

Migrant Consortium Survey Themes

Part 1: Ag Worker Wellness Problems

Q1. What are the housing problems that agricultural and food processing workers experience in Minnesota?

Lack of housing close to work

- “No housing available in the community/town where the facility is located, which workers have to travel up to 60 miles to work daily, work 12 hours, drive back”
- “Homes away from transit or transportation hubs (rural areas)”
- “It’s not available houses for agricultural workers”

Lack of affordable housing

- “lack of affordable housing (pertaining to migrant/seasonal and year-round ag workers)”
- “high-cost rent”
- “Not enough low-income housing available”

Lack of short-term housing leases

- “sometimes to rent a house it has to be a 1-year contract to rent a house”
- “Migratory families not found short term housing contracts”
- “Either there is no affordable housing at all, or the leases are unrealistic for workers who are only here temporarily”

Very poor housing conditions that are not safe or healthy

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Overcrowding”• “Workers are piled together, either by employer or on their own, which creates safety issues”• “Old homes that are not safe”• “Repairs to windows that are not done by owner/manager”• “Mobile homes that don't have proper window ventilation”• “Non-functioning stove”• “no stoves-kitchen”• “Washers/dryers that do not work or are leaking water in the laundry room and the water is collecting on the concrete floor”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Lack of good heating and cooling systems”• “no air conditions”• “Bathrooms and kitchen in really bad shape”• “unsanitary bathrooms”• “no running water”• “no beds nor linens”• “they smell, floor is not clean”• “broken windows/doors and unsafe front door steps railings.”• “infestations (ex. bed bugs)”
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Current housing regulations not working

- “Sub-par housing standards and gaps in protections”

- “Lack of accountability to adhere to state, federal (and local) regulations. Need more staff to inspect all housing for H-2A (one or two people cannot do this job adequately), migrant, seasonal, and year-round workers. This will be tricky for non-employer provided housing (ex. hotels/motels) and some H-2A housing like trailers/campers/RVs (in which the job order has an itinerary for traveling intrastate, even interstate)”
- “Easy going FLCC staff person. Seems to be employer-friendly and not focused on black and white of enforcing standards that protect H-2A workers via housing conditions”

“Finding housing is very difficult. Either there is no affordable housing at all or the leases are unrealistic for workers who are only here temporarily. Affordable housing is a huge issue! Families tend to double or triple up or sleep in their vehicles if they cannot find housing. This can lead to dangerous situations.”

“Migratory agricultural workers often only need temporary housing and it can be hard for them to find something affordable and available in area that is near their workplace. When housing is not found, often workers and their families must find someone to live with or stay in a motel, which is expensive due to a daily charge.”

Q2. What are the health & safety problems that agricultural and food processing workers experience in Minnesota?

Dangerous working conditions

“The labor that agricultural and food processing workers do is hard and physical labor that is often paired with hazardous conditions.”

Long work hours

- “long hours with inadequate break time.”
- “Extended long hours of work or continuous work days that do not allow for medical appointments or self-care appointments.”
- “After working 10-12 hours a day in heat, get sick”
- “For agricultural workers who work outside, they are sometimes exposed to weather conditions that could cause health problems such as heat stroke, dehydration, etc.”

Lack of protection against hazards

- “Close proximity to other workers [COVID-19]”
- “Many times agricultural and food processing workers are considered essential workers, so during the COVID-19 pandemic they are often still exposed to many people.”
- “Need for more on farm training.”
- “lack of training on handling hazardous chemicals”
- “No having proper equipment”

Barriers to Healthcare

“Many workers do not have access to medical care services which makes them go to the hospital only for an emergency medical need”

Health Insurance	Getting There	Communication
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “No health coverage.” • “Lack of affordable health care” • “No health or dental insurance coverage” • difficulties obtaining medical insurance • “The majority of our agricultural/food processing workers have difficulties obtaining medical insurance and assistance completing the medical application.” • “No portable cross state insurance or medical records.” • “They not able to use the health insurance from their home base in MN” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Transportation to and from appointments is difficult” • “Do not get paid sick time or PTO so when they are sick, they cannot afford to lose a day's pay and then they end up continuing to work. Or they may lose their job if they don't come into work.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Language barriers” • “Lack of understanding of the health care system” • “Diagnosed with high blood pressure, diabetes, but I know they are not doing preventive health because of lack of health care health insurance, not affordable and lack of bilingual health care staff to be able to communicate when visiting clinics, hospitals etc.”

Other Health & Safety Problems

- “Under-reporting of workplace injuries”
- “The fear to police and authorities keeps them from reporting crime and other situations that could put their health and safety at risk.”
- “Not easy access to worker's comp attorneys for workplace injuries (esp if there is a language barrier).”
- “Human trafficking”
- “sex trafficking”

“Safety concerns at work are not addressed rapidly. There should be a anonymous method to immediately report safety issues and have the enforcement agency act, immediately on that information. When it takes weeks to decide whether or not to act on a complaint or concern---it costs the workers their health and well being.”

Q3. What are the labor problems that agricultural and food processing workers experience in Minnesota?

Pay is Low to Begin With...

- “Low wages for high risk jobs, no insurance or benefits.”
- “Low pay for the work that they do.”
- “weather conditions can interrupt regular work schedules.”
- “Workers wages continues to be low and on top of that, many of them have to pay for housing and other many utilities.”
- “Do not get paid sick time or PTO so when they are sick, they cannot afford to lose a day's pay and then they end up continuing to work. Or they may lose their job if they don't come into work.”

...add wage theft...

- “Working long hours and not getting pay accordingly”
- “Overtime is good pay, but some companies require the worker to be working 12 hrs 7 day a week”
- “Some employers not paying overtime to AG workers”
- “unpaid wages”
- “Employees may often go days without work and can be recalled to work with little prior notice.”
- “Employers tend to ignore terms of migrant contracts (not paying the 70-hour two week minimum)”

...and an environment where it isn't safe to complain.

- “Fear of reporting abuse, wage theft.”
- “treated improperly, disrespected”
- “see a lot of retaliation if they speak up regarding work conditions”
- “Safety issues that go unresolved because the employers instruct workers to lie about the situation or their jobs will be on the line.”
- “employment contracts that are vague and workers don't understand the rights of the employment contracts”
- “DOL is not able to enforce the rights of the workers”

“These ag workers have experienced numerous times unpaid wages, no holiday pay-nor sick pay-nor vacation pay, no lunch breaks-bathroom breaks, no immediate medical attention even though it was a severe accident/work injury, no assistance for completing medical injury report, severe work harassment/retaliation against the worker after any injury or accident has occurred and mandatory working 12 hour shifts with the straight 7 days working which has severing increase injuries/accidents.”

Q4. Other than housing, health and safety, and labor problems, what other problems do agricultural and food processing workers experience in Minnesota?

Isolation & Mental Health

“Most ag workers are minorities that face racism and discrimination, and are disconnected from the community.”

<p>Workers are feeling...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loneliness • No sense of community • Anxiety • Depression • Other mental health issues 	<p>Contributing factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working in Minnesota, away from family and friends • Discrimination • Systemic racism • Language barriers • Lack of access to wifi, technology • Students uprooted from their home school districts before end of school year
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Current Support Services Not Meeting Needs

- No clear understanding of what agencies enforce the laws for migrant & seasonal farmworkers
- Lack of culturally responsive services - to ensure their overall health and wellbeing
- Forever hard to qualify for local support services upon arrival in MN, such as housing, education, daycare, vocational rehabilitation services, and disability.
- Lack of educational opportunities even though programs are in place

Q5. Which of the problems you listed above do you think are the most important for the Agricultural Worker Wellness Committee to address? Why?

“Housing and health.”

“Health and housing.”

“Housing problems, they need somewhere to live that feels safe.”

“Housing; if workers cannot find housing, they will either leave the area, leaving a shortage of workers, or live in conditions that are not safe.”

“Health Care and wellness access”

“Culturally responsive services - health, wellbeing, housing help, medical services, support to address labor and other issues during their time working in Minnesota”

“Safety Concerns. Accidents that cause injury to workers that go unresolved or that lead/Supervisors ignore for the benefit of the employer.”

“Enforcement of migrant contract. Right now, if employers violate the contract, employees most likely will have to sue the company or hope that Attorney General will take and pursue complaint under wage theft provisions.”

“Labor rights and enforcement, with employment contracts they are not defined and are vague that benefits the employer and does not protect the workers rights”

“Discrimination and racism. People have a huge misunderstanding of who the agricultural workers are and where they come from. They are not valued for their contributions to the communities they live in.”

“All these issues intertwine within itself. So, if the committee is focus on the well-being of the worker then I would start from the employer. I would relist all the agricultural worker issues these community is facing then write out a policy that would prevent these issues from reoccurring. I would say that a written policy coming from leaders have a stronger support of implementing and following through than just taking about it.”

Part 2: Ideas and Solutions

What ideas do you have to help with the problems listed above?

Do you have examples of successful programs or solutions that have helped agricultural and food processing workers with the problems listed above?

- **Collaboration and Community Involvement**
 - General thoughts:
 - “I believe that spreading awareness to communities and organizations that may be able to help these agricultural workers is a good start.”
 - “Work with community partners to solve housing shortages and training on health and safety awareness.”
 - Specific ideas:
 - “Community events that welcome everyone. Employers could host an event for their ag workers and open to the community.”
 - “Mobile health collaborations”
 - *Example:* “U of M mobile health”
 - “Have an agriculture and food processors consortium group to help and guide, support the challenges they have to recruit, employer and employee rights, housing and health care issues to help their employees.”
 - *Example:* “Wisconsin and Michigan have done some great things for the workers and employers”
 - “Is there a way to loop in the faith community for ag worker housing needs? Can faith communities be charged with operating ag worker housing facilities? One would think they would not have an ulterior motive. Offering grants to such

faith communities to create/buy or revamp, and maintain/operate, those housing facilities.”

- **Strengthen Current Laws and Enforcement**

- General thoughts:

- “Strengthen migrant wage protection and housing quality laws.”

- *Example:* “In the housing area, one company has provided clean, well-maintained housing for employees. This includes providing modern amenities.”

- Specific ideas:

- “Enforcement agency assigned to act immediately.”

- “A broader definition of “labor camp”

- “I would say that a written policy coming from leaders have a stronger support of implementing and following through than just taking about it.”

- *Example:* “Yes, I’ve coordinated migrant seasonal orientation at migrant camps where I invite guest speakers serving these communities talk about their services. It’s extremely important to provide outreach where migrant communities gather, live and meet them where they are.”

- **Funding**

- To support existing organizations and agencies

- “Additional funding to increase the impact of current agencies or organizations supporting workers”

- To create incentives

- “Provide incentives for landowners/landlords to rent short term to tenants; Provide incentives to landlords (or agribusinesses) to build/provide affordable housing in areas that are in need; Have restoration incentives for people to restore buildings and turn them into affordable housing units.”

- “Offering grants to... faith communities to create/buy or revamp, and maintain/operate, those housing facilities.”

- **Housing**

- See related comments under Collaboration and Community Involvement, Strengthen Current Laws and Enforcement, and Funding areas above

- Specific ideas:

- “Database for recruiters and workers to locate possible housing.”

- “Strategically place ag worker housing in central hubs throughout the state so that a one-way drive is no more than 1 hour (ideally less) each way. Centralize housing that is not employer-owned so that migrant workers, who would likely be out of luck to find any (newer) affordable/revamped housing, know where to go.” [Same respondent who suggested “Can faith communities be charged with operating ag worker housing facilities?]

- Additional examples:

- “Migrant Workers Project”

- “I all the time help and share resources to our migratory families”

If money and resources were not a barrier, what specific policy or program solutions/suggestions do you have to solve the problems with housing, health and safety, and labor?

- **Collaboration and Unified Approach to Services**
 - “Collaboration, collaboration, collaboration among state, local and other agencies and organizations to work on behalf of workers and their families.”
 - “Solutions for housing, health, safety and labor would be to provide agricultural workers with easy one page intake for all services in one stop that would determine eligibility with good outcomes.”
 - “There should be accessible programs in agricultural areas that agricultural and food processing workers can go to for resources on the problems listed. Having someone who knows the area well and is able to help them find affordable and available housing. There could also be housing built specifically for migratory agricultural workers, where they could stay for short periods of time with their families.”
 - “Build accessible, affordable housing. Train management staff, supervisors and team leads in processes to deal with incidents/accidents and how to report and fix safety concerns. Train on antidiscrimination laws, equity and cultural diversity.”
 - “Build affordable housing units throughout the state. Would need to make sure that the housing units were mixed in with other housing to deter issues that arise in areas with economic disadvantages. Have medical facilities on-site and available for all. Also, within the facility, have space for a childcare center (such as Migrant Seasonal Head Start). There could also be an affordable grocery store in or near the facility. If money wasn't an issue, it would be great to provide an affordable housing epicenter for anyone (but also including reserved spaces for migratory families) and have all of the above-mentioned resources available. There could also be additional resources, such as a workforce center where jobs are provided for people that are looking for additional skills. Maybe ESL classes offered, etc.”
- **Access to Health Care**
 - “Portable health insurance and records”
 - “Accessibility to use medical insurance from their home base.”
 - “Universal health care! Health insurance is outrageous for everyone, and people are dying because they cannot afford to go to the doctor (with or without insurance).”
- **Financial Assistance**
 - “rent and gas assistance”
- **Employer Involvement and Responsibilities**
 - “1. Employers would supply housing that meets local and state code at reasonable cost. 2. Employers would provide adequate or better safety training, and take advantage of government resources to ensure workplace safety and acceptable housing. 3. Employers would honor contracts and not use intimidation tactics to dissuade employees from exercising their workplace rights.”
- **Stronger Inspection and Enforcement**

- “Expand inspection processes/programs. MDH should be involved in housing inspections as they use to be in the past. Act quickly when reports of unsafe conditions are received by OSHA.”
- **Additional Comments**
 - “Money and resources will always be a barrier until government changes the way they handle spending.”

What else would you like the Agricultural Worker Wellness Committee to know?

- **Awareness, Visibility, and Understanding**
 - “To keep pushing for housing for the farm workers in MN.”
 - “We have to make these issues visible to the rest of the folks in Minnesota so we can all pay attention to these and contribute to programs that benefit workers and their families.”
 - “Please continue to learn and be aware of the issues of the migrant seasonal food processor workers, they are different from the permanent food processors”
 - “Without agricultural workers, we would not have all of our ag products that we eat on a daily basis. It is crucial to spread awareness to communities how many hardships these workers face due to poor working conditions and strenuous physical labor. It is important to provide resources to keep these workers and their families safe and healthy.”
- **Better Worker Protection**
 - “It is vital that each agency's leadership work with the Legislature to craft and enforce laws that provide better protection to vulnerable workers.”
- **Appreciation**
 - “I appreciate your time and commitment to this project.”
 - “All of your hard work is very much appreciated!”
- **Specific Recommendations**
 - “I would like to recommend that the Agricultural Worker Wellness Committee to include : 2 Migrant Labor Representatives, 2 Agricultural employers-Food Processing Employers and 2 legislators. These people are important pieces and would assist with the establishing of a policy that can work for both the worker and employer.”
 - “-The H-2A program has been increasingly utilized by ag employers over the recent years and will most likely continue to be. I think there needs to be a renewed and enhanced effort to get domestic workers of all backgrounds to work in ag. That might help raise the bar for treatment of ag workers overall. -The AWWC’s proposals should be framed in a way that not only benefit and protect ag workers (although those are so important!) but also considering public interest. Frame it as a social justice cause, part of the farm to table situation, etc.”