



Farm Labor Outlook from the viewpoint of a Farm-Worker

Domingo Atilano

Background

- Born in San Marcos, Guerrero, Mexico
- Born into a Nahuatl speaking village
- First came to California at the age of 16 in 1990



- Crossed the border near Tijuana without papers.
- The cost to cross in 1990 was \$250.
- First settled in Ontario, California with friends and relatives.
- Started picking citrus in Hemet, Indio, and Riverside.
- Through word of mouth, learned of citrus harvesting on the coast.



- The first years were the most difficult, with a steep learning curve.
- Early challenges include: language, food, transportation, and a general disorientation from being in a foreign country with few resources.
- Most workers need access to an automobile.
- Most workers will not have a valid drivers' license.
- Nearly all workers will have car insurance due to registration requirements.



- Deported twice in 1990.
- Picked up at the work place in the Indio area.
- Taken the first time to Mexicali and the second time to San Luis Rio Colorado.
- Crossings in 1990 cost \$250-300.
- Returned to Guerrero in 1995 for a vacation. By then crossings cost \$450.
- Today it costs \$5-6000 to cross the border illegally.



Viewpoint

- Workplace conditions have improved in recent years due to the decrease in labor availability.
- There is a general feeling in the farm-worker community that other industries (factories, textile) have poorer working conditions than farm work.



Viewpoint

- Most immigrants tend to be single males
- The vast majority do not learn English
- In general, the grandchildren of the immigrants speak little-to-no Spanish



Legalization Process

- Achieved Legal Resident status in 2008
- Achieved Permanent Resident status in 2009
- Will be eligible for citizenship in 2014



Requirements and Costs:

- 10 years of work history living and working in the United States.
- Provide a good reason to stay (family, work, etc.)
- Roughly \$6,000 per applicant



Risks

The case could be rejected by the judge.



General Perceptions:

- The immigrant experience has been beneficial.
- There is a lot of worry in the farm-worker community about a new Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) building being built in Santa Maria.



General Perceptions:

- The workers do not see the farm industry raising similar concerns.
- There is a general feeling that inaction on immigration, by Congress, communicates to immigrants that their legal status is not important to the federal government.



Conclusions

