

Agricultural Labor and Specialty Crops

Summary

The purpose of this economic research program is to evaluate potential changes in the demand for labor and the availability of labor for Florida and other specialty crop producers. The production of fresh fruits and vegetables, and nursery and greenhouse products, is highly labor intensive. Fruits and vegetables require intense seasonal demands for labor, while the expanding nursery and greenhouse group offers more continuous employment. These jobs typically require few skills that are in high demand elsewhere in the economy, so compensation is relatively low. Consequently, agricultural employers compete for unskilled labor with industries such as construction, hotels, and restaurants. One important segment of the unskilled labor market is unauthorized foreign workers who work in agriculture and selected other industries because personal interaction with the public is not a significant part of the job. Homeland Security issues and alternative legislative proposals to address the foreign worker issue create considerable uncertainty for agricultural employers as well as the involved foreign workers. One aspect of the empirical research will address concerns about how long different types of workers may continue working in agriculture, particularly if there are changes in immigrant or guest worker programs. The empirical research program will also address factors such as new technology and minimum wage policies, both of which could alter demand for agricultural labor. Issues of worker compensation are of interest not only to the employer and the worker but also to the public, which has expressed considerable interest in farm workers. Closely related to the farm labor market in Florida is the competitiveness of Florida's labor-intensive commodities with labor-intensive agricultural commodities from Latin American and Caribbean economies. Comparative labor costs and productivity are of direct importance in understanding what potential changes may be forthcoming in Florida's agricultural industry. The empirical economic research proposed can provide useful information in addressing these difficult and important issues.

Projects

- o The demand for agricultural labor in Florida
- o Farm worker attachment to agriculture and immigration status
- o The role of incentive wage systems in specialty crop agriculture
- o Economic effects of regional integration on Florida's agricultural competitiveness

Researchers

R. D. Emerson, C. G. Davis, R. Kilmer, and J. Seale

