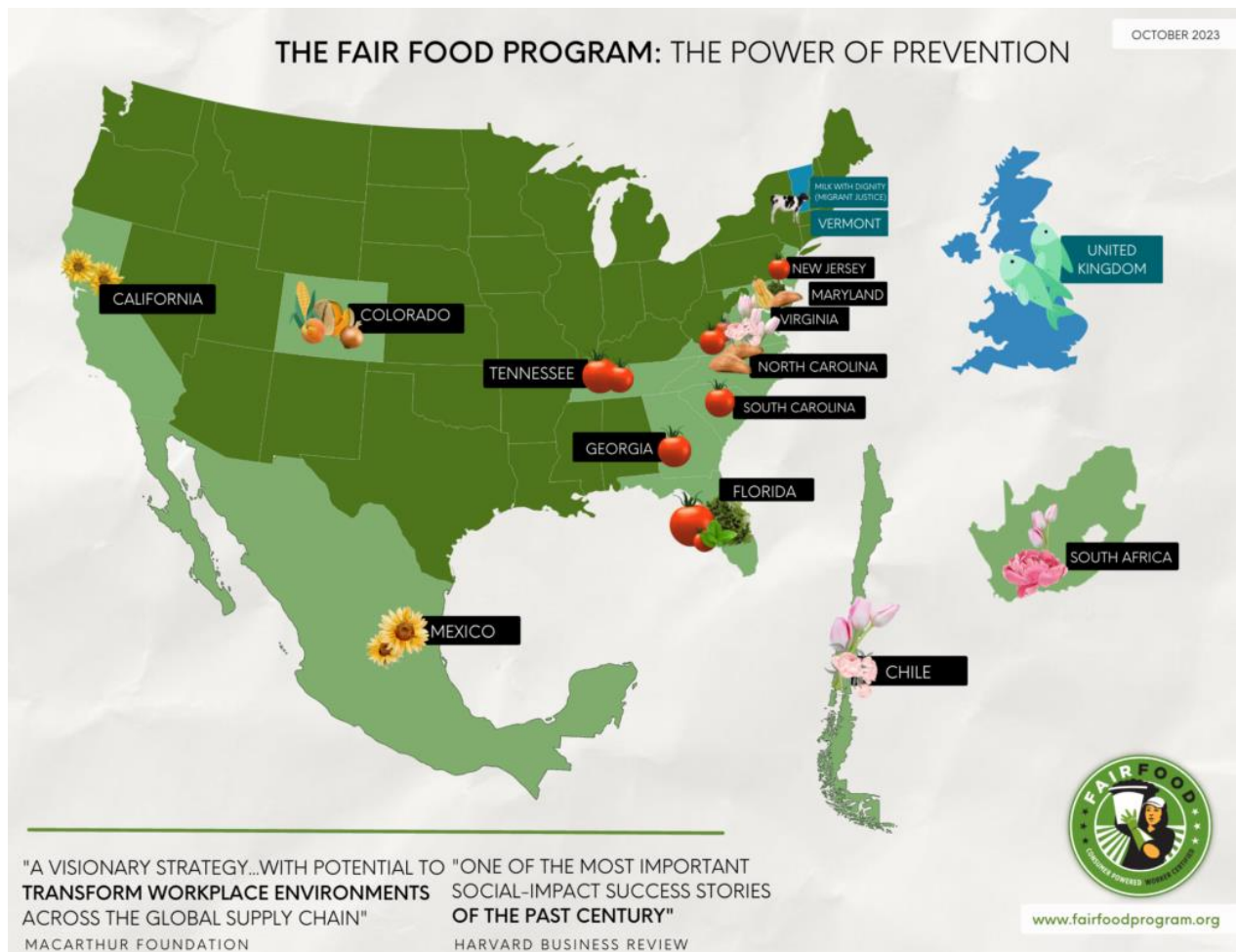


Image 4. This is an image of the states and countries involved in the Fair Food Program. It started in tomato farms in Florida and has now expanded internationally. Image courtesy of the Fair Food Program.

2. *Anti-Slavery Program*: Established with the help of Laura Germino, this program aims to end modern slavery operations on farms (National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, n.d.). Many farmworkers are stuck in involuntary servitude, held against their will by their employers to work in fields, through the use of violence, threats of violence, and coercion (CIW, 2022). Since the 1990's, this Anti-Slavery Program has liberated over 1,200 workers working against their volition by discovering, investigating, and prosecuting multiple farm slavery operations (CIW, 2020).

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Latina farmworkers face unique challenges and health risks as women working in agriculture. Not only do they endure the same harsh working conditions as male farmworkers such as extreme heat, pesticide exposure, working bent over, and carrying heavy loads, but also due to societal and cultural gender expectations, they grapple with additional household responsibilities like cleaning the house, preparing meals, and raising children. They experience high rates of sexual harassment and violence, mental illness, substance misuse and abuse, yet they have limited access to healthcare due to barriers such as cost, time, transportation, and lack of insurance.

Latina farmworkers break their backs to support themselves, their families, and this country. Most people don't realize or appreciate that the food on our table comes from farmworkers who themselves struggle to feed their families due to the poor living and working conditions they face. Latina farmworkers are human beings deserving of rights and protections. They are essential to feeding the U.S. and maintaining the economy and should therefore be treated with dignity.

It is critical that we advocate for and support Latina farmworkers. Double check where your food is coming from. If possible, cut out food chains and retail food companies that do not actively work against slavery farm operations, or donate money to organizations like Líderes Campesinas and the Coalition for Immokalee Workers. If these options are not feasible, raise awareness about the cruel conditions Latina farmworkers endure to barely make enough money to support themselves and their families through conversations with friends, family, and colleagues.

Lastly, I wanted to end by saying thank you to Latina farmworkers who undergo all the labor, sacrifice, and pain to keep the U.S. running. You are the backbone of this country. I pray this nation recognizes, appreciates, and respects all the resilience you have demonstrated and continue to demonstrate in the face of adversity.

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### Image Credits:

Image 1: Latina farmworkers picking strawberries: <https://www.ncfh.org/ncfh-blog/-women-in-the-fields-las-mujeres-en-los-campos>

Figure 1: Real wages for U.S. nonsupervisory and nonfarm workers, 1990-2022 graph: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/chart-gallery/gallery/chart-detail/?chartId=63464>

Figure 2: Share of U.S. farm laborers/graders/sorters who are women, 2006-21 graph: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/chart-gallery/gallery/chart-detail/?chartId=86783>

Figure 3: Undocumented agricultural workers, by sex graph: <https://cmsny.org/agricultural-workers-rosenbloom-083022/>

Image 2: Farmworkers women packaging lettuce: <https://aghealth.ucdavis.edu/news/small-grants-big-impacts-latina-graduate-student-takes-sexual-harassment>

Image 3: Dolores Huerta: <https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/dolores-huerta>

Image 4: Fair Food Program: <https://fairfoodprogram.org/>

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