

SPECIAL NEEDS FARMWORKERS

Farmworkers are traditionally defined as persons whose primary incomes are earned through permanent or seasonal agricultural labor. Permanent farm laborers work in the fields, processing plants, or support activities on a generally year-round basis. When workload increases during harvest periods, the labor force is supplemented by seasonal workers, often supplied by a labor contractor. For some crops, farms may hire migrant workers, defined as those whose travel prevents them from returning to their primary residence every evening.

Agricultural employment accounted for an annual average of approximately 6,000 jobs or 7 percent of Model County's job base in 1997, according to the State Employment Development Department (EDD). In terms of total harvested acres annually, the agricultural business in Model County produces a significant crop of vegetables, valued in excess of \$300 million harvested annually.

County Farmworker Data Figures

Estimating the size of the agricultural labor force is problematic as farmworkers are historically undercounted by the census and other data sources. For instance, the government agencies that track farm labor do not consistently define farm labor (e.g., field laborers versus workers in processing plants), length of employment (e.g., permanent or seasonal), or place of work (e.g., the location of the business or field).

Farmworkers are typically categorized into three groups: 1) permanent, 2) seasonal and, 3) migrant. Permanent farmworkers are typically employed year round by the same employer. A seasonal farmworker works on average less than 150 days per year and earns at least half of his/her earned income from farmwork. Migrant farmworkers are seasonal farmworkers who have to travel to do the farmwork so that he/she is unable to return to his/her permanent residence within the same day.

Currently there are 5,229 permanent, seasonal and migrant farmworkers working on 678 farms located within Model County. The majority of farms (75 percent) employ less than 10 employees – accounting for 32 percent of the farmworker population. Large farm operators account for only 24 percent of the farms in Model County but employ more than 67 percent of all farmworkers.

	Farmworkers	Farms
Farm Operations with less than 10 Employees		
Permanent	858	222
Seasonal (e.g., less than 150 days)	854	291
Total	1,712	513
Farm Operations with 10 or more Employees		
Permanent	1987	86
Seasonal (e.g., less than 150 days)	1530	79
Total	3,517	165

Source: USDA 2002 Census of Farmworkers, USDA

The numbers of farms and farmworkers in Model County have decreased only slightly during the last 10 years. The number of farms has decreased by 13 percent while the number of employed farmworkers has decreased only 5 percent. This is due, in part, to the shifting ownership of many locally run, family farms to larger, corporate owned farms.

	2002	1997	1992
Hired farm labor (farms)	678	690	779
Hired farm labor (workers)	5229	5174	5489

Source: USDA 2002 Census of Farmworkers, USDA

While the data indicates 5,229 farmworkers working in the Model County, it is estimated that another 4,260 non-farmworker individuals live in farmworker households. While most migrant workers are single males, many of whom are married and migrate alone to support their families who live at home, a small percentage of migrant families include more than one employed member, traveling together. Seasonal workers make up the largest percentage – comprising 66 percent of all farmworkers and account for 88 percent of non-farmworker household members. While county figures are not available, statewide estimates indicate that 60-70 percent of the non-farmworker population in both seasonal and migrant farmworker households is between the ages of 1-13 years. This indicates a need not only for migrant worker housing which is commonly dormitory style in nature, but also single-family and multifamily units that are affordable and located within close proximity to work-sites.

Note: The data above was taken from a variety of sources and therefore the numbers represented are slightly different and are provided to estimate needs.

Identification of Needs

Farmworkers are generally considered to have special housing needs because of their limited income and the often unstable nature of their employment (i.e., having to move throughout the year from one harvest to the next). While no local surveys are available which document the specific housing needs of farm labor in Model County, Statewide surveys provide some insight into the demographic characteristics and housing needs of farmworkers. Among the major findings are:

- **Limited Income:** Farmworkers typically fall within extremely low-incomes groups. According to the Rural Community Assistance Corporation, three-fourths of California's farmworkers earned less than \$10,000 a year in 2000. Only one out of seven earned more than \$12,500 annually.
- **Overcrowding:** Because of their very low incomes, farmworkers have limited housing choices and often forced to double up to afford rents. No local surveys have been taken of farmworker housing, but a statewide survey indicates that overcrowding is prevalent and a significant housing problem exists among farmworkers (California Institute for Rural Studies, 1997).

- **Substandard Housing Conditions:** Many farmworkers live in overcrowded conditions and occupy substandard housing, including in formal shacks, illegal garage units, and other structures generally unsuitable for occupancy (California Institute for Rural Studies, 1997).

Given the importance of agriculture and its labor force, the provision of adequate farmworker housing is a critical issue for Model County as many of these workers are believed to be living in poor housing conditions and face the problems of overpayment and/or overcrowding. Census 2000 figures indicate 35 percent households in Model County live in overcrowded conditions, 28 percent of which are lower-income. In addition, 42 percent households pay more than 30 percent of their income on housing costs – representing nearly 72 percent of the County’s extremely low-, very low- and low-income households. While it cannot be ascertained what percentage of these households work in the County’s agricultural industry, it is an insight into the housing problems faced by the County’s farmworkers.

Existing Resources for Farmworkers

Historically, many migrant agricultural workers resided in farm labor camps throughout the County. However, similar to areas throughout the State, many farm operators have shifted away from hiring their own workers, and instead use farm labor contractors to provide needed agricultural labor, particularly for migrant or seasonal labor. The supply of farmworker housing remains inadequate, largely because area growers only offer limited housing facilities and supportive services to employees. Based on discussions with local community members, the number of units provided by privately held companies has declined in recent years.

The farm operators are therefore not directly involved with employing their workforce, and have also removed themselves from providing housing for the workers. This trend is borne out of a significant decline in privately-owned farm labor camps in the Model County, decreasing from 33 camps in 1986 to 20 camps in 1993 and 9 camps in 2002. The table below identifies the remaining 9 camps, 4 of which are year round and 5 which are seasonal.

Privately-Owned Farm Employee Housing Facilities - 2002		
Facility Name	Number of Employees	Year Round (Y) Seasonal (S)
Bonanza Farms	16	Y
Western Farms	95	Y
ABC Farms	44	Y
Smithson Ranch	160	Y
Las Manzanitas	25	S
Owl Creek	38	S
Big River Ranch	142	S
Bonita Valley	27	S
Orchard Vista Family Farms	80	S

In addition to privately-owned farm employee housing facilities, Model County Housing Authority operates and owns farmworker housing throughout the County. Currently, all of these publicly-owned farmworker housing centers are currently running at full capacity and have no further room for migrant families or individuals. The Housing Authority operates both year round and seasonal housing. These facilities are outlined in the table below:

Publicly-Owned Farmworker Housing		
Facility Name	Location	Number of Units
Serna Place	Town A	55
Sol Tierra	Town A	24
Chavez Court	Town B	15
Cherry Lane	Unincorporated County	30
Antelope Park Apts	Unincorporated County	85
Willow Creek Apts	Town B	120

Identified Farmworker Housing Needs

Permanent Workers		Seasonal Workers	
Total Permanent Farmworkers	Current Inventory of Units Available	Total Seasonal Farmworkers	Current Inventory of Units Available
2845	644	2385	312

Zoning for Farmworker Housing and Programs Related to the Needs of Farmworkers

Housing for migrant and seasonal/short-term farmworkers are an urgent need in the County given the large amount of agricultural activity. Housing for farmworkers is divided into two categories in the zoning ordinance: labor camps and farm-related group care facilities. Farm labor camps – defined as living quarters for no more than 12 workers and their families – are permitted by right in the Model County’s three agricultural zones. Farm-related group care facilities - defined as living quarters for more than 12 workers - are permitted only in the A-G zone and is subject to an administrative review to ensure compliance with zoning standards. As the majority of land in the County is zoned for agricultural use, sites available for agriculture worker housing is limited mainly by the interest in the development of farmworker units by private and non-profit developers.

For those agricultural workers in the County who are full-time residents, housing needs are best met through the provision of permanent affordable housing. The County is actively involved in the provision of permanent housing suitable for farmworkers, and has over 500 affordable rental units and 350 ownership units assisted through Rural

Development as well as several self-help housing developments targeted to farmworkers. The County has established the provision of larger units (3+ bedrooms) as a high priority to address the needs of farmworker families and continues to provide funding support for affordable projects for large families. Where possible these units should be located in town and near services.

In addition to expanding the stock of housing permanently available and affordable to farmworkers, it is important to retain the existing stock of affordable housing that has been financed by federal and State sources. The USDA Section 515 rental housing program, while not specifically targeted to farmworkers, provides low cost housing in rural areas including many farmworker households. More than 17,000 units of Section 515 housing in California alone are at-risk of conversion because the property owners can prepay their mortgage and move to market rents. A loss of any of these units would further worsen the housing crisis for farmworkers. The County will continue to monitor the status of these units and take all necessary steps to ensure that a project remains in or is transferred to an organization capable of maintaining affordability restrictions for the life of the project.

The housing element also establishes programs to facilitate the provision of additional affordable housing for migrant and seasonal farmworkers to address the needs of this group including fee waivers for and reduced development standards for farmworker housing developed in the agricultural zones.

In 1995 the County facilitated the replacement of over 80 run-down plywood shacks in a former farm labor camp with 128 new three-bedroom homes for farmworkers and their families. The City waived selected fees and granted reduced parking standards and waived the underground utilities requirement. Most of the units were made available for sale to farmworker households at very affordable prices while 50 units were maintained by the County Housing Authority as affordable rental units.

The Model County will also increase its educational outreach efforts on fair housing issues related to frequent housing discrimination faced by farmworkers due to their ethnicity and type of employment, landlord/tenant issues and the Employee Housing Act related to farm laborers, farm labor contractors and agricultural employers.