

The Needs of Farmworkers in Washington State: Final Report

The 2022 Washington Legislature tasked WSIPP with conducting a study of the needs of farmworkers, including a survey of farmworkers on work-related issues, an assessment of how state and federal agencies coordinate on farmworker issues, and a review of research-backed programs and policies to help farmworkers.

Background

We surveyed 202 farmworkers in Washington about their experiences with workplace safety, wages and hours, use of government services, harassment and retaliation, and socioeconomic challenges. We also spoke with members of state and federal agencies to determine whether coordination challenges exist between them and reviewed the research literature on policies to support farmworkers.

Findings

Key findings from our survey include:

- More than half of the respondents said employers do not consistently adjust work for excessive heat or smoke.
- English speakers were more likely to recall receiving safety-related training and equipment.
- Nearly half of farmworkers reported using government services, and 69% of those who did sought help from a community organization or figure.
- 43% of H-2A workers report struggling to find housing and food “every week” despite being guaranteed both by their visa status.
- Having health insurance is associated with greater use of preventative healthcare and less use of emergency services.

Federal agency staff relayed that Washington is one of the most effective states at providing services to farmworkers. However, state agency coordination is hampered by a lack of formal processes for collaboration, such as shared databases on claims and enforcement actions or official linkages between personnel at different agencies.

The research literature emphasizes the importance of state- and community-led initiatives to support the specific regional needs of farmworkers.

Frequency of Respondent Experiences

| Experience | Percentage of respondents |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| <i>Work-related exposures</i> | |
| Exposure to excessive heat | 55% |
| Exposure to smoke | 51% |
| Exposure to pesticides | 45% |
| Work-related injury | 15% |
| <i>Use of services</i> | |
| Using government services | 45% |
| <i>Socioeconomic risks</i> | |
| Food insecurity | 42% |
| Housing insecurity | 26% |
| Lack of insurance | 39% |

Assignment Details

Assigned in 2022 Legislative Session
[ESSB 5693](#)

[Full report available on WSIPP's website](#)

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