



Center for Worker Health

Wake Forest School of Medicine

POLICY BRIEF

Latinx Child Farmworkers in North Carolina: Work and Wage Characteristics

Summary

Children as young as 10 years old can be hired to work on farms in the United States (US). Children hired to do farm work are most often Latinx. Agriculture is a hazardous industry, and Latinx children hired to do farm work are at risk for injury, illness and death. However, we know very little about these child farmworkers. This policy brief provides information on the work and wage characteristics of 202 Latinx child farmworkers aged 10 to 17 years who were interviewed between May and November 2017 in North Carolina.

Almost one-in-five (18%) of the child farmworkers were migrant workers. Many of the child farmworkers worked 6 or 7 days per week (30%), and over 40 hours per week (34%). Most (90%) were paid in cash, and one-third worked by production (piece-rate). More than half of the child farmworkers had worked in tobacco in the week preceding their interview (57%).

Long hours, cash payment, piece-rate, and tobacco work increase the risk for injury and for wage theft. Efforts are needed to end child agricultural labor, which could include limiting the work hours for child farmworkers, eliminating piece-rate for child farmworkers, ensuring that they receive documentation for their pay, and eliminating their involvement in tobacco work.

Why does it matter?

Children as young as 10 years of age can be hired to work on farms in the US (children of any age can work on their parents' farms). Many children hired to work on farms in North Carolina and elsewhere in the US are Latinx. Agriculture is one of the most hazardous industries in the US, with high levels of injury and death experienced by agricultural workers. Yet little research has documented the immediate or long-term effects of farm work on the health and development of these Latinx children. Information on the work they perform and on how they are paid is needed to inform policies and procedures to improve their safety and well-being.

What did the researchers do?

In 2017, researchers recruited 202 Latinx child farmworkers aged 10 to 17 years working across North Carolina with the help of community partners. These child farmworkers completed interviewer-administered questionnaires in their preferred language (Spanish or English). The interviews included questions on the child farmworkers' personal, educational, work, and health characteristics. The interviews also collected information to describe such workplace characteristics as organization of work and work safety culture.

What did the researchers find?

Work Characteristics

- Thirty-six of the 202 (18%) child farmworkers were migrant workers (workers who changed their residence for temporary work in agriculture).



Photo courtesy of Peter Eversoll

Research for this policy brief is reported in: Arcury TA, Arnold TJ, Sandberg JC, Quandt SA, Talton JW, Malki A, Kearney GD, Chen H, Wiggins MF, Daniel SS. Latinx child farmworkers in North Carolina: Study design and participant baseline characteristics. *Am J Ind Med.* 2019;62:156-167.

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- Almost one-third (30%) of the child farmworkers worked 6 or 7 days in the previous week (Fig 1a).
- One-third (34%) of the child farmworkers worked more than 40 hours in the previous week (Fig 1b).

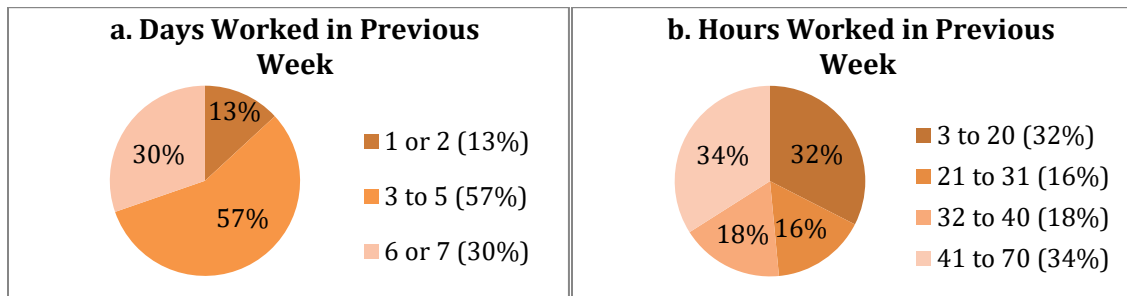


Figure 1 a-b. Days and hours worked in the previous week by child farmworkers.

Wage Characteristics

- Most child farmworkers had been paid in cash (90%); only one-in-five had been paid by check (19%) (Fig 2a).
- One-third (34%) of the child farmworkers had been paid piece-rate (Fig 2b).

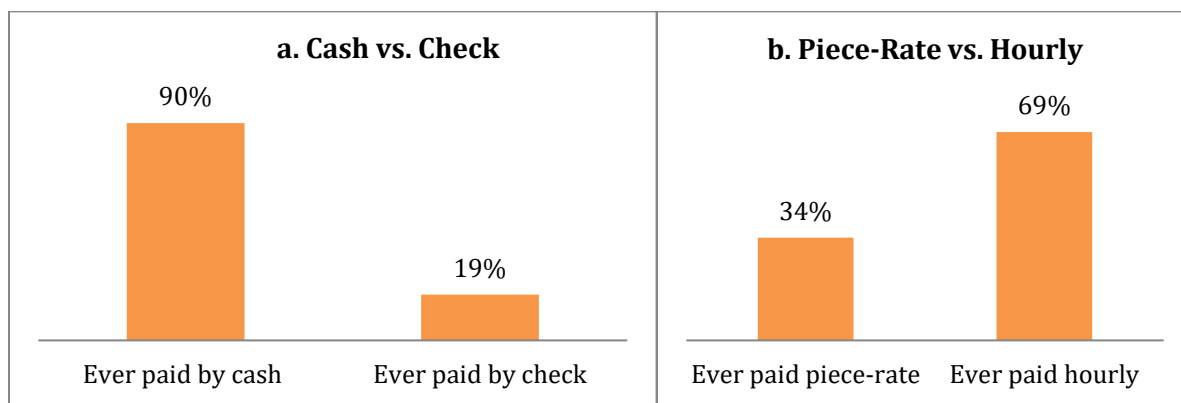


Figure 2 a-b. Wage characteristics of child farmworkers

Crops

- Over half of the child farmworkers had worked in tobacco in the previous week (Fig 3).

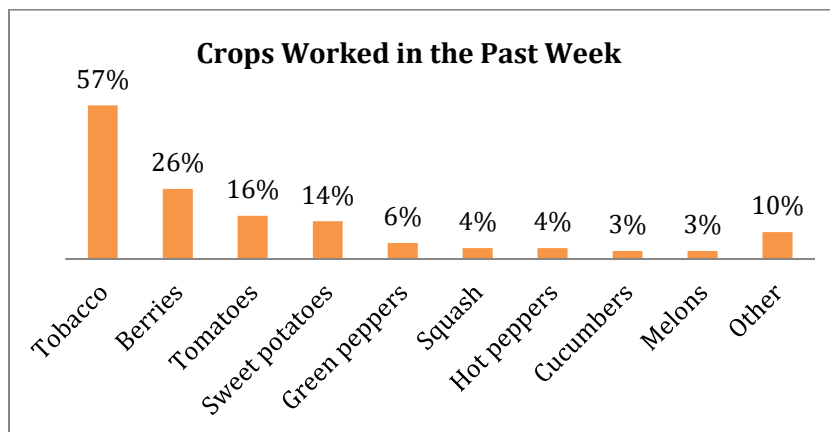


Figure 3. Crops worked in the previous week by child farmworkers (could work in more than one crop)

Recommendations: Child farmworkers’ long hours, cash payment, piece-rate, and tobacco work increase their risks for injury and wage theft. Policies are needed to:

- Eliminate child labor in agriculture.
- Limit the number of hours and days that children can work in agriculture.
- Require wages to be paid by check; enforce current regulations that payment include documentation of hours worked, wage rate, and taxes withheld.
- Eliminate piece-rate work for child farmworkers. Piece-rate encourages employers and workers to ignore safety.
- Restrict children from tobacco work. Tobacco work is most often conducted in the heat, and involves exposure to nicotine as well as pesticides (both of which have negative developmental effects).