



# Center for Worker Health

Wake Forest School of Medicine

## POLICY BRIEF

### Quality of Kitchen Facilities in NC Migrant Farmworker Camps

#### Summary

Preparing food and eating are basic activities of daily life. Being able to eat nutritious and safe food affects health and the ability to work. For farmworkers, housing conditions related to cooking and eating have immediate and significant effects on workers' health, safety, and ability to perform the strenuous work required in farming.

Researchers studied the quality of kitchen facilities in 182 migrant farmworker camps in eastern North Carolina. A large number of camps failed to meet state standards. Improper refrigerator, cockroach and rodent infestation, contaminated water, and holes in walls and floors were the most common problems. Greater enforcement of existing regulations is needed to protect farmworkers.

#### What did the researchers do?

From June through October, 2010, the researchers studied 182 migrant farmworker camps in 16 eastern North Carolina counties. The study collected data in two ways:

1. Researchers used 15 NC Department of Labor standards to inspect kitchen and eating facilities in each camp. Inspections included observing conditions and measuring temperature in refrigerators.
2. Researchers took water samples in each camp, which were tested in state-certified labs to check for contamination.

#### What did they find?

For 8 of 15 kitchen standards assessed, at least 10% of camps did not meet standards. The most common violations were for improper refrigerator temperature (66%), cockroach infestation (46%), and water contamination (34%) (Figure).

Unsanitary kitchen conditions and cockroach infestation were more likely to occur late in the agricultural season. Structural (e.g., flooring) or equipment (e.g., fire extinguisher, refrigerator temperature) violations were less likely when workers had H2A visas or NCDOL housing inspection certificates were posted.



Examples of varying quality of kitchen facilities in participating camps

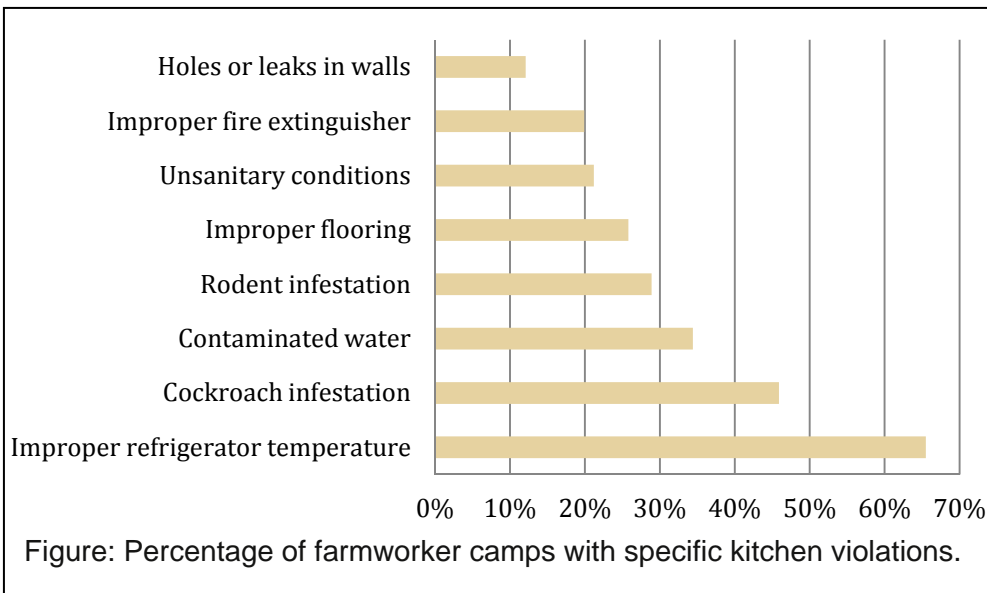
Research for this Policy Brief is reported in:

Quandt S et al. Cooking and Eating Facilities in Migrant Farmworker Housing in North Carolina. *American Journal of Public Health* 2013 Jan 17.

<http://tinyurl.com/an45ox9>

#### For more information, contact:

Thomas A. Arcury, PhD, Director  
Center for Worker Health  
Wake Forest School of Medicine  
phone: 336-716-9438  
e-mail: [tarcury@wakehealth.edu](mailto:tarcury@wakehealth.edu)



### Definition of Terms:

**Exposure** – Contact with something by swallowing, breathing, or touching the skin or eyes. Exposure may be short-term or long-term.

**Hazard** – A situation that poses a threat to life, health, property or the environment.

**Migrant Farmworker** – Someone who leaves home and travels to reach a farm where they have temporary work. Many migrant workers travel from state to state, or cross from one country into another to work on a farm.

**NCDOL** – The NC Department of Labor is the agency responsible for enforcing labor laws and regulations in North Carolina.

**Proper Refrigerator Temperature** – Refrigerators should cool at 45 degrees Fahrenheit or lower to slow the growth of bacteria.

**Violation** – An offense in which the person who owned or provided the housing was not following federal or state laws.

### Why does it matter?

Food- and water-borne diseases can cause serious illness. Symptoms often include diarrhea, vomiting, and dehydration. Such symptoms become particularly dangerous in hot working conditions and when exposed to nicotine while working in tobacco.

The hazards observed in the camps assessed suggest that farmworkers are at serious risk for food- and water-borne diseases: foods are not being stored at safe temperatures, there is substantial evidence of cockroach and rodent infestation, and drinking water is contaminated.

Workers live in close quarters and share bathing and toilet facilities. This increases the chance of diseases spreading within a camp.

### Recommendations

In order to improve health and safety of migrant farmworker housing, the researchers made two recommendations:

1. Stronger enforcement of existing regulations by state agencies.
2. Expand housing inspections from the currently required pre-occupancy period to include inspections during occupancy.

### Further Reading

For more detailed description of farmworker housing conditions and problems with water contamination:

Arcury TA et al. Migrant farmworker housing regulation violations in North Carolina. *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*. 2012;55:191-205.

Bischoff W et al. The quality of drinking water in North Carolina farmworker camps. *American Journal of Public Health* 2012;103(10):e49-e56.