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The Social Situation of Immigrant Farm Workers: A Comparative Study between Spain and the U.S.¹⁾

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Summary

In Spain and in the United States domestic farm laborers are not available in sufficient numbers during peak harvest seasons. Therefore, intensive farm production has a dependence on immigrant workers, mainly laborers who lack proper documentation to legally reside or work. Moreover increases in the labor supply, prompted by continued unauthorized entries and employment has adversely affected the wages and working conditions in the farming sector, speeding the exit of local workers from agriculture. As a result, immigrant farm workers suffer from labor irregularity, underemployment and social isolation.

This paper analyses comparatively the social situation of Mexican' farm workers employed in US agriculture and Moroccan workers engaged in the Spanish farming sector.

1. Introduction

Both in Spain and in the United States, in the first case during more than two decades and in the second for more than a century, there is a lack of local labor willing to accept salaries and working conditions offered by the farming sector. As a result, in both countries, specifically in the sector of fruits and vegetables, there is a growing demand of migrant labor to fulfill those activities that are not filled by home nationals.

Migrant farm workers figure among the poorest people living in the agricultural counties of the United States (Kim-Godwin and Bechtel [38, p. 272]) and Spain (Checa [12]). Migrant farm laborers live in remote areas; suffer from malnutrition (Quandt *et al.* [60, p. 573]), low pay (Alderete *et al.* [3, p. 609]), a high mobile lifestyle (Parra-Cardona *et al.* [55, p. 369 and 370], Pedreño [58]), difficult working conditions (García Sanz and Izcará Palacios [23]) and precarious living environments (Molina Herrera [53], Hansen and Donohoe [27]). Moreover, salaries are lower than in other economic activities (Hoggart and Mendoza [29, p. 549]) and work demands are tougher (Magaña

Hovey [41, p. 79]). As a result farming employs those immigrant workers whose qualifications (i.e.: are illegal workers and/or have poor language skills) prevent them from being employed in other sectors of the economy.

Furthermore, farming operates outside the formal labor market as it constitutes a refuge for illegal immigrants. Agriculture is more difficult to inspect and regulate than other activities as a result of the constant mobility of workers. As a consequence, farming is able to employ undocumented workers more easily than other activities. On the other hand, immigrant labor availability affects the ability of U.S. and Spanish producers to compete with low-cost producers abroad (Boucher *et al.* [7, p. 4]). Indeed, the employment of undocumented farm workers has been a key factor in the development of U.S. fruit, vegetable and horticultural production for more than a century (García Moreno [22, p. 106], Martín [43, p. 71], Verduzco Igartúa [71, p. 585]) and in the expansion of Spain's export agriculture during the last three decades (Molina Herrera [53], García Sanz and Izcará Palacios [23]).

In addition, agriculture's demand for immigrant labor is very great but also variable and is limited to certain seasons of the year (Thompson [66, p. 75]); as a result, farm laborers suffer from unemployment (U.S. Department of Labor [69, p. 24]). On the other hand, social isolation, a concept that can be understood as "the lack of contact or sustained interaction with individuals and institutions that represent mainstream society" (Wilson [71, p. 60]) has also been reported as one of the main causes of distress among immigrant farm workers (Kim-Godwin and Bechtel [38, p. 275], Alderete *et al.* [3, p. 609], Parra-Cardona *et al.* [55, p. 363], Chavez *et al.* [11, p. 1017]).

This paper analyses the social situation of Mexican workers employed in agriculture in the United States and Moroccan farm workers engaged in Spain's farming sector. The analysis is grounded in original research conducted by the authors in both Spain²⁾ and Mexico³⁾ which included in deep interviews with Mexican and Moroccan seasonal farm workers⁴⁾. Farm Workers Union activists also were interviewed in Spain and in the U.S.

2. Immigrant farm labor in Spain and in the United States

The presence of immigrant labor in the farming sector is a growing phenomenon in Spain and the United States. Migrants come principally from Morocco in the case of Spain (see Table 1), and from Mexico, in the case of the United States, where the rise in foreign-born workers is due primarily to an increase in the proportion of Mexican farm workers, from 53% of all farm workers in FY 1990-91 to 75% in FY 2001/2002 (see Table 2)⁵⁾. On

the other hand, migrant labor is composed mainly by young male workers (see Table 3).

Table 2 Foreign workers employed in agriculture in the United States (unit: percentage)

Ethnic group	1990/1991	1994/1995	1997/1998	2001/2002
Mexican origin	57	74	85	84
Born in Mexico	53	65	77	75
Mexican-American	4	9	8	9
Other ethnic groups	43	26	15	16
Foreign born	62(1988/89)	69	81	78
US born	38(1988/89)	31	19	22

Source: U.S. Department of Labor [68, p. 5 and 69, pp. 3 and 4])

Table 3 Age distribution of migrant farm workers (unit: percentage)

	14-19	20-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65 +
US crop workers (2001/2002)	11	20	30	20	12	6	0
Spanish immigrant farm workers (2005)	3	14	45	26	10	2	1

Source: U.S. Department of Labor [69, p. 10], Ministerio de Trabajo y Asuntos Sociales [51].

The migration of Mexican farm workers to the United States dates back from the late XIXth century (Bustamante [8, p. 341], Díez-Canedo Ruiz [19, p. 93], Alanís Enciso [2, p. 414]). Immigrants came principally from West Central rural areas of Mexico to work in California or Texas (Corona Vázquez [16], Verdusco Igartúa [70], González Quiroga [26], Marcelli and Cornelius [42]). In recent years emigration from the Pacific-south and Northeastern areas of Mexico has expanded and Northwestern and Southeastern regions of the United States have become an increasing place of destination for many farm workers (Fairchild and Simpson [21], Quandt *et al.* [60], Reyes [62, p. 244]).

In Spain the migration of Moroccan farm

Table 1 Foreign workers affiliated to the Special Agricultural Regime of the Social Security in Spain by country of origin (unit: persons)

Year	Morocco			Other countries			Total		
	Total	%	2001=100	Total	%	2001=100	Total	%	2001=100
2001	44,205	55	100	36,373	45	100	80,578	100	100
2002	52,715	48	119	56,265	52	155	108,980	100	135
2003	53,024	44	120	68,595	56	189	121,619	100	151
2004	49,729	43	112	64,923	57	178	114,652	100	142
2005	67,362	41	152	97,895	59	269	165,257	100	205

Source: Ministerio de Trabajo y Asuntos Sociales [47, 48, 49, 50 and 51]

workers commenced in the mid-seventies, when migrant farm workers were employed in Catalonia. During the eighties Moroccan workers were involved in fruit and vegetable picking activities along the Mediterranean coastline (Valencia, Murcia and eastern Andalusia). One decade later migrant workers were also engaged in the vineyards of the Rioja region and in Andalusia's olive sector (Giménez Romero [24], Izcará Palacios [30 and 31]). Nowadays migrant farm workers can be seen along agricultural counties all over Spain.

Until the mid-eighties, in the case of Mexican farm workers (Corona Vázquez [16], Verdusco Igartúa [71]), and the early nineties in the case of Moroccan migrants (Izcará Palacios [30 and 31]), this migratory phenomenon used to be a circular flow of able-bodied male workers (Massey [46, p. 211]). Most immigrants were unaccompanied men (Quandt et al. [60, p. 119]), who returned to their home country when the harvest season was over. However, the shift of U.S. and Spanish migratory policy in the mid-eighties eroded the return migration model (Durand [20, p. 28], Aragón and Chozas [4]). In a new environment of legal uncertainty and more stringent border enforcement migrant farm workers stay longer in the country of immigration resulting in higher unemployment (Reyes [62, p. 245], Cornelius [13, p. 668]).

Immigrant farm workers are poor, uneducated and come from areas of high levels of unemployment. However, they are not the poorest, as the most disadvantaged households lack the resources for international migration both in Mexico (Arizpe [6, p. 643], Quinn [61, p. 148]) and Morocco (Izcará Palacios and Andrade Rubio [35]). As Massey [46, p. 208] has noticed the poorest communities generally do not send out the most immigrants. Likewise, Castles [10, p. 272] has pointed out that emigration from the very poorest areas may be rare because people lack the economic, social and cultural capital to successfully find work in a new environment. In Mexico smugglers can charge more than \$ 2 thousand, and in Morocco between \$ 5

hundred and \$ 2.5 thousand (Arango and Martín [5, p. 267]); therefore, only the most advantaged of the poorest families can afford the cost of international migration. Accordingly, migrant farm workers have some access to farm land or other sources of capital (Díez-Canedo Ruiz [19, p. 68]). Neither are they the less educated as those more likely to migrate are the higher educated individuals from the lower educated households (Quinn [61, p. 147]).

Both in Spain and in the United States the immigrant farm labor supply has been abundant for decades (Martín [45, p. 1290]). Continued unauthorized entries and employment has led to surpluses of workers (Martín [45, p. 1284]). As a result, salaries and social conditions in the farming sector have been more precarious than in off-farm activities. Moreover, programs intended to regularize the farming labor market have failed. For example, in the U.S. during the "Bracero Program" (1942-1964) illegal immigration provided a pool of abundant cheap labor that employers could dismiss at any time (Verdusco Igartúa [70, p. 577]). Moreover, the 1987/88 Special Agricultural Worker Program (SAW), that intended to regularize illegal farm workers and to improve their social and labor conditions, had the opposite effect. This Program prompted a surplus of migrant workers who competed for scarce employment opportunities (Martín [43, p. 93]). In the case of Spain, from the mid-eighties a change in the migratory policy in order to legalize illegal workers also prompted a surplus of foreign labor in rural areas (Izcará Palacios [30 and 31]).

3. Looking for higher salaries: the reason to migrate

Neoclassical migration models (Harris and Todaro [28, p. 126]) have viewed migration as a response to differences in expected earnings—i.e., workers are expected to move to areas where wages are higher—.On the other hand, the new economics of migration literature has emphasize non-wage factors like: previous migration experience,

migrant networks (Delechat [17]), or relative deprivation (Stark and Yitzhaki [64], Quinn [61]).

From the analysis of Moroccan and Mexican farm workers' discourse it can be concluded that migration obeys to an asymmetrical salary relation in a context of vicinity –i.e.: a strong difference in salaries for realizing the same activity in adjacent spaces– (Durand [20, p. 23]). The decision to migrate is usually fostered by a precarious economic situation in the country of emigration (Izcara Palacios and Andrade Rubio [36], Izcara Palacios [33]). However, the main trigger of the migratory process is not the lack of employment opportunities at home; but the fact that the salaries are much lower than in the country of immigration. As a result, quantitative studies have shown that the U.S. wage variable has a positive and significant coefficient with respect to US migration (Quinn [61, p. 148]). On the other hand, social networks are very important, as they provide the information and connections that influence people's migration (Reyes [62, p. 254]). Consequently, households that send migrants have a tendency to repeat this migration pattern several times (Quinn [61, p. 151])⁶⁾.

Salaries in the farming sector are lower than those paid for off-farm activities. As it can be seen from table 4 in the U.S. salaries of farm workers are less than half of that earned by manufacturing workers. In the case of Spain wages in the tourism industry close to 90 per cent higher than in agriculture (Hoggart and Mendoza [29, p. 549]).

Moreover, migrant farm workers often are paid a lower hourly wage than the amount that was

agreed, inaccurate amounts in paychecks also are frequent (Magaña and Hovey [41, p. 81]). A farm worker interviewed in Caballeros (Mexico) in March 2007 commented that the employer⁷⁾ he was working for a few months ago did not pay him the hourly wage that was agreed before traveling to Georgia. He showed us his paychecks where he was paid 7 hours per day; however, he mentioned that normally he had to work 10 or more hours. On the other hand, he told us that he did not want to complain because the salary was very high for him and he did not want to upset his employer and jeopardize the opportunity to return the next season.

However, salaries in the country of immigration are much higher than those received by farm workers at home. For example, the salaries of farm workers in Baja California (Spain) are more than 80 per cent lower than the salaries received by underemployed farm workers in the U.S. (López Gamez and Ovalle Vaquera [39, p. 93]). Rural workers interviewed in Mexico referred constantly to the equivalence in economic terms of one hour work in the United States with one day work in Mexico, or the correspondence of one day work in the United States with one week of farm work in Mexico. As it was pointed out by one of the interviewees “*the job I got was in agriculture, but I did very well, I can not complain, the salary was good; indeed 10 times higher than here, in Mexico*”⁸⁾.

4. The problem of agricultural underemployment

Migration obeys to a surplus of labor force in the country of origin that has access to a labor market rejected by local workers in the country of immigration, principally in the farming sector. Therefore, both Moroccan and Mexican workers are employed principally in activities, like farming, characterized by labor shortages and a lack of competition for jobs (Hoggart and Mendoza [29, p. 549]). However, it is not an easy task for farm workers to find a job in the country of immigration. There is a surplus of labor force, principally undocumented workers, who compete for farm

Table 4 Salaries per hour in the United States (unit: US dollars)

Year	Agriculture	Manufacturing	Ratio of hourly farm wages to manufacturing wages
1950	0.85	1.6	0.53
1960	1.2	2.6	0.46
1990	5.23	10.01	0.52
1998	6.4	12.78	0.50

Source: U.S. Department of Labor [67 and 68, p. 26], Martin [44, p.1129].

employment. As a result, agricultural employers have access to a myriad of foreign workers who are eager to work under unfavorable labor conditions. As it was pointed out in one interview: “if you are willing to cross, leave your siblings and risk your life crossing the river, you are going to take any job”⁹⁾.

Therefore, undocumented farm workers can not count on being employed. Indeed, the difficulty in finding a job is one of the main fears of seasonal farm workers (Kim-Godwin and Bechtel [38, p. 274]). Once they have crossed the border the crucial necessity is to work in order to survive, and is much easier to find employment in agriculture than in other activities. As a result, the first job undocumented migrants normally find both in Spain (Hoggart and Mendoza [29, p. 547]) and in the U.S. (Fairchild and Simpson [21, p. 224]) is in agriculture. However, frequently the search for employment in the farming sector may last from one or several weeks to one or several months. The testimony of a 36 years old farm worker, interviewed in Villa de Casas (Tamaulipas), in October 2004, is illustrative of the difficulties that face illegal workers to find a job in the United States.

“Once I was there it took me approximately two months to find employment. Nobody recommended me (...) these two months that I was there I did not have any money. I could manage to survive because I had some relatives there (...) I con-

sider short the time it took me to find employment if I compare myself with other people. There, I knew people who lasted 5 or 6 months unemployed and nobody’s helped them”.

Likewise, one of the Moroccan migrant workers interviewed pointed out that when he arrived to Spain in 1996, with a friend, it took him 2 months to find a job. During this time he lived in a wrecked cottage in the woods, eating just almonds from the trees. Finally, he found a job in a small tomato farm¹⁰⁾. Also, we could interview other Moroccan farm worker in Almeria who said that it took him 8 months to find a job.

Unemployed migrant farm workers who have the support from family or friends have lower levels of distress. However, those who lack of social support systems are particularly vulnerable (Kim-Godwin and Bechtel [38, p. 276]). As it was pointed out by one of the interviewees: “*There, if you work you eat, if you do not work you do not eat; it is so simple like that. There, there are occasions when you do not work for a week, or during entire months. Then, the situation becomes difficult*”¹¹⁾.

On the other hand, agricultural jobs are seasonal. Farm workers have a mobile lifestyle. They migrate from one place to another to earn a living in agriculture (Martin [44]). They are constantly being uprooted and they have to face the instability

Table 5 U.S. farm workers’ time spent in labor over the year (unit: percentage)

Month	Farm employment		Off-farm employment		Unemployment		Living abroad	
	1994/95	1997	1994/95	1997	1994/95	1997	1994/95	1997
January	28	36	14	9	28	22	30	34
February	31	36	14	9	28	23	27	32
March	37	40	12	10	26	22	25	29
April	46	47	11	10	22	20	21	23
May	51	52	13	11	19	18	17	20
June	56	58	12	9	13	16	19	17
July	56	56	12	9	13	15	19	20
August	53	55	12	9	14	16	21	21
September	47	56	12	7	19	16	22	22
October	43	52	13	7	21	20	23	21
November	38	50	13	7	23	23	26	21
December	32	43	13	7	25	23	30	27

Source: U.S. Department of Labor [67 and 68].

of constantly finding and leaving housing (Magana and Hovey [41, p. 79]). As it was pointed out by one interviewee:

*“When you are there, you are not in the same place; you have to move in search of employment. I have been working in Georgia, Louisiana, New Orleans, Tennessee, Atlanta and Michigan”*¹²⁾.

Due to the seasonality of farm production only a few percentage of farm workers are employed the year round (Hoggart and Mendoza [29, p. 551]). As it can be seen from table 5 unemployment is widespread within the farm workforce. With the exception of the summer period when job opportunities are higher, unemployment rates among day laborers are over 20 % in the U.S. Moreover, during the months of June and July, when demand for farm labor peaks, less than 60 % of the entire farm work force is employed in agriculture.

In the farming sector mobility from one field to another is the norm (Izcara Palacios [32, p. 24]). In the case of Spain some authors mention the so called “national agricultural cycle” followed by immigrant farm workers (Checa [12]; Arango and Martin [5, p. 259]). Many immigrant farm workers follow a northern route that take them from Catalonia, Zaragoza and Huesca’s apple areas¹³⁾ to the Rioja¹⁴⁾ region vineyards, and finally to the orange orchards in Valencia and Castellon¹⁵⁾ (see Figure 1). Others follow a southern route that takes them from the horticultural centers of Almeria¹⁶⁾ and



Figure 1 Routes followed by Moroccan farm workers in Spain

Source : The authors.

Murcia¹⁷⁾ to Huelva’s strawberry area¹⁸⁾, and then to Jaen¹⁹⁾ olive fields (Aragón and Chozas [4], Checa [12], Actis *et al.* [1], Hoggart and Mendoza [29, p. 548]; Arango and Martin [5, p. 259]).

In the case of the United States Mexican farm workers follow predetermined migratory streams in search of farm employment. Three main routes can be distinguished (Alderete *et al.* [3, p. 608]). The western stream comprises primarily Mexican farm workers who depart from Mexico, Southern California or Arizona (see Figure 2). This route includes a north-western stream that runs through Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington. The Midwestern route departs from south Texas and Mexico and runs through Ohio and Michigan (Magana and Hovey [41, p. 75], Parra-Cardona *et al.* [55, p. 362]). Finally, the Eastern stream departs from a home base in Florida (Kim-Godwin and Bechtel [38, p. 272]) and runs along the East Coast. While the Western and Midwestern streams date back from the early XIXth century, the Eastern route constitutes a new stream for Mexican workers. Until the early 1990’s seasonal farm workers population in this area was largely African American and white; however, actually its ethnic composition mirrors the national trend –i.e.: most workers are Mexicans– (Quandt *et al.* [60, p. 569]). Likewise, Mexican migration to the north-western states began during the Bracero Accords in 1942;



Figure 2 Routes followed by Mexican farm workers in the United States

Source : The authors.

Table 6 Deaths among unauthorized border-crossers to the United States (unit: persons)

Year	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Number of deaths (southern border)	61	87	149	329	358	499	387	371	412	373	516
1995=100	100	143	244	539	587	818	634	608	675	611	846
Border Patrol apprehensions (southern border)	1,271,390	1,505,020	1,368,707	1,514,565	1,536,947	1,643,679	1,235,717	929,809	905,065	1,153,802	1,171,428
Deaths per 10 ⁴ apprehensions	0.48	0.58	1.09	2.17	2.33	3.04	3.13	3.99	4.55	3.23	4.40
1995=100	100	120	227	453	485	633	653	832	949	674	918

Source: Cornelius [14, p. 265].

however, only in recent years the presence of Mexican migrants has been notorious (Fairchild and Simpson [21, p. 219]).

5. Farming: A labor market outside the formal economic system

Illegal immigration is a major issue in Spain (Arango and Martin [5, p. 265]) and in the United States (Martin [45]). In Spain there are at least 500 thousand unauthorized foreigners (Arango and Martin [5, p. 265]) and approximately two-thirds of Mexican migrants enter the U.S. without proper documentation (Fairchild and Simpson [21, p. 220]). Illegal immigrants arrive from Morocco crossing the Strait of Gibraltar in small boats, and those who succeed usually head towards the intensive agricultural areas of Almeria, Murcia and Huelva (Arango and Martin [5, p. 266]). In the case of the United States Mexicans are herded in large numbers by smugglers or “coyotes” and sent on journeys of more than 100 Km crossing rivers, mountains or desserts (Thompson [66, p. 78], Izcara Palacios [33, p. 97]).

As a result, dividing lines between Mexico and the United States and between Morocco and Spain are probably the most dangerous frontiers in a context of peace, the offer of temporary farm jobs in the country of immigration being one of the engines of this migratory flow (Carella [9, p. 87]). In the case of the United States tougher border en-

forcement from the 1990’s has resulted in a sharp increase in the number of migrants who die trying to gain entry in the country (see Table 6), most migrant deaths resulting from hypothermia, dehydration or drowning (Cornelius [13, p. 669-671]). In the case of Spain apprehensions of African immigrants trying to cross the border have increased during the last years, the risk of death being higher than in the U.S. (see Table 7). Moreover, apprehensions data understate the flow because of the large number of unauthorized migrants who manage to enter without detection. According to Cornelius [13, p. 665] a range of 70-80 per cent of illegal immigrants avoid apprehension in the U.S. Likewise, Massey [46, p. 211] estimates that only 20 per cent of illegal immigrants are apprehended at the US-Mexico border. On the other hand, Spanish police estimate they catch one in four migrants attempting entry into Spain (Arango and Martin [5, p. 266]).

Table 7 Apprehensions of illegal immigrants trying to cross the border realized by the Spanish police (unit: persons)

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Apprehensions	3,569	15,195	18,513	16,670	19,176	15,675	11,781
Number of deaths	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	101	81	24
Number of disappearances	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	109	60	38
Deaths and disappearances	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	210	141	62
Deaths and disappearances per 10 ⁴ apprehensions	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	110	90	53

Source: Ministerio de Trabajo y Asuntos Sociales [52]

In Spain and in the United States the farm labor market operates outside the formal economic system (Arango and Martin [5, p. 269]). Several studies have shown a preference of farm employers, both in Spain (Pedreño Canovas [57, p. 211 and 58, pp. 110 and 111]) and in the United States (Poss and Pierce [59, p. 139]) for illegal workers. Farmers prefer Moroccan (Hoggart and Mendoza [29, p. 550]) or Mexican (Thompson [66, p. 77]) labor better than home nationals because the latter are described as “not hard workers”. Difficulties of inspecting agriculture have favored the hiding of irregular workers in the farming sector. Moreover, in this sector an elevated degree of irregularity is the result of the coexistence of restrictive laws with the willingness of employers to break the law hiring unauthorized labor (Giménez Romero [24], Gómez and Segrelles [25], Romero and Delios [63]). As a result, labor-intensive crop production depends on illegal immigrants to obtain workers in the flexible manner for their perishable agriculture (Martin [45, p. 1283]).

As it can be seen from Table 8 more than half of US farm laborers are undocumented workers.

In Spain and in the United States migratory law includes severe fines on employers who knowingly hire illegal immigrants; however enforcement of the sanctions has been limited (Arango and Martin [5, p. 264]). One of the reasons is because rides to search for unauthorized workers tend to unite employers, unions and migrant advocates against immigration authorities (Donato et al. [18, p. 9]).

Table 8 Undocumented farm workers in the U.S. (1989-2002) (unit: percentage)

Farm workers	1989	1990/91	1992/93	1994/95	1997/98	2001/02
Authorized workers	90	81	69	61	48	47
US citizens	42	42	35	32	19	25
Permanent legal residents	13	13	20	25	29	21
(Pending legal situation)	35	26	14	4	n.a.	1
Unauthorized workers	7	16	28	37	51	53
Unknow	3	3	2	2	n.a.	n.a.

Source: U.S. Department of Labor [67, 68, p. 26 and 69, p. 56].

In the United States IRCA's sanctions imposed to employers were never materialized because employers used the services of Mexican contractors, who dealt directly with migrant farm workers (Verduzco Igartúa [70, p. 582]). Moreover, US migratory policy has centered its efforts on the surveillance of the border, the absence of an effort to prevent employers from hiring illegal farm workers being notorious (Cornelius [13]). Accordingly, one of the interviewees was astonished when he realized the absence of migratory authorities' supervision in the fields.

“I think that the owner of the ranch had an agreement with migratory authorities, because the farm was at the side of a main road, and they (the migratory authorities) never came to see if we were illegal or not”²⁰.

In Spain, from the year 2000, when was approved the new immigration law and mechanisms to avoid illegal immigration were strengthened, farmers became more cautious about employing illegal workers (Corkill [15, p. 841]). As it was pointed out by a 52 years old farmer, interviewed in Loja (Granada) in July 2003, in those areas next to main roads employers did not take the risk to employ illegal workers; but, in those areas that were out of sight illegal migrants were frequently employed.

Many of the Moroccan farm workers interviewed pointed out that farmers preferred to employ illegal workers, because they were willing to work harder for lower salaries. As a result, legal immigrants felt displaced by illegal workers who come everyday from Morocco in such a precarious economic conditions that they are not in a position to reject any employment offer. A Moroccan worker of 32 years old affirmed that after 10 years working in the farming sector he had to leave agriculture because he was rejected by employers after obtaining proper documentation. Accordingly, some migrant workers declared that having papers was a handicap to obtain employment in agriculture: *“for example I have been working for a long time with my boss,*

and comes one who do not have papers, who do not have rights nor nothing, who do not have employment, and he tells him: «go to work». That is a problem”²¹⁾; “farmers do not want people with papers, they want new people, with muscle”²²⁾.

Moreover, in Spain legal farm workers frequently are employed irregularly. As it was pointed out by an activist of the Farm Workers Union (SOC), interviewed in Almeria in July 2003, in order to cut production costs farmers remove legal migrant workers from the Social Security System just a few days after they brought them into the system. Also one interviewee told us that some employers never regularize the labor situation of migrant workers. In order to avoid being penalized by inspectors these farmers write down the data of those migrant workers they employ in a list, and instruct them to say that just they have started working for this farmer, and because of this his employer did not have time to formalize their situation (Izcara Palacios [32, pp. 22 and 23]).

In the United States, where agribusinesses account for most of the hired labor (Martin [44, p. 1126]), only workers who have a Social Security Number are employable. Paradoxically, more than half of Mexican farm workers are undocumented. However, this does not prevent them from being employed. Accordingly, many farm workers interviewed in Mexico affirmed that they bought “false documents” at a cost lower than 200 dollars. Accordingly, the U.S. Social Security Administration has noticed up to 50 per cent mismatches between the names and the Social Security Numbers of farm workers (Martin [44, p. 1136]). Moreover, the use of “false documents” allows under-age workers to qualify for agricultural jobs as they work under false name and age data. The use of “false documents” is well well-known by employers; however the large demand for low-skilled workers creates conditions that are not conducive to markedly changed hiring behavior (Lowell and Jing [40]). In the interviews farm workers describe how easily they can get “false documents” in the United States

in order to be employable.

“In fact I got “false documents”. I went and bought some papers and I wrote a different name, because I did not want my name to come out (...). I registered more years because with my age I could not work, and yes, I wrote more years and everything, and I got the job”²³⁾.

“One who is “wetback” (illegal) get some “false documents” in order to receive a salary; however, always the hourly salary is lower”²⁴⁾.

Salary discrimination is an element that always comes together with labor irregularity (Gómez and Segrelles [25]). As it has been pointed out by Donato et al. [18, p. 17]) being undocumented increases the likelihood of receiving lowered wages. Accordingly, one of the interviewees noticed: “I was not treated the same, they took advantage of my circumstances (being undocumented). I had to work harder; but, anyway, I had to send money to my family”²⁵⁾. Likewise, several Moroccan farm workers interviewed in El Ejido (Almeria), who had a working permission, affirmed that they did not work overtime for free, but this was not the case with illegal workers.

Therefore, two decades of limited enforcement of actions against illegal labor have not deterred the entry and employment of unauthorized workers²⁶⁾. The farming sector employs workers who do not have access to other sectors of the economy, especially illegal migrant labor. Consequently, there is a correlation between the process of regularization of illegal labor and the abandonment of the farming sector to search for off-farm jobs (Stephen [65, p. 93]). Immigrant workers are employed in the farming sector as a provisional solution until they become legal workers and leave for non-farm jobs (Izcara Palacios [32, p. 20]). Legalized immigrant farm workers move to cities to find jobs in services, construction or manufacturing (Martin [45, p. 1285]). Therefore legalization of unauthorized foreigners in the United States (1986)²⁷⁾ and in Spain (1986, 1991, 1996 and 2000-2002)²⁸⁾ has not resolved the problem of the dependence of

farmers on unauthorized workers. Newly legalized workers leave farm work and once again illegal workers are needed to fill the holes in the labor supply that legal workers have left. For example, the 1987/88 U.S. Special Agricultural Worker Program legalized 1.2 million illegal farm workers (Martin [45, p. 1282]). By the year 1989 33 per cent of U.S. farm workers were legalized under the SAW Program. However, legalization under the SAW Program increased the mobility of workers out of farm jobs (Martin [44, p. 1133]). As a result, by the years 1997/1998 only 16 per cent of U.S. farm workers had been legalized under the SAW Program (see Table 9).

Table 9 Farm workers in U.S. legalized under the SAW Program (unit: percentage)

1989	1990/91	1992/93	1994/95	1997/98
33	29	25	19	16

Source: U.S. Department of Labor [67 and 68, p. 26].

On the one hand, illegal immigration increases the farm labor supply putting downward pressure on salaries and speeding the exit of legal workers from agriculture. On the other hand, the exit of legal workers increases the dependence on illegal workers. Accordingly, migrant laborers contemplate farm work as something transitory (Martin [44]). Working abroad in the farming sector is an opportunity to accumulate some savings before they return to their country (Diez-Canedo Ruiz [19, pp. 69-73]), or is a platform they can use to jump to other sectors of the economy (Moreno Torregrosa [54], Jabardo Velasco [37], Hoggart and Mendoza [29]).

6. The problem of social isolation

“Social isolation” or the lack of sustained interaction with individuals and institutions that represent mainstream society is one the most unpleasant aspects of immigration. Immigrant farm workers, who are physically isolated from nearby towns that surround the farms on which they work, being one of the most socially isolated groups in Spain and the U.S. Social isolation has been associated to

feelings of sadness, depression and substance abuse (Kim-Godwin and Bechtel [38, p. 275], Parra-Cardona *et al.* [55, p. 363]).

Both Mexican and Moroccan workers keep generally an unpleasant remembrance of their involvement in the farming sector. Immigrant farm workers usually arrive to the host society with the main purpose to save as much money as possible. For example, in a recent study Fairchild and Simpson [21] found that Pacific Northwest Mexican migrants, who were more likely to work in agriculture than non-Pacific Northwest Migrant laborers, earned less but remitted more. Migrants consider farm work as a sacrifice they make to help their family. As a result, they keep in mind that in the host society they will only find shortages and difficulties. However, the reality is frequently harder than their expectations (Izcarra Palacios [32, pp. 17-19]).

The feeling of confinement is one of the most difficult aspects to bear in the host country. Some interviewees compared themselves with hostages. The lack of freedom of movement was for many of them the bitter aspect of agricultural work. Moreover, at the work place immigrant workers feel alone as many of them do not find anybody to talk to (Magaña and Hovey [41, p. 82]). Therefore, for many immigrants working in the farming sector becomes something similar to being imprisoned.

*“You are incarcerated, you are like imprisoned”*²⁹⁾

*“One is like imprisoned; you can not go out anywhere. We are incarcerated, because we only move from the house to the workplace and from the workplace to the house”*³⁰⁾.

A Moroccan immigrant of 41 years old, interviewed in El Ejido³¹⁾, in December 2003, affirmed that he had lost his humanity. He was living in a rudimentary hut, made of wood and plastic, which was constructed beside the greenhouse where he worked everyday. His daily activity consisted in going to the greenhouse, where he suffered from high temperatures and an environment intoxicated by agrochemicals, and come back to eat and rest in a cottage that he had to share with his wife, two

daughters, and another two migrant workers. Usually he did not move from this space, situated several kilometers from El Ejido, however he did not save any money, even he had proper documentation to work in Spain.

Illegal workers feel more strongly this situation of confinement, because they have to be hidden from migratory authorities. However, this feeling of imprisonment is common also in those workers who legally reside in the host country. Migrant farm workers, who work far from population centers, tend to lack familial support and social networks (Chavez *et al.* [11, p. 1017]). Separation from family and friends, loneliness, harsh working conditions and not having days off have been documented as some of the most stressful aspects that migrant farm workers suffer from (Magana and Hovey [41, pp. 79 and 82], Kim-Godwin [38, pp. 274 and 275], Parra-Cardona *et al.* [55, p. 371]). Moreover, intra-group competition for employment exacerbates the trend toward social isolation. In Spain competition for employment is especially fierce in the extensive farming areas of inner Andalusia (Izcara Palacios [34, p. 178]). In the United States migrant Mexican workers reported in the interviews frequent confrontations with permanent legal residents, principally of Mexican origin. Local labor sees immigrants as a menace to their economic opportunities as they are more prone to accept lower salaries or to work overtime. As a result, migrant farm workers have substantially lower levels of trust than other social groups (Chavez *et al.* [11, p. 1023]).

This situation of social isolation and disconnection from the local society lays the foundations for a future underclass that is not incorporated into the broader society (Chavez *et al.* [11, p. 1026], Massey [46, p. 211]).

7. Conclusion

During the last decades there has been a notable increase in immigrant employment in Spanish and U.S. agriculture. Immigrant farm workers are called on to fill the holes in labor supply that locals

have left. The geography of demand for immigrant labor is associated with labor-intensive crop production, like fruit and vegetables. Both in the U.S. and Spain the juxtaposition of an increase in labor-intensive agricultural production with a growing reluctance to accept farm work by the local populations has resulted in a growing demand for immigrant farm labor.

Similar findings were found in Spain and in the U.S. In both countries farm employment is rejected by local labor because agriculture is characterized by low-pay seasonal jobs. Moreover, employers prefer immigrants than locals because the former work harder, are less likely to join unions and press for wage increases, and are more prone to accept lower salaries. Therefore, continued unauthorized entries drive down salaries and deteriorate working conditions in agriculture, farm jobs being less and less appealing to local labor.

Mexican and Moroccan farm laborers, especially if they do not have papers, are eager to work in agriculture because salaries at home are much lower. However, in the country of immigration work demands are more rigid than in the country of emigration. Activities that migrant farm workers refuse to carry out at home like (working overtime with short periods to rest or having no days off) are quietly accepted in the country of immigration. Accordingly, when migrant workers are asked to compare labor conditions between the countries of emigration and immigration, always appear a reference to higher difficulties resulting from the structure of the work environment in the country of immigration. Moreover, agriculture's demand for immigrant labor is variable and seasonal. As a result, immigrant farm workers suffer from unemployment and underemployment. However, one of the worst aspects of agricultural work is the situation of social isolation. Therefore, both Mexican and Moroccan farm workers keep an unpleasant remembrance of the host country.

On the other hand, while U.S agriculture is becoming increasingly dependent on Mexican farm

workers, in Spain during the last decade Moroccans have been gradually replaced by south-American and east-European farm workers, as a result of the growth of an anti-Muslim sentiment.

In conclusion, a surplus of non-unionized and low-wage immigrant workers has reduced labor costs and has increased agricultural employers' profits. Therefore, as a result of the access to cheap illegal alien, U.S and Spanish agriculture are more competitive. However, wage income of Spanish and American farm workers has been depressed through the competition of immigrant workers and many of them are abandoning the farming sector. Moreover, substandard living and working conditions of immigrant farm workers is also morally reprehensible.

Notes

- 1) This article presents some of the results of the research project 52636 entitled "Migrantes rurales Tamaulipecos estacionales en la Agricultura de Estados Unidos" funded by the CONACYT (National Council of Science and Technology of Mexico). This work was also partially funded by a Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (A) No.16208021 from the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture of Japan. However, the opinions expressed are those of the authors alone.
- 2) In Spain Moroccan farm workers were interviewed in several rural communities of Granada and Almerín, which are located in Andalusia.
- 3) Mexican farm workers were interviewed in several rural communities of González Fariás, González, Guémez, Hidalgo, Jaumave, Mante, Padilla, San Carlos, San Fernando, Tula, Valle Hermoso, Victoria and Villa de Casas, which are located in Tamaulipas.
- 4) The investigation (carried out between 2003 and 2007) is based on in depth interviews. An interview guide based on open-ended questions was compiled focusing on immigrant farm workers lived experiences as they were represented in thoughts, ideas, feelings, attitudes and perceptions. The interviews were tape-recorded and typewritten. Fourteen Moroccan agricultural workers were interviewed in Andalusia (Spain), and thirty-three immigrant farm workers were interviewed in Tamaulipas (Mexico). The sampling strategy may be called "stratified purposeful sampling" (Patton [56, p. 174]) as information-rich cases were selected non-randomly. The selection of interviewees was guided to capture depth and richness, and the sample size obeys to "saturation" with information about the topic under scrutiny.
- 5) US hired farm workers are a population very difficult to count. More than half are illegal and they do not live in the same place all over the year, they migrate from one place to another in search of job opportunities.

The US Current Population Survey and US Census data are not a reliable source of information on hired farm workers in the United States. Both, the Current Population Survey and the Census undercount this difficult-to-find population. The US Department of labor National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS) is the only reliable information source on the demographics of U.S. hired farm workers because it samples hired farm workers at their work sites in three cycles each year from 1989.

Unfortunately from the NAWS it is not possible determine how many hired farm workers are employed in US agriculture; however it is possible to calculate their composition by gender, age groups, ethnic groups or origin.

Therefore from the US Department of labor NAWS it is possible to conclude that foreign-born farm workers have increased rapidly from the early 1990's; by 1988/1989 they comprised 62% of all farm workers, and 78% by 2001/2002. This rise in foreign-born workers is due primarily to an increase in the proportion of Mexican farm workers, from 53% of all farm workers in FY 1990-91 to 75% in FY 2001/2002. Over the same period of time, the percentage of farm workers who were born in the United States dropped from 38% by 1988/1989 to 22% in FY 2001/2002.
- 6) Migrants usually do not travel alone. They migrate accompanied by a relative or friend who has migrated before, or they know somebody in the country of immigration.
- 7) "Bland Farms", located in Reidsville, Georgia.
- 8) Farm worker of 36 years old interviewed in Villa de Casas (Tamaulipas) in October 2004. In the case of Moroccan workers, some of them affirmed that they

- were persuaded by Spanish Television (which is received in Morocco), which portrays a paradise of wealth, compared with the deprivation they experience in Morocco.
- 9) Farm worker of 50 years old interviewed in Valle Hermoso (Tamaulipas) in April 2005.
 - 10) Interview realized in Aranda de Duero (Burgos) in December 2002.
 - 11) Farm worker of 38 years old interviewed in Tula (Tamaulipas) in November 2004
 - 12) Farm worker of 26 years old interviewed in Jau-mave (Tamaulipas) in October 2005.
 - 13) The fruit picking season in these areas runs from July to September.
 - 14) The vineyards of the Rioja region employ farm workers during October.
 - 15) In Valencia and Castellon migrant workers are employed picking oranges from November.
 - 16) In Almeria's greenhouses farm workers are employed from October to April.
 - 17) In the horticultural centers of Murcia labor demand escalates during May and June.
 - 18) In Huelva immigrants are employed principally during the months of April and May.
 - 19) In Jaen migrant workers are employed from December to February picking olives.
 - 20) Farm worker of 17 years old interviewed in Victoria (Tamaulipas) in October 2004.
 - 21) Moroccan farm worker of 18 years old interviewed in El Ejido (Almería) in December 2003.
 - 22) Moroccan farm worker of 44 years old interviewed in El Ejido (Almería) in December 2003.
 - 23) Farm worker of 18 years old interviewed in the ejido Francisco Villa (Tamaulipas) in April 2006.
 - 24) Farm worker of 26 years old interviewed in Jau-mave (Tamaulipas) in October 2005.
 - 25) Farm worker of 45 years old interviewed in Jau-mave (Tamaulipas) in October, 2005.
 - 26) For example, an immigrant from Morocco, interviewed in July 2003 affirmed that in the field where he was working in Zafarraya (Granada), his squad, composed by 25 Moroccan workers, had only 7 legal workers.
 - 27) 2.7 million foreigners were legalized, 1.2 million in the farming sector (Martin [44, pp. 1131 and 1133]).
 - 28) 600 thousand foreigners were legalized (Arango and Martin [5, p. 266]),
 - 29) Farm worker of 42 years old interviewed in Padilla (Tamaulipas) in October 2004.
 - 30) Farm worker of 44 years old interviewed in Victoria (Tamaulipas) in April 2005.
 - 31) A 50 thousand resident city situated in the South East corner of Spain.

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