COVID-19 Labor Availability

- H-2A Guest Worker Program
  - Consulates closed.
  - Mexican consulate interview waivers
    - Expanded interview waivers from 12 months applicability to 48 months
    - Mission Mexico issued 88.2 percent of all H-2A visas in FY2019
  - Lockdowns in other countries still presented problems.
    - South Africa, Peru, and Jamaica
Agriculture Labor and COVID-19

- Pandemic shutdowns came at critical time for agriculture.
- Q2 and Q3 are peak months for H-2A employment.
Labor Demand

Q3 data indicates that H-2A applications continued to increase, even during the pandemic.

Figure 1. H-2A Program Q3 Certified Positions and Percentage Increase from Previous Year

Source: DOL
Figure 3. H-2A Applications Processed “Timely”, FY 2016-2020

Certified Positions

Q1 | Q2 | Q3 | Q4

2016: 99% 99% 97% 98% 91% 90% 97% 97% 90% 86% 96% 98% 96% 92% 96%

Source: DOL
Essential Workers

- Food supply chain workers quickly deemed essential.
- CISA published Critical Infrastructure Workforce Guidance.
  - State governments could use CISA guidance as tool, but not required to adhere to it.
CDC COVID-19 Guidance and Checklist

• It is critical to keep agricultural workers healthy.

• Guidance provides a range of options.
  • Cohort
  • Infection prevention training
  • Social distancing
  • Screening and monitoring workers
  • Sanitation protocols
  • Cloth face coverings
  • Housing
COVID-19 Issues

• Complying with COVID guidance creates unaccounted for expenses.
• Some states have enforced mandatory COVID standards too.

• Advocacy:
  • PPE and vaccine prioritization
  • Housing
  • Testing availability and result timeliness
  • Cost offsets
Pandemic Shutdowns

- Shutdowns caused major disruptions in service industry.
  - Tourism
  - Hospitality
  - Restaurants
- Schools shut down too.
American Food Expenditures Pre-Pandemic

• Food purchases at restaurants and other similar establishments more prevalent than purchases for at-home consumption.
Pre-Pandemic Food Expenditures

Figure 1. Nominal Food At Home and Away From Home Expenditures, Includes Taxes and Tips

- Grocery Stores & Warehouse Clubs and Supercenters
- Other Food At Home
- Restaurants (Full- and Limited-Service)
- Other Food Away From Home

Source: USDA ERS, Farm Bureau Calculations
Why plow?

• Perishable.
• Specialty crops are costly to pick.
  • Average AEWR is $13.99/hour
• Sales structure varies between grocery store and service industry.
  • Packaging
  • Quantities
  • Quality
How have farmers adapted?

- Government resources:
- PPP, although H-2A wages not eligible for loan forgiveness
- Farmers to Families Food Box Program
- CFAP 1.0
  - Specific payment rates per product for specialty crops
- CFAP 2.0
  - Payment based on 2019 sales