

Abstract

Hamilton, James Victor. The Dynamics of Labor in North Carolina's Christmas Tree Industry (Under the direction of Frederick Cubbage)

Hispanic workers now make up a majority of the labor force in North Carolina's Christmas tree industry. Data were collected from Christmas tree growers, Hispanic workers, and government agency personnel in 2001 and 2002 to analyze the factors that (1) contribute to the dynamics of labor issues and (2) influence decision-making among growers and workers in the industry. While advocacy groups, researchers, and the popular media commonly address labor exploitation and public health issues among migrant workers, objective appraisals of labor management strategies within specific industries are rarely undertaken. In this study, labor issues within North Carolina's Christmas tree industry are analyzed. The existing theoretical body of social exchange research also is challenged by emphasizing the importance of non-economic factors, such as social and psychological values, in social exchange among industry participants. A qualitative approach was used to develop a more complete understanding of labor dynamics in the industry, incorporating multiple methods including a mail survey, personal interviews with industry participants and agency personnel, and participant observation.

Survey and interview results among growers yielded an historical context to the development of the industry's labor force. This, in turn, revealed a body of concerns under which Christmas tree growers currently manage their labor force such as hiring and training, legal status and language barriers, as well as regulatory monitoring and advocacy scrutiny of their operations. Interviews with Hispanic workers illustrate how social networks influence their

decision-making in migration and job selection and reveal concerns about both legal status and communication with their employers. Respect, rapport, and positive interaction among industry participants in a system of mutual benefit are also revealed. This information can be used to challenge the traditional notions of a confrontational and exploitative dynamic between migrant workers and employers that is commonly portrayed in the popular media at least within this industry sector. Recommendations are provided that will make it possible for educators, advocates, and policy makers to develop more effective strategies for meeting the labor needs and concerns of employers and workers in the Christmas tree industry and other agricultural and forestry industries.

**THE DYNAMICS OF LABOR IN NORTH CAROLINA'S CHRISTMAS TREE
INDUSTRY**

by
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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
North Carolina State University
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY

Raleigh

2004

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Biography

James Victor Hamilton, Jr. (Jim), son of James Victor and Betty Baker Hamilton, was born October 3, 1971, in Jacksonville, Florida. He graduated from Benjamin Russell High School in Alexander City, Alabama as salutatorian in 1989. He attended the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee, and graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Natural Resources and Anthropology in 1993. After working as an Agroforestry Extension Agent in rural Paraguay from 1993-1995 with the U.S. Peace Corps, he enrolled in Auburn University's graduate forestry program and received his MS in Forestry in 1998 under Dr. John Bliss. After working for an environmental consulting firm for two years in Atlanta, Georgia, Jim returned to Paraguay to serve as a trainer for new Peace Corps Volunteers in 1999. He married Silvina Martinez the following year and moved to Raleigh to begin his doctoral work at North Carolina State University. While at NC State, Jim worked as the regional campus recruiter for the Peace Corps where he had the highest recruitment numbers for any campus recruiter nationwide. He was recognized in 2003 with the Arthur W. Cooper Graduate Fellowship for Excellence in the Social Sciences. Jim also served as the editor of *Sylvanet*, the Department of Forestry's international forestry publication, from 2001 to 2004.

Upon completing his graduate coursework in 2002, Jim accepted a position with North Carolina's Cooperative Extension as the Watauga County Agricultural Extension Agent for Christmas trees and commercial horticulture in Boone, North Carolina.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following friends, family, and colleagues for their professional and academic wisdom, support of my research, career goals, and scholarly maturation, and especially their sense of humor and genuine interest in me:

- Fred Cubbage, Committee Chair and friend, for his overwhelming support of my research and sideline projects, and loose purse strings for an otherwise unfunded endeavor. *Muchisimas gracias!*
- Toddi Steelman, Committee Member and champion editorial scrutineer, for draining red pens on many drafts and chapter reviews and helping me get a handle on the theoretical merits of my research.
- John Frampton, Sarah Warren, and Steve Jones, Committee Members, for their professional advice, encouragement, and contacts in Extension.
- The Christmas tree growers, Extension Agents, and Hispanic farmworkers who opened up their homes and shared their perspectives on the industry.
- The Ford Foundation Community Forestry Research Fellowship program for their support and interest in this research.
- Mike Tighe, friend and oyster-eating companion, for being a great short-notice host and keeping me grounded in the bigger picture throughout the process.
- My parents for their unfaltering support of my professional and academic pursuits (and financial support for everything in between).
- And my wife, Silvi, for her unconditional devotion and tolerance of my whims, nights spent away from home, and trouncing around North Carolina in support of my career.
Te quiero mucho!

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I. An Overview of the Research

Introduction

Christmas tree production is a \$110 million dollar per year industry in North Carolina. From a handful of entrepreneurs in the mid 1950s, the industry has grown to over 1,600 Christmas tree growers who produce approximately 20 percent of Christmas trees in the United States (NCSU Christmas Tree Genetics Program 2001). Hispanic workers, primarily from Mexico, make up the majority of the labor force in this industry. However, little research has focused on this industry, its use and reliance on Hispanic labor, and employer/worker relationships within it. This study investigates the perceived costs and benefits with respect to social exchange relationships and migration to understand how industry participants make decisions and what factors are used to determine value within these exchange and migration decisions. Employers of Hispanic labor were interviewed and surveyed in several western North Carolina communities to analyze their perspectives regarding selection, hiring, training, and policies related to the Hispanic labor force in the Christmas tree industry. Hispanic laborers were interviewed to determine their challenges and concerns regarding their status in this industry. The overall question that this study seeks to answer is:

What factors contribute/have contributed to the dynamic of labor and have influenced decision-making among growers and workers in western North Carolina's Christmas tree industry?

Little research has been conducted on the basic makeup and dynamics of hiring and training Hispanic employees and the impacts of this emerging dominant labor force within forestry and agricultural industry. This exploratory research seeks to document trends in Hispanic labor and employer/worker relationships in the Christmas tree industry. It has the ultimate goals of enhancing knowledge regarding the Hispanic labor force and their employers in the Christmas tree industry; elaborating on the social exchange among industry participants and the effects this exchange has had on migration into the industry; and providing a reference for professionals addressing Hispanic labor issues in this and other industries.

Rationale and Related Work

Research recently has begun to focus on the underlying social, political, and economic causes, costs, and benefits of an increased Hispanic presence in the U.S. workforce. Cornelius (1998) asserts that this type of research is important in understanding the character and determinants of the demand for immigrant labor in the United States. He challenges popular characterizations that have been sensationalized by the media and interest groups that often lack objectivity:

The traditional labor economics paradigm in which the presence of low-skilled immigrants in the U.S. economy is simply a function of employer greed and convenience coupled with inadequate governmental regulation of labor markets, has been exhausted (p. 140).

While investigative journalism and action research by groups and social scientists engaged in labor exploitation research have contributed to policy improvements and public awareness of

migrant labor issues, other themes influencing the dynamics of the migrant labor issue have been ignored.

Southeastern states have seen increases in their Hispanic populations as migrant workers sought employment opportunities beyond historical gateways such as California, Texas, and Florida. Although a majority of Hispanic migrants find work in urban areas in the service and construction sectors, many laborers are utilized in the forestry and agriculture industries in rural areas (Arcury et al. 1999). However, due to the dynamic nature of Hispanic worker movement in the agricultural and forestry sector, social scientists and agencies alike have great difficulty in accurately describing this labor force (Griffeth and Kissam 1995). McDaniel and Cassanova (2003) recently analyzed the use and dynamics of Hispanic guestworkers who are increasingly participating in Alabama's forestry and tree planting industry. My research fills gaps in the current body of research, seeks to explain some of the forces behind the dynamic nature of the Hispanic labor force in the Christmas tree industry, and explores the strategies that employers use to work effectively with it.

Refugio Rochin asserts that "U.S. agriculture is going through a phase of 'Mexicanization' rather than the 'mechanization' predicted in the 1970s and 1980s." (Rochin 1995, pp. 286-287). An abundance of undocumented immigrant farmworkers has removed the need for employers and agricultural industries to improve technology and develop new farm production strategies. Rosenbaum (2001) evaluates farm labor policy arguments and suggests that migrant labor systems be developed that shift the burden of support from the agricultural employer to other capable and accountable institutions to improve worker wages, training, and regulation. She endorses the development of a government or other non-partisan entity to manage, regulate, and enforce agricultural labor practices to "relieve the basic

economic, political, sociological, and legal deprivations which farmworkers, especially migrants, suffer in U.S. society (p. 33)” while meeting the labor needs of this industry and addressing employer concerns on the majority of U.S. farms.

Each industry (and employer for that matter) has specific concerns related to their labor force. The use of immigrant labor presents its own set of challenges. To understand and address these challenges effectively, research must focus on the specific industries in which immigrant labor is employed, and analyze the effects of their increased presence in those industries. Gabbard and Perloff (1997) used a model from data from the National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS) to determine the effects of wage and work conditions on farmworker retention. However, much of the research in North Carolina conducted on migrant workers focuses on public health issues such as pesticide exposure and other occupational hazards that affect this population (Arcury et al. 1999; Quandt et al. 1998; Elmore and Arcury 2001).

There is a wealth of documentation and narrative regarding the plight and marginalization of the immigrant farm worker and migrant laborer, especially in the popular media. Novels and narrative accounts of illegal immigrant smuggling and portrayals of farm worker treatment are occasional best sellers and have served to raise public awareness of the ‘plight of the immigrant farm worker’ (Conover 1987, Rothenburg 1998, Martin 2000, Grisham 2000). The documentary “Harvest of Shame” graphically documented deplorable living conditions under which many guestworkers in the United States were living during the Bracero Program (Murrow 1960). While bringing the issues of marginalization and exploitation of migrant workers to light, this type of mass media coverage traditionally has

vilified all employers of immigrant labor, and has made it increasingly difficult to approach these industry participants to conduct objective research without suspicion.

Articles addressing cultural and language barriers in the workplace have begun to appear in technical journals and publications in the landscaping and nursery industry regarding Hispanic labor and management themes (West 2002, Mulhern 2003, Churchill, 2001). Technical conferences also are addressing industry needs such as improving communication and employer/employee relationships with their increasingly Hispanic workforce. DJ Case and Associates, a consulting group, responded to an expressed need from the wood products industry to assess the integration of Hispanic employees and provide recommendations to improve services and management within this industry (DJ Case and Associates 2003). The increased prevalence of this type of research and programming demonstrates the importance of developing collaborative and equitable relationships in industries with predominantly Hispanic workforces and recognizes the need for further exploration of employer/worker relationship phenomena.

Hispanic Labor in North Carolina

An increasing number of Hispanic workers have entered North Carolina in recent years to take advantage of employment opportunities in the state's burgeoning economy. Recent population estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau (2001) indicate that more than 379,000 Hispanics live in North Carolina. However, other estimates that have taken into account undocumented aliens and seasonal workers have placed the number around 500,000 with a population growth rate of 600% since 1990 (Kitchen 2002). Five of North Carolina's counties are among thirty counties nationwide that have experienced the most rapid growth in their Hispanic populations (Johnson, Jr. et al. 1999). The explosion in North Carolina's

foreign-born worker population presents a challenge to state agencies and industry associations that historically have worked together to address policies affecting labor. The introduction of new actors with a broader range of cultural identities poses new challenges that policy makers must address to meet the needs of industries and their workers.

Migrant workers come into the state under a number of visas and legal status categories. Apart from workers who received amnesty status under the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) in 1986, H-2A (agricultural) and H-2B (non-agricultural) guestworkers make up the majority of legally admitted foreign-born Hispanic workers. However, undocumented migrants, who are estimated to make up more than 40% of the foreign-born population, comprise a large segment of North Carolina's Hispanic workforce. In western North Carolina, Hispanic workers are most noticeable among Christmas tree growers, apple orchard crews, and nursery and tree planting crews. A majority of these workers are undocumented according to growers and extension agents in the western North Carolina counties. According to Passel et al. (2004), two groups account for the most undocumented immigrants: a) those who entered the country without valid documents, including people crossing the Mexico-US border clandestinely; and b) those who entered with valid visas but have overstayed the visas' expiration or otherwise violated the terms of their admission.

Literature related to Hispanic labor issues in North Carolina is sparse. Johnson, Jr. et al. (1999) have addressed growth of North Carolina's Hispanic population across labor sectors. However, much of the literature on Hispanic labor in North Carolina pertains primarily to health-related research of migrant workers. Quandt et al. (1998) examined farmer and farmworker perceptions of agricultural chemical exposure with farmers and

Hispanic laborers in eight counties of central North Carolina. Arcury et al. (1999) developed a model to increase community participation in intervention research on agricultural chemicals based on experience gained within a participatory health project initiated by several North Carolina universities and community representatives. They found that perceptions of exposure among employers and farmworkers have an influence on farmworker health practices and that training delivery systems must be modified to take into consideration the cultural and educational backgrounds of farmworkers and their employers to effectively address pesticide exposure issues.

The local news media regularly reports on the increasing Hispanic population in the state and occasional stories regarding exploitation of farm workers. Leiter and Tomaskovic-Devey (2001) examined growth and distribution of Latino employment in several North Carolina labor sectors. Their studies examine the nature of 'ethnic replacement' whereby Hispanic workers fill unskilled jobs that have traditionally been held by lower income African-Americans who have taken higher-paying jobs. However, their source of data did not include Hispanics within the agriculture/forestry industry sectors.

Although there is a wealth of publications and technical references regarding the cultivation and propagation of Christmas trees in North Carolina, scant information exists regarding the history, culture, and socioeconomics of the Christmas tree industry. For this study, a majority of discussion and background of the Christmas tree industry and its culture comes from the growers themselves based on formal and informal interviews with these industry participants. This discussion frames important historical perspectives that have shaped the industry's "labor landscape" and provides useful information for a particularly important sector in western North Carolina's economy.

Research Objectives

The primary goal of this research is to fill gaps in what is known about labor dynamics in North Carolina's Christmas tree industry. To this end, I focus on those factors that have determined the development of the industry's labor force. Additionally, the research provides much needed descriptive data for practical use by industry professionals including an analysis of trends in and areas for improvement in training. In this research, I challenge the existing theoretical body of social exchange research through an emphasis on the importance of non-economic factors, such as social and psychological values, that influence migration and exchange interactions between employers and workers. The factors influencing the evolution of labor dynamics in the Christmas tree industry are described and analyzed through the following objectives:

Objective 1: Compile baseline data on the demographics and dynamics of the North Carolina Christmas tree industry's labor force.

To date, there have been no comprehensive studies related to Hispanic labor in this industry. To understand the significance of migration of labor to the industry, the socioeconomic aspects, dynamics, and policies that influence the process must be analyzed.

Thus, this objective requires investigation of:

- The shift to and subsequent reliance on Hispanic workers among North Carolina's Christmas tree farms
- Seasonality and influx patterns among Hispanic labor, and participation in the H-2A Guestworker Program
- Hiring practices

- Motivations for Hispanic laborers to work in this industry
- Formal and informal labor networks among workers and growers

Objective 2: Analyze the professional and personal dynamics between Hispanic workers and Christmas tree growers.

Little is known about the role of noneconomic factors that influence the social exchange and decision making in the industry. While the popular media contributes to public awareness of certain farm labor issues such as wage discrepancies and living/working conditions of these workers, perspectives and management policies of farm owners and their relationships with their workforce have not been given the same attention. A goal of this research is to assess and study more objectively popular conceptions of employer/worker interactions in the Christmas tree industry to analyze the level of social exchange that exists in this industry as well as the criteria used in participants' decision making that affects this interaction. Relationships between growers and workers in the industry are examined to explore whether they are generally more cooperative and less exploitative than portrayed in the media and popular literature, indicating a generally mutually beneficial level of social exchange. To meet this objective, the following factors are explored.

- Concerns by these workers and employers regarding communication, hiring and training, and other occupational environment issues affecting their labor force.
- Decision-making processes used by participants in their interaction in the industry.
- Perceptions of policies that affect employers and laborers.

Theoretical Framework

The demographics of rural western North Carolina are distinct from other agriculturally dependent areas in the southeastern United States where larger farms traditionally relied on a more available permanent workforce. Christmas tree growers began their farms by relying on their large families and neighbors for labor. Low unemployment rates and a lack of available local labor eventually forced many Christmas tree farms to seek migrant labor from other industries in other areas as Christmas tree farm sizes increased and more growers entered the industry. To recruit and train labor for the industry, growers established strategies and relationships with the migrant work force to sustain productivity. Thus, social exchange theory and elements of migration theory help to conceptualize these strategies and relationships between industry participants.

This section begins with a background and description of social exchange theory to provide theoretical context for this research. Migration theories are summarized that provide a backdrop for factors contributing to Hispanic migration into the area (western North Carolina) and into the Christmas tree industry. These theories help to explain the social and economic networks under which the labor force and its employers operate. Finally, the conceptual framework of the research is presented to refine the theoretical role and define the operational concepts and themes that underpin the methods of the research.

Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory, which had its origins in the 1960s with the works of Blau, Homans, and Emerson, emphasizes the social interactions within economic markets. Equity, distributive justice, power and exploitation are elements of interpersonal processes

commonly referenced in social exchange theory literature (Adams 1963, Blau 1964, Cook and Parcel 1977, Emerson 1962; 1972a; 1972b, Homans 1961, and Walster 1975). Due to the socioeconomic differences between the two populations in this study—farmers/employers and laborers—social exchange theory serves as an appropriate conceptual platform in examining 1) the social costs and benefits of working in this industry and 2) the factors that influence the decision making of many Hispanic farmworkers who have entered the industry. An assumption that could be made regarding employer and worker relationships in this industry is that cooperation between these groups exists on a number of levels to make it a mutually beneficial system. Employer and worker perspectives on their own interactions shed light on the impact of current Hispanic labor involvement in this industry and establish how grower and worker relationships have allowed this labor force to develop over the last twenty years.

The two specific actors within an industry can be categorized as worker and employer. Exchange theory asserts that increased knowledge of inequities in a system can result in more equitable choices (Handel 1993) between these actors. Homans' (1958,1969) interpretation of social exchange theory holds that people choose to behave in ways that they anticipate will be the most rewarding. He adds that people tend to repeat rewarding behavior and avoid punishing behavior, which is a core idea of economics, psychology, sociology, and other disciplines. Emerson (1972b) supports that while the “market” as a theoretical construct often stands at the core of economic theory, in exchange theory it is the “long term exchange relation between two specific actors that is the central concept” (Cook 1987, pp. 11-12). This longitudinal exchange also can include social and psychological factors that are often

undervalued in social exchange research. In my study, the actors engaged in the “exchange” are Christmas tree growers and Hispanic workers who are employed on these farms.

Because this research includes an examination of perceived costs and rewards among employers and laborers within the Christmas tree industry, social exchange theory is used to explain, in part, the dynamic of the decision-making process of the individuals and the social networks that affect hiring and training practices in this industry. There is much published on theoretical analysis of employer/laborer relationships and reliance within the social exchange paradigm. Judith Blau and others have examined cooperation and the role of social contracts in economic markets. Blau (1993) asserts that “there are long-term advantages to cooperation, and social arrangements depend on cooperation,” and that “people cooperate when they recognize the beneficial consequences of doing so, but they also cooperate owing to the consequences of noncooperation (p. 181).” However, she also provides insight into the complicated nature of social contracts inherent in the workplace and maintains “it is fairly clear that the structural underpinnings of the division of labor lead not to equality—the principle of community—but rather to enormous inequalities—of pay, authority, perks, responsibilities (Blau 1993, p. 78).”

Through my research, I argue that the strong demand for a reliable and efficient workforce in the Christmas tree industry along with personal relationships established among industry participants has created a mutually beneficial dynamic between the workforce and its employers. This dynamic has forged an “industrial community” whose social contract is more cooperative and less antagonistic than Blau might suggest.

Critics of social exchange theory argue that its fundamental premise—all social life can be treated as an exchange of rewards or resources between actors engaged in market

transactions—limits the psychological and sociological implications that also influence actors or, in the case of this research, groups of actors—workers and employers (Zafirovski 2003). In other words, exchange theory typically explains non-economic exchange processes through human operation in economic contexts including marginal utility, supply and demand market principles, etc. (Coleman 1990, Emerson 1976). However, the recognition of the impact that non-economic exchange has within economic systems and its pertinence to exchange theory is a relatively recent phenomenon within the theoretical discourse. Peter Blau (1994) elaborates on this theoretical debate:

A distinction between social and economic exchange is that social exchange engenders diffuse obligations, whereas those in economic exchange are specified. The diffuseness of the obligations implies that large-scale social exchange is not likely to occur unless social bonds rooted in trust have been established. The mutual advantages from the association fortify their social bond. This may appear to be merely a by-product of social exchange, but it is its most important product (pp. 152-156).

Three concepts in Kelley and Thibaut's (1978) work in social exchange include relational outcome, relational satisfaction, and relational stability. They posit that the exchange relationship entails participants working towards an economic equilibrium (stability) whereby both employers and workers are satisfied with the exchange relationship (satisfaction) and work towards a mutually beneficial end (outcome). While social and psychological impacts on this system can be inferred, they are largely ignored in the theoretical discourse. A recent reevaluation of social exchange theory (Zafirovski 2003) proposes that actors in social exchange can be individual and group alike and that the social-psychological dynamics of these groups have implications beyond strictly market pricing—

that noneconomic rewards and incentives such as esteem, respect, and rapport are valued among social actors in an economic exchange and have an important impact on the end exchange. My research supports Zafirovski's challenge to the adequacy of existing social exchange premises based on the analysis of empirical evidence collected from Christmas tree industry participant groups.

Migration Theory

A number of studies within economics and sociology have addressed the origins and causes of migration at the macro and micro level to shed light on why migration happens and what sustains it. By analyzing historical and current hiring trends and evaluating perspectives shared by industry participants, this research contributes to our knowledge of migration of labor into the rural agricultural area of North Carolina. By assessing the level of social exchange in the industry, we can derive its impact on migration. In addition, several tenets within the body of migration theory provide approaches to and assess the noneconomic values and benefits in the industry dynamic that social exchange theory has traditionally underemphasized. It is therefore important to elaborate on current theoretical premises of migration and address elements of migration theory applicable to this research. Social networks are prevalent in migrant worker communities and influence the noneconomic values that play a role in their decision-making. Analyzing the social networks among workers in the industry is necessary to understand their role in the development of the Christmas tree industry and exchange among its participants.

Neoclassical macroeconomic theory asserts that wage differences between countries drive most international migration (Thompson 2001). Piore (1979) argues that international migration is theoretically poverty-driven. When the benefits of migrating are perceived to be

greater than the cost, the individual makes the decision to migrate. Neoclassical microeconomic theories of migration focus on individual choice as the principal factor in migration. Brettell and Hollifield (2000) suggest that migration decisions are made by the individual based on a cost-benefit analysis of their situation. A rational choice is made to migrate if they believe the return will be greater than the cost. Other migration theories use the family or “culturally defined units of production” as units of analysis (Massey et al. 1998). Under these theories, family units collectively engage in the decision-making process. Through joint decisions, families or households send members abroad to earn while other family members remain in their home country.

Michael Piore (1979) offers another perspective under the theory of segmented labor markets. He states that while many theories evolve from economic analyses of the internal factors within migrants’ home countries, international migration results from the demand for migrant labor in industrialized countries, especially due to stigmas associated with certain jobs among local workers. Jobs filled by migrants typically are felt by native workers to be bottom-level jobs. In interviews with Christmas tree industry employers, many relate that they cannot find reliable native workers who want to do the manual labor necessary for this industry. Due to a lack of status, prestige, and pay in certain types of employment, native workers reject these jobs, forcing industries to recruit migrant workers to fill these positions (Piore 1979). Leiter and Tomaskovic-Devey (2001) use the term “ethnic migration” to describe the process in which traditionally lower-income earning segments of the native population leave certain jobs while migrants, more willing to do these types of labor, fill in at the bottom. However, unemployment is relatively low in the rural western mountains of North Carolina where most Christmas tree farms are located. While Hispanic migrants do

make up a large percentage of the manual-labor force, displacement of local labor or ethnic migration has not occurred.

While economic and sociological theories partially explain the initial motivation to migrate, they do not address political and social forces that perpetuate migration (McDaniel and Cassanova 2003). These theories posit that migration decisions are made based on a perception of higher wage potential and other individual or familial economic decisions. Many of these theories can explain in part the factors that influence the initial decision to migrate. However, they fall short in explaining the factors that affect the decision to migrate to a particular place or remain in a particular industry. Work in social capital theory has shown that information, personal contacts and family connections are the leading variables in the individual decision to migrate (Massey and Espinosa 1997; Lin 2001). However, there has been little analysis of the role of industrial recruitment of migrant workers and the role of the state in granting access to migrants. Many studies assume that workers make the decision to migrate, and then follow family and friends to seek employment in areas that have been “pioneered” by other members of the social network (Wilson 1998). However, recruitment by employers and the use of guest worker visas have become increasingly important factors in migration decisions. Piore (1979) believes that “migrations from underdeveloped to developed areas seem to be initiated by active recruitment of the part of employers (p. 19).” In many cases employers are actively seeking foreign workers in their home countries, expediting transportation, documentation, and advancing money to encourage migration. In North Carolina’s Christmas tree industry, the North Carolina Growers Association that expedites the H-2A guestworker visa process serves as a recruitment vehicle to this end.

However, only about 10% of the Hispanic labor in the Christmas tree industry has been recruited through the H-2A guestworker program.

To describe how migration is sustained in a particular economy, social networks can be analyzed. Analysis of social networks and social capital offers a viable perspective for looking at the effects of social resources on economic decisions. Social capital theory has been used to explain how the decision to migrate is made at the individual or household level, while acts of immigration expand these networks and lead to the development of larger networks and institutions which in turn decrease risk for those who follow (Massey et al. 1998). Like physical and human capital, social capital refers to features of social organization such as information flows, networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit (Putnam 1993). As the volume of social capital rises within a network, risks decline and more members are more easily drawn into the network.

In the Christmas tree industry, analysis of grower networks can shed light on how the decisions of growers to hire or not to hire Hispanic workers are influenced. Among the worker population, social networks can be defined in terms of dense or weak ties: ties among family and community members vs. ties with acquaintances or other outside influences. Weak ties outside of the group often can provide new information and access to new opportunities (Granovetter 1973, Wilson 1998). Although trust of information offered by a family member is likely to be greater than a weak tie (information provided by a contractor or “coyote”—Mexican term for migrant smuggler), the latter would have access to information that individuals, and the other members of their network, do not.

Conceptual Framework

Social exchange theory focuses on how people arrive at their decisions in relationships, and takes into account the actions of others, costs and benefits, comparing results, and dependence and control. Decision-making in social exchanges is influenced by an exchange participant's past experiences, values, and level of knowledge (Emerson 1976, Coleman 1986, Lobao and Thomas 1992). Both economic and non-economic values play a role in the dynamics of industry participant relationships and the decisions made by individuals regarding this interaction. To address these notions and frame the most conspicuous factors and issues related to the dynamics of the Christmas tree industry's labor force, I undertook formative, applied research that included both traditional ethnographic fieldwork of observation and informal preliminary interviews with industry participants. These were followed by more directed semi-structured interviews and a mail survey.

Exchange theory assumes that the outcome of an interaction is the combination of costs and rewards. Survey and interview questions were designed to solicit responses from participants to identify and elaborate on influencing factors and criteria by which participants make decisions and interact within the industry, per Kelley and Thibaut (1978):

- The social, material, or psychological factors that industry participants define as costly or beneficial,
- The ways by which individuals acquire information needed to make decisions regarding their participation in the industry,
- The criteria individuals use to determine value, and
- The perceived outcomes of the exchange relationship.

Social exchanges can be impacted by the amount of resources possessed by each social actor, both material and informational. Actors with more resources are able to take

greater risks and have more flexibility in determining the course of the exchange (Thibaut and Kelly 1986). Growers strive to reduce costs and maximize profits by appraising their individual economic strategies, the policies that affect them, and their production practices. Workers seek personal economic advantage, employment satisfaction, and needs attainment for themselves and their families. Thus, differences in decision-making and value determination affect the exchange between these actor groups.

While social exchange theory and migration theory are used as tools for evaluating the social interaction of industry participants with an economic cost-benefit lens, strict adherence to the microeconomic assumptions prevalent within these theoretical parameters limits or ignores the non-economic factors that also play a role in migration and exchange. Much of the literature in migration theory is based on microeconomic analyses to explain the behavior and decision making of migrants. Migration theory does provide room, to some extent, to assess the impact of social networks as a variable that influences individual and family/group decision-making among migrants. However, both social exchange theory and migration theory undervalue the sociological and psychological factors that also play a role in the interaction and relational satisfaction among these industry participants. By extending the boundaries of exchange and migration theory, this research explores the socio-psychological factors that have an impact on the dynamic of labor and industry participant relationships.

Concept Measurement

Decision-making in social exchanges is influenced by a participant's past experiences (Lobao and Thomas 1992) and level of knowledge (Coleman 1986). In the context of this study, survey questions were designed and posed through directed survey and interview

questions to participants to determine what is valued among industry participants not only from an economic or productivity standpoint, but also in a relational standpoint. It was important to frame interview questions in an open-ended format to solicit more objective appraisals.

Among migrant workers, these questions solicit inputs on those aspects of the social exchange in the industry that have influenced their migration decisions and decisions to remain in the industry. For growers, answers to these questions provide their perspectives concerning influences on their hiring and training decisions, and what guides their decision-making related to policy issues inherent in the industry. Historical perspectives, provided by both growers and workers, were included to provide context and further ground the study.

Through preliminary interviews with industry participants (workers and growers), archival document analysis, and discussions with agency professionals who work with the Christmas tree industry, a number of categorical variables and concepts emerged that served to frame the study. The dynamics of labor in the industry and cost-benefit influences on the decision-making process of participants are defined and explained through a number of experiential interactions and attitudinal influences including the hiring and training strategies adopted by growers to recruit workers, the impact of communication issues and language barrier, and strategies by which growers manage labor policy and legal issues with their workforce. The level of social exchange is defined and demonstrated through relationships and rapport between industry participants while migration to and participation within the industry among workers can be gauged by their insights regarding the influence of social networks among participants.

Based on preliminary interviews, five main analytic categories/issues emerged and were dominant in discussions of labor in the industry:

- the shift to Hispanic labor,
- hiring dynamics and training practices,
- communication and the language barrier,
- work environment and relationships among industry participants,
- and the policy issues facing the industry.

Interview questions and the mail survey questions were framed to solicit and extract themes within each category. These categories help frame important questions about the labor dynamic in the industry. They also serve to elaborate on the social exchange and causal impacts on migration into the industry by explaining the processes by which growers and workers have made decisions in the industry, how they interact, and the costs and benefits of these decisions. Predominant themes gleaned from grower and worker interviews and survey responses are presented throughout Chapters IV and V.

To define the cost-benefit concepts of grower-worker relationships in the context of the Christmas tree industry, it was necessary to identify the advantages of the availability and work ethic of Hispanic labor versus the costs of training and interaction with a non-English speaking workforce. This is more a subjective determination based on the growers' needs, the size of their operation, and their individual perspectives on the issues they face with this workforce. However, it identifies the relevant social, economic, and psychological variables that are part of the agricultural labor management decision process. To understand the catalysts that prompted a shift to Hispanic labor in the industry and migration of these foreign-born workers into the industry, a historical perspective, including the origins and

growth of the industry, the local labor supply, and the initial recruitment of Hispanic workers, provided valuable context for the study. Interviews with early industry participants and their historical insight fulfilled the contextual needs for the study and provided additional depth to the research.

Among the Hispanic worker population, the input from individuals with many years of experience in the industry provided historical perspectives on the advantages and disadvantages of working in the industry including amount of work available, type of work required of them, relationships with employers, and wages in this industry compared to other industries they may have worked in. These inputs also explain the decision-making process used to migrate to the industry and the factors that determine costs and benefits of working in the industry.

Survey questions and survey response data among growers elaborate on the diversity and frequency of hiring and training strategies practiced by the industry and provide important baseline information regarding its labor force. Using survey response data to extrapolate the extent to which Hispanic labor is actually used measures the importance of this labor force to the industry, the needs growers have, and risks growers are willing to take to maintain it. Survey response data are also used to show the measures growers take or are willing to take to train their workers, improve communication, and familiarize themselves with migrant labor policy. A more thorough understanding of the social exchange between growers and their labor force can be developed which sheds light on the influence it has had on the migration of foreign-born workers into this industry.

Chapter 2, Research Design and Methodology, is organized to detail the various research methods included in the study followed by a discussion of the analytical processes

used to extract and elaborate on themes. Chapter 3 provides historical context of the Christmas tree industry and the policy issues surrounding the H-2A Guestworker program under which legal nonimmigrant workers are hired in the industry. This chapter introduces the participants and the inherent problems with the current guestworker program that have influenced the current labor dynamic in the industry. Chapter 4 presents results from both the interviews and a mail survey to Christmas tree growers through survey data and illustrative quotes from these industry participants. Chapter 5 presents results from interviews and participant observation with workers to elaborate on issues that impact their participation in the industry. Recommendations for the industry and theoretical implications of this research are discussed in Chapter 6.

II. Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

This research employed a qualitative approach that relied on semi-structured and unstructured interviews, participant observation, and a mail survey to build a study about the role of Hispanics in the Christmas tree industry in North Carolina. Ethnographic and qualitative research methods often are used to describe contemporary events or occurrences in depth (Creswell 1998; Marshall and Rossman 1999; Yin 1994). These methods are used when the focus of a study is on the process of events as they unfold, within their particular context, rather than on an end result.

Qualitative researchers develop knowledge primarily through analytic induction of verbal data, observation, and other methods which focus on interpretation and extracting meaning from social phenomena (Gall et al.1966). Qualitative methods are useful in identifying and describing the complexity of social issues and allow the researcher to see beyond simple dependent variables (Marshall and Rossman 1999). Whereas quantitative research breaks down phenomena to examine their components that become variables of a study, qualitative research can reveal how the parts interact to form a more complete picture (Merriam 1998). Creswell (1998) defines qualitative research as “an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social and human problem...(in which) the researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting.” The qualitative approach chosen for this research is appropriate and necessary to more fully

explore and explain the dynamics of labor based on the perspectives of the participants which have yet to be studied in this industry.

Figure 2.1 summarizes the research process. General research questions first were developed in the spring of 2001. Archival document analysis and preliminary interviews with agency personnel and industry participants followed in the summer of 2001 to identify issues and themes regarding labor in the industry. Based on preliminary interviews and observations, it was determined that a mail survey to growers in 2002 would be an efficient method to reach a larger number of these industry participants due to an available and easily accessible sampling frame. In-depth, semi-structured interviews and participant observation were carried out in the summers of 2001 and 2002 to yield more explanatory data on the perspectives of industry participants to tie into theoretical inference. Interview questions were designed to solicit responses from participants regarding hiring, training, communication and policy issues important to the industry. The mail survey to growers was also used to obtain much needed industry-wide baseline demographic and descriptive data on growers and hiring and training practices that have yet to be produced for this industry. Survey questions also were designed to elaborate on hiring, training, communication, and policy-related variables that had been revealed as common themes in preliminary interviews with industry participants.

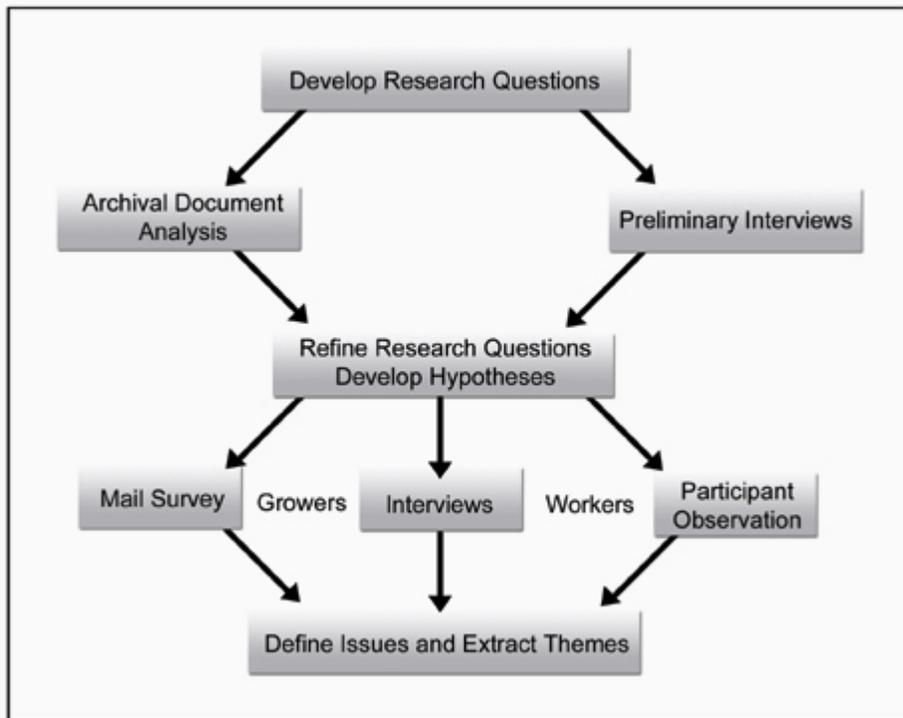


Figure 2.1. Diagram of research approach and methods.

Phenomenological Approach to the Research

Demographic surveys and data analyses compiled by state agencies are not sufficient to address worker and employer perceptions of issues that affect industries. Economic analyses of Hispanic labor inputs into industry do not take into consideration noneconomic factors that may influence industry participants. A phenomenological approach was chosen for a more thorough exploration of these issues, such as perceptions of Hispanic labor policy. It is an effective tool in explaining and describing how issues and policies affect participants in social and economic groups. This approach allowed me to provide a more complete picture of the social exchange and decision-making among industry participants and the migration of Hispanic labor into North Carolina’s Christmas tree industry to determine the factors that have contributed to its overall labor dynamic. I also incorporate a policy sciences

approach in Chapter 3, which parallels the phenomenological approach, for an initial evaluation of the industry and issues affecting its labor dynamic. Clark et al. (2000) define the policy sciences as “a set of integrated conceptual tools, an analytic framework, and set of fundamental propositions to explore policy problems and devise practical intervention strategies (p.7). Lasswell and McDougal (1992) add that this approach “is directly and immediately applicable to any and all contexts wherein people interact (p.12).” Under this approach, the problem or phenomenon is described in current and historic trends and its key factors and conditions analyzed using the perspectives of the participants involved (Clark et al. 2000).

The products of phenomenological research describe the meaning of “lived” experiences for individuals or groups of individuals and articulate the reasons behind issues or systems while offering congruency to similar issues (Creswell 1998). Due to the complexity of phenomenological studies, multiple research methods such as interviews, observation, and surveys are commonly used to gather data more effectively and thoroughly (Marshall and Rossman 1999). This approach was especially appropriate for my research for a number of reasons. The use of migrant workers in the Christmas tree industry is a relatively recent phenomenon, beginning in the early 1980s and dramatically increasing by the early to mid 1990s. The Christmas tree industry in North Carolina represents a “niche group” within North Carolina’s forestry and agriculture industry. This particular group and the issues surrounding the dynamics of its labor force have yet to be studied in any detail.

Phenomenological studies typically examine the interplay of many variables in order to provide a more complete understanding of an issue or situation (Merriam 1998). This type of comprehensive understanding is achieved through “thick description,” which involves an

in-depth description of the phenomenon being evaluated, the circumstances under which it exists, the characteristics of its participants, and the nature of the community in which it is located (Creswell 1998). Thick description also involves interpreting the meaning of demographic and descriptive data such as cultural norms and mores, community values, ingrained attitudes, and motives. Categories of perceptions and related themes are extracted from interview data and pieced together to form a more complete picture of the phenomenon studied.

This type of qualitative approach gives voice to the participants in this study and allows research to be conducted in their environment, thus allowing a more personal and intimate glimpse into the people and issues that affect this industry. Quotes extracted from interviews are used extensively throughout this study to illustrate themes. By reflecting the lived experiences of the study participants and addressing the research questions from their point of view, a richer understanding of the issues that affect them is accomplished. Supporting documentation of Hispanic labor and employer interactions from various agencies and additional sources were also used to complement observations and conclusions made about this niche of North Carolina's forestry/agriculture industry. A mail survey of growers supports interview data and provides descriptive statistical validity to themes elaborated on in interviews. By approaching the subject from a number of directions, this approach allows a more thorough synthesis and analysis of the social exchange between employers and Hispanic laborers in this industry and sheds light on the dynamics, values, and networks inherent in their relationships.

Target Population

In this study, Christmas tree growers and Hispanic workers on Christmas tree farms in western North Carolina made up the target population. For the purpose of this research I define “Hispanic” as persons of Latin American descent who speak Spanish as their primary language. In the North Carolina Christmas tree industry, workers are almost exclusively foreign-born Mexicans. This population is bounded geographically by counties that support the production of Fraser fir (*Abies fraserii*), which makes up more than 95% of Christmas trees grown in western North Carolina. According to the North Carolina Christmas Tree Association (NCCTA), there are approximately 1,400 Christmas tree growers in western North Carolina with production levels that vary from 25 to 200,000 trees harvested per year. They include full and part-time growers with different ages, education level, and economic status. While approximately 600 temporary Hispanic guestworkers workers are brought in annually to the industry through the H-2A program and the North Carolina Growers Association, there is no reliable data as to the total number of Hispanic workers hired by the industry. However, based on preliminary interviews with Hispanic workers in the industry and the Department of Labor, the majority of Hispanic workers in the Christmas tree workers are male, from Mexico, between the ages of 18 and 55, and undocumented (Luginbuhl 2001).

Interview Selection Criteria and Procedures

Purposive sampling was used to reach key respondents who were identified as being particularly knowledgeable about labor issues in the Christmas tree industry. This type of nonprobability sampling is useful in the preliminary stages of a research project to reveal key issues underlying a research study (Rea and Parker 1997). For preliminary and follow-up interviews, growers and workers were selected based on their willingness to participate in the

study and their experience with Hispanic labor. County Extension Agents who work closely with Christmas tree farms and growers were contacted in three counties to provide names of potential participants including growers with different size farms and different workforce compositions.

Rapport building is essential to being able to work with farmworkers and with their employers. Workers and employers who participate in the H-2 guestworker program are sometimes more easily accessible and more open to research, partly due to their legal status and regulations and documentation required of them. In Alabama's tree-planting industry, McDaniel and Cassanova (2003) successfully gained access to participants in this industry, interviewed H-2 employers, and found that approximately 84% of the work is being done by H2-B guest workers. In North Carolina's Christmas tree industry, only 30 of the state's estimated 1,600 Christmas tree growers participate in the H-2 program and hire only 10% of the estimated labor force in the industry. H-2A industry participants were easily accessible, open to discussing their practices, and willing to provide access to their work crews for interviews and participant observation. However, to understand the broader dynamic of labor in the industry, a broader base of industry participants had to be sampled. To access non-H-2A employers and workers, I worked closely with county extension agents who arranged initial contact with several non-H-2A growers who they believed would be interested in participating in the study.

Because there is no existing literature focusing on labor issues in the Christmas tree industry, informal and semi-structured interviews with growers and workers served as a primary source of information regarding these industry participants. A set of interview questions was developed and redefined through this process for both employers (Christmas

tree growers) and laborers. Interview questions were developed and reviewed by industry participants and area extension agents to verify relevance and tailor the language of the questions to address themes that participants felt would result in positive outcomes for future program development. Semi-structured interviews, consisting of open-ended questions framed by the researcher, took place on site with study participants for a non-predetermined duration. Participants were also informed as to the protection of their anonymity and confidentiality and the investigator answered any questions asked by the participants. In order to maintain anonymity, quotes presented throughout this report are referenced by an abbreviation and number system representing the type of participant and the order in which they were interviewed. For example, G1 would represent the first grower interviewed. W2 would represent the second worker interviewed. EA1 stands for the first Extension Agent interviewed. A quote referenced by WC1 represents a quote from the first crew of workers interviewed.

Growers were contacted to explain the purpose of the study and arrangements were made to conduct interviews with these growers and individual workers on these farms. This type of purposive sampling was necessary to gain entry into the participant group and to identify and sample a diverse group of growers to help understand the range of perspectives and issues concerning the labor force in the industry. Interviews took place with growers in the summers of 2001 and 2002 and in March of 2002 at the NCCTA's winter meeting. Growers interviewed were a diverse group including individuals with different size operations, from different counties in western North Carolina, and with different socioeconomic backgrounds. Twenty growers were interviewed, including twelve growers who contract workers through the H-2A program. Pat Gaskin, the legislative advisor for the

NCCTA, served as a contact for information about issues regarding the H-2A program that impact the Christmas tree industry. Additional informal conversations took place with members of the Department of Labor, the North Carolina Growers Association, and the North Carolina Farm Bureau Federation to become familiar with the policy issues affecting the industry. Semi-structured interviews with these industry participants were open ended and allowed informants to elaborate more thoroughly on perspectives and issues such as the advantages and disadvantages of hiring Hispanic workers. More thorough description and explanation of industry issues such as housing and wage policies, interaction among growers and workers, and anecdotes to illustrate points were achieved through interviews and served to explain the broader theoretical questions and implications. Interviews took place with growers at their homes, farm offices, in the field, or at restaurants. Interview notes were transcribed by hand during the interview because initial interview subjects appeared uncomfortable with tape-recording interviews. Interviews ranged from one to three hours. Two interviews lasted entire days while the researcher participated in on-farm activities with the grower.

All farmworkers who were interviewed worked on Christmas tree farms in three North Carolina Counties—Watauga, Avery, and Jackson. Men make up the majority of workers in the industry. While women are employed in the industry in certain activities such as wreath and garland making, they rarely, if ever, work throughout the season or in the fields (Elmore and Arcury 2001). Contacts with individual workers were made in person by the principal investigator and the topics that would be covered and the length of the interview were discussed. Because migrant farmworkers are often considered a vulnerable population, participants' names were not recorded. No compensation was offered for participation in the

study. All 35 participants who were approached agreed to participate. This project was reviewed and approved by the North Carolina State University Institutional Review Board for research involving human subjects (Appendix 1).

All farmworkers selected were natives of Mexico. Their time spent as a farmworker in the Christmas tree industry ranged from less than one year to more than 20 years. H-2A temporary guestworkers as well as undocumented resident and seasonal migrant workers were interviewed to include the perspectives of members of the documented and undocumented workforce. All interviews with workers were conducted in Spanish even though two workers felt comfortable speaking English. For these workers, certain themes were clarified in English. Twenty interviews were with single individuals, while three took place with groups of three workers at their residences. An additional six interviews took place in the field while I participated as a crewmember during two weeks of shearing fieldwork in the summer of 2002. Interviews were between 45 minutes to over three hours and took place in the field, while workers were on break, at their residences, and one in a farm office. Demographic information was collected for individual workers and their individual inputs were recorded and identified. Interview notes were transcribed during the interviews and transcripts were read several times to identify and extract segments related to farmworker beliefs regarding the factors contributing to their decision-making process for working in the industry and the relationship with their employer. Interview segments were translated into English for the report.

Out of the 35 workers interviewed, 21 had participated in some form of agricultural work in the United States and 22 mentioned that they had worked on farms in Mexico (Table 2.1). Eight mentioned that they had worked in construction in the U.S. Two of the younger

workers mentioned work as painters. While there is little data about the demographic composition of Christmas tree workers, the majority of the workers surveyed were from rural areas of the Mexican states of Michoacan, Chiapas, and San Luis Potosi. Two workers from Queretaro, one worker from Nayarit, and one worker from Olipas were also interviewed.

Table 2.1. Study sample characteristics from worker population (n=35).

| | |
|---|----|
| <i>H-2A Guestworkers</i> | 14 |
| <i>Undocumented</i> | 18 |
| <i>Resident alien or citizen</i> | 3 |
| <i>Previous Ag Work in U.S.</i> | 21 |
| <i>Previous Ag Work in Mexico</i> | 22 |
| <i>Less than 5 years in U.S.</i> | 17 |
| <i>5 years or more in U.S.</i> | 18 |
| <i>Family in U.S.</i> | 28 |
| <i>Less than 5 years in Christmas tree industry</i> | 23 |
| <i>More than 5 years in Christmas tree industry</i> | 12 |
| <i>21 years old or younger</i> | 4 |
| <i>22-30 years old</i> | 19 |
| <i>Over 30 years old</i> | 12 |

Survey Sampling Frame and Sampling Procedure

While several sampling frames in the form of tax information databases exist for agricultural occupations in the state, the researcher relied on the contact database of Christmas tree and ornamental growers maintained by county extension offices to narrow and isolate an appropriate sampling frame. To meet the conceptual and operational objectives of the research, it was necessary that the sampling frame include Christmas tree growers from different sized farms and with individuals who had worked in the industry for various lengths of time. By sampling a diverse population of growers, differences in labor requirements and the dynamics of recruitment, hiring, and training practices could be more fully recognized

and delineated. For the mail survey, purposeful and systematic sampling from county-maintained lists of growers from the six largest Christmas tree producing counties achieved this variability (Ashe, Alleghany, Avery, Watauga, Mitchell, and Jackson Counties). While these lists included contact information for individuals who were not necessarily Christmas tree growers, such as allied businesses, the sampling frame included all members on these lists; that is, it defaulted in favor of including contacts rather than excluding them.

A 1997 North Carolina Department of Agriculture (NCDA) survey of the industry indicates that of the estimated 1,600 Christmas tree growers in the state, two-thirds have operations with an average of three acres of trees per operation. The 60 largest growers, operations having 100 or more acres, account for 51% of the Christmas tree inventory while the average Christmas tree operation in North Carolina has 15 acres of trees with 1,452 trees on each acre. Grower lists from the six counties that make up approximately 90% of Christmas tree production in North Carolina (NCDA 1997) were selected for sampling (Figure 2.2). Surveys were mailed to every other contact listed in these county databases. Survey responses confirmed a distribution of large, medium, and small operations consistent with NCDA (1997) estimates of growers and Jill Sidebottom's 2002 pest management survey of 336 growers. According to the NCCTA, approximately 10% of North Carolina's Christmas tree growers produce 25,000 trees or more per year. Ten percent of survey responses from this study were from major growers, also consistent with Sidebottom's and NCCTA estimates.

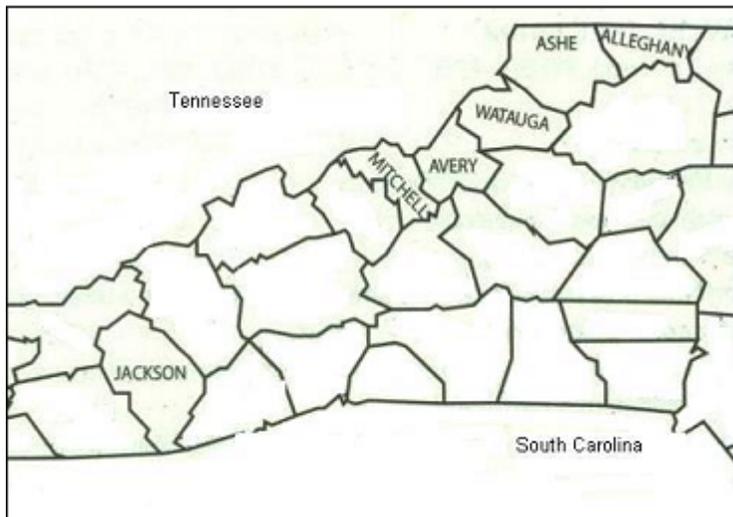


Figure 2.2. Counties selected for mail survey.

Survey Administration

In July and August of 2002, 850 copies of a survey booklet were mailed to ornamental and Christmas tree growers in the target counties. The nine-page booklet contained 37 separate questions. Apart from questions concerning demographic data of the respondent and descriptive data about the industry's labor force, the survey booklet contained 11 questions about their workforce composition and hiring practices, 8 questions about communication, 5 questions about training, and 3 policy-related questions. The questionnaire was peer reviewed by the research committee and graduate students and professors in the Department of Sociology and approved for use by the Human Research Advisory Panel for NC State University (Appendix 1). A pilot test group of five Christmas tree growers and three extension agents in the surveyed counties completed and critiqued the survey. Their editorial and style suggestions were incorporated into the final questionnaire.

The questionnaire and additional correspondence to growers followed a modified approach to Dillman's (1999) Mail and Internet Surveys: The Tailored Design Method.

Participants received an initial letter notifying them that they would be receiving a survey and explaining the purpose of the study. The questionnaire was sent one week later and was followed by a thank you/reminder postcard one-week later (Appendix 2). Two hundred and fifty six surveys were returned and 11 phone calls were received for an overall response rate of 31%; however, 72 respondents returned surveys indicating that they do not grow Christmas trees and the 11 phone calls were also from individuals who no longer grow trees. Overall usable returned surveys totaled 185 (or 22%) which represents 13% of the estimated 1,400 Christmas tree growers in western North Carolina (NCDA, 1997). Response rates were somewhat lower than Sidebottom’s 2002 study, which had a 33% usable response. However, the percentage of respondents who indicated they no longer grew Christmas trees (31%) was nearly identical to Sidebottom’s study (30%). Non-respondents may have decided not to reply due to disinterest, length of the survey, unfamiliarity with the topic, or the sensitivity of the topic. Thirty-three percent of mail survey respondents were from Ashe County, which has the largest number of Christmas tree growers, approximately 550 of the state’s estimated 1,600 growers (Ashe County Extension Office, 2004).

Table 2.2. Surveyed North Carolina counties and response statistics.

| County | # of Surveys Sent | Total # of Respondents from County | # of Hiring Growers** | # of non-hiring Growers | # of Trees Harvested in 2001 |
|------------------|-------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| Ashe | 318 | 61 (19%) | 45 | 13 | 868,000 |
| Alleghany | 99 | 19 (19) | 13 | 5 | 95,460 |
| Avery | 118 | 27 (23%) | 20 | 7 | 153,200 |
| Watauga | 74 | 20 (27%) | 10 | 10 | 60,700 |
| Mitchell | 109 | 9 (8%) | 7 | 2 | 14,100 |
| Jackson | 89 | 10 (11%) | 6 | 4 | 115,800 |
| Other* | * | 39 | 24 | 13 | 56,934 |
| Totals | 850 | 185 | 125 | 54 | 1,364,194 |

*Some growers live in different counties from where their tree farms are located.

**Some survey respondents did not indicate whether they hired or did not hire during the 2001 season.

Archival Document Analysis

There is an enormous amount of literature and policy debate on the subject of migrant labor. Archival document analysis of sources within the World Wide Web served as a source of government information related to H-2A guestworker policy and immigration and labor law. Web sites maintained by the Department of Labor and Department of Agriculture also were used to retrieve information concerning the legal and operational mechanisms behind the H-2A program. Press releases in local and regional media and other popular literature on Hispanic labor were reviewed for comparative perspective on the issues facing this population and various aspects of their employment. Academic publications and policy analyses of migrant labor issues and trends were also reviewed as supporting literature for background information and global insight on the subject of agricultural labor.

The Julian Samora Research Institute at Michigan State University, the Pew Hispanic Center, and other organizations dedicated to Hispanic and Latino research are excellent sources of data, publications, and studies regarding labor, socioeconomics, and policy impacts of an increasingly Latino population in the United States. Population and employment statistics from the U.S. Census, Department of Labor, Department of Agriculture, and Equal Opportunity Commission files were reviewed to identify and describe major trends within North Carolina related to Hispanic growth in the state's forestry sector—in particular, the western portion of the state where the majority of Christmas tree farms are located. However, this type of statistical data typically is inaccurate and quickly dated due to the dynamic nature of the migrant farm labor force. Griffeth and Kissam (1995) relate that researchers, journalists, and other professionals have great difficulty accurately representing U.S. farm labor due to high numbers of illegal and new immigrant workers in the farm labor

force, and the dynamic and sometimes “invisible” nature of migrant and seasonal farm workers.

Participant Observation

Participant observation is an ethnographic method by which a researcher is immersed in the day-to-day lives of members of the group being studied (Creswell 1998). Marshall and Rossman (1999) explain participant observation as “firsthand involvement and immersion in the social world chosen for study (p. 106).” It allows the possibility for the researcher to operate on a continuum from being a complete outsider to being a complete insider (Jorgensen 1989). For two weeks during the summer of 2002, I worked on a shearing crew with 12 Mexican farmworkers on a Christmas tree farm in rural Jackson County to be immersed briefly in one aspect of Christmas tree production as a worker. This allowed me greater access to the perspective of Hispanic workers and to build rapport with workers and with growers. During this two-week period, I participated in all on-farm activities with the group of Mexican workers in the field and at their residences on the weekends. Interviews were simultaneously conducted informally in the field and on breaks; responses were recorded after the day’s work. Interactions also were observed regarding hiring and training practices conducted on the particular farm and the relationship between the grower and individual workers. This experience provided a distinct and necessary level of access to the target population to add depth to the study.

Analysis

Multiple analytical tools were used throughout the study, drawing from applied qualitative ethnographic and anthropological traditions. Standard descriptive statistical

analysis was used to develop a demographic profile of employers and delineate hiring, training, and communication issues in the industry. The demographic profile provides a broader understanding of the cultural context of Hispanic laborers and Christmas tree farmers within this industry as well as their relational context and social exchange. Survey responses and response frequencies were compiled and illustrated in tables to further tie survey data with interview data.

Marshall and Rossman (1999) assert that data collection and analysis should occur simultaneously to most effectively interpret the data. Data from interviews were transformed into clusters of meaning and tied together to make a general description of the industry participants' experience, which is both textual in regards to what is experienced and structural in regards to how it is experienced. Moustakas (1994) relates the central tenets of the phenomenological approach as:

determining what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it. From these descriptions, general or universal meanings are derived, in other words, the essences of structures of the experience (p. 13).

I identified developing concepts and trends and modified them as more data were collected and analyzed.

Typical analytic procedures fall into six phases: (a) organizing the data; (b) generating categories, themes, and patterns; (c) testing the emergent understandings; (d) searching for alternative explanations; and (e) writing the report. Each phase of data analysis entails data reduction as the reams of collected data are brought into manageable chunks and interpretations as the researcher brings meaning and insight

to the words and acts of the participants in the study (Marshall and Rossman 1999, 152-3).

The strategy of constant comparison was used for efficacy and to maintain perspective of data and emerging themes gathered throughout the data collection process. Constant comparison allows for hypotheses and comparisons to be made across categories that have been extracted and classified from the beginning of the data collecting process to the end (LeCompte and Preissle 1993). In the process of constant comparison, initial data are collected and analyzed (for this study, via document review and preliminary interviews with study participants), tentative conclusions, hypotheses, and themes are developed; additional data then are collected and analyzed. These data are tested then against the initial conclusions and themes, while new data sources and perspectives are sought to strengthen or reassess them (Dye et al. 2000). Analytic induction played a key role in developing typologies for the phenomena and relationships observed during the course of the study. This type of analysis afforded an appropriate level of flexibility for the qualitative researcher as new observations were generated throughout the interview process and related to the complexity of the participants and the phenomena perpetuated in the industry.

Interviews were analyzed by interpreting interview transcripts, extracting categories of responses, identifying and generating themes, and making generalizations based on collective responses. Major thematic categories were extracted based on the frequency of similar responses to interview questions from participants. Transcript segments then were extracted and organized according to their relevance to these major thematic categories. Individual themes generated from common and congruent interview and survey responses of growers and workers are presented throughout the results chapters under major thematic

categories. Quotes from participant interviews are used frequently throughout the report to illustrate key themes and represent perceptions of the study group. This strategy allowed the principal researcher to delineate understandings as well as tacit and constructed beliefs about the dynamics of Hispanic labor in this industry.

Constant comparison was a suitable analytical tool for use within the study due to the dynamics of the study participants and the social phenomena associated with their work environment. Because the research is framed under the umbrella of social exchange theory, constant comparison permitted the development of themes and relationships throughout the study that could be readily compared and contrasted with one another. Tables were created from the data to delineate and present these typologies to illustrate an effective diagnostic conceptual frame of key themes of the study.

Validity and Reliability

Due to the cultural diversity represented by the study population and the type of information acquired and analyzed, the project required applying a diverse set of social science methodologies. Triangulation—the application of multiple data sets and types, multiple research methods, and multiple scales of analysis (Creswell 1998)—was used to increase the degree of confidence in the findings. In triangulation, researchers use these multiple data sources and methods to provide corroborating evidence to shed light on themes or perspectives (Ely et al. 1991, Miles and Huberman 1994). Comparing and complementing data assimilated with a variety of techniques achieves a more comprehensive and rich understanding of the issues at hand. Key themes that emerged from the data compiled through interviews, survey, observation, and document analysis were synthesized to develop a more complete and illustrative report.

Access to a contact database and mail survey sampling of the grower population allowed broader coverage of this participant group. While a diverse group of documented and undocumented workers were selected and interviewed from different farms, a smaller sample size for this participant group could be seen as a weakness. In addition, because these participants were selected from farms with employers willing to allow the researcher to openly interview themselves and their workers, it is reasonable to assume that a certain subset of growers and workers with different attitudinal beliefs or perspectives was not sampled.

To assess the reliability of data gathered throughout the course of the research, member checks, consisting of follow up interviews and reviews of results and conclusions with participants and peers, were conducted in order to verify summaries of data collected and transcribed from the interviews. Member checks are considered to be “the most critical technique for establishing credibility (p. 314)” according to Lincoln and Guba (1985). Participants were asked to review transcription summaries to clarify and validate assumptions and interpretations made by the researcher. Members of the research committee also reviewed data summaries and assumptions in order to ensure the dependability and transferability of the research. Based on the congruity of interview responses and similar themes inherent throughout data collection and analysis, the researcher is confident in the validity of the research findings and generalizations made about the industry’s labor dynamic.

Limitations and Bias

One of the most striking characteristics of migrant communities is their wide transnational spatial distribution and sociocultural dynamics (Basch et al. 1994, Kearney 1996). Migrant communities are difficult to place into categories and sample and often represent a hidden population that is difficult to research (Schensul et al. 1999). Private employers, crew leaders, and labor contractors also are difficult to approach. Many worry about increasing government regulation and legal concerns of hiring documented and undocumented workers. They are also sensitive to negative publicity and prior experience with negative media exposure regarding wages, working conditions and treatment of migrant workers. An inherent distrust of advocacy groups and researchers exists as well due to studies or reports produced by these groups which growers/employers felt have reflected negatively on the industry. Building rapport is essential to being able to work with both groups. In Alabama's tree-planting industry, McDaniel and Cassanova (2003) found that a majority of the work is performed by H-2 Guest workers and noted that these industry participants are more open about their practices and more willing to provide access to their work crews for interviews and participant observation. Workers and employers who participate in the H-2A guest-worker program are more easily accessible and more open to research partly due to the regulations and documentation required of them.

The strength of this type of research relied on the openness and willingness of the study participants to respond candidly and with confidence in the intentions of the researcher and the assurance of strict confidentiality of their comments. Establishing trust and rapport with prospective participants was paramount to achieving reliable study results. In addition, addressing research questions that growers and workers feel will result in positive outcomes

can increase participation. While no informants declined participation in interviews, non-responses from the mail-survey suggests that some prospective participants did not want to participate in the study. Employers often can be skeptical about providing information, and immigrant laborers are sometimes reluctant to give information that they perceive might affect their jobs or residency status (Elmore and Arcury 1999).

Due to the relatively small number of interview participants among the worker population, generalizations of this research to the broader population of farmworkers may be limited. Interviews were conducted during the summer production season and encompassed workers primarily engaged in shearing Christmas trees. Thus, it is possible that potential attitudinal differences between these workers and workers participating in different activities during different production seasons were excluded. Many workers who are employed in the industry work exclusively during the harvest season. Their perspectives and factors that influence their decision-making and exchange with employers in the industry were not assessed.

I worked closely with county extension agents and other personnel familiar with employers and other involved personnel to build confidence in the potential benefits of the research. Contacts with the existing North Carolina State University Christmas tree program also helped establish trusting relationships with Christmas tree growers. In addition, my Spanish language skills and familiarity with Latin American culture and willingness to work side-by-side with industry participants were advantageous in establishing rapport with Hispanic workers. Despite these substantial connections to the principal grower and worker groups, surely the high levels of fear and distrust on all sides led to cautious or self-serving replies at times. In addition, probably the least law-abiding or exploitative individuals

shunned contact with the researcher or did not reply to the survey. Nevertheless, the best available data was collected.

Observational Standpoint

I am a student of natural resources and anthropology with a keen interest in sociology and the socioeconomics of rural areas. As a Peace Corps volunteer in rural Paraguay, I lived and worked with small-scale farmers who worked their fields on a daily basis to exist at a subsistence level with limited technological and financial resources. Through casual conversations with Hispanic workers in the United States, I have realized that many of these workers come from the same rural agricultural roots as those farmers with whom I worked and established close personal ties. I am also aware of the perceptions that many Americans have regarding the “immigrant” situation in the United States, and recognize that employers of Hispanic labor in agricultural areas have been under constant scrutiny due to highly publicized incidences of unsafe working and living conditions. However, I also believe that, while improvements are needed, this economic system is beneficial for both employers and laborers, and that the majority of employers and laborers work together with minimal incident in an endeavor of mutual benefit. I have a bias against undereducated or “armchair” advocacy groups and media that often use questionable tactics to acquire information and provide only one side of the story in addressing migrant labor issues. Likewise, I maintain a strong dislike for those unscrupulous growers who purposefully exploit migrant workers.

All of these factors have drawn me towards conducting collaborative “solution-building” research in the Hispanic/migrant labor issue in the forest industry. For the past three years, I have interviewed Christmas tree growers, workers, and other agency and organizational participants and currently work with Christmas tree industry participants as an

Agricultural Extension Agent with North Carolina's Cooperative Extension service. I hope that my objectivity and diligence as a researcher will allow me to develop a more rich understanding of labor needs and relationships in this industry, eventually opening up a forum in which both employers and Hispanic laborers can express their opinions, concerns, and challenges. Hopefully this research can help destigmatize what is obviously a strong market-based economic exchange of labor and capital. Furthermore, perhaps it can help improve the distribution of economic and social benefits to both employers and workers.

III. An Overview of Hispanic Labor Issues in North Carolina's Christmas Tree Industry

Introduction

Migrant labor issues have been at the forefront of polemical immigration reform debates between policy makers, industry, and advocacy groups for decades. There have been numerous attempts to regulate the number of undocumented aliens entering the U.S. migrant labor stream. However, many sectors of the United States agricultural economy have traditionally relied on immigrant labor streams for their seasonal and temporary labor needs (Briggs 1996). In the western part of the state, many of the largest Christmas tree producers rely on the H-2A Guestworker Program to supply around 600 workers per year during the growing and harvesting season. The H-2A program was revised under the 1986 Immigration Reform Control Act to enable agricultural employers to legally hire foreign workers for temporary labor (Wasem and Collver 2001). Currently, this program is the only legal means by which employers can contract non-immigrant guestworkers. However, low adoption rates of this program and unpermitted hiring of undocumented workers by a majority of employers point to a broken system.

To place Hispanic labor issues into context and understand part of the reasoning behind current hiring trends in the Christmas tree industry, it is necessary to understand the H-2A program, the participants it affects, and the underlying policy issues that impact employers and their workers. This chapter examines current labor policy issues surrounding migrant labor and the H-2A program, ongoing reform efforts, and the implications for labor within the context of the Christmas tree industry of North Carolina. I begin with an historical perspective of North Carolina's Christmas tree industry, followed by a general overview of

the issues and problems associated with the H-2A program. I then relate the impacts of the H-2A program to labor in North Carolina's Christmas tree industry and provide the participants' profiles and perspectives on the issue.

History of Western North Carolina's Christmas Tree Industry

In the early 1950s, several entrepreneurial individuals from Georgia and the western counties of North Carolina begin cutting and selling the tops of mature Fraser fir trees from nearby national forest land. Some individuals transported and sold treetops to urban population centers in the Southeast. After recognizing a potential market and increasing demand for these 'tree-top' Christmas trees, several growers decided to collect and transplant wild seedlings to their farmland and grow the trees locally. A grower from Avery County explains:

At that time, you could buy the rights to sections of trees from the National Forest Service. Folks would buy a section of trees, cut the tops off, and sell them in Atlanta. Four of us here in Avery County organized and bought seedlings out of Maine and from the state nursery in Henderson County. Different types of trees. Put in every type of tree we could find—Black Hill spruce, Scotch pine, Fraser fir, Siberian spruce, concolor fir, Norway spruce, white pine, blue spruce. Some to sell as ball and burlap for landscaping. Back then, the banks didn't have money for Christmas trees, because there's such a long time between the initial investment and harvest. It's a long time to recuperate costs—8 years before you ever see any money. I sold my first trees for \$3.75 mainly to civic clubs for fund-raising (G4).

After these first few "entrepreneurs" harvested and sold their first rotation of trees, other growers and local farmers began to recognize the economic potential of this practice and duplicated it on their own farms. In 1959, The North Carolina Christmas Tree Growers

Association was chartered with 10 growers and elected its first president (G6). At that time, Christmas tree production was considered an alternative and risky venture due to the 8 to 10 year time frame that was involved to recuperate costs.

The earliest growers, some of whom now harvest around 200,000 trees per year, began planting trees on a larger scale in the late 1950s. Several growers mention they quit their jobs and began Christmas tree production as a full-time endeavor in the early to mid-1970s. Until then, Christmas tree production was a supplemental alternative source of income that growers pursued in their spare time. Tree farms typically were established on less usable, highly sloped land that had been used previously for pasture or potato and cabbage production. At that time all labor involved, such as shearing, planting, and fertilizing, was carried out by themselves and with their immediate family members. Some growers mentioned they would hire college students or high-school kids for part-time labor or go to the Employment Security Commission to find local labor for short-term work (G8, G9, G12, G15). In subsequent years, as more people began realizing the potential profit of growing Christmas trees, smaller operations began popping up, earlier operations began to expand, and the larger operations began to realize a need for more labor. Today, there are approximately 1,400 growers in the western mountain counties of the state (NCDA, 1997). A majority of the largest Christmas tree growers participate in the H-2A Guestworker Program. However, the thirty growers who typically enroll in the program each year represent only a fraction of the total growers who hire labor.

The Problem

The H-2A Guestworker program was initially established in the early 1960s as a more progressive and regulated prescription to the farm labor supply problem than its predecessor,

the now infamous “Bracero” Program. Policy makers believed that the H-2A guestworker program would assure employers an adequate labor force while protecting the jobs and wages of U.S. workers as well as the well-being of the guestworkers. The H-2A program enables agricultural employers to legally hire nonimmigrant alien workers for seasonal jobs if domestic labor is in short supply or unavailable. However, poor adoption rates by agricultural employers and increasing numbers of undocumented workers entering the farm labor system have proven it an ineffective prescription (Papademetriou and Heppel 1999). Many agricultural employers see the H-2A program in its current form as too costly and inconvenient and demand reforms. They argue that associated costs and requirements to participate in the H-2A program are restrictive and place undue accountability and scrutiny on employers. They support changes that would speed up the process by which they can request and receive labor and reduce certain housing and wage requirements associated with the program.

On the other hand, advocacy groups and the popular media, among others, argue that the program perpetuates low wages, exploitation, and poor working and housing conditions for workers. They contend that expanding or reforming the H-2A program will exacerbate the existing problems of “unfair” working conditions for all workers (Meade 1999). They lobby for legislative changes that include amnesty for long-time undocumented farmworkers, more stringent regulation and monitoring of farm employers, and more rigorous enforcement and harsher penalties for employers who exploit farmworkers.

Any reform measures to the H-2A program will have implications for a number of participants in North Carolina’s Christmas tree industry who have their own set of perspectives, values, and strategies that they use to understand and approach the issue.

Identifying these participants and accurately mapping their perspectives will allow a broader understanding of the implications of labor reform for this industry sector and provide alternative measures to address this sensitive issue.

There is a wealth of data that has been collected by various federal agencies and non-government organizations that support the need for a reform to the Guestworker Program. The most comprehensive and available intelligence information related to farmworkers comes from the National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS) (USDOL 2000). Since 1988, the Department of Labor has conducted the NAWS to sample farmworkers each year at their work sites. A similar survey for growers would be helpful in mapping farmworker hiring trends and opinion polling to analyze the effectiveness of the program.

While much of this intelligence data is dependable and has been used by policy makers to analyze trends and opinions regarding migrant agricultural labor, it is by no means comprehensive. Data from the Employment Security Commission and Department of Labor point to the discrepancy between reported and non-reported workers that have helped proponents of reform build the case against the effectiveness of the H-2A program (Ward 1999). In North Carolina, enumeration studies on migrant workers for health organizations and church affiliated outreach groups also offer estimates of seasonal and migrant farmworkers that are used by agencies to support their cases (Larson 2000). Advocacy and farm worker groups often conduct their own surveys and use worker narratives as a creative way to communicate data to decision makers and the public. However, due to the dynamic and elusive nature of Hispanic workers in many industry sectors, this labor force is difficult to represent accurately (Griffeth and Kissam 1995).

The H-2A Guestworker Program

Historical Perspective

Between 1942 and 1964, absorption of U.S. labor by the World War II effort led to the creation of the “Bracero” Program through which Mexican citizens contracted for employment on U.S. farms as nonimmigrant guest workers (Suarez-Orozco 1998). During the later half of this period, over 400,000 foreign workers per year entered the U.S. for farm work through the traditional gateways of California, Texas, and Florida (Rothenburg and Coles 1998). Unfortunately, an effective regulatory system did not exist and farmworkers were commonly exploited and suffered through poor living and working conditions and unscrupulous employers. The 1960 television documentary “Harvest of Shame”, which chronicled the extent of farmworker exploitation in Florida, was one of many factors that led Congress to end the Bracero Program in 1964 after substantial public outcry (Ward 1999).

A high demand for labor continued, which the agriculture industry argued could not be filled by domestic workers alone. After a reevaluation and restructuring of immigration and guestworker policy, the H-2A program was introduced to replace the Bracero program in 1964 (Papademetriou and Heppel 1999). The term “H-2A” refers to the section of the Immigration and Nationality Act, Section 101(a)(15)(H)(ii)(a), which authorizes agricultural employers to legally hire nonimmigrant alien workers for seasonal jobs (Wassem and Collver 2001). The program was again reevaluated in 1986 to take into consideration the amnesty provision provided by the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA). Today, the H-2A program is the only legal temporary nonimmigrant agricultural labor program in the United States.

Policy makers believed that the H-2A program would assure agricultural employers an adequate labor force while protecting the jobs and wages of U.S. workers. However, of the 1.6 million farmworkers in the United States (Rosenbaum 2001), only around 30,000 participate in the H-2A program (Wasem and Collver 2001). A large percentage of undocumented workers make up the difference. Many feel that high numbers of undocumented workers have created a surplus of labor that subsequently keeps wages from improving in the industry. In North Carolina, over 10,000 H-2A workers are recruited annually by the North Carolina Grower's Association to participate in seasonal and temporary labor on farms throughout the state (Carlin 1999). Almost half of those recruited are contracted for work on tobacco farms. In 2003, growers in North Carolina's Christmas tree industry contracted around 500 workers under this program.

Procedural Requirements

There are a number of procedural requirements that employers must meet to employ alien labor through the H-2A program. The employer must first apply to the U.S. Department of Labor for a temporary labor certification to show that sufficient U.S. workers are not be available. The employer must also prove that they are offering terms and conditions of employment that conform to DOL requirements while not adversely affecting U.S. workers (USDA 2002). Figure 3.1 highlights the additional stipulations that employers must meet to participate in the H-2A program.

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| <p>Recruitment: The employer must engage in independent positive recruitment of U.S. workers--including newspaper and radio advertising in areas of expected labor supply.</p> <p>Housing: The employer must provide free and approved housing to all workers who are not able to return to their residences the same day.</p> <p>Transportation: The employer is responsible for transportation of workers: (1) After a worker has completed 50% of the contract period, the employer must reimburse the worker for the cost of transportation (2) The employer must provide free transportation between any required housing site and worksite for any eligible worker. (3) Upon completion of the work contract, the employer must pay return transportation or transportation to the next job.</p> <p>Meals: The employer must provide either three meals a day to each worker or furnish free and convenient cooking and facilities for workers to prepare their own meals.</p> | <p>Workers' Compensation Insurance: The employer must provide Workers' Compensation or equivalent insurance for all workers. Proof of insurance coverage must be provided.</p> <p>Tools and Supplies: The employer must furnish at no cost to the worker all tools and supplies necessary to carry out the work, unless it is common practice for the worker to provide certain items.</p> <p>Three-fourths Guarantee: The employer must guarantee to offer each worker employment for at least three-fourths of the workdays in the contract.</p> <p>Wages: The wage or rate of pay must be the same for U.S. workers and H-2A workers. The rate must also be at least as high as the applicable Adverse Effect Wage Rate (AEWR) or the applicable prevailing wage rate-- whichever is higher.</p> <p>Fifty Percent Rule: The employer must employ any qualified U.S. worker who applies for a job until fifty percent (50%) of the contract period has elapsed.</p> | <p>Labor Dispute: The employer must assure that the job opportunity for which the employer is requesting H-2A certification is not vacant due to a strike or lockout.</p> <p>Certification Fee: A fee will be charged to an employer granted temporary alien agricultural labor certification. The fee is \$100, plus \$10 for each job opportunity certified, up to a maximum fee of \$1,000 for each certification granted.</p> <p>Other Conditions: The employer must keep accurate records with respect to a worker's earnings. The worker must be provided with a complete statement of hours worked and related earnings on each payday. The employer must pay the worker at least twice monthly or more frequently if it is the prevailing practice. The employer must provide a copy of the work contract to each worker.</p> |
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Figure 3.1. Conditions for participation in the H-2A Guestworker program (USDA 2002).

The Department of Homeland Security's Immigration and Naturalization Service (formerly INS) oversees the admission of alien workers while the Department of State administers the issuance of guestworker visas (USDOL 2002). Applications must be filed with the appropriate U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), Regional Administrator (RA), Employment and Training Administration (ETA), and local office of the State Employment Service at least 45 calendar days before the first date on which workers are needed (USDA 2002).

North Carolina's Christmas Tree Industry and the H-2A Program

Workers and growers explained during personal interviews that the first migrant Hispanic workers began showing up on larger Christmas tree farms around 20 years ago. During the early 1980s, the larger Christmas tree operations had grown to the point that more labor was needed than simply immediate family or friends who could devote a few hours of time to work on the weekends. Several growers began recruiting Hispanic workers from other crops in North Carolina. After finishing the tobacco, tomato, or other summer crop harvests, workers began to filter into the mountains to help with shearing or pruning of Christmas trees in the summer, followed by the harvest in November and December. While many workers received green cards under IRCA in 1986, the majority of the workers on Christmas tree farms in the early 1980s were undocumented laborers, almost exclusively from Mexico. Several workers mentioned they had migrated into the rural western counties of North Carolina to reduce detection risks from the INS and because work was steadier and wages higher in Christmas trees than in other crops at that time.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, as Christmas tree farms grew in size and more familial networks were established among the Hispanic migrant labor population, the number of undocumented workers employed full and part-time on Christmas tree farms increased. In 1994 the Department of Labor raided several of the largest Christmas tree operations in western North Carolina for housing, hiring, and wage violations (Porter 2001). The raid occurred during the height of the harvest season and forced those growers to temporarily shut down their operations. While many of the workers on these farms were undocumented, housing and wage violations were the main focus of the raid (G4). The following year, these

Christmas tree growers were the first in North Carolina to enlist in the H-2A program, mainly to avoid further violations and disruptions to their operations during critical production times.

Although the Department of Labor fined these growers and ordered them to pay back wages for overtime work owed to workers, five of these growers filed suit against the Department of Labor with the U.S. District Court claiming they should be exempt from the overtime rule because the industry is classified as non-agricultural (Porter 2001). As of March, 2004, this suit had yet to be settled. Since the raid, the number of Christmas tree farms registered with the Department of Labor to receive H-2A workers has grown to around 30 (Eury 2002). During the 2000 season, approximately 950 workers were contracted for work on Christmas tree farms in western North Carolina. That number dropped to around 500 workers during the 2003 season—a difference possibly due to more stringent immigration enforcement following the September 11th tragedy, or more probably due to increased hiring of undocumented workers among larger growers.

The Growers

North Carolina is the second largest producer of Christmas trees behind Oregon (NCCTA 2001, Glenn 2001). The Christmas tree growers in North Carolina are some of the most vocal advocates of farm labor reform in the state. Many of the largest growers rely on the H-2A program to provide their labor throughout the year. The sounding board for these industry participants is the NCCTA whose 300 members maintain substantial political connections. Their strategy is to use their influence to apply direct legislative pressure through personal contacts with political figures or support lobbying efforts by groups such as the North Carolina Farm Bureau Federation. This group seeks to influence labor reform for

their own interests and their short and long-term objectives focus on a reliable work force for the least cost.

A former legislative advisor for the NCCTA and spouse are Christmas tree growers who harvest around 25,000 trees per year. Ten of their employees are green card workers from Mexico who work full time for 9 months out of the year. For the harvest, they bring in an additional 29 workers under the H-2A program because “there aren’t enough local people here in the mountains for the work, so we have to bring people in.” They comment that the paperwork associated with the program is “horrendous” but feel “pretty versed on what’s legal and what’s not.” They believe that the “whole system needs overhauling to make it simpler to permit workers to bring in.”

Other growers share her sentiments. Many Christmas tree growers abstain from participating in the H-2A program to reduce attention drawn to them. A grower in Avery County explains:

The big guys doing the best job on their own to follow regulations are the easiest targets. After all, it’s a matter of public record who uses the guestworker program. There’s some level of illegal hiring practices in the smaller operations. Being in H-2A is like having a target on your back...you’re always aware of the rules. You can’t plead ignorance anymore once you’re under their guidelines. That makes growers shy away from the program (G4).

Industry Classification: What are Christmas Trees?

One of the most contentious issues for Christmas tree growers is the problem associated with conflicting government assignments of both agricultural and non-agricultural status to the Christmas tree industry. This creates conflict over the industry’s wage structure. The Internal Revenue Service, the United States Department of Agriculture, and the Office of

Management and Budget's Industry Classification System consider Christmas tree production to be an agricultural industry (Gaskin 2002), which exempts employers from paying overtime wages. In addition, the Department of Labor classifies the Christmas tree industry as agricultural for the purposes of the H-2A program. However, under the Fair Labor Standards Act (also governed by the Department of Labor), Christmas tree production is considered non-agricultural, thus requiring growers to pay workers time and a half for overtime work. Because agricultural guestworkers are classified under the H-2A program, growers believe they should not be required to pay overtime. Several growers mentioned that they do not hire H-2A guestworkers because they do not want to pay overtime but they do not want to break the law by hiring H-2A workers and not paying them overtime. From the growers surveyed only 12% indicated that they paid overtime.

The Chair of Legislative and Regulatory affairs for the National Christmas Tree Association, claims that there are two reasons for this confusion in industry's classification. He notes,

First, Christmas tree production has rarely stood on its own with regards to laws, rules, and regulations as it has been classified under forestry (industrial), horticultural, or agricultural. Second is the fact that the way Christmas trees are produced has changed. Over roughly forty years, production has gone from cutting Christmas trees from the forest to farming trees on farmland using accepted farming practices (Gaskin 2001a, pp. 14-15).

In any case, many growers have strong feelings about this issue. Growers indicate that labor costs can make up to 50% of their operating expenses. During the harvest season, workers can sometimes be needed for 80 hrs of work per week for a 6 to 8 week period. Many growers feel that having to pay overtime costs is prohibitive and unfair "because all other

agricultural producers are exempt from overtime payments under the (Fair Labor Standards) act which places the Christmas tree industry at a severe economic disadvantage (Gaskin 2001a).” In December of 2001, Representative Cass Ballenger of North Carolina introduced a bill in Congress to clarify the status of Christmas tree farming as agriculture for U.S. Department of Labor classification purposes (Gaskin 2002). This bill has not been considered yet.

In addition to the overtime issue, Christmas tree growers participating in the H-2A Program are required to pay workers the higher of the prevailing pay rate or the Adverse Effect Wage Rate (AEWR) (USDOL 2002). The AEWR for each state is an hourly wage determined by the Department of Labor based on the average hourly wages of field workers determined by U.S. Department of Agriculture surveys. In North Carolina, the 2001 rate was \$7.06 per hour, increased to \$7.53 per hour in 2002, and is currently \$8.06 per hour in 2004. Christmas tree growers oppose this requirement, as do many agricultural employers in the H-2A program. They argue “in addition to the requirements to provide housing, transportation, and time and a half wages overtime, the artificial and inflated adverse effect wage rate would render the program unusable (Gaskin 2001, pp. 14).” A grower in Watauga County added that “when you factor in housing, transportation, and the fee charged by the North Carolina Growers Association, the cost to the grower is actually well over \$12.00 per hour...that translates to thousands of trees you have to cut just to afford your labor (G14).”

The Workers

In general, Christmas tree workers, like other farmworkers, are neither well organized nor well represented and have the least voice in the policy-making process for guestworker program reform. The status of H-2A guestworkers as non-immigrants means they cannot

unionize. The Department of Labor dictates all parameters and enforcement of the guestworker program. While H-2A workers have the right to make complaints, many fear being blacklisted from future participation (employment) in the program by voicing complaints about their employers or unreasonable occupational environment conditions (Gomez 2001). Several H-2A workers mentioned that when someone makes a complaint, that person is put on a special list and is likely not rehired in subsequent years. Thus, their opposition to the program is often voiced through advocacy groups via the media or litigated by the Farmworker Unit of Legal Services of North Carolina. Workers value their well-being and respect and have short and long term goals of improving their economic position. Many workers in the Christmas tree industry privately comment that the H-2A program provides an excellent opportunity to work under reasonable conditions: “there’s good bosses and bad bosses...I’ve been working for the same *patron* (employer) for 10 years...he is very fair (W5).”

One Christmas tree worker in Avery County, who entered the H-2A program five years ago said, “the advantage of the H-2A program is that you get a free place to live, set wages, no taxes, transportation, and a lot of work.” Before enlisting as an H-2A worker, he worked as an undocumented migrant. Another Avery County worker concurred:

If you’re illegal, you have to depend on the *patron*. You have to work out all the details with them. You have to trust them to pay you, give you hours, and sometimes give you transportation. As an illegal you have more freedom and flexibility—you can change jobs, work two jobs, and leave when you want to. With the H-2A program, you can only work for one boss—if you don’t like them you can’t just leave. However, there are more risks like getting deported by *la migra* (INS) or getting cheated by an employer when you’re illegal.

However, he mentioned that he knows many other workers in other crops who do not make as much money as he does in the H-2A program. He echoes what many workers and advocates describe as a disadvantage of the program:

If the work is not good, or if you're not working as many hours as you want, you can't change...actually, you can, but there's a process you have to go through and if you complain, they may take you off the hiring list for next year. They give you three strikes and then they (the NCGA) don't ask you back.

The Advocacy Effort in North Carolina

There are a number of active farmworker advocacy groups in North Carolina that operate under ideological base values; they challenge migrant labor and the H-2A program on different levels and for distinctly different reasons. While none of these groups focus their efforts exclusively on the Christmas tree industry, these groups value the well-being of workers and seek rectitude on their behalf. They contend that the H-2A program and employers, in general, perpetuate the exploitation of alien farm labor (Wasem and Collver 2001). Many advocacy organizations such as the Farm Labor Organizing Committee use the media and public rallies as platforms to bring examples of farmworker exploitation to the public's attention to push for wage reform and farmworker rights (FLOC 2000). The short-term outcomes for these groups have included education of workers of their rights and garnering public support against worker exploitation. Their long-term objectives include dismantling the guestworker program, amnesty for immigrant farmworkers, improving living and working conditions, and giving farmworkers the rights to unionize.

Media coverage also has had an impact on the Christmas tree industry. The Department of Labor raid in 1994 drew negative media attention to North Carolina growers (Porter 2001). The raid resulted in several articles in state newspapers and advocacy groups

capitalized on the coverage to bring wage exploitation of workers to public light. In December 2001, an investigative exposé of the labor situation in the Christmas tree industry appeared in a Triangle area newspaper (Cuadros 2001). Photographs and interviews with workers portrayed workers as a group exploited by profitable Christmas tree operations. While this type of media coverage has brought attention to labor issues in the Christmas tree industry, it also has made growers even more cautious and less likely to draw attention to themselves.

Legal Services' Farmworker Unit

One of the most vocal advocates for farmworker legal rights in the state is the Farmworker Unit of Legal Services of North Carolina. They are a non-profit, federally funded group of attorneys that rely on litigation against employers to raise awareness and public opinion against farmworker exploitation. Attorneys and other representatives from the Farmworker Unit often visit labor camps at night to educate workers on their legal rights. Workers can make confidential complaints and receive free representation. Farmworker Unit attorney complain that because their organization is federally funded, they cannot legally represent undocumented workers who are at greater risk of exploitation (Ward 1999). Thus, their cases can only include H-2A or other legally documented farmworkers. The Farmworker Unit lost their federal funding and was ordered to reorganize after three agency lawyers were videotaped conducting public meetings in Mexico to inform prospective farm workers of their legal rights in America and attempting to recruit workers to bring complaints against agricultural growers (Glascok 1999).

Other Participants

The North Carolina Growers Association

North Carolina boasts the highest number of H-2A workers per year in the United States primarily due to the efforts of the North Carolina Growers Association (NCGA) (Glascock 1999). The NCGA, headquartered in Vass, North Carolina brings in almost all of North Carolina's guestworkers each year. The NCGA is a private enterprise, run by a former North Carolina Employment Security Commission employee. The association serves as a labor broker for many agricultural and non-agricultural employers throughout the state. Individual growers or 'members' of the NCGA pay an annual membership fee and approximately \$500 dollars per worker contracted for work on their farms. The NCGA recruits workers in Mexico, secures their H-2 visas, provides transportation to and from Mexico, and consults growers on compliance issues. By serving as a clearinghouse, the NCGA files and maintains all paperwork and visas of workers and arranges the logistics of the growers' workforce, thus removing the logistical burden of the growers.

The North Carolina Growers Association is the entity through which a number of Christmas tree growers in the state contract their labor. About thirty Christmas tree growers are members of the NCGA and use the association to contract anywhere from 500-1000 total workers per year (Eury 2002). The NCGA also bears most of the legal, media, and legislative burden for the H-2A promotional effort. Many newspaper and other media articles have centered around the impact and influence of the NCGA in North Carolina's strong H-2A participation. The head of the NCGA claims that his organization is involved in around a dozen lawsuits each year regarding worker claims filed by a number of advocacy groups.

North Carolina Department of Labor

The H-2A program is maintained under the Department of Labor, which sets the wages and parameters for participants in the program (USDA 2002). Thus, this agency and their inspectors serve in a regulatory capacity, inspecting H-2A housing and conducting jobsite inspections and bilingual safety training with incoming H-2A workers. Innovative individuals within North Carolina's Department of Labor and other state agencies (ie., Department of Agriculture) have evolved strategies to develop more educative and less punitive ways to more effectively address and enforce labor and safety issues and regulations under the program (Luginbuhl 2001). While these collaborative strategies have fostered more trust and respect among Christmas tree industry participants, North Carolina's Department of Labor has had a limited role in the H-2A reform process. Shortfalls in funding and limited staff result in a diminished capacity to effectively regulate all growers participating in the H-2A program.

“Spin City”: Promotion in the Labor Reform Game

Organized forums and presentation of recommendations have been the most common means by which industry participants have promoted migrant labor reform initiatives. While growers' groups use their political influence to lobby at the legislative level to promote their collective points of view, advocacy and workers' groups utilize the media and other publicity campaigns to build public support against the H-2A guestworker program and other programs or practices that they deem exploitative. The North Carolina Christmas Tree Association encourages its members to write their congressional representatives to urge changing the language in the labor laws to reduce labor costs for overtime they must pay Christmas tree workers (Gaskin 2001b).

Policy makers have heard the complaints voiced by lobbyist groups such as the Farm Bureau Federation on behalf of growers and by national farmworker coalition groups such as the Farm Labor Organizing Committee on the workers' behalf. It is interesting to note that both sides have urged changes by promoting an image of victimization by the current migrant labor system. Growers claim to be victims of high labor costs and unreasonable regulatory scrutiny while advocacy groups claim H-2A guestworkers and undocumented workers are a "powerless and captive work force" (Ward 1999).

Policy makers (and often workers) are caught in the middle and left to sort out effective guidelines and functional policies from the mayhem. As each group jockeys independently for public support and policy reforms that meet their own agendas, a more collective and diplomatic approach might lead to the development of more progressive farm labor solutions that could more adequately satisfy the needs and wishes of all parties involved. The inclusion of farmworker insight is a crucial element necessary to developing effective reforms. So far, no definitive long-term outcomes have been reached. However, many feel that in the short-term, the wealth and power of the agricultural groups will dominate any decisions regarding migrant labor reform.

Trends: Macro to Micro

Labor reform efforts are ongoing in a number of different arenas. As the Bush administration and Mexico's Vicente Fox negotiated the larger scale issues of immigration reform (Economist.com 2001), the intricacies of labor policy reform in the post 9/11 atmosphere have been carried out slowly and diplomatically at the legislative level. The Department of Labor and Department of Homeland Security continue to serve the regulatory/enforcement role for the program with limited resources. Growers and advocates

continue their lobbying and promotional efforts. Until an effective farmworker labor program is developed, many growers will continue to shy away from the current program, seeking alternative labor sources, which often include an increasingly large undocumented worker pool that may not receive the same benefits or protections as those in a regulated program.

Many suggest that farm labor policies and the agencies in charge of their implementation are evolving in a more progressive and ethically responsible direction. In North Carolina, innovative approaches by regulatory agencies and other organizations as well as a more pronounced public awareness are improving the chances of achieving more equitable solutions. The North Carolina Department of Labor recently implemented “Labor One”, a mobile farmworker training office (housed in an RV) that can be requested by employers at no charge to conduct on-farm safety training sessions with workers (NCDOL 2001). During interviews, growers also mentioned that the regulatory agencies (such as the Department of Labor) are shifting to more educative and less punitive means of addressing farmworker regulation issues—especially in regards to housing and jobsite requirements.

However, although policy makers, advocates, and growers acknowledge the ineffectiveness of the current guestworker program, there has been little progress in determining how to best ameliorate the situation. Growers continue their legislative onslaught amidst the protests of advocates while increasing numbers of undocumented farmworkers continue to enter and work in the U.S.

IV. The Growers' Perspectives on Labor in North Carolina's Christmas Tree Industry

Introduction

Over the past 20 years, North Carolina's Christmas tree industry has become increasingly reliant on Hispanic labor for the cultivation and harvest of their trees. The growing Hispanic workforce in this industry reflects a nationwide trend, in which many industries increasingly rely upon Hispanic workers for bottom-level, manual labor jobs, especially in many sectors of manufacturing, forestry, and agriculture. In the Christmas tree industry most growers that have employed Hispanic workers are pleased with the productivity and work ethic of their workers. However, they identify a number of challenges. The language barrier and legal status of their work force, labor policies affecting hiring and wage laws and housing requirements, as well as cultural issues are often mentioned as obstacles for this and many other industries that employ large numbers of Hispanic workers.

Christmas tree work is still labor intensive. The majority of the manual labor force is needed for the shearing of trees, which usually takes place during the summer months, and for the month and a half to two month harvest season in November and December. However, labor also is needed and used for spraying pesticide and herbicide applications, applying fertilizer, and the initial planting of seedlings. According to survey results, labor expenses can be up to 50% of the total operational costs on many farms. Growers mention that as of yet, there is no technology available that is cost-effective to substitute for manual labor. Aerial spraying and fertilizing as well as mechanical shearing and harvesting is limited in a large part by the topographic challenges of the region including the patchy nature of these farms, small acreage, and steep terrain.

In this chapter, a brief history of the Christmas tree industry is presented based on personal interviews collected from growers. This is followed by an explanation and discussion of the predominant themes based on interviews and survey results including the shift to Hispanic labor and the dynamics of hiring, training, communication, and policy issues important to the industry. Direct quotes from a majority of the growers interviewed are used extensively throughout the chapter to illustrate predominant themes. In interviews, growers were asked to elaborate on their personal relationships and interactions with their workforce and comment on the predominant issues facing them.

Theoretical Relevance

This chapter examines factors that have contributed to the dynamics of labor and the decision-making of Christmas tree growers and elaborates on the criteria that they have used to develop and sustain the exchange with their labor force from their perspective. Several assumptions often are made about employer beliefs and decisions regarding their use of migrant workers. These assumptions are based on a body of literature and research that has been dominated by advocacy activism, investigative journalism, and public health disciplines.

Macro and micro economic trends do play a major role in how this dynamic developed and continues to function. However, while migration and social exchange literature regarding the employer and worker relationship approaches the dynamic of industry participants through a cost-benefit lens, this approach often ignores important policy, attitudinal, and socio-psychological factors that also play a role in participant interaction and exchange. A phenomenological approach grounded in social exchange theory was implemented to gather attitudinal beliefs, extract themes, and answer questions about the

perceptions of these industry participants to analyze the decision-making processes that govern the interaction of growers with their predominantly Hispanic workforce. This research also challenges traditional notions of the employer/migrant worker dynamic and illustrates the need for more objective appraisal and empirical study of the factors that influence employer and migrant worker relationships.

The Christmas tree industry ranks second behind Oregon in Christmas tree production nationwide. Survey results show that Hispanic workers make up around 80% of the total workforce employed by Christmas tree growers in the western counties where Fraser fir (*Abies fraserii*) is the most popular species grown. Table 4.1 provides industry and survey sample characteristics.

Table 4.1. Industry and survey sample characteristics.

| | Hiring growers* | (Major growers)** | Non-Hiring growers*** |
|--|------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| Total Growers Surveyed | 131 | 19 | 54 |
| Avg years growing Christmas trees for commercial sale | 20 | 24 | 15 |
| Total Workers Hired in 2001 | 1819 | 815 | * |
| # of Hispanic Workers | 1446 | 703 | * |
| Avg. # Trees Harvested 2001 | 10,561 | 49,157 | 862 |
| Median Trees Harvested 2001 | 1,200 | 35,000 | 200 |
| Avg. Labor Costs (%) | 33% | 45% | 7% |
| Avg. % of household income from 2001 Christmas trees | 42% | 76% | 5% |
| Full time Christmas tree grower | 61 | 16 | 5 |
| Part time Christmas tree grower | 65 | 3 | 46 |
| Member of National Christmas tree Association | 44 | 14 | 2 |
| Member of North Carolina Christmas tree Association | 70 | 16 | 11 |
| Member of county growers association | 95 | 17 | 22 |
| Average Age | 53 | 53 | 57 |

*Growers who indicated they hired labor in 2001.

**Major growers (growers who indicated they harvested more than 25,000 trees in 2001) included in total hiring growers.

***Growers who indicated they did not hire labor in 2001.

Shift to Hispanic Labor

Growers and extension agents in the area relate that the hiring of additional labor becomes necessary once production reaches 5 to 10 acres under cultivation. While family members, local help, and area high school and college students initially made up for additional labor needs, the labor deficit began being filled by Hispanics in the late 1980s and early 1990s. One grower from Avery County explained:

I was one of the first to hire Hispanic labor in the region...back in, I think, 1984. A guy came to the farm and asked me if I had any work. I didn't at the time, but the guy came back two weeks later and I put him to work...I was amazed at how hard he worked. The next year, the guy brought several relatives with him and that's how I eventually started hiring Mexicans on a regular basis (G1).

For the Christmas tree growers surveyed by mail, a majority began hiring labor for the first time in the mid 1980's. Survey respondents indicated that they began hiring Hispanic workers for the first time in the early 1990's. Based on survey responses, 64% of growers now hire Hispanic workers who make up approximately 80% of the labor force in the industry.

Grower Theme: Lack of available and reliable local labor source forced growers to seek another source of labor.

Ninety three percent of survey respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they began hiring Hispanic labor because local labor became less available and/or reliable. Based on interviews and results from the mail survey, the first Hispanic labor began appearing on the larger operations in the early 1980s. The majority of these workers were migrant workers whom Christmas tree growers recruited from fellow growers of crops such as fruit trees, tomatoes, and tobacco and other seasonal crops in the region. Some growers mentioned recruiting labor from Employment Security Commission offices where workers had come seeking employment after the tomato harvest. Many of the growers interviewed also relate that more desirable local jobs supporting the tourism and service industries in the region had begun to deplete the already tenuous available local labor force. Ninety percent of the survey respondents agreed that they hired Hispanics because they were more available (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2. Frequency of common decisions for hiring Hispanic labor.

| Why did you begin hiring Hispanic labor? | *SA/A | *D/SD | Don't Know |
|---|--------------|--------------|-------------------|
| Could not find local labor (n=108) | 91% | 7% | 2% |
| Local labor less available/reliable (n=107) | 93% | 5% | 2% |
| Hispanic workers more readily available (n=105) | 90% | 10% | 1% |
| Hispanic labor less expensive (n=105) | 34% | 61% | 5% |
| Hispanic labor more productive (n=106) | 80% | 14% | 6% |
| Other farmers were using Hispanics, so I decided to (n=103) | 68% | 28% | 4% |

*Strongly agree or agree, disagree or strongly disagree

**12 respondents indicated that they have not hired Hispanic labor.

The following interview excerpts illustrate growers' perspectives regarding the factors that contributed to a shift from local labor and greater reliance on Hispanics:

More jobs in the area were becoming available. Local labor began shifting to the tourist and service industries in the region. More hotels, resorts, restaurants, etc. began popping up in the area. These jobs are less physical. College kids would rather work in-town and inside rather than outside in the elements (G5).

Reliable local labor began buying their own land and starting their own tree farms or staying on with one farm permanently as a crew leader (G8).

The available local labor pool for Christmas tree work was small to begin with. Then you had more farms that sprang up that needed labor. The first tree growers were also getting bigger and needed more labor (G2).

The local labor up here is low quality, unreliable, and sporadic. Those of us who initially hired Mexicans were impressed by their work ethic and reliability and started hiring all-Mexican crews (G17).

Longer-term employment also became available for work on Christmas tree farms as farms grew in size. Managing Christmas trees requires some amount of labor throughout the year. This helped attract a full-time migrant labor force looking for steady work. As more workers were hired into the industry, word spread among family networks in the Mexican worker population leading to a further influx of Mexican workers. After the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) in 1986 granted a large group of agricultural workers permanent resident status, a pool of workers became available for more full-time work. One of the largest Christmas tree growers relates:

In the mid-eighties, I noticed the first Hispanics showing up. We hired two guys that had been working in apples that I met through connections with the apple grower. I hired them because we needed additional help...it was harder to find local labor. Whenever we needed additional help, we went to the Employment Security Commission to get local workers who would show up late and were unreliable. We hired the Mexicans out of necessity. We had to make contacts and actively recruit them because there were only a few here that we knew of in the area...They'd bring their brothers and cousins to come work with them. We'd ask them if they knew anyone else who wanted work, and next season a few more of them would show up. It seemed like they all knew each other from somewhere or were family (G9).

Many growers feel that the influx of Hispanic labor has permitted the industry to grow as large as it has and suggest that the "industry would dry up if it weren't for the Mexicans" (G9, G2, G4). However, it appears that, initially, growers were expanding their operations anyway due to increasing demand and market stability for their Christmas trees. They went to the first and best available labor source they could find, Hispanic workers from other crops. This process affected migration and migration decisions of workers as well

(Chapter 5). Once word spread among the Mexican worker community that there was longer-term work available in Christmas trees, more workers began migrating to the area to seek employment in the industry. Survey results show that a majority of growers now feel dependent on the Hispanic labor force (Table 4.3).

Table 4.3. Survey responses regarding importance of Hispanic labor among hiring growers.

| | Very important/Important | Somewhat Important | Not really important | Don't use Hispanic labor |
|---|---------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| How important do you feel that Hispanic labor is for your operation? (n=126) | 69% | 13% | 8% | 9% |

Table 4.4 shows that while many growers mentioned that they would consider investing in new technology that requires less labor if Hispanic workers were no longer available, a majority of growers indicate that they would scale down their operations.

Table 4.4. Frequencies for consideration of alternatives to Hispanic labor.

| If for some reason Hispanic labor were no longer available, to what extent would you consider the following options? | Would consider | Might consider | Would not consider |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| I would offer higher wages to attract reliable local labor (n=102) | 20% | 54% | 26% |
| I would invest in new technology or equipment that requires less labor (n=99) | 41% | 40% | 18% |
| I would scale down my operation (n=108) | 57% | 26% | 17% |
| I would try and do all the work myself (n=102) | 33% | 22% | 45% |

*Four growers mentioned that they would sell out or quit Christmas tree farming altogether if Hispanic labor were no longer available.

Today, unemployment rates remain relatively low for the rural counties in which the majority of North Carolina Christmas tree farms are located. The surveyed counties have an average unemployment rate of 5%, ranging from 7.9% in Mitchell County to 2.1% in Watauga County, as of November 2003 (North Carolina Employment Security Commission, 2003). This can explain, in part, the shortage of an available local manual labor force for the Christmas tree industry and why the industry began recruiting and continues to rely on Hispanics for labor.

Grower Theme: Hispanic workers are more reliable and have a better work ethic.

Every interviewed grower and the majority of survey respondents shared that they value the reliability and work ethic of their Hispanic workers. Eighty percent of surveyed growers felt that Hispanic labor is more productive than local labor. This perception is commonly recognized in migrant workers and is a belief shared by employers and managers in other industries as well (Leiter 2001). Growers commonly mentioned that their Hispanic workers generally showed up on time, worked hard, did not complain, and did a good job. They also felt that many workers are interested in working as many hours as possible:

You have to find them work to keep them busy or they'll find something else—another job. Sometimes when there isn't really any work in the field to do, we find them odd jobs to do to keep them busy...to give them hours. If they aren't working full time, they start looking for another place to work. They want to make as much money as possible. Some will leave if you don't have 60 hrs to give'em! (G11)

Mexican people are hard working and will work longer and harder than any white man. They have stronger family values and are very loyal and proud (G2)

A crew of Mexicans will work steady and work hard. I used to have a crew of white guys who were always late, didn't work as hard, and didn't do as good of a job. They're (the Mexicans) here to work, here to make money. They're easy to work with and they try to do a good job. They're more willing to do a good job. Have a better work ethic. Mexicans grew up doing manual labor. They're used to it (G18).

They want to work. They give you their best day of work every day (G12).

This attitude among employers in the Christmas tree industry towards Hispanic workers has influenced their hiring decisions and in many cases, biased them towards hiring Hispanics over local labor. Experiences with hiring locals referred by the Employment Security Commission were generally negative. All growers agreed that local labor referred by the ESC was generally unreliable and far less productive than Hispanics. Gabbard and Perloff's (1997) study of agricultural employers found that employers are 21 percent more likely to rehire a foreign-born worker due to their "work ethic" or perceived greater productivity compared to local workers.

Recruitment and Hiring

Turnover rates in agricultural employment are traditionally high due to the nature of the work as well as employer and employee decisions. Based on case studies from the *Report of the Commission on Agricultural Workers* (Kissam and Garcia 1993), worker turnover is greater than 50% in Michigan and greater than 25% in Washington (Gabbard and Perloff 1997). Christmas tree growers reported a 65% turnover rate among their workforce from the previous year. Among the 19 major growers surveyed, a 70% turnover rate was reported.

Such high turnover rates have led growers to implement a number of strategies to recruit workers.

Grower theme: Hiring and recruiting strategies are based on individual grower needs and risk assessment of worker availability during critical production and regulatory concerns

The complexity of the recruiting and hiring of workers in the Christmas tree industry is a theme unto itself. Workers are recruited and hired throughout the year in a number of ways, for different amounts of time, for different tasks, and for different wages. While many of the major Christmas tree growers (growers who harvest 25,000 or more trees per year) have shifted to participating in the guestworker program to secure a legal and reliable workforce during peak and critical production and harvest times, they and medium to small-scale growers also employ a wide array of other strategies to meet the labor needs for their farms.

Table 4.5 illustrates survey responses regarding the frequency of particular hiring practices. While 57% of growers indicate that they always or often recruit and hire their own workers, other practices also are used. The Employment Security Commission, labor contractors, the H-2A guestworker program, and posting local jobs are the least utilized hiring mechanisms. Relying on current workers to recruit new workers was indicated as the second most utilized strategy for obtaining labor. In interviews, growers elaborated that they rely on the familial and acquaintance networks among Hispanic workers to “get the word out” when work is available on their farms. Often, longer-term Hispanic employees on individual farms serve as ad hoc *coyotes* who make arrangements to bring family members or acquaintances from Mexico or from other areas in the U.S. to work on farms. Growers

indicated that while they sometimes hire “drive-ups” who show up on their farms and ask for work, that they feel more comfortable hiring someone when a current employee knows personally.

Survey results and grower interviews also indicate that “borrowing” from other growers is a common practice in the recruitment and hiring of workers. While an unauthorized practice for participants in the H-2A program, larger growers with H-2A workers will sometimes permit their workers to work on other farms requiring labor. Under the H-2A guidelines, guestworkers can only work on H-2A authorized farms. These guidelines are in place to protect guestworkers from working under unapproved conditions. This practice typically occurs during slow work periods, or when certain tasks have been completed. H-2A growers are required to provide at least a 30-hour workweek to guestworkers. If there is not enough available work on the particular farm, H-2A growers will “lend” these workers to colleagues in need of labor for certain amounts of time. Thus, the grower who “borrows” these workers pays their wages. Growers feel that this allows workers to earn wages that they otherwise would not if they were not working a 40-hour workweek. This practice also occurs with non H-2A growers who employ crews. Often, there is an informal network among growers who rotate crews of workers to meet labor demands on their individual farms.

Table 4.5. Frequency of common recruiting strategies among hiring growers.

| How frequently do you use the following ways to get labor for your Christmas tree operation? | Always/Often | Sometimes | Rarely/Never |
|---|---------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| Recruit and hire my own workers (n=118) | 58% | 17% | 25% |
| Through an American contractor (n=109) | 11% | 8% | 81% |
| Through a Mexican labor contractor (n=109) | 13% | 17% | 71% |
| I 'borrow' workers from other growers when I need work done (n=114) | 27% | 31% | 42% |
| Participate in the H-2A program (n=108) | 14% | 6% | 81% |
| By contacting the Employment Security Commission (n=108) | 9% | 16% | 75% |
| I hire workers who drive up and ask for work (n=111) | 12% | 36% | 52% |
| I have workers who bring in other workers when I need them (n=111) | 35% | 33% | 32% |
| I post job openings locally (n=109) | 6% | 7% | 87% |

The production and harvest schedule for Fraser fir dictates the employment schedule for most growers. Generally, planting and fertilizing occur in late winter to early spring, shearing and pesticide/herbicide applications from early summer to fall, and harvesting trees beginning the first week of November through the second week of December. Table 4.6 illustrates differences in labor needs in the industry based on the cultivation and harvest schedule. Many growers with larger operations maintain a full-time workforce almost year-round to meet their labor needs while smaller-scale growers rely on a seasonal or part-time workforce for some tasks. Both major and small-scale growers indicated a need to hire additional labor for the harvest, which is the most time-critical production activity of the year.

Table 4.6. Breakdown of seasonal hires and frequency of Hispanic workers hired.

| | Total | #Hispanic | %Hispanic | Avg. Days Hired |
|---|--------------|------------------|------------------|------------------------|
| # of workers hired in 2001 (n=185) | 1,819 | 1,446 | 79% | * |
| <i>Major growers (n=19)</i> | 815 | 703 | 86% | * |
| Full-Time Workers | 452 | 379 | 84% | * |
| <i>Major growers</i> | 276 | 211 | 76% | * |
| Seasonal Workers | 683 | 608 | 89% | 46 |
| <i>Major growers</i> | 175 | 166 | 95% | 91 |
| Harvest Workers | 977 | 840 | 86% | 19 |
| <i>Major growers</i> | 447 | 425 | 95% | 27 |

Shearing and harvesting were the tasks that growers most frequently hire Hispanic labor for (Table 4.7). These are also the most labor-intensive tasks in the management of Christmas trees. Growers also mentioned that they employ a large number of migrant workers who come to the area just for the harvest due to the demand for labor during this time of year and the number of hours that an individual can work. While few growers mention that they pay overtime, they relate that 80-hour weeks are not uncommon during the harvest season.

Table 4.7. Frequency of positions recruited for.

| How often do you hire Hispanic labor for the following tasks? | Always/Often | Sometimes | Rarely/Never |
|---|--------------|-----------|--------------|
| As crew leaders (n=105) | 20% | 24% | 56% |
| For planting/setting seedlings (n=110) | 63% | 15% | 22% |
| For fertilizing (n=111) | 63% | 18% | 19% |
| For shearing (n=112) | 76% | 11% | 13% |
| For spraying (pesticides and/or herbicides) (n=111) | 60% | 15% | 24% |
| For harvesting (n=106) | 78% | 7% | 15% |
| For garland/wreathmaking (n=105) | 28% | 16% | 56% |

*13 growers indicated that they have not hired Hispanic workers.

Wages

Grower theme: wage determination is based on the individual grower, supply and demand, familiarity with the individual worker, or source of labor (use of contractor/participation in H-2A program).

The wages that are determined and paid to workers depend on a number of variables including: the individual grower, the relationship between the grower and worker, the worker's tenure in the industry, whether the grower uses a labor contractor, etc. Table 4.8 provides the frequency of what growers use to determine what they pay their workers. Based on interviews, although a majority (52%) of growers indicate that they negotiate wages with the individual worker considered for hire, wages paid to farmworkers fell within a range from just above minimum wage up to \$15.00 per hour. While this research did not empirically analyze wage rates among employers, growers and extension agents suggested that part-time, seasonal workers earn an average of \$8 per hour for tasks such as shearing and

harvesting. Crew leaders or full time workers with several years of experience in the industry could earn \$12 to \$15 per hour.

The use of labor contractors was less than reported contractor use of Hispanic employees in Alabama’s tree planting industry (McDaniel and Casanova 2003). In interviews, growers indicated mixed experiences with labor contractors. While some growers mentioned using labor contractors frequently due to high quality of work and relationship with the individual growers, several growers mentioned that they had had poor experiences with labor contractors who, they felt, exploited the workers under their employ.

Table 4.8. Frequency of common wage determination practices.

| How often do you use the following ways to determine what you pay your workers? | Always/Often | Sometimes | Rarely/Never |
|--|---------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| I pay minimum wage with overtime (n=93) | 8% | 4% | 88% |
| I pay minimum wage with no overtime (n=95) | 2% | 4% | 93% |
| I negotiate the wage with the individual worker (n=106) | 52% | 19% | 29% |
| I offer to pay what other growers say they pay their workers (n=101) | 28% | 25% | 48% |
| I use a contractor—I don’t pay workers directly (n=105) | 26% | 26% | 59% |
| I am in the H-2A program and am required to pay the set wage (n=102) | 16% | 3% | 81% |
| I pay some more than others depending on the job or how well I know them (n=100) | 28% | 32% | 40% |

While growers interviewed mention that turnover among their workforce is relatively high, especially among their undocumented worker population, survey respondents indicated that 35% of the same Hispanic workers returned to their farms from the previous year.

Survey responses from the 19 major growers surveyed indicated only 30% of their Hispanic

workforce returned to their farms in 2001 from the previous year. Among major growers who use H-2A workers, the high turnover rate can be attributed to the assignment of return workers to different farms through the North Carolina Growers Association (NCGA). Turnover rates among smaller operations with non-H-2A workers might be attributed to workers' decisions to seek other types of employment in the same area or working with different growers for short term periods during different years.

Availability and productivity rank the highest among the concerns that growers have about their work force, while workers' legal status and ability to communicate effectively ranked the lowest (Table 4.9). In interviews, larger scale or major growers indicated that the workers' legal status is especially a concern because they have a more visible workforce and maintain a production level that demands a steady workforce with less risk of turnover during critical production times (G11, G2, G18). However, because most major growers now participate in the H-2A program, legal status was not indicated as an issue of major concern. Smaller scale growers who use labor only for limited times during the production season are less concerned about the legal status of their workers.

Table 4.9. Level of concern regarding common workforce related issues.

| Please indicate your level of concern regarding the following aspects of your labor force | Very Concerned/Concerned | Somewhat Concerned | Not Concerned |
|--|---------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|
| How much I'm required to pay them (n=115) | 50% | 30% | 20% |
| Legal status (n=115) | 52% | 27% | 21% |
| If they're going to be available when I need them (n=119) | 76% | 18% | 6% |
| If they're good workers (n=116) | 71% | 21% | 9% |
| Being able to effectively communicate with them (n=117) | 53% | 29% | 18% |

Training

Most growers indicate that they employ workers who have had some prior experience working on Christmas tree farms. Seventy-two percent of survey respondents also indicated that they train workers in the field through demonstration and/or rely on the worker who speaks the best English to translate instructions to the rest of the crew (55%). Table 4.10 describes the frequency of practices that growers use to train their workforce.

Grower Theme: Level of training provided to workers depends on the needs and technical capacity and knowledge of the growers.

Table 4.10. Frequency of common training practices for industry’s farmworkers.

| How is job training for workers carried out at your farm | (n=122) |
|---|----------------|
| I use workers who already have experience working on tree farms | 74% |
| I train the workers by taking them to the field and showing them what to do | 72% |
| I use a labor contractor and therefore do not train workers directly | 17% |
| The worker who speaks the best English translates what I say to the rest of the workers | 56% |
| I have a local crew leader who trains the workers | 6% |
| I have a Mexican crew leader who trains the workers | 27% |
| Other: uses video for certain training (ie., pesticide safety) | 2% |
| Other: relies on North Carolina Growers Association for training | 2% |

Training varies greatly among growers but typically entails a “hands-on” or “hands-off” approach depending on the size of the operation and the immediate involvement that the grower has throughout the cultivation and management of their trees. Both workers and growers mention that the work involved in Christmas tree farming is not difficult and does

not take much time to learn how to do. Training of workers takes on a number of forms at different levels.

For training NOT including pesticide/herbicide application:

- Grower or the grower's crew leader gives hands-on demonstrations to new workers in the field; how to shear, how to harvest, etc. (hands-on). (G3, G7, G10)
- Growers use contractors who train their own workers (hands-off). (G19, G6, G5)
- Growers have a Hispanic crew leader who has previous experience in the industry and knows how to do the job. This person conducts all training of new workers (hands-off, for the grower) (G4, G12)
- For groups of new workers, the Hispanic worker who speaks the best English translates to the other workers what the grower wants done while the grower is present (hands-on) (G1, G7, G20, G10)
- Workers who have done the job before show the other workers in the field how to do the job (hands-on) (G11, G16, EA1)
- Workers with better English skills receive verbal instructions from grower (hands-off) (G5, G11, G14)

A major grower from Avery County illustrates the strategy used for training for his operation:

For training, we let the repeat workers train new workers. We pair them up to work together until they get the hang of it. Before, we had a Mexican contractor who would translate what we wanted done. Now we have a local foreman. About 3 of our workers speak English. He relates directions to them, and lets them train each other (G11).

Pesticide Training

Grower theme: While growers feel that pesticide education and safety practices are sufficient, previous study data indicate that most workers receive little or ineffectual training.

While pesticide exposure issues were not a focus of this study, I did ask growers in interviews to explain the ways in which workers are trained for pesticide application. There is extensive documentation of farmworker exposure to pesticides and associated health effects in the agricultural and occupational health body of literature. Many reviews of occupational health issues address pesticide exposure and the need for more effective pesticide education implementation (Wilk 1986; Villarejo and Baron 1999; Von Essen and McCurdy 1998). The EPA mandated Worker Protection Standard (WPS) requires that all farmworkers receive basic pesticide safety training.

In North Carolina, a 1999 study by Arcury et al. of 270 Hispanic farmworkers on 35 sites in 8 counties, found that only 35% of these workers reported ever receiving information or training on pesticide safety while 24% reported training during the current season or year. The survey also found that approximately half of the workers indicated that they had no source of information about pesticides on the farms despite training and fewer than 4% could name any chemical around which they had worked. In another recent survey of agricultural and residential pesticides in farmworker family residences in western North Carolina and Virginia, at least one of the pesticides regularly used in the Christmas tree industry including disulfoton, esfenvalerate, lindane, oxyflourfen and simazine was detected in floor wipes in 71% of residences sampled (Quandt et al. 2003). A 2001 study by Elmore and Arcury on exposure beliefs among workers in the Christmas tree industry found that among the 20 study participants, all knew how to reduce pesticide exposure while some had received training

from the grower they worked for, and some had not. Attempts have been made over the years to improve the training and certification of workers; however, several studies indicate that training is still inadequate or ineffectual (Larson 2000, Perry and Difonzo 1998, Columbia Legal Services 1998, Davis and Schleifer 1998, Mines et al. 2001).

In interviews, growers mentioned a number of ways that pesticide/herbicide application training was typically carried out:

- Workers receive safety video and instruction at the North Carolina Growers Association upon their arrival in North Carolina (for H-2A workers) (G4)
- Workers receive training from certified applicators on-site who are either the grower themselves, the labor contractor, or someone else on the farm holding the pesticide applicator permit (G8, EA1)
- The grower instructs/demonstrates to workers how to mix and spray, use equipment, etc. (G15)
- Workers train other workers in the field (G2)

Interview participants indicated that one restricted-use pesticide is applied by large numbers of workers. Growers who were interviewed mentioned that they hire workers to apply Di-Syston, a granular pesticide, traditionally applied with a spoon and bucket, during late spring to combat the ‘twig-aphid’ for harvest year trees. For more specialized insecticide spraying, with high-pressure sprayers, growers mentioned that very few workers participate in this type of application and that “guys who do more specialized spraying get more training on site (G6).” Several smaller-scale growers mentioned that they prefer to apply pesticides

themselves because they “know more about what needs to be done” (G10, G18). Herbicide treatments with Round-up, a non-restricted herbicide, are also applied by large numbers of workers on the majority of farms during the summer months to eliminate weed competition. Again, training for this type of work is conducted on-site and varies, depending on the growers’ needs and technical capacity.

Communication and the Language Barrier

Grower Theme: The language barrier is a frustrating disadvantage with the workforce, especially in explaining details, but a number of strategies are implemented to manage it.

Communication issues between growers and their predominantly Spanish-speaking labor force were consistently mentioned as a disadvantage of the Hispanic workforce in interviews with the growers. Very few growers have effective language skills in Spanish, while a majority of the workforce, especially recent immigrants, lack effective English skills (Tables 4.11 and 4.12). Only eight growers responded that they feel comfortable or fluent in Spanish, while half of the growers surveyed indicated that none or few of their workers spoke English well enough to communicate. Survey results indicate that 42% of growers feel there is always or often a language barrier (Table 4.13). While 44% of growers surveyed indicate that they know a few work related commands, in interviews, growers mentioned frustrations in communicating details of specific tasks and provided examples of work done improperly due to a mutual lack of understanding between themselves and their work force.

Table 4.11. Frequency of Spanish language skill level among growers.

| Which of the following best describes your ability to speak Spanish? (n=120) | # | % |
|---|----------|----------|
| I don't speak Spanish | 43 | 36% |
| I know how to say a few work-related words/phrases in Spanish | 53 | 44% |
| I can handle very basic conversation in Spanish | 16 | 13% |
| I feel comfortable conversing in Spanish | 7 | 6% |
| I am fluent in Spanish | 1 | .8% |

Table 4.12. Frequency of English skilled Hispanic employees.

| | Few/None | Some | Most/All |
|--|-----------------|-------------|-----------------|
| How many of your Hispanic workers speak English well enough that you can regularly communicate with them? (n=111) | 50% | 40% | 10% |

The following interview responses illustrate these frustrations:

The language barrier is a concern, very difficult to communicate. I have to go out and show new workers who don't speak ANY English how to do the work...I have taken Spanish classes to learn some phrases, but it's difficult to continue to take classes. I'm too old to learn a lot and I have to take them in the evenings when I'm exhausted (G3).

Language is a barrier. There's always someone in the group that at least understands what you're saying. They may not speak very good English, but they get what you're saying and explain it to the group. I do most of my training through demonstration and a couple of words 'Do it this way, *bueno*. Don't do it this way *malo*' (G8).

To explain exactly what you want, it's difficult. I would be interested in info on Spanish work phrases. I use the internet sometimes and the extension office for information (G13).

For the basic work, we can get by, but the language barrier for pesticide training can be difficult, because there are important points that need to be addressed for proper use and safety of pesticides. It depends on the individual worker's ability to understand as well as the person giving the instruction (EA1).

Some growers have remedied the communication issue by hiring Spanish-speaking locals or relying on English-speaking Hispanics to communicate their needs to the rest of the workforce. Labor contractors with bilingual crew leaders also are used occasionally by some growers to bypass communication difficulties. Survey results revealed that while the language barrier sometimes affects worker productivity, it rarely affects worker safety (Table 4.13). However, growers' survey responses and interviews indicated the language barrier as one of the major disadvantages of their Hispanic workforce. Giving specific details for certain tasks and explaining directions were repeatedly mentioned during in-person interviews. Shearing was the work-related activity that growers indicated as the most difficult to explain:

I like my trees sheared and topped a little different than a lot of growers who these guys have worked for. I don't like 'em sheared as heavy, so when new guys come in who don't speak English, they usually butcher a bunch of trees before they understand what I'm talking about. I just don't know enough Spanish to tell them how exactly I want it done...how to tell them not to shear a harvest-year tree as much as a younger one (G19).

Survey results indicate that 18% of growers find the language barrier always or often difficult with shearing and other tasks such as equipment operation (19%) and giving instruction for pesticide application (15%). It is interesting to note that 20% of the growers surveyed indicate that the language barrier is difficult always or often in non-work related

situations. Hiring and harvesting details were indicated as the least difficult to communicate, as interviewed growers suggested that these activities are more easily explained with basic language, demonstration and gestures, and negotiation—“sometimes with a pen and paper to offer wages (G12).”

Table 4.13. Perceived impacts of language barrier on aspects of labor.

| | Always/Often | Sometimes | Rarely/Never |
|---|---------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| Do you feel there is a language barrier between you and your Hispanic workforce (n=113) | 42% | 35% | 23% |
| Do you feel that the language barrier affects worker productivity (n=111) | 13% | 32% | 55% |
| Do you feel work is done incorrectly due to the language barrier (n=111) | 7% | 36% | 57% |
| Do you feel that language barrier affects worker safety (n=110) | 5% | 17% | 78% |

Table 4.14. Perceived impacts of language barrier on common work-related tasks.

| How often is the language barrier difficult in the following situations? | Always/Often | Sometimes | Rarely/Never |
|--|---------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| During the hiring process (n=110) | 11% | 33% | 56% |
| Discussing daily job duties/activities (n=110) | 16% | 35% | 49% |
| Giving instructions for shearing, planting, or setting (n=111) | 18% | 35% | 47% |
| Giving instructions for pesticide/herbicide handling, mixing or spraying (n=105) | 15% | 25% | 60% |
| Giving instructions for harvesting (n=106) | 9% | 29% | 61% |
| Giving instruction for equipment operation (n=108) | 19% | 29% | 53% |
| In non-work related situations (n=108) | 20% | 35% | 44% |

*Other situations mentioned by growers include new workers with no English skills and Hispanics having problems with understanding ‘mountain English.’

Grower theme: English-speaking workers who have been in the United States for a longer period of time can be perceived to be ‘troublemakers.’

While a majority of growers value English-speaking members of their workforce for translating and leading fellow non-English speaking workers, several growers mentioned that workers who understand and speak English well could sometimes be ‘troublemakers’ among the workforce. They also believed that recent immigrants with little to no English skills were the most productive and ‘cause the least trouble.’ When asked to elaborate on this perception, one grower suggested, “They’ve been here long enough to figure out how to manipulate the system” (G13). Several growers mentioned that some workers downplay their knowledge of English to avoid responsibility. Another grower added:

The one that speaks English is gonna be the one who talks the others into renegotiating their wages and they’re always the spokesman for the group. He’ll do all the talking while the other ones stare at the ground with their arms crossed. I usually won’t hire them (English-speakers) anymore (G7).

This difference in perceived value of English-speaking workers is related to individual instances and could reflect cultural misinterpretations. In the following chapter, workers relate that while English skills are valued, machismo or other cultural factors could play a role in the grower’s perception that a worker is ‘sneaky’ because they portray a lack of English.

Legal Status and Policy Issues

Grower theme: while there are many policy-related issues related to the Hispanic work force, few growers know many details about these policies and associated regulatory mechanisms.

There are a number of policy issues that directly or indirectly affect Christmas tree growers and their decisions related to their Hispanic workforce. While many of these policy issues are more fully discussed in Chapter 5, grower perceptions of these policies are elaborated here. Survey data concludes that growers who hire workers are most concerned about occupational safety and pesticide safety regulations and wage and hiring laws and policies (Table 4.15).

Table 4.15. Frequency of concern related to common migrant labor policy issues.

| If you are familiar with laws and requirements regarding labor, please indicate your level of concern regarding the following government policies | Very concerned | | Concerned | | Somewhat concerned | | Not concerned | |
|---|----------------|------------|---------------|------------|--------------------|------------|---------------|------------|
| | Hiring grower | Non-hiring | Hiring grower | Non-hiring | Hiring grower | Non-hiring | Hiring grower | Non-hiring |
| Hiring and wage policies (hg n=104; nhg n=22) | 21% | 4% | 48% | 32% | 21% | 41% | 11% | 23% |
| Migrant housing policies (hg n=99; nhg n=22) | 16% | 0% | 34% | 50% | 21% | 21% | 28% | 41% |
| Occupational safety/Pesticide safety policies (hg n=102; nhg n=22) | 27% | 18% | 41% | 45% | 22% | 23% | 10% | 14% |

While interview and survey questions did not focus on the legal status of the Christmas tree industry workforce, interview participants felt comfortable discussing this issue and detailing their perspectives and concerns. It is not surprising that growers agreed that a large percentage of the workforce in the Christmas tree industry is undocumented. Due to the dynamic nature of the agricultural workforce, there are few data available by which to

determine the exact number of legal and undocumented workers in the industry. Growers contracted approximately 600 H-2A guestworkers per year from 2001 to 2003 through the North Carolina Growers Association (Stan Eury 2002). While there are workers still employed in the industry who were granted green card status in 1986 under IRCA, the remainder of the workforce composition consists of undocumented migrants and/or residents.

Hiring, wage, and housing issues were the predominant policy related themes that emerged in interviews with growers. However, interview respondents and survey results show that a large number of Christmas tree growers have limited knowledge regarding the legal and policy requirements of their workforce (Table 4.16).

Table 4.16. Familiarity among growers regarding legal requirements for migrant labor hiring and training.

| How familiar are you with laws and requirements for hiring and training of migrant labor? | Very familiar | Somewhat familiar | Not very familiar | Know nothing about requirements |
|--|----------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| Hiring Growers (n=125) | 22% | 51% | 18% | 10% |
| Non-hiring growers (n=52) | 4% | 25% | 37% | 35% |

Hiring Issues

When workers are hired, employers are required to file W4, NC4, and I9 forms and provide workman’s compensation insurance. Workers are required to provide a social security number. Many growers mentioned that undocumented workers often provide false documentation. However, employers cannot legally refuse a worker’s credentials because they think they might be false. Many of them either hire the worker and pay them in cash without taking out taxes, or file the required forms with social security numbers that the worker provides. If the worker’s social security number does not match, the Social Security

Administration eventually contacts the employer to advise them of the discrepancy—usually several months after the worker has been hired. One grower elaborated:

In the meantime, I've been paying taxes and social security. If he's still around, (many times the worker has 'moved on'), I ask him to bring me "real documents." At that point, he either disappears or returns with more false documents and the process repeats itself (G12).

Growers indicate that they feel that they shoulder an unfair burden in accountability. Several growers mentioned that the Social Security Administration often follows up several times with them and threatens them with improper filing. To avoid the whole issue, many growers will often simply pay workers in cash. Growers also noted that many workers only would accept cash and require no taxes be taken out. One grower mentioned a colleague who normally withdrew \$30,000 in cash per year to pay his labor to avoid confrontations with the Social Security Administration altogether.

Regulation, Enforcement, and Advocacy Scrutiny

Grower theme: Regulatory and advocacy scrutiny is punitive, excessive, and vilifies growers.

Because growers who use H-2A workers are registered with the Department of Labor and with the NCGA, they feel that they receive more official and unofficial scrutiny by worker advocates and the media. Participants in the H-2A program are required to provide housing for their workers and are subject to housing requirements and inspections. Housing inspections take place before workers arrive and periodically through the season depending on the inspector (Luginbuhl 2002).

Larger growers who participate in the guestworker program feel that it is critical for the success of their operations to have a reliable labor supply. They believe that the only way

to do that is through the H-2A program, which they feel makes them the easiest targets for scrutiny while the smaller scale growers who typically hire undocumented workers “get away with illegal practices (G6).” Journalists, researchers, advocacy groups, and legal services also are more likely to approach these growers due to the size of their operations (most growers who use H-2A workers have large operations), their presence in the community, and the number of workers they hire.

Growers mentioned several advantages and disadvantages in participating in the H-2A guestworker program:

Advantages:

- Labor availability. The grower contacts the NCGA and requests a number of workers per their needs, which is important for labor critical times of the year such as shearing and harvest season.
- Workers are legal. Many growers indicate that their workers are more productive because they do not have to worry about finding a place to stay, transportation, and ‘being illegal.’
- Workers receive some training upon reaching the U.S. through the NCGA (on pesticide safety—video in Spanish.)

Disadvantages:

- “Scrutiny from all sides (G6)”: Department of Labor, the media, advocacy groups, legal services.
- Housing requirements are perceived to be extreme: “I have to provide a water fountain at their housing—workers can’t drink tap water (G7)?”
- Must have enough labor for workers: “workers get restless and want to leave if they are not working more than 40 hours per week. Sometimes we have to find other ‘odd jobs’ for them to do to pay them for (G11).”
- Penalty system for non-compliance with housing, hiring undocumented workers, etc. Several growers commented that the Department of Labor is “more punitive than educational (G6).”

- Grower accountability for housing/working conditions: “workers trash the housing, but we get fined for it...The law says you have to have a port-a-john in the field with your workers. If they come out to inspect the job site and it ain’t out there, you get fined. Do you know how hard it is to lug a toilet around to every field you work in (G19)?”
- Cost. While growers do not have to pay taxes several mentioned that “the ‘real cost’ of participation in the guestworker program is around \$12.00/hr when housing and transportation costs are factored in (G10).”

The smaller-scale growers interviewed believe that participation in the H-2A program is too expensive and that the regulations too “extreme” to make it worth it for them to participate, especially since they feel that there is little enforcement in the region. The following input from growers illustrate their perspectives:

I don’t worry much with regulations. With pesticides and other types of spraying and application, I make them wear the safety equipment. Never had any problems with my bunch. Most problems occur with housing and transportation, but I don’t have to worry about that. They have rented their own place and have a car. The other times I’ve used Mexicans, I had to transport them everywhere which was a waste of time and resources (G14).

I do as little as possible to draw attention to myself...whatever it takes to get around the rules. I don’t have workers housed on site. DMV knows when trucks are operating and going from the field to loading stations. They’ll set up checkpoints to cite them for violations. Raids from DOL and inspections come at peak times. Almost seems antagonistic. Government is hurting more than helping (G6).

I only hire guys for a couple of weeks at a time for shearing. It’s too big of a headache to deal with the paperwork and worry about finding housing for just a few

weeks of work. Most of Mexicans I hire live here in the area now. They (DOL) never bust anybody up here anyway (G20).

To determine grower interest in receiving training regarding their labor force to ameliorate knowledge gaps in training and policy awareness, survey participants were asked if they would be willing to receive training, pay for training, and who they would most prefer to conduct training. The North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service was the preferred training agent (Table 4.17). Growers mentioned that rapport with their county extension agents and the type of educational programming offered was more appropriate for meeting their needs.

Table 4.17. Preferred training entities for migrant labor programs.

| Who would you most prefer to conduct employer training related to migrant or Hispanic labor? | Hiring growers (n=129) | Non-Hiring growers (n=37) |
|---|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Department of Labor | 5% | 3% |
| Employment Security Commission | 2% | 0% |
| North Carolina Cooperative Extension (County Extension Agents) | 43% | 51% |
| Christmas Tree Growers Association | 19% | 5% |
| A private consulting group | 5% | 0% |
| The employer should be responsible for his own training | 12% | 22% |
| A non-profit organization | 2% | 3% |
| No preference | 12% | 16% |

Sixty-eight percent of growers who hire workers indicated that they would or might be interested in receiving training regarding the hiring and training of Hispanic workers while 50% indicated that they would be willing to pay for this type of training (Table 4.18).

Table 4.18. Interest in training related to employer hiring and training requirements and willingness to pay for training.

| | Yes | | Maybe | | No | |
|---|----------------|------------|----------------|------------|----------------|------------|
| | Hiring Growers | Non-hiring | Hiring Growers | Non-hiring | Hiring Growers | Non-hiring |
| Would you be interested in training related to employer requirements regarding the hiring and training of Hispanic Labor? (n=124 hg; n=49 nhg) | 19% | 2% | 49% | 24% | 32% | 73% |
| Would you be willing to pay for an employer training course or service related to Hispanic labor? (n=124 hg; n=48 nhg) | 6% | 2% | 44% | 19% | 50% | 79% |

Relationships and Rapport with the Workforce

Grower theme: Personal relationships among workers and their employers are valued and generally more cooperative and less exploitative than portrayed in the popular media.

In preliminary interviews with growers and workers, a perceived “cooperative system of mutual benefit” emerged among participants. To explore further this notion and the social exchange between participants in the industry, growers were asked about their personal relationships with their workforce. While anecdotal, grower responses indicated positive social relationships with many of their workers. Many growers highlighted strong relationships with particular individuals, especially with individuals who had worked for them multiple years and members of their workforce with better English. The language barrier was suggested as a major factor in limiting the level of personal interaction with their workforce. As one grower stated: “It prevents you from getting personal with your personnel! (G6)”

A general sentiment of respect for and rapport with their workforce was expressed among the majority of growers interviewed:

I've been to Mexico a couple of times. I wanted to see where my guys came from, how they lived. It was a great experience. They treated me like family. My Mexican crew leader has been with me for 16 years. I treat him like a son. He makes more money on the farm than anyone and special 'under the table' benefits (G2).

It's like having children! I've gotten phone calls from the sheriff in the middle of the night to come bail guys out who went on a tear (drinking)...I'm a perpetual banker for unsecured loans. I lend them money when they need it. So far I've always been paid back...When I hired my first crew of Mexicans I put them up in a trailer here at the farm and had a phone put in. The month after they left, I got a \$1,000 phone bill. They had been calling Mexico on my nickel! Needless to say I took out the phone. Besides minor problems with some individual workers, they're a good bunch (G6).

We joke a lot when we're in the field. I don't really know what they're saying most of the time, and they might not understand me, but we laugh at each other. I work with them almost all the time in the field. They respect that. We're all doing the same work. It's hard work but we manage to have a good time (G15).

It's a business relationship, but we get along real well. I get invited to all the birthday parties and fiestas and have them over for dinner every now and then (G9).

There's less history between Christmas tree growers and migrants. The industry is young. It's a more naive industry. Not as much deep-seated prejudice as in some other areas of the state. There is more inherent respect for laborers and they're not taken for granted (G16).

Growers reflected a keen awareness of public opinion towards the industry and shared strong sentiments regarding negative media attention directed toward them. A number of growers commented on their concerns regarding an article that appeared in a Durham, North

Carolina paper about the exploitation of workers in the Christmas tree and garland industry (Cuadros 2001). One grower elaborated:

It just doesn't make sense. Your labor is the most important part of the operation... Labor's too important to the industry to mistreat your workers. Growers always get a bad rap, and I know there's probably a few who deserve it, but I know the guy who runs the garland operation they were talking about in that article and he's a good man. Those workers make a lot of money...he has to turn away folks every year who want to work there (G12).

While bringing the issues of marginalization and exploitation of migrant workers to light, mass media coverage of industries employing Hispanic labor has traditionally vilified employers and focused on harsh living and working conditions and unfair treatment of labor. Research in the public health field of the Hispanic demographic focuses on occupational safety and pesticide exposure risks of the agricultural workforce. Thus, other perspectives of the migrant worker/employer dynamic have largely been ignored. This research point to another level of exchange where respect and rapport are valued and more prevalent than might ordinarily be assumed.

V. Farmworkers' Perspectives in North Carolina's Christmas Tree Industry

Introduction

Several theories of migration focus on the costs and benefits of migrating to the United States while others focus on the social networks among the Hispanic community and with employers actively recruiting a Hispanic workforce. Personal and family economic decisions are the primary motivations for coming to the United States and have been studied extensively by economists and others. Forestry and agricultural industry participants relate that they can earn ten times as much working in rural North Carolina in agricultural based endeavors such as the Christmas tree industry than they can make in Mexico (McDaniel and Cassanova 2003). However, other factors also influence the decision-making of migrants while employed and play a role in the decision of whether or not to stay in a particular area or in a particular job.

Although the popular media tends to portray the employer/laborer dynamic as antagonistic or exploitative at best, interviews with workers revealed a different perspective and an exchange including respect and rapport that challenges traditional notions of the employer/migrant worker dynamic. The obvious communication barrier and cultural differences between these industry participant groups presents a challenge. However, there has been little research conducted to shed light on this dynamic and how it affects the decision making of workers regarding migration and work related decisions within an industry.

This chapter examines perceived costs and benefits of working in the Christmas tree industry from the workers' perspective and demonstrates the importance of social networks

among family and acquaintances, as well as networks established by employers in the industry, that affect the decision-making process involved in migrating to the area and deciding to work and continue to work in this industry. In personal interviews with 35 Christmas tree farm workers, issues such as communication, the relationship with their employer, legal status, and other perceived costs and benefits of working in the Christmas tree industry are explored to analyze key themes related to the social exchange between these industry participants and their employers. Direct quotes from many of the interview participants are used extensively to illustrate common perceptions and themes among workers in the industry.

Theoretical Relevance

Native workers typically view jobs being filled by migrants as bottom-level jobs (Piore 1979). Thus employers are forced to be proactive in the recruitment of labor from outside sources. In interviews with Christmas tree industry employers, many relate that they cannot find reliable native workers who want to do the manual labor necessary for this industry. While larger growers have turned to the H-2 guestworker program as a source for reliable labor, the majority relies on undocumented migrants to fill labor-intensive jobs in the industry. In the rural mountain counties of North Carolina where most Christmas tree farms are located, a pronounced shortage of local labor has led to Hispanics migrating to the industry to fill the manual labor positions in the Christmas tree industry.

My research confirms notions within social capital theory that a history of prior migration or contact with a person who has migrated increases the probability of future migration (Faist 2000). However, there has been little analysis of the role of industrial recruitment and the role of the state in granting access to migrants. Many studies assume that

workers make the decision to migrate and seek employment in areas that have been “pioneered” by other members of the social network such as family members or acquaintances (Wilson 1998). However, recruitment by employers and the use of guest worker visas have become increasingly important factors in migration decisions. In North Carolina’s Christmas tree industry, the North Carolina Growers Association that expedites the H-2A guestworker visa process serves as a recruitment vehicle to this end. However, only approximately 10% of the Hispanic labor in the Christmas tree industry has been recruited through the H-2A guestworker program. Other factors drive migration of undocumented workers into the industry. This chapter explores some of these factors.

H-2A Guestworkers vs. Undocumented Workers

Worker theme: there are inherent advantages and disadvantages to documented and undocumented worker status.

While legal status was not a question directly asked during interviews, interview participants provided this information without prompting which allowed me to draw a number of distinctions within the Christmas tree farmworker participant group. Several distinctions were drawn from the demographics, decision-making, motivation, and attitudinal beliefs between undocumented workers and workers who participated in the H-2A program. Around 600 of North Carolina’s 10,000 average guestworkers per year are contracted for work on Christmas tree farms through the North Carolina Growers Association under the H-2A guestworker program. The remainder of the Hispanic workforce consists of a large number of undocumented migrants, undocumented residents, or resident aliens. Based on grower surveys of approximately 12% of all Christmas tree growers in western North Carolina, there are an estimated 6,000 Hispanics that work on Christmas tree farms at some

point during an average growing season. Thus, guestworkers make up only around 10% of the labor force in the industry.

H-2A Guestworkers

H-2A guestworkers who were interviewed were generally older. Several were married with children, and had somewhat different motivations for their participation in the industry compared to non-H-2A or undocumented workers. Guestworker status and the ability to travel to and return from the U.S. safely without deportation risks as well as the guarantee of wages and housing were seen as major advantages to participation in the program. In the words of one guestworker:

The advantage of the H-2A program is that you get a free place to live, a set wage, no taxes, transportation and a lot of work. I know of other folks in other crops who don't make as much money. In *pinos* (term commonly used for Christmas trees), with the grower I work for, we work 60 hours a week. Some workers don't get that many hours. I work for eight months, then I go home and don't work until I come back (W5).

While many of the undocumented workers who were interviewed had participated in some form of agricultural employment in the U.S. or in Mexico, most of the H-2A workers mentioned employment in a number of different occupations before coming to work in the H-2A program including jobs in masonry, construction, shop keeping, and manufacturing. Four of the H-2A workers interviewed had worked in the Christmas tree industry for several years.

While many H-2A workers had friends, family, or acquaintances that were currently or had previously participated in the guestworker program, a majority mentioned limited prior acquaintances among the crewmembers with whom they worked. Because H-2A

guestworkers are recruited from a number of Mexican states and assigned to particular farms by the NCGA upon reaching the U.S., the demographic makeup of this group is more varied than crews of undocumented workers who often know each other. H-2A workers also agreed that their status as guestworkers allowed them to work with job stability and less risk than being illegal.

The desire to return to Mexico with guaranteed earnings for a fixed contract period was another motivating factor that guestworkers mentioned for wanting to work in the Christmas tree industry under the H-2 program. The majority of guestworkers interviewed were not interested in permanently migrating to the United States, but indicated that they could earn a substantial income in a short period of time to take back to Mexico, where the cost of living is significantly less. Several workers said that they had heard about the advantages of working in Christmas trees compared to other crops while in Mexico and while working in other crops in the program in North Carolina.

The one disadvantage of participating in the guestworker program that was mentioned by workers is the risk of being contracted by an unreasonable grower or for a job with limited hours available for work. While workers can request reassignment and can and do occasionally make complaints against employers, there is a fear among workers of being 'blacklisted' by the NCGA from further participation in the program. One worker elaborated:

If you don't like the work, you can leave, but you have to file papers and wait around for them to decide what to do. Under the H2 program, you are tied to a single employer. If you complain, they won't ask you back (W12).

Undocumented Workers

Undocumented workers who were interviewed were generally younger and unmarried and had worked in the industry for less than five years. A majority mentioned having been

employed in a diverse array of agricultural and non-agricultural employment and related “more freedom to move between jobs (W9)” as the only advantage of being “illegal.” One worker explained: “If you don’t like your job, or the boss, or if you find a better job, you can just leave (W3).” Several interviewees referenced the guestworker program and the formalities involved with applying for the program and the perception of being “locked in” to a certain job or employer.

However, many more disadvantages than advantages were described throughout interviews. Other disadvantages of being undocumented that were mentioned by workers included:

- *Border crossing expense and risks.* Several undocumented workers indicated that they paid anywhere from \$2,000 to \$5,000 to get to North Carolina through a *coyote*, or immigrant smuggler. They also acknowledged other dangers of border crossing such as the weather and snakes (WC2).
- *Risk of INS and deportation.* One worker mentioned he had been caught and deported three times while crossing the border. However, workers related that there was little risk of *la migra* in western North Carolina (W26, W4, W8, W15).
- *Lower wages (still at least minimum wage).* While several workers mentioned that growers paid less to undocumented workers (W18, W5, W6), no workers indicated they were being paid less than minimum wage. Wages reported from undocumented workers ranged from \$6.50 to \$10.00 per hour.
- *Reliance on the “patron”—especially in rural areas.* Several workers related that they relied on their employers for wages, housing, and transportation (W9, W21, W31, W2, W16, W35).

One of the interview participants migrated to the U.S. when he was eleven and now has his green card. He moved to western North Carolina and began working in the Christmas tree industry 18 years ago after several years of working in different areas of the U.S. He elaborated on the risks and disadvantages of the undocumented status:

If you're illegal, you have to depend on the *patron*. You have to work out all the details with them. You have to trust them to pay you, give you hours, sometimes transportation, etc. You have to trust them, but sometimes they screw you. In Texas, one of my *patrons* said he would hold our money for us, but never paid us. That doesn't happen anymore though; I'm not naïve anymore. There are some tree growers up here that have screwed people. They have a hard time keeping workers on their farms...everyone knows who they are now. However, there are not that many here in this region (W21).

Several of the younger, undocumented workers mentioned “adventure” or “seeing a lot of different places,” while making money, as reasons for them initially coming to the U.S. to work (WC1). A majority had worked in several places where they had friends or family members. Two workers said that after they finished shearing with the particular grower they were currently working with, their plans were to go to Atlanta to find work that pays more such as in construction or painting. Others mentioned that they liked the area and worked in the industry simply because it was the only job they could find in the area. Others mentioned they like the type of work in the Christmas tree industry.

Migration and Decision-Making in the Christmas Tree Industry

All undocumented workers mentioned that they had family or friends from Mexico who lived in the area and indicated that this factor played a major role in their decision to migrate to western North Carolina. While some of their family or other acquaintances

worked in the Christmas tree industry as well, others had family members working in other industries/jobs in the area. Four of the undocumented workers interviewed lived with their wives and children who had migrated with them. Two of the workers interviewed have been in the Christmas industry around 20 years. They mentioned that when they initially moved to the area, there were few Mexicans. One of them related: “It was hard back then. At the time, there were only maybe 20 other Mexicans in the area working on farms up here. I’ve noticed a lot more Hispanics coming to the area in the last five years or so especially (W4).”

While many workers mentioned that other types of jobs in the area paid better wages to migrants, they mentioned a number of factors that influenced their decision to work in the Christmas tree industry:

Worker theme: Family and personal networks with other workers in the Christmas tree industry play a dominant role in migration decisions

While many H-2A guestworkers in the Christmas tree industry who were interviewed indicated that they did not have prior familial influence to come into the Christmas tree industry, several mentioned that they had influenced members of their family and community to consider participating in the program and working with Christmas trees. Several mentioned that family members or acquaintances in Mexico had been hired by the same farms where they worked and on other farms. Each undocumented worker who participated in the study mentioned that family members or friends working in the area influenced their decision to migrate. One undocumented worker from Watauga County illustrates:

I came here because I have cousins who work in Christmas tree industry who said there was a lot of work (W11).

Another worker/crew leader, who was granted green-card status in 1986 under IRCA, from a large Christmas tree farm in Avery County related:

I plan on living here for good. I'm married with two kids born here. Been working in the U.S. since I was 11. Came over to find my father and worked on a railroad, worked in factories, worked in Texas, Illinois...worked in a tape factory. I've worked here with the same Christmas tree grower for 16 years. Came to the area with my brothers, when another brother let us know there was work up here (W2).

Worker theme: Greater job availability—less competition for Christmas tree jobs

Several workers mentioned that they moved to the area and sought work in the Christmas tree industry because of competition for other types of jobs in other areas. Several individuals who had initially migrated to Chicago, Atlanta, and Raleigh mentioned that it took longer for them to find jobs there and that more migrants competed for jobs in those urban areas. They agreed that steady work was more available in rural agricultural areas.

Worker theme: Christmas tree work is preferred to work in other crops.

Workers were asked their perspective on the advantages and disadvantages of Christmas tree work. Workers were asked how the work in Christmas trees compared to other industries. Several workers offered comparisons to working with other agricultural crops while others made comparisons to other types of jobs. Their preference to work in Christmas trees was mainly attributed to the amount of work available and the year-round nature of the work. One worker shared:

During shearing and harvest season on larger farms, you can work steady, 60 hours a week, for several months. Even though some growers don't offer overtime, you can still make a lot of money (W30).

The following interview excerpts also illustrate worker comparisons and insight on work with Christmas trees.

I like working in *pinos* because there's different things to do. You're not bent over all day picking potatoes or cucumbers. Working in tobacco isn't any harder. All work in agriculture is hard work. Some guys can't handle the nicotine in tobacco...makes them sick (W16).

With the *pinos*, there are different types of work to do...Some days we shear the trees, other days we apply fertilizer, other days we plant trees (W8).

The work is not hard to do... There's work in Mexico that's a lot harder than this (W22).

I've worked in several different crops and manufacturing...I like working outside in the fresh air. It's a lot cooler here than in the tobacco fields near Raleigh (W4).

Doing piecework with oranges or potatoes is stressful. You can make a lot of money, but hourly work here is better. You can take your time and make the same kind of money (W33).

Working in *pinos* is a little easier—about like roofing. The pay is better in Christmas trees than with tobacco (W1).

Worker Theme: Work in Christmas trees fills time when other part-time jobs aren't available

Several interview participants mentioned that they only worked seasonally in the Christmas tree industry due to lack of availability of other forms of employment. In Watauga and Avery Counties, several farmworkers mentioned that they work in various aspects of the construction industry during the spring and summer months and transition to Christmas trees for the remainder of the year, for shearing or harvesting trees, when construction

opportunities end. Other workers rotate between the landscaping and Christmas tree industries depending on the needs of employers for part-time employment. Several workers mentioned part-time winter employment in service related industries, such as in restaurants or the skiing operations in the area from January to March. From there, they typically sought employment with growers for planting, fertilizing, and shearing jobs on Christmas tree farms—often with the same growers they had previously worked for on a part-time or seasonal basis.

Two workers who were interviewed together explained that they were working in the Christmas tree industry temporarily due to circumstance:

We were painting houses and finished the job. Some of our friends who worked in *pinos* introduced us to the grower and he hired us. We'll work here until something better comes along, but there isn't much here this time of year (late summer). Most construction crews already have enough people. You can make more money in construction...The work in Christmas trees isn't that bad, but it doesn't pay as much. We can make more money in Charlotte painting houses (W16).

Another worker with 15 years of experience in the industry shared his reasons for working with Christmas trees:

Work availability is the number one factor in picking a job and staying there. If there's enough work, it doesn't matter what crop it is, a person will stay. As long as you're working enough hours, it's good. If there's not enough work, we'll look for another job. In Christmas trees, shearing is good work. Lots of hours. At harvest time as well. You can work more hours (W9).

Communication and the Language Barrier

Worker theme: Communication and language barrier are major obstacles to work and non-work related activities. Workers rely on a number of strategies to get by without English skills.

The language barrier and communication problems between workers and growers were a major theme discussed with all farmworkers who were interviewed. Most workers indicated that they spoke little to no English. Only four of the workers mentioned they felt comfortable conversing in English. Because growers in the industry speak little to no Spanish, the language barrier is felt to have an impact on job-related communication and affect the relationships among industry participants. The fact that most Hispanic farmworkers live and work together in relative isolation from the communities in which they live limits their exposure to English. Besides brief interaction with native English speakers during weekend shopping excursions, most workers indicate that they do not spend enough time around English speakers to improve their skills. While there are opportunities to learn English in many of the communities where workers live, they find it difficult with their work schedule and limited free time to participate in English classes offered by local church and non-profit groups.

Difficulties with English and communication with the growers manifested itself in a number of ways. Several workers mentioned that the language barrier affects their initial contract with grower and non-work related logistics:

“I didn’t know when he was going to pay us or how much (W32).”

“It was hard to explain to him that I couldn’t come to work because I was taking my brother to Charlotte (W17).”

“I couldn’t give him directions to the house to pick me up at (W9).”

The Language Barrier and Job-Related Frustration

While growers indicated some frustration with the language barrier and communication, survey results indicated that growers feel that the language barrier only occasionally affects worker productivity. This contrasts sharply with farmworkers who generally expressed a greater level of frustration with work-related communication and indicated that it has a definite impact on their ability to perform certain tasks. One farmworker with over 10 years in the industry shared a common sentiment among workers:

The language barrier is very frustrating and can drain you physically and mentally. Because if your patron tells you what to do, and you don’t understand him, you end up doing the work the wrong way and have to go and do the work all over again. Sometimes we won’t do a job right because we’re too afraid of doing it wrong! (laughter) (W21).

Just as growers rely on English-speaking workers to ameliorate communication problems in translating farm tasks, workers mentioned their reliance on co-workers to translate for them. Most workers (and growers) mentioned that they learned enough words and phrases for basic communication. However, a majority of workers indicated that they relied on someone else to communicate for them. Workers agreed that the individual with the best grasp of English translates most communication from the grower for the rest of the crew:

One of my friends understands English and he explains what we need to do (W28).

The crew leader speaks English and works with us and shows us how to do the work (W29).

However, several workers mentioned that they understood more English than they could speak and hinted to the fact that often they did not make this obvious to their employer so as not to be seen as a favorite. Several workers also mentioned that they DO understand all of the insults in English and are aware when they are directed at them. One worker explained:

When the grower gets mad because we did something wrong, I hear him say things like “Fucking Mexican”...or “Stupid Mexican”. I don’t know a lot of English, but I know what that means (W34)!

Communication issues between workers in this industry are the same in many other industries. Cultural differences are sometimes misperceived by growers or American employers that can lead to misinterpretation or conflict that industry participants might not understand well enough to address effectively (West 2002).

Training and the Language Barrier

Training is addressed here under communication issues because the language barrier had the most immediate and influential impact on training. Both workers and growers mention that the work involved in Christmas tree farming is not difficult and does not take much time to learn how to do. Workers indicated that training is conducted in a number of different ways through hands on or hands off approaches by the grower—in the same manner described by growers. However, the majority of workers mentioned that they relied on fellow workers who understood English better or who had previous experience in the job-related task to more fully explain how to do the work or explain the growers’ wishes. While several workers mentioned that the grower worked with them in the field and would periodically show them how to do particular tasks, others mentioned that after a brief demonstration of how to do a task, they were left to do work on their own. While many tasks can be effectively

understood through adequate demonstration of the task, details regarding certain activities are often left to the workers discretion. Several workers mentioned that they had done work, such as shearing, incorrectly because they did not know exactly how the grower wanted the work done. In all cases, workers contributed these discrepancies to the language barrier.

Relationships with Growers

Economics (i.e., wages and amount of work available) appear to drive the decision-making of individuals to maintain or change their employment status, while networks between the workforce and family and employer networks in the area also influence migration into rural western North Carolina and impact the decision-making process of the individual worker. However, the social exchange between the worker and the employer also has an impact on their relationship and longevity in the industry. A farmworker's decision to stay with a particular grower can be influenced by a number of factors including benefits offered by the grower and the relationship between the worker and the grower. Certain personal relationships established between the individual grower and members of their workforce were indicated as the main reason certain workers continued to work in the Christmas tree industry.

Personal and work relationships and interaction with growers varied widely among the interview participants and depended on a number of variables including the size of the operation, the number of workers employed on the farm, the amount of contact the worker had with the employer, and the individual personality of the grower and worker. While some workers indicated a strong sense of respect, rapport, and personal interaction with their employers, others mentioned very little. Several workers from larger operations mentioned that they only had limited interaction with the grower, but interacted more with the non-

Hispanic crew leader who participated with them in farm activities. Some workers from large H-2A employers indicated a much greater level of interaction and rapport with the employer than other workers from the same farm. Several attitudinal themes were extracted based on interview responses from workers in the industry.

Worker theme: Growers meet worker needs beyond worker expectations.

“Growers will help you find work with their friends if they run out (W6).”

“I’ve worked for the same grower for many years and he has helped out my family (W13)”

“The grower I work for is helping me and my family with the immigration process (W8).”

“When my child was sick he paid the hospital bill and his wife brought us meals for a week (W12).”

“I have been working for this grower for a few years now and he pays me \$15/hr. He also helped me get a loan for our house (W19).”

Worker theme: Growers use us because they know we’re Mexican and we need the money.

“They sell these trees for 40 dollars each. I’ve sheared 10,000 of them. And he pays me \$8 per hour. He makes a lot of money from my work (W32).”

“There are a few growers who don’t pay well and sometimes cheat you because they know you won’t complain (W12).”

Worker theme: Grower respect is valued among workforce—trying to speak Spanish and working alongside of them

We work hard but the ‘patron’ is fair (W4)

The first grower I worked for worked with us and showed us exactly what to do. He worked his own rows and worked as hard as we did (W7).

He knows all our names. He speaks horrible Spanish, but at least he tries. Some don’t even try (W19).

The crew leader only calls us names and curses a lot. Doesn’t have a sense of humor. He doesn’t respect us and we don’t respect him (W26).

The grower makes jokes with us and tries to understand our jokes about him. He’s just like one of us (W3).

Workers who had been employed for the same growers for a number of years had the strongest personal relationships among their employers and indicated the longer they worked with a particular grower, they received higher wages, more responsibility, and more flexibility. Once they establish rapport with the grower, they begin to manage groups of new workers or work more closely with the grower for particular tasks. A worker from Avery County explains:

I’ve learned a lot from the grower—we have a very close relationship. He’s like a second father. He’s helped me out a lot, but I’ve helped him out a lot as well. I have more responsibility on the farm. I run my own crews and manage parts of the farm on my own. I was very lucky to find someone like this patron to work for. I’ve have worked for some real assholes in the past (in other industries) (W21).

Another worker mentioned that during the harvest season, he goes to Raleigh to work on a retail Christmas tree lot with the grower:

I help the grower with his trees on the lot. Unload trucks, arrange the trees, help the customers load the tree on their car. That's pretty easy work. We have more fun on the lot (W31).

In general, the level of exchange differed among workers and their employers. While some workers indicated that they maintain a positive relationship with the grower, others maintained indifference or indicated a perceived indifference from the growers for whom they worked. Factors such as the time that the worker had been employed with the grower, the effort the grower made to interact with the workers, and the level of respect that the grower offered workers in their employ influenced relationships among the workforce. The language barrier was a prevalent theme expressed by workers that was felt to have an impact on the level of relationship that could be established with their employers.

Occupational Health

Worker theme: Occupational health perceptions focus on external injury risk...not internal, such as residual pesticide exposure, repetitive motion injury, etc.

While health issues were not a focus of the research, the interviews with workers contained discussion of risks of working on Christmas tree farms. The following occupational risks were identified among workers interviewed:

- Cuts while shearing and from the chainsaw (harvest)
- Poison ivy
- Bees (wasp/yellow jacket nests common in fields)
- Snakes

- Flying debris getting in their eyes while harvesting

It is interesting to note that workers (and growers) did not mention the application of agricultural pesticides as a perceived risk—pesticide and herbicide application were discussed among training procedures. The EPA mandated Worker Protection Standard (WPS) requires that all farmworkers receive basic pesticide safety training. While attempts have been made over the years to improve the training and certification of workers, several studies indicate that WPS laws are not enforced, many workers don't receive training, and those that do receive inadequate or ineffectual training (Larson 2000, Perry and Difonzo 1998, Columbia Legal Services 1998, Davis and Schleifer 1998, Mines et al. 2001).

Half of the workers interviewed indicated that they had applied pesticides and herbicides. When asked about pesticide training, H-2A workers indicated that they had been shown a video about pesticide safety at the North Carolina Grower's Association upon their arrival to the U.S. and were provided safety equipment at the farms where they worked. Non-H-2A workers that were interviewed said that while they did not receive any formal training from the growers they worked for regarding pesticide safety, that they were offered equipment before applying chemicals. Several workers mentioned that they would sometimes take off their gloves, glasses, and other gear because it slowed them down or was uncomfortable during warm weather. Worker experiences regarding applying pesticides and pesticide safety training were similar to Elmore and Arcury's (2001) study. Their findings show that while many farmworkers in the Christmas tree industry receive some type of training and/or safety equipment, many workers often receive inadequate training and do not follow necessary precautions while applying chemicals.

VI. Discussion and Recommendations

Introduction

It is estimated that there are over 4.2 million seasonal and migrant farmworkers and their dependents employed in 42 of the 50 states (Briggs 1996). As more Hispanic and other immigrant workers enter U.S., additional infrastructure must be established or augmented to address their health, legal, and socioeconomic needs. More resources will be required to monitor employers. More administrative infrastructure will be necessary to document, process, and monitor the status of these workers. Law enforcement agencies as well as the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) will require additional means of monitoring illegal activity, among employers and migrants. Each state's educational and health infrastructure will require more resources to provide these services to these additions to the population. Workers and growers in agricultural and forest industries are typically underserved in educational and programming efforts related to labor due to the rural and sometimes isolated nature of these industries.

An expected outcome of my research is insight into key elements of interaction and exchange among industry participants that can be used to help identify and develop training approaches for employers and Hispanic workers for the long-term benefit of both the Christmas tree industry and its Hispanic workforce. While this research focused on a subset of labor issues within North Carolina's forestry/agricultural industry, several important observations and recommendations are made that can be applied to other industries with similar concerns. Themes generated from survey and interview results (Table 6.1) reflect some common areas where programmatic training could be developed to address industry

participant needs and also areas that growers and workers could improve upon. Issues with communication and the language barrier and its impact on training were predominant themes gleaned from the research. Problems with legal and policy familiarity and inadequate training procedures were also important thematic topics where improvements could be made. The value placed on respect and rapport among industry participants that was prevalent throughout interviews with industry participants contradicts popular notions and also could be further explored to improve employer/worker relationships, which would subsequently improve production and overall participant satisfaction.

While some conclusions based on this research may be applied at a broader level to migrant labor concerns in other industries, it is important to note that these findings apply to a specific industry in North Carolina and should not be over-generalized beyond this realm. Each industry has specific issues and concerns with its labor force. Christmas tree farming is a niche industry in western North Carolina with a relatively short history. While findings from this research point to a mutually beneficial system of employer and worker networks and relationships, they are by no means a defense of undocumented labor practices. Confronting employers with questions about their labor force and management practices can invite skepticism on the perceived intent of the research due to the sensitivity of the topic and may influence responses. However, growers and workers approached for interviews for this project were candid and open throughout the interview process.

Table 6.1. Comparison of major themes by industry participants.

| <u>Thematic Categories</u> | <u>Grower Themes</u> | <u>Worker Themes</u> |
|--------------------------------|---|--|
| Hiring and Training | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of available and reliable local labor source forced growers to seek other source of labor. • Hispanic workers are more reliable and have a better work ethic than local workers. • Hiring and recruiting strategies are based on individual grower needs and risk assessment of worker availability during critical production and regulatory concerns. • Level of training provided to workers depends on the needs, technical capacity and knowledge of the growers. • While growers feel that pesticide education and safety practices are sufficient, previous study data indicate that most workers receive little or ineffectual training. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family and personal networks with other workers in the Christmas tree industry play dominant role in migration decisions. • Greater job availability—less competition for Christmas tree jobs. • Christmas tree work is preferred to work in other crops. • Work in Christmas trees fills time when other part-time jobs aren't available. • Occupational health perceptions focus on external injury risk...not internal, such as residual pesticide exposure, repetitive motion injury, etc. |
| Communication Issues | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The language barrier is a frustrating disadvantage with the workforce—especially in explaining details—but a number of strategies are implemented to manage it. • English-speaking workers who have been in the United States for a longer period of time can be perceived to be 'troublemakers'. However, many growers also rely on bilingual workers or crew leaders to ameliorate communication problems. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication and language barrier is a major obstacle and frustrating in work and non-work related activities. Workers rely on a number of strategies to get by without English skills. |
| Employer/ Worker Relationships | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal relationships among workers and their employers are valued and generally more cooperative and less exploitative than portrayed in the popular media. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growers meet worker needs beyond worker expectations. • Growers use Hispanic workers because they know Mexicans need the money. • Grower respect is valued among workforce—trying to speak Spanish and working alongside of them |
| Policy Related Issues | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wage determination is based on the individual grower, supply and demand, familiarity with the individual worker, or source of labor (use of contractor/participation in H-2A program). • Regulatory and advocacy scrutiny is punitive, excessive, and vilifies growers. • While there are many policy-related issues related to the Hispanic work force, few growers know many details about these policies and associated regulatory mechanisms. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are inherent advantages and disadvantages to documented and undocumented worker status. |

Summary of Results

Interview and survey results met the initial research objectives of the study: 1) to compile baseline data on the demographics and dynamics of labor in North Carolina's Christmas tree industry, and 2) analyze the professional and personal dynamics between Hispanic workers and Christmas tree growers. The following conclusions regarding the dynamics of labor in North Carolina's Christmas tree industry were derived from the research:

Among growers:

- A lack of reliable available local labor and larger farm sizes led to an increase of Hispanic labor recruitment.
- Hiring and training strategies/practices differ according to size of operation and individual labor needs of growers.
- Worker availability and reliability are the most important labor concerns for growers
- Larger growers are most concerned and most engaged in legal/policy issues related to labor. Smaller growers share concerns, but are less engaged.

Among workers:

- Networks among Hispanic labor influenced and increased migration into this industry.
- Workers generally view working in the Christmas tree industry as more desirable than other agricultural industries.

Among both industry participant groups:

- Relationships between growers and workers in the industry are generally more cooperative and less exploitative than portrayed in the media and popular literature—indicating a generally mutually beneficial level of social exchange.

- Non-economic factors play a role and impact the social exchange relationships between employers and migrant workers.

Oral histories provided from several of the pioneer Christmas tree growers indicated that in the early to mid 1980s, as the number of farms and farm sizes increased, a lack of reliable local labor forced growers to seek labor from outside sources. Oral histories provided from several early migrant workers in the Christmas tree industry indicated that in the early to mid 1980s, they were recruited initially from other crops or came to the area based on contacts with family members working in the industry. Apart from economic motivations, the networks among the Hispanic worker population and a greater demand for labor influenced migration of these workers into the area to work in the industry, especially over the last decade. Today, the industry is reliant on the Hispanic labor workforce, which accounts for around 80% of the entire workforce according to the survey. Survey results confirm that initial hiring and recruiting of Hispanic workers resulted from a lack of available and reliable local labor. Informal networks among growers currently impact hiring and recruiting strategies as larger operations with more established labor forces are a source for smaller operations that “borrow” or hire workers from these farms for short-term work on weekends or slower periods of the production season.

Among the worker population, the Christmas tree industry was generally favored over other agricultural jobs due to availability of work, the ability to work more hours, somewhat higher pay, the mountain environment, and the type of work carried out on farms. Hispanic workers often transition into other service-related jobs, construction, and landscaping, but indicate that they seek work in the Christmas tree industry during the Christmas tree harvest and other high labor demand periods of the production season. Workers indicate that their

familial and acquaintance networks influenced their decisions to migrate to the area and into the industry. Several workers also indicated that their relationship with their employer was a factor in continuing to work in the industry.

While labor availability and reliability are considered the most important labor concerns among growers, communication issues associated with the language barrier are pervasive throughout the industry. While growers and workers have developed a number of strategies to manage the language barrier, it often impedes productivity and communication on a number of levels. Many major growers who maintain a more full time workforce rely on bilingual members of their workforce or crew leaders with prior experience on their farms to conduct training and relay job-related instruction. Over half of all growers surveyed indicated that they rely on bilingual workers to communicate work instructions to the rest of the crew. Smaller growers who hire workers for part time work train their workers in the field through demonstration or hire workers from other farms who have previous experience.

Due to legal status and availability issues with the migrant workforce, growers have adopted a number of hiring strategies to meet the needs of their operations. Mail survey results and interviews revealed nine different ways that growers recruit and hire labor. While smaller growers use a number of means to hire their workers, larger growers typically rely on the H-2A Guestworker Program to supply their workforce. Low adoption rates of the H-2A program among smaller growers is the result of several factors including housing requirements for workers, increased accountability, a “burdensome” level of paperwork, perceived scrutiny associated with participating in it, and other associated costs. Smaller growers, therefore, often openly hire undocumented workers (or workers with false documents) in a cash-based exchange driven not only by an availability of undocumented

workers seeking work in the area, but an ineffective regulatory system that has decreased the perceived risk of regulation of such practices among growers.

Larger growers with more visible operations also share concerns about regulatory issues and are at higher risk of regulatory enforcement than smaller operations that hire labor for brief periods of time. In interviews, larger growers expressed generally more knowledge about policy issues and asserted that they were more engaged in addressing their concerns over labor through their legislative affiliates at the local and national level. Larger growers typically shoulder the majority of the regulatory and advocacy burden for labor issues as their participation in the H-2A Guestworker Program is documented and regulated.

Theoretical Contributions

Interview and survey results from industry participants reveal a number of factors that support and contradict several premises of social exchange and migration theories. A number of factors affect decision-making among industry participants and have an influence on the migration of workers to the industry and the social exchange between workers and their employers. Table 6.2 outlines the economic and non-economic factors that influence the decision-making among workers who participate in the Christmas tree industry. Table 6.3 outlines the economic and non-economic factors that influence grower decision-making related to the use of Hispanic workers on their farms.

Table 6.2. Decision-making factors affecting/influencing workers in industry.

| Economic Factors | Non-Economic Factors |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guaranteed wages, housing, transportation, legal status (for H-2A guestworkers) • Remittances to family • Steady, full-time work in Christmas tree industry • Availability of short term work with high returns (more hours during shearing/harvest seasons) • Less competition for jobs • Cash-based exchange (in some cases)* | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect/rapport with grower • Collateral benefits with particular employers (assistance with housing, legal status, healthcare) • Familial ties (ability to work/live with family members) • Informal networks among other workers and growers • Community preference • Type of work/work environment preference • Legal status and associated employment barriers* • Fear of deportation* • Health/occupational risks • Reliance on employer (exploitation risks) |

*Among undocumented workers.

Table 6.3. Decision-making factors affecting/influencing growers in industry.

| Economic Factors | Non-Economic Factors |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost of participation in H-2A program (housing, transportation, set wages) • Regulatory risks of hiring/training practices • Wage determination and overtime issue associated with Christmas trees | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships with individual workers • Greater perceived work ethic of Hispanic workers • Recruitment potential among other growers and worker networks • Advocacy scrutiny, public opinion regarding industry • Language barrier |

The Role of Economic and Non-Economic Factors

The initial recruitment of Hispanic labor to the Christmas tree industry and its impact on immigration conforms with Piore's (1979) assessment that "migrations from underdeveloped to developed areas seem to be initiated by active recruitment on the part of employers" (p. 19). However, while the North Carolina Growers Association still currently serves as a labor recruitment mechanism for H-2A guestworkers by actively recruiting temporary, nonimmigrant guestworkers in Mexico, a majority of Hispanic workers today are recruited into the Christmas tree industry from other industries and by informal networks of workers through family members, acquaintances, and by fellow growers. Employers in other industries actively may be seeking workers in their home countries, expediting transportation, documentation, and advancing money to encourage migration. Recruitment by employers, while a factor that can influence the individual's decision to migrate, is only one of many reasons that workers have migrated and continue to migrate to the U.S. Continued immigration into the Christmas tree industry largely has been due to the informal networks among undocumented migrants that initially may have been recruited from other crops within the U.S., or who have moved into the area more recently to take advantage of the demand for labor in this industry. A number of economic and non-economic factors play a role in the decision making process of these workers.

The economic factors involved in the social exchange within this industry cannot be ignored and are supported by this research. Initial motivation to migrate and participate in the industry follow Piore's (1979), Thompson's (2001), and Brettell and Hollifield's (2000) microeconomic assertions that poverty in workers' home countries and individual or familial cost-benefit analyses are primary factors that drive migration. Workers in the study related

that they earn exponentially more working in rural North Carolina in agricultural based endeavors such as tobacco and Christmas trees than they could make in Mexico and made the decision to migrate based on this premise. A majority of the workers interviewed indicated that they periodically sent earnings to their families in Mexico. It is estimated that Latin American immigrants sent an estimated \$30 billion in remittances to their home countries (Harrison 2003). According to the 2002 National Survey of Latinos conducted by the Pew Hispanic Center and the Kaiser Family Foundation, 42% of adult foreign-born Hispanics send money home regularly (Brody et al. 2002).

Although individual cost-benefit decisions have an impact on determining the individual's value of participation in the industry, psychological and relational exchanges between employer and worker also play a role in determining the overall value of the work experience. Zafirovski (2003) argues that "within-group processes and inter-group relations cannot be subsumed under economic exchange, especially market transactions, since they involve social exchange and noneconomic phenomena as well" (pp 14-15). This type of value placed on noneconomic exchange is evidenced by the fact that personal relationships established between the individual grower and members of their workforce were indicated as a main reason certain workers continued to work in the Christmas tree industry.

Ties among workers in the Christmas tree industry are reflected in their responses to interview questions concerning the influence of family, friends, and employers on their decision to migrate to the area and into the Christmas tree industry. This concurs with studies in social capital theory that show that information, personal contacts, and family connections are the leading variables in the individual decision to migrate (Massey and Espinosa 1997;

Lin 2001). Each of the undocumented workers who were interviewed indicated that familial ties led them to the area and the Christmas tree industry.

The “borrowing” or sharing of labor by networks of individual growers elaborates on Putnam’s (1993) insights into social capital and how as the volume of social capital rises within a network, risks decline, and more members are more easily drawn into the network. Networks that have developed over time among growers (and workers) also have had a definite influence on the development of the current labor system in the Christmas tree industry. Almost 60% of grower survey respondents indicated that they “borrow” workers from other growers when they need work done, often from neighbors or other growers who have workers currently on their farms. While the borrowing of H-2A workers from growers participating in the Guestworker Program goes against Department of Labor guidelines, this system meets the needs of both growers and workers: H-2A workers are able to work more hours, H-2A growers worry less about filling their workers contracts during slow work periods on their farms, and smaller growers receive access to these workers.

Social exchange theory asserts that individuals involved in an exchange, such as employers and workers, employ different levels of information, power, and motivation that affect their decision-making and interaction. Growers and workers are social actors engaged in goal attainment behavior (Thomas & Thigpen, 1996). Growers strive to reduce costs and maximize profits by appraising their labor and production needs, markets and policies, and making rational production and labor decisions. Workers attempt to find employment in industries that meet their economic needs and personal satisfaction.

Zafirovski also endorses amendments to social exchange theory that not only acknowledge the import on the sociological and psychological interpersonal relationships and

exchange between individual actors in the marketplace, but also among groups. His conclusions and trends in social exchange research also assert, “In-group processes and intergroup relations are more complex than being sets of market transactions” (p. 1). Assumptions and conclusions from my research on the Christmas tree industry point to a number of generalizations concerning the industry’s participant groups and the economic as well as sociological dynamics that exist between its participant groups, growers and workers. Networks established among the worker population are influenced by the network among growers to an extent that continues to influence the labor system in the Christmas tree industry. Workers mentioned that growers often put them in contact with other growers needing work while growers often rely on members of their workforce to provide them with family members or acquaintances who are looking for work.

Conclusions from this research support the current theoretical discourse among social exchange researchers on a number of sociological and psychological influences that impact the exchange between participants in this industry. Findings support a multifaceted process by which the decision to migrate and remain (or leave) the industry is based on familial and interpersonal networks, the relationship with the employer, and cost-benefit decisions among workers in the industry. These decisions also are influenced by the growers and the industry itself based on the type of work, personal and financial benefits or opportunities offered by the growers, and the rapport and respect between the employer and members of the workforce. Christmas tree growers, in the survey and interviews, agreed that workers were initially recruited into the industry from local and regional sources. Other growers who observed the productivity and increasing availability of these workers soon began hiring

workers and indicated that they “borrowed” workers from other growers in an informal network of labor supply.

While economic exchange is a dominant influence on the decision making process for both participant groups, the importance of the social relationships and exchange between them cannot be ignored. Faist (2000) asserts that a history of prior migration, or contact with a person with a history of prior migration increases the probability of future migration. Interviews with migrant workers in the Christmas tree industry corroborate these findings. Each worker interviewed confirmed that their decision to migrate to western North Carolina and to the industry was influenced by family members, friends, or acquaintances in the H-2A program that had worked in the industry. Interviewed workers who had been in the region and working in the industry for over 15 years echoed how recruitment by employers to the industry played the initial role in establishing a “migrant base” of workers. These migrant “pioneers” established the initial social network by which other migrants, family members and acquaintances, followed.

Cooperative Social Exchange

Although the observations derived from this research are confined to the Christmas tree industry, they show a different perspective and offer another viewpoint to popular conceptions of the migrant agricultural labor dynamic. One of the most interesting observations in this study was the cooperative social relationship evident among many industry participants interviewed. While researchers, the popular media, and the advocacy effort tend to portray a confrontational and exploitative dynamic between agricultural labor and their employers, the observations of this study point to a much more multi-faceted relationship. The interactions and exchange between participants in the Christmas tree

industry has thus far generally resulted in a system of mutual benefit. With few exceptions, workers and growers who were interviewed implied a cordial or professional relationship. While turnover of workers in the industry was indicated to be quite high (65% among survey respondents), interviews and surveys indicated that workers do have the opportunity to advance in pay, perquisites, and responsibility. Exceptions tended to be anecdotal and particular to individual participants and workers who enter the industry only periodically for short term work opportunities.

These results contradict Blau's (1993) assertions of an antagonistic and exploitative system of exchange perpetuated by inequalities of pay, authority, perquisites, and responsibilities. Strong personal relationships between growers and workers that reflected respect and rapport were evident in interviews with many industry participants. While inequalities can manifest themselves in wage differences and responsibilities, the dynamic among industry participants has forged overall an "industrial community" whose social contract is more cooperative and less antagonistic than Blau suggests. Workers and growers often work together throughout all aspects of farm activities, thus diminishing the "division" of labor often used to illustrate exchange relationships between employers and workers. Several workers mentioned higher pay and other benefits from growers such as free housing, assistance with non-work related medical expenses, and assistance with the immigration process. Every grower interviewed recognized the contribution Hispanic workers have made to the industry and acknowledged the role of these workers in the industry's growth.

One notion prevalent in newspaper and popular literature is that migrant workers are paid less than local labor and that migrant workers are displacing local labor. However, industry participants revealed that workers earn more than minimum wage and non-H-2A

workers often negotiate their wages, typically several dollars over minimum wage. Survey results also showed that 61% of growers disagreed or strongly disagreed that hiring Hispanic labor was less expensive than hiring local labor (Table 3.2). Interviews with growers support that local labor is difficult to encounter and often unreliable and strongly disagreed that Hispanic workers were displacing local workers. Low unemployment rates in the counties where the majority of Christmas trees are grown also suggest that the hiring of Hispanics for jobs in the Christmas tree industry is not displacing local workers.

Thomas and Thigpen (1996) assert that any improvement in the conceptualization of exchange processes should address the identification of antecedent influences and subsequent attitudinal effects on labor-related behaviors among industry participants. If policy makers and regulatory authorities seek to develop appropriate strategies to ameliorate the current bureaucratic and social challenges facing employers and migrant workers, more research is needed on the social exchange process among these participants.

Industry Recommendations

A number of recommendations are made from study findings that can be applied to assist industry participants and professionals who work with the industry on a number of levels. More formalized, standardized, and frequent training related to important issues recognized by industry participants should be implemented to improve grower and worker understandings of policy and productivity issues and improve interpersonal relationships within the industry. Growers and workers do continue to struggle in their relationships due to the language barrier, legal status issues, and policy and regulatory concerns. While exploitation and mistreatment of migrant workers have been sensationalized to bring attention to this vulnerable population, the implications of these broad generalizations have

tended to reflect negatively on all employers. Labor advocacy groups and regulatory agencies also share a responsibility in improving the existing system. Table 6.4 outlines a number of recommendations for industry participants and regulatory and advocacy agents that work in the industry.

Table 6.4. Recommendations for industry participants.

| Growers | Workers | Regulatory/Advocacy Agents |
|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve familiarity with policy/legal requirements • Use incentives and benefits to decrease worker turnover and increase productivity • Improve communication barrier: through bilingual training, use of materials in Spanish • Improve occupational/pesticide safety training • Cultural training/awareness for themselves and crew leaders • Greater collaboration with regulatory agencies and advocacy groups | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take advantage of English training opportunities • Follow pesticide/occupational safety guidelines and use of proper equipment • Improve communication with employer to address areas where productivity/safety/benefits could be enhanced | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve collaboration with growers • Educational approach vs. confrontational tactics • Improve regulatory system to meet practical needs of growers and workers • Development and use of incentives to acknowledge, reward, and encourage employers |

Although survey results indicated that growers perceived only minor effects of the language barrier on worker productivity and safety, frustration with communication and the language barrier was a common theme among growers and workers who were interviewed, especially in communicating details and non-work related issues. While growers and workers have developed their own strategies for managing difficulties with the language barrier, communication difficulties have implications on productivity, effectiveness of pesticide and

occupational safety training, and conflict resolution. Addressing communication problems through the production of bilingual materials related to pesticide safety and other job-related activities relevant and specific to the Christmas tree industry could improve various aspects of the grower-worker relationship in the industry. A manual (supported by training) to assist the Hispanic worker in adapting and understanding American cultural and work place norms could also be developed with the following topics: legal issues, communication/education, work environment, culture and communities, and an English/Spanish audio resource of common terms in the Christmas tree industry workplace. On-farm training programs could be implemented to address individual grower needs in the production areas of shearing and harvesting that would improve productivity as well as worker perception of performance.

Industry participants' perceptions regarding pesticide and occupational safety have immediate and long-term implications on not only the welfare of their workforce, but also play a large role in regulatory and advocacy scrutiny of individual operations as well as public opinion regarding the industry in general. While the language barrier between growers and workers plays a large role in the effectiveness of communication and training related to these issues, grower and worker awareness of pesticide and occupational safety risks must be emphasized and improved. Although nearly 80% of growers surveyed felt that the language barrier rarely or never affected worker safety, previous studies indicate that growers and workers share unrealistic beliefs regarding pesticide exposure and many workers (and growers) participate in pesticide applications without proper training (Wilk 1986; Villarejo and Baron 1999; Von Essen and McCurdy 1998). Arcury's (1999) study revealed that more than one third of 270 Hispanic workers surveyed had never received any type of pesticide safety training. Survey results among Christmas tree growers showed that 68% of growers

who hire labor are very concerned or concerned about occupational and pesticide safety issues. However, growers must improve their personal knowledge of pesticide safety and provide proper WPS (Worker Protection Standard) training to their workers and assure that their workers are following proper procedures. This will reduce short-term and long-term risks to themselves, their workforce, and improve the popular conceptions and regulatory risks facing their operations.

Growers and workers should capitalize on English education programs that are offered routinely by local volunteer groups, churches, and other Hispanic support organizations. Active encouragement or incentives for workers to attend these programs might improve language skills of workers that would reduce language barrier difficulties in the workplace. Survey results and interviews indicated a strong reliance on English-speaking workers or crew leaders for communication and training of non-English speaking workers. While some growers inferred that some English-speaking members of the workforce were deemed to be ‘trouble-makers’, perhaps incentive based promotions of these workers would encourage these worker participants to utilize their language ability more constructively.

Growers who employ local crew leaders to manage groups of workers or contractors should monitor these individuals to ensure their interaction with the workforce is appropriate. In interviews, several workers indicated instances of crew leaders who used abusive language when the grower or employer was not present. This type of negative interaction can influence productivity and perpetuate traditional feelings of ill will between the workforce and employers. This interaction also fuels long-existing arguments of labor advocates who maintain an abusive premise of the migrant worker/employer dynamic. Crew leaders and

labor contractors should be made well aware of the impact of their behavior towards the overall management goals of the industry.

Survey results indicate that a large segment of Christmas tree growers are not familiar with laws and requirements for hiring and training migrant labor. While 51% of employers in the industry indicated they were somewhat familiar with legal requirements, 28% indicated that they were not very familiar or knew nothing about legal requirements. Immigration and hiring issues are a serious concern among the Hispanic population and to a lesser extent their employers. While many other industries struggle with this issue, there has yet to be a well-defined solution. Information regarding hiring requirements could be compiled and made available in a user-friendly format to both growers and their Hispanic workers. Employer training programs that address pertinent legal issues could assist growers interested in operating within compliance, improving awareness of their legal responsibilities, and ultimately lead to more equitable employment conditions for the industry's workforce. While necessary, regulatory approaches have typically been considered more punitive than educational. A more structured educational approach to address legal shortcomings of industry participants could possibly increase grower compliance without the perceived antagonism that growers currently feel.

Gabbard and Perloff (1997) found that producers who adopt better labor-management practices can expect higher productivity, lower turnover, and reduced anxiety about labor. This was evident in interviews with some growers who had hired bilingual crew leaders familiar with the farm operation, participated in the H-2A program, and who made an effort to provide workers with better housing. Incentives and relational benefits could be offered to workers to increase job satisfaction and improve employee retention. Turnover increases cost

as growers face additional expense in recruitment and training new workers. If growers can retain their best workers over extended periods, they can cut operation costs. While economic benefits influence worker decisions to remain in a particular job, employment conditions also contribute to workers' desires to return. Improving economic and non-economic benefits could increase production and ameliorate employee retention problems in the industry. Gabbard and Perloff found that employers wishing to retain good workers should greatly increase the use of benefits. In their 1997 study, the probability of a farmworker wanting to return rises by 19 percent if health insurance is provided and 21 percent if paid leave is offered.

Collaboration of efforts between advocacy groups, regulatory agencies, educational organizations, and industry representatives is essential for the development of effective strategies to address the industry's labor issues. Research-based educational programs such as those offered by North Carolina's Cooperative Extension Service and others who have established greater rapport with growers would be appropriate delivery mechanisms for this type of information. The Cooperative Extension Service was the preferred training delivery entity indicated in the survey of growers. Groups interested in educational initiatives to worker and grower groups could use the Cooperative Extension Service to assist them in reaching these groups with whom extension agents traditionally have maintained rapport.

Improving productivity and efficiency as well as participant relationships within this industry could be achieved by quality training efforts. Expectations that a majority of the industry's Hispanic workers will become proficient in English should be modest. If growers wish optimum performance from their employees, they and their crew leaders should be assured that the workers fully understand their positions and the work environment.

Developing training materials and efforts specifically for this audience is a logical solution to this end. In addition, recognition and sensitivity to cultural and language differences between each participant group could improve working relationships within the industry.

Information about the agricultural workforce and the general business environment is important. Knowledge about employment and management at the level of the individual farm also is beneficial to industry professionals working to help employers improve management decisions and relationships with their employees (Rosenburg et al. 1994, Gabbard and Perloff 1997). To conduct more effective research or design programs to reach all participants in the industry, more collaborative approaches to research and education among these industry participants must be considered.

Policy Analysis and Recommendations

There are many social and economic factors, relationships, and conditions that continue to complicate migrant labor policy reform efforts. Market competitiveness and other U.S. economic characteristics such as the “cheap food policy” push growers to seek the most cost-effective alternatives as possible, starting with wages (Papademetriou and Heppel 1999). Papademetriou and Heppel (1999) elaborate:

The seasonality and arduousness of fieldwork mitigate against a significant year-round, permanent workforce. As a result, foreign-born workers dominate the agricultural labor market that, in turn, reinforces the sector’s reluctance to invest systematically in labor-saving technologies, improve labor standards in significant ways, alter its labor management practices, or offer the associated services (such as acceptable housing provisions) that might allow it to attract a more loyal and stable workforce (p. 14).

An oversupply of undocumented workers also complicates the matter (Rosenbaum 2001). Some argue that the first deliberate step in improving farm labor conditions should be reducing the farm labor supply by more effective enforcement of immigration and labor laws (Martin and Martin 1994). The common use of fraudulent documents by workers and the legal mechanisms in place that prevent employers from questioning documentation have perpetuated a system whereby undocumented workers can easily find employment. If policy makers are not willing to or do not have the resources to commit to increasing substantially the enforcement of existing immigration law and illegal hiring practices among employers, across all sectors, the current dynamic will continue. However, in the meantime, the development of a better occupational educational infrastructure of all industry participants would at least ameliorate working conditions and wage issues that impact the health and well being of these workers.

Currently, there is no legal, cost-effective alternative available for smaller producers who only need labor for limited periods of time. These employers typically hire undocumented workers or “borrow” guestworkers from larger producers to meet the labor needs. In interviews, smaller scale Christmas tree growers complained that hiring workers through the guestworker program was cost-prohibitive and not feasible due to the size of their operations and the additional expense of housing and transportation required for participation in the H-2A program. Any broad policy considerations for improvements to the guestworker program should include provisions for smaller scale producers to improve their ability to legally and affordably hire a legal workforce. This improvement would also meet the financial wishes of workers wanting additional wage hours on weekends or during slow work periods by allowing them greater flexibility of movement between employers.

Cultural differences between industry participants including the language barrier, perceptions of occupational conditions, education levels, prejudice and racism also play a role in complicating the issues. In addressing reform, the typically parochial conservative rural identity of growers often clashes with traditionally more liberal and progressive advocates. Many of the Christmas tree farmers believe that advocacy groups, the media, and other “outsiders” are simply antagonists trying to “put them out of business.” Unfortunately, many of the tactics used by the media and others exacerbate the traditional ill will between growers and advocacy groups. Several growers mentioned that advocates and members of the media often have sneaked on to their farms or posed as graduate students or researchers to take pictures and conduct interviews that are “taken out of context” when they are published (G8).

Very rarely have participant groups interacted collaboratively to address their concerns to remedy inherent problems or ameliorate occupational environmental issues, primarily due to their opposing value systems, long-term objectives, and misperceptions of each group’s goals. The majority of growers maintain a quiet distance from public interaction regarding immigrant labor issues. While Christmas tree growers and state agencies maintain a forced yet civil relationship, advocacy groups and workers interact inconspicuously to avoid possible retribution from disgruntled growers. A strong sense of discord and animosity was noted throughout interviews with growers regarding advocacy groups and perceived ‘antagonistic’ practices in which many of these groups approach their objectives. While most advocates operate within their legal right to approach and visit with workers, both on or off the farms, the advocacy and worker education movement could be greatly enhanced by improving collaboration with growers and communicating their intentions more clearly. Of

course, any advocacy effort involving encouraging workers to demand higher wages or bring legal action against their employers will be met with resistance by growers. However, other programs such as occupational and pesticide safety education, farmworker health programs, English as a second language classes, or service-related activities are generally appreciated by employers who may not be technically capable or willing to provide such programs themselves. Many advocacy groups operate under the assumption that growers care little for the health and well being of their workforce. Grower feedback and perspectives throughout this research dispute this over-generalized notion and point to an enormous opportunity to provide needed services to workers through greater collaboration with employers of migrant workers.

Developments in Immigration Reform

A number of immigration reform bills are currently under debate on a Congressional level to determine improvements to stem illegal immigration while providing an adequate manual work force for agricultural employers who rely on migrant farmworkers. In September 2003, legislation was introduced to overhaul the current agricultural labor system known as the AgJOBS bills (S.1645 and H.R.3142). The AgJOBS bill has provisions that streamline the administrative procedures required of growers applying for labor and workers wishing to enter the program. The program allows a means for currently undocumented workers to enter the program with no penalty and has provisions to allow workers who are employed over set periods of time during a six-year period to apply for permanent resident status. The AgJOBS bill is an agreement reached by several years of negotiation between agricultural employers, farm labor organizations, and a bipartisan group of Congressional leaders to improve the current H-2A Guestworker Program. Numerous associations

representing both H-2A users and non-users, including the National Association of Agricultural Employers, have endorsed this piece of legislation. A different immigration reform proposal by the Bush administration in January of 2004 has similar implications to guestworker reform. While the details of this legislation have yet to be revealed, the plan would provide a one-time opportunity for undocumented individuals in the U.S. to pay a fee to obtain work authorization and the ability to travel in and out of the U.S. Thereafter, only individuals outside the U.S. would be eligible to participate in a temporary worker program. The Bush proposal would apparently require employer sponsorship and a demonstration by the employer that it has attempted to recruit U.S. workers for the position they seek to fill.

Any immigration reform that entails amnesty for workers will probably have a significant impact on the Christmas tree industry and other industries that rely on undocumented workers who often choose these industries due to the clandestine and cash-based nature of the work. Legally documented workers will more than likely prefer to leave these types of jobs to seek higher paying, more permanent, less arduous, and less seasonal jobs. Growers will more probably have to offer higher wages or benefits to attract and/or keep reliable workers.

Conclusions

Recommendations: Objective Appraisal and Equitable Solutions

Informal appraisal of the existing H-2A Guestworker program has taken place at a number of levels. Individual growers who use the H-2A program have appraised the program since they began using it and have communicated their discord to their respective legislative liaisons (Gaskin 2001b). Advocacy groups perpetuate their appraisal by continued diligence in criticizing the program through the media and other public awareness

campaigns. This informal continuous appraisal has led to a more formal evaluation of the program and the current Congressional discourse on the issue. However, more objective and dependable appraisals could come from state agencies such as the Department of Labor or the Cooperative Extension Service that work directly with workers and growers. More importantly, appraisal from the workers should be included to increase the contextual validity of any reform measures. Whether the current guestworker program is reformed or restructured, sound criteria for continuous appraisal should also be implemented to ensure that the needs of all participants are realistically and effectively addressed. Each group of study participants indicated that greater flexibility is needed in the current system. Growers who participate in the H-2A program concurred that associated costs and accountability as well as inflexible regulatory requirements of the program make it difficult to adopt. Growers who hire workers but who do not participate in the guestworker program point to the H-2A Program's regulatory stringency as the reason for not participating in the program. Undocumented workers as well as H-2A guestworkers point to the difficulty in changing employers as a disadvantage of the program. While accountability should ideally be shared among the major participant groups, an independent evaluator should participate in program monitoring.

Objective research including oral histories and interviews along with analysis of data from the National Agricultural Workers Survey can be used to continue to explore trends. Social exchange theory and migration theory are possible theoretical avenues that could be explored to explain relationships and trends among industry participants (Deluga 1994). This type of research and data hopefully will be applied to solution-building in the future. More immediate scenarios for addressing migrant labor issues likely will include the

implementation of a more flexible guestworker visa program, more stringent immigration enforcement, or a new system of employer regulation that more effectively monitors employers—especially individuals who are known to abuse the system.

A comprehensive and inclusive review process must first occur to evaluate the perspectives and concerns of all industry participants. Some have suggested that the existing labor system be replaced by an autonomous federal agency that would independently supply and regulate farmworkers, maintain an accurate worker registry, and serve in a regulatory capacity. This agency ideally would be structured to relieve the legal and socioeconomic deprivations that many farmworkers experience (Rosenbaum, 2001). It also would reduce the level of accountability that many growers attribute to their non-adoption of the current guestworker program. While the likelihood of the development of such an agency seems far-fetched for the near future, this research offers recommendations to improve labor management and policy.

For the Christmas tree industry, any new reforms must satisfy the growers' concerns for labor and production costs while maintaining safety and occupational environmental standards that meet the needs of the workers and the demands of advocacy groups that represent them. In the long term, policy makers will have to continue to address the broader issues of protecting workers' rights and interests in other undesirable labor market sectors which will serve a more comprehensive role in mediating and providing alternatives to the current and obviously problematic farm labor system.

Future Directions

With an increasing reliance on Hispanic and other migrant labor in rural and urban sectors for unskilled and manual labor jobs, more research into the dynamics of multi-

cultural labor management should be a priority. While migrant labor policy issues are hashed out at the state and national level, more research into the employer/worker dynamic can lead to more equitable and effective management strategies for industries with predominantly Hispanic labor forces. Objective research into the dynamics between foreign workers and their employers may also broaden the cultural understanding among industry participants and lead to more realistic appraisals of industry labor dynamics.

Based on the findings of this applied research, a number of hypotheses are suggested for future study:

- a) Bi-lingual training and improved communication between employers and workers leads to increased productivity and job satisfaction and decreased worker turnover.
- b) Pesticide safety education conducted in Spanish for Hispanic workers decreases exposure risks and improves on-farm worker safety practices.
- c) Streamlined foreign/guestworker labor application procedures reduce unpermitted hiring practices among employers and promote adoption of legal hiring practices.
- d) Popular media references and scientific research show a bias towards a focus on exploitation themes and confrontational relationships among migrant labor and employers.

Tree growers share many of the same labor issues with other agricultural employers of migrant workers. Likewise, migrant workers in this industry share many of the same concerns as agricultural workers throughout the United States. While lawmakers develop the formal framework to address the larger issues surrounding immigration and migrant worker policy reform, in North Carolina's Christmas tree industry, industry participants will undoubtedly continue to evolve their strategies and relationships to meet their individual

needs on and off the farms. While challenging for these industries and researchers alike, further research into the dynamics of migrant labor in agricultural industries will certainly contribute to more equitable solutions to this multifaceted topic.

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Appendix A.

**North Carolina State University
Institutional Review Board for the Use of Human Subjects in Research
COVER PAGE**

Title Of Project: **Hispanic labor in North Carolina’s Christmas tree industry: employer and laborer perspectives**

Principal Investigator **James Victor Hamilton, Jr.**

Department **Forestry**

Source of Funding (other than personal): **Community Forestry Foundation (Ford Foundation)**

Project Duration - Start Date **July 2001**

End Date: **June 2002**

Campus Address (Box Number) **8008**

E-Mail: jim_hamilton@ncsu.edu Phone: **919-515-5340 (w); 919-363-2082 (h)**

RANK: Faculty_____

Student: Undergraduate_____ Masters_____ PhD **XXX**

Other (specify):_____

If rank is *other* than faculty, name of faculty sponsor overseeing the research **Dr. Frederick W. Cubbage**

Sponsor's e-mail address and/or Campus Box #: **Box 8008; fred_cubbage@ncsu.edu**

Phone: 919-515-7789

As the principal investigator, my signature testifies that I have read and understood the University Policy and Procedures for the Use of Human Subjects in Research. I assure the Committee that all procedures performed under this project will be conducted exactly as outlined in the Proposal Narrative and that any modification to this protocol will be submitted to the Committee in the form of an amendment for its approval prior to implementation.

Principal Investigator

James Victor Hamilton, Jr.

(typed/printed name)
(date)

(signature)

5-10-2001

*As the faculty sponsor, my signature testifies that I have reviewed this application thoroughly and will oversee the research in its entirety. I hereby acknowledge my role as the **principal investigator of record**.*

Faculty Sponsor:

Frederick W. Cubbage

(typed/printed name)
(date)

(signature)

IRB Committee Reviewer

Acceptable:

Not Acceptable:

Reviewer Name: _____ Signature: _____

Date: _____

Final IRB Committee Decision

Approved: Exempt Review Expedited Review Full Review

Not Approved:

Committee Chairperson

Date

RECEIVED: _____ SENT TO REVIEWER: _____ LETTER TO PI: _____

**North Carolina State University
Institutional Review Board for the Use of Human Subjects in Research
PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS**

- 1) Is this a taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance study, where (i) wholesome foods without additives are consumed or (ii) food is consumed that contains a food ingredient at or below the level and for a use found to be safe, or agricultural chemical or environmental contaminant at or below the level found to be safe, by the Food and Drug Administration or approved by the Environmental Protection Agency or the Food Safety and Inspection Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture ?

No

- 2) Will the subjects remain completely anonymous (i.e. no identifiers which can link an individual subject to their data)?

No

- 3) Will anyone other than the PI or the research team have access to the data (including any completed surveys) from the moment they are collected until they are destroyed?

No

- 4) Is your subject population going to consist of only elected or appointed public officials?

No

- 5) Does your research involve the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), **survey procedures, interview procedures** or observation of public behavior?

Yes

- 6) Does your research involve the analysis of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens or diagnostic specimens?

No

- 7) In your estimation does the study involve no more than minimal risk to the subjects (see definition of minimal risk in the Policies and Procedures page)

Yes

**North Carolina State University
Institutional Review Board for the Use of Human Subjects in Research
PROPOSAL NARRATIVE**

In your narrative, address each of the topics outlined below. If a section does not apply to your study type “N/A”. Failure to follow these directions will result in delays in reviewing/processing the protocol.

A. Introduction

1. The proposed research will focus on costs and benefits of the Hispanic labor force in North Carolina’s Christmas tree industry from the perspective of employers, laborers, and agency personnel associated with the industry. Hispanic workers are prevalent among many Christmas tree producers. However, little research has focused on this industry and its use and reliance on Hispanic labor. The proposed project will address costs and benefits faced by employers in the Christmas tree industry related to their use of Hispanic labor and identify costs and benefits of Hispanic laborers who work in this industry. Results of this research will provide perspective and insight to professionals who work with Christmas tree farmers and Hispanic labor, and allow growers and laborers to express their concerns regarding policies and issues that directly impact them.
2. The proposed project is a Ph.D. dissertation conducted through the Department of Forestry, North Carolina State University.

B. Subject Population

1. Between 25-50 individuals will be involved in the research. Research participants will consist of: 1) Christmas tree farm owners who may or may not employ Hispanic labor 2) Hispanic laborers who work in the Christmas tree industry 3) agency and extension personnel and private voluntary organization (PVO) members.

2. Potential research subjects will be identified by extension personnel with North Carolina State University's Cooperative Extension Service. Snowball sampling and self-identification will also be used to identify potential participants. Potential interviewees will be asked to participate in the study by the principal investigator. Participation in the study will be voluntary.
3. Interview protocols are designed to be semi-structured and open-ended. The participant and interviewer will mutually determine interview length. Interviews are anticipated to last between 1 and 3 hours.
4. In order to be eligible to participate in the study, the participant must either be:
 - a) A Christmas tree grower within the state of North Carolina
 - b) A Hispanic laborer employed in the Christmas tree industry in North Carolina.
 - c) An agency or organization member who works directly or indirectly with the Christmas tree industry
5. N/A.
6. N/A
7. Because the proposed study focuses in part on Hispanic laborers, some participants may be undocumented aliens or economically disadvantaged. No individuals will be identified based on their status. Protocol for obtaining consent of these subjects is explained below.

C. Experimental Procedures N/A

D. Potential Risks

1. There are no anticipated risks connected with the proposed research procedures.
2. Some of the research questions might be sensitive because of economic or immigration status. Any economic and legal data will be maintained as anonymous or confidential as described below.
3. N/A

4. Data from interviews with Hispanic laborers will be anonymous. Privacy and confidentiality will be maintained throughout the course of the study for all growers and agency/organization members. Each informant will be assigned an identifying number. All data will be recorded using only the identifying number. No association will be made which could link participants' names to data gathered. Data will remain in a locked cabinet in the office of the principal investigator at 222 Daniels Hall, NCSU. Consent forms will be tagged with the identifying number and be stored in a locked cabinet in the office of the Dean of Forestry, 8008 Jordan Hall, NCSU. Reports will be written in aggregate terms so that no data can be identified with any participant. Individual responses that might be used in quotations in such reports will be identified by name only with the consent of the respondent.
5. Audio recording of interviews will occur only if permitted by the participant. Such tapes will be transcribed, and erased immediately following transcription.

6. N/A

D. Compensation

1. There will be no direct compensation gained by participants in the study.
2. N/A
3. N/A

E. Collaborators

1. The following collaborators in the investigation consist of the principal investigator's graduate committee:

Frederick W. Cabbage, Head of Department of Forestry

Sarah Warren, Department of Multidisciplinary Studies

John Frampton, Department of Forestry

Toddi Steelman, Department of Forestry

G. Additional Information
Questionnaire Components

**Preliminary Survey/Interview Questions
For Employers—Christmas tree growers**

- How much land do you have under Christmas tree cultivation?
- How long have you been a grower?
- How many employees do you have?
- How many of your employees are Hispanic?
- When did you begin hiring Hispanic labor?
- What made you decide to hire Hispanic labor?
- Why do you hire Hispanic labor now?
- Do you have a preference for labor? If so, what?
- Is there available local labor?
- Where do the majority of these laborers come from?
- How many Hispanic workers are brought onto your farm through the H-2A program?
- Are they resident, migrant, seasonal?
- Are labor contractors used?
- Do you know what kind of training do new workers receive?
- Where and how are they trained?
- Do you have to pay for this training?
- Is there a language barrier? Do you address this issue? How do you address that issue?
How do you feel that affects training of employees, or their understanding of what's expected from them?

- What is required of employers for hiring and training and working conditions? What are the regulations that you have to follow?
- What are your thoughts on these regulations related to the Christmas tree industry?
- What are the most common on-the-job injuries?
- How adequate do you consider safety standards within the industry?
- Do feel that these requirements are adequate, fair? For you and the workers?
- What could be done to improve current standards?
- Which requirements do you feel are the most/least important?
- Would you be interested in receiving training related to employer requirements regarding the hiring and training of Hispanic labor?
- What type of information would you be most interested in receiving?
- Would you be willing to pay for such a service?
- What are the advantages/benefits of hiring Hispanic labor?
- What are the disadvantages/costs of hiring Hispanic labor?
- What is the greatest concern you have regarding your labor situation?
- If you could talk your congressman into passing one law regarding Hispanic labor, what would it be, and why?

For Hispanic Workers

- How long have you been working here (at this particular place)?
- How did you decide to work here?
- What other kind of work have you done? What kind of work did you do before?
- How long have you been working in the Christmas tree industry?

- How long do you plan on working here?
- What are your future plans?
- How did you get here?
- How do you feel about the pay, working conditions, benefits, etc. Are they more favorable in this industry?
- Is there competition for jobs among seasonal and migrant workers?
- Do you have a choice of where you work?
- What sort of job training do you receive?
- Do you feel you get enough training to do your job?
- What methods do your boss utilize for non-English speakers for training, job requirements, etc.?
- What safety measures are required when working?
- Do you get safety training? Who does the training?
- What other kind of training do you receive?
- Is there additional training you would like to receive? If so, what?
- What are the most common on-the-job injuries?
- What are the advantages of working in this industry?
- What are the disadvantages?

North Carolina State University
Informed Consent Form

Hispanic Labor in North Carolina's Christmas Tree Industry: Employer and Laborer Perspectives

James Victor Hamilton, Jr.

Frederick W. Cabbage

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to identify costs and benefits of employers in the Christmas tree industry related to their use of Hispanic labor. It is also to identify costs and benefits of Hispanic laborers who work in this industry.

Information

1. You will be asked to participate in one or more interviews. Interviews will be taped if you give permission. The principal investigator will review the information to identify key points made throughout the course of the interview.
2. You and I will decide the duration of the interview. The interview will consist of several open-ended questions.

Benefits

The results of this research will shed light on some of the issues affecting Christmas tree growers who employ Hispanic labor and the laborers themselves. There is little information available regarding the challenges and needs of employers who use Hispanic labor and often, the popular media's coverage of Hispanic labor guides decision-making.

It is the researcher's goal to identify the issues affecting Christmas tree growers and their Hispanic workers. Results of this research will provide valuable perspective and insight to professionals who work in this field, and allow growers and workers to express their concerns regarding policies and issues that directly impact them.

Compensation

You will not receive any direct compensation for participation in this study.

Contact

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Jim Hamilton, at 919-515-5340. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in this research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. Matthew Zingraff, Chair of the NCSU Institutional Review Board for the Use of Human Subjects in Research committee, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919-515-7856) or Mr. Matthew Ronning, Assistant Vice Chancellor, Research Administration, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919-513-2148)

Participation

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

Consent

I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Subject's signature _____ **Date** _____

Investigator's signature _____ **Date** _____

**Solicitud de Permiso
North Carolina State University**

Nombre del estudio: Obra Hispana en la industria de arboles de Navidad en North Carolina: perspectivas de los productores y los trabajadores

James V. Hamilton, Jr.

Frederick W. Cabbage

Esta invitado a participar en un estudio. El objetivo de este estudio es identificar las ventajas y desventajas de trabajar en la industria de arboles de Navidad en North Carolina del punto de vista del trabajador y productor. A la vez, este estudio quiere desarrollar ideas que pueden mejorar la relacion entre el productor, el obrero y las agencias que trabajan en esta industria.

Informacion

1. Estoy solicitando su permiso para entrevistarlo/la. Si me permite, me gustaria grabar la entrevista para, una vez acabada, poder traducirla al ingles, y a la vez identificar los temas mas importantes.
2. Usted y/o el investigador decidiran la duracion de la entrevista. Esta entrevista consistiria de varias preguntas informales sobre su experiencia en la industria arbolera.

Beneficios

Hay poca informacion sobre el sistema de empleo y entrenamiento en la industria de arboles de Navidad en North Carolina. La meta de este estudio es identificar cuestiones que afectan a los productores y trabajadores en esta industria y permitir que ellos expresen sus ideas.

Retribucion

No recibira compensacion por participar en este estudio.

Contacto

Si tiene cualquier pregunta sobre el estudio o el procedimiento, favor de contactar al investigador, Jim Hamilton, al numero de telefono: 919-515-5340. Si tiene preguntas sobre sus derechos como participante, puede comunicarse con Dr. Matthew Zingraff, Presidente del Comite de Institution Review Board for the use of Human Subjects in Research.

Participacion

Su participacion en este estudio es voluntario.. Si decide participar, podra retirarse del estudio en cualquier momento.

Consentimiento

He leido y entiendo la informacion dada en este formato. He recibido una copia de este formato y doy mi consentimiento para mi participacion en este estudio.

Firma de participante _____

Fecha _____

Firma de investigador _____

Fecha _____

Sponsored Programs and Regulatory Compliance
Campus Box 7514
1 Leazar Hall
Raleigh, NC 27695-7514
919.515.7200
919.515.7721 (fax)

From: Debra A. Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator

North Carolina State University

Institutional Review Board

Date: June 18, 2001

Project Title: Hispanic Labor in North Carolina's Christmas Tree Industry: Employer and Laborer Perspectives

IRB#: 232-01-6

Dear Mr. Hamilton:

Based on the information provided, this project is exempt from the policy as outlined in Code of Federal Regulations (Exemption: 46.101.b.2). Provided that the only participation of the subjects is as described in the proposal narrative, this project is exempt from further review.

NOTE:

1. This committee complies with requirements found in Title 45 part 46 of The Code of Federal Regulations.

For NCSU projects, the Assurance Number is: M1263; the IRB Number is: 01XM.

2. Review de novo of this proposal is necessary if any significant alterations/additions are made.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Debra Paxton
NCSU IRB

Sponsored Programs and Regulatory Compliance
Campus Box 7514
1 Leazar Hall
Raleigh, NC 27695-7514
919.515.7200
919.515.7721 (fax)

From: Debra A. Paxton, IRB Administrator
North Carolina State University
Institutional Review Board

Date: May 29, 2002

Project Title: Hispanic Labor in North Carolina's Christmas Tree Industry: Employer and Laborer Perspectives

IRB#: 232-01-6

Dear Mr. Hamilton:

Your addendum to the study named above (addition of self-administered mail survey) has been reviewed by the IRB office, and has been approved. Your study remains exempt from the federal regulations at 45 CFR 46. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact the IRB office at 919.515.4514.

Thank you,

Debra Paxton
NCSU IRB

Appendix B. Survey Questionnaire and associated letters.

(Pre-survey letter to growers)

Dear North Carolina Christmas Tree Grower:

I would like to invite you to participate in a survey that you will receive by mail in the next few days from the Department of Forestry at NC State University. The purpose of the survey is to determine how the labor force developed in North Carolina's Christmas tree industry, what are the challenges that many of you face as employers of Hispanic labor, and how growers and laborers can get better public assistance to do their jobs.

There is little information available regarding the challenges and needs of employers who use Hispanic labor and often, the popular media's coverage of labor issues guides decision-making. Your participation in this research project will help to objectively identify and address the issues currently affecting Christmas tree growers and their workforce.

All information received in the survey will be kept confidential. Your responses will be combined with the responses of other growers to create an overall "picture" of the industry as a whole. There will be a drawing for a \$100 gift certificate to Lowe's Home Improvement for participants who complete the survey. I thank you in advance for your participation in this project. If you have any questions about this survey, the study, or your confidentiality, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Jim Hamilton

Graduate Student

Phone: 919.515.5340

Email: jvhamilt@unity.ncsu.edu

(survey letter to growers)

Dear North Carolina Christmas tree grower,

I am writing to ask your help in a study of labor in North Carolina's Christmas tree industry. We are contacting a random sample of Christmas tree growers from the major Christmas tree producing counties in North Carolina.

The enclosed questionnaire is part of an effort to determine the dynamics of the industry's labor force, challenges that many of you face as employers of Hispanic labor, and how growers and laborers can get better public assistance to do their jobs. Because the popular media's coverage of labor issues often guides decision-making, your participation in this research project will help to objectively identify and address the issues currently affecting Christmas tree growers and their workforce.

Your answers are completely confidential and will be released only as summaries in which no individual's answer can be identified. If for some reason you prefer not to respond, please let us know by returning the blank questionnaire in the enclosed stamped envelope.

As a small token of our appreciation, there will be a drawing for a \$100 gift certificate to Lowe's Home Improvement for participants who complete the survey. Whether you use labor on your farm or not, your participation in this questionnaire is important.

If you have any questions or comments about this study, we would be happy to talk with you. My number is 919-515-5340. Thank you very much for helping with this important study.

Sincerely,

Jim Hamilton

P.S. If by chance we made a mistake and you do not grow Christmas trees in North Carolina, please check the space provided on the cover of the questionnaire and return the rest of it blank. Many thanks.

(reminder postcard)

July 12, 2002

Last week a questionnaire about labor issues in North Carolina's Christmas tree industry was mailed to you. Your name was randomly selected from your county's list of growers.

If you have already completed and returned the questionnaire to us, please accept our sincere thanks. If not, please do so as soon as possible. We are especially grateful for your help, because it is only by your willingness to share your experiences that we can understand and address important labor issues in the industry.

If you did not receive a questionnaire, or if it was misplaced, please call us at 919.515.5340 and we will get another one in the mail to you today.

Jim Hamilton, Graduate Student
Department of Forestry
3019 Jordan Hall, Box 8008
NC State University
Raleigh, NC 27695-8008

NORTH CAROLINA CHRISTMAS TREE GROWERS LABOR SURVEY



Thank you for your participation in this survey and completing this questionnaire. All information you provide will be kept confidential. If you have any questions or concerns about a particular item in the questionnaire or about your confidentiality, please contact Jim Hamilton directly at 919-515-5340 or at jvhamilt@unity.ncsu.edu

To be considered for the drawing for the \$100 gift certificate to Lowe's Home Improvement, please return your completed survey in the enclosed return envelope by July 31.

If you do not grow Christmas trees for commercial sale and received this survey by mistake, please check the space below and return the survey in enclosed envelope.

_____ **I do not grow Christmas trees**

The survey should take you around 20 minutes to complete. Some questions ask you to check the most appropriate answer while others ask you to circle the answer or number that best fits or fill-in-the-blank. There are no “trick questions” or wrong answers-- please answer the questions the best way you see fit.

1) How many years have you been growing or harvesting Christmas trees for commercial sale (Estimates are fine)?

_____ years

2) In 2001, did you hire, either personally or through a contractor, **ANY** full or part-time workers for your Christmas tree operation? (By workers we mean manual laborers, **not including family members**, for planting, shearing, spraying, harvesting, wreath and garland making, crew leading, etc.)

_____ Yes

_____ No (If you answered NO, please skip to Question #21)

3) How many **total** workers did you hire in 2001 for any amount of time?

_____ total workers in 2001

3a. How many of these workers were Hispanic (this includes anyone of Mexican or other Latin American origin whether they are citizens, recent immigrants, or migrant workers)

_____ of these workers were Hispanic

4) Currently, how many of your workers (Hispanic **or** non-Hispanic) work for you in some capacity year-round--from early spring until the end of the harvest?

_____ year-round workers

4a. How many of these workers are Hispanic?

_____ year-round Hispanic workers

5) Not counting the harvest, how many seasonal workers do you usually hire or contract. By seasonal, we mean workers that are hired for several days or weeks at a time, either full or part-time, to perform specific tasks like planting, spraying, fertilizing, and shearing.

_____ seasonal workers

5a. How many of these seasonal workers are Hispanic?

_____ seasonal Hispanic workers

5b. For how many days or weeks are these seasonal workers usually employed?

_____ days **OR** _____ weeks

6) Do you normally hire additional workers for the harvest?

_____ Yes

_____ No (*If no, go to question #7*)

6a. If you answered yes, how many additional workers did you employ for the **2001 harvest**?

_____ additional workers for the harvest

6b. How many of these workers were Hispanic?

_____ workers

6c. For how many days or weeks were these Hispanic workers hired or contracted **for the harvest**?

_____ days **OR** _____ weeks

7 a). What year did you first begin hiring **any** labor for Christmas tree production?

7b). What year did you first begin using **Hispanic** labor?

8) Why did you begin hiring Hispanic labor? Please circle the number that best describes to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements.

| | strongly agree 1 | agree 2 | disagree 3 | strongly disagree 4 | don't know 5 |
|---|------------------------|------------|---------------|---------------------------|-----------------|
| I could not find enough local labor | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Local labor became less available/reliable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Hispanic workers were more readily available | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Hispanic labor was less expensive | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Hispanic labor was more productive | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Other farmers were Using Hispanic labor, so I decided to try them | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

____ I have not hired Hispanic labor

Other (Please explain): _____

9) How frequently do you use the following ways to get labor for your Christmas tree operation? **(Please circle one number for each item)**

| | always 1 | often 2 | sometimes 3 | rarely 4 | never 5 |
|---|-------------|------------|----------------|-------------|------------|
| I recruit and hire my own workers | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I go through an American labor contractor | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I go through a Mexican labor contractor | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I "borrow" workers from other growers when I need work done | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I go through the North Carolina Growers Association/H2A program | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I contact the Employment Security Commission and let them know I'm hiring | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I hire folks that drive up and ask for work | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I have one or more workers who brings in other workers when I need them | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I post job openings locally | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Please list any other ways you find labor:

10) How often do you hire Hispanic labor for the following tasks (Please circle one number for each item)

| | always 1 | often 2 | sometimes 3 | rarely 4 | never 5 |
|---|-------------|------------|----------------|-------------|------------|
| As crew leaders | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| For planting/setting seedlings | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| For fertilizing | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| For shearing | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| For spraying (pesticides and/or herbicides) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| For harvesting | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| For garland/wreath making | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

_____ I have not hired Hispanic workers

Other tasks

11) Do any of the same Hispanic workers return each year to your farm?

_____no

_____yes

11a. If yes, how many returned in 2001? _____

12) How many of your Hispanic workers speak English well enough that you can regularly communicate with them?

_____ none of them

_____ few of them

_____ some of them

_____ most of them

_____ all of them

12a) Which of the following best describes your ability to speak Spanish?

_____ I don't speak Spanish

_____ I know how to say a few work-related words and phrases in Spanish

_____ I can handle very basic conversation in Spanish

_____ I feel comfortable conversing in Spanish

_____ I am fluent in Spanish

13) Do you feel there is a language barrier between you and your Hispanic work force?

_____ all the time

_____ often

_____ sometimes

_____ rarely

_____ never

14) Do you feel that the language barrier affects worker **productivity**?

_____ all the time

_____ often

_____ sometimes

_____ rarely

_____ never

14a) How often is work done incorrectly due to the language barrier?

_____ all the time

_____ often

_____ sometimes

_____ rarely

_____ never

14b) Please give a brief example of a task or job that you feel was done incorrectly due to the language barrier:

15) Do you feel that the language barrier affects worker **safety**?

_____ all the time

_____ often

_____ sometimes

_____ rarely

_____ never

16) How often is the language barrier difficult in the following situations? (Please circle one number for each item)

| | always 1 | often 2 | sometimes 3 | rarely 4 | never 5 |
|---|-------------|------------|----------------|-------------|------------|
| During the hiring process (negotiating wages, pay schedule, paperwork, etc) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Discussing daily job duties or activities | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Giving instructions for shearing, planting, or setting | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Giving instructions for pesticide/herbicide handling, mixing, or spraying | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Giving instructions for harvesting | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Giving instructions for equipment operation | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| In non-work related situations | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

_____ Other situations (please explain)

17) How often do you use the following ways to determine what you pay your workers? (Please circle one number for each item)

| | always 1 | often 2 | sometimes 3 | rarely 4 | never 5 |
|--|---------------------|--------------------|------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| I pay minimum wage with overtime | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I pay minimum wage with no overtime | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I negotiate an hourly wage with the individual worker | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I offer to pay what other growers say they pay their workers | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I use a contractor—I don't pay workers directly | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I am in the H2A program and am required to pay workers the set wage rate | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I pay some workers more than others depending on the job or how well I know them | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

_____ Other (please explain):

18) Which of the following describes the way **job training for workers is carried out at your farm (**Please check all that apply**):**

____ I use workers who already have experience working on Christmas tree farms

____ I train the workers by taking them to the field and showing them what to do

____ I use a labor contractor and therefore do not train workers directly

____ The worker who speaks the best English translates what I say to the rest of the workers

____ I have a local crew leader who trains the workers

____ I have a Mexican crew leader who trains the workers

____ Other (Please Explain):

19) If for some reason Hispanic labor were no longer available, to what extent would you consider the following options? (Please circle one number per item)

| | would consider | might consider | would not consider |
|--|----------------|----------------|--------------------|
| I would offer higher wages to attract reliable local labor | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| I would invest in new technology or equipment that requires less labor | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| I would scale down my operation | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| I would try and do all the work myself | 1 | 2 | 3 |

Other: _____

20) Please indicate your level of concern regarding the following aspects of your labor force. (Circle one number for each item)

| | very concerned | concerned | somewhat concerned | not concerned |
|---|----------------|-----------|--------------------|---------------|
| How much I'm required to pay them | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Their legal status | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| If they're going to be available when I need them | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| If they're good workers | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Being able to effectively communicate with them | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

Other: _____

21) How familiar are you with the laws and requirements for the hiring and training of migrant labor? (Please check only one)

I am very familiar with the hiring and training requirements

I am somewhat familiar with the requirements

I am not really familiar with the requirements

I know nothing about the requirements

22) If you are familiar with laws and requirements regarding labor, please indicate your level of concern about the following government policies. (Please circle one number per item)

| | very concerned | concerned | somewhat concerned | not concerned |
|---|---------------------------|------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Hiring and wage policies | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Migrant housing policies | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Occupational safety/Pesticide safety policies | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

Other (**Please Explain**):

None of these government policies are applicable to me

23) Would you be interested in receiving training related to employer requirements regarding the hiring and training of migrant labor?

No

Yes

Maybe

24) Would you be willing to pay for an employer-training course or service related to Hispanic labor?

____ No

____ Yes

____ Maybe, depending on the cost

24a) If you checked yes or maybe, what would be the **most** you would be willing to pay for such a course or service?

____ \$5 or less per worker ____ \$20 per worker ____ \$100 per worker

____ \$10 per worker ____ \$50 per worker ____ more than \$100

25) Who would you most prefer to conduct employer training related to migrant or Hispanic labor? (**Please check only one**)

____ Department of Labor

____ Employment Security Commission

____ North Carolina Cooperative Extension (County Extension Agents)

____ Christmas Tree Growers Association

____ A private consulting group

____ The employer should be responsible for his own training

____ A non-profit organization

____ No preference

Other _____

26) How important do you feel that Hispanic labor is for your operation (**Please check only one**)

- _____ Very important
- _____ Important
- _____ Somewhat important
- _____ Not really important
- _____ I don't use Hispanic labor

27) What is the main advantage of hiring Hispanic labor?

28) What is the main disadvantage of hiring Hispanic labor?

29) In what county do you live?

_____ County

30) In which county or counties do you have Christmas trees (either on your own land or on land that you lease)?

_____ County

_____ County

_____ County

_____ County

31) About how many Christmas trees did you harvest during the 2001 season? (Estimates are fine)

_____ trees

How many trees do you expect to harvest in the 2002 season (Estimates are fine)?

_____ trees

32) Labor costs are **what percent** of your total operating costs? (Estimates are fine)

Approximately _____%

33) What percentage of your annual household income came from Christmas trees last year (2001)? (Estimates are fine)

Approximately _____% of my annual household income comes from Christmas trees

34) Do you consider yourself a part-time or full-time Christmas tree grower?

_____part time

_____full time

35) Are you a member of the National Christmas Tree Association?

_____Yes

_____No

The North Carolina Christmas Tree Association?

_____Yes

_____No

A county Grower's or Nurserymen's Association?

_____Yes

_____No

36) What is the highest level of school you have completed? **(Please check only one).**

___Less than 12th grade

___High school graduate or GED

___Some college

___Associate or technical degree

___Bachelor's degree

___Graduate degree

37) In what year were you born?

Would you be willing to participate in an in-person interview to speak in more detail about Hispanic labor issues?

_____ Yes

_____ No

If you are interested in participating in an interview, please provide your name and phone number and the best time to reach you below.

Name: _____

Phone Number: _____

Best time to contact you: _____

Thank you very much for your participation in this survey!

Please include your contact information below to be included in the drawing for the \$100 Lowe's Home Improvement gift certificate. This information **will not** be used to tie you to information provided in the survey or be distributed to anyone else. It will only be used for the gift certificate drawing. After the gift certificate drawing, all contact information will be destroyed. Good luck!

Name _____

Address _____

Phone Number: _____

e-mail address: _____

Thank you!

If you have any questions or concerns about a particular item in the questionnaire or about your confidentiality, please contact Jim Hamilton directly at 919-515-5340 or at jvhamilt@unity.ncsu.edu

Jim Hamilton
Department of Forestry
3019 Jordan Hall, Box 8008
North Carolina State University
Raleigh, North Carolina 27695-8008