

VT Migrant Farmworker Solidarity Project

www.vtmfsp.org

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There are approximately 1200-1500 migrant workers that help sustain Vermont's struggling dairy farms. Without any available legal status and living in one of the whitest and most rural states in the country migrant dairy workers are subjected to aggressive racial profiling practices that convert many into virtual prisoners on the farm. Due to this isolation and marginalization workers struggle to access essential community resources and some experience human and workers' rights abuses. Furthermore, many workers are *forced* to migrate here because their agricultural communities are marginalized by U.S. sponsored trade policies such as NAFTA that have driven 2 million farmers out of business and into migration. Ironically, upon arriving to Vermont, many migrant farm workers find themselves on dairy farms who also struggle to stay afloat due to similar policies and processes underway that work to marginalize family farmers while enabling the corporate control of the dairy market.

While the federal government continues to fail to create humane and just immigration, food system, and health care policies we in Vermont have an opportunity and responsibility to build welcoming, inclusive, just and humane communities for everyone who lives and works here!

Facts about Vermont's migrant workers and Vermont dairy farms:

- Today just over 1,000 Vermont dairy farms exist
- Approximately 1/2 of Vermont's milk comes from the labor of undocumented workers (VT Agency of Agriculture)
- Vermont farmers who employ immigrant workers consistently state they would not survive without them (VT Dairy Farmers, VT Department of Agriculture)
- There is no available legal path for undocumented immigrants to work on Vermont on dairy farms
- Vermont's migrant farm-workers **do** pay taxes; not only federal and state income taxes but also social security taxes and sales taxes from which they will never receive any direct benefits.

(source for above: UVM Extension, VT Human Rights Commission)

- U.S. Trade Policies have increased migration. The North American Free Trade Agreement eliminated over 2 million Mexican corn farms as subsidized corn imported from the U.S. undersells the indigenous producers. Migration from Mexico to the U.S. has doubled since NAFTA.
- An H2A VISA program alone would not legalize workers currently living and working on Vermont dairy farms.
- The VT Attorney General recently released a recommended policy for Bias-Free Policing in Vermont that states: "To effectively serve all communities and to ensure trust and cooperation of all victims and witnesses, law enforcement officers, unless otherwise appropriate (*e.g.*, agencies' investigations of suspected human trafficking or investigations of hate-motivated crimes), should not ask about, or investigate the immigration status of crime victims or witnesses."

National myths and realities about immigration and immigrants:

Myth: Immigrants don't pay taxes and just milk the system

Reality:

Many studies have found that immigrants pay more in taxes than they receive in benefits. The National Research Council estimated in 1997 that "the average immigrant pays nearly \$1,800 more in taxes than he or she costs in benefits." Many recent state-level studies have also found that immigrants contribute more to the economy than they take out.

Between one-half to three-quarters of unauthorized immigrants pay federal and state income taxes, Social Security taxes, and Medicare taxes. All unauthorized immigrants pay sales taxes (when they buy anything at a store, for instance) and property taxes (even if they rent housing). And yet they receive no social security or medicare and many 'legal' immigrants must wait at least 5 years to do so.

According to a study in the *American Journal of Public Health*, immigrants do not impose a disproportionate financial burden on the U.S. health care system. The per capita total health care expenditures of immigrants are less than half those of U.S.-born persons, and immigrants are significantly less likely to use the emergency room than are citizens.

Myth: Undocumented workers should just get in line and come here legally

Reality:

There is no “line” for the vast majority of unauthorized immigrants: Accusations that an estimated 11.1 million unauthorized immigrants—about 5% of the U.S. workforce—should simply “get in line” miss the point: **There is no “line” and the “regular channels” do not include them.**

Myth: Americans don't support immigration reform:

Reality:

According to polls of likely 2010 general election voters conducted for America's Voice by Lake Research Partners and Benenson Strategy Group, 66% of all voters and 74% of Latino voters supported comprehensive immigration reform as opposed to enforcement-only measures. This included 62% of Republicans, 67% of Independents, and 69% of Democrats.

Myth: Immigrants are stealing jobs and ruining the economy.

Reality:

A 2010 report released by the Immigration Policy Center (IPC) and the Center for American Progress (CAP), *Raising the Floor for American Workers: The Economic Benefits of Comprehensive Immigration Reform*, finds that comprehensive immigration reform which includes a legalization program for unauthorized immigrants and enables a future flow of legal workers would result in a large economic benefit—a cumulative \$1.5 trillion in added U.S. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) over 10 years. In stark contrast, a deportation-only policy would result in a loss of \$2.6 trillion in GDP over 10 years.

A 2009 report by the libertarian Cato Institute came to startlingly similar conclusions. Cato found that legalization would boost the incomes of U.S. households by \$180 billion in 2019.

The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that in 2002, 1.6 million Hispanic-owned firms provided jobs to 1.5 million employees, had receipts of \$222 billion, and generated payroll of \$36.7 billion. The same year, 1.1 million Asian-owned firms provided jobs to 2.2 million employees, had receipts of \$326.4 billion, and generated payroll of \$56 billion.

According to the Selig Center for Economic Growth at the University of Georgia, the purchasing power of Latinos totaled \$978.4 billion in 2009 and is projected to reach \$1.3 trillion by 2014. The purchasing power of Asians totaled \$508.6 billion in 2009 and is projected to reach \$696.5 billion by 2014.

The annual budget of the U.S. Border Patrol stood at \$3 billion in Fiscal Year (FY) 2010—a nine-fold increase since FY 1992. The number of Border Patrol agents stationed along the southwest border grew to 17,000 in FY 2010—a nearly five-fold increase since FY 1992.

Source: GIVING FACTS A FIGHTING CHANCE: ANSWERS TO THE TOUGHEST IMMIGRATION QUESTIONS. IMMIGRATION POLICY CENTER. OCTOBER, 2010. www.immigrationpolicy.org.

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