

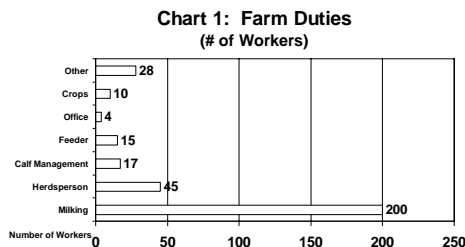
Dairy Employee Survey Results (Fond du Lac & Sheboygan Counties)

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Driving around the eastern half of Wisconsin it is very clear that the dairy industry is changing. No one is building a tiestall barn and there are almost no vertical silos being built. On the farm, life is changing as well. The dairy producer's role is changing. Whereas a producer at one time did all the manual labor on the farm himself, now he spends more of his time managing employees.

There have been a few studies that have looked at these changes on dairy farms, but almost all have come from the employer's perspective. This past summer (2007), I wanted to look more closely at these changes from the employee level. Collaborators on the project included Jill Harrison from the Department of Rural Sociology (UW), Tina Kohlman (UWEX Sheboygan), and Brent Valentine (moderator & chief information surveyor). We wanted to look at the demographics, goals, and working conditions of employees on dairy farms in this part of the state.

Over a couple of months, Brent visited **34 dairies** and interviewed **309 employees** in Fond du Lac and Sheboygan Counties. Brent's bilingual ability allowed him to interview both Spanish and English speaking employees. Brent attempted to interview all employees on each of the farms visited. Chart 1 shows the various job descriptions of these employees; by far, most of these workers were milkers/cow pushers.



So what did we find?

Looking at Charts 2 to 4, we can see some clear demographics of this group. About 70% of the employees on these farms were Hispanic, and 87% were male. For those who have been watching the industry over the last few years the shift to Hispanic employees has been very apparent. The agribusiness community has adapted to this change through bilingual literature and labels. This survey is one of the first to actually put a number on the impact of this Hispanic labor.

Looking at the origins of the farm workers (Charts 5 and 6), it becomes quite apparent that beyond Wisconsin, Mexico is the primary origin of many of these workers. Even more interesting is that when you look at the state/province of origin, Veracruz is the primary origin. And we

can go farther than that. When interviewing the employees, there were about 25% of the Hispanic employees from a handful of villages in one region of Veracruz. So it's safe to conclude that many of these employees know each other from Mexico. How has this happened? When we looked at how workers found their jobs, 86% said they had been

Chart 2: Who are the Workers?

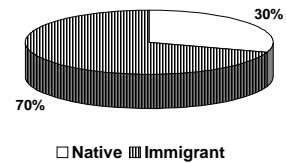


Chart 3: Workers by Gender

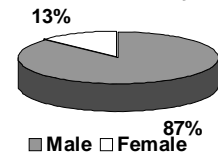
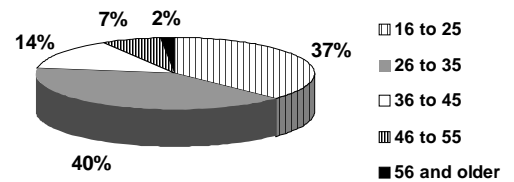
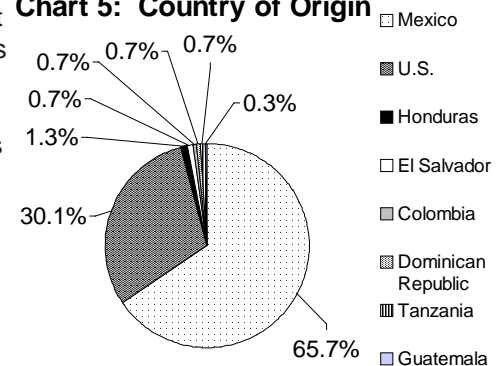


Chart 4: Workers by Age



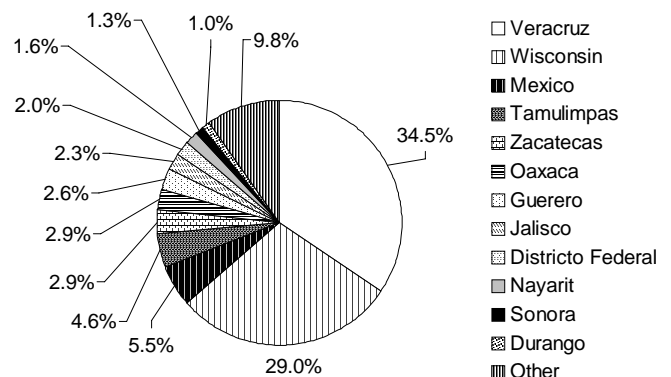
recommended by a family member or friend, 9% walked on the farm, 4% responded to a job advertisement and 1% were hired through an employment agency. What essentially has happened is this. An employer hires a new employee. He/she is reliable. A different employee leaves. The newest employee

Chart 5: Country of Origin



brings along a friend or family member to fill the position. This has been repeated over the last 10 years within individual farms and across farms in Eastern Wisconsin. The reliability and availability of Hispanic workforce has

Chart 6: State of Origin



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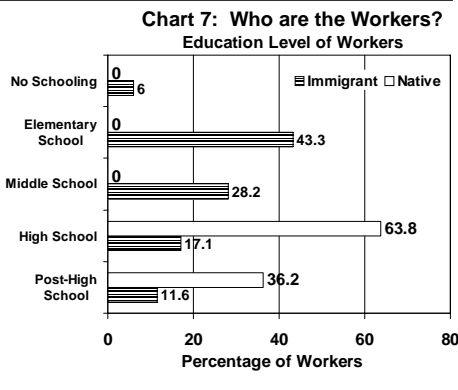
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driven the demographics of farm labor to change drastically. Over 42% of the farms in this survey reported they began employing Hispanic workers between 1996 and 2000 (7% between 1991 and 1996, 45% between 2000 and 2005, and 5% after 2006).

And what were the goals of these immigrants? When asked this question, 19% said they wanted to stay as long as possible and 79% said they wanted to work and return to their home country.

Other key demographics

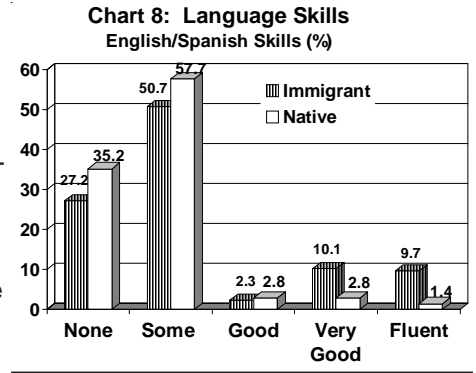
Education levels. There is quite a difference in the educational levels between Immigrant (Hispanic) and Native (English Speaking) workers. In Chart 7, the educational differences can easily be seen. About 63% of the Native workers had started or completed high school and 37% had some educational training beyond high school. For Hispanic workers, 6% had no schooling while another 43% had only completed or started primary (1-6) school. Of the



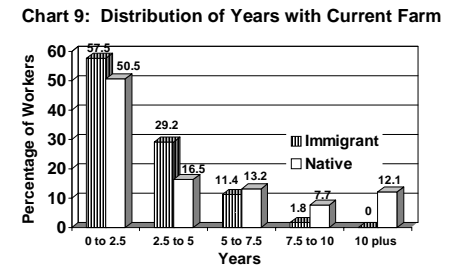
Hispanic workers, 17% had started or completed high school (Prepa) while 12% had some post high school training. Why does this matter? We asked this question primarily to understand the educational levels and perhaps the literacy levels of the Hispanic workers. Literacy is not really a question that can be asked directly. Many of our training programs, literature, and oral communication on farms assume a certain amount of literacy and education. A great example of this is the translation of popular trade magazines into Spanish. Can someone with a 6th grade education level or less, have the educational background to understand concepts like Ovsynch and fresh cow protocols? When I was in 5th grade I am not sure what level my vocabulary was at. I am pretty sure I wouldn't understand the terms "esophageal feeder" and "rumen canula". I am not sure many of these magazines have really understood their audience. (This is the basis for the Dairy Partner/El Compañero newsletter that I put out; I keep the articles short and full of pictures.) Does this mean these employees are "dumb"? Certainly not!! Many of these employees simply have not had the educational opportunities to utilize their intelligence. The key is to try and understand the individual employees. Realize their potential and limitations. Train accordingly.

English/Spanish Speaking skills. In chart 8 we can see

that 20% of the Hispanic workers consider themselves very good or fluent in English while 4.2% of Native workers consider themselves fluent or very good in Spanish. About 37% of the Hispanic workers have taken English classes while about 90% would like to take English classes. For English speaking employees, 25% have taken Spanish classes and 56% would like to take classes in the future.

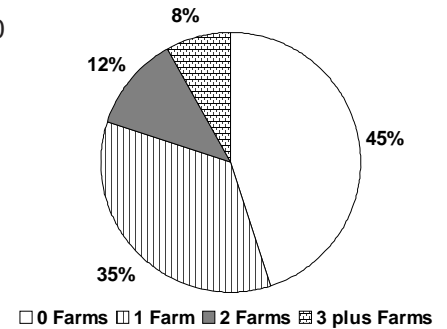


Employee Turnover Looking at Chart 9 we can see that over 45% of employees (Hispanic and Native) have been on their current farm for more than 2.5 years. From the chart its also quite apparent that the non-Hispanic employees have been on the farm longer than 10 years. As mentioned earlier, this is due to the fact that most employers only started hiring Hispanics in the last 10 years.



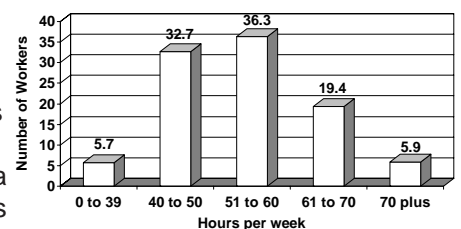
Another common question is whether or not employees are jumping from farm to farm. In Chart 10 we can see that almost 80% of employees have been employed on only one or two dairies.

Chart 10: How Many Dairies Have You Worked on in the Past?



Hours Worked / Time off. Charts 11 and 12 show the number of hours worked by employees and the number of days off per month. Many of the farm laborers are working long hours and without a lot of days off. This

Chart 11: Hours Worked per Week

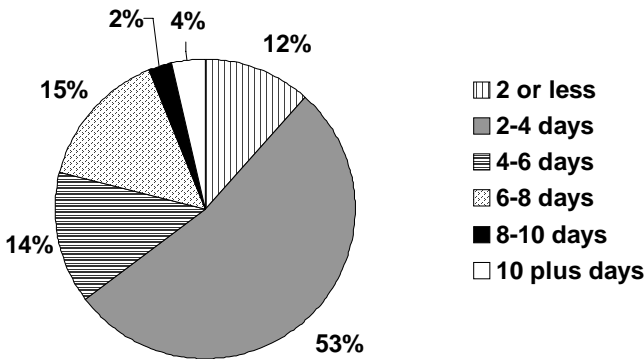


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of course is compared to the non-agricultural community; those in agriculture know this has been true for many years. When asked, "Do you want to work more/less hours and do you want to work more/less days off?", about 80 % were content with the hours worked and days off.

Chart 12: Number of Days Off Per Month



Wages/Benefits Tables 1 and 2 show what the current wages are in Fond du Lac and Sheboygan Counties. On average the native workers are making more money than the Hispanic workers; this is primarily due to the fact that Hispanics are in the "starting" jobs on the farm (milking).

Table 1: Current Employee Income (All Employees)

	Immigrant	Native
	-----%-----	
\$7-\$8	7	7
\$8-\$9	30	4
\$9-\$10	33	6
\$10-\$11	20	29
\$11-\$12	7	18
\$12 plus	3	35

Table 2: Milker Income

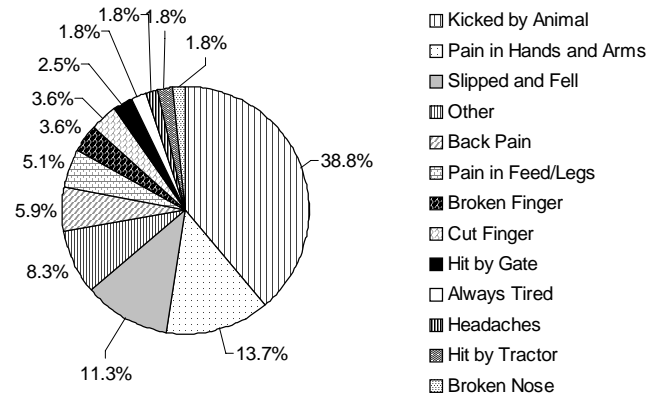
\$7-\$8	10.4%
\$8-\$9	31.8%
\$9-\$10	31.2%
\$10-\$11	20.2%
\$11-\$12	3.5%
\$12 plus	2.9%

Training/ Safety When asked whether they had received training, 35% of employees said

they had received no training. Of the 65% of employees that had received training, 14.5% had less than 2 days, 14.8% had 2-4 days, 19% had 4-6 days, and 14.2% had more than 6 days. For employees, job advancement is important. Over 66% would like more training for job advancement. On many farms, safety is not always a priority. This has

been true in agriculture for a long time. When we asked employees, 30% said they have had injuries in the workplace. Chart 13 lays out the different injuries that were reported by employees. These are some of the first numbers on injuries in the work place on dairy farms that I could find. I don't know if they are high as compared to the rest of dairy industry or typical. Some of these injuries are likely not serious but they do raise the question of what is acceptable and what is preventable.

Chart 13: What Kind of Injury?



The Big Picture

What is in the future for these employees? We did not ask the legal status (documented vs undocumented) of the Hispanic workers; this was not the goal of this study. But it would seem likely that changing national immigration policies would affect many of these employees and their employers. The fact that 78% of the Hispanic workers arrive at work in their own car but only 44% have a driver's license, has policy implications on all government levels. These are issues that will need to be addressed over the next few years.

Final Comments

A study that included this many farms and this many employees would not have been possible without their cooperation. Thank-you for your help. It is very much appreciated. Any questions let me know.

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