Migrant Farm Work in the State of Maine: Meeting the Community Needs of Maine's Working Immigrant Population

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MIGRANT FARM WORK IN THE STATE OF MAINE: MEETING THE COMMUNITY NEEDS OF MAINE’S WORKING IMMIGRANT POPULATION

By

Olivia Ruhlin

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for a Degree with Honors (Anthropology)

The Honors College

University of Maine

May 2019

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to create a greater awareness about the community of migrant farm workers who have either settled in Maine’s Downeast regions, or travel to Maine seasonally for work. I have aimed to focus my research on developing answers to the following questions: why do people choose to migrate? What do Maine’s agricultural industries have to offer for a migrant farm worker? What challenges do they face? What challenges do the community of immigrants who choose to stay in Maine face? Are these communities underprivileged, and if so, what organizations are working to facilitate better opportunities for these people? By answering these questions, I have learned that migrant farm workers are not only responsible for bringing food to our tables, but also for our agricultural economic success in the state of Maine. We owe a lot to migrant farm workers, and this thesis will hopefully show what it is we can be doing for migrant farm workers to ensure a happier, healthier community.

In doing this research, I also wanted to ensure that I conveyed the importance of decolonizing anthropology, which largely involves holding ourselves accountable for what we choose to publish as anthropologists when writing about communities of people who might be considered “marginalized”. I discuss how using new methods of informant-based research can help introduce information that is more qualitative vs. quantitative, and although the surveys featured in this thesis produce several statistics on the overall health and socioeconomic background of migrant farm workers, I want to preface this data by stating that the people behind these numbers are mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, sons and daughters, who work and live their every day lives just as any other person living in the United States would. Decolonizing anthropology is becoming
increasingly more urgent as we aim to better understand and give back to indigenous communities, and the first step in doing that is done by listening first before sharing their stories.
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INTRODUCTION

The Honors Thesis is a project to be completed by graduating seniors in the Honors College. It not only aims to highlight the work put into the student’s entire, four-year academic experience at the University of Maine, but also offers an opportunity to showcase their academic ability toward a subject that they are passionate about. For me, this was human rights activism, which I was able to more specifically tailor toward this project through the research and discussion of migrant farm work in our very own state of Maine. Through studying anthropology, specifically cultural anthropology, for the last three and a half years of my college undergraduate experience, I have been exposed to methods and theoretical frameworks that aim to explain the social behaviors of humans since the birth of their existence. It was in a course taught by Dr. Cynthia Isenhour however, “The Anthropology of Food”, that I became more aware of the complex social structures that exist within my own community and other communities belonging to the state of Maine, my home state. In her class, I was moved by a book we read called Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies by Seth M. Holmes, which examines the social issues associated with migrant farm work in the United States, and the societal forces that allow for the invisibility of harmful work conditions and lack of healthcare.

Eventually, I came to realize that migrant farm work not only exists within the state of Maine, but is prevalent around the world. I also discovered that many migrant workers and their families have chosen to settle here as a way of starting a new lifestyle for themselves, sometimes as an alternative to returning back to their native homes. For this project, I have been researching the effects of migrant farm work in the state of Maine, and how migrant famers and their families have adjusted to settling into some of
Maine’s Downeast communities. I learned about what migrant farm work is, why bigger farming industries use migrant farm work, how migrant farm workers are affected by lack of health care, and how Maine’s consumers play a large role in raising awareness about migrant farm workers and their need for better access to healthcare and education. With that being said, I have become mainly interested in learning about the challenges faced by these migrant families while acculturating into Maine’s Downeast lifestyle. To do all of this, I have been using resources provided to me by a non profit organization called Mano en Mano, which was established in 2005 in response to the rapid influx of migrant farmworkers who chose to settle in parts of Washington and Hancock county as a way of leaving the east coast migrant stream and settling down with their families. This organization offers educational programs, basic resources, as well as potlucks for these marginalized community members as a way of helping them feel more welcome and more empowered. Much of the information that I have used to understand Maine’s migrant farm working population has come from Mano en Mano’s most recent community survey, a project conducted every three years that aims to gauge an idea as to what Mano en Mano can be doing better at to ensure that the needs of the community they serve continue to be met.

**Decolonizing Anthropology - Giving Back to Indigenous Populations Through Research**

Julie Velásquez Runk is an Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Georgia. Her research involves using integrative approaches to understand how people use and manage their land and its relation to science, conservation, indigenous knowledge, and policy. She further goes on to examine how all of this pertains to people
and their ability to cope with variability and change within their environment. This work is grounded in political ecology, technology studies, human geography, environmental humanities, and most importantly, collaboration. Her investigations aim to seek ways in which anthropologists can bridge the divide between indigenous communities and environmental scientists and other anthropologists in culturally sensitive ways. By doing so, she also advocates for indigenous people’s rights during periods of rapid environmental change. What she is most prominently renowned for, however, is her investigative attempts to make anthropology more collaborative. She does this by decolonizing old theories and developing new theories that incorporate multiple voices in an effort to give back to indigenous communities whose voices have traditionally been otherwise left out of the fundamental frameworks in anthropology. In her article, *Enriching Indigenous Knowledge Scholarship via Collaborative Methodologies: Beyond the High Tide’s Few Hours*, she illustrates the collaborative approaches she practiced when researching the Wounaan and Emberá groups native to eastern Panama. This piece in particular aims to demonstrate the widespread, increasing interest in collaborative and decolonizing methodologies used within anthropology, but how a lack of published research on the matter serves as an issue worth addressing. This piece serves as an example on how using collaborative methodologies allowed her to gain a better and fuller understanding of indigenous knowledge amongst the Wounaan and Emberá people in eastern Panama using a specific process involving co - designing research, co - analyzing results, and co - authorship of publications. The reason this modern day anthropologist’s work is so revolutionary is because she aims to address the issue of single - voiced biases that came out of anthropology’s Western, 19th century foundation. In her article, she
discusses the ways in which collaborative anthropology can help us move out of our colonized methodologies as she states,

Collaboration has clearly enhanced my scholarship; moreover, it builds an ethos of “standing with” (Tallbear 2014), of networked conversation, engagement, and scholarship. As such, the conceptualization of indigenous knowledge as situated and practiced and the use of a collaborative methodologies are mutually reinforcing I concur with other researchers that collaboration thus bears potential for revitalizing anthropological thought (Lassiter 2005, Hale 2007, Rappaport 2008, Breunlin and Regis 2009, Laborde 2013) (10).

Velásquez’s process of working closely with local community leaders and experts allowed for her research to be multivocal. If we examine the published work that came out of some of anthropology’s most famous theorists we can see that the voices of others are still being spoken for.

Writing similarly about the importance of collaborative anthropology is Luke Eric Lassiter, who posits the term “collaborative ethnography”, which is meant to distinguish the relationships made between anthropologists and the people they choose to study. For far too long, the voices of indigenous communities have been muted and washed over by anthropological research that speaks for them. Luke Eric Lassiter suggests combating this by establishing a relationship between one’s fieldwork and the public that is reciprocal and reflective. In his work, The Chicago Guide to Collaborative Ethnography, he reflects on a particular encounter with former Kiowa tribal chairman Billy Evans Horse in Oklahoma upon discussing his plans to become an anthropologist,
When I announced my newest decision, to do anthropology in Kiowa country, Billy Evans got up from his seat. He removed a book about Kiowas from the bookshelf and tossed it onto the table in front of me. “So now you’re going to be an expert like him?” he asked. The books that anthropologists wrote, he said, had more relevance to other anthropologists than to Kiowas. Volume after volume seemed to engage a discussion among “white people” and not people like him. Just what were the goals of anthropology? he questioned (Lassiter, 2005).

Lassiter continues on by addressing these key questions - who are anthropologists representing when producing data used to analyze a specific group of people? Does anthropology serve itself? How can anthropologists ensure that their work is relevant for the people they serve? With collaborative ethnography, Lassiter suggests that in order to meet both the needs of a community and the needs of ethnography, one must seek to be informed by members of the community first to assess what those needs are as opposed to drawing on theoretical problems before taking on a collaborative approach. He correctly points out that, “More often than not, informants can identify urgent research more clearly than the ethnographer”, which is what I have aimed to express in my thesis. When using an ethnographic approach toward studying a marginalized group of people like migrant farm workers, it is crucial that the research we conduct as anthropologists be not only multivocal, collaborative and inclusive of community members, but also beneficial for them as well as us.
Who Are Migrant Farm Workers?

The difference between a migrant farm worker and any other agriculturalist/farmer/land owner is not just their country of origin, but more importantly, their rate of pay, their hours spent on the land, and their overall health. It is estimated that between 1 and 3 million migrant farm workers leave their native homes to work throughout the country per year (“Migrant Farm Workers: Our Nation's Invisible Population”, 2015). This estimation holds such a large gap because a portion of these people are classified as undocumented immigrants, making it more difficult to suggest more precise numbers in regard to the migrant farmer population. These people are predominantly native to Mexico, however many others come from Jamaica, Haiti, Honduras, Puerto Rico, Guatemala, as well as the United States (Brower, 2009). What may also be considered worthy of noting is the high population of migrant workers coming from various Native American communities (“MDOL: Migrant Worker Survey”, 2015). These people are dispersed throughout the country for seasonal agricultural work, with the hopes that they may be able to provide for their families living back home.

Written by medical anthropologist Seth M. Holmes, Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies is a book in which he narrates his time spent amongst an indigenous Mexican community illegally working on farms throughout California and Washington state. In his writing, he interprets the reasoning behind why people from all over Mexico and Central America choose to migrate, which he so powerfully describes as the following:

. . .the reality of survival for my Triqui companions shows that it would be riskier to stay in San Miguel without work, money, food, or education. In this original context, crossing the border is not a choice to engage in a risk behavior
but rather a process necessary to survive, to make life less risky (Holmes, 2014). For many people, migrating to the United States is not so much as an option, but rather a necessary risk for the survival of oneself and their family. Migration largely depends on the food harvested in accordance to its region. For example, blueberries, one of Maine’s top cash crops, are primarily harvested in August through September, whereas oranges in Florida can be harvested as early as October through January. A large majority of these workers are male, and vary in age, from anywhere between 17 and 70 years old (“MDOL: Migrant Worker Survey”, 2015), (Figure 1). Some arrive to their summer destinations with a high level of expertise for farm labor, while several others can have little to no knowledge of farming whatsoever.

Several of the following statistics used to analyze Maine’s migrant farm worker population were gathered from a survey conducted by the Maine Department of Labor during the summer of 2015. In this survey, 54 migrant farm workers belonging to both broccoli and blueberry farms were interviewed as an attempt to understand the number of migrant workers coming to Maine per year and where they’re coming from. The results showed the average age to be 38, with ages 20 - 29 being the next largest age category. 56% of Maine’s migrant farm workers were reported to be from Mexico, 17% from the U.S, 10% from Haiti, 8% from Canada, 6% from Honduras, 2% from El Salvador, and 2% from the Philippines. The survey notes that some of the U.S citizens were originally of Mexican descent. Three quarters of this demographic were male, while the other quarter were female. When reporting on what these workers considered to be called “home”, the study found that Florida was the largest response at 34%, with Mexico following at 17% (Figure 2). The author of the article adds that many of these people
spend time traveling from Texas and Florida up to Maine, which can otherwise be referred to as the “East Coats Migrant Stream”. The traveling between the two places meant that for some, there were two permanent homes, one in Texas or Florida, and one in Maine, spending six months of the year in both locations.

**Defining Migrant vs Immigrant**

While the terms migration vs immigration correctly connote the idea of moving from one place to another, it is important to recognize that one refers to moving from one place to another with the intent to return back to their original country from whence they came, and the other refers to moving to another place with the intent to stay. Migrant farm workers are often perceived as ‘illegal immigrants’, a term that in and of itself falsely denotes the idea that a human being can be deemed invalid, illegitimate or unlawful according to U.S law. While several migrant workers often travel to the United States undocumented, they, firstly, are typically protected under what’s called the H - 2A policy, and secondly, migrate with the intent to return home to their families, (see “Scope of the Problem”).

In several states however, such as Maine, many migrant farm workers will travel to the United States with the intent of staying, usually in the hopes of gaining a better economic status if their seasonal work pays well enough, bringing their families to work alongside them. Maine saw a rapid surge of these families coming to settle in the primarily Downeast parts of the state during the 1990’s, which is where Mano en Mano came to rise in 2005 as a way of providing care and help for families in need of better opportunities (“Manomaine: WHO WE ARE”, 2016). For some, living in Maine meant
securing their employment on the farms they had been migrating to come harvest season, for others, being in Maine meant having the ability to leave the east coast migrant stream, and to seek out new jobs that hold a greater promise of financial stability, as well as better education and overall living circumstances for their children.

The terms ‘migrant’ and ‘immigrant’ are often mixed with another term sparking a similar definition, ‘refugee’, and while the three are often used interchangeably, it is important to understand the legality behind their differences in order to understand why we have migrants coming to Maine for seasonal farm work, immigrants attempting to cross the Mexican border, and refugees fleeing to parts of Europe out of Syria. Identity, when researching a population of people made up of migrants, immigrants and/or refugees, deserves a seat at the head of the table for discussion. When a person is forced to flee his or her country because of some kind of imminent danger such as war, governmental turmoil, natural disaster and the like, any person attempting to escape these forces are considered refugees because there is undeniable evidence that there is a need to flee (Vore, 2015). For an immigrant/migrant, the circumstances causing them to migrate aren’t as clear or obvious, as the reason for migrating to the U.S can look different from person to person. Take Mexico for an example, the country from which the majority of Maine’s migrant farm workers descend from. We know there are parts of Mexico that face some of the world’s worst political corruption, and yet millions of Americans will travel to Mexico between now and the next six months for vacation. The same cannot be said for Syria and that is because it is an area deemed far too dangerous for a U.S citizen to visit by standards put forth by the United States government. This is because much of Mexico’s economy will rely heavily on tourism, thus travelers in Mexico won’t
experience the kinds of poverty, and government and drug related violence that gets reported, but will know all the while that it very well does exist. This doesn’t eliminate the dangers and challenges faced by a citizen of Mexico whose job lies anywhere outside of the tourism industry. In turn, this creates a common misconception that a Mexican immigrant’s purpose for migrating across the border has everything to do with seeking financial gain, (which doesn’t necessarily have to be untrue), and nothing to do with escaping poverty or violence, because if travel to such a country is still considered safe for tourists in some parts, then how is it not the same for Mexicans, or Hondurans, Guatemalans and El Salvadorians, for that matter? While the state of one’s nation may not be as severe as its war torn, anarchist - state counterparts, we must realize that it doesn’t dismiss a need to escape one’s home country if the circumstances call for it. This paper will discuss, at length, the obstacles faced by Maine’s working im/migrant communities, and in order to do so, it must be acknowledged that there is a considerable legal difference between being a migrant, an immigrant and a refugee, and yet the purposes for which someone might be identified as any of the three are all quite similar.

Scope of the Problem: Maine’s Migrant Workers and The Health Risks They Face

The challenges that a migrant farm worker will face once migrated across the border do not lessen despite the attempt to improve their overall economic circumstance. If you are a migrant farmer seeking work in Maine, it’s no surprise that the best time to be there is in August, where one can make upwards of a hundred dollars per day, if not more, raking low bush, or “wild” blueberries on Maine’s blueberry barrens. Maine is the largest producer of low bush blueberries in the United States, thanks to the rich, acidic
soils in some of Maine’s Downeast regions that allow these plants to not only thrive in numbers, but also withstand Maine’s harsh weather. To put these numbers into perspective, the Agricultural Marketing Resource Center listed Maine as having produced 101.6 million pounds of low bush blueberries in the year 2017, with 380,000 pounds being sold fresh and 101.2 million being sold processed, all valuing at a total of $27.7 million (AGMRC, NASS 2017). The majority of this revenue was harvested by Maine’s migrant farm working population, but with such a high amount of production reported, what would the level of work look like for said laborers? The answer is much higher than we report.

Harvesting low bush blueberries is actually far more cumbersome than it’s cut out to be, and isn’t exactly like raking leaves, through raking is certainly a part of the process. To say raking low bush blueberries is tiresome, time consuming, or even painful would be, frankly, an understatement. Imagine learning to play field hockey for the first time. You spend the entire hour and a half long practice spent running up and down a field with your back hunched over while holding a hockey stick. You go to bed that night with your back feeling sore and out of place from having put so much physical exertion on it than it’s used to. Now think about raking blueberries. The process requires you to bend over hundreds, if not, thousands of bushes per day while running an aluminum, hand - held rake through its contents, catching the fruits like a sort of strainer. Combine this with the heat of the Northeastern climate during the month of August and anywhere between 9 - 12 hours worth of raking and you have an average day for a migrant farm worker working a blueberry barren in Maine (“Migrant Farmers”, Accessed 20 March 2019). These farmworkers are the root of Maine’s agricultural industrial success. They
are the ones responsible for planting, attending to and harvesting the produce we buy and consume from our local grocery stores. The work they do has proven to be both physically and mentally taxing due to extreme conditions in the workplace. These people, despite the truly unthinkable amount of work they put in, live in poverty. Not only that, but many of them cannot speak English, and thus face difficulty when accessing educational and health services/basic resources. Organizations such as Mano en Mano are working to improve the lives of these workers, but perhaps where a greater need lies is in their healthcare.

In a recent article published by Dr. Melissa A. Brower, Research Study Coordinator at the New York Center for Agricultural Medicine and Health/Northeast Center for Agricultural Health, with the assistance of Giulia B. Earle - Richardson, John J. May and Paul L. Jenkins, researchers present the results of two similar surveys, one conducted in New York and the other in Maine. The goal of this research was to estimate the number of seasonal and migrant farm workers of these particular Northeast regions who receive healthcare due to occupational illness or injury at migrant health centers versus other occupational healthcare facilities. The methods used for this survey involved visiting farm camps during the wild blueberry, apple, and broccoli harvests by the assistance of local labor and migrant health experts. Upon visit to these locations, a team of bilingual data collectors conducted interviews with interested participants. All growers were contacted for consent of participation in the survey. All injuries reported during the survey were organized as being treated at a migrant health center, at an emergency room, “other location,” or “no treatment” based on what was given for response. Injuries were further classified as being either musculoskeletal strain/sprain; chemical or natural irritant
exposure, (dust, poison ivy, sun and heat exhaustion), cut/crushed, struck by an object or animal, falling, and other/unknown.

In 2006, 15 camps in Maine were visited, which consisted of three broccoli, five apple, and seven blueberry, however due to the remoteness of the area and the time investment taken out of workers’ time off in the evening, not all of the blueberry camps could be reached. A total of 619 farmworkers were invited to participate in the survey, and 553 agreed to partake. In both of the surveys conducted in New York and Maine, the largest nationality group reported was Latin American, with 41% of Maine’s farm workers interviewed being so, followed by the next largest group being Canadian Native Americans, (28.4%). The average age of participants for both sample groups was 33. The results concluded that 32 of the 553 participants reported an injury in Maine, and that migrant health centers treated 17 or 53% of said injuries. Three, or 9.4%, of these reported injuries were treated in an ER, followed by 6, (18.8%), classified as “other”, and the remaining 6 injuries, (18.88%), received no treatment. In combining both data from the Maine survey as well as the survey conducted in New York, (each developed similar results), the data reported that the most common mechanism for injury was musculoskeletal strain/sprain (39.3%). Chemical or natural irritant exposures made up 23.2%, followed by cuts from tools or machines at 19.6 %, being struck by an object at 7.1%, and falling at 7.1%. Two injuries, (3.6%), were categorized as other or unknown (Figure 3). Their discussion concluded that much of this research that focused solely on areas where a migrant health center was in reach didn’t account for the number of occupational injuries treated at an ER, but in doing so would require an ER chart review to go along with their MHC chart review. Thus, more surveillance involving ER chart
reviews is certainly needed when trying to create a more accurate and precise occupational illness and injury rate estimate (Brower, 2009).

What is, perhaps, most important note when trying to collect data over migrant farm workers is that their lifestyle is nomadic by nature, their English proficiency is limited and their citizenship status is often questionable. Because of this, obtaining information that is both precise and accurate can be incredibly difficult. What this means is that research with even the most professional, well-supervised and thorough methodologies can still miss a lot of crucial information. The United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, under the Department of Homeland Security, have developed what is called the H-2A program for temporary agricultural workers. This program allows U.S. employers or U.S. agents, having met specific regulations and requirements, to bring foreigners into the United States to fill various temporary agricultural jobs. What this means for a researcher attempting to collect information about a migrant farm worker is that a lot can happen behind closed doors, and attempting to uncover what that may be can be extremely difficult if not, downright impossible. The H-2A program is a kind of double edged sword for a migrant farm worker, in a sense. What this means for a migrant farm worker is that although he or she may be granted protection to work in the United States as an undocumented immigrant, they may risk deportation at any moment by their employer, thus covering up any kind of maltreatment by an employer for fear of losing one’s job becomes all too common.

We know that nationally, migrant farm workers are not only one of the most underserved populations, but also one of the most understudied. We know that farm work-related health issues such as pesticide-related illnesses, musculoskeletal and soft-tissue
disorders, dermatitis, noninfectious respiratory conditions, reproductive health problems, health problems relating to children, climate-caused illnesses, communicable diseases, bladder and kidney disorders as well as eye and ear problems have been reported from regions across the United States, and yet not a single, all - encompassing epidemiological study has been conducted in order to fully assess the magnitude of this issue (“Occupational health problems”, Accessed 22 February 2019). Maine’s migrant farm working population faces several of the aforementioned health issues, however a more serious issue involving raking blueberries has traditionally been, at times, one of the most common.

Cheryl K. Seymour, a family medicine physician whose clinical interest is in migrant healthcare, lead authors an article titled, “Structural Differential — A 32-Year-Old Man with Persistent Wrist Pain”. In her writing, she discusses a common occurrence amongst Maine’s migrant blueberry farm rakers: “acute wrist tendinitis with pain, erythema, warmth, and swelling over the extensor and ulnar aspects of the wrist”(Seymour, Accessed 27 March 2019). She discovered that reports of intense wrist pain were coming from blueberry rakers, which she assessed would require rest and recovery from raking blueberries in order to reduce the pain, and yet because a blueberry raker’s pay depends on how many pounds of blueberries one can produce in a day, this clearly wasn’t an option. She defines a structural differential as what “delineates the social, political, and economic factors that may be influencing a patient’s health and health care and facilitates responses to the modifiable factors”. She uses this structural differential to determine that in order to treat these wrist injuries whilst allowing workers to continue in doing their jobs, a new two - handled rake, one that puts less pressure on
the single wrist of a worker’s strong hand. Using structural differentials in evaluating the healthcare of migrant farm workers requires physicians to take context into account before providing an analysis. When it comes to improving healthcare for migrant farm workers, it becomes not only important, but necessary to use structural differentials in and out of the exam room.

Globalization, industrial reform and policy structure are all the underlying foundation for why healthcare needs are still not met by all working folk in the United States, and this especially affects migrant workers at a much higher scale. When discussing structural differentials to help assess the healthcare needs of working migrant communities, it is important that we, as anthropologists, take history into context as well.

In the article titled, “Worker’s Decompensation: Engaged Research with Injured Im/migrant Workers”, (Dvera I. Saxton, Angela Stuesse), the topic covers workers’ compensation on a timeline as a way of connecting the key issues that are affecting migrant workers today. Interestingly, the article mentions that prior to the early 1900’s, state courts were responsible for deciding whether or not employers were to take liability over any work-related injury/illness. This placed pressure on employees who chose to come forward to contest against their employers, and thus resulted in settling deals out of court. Even after decades of increasing awareness toward worker’s rights and healthcare accessibility, it wasn’t until 1970 that Congress had officially passed the Occupational Safety and Health Act, which would ensure that all workplace hazards were regulated and assessed properly. What this act didn’t ensure however, was healthcare coverage for all workers, and although it was recommended by commission, many states were not mandated to follow this proposal, and thus the situation became circumstantial from state
to state. Since then, budget cuts made back in 2004 to the Department of Labor only increased the overall pressure for employees to work through sickness and injury (Saxton, Stuesse, 2017). For a migrant farm worker who doesn’t qualify for any of the aforementioned workplace regulations, their healthcare needs get left behind entirely. As anthropologists, this means that our methods of research must accelerate toward re-evaluating and scrutinizing our nation’s current workers’ compensation system as well as private insurance companies (Saxton, Stuesse, 2017).

**Maine Mobile Health**

The Maine Mobile Health Program, established in 1991, is currently the only existing farmworker health organization in Maine. Formerly known as Maine Migrant Health, they changed their name with the acknowledgment that not all farm workers receiving this healthcare are migrants, (e.g, several are Native Americans born and raised in Maine). It is estimated that roughly 1,500 migrant workers receive healthcare from them yearly. Maine Mobile Health came to be out of response to the rush of migrants who were rapidly coming up off of the East Coast Migrant Stream to settle and work. Their work is crucial, as it responds to the key issue of making healthcare more accessible in even that remotest areas where migrants will typically work. They offer mobile medical and nursing care to patients, meaning they travel via van, which makes it easy to reach most places where farmers may need assistance. This program also has over 50 voucher contract sites, giving transportation, language interpretation and care coordinating services that allow individuals to be brought to a nearby community healthcare provider. Maine Mobile Health travels throughout various agricultural sites
such as farms within the blueberry, apple, egg, Christmas tree and wreath, tree planting and broccoli industries. Maine Mobile Health also provides educational resources that help to teach farmers about safety when using pesticides, the dangers of hypertension and mental health issues such as depression. These staff members can also speak in both Spanish and Creole in order to better communicate with and assist farm workers. This program is vital for migrant farm workers, and being the only migrant farm worker healthcare organization, their work is more arduous than ever, yet their stance on helping migrant farm workers comes from a place of true commitment. In the information page of their website, they address the very real issues that are faced by this particular group, stating,

While MSFWs make an overwhelming contribution to our lives and health through the work of harvesting our fruits and vegetables (80% of which is done by hand in this country), they remain a critically vulnerable community. Unfortunately, we have come to take for granted the low-cost, high-quality produce available in our local grocery stores and do not consider the individuals or families that plant, nurture, and harvest our produce (Maine Mobile Health, Who We Help, Accessed 29 March 2019).

Mano en Mano, and Other Similar Organizations

While Maine Mobile Health is currently the only healthcare program dedicated to serving migrant farm workers, there are other organizations who aim to help these people in other
ways. Mano en Mano, located in Milbridge, Maine, is an organization that was established at the same time as Maine Mobile Health in response to the rapid movement of migrants coming to Maine and choosing to settle. In wanting to respond to the needs of Milbridge’s newest community members, the town’s public library, town office, as well as schools volunteered to offer educational resources, basic needs, and community potlucks. Mano en Mano is strategic and organized in ensuring that every year, the needs of this particular community are met by making Milbridge and greater Washington county a space that is welcoming. They do so by collaborating with Maine Mobile Health to ensure healthcare access for all post and current farm workers, increase affordable housing and provide better language services, just to name a few. Mano en Mano is also well known for their Blueberry Harvest School, which is a summer school designed for migrant children ages 3 - 13 who might be missing school hours back in their home states. The program is eligible only for children living in Washington county, and was made possible by Title I, Part C of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and the Maine Department of Education’s Maine Migrant Education Program (Maine MEP).

A similar organization that focuses primarily on providing educational services to migrants in Maine, The Maine Migrant Education Program, provided under the Maine Department of Education, allows for children of seasonal farm workers to keep up with their schooling despite being relocated. Requirements for a child to be entitled to these services are that they must be under 21 and have moved from their homes within the last 36 months due to economic necessity either with or as a worker in temporary or seasonal employment in either the fields of agriculture or fishing. This child can also not have
already obtained a high school diploma or a GED in order to qualify for this program.
The Maine Migrant Education Program provides a number of in-school resources including after school tutoring, preschool and daycare services, transportation, as well as referrals to other outside support agencies. They also offer out-of-school advocacy services to help qualified students who chose to work instead of attending school by offering information and support on ways in which they can achieve their educational goals.
As part of my research while doing this project, and as a way of narrowing down my research on such a broad topic, I contacted Mano en Mano and asked for their input on some of the key issues the migrant farmer population of Maine face. Mano en Mano came to be the best ongoing resource for this project because of their access to information about the community I wanted to understand more about, and the services they provide for them. The following pages will include an in-depth analysis of their most recent community survey published in 2016, as well as suggestions for their next community survey, which will be taking place during the coming spring/summer months. This survey was conducted in collaboration with Colby College, and is open to the public for free access. You can find the final report that I will be writing about on Colby College’s website (see “References”).

Purpose of Community Survey

The purpose of the community survey is to gauge an idea of how Mano en Mano can improve on providing for the migrant community they serve. One of the ways they accomplish this is by organizing a series of typically 50 or more interviews with people of the area to gain insight on any of the challenges they may still face despite accessibility to Mano en Mano’s services. The community survey is done to ensure that Mano en Mano is moving and progressing in a way that coincides with the growth and improvement of the migrant community. While I had originally submitted an IRB proposal to take part in this year’s community survey, the trajectory of the survey looked as though more planning would be needed before the interview process could begin, which would go beyond the timeline I had allowed for my thesis. So, instead, I chose to
do a literary-based review of Mano en Mano’s final report of the 2016 community survey, which would not require an approved IRB proposal, but still allow me to write about the data and final results from the published report. Christina Ocampo is the project leader of this year’s community survey, who I was able to speak with about her work for Mano en Mano on several occasions. From our phone conferences, I was informed that the goals for every community survey conducted are as follows: to include more people into meetings which discuss the purpose of the survey, and inform people about Mano en Mano, more community outreach, and better identification of people that might express interest in representing/joining Mano en Mano so that they may share their stories. For this upcoming survey, Mano en Mano is tentatively looking at completing 75 home visits, which with 2 staff dedicating one hour to each home visit, would result in a need for 150 hours for interview sessions during home visits. They will also be compensating participants for the upcoming survey with a $25 grocery card per house visit, meaning a total of $1,875 will need to be saved to complete participant compensation. When planning this project, it has been noted that there are questions they need to ask themselves before moving forward such as, “What is it we are promising as an outcome of this survey?”, “Will these interviews give interviewees ownership over the questions we ask?”, and “Will this research allow for and encourage migrant families to speak for themselves?”
Mano en Mano’s most previous community survey was conducted in 2016, titled “From Sojourner to Settler - A Community Needs Assessment and Economic Impact Analysis Of the Im/migrant Population In and Around Milbridge, Maine. The interviewees in this survey were prefaced with a brief introduction that outlined the intention of the survey, which were to assess the needs the immigrant population in the area, and to understand the ways in which migrant farm workers were contributing to the economy within this particular region of Maine. It was also specified that answers during interviews were kept confidential, and that the interviewee may choose not respond to a question or end the interview all together upon their request. All interviewees were compensated with a $20 gift card to Hannaford’s grocery store.

Of numerous questions that were asked during the interview process in regard to living in Maine, financial income, and personal preferences, I found the following results to be the most noteworthy:

When asked what the interviewee’s level of education was, 13% of the participants over the age of 18 reported to be college or university graduates, while 45% had no high school diploma (Figure 4). 80% of theses respondents reported to be Latino or Hispanic, while 18% identified as having two or more racial ethnicities and 1% reported as white/caucasian (Figure 5). In this survey, 76 households were willing to share their annual income. The results concluded that 39% of participants made $15,000 - $24,999 per year, while 33% made $25,000 - $49,000 per year, 13% made $50,000 - $74,999 per year, 3% made $150,000 - $199,999 per year, and 12% made less than
$15,000 annually (Figure 6). The average household size for these families were 2.39. Families of two earning less than $16,020 and families of three earning less than $20,160 per year are considered to be impoverished according to the 2016 Poverty Guidelines for the 48 States.

44% of these participants were employed on blueberry barrens for raking, while 28% worked as seafood harvesters, followed by another 28% as blueberry processors, 23% in crop harvesting/field work, 19% working in the seafood industry, 18% in forestry, 12% in mechanized blueberry harvesting, and 6% in other crop processing (Figure 7). With these results, it’s clear to see that agriculture appears to be the main source of migrant employment, however when asked what the biggest challenge would be for starting their own business, the most common response, at 69% of responses, was lack of money. For healthcare and insurance, 45% of participants reported to receive government provided insurance such as Mainecare, Medicaid, or CHIP. 33% were given employer provided insurance, 17% didn’t have insurance, 9% purchased insurance through the Maine Insurance Marketplace, 1% purchased through an H2B insurance requirement and 12% relied on vouchers Maine Mobile Health. Lastly, when asked what would improve life in your community, 27% responded to having a community center, and another 18% said having more job opportunities (Figure 8).

With these results, Mano en Mano can analyze this data to further strategize the ways in which they can improve their services. This might mean aiding people in getting more health insurance coverage for those who reported to have had none, creating more job opportunities to help minimize poverty levels, using Mano en Mano to build a better sense of community with a community center, and providing more outreach programs.
that encourage community members to continue on with educating themselves. By analyzing these community surveys conducted every three years, they know what they need to be working toward in the coming years. This project presents itself as a way of checking in and making sure Mano en Mano has been doing that, and if not, making changes along the way that better suit the people the organization serves. I would have liked to have been able to share the results of the finalized report for this upcoming year’s survey to analyze the rates at which Mano en Mano has improved on meeting the goals set forth by the last survey, however more time and research put into structuring the interview process for this next one will be needed before that can happen.
DISCUSSION

In attempting to research what it is that migrant farm workers face for challenges while working in Maine, I found that there are several factors that come into play. One is context: was this person already a legal U.S citizen? That makes healthcare coverage easier to receive, and causes for less fear of deportation, and in turn, reduces the need to migrate. For many migrant workers, they are protected to work in the U.S under the H2 - A policy, however this typically means cheaper labor for a private employer, which can often keep a migrant farm worker from seeking healthcare for numerous health issues that go unreported, or reporting maltreatment in the work place for fear of losing a job, or worse, becoming deported. This cycle tends to trap a migrant farm worker to their work. With that being said however, I believe the solution to this problem, one that accounts for poverty, healthcare and education, is in Cheryl K. Seymour’s idea of using structural differentials to take on an issue with this great a magnitude.

By understanding the economic, environmental and political factors that keep a migrant farm worker tied their job, we can create solutions, (e.g, the two - handled blueberry rake), that help keep the farm worker healthy while still allowing them to continue working for the same employer. What I also came to find was that creating more of these solutions for an underserved community like migrant farm workers is going to require more funding for the expansion of both migrant healthcare facilitates and migrant community services, as well as more research. Some of the biggest challenges I faced while working on this thesis was not having enough to write about at certain times, especially on the health issues associated with migrant farm workers in Maine. This is an issue that goes beyond a state level, as there has yet to be a conclusive, national study
performed on the healthcare of migrant farm workers across the U.S, and while there have been some conducted at a state level, those numbers are far and few, and have the potential of producing unreliable data given the remote nature of the places these people work in, and the companies they work under. Through data analysis of scholarly reports done by the Maine Department of Labor, the National Center for Biotechnology Information and Mano en Mano, as well as several literary journals, I have concluded that ensuring better healthcare and educational services for migrant farm workers will grant a more prosperous future for not only them, but the state of Maine as well. Maine’s migrant farm working population are who are putting our food in our grocery stores, and the work it takes to do that is painstaking. If we were to allocate more funding toward establishing a combination of more migrant healthcare and educational organizations, like Maine Mobile Health and Mano en Mano, then we would have healthier, happier farm workers, which could perhaps mean a better rate of production for Maine’s agricultural industries. It is for this reason that I believe that it isn’t only necessary to look after the health and education of Maine’s migrant farm working community, but also within our best interest toward our economy. By supporting these farm workers through better access to healthcare and education, we give them reasons to continue coming back to Maine that go beyond money. In doing this, we could support the longevity of our long sought after agro - industrial success.
FIGURES

Maine Department of Labor

Figure 1 - Median Age

Figure 2 - Country of Origin
(MDOL: Migrant Worker Survey, 2015).
NCBI: Occupational Injury and Treatment Patterns of Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers

Figure 3 - Treatment Locations

![Table: Observed proportions of farmworker occupational injuries treated at various locations (MHCs, ERs, other, and no treatment) as ascertained by survey](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Treatment Location</th>
<th>Maine</th>
<th>New York*</th>
<th>Combined</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MHC</td>
<td>17 (53.1%)</td>
<td>13 (54.2%)</td>
<td>30 (53.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ER</td>
<td>3 (9.4%)</td>
<td>5 (20.8%)</td>
<td>8 (14.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6 (18.8%)</td>
<td>3 (12.5%)</td>
<td>9 (16.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No treatment</td>
<td>6 (18.8%)</td>
<td>3 (12.5%)</td>
<td>9 (16.1%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*percentages differ slightly from Earle-Richardson et al., 2008, due to reclassification of one worker from “other” category to “ER”

(Brower, 2009)

Mano en Mano: “From Sojourner to Settler”

Figure 4 - Educational Attainment in Adults
Figure 5 - Racial Identity

Figure 6 - Annual Household Income
Figure 7 - Types of Work

![Bar chart showing breakdown of types of farm, fish, or forestry work done.]

Figure 8 - Economic Challenges

(“From Sojourner to Settler”, Colby College, 2017)
REFERENCES


“Migrant Workers”, (n.d), http://www.uniquemainefarms.com/uniquemainefarms.com/Migrant_Workers.html


AUTHOR’S BIOGRAPHY

Olivia Ruhlin is a fourth year Anthropology student with a Spanish minor at the University of Maine, Orono. She enjoys music, reading, the outdoors, being around animals, and above all, traveling. She chose to study cultural anthropology for her love of learning, particularly about different cultures. Along with being a dedicated student, she is also a fierce human rights activist. As part of her student activism, she has recently taken on the position as president of the Maine Peace Action Committee, and has also spent three years being actively involved with the UMaine Feminist Collective.

During the spring of 2018, Olivia studied abroad in Costa Rica, where she lived with a host family for four months and took classes at La Universidad Nacional in Heredia. While studying abroad, her passion for Spanish and Latin American culture deepened, and thus motivated her to pursue a career that might allow her to work with immigrants one day. She has thoroughly enjoyed her time at the University of Maine and looks forward to what lies ahead of her.