

Sonoma County Farmworker Health Survey (FHS) 2013-14:

Report on the health and well-being of Sonoma County farmworkers

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Executive Summary

Background

Agriculture is an essential component of the economy in Sonoma County, where wine grapes alone grossed nearly \$600 million in 2012. A healthy agricultural workforce is critical to maintaining the local economy, yet agriculture has been recognized as one of the most demanding and high-risk industries for hired workers. Compared to the general population, farmworkers experience higher rates of unintentional fatal and occupational injuries and a higher prevalence of chronic diseases. Previous research also indicates many farmworkers lack high-quality, affordable housing options and that housing affects many aspects of health. With the goal of identifying preventable disparities, the Sonoma County Farmworker Health Survey (FHS) was conducted in the fall of 2013 to collect local data on the health and well-being of Sonoma County farmworkers.

Main Findings



DEMOGRAPHICS

Farmworkers surveyed (n=293) were mostly male (91%), Latino (95%), young (median = 37 years), and had a low educational attainments (54% had less than a ninth grade education). The majority of farmworkers (88%) reported that Sonoma County was their permanent residence, and most (71%) farmworkers were living in the US with their families. These data suggest that the farmworker labor force in Sonoma County is relatively stable, a trend that is being observed in other communities in California.

Key Finding #1: The majority of farmworkers (88%) are permanent residents of Sonoma County.



HOUSING

Most farmworkers lived in houses (41%) or apartments (45%) in Sonoma County, and essentially no homelessness was reported in this assessment. Thirty percent (30%) of farmworkers were receiving some type of housing support from their agricultural employer. These results suggest that Sonoma County farmworkers are mostly living in off-site, unsubsidized, and privately-owned dwellings in Sonoma County, consistent with trends among California farmworkers overall. The US Department of Housing and Urban Development recommends that housing should require no more than 30% of a family's annual income. Farmworker families earning \$20,000 each year were estimated to spend between 30% and 54% of their annual income on housing, making it clear that farmworkers lack access to affordable housing. Additionally, up to 67% of farmworkers lived in overcrowded dwellings in Sonoma County, and farmworkers who lived with their families were the most likely to live in overcrowded conditions. The health impacts of overcrowded housing conditions are numerous and severe, and children are particularly affected by overcrowded conditions.

Key Finding #2: Farmworkers live in unaffordable and overcrowded housing conditions. 67% Farmworkers reported living in overcrowded dwelling in Sonoma County.



TRANSPORTATION

Prior state-wide research combined with FHS results suggest that farmworkers lack access to safe, reliable, and affordable transportation options in Sonoma County. While the majority (63%) of surveyed farmworkers reported driving a car to their farmwork job in Sonoma County, about 20% of farmworkers utilized *rateros*, or individuals that farmworkers pay to drive them from place to place. Data from other studies find that *rateros* can be unsafe and expensive. FHS finds that farmworkers utilizing *rateros* were spending \$0.10 more per minute of travel than farmworkers using other types of ride sharing like buses. During peak harvest season, the farmworker's transportation to and from work was estimated to cost 6% of the total annual family income of farmworker families earning \$20,000 each year. This estimate illustrates that work-related transportation is a significant annual cost for farmworker families.



ECONOMIC WELLNESS

An estimated 92% of surveyed farmworker families did not earn enough to meet their family's basic needs in Sonoma County. Single and childless farmworkers (\$19,000) earned about half the income of Sonoma County one-person households in 2012 (\$36,000). This difference is even more dramatic for farmworker families. Farmworkers living with their families (\$24,000) earned about one-third the income of Sonoma County families in 2012 (\$70,000). Only one in four farmworkers reported that their family received any non-wage income in 2012 (e.g., CalFresh). However, no data was collected on immigration status, so patterns of eligibility for publicly-funded benefits were unknown. Sonoma County farmworkers (17%) reported more food insecurity in the last 12 months when compared to the lowest income (\leq 200% federal poverty level) Sonoma County adults in 2011-12 (11%). Taken together, these data highlight a dramatic economic disparity between farmworkers and even the poorest Sonoma County residents. Extensive research has documented poverty as a strong social determinant of health, which may have tremendous effects on the health and well-being of farmworkers and their families.

Key Finding #3: 92% of Sonoma County farmworker families earn insufficient incomes to meet their family's basic needs.



ACCESS TO HEALTH-RELATED CARE

Every child in Sonoma County is eligible for health insurance, yet only three in four (77%) children of farmworkers were insured. Thirty percent (30%) of Sonoma County farmworkers had health insurance, about three-times lower than Sonoma County adults in 2011-12 (86%). Farmworkers reported that cost or lack of health insurance were the main barriers to receiving needed medical care and medications in Sonoma County. Three in five (61%) farmworkers that needed medical care in Sonoma County in the last 12 months reported going to a clinic or health center, one in five (21%) reported going to a hospital, and less than 5% reported going to the emergency room. In sum, the low health insurance coverage among Sonoma County farmworkers and their children may be restricting access and utilization of needed medical care.

Key Finding #4: Only 30% of Sonoma County farmworkers reported having health insurance, thereby restricting access to preventive and medical care.



HEALTH BEHAVIORS AND HEALTH CONDITIONS

Sonoma County farmworkers (47%) were three-times more likely to binge drink in the last 30 days when compared to US adults in 2011 (18%). However, the frequency of binge drinking (4.1 occasions in the past 30 days) among Sonoma County farmworkers who binge drank was the same as US adults in 2011. Sonoma County farmworkers (44%) were three-times more likely to report their own general health as *Poor* or *Fair* when compared to Sonoma County adults in 2011-12 (13%). The self-reported prevalence of diabetes among farmworkers (15%) was three-times higher than Sonoma County adults in 2011-12 (5%). One in four (26%) farmworkers had ever been diagnosed with high blood pressure, nearly the same prevalence as Sonoma County adults in 2011-12 (25%). Fewer farmworkers (45%) ever diagnosed with high blood pressure were currently taking high blood pressure medications when compared to Sonoma County adults in 2011-12 (77%). All told, these data highlight health disparities and that Sonoma County farmworkers are at increased risk of chronic diseases like diabetes Type II mellitus and heart disease.

Key Finding #5: Sonoma County farmworkers experience significant health disparities.



WORKSITE CONDITIONS AND WELLNESS

About 1 in 10 (9%) farmworkers reported an injury or poisoning while working in Sonoma County in the last 12 months, and nearly half (48%) of these injuries or poisonings resulted in a workers' compensation claim. Farmworkers that did report an injury or poisoning were more likely to work for a farm labor contractor when compared to farmworkers that worked for the grower or owner (17 vs. 6%). Nearly all farmworkers were provided daily access to drinking water, toilets, and other required worksite amenities. Thirteen percent (13%) of farmworkers lacked consistent daily access to shelter from the heat or weather. Farmworkers working for a contractor or labor management company were less likely to have access to shelter when compared to farmworkers working for the grower or owner (19% vs. 9%).

Why are these findings important?

Sonoma County is world renowned for the beauty, quality and strength of its agricultural economy. Underpinning all of this success are the farmworkers who work the local vineyards, ranches, dairies and fields of its robust agricultural sectors. This survey, the first of its kind, represents an important step towards reducing disparities and achieving health equity for this community. By clearly documenting and understanding the health and well-being of the county's farmworkers, community advocates and stakeholders will now have important local data to identify opportunities to improve health and to help craft and customize the strong local policies, programs and services that best fit the unique needs of Sonoma County's farmworkers and their families.

Conclusions

The majority of Sonoma County farmworkers and their families live year-round in this community. Sonoma County farmworker families are not earning enough to meet their family's basic needs. Farmworkers lack access to affordable housing in Sonoma County, and current housing conditions are overcrowded. The majority of Sonoma County farmworkers lack health insurance, and this lack of insurance is the main barrier to receiving needed medical care. When compared to Sonoma County adults overall, farmworkers are three-times more likely to report their own health as *Fair* or *Poor*, a measure that is considered a good indicator of overall health. Taken together, these data highlight a specific population living with the inequities explored in *A Portrait of Sonoma County*, a Board of Supervisor commissioned report that examines disparities in health, education, and income by neighborhood, ethnicity, and gender.