

**Awareness of Worker's Rights and Aid Resources  
among Farm Workers in the  
Pierson and Seville Communities in Florida**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of our qualitative research is to investigate migrant farm workers in the Pierson and Seville communities, particularly their awareness of workers' rights, their exposure to pesticides, and their accessibility to various resources. This cross-sectional qualitative study was conducted with Marcos Crisanto, the coordinator of La Plaza Comunitaria in Pierson and the Redlands Christian Migrant Association (RCMA) office in Seville, where interviews with the farm workers were conducted. The investigation suggests that farm workers in the Pierson and Seville communities are in constant exposure to pesticides, are underpaid, and that more than half of the farm workers are unaware of their rights. We believe that such investigative research is important because our findings may yield valuable information that can benefit community efforts to increase farm workers' awareness of rights and accessibility to resources.

## **Acknowledgments**

We would like to sincerely thank Marcos Crisanto, the coordinator of La Plaza Comunitaria in Pierson, and the Redlands Christian Migrant Association office in Seville for their support in our research and for permitting us to use their respective sites to conduct interviews. It is through their support that this qualitative investigation is possible.

## **Introduction and Literature Review**

Throughout the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and into the 21<sup>st</sup>, policies regarding farm workers' labor rights and environmental policies have been evolving. Murphy-Greene and Leip explain that the Civil

Rights Act of 1964 initiated the protection of workers' rights by protecting minorities from discrimination and that President Clinton's Executive Order 12898 in 1994 attempts to secure environmental justice for the minority and low-income farm workers (Murphy-Greene, "Assessing the Effectiveness of Executive Order 12898," p. 679).

However, these policies do not sufficiently secure farm workers from pesticide exposure and severe health consequences. In the early 1920s, migration laws that prohibited the Chinese from migrating to the United States were waived to allow Mexican immigrants work on American fields (Shae p. 124). Many of the immigration laws used to exclude the Chinese from migrating to the U.S. were "waived to ensure the flow of Mexican workers into the fields" followed by the Bracero program in 1942, which recruited four to five million workers to the United States following World War II (Shae p.124). At the same time, the U.S. federal government initiated large-scale deportations of Mexican farm workers creating a somewhat circular flow of in and out migration. Quoting Greg Shell, a Legal Services attorney, Shea criticizes the H-2A visas claiming that "[t]he H-2 program is essentially a system of mail-order workers... perfect for growers because it keeps them from having to recruit domestic workers or raise wages to keep workers from going to another farmer who might pay more" (Shea p.125).

Migrant farm workers are ideal manual laborers because, unlike most professions in the U.S. work force, farm workers do not get paid for working overtime, are not entitled to breaks during the work day, and are not paid an hourly wage. In addition, farm workers typically consist of immigrants because the language gap enables employers to exploit migrant workers as the cheapest source of labor (Murphy-Greene, "The Occupational, Safety, and Health of Florida Farm Workers," p. 289-90). Furthermore, undocumented migrant workers are categorized

“occupy the lowest niche” in the hierarchy of farm workers and their fear of deportation also hinders them from asserting their rights (Byrd p. 247).

It is valuable to note that, among the literature reviewed, there was little amount of literature on the effect of pesticide exposure on migrant workers. This indicates the important potential for research of this topic and that pesticide exposure and regulation will become an important topic of research in the near future. However, there is clearly an abundance of information and literature available but a dearth of information on pesticides and exposure. Collectively, the literature brings to light the role of U.S. immigration policy and undocumented migrant behavior in the perception of undocumented workers and their labor rights.

The farm worker community in Pierson and Seville, Florida is an excellent case study that exemplifies some of the concerns mentioned above. Hispanics compose the majority of the population in Pierson and Seville, many of whom are farm workers working with fernery. Pierson also has a Farmworker Association of Florida office, known as La Plaza Comunitaria, to accommodate the Hispanic and farm worker community by offering financial, legal, and educational support (*Farmworker Association of Florida*). Seville also supports the farm worker community through the Redlands Christian Migrant Association (RCMA) which offers child care and education for students of farm worker families (*RCMA*).

**The purpose of our investigation is to better understand local farm workers, particularly their awareness of workers’ rights, their exposure to pesticides, and their accessibility to various resources. As per the request of Marcos Crisanto, the coordinator of La Plaza Comunitaria in Pierson, a cross-sectional qualitative investigative study was conducted through interviewing farm workers at both La Plaza Comunitaria in Pierson and the**

**RCMA office in Seville. We believe that such investigative research is important because our findings may yield valuable information that can benefit community efforts to increase farm workers' awareness of rights and accessibility to resources.**

While our investigation will be conducted with professionalism, our previous experiences and preconceptions of farmworkers will inevitably affect our perceptions throughout the investigation.

## **Research Design**

### *Participants*

The sample was taken from a population of farm workers at La Plaza Comunitaria in Pierson and of farm workers at the RCMA in Seville. We used both a criterion sample, in which participants had to meet the condition of being currently or to have been previously employed as a farm worker, and a sample of convenience, in which the participation of qualified participants depended on the individuals' availability. Differences in the participants' age, sex, English proficiency, and income are noted but not controlled to ensure our sample best represents the population. Participants are selected on a first come, first serve basis until we attained twenty-eight participants.

### *Instrumentation*

Interviews were conducted at La Plaza Comunitaria and at the RCMA two to four times per week over a period of ten weeks in which we got acquainted with La Plaza's service of offering

financial support and English classes, attended a community meeting, and conducted interviews. Interviews were conducted to collect information regarding the participants' demographics, experience in the work place, and the accessibility of resources. To best accommodate the participants, interviews were available in English and Spanish and could be completed either orally or written; however, all interviews were conducted in Spanish and administered orally with one interview conducted in English. The interviews were conducted until the target number of 28 interviews was reached.

### *Procedures*

To ensure an ethical approach, an emphasis was placed that the interviews were completely voluntary and that there would be no negative consequences should anyone decline to participate in the interview. At La Plaza Comunitaria in Pierson, interviews were mostly conducted outdoors and while standing. Although the interviews were casual, confidentiality and the participants' privacy while participating was ensured. At the RCMA in Seville, the confidentiality and each participant's privacy were also ensured, while the interviews were conducted indoors in a vacant office space. Furthermore, participants were ensured that their identity and immigration status would remain ambiguous by not asking any questions regarding immigration status and by maintaining their responses with the strictest confidence. After all data had been collected and analyzed, recorded interview responses and notes were appropriately disposed of.

## Results

Table 1.1: Participant demographics

	Min.	Max.	Avg.
Age	19	71	37
Household Size	2	8	4
Daily Income	\$20	\$100	\$48.28
Yearly Income	\$1,000	\$33,000	\$9,318

Table 1.2: Participant demographics

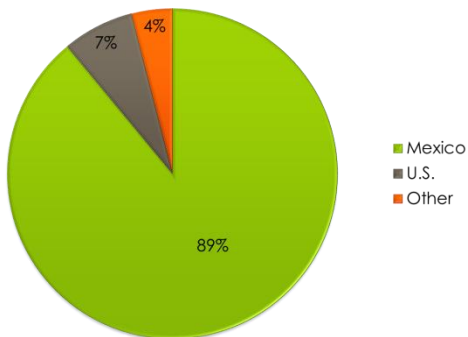
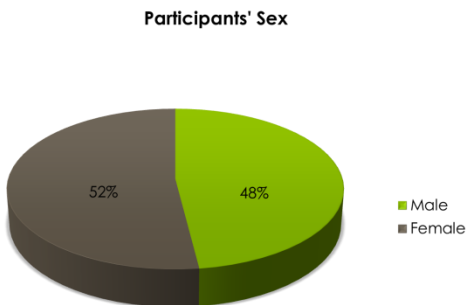


Table 1.3 Participants demographics



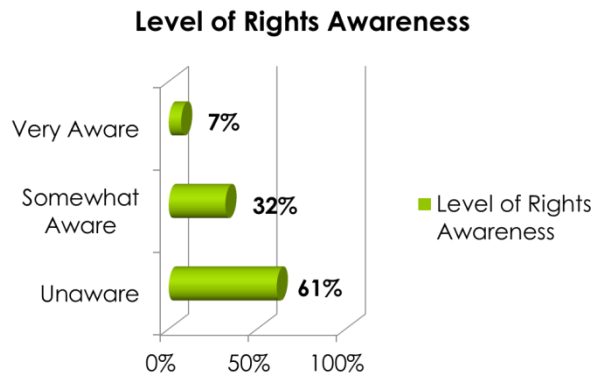


Tables 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3 convey the participants' demographic information. The majority of participants was of Mexican descent and was almost evenly distributed between male and female participants. The average participant's income was \$9, 318 and had a household size of four.

*Table 2.1: Availability to and use of resources*

	Do Not Ask	The Employer	La Plaza	RCMA	Clinic	Medical Truck	Churches
Your Rights	30%	11%	<b>41%</b>	19%	--	--	--
Your Job	30%	37%	<b>26%</b>	7%	--	--	--
Your Health	15%	7%	<b>7%</b>	--	59%	11%	--
Your Finances	56%	7%	<b>33%</b>	--	--	--	4%

*Table 2.2: Awareness of rights*



Tables 2.1 and 2.2 portray the participants' availability to resources and awareness of rights. Table 2.1 indicates that La Plaza Comunitaria is an important resource for farm workers who have questions regarding their rights, finances, or job, while questions regarding their health are mostly directed to the clinic.

## **Discussion**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to better understand the farm workers' awareness of rights and exposure to pesticides in the Pierson and Seville communities. The investigation suggests that the majority of sampled farm workers are underpaid, are constantly exposed to pesticides, and that more than half is unaware of their rights. Furthermore, the investigation indicates that while most participants utilize La Plaza Comunitaria as a resource to answer questions regarding their rights, their job, and their finances, over half of the participants do not ask any questions about their finances and approximately one-third of participants do not ask any questions about their rights or their job. Such lack of awareness and/or lack of use of resources supports Byrd's and Murphy-Greene's notions that migrant farm workers are easily exploited due to their language barrier and fear of deportation, thus placing them on the bottom of the hierarchy of workers.

Considering these implications of the results, it is suggested that the Pierson and Seville communities host monthly information meetings to discuss the effects of pesticides and precautionary measures farm workers can take to prevent physical harm. It is also suggested that future research be conducted on the effects of pesticides on farm workers, as this was discovered to be a prominent issue in our investigation, yet not a common topic of research among literature.

## Works Cited

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