

Farmworkers' Vital Contribution to North Carolina's Economy



Agriculture serves as the economic backbone for North Carolina, and farmworkers' hand labor is needed to produce crops that bring in billions of dollars to the state's economy each year. Despite this fact, farmworkers remain one of the state's most economically disadvantaged and unprotected group of laborers.

Farmworkers are critical to North Carolina's agriculture:

Agriculture is North Carolina's leading industry, including food, fiber, and forestry, bringing in \$59 billion and constituting 22% of the state's income.¹

North Carolina has a diverse agricultural economy, with 56,000 farmers growing over 80 different crops.¹

Eighty-five percent of fruits and vegetables produced in the United States, including those in North Carolina, are harvested by hand.²

Over 150,000 farmworkers and their dependents labor each year in North Carolina in crops including tobacco, greenhouse and nursery, Christmas trees, vegetables and fruits.^{1,3} Together these crops bring in more than \$1.8 billion in sales to North Carolina's economy.¹

Each farmworker's labor contributes over \$12,000 in profits to North Carolina's economy annually.³

With each agricultural season, farmworkers' presence increases the overall economy in the regions in which they work and boosts the number of jobs available to local residents.²

Farmworkers face low wages and few protections:

Poverty: Farmworkers' average annual income is \$11,000,⁵ making them the second lowest paid workforce in the nation.⁶ Farmworkers living in East Coast states such as North Carolina earn about 35% less than this national average.⁷

Decreased Wages: Though farmworker wages have increased slightly over the last decade, after adjustment for inflation they have actually decreased by 5%.²

Food Insecurity: According to a recent study, nearly five out of ten farmworker households in North Carolina cannot afford enough food for their families.⁸

Hazardous Work: Agriculture is consistently ranked one of the three most dangerous occupations in the United States. Despite this, farmworkers are not protected by the same safety laws that protect workers in other industries. Falls, heat stress, dehydration, and pesticide poisoning are frequent occupational health concerns experienced by farmworkers.²

Child Labor: Labor laws allow children as young as twelve years old to work in agriculture in North Carolina with their parent's consent.⁹ However, children of all ages can be found working in the fields.²

Limited Workers' Compensation: In North Carolina most growers are exempt from laws requiring Workers' Compensation for farmworkers who are injured on the job.¹⁰

Few Workers' Rights: There is no protection under North Carolina or federal law for farmworkers to organize a union, work overtime, take sick leave, or for those who are laid off from their jobs.²

Where does your food dollar go?

71¢ = Corporate Food Processor
23¢ = Farmer
6¢ = Farmworker¹¹



“These workers are doing work that American people will not do. We depend on farmworkers, and we can't be in business without them.”

Sampson County Farmer, North Carolina¹²

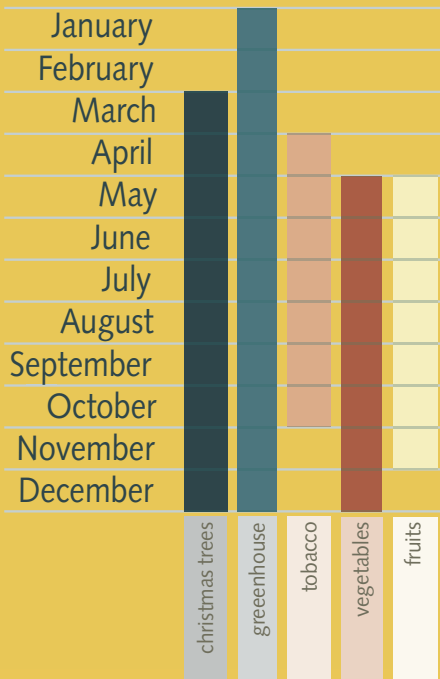


Hand-Harvested Agriculture in North Carolina

This page highlights recent statistics about the state's major hand-harvested agricultural crops, seasons, number of workers during peak harvest, and pay rates.^{1,13}

Farmworkers are typically paid hourly or by the bucket (5/8 bushel) of fruit or vegetable that they pick.

NC Agricultural Seasons



Greenhouse/Nursery: \$832 million

NC ranks 4th in US production
13,400 workers
\$6.00/hour

Tobacco: \$620 million

NC ranks 1st in US production
32,000 workers
\$7.00/hour

Vegetables: \$168 million

NC ranks 1st in US production of sweet potatoes
22,500 workers
PIECE & HOURLY RATE
sweet potatoes: 35¢/bucket
peppers: 35¢/bucket
pickle cucumbers: 70¢/bucket
cabbage: \$6.00/hour
tomatoes: \$6.00/hour

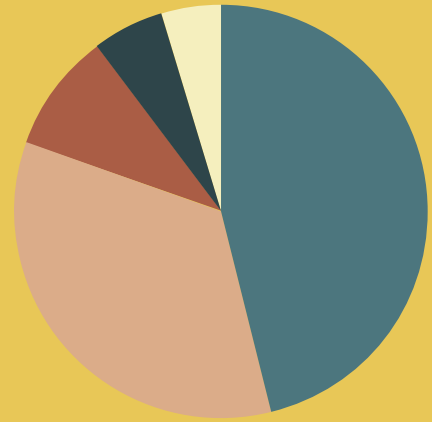
Christmas trees: \$101 million

NC ranks 2nd in US production
3,000–7,000 workers depending on time of year
\$7.00/hour

Fruits: \$84 million

NC ranks 4th in US production of blueberries & strawberries
7,250 workers
PIECE & HOURLY RATE
blueberries: 42¢/pint
apples: 50¢/bushel
strawberries: \$6.00/hour
peaches: \$6.00/hour

Sales by Crop



- Greenhouse/Nursery: \$832 million
- Tobacco: \$620 million
- Vegetables: \$168 million
- Christmas trees: \$101 million
- Fruits: \$84 million
- Total: \$1.8 billion**

Get Involved!

Visit www.ncfarmworkers.org to learn more and to take action in support of farmworkers.

The Farmworker Institute is a project of the NC Council of Churches' Farmworker Ministry Committee, whose members include the Farm Labor Organizing Committee, Farmworker Unit of Legal Aid of North Carolina, National Farm Worker Ministry, North Carolina Farmworker Health Program, Student Action with Farmworkers, and Triangle Friends of the United Farm Workers.

Did you know that in North Carolina, a farmworker needs to pick and haul 125 buckets of sweet potatoes (two tons) to make \$50?

1 NC Dept. of Ag. and Consumer Services, 2004; 2 National Center for Farmworker Health; 3 Larson A., Farmworker Enumeration Study, 2000; 4 Sutter, S. NC State University, 1988; 5 US Dept. of Labor, National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS), 2005; 6 Runyan, J. USDA, 2001; 7 Ward, L. Analysis of NAWS, 2003; 8 Quandt, S. et al, Public Health Reports, 2006; 9 Fair Labor Standards Act; 10 NC General Statute; 11 Ag. Council of America, and Lilly, P. NC State University, n.d.; 12 WRAL, 2005; 13 US Dept. of Labor, Prevailing Wage Survey, 2002; 14 Rothenberg D., 1998. Full citations available at www.ncfarmworkers.org.