



Supporting Agricultural Workers from Mexico: Balancing Work and Family Demands

**A Video and Discussion-Based Program
from an Immigrant's Perspective**



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA | EXTENSION



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| Program Overview | 4 |
| Program Background | 5 |
| Unit 1: Introducing the Program | 6 |
| Unit 2: Understanding Family Life of Migrant Latino/a Workers..... | 7 |
| Unit 3: Understanding the Need to Go Home and Who the Workers Are as Individuals..... | 9 |
| Unit 4: Understanding the Challenges Associated With Bridging Language Differences | 11 |
| Notes | 14 |
| Appendix..... | 15 |



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Supporting Agricultural Workers from Mexico: Balancing Work and Family Demands has been developed for agriculture-sector employers who hire workers from Mexico and other Spanish-speaking countries. These materials may also be of interest to Spanish-speaking agricultural workers and their co-workers, non-profit organization professionals in rural communities, and individuals who are interested in learning more about the lives of agricultural workers from Mexico.

This program is based on data from a University of Minnesota research study in which Mexican agricultural workers in Southern Minnesota and one of their family members in Mexico were interviewed to better understand their work and family situations. Results of the study were used to guide the video and the accompanying educational materials. The people in the video are not the people who were interviewed for the research study. They were asked to get involved in the video project because they personally had similar experiences to those in the research study. While the research focused specifically on workers from Mexico, we believe the ideas can be applied to other Latino/a agriculture workers' situations.

By completing this program employers will:

- Understand the significant role Latino/a agriculture workers play in the United States economy.
- Be aware of the Latino/a worker population's contribution to the U.S. economy.
- Understand the complex lives of workers from Mexico.
- Identify their employees' needs and situations, including:
 - ▷ The complex nature of family care across countries.
 - ▷ Communication and language challenges.
 - ▷ Culture challenges.
 - ▷ Financial needs (advance payments, short-term loans, etc.).
 - ▷ Reasons employees are in the United States, e.g., a strong need for money to care for parents in their home country, and/or a lack of work opportunities in their home country.
- Understand their role in facilitating a positive work environment and improved relationships and communication among employers and employees.
- Develop a plan for creating a safe, healthy work environment — both physically and emotionally.
- Be aware of agencies (national, regional, state, county, and city) to aid their Latino/a workers.

These objectives will be reached through four units using video and discussion to aid learning

The units are:

- Unit 1: Introducing the Program
- Unit 2: Understanding Family Life of Migrant Latino/a Workers
- Unit 3: Understanding the Need to Go Home and Who Workers Are as Individuals
- Unit 4: Understanding the Challenges Associated With Bridging Language Differences



PROGRAM BACKGROUND

Workers from Latin America are a critical component of today's agricultural workforce in the United States. According to the National Center for Farmworker Health, Inc. (2009), 83 percent of all U.S. farm workers are Hispanic — from Mexico, Cuba, Puerto Rico and other Central and South American countries—and 81 percent of farm workers speak Spanish as their primary language.

Almost all Latino/a workers migrate for economic reasons; they hope to earn a decent living so they can send money home to improve the lives of the families they left behind. Some workers migrate alone, leaving family behind; others bring immediate family members with them but may leave aging parents behind in their home countries. Thus, their personal lives can be characterized as bi-national — spanning two countries, languages, cultures, economic systems, and ways of life.

Balancing work and family demands is difficult for all workers, but the issue is more complex for migrant workers whose families are located in two countries. We contend that a better understanding of these workers' unique family challenges will benefit both employers and the workers themselves. We hope that listening to workers' suggestions of ways for employers to support their ability to balance work and family demands will lead to improved workplace conditions and thus higher worker productivity and satisfaction.

Funding for the research study and the development of these outreach materials was provided by the National Institute for Food and Agriculture International Science and Education Program. Any questions about the research study can be directed to Catherine Solheim, Ph.D., Principal Investigator, University of Minnesota (csolheim@umn.edu).



UNIT 1: INTRODUCING THE PROGRAM

Objectives:

- Employers will understand the significant role Latino/a agriculture workers play in the United States economy.
- Employers will be aware of the Latino/a population's contribution to the U.S. economy.

Required Resources for This Unit:

- Copies of "Getting to Know You: An Immigration Quiz" (found in the Appendix) for each participant
- Copies of "Answers to Getting to Know You: An Immigration Quiz" (found in the Appendix) for each participant
- Writing utensil (e.g., pen) for each participant

Lesson Time: 15 minutes

Activity 1: Make introductions and explain research basis for the video (5 minutes)

- Introduce yourself and have the program participants introduce themselves to you and each other.
- Describe the research basis for the video. Say:

"This program is based on data from a University of Minnesota research study in which Mexican agricultural workers in Southern Minnesota and one of their family members in Mexico were interviewed to better understand their work and family situations. Results of the study were used to guide production of the video and the accompanying educational materials."

Activity 2: Distribute immigration quiz (10 minutes)

- Hand out the "Getting to Know You: An Immigration Quiz."
- Allow participants time to take the quiz.
- After they are done taking the quiz, distribute the "Answers to Getting to Know You: An Immigration Quiz."
- Briefly discuss the answers to the quiz. Remind participants that while today's discussion is brief, participants can keep the answers for future reference. [The quiz could take a very long time if you talk about each question thoroughly. Limit conversation about the answers, perhaps selecting only 2-3 questions to discuss, to allow enough time to watch and discuss the video.]
- Remind participants that their own families also emigrated at some point. Say:

"What country did your families emigrate from? What first jobs did they have when they arrived in the United States? We often forget our own family's immigration story is similar to the Latino/as who we work with."

UNIT 2: UNDERSTANDING FAMILY LIFE OF MIGRANT LATINO/A WORKERS

Objectives:

- Employers will understand the complex lives of workers from Mexico.
- Employers will identify their employees' needs and situations, including:
 - ▷ The complex nature of family care across countries.
 - ▷ Communication/language challenges.
 - ▷ Culture challenges.
 - ▷ Financial needs (advance payment, short-term loan, etc.).
 - ▷ Reasons employees are in the United States, e.g., a strong need for money to care for parents in their home country, and/or a lack of work opportunities in their home country.

Required Resources for This Unit:

- First three clips of the Realidades: Mexican Agricultural Workers in Minnesota Video:
 - ▷ “The Decision to Leave”
 - ▷ “Leaving Family Behind”
 - ▷ “Balancing Family with Job Responsibilities”
- Copies of “Video Reflection Handout” (found in the Appendix) for each participant
- Optional: Copies of “Realidades: Mexican Agricultural Workers in Minnesota — Video Script”
- Writing utensil (e.g., pen) for each participant

Lesson Time: 30 minutes

Activity 1: Introduce the three video clips (2 minutes)

- Introduce the first three video clips. Say:

“We are now going to watch three video clips. The clips are based on the University of Minnesota research study mentioned earlier. The people in the video are not the people who were interviewed for the research study, but they have similar experiences to those in the study. While the research focused specifically on workers from Mexico, we believe the ideas can be applied to other Latino/a agriculture workers' situations.”
- If you did not do Unit 1, add the following additional information:

“This program is based on data from a University of Minnesota research study in which Mexican agricultural workers in southern Minnesota and one of their family members in Mexico were interviewed to better understand their work and family situations. Results of the study were used to guide production of the video and the accompanying educational materials.”
- Distribute the “Video Reflection Handout” found in the Appendix.
- Discuss the questions that participants should try to answer while watching the video, as they are listed on the “Video Reflection Handout.” While holding up the handout say:

“While watching the video, think about the questions on the handout I just distributed:

 - ◆ Why do workers leave Mexico?
 - ◆ What challenges do workers experience in balancing family with job responsibilities?
 - ◆ What is the impact of stress and worry on workers in the work environment?
 - ◆ How have employers dealt with workers' need to travel home for an extended time?

UNIT 2: UNDERSTANDING FAMILY LIFE OF MIGRANT LATINO/A WORKERS

You can use the handout to write down your thoughts on the questions.”

Activity 2: Watch the three video clips (12 minutes)

- If needed, distribute the optional handout, “Realidades: Mexican Agricultural Workers in Minnesota.”
- Watch the following three video clips:
 - ▷ “Decision to Leave” (2 minutes)
 - ▷ “Leaving the Family Behind” (4 minutes)
 - ▷ “Balancing Family with Job Responsibilities” (6 minutes)

Activity 3: Engage in group discussion (10 minutes)

- Using the “Video Reflection Handout,” engage the participants in a group discussion. Ensure that the following points are discussed for each question.
 - ▷ *Why do workers leave Mexico?* — Possible answers include:
 - ◆ Workers feel a moral responsibility (deeply rooted in Mexican culture) to find a better way to support their families.
 - ◆ Parents wanted to improve their children’s opportunities, particularly education.
 - ◆ Adult children wanted to take care of their aging parents.
 - ◆ Age discrimination in Mexico — middle-aged and older workers are not hired.
 - ◆ Work did not pay enough in Mexico to cover basics or invest in the future.
 - ◆ Not able to reach their financial goals in Mexico.
 - ▷ *What challenges do workers experience in balancing family with job responsibilities?* — Possible answers include:
 - ◆ They feel bad about leaving family behind; it was a very difficult decision.
 - ◆ They are motivated to work very hard to be able to send enough money home but they might overdo work and become exhausted.
 - ▷ *What is the impact of stress and worry on workers in the work environment?* — Possible answers include:
 - ◆ Not knowing about their families or being unable to visit when there are crises back home creates worry and anxiety for workers.
 - ◆ Worry or inability to deal with family back home can result in increased injury on the job.
 - ▷ *How have employers dealt with workers’ need to travel home for an extended time?* — Possible answers include:
 - ◆ Providing workers with documentation of job permanence/security will help workers legally bring family members to the U.S., meaning they won’t have to travel for an extended time to care for family.

Activity 4: Summarize the video clips discussion (6 minutes)

- Pose the following questions:
 - ▷ “Can you imagine taking a risk like these workers did to find work to support your family? How do you think they were able to do that?”
 - ▷ “What are some major cultural differences between people from Mexico and European American people?”
 - ▷ “What was said in the video that indicates the importance of family for these workers? From your experience, are these stories similar? How have you seen the importance of family expressed in Latino/a workers you’ve hired or with whom you’ve worked?”

UNIT 3: UNDERSTANDING THE NEED TO GO HOME AND WHO THE WORKERS ARE AS INDIVIDUALS

Objectives:

- Employers will understand their role in facilitating a positive work environment and improved relationships and communication among employers and employees.

Required Resources for This Unit:

- Next two clips of the Realidades: Mexican Agricultural Workers in Minnesota Video:
 - ▷ “The Relationship with Employer”
 - ▷ “Improving the Relationship...”
- Copies of “Video Reflection Handout” (found in the Appendix) for each participant
- Optional: Copies of “Realidades: Mexican Agricultural Workers in Minnesota — Video Script”
- Writing utensil (e.g., pen) for each participant
- Optional: Sample of the Employee Handbook Template found at <http://agebb.missouri.edu/commag/swine/hdbook.pdf>

Lesson Time: 25 minutes

Activity 1: Introduce the two video clips (2 minutes)

- Introduce the first three video clips. Say:

“We are now going to watch three video clips. The clips are based on the University of Minnesota research study mentioned earlier.” [If you did not do Unit 2, add the following: “The people in the video are not the people who were interviewed for the research study, but they have similar experiences to these in the study. While the research focused specifically on workers from Mexico, we believe the ideas can be applied to other Latino/a agriculture workers’ situations.”]
- If you did not do Unit 1, add the following additional information:

“This program is based on data from a University of Minnesota research study in which Mexican agricultural workers in southern Minnesota and one of their family members in Mexico were interviewed to better understand their work and family situations. Results of the study were used to guide production of the video and the accompanying educational materials.”
- If you haven’t done so already, distribute the “Video Reflection Handout” found in the Appendix.
- Discuss the questions that participants should try to answer while watching the video, as they are listed on the “Video Reflection Handout.” While holding up the handout say:

“While watching the video, think about the questions on the ‘Video Reflection Handout’:

 - ◆ What is the source of workers’ worry and stress?
 - ◆ How have employers worked to create a healthy work environment and improve relationships among employers and employees?

You can use the handout to write down your thoughts on the questions.”

UNIT 3: UNDERSTANDING THE NEED TO GO HOME AND WHO THE WORKERS ARE AS INDIVIDUALS

Activity 2: Watch the two video clips (8 minutes)

- If needed, distribute the optional handout, “Realidades: Mexican Agricultural Workers in Minnesota.”
- Watch the following two video clips:
 - ▷ “The Relationship with Employer” (6 minutes)
 - ▷ “Improving the Relationship” (2 minutes)

Activity 3: Engage in group discussion (10 minutes)

- Using the “Video Reflection Handout,” engage the participants in a group discussion. Ensure that the following points are discussed for each question.
 - ▷ *What is the source of workers’ worry and stress?* — Possible answers include:
 - ◆ Going home to visit family members who are sick may be extremely important for workers. They may be undergoing an internal struggle between continuing to work so they can send money home and returning to Mexico provide needed emotional and physical support.
 - ◆ Religious holidays may be very important to Latinos/a workers. Good Friday, for example, is considered an important holy day. Some workers may have leadership roles in their families pertaining to religious holidays.
 - ▷ *How have employers worked to create a healthy work environment and improve relationships among employers and employees?* — Possible answers include:
 - ◆ Being flexible about allowing workers to meet important family needs both in the United States and in Mexico.
 - ◆ Emphasizing communication, which is important to quality relationships. Lack of communication may lead to inaccurate assumptions about each other by both workers and employers.
 - ◆ Encouraging social contact outside the workplace, which can lead to increased understanding of Latino/a workers’ lives and culture. Employer attendance at employees’ cultural events and vice versa gives both parties a chance to learn about each others’ cultures.
 - ◆ Organizing regular opportunities for interaction with workers in which employers could ask them about their families, their lives, and their culture.
 - ◆ Conducting open discussions with employees about the concept of time. Latinos/as may have a different cultural view of time. This often means they are willing to work long hours to get the job done, but they may not arrive exactly on time. Both employer and employee need to have a clear understanding of what is acceptable in their work location.
 - ◆ Starting off on the right foot by going over the employee handbook — especially sections on personal leaves, bereavement leaves, and tardiness. A sample of a farm employee handbook can be found at <http://agebb.missouri.edu/commag/swine/hdbook.pdf>.

Activity 4: Summarize the video clips discussion (5 minutes)

- Pose the following questions:
 - ▷ “What ways can employers support Latino/a workers’ need to travel home for emergencies? How has this been accomplished in your work environment?”
 - ▷ “What are the costs and benefits of being flexible as an employer?”

UNIT 4: UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH BRIDGING LANGUAGE DIFFERENCES

Objectives:

- Employers will be aware of their employee handbook as a communication tool.
- Employers can develop a plan for creating an environment for a safe, healthy work environment — both physically and emotionally.
- Employers will be aware of agencies (national, regional, state, county, and city) to aid their Latina/o workers.

Required Resources for This Unit:

- Last two clips of the Realidades: Mexican Agricultural Workers in Minnesota Video:
 - ▷ “Bridging the Language Divide”
 - ▷ “Conclusion”
- Copies for each participant:
 - ▷ “Video Reflection Handout” (found in the Appendix)
 - ▷ “Case Study: Juan” (found in the Appendix)
 - ▷ “Case Study: Margarita” (found in the Appendix)
 - ▷ “Case Study: Ricardo” (found in the Appendix)
 - ▷ “Supporting Agricultural Workers in Minnesota: Balancing Work and Family Demands Evaluation”(found in the Appendix)
- Optional: Copies of “Realidades: Mexican Agricultural Workers in Minnesota — Video Script”
- Optional: Laptop and projector to show the Minnesota and national resources found off of www.extension.umn.edu/family/tough-times/farm-families/workers-from-mexico/; alternatively, printed copies of the webpage could be prepared
- If you are doing case studies you will also need these copies for each participant
- Writing utensil (e.g., pen) for each participant

Lesson Time: 50 minutes with case studies or 30 minutes without case studies

Activity 1: Introduce the three video clips (2 minutes)

- Introduce the first three video clips. Say:

“We are now going to watch three video clips. The clips are based on the University of Minnesota research study mentioned earlier.” [If you did not do Units 2 or 3, add the following: “The people in the video are not the people who were interviewed for the research study, but they have similar experiences to those in the study. While the research focused specifically on workers from Mexico, we believe the ideas can be applied to other Latino/a agriculture workers’ situations.”]
- If you did not do Unit 1, add the following additional information:

“This program is based on data from a University of Minnesota research study in which Mexican agricultural workers in southeast Minnesota and one of their family members in Mexico were interviewed to better understand their work and family situations. Results of the study were used to guide production of the video and the accompanying educational materials.”



UNIT 4: UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH BRIDGING LANGUAGE DIFFERENCES

- If you have not done so already, distribute the “Video Reflection Handout” found in the Appendix.
 - Discuss the questions that participants should try to answer while watching the video, as they are listed on the “Video Reflection Handout.” While holding up the handout say:
 - “While watching the video, think about the questions on the ‘Video Reflection Handout:’
 - ◆ What challenges do workers experience due to their inability to speak English?
 - ◆ What are the challenges with language interpretation?
 - ◆ What are alternatives to communicate other than speaking?
 - ◆ What are the workers’ suggestions for ways employers can facilitate English language learning?
- You can use the handout to write down your thoughts on the questions.”

Activity 2: Watch the video clip (4 minutes)

- If needed, distribute the optional handout, “Realidades: Mexican Agricultural Workers in Minnesota.”
- Watch the following video clip:
 - ▷ “Bridging the Language Divide”

Activity 3: Engage in group discussion (10 minutes)

- Using the “Video Reflection Handout,” engage the participants in a group discussion.
- Continue the conversation by asking the following questions:
 - ▷ “How important is it that people who work for you speak English?
What do you do if they cannot?”
 - ▷ “What other ways do you communicate with your employees?”
 - ▷ “How do you handle interpretation? Were you aware that workers’ mistrusted interpreters?
How can you ensure your interpreters are competent?”
 - ▷ “What are your ideas for ways to encourage and support learning English among your employees?”
 - ▷ “What resources for English language learning are available in your community?”

Activity 4: Case Studies (optional; 20 minutes)

- Divide the large group into smaller groups.
- Distribute the three case studies.
- Introduce the case studies. Say:
 - “We are now going to discuss a sample situation immigrants face in small groups. You all have copies of three different case studies. For the sake of time, I want each group to focus on one case study. If you have time after your discussion, you can then move to another.”
- Clarify which group will discuss each of the three case studies, ensuring that they are all being covered. Say:
 - “You will now have 10 minutes to work on your case study. Start by reading the description of the situation. Then discuss the related questions together. After 10 minutes, I will ask each group to briefly share their situation and any key things that they’ve learned.”
- Allow the groups time to work on the case studies. Walk around and answer any questions as they arise.

UNIT 4: UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH BRIDGING LANGUAGE DIFFERENCES

Activity 5: Wrap up and summarize today's session (5 minutes)

- Gather participants back into the full group and highlight the key message of the day's session. Say:
 - ▷ "Latino/a workers are important to agriculture enterprises in the United States."
 - ▷ "Latino/a workers want employers to recognize that they are good workers; they are willing to work very hard to support their families and improve their lives."
 - ▷ "Latino/a workers want employers to know them as individuals with families, hopes and dreams, beyond merely employees."
 - ▷ "Latino/a workers would appreciate a specific workplace policy that would allow them the flexibility to return home for family emergencies with the promise of a job if they return within an agreed upon time. If employers can do this, workers say they will be more productive and less prone to accidents."
 - ▷ "Many Latino/a workers want to learn English so they can communicate effectively with supervisors and co-workers."
 - ▷ "Many Latino/a workers would appreciate opportunities to learn English in the workplace."
 - ▷ "Many Latino/a workers mistrust interpreters. However, competent interpreters will increase workers' trust — resulting in better communication in the workplace."

Activity 6: Watch the final video clip (4 minutes)

- Watch the final video clip:
 - ▷ "Conclusion"
- Summarize by saying the following:

"The pursuit of the American dream is what motivated our ancestors to immigrate to the United States and what continues to draw new immigrants here. Employers who understand their migrant labor force and create supportive, flexible work environments will benefit from the increased productivity of their their workers."

Activity 7: Evaluation and closure (5 minutes)

- Distribute the evaluation form to the participants.
- Thank participants for their participation and encourage them to complete the evaluation. Say:

"We thank you for participation in this educational program. The best way we can provide meaningful educational programs is by your feedback. Please take the time to thoughtfully provide us with information on what was useful in this program, how it could be improved, and ideas for future programming. Thank you."
- If desired, show the Minnesota and national resources provided at www.extension.umn.edu/family/tough-times/farm-families/workers-from-mexico/ at this time. In particular, show the resources on the "Additional Resources for Latino Families and Their Employers" sub-page.

NOTES

APPENDIX

| | |
|--|----|
| Getting to Know You: An Immigration Quiz | 15 |
| Video Reflection Handout | 19 |
| Case Studies | |
| • Case Study: Juan..... | 20 |
| • Case Study: Margarita | 21 |
| • Case Study: Ricardo | 22 |
| Supporting Agricultural Workers from Minnesota: Balancing Work and Family Demands Evaluation..... | 23 |
| Realidades: Mexican Agricultural Workers in Minnesota — Video Script | 26 |
| Notes | 33 |
| Additional Information | 34 |

For additional resources, visit the project website:

www.extension.umn.edu/family/tough-times/farm-families/workers-from-mexico/.

GETTING TO KNOW YOU: AN IMMIGRATION QUIZ

1. What two countries have the largest number of immigrants?

2. Where in the world do most immigrants to the U.S. come from?
 Africa
 Asia
 Latin America
 Middle East and Africa
 Asia and Latin America
 All of the above
3. The majority of *documented* immigrants in the U.S. come from what country?
 People's Republic of China
 Philippines
 Mexico
 India
4. What is the main reason immigrants come to the U.S.?
 To be with a family member
 For employment
 To escape persecution
 All of the above
5. What percentage of U.S. immigrants are female?
 31.5 percent
 45.5 percent
 53.5 percent
 62.5 percent
6. During 2007-2009, which country did the majority of refugees to the U.S. come from?
 Former Soviet Union
 Cuba
 Iraq
 Burma
7. The Latino workforce has generated new jobs for non-Latinos.
 True
 False
8. Immigration is an important factor in stopping the decline in student population and in adding funds to some school district budgets
 True
 False
9. The government spends more money on new immigrants than it receives in taxes from them.
 True
 False
10. Which of the following people was born in the United States?
 Madeleine Albright, former U.S. Secretary of State
 Andrew Grove, founder, Intel Corporation
 Jennifer Lopez, actress, singer and dancer
 Gene Simmons, rock musician, KISS
 Patrick Ewing, basketball player, New York Knicks

ANSWERS TO GETTING TO KNOW YOU: AN IMMIGRATION QUIZ

Note: The numbers in parentheses refer to the References listed below.

1. What two countries have the largest number of immigrants?
United States and Russia
The United Nations (as cited by Pew Hispanic Center) indicated that the United States had 12.7 million immigrants from Mexico alone in 2008, and Russia had 12 million immigrants from countries that formed the Soviet Union (8).
2. Where in the world do most immigrants to the U.S. come from?
Asia and Latin America
Between 1900-2000, the proportion of immigrants from Asia and Latin America increased from less than 1.5 to 26 percent, (Asia) and 52 percent, (Latin America) (9).
3. The majority of documented immigrants in the United States come from what country?
Mexico
According to The National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, the 1998 Immigration and Naturalization Service Annual Report said the highest number of documented immigrants came from Mexico that year — 131,575. The next highest number — 36,884 — came from China and India combined, while a lower number of documented immigrants came from the Philippines (7).
4. What is the main reason immigrants come to the U.S.?
To be with a family member
Most legal immigrants (about 75 percent) come to the U.S. to reunite with family. Finding employment and escaping persecution are other main reasons people come to this country (9).
5. What percentage of U.S. immigrants are female?
53.5 percent
In recent years, slightly more than 50 percent of all immigrants to the United States are female (7).
6. During 2007-2009, which country did the majority of refugees to the U.S. come from?
Burma
Between 2007-2009, a total of 50,237 refugees from Burma were admitted to the U.S., while 34,468 refugees came from Iraq. Iraq refugees had the highest percentage increase in that time — 36 percent from 2008 to 2009. In 2009, the percent of refugees to the U.S. from Burma, Iraq, and Bhutan combined was 68 percent (5).

ANSWERS TO GETTING TO KNOW YOU: AN IMMIGRATION QUIZ

7. The Latino workforce has generated new jobs for non-Latinos.

True

Immigrants create more jobs than they themselves fill. They do so directly by starting new business and indirectly through their expenditures on U.S. goods and services. Latinos/Hispanics represented 8.9 percent of the nation's buying power compared with 5 percent in 1990 (3). In Minnesota, Latino/Hispanic businesses have increased their entrepreneurial capital by 350 percent from 1990 to now (1). The Latino work force makes a \$1 million annual contribution to south central Minnesota alone as a result of newly generated jobs and businesses. Note that 33 percent of employees in food processing and packaging firms in south central Minnesota are Latino workers, and the presence of Latinos in this region has added more than 7,800 jobs to the local economy (4).

8. Immigration is an important factor in stopping the decline in student population and in adding funds to some school district budgets.

True

In 30 rural Minnesota counties, school enrollment fell drastically during the school years of 1984-1985 and 1998-1999, resulting in a loss of funding in some cases. However, an increase in Latino student enrollment (600 percent from 1985-2001) in several areas of the state have added funds to some school district budgets, and as a result schools are open and functioning (2). Children of immigrants are an important factor in keeping schools open and consolidated, because the schools receive \$5,124 in state funds per child and an average of \$700 per child with Limited English Proficiency (1).

9. The government spends more money on new immigrants than it receives in taxes from them.

False

The National Research Council and National Academy of Sciences cited by the Drum Major Institute for Public Policy says, "The average immigrant pays \$1,800 more in taxes than she receives in public benefits" (10). In south central Minnesota, state and local governments have spent \$24.5 million on social services for new Latino immigrants; however, immigrants in this region have generated \$45 million in state and local tax revenue (4).

10. Which of the following people was born in the United States?

Jennifer Lopez, actress, singer and dancer

Jennifer was born in the Bronx, New York, to parents from Puerto Rico, a U.S. Commonwealth. All others on the list are first-generation immigrants to the U.S.: Madeline Albright is from Czechoslovakia, Andrew Grove is from Hungary, Gene Simmons is from Israel, and Patrick Ewing is from Jamaica (9).

This quiz was adapted from *Diversity in People: The New Americans: Immigration Myths & Realities Quiz* presented by the Public Broadcasting Service-Independent Lens (2004), and the *Bridge Quiz* by the National Network for Immigration and Refugee Rights www.nnirr.org (nd).

ANSWERS TO GETTING TO KNOW YOU: AN IMMIGRATION QUIZ

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VIDEO REFLECTION HANDOUT

Unit 2: Understanding Family Life of Migrant Latino/a Workers

1. Why do workers leave Mexico?
2. What challenges do workers experience in balancing family with job responsibilities?
3. What is the impact of stress and worry on workers in the work environment?
4. How have employers dealt with workers' need to travel home for an extended time?

Unit 3: Understanding the Need to Go Home and Who the Workers Are as Individuals

5. What is the source of workers' worry and stress?
6. How have employers worked to create a healthy work environment and improve relationships among employers and employees?

Unit 4: Understanding the Challenges Associated With Bridging Language Differences

7. What challenges do workers experience due to their inability to speak English?
8. What are the challenges with language interpretation?
9. What are alternatives to communicate other than speaking?
10. What are the workers' suggestions for ways employers can facilitate English language learning?

CASE STUDY: JUAN

Eight years ago, 32-year-old Juan migrated from central Mexico to the United States. He has a ninth grade education, is single and works on a hog production farm in Minnesota. Juan left Mexico to pursue better job opportunities. His family includes his father who doesn't have a stable job and his mother who is a full-time homemaker. Two brothers live at home in Mexico and have started to attend college. Juan sends money home to pay for their college tuition. In addition, Juan sends money home to pay for improvements to the house in which his parents and brothers live.

Juan is considered good at this hog production work but knows he needs to improve his language skills. At times he has made mistakes or has had near accidents because he didn't understand his supervisor's directions. Juan is motivated to take English as a Second Language (ESL) classes through the adult education program near his work, but he has been unable to attend because of his work schedule. He has asked permission to adjust his work schedule to attend the class, but his supervisor has not responded favorably.

Questions:

1. Do you know employees with English-language challenges similar to Juan's?
2. How important is English to Juan's success as a worker in this environment? What are the potential problems with his limited English capabilities?
3. What suggestions do you have for Juan to persuade his employer to be more flexible in his schedule so he can take ESL classes?
4. What suggestions do you have for Juan's employer to grant this flexibility?
5. What other strategies or resources can you think of that could help Juan improve his English-language skills?



CASE STUDY: MARGARITA

Margarita is a married woman in her 40s with three children: Juan, Flor, and Maria. She works in a food-processing plant in southern Minnesota, and her husband works part-time in a local restaurant. Margarita and her husband emigrated from Mexico to find new job opportunities. A high school graduate, she arrived in Minnesota nine years ago after working on farms in other U.S. states.

Margarita's parents and two younger siblings, a brother and sister with families of their own, still live in Mexico. Her siblings each have average daily incomes of \$5, which barely support their families. Margarita's father is a farmer who grows corn on eight acres of land. Her 70-year-old mother suffers from diabetes and high-blood pressure, does not have health insurance, and must pay for medical services and medications out of pocket.

Margarita sends an average of \$250 each month to her parents. She does not visit her parents every year because she needs to keep working in the United States to support her children. There are other Latinos/as in Margarita's workplace who came to the U.S. from Mexico for similar reasons. Margarita is a fast learner and understands enough English to perform her job at the plant, but she does not read or write English. She is hard working and responsible. However, she has been very worried lately due to her mother's worsening health. Also, her parents' income has decreased because of poor growing seasons caused by reduced rainfall.

Like many other Latino/a families in the United States, Margarita has strong family ties with relatives in her homeland. Margarita would like to visit her mother and the rest of the family each year; however, the vacation days she gets at the plant are not enough, since she takes days off when one of her children gets sick. As a result, she asks you, her employer/supervisor, for permission to take one to two weeks off each year so she can have enough time to go home and care for her parents.

Questions:

1. Do you know employees with situations similar to Margarita's?
2. What do you think are Margarita's and her family's necessities in Minnesota? In Mexico?
3. How could your employer manage Margarita's case?
4. What else do you feel your employer needs to know about Margarita's family to better help her?
5. If you do not see cases like this in your work site, how do you think your employer could help employees like Margarita?

CASE STUDY: RICARDO

Ricardo is a young man from Veracruz, Mexico. He is married with two children; his mother and his younger brother live with his family in a small house outside the city. He was the family's sole breadwinner until a year ago when he lost his job in retail. He has been job hunting since then but has had no luck. His wife and his mother sell food on the weekends to help, but it's not enough.

Ricardo had started to become desperate when he heard about the possibility of working on a farm in Minnesota where a close friend has been for a few years. He soon left for Minnesota, where (as hoped) he got a job at a dairy farm.

Ricardo doesn't know any English, nor did he have experience in farm work before starting the job. Nevertheless, he learned enough to put in a few months on the farm. However, it wasn't enough to keep Ricardo from getting into trouble with another employee for not doing a task the way he was supposed to. He was almost fired because of this and tried to explain things to his supervisor.

The supervisor knows that despite the incident, Ricardo is a very good worker and a responsible person. He thinks it is probably a misunderstanding that caused the problem. However, because the supervisor doesn't speak any Spanish, he had to request an interpreter to sort out the problem between Ricardo and the other employee.

The interpreter wasn't available that day, so the supervisor had to send Ricardo home and schedule a meeting with her for the next day. The supervisor knows it will be hard to finish the shift without Ricardo. But he can't let Ricardo resume work until he understands what happened and how he might help the situation.

Questions:

1. What ideas can you give to Ricardo's supervisor to resolve this problem?

2. What can Ricardo do to avoid this kind of problem in the future?

SUPPORTING AGRICULTURAL WORKERS FROM MEXICO: BALANCING WORK AND FAMILY DEMANDS EVALUATION

Please give us your feedback regarding this Extension training. Your comments will help us improve the activities for the future!

| A. General Reaction to the Training Today | Poor | Fair | Good | Excellent |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Rate the session overall | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. How useful is the subject matter for your work? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. How useful is the subject matter to you personally? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Complete this sentence: Attending this training was a good use of time. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

| B. Specific Learning How much did/do you know about these subjects? | Before this program I knew... | | | | | Now I know... | | | | |
|--|-------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| | Very little | Little | Some | Much | Very much | Very little | Little | Some | Much | Very much |
| 1. Complex lives of workers from Mexico | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Unique needs of your immigrant employees (family, language, culture, financial) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. How to facilitate a positive work environment and improve relationships, communication, among employers and employees | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Resources available for employees in the areas of English learning, GED, and/or immigration | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

| C. Specific Practices To what degree did you/will you do the following? | Before this program I knew... | | | | | Now I know... | | | | |
|---|-------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| | Very little | Little | Some | Much | Very much | Very little | Little | Some | Much | Very much |
| 1. Provide opportunities to know employees' families and culture | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Use a qualified interpreter in work setting | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Share information about English language learning with employees | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Discuss our employee handbook, including topics about travel home for family care with immigrant employees | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

SUPPORTING AGRICULTURAL WORKERS FROM MEXICO: BALANCING WORK AND FAMILY DEMANDS EVALUATION

D. What was the most useful about this training?

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E. What was the least useful about this training?

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F. What additional information do you need in order to use this training in your work?

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DEMOGRAPHICS

| G. Primary Focus of Your Work | H. Your Location | I. What language(s) do you speak at work? |
|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Farm owner <input type="checkbox"/> Farm manager <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Minnesota <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ Zip code: _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> English <input type="checkbox"/> Spanish <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

| J. Main Commodity of Farm: | K. Immigrants You Employ | L. What major changes do you anticipate in the next decade in the farm operation? |
|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dairy <input type="checkbox"/> Hog <input type="checkbox"/> Beef <input type="checkbox"/> Poultry <input type="checkbox"/> Crop: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ | Country _____ # of employees ____ Country _____ # of employees ____ Country _____ # of employees ____ Country _____ # of employees ____ | |

M. Additional Comments and Testimonials:

| |
|--|
| |
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Thank you for completing this evaluation!



REALIDADES: MEXICAN AGRICULTURAL WORKERS IN MINNESOTA—VIDEO SCRIPTS

Introduction

Hispanics are now the largest minority population in the United States and Mexico is the leading country of origin for U.S. immigrants. In Minnesota, workers emigrating from Mexico comprise a significant portion of the agricultural labor force in the food processing industries—mainly in the southern part of the state. There is considerable information about the challenges of immigrant workers from Mexico yet critical aspects of Mexican worker’s lives—such as their families in Mexico and the ongoing struggles they face—are often neglected. To better understand these transnational families’ situations, we’ve talked to four Mexican workers who have ties and support families in Mexico. In this video, you will hear their perspective and their personal stories about their new life in Minnesota, and their challenges and experiences in the workplace. You will also hear from an employer who will share his experience about working with Latino employees. By addressing some of the complex challenges Latino employees face, we hope to shed light on key issues and to open a dialog that may lead to increased understanding between workers and employers for long-term, mutually beneficial results.

The Decision to Leave

Alberto Gallardo, Dairy Worker

The main reason why I came to work in Minnesota is because of the lack of opportunity that one has, well in this case, Mexico. Another reason is that I wanted a future for my family: my children—that’s really the main reason why I am here. My children will have a chance for a better education here than they would have had in Mexico. I say this because not all of us have the opportunity to go to school which is what helps a person get ahead.

Reyna Thomas, Food Processing Worker

The reason I came to this country—for my parents. I came from a family of 13 brothers and sisters. So, the economic situation was the reason for coming—to help my parents and to help myself, support myself; and be independent at a young age. My parents depend on me; every two weeks or every month I send them an amount. I won’t say exactly how much but yeah...they wait for it. Now, one by one, my sister...me...we are bringing more...a sister, a brother, to migrate here to help the family. So my parents can have a better life... because you do this for your parents, and for yourself too, you know.

Francisco Guerrero, Dairy Worker

The main reason I came to the United States was to work and help my family. To support my family, because sometimes in our country...sometimes it is hard. There is work—I don’t deny that—but it’s hard to be there and support your family. So that is one of the main reasons I emigrated to the United States.

REALIDADES: MEXICAN AGRICULTURAL WORKERS IN MINNESOTA—VIDEO SCRIPTS

Leaving Family Behind

Alberto Gallardo, Dairy Worker

Well, when I first came here I came alone. I left my wife and kids in Mexico. My parents also. We were raised to believe that sometimes you may need to support your parents and even your grandparents. And so I came here for my family—my wife and my kids...but for my parents, too. At first, like I said before, I came alone. And it was very difficult for me to be by myself because I didn't know what was going on with my family in Mexico. About a year—year and half—later, my wife and two kids came. This was my first goal I set for myself when I came here—that they will follow after—and I did it. And right now I have my mom, my dad, and three brothers there that somehow depend on me economically. I talk with them regularly—every week or two—but you see that's the problem you face here: the fact that you live always with the uncertainty of not knowing what's going on with them there in Mexico.

Maria Manuela R. de Gonzalez, Retired Food Processing Worker

When I came here to Minnesota I left all of my family in Mexico. My children, my mother, my father, my brothers and sisters who were depending on only one person—me—the one who was working. It is really sad and hard because once you are here, you need to find a way to make enough money not just for those who were left behind but for us to live here. Pay the rent, buy clothes and food; and it is very sad because I wouldn't have money for a pair of shoes because I had to say send money to my family in Mexico.

Francisco Guerrero, Dairy Worker

You worry because they are so far away and you are here. So one of the things that drives me to work hard—like I said before—is that I know that they believe in me, and they know that I will stick with them. And they are my family, and it's for them that I work hard. That's why I happily throw myself into my work. It's what keeps me going.

Alberto Gallardo, Dairy Worker

Well, having my relatives still in Mexico is a responsibility. I don't see it so much as an obligation, as I don't look at it as a burden. I do it with enthusiasm. They are my parents. I have brothers who are still in school and this drives me to work harder, and to do the best that I can do to take care of my job, because jobs are very scarce these days. But it is a beautiful responsibility. I am very proud and I think that they are also very proud that I am helping them. Because your family—I'll say it this way—your family that is in Mexico when you come to the United States is like...let's say, it's like they have mixed feelings. I think because it's a relief that the financial situation will be better but at the same time we don't know if we will ever see each other again alive. So, it drives me. It's something that I do with great enthusiasm.

REALIDADES: MEXICAN AGRICULTURAL WORKERS IN MINNESOTA—VIDEO SCRIPTS

Balancing Family with Job Responsibilities

Ron Durst, Durst Brothers Dairy

The workers understand that there's an impact on our business if they go back to Mexico and come back: the fact that somebody has to do the work for them. But, I do understand that feeling because I remember when I was about 24 years old, I moved to another state and was by myself and worked, and how lonesome I was at first by doing that. It was a tough thing for me to do, so I understand that and so we try to work with the people as much as we can, and at the same time run our business to allow them to do that. There are situations where if they tell me that they are going to be back at such and such a date—say it's within a month—I'll hold their job open and try to accommodate them. But if they tell me they are going to come back in a month and show up three months later, then you know there may or may not be a job at that time for them. I need to know to plan my work here to have labor and to accomplish that. So, there has to be a mutual understanding between the two of us about what the expectations are going to be. If they need to suddenly...say there is a family emergency at home; that they need to go right now—a death in the family or you know, a parent in the hospital or this type of thing—they need to go. And we understand that, and we will work around that.

Alberto Gallardo, Dairy Worker

Sometimes you carry worries with you. You can't just put aside the things that you worry about. Every now and then you have to carry them even though you try not to bring it to work. But sometimes, you can't just put them aside so easily—especially, when there are things that are happening to family members that you love very much. Something that happened to me four years ago—I say this to share with everyone—one of my sisters died. She was 22 years old. I couldn't be with my parents; I couldn't be there with her during that sad moment. This is something I still can't forget about because I have to think, what if? What if I had gone to Mexico? Why didn't I go? However, it will have been like to start over again. Going away will have created so much turmoil.

Francisco Guerrero, Dairy Worker

Once I had to leave the country for almost two months for an illness in the family. So that affected my work and the economic situation. I had to leave the country for two months because my parents were sick. And for the same reason that I went down there for, I had to come back here. Because of his sickness I had to return here to work, because it was more important to keep working to help my dad with his medical expenses. Yes, it gets to you. It gets to you but it benefits you at the same time. Because if you look at it positively—even though it affects you to have to leave to be with your loved ones in Mexico—you know that when you return here, you are able to help your family with the medical expenses which are really tough in Mexico.

Maria Manuela R. de Gonzalez, Retired Food Processing Worker

So, unfortunately I'm not the only person—we all work with a sadness and a feeling that we are here to do what they say. And we do what they say with the sadness that if family members get sick, you already know that you are going to lose your job because they won't give you the option to go to Mexico. If they would look to the needs of the worker, the worker would be even more motivated to work harder and with more enthusiasm. For example, your mother is there, very sick in Mexico. You ask: "Can you please give me permission to go?" They say: "Wait..."

REALIDADES: MEXICAN AGRICULTURAL WORKERS IN MINNESOTA—VIDEO SCRIPTS

today or tomorrow we will see how it goes”—because work comes first—and then they say you can not go. No one wants to lose their job because there are a lot of family members who depend on you. So, you go to work but now you are not working well—because your mind is on other things—and that’s when accidents happen. Maybe you smash a finger or you get caught in a machine. Or maybe it is just that you can not do your job well because your mind is not on your job.

The Relationship with the Employer

Ron Durst, Durst Brothers Dairy

I have a lot of employers who have been with me for a long time. And some of them..I think the longest one (Hispanically) has been with me, oh, about 15 years I would say. But one of the things that makes us successful is that all three of us that work on the farm are very engaged with the people who work for us. Meaning, we work with them on jobs and so we see what’s going on. And normally here on our farm and at the dairy, anyway, if we’re going to try something new, I will normally try it out myself and see where the glitches are going to be and try to streamline all that before I turn it over to them—to make things smoother, and so we’re constantly trying to streamline things, make things easier for our workers to get things done. I always tell the story about my early experience with a Latino worker. We had our old farm, which is about half a mile from here—an older farm. I typically worked with them at night doing hospital cows. And so I’d come in at midnight—one-two o’clock, whenever it was—and work with them at night. And after a period of time you know they watched me very intently to see what I’m doing so they can learn what to do and so after a period of time went by. And one evening, and I will never forget this, one of them came over to me and said: “Señor Ron, why don’t you go over here and sit down and we’ll take care of the work for you.” And, uh, to me it was probably one of the moments that I’ll never forget. And I tell my kids the same thing, you want to impress your employer just tell them: “Hey, I’ll take care of this for you and you don’t need to worry about it.”

Francisco Guerrero, Dairy Worker

I will appreciate it if the bosses take into consideration the needs of the Hispanic: the need related to when we have to leave the country, whether it’s my boss or other employers or farmer. I will like them to realize that sometimes you have to leave the country for an emergency. That they understand this and so they don’t think: “Well, he has left so he doesn’t have a job.” This is what I would like them to keep very much in mind.

Maria Manuela R. de Gonzalez, Retired Food Processing Worker

I work for the top boss for many years. I would like it if they would work with Mexican employees and treat them with humanity. The bosses complain that there are many accidents; that they pay many thousands...when they could save them money, by giving that person permission to go home for a bit and then come right back, and give them back their job because typically when they come back the work is not there. This will be a good rule because they are good workers. They know their jobs and that will cost employers to train a new person from scratch. They will save much more. This is one of the things I would say to them.

REALIDADES: MEXICAN AGRICULTURAL WORKERS IN MINNESOTA—VIDEO SCRIPTS

Alberto Gallardo, Dairy Worker

An experience that happened to me with another employer when I first came here. I was working in the fields picking cucumbers, pumpkins, and cauliflower, and so. My family was still in Mexico. I think this happened for lack of understanding of our culture; that's what I will call it. My wife sent me some things from Mexico—some letters and that kind of thing. And I asked my boss permission to go get them at the post office. He didn't want to let me go. We were working from six in the morning to six at night and I would need maybe a half hour. But they were open work hours to get them from the post office. He told me that I couldn't leave work because it would mess up the shift. I told this to a co-worker next to me and he said to me: "Go, and nothing will happen. This is your family and your business. The only one who is going to care about them is you." I didn't want to lose my job. I didn't want to go without permission because I wanted to keep my job, but I went and came back. I went without telling my boss. I came back and fortunately, this time, he understood the situation. He asked me if everything was okay. He asked me if I liked the things that they sent me. I told him yes. But I think what is lacking sometimes from the employers is a sensitivity towards our needs. Besides, there are more things that make you feel that they are recognizing your hard work. Your presence on the job and the help that you are to them.

Francisco Guerrero, Dairy Worker

I can say that my relation with my employer has been good to this point. Because we talk a lot about Mexico, about my family there, and about his farm and work. But, the relation is good more than anything else because of the communication. My part and his part. He understands me and I understand him. So, whenever something doesn't seem right to him or me, we get together and we talk about it. So, between me and my employer this has helped a lot—for me and for him.

Improving the Relationship

Francisco Guerrero, Dairy Worker

I will like it if we will have more social contact. Not just at work but all of the functions. Whatever it is—the church, whatever—just have more contact...more social contact from both sides. This will help in a lot of things, not just work, to have more contact outside of work.

Alberto Gallardo, Dairy Worker

Well, I think that to improve the relationships between employer and employee it will be a good idea maybe if the employers had meetings and ask us questions about our countries, what we like about there in Mexico, what we think about here. That they can see the hardships we had to face coming from different cultures to this one. That they will try to understand us more so that they wouldn't see us as just workers but they will try to show them that they want to know about the person too. Not just to see us as employees—a source of labor—but to have more person-to-person relationship, you know.

Reyna Thomas, Food Processing Worker

It would be good if they understood a little more about us so that we could communicate it better, because we are good workers. I think we Mexicans are very, very hard workers. Why? Because we always have two things

REALIDADES: MEXICAN AGRICULTURAL WORKERS IN MINNESOTA—VIDEO SCRIPTS

on our mind: our family at home and our new future in this country. I would like it if the employers would think a bit about how hard it is to leave your family in a country so far away and commit totally to this country. That they will understand this a bit because they know that we are very good workers and if sometimes the work is not good enough or wasn't done right, it is for lack of communication due to the language and because we have very different customs from this country. It will be good if they would understand this and that we are here to better ourselves and get ahead in this country and live the American dream. Have been here twenty two years and I haven't got a debt yet.

Bridging the Language Divide

Ron Durst, Durst Brothers Dairy

Probably the most challenging aspect of working with the people is probably the language part of it. And we... we manage that by...we have probably about 4 or 5 people here. Three of them speak very good English and two or three others that speak English fairly well. And so, that's how we communicate with the rest of the crew. The people who can speak English talk to me in English because I know some key words in Spanish, but not enough to be able to communicate with them. But, you know, there are a lot of other ways to communicate besides the spoken word—by demonstrating what you want done—and they pick up very quickly on that. And here we train and we re-train so to keep our procedures that we want done each day very similar each day. And so we have meetings typically every other week with the crew here. And I find it needs to be about every other week to really keep people well-trained and it shows them that you know we are engaged in what we are doing. Because most of the people that work for me—and I think this is common on most farms where these people work—if they sense something is not important to me, it's not important to them. And so, having these meetings reinforces what I think is important and they pick up on that. And that's how we improve things.

Reyna Thomas, Food Processing Worker

But I think that the most difficult thing when you get to this country, more than anything, is the language. Like when you're work in a plant, sometimes you want to say something and there is just no way to communicate it with your supervisor worker if they are Americans. And well, it is difficult sometimes. Sometimes something is hurting or you are feeling sick and you can not communicate that.

Maria Manuela R. de Gonzalez, Retired Food Processing Worker

When the boss speaks to us Hispanics that don't speak English, he uses an interpreter. And in this, also, there are a lot of errors, cause the person who is speaking with the boss thinks that the person is interpreting correctly and the interpreter is really saying it in his own way. This is a problem.

REALIDADES: MEXICAN AGRICULTURAL WORKERS IN MINNESOTA—VIDEO SCRIPTS

Alberto Gallardo, Dairy Worker

It will be a good idea if the employer will set aside time for classes—even like a break for fifteen minutes—with a person who is interested in teaching us a little bit of the language. It will be a good incentive too, but unfortunately it doesn't work that way.

Maria Manuela R. de Gonzalez, Retired Food Processing Worker

For me, since then, I have come to understand that it is very important to learn English—very important. Me, when they set up an opportunity when they are giving classes in English—whether in the evening or in the morning—I get up and I go—even if it is just for an hour—because it never goes more than an hour—and I go. And I get desperate because there were two or three months there weren't any. And I said to myself: "But why?" And it goes that way in bits of pieces. I say: "No. I want to learn more." I went to the bookstore and I bought a package to learn English for the computer. But it is is all in English!

Alberto Gallardo, Dairy Worker

When I speak with my boss we try to understand each other. He speaks a little Spanish and I speak a little English and we mix them both.

Conclusion

The decision to leave came when the migrants-to-be realized that their circumstances were so bleak that they could not sustain their families locally. Leaving became the only possible way to fulfill a deep, moral responsibility to provide for one's family. In reality, migrants never really leave their families behind. They are permanently on their minds. Whatever sacrifice they made, it is with their family's wellbeing in mind. Workers feel ongoing push-pull desires to provide and visit their families in Mexico. But the cost of leaving their job here, even for short periods of time, pose a huge challenge for workers. Understanding employees' culture, situations, and challenges is key to improving communications. Migrants want to be seen as individuals rather than just employees. Most Latino workers agreed that learning to speak English fluently was the fundamental way to improve employer relations. Lacking necessary language skills deeply frustrates Latino employees, and hinders their ability to effectively communicate their ideas and needs. Minnesota's agricultural industry relies on the skills and labor of workers from Mexico. These workers count on these jobs in Minnesota to earn income to support their families in Mexico and Minnesota. These Mexican workers stories are American dream stories. That have persisted since the founding of

NOTES





ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For more information on this and related Extension resources, visit www.extension.umn.edu/family/tough-times-farm-families/workers-from-mexico/. Funding was provided by the National Institute for Food and Agriculture International Science and Education Program.

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