Findings from the 2020 Colorado Agricultural Labor Survey

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Overview and Presentation Objectives

Objective 1: Overview of the 2020 Colorado Agricultural Survey
- Survey purpose
- Research team
- Survey design and sample

Objective 2: Preliminary results
- Trends in labor supply and demand
- Technology and H-2A
- Worker Pay and Housing

Objective 3: Looking forward
- Employer responses
- Desired government interventions
- Policy relevance and future research initiatives
What is the 2020 Colorado Agricultural Survey?

Purpose:
- Regional analysis of farm labor supply and demand
- Characterize challenges and opportunities for maintaining a viable farm workforce
- Identify resource gaps

Gaps in Available Data:
- National data sources offer some information, but at an aggregate level
- A comprehensive Colorado agricultural labor survey
- Growing interest among worker advocates, agricultural producers, policy makers, and academics
Who Conducted the 2020 Colorado Agricultural Survey?

Alexandra Hill  
Assistant Professor, Colorado State University

Adrian Card  
Extension Agent, Colorado State University Extension

**Partners:** Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, Colorado Farm Bureau, Colorado Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association, Colorado Livestock Association, Colorado Nursery and Greenhouse Association, National Young Farmers Coalition, and Rocky Mountain Farmers Union.

**Funding:** This work is supported by the Western Center for Risk Management Education
Survey Design and Scope

Administered online through Qualtrics

Targeted farm, ranch, and green industry employers

Promoted via email and social media platforms with the aid of partner organizations

Open for responses from November 20th, 2020 through January 31st, 2021
Survey Design and Scope

Survey Responses: 354

Population Comparison: (2017 US Census of Agriculture)
- 4,060 Colorado farms with labor expenses of ≥$25,000
- 2,797 Colorado farms with labor expenses of ≥$50,000
- 1,882 Colorado farms with labor expenses of ≥$100,000
Survey Design and Scope

Q5 - We would like to understand the economic class of your operation, are you an ... ?

Population Comparison:
(2017 US Census of Agriculture)

- 28,322 CO farms with sales of <$25,000
- 7,365 with sales of $25,000 - $250,000
- 2,324 with sales of $250,000 - $1,000,000
- 882 with sales of ≥$1,000,000
Survey Design and Scope

Q5 - We would like to understand the economic class of your operation, are you an ... ?

Population Comparison:
(2017 US Census of Agriculture)
Excluding farms with sales of <$25,000

- 70% with sales of $25,000 - $250,000
- 22% with sales of $250,000 - $1,000,000
- 8% with sales of ≥$1,000,000
Survey Design and Scope

Q2 - What type of agricultural products do you produce? (select all that apply)

- **Animal Agriculture**: dairy, beef, lamb, sheep, goat, pork, poultry, eggs, bees/honey
- **Other Field Crops**: corn, wheat, barley, sugar beets, hemp, dry beans, alfalfa, grass hay, sunflowers
- **Produce**: fruits, wine grapes, vegetables, cut flowers, herbs, mushrooms, plant starts, potatoes
Preliminary Findings:

Labor Supply and Demand

Technology and H-2A

Worker Pay and Housing
Findings: Labor Supply and Demand

In the past five years, during your peak season (when your labor needs were highest), how many workers did you need, on average?
Findings: Labor Supply and Demand

Over the next five years do you expect employment needs on your farm to increase or decrease?

- **Increase**
- **Decrease**
- **Stay the same**
- **Unsure**

The bar chart shows the distribution of responses by category and type of agriculture:

- **Produce**
- **Other Field Crops**
- **Animal Agriculture**

The chart indicates a majority of respondents expect employment needs to **decrease** in **Animal Agriculture**, followed by **Stay the same** in **Other Field Crops** and **Increase** in **Produce**.
Findings: Labor Supply and Demand

During which of the years listed below were you unable to obtain all the workers you needed? (select all that apply)

Able to obtain in all of these years

- 2016
- 2017
- 2018
- 2019
- 2020

Produce
Other Field Crops
Animal Agriculture
Findings: Labor Supply and Demand

How would you characterize your level of business risk (e.g. monetary losses, inability to produce desired ag product, etc.) regarding recruiting and retaining qualified farm workers?
Findings: Labor Supply and Demand

How would you characterize your level of business risk (e.g. monetary losses, inability to produce desired ag product, etc.) regarding recruiting and retaining qualified farm workers?

![Bar chart showing the distribution of risk levels for worker shortages and no worker shortages.](chart)
Findings: Labor Supply and Demand

What do you perceive as the main challenge(s) to recruiting domestic agricultural workers? (select all that apply)

- Seasonal employment
- Physical work is too difficult
- General lack of interest in being farm laborers
- Lack of qualified applicants
- Pay is too low
- Cost of living (housing, food, utilities, etc.)
- Insufficient benefits (including bonuses and health care)
- Too many hours
- Lack of affordable or adequate housing
- Current unemployment compensation is a barrier to workforce...
- Outdoor work environment
- Cultural/personal differences
- Other

Bar chart shows the percentage of responses for each challenge across different categories of agriculture: Produce, Other Field Crops, and Animal Agriculture.
Findings: Technology and H-2A

During the past 5 years, have you used a new technology that has reduced the amount of labor you require to produce your main ag product?
Findings: Technology and H-2A

During the past 5 years, have you used a new technology that has reduced the amount of labor you require to produce your main ag product?

No

Yes

Worker shortages  No worker shortages
Findings: Technology and H-2A

What motivated you to use this technology? (select all that apply)

- Not enough workers
- Rising labor costs
- Technology became more accessible
- Technology became affordable
- Workers lacking appropriate skills
- Falling prices for ag product(s)
- Rising non-labor input prices
- Other

Bar chart showing the distribution of motivations across different sectors: Produce, Other Field Crops, Animal Agriculture.
Findings: Technology and H-2A

During the past five years (2016-2020), has your farm employed H-2A workers?

- **No**
  - Produce
  - Other Field Crops
  - Animal Agriculture

- **Yes**
  - Produce
  - Other Field Crops
  - Animal Agriculture
Findings: Technology and H-2A

For the most recent 5 years that you hired H-2A workers, what percent of your workforce was H-2A? (on average each season)
Findings: Technology and H-2A

What challenges or barriers have you faced in using the H-2A program?

- Cost of H-2A process
- Wage rate
- Timeliness of worker arrival
- Housing
- Forecasting labor needs
- Difficulty navigating application process
- Other
- Transportation to agricultural business
- Access to medical care and other services
- H-2A workers getting along with other workers
- Difficulty in training workers to do desired job
- Effectiveness of workers

Legend:
- Produce
- Other Field Crops
- Animal Agriculture
Findings: Worker Pay and Housing

Are the majority of your domestic workers able to find affordable housing appropriate for their needs?

- No
- Yes
- Unsure

Bar chart showing the distribution of responses among different agricultural fields.
Findings: Worker Pay and Housing

What do you perceive as the maximum monthly rent an average domestic worker in your ag business can afford?

![Bar Chart](chart.png)

- **$1300 or more**
- **$1000-$1199**
- **$800-$999**
- **$600-$799**
- **$400-$599**
- **$200-$399**

Legend:
- **Produce**
- **Other Field Crops**
- **Animal Agriculture**
Findings: Worker Pay and Housing

What are the top three barriers to housing for ag workers in your primary county of production? (select up to three)

- Rental price
- Competition for housing
- Low inventory of housing
- Lack of appropriate housing options
- Local permitting of new housing
- Landlords have high barriers to rent for some...
- Local permitting of renovated housing
- Other
- No barriers

[Bar chart showing the distribution of barriers by crop type: Produce, Other Field Crops, Animal Agriculture]
Findings: Worker Pay and Housing

What incentives do you offer your (non-H2A) management level workers?

- Take food products home
- Flexible leave
- Bonuses
- Appreciation parties
- Farm business or production education
- Housing
- Raise and promotion pathways
- Unemployment insurance
- Paid sick leave
- Transportation to work
- Other food items
- Health insurance
- Transportations for other purposes
- Access to health care services
- None
- Other
- Profit sharing
- Calling cards
- Childcare
- Piece rate payment

![Chart showing incentives offered to workers by type of agriculture]
Findings: Worker Pay and Housing

In order to recruit and retain enough entry level workers, how much have you increased wages over the past 5 years (in dollars per hour equivalent)?

- More than $5
- $4-$4.99
- $3-$3.99
- $2-$2.99
- $1-$1.99
- Less than $1
- I have only increased wages as required by law (legal minimum wages)
- Not at all

![Bar chart showing wage increases in different sectors.](chart.png)
Findings: Worker Pay and Housing

How would you describe your ability to increase wages to attract and retain workers?

- I am struggling to remain profitable at the current wages I pay
- I cannot pay more
- I could pay slightly more
- I could pay significantly more

![Bar chart showing responses by industry]

Produce
Other Field Crops
Animal Agriculture
Looking Forward:

What employer actions might we expect?

What is the desired role of government policies?
Findings: Looking Forward

If ag worker supply issues do not change for me, I will (select all that apply):

- Mechanize more
- Reduce production of labor-intensive ag...
- Increase (or start using) H-2A
- Cease production of labor-intensive ag...
- Make no changes to my business
- Expand worker recruitment strategies
- Other
- Reduce the size of my business
- Close by business
- Find a second job

(Bar chart showing responses by sector: Produce, Other Field Crops, Animal Agriculture)
Findings: Looking Forward

What policy solutions do you think would be most effective for addressing challenges faced by workers at your agricultural business? (Select top three)

- Low cost health care
- Rent subsidies
- Farm labor compensation subsidies
- Student loan forgiveness
- Creation of government funded housing
- Worker training programs
- Transportation assistance
- Alignment among federal regulations
- Other
- Creation of a government task force to address...
- Utility bill subsidies

[Graph showing policy solutions and their effectiveness by different sectors: Produce, Other Field Crops, Animal Agriculture]
Concluding Remarks

Current policy considerations:
• Minimum wage laws
• Overtime laws
• COVID-related policies

Top policy solutions (survey):
• Health care
• Rent subsidies
• Farm labor subsidies

Please join us for the live Q&A to offer your suggestions for upcoming reports and ask for additional details from the survey!

https://foodsystems.colostate.edu/research-impacts/agricultural-labor/
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Findings: Labor Supply and Demand

Produce: What do you perceive as the main challenge(s) to recruiting domestic agricultural workers? (select all that apply)

- Seasonal employment
- Physical work is too difficult
- General lack of interest in being farm laborers
- Lack of qualified applicants
- Pay is too low
- Cost of living (housing, food, utilities, etc.)
- Insufficient benefits (including bonuses and health care)
- Too many hours
- Lack of affordable or adequate housing
- Current unemployment compensation is a barrier to...
- Outdoor work environment
- Cultural/personal differences
- Other
Findings: Labor Supply and Demand

Other Field Crops: What do you perceive as the main challenge(s) to recruiting domestic agricultural workers? (select all that apply)

- General lack of interest in being farm laborers
- Lack of qualified applicants
- Physical work is too difficult
- Too many hours
- Pay is too low
- Seasonal employment
- Insufficient benefits (including bonuses and health care)
- Cost of living (housing, food, utilities, etc.)
- Current unemployment compensation is a barrier to...
- Lack of affordable or adequate housing
- Outdoor work environment
- Cultural/personal differences
- Other
Findings: Labor Supply and Demand

Animal Agriculture: What do you perceive as the main challenge(s) to recruiting domestic agricultural workers? (select all that apply)

- General lack of interest in being farm laborers
- Physical work is too difficult
- Lack of qualified applicants
- Pay is too low
- Too many hours
- Seasonal employment
- Insufficient benefits (including bonuses and health care)
- Current unemployment compensation is a barrier to workforce...
- Lack of affordable or adequate housing
- Cost of living (housing, food, utilities, etc.)
- Outdoor work environment
- Cultural/personal differences
- Other
Findings: Migrant Workers

What percent of your domestic (non-H-2A) workers are migrant workers? Migrant workers do NOT permanently reside in or near your primary county of operation.

[Diagram showing percentage distribution of migrant workers across different sectors.]
Findings: Technology and H-2A

During the past five years (2016-2020), has your farm employed H-2A workers?

- Yes
- No

Sales Categories:
- Greater than $1,000,000 in annual sales
- Ag business with $350,000-$1,000,000 in annual sales
- Ag business with $25,000 to $350,000 in annual sales
Findings: Worker Pay and Housing

What incentives do you offer your (non-H2A) *entry level* workers?

- Take food products home
- Bonuses
- Flexible leave
- Appreciation parties
- Other
- Other food items
- Raise and promotion pathways
- Same as management level workers
- Housing
- Transportation to work
- Paid sick leave
- Transportations for other purposes
- Unemployment insurance
- None
- Access to health care services
- Health insurance
- Calling cards
- Childcare
- Piece rate payment

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*Produce* | *Other Field Crops* | *Animal Agriculture*