

Experiences of Food Security among Latinx Food System Workers in Oregon



Stephanie Grutzmacher
Assistant Professor, Global Health, Nutrition



Oregon State University
College of Public Health
and Human Sciences

FOOD SECURITY AMONG LATINX FOOD SYSTEM WORKERS

- A disproportionate number of Latinx households (18% vs. 11.8% nationally) are food insecure¹, and the prevalence is likely higher for undocumented Latinx immigrants²
- Cumulative structural factors may create a unique experience of food insecurity for Latinx, undocumented immigrant, migrant, and food system worker individuals³

¹Coleman-Jensen, Gregory, & Rabbitt, 2018

²Hadley et al., 2008; Hill et al., 2011

³Nord, Andrews, & Carlson, 2009; Hadley et al., 2008; Hill et al., 2011; Munger et al., 2015; Remley et al., 2010; Davis, Munger, & Grutzmacher, 2016

HEALTH CHALLENGES AMONG LATINX FOOD SYSTEM WORKERS

- Workplace injury, illness, and fatality⁴
- Lack of health insurance
- Social isolation
- Psychosocial consequences of working among abundant food
- Depression, behavioral health challenges due to low job control, high strain⁵

⁴Dogan & Demirci, 2012; Arcury et al., 2015; Calvert et al., 2015; Mora et al., 2016; Neyra et al., 2014; BLS, 2015

⁵Grzywacz et al., 2014; Tribble et al., 2016; Pulgar et al., 2016; Roblyer et al., 2016

UNIQUE VULNERABILITIES

- Documentation status
- Unfamiliar food environments
- Formal safety net exclusion (e.g., SNAP)
- Job/economic insecurity, low wages, piece-rate systems
- Exclusion from labor protections
- Social networks may be comprised of vulnerable individuals



UNIQUE STRENGTHS AND ASSETS

- Relatively good health upon U.S. arrival
- Strong social and family ties
- Interdependence and cooperation
- Resilience to hardship
- Religious involvement⁶
- Access to food at work?



⁶ Ai, Carretta, & Aisenberg, 2017

PREVIOUS FI STUDY – NON-FSW⁷

- **Characterization of food insecurity**
 - Food shortages, unsuitable quality, lack of choice
- **Vulnerabilities: Immigrant status**
 - Unfamiliar food environments
 - Responsibility of remittances
- **Vulnerabilities: Documentation status**
 - Employment
 - Government assistance
- **Community Assets**
 - Community resources
 - Proximity of culturally appropriate and desired foods



⁷Munger et al., 2015

STUDY METHODS

- In-depth interviews with 18 food system employees in Hood River
- Transcribed and translated into English
- Open coding process to identify themes⁸



⁸LaRossa, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1997

STUDY PARTICIPANTS

- 67% male
- All of Mexican origin
- Ages 30-73 (median=50)
- Arrived in U.S. between 1971-2005 (mean=29 years in U.S.)
- Worked in farms, orchards, vineyards, and fruit packing facilities
- Job functions included machine operators, pickers, salespeople, and supervisors



PARTICIPANTS' WORK

- Half worked 6-7 days per week
- 39% considered their jobs permanent
- 82% had worked for same company for > one year
- Most felt as though they were able to demand better working conditions without any reprisal
- 82% reported never feeling defenseless towards unfair treatment by supervisors



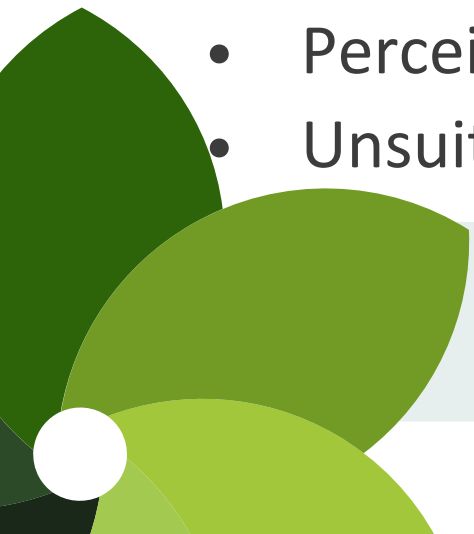
PARTICIPANTS' FOOD SECURITY

- 61% reported high food security; 39% reported low food security
- 55% had used a food pantry at some point
 - 17% used at least every month, 83% not currently using
- 22% had never used SNAP, WIC, or school meals



THREE THEMES

- **Perceptions of well-being**
 - Most knew others who struggled more, which enabled participants to assess their own circumstances as less difficult, serious, or deserving of resources
 - Many struggled more in the past than they do now
- **Individual and cultural hardiness and persistence**
 - Fatalismo – indicated both protective adaptation and resignation
- **Limited use of food safety net resources**
 - Perceived food assistance as finite, should be left to more vulnerable people
 - Unsuitability of foods





PERCEPTIONS OF WELL-BEING



"Well, ... I worry. I worry because when I was a child, where I grew up, life was harder than now. There were occasions that they would give us a little glass of milk and a bean taco with cheese. We ate it daily. And right now, my girl tells me, "Take me to buy something, I want to eat this," and I'll go and get it for her. In those times, no, we stayed there in a ranch in a mountain range. If we ate, we ate what my father was carrying. They went every eight days to the village. The stores were not close at all, they were far away. We had to walk for four hours to go to town."

72-year old married father, in U.S since 1980, works on farm



“Well ... there have been times that if we do not have ... let's say, money to buy food, but ... almost always ... we have had SOMETHING to eat.”

72-year old married father, in U.S since 1980, works on a farm



I: In the last twelve months, have you or another adult in your home ever reduced the amount of your food or stopped having breakfast, lunch, or dinner because you lacked money for food?

R: No, no, not that... Even if we only had beans, [we still had something].

56-year old married father, in U.S. since 1987, works on farm and in construction



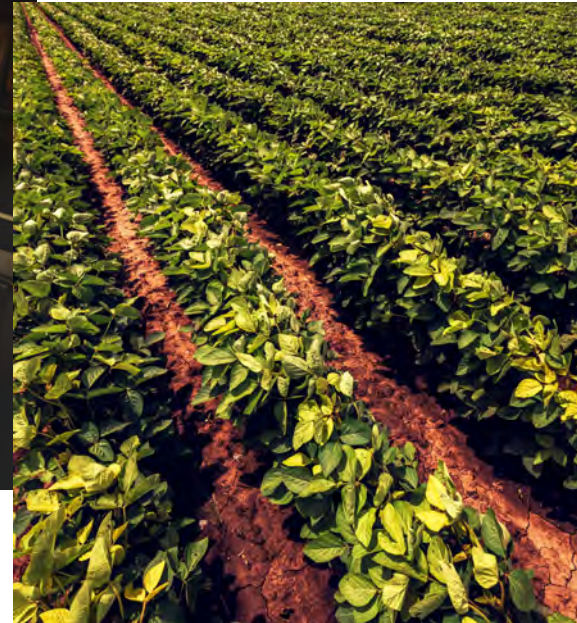


INDIVIDUAL AND CULTURAL HARDINESS AND PERSISTENCE



“ When you just get to the United States, everyone always suffers that. But now, time passes and you adapt to this place... and you come to the idea that you have to make an effort not to spend more to not suffer that [precariousness]... And to not bother other people because then you can go to ask for [food] stamps, right? But it is confidential.”

56-year old married father, in U.S. since 1987, works on farm and in construction



I: Here in Oregon, there have been a few incidents with ICE targeting undocumented or documented people... in the past few years. How do you think that these issues have affected the community?

R: I think that every individual has their own way of thinking. The way I see it is, if it's my turn, then there's nothing I can do. We will have to wait and see. But I try to see the big picture, otherwise you are not going to feel comfortable at work.

42-year old, married father of three, arrived in U.S. in 1997, works in food transportation



I: And what does it feel like to have to struggle to provide enough food for your family?

R: Well, I think it's fine. Because it's something that we all know. We have to work in order to eat. If you don't work – it's a normal thing.

45-year old married father, arrived in U.S. in 1989, works on a farm

“Sometimes, you get stressed because, you say, ‘I’m just working just to break even.’ And it does stress you out. You feel good, at the same time because, you know you’re struggling for your family, to take them ahead.”

30-year old unmarried father of one, arrived in U.S. in 2005, works on a





LIMITED USE OF FOOD SAFETY NET RESOURCES



"I do not like to bring something that I'm not going to eat. I leave it to people who do eat it. If I go and get canned food and if I'm not going to eat it, then why take it?"

73-year old married father, in U.S. since 1990, works on a farm



"I used to go [to the food pantry] a lot but it's been a while, a while. I went a lot of times, but I haven't been in 15 years. If I didn't like the food, I would give it to someone else who did like it."

56-year old married father, in U.S. since 1987, works on a farm and in construction



Well, we have a little [food]. People that need [the food pantry], yes [they should go].”

53-year old married father, in U.S. since 1974, works on a cattle ranch

If you are not going to eat them, then there are many people who actually need them...”

46-year old married father of three, in U.S. since 1988, works on a farm



R: "We did go [to the Christmas food distribution], and they gave us little things or they gave us food as well... and well, that food, we didn't eat it... My children would take them to school, because there's always a time of year when they ask for food at school [for food drives]. I don't know if it's for the same food banks or for other people that truly need it... If you had canned foods, if they could take them to school, [the school] would take them.

I: Ok, you don't like canned food?

R: No, so it's better if people who eat it and need it get it."

**46-year old married father of three,
in U.S. since 1988, works on a farm**



WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

- Fatalism and relative comparisons may both contribute to reports of food security and lack of safety net use
 - If others are more vulnerable, resources should be left for them
 - If my fate is to be food insecure, I will adapt and endure
- Safety net improvements are needed
 - What services will be perceived as relevant, quality, dignified, and effective?
 - What outreach messages are needed?

NEXT STEPS

- **Examine other food system workers**
 - Service sector, processing, distribution, etc.
- **Explore owner/operator and stakeholder perspectives**
- **Determine safety net adaptations**
 - Work with community partners and extension to identify opportunities



CONVERSATIONS

- What else do we need to know about food system worker experiences?
- In what specific ways can we help providers improve their services and resources?
- What specific policies should we advocate for?



APHA POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Cover all farm workers in OSHA and FLSA
- Enforce EPA, OSHA, and Department of Labor protections
- Address musculoskeletal injuries, zoonotic disease exposure, pesticide exposure,
- Include agricultural workers in wage laws, collective bargaining laws, and workers compensation protections



Acknowledgements: Mayra Crespo Bellido, Lauren Gwin, Lauren Kraemer, Deborah John, Ashley Munger, Anna Osborn, Briana Rockler

**THANK YOU.
QUESTIONS?**

