

Farmworkers from Chiapas, Mexico
Train for health promotion work in Northern Mexico
Nosotros Sanos

Arizona and Sonora have extensive agricultural enterprises throughout the region with a large number of migrant and seasonal farmworkers supporting these businesses. NAFTA has increased our economic interdependence and the issues surrounding the health of migrant farmworkers. Since 2006, the University of Arizona (MEZCOPH) has been collaborating with researchers from El Colegio de Sonora (COLSON) and Centro de Investigación en Alimentación y Desarrollo (CIAD) in understanding the health risks and challenges of agricultural migrant workers on both sides of the border. In our studies, we have



observed that in order to make a true impact on migrant workers' health training a group of field workers as "health promotores" is key. Migrant workers' mobility and cultural characteristics makes it difficult to prevent and treat common health problems. It requires reaching out to workers in their communities of origin in the southern and central regions of Mexico and during the off season. During the seasonal periods work in intense and not amenable to providing effective training and education opportunities. This new project focuses on health

promotor training in their communities of origin with the intent of having a greater impact on the health and occupational safety of workers when they are in the farms in Sonora. This particular research will enhance our knowledge on the development of health promotion models for migrant populations, and support bi-national public health policies aimed to impact migrant workers lives.

The following policy recommendations were included in an article published last year based on a binational study on farmworker health (Rosales, et a., 2012):

1. Standards on both sides of the border are a first step toward improving farmworkers' lives. Like industrial laborers, farmworkers should be able to benefit from standardized, livable wages, safe working conditions, health care, and other benefits. Accessible health care alone would serve to alleviate many other life challenges faced by the population, including stress, poverty, and unemployment. A model of social responsibility in agribusiness can facilitate these changes, but it must be embraced by business leaders. Those who have embraced the process in Mexico or the US can serve as a model for others, ultimately increasing productivity thereby demonstrating the value of the approach.

2. Recommendations emerging from the Sonora project include implementation of a model of corporate social responsibility with agricultural companies, in order to institutionalize better working conditions and benefits for farmworkers. Working conditions and health issues are only a few of the environmental

stressors for farmworkers in the US and Mexico, but the potential for implementing positive change within agribusiness holds promise for improving farmworkers' health and development.

3. Educational, health and social service agencies are working to assist migrant farmworkers on both sides of the border, but there is little communication or collaboration between them. Since migrant farmworker populations in the US and Mexico have similar demographic profiles and face parallel challenges, there is a benefit to be had in cross border partnerships. The establishment of a binational network for farmworker health and development would allow agencies to share information, strategies, materials, and resources to enrich their services and advocate more effectively for their clients.

With funding from the [Research Program on Migration and Health \(PIMSA\)](#) to develop health promotion models for migrant populations and support binational public health policies aimed specifically to impact migrant workers lives, we conducted our first training during the week of July 29 through August 3, 2013 in the rural community of Larrainzar, Chiapas, Mexico. Eight farmworkers recognized as leaders within the migrating farmworker network of the surrounding indigenous communities of Chiapas, received our community health worker training and are now ready to share and apply their newly acquired skills upon returning in September 2013 to work the fields in Hermosillo, Sonora, Mexico.



Farmworkers recruited from the central and southern states in Mexico stay an average of 10 months working long and intense hours in the fields of Sonora in various capacities and return to their sending communities for two months out of the year. Farmworkers are much more amenable to training and learning during the off season. The team plans to train another cohort from the state of Puebla in 2014.

The research team includes Dr. Cecilia Rosales and Dean Jill Guernsey de Zapien from MEZCOPH, Dr. Patricia Aranda from COLSON and Dr. Isabel Ortega and Mstra. Alma Contreras from CIAD.