

Health and Safety of Migrant Farmworkers in Difficult Times

Farm to Plate Annual Gathering
November 21, 2025

Panelists:

Dan Baker, UVM Dept. Of Community Development & Applied Economics / UVM Extension

Esbey Hamilton HUVN Extension Migrant Education Program

John Roberts HFarmwise Solutions

Naomi Wolcott-MacCausland - UVM Extension Bridges to Health Program



University of Vermont
Extension

College of Agriculture and Life Sciences

Welcome and Overview

Brief overview of some of the "perennial", new and emerging issues affecting migrant farmworker health, safety and well-being.

Ask questions as they occur to you or write them down on index cards and we'll pick them up

Our hope is to expand opportunities to build momentum to support the migrant farmworker community thrive during their time living in Vermont.

To expand understanding of the role that service agencies and community partners play in supporting the migrant farmworker community.

And leave here with motivation and direction for what we can do individually, within our organizations, and collaboratively to support migrant farmworkers within our state and region.

Panelists Introduction

Dan Baker, UVM CDAE / UVM Extension Agricultural Business Program

Esbey Hamilton HUVIM Extension Migrant Education Program

John Roberts HFarmwise Solutions

Naomi Wolcott-MacCausland - UVM Extension Migrant Health Programs

Im/migrant Agricultural Workers in Vermont

Agricultural workers: population estimates

1525

- Year-Round Immigrant Agricultural Workers & Family Members
- Seasonal Migrant Agricultural Visa Holders (H2A)

900

625

Year-round agricultural workers and family members *

Farm types: dairy, slaughter/processing, greenhouses, logging

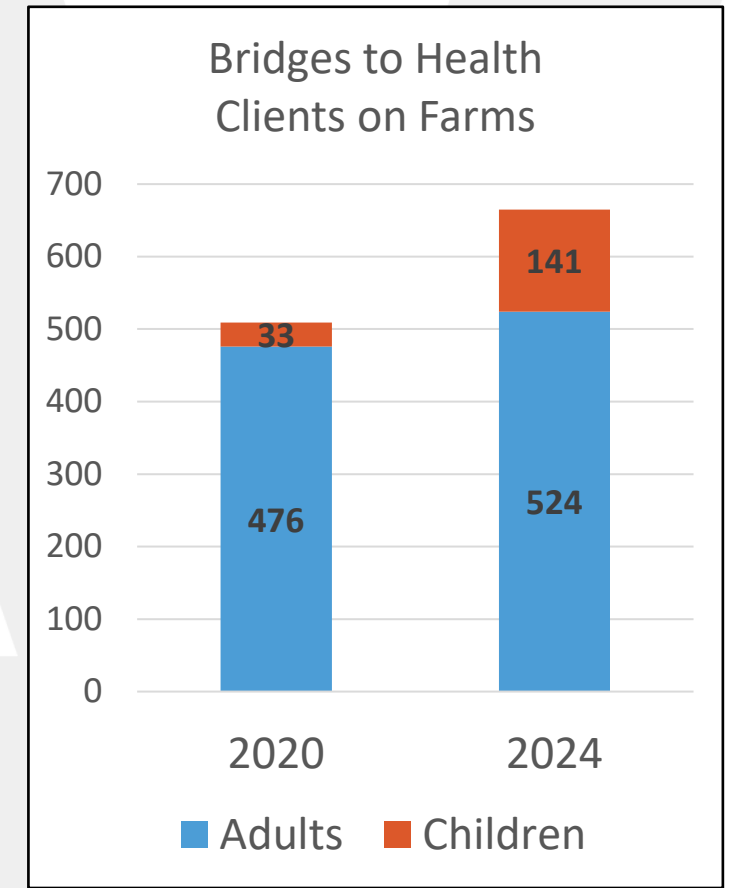
95% from Mexico

5% from Guatemala

Occupy approximately 750 positions on ~150 farms (of ~250 that outsource)

Over 150 accompanying family members (children & spouses)

**additional workers connected to food system and ag work in restaurants, lumber yards, food processing*



Im/migrant Agricultural Workers in Vermont

664 seasonal agricultural workers positions with H2A HSeasonal agriculture visas

- Work contract lasts from 90 days to 10 months
- Some workers transition from one crop to another during calendar year
- Farm types include apple orchards, greenhouses, processing facilities, vegetables and berry farms, maple sugaring, & apiaries
 - 74% increase in the number of farms requesting H2A workers in past decade (46 to 80)
- 84% from Jamaica who speak standard English and often Patois
- 12% Spanish speakers from Mexico & Central America
 - Some speak an indigenous language as their first language

Organizations & Programs Intentionally Supporting Migrant Farmworkers in VT

Health Care Prevention & Access to Services

- UVM Extension MHP Bridges to Health (statewide)
- Open Door Clinic (Addison County)
- Little Rivers Healthcare & Project Salud – N. Orange County
- Ventanillas de Salud (MX nationals – virtual)

Food Security

- UVM MHP Huertas & Bridges to Health
- Open Door Clinic
- Feeding Champlain Valley
- Fairfield Community Center
- Hardwick Area Food Shelves

Farmworker Housing

- Milk with Dignity (enrolled farms statewide)
- Champlain Housing Trust with UVM Extension (statewide)

Education & Leadership

- UVM Extension Migrant Education Programs (statewide for enrolled students)
- Migrant Justice

Systemic & Individual Discrimination, Racism, Immigration

- Migrant Justice (statewide)
- Vermont Asylum Assistance Project (VAAP)
- Pine Tree Legal Assistance – H2A workers, virtual

Resource/Help Lines

- Migrant Justice (statewide)
- Milk with Dignity (enrolled farms statewide)
- Migrant Clinicians Network (National, virtual)

Social supports, trusting networks, mobility, spiritual resources

- UVM Extension Migrant Education Programs (statewide for enrolled students)
- Migrant Justice
- Addison Allies & Migrant Support Group – Addison County

Workplace Safety

- Milk with Dignity (enrolled farms statewide)
- Migrant Justice
- UVM Extension/CDAE
- Northeast Center for Occupational Health & Safety

“Perennial” Challenges of Farmworker Health & Safety

Prior to the Trump Administration:

Agriculture is one of the most dangerous industries

The unique precarity of migrant dairy workers: The VT trifecta

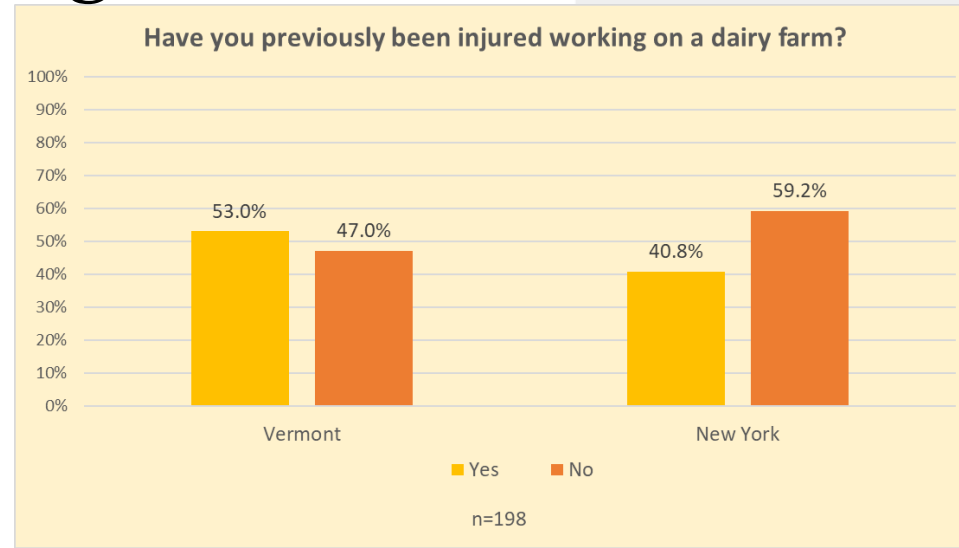
- No dairy visa
- Border state
- Very white

Migrants contribute to our communities, and migrants need services. Generally demand exceeds supply

Providing those services has become both more important and less available under the Trump administration

“Perennial” Challenges of Farmworker Health & Safety

Farm Safety



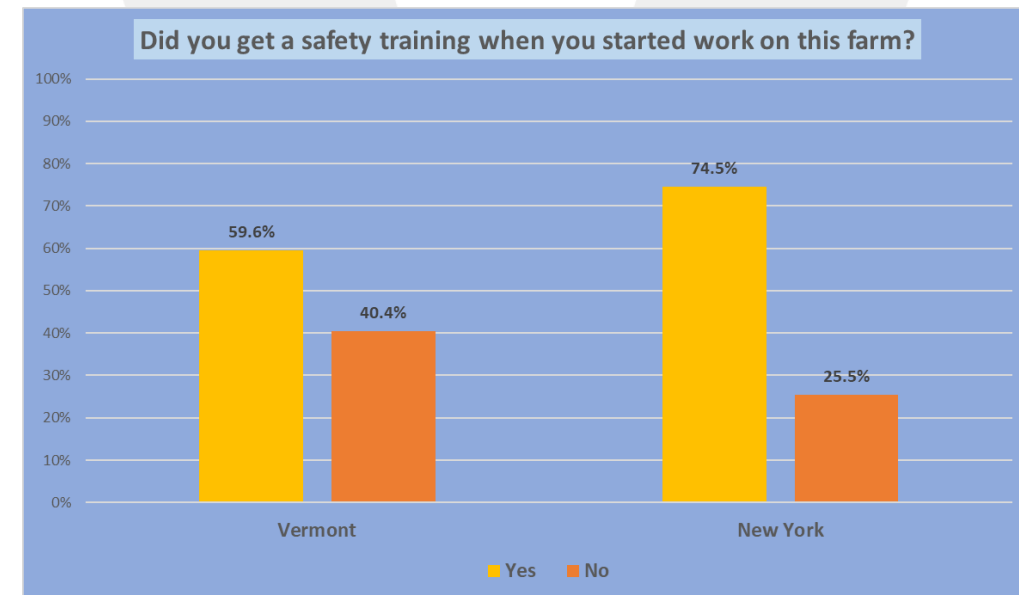
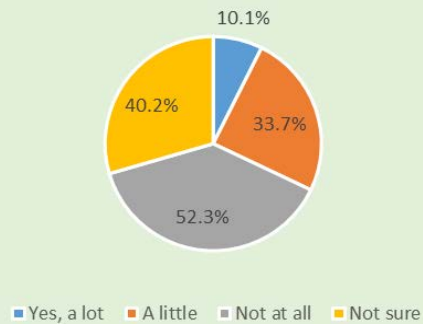
47% of farmworkers injured

At least 26% were injured more than once

58% of those injuries required a doctor

28% reported still suffer from an injury

Does your English language proficiency effect your ability to work safely?



Health Access

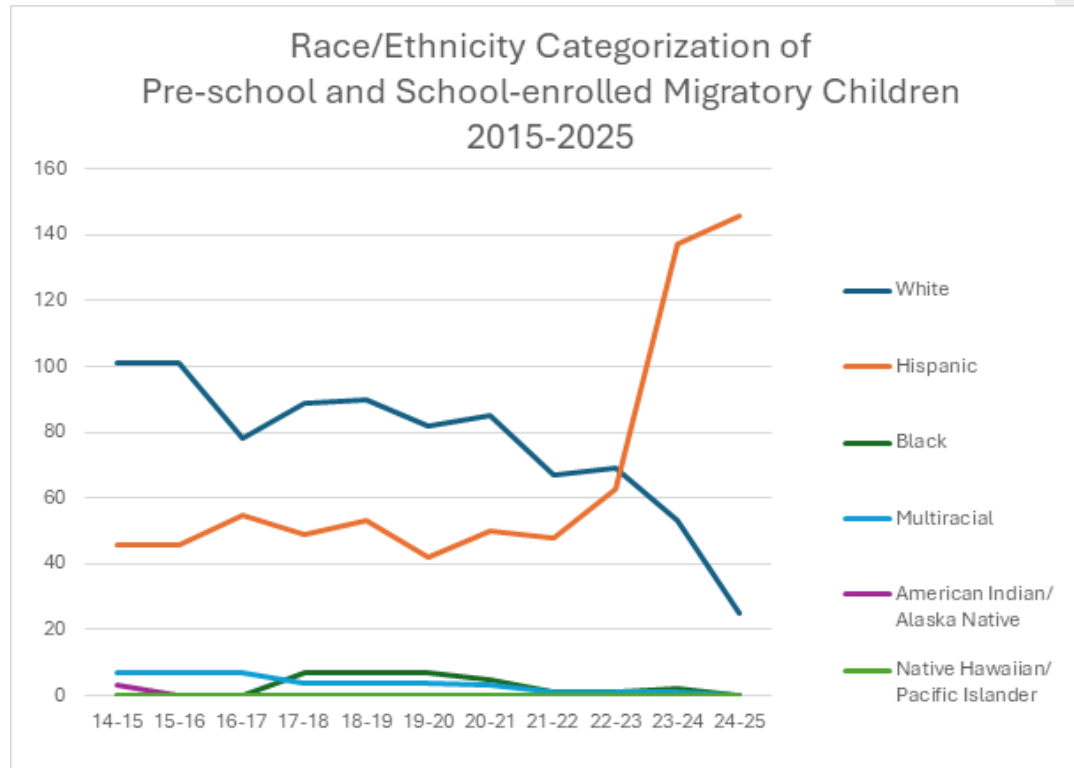
Systemic/Structural

- ☐ Language access
- ☐ Cultural awareness
- ☐ Complex health care system
- ☐ Inconsistency in sliding fee/discounted care policies
- ☐ Complex paperwork and billing
- ☐ Discrimination
- ☐ Ineligibility for gov. programs
- ☐ Immigration law

Individual

- ☐ Cost (91% of adults uninsured)
- ☐ Transportation (80% lack reliable transpo)
- ☐ Language ability
- ☐ Fear
- ☐ Unfamiliarity with health systems
- ☐ Geographic isolation
- ☐ Shame/stigma (esp. mental health)
- ☐ Different cultural health beliefs
- ☐ Work conflicts
- ☐ Power dynamic with employer
- ☐ Unstable employment/housing

Migrant Education



Workers Rights

Highly variable conditions on farms

Lack of consistent federal regulation and enforcement (H2A vs Dairy)

- Minimum wage/overtime
- Time off
- Rest breaks
- Paid sick leave

Social Isolation



New and Emerging Health and Safety Issues

Public health issues/Communicable Disease

More kids/spouses

Federal level changes

Impacts of Federal Changes

Individuals

- Health insurance changes
 - Limits eligibility for coverage & cost prohibitive for eligible farmworkers
 - Shortened enrollment period disproportionately impacts individuals who have complex income & immigration scenarios
 - Administrative burden Eligibility proof every 6 months
 - Likelihood of larger gaps in coverage due to retro coverage limits
- Reluctance to apply for eligible programs
 - Concern about data sharing and interactions with federal programs
 - Concern about use of health care services/program impact on immigration applications
 - SNAP (3SVT) letters include language that has worried some applicants

Impacts of Federal Changes

Individuals

- Fear of accessing services
 - Delaying or forgoing care
 - Sending others to the store on their behalf
 - Keeping children home from school
- Some workers deciding to return home due to uncertain/stressful environment
- Limiting time outside in visible spaces



Impacts of Federal Changes

Individuals

- Fear of family separations
 - Parents concerned about being detained without their children or being separated if detained
 - Only one parent in public space at a time
 - Concerns about children's safety while at school or in transit
 - Economic impact when a parent is detained or deported
- Seasonal ag visa holders
 - Concern about not being able to return (support family) due to potential changes in program
 - Concern about availability of health care services while here

Impacts of Federal Changes

Programming Impacts

- Fewer options for workers to get to health appointments, food access points etc
 - Community member volunteers & farm owners concerned about driving workers to appointments
 - Workers with licenses less likely to transport co-worker
- Health and social service system getting more confusing and uncertain; time burden of navigating changes with clients
- Challenging funding outlook
 - No current federal funding opportunities for health equity work (misalignment with current federal priorities)
 - Education funding to support migratory and EL students is statutory but still threatened
 - Increased pressure on nongovernment funds including philanthropy (greater competition for limited funds)

How do we meet/support programs for these challenges going forward?

- *Moving forward, what can we do individually and through our organizations to help advance farmworker well-being?*
- **If you are engaged in farmworker health, safety or well-being**
- **What are you doing?**
- **What hurdles do you face?**
- **What opportunities do you see?**

Opportunities for Engagement: A Guide to Organizations and Opportunities

Review existing opportunities for engagement

- **Legal Assistance and Information**
 - **Know Your Rights**
 - **Resources for Advocacy and Solidarity**
 - **Farmworker Housing**
 - **Volunteer Opportunities**
 - **Donating and Fundraising for Critical Programs**
 - **What's Missing?**
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- **Sign up at the back of the room if you would like to receive a copy**

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