

Enduring Migration: Puerto Rican Workers on U.S. Farms

ISMAEL GARCÍA-COLÓN and EDWIN MELÉNDEZ

ABSTRACT

This article investigates the formation of contemporary Puerto Rican farm labor in the United States and is based on a survey of farmworkers conducted from July through November of 2010 in the Northeast. We argue that this labor force is constructed, organized, and maintained by the following: labor-market conditions, including high unemployment in Puerto Rico and higher wages in the United States; circular migration and social networks among seasonal agricultural workers; U.S. citizenship of Puerto Rican workers and the legal requirements of employers to give native workers preference in hiring for agricultural jobs; and, finally, factors contributing to the social isolation of Puerto Rican seasonal workers, such as few ties to the local communities in which they work and poor English-language skills. Puerto Rican farmworkers offer a prime example of open-border seasonal migration for examination by scholars and policy makers concerned with agricultural guest-worker programs. This case study provides insights into how policies, experiences, and conditions in farm labor may or may not be related to the workers' legal status, but rather to the labor-market dynamics and social conditions affecting them. [Key Words: farmworkers, labor migration, circular migration, working and living conditions]

Ismael García-Colón (Ismael.Garcia@csi.cuny.edu) is an Associate Professor of Anthropology at the College of Staten Island. He is a historical and political anthropologist with interests in political economy and oral history. García-Colón is the author of *Land Reform in Puerto Rico: Modernizing the Colonial State, 1941–1969* (University Press of Florida, 2009). His research explores how development policies formed modern subjectivities in Puerto Rico during mid-twentieth century. He is currently studying the Puerto Rican experience in U.S. farm labor (1940s–present).

Edwin Meléndez (emele@hunter.cuny.edu) is a Professor of Urban Affairs and Planning at Hunter College and the Director of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies. He has conducted considerable research in the areas of Puerto Rican and Latino studies, economic development, labor markets, and poverty. In addition to numerous scientific papers and other publications, he is the author or editor of ten books and has served as invited editor of several special issues of academic journals including “Pathways to Economic Opportunity” (*CENTRO Journal*, 2011).

OVER THE LAST SEVERAL DECADES THE UNITED STATES HAS EXPERIENCED THE LATINIZATION OF THE AGRICULTURAL LABOR FORCE, AND THE MAJORITY OF FARMWORKERS ARE OF MEXICAN ORIGIN (PFEFFER AND PARRA 2005: 4, 2006: 81; GRAY 2010: 170). However, Puerto Ricans, together with Southern African Americans, Haitians, and West Indians, have been present in agriculture in the Northeast since the 1940s. According to official estimates, 53 percent of contemporary farmworkers are undocumented and 75 percent are of Mexican origin (Alves Pena 2009: 856-7; U.S. Department of Labor 2005: ix). The American Community Survey calculations for 2006 through 2008 estimate that there are 5,274 Puerto Rican workers in agriculture-related activities in the United States and more than 50 percent work in Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Jersey, and New York.

The relatively small number of Puerto Rican farmworkers explains why Puerto Rican farmworkers are forgotten in the contemporary literature on Puerto Rican migration, and, more generally, in the Latino farmworkers literature. Studies of U.S. farm labor concentrate on West Indian and Mexican workers (Daniel 1981; González 1999; Hahamovitch 2011; López 2007; Weber 1994), and contemporary studies about Puerto Rican migrants focus on urban communities (Pérez 2004; Whalen 2001). This study contributes to the literature by concentrating on Puerto Rican farmworkers who migrate temporarily from the island to the Northeast United States for work and return to Puerto Rico when the season is over. In particular, we compare wages, benefits, and other labor-market outcomes of seasonal migrants and U.S.-based Puerto Rican farmworkers. Puerto Ricans offer an important case in the literature on farmworkers because, despite being U.S. citizens, they are treated and made to feel like foreigners in the communities in which they work. This case study provides insights into how policies, experiences, and conditions in farm labor may or may not be related to the workers' legal status, but rather to the labor-market dynamics and social conditions affecting them.

Puerto Rican seasonal migration began in post-war United States during the late 1940s. Initially, the need for workers led to the push for recruiting agents to travel to Puerto Rico seeking to hire thousands of workers. The problems confronted by these Puerto Rican workers prompted the government of Puerto Rico to design a farm labor migration program as part of its strategy of modernization. From 1947 to 1993, thousands of Puerto Rican workers migrated through the government of Puerto Rico's

Farm Labor Program (García-Colón 2008: 270–5; García-Colón 2009: 108–11; Griffith and Kissam et al. 1995: 151–6, 173–4). In some cases, former Puerto Rican farmworkers have become crew leaders or farm managers, hiring and supervising Latino workers. In other instances, farmers learned Spanish by interacting initially with Puerto Ricans. Puerto Rican farmworkers were the pioneers of many contemporary Latino communities throughout the Northeast in such places as Vineland, NJ; Lancaster, PA; Holyoke, MA; Oswego, NY; and, Harford, CT (García-Colón 2008; Griffith and Kissam et al. 1995: 173–4, 180–2).

Puerto Ricans are attracted to farm labor in the U.S. for reasons that are similar to those of other historic and contemporary farmworkers—the preference for agricultural work and the social relations involved in forming a low-wage labor force. Furthermore, agricultural work draws populations with low levels of formal schooling, lack of stable jobs, and a high dependence on resources provided by their communities and kin. Farm labor has represented an opportunity for low-wage Puerto Ricans to obtain minimum wage (Binford 2009: 505; Gray 2010: 171–4; Ngai 2004). The H-2A visa program, which requires employers to try to hire domestic workers before bringing in foreign workers, benefits Puerto Rican contract workers. However, most Puerto Rican farmworkers work without contracts, because they rely on established networks that have linked farming communities in the Northeast to rural Puerto Rico for decades.

The literature on Puerto Rican farmworkers has dealt with the history of this migration and has studied workers' problems, living and working conditions, and strategies for survival (Bonilla-Santiago 1986; Duany 2011; García-Colón 2008; Nieves Falcón 1975; Ortiz 1998; Rivera 1979; Stinson-Fernández 1996; Valdés 1991; Whalen 2001: 49–92; Whalen 2005). Nieves Falcón (1975) surveyed the living and working conditions of Puerto Rican farmworkers in the 1970s. He found that discrimination against workers in the local communities played an important role in their experiences. Whalen (2001) and Valdés (1991) explored the historical conditions and their migration to Philadelphia and Michigan. Whalen demonstrated the importance of farmworkers in the formation of Puerto Rican sections of Philadelphia. García-Colón (2008) investigated claims for rights and power relations during a social protest staged by workers in western New York against the local authorities. Anthropologists Stinson-Fernández (1996) and Duany (2011) have analyzed the policies of the government of Puerto Rico regarding seasonal farmworkers, establishing that development policies encouraging circular migration are important to understanding farmworkers' migration patterns. Finally, Bonilla-Santiago (1986) and Rivera (1979) studied the role of labor organizing among Puerto Rican farmworkers. Labor leaders, religious organizations, and community groups have been key in defending farmworkers' rights. However, all these studies refer to Puerto Rican

farmworkers in the twentieth century. Our findings, on the other hand, indicate that, although the working and living conditions of contemporary Puerto Rican farmworkers have not changed much over time, their reasons for migrating, demographics, and political and economic conditions have changed.

Our approach is different from previous research on this subject, because we base our analysis on survey methods. This is the first study that uses a random survey to understand the situation of Puerto Rican farmworkers and one of the few that examines farmworkers from a specific ethnic-group perspective. The survey sample consists of 196 interviews (see Appendix). Because most migrant and local workers are engaged in agricultural work from March through June, we conducted the survey from July through November of 2010. Subjects were identified in the principal regions of Puerto Rican migrant labor: southern New Jersey, upstate New York, Connecticut, eastern Pennsylvania, and western Massachusetts. In addition, the study examined the opportunity for advancement within and outside the industry, the historical reasons for migration, the government policies and economic conditions in Puerto Rico, and the relations between migrants and other workers and between migrants and farmers and residents of farm communities. As U.S. citizens, the migration of Puerto Ricans to U.S. farms offers an example of open-border seasonal migration for scholars of guest-worker programs.

We argue that the Puerto Rican farm labor force is constructed, organized, and maintained by the unemployment situation in Puerto Rico combined with workers' own networks, U.S. citizenship, preference for agricultural jobs, lack of English-language skills, and lack of integration into the local communities, and continuing engagement in circular migration, as well as the enticement of higher wages in the U.S. We begin by describing who the workers are, why they continue to migrate, and why and how they use seasonal farm labor migration as a temporary or permanent strategy. Thus, we explain why Puerto Ricans continue to work in an industry characterized by low wages and intense competition from other seasonal and undocumented workers.

Contemporary Puerto Rican Farmworkers: Their General Characteristics

Place of residency is an important variable in understanding farmworkers. We estimate that 73.6 percent of Puerto Rican farmworkers have their primary residence, or where they live with their families for most of the year, in Puerto Rico. For the most part, they come from rural and agricultural areas in such municipalities as Villalba, San Lorenzo, Yauco, Isabela, Caguas, Patillas and San Sebastian. Of the 26.4 percent of farmworkers residing in the U.S., most live in Massachusetts and Connecticut and are concentrated in such towns as Springfield and Holyoke, and Willimantic and Hartford. The fact that the majority of the farmworker population chooses to migrate for the agricultural work

TABLE 1. Farmworkers' Place of Residence

Puerto Rico	%
Villalba	11.0
San Lorenzo	8.1
Yauco	6.9
Isabela	4.3
Caguas	4.0
Patillas	3.9
San Sebastian	3.6
Other	31.8
Total Puerto Rico	73.6
United States	%
Massachusetts	10.3
Connecticut	7.3
Other	8.8
Total United States	26.4
Total	100.00

season suggests that most of the workers prefer to live in Puerto Rico, but the lack of job opportunities prevents them from having a more stable work situation.

The demographics of the Puerto Rican farm labor population explain why high unemployment, limited networks for finding jobs in other industries, lack of cultural integration, and limited English-language skills force this population to engage in low-wage farm labor. Their language skills, social capital, and experiences are indicators of their advantage or disadvantage in the farm labor market. These characteristics influence their reasons for migrating, job-search process,

working and social conditions, and aspirations. We divided the data in Table 2 into two groups of Puerto Rico residents (PRRES) and stateside residents (USRES) to better understand differences in the Puerto Rican farm labor population.

Data from the survey show that Puerto Rican farmworkers in the United States have some of the same general characteristics as the U.S. domestic agricultural labor force. Agricultural work is a form of low-wage labor associated with Mexicans, other Latinos, African-Americans, and West Indians (Griffith 1993: 5). Being Latino and part of a minority group makes Puerto Rican workers different from the majority of residents in rural areas, who are predominantly white. The vast majority of participants (91.7%) were born in Puerto Rico and the remainder (8%) in the northeast United States (Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, and Massachusetts). In terms of the demographics, the age of workers ranges from 18 to 74 years. The majority of farmworkers in the sample are men (97.4%), which is consistent with figures from the National Agricultural Workers Survey for the years of 1994–1995 (U.S. Department of Labor 1997). Most of the workers surveyed are in their forties and fifties, including 40.7 percent who are 45 and older.

Farmworkers' low educational attainment is an important factor explaining their limited occupational mobility and lack of employment opportunities. Having a high school diploma, GED, or higher education degree provides opportunities to leave farm

TABLE 2. General Characteristics of Puerto Rican Farmworkers

	PRRES	USRES	Total
Age			
18 to 24	19.0%	8.1%	16.2%
25 to 34	23.7%	13.5%	21.1%
35 to 44	22.7%	20.3%	22.1%
45 to 64	33.2%	58.1%	39.6%
65 and Over	1.4%	0.0%	1.1%
Sex			
Male	100.0%	82.4%	95.5%
Marital Status			
Married, with Partner	53.0%	20.3%	44.7%
Single, Widowed, Divorced, Separated	47.0%	79.7%	55.3%
Household Size	4.5	3.2	4.2
Place of Birth			
PR Born	94.8%	82.5%	91.7%
U.S. Born	5.2%	17.5%	8.3%
Education			
Junior High School & Below	33.5%	40.6%	35.3%
Attended High School & Above ¹	66.5%	59.4%	64.7%
English Fluency			
None/Little/Get By	91.3%	64.9%	84.5%
Well/Very Well	8.6%	35.0%	14.5%
Years as Farmworker			
Less than a Year	40.3%	16.6%	35.0%
1 to 4 Years	44.2%	69.8%	50.7%
5 to 8 Years	12.1%	10.1%	11.7%
9 Years and Over	2.4%	3.4%	2.7%

¹ Category includes High School, High School Diploma, GED, Vocational Training, BA & Other

work for higher-paid jobs or improved working conditions (Pfeffer and Parra 2005: 6). The survey found that 64.7 percent of the workers have less than high school, high school or GED, or more advanced education while only about 35.3 percent report having junior high or lower educational attainment (Table 2). Puerto Rico residents (PRRES) have a slightly higher proportion of workers who attended high school or more than high school (66.5%) than U.S. residents (USRES) (59.4%).

Spanish language is a powerful ethnic marker that distinguishes Puerto Rican workers from other workers and most residents of farming communities, but is one shared by the majority of farmworkers (Pfeffer and Parra 2009). Spanish-speaking farmworkers constitute 81 percent of U.S. farmworkers (Gray 2007: 16). Most are not fluent in English and also have low literacy rates in Spanish. In the case of Puerto Rican workers, 84.5 percent of survey participants reported none or little English fluency. Puerto Rican farmworkers residing in the United States (USRES) have a higher level of English fluency, with 35 percent reporting understanding English well or very well compared with only 8.6 percent of island residents (PRRES) who report understanding English well or very well.

In Table 3 we disaggregate farmworkers by place of birth (PR born, U.S. born) and age to better understand their migratory experience. U.S.-born farmworkers show a clear advantage in English fluency when compared with island-born workers. Fifty-eight percent of U.S.-born farmworkers report their English fluency as understanding well or very well. In contrast, only 15 percent of those born in Puerto Rico achieved the same level of English fluency after 25 years of arriving in the U.S. for the first time. After 25 years of having arrived in the U.S. for the first time, 19.8 percent of farmworkers reported no English fluency whatsoever. Similarly, most younger workers, having arrived in the U.S. for the first time less than 25 years ago, show very low levels of English fluency, with over 90 percent of those with less than four years of residency in the U.S. reporting none (49%) or little (43.3%) English fluency. English fluency remains low even after many years in the country, with only 2 percent of those with 5 to 14 years in the U.S. and 17.5 percent with 15 to 24 years in the U.S. reporting their English fluency as understanding English well or very well. These figures suggest a population with few opportunities or little interest to improve their English fluency. This finding is of significance to the extent that, among other potential benefits of improved communication skills, English fluency is a factor leading to higher hourly wages. Therefore, lack of English fluency seems like an important factor preventing farmworkers from moving to better paying jobs and higher earnings.

Place of birth and years in the U.S. influence the educational attainment of farmworkers. As shown in Table 3, the longer they have been in the country, the lower their educational attainment, and, conversely, the more recently they have arrived, the higher their educational attainment. For more recent migrants, those with less than four years in the country, 85.7 percent have attended high school or have higher educational attainment, while only 14.3 percent have less than high school enrollment. In contrast, these proportions reverse for those with more than 25 years in the U.S. with 66.3 percent of these workers having less than high school enrollment and 33.7 percent having high school enrollment and over.

TABLE 3. Migratory Experience of Puerto Rican Farmworkers

	PR-Born				U.S. Born
	0–4	5–14	15–24	25 and over	
Years in the U.S.					
Worked as Farmworker in PR	39.6%	41.3%	46.8%	58.8%	50.0%
English Fluency					
None	49.0%	29.6%	29.2%	19.8%	12.8%
Little/Get By	43.3%	68.4%	53.3%	65.2%	29.4%
Well/Very Well	7.7%	2.0%	17.5%	15.0%	57.8%
Trips to PR	2.7	7.2	12.5	19.3	14.4
Reasons for Migrating					
Unemployment	66.7%	87.0%	79.4%	82.5%	100.0%
Steady Employment	73.0%	77.3%	81.6%	85.0%	73.5%
Low wages	54.5%	59.3%	73.4%	64.7%	70.8%
Family Problems	9.4%	11.0%	2.8%	15.3%	N/A
Financial Problems	49.5%	63.5%	71.5%	74.0%	55.1%
Other	32.2%	33.9%	43.7%	42.9%	32.5%
Education					
Less than HS	14.3%	26.0%	21.9%	66.3%	16.6%
HS and over	85.7%	74.0%	78.1%	33.7%	83.4%
Type of housing					
Labor Camp	78.2%	78.8%	70.2%	73.9%	33.6%
Apartment, House, Other	21.8%	21.2%	29.8%	26.1%	66.4%
Send Remittances to PR	83.3%	84.8%	80.3%	77.8%	66.8%
Who Influenced Decision to Move					
Friends and Relatives	66.9%	64.1%	64.5%	50.6%	46.1%
Other Farmworkers, Farmers, Farmworkers' Organizations	26.6%	29.4%	26.3%	19.1%	35.5%
Government	11.0%	8.3%	7.7%	18.1%	11.3%

As suggested by Aguilera (2005: 570), English-language fluency is very important for Puerto Rican farmworkers because of the correlation of employment experience and English skills with higher earnings. One of the important findings of this study is identification of the advantages to be gained from English fluency. In reference to Table 4, those born in Puerto Rico who claim mastery of English at the “well-very-well” level show a \$2.00 per hour pay differential compared with those reporting “little-get-by” fluency level and an almost \$3.00 per hour pay differential when compared with those in the “none” fluency level. In addition, English

TABLE 4. Hourly Wages of Puerto Rican Farmworkers

	PRRES	USRES	Total
Mean	8.33	10.70	8.94
Farm Type			
Fruits	7.60	9.08	7.89
Vegetables	7.87	8.20	7.89
Tobacco	10.45	11.43	11.19
Fruits, Vegetables, and Nursery	7.69	10.40	9.61
Education			
None/Elementary	8.77	10.22	9.32
Junior High	8.69	10.31	8.91
High School/GED	8.13	10.95	8.86
Vocational/Associate's Degree	8.35	11.00	8.59
Bachelor's Degree/Other	N/A	12.00	N/A
English Fluency			
None	7.62	8.51	7.69
Little	8.46	10.66	8.94
Get by	8.41	10.06	9.34
Well	9.57	N/A	9.57
Very Well	10.46	11.65	11.14
Type of housing			
Labor Camp	8.29	8.17	8.26
Apartment, House, Other	8.11	10.91	10.55
Belongs to a Union	8.82	10.16	9.18
Does Not Belong to a Union	8.32	10.72	8.95
Handles Pesticides	9.91	11.41	10.31
Does not Handle Pesticides	8.12	10.42	8.68

fluency is critical for on-the-job training and safety, for receiving health care and other services, and for establishing interactions with the larger community and overcoming social isolation.

The data for hourly wages indicate that the effects of education are mediated by English fluency. As depicted in Table 4, a wage premium is evident for those U.S. residents with more education, ranging from \$1.78 per hour more for those with a bachelor's degree than for those with high school attainment, to about \$1.00 more than those with a high school or GED diploma or vocational degree. But average

observed hourly wages do not improve with education for Puerto Rico residents, who are the vast majority of farmworkers.

Puerto Rican workers share many of their characteristics with foreign and domestic workers. Most of them are middle-aged men with permanent residences in their communities of origins in Puerto Rico. Similar to workers from Latin America, most Puerto Rican farmworkers have limited English-language skills and fewer years of formal schooling, factors that restrict the range of possibilities for better-paid jobs in Puerto Rico and the United States. The general characteristics of Puerto Rican farmworkers affect their ability to find jobs and surmount unemployment, influencing their decision to migrate every year.

Becoming a Migrant Farmworker

Farmworkers choose seasonal agricultural work for many reasons. Some workers are not able to hold a steady job. Younger workers choose farmwork because of personal problems that force them to leave their homes. Others have legal problems and try to change their environment by working in the fields and living in the camps. Some old or sick workers are unable to find other kinds of work. Others get used to the skills and types of work performed, discipline, hours of work, and seasonal migration (Nelkin 1969: 377). Lack of work experience in other areas and the knowledge and skills gained in agriculture shape the decision of many workers to continue toiling the fields. As we surveyed farms in the Northeast, it was common to hear farmworkers say that they like their work and the opportunity of earning a living, as well as express the need to support their families. One worker told us that “nobody wants to leave their family and be here worrying about them or if something happens not being able to be there for them.”

A new finding of this study that highlights its contribution to the literature on Puerto Rican farmworkers is that work experience in agriculture is still a determining factor for becoming a U.S. farmworker. Fifty-two percent of those who participated in the study and who are migrants indicated they worked as farmworkers in Puerto Rico. When we examine the place of birth and years of migratory experience, we find that 50 percent of U.S.-born workers have worked as farmworkers in Puerto Rico (see Table 3). For workers born on the island, the years of residence in the U.S. increase the likelihood that they have worked as farmworkers in Puerto Rico, with 59 percent of those with 25 years or more in the U.S. reporting that they have at some point worked in agriculture in Puerto Rico. This proportion decreases with fewer years in the U.S., down to 40 percent of those with less than four years in farm work having worked in agriculture in Puerto Rico. These figures are consistent with the

decline of agricultural work as an option in Puerto Rico and the higher educational attainment of younger cohorts among the farmworkers, which opens employment opportunities in services and other occupations.

Formerly, the percentage of migrant farmworkers with prior experience in Puerto Rico was higher. From the 1940s through the 1980s, the government of Puerto Rico explicitly recruited contract workers who had agricultural experience in Puerto Rico. Contemporary workers, even though they work in agriculture and live in rural areas, tend to be exposed to urban life and have more experience in migrating than workers from prior decades. The dichotomies of modern versus traditional and urban versus rural are blurred when examining workers' lives and the processes of constructing the different Puerto Rican subjects in the U.S. farm labor force (García-Colón 2009: 129; Griffith 1993: 8; Griffith and Kissam et al. 1995: 173–4).

The economic and political context in which these workers developed is different than what previous generations of Puerto Rican farm labor migrants experienced. The migrant farmworkers of the 1940s and 1950s were generally landless workers who lived in a mostly rural and agrarian society. During the 1940s, the government of Puerto Rico was promoting Operation Bootstrap—a program encouraging industrialization, urbanism, and migration to the United States (History Task Force 1979). One of the government's goals was to transform rural populations into urban labor for industrial manufacturing companies (García-Colón 2009). By 1970, the U.S. census proved the success of these government modernization policies as the majority of Puerto Ricans lived in urban areas with jobs mostly in the service, public, construction, and industrial sectors.

In the last two decades, Puerto Rico has experienced deep economic and social transformation. Workers from Puerto Rico come from a society experiencing a long-standing recession, a crisis in public finance, and problems in the construction and banking sectors. Transnational corporations have left the territory as a result of the elimination of federal tax exemptions to the industrial manufacturing sector, thereby increasing unemployment. Layoffs in the public sector and privatization of government services have also intensified unemployment. In part, the data presented here reflect how, during the last two decades, these transformations have shaped their livelihoods.

Puerto Rican migrant workers have joined the thousands of other farmworkers who migrate for economic reasons. Regardless of the years on the mainland, migrant workers report unemployment and seeking more steady employment and better wages as the primary reasons for migrating. Overwhelmingly, farmworkers send remittances to Puerto Rico. Even among U.S.-born workers, more than two-thirds send remittances to families in Puerto Rico. Family problems and other reasons are cited less often than employment reasons.

Since the late 1940s, government policies in Puerto Rico have fostered migration to the United States as a way to escape unemployment (Stinson-Fernández 1996). However, workers regard friends and relatives as being more influential in their decision to move to the United States than other farmworkers or government. Government is more influential with older cohorts of Puerto Rico residents (PRRES), with 18 percent reporting that government influenced their decision compared with 11 percent for the most recent cohorts.

In many respects, the experiences of Puerto Rican farmworkers as seasonal migrants are similar to those of other Latinos. They experience the same inequalities suffered by other groups caused by the dynamics of U.S. farm labor. However, as U.S. citizens, Puerto Rican farmworkers enjoy many advantages over undocumented and guest workers. Puerto Rican farmworkers can rely on unemployment benefits, self-employment, and temporary off-the-books employment to supplement their income, and, thus, they remain marginal to the general labor force. Workers engage in non-wage income-generating activities, or activities that reduce their household expenses, in effect, subsidizing the farms where they are employed seasonally (Griffith 1993: 43).

Because of *el vaiven* (migrating back and forth), Puerto Rican farmworkers have been able to develop the necessary networks for finding employment opportunities and maintaining income-earning strategies (Duany 2011; Duany 2002: 2–3; García-Colón 2008; García-Colón 2009: 108–11; Griffith and Kissam et al. 1995: 151–72; Pérez 2004). Our findings support prior studies indicating that Puerto Rican seasonal migrants are engaged in circular migration between Puerto Rico and the United States (Hernández-Alvarez 1967). Circular migration is the best option for employment for these workers given the limited employment opportunities in Puerto Rico. Workers maintain family and employment ties to the island. They send remittances, stay in camps, save money, and support their families in Puerto Rico. During the off-season, they work in casual labor (e.g., fishing, street vending, or craft production) or agriculture, construction, and other industries in Puerto Rico (Griffith and Kissam et al. 1995: 169; Griffith and Valdés Pizzini 2002). In sum, for Puerto Rican farmworkers, seasonal migration has become a way of life, one that they endure with the help of other workers and family.

In the Field: Experiencing Farmwork's Life

The experiences of Puerto Rican workers in farm labor are shaped by their ethnicity, working-class background, education, migratory experience, and social networks. Spanish as a primary language and limited English-language skills combined with the relatively recent experience of most migrants, low educational attainment, and

lack of networks with access to jobs in other sectors force many workers to stay in farm labor and to migrate seasonally for many years. These circumstances influence workers' perceptions that earnings from agricultural work are a viable way to contribute economically to their households. This section deals with how their working conditions in the field and aspirations also influence workers' decisions to pursue farm labor.

The main difference between Puerto Rican workers and undocumented and foreign workers is that Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens. Although citizenship provides workers with many advantages, it does not shield them from forms of discrimination and other mistreatment affecting undocumented immigrants. In addition, seasonal and temporary workers are vulnerable to many types of exploitation (Gray 2007: 6–8). U.S. farmworkers have always been susceptible to exploitation because they do not have the same labor rights as other workers. For example, in most states, including New York, farmworkers do not have the right to collective bargaining, a day of rest, or overtime pay (Gray 2007: 3).

The survey asked workers about their experiences in the community. Stories of exploitation and abuse are common in the literature of farm labor. However, participants in the survey report moderate incidences of abuse on the farm or in the community. A new finding by this study is that USRES (stateside residents) report more abuse on the farm (15%) than PRRES (Puerto Rico residents) (2.4%), and from residents in the community (20% USRES and 2% of PRRES). A similar pattern is found among those reporting being victims of any type of crime in the farm or the community. Only 6.8 percent of USRES report being the victim of a crime on the farm and 3.3 percent of PRRES report similar situations. The incidence of being victims in the community was higher for USRES, 13.5 percent, than for PRRES, 1.0 percent. One possible explanation is that USRES indicate being victims of abuse and crimes on the farm and the community more often than PRRES because they are not as isolated as the seasonal migrants from Puerto Rico.

Although wages are at the core of their decision to migrate, become a farmworker, and remain working in farm labor for many years, wages are also an important factor influencing how workers perceive their experience. Wages vary among Puerto Rican farmworkers according to the specific tasks performed, type of crop cultivated, place of residence, and migratory experience. USRES tend to have higher wages than PRRES. The mean wage per hour for all USRES is \$10.70, and for all PRRES it is \$8.33. USRES have more experience and English fluency, which may explain a large proportion of the wage differential. USRES' higher earnings for handling pesticides indicate that they also have better training, which may in turn be favored by longer work experience and greater English fluency.

TABLE 5. Working Conditions of Puerto Rican Farmworkers (in percentages)

	PRRES	USRES	Total
Received a Bonus	56.52	16.67	
Type of Housing			
Labor Camp	90.9	16.6	71.9
Apartment, House, Other	9.1	83.4	28.1
Receives Health Services			
Farm	63.2	40.8	57.5
Community	40.7	22.4	36.3
Transportation			
Has Access to a Car	56.6	75.5	61.4
Pays for Own Transportation	58.3	94.0	69.7
Employer Pays for Transportation	66.6	12.9	60.5
Other Pays for Transportation	9.2	20.6	11.4
Abuse/Victims			
Abuse on Farm	2.4	14.9	5.6
Abuse in Community	1.9	20.2	6.5
Victim on Farm	3.3	6.8	4.2
Victim in Community	1.0	13.5	4.1
Trained to Handle Toxic Substances			
Never	46.3	29.7	42.1
Sometimes/Frequently	21.3	26.7	22.6
All the Time	32.5	43.6	35.3

Skills and work experience are factors that determine wages in agriculture. In some types of agricultural work, the industry relies on manual labor because machines cannot fully replace workers' knowledge and skills. Thus, workers are appreciated, solicited, and paid accordingly to their experience, knowledge, and skills. Workers who report handling pesticides earn more per hour (PRRES \$9.91 and USRES \$11.41) than those who work planting, harvesting, canning, or transporting workers. Workers on tobacco farms earn, on average, slightly higher wages, \$11.19 per hour, compared with workers on vegetable and fruit farms, who earn \$7.89 per hour. PRRES on tobacco farms earn \$10.45 an hour compared with USRES, who earn \$11.43 an hour.

Fringe benefits, access to sick days, health coverage, bonuses, and sick leave, are additional reasons for workers to consider an agricultural job as an option. We were able to document the degree to which workers lack or possess adequate benefits. An

essential aim of U.S. agriculture is to maintain labor costs at a minimum. David Griffith (1993:6) has pointed out that domestic production in the migrant's communities of origin absorbs the cost of reproducing farm labor supply and relieves employers of providing living wages, unemployment, health insurance, and pensions. Thus, employers in the agricultural sector are not forced to provide better benefits to workers.

The principal and traditional benefit that most workers have historically received is a bonus after the harvest. Such a bonus is reported by 57 percent of PRRES, while only 17 percent of USRES report receiving one. USRES typically receive fewer supports and benefits from employers than do PRRES. The fact that 72 percent of participants live in a labor camp indicates that most of them are traditional seasonal migrant farmworkers. The vast majority of PRRES live in labor camps (91%) provided by the employers, compared with 17 percent of USRES. Seasonal migrants tend to arrive between April and June and leave between September and October. A majority of PRRES report receiving health services at the farm, 63 percent, and employer-provided transportation, 67 percent, while fewer than half of USRES report receiving health services at the farm, and only a very small number, 13 percent, report receiving transportation benefits from their employer. The fact that most PRRES receive bonuses, live in labor camps, and have health and transportation benefits demonstrates that employers use various measures to entice and maintain a disciplined and steady labor force for the season.

Although health service providers and advocates for farmworkers are very aware of the effects of pesticides on the farm labor force, the literature on Puerto Rican farmworkers does not address this issue. For farmworkers, learning to handle toxic substances is essential to preventing work-related accidents and avoiding long-term health consequences. As we have discussed previously, training in hazardous materials also results in higher compensation rates for workers undertaking higher risks. Nearly half (46%) of PRRES reported never receiving any training in the handling of toxic substances. In contrast, 43 percent of USRES reported receiving this training all the time, and 27 percent reported receiving it sometimes or frequently. Since all workers are exposed to toxic substances while working on farms, these figures are cause for concern, especially for the PRRES who may need training delivered in Spanish and from culturally competent health-service providers.

Despite the immediate employment opportunities provided by agricultural work, particularly seasonal work, workers constantly express the desire for a better life. "Buscando ambiente" (to search for better opportunities) by migrating to U.S. farms has been a viable strategy for Puerto Ricans since the late 1940s (García-Colón 2006; García-Colón 2009: 108–11; Pérez 2004). Most workers hope to improve their working

TABLE 6. Aspirations of Puerto Rican Farmworkers (in percentages)

	PRRES	USRES	Total
Would Like to Receive Vocational Training	71.2	49.4	65.6
Mechanic	49.7	36.1	46.2
Refrigeration	29.5	23.0	27.8
Construction	40.7	21.9	35.8
Truck Driver	39.4	27.9	36.5
Restaurant Work	26.3	32.9	28.1
Electrician	39.4	13.2	32.8
Tech/computers	30.8	47.5	35.1
Other	27.8	23.0	26.9
Needs to Continue Education			
More Information about Opportunities	66.9	60.0	65.2
Financial Aid	71.5	52.4	66.8
Academic Remediation	52.1	55.0	52.8
English Tutoring	79.2	49.3	71.9
Math Tutoring	46.9	42.9	45.9
Transportation Help	55.4	31.8	49.4
Grades while in School			
A's & B's	18.8	28.6	21.4
B's & C's	60.7	48.1	57.4
C's & D's	14.5	20.4	16.1
Don't Remember	6.0	2.8	5.1
Expects Letters and Recommendations			
Elected Official	27.4	17.7	25.2
Teacher	30.4	33.9	31.3
Religious Leader	14.3	22.9	16.3
Business Owner	43.9	38.7	42.7
Physician	17.4	24.2	18.9
Business Manager	29.0	25.0	28.1
Other	30.0	40.1	31.7

and living conditions. The vast majority of Puerto Rican farmworkers (71% of PRRES and 50% of USRES) say they would like to receive vocational training. In 2010, we met José, a 19-year-old worker laboring on one of the farms we surveyed. He told us that farm work was his only opportunity to earn enough money to provide for his recently born

child. In Puerto Rico, he could only find temporary jobs in stores working 20 hours a week. His last job had been working in a 99-cents store. Manuel, a former farmworker receiving training in a non-profit organization and a single father, said that he migrated with his daughters because he could not find work in Puerto Rico. He said that migrant farm labor was his only chance of escaping welfare and extreme poverty.

One of the most important aspirations of farmworkers is to learn another better-paying trade or to receive training. The survey explored their desire for vocational training in mechanics, refrigeration, construction, heavy-duty driver, restaurants, and electricity. Among USRES and PRRES there were a few similarities and some stark differences. USRES and PRRES report similar aspirations in training as mechanics, 50 percent of PRRES and 36 percent of USRES, refrigeration, 30 percent of PRRES and 23 percent of USRES, construction, 41 percent of PRRES and 22 percent of USRES, or heavy-duty driver, 40 percent of PRRES and 28 percent of USRES. The biggest discrepancies were reported in restaurant work, 26 percent of PRRES and 33 percent of USRES, electrician, 35 percent of PRRES and 13.2 percent of USRES, and technology/computers, 31 percent of PRRES and 48 percent of USRES. These disparities between the aspirations of PRRES and USRES may be due to varying access to jobs and perceptions of better remuneration and working conditions in Puerto Rico versus in the United States.

Government and community organizations with appropriate funding can help workers fulfill their aspirations for better-paying work by providing literature, tutoring, transportation, and financial assistance. Among survey participants, 67 percent of PRRES and 60 percent of USRES report needing assistance with more information about opportunities, and 72 percent of PRRES and 52 percent of USRES say they need financial aid. Both groups report needing similar levels of assistance for academic remediation, 52 percent of PRRES and 55 percent of USRES, and math tutoring, 47 percent of PRRES and 43 percent of USRES. English tutoring is more important for PRRES, 79 percent, but it is still an issue for 49 percent of USRES. Access to transportation would be valuable to 55 percent of PRRES and 32 percent of USRES. Overall, the differences between PRRES and USRES are not significant. Programs for adult education targeted to the needs of all farmworkers could provide valuable opportunities for Puerto Rican workers.

In general, farmworkers lack adequate academic preparation and receive minimal community support to continue their training and education. Workers attending second-chance educational institutions, including vocational training, GED, and adult education programs, report having grades and the possibility of obtaining letters of recommendation typical of their educational level.

The figures in Table 6 indicate that farm work is not perceived as the end of workers' dreams for a better life. Even as farm work has become a way of life for some workers, it does not mean that they are not willing to explore other trades and opportunities. Their struggle to earn a better living is constant. Access to financial assistance for tutoring and training is key to overcoming barriers. Workers know that poor English-language skills limit their access to better job opportunities and other types of employment networks. As Pfeiffer and Parra (2009: 245) found, our survey documents that workers who have friends in the community outside their ethnicity are in a better economic position than those who don't have such connections.

Conclusions

Although their working and living conditions are similar to what earlier generations of farmworkers experienced, contemporary Puerto Rican farmworkers tend to be older, show a preference for agriculture, have better networks in farm labor, and work without any Puerto Rican government protection. Although there are those Puerto Ricans who choose to work in agriculture in the United States, either by migrating or residing near farming areas, because of their preference for farm work, for many, this type of low-wage employment is determined by their inability to obtain better-paying jobs, lack of knowledge in how to access other job markets, and existing links to job networks in farm labor. They continue working in agriculture because of their low educational attainment, unemployment rates in Puerto Rico, and lack of work experience in other fields. Their U.S. citizenship gives them an advantage over other workers, allowing farmers to demonstrate to the authorities that they have made an effort to hire available native workers before hiring foreigners. Lasting networks in farm labor combined with their U.S. citizenship ensure that Puerto Rican workers, despite being few in number, remain competitive with other seasonal and undocumented workers.

The circular migration of Puerto Rican farmworkers has implications for immigration policy. As we have shown, the experience of Puerto Rican workers in farm labor is very similar to the general population of farmworkers, but their U.S. citizenship facilitates their circular migration and their ties with their homeland Puerto Rico. An open-border policy, similar to what the Puerto Rican workers currently enjoy through increases in visas to match the demand for seasonal agricultural workers, can eventually solve the problem of eliminating the enduring flow of undocumented immigrants crossing the borders in search of agricultural jobs in the United States. In the current anti-immigrant climate of increased border security, undocumented immigrants are less inclined to engage in circular migration and leave their families

behind (Binford 2004; Smith 2006: 22–3). Their main option is to settle permanently in the United States. The result is a lasting population of undocumented immigrants. In addition, the legalization of current undocumented farmworkers could raise the wages of all groups of farmworkers, particularly legal residents and U.S. citizens.

Although aware of U.S. agriculture's low wages, Puerto Rican farmworkers assess their earnings in relation to wages available in the low-wage labor market of Puerto Rico and the possibility of receiving unemployment benefits after the harvest. One of the most important findings of this study is that place of residence is an important factor determining differences in earnings among Puerto Rican farmworkers. Most farmworkers who live in the United States (USRES) remain in farm labor because their wages are higher than the minimum wage offered in other jobs. We found that a significant group of workers residing in Puerto Rico with few years of migratory experience are earning lower wages and working in types of farms that are more labor intensive and pay less. A group of more experienced migrants who reside in the United States earn higher wages. Puerto Rican farmworkers residing in the United States earn higher wages because of better English skills, their ability to be trained and certified in handling pesticides and other hazardous materials, and their concentration in tobacco farms that pay higher wages. Puerto Rican farmworkers who are island residents (PRRES) depend on other farmworkers, organizations, and farmers to obtain their jobs and rely on other workers for transportation. These factors induce a concentration in vegetable farms that pay lower wages. Better wages are also noticeable for those U.S. residents (USRES) with more education, though wages do not improve with education for Puerto Rico residents (PRRES), who are the vast majority of farmworkers.

The isolation of Puerto Rican migrant workers from the rest of the community is a problem of concern. Pfeffer and Parra (2005) found that employment, income, and homeownership are linked to relationships with white residents, who represent the majority of rural communities. Farmworkers have greater access to community resources when they establish friendships with workers of other ethnicities. Networks provide workers with information about U.S. employment practices and are important for finding better-paid jobs. Our findings complement Aguilera (2005: 571) and Pfeffer and Parra (2005: 9), offering specific information about the Puerto Rican farmworkers' lack of integration into the local communities, poor English-language skills, and continued use of existing networks. Strategies for interventions by community organizations should take advantage of workers' existing networks.

Improvements in the areas of health, education, housing, and working conditions are always at the core of the problems of farm work. Education and training are alternatives that workers are willing to explore and could generate better employment

opportunities. It is important to note that farmworkers toil for long hours and most of the days during the working season, hence, most training programs must be designed to take place after working hours or the working season in their communities of residence. Winter programs held in Puerto Rico and the states could provide training in English and Spanish literacy, the handling of pesticides, and licenses and certifications for truck drivers and heavy machinery operators, among other trades . Based on the findings from the survey on wage disparities, it seems that workforce development strategies should focus on improving English fluency, offer bilingual training in the use of pesticides, and improve regional transportation to provide access to tobacco farms and other higher-paying crops. Other skills development strategies might be more difficult to implement given Puerto Rican farmworkers' circular migration, low educational attainment, and limited contacts and interaction in the community.

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APPENDIX: METHODOLOGY

This study is based on interviews conducted with Puerto Rican farmworkers from July to November of 2010. Subjects were identified in the principal regions of Puerto Rican migrant labor: southern New Jersey, upstate New York, Connecticut, eastern Pennsylvania, and western Massachusetts.

Using ACS (2006-2008) and the USDA (2007) census, we identified 26 counties in five states (NJ, PA, CT, NY, and MA) with farms that employ Puerto Rican workers. Community and advocacy organizations provided lists of farms identified to have Puerto Rican workers. These lists were combined and the counties were scouted for other farms with Puerto Ricans. To facilitate selection of workers, identified farms were assigned a random number. The farms were ranked according to the random assignment. Then, farms were classified as small (<9), medium (10-19), or large (20+) according to the number of workers. These sizes were assigned a targeted number of farms where interviews were conducted (we targeted 38 farms) as follows:

Size	Type	Target
1 to 9	S	6
10 to 18	M	11
20 to 200	L	19

Based on the expected yield, we selected the number of farms necessary to reach 200 interviews. Of the 26 identified counties with Puerto Rican farmworkers in five states, 12 had farms selected for conducting the survey. Interviewers visited farms and labor camps selecting participants using a random number table. Interviews were conducted in Spanish and English depending on the preference of the participants. Interviews were structured lasting from 20 to 30 minutes per session. The instrument consisted of 61 questions divided in five parts (1. Personal Background, 2. Migration History, 3. Employment History, 4. Injuries and Health, 5. Social Networks and Transnationalism, 6. Final Comments by Interviewee, and 7. Interviewer's Observations). The survey was designed to provide information on the reasons for the contemporary migration flow, identify and survey workers who reside stateside and migrate to other states, and investigate workers' demographics, incomes, households, migratory patterns, housing, health, and job-related activities.