

**Migrants on the Move:
A Study of Movement Patterns of Latino Migrant Farmworkers on
the East Coast of the United States**

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Introduction

Latino immigrants have always been present in the United States in California and other border states such as Arizona and Texas. In the early 1900s, Latino migrant workers became a common phenomena in California as the agricultural industry expanded in that state. However, recently, the phenomena of Latino migrant workers has turned into a wave that is sweeping across the entire United States. This wave involves Latino migrant farmworkers who are largely of Mexican and Central American origin. As with any new immigration inflow, there have been both positive and negative reactions at the local and national level. The steady influx of these Latino immigrants is bringing many social issues and tensions to the surface: Whether it is the border controversy, English language only issues, documented versus undocumented migrants, or cultural influences by Latino immigrants in traditionally non-Latino communities, the recent wave of migrant farmworkers is bringing all of these issues to the surface.

This paper will study the migration patterns of migrant farmworkers on the East Coast of the United States. The study concludes that these migrants follow rather fixed, defined circular migration patterns in the region. Specifically, on the East Coast of the United States they follow a circular migration route that involves starting in Florida, moving north to New Jersey, passing through Pennsylvania, and then returning to Florida and resuming the pattern again.

There are many different definitions for the term 'migrant worker', and in different states or districts the qualifications to be considered a migrant worker may differ. The fieldwork for this paper was conducted in Adams County, Pennsylvania.

As such, for purposes of this study, I have adopted the definition set out by Pathstone, a community development and human service organization that operates in Adams County and provides services to low-income families, and primarily migrant farmworkers. Pathstone defines a migrant farm worker as “someone who has changed their residence by moving within the last 24 months from one geographic location to another, either intrastate or interstate, for the purpose of engaging in agricultural work that involves the production and harvesting of field and tree crops, and whose family income comes primarily from this activity.”¹

Literature Review

Research and work on Latino migrant farmworkers in the U.S. is becoming more developed as the phenomena becomes increasingly important both in its impact on a national level in the U.S. (economically and politically), and given the attention issues relating to migrant workers have been receiving in the media. To date, there has been very little academic research, or even media coverage, of the actual geographic routes or circuits that migrant farmworkers follow in various regions of the U.S. Most of the literature (be that academic research or media coverage) has focused on specific social issues, for example: (1) health care issues confronting migrant workers²; (2) educational challenges confronting children in migrant camps³; and (3) economic and social impacts of migrant workers on the

¹ <http://www.pathstone.org/>

² New York State Department of Health, *Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers: Health Care Access and HIV/AIDS in this Population*; Hansen, E. and Donohoe, M., *Health Issues of Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers*.

³ National Migrant and Seasonal Headstart Collaboration Office, *Invisible Children*; Atkin, S. B., *Voices from the Fields : Children of Migrant Farmworkers Tell Their Stories*.

communities they visit.⁴ However, I have uncovered very little research on the actual migratory movement and lifestyle of migrant farmworkers. I believe the primary reason is that social scientists are more inclined to focus on the problem areas first (the adverse or beneficial impacts on the workers, the economy or the community) as opposed to the migration pattern itself. A secondary factor, as pointed out in some of my interviews, may be the fact that the many of the migrant workers are undocumented and reluctant to talk about the places they go for work and the reasons they go there.

One recent study that I did identify is a book written by Ann Aurelia Lopez entitled *The Farmworkers' Journey*. The book is based on her doctoral dissertation at the University of California at Santa Cruz, and focuses on the lives of migrant farmworkers traveling primarily from Mexico to Southern California, and the circuit they travel in California. While this study does address some issues relating to migration patterns on the West Coast, the primary focus was on broader social issues such as exploitation of the workers and the impact of agricultural and trade policies on migration.⁵

Background

Over the last decade the percentage of Latinos all over the country has increased significantly, easily making this newest wave of immigration the largest the United States has ever seen. According to the United States Census Bureau, in the year 2000, Hispanics and Latinos constituted 12.5% of the total U.S. population.⁶

⁴ Rosenbaum, R., *The Direct Economic Impact of Migrant Farmworkers on Southeastern Michigan*.

⁵ Lopez, A., *The Farmworker's Journey*.

⁶ United States Census Bureau, Hispanic or Latino by Type: 2000, 2000 Census Summary File 1.

In the year 2010, Hispanics and Latinos constituted 16.3% of the total U.S. population.⁷ In other words, the percentage of Hispanics/Latinos in the U.S. grew by slightly over 30%. While these data clearly demonstrate the dramatic increase in the Hispanic/Latino population, it may well be understated because there are many undocumented workers who are not registered with the census.

The significant increase in the Hispanic/Latino population in the United States is extremely visible in everyday life. In many cities across the U.S., entirely Hispanic neighborhoods exist. There are increasing numbers of street signs and other public signage in Spanish, paperwork and forms that can be found in both English and Spanish in public facilities like schools, hospitals, municipalities, and the Latino presence is more visible in other areas like restaurants and small grocery stores. This phenomena is becoming increasingly evident on the East Coast of the United States. The Southwest, Southeast and Pacific Northwest, all had larger, preexisting Hispanic/Latino populations and the existence of Latino migrant farmworkers had a longer history in those other regions.

Adam's County, Pennsylvania is an area that has been greatly affected by the growing population of Latinos and Latino migrant workers. Adam's County is a small, rural region located in Central Pennsylvania. It is primarily an agricultural region, with over 1,300 farms and orchards that produce apricots, cherries, nectarines, peaches, plums, and apples.⁸ It is largely because of the agriculture that Latino workers have been coming to this area. The 1,300 farms provide thousands

⁷ United States Census Bureau, Hispanic or Latino by Type: 2010, 2010 Census Summary File 1.

⁸ ROR Community Needs Assessment – Adam's County.

of jobs. According to the National Center for Farmworker Health, there were 103,453 farmworkers in Pennsylvania in the year 2000.⁹

These migrant workers do not only come to Pennsylvania, they travel to many other rural, agricultural areas across the United States in search of work picking tobacco, oranges, blueberries, melon, and grapes among many other crops. As the workers travel from place to place they inevitably create a patterned route that depends on factors such as what season it is, and when and where certain produce grows. During their travels, the migrants inevitably come into contact with non-Latinos, and as more migrant workers travel, the more visible they are to the outside community and the places they travel to. The Latin migrant farmworkers are very different than resident Latino immigrants in that they do not settle in one place, develop roots in a particular community, and they tend not to integrate or assimilate into the local community and culture. They tend to stand out because often they are different than other people in the communities in which they are working.

These two ideas, that of the patterned route and that Latino migrant farmworkers are different than a settled Latino immigrant, raise questions that can only be answered by observing, working and studying in order to understand the lives of migrant farmworkers. What motivates migrant workers to move? How do they know where to go in order to find places to work? What kind of influence are Latino migrant workers having on the places they travel to? In this paper I will

⁹ National Center for Farmworker Health: Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker Demographics.

answer these questions through information gathered over the past three months as a part of the Latino Mosaic.

Fieldwork and Methodology

While this paper references different places along the migrant trail that many migrant workers take, the fieldwork and research was conducted only in Adams County, Pennsylvania. To gather data and information, I conducted a series of short, informal interviews, and multiple semi-formal interviews. In order to interview and speak to the workers, I visited about 15 different worker camps at the various orchards in the area, and I revisited one larger camp, ONE CAMP, several times. I had the opportunity to visit so many camps because of a Spanish language class I took as part of the Mosaic, Spanish for Health Professions. As part of the class we would assist nurses from a migrant worker health clinic called Keystone. We helped to translate for the nurses so they could register the workers for the clinic. These health clinic visits provided opportunities for multiple shorter, informal interviews where I had an opportunity to speak briefly with migrant workers and their families about the different geographic locations they had lived and worked in, what motivated them to move, and what factors influences their decisions.

For six weeks I went on a weekly trip to the camps. Each of the camps was similar, yet each had its own unique atmosphere and setting. In general, the camps had a large white cement building with shared rooms that were lined up and down the hallway. Some bedrooms might have small posters, crosses or rosaries hung up on the white walls to give it a more homey feeling. The communal kitchens have multiple refrigerators and stove tops so that the workers can cook their own meals

individually. The kitchens have a few picnic tables, always just enough for the people who lived there, with colorful food stains and cuts from forks and knives. The kitchen is considered the common space and while the workers cook they talk or play cards. There are also large corkboards in the kitchens with flyers for all kinds of services and information about the area, where to buy food and do shopping, flyers from the different services for migrant workers in the area, important dates for the orchard, etc. The kitchen was where we would normally register and talk with the workers. Many times they were cooking when we arrived, because they finished working just before we would arrive. While some of the camps were maintained nicely, others were not as well maintained or serviced.

The informal interviews I kept were mainly with the male workers at the camps I visited while working with Keystone. The only camp I visited that had women workers was at ONE CAMP. As a result, I obtained considerably more information about the migration patterns from the male migrant farmworkers. However, I conducted two, in-depth formal interviews with women migrant workers at ONE CAMP. The men were all at the camps alone, or not travelling with family. I noticed that this factor -- whether one travels alone or with family -- has an impact on which camps they go to and where they decide to live, but did not seriously affect the patterned route generally taken by the workers. These interviews were useful for background information and general details on where the workers travel to, what produce they picked and the times of the year they were in each place. In addition to this information, I was able to gain some insight into

how the workers adapt to their situations and began to understand some of the hardships that accompany the migrant worker lifestyle.

The semi-formal interviews I conducted were done at ONE CAMP. Two of these were with different women, both of whom work as pickers and were at the camp with their husbands and children. These interviews were recorded and later transcribed. Another semi-formal interview was with a man who resides in Maryland, but comes to Pennsylvania each year for the apple harvest, and at times, travels to other places in search of work. These interviews were important because they provided more in depth information on what the migrant workers think about when choosing places to work such as payment and treatment, how strict law enforcement is, and what types of services are provided in the areas.

Interviews with Marta and Saúl

One of the most interesting things in the field of anthropology or sociology is an individuals' ability to adapt to constant change when placed in situations that require them to do so. Whether it be changes in their societies and communities, their personal lives or in physical locations, people find ways to adjust their lifestyles according to the trials that they confront. Over the past three months I have been studying the routes taken by migrant farmworkers in the United States, and the ways that they have adapted their lives to always being on the move. Two of the workers I spoke to were able to provide me with a great deal of information, yet they each have very different experiences as migrant farmworkers in the United States.

The story of one woman, Marta, is very interesting, as it provided information on a migrant farmworker's experience, the woman's experience and a mother's experience. Marta is a young woman from Veracruz, Mexico, who has been in the United States for almost ten years. She crossed the border with her younger sister in a large group of people. Marta and her sister travelled together for a few years with a small group of other women and some men, following the migratory route from Florida to New Jersey to Pennsylvania. Eventually they both got married and started travelling with their husbands. Marta's sister lives permanently in Wisconsin and travels from time to time to other places for work. Marta and her husband have decided to continue following the East Coast route. They have two young children, a girl named Kelly who is almost five years old and a little boy name Jose Manuel who is 7 months old. Marta mentioned that when her children start to get older she would like to make a more permanent move so that the constant moves will not have negative impact on their schooling and education, but she does not know where yet.

Don Saúl's story was just as interesting and informative as Marta's. He is an elderly man from San Salvador, El Salvador, and has traveled back and forth to the United States multiple times since his early 20's. What makes Don Saúl's story interesting is that while he has spent the majority of his time in the United States as a migrant farm worker, he has also spent time at a permanent residence in Maryland where he works odd jobs while he is not travelling. Don Saúl is in the U.S. alone, without family, but has two adult daughters that he sends money to in El Salvador.

While Don Saúl is undocumented, he was very open about his history and his experiences crossing the border. The first time he came to the U.S. he paid a *coyote* to help him cross the border, but since then he has always crossed alone or with smaller groups of men using his memory as a guide. Don Saúl's journey to cross the border is much more treacherous than a Mexican immigrant's journey, because he must travel into, through and out of Guatemala, and then travel through Mexico to one of the border towns to prepare for crossing into the United States. Don Saúl spoke about an underground bus system set up along the Guatemalan-Mexican border to take people through Mexico. The "convis" or busses are normally packed with Guatemalan, Salvadoran and other Central American immigrants in a trip that lasts almost two days. This journey to simply get to the Mexico-U.S. border can last anywhere from five days to a few months, depending on weather, transportation, how many people are travelling, and run-ins with authorities. Once in the United States, Don Saúl takes a train or bus to his destination.

For the first few years upon arriving in the United States, Don Saúl worked mainly in California, but decided to move to the east coast when he heard that the pay was better. Like many new migrant workers, he began working in Florida and slowly started the routine of travelling with the other single men north when the seasons changed. When asked if workers share each other information on where to go for work, Don Saúl chuckled and continued to explain that unless you have family members who are already established, or are travelling with other men, it is difficult to get advice from other workers on where to go or which orchards to work for or avoid. One would think that they would want to help each other; however there is a

level of competition that is only increasing as more migrant workers come to the U.S. Thus, while some information is passed, individual preferences are developed by individual experience.

Eventually Don Saúl developed a preferred route on the geographic circuit based on his own preferences as to camps or farms he was comfortable working, where the pay was better, and which seasons were going to be good for picking or not. After a few years travelling the route from Florida to New Jersey to Pennsylvania, Don Saúl decided that settling in one place would be easier and more economical for him than travelling constantly. He was discouraged from his original routine of travelling for work when there was a period of consecutive bad seasons for the farmworkers. He explained that because most of the work picking is paid by quantity, when there is a bad season, he would get paid less. Now, Don Saúl lives in Maryland working construction jobs, window washing, and as a janitor. The only time of the year that he picks fruit is during the apple season, because it is the best paid job at that time of the year. During the apple season he travels to Pennsylvania with other men that live near him, and then they return at the end of October when the season is over.

Don Saúl has been living as a migrant farm worker and undocumented immigrant for many years, and while each individual experience is incredibly different, details from his story do resonate in the stories of many other Latino migrant farmworkers.

Map & Route

The cities and areas that migrant farmworkers travel to for work are all part of a non-official, but well-defined route or circuit for Latino migrant farmworkers. When the work in one area finishes, migrant workers pack their few belongings and move on to the next destination in search of a new job that they will work until the season is over. The stops that migrant farmworkers might take on the East Coast can differ depending on a variety of factors, however there is a consistent, well-defined general route that is followed. From the interviews conducted for this project, I learned that there are three main stops along the circuit. The first stop is in Florida, home base for the majority of the farmworkers at ONE CAMP, for the orange and citrus season. The second stop is in New Jersey for the blueberry season. The third and final stop is in Pennsylvania for the apple season. Each place has unique characteristics, advantages and disadvantages, which all add to the migrant farmworker's experience.

On the East Coast circuit, Florida is generally the first stop, or the place many migrant farmworkers begin their journeys. This is also where the most time is spent during the year because the season is longer. The citrus harvest in Florida lasts from late October to late May, nearly seven months picking oranges and other citrus fruit. When Marta was asked what it was like picking oranges, she explained:

“Casi viene hacienda lo mismo. Bueno es más...yo digo que es más matado, no sé si es. Porque, si cuesta..es más trabajoso que las manzanas. Aquí si fuera, bueno las manzanas...es trabajoso porque pues tiene...como uno anda en el grupo tiene uno que andar corriendo conjunto con la gente si no te quedas, si no, como que no avanza.”¹⁰

¹⁰ Gonzalez, M., *Formal Interview – Marta*, p. 1.

“It’s almost the same thing. Well it’s more...I say that it’s harder, I don’t know if it is. Because, it is tolling...it’s more work than the apples. Here is it was...well the apples...it’s hard work because you have to...one goes along with the group and has to stay running with the people and make sure you don’t stay behind, it just doesn’t advance.”

She explains that picking oranges is more complicated and harder work because the way they are instructed to pick requires that they follow a truck with a large group of people. Sometimes, if a worker is not quick enough, they get left behind and have to stop working for the day because the truck will not wait. This can be extremely discouraging for the workers, but Marta says she thinks that they do it on purpose in order to force everyone to work faster. Many other workers, including the men, commented on the difference between the apple harvest and the orange harvest, and often explained how much more tedious and difficult it was picking citrus, hinting at the fact that working and living in Florida was not the preferred job choice for many people. This attitude toward the work in Florida also reflected on how they felt about life in Florida in general. In another interview conducted by Aidan Gaughran, JJ Luceno and Rachel Gilbert, a woman explains that in Florida, camps are not always provided to the workers, as they are in Pennsylvania or New Jersey. In Florida the family must rent an apartment or small house to stay in during their seven months there.

“Allá es diferente porque allá no vivimos en campo. Allá vivimos en trailer; rentamos. Allá no estamos como aquí, que estamos todos juntos. Allá cada quién llega, busca su renta, no te van a rentar.”¹¹
“Y luego... na’ más trabajas pa’ pagar la corta, pa’ pagar la salida, como... no, está difícil... está más difícil allá a veces. Porque allá gana uno poquito; paga una renta que son unos quinientos al mes; paga una luz,

¹¹ Hernandez, A., *Formal Interview – Angelica*, p. 5.

que viene más de cien; paga uno agua, que son más de cincuenta, cada mes, y ¡gana uno poquito!”¹²

“There it is different because there we don’t live in a camp. There we live in a trailer; we rent. There is not like here, where we are all together. There whoever arrives looks for their own rent, and they don’t rent to you.”

“And then...all you do is work to pay the court, to pay the exit, like... no, it’s hard... it’s harder there sometimes. Because there one makes very little; one pays rent which is five hundred a month; one pays the light which is over one hundred dollars a month; one pays the water which is more than fifty, every month, and one makes very little!”

Marta explains that they make much less money in Florida because they have to pay rent, light, water, etc., and when everything adds up they have little to spend or save. Predictably, Florida and the orange harvest are one of the least favorite areas of work for migrant workers on the route.

The second stop along the general route is in New Jersey for the blueberry season, although there are alternative stops along the circuit during this same summer (late June or early July through late August) time frame. For example, alternative summer stops in the Mid-Atlantic area might be made in Connecticut or North Carolina. However, almost all of my interviews confirmed that New Jersey was the strongly preferred summer stop, if possible.

New Jersey (or other Mid-Atlantic locations) is also the shortest stop along the route because the harvest period for blueberries is very quick. Workers will be in New Jersey over the summer, generally between early June to mid-August. Blueberries are easy fruit to pick, as Marta says, “es facilito para toda la gente... No tiene uno que cargar nada pesado. Nada más que la ‘basketita’”.¹³ (“It’s easy for

¹² Hernandez, A., *Formal Interview – Angelica*, p. 5.

¹³ Gonzalez, M., *Formal Interview – Marta*, p. 5.

everyone... You don't have to carry anything heavy. Just the basket.") In addition to the relative ease of the labor, Marta thinks, "Las semanas que uno trabaja, trabaja bien. Son bien trabajadas ahí."¹⁴ ("The weeks that one works are worked well. It's good work there.") These feelings towards work in New Jersey also resonated amongst the other workers. Unless they know in advance that the blueberry season is going to be bad (for climactic reasons), migrant farmworkers want to make a stop in New Jersey and to be hired for the blueberry season.

As for home life in New Jersey, many farms give the workers the option to live at a camp on the farm. However, instead of being able to cook their own food at the camps, they buy premade meals from a chef employed by the farm or they pay a fee to eat in a cafeteria where the food is also prepared for them. Marta explains,

"Bueno, sí uno quiere arrendar, puede arrendar para vivir mejor, para hacer comida porque ahí no hacemos comida ahí en el campo. Este, está la cocina grande y ahí pagan cocinera o cocinero para hacer comida. La hacen comida a toda la gente, porque sí es demasiada gente que llega ahí. Son como, llegan, a ver, hasta doscientas personas en un campo de esos. Y ese le pagan a la cocinera y dos ayudantes así para que hacen la comida para todos, toda la gente. Y después a uno ya no lo dejan entrar a la cocina con otros a la cocina si no ocupar la cocina. Le digo si quisieramos sería bien caro pagar, pues va pagar depósito uno, pagar depósito de luz, de agua, de todo porque...Para arrendar tiene que dar depósito y todo eso. Y a pagar la luz también y luego también ya es más difícil porque si quiere uno bajar luz y agua le piden papeles, pero nosotros no tenemos papeles, y este...no ya no. Y sale demasiado caro, y por eso no. Eso no más, dos meses le digo, y después para acá."¹⁵

"Well, if you want to rent, you can rent to live better, to make food there because we don't make food there in the camp. There's the big kitchen and there they pay a cook to make food. They make food for everyone because it's too many people who go there. There's like, let's see, up to two hundred people in one of those camps. And they pay the

¹⁴ Gonzalez, M., *Formal Interview – Marta*, p. 5.

¹⁵ Gonzalez, M., *Formal Interview – Marta*, p. 5.

cook and two helpers so that they make food for everyone, all the people. After they don't let anyone go into the kitchen. I say that if we wanted to it would be very expensive to pay, you have to pay a deposit, pay the deposit for light, for water, for everything because...To rent you have to pay a deposit for all of that. And pay the light also and it is more difficult because if you want to get light and water they ask you for papers, but we don't have papers, and so...we can't. It's too expensive, and because of that no. That's it, two months I say, and then back here."

New Jersey is one of the spots on the route that the workers do enjoy passing through. There is always enough work for many people, the labor is not as intensive as oranges or apples and it is for a short period of time, so people do not get bored with the work.

Finally, the last spot on the general East Coast route is Pennsylvania. The season in Pennsylvania lasts between late August and early to mid October, depending on when the picking is completed at an orchard and when people are ready to move on to the next place. When the workers arrive in August it is very hot still, but the picking starts immediately. Fortunately, apples stay ripe on the trees for a long time, giving the orchards and the workers time to finish. With the Mosaic class, we had the opportunity to go to ONE CAMP towards the end of a work day to see how the picking was done. I was surprised at how quickly everyone moves, often running to the trucks to empty their satchels and then continue picking. There are no formal rules on how to pick the apple, only an unwritten rule to not get in anyone's way. In order to get to the apples, the workers jump, climb the trees and move around tall, rickety wooden ladders. When they are done, they take their bag of apples to a parked truck with enormous wooden crates and empty them.

Attached to their hats, bags or clothes, is a tag with their name and a barcode. A

woman scans the barcode as they bring their filled bag to the crate to record how many bags they filled, and helps make sure that the apples are not bruised when they are emptied into the crate. The workers are paid by the number of bags they fill, so when they are sure their barcode was scanned, they run back to the trees to start all over again.

While picking apples is difficult, intense work, Pennsylvania is one of the most popular places for the workers to travel to, and there are many factors that draw workers there. These factors include simple reasoning such as the weather being agreeable during the apple season, and more complex reasoning, such as the services that are provided in Pennsylvania for migrant workers. Through the mosaic, the students were able to visit different organizations that provided different services to migrant workers, like daycare, food bank, legal assistance, help finding new, permanent jobs in the area. As a result, many of the workers have been going to Pennsylvania for many consecutive years. For example, Saúl has been going to Pennsylvania to work the apple season for nearly fifteen years. While he now lives permanently in Maryland, he continues traveling as a migrant worker to Pennsylvania between August and October of every year. According to Don Saúl and many of the other men I interviewed, picking apples in Pennsylvania is the best paid work along the East Coast. In addition to good pay, Pennsylvania state law requires that, “Any seasonal farm labor camp within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is required to hold a valid permit prior to occupancy of the camp.”¹⁶ This required permitting of the camps is designed to ensure that the living spaces and facilities are

¹⁶ Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, *Seasonal Farm Labor Camps*, www.agriculture.state.pa.us.

safe, clean and adequate. Understandably, the quality and availability of living space and common facilities for the workers is a major pull factor for many migrant workers.

When the apple season is completed, the cyclical route kicks up again, and the workers travel back to Florida. The time spent traveling or in transition between each geographic location is always very stressful and unpredictable for the workers. The day they leave depends on whether or not all the work is actually done at the orchard, when the boss has their paychecks ready, and how long it takes them to pack their things. I was at ONE CAMP the day the workers were supposed to be receiving their checks, and the atmosphere was very tense. Everyone seemed to be waiting around or doing things to kill time like cleaning their kitchen stations or making sure every little thing was packed. Between each location on the circuit, travelling is the most unsettling aspect of the experience, and the days leading up to the next move are always nerve racking.

The chart below shows the three main points, along with variations to the route that Marta and Don Saúl spoke about travelling to.

Places Traveled/Destination	Fruit Picked	City/Area	Time of Year
Florida	Oranges	Bartow	Late October - late May
New Jersey	Blueberries	Vincentown	Early June - mid August
N. Carolina	Tobacco	Caswell County	Early July - late August/early September
Connecticut	Tobacco	Windsor	Early July - late August/early September
Pennsylvania	Apples	Adam's County	Late August/ early-mid October
Wisconsin	Apples	Mukwonago	Late August/ early September – mid October
W. Virginia	Apples	Martinsburg	Late August/ early September – mid October

Factors Affecting Migration Pattern

The route that migrant farmworkers take is generally the same year after year. However, there are a multitude of factors that affect the migration route and where people decide to move after they are done in one place. The most important factors that affect the migration pattern are: how the workers are treated and paid, how strict law enforcement is, and whether or not they are travelling with others, be it family, a small group of other workers, or alone.

Many seem to think that migrant workers have stopped worrying about the treatment they receive from their bosses and other authority. In the past, when workers from Mexico started coming to the U.S. as part of the Bracero program in the early 1900s, they were treated terribly by their employers. “One Californian explained that ‘we want Mexicans because we can treat them as we cannot treat any other living men’”.¹⁷ Fortunately, since the early 1900’s conditions and opinions on this matter have improved significantly. If a worker accepts a job at a place that does not treat them well, the next year they simply will not return. The demand for workers in these areas is great enough that they do not have to work somewhere they do not want. Along with treatment is salary. Migrant farmworkers are looking for the best pay possible, and will not travel somewhere to work tirelessly if they do not feel they are being paid enough. Marta mentioned that she and her husband went to Wisconsin one year to pick apples instead of going to Pennsylvania. As she looked back on that decision she decided that it was a mistake, because the orchards in Wisconsin pay much less than the ones in Pennsylvania. They will never return to Wisconsin for apple season. This factor is extremely important to the workers and is often something they base their travels on.

Another important factor for Latino migrant farmworkers is how strict law enforcement is in the places they are travelling to, and in the places they travel through to arrive to their destinations. While legal status is not something I spoke about with all of the people I interviewed, the way they spoke about law enforcement made it clear that this is something that is constantly on their minds.

¹⁷ Overmyer-Velazques, M., *Beyond la Frontera: The History of Mexico-U.S. Migration*, p. 82.

In recent years, law enforcement and immigration in Florida has been increasingly threatening to migrant workers. In fact, many of the workers I spoke to earlier in the semester had not decided yet where they were going after the apple season, because they were not completely positive that they wanted to go to Florida and deal with the fear of being found by 'la migra'. In an interview that Aidan Gaughran conducted with a woman at one camp, she spoke openly about the presence of police in Florida.

*"Si un policía te ve, te sigue y te chequea la plata y ya. Allá es bien difícil, y acá no. Porque el otro día venimos del escuelita yo y mi esposo y venía un policía detrás de nosotros y ya mi esposo pensaba: nos va a parar... y ¡no! Pero allá no, allá no la dejan pasar."*¹⁸

"If a police sees you, he follows you and checks your license plate. There it's very difficult, and here it isn't. Because the other day my husband and were coming from the little school and a police was behind us and my husband thought: they're going to stop us... but no! But not there [Florida], there they won't let you pass."

She notes that had this happened in Florida, they would not have been as lucky, indicating that Pennsylvania is much less strict, another reason why it is a popular destination among migrant farmworkers.

Law enforcement also affects the way workers travel to and from their destinations. Travelling is the most important aspect of a migrant worker's lifestyle and experience in the U.S. When I was speaking to Marta I asked how she traveled with the kids and their belongings and she replied,

"Siempre tratamos de salir como en la noche, o salimos en la tarde. Sabemos que los niños nos va dar guerra un ratito, unos dos tres horas y luego se duermen y duermen toda la noche. Y pues como queda en la noche está más tranquilo y más fresco. Es mejor en la noche. En el

¹⁸ Hernandez, A., Field Notes 8/11/2011.

día pues entra el sol y hace más calor, hay más tráfico, todo es más...no es lo mismo. Y como es viaje largo, pues tratamos de salir de tarde para llegar por ahí de mediodía llegamos a.. del otro día, pues toda la noche manejando.”¹⁹

“We always try to leave in the night, or we leave in the evening. We know that the kids are going to fight us for a little while, maybe two or three hours but and then they fall asleep for the whole night. And since it’s in the night it’s more calm and fresh. It’s better in the night. In the day the sun is out and it’s warmer, there’s more traffic, everything is more...it’s not the same. And since it is a long trip, well we try to leave in the evening so we arrive there around midday we arrive at... the other day, driving all night.”

The unspoken understanding in her response was that during the night there are fewer police on the roads and fewer chances of getting pulled over for any reason.

Finally, another important factor affecting the circular migration route is who a migrant worker is travelling with. Migrant workers, particularly men, travel alone or in small groups, or they travel with their families, which is most common for women. Those travelling without families have more freedom to deviate from the circular route. They are able to move to different places more often than families are, because they are not restricted by the needs of anyone else but themselves. Their schedules and travel route are the most flexible. Don Saul spoke about the many different places he was able to visit because he was travelling alone. Before he settled in Maryland, he worked all along the west coast, in the mid-west and then up and down the east coast. Those travelling with their families do not have the flexibility to travel as freely. They must consider the needs of everyone travelling with them, especially if that includes young children. The concerns for migrant

¹⁹ Gonzalez, M., *Formal Interview – Marta*, p. 4-5.

workers with children are much more extensive, and the things they look for when moving to a new place are numerous. For example, if there are children involved, working at an orchard or renting a home or apartment near a school is very necessary. If the kids are not yet in school, mothers worry about having someone in the area that can provide care for their child while they are working, such as a daycare or a sitter. When speaking about the children and what happens with them when they move to new places to work, Marta explained, “Bueno con los niños, porque yo no los dejo con cualquier persona tampoco... Yo los niños no los dejo con cualquiera. No lo...porque so no salgo a divertirme porque como voy a dejar mis niños con alguien que a lo mejor no conosco. A veces uno se lleva cada sorpresa con la gente que ya conoce.”²⁰ (Well with the kids, because I don’t leave them with anyone either...I won’t leave the kids with any person. I don’t...because I don’t go out to have fun because how am I going to leave the kids with someone that I hardly know. Sometimes you can be surprised even with people you know.) When there is more than one person to consider in travel plans, it is much more difficult to have a flexible schedule, and one must make travel plans and decisions according to the needs of everyone involved, especially if those involved are children.

Conclusion

That “migrant” farmworkers “move” from location to location to work is obvious, hence the word migrant in the title. However, the mere availability of work in a particular location is not the only factor that attracts the migrant workers to a

²⁰ Gonzalez, M., *Formal Interview – Marta*, p. 6.

given geographic location. Rather, other social and economic factors play an equally important role in defining a migrant worker's movement.

In my field study and interviews I was able to discern a well-defined, circular migration pattern on the East Coast of the U.S. This circuit is now repeated, year after year, by thousands of migrant workers. The annual migration route starts every year in Florida, then moves north to a Mid-Atlantic state for the summer, preferably to New Jersey, and the cycle completes in the fall in Pennsylvania. Upon completing the circuit in Pennsylvania, the migrant workers then return to Florida and start the pattern again.

As noted above, the mere availability of work is not the only factor that helps define the particular locations migrant workers will travel to. In my study and interviews I identified three factors that help shape the migratory pattern on the East Coast. The first is pay, and specifically the fairness of the pay. Simply put, workers will travel to locations where they think they can make the most money for their labor. This is not to say they will seek easier work. To the contrary, there were repeated references in interviews to willingness to take harder work if the pay was commensurate. In addition, as mentioned in the paper, many farms have established elaborate systems for rewarding productivity or paying workers more for the quantity they harvest, and the migrant workers prefer such systems where their hard work or added productivity is rewarded. In contrast, workers will shun specific farms or geographic locations if they perceive the pay to be inferior (as in the case of picking apples in Wisconsin) or if they perceive that the work will not be lucrative in a given year (for example if climactic factors reduced the crop and the

harvest will be poor, which makes it more difficult to reach the productivity incentives for picking more).

A secondary factor that has helped define the migratory pattern is the quality and availability of adequate living facilities. References to living facilities, cost of living in rented spaces versus living in camps, and the adequacy of the camps, was a constant theme in my interviews with workers. As mentioned above, the relatively favorable conditions of the worker camps in Pennsylvania, for example, has been a factor in establishing Pennsylvania as an important stop on the annual migratory circuit.

Finally, a third factor that came out in various interviews as helping define preferences for certain locations over others is the perceived strictness of law enforcement in particular locations. This obsession with law enforcement is understandable in a community of undocumented workers. It helps define not only the places they will prefer and ultimately chose to live and work, but even impacts how and when they travel (for example traveling at night). This preoccupation with law enforcement extends not only to the “migra” (immigration police from Department of Homeland Security, Immigration and Customs Enforcement), but also to local law enforcement officials who will often hassle and detain migrant workers.

One final observation is warranted, and that relates to a conclusion I made in the context of my literature review. While my own study just barely scratches the surface in terms of looking at this issue, I was struck by the fact that there has been very little research to date on the issue of the migratory routes being followed by

Latino migrant workers, and the factors that help shape those routes. I looked at the most common migratory route being followed by migrant farmworkers on the East Coast, and I suspect there are other well-defined regional routes (Southeast, Midwest, Pacific Northwest) that could be studied. This is a research area where little work has been done to date in terms of studying the actual routes followed by the workers. However, I suspect that when such research is conducted, the conclusions will be similar: That while the migratory routes may be different from one part of the country to the other, the factors that help define the route will be similar, that is to say fairness of pay, adequacy and cost living facilities and conditions, and strictness and intrusiveness of law enforcement.

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Formal Interviews

Gonzalez, Marta. Interviewed by Alexandra Kaye. Carlisle, PA: Dickinson College Community Studies Center, Fall 2011.

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Informal Interview Notes:

Angelica Hernandez, Interviewed by Aidan Gaughran.

Don Saul, Interviewed by Alexandra Kaye.