

Farm Workers Provide Insight For Improving Field Labor Retention in Arizona

Jorge M. Fonseca¹ and Kurt D. Nolte²

¹ The University of Arizona, Yuma Agricultural Center, Yuma, AZ 85364

² The University of Arizona, Yuma County Cooperative Extension, Yuma, AZ 85364

A 60-question assessment was administered to over 200 field workers during 2006-2007 to identify factors that could aid southwest vegetable producers with retaining current field labor. The population surveyed included 38% females and 62% males with over 50% crossing the US/Mexican border daily. Age distribution of the survey participants was 0.9, 14.9, 10.3, 20.6, 29.0, 21.5 and 2.8% for <17, 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64 and over 65 years old, respectively. The results indicated that only 1/3 of the respondents would recommend their current job. Contrary to the conventional belief that salary is the only true mechanism to retain field labor, our study revealed several factors that may be equally important. In improving the appeal for field labor, salary was only indicated by 20 and 12% of respondents who would either recommend or not recommend field work, respectively. Of workers who do not recommend field labor, 30% indicated the need for additional breaks and 13% wanted better benefits. Workers who recommend their job value convenient work schedules in addition to salary. Although 50% of the respondents did not initially expect to work more than 4 years in the field, 33% of all respondents would likely work when ill, revealing potential implications associated with food safety. Overall, this study provides a direction for agricultural labor leaders to initiate efforts aimed at retaining field labor. In addition to increasing salaries, field workers consider including health-care benefits, consistent breaks, and a more convenient work schedule as paramount if they are to continue to provide a stable workforce in the region. A discussion of the influence of age, gender and place of living on the type of responses is also provided.