

FARMWORKER STUDY

PRELIMINARY DATA BRIEF

September 21, 2020

Oregon Fires Exacerbate COVID-19 Impact on Farmworkers' Health, Housing, and Livelihoods

The COVID-19 global pandemic exacerbated by unprecedented wildfires in Oregon has demonstrated that farmworkers deemed "essential" are on the frontlines of the climate crisis, worsening already hazardous working conditions to maintain food on our tables. Oregon's farmworker population—with an overwhelming proportion of Latinx and Indigenous people from Mexico and Guatemala—has experienced disproportionately higher rates of COVID-19 infection than people from other ethnic backgrounds and employment industries. Oregon Health Authority's COVID-19 weekly report¹ continues to highlight food packing and agricultural worksites as uniquely vulnerable (i.e., at high risk) to the spread of the virus due to workflows and other factors that create an overrepresentation of cases suffered by people of color in agricultural worksites— such as high infection rates in agricultural areas like Umatilla, Morrow, and Malheur Counties². Despite challenges, Oregon farmworkers demonstrate a commitment to safety in the face of COVID-19 while confronting economic, health, and social challenges without adequate safety nets and protections. The consequences signal a new normal, demanding immediate attention to maintain farmworkers' safety and well-being at work and home.

The Oregon COVID-19 Farmworker Study (COFS) provides strong evidence that the current pandemic has had a major impact on the work and home lives of Oregon's estimated 174,000 farmworkers³. Farmworkers and organizations that work with them have powerful and

¹<https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/DISEASES/CONDITIONS/DISEASESAZ/Emerging%20Respiratory%20Infections/COVID-19-Weekly-Report-2020-08-26-FINAL.pdf>

²<https://public.tableau.com/profile/oregon.health.authority.covid.19#!/vizhome/OregonCOVID-19TestingandOutcomesbyCounty/OregonsCOVID-19TestingandOutcomesbyCounty>

³ Estimates of Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers in Agriculture, 2018 Update June 2018

productive suggestions for improving the safety of workplaces and communities. Preliminary findings from data collected through the first 214 (of an anticipated total of 300) surveys of farmworkers during the pandemic reveals the following:

1. When protective equipment is available, farmworkers take necessary precautions and follow safety procedures at home and in the workplace to minimize exposure to COVID-19.
2. Farmworkers report periods during the working day when they lack appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) and cannot socially distance, despite saying that employers have taken some steps to prevent COVID-19 infection.
3. Farmworkers experienced a significant loss of work and income during the COVID-19 pandemic creating broad economic challenges.
4. Farmworkers know people infected or have been directly exposed to COVID-19, but few report getting tested. Cost and fear of losing a job are significant barriers to accessing testing and care.
5. Few farmworkers have the means to quarantine or isolate if they or someone in their household is sick.
6. One-half or more of farmworkers surveyed remain unaware of paid sick leave benefits and existing relief funds organized by the federal government and the State of Oregon.
7. Farmworkers that speak Indigenous languages face additional information and accessibility gaps. Oregon Indigenous farmworkers speak at least 23 different languages from Guatemala and Mexico (such as Triqui, Mixtec, Mam, Kanjobal, among others) and many are not fluent or literate in Spanish.
8. Farmworkers are also caregivers. Farmworkers have trouble accessing affordable childcare and supporting their children's education with the shift to remote classes.
9. Farmworkers are feeling increasing stress levels affecting their emotional well-being yet severely lack access to mental health services.
10. Farmworkers worry greatly about family members outside the U.S. and the pandemic has resulted in a significant reduction in remittances sent to families in Mexico and Guatemala who depend on them.

Recommendations by the Oregon COFS Team for swift policy action based on this critical data can be found at the end of this brief.

Introduction

Farmworkers are essential workers who continue to produce food on the frontlines of a global pandemic. Now they are facing work during intolerable air quality conditions resulting from

<https://www.oregon.gov/oha/HPA/HP-PCO/Documents/2018%20Updates%20to%20MSFW%20Enumeration%20Studies%20Report.pdf>

historic wildfires, so Oregonians can continue to eat. Despite delivering necessary food to our tables, they have not had equal access to the support and care that other essential workers (e.g., day care provisions of healthcare workers) have received. COVID-19 has exacerbated already existing conditions of inequality on multiple levels for farmworkers. Since catastrophic and ongoing wildfires in Oregon beginning on September 8th, the vulnerability of farmworkers is even greater with people displaced but still having to work in hazardous conditions.

The Oregon Health Authority estimates that “174,000 migrant and seasonal farmworkers, and related family members” support Oregon agriculture and put food on our tables.⁴ Nationally, farmworkers’ mean and median personal incomes during 2015-2016 were in the range of \$17,500 to \$19,999.⁵ Most work at seasonal jobs—rarely holding full-time, year-round work. About half of farmworkers had some form of health insurance in 2015-2016, but there is no specific data for Oregon farmworkers. More than one third of Oregon’s agricultural workforce is undocumented⁶, excluding them from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act relief and unemployment benefits.⁷ Studies estimate that up to 40 percent of Oregon’s 174, 000 farmworkers and families are Indigenous.⁸

The existing structural disparities heightened by the pandemic make it critical that Oregon allocates adequate resources to prevent, identify, and treat COVID-19 and related consequences for already vulnerable farmworkers. This study provides the first state-wide picture of the impact of COVID-19 in the work and home lives of Oregon farmworkers. The study is the result of six months of planning and collaboration among eleven farmworker-serving community based organizations, researchers from three Oregon universities, and contributions from a wide range of advocates around the state. The COVID-19 Farmworker Study (COFS) is the first study of its kind in Oregon to provide information about specific impacts on working conditions, sanitation, transportation, homelife, health and mental health of farmworkers and their families. Since the scientifically-designed survey was administered by staff from trusted organizations in farmworker communities, we are confident that the results reflect the experiences of farmworkers in contact with farmworker serving organizations, but a limitation of

⁴ Oregon Health Authority, 2018. Estimates of Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers in Agriculture, 2018 Update.

<https://www.oregon.gov/oha/HPA/HP-PCO/Documents/2018%20Updates%20to%20MSFW%20Enumeration%20Studies%20Report.pdf>

⁵ Findings from the National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS) 2015-2016:A Demographic and Employment Profile of United States Farmworkers, pp.36. JBS International, 2018.

https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ETA/naws/pdfs/NAWS_Research_Report_13.pdf

⁶ Occupations with highest shares of unauthorized immigrant workers by state, 2014, continued. (2016, November 02). Retrieved September 17, 2020, from

https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2016/11/03/appendix-d-detailed-tables/ph_11-03-16_unauthorized-app-d-04/

⁷ Bauer, J. (2020, April 06). Oregon Should Assist Laid-off Immigrant Workers Excluded from Federal Aid. Retrieved September 17, 2020, from

<https://www.ocpp.org/2020/04/06/oregon-immigrant-workers-excluded-federal/>

⁸ Promoting the Occupational Health of Indigenous Farmworkers, Farquar, et. al, 2008. Journal of Agricultural Safety and Health 15(1): 89-102, http://www.adph.org/ALPHTN/assets/042309_promote.pdf

the survey is we are not able to capture the experiences of farmworkers who do not receive services from these organizations and are likely more vulnerable.

Survey Methods

This survey will include 300 phone surveys with farmworkers throughout Oregon between August 1st and September 30th, 2020 by a team of thirty-five surveyors managed by eleven community-based organizations that serve farmworker communities: Bienestar, CASA of Oregon, Centro Cultural de Washington County, Euvalcree, Farmworker Housing Development Corporation, Legal Aid Services of Oregon, Oregon Human Development Corporation, Oregon Law Center, UNETE, Columbia River Keepers, Unidos Bridging Community, and University of Oregon. The preliminary results presented here are based on the first 214 surveys completed.

Regional survey targets were established based on historic labor demand using a three-year (2017-2019), monthly average of officially reported Agricultural Employment during June, July and August. These averages were computed for each of Oregon's counties from published Official Department of Labor data posted by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment & Wages. County data were grouped within the eight USDA-designated Natural Resource Conservation Regions, and finally compiled further into four sampling regions, according to the temporal similarity of seasonal crop production in each Natural Resource Conservation Resource. This sample strategy insured that every type of Oregon agricultural production would have a chance to be represented in the survey.

The rapid nature of this study was only possible by using a snowball sample technique with the support of trusted networks that serve farmworker communities, rather than a simple random sample technique. The survey sample is designed to be representative of industry specific characteristics, such as employer type and a mix of both on-farm and non-farm agricultural employment—forestry and support services, fishing, and fresh packers. Demographic considerations include gender, age, length of settlement, and indigeneity.

Partners were compensated for overhead, training, surveyor time, and survey incentives distributed to farmworkers for their participation. Surveyors completed a four hour training model with follow-up weekly survey check-in meetings and a focus group scheduled at the end of the survey collection. Farmworkers were given two \$25 incentives for a total of \$50. Each organization was given full autonomy to decide on the method of dispersal and was required to submit proof of payment to the fiscal sponsor based on best practices and confidentiality considerations of respondents. No respondent identifying information was collected. The results are examined by a team of expert analysts who specialize in the themes of the survey. This report is based on a preliminary analysis of 214 surveys. A final analysis will be based on the full 300 surveys and follow-up qualitative interviews in phase two.

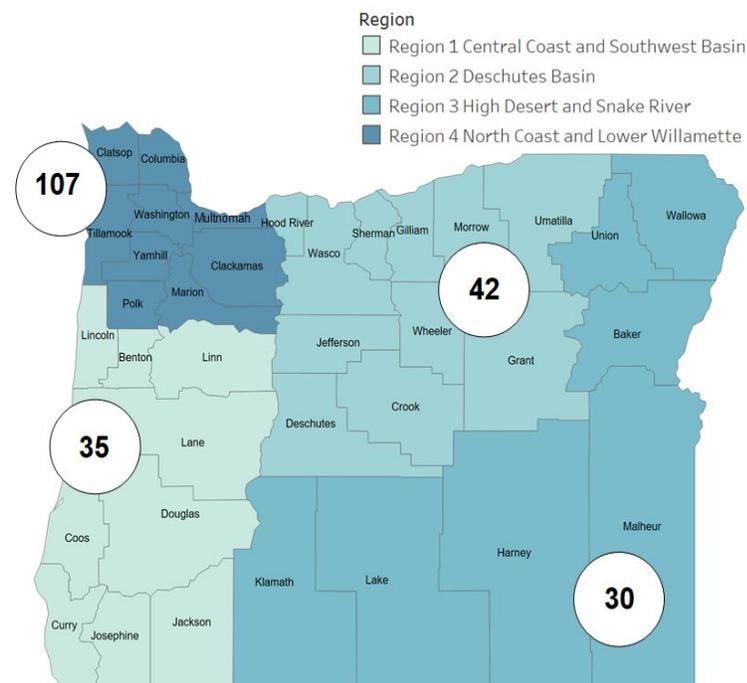
Topics covered in the survey included COVID-19 prevention in the workplace, employer and employee practices and use of personal protective equipment (PPE), transportation to and from work, housing conditions, family structure and challenges in the home, access to health care and mental health, and economic challenges.

Participant Characteristics

Of the 214 surveyed farmworkers represented by the partial data set used for this brief, 58% identified as women and 42% as men. The median age was 40; 72% are married or in a marriage-like relationship and most have children aged 12 or younger. Over 50% of the farmworkers surveyed work in the Willamette Valley (Figure 1), which accounts for about 40% of agricultural production⁹ in Oregon, growing more than 170 different crops and hosting the vast majority of farmworkers¹⁰.

Figure 1. Respondents by Region

Throughout the state, 39% of farmworkers reported working for a Farm Labor Contractor (FLC) or a personnel agency, 46% reported being directly employed by a grower, and 9% reported



working for a packing house, and 3% did not know or preferred not to answer (Figure 2). The vast majority of farmworkers have lived in the United States over fifteen years and 33% reported living here less than fourteen years. Approximately 81% of respondents were born in Mexico, 12% in Guatemala, 6% in the United States, and 1% from Peru and Honduras. Nineteen percent of respondents speak Indigenous languages including Kaqchikel, Mam, Mixteco Bajo, Mixteco Alto, Purépecha, Triqui/Trique,

⁹ United States Department of Agriculture State Profile.

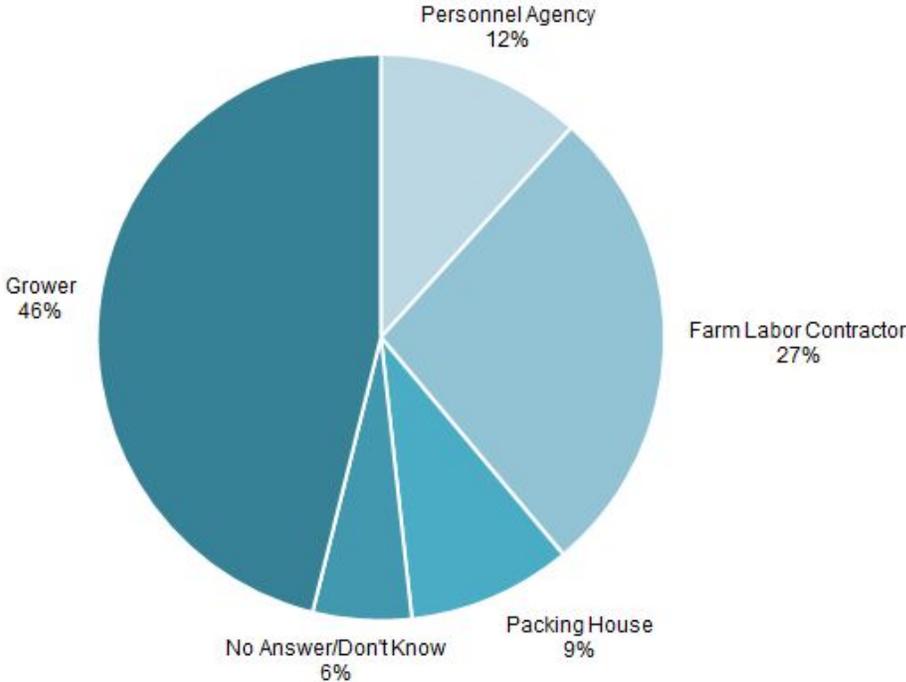
https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Online_Resources/County_Profiles/Oregon/index.php

¹⁰ Oregon Department of Agriculture

<https://www.oregon.gov/ODA/shared/Documents/Publications/Administration/ORGrowingRegions.pdf>

Zapoteco, and Quiche),¹¹ but the vast majority of farmworkers preferred to do the interview in Spanish. Over 24% of farmworkers identify as Indigenous (from “pueblos originarios or pueblos indígenas”) in Mexico and Guatemala and 75% did not identify as Indigenous. Nearly three percent of respondents identified as 2-Spirit, LGBTQI or LGBTTTI and six percent more preferred not to answer or did not know how to identify.

Figure 2. Respondents by Employer Type



¹¹ The full list of indigenous languages spoken by Indigenous immigrants in Oregon from Mexico and Guatemala includes: Achi, Akateko, Amuzgo, Chuj, Ixil, Huichol, Jakalteko, Kaqchikel, Mam, Maya Yucatan, Mixteco, Mixteco Alto, Mixteco Bajo, Nahuatl, Purépecha, Q'anjob'al, Q'eqchi', Quiche (K'iche'), Tlapaneco, Tojolobal, Trique (Itunyoso and Copala), Tzeltal, Tzotzil, and Zapoteco (different variants).

Key Findings

1. When protective equipment is available, farmworkers take necessary precautions and follow safety procedures at home and in the workplace to minimize exposure to COVID-19.

Farmworkers have made significant changes in the workplace and at home to limit their exposure to COVID-19. In the workplace, 57% of farmworkers report washing their hands with frequency, five times or more, and many commented on using hand sanitizer when handwashing stations are not available.

“The workers themselves take turns to maintain the bathrooms clean.”

□ *Nursery Farmworker, Woodburn, OR*

They report that overall, 77% of their co-workers wear a mask at all times. A distinctive shift also appears to be occurring in farmworkers' transportation plans to and from work. While in the past a significant number may have travelled to work in vans or other larger shared vehicles, 77 percent of farmworkers reported making changes to their transportation plans by travelling in their own vehicles and avoiding car-sharing with people outside of their households as a strategy to limit exposure to the virus. While this has been a popular strategy, 20% of farmworkers still report car sharing with *rateros* (drivers with vehicles who offer shared transportation for a fee). This shift in transportation has created unique vulnerabilities for those that lack transportation and cannot distance themselves from other riders. It can also subject some farmworkers to hostile situations. In one case, a farmworker provided testimony that the person she rode to work with sexually accosted her and left her stranded in the fields.

Since the pandemic, the majority of farmworkers report changing their practices before entering their home after work to protect their families and others in the household, including changing and washing their clothes as soon as they arrive, limiting interaction with family until after they have showered, and disinfecting counters with more frequency.

2. Farmworkers report periods during the working day when they lack appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) and cannot socially distance, despite saying that employers have taken some steps to prevent COVID-19 infection.

While the majority of farmworkers reported that their employer made some changes¹² to prevent the spread of COVID-19 such as adding more bathrooms and sanitizing stations, 22% of farmworkers reported no changes to the conditions of bathrooms and handwashing areas. Seventy-seven percent of farmworkers reported receiving an employer-provided mask. Despite efforts to supply farmworkers with face-masks, 20% of farmworkers report their employer did not

¹² Temporary COVID rules regarding field sanitation, established by Oregon OSHA, require additional bathrooms/handwashing facilities for labor-intensive/hand labor operations (with some feasibility exceptions).

supply them with masks. Sixty-seven percent of farmworkers reported that their masks were made of cloth and 36% were disposable.

Thirty-nine percent of farmworkers reported that during meetings or due to the structure of the work, there are moments during the workday when farmworkers cannot remain six feet apart. In those jobs that require working in close contact at all times or in specific periods, about 31% of farmworkers report employers required them to be closer than six feet apart, without protection of personal protection equipment (PPE).

“Workers can’t maintain distance, because when we pack the flowers the band runs very fast and we need the help of other people and that is why we can’t distance sufficiently.”

□ *Nursery Farmworker, Woodburn, OR*

“Yes, the type of work in a packing house does not allow for 6-foot distancing. It is very difficult to keep our distance, there are several of us in a small area.”

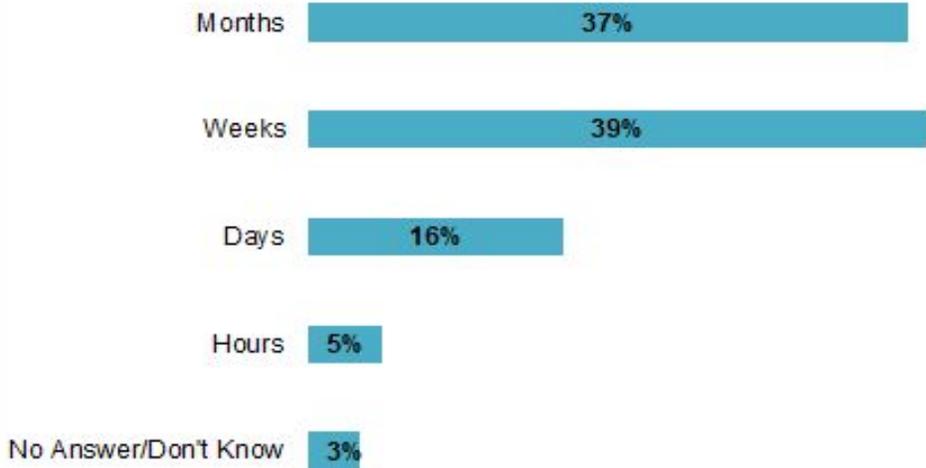
□ *Packing House Worker, Nyssa, OR*

Farmworkers had several recommendations about employer practices that can be implemented to establish and sustain social distancing, some that are workplace specific and others that can be applied in multiple settings. Many farmworkers recommended adding more restrooms and hand washing stations and sanitizing them with more frequency, continuing education and continuously giving information about COVID-19 prevention practices. Many farmworkers had specific recommendations on how to improve workflows to improve distancing, including slowing down conveyor belts and creating a better plan for when farmworkers come together to offload the fruit they have picked.

3. Farmworkers experienced a significant loss of work and income during the COVID-19 pandemic creating broad economic challenges.

Sixty-eight percent of farmworkers reported dramatic loss of work and income during the COVID-19 pandemic. These income losses have not been recovered due to systemic exclusions from important safety-net programs, such as Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, unemployment, workers compensation and other state and federal support programs. The seasonality of work and now wildfires, compound the effects of lost earnings and heighten the vulnerabilities of farmworkers and their families. The majority (76%) of farmworkers lost months and weeks of work, 16% lost days, and 5% lost hours (figure 6). In all cases, this significantly reduced their income. Some lost work because the workplace shut down, they were exposed and quarantined, or they cared for someone close to them that got sick. When the data is disaggregated by gender, 44% of women reported losing months of wages, while only 26% of men reported losing months of work. Testimonies from farmworkers suggest that this gender gap relates to caretaking responsibilities that occurred during the sudden school closures. Women stopped working to provide childcare. This trend continued into September of 2020.

Figure 3. Time Span of COVID-19 Related Work Interruption



“The company gave us 2 weeks of rest because there was no product. But then, we were told they had to disinfect the worksite due to certain workers who contracted COVID-19.”

Packing House Worker, Umatilla, OR

“It was very difficult. I was at home for two months without work. My wife too. Three of us did were out of work. My eldest son was also out of work. All the companies closed. There were no outlets for the sale of salal and other companies shut down.”

Pine Cone Harvester, Bend, OR

“We lost more than a month of work. At work they did not want to take many of us, only very few, about 10. When we went to look for work in grass farms, in vineyards, in nurseries there was no hiring in March and part of April. Not until about May.”

Fruit Farmworker, Gervais, OR

Beyond loss of wages, results indicate that changes to benefits are creating longer lasting impacts. Thirty-six percent of farmworkers reported that their salaries or benefits had changed, receiving either lower piece rates, fewer hours of work, and/or a lack of overtime where applicable.

“Since the COVID thing started, they eliminated the time and a half overtime. We only worked 40 hours a week.”

Nursery Worker, Mc Minnville, OR

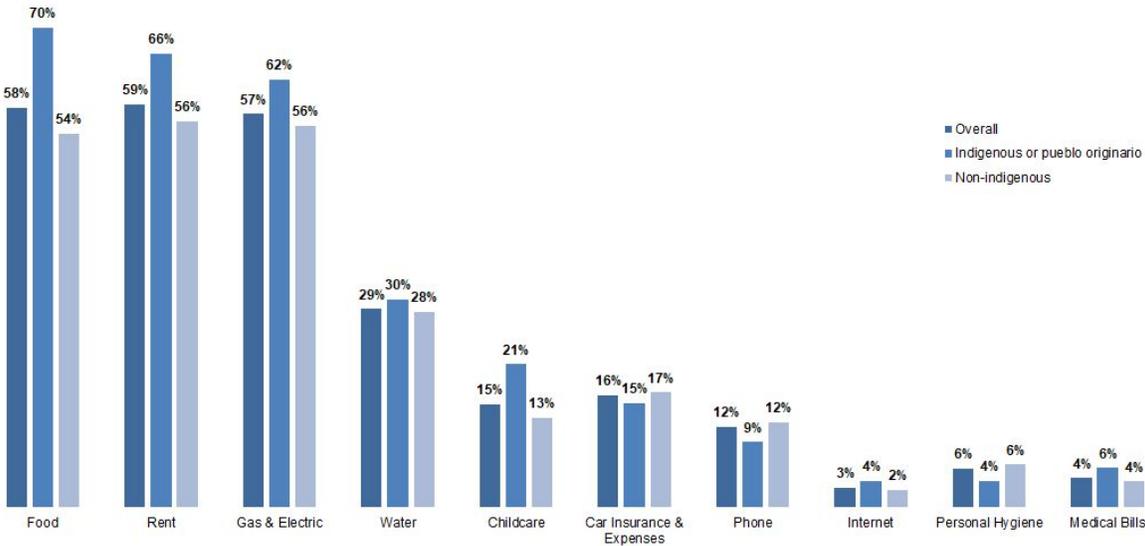
“We are being paid less than we used to. They used to pay \$.50 Cents per pound. Now it’s \$.40 to \$.45 cents a pound.”

□ *Vineyard Farmworker, Cottage Grove, OR*

Loss of wages has created significant challenges. A majority reported difficulties paying for basic expenses: 58% for food; 59% for rent; 57% for gas and electricity; 29% for water; 15% for childcare costs; and 16% identified difficulty paying for automobile related expenses, such as car payments, insurance, gas and maintenance; 12% had trouble paying their cell phone bills and 3% reported difficulty paying for internet (necessary for kids in school); 6% reported difficulty paying for personal hygiene products including diapers; and 4% reported difficulty paying medical bills.

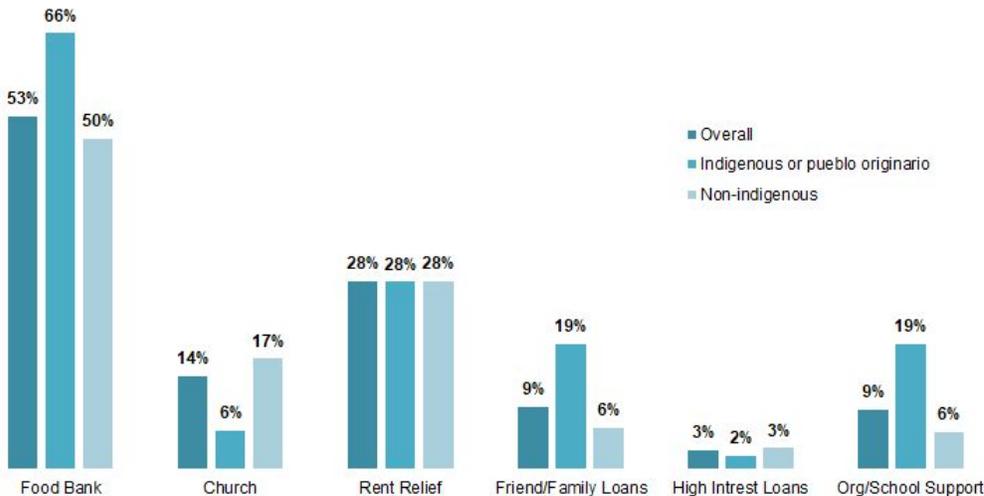
Among farmworkers that identified as Indigenous to Mexico and Guatemala, economic difficulties paying for basic expenses have been more pronounced in specific areas: 70% for food; 66% for rent; 62% for gas and electric; 21% for childcare (figure 4).

Figure 4. Difficulty Paying Expenses



To supplement for the loss of wages and increased cost of expenses, many farmworkers went to food banks (53 percent), to churches for help (14 percent), sought rent relief (28 percent), borrowed money (9 percent) and others used a combination of relief through credit cards, school and non-profit organizational support to make ends meet (figure 5). Farmworkers that identified as Indigenous sought relief in food banks (66 percent), friend and family loans (19 percent), and non-profit and school support (19 percent) at higher rates than farmworkers that did not identify as Indigenous.

Figure 5. Assistance Use and Access



4. Farmworkers know people infected or have been directly exposed to COVID-19, but few report getting tested. Cost and fear of losing a job are significant barriers to accessing testing and care.

The survey suggests that COVID-19 has hit close to farmworkers’ homes. Over 34% of farmworkers reported they knew a coworker who was infected and 20% reported someone in their household has been infected. When asked what happened to the person(s) infected, 26% said they were taken to the hospital, 54% were isolated away from family, 18% reported they continued isolation in the same household with family, and 9% reported COVID-19 resulted in death. Currently, OHA does not release the occupation of those who died due to COVID-19. Results indicate a far higher mortality rate than the 1% reported by the Center for Disease Control¹³ (CDC) and from what one would expect from a small sample.

Overall, only 37% of farmworkers reported having been tested for COVID-19. Only 55% of those that said they were exposed or knew someone infected reported taking a test. Of those that reported someone in their household became infected, 31% said they tested. Only 19% of those with relatives infected reported being tested. Only 30% of those reporting knowledge of co-workers infected with COVID-19 got tested.

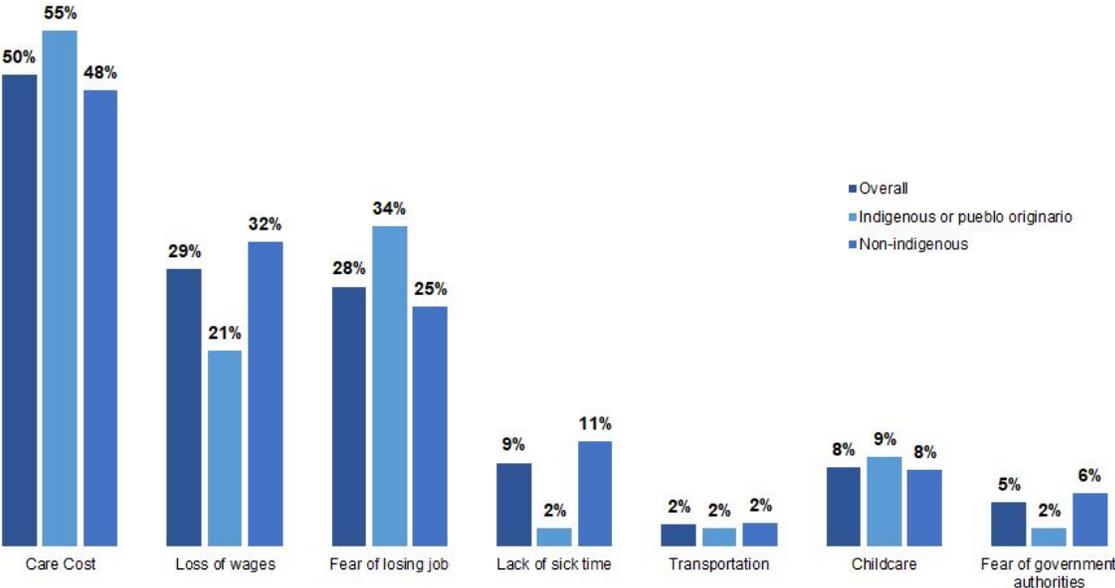
Our survey did not explicitly identify farmworkers that live in labor housing, but we did ask if their home was provided by an employer. Only ten respondents (5%) in our sample replied affirmatively. Of those ten respondents, only two reported knowing a coworker or a family member infected. However, out of the ten respondents, only one reported taking a test for COVID-19.

¹³ Harmon, A. (2020, April 17). Why We Don't Know the True Death Rate for Covid-19. Retrieved September 21, 2020, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/17/us/coronavirus-death-rate.html>

The vast majority of farmworkers who got tested reported that they were not charged. Seven percent of farmworkers that reported paying for a COVID-19 test, paid between \$100 to \$280. These paying farmworkers were scattered across the state in places like Woodburn, Medford, and Ontario. A majority of farmworkers received their results within 4-6 days (40%) or 1-3 days (33%). Most farmworkers reported they would go to a clinic (73 percent) if they needed care, followed by hospital or emergency room (33 percent). In many of the comments, farmworkers recognized specific clinics they were familiar with, such as the Virginia Garcia Clinic in Cornelius or Salud Medical Clinic in Woodburn.

Still, there are significant barriers when farmworkers need to seek medical attention (figure 6). Fifty percent of farmworkers reported that the cost of care would keep them from seeking medical attention. Twenty-nine percent reported loss of wages from taking time off work also being a barrier. Twenty-eight percent of farmworkers reported fear of losing their job if diagnosed with COVID-19. Lack of sick time and childcare were also identified as barriers by 9% and 8% of respondents respectively. Five percent of farmworkers feared government authorities and two percent suggested that transportation is a barrier. When we look at barriers to health care by indigeneity, farmworkers that identify as Indigenous reported fear of losing a job is a significant barrier at a higher proportion (34 percent) than non-indigenous respondents. In addition to language barriers, this is likely because they work lower-paying, unstable, seasonal jobs than other farmworkers, and have less support in the workplace.

Figure 6. Barriers to Seeking Medical Attention



5. Few farmworkers have the means to quarantine or isolate if they or someone in their household is sick.

The majority of farmworkers (59 percent) reported living in an apartment, 23% in a house, 14% in a mobile home, and 2% report renting a room. The majority of farmworkers reported sharing their bedroom with family, typically spouse and young children. The survey did not directly ask if farmworkers lived with more than one family.

When farmworkers were asked what plans they may have to quarantine or isolate if they or someone in the household becomes infected with COVID-19, the majority (70 percent) reported they would stay in a room or a safe space in their household. Many farmworkers reported they did not have a plan and that it would be difficult to isolate.

“The truth is that I have no plans. I live in the living room with my daughter and there are two other families there, one in each room. There is nowhere to go.”

Fruit Farmworker, Woodburn, OR

“Well, I do not have a plan. If someone in my family is sick, maybe the other family with whom we live would have to find another home so that they are not with us.”

Fruit Farmworker, Cottage Grove, OR

One farmworker reported facing housing insecurity. They lived in their car with children while they looked for a new apartment. This has likely only increased in the past week due to the fires as workers have to continue to work even though their housing is lost.

“It is difficult to sleep in a car with the family. Our children are grown. The stress and the difficulty in finding a new place to live and get steady work again.”

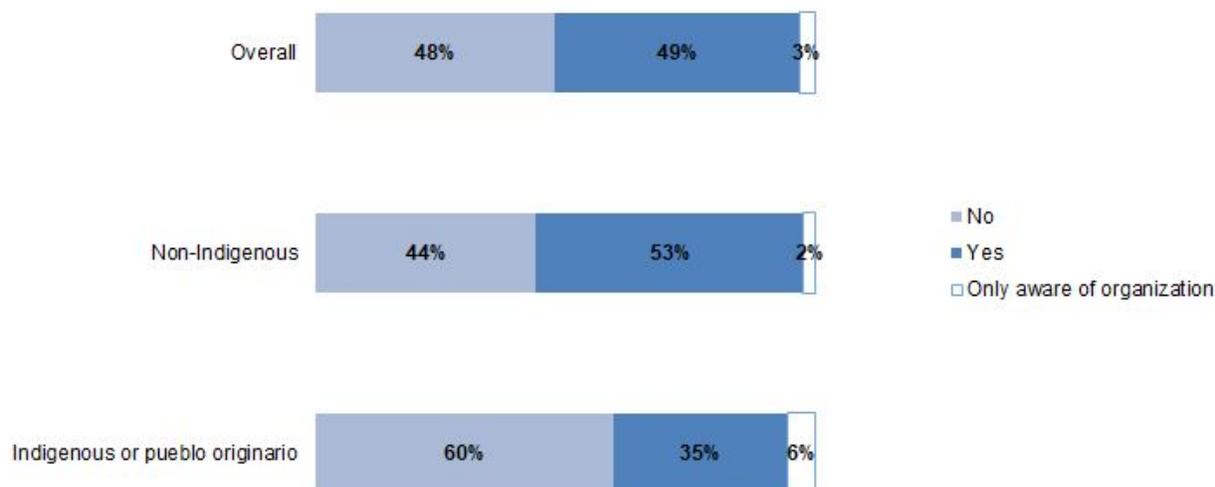
Seafood Worker, Newport, OR

6. One-half or more of farmworkers surveyed remain unaware of paid sick leave benefits and existing relief funds organized by the federal government and the State of Oregon.

Over 100 Oregon community partners came together to form a \$20 million Oregon Worker Relief Fund¹⁴ to help immigrant Oregonians that did not qualify for unemployment, make ends meet during this crisis. In our study, 48% or 104 respondents were not aware of the fund. A remainder 3% of farmworkers said they were not aware of the fund’s name, but were aware of organizations providing relief connected to the fund. The data suggests that 60% of farmworkers that identify as Indigenous were not aware of the fund, whereas 44% of respondents that did not identify as Indigenous were unaware of the fund. At the time the survey was created, the Oregon Worker Quarantine Fund had not been announced and we did not ask directly about the fund.

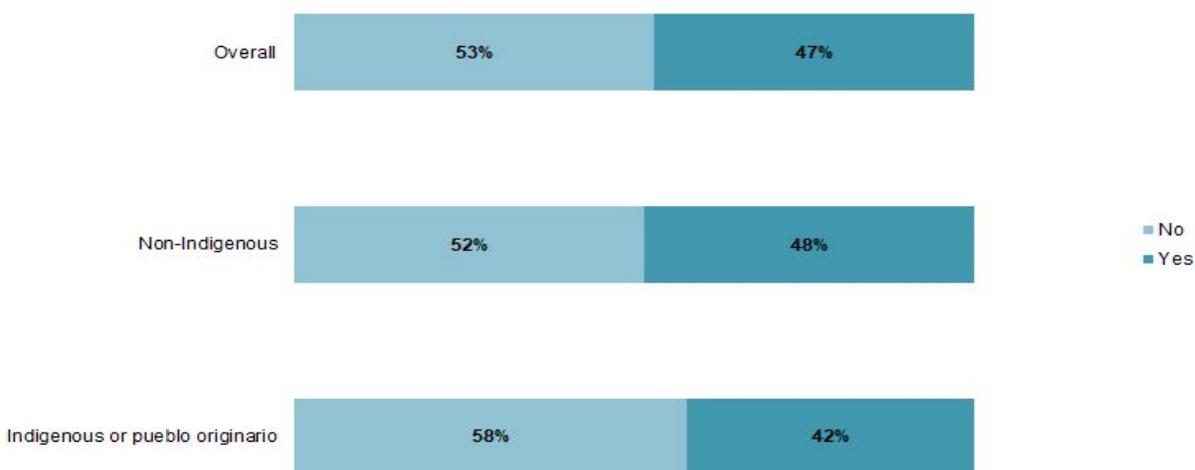
Figure 7. Knowledge About the Oregon Worker Relief Fund

¹⁴ Oregon Worker Relief Fund <https://workerrelief.org/>



Oregon law gives all workers, including many farmworkers, sick and family leave based on certain thresholds¹⁵¹⁶. When we asked farmworkers about their labor rights, such as access to Sick Leave Pay, overall 53% percent of respondents indicated they did not know about sick leave. The information gap was more visible among respondents that identify as Indigenous (58 percent).

Figure 8. Knowledge About Sick and Family Leave Pay



¹⁵ Oregon Bureau of Labor Industries <https://www.oregon.gov/boli/workers/pages/sick-time.aspx>

¹⁶ Farmworkers were not asked about The Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA or Act) requiring certain employers to provide their employees with paid sick leave or expanded family and medical leave for specified reasons related to COVID-19.

7. Farmworkers that speak Indigenous languages face additional information and accessibility gaps. Oregon Indigenous farmworkers speak at least 22 different languages from Guatemala and Mexico (such as Triqui, Mixtec, Mam, Kanjobal, among others) and many are not fluent or literate in Spanish.

The survey identified speakers of Mam (16), Kanjobal (2), K'iche/Quiche (1), Mixteco (13), Mixteco Alto (1) Purépecha (2), Triqui/Trique (1), and Zapoteco (1) so far. Fifty-three respondents (25 percent) reported that their parents or grandparents are members of an Indigenous community. Oregon has Indigenous immigrants who speak at least twenty two different languages from Mexico and Guatemala as their first language including: Achi, Akateko, Chuj, Ixil, Jakalteko, Kaqchikel, Mam, Q'anjob'al, Q'eqchi', Quiche (K'iche')--all spoken in Guatemala, and Amuzgo, Maya Yucateco, Mixteco Alto, Mixteco Bajo, Huichol, Nahuatl, Purepecha, Tlapaneco, Tzeltal, Tzotzil, Trique (Itunyoso and Copala), and different variants of Zapoteco, all spoken in Mexico.

A majority of respondents (68 percent) reported that they or their foreman, expressed as *mayordomo*, received training on how to be safe from COVID-19 various times, 20% said they received little training, and 8% said they received no training. Of those that received training, information came in different forms: roughly 12% watched a video, 76% received a talk, 30% reported that they were taught how to use protective equipment, and 41% were given a written information sheet. A majority, 91%, stated they got the instructions in a language they understood. However, 6% (11) of respondents stated that they did not receive training in a language that they preferred and of those 4% (9) said they understood some of the information provided in the training. These respondents include 3 Mam speakers, 2 Mixteco speakers, 1 Purépecha speaker, 2 English speakers, and 3 Spanish speaking respondents. Three respondents reported they got instruction in the language they preferred, Spanish, but only understood part of it, and 7 people reported they preferred not to respond.

While 1 person reported having Mam interpretation for texts and youtube videos, comments from several other Mam respondents revealed widespread concern about many people's lack of understanding. Several people reported that they worked with almost all Mam speakers in blueberry harvesting and they thought that at least half of them didn't understand Spanish or the instructions.

“Well, at the beginning they explained to us how to work and how to wash our hands every day. Now they only do it from time to time. The truth is that we speak languages like Mam and other languages from Guatemala and many people do not know the Spanish. If people don't understand, they can't obey. The explanations are not offered in our languages . It would be nice if the explanations were offered in Mam. I understand a little [in other languages]. Others have to ask for translations from those who understand. Without translation, people are left without information. There are people who come to work the first day and are unable to understand.”

□ Blueberry Farmworker, Woodburn, OR

“Well, I understand Spanish which is the language used when they talk to us. But I think that not everyone speaks Spanish. Where I work many of us speak Mam. I translate for my wife and perhaps for another friend, but not for everyone. I think it would be better to communicate with everyone in Mam. The talks should be in Mam. Some people do not know how to read or write so signs are not useful.”

□ Salal and Vineyard Farmworker, Cottage Grove, OR

“There are many people who do not speak [Spanish]. Most speak Mam. There is a company I know where most workers speak Mam, 50 percent who do not speak Spanish. Nobody translates. It may be that [the Mam speakers] did not understand the instructions.”

□ Fruit-Tree Farmworker, Woodburn, OR

All but four survey respondents opted to do the interview in Spanish (this may be an artifact of the make-up of the survey team which has only a couple interviewers available that speak Indigenous Mesoamerican languages). Further, the data point to the need to develop competency in a diversity of Indigenous languages from Mexico and Guatemala for future outreach and research efforts. Ninety-two percent of respondents listed Spanish as one of the languages they use at home. This might indicate that lack of linguistic competency in COVID-19-related outreach information is producing information gaps.

8. Farmworkers have trouble accessing affordable childcare and supporting their children’s education with the shift to remote classes.

A majority (75 percent) of respondents had between 1-4 children under the age of 18 under their care. About 25% of farmworker parents reported being single, divorced, or separated with children under their care. Those farmworkers with children under the age of 12 had to figure out where to get care as COVID-19 shut schools and made changes to their usual child care arrangements: 41% stayed at home with a parent, adult relatives, older children, or friends; 1% took them to work; and only 11% paid someone to care for them at a childcare center or house where they paid for childcare. Most relied on networks of family and friends. Qualitative comments suggest that women did most of this caretaking.

Many parents worried about their children missing school, having to go to school at home, and how they will be affected by these changes. Some struggled with their kids at home, one didn’t have access to the internet so they couldn’t participate in school. Many also noted that their older children are taking on more responsibility in the home and are feeling significant stress and uncertainty.

“My 15-year-old son takes care of his little brothers and does not have time to himself as before due to COVID-19. This makes him a little angry, or stressed, depressed about being at home with this responsibility.”

□ *Fruit-Tree Farmworker, Milton-Freewater, OR*

“They were studying at home. It is more difficult than when they go to school. They are on the computer. When it all started, everything worked out. But towards the end, you could tell the girls did not pay attention. They didn’t want to. They said it was not the same. They did not pay attention. It is worrisome. They had to attend Summer school. They were almost traumatized because all they did was homework. They don’t want to do any more homework. The house is not a school. School is fun. Home, here, isn’t.”

□ *Fruit-Tree Farmworker, Woodburn, OR*

“Well, it’s a problem because the teachers have computers but we don’t have internet. My children couldn’t participate much. They also wanted to go out but they couldn’t. All they could do was read their school materials.”

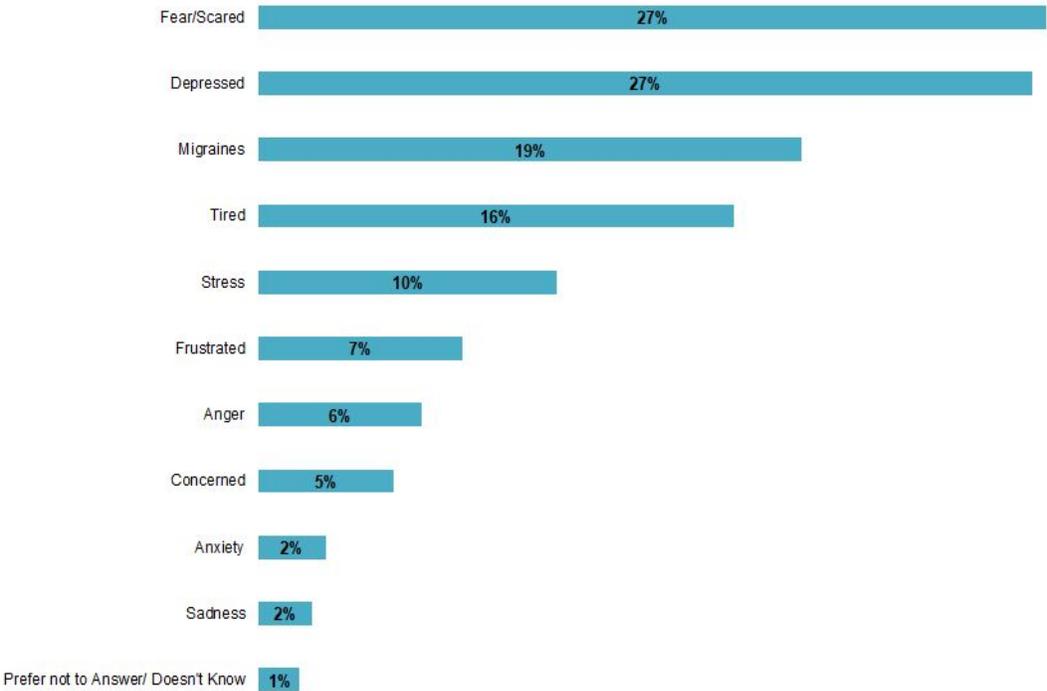
□ *Fruit Farmworker, Gervais, OR*

9. Farmworkers are feeling increasing stress levels affecting their emotional well-being yet severely lack access to mental health services.

Many reported stress from their children being at home and having to home-school them. Twelve people made specific comments about their children being bored, wanting to go out, and not knowing how to help them.

A majority (67 percent of responses) reported physical, emotional and spiritual symptoms of stress and other indicators of mental health needs. These included *cansado* or tired (16 percent), *coraje* or anger/frustration or (8 percent), *enojo* or anger (6 percent), *deprimido/a* or depressed (27 percent), *dolor de cabeza* or headaches/migraines (19 percent), *susto* or fear/being frightened (27 percent), not wanting to go to work (5 percent). Additional answers mentioned: anxiety, sadness, concerned, spent, and impotence for not being able to work (figure 9).

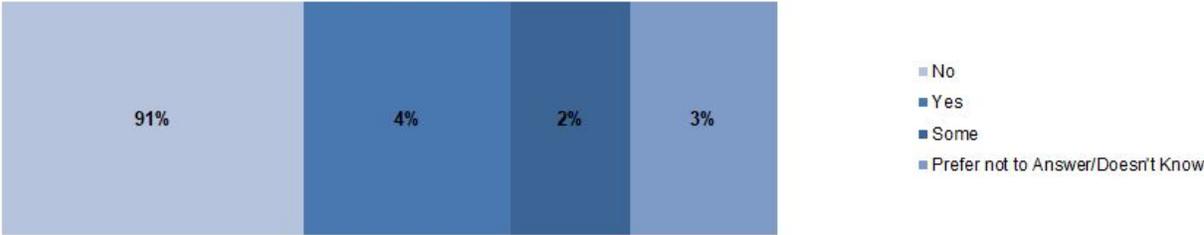
Figure 9. Emotional and Mental Well-Being



They also demonstrated creativity and resiliency in their responses to their symptoms and feelings. Many people shared their solutions that included exercising, drinking a lot of fluids, playing sports, listening to music, watching TV, shopping, walking, reading, taking vitamins, talking with family and spouses and children, drinking teas, maintaining their faith, reading, playing with their kids, Zumba, gardening, going out in nature, baths, and massages.

Despite these challenges, 91% of farmworkers reported that they had no access to mental health services, and only 6% reported seeking some level of support, making their creativity and resiliency all the more impressive (figure 10).

Figure 10. Access to mental health support



10. Farmworkers worry greatly about family members outside the U.S. and the pandemic has resulted in a significant reduction in remittances sent to families in Mexico and Guatemala who depend on them.

Ninety percent of those surveyed reported that they worry about their families in their home communities, illustrating the strong connections people have with family outside of the U.S. Results suggest the additional economic and emotional burden farmworkers bear through providing support to their extended families outside of the U.S. COVID-19 has created significant challenges for those that support their family abroad.

Farmworkers reported a wide range of worries connected to their families in home communities. A majority of respondents worried about their relatives getting sick with COVID-19. They also worried about a lack of work because of shutdowns, a lack of access to medical care, lack of funds, shortages of food, health problems, underlying medical conditions such as diabetes mixing with COVID-19, that their relatives--particularly parents--would get sick and they would not be able to leave the U.S. to go to see them. Some expressed lack of faith in health-care institutions in Mexico and Guatemala.

“Me preocupa porque dicen que cuando llega una persona con síntomas le ponen una vacuna y muere ya no sale del hospital. Se dice que los están matando porque sale más barato que tratar de curarlos.”

□ *Vineyard Farmworker, Woodburn, OR*

“That people’s health is affected because they do not have the means to get assistance. The government is not concerned about COVID and hospitals do not help either.”

□ *Vineyard Farmworker, Talent, OR*

“About my mother getting sick because of her age. She’s a sturdy woman; I still have my other children there; the economic situation is very difficult for my relatives there.”

□ *Packing House Worker, Umatilla, OR*

“About them getting sick and maybe they don’t take into account that it does exist. In Mexico you don’t have the resources available here, one has to pay for the test and other expenses.”

□ *Vegetable Farmworker, Merrill, OR*

Overall, 44 percent of respondents reported that they continue sending money to relatives in their home communities. Many of those who send (34 percent), are sending in smaller amounts and 8% are sending at the same levels prior to the pandemic. Only 2% of farmworkers reported they are sending more. Forty percent of respondents indicated that they no longer send anymore, mostly due to income restraints. Fifteen percent reported that the question did not apply to them.

Comments revealed how the loss of work and farmworker's own debts affected their ability to send funds. One still owed on a loan to pay a coyote for passage to the U.S. and had to renegotiate.

“Well, I can send a little [money] now. Before the disease (COVID) yes. But I no longer send anything because I had no job or money and I owed on a loan. A few days ago I sent a little [bit of money] for the first time since March.”

□ *Pine Cone Harvester, Bend, OR*

“When the disease COVID started, I still owed my fees to the coyote. I couldn't pay. Again in May when I was able to work again, it was able to send [money] to pay. It still owed during the pandemic. What we do is we take a loan from wealthy people and we make a contract with them. I had to tell them that I couldn't pay without a job. They do understand. So when I started working again I started to pay.”

□ *Vegetable Farmworker, Woodburn, OR*

Conclusions and Recommendations for Action

Based on the above findings, the Oregon COFS policy and action committee have endorsed the following nine policy recommendations that will be presented to various committees and legislators in the upcoming special session. Each recommendation is based on what we have learned from farmworkers navigating the difficulties of COVID-19, forest fires, and displacement.

- 1. Replenish income and safety net support for farmworkers regardless of documentation status, such as the Oregon Workers Relief Fund, COVID-19 Farmworker Rental Relief Fund, and expand qualifications for Oregon Worker Quarantine Fund.**
- 2. Expand stock of housing opportunities that can serve farmworker families facing housing insecurity and/or needing temporary quarantining shelter with adequate social distancing.**
- 3. Enforce existing anti-retaliation and workplace protections that assure farmworkers can take time off and/or can file employer complaints without fear of retribution, such as supporting stronger Whistleblower protections and abolishing farm labor collective bargaining restrictions.**
- 4. Strengthen Oregon/OSHA occupational safety enforcement and worksite auditing activities, including random inspections.**
- 5. Provide compensation for farmworkers who were forced to take time-off work and/or relied on informal networks for caretaking/childcare responsibilities due to**

the closure of childcare facilities and transition to virtual education since the start of COVID-19.

6. **Implement digital literacy programs to improve farmworker families' access to technology, such as supplying smartphones, tablets, and stipends to offset internet service costs.**
7. **Mandate employers provide training, when not already required, in languages farmworkers speak and provide targeted plans to improve language accessibility of information, rules, guidance published by government agencies, by funding local organizers and navigators that can reach and inform farmworkers who speak Indigenous languages.**
8. **Provide frequent and extensive access to COVID-19 testing with convenient access to lab results, vaccinations when available, and access to traditional methods of mental health support administered through trusted community clinics.**
9. **Ease barriers for exercising legal rights by connecting farmworkers to legal navigators that can provide legal advice on workplace rights, tenant rights, concerns over public charge, and immigrant rights.**

Next Steps for Oregon COFS

Topic-specific data briefs will be released in the coming months and will be focused on workplace conditions, transportation to/from work, caring for children with closed schools and challenges of remote schooling, housing conditions, access to medical care, and other basic needs.

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About the COVID-19 Farmworker Study (COFS)

COFS is an extremely collaborative research project with participation from a wide group of community-based organizations, researchers and policy advocates. A full list of project partners and supporters is available at www.covid19farmworkerstudy.org. The Oregon study has been generously supported by the Oregon Community Foundation, University of Oregon, and CASA of Oregon.