

2024

Yolo County Farmworker Assessment



BACKGROUND

Yolo County is home to a flourishing agriculture industry with both local and global reach. As the county’s leading business, the industry generated over \$901 million in 2023(1). Farmworkers are essential to the success of the agriculture industry in Yolo County and the nourishment of many through local and global food supplies. Recent estimates indicate that approximately 7,000 farmworkers live and work in Yolo County(2). Farmworkers are both essential to sustaining the growth and the demands of the agriculture industry and are an important part of our county’s community and culture. The Yolo County Farmworker Assessment was conducted to identify the unique needs and challenges of the local farmworker community which may limit their ability to thrive in the very place in which they work and live.

PURPOSE & METHODOLOGY

This Farmworker Assessment aims to highlight the social, economic, health, and environmental conditions affecting Yolo County farmworkers. While there are substantial data on farmworkers across the state, Yolo County Health & Human Services Agency (HHSA) wanted to learn more about the particular circumstances of Yolo County farmworkers to better address their needs, and to work collectively as a county to address the root causes of health inequities affecting farmworkers.

The assessment process had two components: a written survey administered through individual interviews with 301 farmworkers, and 10 focus groups totaling 64 farmworkers. HHSA’s bilingual staff facilitated the focus groups and administered the surveys across Yolo County between September 2023-March 2024.

SURVEY PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS (N=301)



59% MALE
41% FEMALE



96% ARE PERMANENT RESIDENTS



MEDIAN: 47
MAX: 77

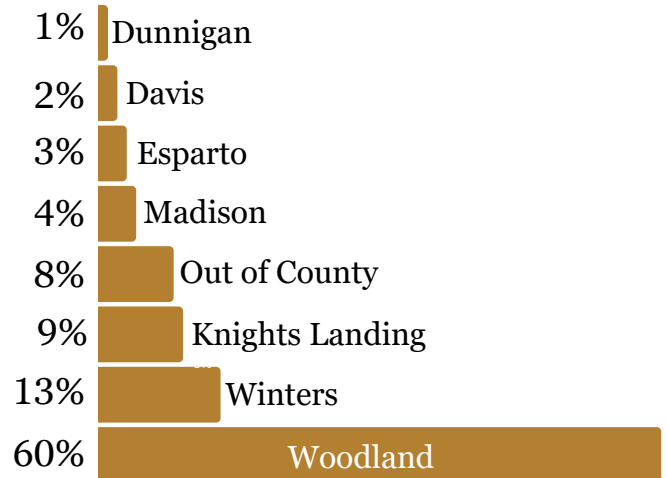


62% HAVE CHILDREN IN THE HOME



92% BORN OUTSIDE THE U.S.

PLACE OF RESIDENCE



(1) <https://www.yolocounty.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/82202/638622676187970000>

(2) Estimate based on the 2022 Hired Farm Labor report (underestimate due to limits on type of laborers captured) [st06_2_007_007.pdf \(usda.gov\)](#), and farmworker census estimates based on COVID-19 vaccination efforts for farmworkers in 2020-21: [HealthyDavisTogether_CaseStudy-ProvidingSupporttoAgriculturalWorkers.pdf \(healthyolotogether.org\)](#).



Housing & Household Information



HOUSEHOLD SIZE

Median: 3
Average: 4
Max: 9

COHABITATION Share a Home with Another Family



CROWDING 3 or More Individuals per Bedroom

Pests 28%
Mold 13%
No AC/Heater 12%



KEY FINDINGS

Financial stress was the number one stressor identified by survey participants. Increasing housing and utility costs are the primary driver of this financial stress. Most farmworkers who earn minimum wage in Yolo County struggle to cover these costs, which makes it difficult to meet their basic needs month to month. Census data show the median rent in Yolo County is higher than the median rent in neighboring counties like Sacramento, Yuba, Sutter, and Colusa(1). Housing costs are on the rise, while many Yolo County farmworkers express a decrease in earnings with the overtime regulation from the Fair Labor Standards Act in full effect, requiring employers to pay farmworkers time-and-a-half after working 40 hours in a week(2). 81% of farmworkers pay rent and are subject to rental increases. This adds to their difficulty in paying for regular expenses and saving money, since housing costs rise but wages do not. Farmworkers would like to see permanent affordable housing opportunities to avoid rental increases and to be able to acquire generational wealth they can pass on to their children.



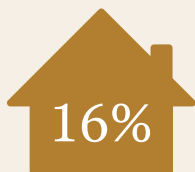
“Housing here is expensive and owners don't want to fix them, some housing is in very bad conditions. That's probably the biggest necessity here.”

“And every time they fix something they increase the rent.”

OWNER-OCCUPIED HOUSING



YOLO COUNTY (3)



FARMWORKERS

HOUSING COST

FARMWORKERS

Median: \$900
Max: \$2,800



YOLO COUNTY (3)

Median: \$1655

41% of farmworkers have a housing cost that is 50% or more of their monthly income.



“We need a house that is ours so we can stop throwing away our money. Rent is not cheap, and we work just to pay rent. We get old in the fields and we’re never going to have something that belongs to us... because that house will never be ours, and they just keep increasing the rent.”

“I know a lot of people who are leaving and moving to Fresno, Madera, because they can keep working in the fields over there and have better opportunity at buying a home of their own.”

The sustainability of the agriculture workforce is at risk. The lack of affordable permanent housing is driving farmworkers away to other counties where they say they can continue to work in agriculture but pay less for housing. Their low income makes it very difficult to afford purchasing a home in Yolo County, and finding low-income public housing is also very unlikely with long waitlists that indicate a shortage of available low-income housing units in the county.

“Those low-income housing have a waiting list of about 300 people, you're never going to get called. We definitely need more housing.”

According to information received from Yolo County Housing Authority in October 2024, waitlists for low-income public housing programs are considerably long.

YOLO COUNTY HOUSING AUTHORITY

Affordable Housing Waitlists

Housing Choice Voucher

Public Housing

Total: 14,211

**Figure represents unique applications*

HOUSING TYPE



HOUSE
38%

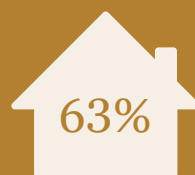


APARTMENT
34%



MOBILE HOME
25%

TOP 3 HOUSING NEEDS



Permanent
Housing



Rent
Assistance



Utility
Assistance

“What is very stressful and essential is rent. We need help with rent, utilities, and food. Our work is seasonal, and we have to ask around to borrow money to have enough for rent or utilities. We have to arrange payment plans so we don't go without electricity. It's very stressful.”

Farmworkers are stressed over the increasing cost of utilities. Hotter summers create a greater need for electricity to be able to stay cool at home. **They are struggling to pay outstanding utility bills that just keep growing as they prioritize rent and food.** Payment plans are common and very much needed to keep their utilities on.

(1) <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/colusacountycalifornia,sacramentocountycalifornia,yubacountycalifornia,suttercountycalifornia,yolocountycalifornia/PST045223>

(2) <https://www.npr.org/2023/07/21/1188258994/overtime-farmworkers-washington-state-agriculture>

(3) <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/map/yolocountycalifornia/PST045222>



Income & Socioeconomics



KEY FINDINGS

Many farmworkers experience poverty and face the challenge of low wages with a high cost of living. The median annual income for a farmworker is \$20,000 and \$37,000 for a household of 3. **These income levels fall into the Extremely and Very Low-income categories**, respectively, for HUD (1). Financial hardship shows up in various ways for farmworkers. For example, **92% of farmworkers surveyed live permanently in Yolo County, but only 16% own a home**, and many cite low wages and the lack of year-round work as a barrier to saving for a down payment. **Most farmworkers are employed for 7 months or less** out of the year, and **30% are not eligible for unemployment benefits, suggesting they are undocumented**. Despite low income levels, few farmworkers use public benefits such as CalFresh and CalWORKS.

MEDIAN INCOME FOR 3



\$37K

Very Low-income

MEDIAN INCOME FOR 1



\$20K

Extremely Low-Income

FARMWORKER INCOME LEVELS BASED ON INCOME LIMITS FROM THE US DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT (HUD) TO DETERMINE ELIGIBILITY FOR PUBLIC HOUSING

"Our wages are too low, it's very heavy work for little pay."

"We also need a pay raise. Field work is tough, but we can't survive financially with 40 hours per week."

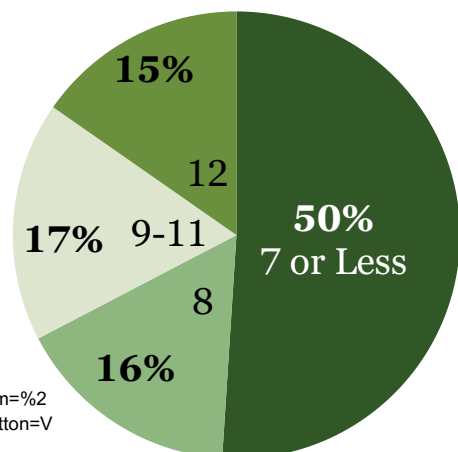
HUD ANNUAL INCOME LIMITS

Extremely Low-Income → **51% of Farmworkers** → (\$0 - \$24,250)

Very Low-Income → **26% of Farmworkers** → (\$24,251 - \$40,400)

Low-Income → **8% of Farmworkers** → (\$40,401 - \$64,600)

Months Employed Annually (%)



(1) [https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/il/il2024/2024summary.odn?STATES=6.0&INPUTNAME=METRO40900MM9270*0611399999%2BYolo+County&stalist=&stname=California&wherefrom=%24wherefrom%24&statefp=06&year=2024&ne_flag=&selection_type=county&incpath=%24incpath%24&data=2024&SubmitButton=V](https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/il/il2024/2024summary.odn?STATES=6.0&INPUTNAME=METRO40900MM9270*0611399999%2BYolo+County&stalist=&stname=California&wherefrom=%24wherefrom%24&statefp=06&year=2024&ne_flag=&selection_type=county&incpath=%24incpath%24&data=2024&SubmitButton=View+County+Calculations)



“Everything is so expensive. With \$100, you can’t take many groceries home. We need a pay raise.”

“Working in the fields is beautiful. If we were paid better for our work, we wouldn’t face difficult financial situations.”



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“Sometimes we don’t have enough for food. We have to go to social services to get a food referral or go to food banks.”

“When we don’t work, we still have to pay for utilities.”



46%

EXPERIENCE
HARDSHIP
PAYING FOR
UTILITIES



41%

HAVE HOUSING
COSTS THAT
ARE 50% OR
MORE OF THEIR
MONTHLY
INCOME

EMERGENCY

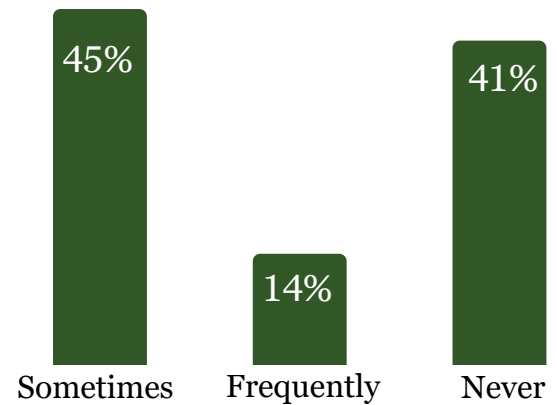
73%

Can’t pay for a \$400 emergency expense.

Only 5 of the 301 survey participants (1.6%) reported income above \$64,600 (HUD’s 2024 Low-Income limit for 1 individual in Yolo County). Farmworkers are struggling to pay for rent, food, utilities, and other major expenses. 25% report paying medical bills as the most significant expense outside of food and housing, followed by sending money to Mexico at 17% and credit debt at 13%.



Use Of Food Distributions

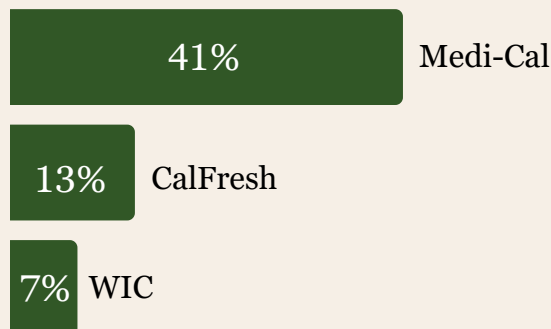


*Top Reasons Why Farmworkers Don’t Use Food Distributions:

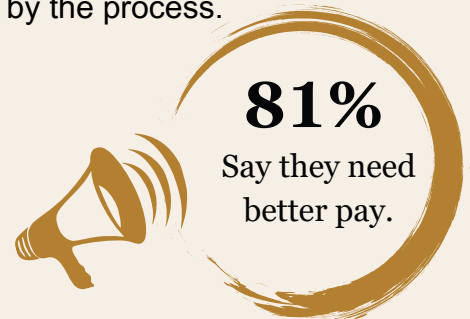
- They occur during work hours.
- They don’t know where they occur.

Despite low income levels, the use of public benefits among farmworkers is considerably low. Some may be ineligible, but participants shared additional reasons like fear of legal repercussions, past experiences where they felt discriminated against, or feeling overwhelmed by the process.

Use Of Public Benefits



*Less than 1% use CalWORKS



“I have never applied for foodstamps or any government program because I don’t want any problems with government or immigration.”



Health & Access to Healthcare



KEY FINDINGS

The leading chronic condition reported by farmworkers is high blood pressure, which increases their risk of heat-related illnesses during work due to physically demanding labor and high temperatures. The CDC states that “conditions like heart disease, mental illness, poor blood circulation, and obesity are risk factors for heat-related illnesses”(1). Also in the top 5 chronic conditions reported by farmworkers is anxiety and depression. Additionally, **80% of farmworkers indicated they experience 1 or more life stressor** as indicated in the graphic below. However, **mental health services are significantly underused** with only 7% of participants stating they have used mental health services in the past 12 months.

PHYSICAL HEALTH



FARMWORKERS

HEALTHY OR MODERATELY HEALTHY

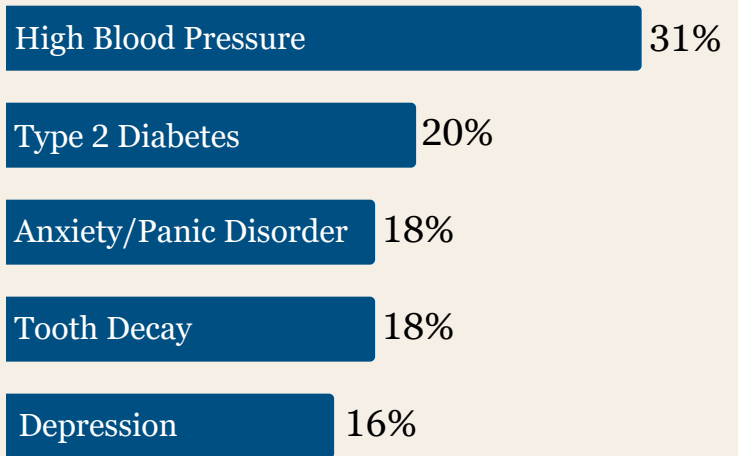


YOLO COUNTY(2)

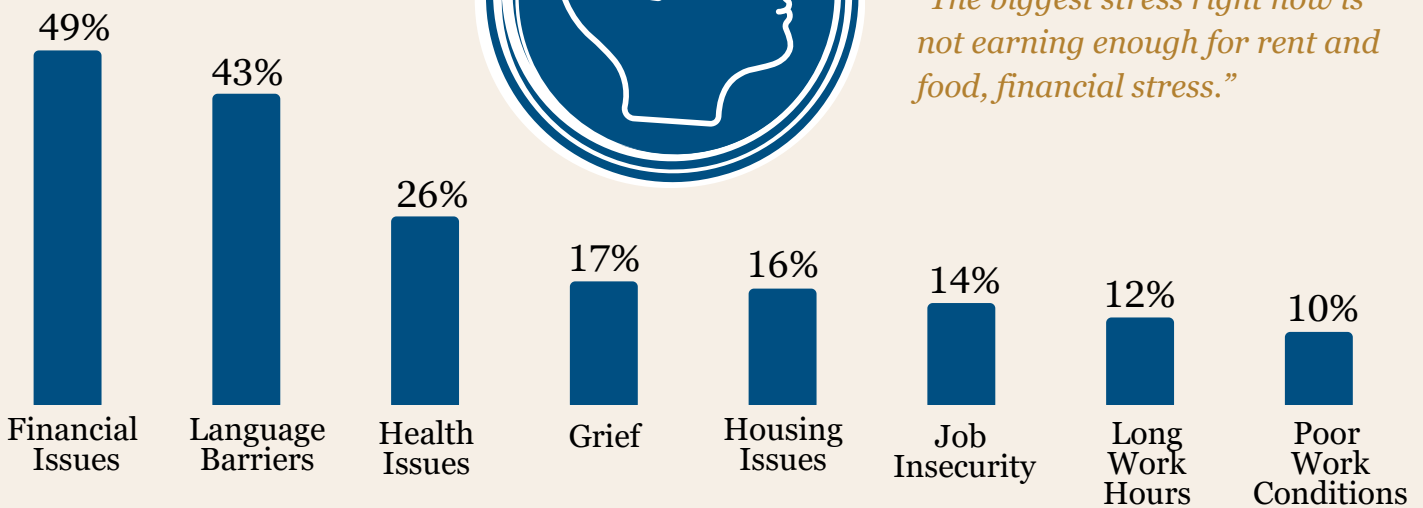
63% FARMWORKERS DIAGNOSED WITH 1 OR MORE CHRONIC CONDITION

“When you are sick, that's what most stresses you out. If you have diabetes or another illness, it affects you most.”

TOP 5 CHRONIC CONDITIONS



STRESSORS



“The biggest stress right now is not earning enough for rent and food, financial stress.”

(1) <https://www.cdc.gov/heat-health/risk-factors/heat-and-chronic-conditions.html>

(2) <https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/health-data/california/yolo?year=2024>



“Lack of English, it complicates doctor visits. We don't know how to request Medi-Cal or solve our issues with EDD, or not knowing where to get work when we are laid off... Everything is now over the internet, and we don't know how to do all that.”



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FOCUS GROUP HIGHLIGHTS ON WELLBEING

- The physical labor at work takes a toll on farmworker health, especially during extreme weather conditions.
- Language and technology barriers make navigating the public service and healthcare systems difficult. Learning English is a challenge due to work, family needs, and age.
- Working long hours during the summer takes a toll on family dynamics, and periods of unemployment are stressful, especially for undocumented farmworkers.
- Living with a health condition or having a family member with a health condition generates a lot of stress.

“The stress comes in various ways. When the work starts, the bosses want you to work. But sometimes there are workers who have ill family members at home and that stresses them out. They're at work but their minds are thinking about their ill relatives at home.”

72%

HAVE HEALTH INSURANCE

70%

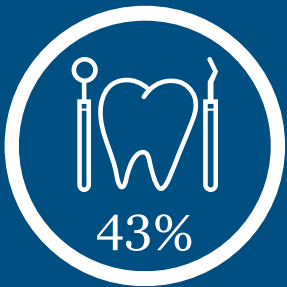
HAVE ANNUAL CHECK-UPS

Over 2/3 of farmworkers have health insurance, and most of them are seeing a doctor for annual check-ups. The majority of those with health insurance have Medi-Cal, followed by Medicare and Covered CA. However, despite having health insurance, **farmworkers have identified money as a barrier to accessing healthcare services.** Either procedures are not covered through health insurance or copays are too expensive. This has resulted in farmworkers seeking healthcare services, such as dental procedures, in Mexico where they are more affordable.

50%
Medi-Cal or Medicare

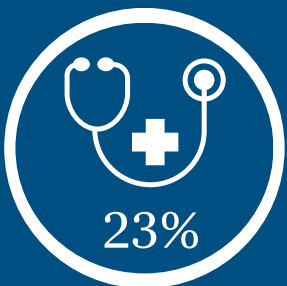
22%
Other Health Insurance

28%
No Health Insurance



43%

RECEIVED DENTAL SERVICES IN MEXICO

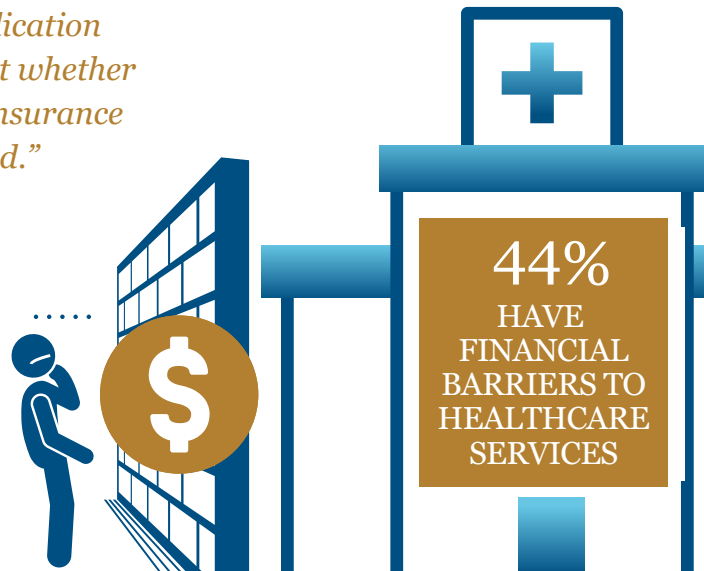


23%

RECEIVED MEDICAL SERVICES IN MEXICO

“Sometimes we need to buy medication and we are forced to think about whether we can keep paying for health insurance if we buy the medication we need.”

“There should be more dental resources. All of that is too expensive and we can't afford it.”



44%
HAVE FINANCIAL BARRIERS TO HEALTHCARE SERVICES

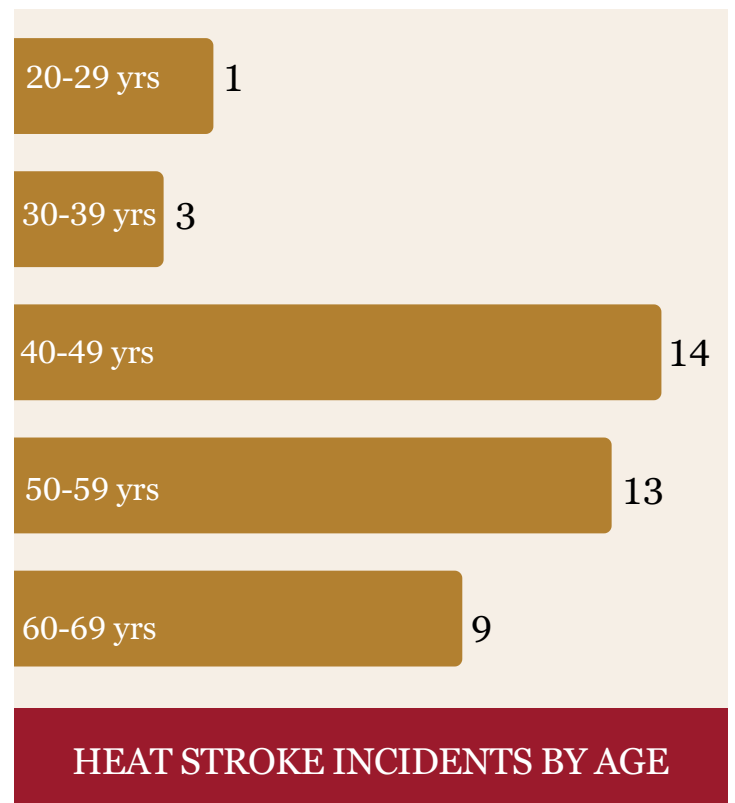
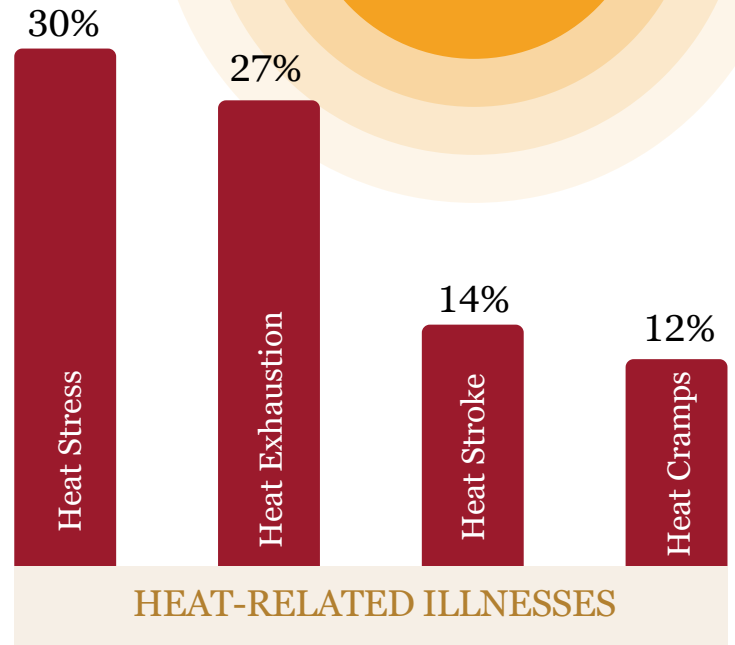
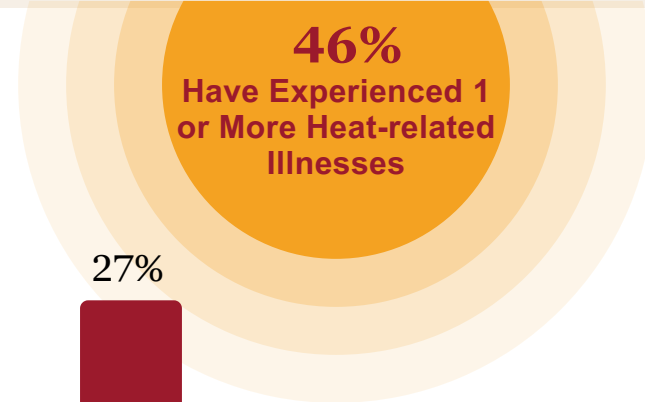
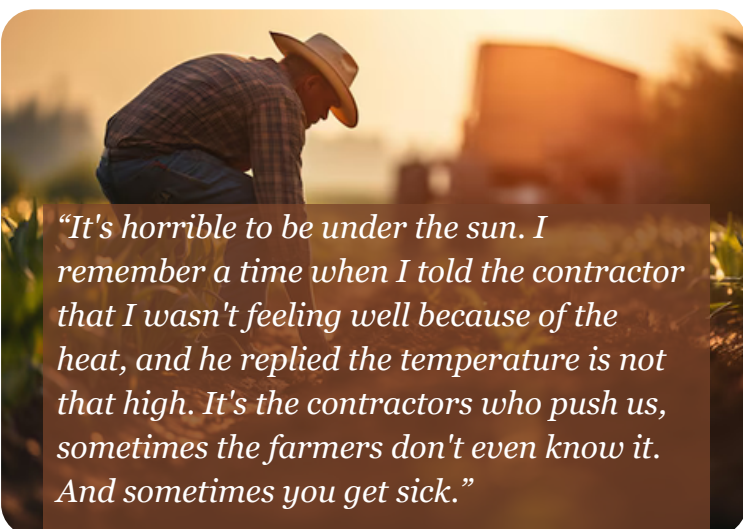


“When we feel sick at work, the contractor scares people from going to the hospital.”

Environmental Stressors

KEY FINDINGS

Yolo County farmworkers are more vulnerable to heat-related illnesses compared to farmworkers along the coast like Salinas, Monterey, and Napa counties where temperatures are significantly cooler. The increasing temperatures in Yolo County are especially concerning for farmworkers given their age and prevalence of chronic conditions. They work at a very fast pace performing physically demanding labor, which increases their internal body temperature while they are being exposed to very high external temperatures. **This may cause increased health risks for the 1/3 of farmworkers who reported suffering from high blood pressure**, as their hearts may need to work harder to regulate body temperature. Age is also a factor to consider when performing physically demanding work under dangerous temperatures. It's important to note that **Yolo County's agricultural laborers is an aging workforce with 58% of farmworkers being 45 years or older**, many with pre-existing **chronic conditions that could be exacerbated by extreme temperatures on the job.**





“I have asthma, so when we have to work outside with smoky air due to the fires, I have to wear two masks and a handkerchief, so I don’t get an asthma attack in the fields.”



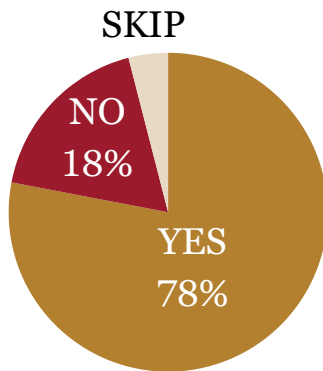
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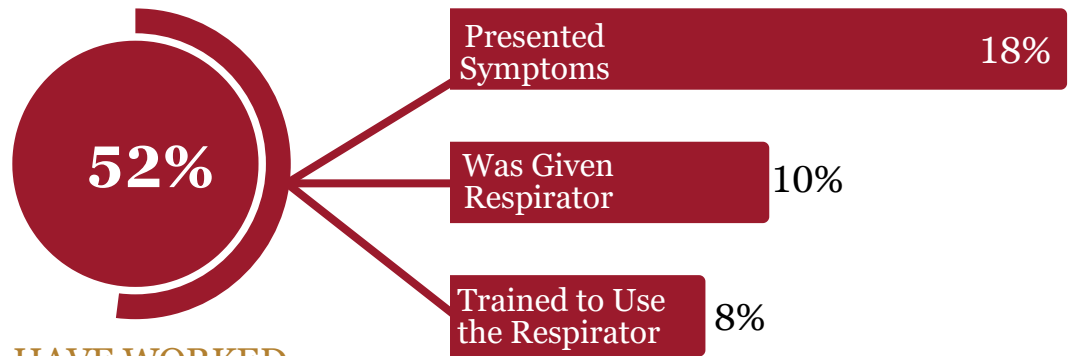
HEAT-RELATED ILLNESS TRAINING AT WORK



Don't Have a Working Air Conditioner



Most farmworkers receive orientation regarding heat-related illnesses at work every summer season. A common reason why someone would not have received the training is because they started work after the orientation had already been offered to the crew all at once.



HAVE WORKED UNDER WILDFIRE SMOKE CONDITIONS

“Last year, when it was too hot, the tomatoes spoiled so they just stopped workers at the cannery, just like that, there was no more work. A lot of people went unemployed and couldn’t even get unemployment because the season was so short, we didn’t work enough to claim unemployment.”

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Extreme heat can shut down operations earlier in the day and farmworkers are sent home without pay. There are no regulations around guaranteed pay when operations stop due to the heat. Participants stated that these unexpected income losses due to heat make paying bills and buying essentials difficult. Sometimes extreme heat spoils crops and there is no work at all, which can amplify the financial uncertainty for farmworkers. Other counties have developed relief programs to help remedy the loss of wages to due natural disasters(1).

“The summers keep getting hotter and hotter and we keep having droughts that don't allow us to plant crops in the amounts we used to. Each year it’s less crops, less work because of the heat. Last year the heat was unbearable at home. I told the manager the AC did not work. He replaced it with a smaller AC unit. It couldn't cool down the apartment. We suffered a lot at home.”

(1) <https://www.nbc1c.org/news-1/california-vineyard-workers-are-losing-wages-amid-extreme-heat-now-they%E2%80%99re-fighting-back>



Access to Public Services & Community Needs

Yolo County Farmworker Assessment



KEY FINDINGS

Most farmworkers have access to green space like parks and walking trails that are conducive to physical activity and social connection. Additionally, **most farmworkers feel safe in their neighborhoods overall, and they feel a sense of community.** Although most participants reported feeling safe overall, more than half report safety concerns in their neighborhoods related to infrastructure.

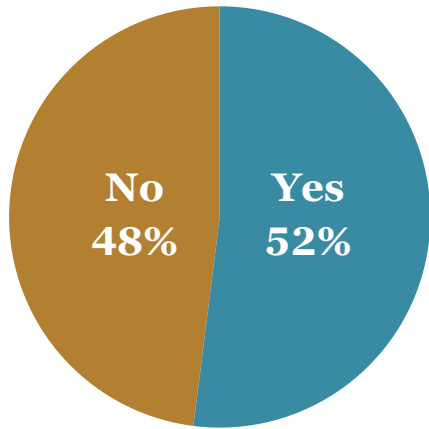


ACCESS TO GREENSPACE

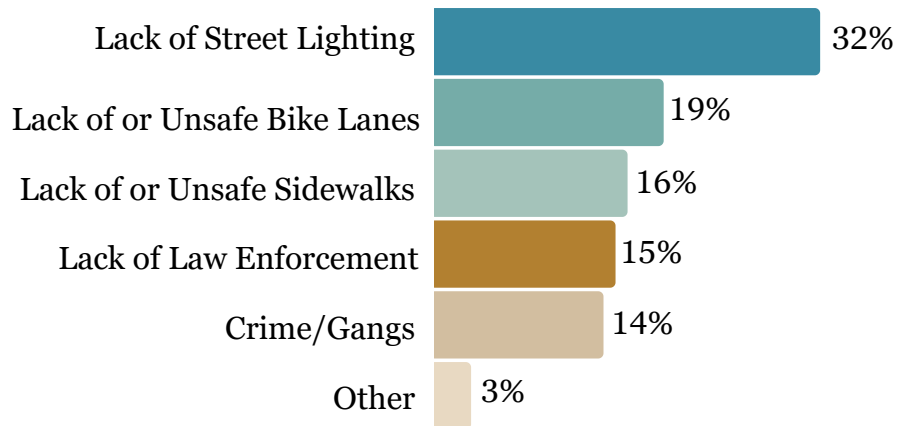


FEEL SAFE IN THEIR COMMUNITY

FARMWORKERS WITH COMMUNITY SAFETY CONCERNS



COMMUNITY SAFETY CONCERNS



PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Very few farmworkers access public transportation. Most rely on their own vehicles, or family and friends. Some have used the bus system at some point, but they feel it's not reliable to get to work or to appointments. **Language barriers make it difficult to use the service because they can't communicate with the driver.**

"We need the conductor to speak Spanish. My aunt got on one time and since she didn't speak English she could not tell them where she needed to get to and so they just took her, and she didn't know where to get off. She spent the day on the bus."

"One time I used a bus to go to Sacramento and then it took me to Davis and all around, and I don't know. It's not like Mexico where you tell the driver where you're going. Here, you get on and don't know where it takes you."



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“Supposedly there is help, but we are afraid, or we don't want to waste our time. We ask for help because we need it, but they don't help us, and the workers treat us as if we are asking for help from their pockets.”



AGENCIES COMMONLY SOUGHT FOR ASSISTANCE

- RISE
- Empower Yolo
- CA Human Development
- Yolo County HHSA

Farmworkers are more likely to turn to nonprofit agencies for help. Participants expressed that County services were more difficult to navigate and that the enrollment processes are very lengthy and less welcoming.

COMMUNITY NEEDS

There is an overwhelming consensus among all farmworker communities throughout Yolo County for permanent affordable housing as the most pressing need overall, as well as rental and utility assistance.

“We need a law that limits rent increases.”

“We need low-income housing, housing that we can buy.”

*“Put on your notes we need 1,000 low-income houses.”
“1,000 is not enough.”*

Additionally, farmworkers identified other needs specific to their communities as reflected in the tables below, in no particular order.

| Knights Landing | Madison | Esparto | Winters | Woodland |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Preschool Park Walking Trails Street Lighting Traffic Lights Grocery Store Youth Sports | Street Sewers Street Lighting Stop Sign -(Quincy St) Grocery Store Animal Control -unsafe to walk outside due to dogs | Law Enforcement HeadStart Extended Hours | Basketball Courts Stop Signs Grocery Store | Gymnastics Facility Sport Subsidies -i.e. golf, yoga Dental Resources -more providers -farmworker discounts |

PRIORITY EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE



42%
Financial Assistance for Medical Needs



35%
Food



16%
Shelter

Survey participants were asked to identify what would be most helpful for their household as an emergency assistance service. More farmworkers selected financial assistance for medical needs than any other option (reinforcing the financial barrier to accessing healthcare) followed by food and shelter.

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Summary

AGING WORKFORCE

Survey results show that the median age of farmworkers is 47 years old, and the oldest participant was 77 years old. 58% of farmworkers are 45 years or older, and 31% are 55 or older. Very few young people are becoming farmworkers due to the low pay for the demanding labor, the seasonality of the work, and family encouragement for children of farmworkers to pursue an education that can lead to better paying career jobs.

IMPACT OF HIGH HOUSING COSTS

92% of farmworkers who participated in the survey live in Yolo County permanently but can't afford the high cost of housing. 87% of those surveyed indicated that help finding permanent affordable housing or paying rent was their top need, and this was echoed in focus groups. While most farmworkers are facing significant housing cost challenges, only 23% of Yolo County residents overall face a severe housing cost burden(1). Yolo County has an affordable housing shortage with a long waitlist. Farmworkers turn to co-housing with other families or living in sub-standard housing conditions. 47% of farmworkers cited housing issues such as pests, lack of heating/cooling, water safety, and mold. The lack of affordable housing is driving farmworkers to the Central Valley where the cost of living is lower, and they can continue to work for the same pay.

WAGES ARE NOT ENOUGH TO AFFORD BASIC NEEDS

Despite working under physically taxing conditions to meet agriculture's seasonal demands, many farmworkers fall short of affording their basic needs, such as food, rent, health care services and utilities. 52% of those surveyed said they run out of food sometimes or frequently, and 34% said they could not afford dental services. Low wages are a root cause of farmworkers' challenge to afford basic needs, which impacts their health, stress levels, and ability to save money for the future.

MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH CONCERNS

Agriculture work comes with unique demands that make farmworkers more vulnerable to physical and mental health issues. Heat stress, exposure to wildfire smoke, physically demanding work at low pay and long work hours can result in poor health outcomes. The number one stressor affecting farmworkers surveyed was financial stress. Additionally, 63% of farmworkers experience a chronic health condition, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and anxiety/depression, making them more susceptible to serious heat-related illnesses and other health conditions that are worsened by long hours of physically demanding work. Farmworkers often face language and immigration barriers that make it harder to access mental and physical healthcare services.

A PATH FORWARD

Completing the Farmworker Assessment was the first step in identifying the needs of farmworkers in Yolo County. Going forward, addressing key issues such as access to permanent affordable housing, better wages, and ensuring the farmworkers have equitable access to the resources available in Yolo County are important steps toward improving farmworkers' lives. HHSA is grateful to the farmworker community for sharing their experiences, and is hopeful that the report will help spur positive change toward ensuring that all farmworkers in Yolo County can thrive.

(1) <https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/health-data/california/yolo?year=2024>