



AgHealth News

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University of California, Davis

Immigration reform: Farmers concerned about the consequences

By Philip Martin, Ph.D.

For the past 150 years, California farmers have relied on waves of newcomers to fill seasonal jobs, but immigrant farm workers over the past two decades have spread throughout the United States. Most hired farm workers were born and educated abroad, and most are not legally authorized to be employed in the U.S.

Opinion polls find that most Americans want additional steps taken to prevent illegal migration. But farmers worry about what will happen if the influx of unauthorized workers slows as a result of stepped up border and interior enforcement. The turnover rate among farm workers is at least 15 percent, meaning that only 85 percent of the hired workers employed one year are also employed the next. If enforcement stops newcomer entries, farmers may turn to guest worker programs to obtain workers.

The House and Senate have taken distinctly different approaches to the issue of immigration. In December 2005, the House approved the enforcement-only Border Protection, Antiterrorism and Illegal Immigration Control Act (H.R. 4437). This bill includes several controversial items, including making “illegal presence” in the U.S. a felony and

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Fourth Western regional ag health and safety conference focuses on research to practice

By Elizabeth Noceti DiDio

As the country responded to an outbreak of *E. coli* from tainted spinach as well as an accidental pesticide drift which sickened 30 farm workers in Sacramento County, health and safety professionals gathered near Salinas Valley—one of the world’s most productive agricultural regions—to discuss solutions to problems such as these using research to practice as the theme of the conference.

The Western Agricultural Health and Safety Conference took place Sept. 20-22 at the Asilomar conference grounds in Pacific Grove, Calif. Titled “Health and Safety in Western Agriculture: Research to Practice (r2p),” the conference was sponsored by the Western Center for Agricultural Health and Safety (WCAHS), the Pacific Northwest Agricultural Safety and Health Center (PNASH) and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH).

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adding 700 miles of fencing along the Mexico-U.S. border. The House bill does not include a guest worker or legalization program.

The Senate-approved guest worker program would add H-2C worker visas to a list that already includes

H-1A, H-1B, H-2A and H-2B. Employers in any U.S. industry could attest that the employment of H-2C migrants “will not adversely affect the wages and working conditions of workers in the United States similarly employed” and not lead to the termination of U.S. workers 90 days before and after the H-2C migrants go to work. Foreigners in their

countries of origin who received job offers from U.S. employers who filed such attestations would pay \$500 and pass medical exams to obtain three-year renewable work permits, after which at least one year must be spent in the country of origin unless the foreigner has become a U.S. immigrant.

H-2C guest workers could change their U.S. employers, but only to work for other employers who have filed the same attestations regarding their need for migrants, and migrants unemployed more than 45 days would be subject to removal. The H-2C guest workers could become immigrants while working in the U.S. in two ways. First, their employers could apply for immigrant visas on their behalf after one year of U.S. work, and second, H-2C visa holders could apply for immigrant visas on their own after four years in the U.S. and knowledge of English and civics. This path to immigrant status may be complicated by the requirement that, in both cases, the U.S. Department of Labor certify that no U.S. workers are available to fill the jobs for which immigrant visas for H-2C workers are being sought, a process that today takes several years.

The current H-2A program presumes that U.S. farmers will normally find sufficient U.S. workers to fill farm jobs. Farmers anticipating too few U.S. workers can ask the U.S. Department of Labor to certify their need for foreign workers, which occurs after supervised recruitment efforts and inspection of housing for out-of-area workers. Requesting H-2A workers alerts unions and advocates, who sometimes sue employers for not hiring U.S. workers who respond to the farmer's ads, as they raise questions about the need for foreign workers in areas with

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Phil Martin, Ph.D., discussed immigration reform and its implications for farmers and workers on Oct. 2, during WCAHS' first seminar of the 2006-07 academic year.

By Juan Carlos Ibarra, UCSB

I attended the WCAHS Seminar Series presentation *Immigration Reform and its Implications for Farmers and Workers* on Oct 2nd because immigration reform is personally relevant given my family's history as farm workers in Northern California and my interest in policy history. In a variety of legal internship positions I have worked with immigrant day laborers and advocated comprehensive reform.

Phil Martin's analysis was quite interesting. His explanation for how and why the agricultural system depends on a particular kind of labor force, and the policy implications of this dependence, prompted many thoughts for me. A relevant predicament that needs to be addressed is the disconnect between policy and politics.

During this one-hour seminar, it was a pleasure to learn this insightful speaker's interpretation, and be able to leave with a better understanding of the issues as they relate to my personal experiences. Additionally, it was extremely beneficial to listen to the thoughtful perspectives offered by, not only Dr. Martin, but the other attendees as well. It is of such great value to be in a setting where everyone offers their experience on a common subject with a genuine interest in progressing a more critical common understanding.

double-digit unemployment rates. Even though over 95 percent of farm employer requests for H-2A workers are certified by DOL, many farmers say the program is “unworkable.”

Farmers confronting increased production and marketing risks realize that the rising share of unauthorized farm workers adds another risk to their operations. The rising labor risk is being dealt with primarily by investments in the political process, as farmers try to convince policy makers that they need legal workers at current costs if steps are taken to reduce illegal immigration. Despite reports of farm labor shortages over the past few years, plantings and sales of labor-intensive crops have continued to increase.

Rural America’s voice in the current immigration debate has been dominated by farm and other employers seeking to legalize access to

inflows of migrants. Rural leaders have to decide if guest workers or immigrants are in the best interest of their communities. A guest worker future would mean more solo men living in temporary quarters while they work in the U.S., allowing significant production facilities in areas with relatively few families. An immigrant future would mean more families and an associated integration challenge.

Today’s immigration reform debate has important implications for farmers, farm workers and rural communities. There are three major options: status quo, enforcement only, and enforcement plus guest workers and legalization. The status quo gets agriculture and associated industries a labor force, but with growing risks and externalities that are increasingly perceived as negative by most Americans. Enforce-

ment only threatens to raise labor costs and force adjustments, most likely unevenly across rural areas.

Enforcement coupled with guest workers and legalization would potentially open a new era for rural America. If history repeats itself, legalization of unauthorized workers would expedite mobility out of farm and farm-related jobs, with the vacuum filled by guest workers. If the guest workers were allowed to become immigrants, as in the Senate bill, the result could be a significant demographic and economic change in rural America.

This article was excerpted from a report titled “Immigration Reform, Agriculture and Rural Communities” by Philip Martin, a UC Davis professor of agricultural and resource economics. He can be reached by e-mail at plmartin@ucdavis.edu.

National coalition launches campaign to keep children off tractors

The Childhood Agricultural Safety Network, a coalition of health and safety organizations, is delivering the following unified message to agricultural communities: children younger than 12 years old should NEVER be on or near a tractor. Tractors are the leading cause of fatal injuries to children on farms.

The Network wants to make a difference in protecting children. They are trying to preserve the best parts of agricultural tradition, but at the same time change social norms so that people view unsafe practices for what they are—unacceptable.

Downloadable posters, logos and fact sheets are available on the new dedicated Web site <http://www.childagsafety.org/>. By mid-October, a PowerPoint presentation will be online, as well as exhibit resources for outreach. The Web site also describes the Childhood Agricultural Safety Network and lists its members and their contact information.

As a health and safety advocate, YOU are encouraged to access the public awareness campaign posters and messages from the Web site and use them in your outreach activities.

Thank you for your support in transmitting the message that “It is easier to bury a tradition (i.e., kids on tractors) than a child.”

For more information, contact Scott Heiberger, communications specialist with the National Children’s Center for Rural and Agricultural Health & Safety, by e-mail at heiberger.scott@mcrf.mfldclin.edu, or by phone at (800) 662-6900.



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Western Center Director Marc Schenker, M.D., M.P.H., began the conference with a challenge. He said, “Research to practice is an appropriate focus for translating research efforts into practical interventions that will decrease the health and safety hazards of agricultural work.”

“Nearly 25 percent of the 110 attendees represented Western states public agencies, while one of every five participants at the conference were students in training,” said Conference Chair Kent Pinkerton, Ph.D.

Other participants included producers, industry representatives, private consultants, and non-profit organizations, along with health care providers and agricultural worker advocates.



View from historic Merrill Hall, where conference attendees convened for the two-day conference. WCAHS researcher Tamara Hennessy-Burt enjoys the perfect weather, sites and sounds on her short walk to Session I.

Eric Lauritzen, Monterey County agricultural commissioner, presented specific examples of progress to address safety issues in pesticide applications. Lauritzen also discussed the uniqueness of California in having an agricultural commissioner’s office in every county of the state.

Conference participants were from Oregon, California, Washington, Idaho, Hawaii, Nevada, North Carolina, New York, Alaska, Arizona and Colorado.

Keynote speaker George Conway, M.D., M.P.H., director of NIOSH’s Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing Program, stressed the importance of NIOSH’s initiative of research to practice (r2p) to reduce occupational illnesses and injuries in the next decade.

Five thematic sessions focused on different areas of r2p, including new approaches for many university investigators, to understanding the

regulatory process of government agencies and advocate groups in shaping policy. In addition, speakers discussed educational approaches for understanding and promoting education through *promotores* (community health workers) farmer training sessions, and public education through social marketing and the local and national media.

Elizabeth McGloughlin, a conference speaker who has for decades worked to increase health and safety through legislative or regulatory change, suggested similar approaches could be applied to agriculture to implement a successful advocacy program.

PNASH Director Richard Fenske stated, “Better definitions of r2p are needed. There is great diversity in the types of research, in the areas of training, measurement detection methods, educational products, and engineering technologies. Developing different r2p models may be necessary.”

The thematic session on agricultural engineering was dedicated to John Miles, an r2p success story. A professor in the UC Davis Department of Agricultural Engineering, Miles played a key role in developing safer agricultural production methods for more than four decades. Miles observed, “reversing roles, observing the operations and spending one season working with people is key to reaching growers.” Other presenters in this session discussed orchard automation, and stated that little progress has been made over the past 65 years in finding better ways for harvesting. However, significant advances have been made in agricultural engineering, including new platforms for tree fruit harvest,



Donna Fairchild, agricultural consultant with the Arizona Department of Agriculture using handles as arm extensions with the “pot carrier.”

and the use of robotics in orchard preparation and harvesting.

Ofelio Borges, a farm worker education specialist for the Washington State Department of Agriculture’s Farmworker Education Program, presented a powerful message in “Mitigating Risks in the Agricultural Workplace: Opportunities and Responsibilities for Employees.”

Borges shared his personal story and transition from a migrant farm worker to his role as advocate for the Worker Protection Standard and educator of Hispanic pesticide handlers on safe practices. Borges said, “When it comes to minimizing risks in agriculture, many different groups have to work together to be successful.”

He discussed the barriers (culture, language, literacy) faced by farm

workers that come to the United States to work in agriculture, especially those who, like himself, come from rural areas in Mexico. Borges said traditional educational methods (the use of books and classroom settings) are not effective in training/educating farm workers who face these kind of barriers. Innovative training approaches are necessary to help farm workers apply what they have learned and, consequently, create greater and more direct impact on mitigating risk at the workplace in agriculture.

Borges further stated, “Employers could represent the most powerful and influential barrier among farm workers. Employers need to cultivate safety by allowing and promoting employee participation in safety programs by encouraging employees to follow safety practices and by developing company policies that address all safety issues and concerns at the farm” He said government agencies should provide

more and better outreach, especially to assist growers in better understanding and complying with safety regulations. Safety consultants need more practical experience to better assist employers by providing them with different options, and they need to be able to communicate and work with both employers and employees.

Agricultural safety and health researchers need to become intimately familiar with the daily tasks of farmers and farm workers as well as finding better ways to disseminate results, according to Borges. If no bridge exists to take research to practice, then all the money, time and efforts invested to conduct studies and obtain results are wasted.

“When we all have a better understanding of our responsibilities

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Kit Galvin, research industrial hygienist with the Dept. of Environmental & Occupational Health Sciences, University of Washington, mechanically cutting stock for propagating, eliminating repetitive hand motion and tendinitis.

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with regard to safety in agriculture, working together we will be much more effective in mitigating risks in the agricultural workplace.”

Conference participants enjoyed a reception and tour of the National Steinbeck Center located in Salinas. The surrounding Salinas Valley is one of the major vegetable-producing areas in the country with 240,000 acres of prime farmland.

The Steinbeck Center created a virtual farm that high school students can run to enhance their knowledge of economics and local agriculture. Visitors to the Steinbeck Center were reminded of the many themes relevant to agricultural health and safety that Steinbeck expressed in his literary work that remain relevant today.

The most important take-home message from the conference was that collaboration, team building



Victor Duraj, a UC Davis Ph.D. candidate in biological systems engineering and associate development engineer, presents honoree Professor Emeritus John Miles with 12 engraved glasses—11 depicting each of his ergonomic inventions designed to increase safety during agricultural production and delivery, and the 12th glass says: “John Miles, Agricultural Engineer.”

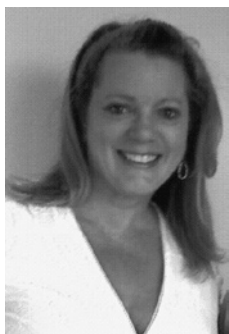
and leveraging of multiple resources are critical to facilitate the transfer of research findings into practice for the benefit of the community.

Dr. Schenker thanked the many conference sponsors and collaborators for their generous support. He closed the conference by saying,

“I am encouraged by this different perspective and conceptualization of ag health and safety, and I believe we can catalyze this approach to really improve health and safety in a hazardous industry. Agricultural health is a small group of individuals in a small discipline, and we will need to work together to achieve our goals.”

WCAHS scientist receives fellowship award for health policy research

The MICASA Field Study Coordinator, Kathleen O'Connor, Ph.D., who is based in Mendota, Calif., received an award from the Central Valley Health Policy Institute (CVHPI) at California State University, Fresno, to conduct a review of available services and a needs assessment in mental health care in Central Valley counties. O'Connor is particularly interested in local ethnic concepts and perceptions of mental health and how this might be used to improve mental health service provision.



Kathleen O'Connor, Ph.D.

Mental illnesses are as common among agricultural workers as is in the general population. Some regional studies have suggested that as Hispanic immigrants become acculturated to American society, their risk of mental

illness increases sharply. Mental health and substance abuse have been identified as pressing challenges for the San Joaquin Valley Region because of the lack of (or inadequate) services. Researchers will identify the gaps and needs for mental health service in underserved populations. Further research will explore the policy determinants of shortages in behavioral health care services, the consequences of these gaps, and new approaches to integrating behavioral health care with primary health care.

O'Connor will be collaborating with local academics to develop a competitive grant proposal to improve mental health services in the area. The Central Valley Health Policy Institute (CVHPI) established at California State University, Fresno, works with state and regional health and human service agencies to foster policy research focusing on key health challenges in the Central Valley. Dr. O'Connor invites comments, she can be reached at koconnor@ucdavis.edu.

WCAHS seminar series provides effective method for sharing new information on agricultural Health and Safety

The monthly seminar series, sponsored by the Western Center for Agricultural Health and Safety (WCAHS), focuses on topical health and safety issues in agriculture as part of our community service activities. The 2005-2006 series was very successful in covering topics ranging from agricultural labor to heat stress to California's growing dairy industry, among other topics.

The Center's seminar series has drawn upon local and national experts in agricultural health and safety. The series is just one of our Center's many efforts to promote two-way communication with the general public, agricultural community, governmental agencies, and researchers to address health and safety needs. In addition to providing the latest in state-of-the-art information, the seminars provide an opportunity for speakers and attendees to share information and develop collaborations. In order to broaden the audience for our 2006-2007 seminar series, UC campus communications will be videotaping the seminars and streaming for Mac and PC users to have them available on our

Web site the day after the seminar. UC Communications will also screen for interest-worthy topics to air on UC TV at <http://www.uctv.tv>, which broadcasts throughout California.

The Seminar Series is traditionally held on the first Monday of the month from 4:00 to 5:00 p.m. in 3201 Hart Hall on the UC Davis Campus. For more information about dates and speakers for the seminar series visit <http://agcenter.ucdavis.edu>, send an e-mail inquiry to agcenter@ucdavis.edu, or call (530) 752-4050. Seminar Series Video Webcast: <http://agcenter.ucdavis.edu/seminar/webcast.php>



Photo from the Oct. 2 seminar, featuring Phil Martin, Ph.D.

Ag health and safety questions at bay? Answers are a few clicks away!

By Amanda Huey-Ayer

Have puzzling questions about health and safety issues in agriculture? Wondering about resources for educational safety seminars? Interested in multi-lingual resources for health and safety training? Curious about how to obtain practical health and safety information? Then contact the Western Center's e-mail list server where experts on these issues are available to answer any questions you may have.

The Western Center for Agricultural Health and Safety's list server was developed in January 2005 as a resource for the global community interested in agricultural health and safety. Currently there are 120 subscribers.

Subscribers may post announcements regarding seminars and other events of interest, research and findings, as well as new programs or URLs (uniform resource locators) relating to agricultural health and

safety. Current posts include announcements about health conferences or courses, links to newsletters, use of protective eyewear, and information concerning heat stress regulations.

The site was initially run by its founder, John Brittnacher. When he retired, his position as information systems manager and management of the list server was passed on to Keith Jose and Cornel Wade. The server is open to anyone interested in agricultural health and safety. To subscribe, go to the Center's homepage at www.agcenter.ucdavis.edu and click on "AgHealth E-mail List." At the bottom of the Web page are further instructions on how to subscribe.

Amanda Huey-Ayer is an agricultural health outreach intern and a UC Davis undergraduate student majoring in clinical nutrition. She may be reach by e-mail at afhueyayer@ucdavis.edu.



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Join our list server!

Among its many electronic communications, WCAHS has an e-mail list server called "aghealth." It is open to anyone interested in agricultural health and safety. We welcome and encourage everyone involved in agricultural health and safety to participate by posting to it. To subscribe, visit our Web site at <http://agcenter.ucdavis.edu>, and click on "AgHealth E-mail List."

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CALENDAR

November 6 4:00-5:00 PM, 3201 Hart Hall, UC Davis

UC Davis Western Center for Agricultural Health & Safety Seminar

Dennis Downing, CEO

Future Industrial Technologies

"Ergonomics vs. Bionomics for Injury Prevention"

December 11 4:00-5:00 PM, 3201 Hart Hall, UC Davis

UC Davis Western Center for Agricultural Health & Safety Seminar

Lucia Kaiser, Ph.D.

UC Davis Department of Nutrition

"Effects of Acculturation and Food Security on the Child-Parent Feeding Relationship Among Latinos"

January 8 4:00-5:00 PM, 3201 Hart Hall, UC Davis

UC Davis Western Center for Agricultural Health & Safety Seminar

Don Villarejo, Ph.D.

Farm Labor Policy Consultant

"Housing Conditions and the Health of Mexican Migrant Farm Laborers in California"

January 26-28, 2007

16th Annual Western Migrant Stream Forum, Sacramento, CA

Se Puede Hoy: Sustaining Migrant Communities for a Healthy Tomorrow.

<http://www.nwrpca.org/conf/forum.php>

February 5 4:00-5:00 PM, 3201 Hart Hall, UC Davis

UC Davis Western Center for Agricultural Health & Safety Seminar

Randy Segawa

Program Supervisor

California Department of Pesticide Regulation

"Ambient Pesticide Air Concentrations in Parlier: Environmental Justice Project"