

FEBRUARY 2022

# Cultivating Home:

A Study of  
Farmworker Housing  
in Hood River,  
Marion, Morrow, and  
Yamhill Counties in  
Oregon

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“When a group of people get together, it's collective power. You know that you're doing it for the good.”

- Dolores Huerta

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# Executive Summary

# Project Context

**Migrant and seasonal agricultural workers are the foundation of Oregon's large and important agricultural sector.** There are more than 531,000 jobs connected to Oregon agriculture, food and fiber, and agriculture contributes \$42 billion to Oregon's economy each year. As of 2017, there are an estimated 100,122 farmworkers in Oregon, doing the skilled and difficult work of growing, picking, and packing the food on our tables. **Most of Oregon's farmworkers earn very low wages, and many farmworker households are in poverty.**

**Due to low wages and a lack of affordable housing, Oregon's farmworkers have few housing options and often live in poor and overcrowded conditions.** Lack of housing options leads to health disparities and perpetuates poverty and poor outcomes for farmworkers. It also adds to the difficulty employers face finding enough workers to harvest their crops, impacting crop production in Oregon. The Oregon Housing and Community Services Department (OHCS) commissioned Stamberger Outreach Consulting to conduct an agricultural worker housing study of Hood River, Marion, Morrow, and Yamhill Counties to further understand the context surrounding farmworker housing and work towards solutions to this complex problem. This Executive Summary outlines the study approach and high-level findings and recommendations. The findings of this study will be used to identify solutions for farmworker housing and direct resources to those solutions.

# Project Approach

**The best understanding comes from lived experience.** A central goal of this study was to hear the experiences and recommendations of farmworkers and agricultural employers in order to better understand the context surrounding farmworker housing and to highlight their requests in our recommendations.

To facilitate this, we conducted individual interviews with 80 farmworkers and nine agricultural employers. Our study focused on local, U.S.-based farmworkers and did not include H-2A visa workers. We also conducted key informant interviews with agency staff who work closely on housing issues with farmworkers and agricultural employers.

As part of the study team, leading housing researchers from ECO Northwest used farmworker population estimates and housing data from the US Census, American Community Survey, OHCS, farmworker housing providers, and the private real estate market to estimate the need for farmworker housing. To provide additional context, the study also included farmworker demographic research and characterization of local agricultural markets. In addition to members of the AWHFT, farmworkers who participated in the study also reviewed and provided comments on this final study report.

# Key findings & recommendations

## Profile of Oregon farmworkers

Researchers at the US Employment and Training Administration's National Agricultural Worker Survey (NAWS) provided our team with farmworker demographic information for the Oregon/Washington region. Their surveys show that Oregon and Washington's farmworkers tend to be about 40% female and 60% male, and most are 25-50 years old. Most workers are seasonal or permanent workers who are settled, and a smaller proportion are migrant workers. Most farmworkers were born in Mexico and identify as Latino/a/e or Mexican. Some indicated they have indigenous heritage. About one third report a 4<sup>th</sup> grade to 7<sup>th</sup> grade education level, with another quarter reporting 8<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> grade. Twenty-one percent said they had a 12<sup>th</sup> grade education or higher. About half are married with children, 12 percent are unmarried parents, and a quarter are single with no children.

Farmworkers in Oregon and Washington have very low incomes and many experience poverty. Thirty-two percent of farmworker households in Oregon and Washington are in poverty, compared to the national estimate of 14 percent for the general US population.

**32%**  
of  
farmworker  
households  
in Oregon and Washington are  
**in poverty,**  
compared to the national  
estimate of 14% for the  
general US population.

## Changing farmworker numbers

Farmworker population estimates show a 3 to 5 percent decrease in the number of US-based (or "domestic") farmworkers from 2012 to 2017 in Hood River, Marion, Morrow, and Yamhill Counties, and a decrease of 13 percent across the state of Oregon. Interviews with employers and agency experts corroborate this data, saying there has been a decline in the number of farmworkers in recent years. Conversely, there has been an increase in the number of H-2A visa workers in three of the four counties and at the state-level

over the past five years (decrease in Yamhill County). Even with this increase, H-2A workers comprise a small percentage of Oregon's farmworkers.

Employers said the decrease in local farmworkers impacts them financially, including increased cost of labor, not being able to harvest their product, and not being able to find the skilled workers they need. They said farmers are mechanizing as much of their operations as possible to reduce the need for labor, and that employers are shifting towards hiring H-2A visa workers, specifically from Mexico, to make up for a lack of local workers.

## Overarching farmworker housing findings & recommendations

**A diverse approach should be taken to increase farmworker access to good quality housing. This includes building new affordable housing, and it also includes investing in supportive services, regulation changes, and partnerships to increase farmworker income, reduce housing eligibility barriers, increase homeownership, improve on-farm housing, and increase the ability to track changes in housing need over time. Through our interviews with farmworkers, employers and agency experts, and our analysis of available data, the Stamberger Outreach team identified eight critical issues for farmworker housing. These issues must be addressed in order to meet the need for farmworker housing.**

# 1

## Farmworkers earn very low incomes

The average farmworker family in Oregon earns **\$20,000-\$24,999** per year, which is between 25 and 37 percent of Median Family Income (MFI) for the general population.

Farmworkers live in poor housing and overcrowded conditions largely because they cannot afford better housing.

Today's low farmworker incomes are connected to a long history of agricultural labor exploitation in the United States. Agricultural labor exploitation is inextricably intertwined with racism in the United States, as those exploited for farm labor were historically primarily Black, Indigenous, Latine, and other People of Color, immigrants, and refugees, and today are primarily Latine immigrants from Mexico. Global competition makes it hard for farmers to earn a profit, which in turn perpetuates low pay for farmworkers as farmers work to keep costs low to stay competitive.

## Recommendations

- **Increase farmworker incomes.**

Increasing farmworker incomes will help farmworkers access better housing and lead to better life outcomes, as well as work towards a less exploitative agricultural system that pays workers what they need to thrive. Examples of opportunities to increase farmworker household income include allowing them to collect overtime, increasing their hourly wage, reducing farmworker income taxes, increasing employment benefits and access to social services, and providing direct government subsidies to farmworkers.

When working to increase farmworker wages, it is important to acknowledge that asking farmers to increase what they pay for labor will put many of them at financial risk. It is important to work with farmers to transition to higher farmworker incomes while reducing negative impacts on local farm businesses.

- **Provide direct rental assistance to farmworkers.**

Rental assistance for farmworkers can be provided through a voucher system like HUD Section 8 or through direct financial assistance paid to farmworkers. OHCS could explore ways to expand eligibility requirements for the Section 8 voucher program to include more farmworkers. Advocacy for universal voucher support at the federal government level is important since this could help make housing choice vouchers more universally available to qualifying low-income households.

## 2

### **There is an extreme shortage of good quality housing at prices farmworkers can afford.**

There are an estimated **66,269** farmworker households in Oregon. Most of these households need affordable housing that is not currently available.

Due to low incomes and lack of affordable housing, we found that most farmworkers are cost-burdened by their housing costs, and 77 percent live in overcrowded conditions. There is much less subsidized farmworker housing than is needed, and even current costs of subsidized housing may not be affordable for farmworkers. Employer-provided housing is also in short supply. Farmworker population estimates indicate there were a total of 83,731 farmworkers and their family members (33,584 farmworkers) in Hood River, Marion, Morrow, and Yamhill Counties combined in 2017. Based on an estimated household size of 3.9 people, there are about 5,177 farmworker households in Hood River County, 9,598 households in Marion County, 1,135 in Morrow County,



and 5,559 in Yamhill County. There are an estimated 66,269 farmworker households in Oregon. According to our analysis, most of these households need affordable housing that is not currently available.

## Recommendations

### **Increase the supply of housing that farmworkers can afford.**

A variety of affordable housing options should be provided to serve diverse farmworker housing needs associated with household size and composition, tenure, need for temporary housing, and farmworker preferences. When increasing farmworker housing in urban areas, developers should consider cost effective means to support farmworker commutes to agricultural areas, which may take the form of public transit or transportation sponsored by employers or a nonprofit organization.

The following list outlines the types of affordable housing that should be considered for development.

- **Low-income rental housing**

Low-income housing was the most common type of additional housing requested by farmworkers in interviews. OHCS should evaluate available resources to support development of additional income-restricted rental housing for farmworkers.

- **Seasonal housing**

Migrant workers only stay in the area during the harvest season, and some said it is hard to find seasonal housing for a temporary stay. They requested more seasonal housing. Employers and agency staff also said there is a big need for seasonal housing. Fluctuating cash

flow makes it difficult for seasonal housing to generate enough income to cover fixed operating costs without some type of additional operating subsidy. The State of Oregon could consider providing operating subsidies for this type of housing or ask agricultural employers to contribute to help boost the supply of seasonal housing available to farmworkers.

- **Housing for older people, single women, and families**

A small number of workers we interviewed requested more housing for older people, single women, and families.

- **Employer-provided housing**

A few farmworkers we interviewed requested more on-farm housing. They said they depend on this free housing. Due to frequent descriptions of poor on-farm housing, the difficulty employers face building and managing housing, and the many other types of housing that may be developed to support farmworkers, we encourage OHCS to consider alternatives to the development of new employer-provided housing. There may be ways to increase access to good quality employer-provided housing that do not require building additional housing. Examples include shared employer-provided housing, portable temporary housing, and improving conditions of existing employer-provided housing.

- **Community-based farmworker housing**

Success has been had in Oregon developing and managing community-based farmworker housing through partnerships with nonprofits, however there are far too few of these units to meet the need. Additionally, some of this

housing may not be affordable for farmworker households given their income. Developers and funders should consider opportunities to decrease community-based farmworker housing rental costs further. We also recommend OHCS, and other government agencies, increase support for this type of housing development.

- **Off-farm rural farmworker housing**

We recommend that OHCS and partners work to develop and sponsor off-farm housing in rural areas funded in partnership between public agencies and employers and operated by community-based organizations. This model reduces the conflict of interest and risk of farmworker exploitation inherent in employer-provided housing, allows employers to pool resources to fund housing, and eliminates the need for individual farmers to act as housing developers and managers. In Oregon, Statewide Planning Goal 10 and Exclusive Farm Use (EFU) zoning rules pose barriers to this type of farmworker housing development. We encourage OHCS and partners to work with state and local agencies to change land use regulations or provide regulatory exceptions to allow farmworker housing development off farms in rural areas. We also encourage financial support specifically for this type of housing development.

- **Middle-Housing**

Middle housing includes townhomes, duplexes, triplexes, quadplexes, and cottage clusters. These housing types tend to be more affordable and are in short supply. Cities larger than 10,000 are required to accommodate some or all of these housing types, per Oregon

House Bill 2001. OHCS and partners should encourage farmworker housing developers to pursue these types of housing.

## 3

### Many farmworkers we interviewed described poor housing conditions

Many of the poor conditions described were in on-farm housing. Farmworkers, employers, and agency staff said market rental housing and some farmworker-owned mobile home units are also in poor condition.

### Recommendations

- **Increase OSHA inspection of employer-provided housing.** Particularly, OSHA should increase investigation, inspection, and enforcement of housing that is not registered through OSHA.
- **Improve conditions of existing housing:** Increase funding opportunities and outreach for rehabilitation, repair, and replacement of employer-provided housing. The State should consider creating or expanding incentives to support and assist with improvements to farmworker housing, such as tax exemptions or low-interest loans for

rehabilitation of existing housing on farms.

Expand funding for community-based organizations currently providing home repair and weatherization services in counties with high farmworker populations with a requirement to use additional funding specifically for eligible farmworker housing, including rental housing.

Explore ways to preserve and rehabilitate mobile home parks and provide more support for low-income owners of mobile home units to repair their units.

- Offer incentives to rental associations or affordable housing complexes to waive or decrease certain requirements for farmworker applicants such as rental deposit amounts, or to accept OHCS vouchers for farmworkers.
- OHCS and other partner agencies and community-based organizations should provide education to rental housing providers and associations to raise public awareness on the importance of farmworkers and the barriers they face accessing rental housing. This work may help encourage more rental housing to reduce requirements or accept and support farmworker voucher programs.

## 4

### Rental application requirements also prevent farmworkers from being able to access private rental housing

Barriers include the need for a valid social security number, high deposits, rental history, work history, proof of stable employment, income requirements, credit history, and applications only in English. The need for a social security number was mentioned the most.

### Recommendations

- Develop a program to provide special clearance, or co-signers, for farmworkers to satisfy these requirements.

## 5

### One in four farmworkers we interviewed said they want to own their own homes but face barriers

They expressed frustration about barriers to the home buying process, including cost, immigration status, and not knowing how to buy a home or where to get help. Farmworkers requested programs to help them achieve homeownership.

## Recommendations

- Support lower-cost alternative homeownership models including community land trusts and housing cooperatives that provide ownership opportunities for farmworkers, with the purpose of building wealth and ensuring that housing remains affordable over the long-term for farmworkers.
- Increase support for financial assistance programs to help farmworkers afford to buy homes including low-interest home loans for farmworkers, increased funding for USDA Rural Housing Service programs (Section 502 direct loans), support for farmworker Individual Development Accounts (IDA) matched savings accounts
- Provide or sponsor homebuying classes and individualized coaching for farmworkers. This may include connecting farmworkers to realtors that specialize in helping farmworkers find homes.
- Develop a program to vouch for farmworkers to help them satisfy loan application requirements. Farmworkers face similar barriers applying for home loans as they face applying for rentals. Lack of work authorization was the most mentioned. OHCS and partners should consider programs to vouch for farmworkers to meet these requirements or encourage lenders to consider special requirement waivers for farmworkers.

# 6

## Farmworkers need resources to help them find housing

Employers and agency staff we interviewed also said workers primarily find housing by word-of-mouth, and there is no dedicated resource for farmworker housing information. Farmworkers requested information on available and affordable housing be published somewhere, or to have help from an organization or liaison to help them find and access housing. Some also requested farmworker resource centers to help them access other general support resources and understand their rights.

## Recommendations

- Sponsor liaison positions to help connect farmworkers with existing housing and to curate, publish, update, and promote affordable housing information for farmworkers. Farmworkers recommended posting housing information at post offices, community centers, stores, Facebook, flea markets, and Hispanic restaurants.
- Fund development of farmworker resource centers.

# 7

## **Employers face many barriers to providing farmworker housing. Agency staff and some farmworkers also described problems with housing tied to employment.**

Employer barriers include high cost, difficulty meeting labor housing regulations, and difficulty with local permitting and zoning requirements. Employers who provide farmworker housing usually provide it for free to their workers in addition to their wages. Some farmworkers said they cannot afford to pay for any housing based on their incomes, and that they were afraid to complain about poor housing conditions for fear of losing their jobs or housing. Some agency staff said lack of work authorization can make farmworkers particularly vulnerable to exploitation related to employer-owned housing.

## **Recommendations**

- Consider alternative models to increase housing in rural agricultural areas such as:
  - Off-farm housing near farms funded in partnership between public agencies and employers, and operated by community-based organizations
- On-farm housing sharing models to connect employers with unused or under-used housing with farmworkers or employers in the area that need it.
- Work with OSHA to approve portable temporary housing for certain farmworkers and areas. Examples of this type of housing can be found in the Washington State temporary worker housing tents and FEMA portable housing that is sold at auction when it is no longer needed for emergency use.
- For programs that seek to increase new on-farm housing provided by employers, we recommend:
  - Increase funding and outreach for the AWHTC, especially in Marion, Morrow, and Yamhill Counties where there is less knowledge of this program.
  - Develop a grant program and low-interest loans for farmworker housing to help smaller and beginning farmers access funds to build farmworker housing.
  - Review and update farmworker housing rules collaboratively with employers, rule-makers, and farmworker advocates to find a balance between the rules and what employers are able to provide.

# 8

## Lack of reliable data about farmworkers and their housing

Insufficient data about the number of farmworkers and their incomes makes it impossible to reliably quantify the need for farmworker housing. Quantifying the need for housing is vital to being able to track progress made towards meeting the need, and remaining need, over time.

### Recommendations

OHCS and partners may be able to support regular and coordinated data in partnership with government agencies and nonprofits. The data collected should include a count of the number of farmworkers, the number of farmworker households, the number of dependents and total number of persons in a household, farmworker annual household incomes, and information on housing conditions.

### Additional County-Specific Recommendations

Each of the counties we studied also has a unique set of conditions that should be considered. These recommendations are based on county-specific observations and should be considered *in addition* to the general recommendations above.

## Hood River County

- Create rural farmworker housing higher in the Hood River Valley in smaller towns such as Parkdale and Odell.
- Potential for off-farm housing development in rural agricultural areas funded by employers and government, operated by community partners.
- If farmworker housing is developed in the City of Hood River, a transportation program will need to be included for rides to work.
- Potential opportunity for short-term temporary portable housing rental program.
- Potential for on-farm housing sharing program.
- Workers in Hood River County requested a farmworker resource center to help them understand their rights, connect to housing, and take classes.

## Marion County

- Continue to increase farmworker housing in urban centers including Salem, Woodburn, and Keizer.
- Consider development of farmworker specific subsidized housing in rural towns closer to agriculture areas.
- Potential for on-farm housing sharing program.

## Morrow County

- Farmworkers said they like the small town feel and community in the town of Boardman.
- Lack of farmworker housing is a significant hardship for employers in Morrow County. Potential for off-farm

housing development in communities funded by employers and government, operated by community partners.

- Due to the current prevalence of RV parks and trailer units, possible opportunity to rehabilitate RV parks and increase homeownership cooperatives allowing farmworkers to access homeownership.
- Farmworkers requested a farmworker resource center in Boardman to educate them of their rights, offer classes, and provide connections to housing.

## Yamhill County

- Continue to increase farmworker housing in urban centers including McMinnville and Newberg.
- Consider development of farmworker specific subsidized housing in rural towns closer to agriculture areas.
- Potential for off-farm housing in farming areas funded by employers and government, operated by community partners.

# Introduction

**Our research shows that most of Oregon's farmworkers earn very low wages, and many farmworker households are in poverty. Due to low wages and a lack of affordable housing, Oregon's farmworkers have few housing options and often live in poor and overcrowded conditions.**

Lack of housing options leads to health disparities and perpetuates poverty and poor outcomes for farmworkers. Employers we interviewed also said it adds to the difficulty they face finding enough workers to harvest their crops, impacting crop production in Oregon.

There is very little housing available to farmworkers in Hood River, Marion, Morrow, and Yamhill Counties. What is available is either high-cost, high-demand private rental housing and homes for sale, or free housing provided by employers in exchange for employment. It is very hard for farmworkers to access private rental housing or homeownership due to very low incomes and application requirements. There are hundreds of applicants on wait lists for the few subsidized farmworker housing units that exist, and much employer-provided housing has closed, making it harder for farmworkers to find. Because they have so few options for housing, farmworkers often live in poor conditions out of necessity. Our study found that overcrowding, not enough heat or air conditioning, pest infestations, outdoor bathrooms, and poor building conditions are common where farmworkers live.

To plan and implement effective solutions to this complex problem, the State of Oregon needed to first estimate the need for housing and further understand the context surrounding farmworker housing and the lived experiences and recommendations of local farmworkers and agricultural employers. To achieve this understanding, the Oregon Housing and Community Services Department (OHCS) commissioned an Oregon Agricultural Workforce Housing Study. This report outlines the results of this study. It will be used to identify solutions for farmworker housing and to direct resources to those solutions.

## Study Context

**The goal of this study was to gain a detailed understanding of the problems with farmworker housing and identify opportunities to meet the housing need.**

OHCS hired Stamberger Outreach Consulting to conduct this study. Stamberger Outreach Consulting assembled an Oregon-based project team for the study, including social science researchers from Stamberger Outreach



Consulting, housing researchers from ECO Northwest, and community-specific liaisons from the Community Engagement Liaison (CELS) program of PKS International. Under Oregon statute, OCHS facilitates the Agricultural Workforce Housing Facilitation Team (AWHFT), a collaborative group of farmworker housing advocates from government and nonprofit sectors. The AWHFT and OCHS oversaw the study. Farmworkers, the AWHFT and OCHS provided input on study design and implementation. The Stamberger Outreach team provided recommendations as a result of this study and both farmworkers at the AWHFT reviewed and provided feedback on this Final Report.

The study assessed housing need in four counties: Hood River, Marion, Morrow, and Yamhill Counties. These counties were chosen by the AWHFT because of their large farmworker populations and agricultural industries relative to other Oregon counties. The study included housing and demographic research, agricultural market characterization, and qualitative interviews with local farmworkers, agricultural employers, and agency staff. For this study, farmworker interviews only included U.S.-based farmworkers, and not current H-2A visa workers.

Research justice was an important value practiced throughout this project, including paying farmworkers to help review research methods and interview questions, paying culturally specific community liaisons to recruit and interview farmworkers in their preferred languages, interviewing farmworkers anonymously, working with them to review the final study report, and paying them for their time and effort contributing to the study. We based the recommendations in this final report

largely on the experiences and recommendations of farmworkers and agricultural employers.

## Research Objectives & Methods

There are many variables that affect farmworker housing, and this study sought to understand the critical issues from multiple perspectives.

**To achieve this goal, we outlined four primary research objectives:**

1. Characterize the agricultural market in Marion, Yamhill, Hood River, and Morrow Counties
2. Compile demographic information about farmworkers in Oregon
3. Assess the need for farmworker housing in Marion, Yamhill, Hood River, and Morrow Counties
4. Identify opportunities to provide safe and healthy housing for farmworkers in the four counties

**Our research methods included:**

1. Compilation of agricultural market information from the Oregon Department of Agriculture, the U.S. Census of Agriculture, and interviews with agricultural employers and expert agency staff
2. Compilation, synthesis, and summary of farmworker population estimates and demographic information from the U.S. Employment and Training Administration's National Agricultural

Workers Survey (NAWS) regional data and the National Center for Farmworker Health (NCFH).

3. Individual interviews with 80 farmworkers, 20 in each county (Hood River, Marion, Morrow and Yamhill). About half of interviewees were migrant workers and half seasonal/permanent workers (per OHCS definitions). Interviewees included both men and women, and a diversity of housing experiences, ages, family types, and included indigenous workers.
4. Individual interviews with nine agricultural employers: two in Hood River County, three in Marion County, one in Morrow County, and three in Yamhill County. Employers we spoke to have a diversity of experiences in terms of how they employ farmworkers, how many and what types of workers they hire, whether or not they provide housing, and how their housing was funded.
5. Individual interviews with nine agency staff members who work closely with farmworkers and employers in the four counties and represent a breadth of knowledge and perspectives, including staff from Oregon Farm Bureau, Oregon OSHA, Oregon Employment Department, Legal Aid Services of Oregon, Oregon Housing and Community Services Department, Oregon Department of Agriculture, and the Oregon Health Authority.
6. Estimation of overcrowding in farmworker housing, housing affordability gap, and amount of farmworker housing needed through compilation, synthesis, and analysis of interview results, farmworker population estimates, and housing data from the

US Census, American Community Survey, OHCS, farmworker housing providers, and the private real estate market.

7. Three case studies of successful farmworker housing projects and programs that exemplify promising opportunities identified through this study.

“No race can prosper until it learns there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem.”

- Booker T. Washington

CHAPTER 1

# Agricultural Market Context

In order to help understand farmworker housing within the agricultural context, we drew on existing information to characterize the agricultural market in Oregon and the four counties.

## Oregon

Agriculture is a vital part of Oregon's economy. There are 225 agricultural commodities produced in Oregon. According to a study by Oregon State University, in 2021, these commodities had a value of \$42 billion (9.1 percent of Oregon's sales output and 4.7 percent of its gross domestic product).<sup>1</sup> Nearly 7 percent (531,000) of Oregon's jobs are associated with agriculture, food and fiber in Oregon. Exhibit 1 shows Oregon's top 20 agricultural commodities and their values in 2020. The top five were greenhouse and nursery, cattle and calves, hay, milk, and grass seed.<sup>2</sup>

### Exhibit: 1. Oregon's Top 20 Agricultural Commodities: 2020

Source: Oregon Department of Agriculture, Oregon Agricultural Statistics, October 2021

#### OREGON'S TOP 20 AGRICULTURAL COMMODITIES: 2020

Rank	Commodity	Value of Production
1	Greenhouse & nursery <sup>1</sup>	\$1,188,911,000
2	Cattle & calves	\$587,848,000
3	Hay	\$569,160,000
4	Milk	\$557,348,000
5	Grass seed <sup>2</sup>	\$458,367,000
6	Wheat	\$273,760,000
7	Potatoes	\$216,810,000
8	Grapes for wine <sup>3</sup>	\$157,900,000
9	Cherries	\$133,826,000
10	Hazelnuts	\$132,300,000
11	Blueberries	\$119,648,000
12	Onions	\$118,665,000
13	Christmas trees	\$106,912,000
14	Pears	\$97,552,000
15	Corn, grain	\$77,542,000
16	Hops	\$74,812,000
17	Eggs	\$72,999,000
18	Dungeness crab <sup>4</sup>	\$72,643,709
19	Sweet corn	\$41,034,000
20	Apples	\$39,208,000

<sup>1</sup> Oregon Department of Agriculture estimate. Please note, the corrected estimate from 2019 is \$1,064,430,000.

<sup>2</sup> Oregon State University estimate

<sup>3</sup> Oregon Wine Board estimate

<sup>4</sup> Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife estimate

All others are estimates from NASS.

<sup>1</sup> Sorte, Bruce, Jeffrey Reimer, and Gordon Jones. "Oregon Agriculture, Food and Fiber: An Economic Analysis." Oregon State University, College of Agricultural Sciences. August, 2021

<sup>2</sup> Oregon Department of Agriculture, *Oregon Agricultural Statistics*. October 2021.

<https://www.oregon.gov/oda/shared/Documents/Publications/Administration/ORAgFactsFigures.pdf>

## Hood River County

Hood River County is known for its picturesque orchards and fruit stands. Indeed, the county's primary agricultural products are fruits and berries. According to the 2017 USDA Census of Agriculture profile for Hood River County<sup>3</sup>, pear orchards comprise the bulk of the crop acres in the county, followed by cherries, hay and silage, apples, and berries, respectively. Agricultural commodities produced in Hood River County comprised 3 percent of Oregon's total agricultural sales in 2017 with \$126 million in market value of products sold. The market value of products sold in Hood River County increased dramatically from 2007 to 2017, with an increase of 64 percent. As seen in Exhibit 2, the number of farms in Hood River County also increased from 2007 to 2017. The number of farmworkers reported to the Census of Agriculture decreased, however, as did the number of farms that hire farmworkers. The cost of payroll has steadily increased, even as the number of workers has decreased, demonstrating an increase in the cost of labor.

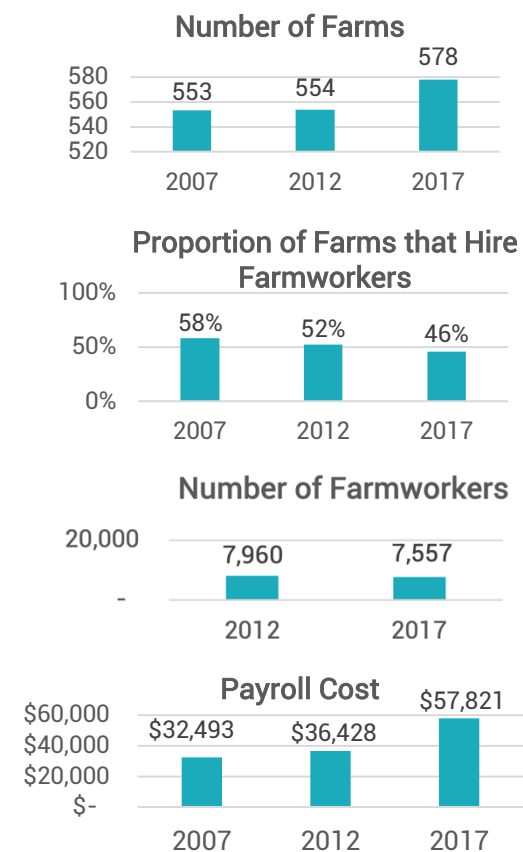
According to industry experts<sup>4</sup>, pears, cherries, apples, berries, and fruit packing houses are the largest employers of farmworkers in Hood River County. Orchard and berry crops require hand labor to harvest, and around half of all farms hire farm labor for this work. In interviews, employers and government agency staff said June through October are the busiest months for farmworkers in the county, and workers there are partially migrant workers and partially seasonal/

permanent workers, with farmworkers tending to settle and stay in the area rather than migrate.

A worker in Hood River County told us about their work saying, "We start the year trimming the trees, we have to clean the pear trees, and then we are maintaining the grape vines assuring that everything is following correctly, start putting the grapes in barrels for the production of wine." – M, 56, Seasonal/permanent worker, Hood River County

### Exhibit: 2 Changes in agricultural statistics in Hood River County in the last 10 years.

Sources: USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service, Census of Agriculture 2007-2017 and National Center for Farmworker Health 2012 and 2017 farmworker population estimates



<sup>3</sup> USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service, Census of Agriculture 2007-2017. *County Profiles*. [https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Online\\_Resources/County\\_Profiles/Oregon/index.php](https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Online_Resources/County_Profiles/Oregon/index.php)

<sup>4</sup> Our research team asked County Farm Bureaus and government agency staff that work in agriculture about the primary industries that employ farmworkers and what types of workers are typically employed.

## Marion County

Located in the heart of the Willamette Valley, Marion County is the state's leading agricultural producer. Marion County produced 14 percent of Oregon's agricultural sales in 2017, with more than \$700 million in market value of products sold, an increase of 18 percent over 2012. Nursery, greenhouse, floriculture and sod is by far the top agricultural commodity and comprises the large majority of farmland. Hay and forage produced the next highest income, followed by fruits tree nuts and berries, and vegetables, melons potatoes and sweet potatoes, respectively. There are more than 23,000 acres of vegetable crops and 16,000 acres of hazelnut orchards in Marion County. Exhibit 3 shows trends in Marion County farms and farm work over ten years from 2007 to 2017. The total number of farms decreased by about 100 farms from 2007 to 2012, and then increased again by about 200 in 2017. The estimated number of farmworkers hired decreased between 2012 and 2017, and payroll costs increased over time.<sup>5</sup>

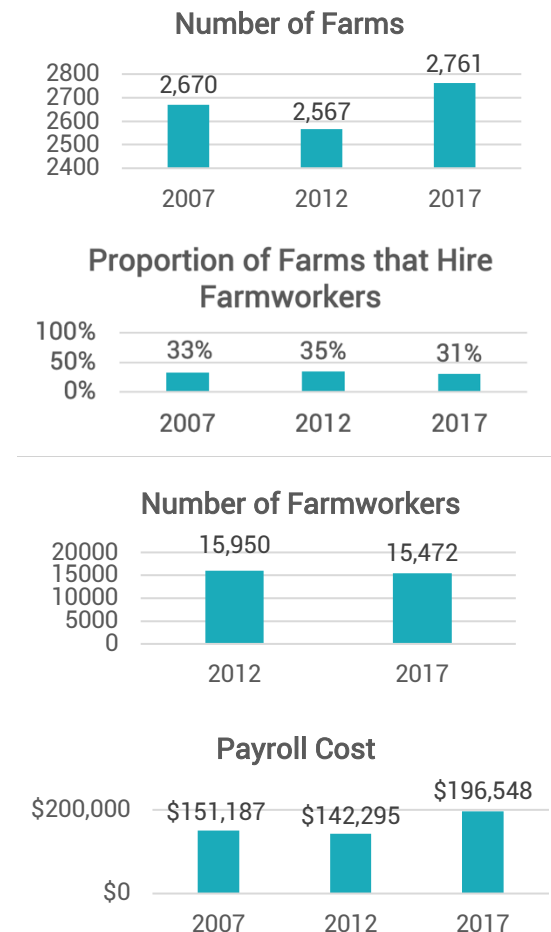
Local experts said berries, vegetable harvest, nursery, *pineros* (forestry/timber), and hemp are the commodities that most employ farmworkers in Marion County. Some of these crops require more hand labor than others, and about one -third of farms in Marion County hire farm labor. There is work for farmworkers year-round in the county, with berry harvest June-September, vegetable harvest in August, and forestry and nursery work happening throughout the year. Workers in the berry and vegetable harvest are a mix of migrant workers and seasonal/permanent workers, while nursery workers tend to be seasonal/

permanent and settled in the area. One worker described their work this way:

"We cut the bunches of grapes, prune them and fix the guides. Then the beets, we plucked them and picked them, put them in a sack and put them in a tray and planted them. Blueberries, we cut them and put them in jars, weighed them and put them in boxes. In the Canerias [canneries] we pick the vegetables, corn, squash, we put them in the boxes." – F, 61, Seasonal/Permanent worker, Marion Co.

### Exhibit: 3 Changes in agricultural statistics in Marion County in the last 10 years

Source: USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service, Census of Agriculture 2007-2017 and National Center for Farmworker Health (NCFH) 2012, 2017 farmworker population estimates



<sup>5</sup> USDA Census of Agriculture 2007-2017. *County Profiles*.

## Morrow County

Morrow County is a state hub of cattle, dairy, wheat and vegetable production in Oregon's Columbia Plateau. The county is the second highest agricultural producer in Oregon, comprising 12 percent of state agriculture sales, nearly \$600 million in 2017. Morrow County saw the market value of its products increase 5 percent from 2012 to 2017. Cattle and calves and milk from cows are the primary agricultural products of Morrow County, followed by wheat and vegetables including onions and watermelons. Wheat comprises the majority of crop acres in Morrow County at more than 165,000 acres, followed by hay with about 38,000 acres, and vegetable and fruit crops with about 32,000 acres. According to the Census of Agriculture by the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service, the number of farming operations in Morrow County decreased steadily from 2007 to 2017 (Exhibit 4). The number of farmworkers hired also decreased from 2012 to 2017. The county saw a small increase in the proportion of farms that hire farmworkers from 2007 to 2017, and a steady increase in the cost of payroll.<sup>6</sup>

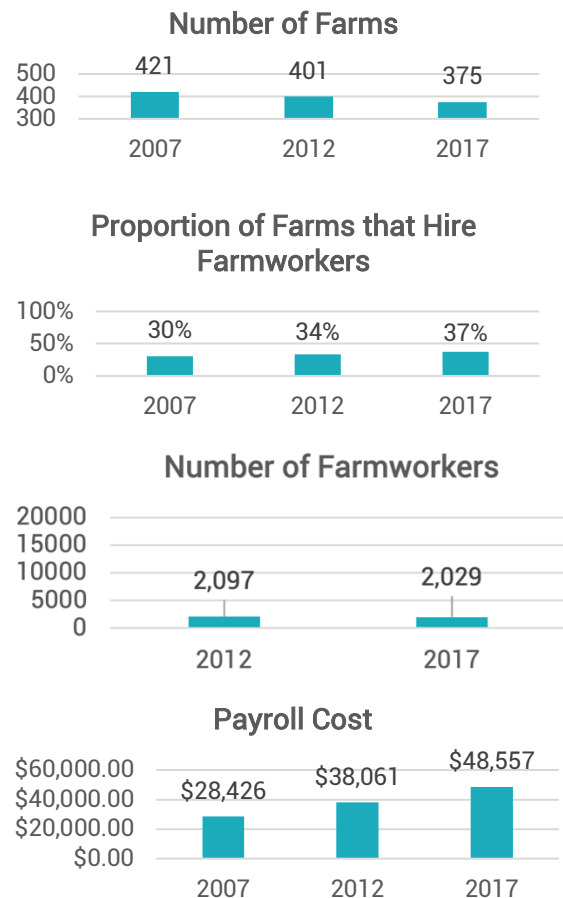
Agricultural experts said the primary agricultural industries that employ farmworkers in Morrow County are cattle, dairy, wheat, watermelon, onions, and potatoes. More than a third of operations hire farmworkers. Cattle and dairy industries require farm labor year-round, while potatoes, onions, and watermelon require the most work from April to September. One employer we interviewed who grows many organic vegetable crops said weeding requires more work than the harvest, making spring their busiest

season. They said farmworkers in Morrow County are primarily seasonal/ permanent workers who are settled in the area.

One worker in Morrow County shared with us, "I have worked hard to survive since arriving to this country and Boardman. I work planting corn, onion, wheat. I have worked for many farms and any opportunities that I can take, I work, and I have worked hard for my farmers, and I feel they have given me an opportunity of work." – M, 43, Migrant Worker

### Exhibit: 4 Changes in agricultural statistics in Morrow County in the last 10 years

Source: USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service, Census of Agriculture 2007-2017 and National Center for Farmworker Health (NCFH) 2012, 2017 farmworker population estimates



<sup>6</sup> USDA Census of Agriculture 2007-2017. *County Profiles*.

## Yamhill County

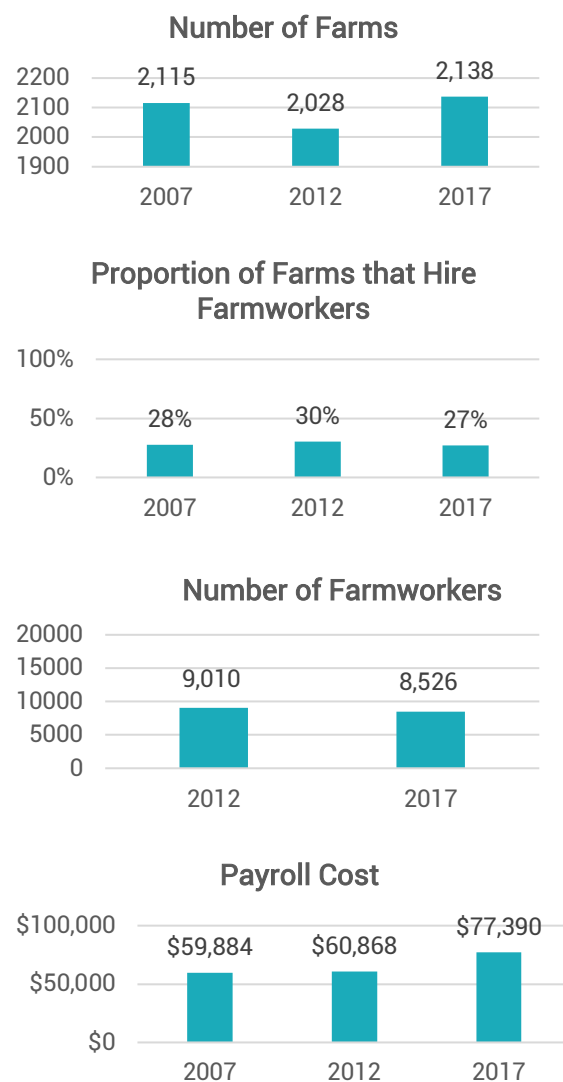
Yamhill County also lies in the fertile Willamette Valley, and is known for its vineyards and wineries. Yamhill County produced 6 percent of Oregon's state agriculture sales in 2017, with a market value of more than \$314 million, a 12 percent increase over 2012. Nursery, greenhouse, floriculture and sod comprise about half of the monetary value of crops in Yamhill County, followed by fruits tree nuts and berries, other crops and hay, and milk from cows, respectively. Fields used for grass seed comprise most of the county's crop acreage (more than 41,000 acres), followed by acres in hay at about 19,000 acres, hazelnuts at nearly 15,000 acres, grapes at about 6,000 acres, and vegetables at about 3,500 acres. Exhibit 5 shows trends in agriculture in Yamhill County from 2007 to 2017. The number of farms stayed relatively consistent from 2007 to 2017. The number of workers decreased from 2012 to 2017. The proportion of farms that hire farmworkers also remained similar from 2007 to 2017, while payroll costs increased more significantly from 2012 to 2017 than from 2007 to 2012.<sup>7</sup>

Experts we spoke to said nursery work, wine grapes, berries, hazelnuts, and hemp are the primary agricultural industries that employ farmworkers in Yamhill County. A little less than a third of farms employ farmworkers in Yamhill County. Nursery work is year-round, and experts said most farmworkers in that industry are seasonal/permanent workers who are settled in the area. The busy season for berries is June through August, and grape

and hazelnut harvest both occur in September and October. The workforce for these crops is a mix of migrant workers and seasonal/permanent workers.

### Exhibit: 5 Changes in agricultural statistics in Yamhill County in the last 10 years

Source: USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service, Census of Agriculture 2007-2017 and National Center for Farmworker Health (NCFH) 2012, 2017 farmworker population estimates



<sup>7</sup> USDA Census of Agriculture 2007-2017. *County Profiles*.



“Our very lives are dependent, for sustenance, on the sweat and sacrifice of the campesinos. Children of farm workers should be as proud of their parents' professions as other children are of theirs.”

— Cesar Chavez

## CHAPTER 2

# Numbers of Farmworkers and Their Dependents

# Current Farmworker Population Estimates

To estimate the need for farmworker housing, we needed to know how many farmworkers and their family members live in Oregon and the four counties. Exhibit 6 includes farmworker population estimates developed by the National Center for Farmworker Health (NCFH). Although these estimates used 2017 US Census of Agriculture data, which is likely out of date at the time of this study, the NCFH estimates are the most accurate and recent farmworker population estimates available<sup>8</sup>.

After subtracting H-2A workers from the NCFH estimates<sup>9</sup>, there were a total of 100,122 US-based farmworkers in Oregon in 2017. NCFH estimates show these farmworkers had a total of 158,327 dependents for a total of 258,449 farmworkers and their dependents state-wide. After subtracting H-2A workers, NCFH estimates show Marion County had 15,472 farmworkers; many more than estimated in Hood River, Morrow, or Yamhill County. Marion County also had the greatest estimated number of

farmworkers and dependents at 37,434<sup>10</sup>, compared to Hood River (20,465), Morrow (5,406), and Yamhill (22,589) Counties. Morrow County had the fewest number of farmworkers and dependents, and a higher proportion of farmworkers in livestock (29%) than any of the other counties; nearly twice as high as the state-wide proportion of farmworkers in livestock (15%).

According to NCFH estimates, 85 percent of farmworkers in Oregon in 2017 were seasonal or permanent workers. The remaining 15 percent were estimated to be migrant workers<sup>11</sup>. Weighted data from the US Employment and Training Administration's National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS), Fiscal Years (FY) 2014-2016 for Oregon and Washington corroborate the NCFH estimates, showing 82 percent of farmworkers did not migrate for work, while 18% did (Exhibit 7).

As part of this housing study, the Stamberger Outreach team conducted qualitative interviews with agricultural

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<sup>8</sup> The National Center for Farmworker Health (NCFH) estimates are based on data reported by employers to the 2017 Census of Agriculture reflecting the number of directly hired employees and the dollars paid to contract workers. NCFH adjusted the reported Census of Agriculture numbers to estimate the number of total workers. In order to analyze data further, coefficients are applied from data taken from the 2015-2018 National Agriculture Workers Survey (NAWS). The NAWS is an employment-based, random survey of the demographic, employment, and health characteristics of the U.S. crop labor force. These estimates include both crop production and animal production workers, as well as workers employed in support activities for both sectors.

<sup>9</sup> The NCFH estimates did not exclude H-2A workers. Because this study sought to characterize the need for farmworker housing, and H-2A workers are provided with housing as a part of their employment, we subtracted the number of H-2A workers given in the H-2A Disclosure Data provided by the Office of Foreign Labor Certification from the total farmworker population estimates.

<sup>10</sup> Due to data limitations, an estimate of dependents was not available for Marion County in 2017. The total workers and dependents in Marion County in 2017 were calculated using percent change in total workers + dependents of crop workers at the state level from 2012 to 2017 (20%).

<sup>11</sup> NCFH estimates use the NAWS (2019) definition of migrant worker, defined as someone who traveled at least 75 miles during a 12-month period to obtain a farm job. This definition differs from the OHCS definition of migrant worker, which includes those whose work has required travel in the past 12-months such that the worker is unable to return to their permanent place of residence within the same day, and who establish a temporary residence away from home while performing farm work. There is not enough information to determine whether the proportion of workers that migrate would be greater or lesser using the OHCS definition.

employers and government agency staff. In interviews, some respondents said most migrant workers these days migrate along circuits within the US, rather than crossing the border from and back into Mexico. Although there were fewer migratory farmworkers than seasonal/permanent workers, NCFH still estimated there were 15,515 migratory crop workers in Oregon in 2017. Due to having the highest number of total workers, it is likely that Marion County had the highest number of migrant

workers of the counties. However, Hood River County had the greatest proportion of workers who migrated (1,403, 19 percent).

The H-2A program allows employers who meet specific regulatory requirements to bring foreign nationals to the US to fill temporary agricultural jobs. Exhibit 8 shows there were a total of 3,292 workers enrolled in the H-2A visa program in Oregon in 2021<sup>12</sup>.

### Exhibit 6. Number and Types of Farmworkers

Source: National Center for Farmworker Health, and US Department of Labor, Office of Foreign Labor Certification, H-2A Disclosure Data for Oregon

County	Livestock Workers	Migratory Crop Workers	Seasonal Crop Workers	Total Crop Production Workers	H2A Workers	Total Workers (H2A excluded)	Dependents 17 and under	Dependents 18 and over	Total Dependents	Total Workers + Dependents
Hood River	48	1,403	6,301	7,703	194	7,557	7,639	5,075	12,714	20,465
Marion	*	*	*	*	51	15,472	*	*	*	37,434
Morrow	587	266	1,195	1,461	19	2,029	2,018	1,341	3,359	5,406
Yamhill	536	1,460	6,560	8,020	30	8,526	8,431	5,602	14,033	22,589
<b>State Total</b>	15,675	15,515	69,697	85,212	765	100,122	120,574	66,056	186,630	286,752

Note: NCFH estimates included H-2A workers. We subtracted the number of H-2A workers to find Total Workers (H-2A excluded). \* Indicates data not available. Due to data limitations, an estimate of dependents was not available for Marion County in 2017. The total workers and dependents in Marion County in 2017 were calculated using percent change in total workers + dependents of crop workers at the state level from 2012 to 2017 (20%).

### Exhibit 7. Farmworker Migrant Status, WA and OR Region, 2014-2016

Source: Weighted data from the Employment and Training Administration's National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS), Fiscal Years (FY) 2014-2016, special data pull for Oregon and Washington region

Status	Proportion
Non-Migrant	82%
Migrant	18%

<sup>12</sup> US Department of Labor, Office of Foreign Labor Certification, H-2A Disclosure Data for Oregon 2021 <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/foreign-labor/performance>

## Exhibit 8. Number of H-2A Workers Certified in Oregon and the Four Counties, 2021

Source: US Department of Labor, Office of Foreign Labor Certification, H-2A Disclosure Data for Oregon 2021

Geography	H-2A Workers Certified 2021
Hood River	489
Marion	338
Morrow	457
Yamhill	51
State of Oregon	3,292

## Changing farmworker numbers

We also compared 2012 NCFH population estimates in Oregon and the four counties to 2017 estimates to see how farmworker population estimates had changed over time. The estimates show a 3 to 5 percent decrease from 2012 to 2017 in the total number of farmworkers in Hood River, Marion, Morrow, and Yamhill Counties, and a decrease of 13 percent across the state of Oregon. Interviews with employers and agency experts

corroborate this data, saying there has been a decline in the number of farmworkers in recent years. There has also been an increase in the number of H-2A workers in Hood River, Marion, and Morrow Counties and at the state-level over the past five years, although H-2A workers comprised less than 1% of Oregon's farmworkers in 2017. Yamhill county had a slight decrease in H-2A workers in recent years<sup>13</sup>.

## Changes in number of local workers

Nearly all employers we interviewed for this study said the number of both migrant and seasonal/ permanent US-based farmworkers has been noticeably declining in recent years, and that they expect the decline to continue. Many agency staff we interviewed also said they have seen this decline. Some agency staff clarified that although there is a decline in farmworker numbers, there are still many local farmworkers and their

families in the area. Nearly all employers we interviewed said it is challenging for them to find enough workers and that competition for workers is high.

When asked what they thought was causing the number of farmworkers to decrease, nearly all employers mentioned competition from other farmers and other industries. Other reasons mentioned were COVID-19, existing farmworkers

<sup>13</sup> US Department of Labor, H-2A Disclosure Data. 2021.

getting older and fewer younger people willing to do farm work, and changes to the immigration system. In addition to the decrease in workers overall, some agency staff said there are fewer migrant workers in the four counties and a shift towards more settled workers that have their families with them. They said there are fewer workers because farmworkers are growing older and aging out of farm work, while younger people, including the children of farmworkers, are choosing higher paying and less physically demanding jobs.

One staff person we spoke to said tighter US-Mexico border security in recent years has also decreased the number of workers coming from Mexico. Some agency staff said there are more and more women going into farm work, and

one said there are still many older farmworkers who intend to stay in farm work.

One staff person said there are still many migrant workers coming up from California, and another said they expect to see more regional migration in the future, especially in areas like Hood River County where farmworkers cannot afford to live close to the farms.

Exhibit 9 shows the National Center for Farmworker Health farmworker population estimates for 2012 and 2017 with H-2A workers excluded. Our analysis indicated a decline in farmworkers hired in the state of Oregon and all four counties included in this study (Hood River, Marion, Morrow, and Yamhill) from 2012 to 2017.

**Exhibit 9. Farmworker Population and Change in Oregon and Hood River, Marion, Morrow, and Yamhill Counties, 2012 to 2017**

Source: The National Center for Farmworker Health (NCFH)

Geography	Total Workers, 2012	Total Workers, 2017	Percent Change, Total Workers, 2012 - 2017
Yamhill	7,960	7,557	-5%
Marion	15,950	15,472	-3%
Morrow	2,097	2,029	-3%
Hood River	9,010	8,526	-5%
State of Oregon	114,738	100,122	-13%

Note: H-2A workers were excluded from the NCFH estimates.

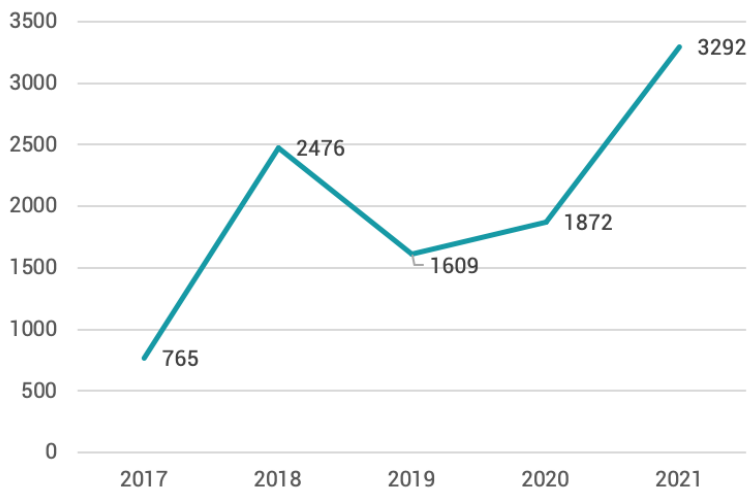
# Changes in number of H-2A workers

Exhibits 10 and 11 illustrate the change in the number of workers certified through the H-2A visa program in Oregon and the four counties from 2017 to 2021. According to US Department of Labor, H-2A disclosure data, H-2A workers have increased four-fold at the state level

since 2017. H-2A workers comprised 1% of Oregon's farmworkers in 2017. Marion, Morrow, and Hood River Counties saw an increase in the number of H-2A workers between 2017 and 2021 as well, but the number went down in Yamhill County.

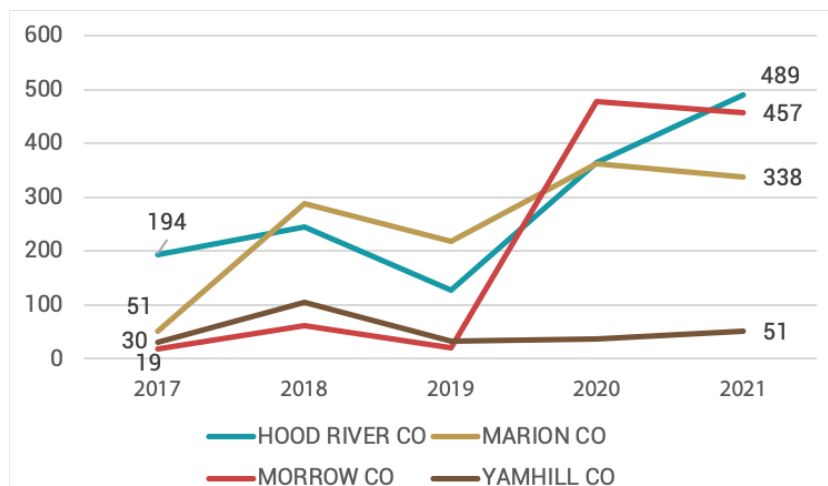
## Exhibit 10. Change in number of H-2A workers in Oregon, 2007-2021

Source: US Department of Labor, Office of Foreign Labor Certification, H-2A Disclosure Data for Oregon 2007-2021



## Exhibit 11. Change in number of H-2A workers in Hood River, Marion, Morrow, and Yamhill Counties, 2007-2021

Source: US Department of Labor, Office of Foreign Labor Certification, H-2A Disclosure Data 2007-2021



"I have worked hard to survive. Since arriving to this country and Boardman, I work planting corn, onion, wheat. I have worked for many farms and any opportunities that I can take I work, and I have worked hard for my farmers, and I feel they have given me an opportunity of work."

- Migrant Farmworker,  
Morrow County

## CHAPTER 3

# Profile of Oregon Farmworkers

# Farmworker Demographics

Compiling information about the demographics of farmworkers helps us learn the story of Oregon's farmworkers, who they are, and what their lives are like. There are few sources of farmworker demographic information, and none for Oregon specifically. Our team worked with the researchers that conduct the National Agricultural Worker Survey (NAWS) at the US Employment and Training Administration to generate a special data pull for the Oregon/Washington region.

In summary, Oregon and Washington's farmworkers tend to be about 40% female and 60% male and most are 25-50 years old. Most workers are seasonal/permanent workers who are settled with their families, and a smaller proportion are migrant workers following crops. Most farmworkers in Oregon and Washington were born in Mexico and identify as Latino/a/e or Mexican. Some have indigenous heritage. About one third report a 4<sup>th</sup> grade to 7<sup>th</sup> grade education level, with another quarter reporting 8<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> grade. Twenty-one percent said they had a 12<sup>th</sup> grade education or higher. About half are married with children, 13% are married with no children, 12% are unmarried parents, and a quarter are single with no children.

Farmworkers in Oregon and Washington have very low incomes, and many are in poverty.

32% of farmworker households in Oregon and Washington are in poverty, compared to the national estimate of 14% for the general population.



## Place of Birth

Farmworkers in Washington and Oregon were largely born in Mexico (80 percent). This is similar to national trends; the US farm labor force is predominantly comprised of immigrants (75 percent), with the overwhelming majority immigrating from Mexico (NAWS, 2019). Exhibit 12 shows the birthplace of farmworkers in Washington and Oregon, based on the analysis of 2014-2016 data from the Employment and Training Administration's National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS).

### Exhibit 12. Farmworker Place of Birth, WA and OR Region, 2014-2016

Source: Weighted data from the Employment and Training Administration's National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS), Fiscal Years (FY) 2014-2016, special data pull for Oregon and Washington region

Place of Birth	Proportion
US/PR	19%
Mexico	80%
Central America	*
Other	*

Notes: \* indicates data were suppressed because they are based on fewer than four observations or they have relative standard errors greater than 50 percent. The NAWS does not survey workers who hold H-2A temporary visas.

## Race and Ethnicity

Farmworkers we interviewed for this study primarily identified as Latino/Latina/Latine, and next most commonly identified as Mexican (Exhibit 13). Due to the small sample size, these results are not

statistically representative of the farmworker population in Oregon or the four counties but seem to corroborate the NAWS data indicating many farmworkers are from Mexico.

### Exhibit 13. Farmworker Interviewee Race/Ethnicity, Hood River, Marion, Morrow, Yamhill Counties, 2021

Source: Farmworker interviews, 2021, 80 total participants (20 in each Oregon County)

Race, Ethnicity	Percent
Hispanic-American	3%
Latino/Latina/Latine	52%
Mexican-American	6%
Mexican	38%
Central American	1%
Total	100%

Note: Some interviewees identified with multiple race/ethnicity categories.

## Languages Spoken & Indigenous Heritage

Looking at languages spoken offers another window into the race and ethnicity of farmworkers. According to 2014-2016 NAWS data from Oregon and Washington shown in Exhibit 14, most farmworkers are most comfortable speaking Spanish (83%), and a much smaller proportion are most comfortable speaking English (16%). This aligns with the findings that most farmworkers are of Latine or Mexican heritage.

Some of the farmworkers we interviewed for this study said they had spoken an

indigenous language growing up, demonstrating that some farmworkers have indigenous heritage. Those languages included Maya, Zapoteco, K'iche', Mixteco, Mixteco bajo, and Purepecha. Most are languages spoken in Mexico, and Maya and K'iche' are both spoken in Guatemala. Of farmworkers we talked to, Marion County had the most who said they spoke an indigenous language. Exhibit 15 shows the requests for indigenous language interpreters from the Oregon Justice Department in 2017. These requests further demonstrate the presence of indigenous people from Mexico and Central America in Oregon, and the four counties. Thirteen of the fourteen indigenous language requests were for languages spoken in what is now Mexico and Central America. The most frequently requested languages were Mam (133 requests), Mixteco Bajo (52 requests), Zapoteco (35 requests), and Q'Anjob'al (32 requests). In 2017, Marion County had the most requests for indigenous languages of any county (142), representing eight different languages. Morrow and Yamhill Counties also had requests for speakers of indigenous languages. The justice department did not make requests for

indigenous language speakers in Hood River County. However, farmworkers we spoke to in Hood River County did report speaking indigenous languages including Maya and Zapoteco. The NAWS Oregon and Washington data had suppressed values for indigenous languages because there were too few observations.

**Exhibit 14. Farmworker Languages Most Comfortable Speaking, WA and OR Region, 2014-2016**

Source: Weighted data from the Employment and Training Administration's National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS), Fiscal Years (FY) 2014-2016, special data pull for Oregon and Washington region

Language	Proportion
English	16%
Spanish	83%
Creole	*
Mixtec	*
Kanjobal	0%
Zapotec	*
Other	*

Note: \* indicates data were suppressed because they are based on fewer than four observations or they have relative standard errors greater than 50 percent.

**Exhibit 15. Oregon Justice Department Statewide Indigenous Language Requests for the Calendar Year 2017, 2018 Update to OR MSFW Enumeration Study \*Not a population estimate**

Source: 2018 Update to the Oregon Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker Enumeration Study<sup>14</sup>

2017	Benton	Clackamas	Clatsop	Deschutes	Lane	Lincoln	Linn	Malheur	Marion	Morrow	Multnomah	Polk	Umatilla	Washington	Yamhill	# by Language
Akateko								1	1		30					32
Chuj									16				7	1	4	28
Huichol													7			7
Ixil											5					5
Mam	33	1			4	29			46		3		16	1		133
Maya																
Yucatan											18					18
Mixteco								1	22					5		28
Mixteco Alto									1							1
Mixteco Bajo						3			30		1		2	12	4	52
Nahuatl		2												6		8
Q'Anjobal		1									3		27	2		33
Quiche	4									2	6		13			25
Purepecha (Tarasco)		2		13							4					19
Trique								1	10		8			1		20
Zapoteco		2			6	2			16				9			35
Total Requests by County	37	8	0	13	10	34	0	3	142	2	78	0	81	28	8	
County Language Count	2	5	0	1	2	3	0	3	8	1	9	0	7	7	3	

Note: These data are not an estimate of the number of indigenous people in Oregon or the counties.

<sup>14</sup> Rahe, Mallory. "Estimates of Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers In Agriculture, 2018 Update." Oregon State University Extension Service, Department of Applied Economics. June, 2018

In 2002, a coalition of organizations including Community and Shelter Assistance of Oregon, Oregon Child Development Corporation, Virginia Garcia Memorial Health Center and the Yakima Valley Farmworkers Clinic, hired Alice C. Larsen Ph.D. of Larsen Assistance Services to complete an Oregon Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker Enumeration Profiles Study. Dr. Larsen went on to update this study in 2013. Mallory Rahe, Ph.D., from the Oregon State University Extension Service Department of Applied Economics completed the most recent update of this study in 2018.

## Gender

Exhibit 16 shows that 60 percent of farmworkers in Oregon and Washington identify as male, and the remaining 40 percent as female. In our interviews with farmworkers, we worked to specifically include workers who identified as women. Thirty of the 80 farmworkers we spoke to identified as female.

### Exhibit 16. Farmworker Gender Identity, WA and OR Region, 2014-2016

Source: Weighted data from the Employment and Training Administration's National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS), Fiscal Years (FY) 2014-2016, special data pull for Oregon and Washington region

Gender Identity	Proportion
Male	60%
Female	40%

## Age

Exhibit 17 outlines the age group distribution of the farmworker population in Washington and Oregon, based on 2014-2016 NAWS data. The predominate age groups are 22 to 34 years and 35 to 44 years comprising 61 percent of the total farmworker population. These predominant age groups include those within the prime age for employment which is not surprising since the focus of the NAWS is to survey working-aged farm labor population. Farmworkers tended to be relatively young and middle aged, with a median age of 37 years and half under the age of 35 years (2014-2016).

### Exhibit 17. Farmworker Age Groups, WA and OR Region, 2014-2016

Source: Weighted data from the Employment and Training Administration's National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS), Fiscal Years (FY) 2014-2016, special data pull for Oregon and Washington region

Age Groups	Proportion
14-17	5%*
18-21	7%
22-24	6%
25-34	32%
35-44	23%
45-50	10%
51-54	3%
55-64	12%
65+	1%*

Note: \* indicates data accuracy concerns since the estimate has relative standard errors between 31 and 50 percent.

## Educational Attainment

Exhibit 18 shows the educational attainment distribution of farmworkers in Oregon and Washington, based on NAWS data from 2014-2016. Fourth to seventh grade education was the most prevalent group, followed by eighth to eleventh grade.

### Exhibit 18. Farmworker Educational Attainment, WA and OR Region, 2014-2016

Source: Weighted data from the Employment and Training Administration's National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS), Fiscal Years (FY) 2014-2016, special data pull for Oregon and Washington region

Highest grade completed	Proportion
No schooling	8%*
1st to 3rd grade	12%
4th to 7th grade	31%
8th to 11th grade	26%
12th grade	13%
13+ grades	9%

Note: \* indicates data accuracy concerns since the estimate has relative standard errors between 31 and 50 percent.

## Family Composition and Marital Status

Exhibit 19 illustrates farmworker household composition in Oregon and Washington. Married people with children comprised half of all farmworker households. In contrast, households comprised of unmarried people with children (estimated at 12 percent) comprised the smallest share of farmworker households. According to the data, farmworkers tend to live with children at a much higher rate than the general population in Oregon (50 percent of farmworker households, in comparison to 26 percent of households in the general population). NAWS data also shows that 63 percent of farmworkers in Oregon and Washington are married, and 37 percent unmarried (Exhibit 20).

### Exhibit 19. Farmworker Family Composition, WA and OR Region, 2014-2016

Source: Weighted data from the Employment and Training Administration's National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS), Fiscal Years (FY) 2014-2016, special data pull for Oregon and Washington region

Family Composition	Proportion
Married parent	50%
Married, no children	13%
Unmarried parent	12%
Single, no children	25%

### Exhibit 20. Farmworker Marital Status, WA and OR Region, 2014-2016

Source: Weighted data from the Employment and Training Administration's National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS), Fiscal Years (FY) 2014-2016, special data pull for Oregon and Washington region

Marital Status	Proportion
Unmarried	37%
Married	63%

## Annual Income

The median and average total income of individual farmworkers, including all sources of income, ranged from \$17,500 - \$19,999 per year in Washington and Oregon (Exhibit 21). The average individual income from farm work alone was \$12,500 to \$14,999 per year. NAWS data showed a median income range for farmworker households of \$25,000 - \$29,999 per year, and an average household income of \$20,000-\$24,999 per year. Both average

and median household incomes are totals, including all sources of income.

More than half of farmworkers we interviewed said they did not know their household income. Many said their income is very unstable due to the seasonality of their work, unpredictable weather and harvest conditions, and the pandemic and wildfires in recent years. Some workers chose not to share their income information. Ultimately, we received 12 responses about farmworker income from the 80 interviewees. Although it is based on too few responses to be statistically reliable, our estimate of the average family income from the 12 responses we received was \$23,329, which falls within the NAWS average range of \$20,000-\$24,999<sup>15</sup>.

### Exhibit 21. Farmworker Individual and Household Annual Income, WA and OR Region, 2014-2016

Source: Weighted data from the Employment and Training Administration's National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS), Fiscal Years (FY) 2014-2016, special data pull for Oregon and Washington region

Median Annual Income	
Farmworker Household	\$25,000 - \$29,999
Individual Farmworker	\$17,500 - \$19,999

## Monthly Income

We also estimated the monthly income of farmworker households (Exhibit 22) based on these 12 responses and information about average number of months worked per year, peak work seasons, and hours worked per week. Farmworker interview respondents reported that they worked an average of 8.3 months per year, with approximately 36 percent doing farm work for six months or less. Additionally, a recent Farm Bureau survey of their members (agricultural employers) found that farm laborers tended to work between 55 and 70 hours per week during peak seasons<sup>16</sup>. From this and data about length of peak seasons, we estimated that farmworkers work an average of 62.5 hours per week in peak season, and 40 hours per week in non-peak season. Using this information, we estimated average monthly income for farmworker households for both peak season and non-peak season. These estimates should be treated with caution due to the low number of farmworker income responses used as the basis for these estimates.

<sup>15</sup> Estimating farmworker household income from the interviews of 80 farmworkers is challenging for a number of reasons, including a lack of responses, uncertainty about wages and payment arrangements (such as payment per bucket of fruit), sporadic seasonal work not extending the full year, uncertainty about earnings associated with non-farm labor, and other limitations. Thus, the findings should be used with caution.

<sup>16</sup> VanderHart, Dirk. "Bill to grant overtime pay to Oregon farmworkers gets last-ditch shot of life." *Oregon Public Broadcasting*. June 16, 2021. <https://www.opb.org/article/2021/06/16/bill-would-grant-farmworkers-overtime>

## Exhibit 22 Farmworker Household Income, Hood River, Marion, Morrow, Yamhill Counties, 2021

Source: Farmworker interviews, 2021, 80 total participants (20 in each Oregon County).

Household Income	Annual Income
Mean	\$23,329
Bottom Half Range	\$1,600 to \$20,000
Top Half Range	\$20,000 to \$70,000
Monthly Household Income for Interviewed Farmworkers	Monthly Income
Peak Season Mean	\$3,165
Non-Peak Season Mean	\$2,026

Notes: Annual household income calculations were only provided for interviewees providing annual income information. Monthly household income calculations were only provided for interviewees only providing hourly wage information. The findings are limited since only 14 interviewees provided their total annual household income and 13 interviewees provided a wage rate. The minimum wage for the county of the interviewee was used when wage rates were not provided. Hours worked per week during the peak season was 62.5 hours per week (OPB, VanderHart, August 19, 2021). Household income estimates were not derived for those preferring not to answer.

## Poverty rates among farmworkers

Analysis of the 2014-2016 NAWS data for Oregon and Washington found that 32 percent of farmworker families were below the poverty level defined by the US Department of Health and Human Services<sup>17</sup>. The federal poverty threshold in the US for a family of three in 2015 was \$18,871 and the US poverty rate was nearly 14 percent<sup>18</sup>. In comparison to the national rates, farmworker households in Oregon and Washington were over two times more likely to be living in poverty (Exhibit 23). This estimate derived from the NAWS data (2014-2016) could be lower than actual conditions since the survey did not include dependents living outside of the US as a part of the assessment.

### Exhibit 23. Farmworker Households in Poverty, WA and OR Region, 2014-2016

Source: Weighted data from the Employment and Training Administration's National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS), Fiscal Years (FY) 2014-2016, special data pull for Oregon and Washington region

Household Type	Proportion in Poverty
Farmworker Households (NAWS OR/WA, 2014-2016)	32%
US Households (US Census Bureau, 2015, family of three)	14%

<sup>17</sup> A poverty threshold was calculated for each worker based on the worker's family size and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' poverty guidelines for the matching year. Workers' family incomes were then compared to the poverty thresholds calculated for their family size. Source: NAWS, 2013-2014 Report

<sup>18</sup> United States Census Bureau. *Income and Poverty in the United States: 2015*, by Bernadette D. Proctor, Jessica L. Semega, Melissa A. Kollar. Report Number P60-256. September 13, 2016. <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2016/demo/p60-256.html>

“It's ironic that those who till the soil, cultivate and harvest the fruits, vegetables, and other foods that fill your tables with abundance have nothing left for themselves.”

- Cesar Chavez

## CHAPTER 4

# Farmworker Housing Needs Assessment



# Our team assessed farmworker housing need by analyzing the following:

1. The gap between typical rent costs and what farmworkers can afford
2. The degree to which farmworker households are overcrowded
3. The availability of subsidized housing for farmworkers
4. Barriers farmworkers face to accessing housing
5. Conditions of current farmworker housing
6. Where farmworkers are currently living
7. Distance from home to work (commute information)
8. Impacts of COVID-19, smoke and wildfires, and extreme heat on housing
9. Impacts on other life aspects
10. Employer barriers and benefits of providing farmworker housing
11. Estimated number of farmworker households in Oregon and the four counties

## 1

### The gap between typical rent costs and what farmworkers can afford

For the general population in Oregon, rent and housing prices have increased faster than household incomes. Rents have increased by around 40 percent over the last decade (Appendix A, Exhibits 54 and 55) while the median household income of the general population increased by only 28 percent. Median housing sales prices in all four counties and the state of Oregon have also increased by 23 to 37 percent (Appendix A, Exhibit 53) in the past three years.

**Our team compared the cost of market-rate housing to what farmworkers earn. Results showed that most farmworker households**

**in Hood River, Marion, Morrow, and Yamhill Counties do not earn enough to afford fair market housing costs.**

An important way to evaluate housing affordability issues is to quantify housing cost burden. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) guidelines indicate that a household is cost burdened when they pay more than 30 percent of their gross household income for housing and severely cost burdened when they pay more than 50 percent of their gross household income for housing. Housing “cost burden”<sup>19</sup> can put households in vulnerable situations and force them to make trade-offs between housing costs and other essentials like food, medicine, or transportation. This unstable condition can also lead to rental evictions, job instability, school instability for children, and homelessness.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, some farmworkers we interviewed said they are living in cars or trucks because they cannot afford the cost of housing. Some said they had owned a home in the past but lost it because they got behind on payments. They reported that losing their homes had taken an emotional toll on them.

Through our analysis, we determined that farmworker households had an average income of \$23,329 per year, or an average household income of \$20,000-\$24,999 per year, according to NAWS data. The Median Family Income (MFI) estimate for a family of four in Hood River, Marion, Morrow, and

Yamhill counties ranges from \$63,200 to \$92,100 (2020, HUD). According to this data, on average, farmworker households have incomes of between approximately 25 percent and 37 percent of the MFI. This is a very low average income. Typically, a household needs to earn about 60% of MFI to afford market-rate rent. Although limited data about farmworker housing costs prevented us from calculating the full extent of housing cost burden among farmworkers, our conclusion from the analyses we could conduct is that nearly all farmworker households are cost burdened. Most have unmet housing need and cannot afford housing that is in good condition and not overcrowded. This finding is supported by the findings from the analysis describing overcrowded housing conditions and other poor housing conditions.

**Most farmworker households have unmet housing need and cannot afford housing that is in good condition and not overcrowded.**

Exhibit 24 describes the housing affordability gap for farmworkers in the four-county region based on farmworker interview findings. The exhibit provides an

<sup>19</sup> The Department of Housing and Urban Development’s guidelines define households paying more than 30 percent of their income on housing experience “cost burdened,” and households paying more than 50 percent of their income on housing experience “severely cost burdened.”

<sup>20</sup> Cost burdening for owner-occupied households is not terribly common because mortgage lenders typically ensure that a household can pay its debt obligations before signing off on a loan. Cost burden does not consider accumulated wealth and assets.

estimate of what would be an affordable housing cost (30 percent of total household income) based on the mean household income and means for the top half and bottom half household incomes. These income levels are compared to fair market rents for each county to assess whether the household could afford or not afford the

fair market rent. Households closest to being able to afford market-rate housing are those with incomes above the farmworker household income mean in Morrow County (who have a gap of \$40 per month) and Marion County (who have a gap of \$220 per month).

**Exhibit 24. Farmworker Housing Affordability Gap for Hood River, Marion, Morrow, Yamhill Counties, 2021**

Source: OHCS interview findings, 2021, 80 total participants (20 in each Oregon County).

			Hood River County	Marion County	Morrow County	Yamhill County
Average Monthly Rent (Fair Market Rent)			\$1,207	\$1,093	\$911	\$1,583
	Average farmworker household income	Affordable monthly housing cost at that income	Affordability Gap: Difference between fair market rent and what the average farmworker household can afford.			
Overall Mean	\$23,329	\$583	Cannot afford, Gap of \$624	Cannot afford, Gap of \$510	Cannot afford, Gap of \$328	Cannot afford, Gap of \$1,000
Comparison of Different Household Incomes						
Households with Incomes below the average (\$23,329)	\$11,800	\$295	Cannot Afford, Gap of \$912	Cannot Afford, Gap of \$798	Cannot Afford, Gap of \$616	Cannot Afford, Gap of \$1,288
Households with Incomes above the average (\$23,329)	\$34,857	\$871	Cannot Afford, Gap of \$336	Cannot Afford, Gap of \$222	Cannot Afford, Gap of \$40	Cannot Afford, Gap of \$712

Note: Housing was considered affordable if it cost no more than 30 percent of the total household income.

# 2

## Overcrowding in farmworker households

In interviews, one in four farmworkers said their housing was too crowded. In addition to hearing the experiences of farmworkers, we also calculated rates of overcrowding from NAWS Oregon/Washington estimates and farmworker interview responses about number of rooms and occupants in their housing. The results show much higher rates of overcrowding among farmworker households than in the general population (Appendix, Exhibits 50, 51).

Overcrowding occurs when the relatively high cost of housing either forces a household to double-up with another household or live in a smaller housing unit to be able to afford food and other basic needs. An overcrowded household is defined by the US Census Bureau as one with more than one person per room, excluding bathrooms, kitchens, hallways, and porches. Severely overcrowded households are households with more than 1.5 persons per room. Overcrowding can indicate that a community does not have an adequate supply of affordable housing, especially for larger families.

As shown in Exhibit 26, most farmworker households in the NAWS

Oregon/Washington analysis were overcrowded (77 percent) – this is an exceedingly high rate of overcrowded living conditions. Our team analyzed farmworker interview responses about number of persons and bedrooms to assess overcrowding among interviewees.

Of the farmworkers interviewed, 52 reported that they were severely overcrowded (1.51 persons per room or more, Exhibit 26).

Some of these households are overcrowded because two or more families were living together, and some were overcrowded because of larger than average family size. This suggests need for additional housing or housing with more bedrooms to reduce overcrowding.

Exhibit 26 shows an astounding 96 percent of the interviewed farmworkers living in overcrowded conditions, and approximately 65 percent in severely overcrowded conditions. Two respondents shared a cabin on a farm with 20 other people.

### Exhibit 25. Overcrowded Housing Results for Farmworkers, WA and OR Region, 2014-2016

Source: Weighted data from the Employment and Training Administration's National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS), Fiscal Years (FY) 2014-2016, special data pull for Oregon and Washington region.

Density Crowding	Proportion
Crowded	77%
Not Crowded	23%

### Exhibit 26. Overcrowded Housing Analysis Results Based on Interviewed Farmworkers, Hood River, Marion, Morrow, Yamhill Counties, 2021

Source: Farmworker interview findings, 2021, 80 total participants (20 in each Oregon County)

Persons per Room	Hood River	Marion	Morrow	Yamhill	Overall
Not overcrowded (<1 Persons)	5%	0%	5%	5%	4%
Overcrowded (1.01 - 1.5 persons)	45%	30%	35%	15%	31%
Severely overcrowded (1.51 or more persons)	50%	70%	60%	80%	65%

# 3

## Subsidized farmworker housing

To help address the need for affordable housing, some organizations offer subsidized rental housing specifically for farmworkers. There is not enough subsidized farmworker-specific housing to meet the need. There are an estimated 83,731 farmworkers and their dependents in Hood River, Marion, Morrow, and Yamhill Counties, and only 395 subsidized units for farmworkers (Exhibit 27). All of these units

are occupied, and all have wait lists of applicants. There is a total of 455 applicants on wait lists in Marion and Yamhill Counties. Three of the seven housing complexes for farmworkers have more than 100 applicants on the wait list. There are no known farmworker-specific subsidized units offered by non-employers in Hood River or Morrow County. To qualify for farmworker-specific subsidized housing in Yamhill County, farmworkers must receive a substantial portion of their income from farm work and earn no more than 50% of area median income for their family size. As seen in Exhibit 28 below, rental costs for these units vary. As indicated in our assessment of what the average farmworker household can afford to pay for monthly rent, some of these subsidized costs may be unaffordable to farmworkers.

**Exhibit 27. Farmworker-specific rental units, vacancies, and applicants on wait list, Marion and Yamhill Counties**

Sources: Farmworker Housing Development Corporation (FHDC), Housing Authority of Yamhill County

Geography	Total Farmworker Units	Vacant Units	Applicants on Wait List
Marion County	341	0	425
Yamhill County	54	0	30
Totals:	395	0	455

**Exhibit 28. Rental costs for farmworker-specific rental units, Marion and Yamhill Counties**

Sources: Farmworker Housing Development Corporation (FHDC), Housing Authority of Yamhill County

1-Bedroom	2-Bedroom	3-Bedroom	4-Bedroom
\$509-\$702	\$505-\$823	\$580-\$952	\$641-\$929

# 4

## Barriers farmworkers face to accessing housing

Most farmworkers we interviewed said it is difficult for them to find housing. Cost was the biggest barrier most farmworkers said they faced when looking for housing. Cost, coupled with very low incomes and income instability, made it difficult for farmworkers to qualify for and keep their housing.

Interviewees also often said that rental application requirements were too burdensome and that there was limited overall housing availability. Many said they wanted to own homes but could not access homeownership due to their incomes and because they can't meet home loan requirements.

Most employers we interviewed also said it is difficult for farmworkers to find housing in their county. Cost and lack of available housing were the most mentioned barriers employers say farmworkers face. Employers also said that workers find housing by word-of-mouth, adding to the difficulty. One employer said rental application requirements and unstable incomes also make it difficult for farmworkers to access housing. A few employers mentioned transportation-related barriers caused by living off-farm

and away from work.

Many agency staff we interviewed also said it is difficult for farmworkers to find housing. Barriers they described included: cost, lack of available housing, rental application requirements that are difficult for farmworkers to meet, language barriers, housing too far from work, and racism and discrimination.

# 5

## Conditions of Farmworker Housing

### Farmworker perspective

Many farmworkers we interviewed for this study talked about poor housing.

A number of workers said they want the government to help improve their housing conditions, and some ask that government workers come see their housing conditions to understand the need.

The most common housing problems farmworkers described were housing in disrepair, overcrowded housing, not enough privacy, not enough heat, and that bathrooms are shared or outdoors. Interviewees also mentioned insect and rodent infestations, being treated poorly by landlords, and unsafe living conditions in previous places they had lived.

For all housing types, interviewers also asked farmworkers about 13 specific housing problems based on HUD housing standards and asked them to indicate whether they have each problem with their current housing (see list of problems in chart on page 93). Most interviewees said they had problems on the list, and all items on the list were reported multiple times. Migrant and seasonal/permanent workers reported most problems at similar rates.

The most reported on the list of specific problems were:

- Not having enough privacy (83%, 66 out of 80)
- Not having enough heat (65%, 52 out of 80)
- Cracking, chipping, or peeling paint (64%, 51 out of 80)
- Mold (59%, 47 out of 80)

Interviewers also asked farmworkers about pesticide exposure concerns around their homes. More than a third of farmworker interviewees said they are concerned about pesticide use around their housing, particularly about risks to their children and worries about long-term health impacts. This concern was shared by workers living both on-farm and off-farm.

## Employer perspective

We asked employers about their sense of the conditions of farmworker housing in their counties. Most said the full range of conditions exist from poor to excellent, and several said they had heard stories about poor conditions. All employers we spoke to who provide housing said the condition of at least some of their housing could be improved. Some employers we spoke to acknowledged that there is employer-owned farmworker housing in their county that has not been registered through OSHA that should be, and that some of this housing is in poor condition. A few farmers said they think OSHA should do more enforcement on those who are not complying with their registration program, and a few others said trying to work with employers to bring them into compliance without penalizing them was a better approach. Some felt it unfair that OSHA increases standards on those who are complying because of the actions of those who aren't.

## Agency staff perspective

Most agency staff we spoke to said there is a significant amount of farmworker housing in poor condition. They described overcrowding, old buildings with structural problems, pesticide exposure in on-farm housing, biting insect infestations, and lack of weatherization for hot and cold weather. Some agency staff said farmworkers don't speak out about poor conditions in employer-provided housing because they fear losing their job or housing. Many also

acknowledged there is farmworker housing that is not registered with OSHA that should be, and that this housing is sometimes in poor condition. One said there is a lot of unregistered housing in all four counties, and hundreds of hidden unregistered labor camps in Hood River County. They said problems with the OSHA registration and inspection process contribute to unregistered housing.

## On-farm housing

Although we did not specifically ask about conditions in on-farm versus off-farm housing, many farmworkers pointed out problems with on-farm housing. Poor housing conditions and inadequate bathrooms were the most common problems that farmworkers described with on-farm housing. A number of farmworkers also noted that they had no choice but to live in free-on-farm housing because they do not earn enough to afford to live anywhere else. Some also mentioned they were afraid to speak out about poor on-farm housing conditions for fear of losing their job, their housing, or being deported.

**"The cabin was my last option. I spent all my savings on my wife's funeral in Mexico. When I came back to work just recently, I found out that the rents tripled. I could not pay that anymore. A coworker took me where he was working, he had housing included. I wasn't charged for a very small room, where I can be only to sleep." – M, 67, migrant worker, Yamhill County**



Some farmworkers said they have a good relationship with their employer and good on-farm housing conditions.

Workers who were happy with their on-farm housing described having all the basic amenities and employers who checked on them, made repairs, and made them feel cared for.

Agency staff described both benefits and drawbacks of farmworker housing provided by employers. They said employers provide housing in order to attract and retain the workforce they need. Another said employer-owned housing has benefits for farmworkers, especially migrant workers, including cheap or free rent, being close to work, no typical rental requirements such as rental history, and availability of temporary housing which can be hard to find otherwise. Quite a few interviewees mentioned problems with the power dynamic inherent in housing that is tied to employment. They said farmworkers often do not speak out about poor conditions in employer-provided housing because they fear losing their job or their housing.

## 6

### Farmworker Housing Characteristics

#### Where farmworkers are living

As seen in Exhibit 29, the NAWS survey data for Oregon and Washington showed that farmworkers primarily lived off-farm, and nearly half said they lived in a single-family home. About one-third said they lived in an apartment, and 20 percent in mobile homes. In interviews with agricultural employers, we asked where the farmworkers they employ tend to live. The responses varied and were county-specific (summarized in Exhibit 30). They said farmworkers tend to live off-farm in Marion, Morrow, and Yamhill Counties, and tend to live on-farm in Hood River County. Our interviews with farmworkers for this study corroborated this finding in Hood River County. Additionally, many workers we interviewed in Morrow County lived in mobile homes they owned.

### Exhibit 29. Farmworker Housing Location and Type of Housing, WA and OR Region, 2014-2016

Source: Weighted data from the Employment and Training Administration's National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS), Fiscal Years (FY) 2014-2016, special data pull for Oregon and Washington region

Housing Type Description	Proportion
Single family home	48%
Apartment	30%
Duplex/triplex	1%*
Mobile home	20%
Dormitory/barracks/boarding house	1%
Motel/hotel	0%
Other (includes RV/camper, campsite, tent, outdoors, car, homeless, no fixed shelter, other unnamed types)	*
Housing Location Description	Proportion
Off farm	86%
On farm	14%
Other	*

Note: \* indicates data accuracy concerns since the estimate has relative standard errors between 31 and 50 percent.

### Exhibit 30. Where Employers Say Farmworkers Tend to Live, OHCS study employer interviews 2021

Source: Interviews conducted with agricultural employers in 2021 through this housing study

County	Where Farmworkers Tend to Live
Hood River	Mostly free, on-farm housing provided by employers
Marion	Most in private rental housing, homes they own, or sharing housing with family, little on-farm housing
Morrow	Some community-based employer-owned housing, some private rental housing, some own trailers or RVs and rent space, some sharing housing with family
Yamhill	Most in private rental housing, some in on-farm housing

## Farmworker Housing Arrangements (Tenure)

Exhibit 31 shows housing tenure trends for Washington and Oregon farmworkers. Although most OR/WA farmworkers said they either rent from non-employer/non-relative (62 percent) or received free housing from employer (12 percent), 22 percent of these farmworkers owned a home.

### Exhibit 31. Tenure of Housing for Farmworkers, WA and OR Region, 2014-2016

Source: Weighted data from the Employment and Training Administration's National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS), Fiscal Years (FY) 2014-2016, special data pull for Oregon and Washington region

Housing Tenure Type	Proportion
Pay for housing provided by employer	1%*
Pays for housing to non-work-related institution	Insufficient data
Receives free housing from employer	12%*
Farmworker or family member owns the house	22%
Rent from non-employer/non-relative	62%
Other	Insufficient data

Note: \* indicates data accuracy concerns since the estimate has relative standard errors between 31 and 50 percent.

# 7

## Distance from home to work (commute information)

According to the NAWS data in Exhibit 32, farmworkers tend to live within 50 miles of their workplace. Within this, 13 percent are located at the job, and 30 percent are within nine miles. Another third is within 10-24

miles, and 22 percent are within 25-49 miles. A majority of farmworkers drive their own car to work, and next most common was carpooling, followed by *raitero* (private fee for service transportation), and then walking. In interviews with farmworkers, they expressed similar commute types, except that only one said they use a *raitero*. The NAWS OR/WA data further shows that over half of farmworkers surveyed pay for rides or gas to get to work, but most do not use labor buses.

**Exhibit 32. Farmworker Commute Information, WA and OR Region, 2014-2016**

Source: Weighted data from the Employment and Training Administration's National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS), Fiscal Years (FY) 2014-2016, special data pull for Oregon and Washington region

<b>Distance from house to work</b>	<b>Proportion</b>
Located at the job	13%
Within 9 miles	30%
10-24 miles	34%
25-49 miles	22%
50-74 miles	0
75 or more miles	*

<b>How Farmworker Commutes</b>	<b>Proportion</b>
Drives car	60%
Walks	6%
Ride with others	18%
Public transportation (bus, train)	0
Labor bus	*
Other	*
Raitero (fee for transportation)	12%

<b>Farmworkers paying a fee for rides to work</b>	<b>Proportion</b>
No	41%
Yes	23%
Yes, just for gas	36%

<b>Farmworkers using labor bus</b>	<b>Proportion</b>
No	94%
Yes	*

Note: \* indicates data accuracy concerns since the estimate has relative standard errors between 31 and 50 percent.

# 8

## Impacts of COVID-19, Wildfires, Smoke and Extreme Heat on Housing

### Farmworker perspective

One in four farmworkers interviewed said their housing was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Impacts included closures and restrictions keeping them from finding housing, getting behind in rent or house payments due to lack of work, and getting sick with COVID-19 or having to quarantine. Another one in four farmworkers reported housing impacts from wildfires and hazardous air quality caused by wildfire smoke. Impacts included losing work and income and being evacuated or needing to relocate to find work. Some experienced health impacts from working in smoky conditions and had to seek medical treatment.

Farmworkers also reported housing impacts due to extreme heat. The most mentioned impact was losing work and income because farms shut down during the heat and crops were lost and not harvested. Not many farmworkers interviewed had been evacuated. Most of those who had been evacuated said they went to stay with family. One said they

were provided with a hotel room for COVID-19 quarantine, and a small number said they went to shelters when evacuated due to wildfires. Some did not know where to go during wildfire evacuations.

### Employer perspective

We asked how COVID-19, the 2021 heat wave, and recent smoke and wildfires had impacted employers and their ability to provide farmworker housing. None of the employers that provide housing said they had ever had to evacuate their workers. Most said they had made it through the pandemic with relatively few cases or hospitalizations but described a variety of other impacts due to COVID-19. When asked about the heat wave, many farmers talked about the new OSHA heat rules. One farmer said the 2021 heat wave “cooked our crops in the ground”.

**As a result of recent smoke and wildfires, employers described negative impacts on worker respiratory health, damage to crop products, and decreased income for them and their workers.**

## Agency staff perspective

In interviews, a number of agency staff said COVID-19 decreased available housing for farmworkers, making it harder for farmworkers to find housing and for employers to house their workers. They said some employers lost workers they needed because they could not house them. Although we did not specifically ask about new OSHA labor and housing rules, agency staff expressed their differing

opinions about them. Interviewees that work with employers said new OSHA rules about COVID-19, heat, and smoke make it more difficult for employers to offer housing, and one said the rules have stopped some employers from providing housing altogether. However, interviewees that work with farmworkers were in favor of increased rules for heat and smoke and mentioned problems with overheated farmworker housing and respiratory health issues among farmworkers who were required to work in smoky conditions.

# 9

## Life impacts of the difficulty finding housing

Half of the 80 farmworkers we interviewed for this study agreed that the difficulty finding housing has negatively impacted other aspects of their lives. When asked to describe how it had impacted them, negative impacts on emotional well-being were the most reported including stress, depression, anxiety, fear, frustration, decreased sense of self-esteem, and feeling rejected by society. Interviewees also mentioned conflicts with family, and financial impacts caused by taking time off from work and needing to pay high deposits

# 10

## Employer barriers and benefits of providing farmworker housing

### Employer Perspective

#### Benefits

In our interviews, when we asked employers why they provide farmworker housing, most said they do it to attract and retain the workers they need in a market where competition for labor is high. They also said providing housing is a great benefit to their workers, increases workers' overall income, and in some cases provides workers with housing that isn't otherwise available.

#### Barriers to providing farmworker housing

We asked employers about their experience providing farmworker housing and what challenges, if any, make providing housing difficult. Nearly every interviewee that provides farmworker housing said the process is difficult. Cost was the barrier employers mentioned most. Next most common were regulations from OSHA and county building departments. Other barriers mentioned less often included high cost and low availability of land for development, rules around providing

A few employers said OSHA increases regulations for owners of registered farmworker housing, rather than enforcing against unregistered housing.

housing for families, and lack of available private rental housing to rent for their workers. One employer said the fear of unwanted attention from farmworker advocacy groups is a barrier that keeps some farmers from providing housing, and another said having to compete for builders with local housing development is a problem.

Most employers we talked to said OSHA regulations on farmworker housing make it difficult for them to provide housing. While most said they've had good experiences registering their housing with OSHA, they also described some OSHA rules as impractical and said they disincentivize employers to provide housing. The majority of employers said the new OSHA rules for heat and air quality make it harder for them to provide housing for farmworkers. Most employers were frustrated with the new heat rules, while a few employers expressed varying reactions to the air quality rules. A few also said they feel OSHA increases the regulatory burden on those who are registered and trying to do the right thing rather than enforcing

against owners of unregistered housing and employers who are not trying to follow the rules.

## Agency Staff Perspective

When asked about barriers to providing farmworker housing, agency staff most mentioned cost and regulations.

Interviewees most often described cost as a problem for employers, who they said struggle to afford providing housing within their often-small economic margins. Some also said public agencies simply don't have enough money to build the housing that is needed. Regulatory barriers included OSHA regulations, which some say have become too complex, and county land use regulations that make it difficult to get approval to build farmworker housing, especially in agricultural areas.

# 11

## Farmworker Housing Gap Analysis

### Estimated housing gap

The estimated housing gap is the difference between the housing farmworkers need and the housing that is available to them. As seen in Exhibit 33, we estimate there are approximately 66,269 farmworker households in Oregon, including 5,177 in Hood River County, 9,598 in Marion County, 1,135 in Morrow County, and 5,559 in Yamhill County. Due to low farmworker incomes and high poverty rates, and because most farmworker households are cost-burdened by their housing and living in overcrowded

conditions, we estimate that affordable, good quality housing is needed for most of these households. We conclude that the farmworker housing gap is equal to the units needed to house nearly all farmworker households. OHCS and partners should work to provide affordable, good quality housing for most farmworker households in Oregon and in the four counties.

There is no data available on the number of farmworker households of different sizes, thus, it is not possible to calculate the sizes of units needed. Unit sizes should vary to accommodate different household sizes and compositions (single households versus larger households with many family members), tenure (rent versus own), temporary housing situations (seasonal), and other preferences (multigenerational housing). Strategies should be developed to address these broad range of housing needs and to increase the access to housing types suited to farmworkers' diverse needs as they described in the Farmworker Interview Results in Chapter 7.



### Exhibit 33. Estimated Total Households for Farmworkers and Dependents in 2017, Hood River, Marion, Morrow, Yamhill Counties

Source: The National Center for Farmworker Health (NCFH), farmworker interview findings, 2021, 80 total participants (20 in each Oregon County).

Geography	Total Workers & Dependents, 2017	Estimated Total Households in 2017
Hood River	20,192	5,177
Marion	37,434	9,598
Morrow	4,425	1,135
Yamhill	21,680	5,559
State of Oregon	258,449	66,269

Notes: Estimated total households are based on calculations of total household size based on the OHCS interview findings, 2021 (mean household size was estimated at 3.9 persons per household). Marion County: The total number of farm workers and dependents in 2017 from the NCFH was used for this estimate. This estimate excluded shared household arrangements. These estimates were rounded to the nearest tenth.

## Estimating number of farmworker households

To determine the amount of farmworker housing needed, we quantified the number of total farmworker households. To quantify the number of households, we needed to quantify the average (mean) number of persons per household. For this project, we estimated the mean household size by integrating findings from 2021 interviews with farmworkers completed for this study. Based on the interview findings, we estimated the household size for farmworkers at 3.9 persons per household, on average. This household size is much

larger than the State of Oregon average household size of 2.51 persons per household and larger than the average size for the general population in each county which ranges from 2.58 to 2.79 persons per household<sup>21</sup>. The farmworker household size likely is larger due to the need to share housing costs by “doubling up”, which can also be seen in high incidence of overcrowding. For this reason, it is possible that the actual number of farmworker households is higher than what we have estimated here. Additionally, intergenerational living arrangements are often preferred by Latino communities. Households for Hispanic and Latino immigrants are more likely to include multiple generations.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> US Census Bureau, *Income and Poverty in the United States*, 2015

<sup>22</sup> AARP (2018) Making Room for a Changing America, U.S. Census Bureau Annual Social and Economic Supplements 1950 and 1970, 2015 U.S. Census ACS.

“As you discover what strength you can draw from your community in this world from which it stands apart, look outward as well as inward. Build bridges instead of walls.

- Sonia Sotomayor

## CHAPTER 5

# Critical Issues & Recommendations for Farmworker Housing

# Critical Issues

We estimate that most of the 66,292 farmworker households in Oregon are in need of good quality affordable housing. Many workers live in housing with poor conditions and overcrowding due to a lack of housing in good condition they can afford.

Many farmworkers we interviewed said they want the government to know there is a critical need to help them. They said they want the government to hear their voices and understand their difficulties. Some said their work is very hard, and they know how important their work is to keeping food on America's tables – yet they feel unappreciated and undervalued. Many said they were skeptical the government will help them, but that they were happy to have their opinions included in this study.

Through our interviews with farmworkers, employers and agency experts, and our analysis of available data, we identified eight critical issues for farmworker housing. These issues must be addressed to meet the need for farmworker housing.

## Critical issues include:

1. Very low farmworker incomes
2. Not enough housing at prices farmworkers can afford
3. Poor conditions of farmworker housing
4. Barriers to rental application requirements
5. Barriers to homeownership
6. A need for resources to help farmworkers find housing and connect to services
7. Challenges of employer-provided housing
8. Lack of reliable data about farmworkers and their housing

# Diverse recommendations

A diverse approach should be taken to increase farmworker access to good quality housing. This includes building new affordable housing, and it also includes investing in supportive services, regulation changes, and partnerships to increase farmworker income, reduce housing eligibility barriers, increase homeownership, improve on-farm housing, and increase the ability to track changes in housing need over time. Each critical issue is described in detail below, including general recommendations and recommendations for funding when applicable. Recommendations were created by the Stamberger Outreach team and reviewed by farmworkers, OHCS, and the AWHFT.

## 1

### Very low farmworker incomes

**Farmworkers earn very low incomes, and they live in poor housing and overcrowded conditions largely because they cannot afford better housing.** According to the National Agricultural Worker Survey and our own research, farmworker households in Oregon earn about \$20,000-\$24,999 per year. This is between 25 percent and 37 percent of the Median Family Income (MFI) of the general population. It is a very low income. Typically, a household needs to earn about 60% of MFI to afford market-rate rent. A number of employers we interviewed for this study said farmworkers cannot afford the cost of housing in their county. One Yamhill County employer said,

**“I don't know how people make what they need to survive based on what we're paying.”**

Further demonstrating the low incomes earned by farmworkers, one labor contractor we interviewed said they see a big need for winter clothing, rain gear, and gloves for their workers and asked us where they could find donations.

**Today's low farmworker incomes are connected to a long history of agricultural labor exploitation in the United States.**

The modern US agricultural system was built on free or cheap labor, and this legacy continues as American farmers continue to rely on inexpensive labor to compete in today's globalized economy.

**Agricultural labor exploitation is inextricably intertwined with systemic racism in the United States, as those exploited for farm labor were historically primarily Black, Indigenous, Latine, and other People of Color, immigrants, and refugees, and today are primarily Latinx immigrants from Mexico.** Early European colonizers began exploiting people for agricultural labor in the US through the forced labor and indentured servitude of other colonists. When colonists eventually could not provide enough labor, the colonizers switched to the system of forced unpaid labor of enslaved Native Americans and Africans. After emancipation, farmers recruited Asian immigrants for farm labor. Then, following the Chinese Exclusion Act, farmers used little-paid Native, Black, and White sharecroppers to harvest crops.

Today, most US agricultural labor is done by poorly paid farmworkers primarily from Mexico. Oregon employers have depended on inexpensive labor from Mexico since the Braceros program of the 1940s-1960s, in which the US government collaborated with the Mexican government to enlist millions of Mexican men to work temporarily for US farmers through special work permits<sup>23</sup>. The Braceros program formally ended in 1964, but our agricultural system's reliance on lower cost labor from Mexico remains.

**Global competition makes it hard for farmers to earn a profit, which in turn perpetuates low pay for farmworkers as farmers work to keep costs low to stay competitive.**

Today's global economy has made it harder for farmers to compete with other countries where agricultural products can be produced more cheaply. Due to global competition, farmers economic margins are narrow, and they must cut costs to make ends meet and earn a profit. Economic factors and global competition set the prices for a farmer's produce, and the farmer has little control over what they can charge. Keeping labor costs as low as possible is one way farmers make ends meet and is a reason farmers resist increasing farmworker wages. Census of Agriculture data shows increasing labor costs for farmers in Oregon and the four study counties over time. Even as farmworker wages and the cost of labor employers pay has increased over time, our data shows farmworkers continue to earn very low incomes.

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<sup>23</sup> Bramen, Lisa. "A Brief History of American Farm Labor." Smithsonian Magazine. September 4, 2009. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/a-brief-history-of-american-farm-labor-67460786/>

“Consider raising the pay per bucket of fruit. We know the government is going to increase the salary in many areas, but for the farmworkers, these conditions do not apply. There are only three months out of the whole year that we earn a fair salary, the rest of the year we just survive, and we also have expenses to cover. Please authorities, think about where what your family eats and smokes comes from.”

– M, 67, migrant worker, Yamhill County

## Recommendations

**1.1 Increase farmworker incomes.** Increasing farmworker incomes will lead to better life outcomes for farmworkers and work towards a less exploitative agricultural system that pays workers what they need to thrive. Higher farmworker incomes will help them access more and better housing options. In our interviews, farmworkers in all counties asked the government to increase what farmworkers are paid. One participant specifically requested overtime pay. Farmworkers mentioned feeling unappreciated and underpaid for their very difficult and very important work. Many said increasing their pay would help them access housing. Examples of opportunities to increase farmworker household income include allowing them to collect overtime, increasing their hourly wage, providing paid vacation and health insurance benefits, reducing farmworker income taxes withheld, providing direct government subsidies to farmworkers, and increasing access to local social services like food banks in rural areas.

When working to increase farmworker wages, it is important to acknowledge that asking farmers to increase what they pay for labor will put many of them at financial risk and could result in the failure of farm businesses. Despite the labor exploitation inherent in the agricultural system, we do rely on the system to produce our food and provide many jobs and income. **It is important to work with farmers and provide public support to transition farmworkers to higher incomes while reducing negative impacts on local farm businesses.**

**1.2 Provide direct rental assistance to farmworkers.** Rental assistance for farmworkers will help them afford available private housing in better condition. Rental assistance will also increase the amount of their income farmworkers can apply to other basic needs like food, transportation, childcare and healthcare, leading to better life outcomes. Rental assistance for farmworkers can be provided through a voucher system like HUD Section 8<sup>24</sup>, or through direct financial assistance paid to farmworkers. OHCS could explore ways to expand eligibility requirements for the Section 8 voucher program to include more farmworkers.

The voucher system can also be challenging. In some locations, there is not enough housing eligible and organized to accept housing vouchers (such as Hood River County). Advocacy for universal voucher support at the federal government level is important since this could help make housing choice vouchers more universally available to qualifying low-income households. As one example of this approach, the Opportunities Industrialization Center of Washington State provides rental assistance vouchers to farmworkers to secure private market rental housing. Priority is given to farmworkers who are currently homeless or living in unsafe or overcrowded conditions. Families are only eligible for up to six months of assistance.<sup>25</sup>

## 2

### **Not enough housing at prices farmworkers can afford**

**Farmworkers earn very low incomes, and there is very little housing available at prices they can afford given their earnings. Nearly all farmworkers are cost-burdened by their housing costs and most live in overcrowded conditions. There is much less subsidized farmworker housing than is needed, and even current costs of subsidized housing may not be affordable for farmworkers.**

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<sup>24</sup> The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) provides Section 8 voucher support for households earning up to 80% of the AMI. HUD has a tenant-based Section 8 rental housing assistance offered primarily through the Housing Choice Voucher program. Voucher holders gain a rental subsidy that can be used at any eligible rental housing.

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.yvoic.org/>

This need for better quality, affordable housing includes most of the 5,177 farmworker households in Hood River County, the 9,598 in Marion County, the 1,135 in Morrow County, and the 5,559 farmworker households in Yamhill County. Many workers live in housing with poor conditions and overcrowding due to a lack of housing in good condition they can afford.

We estimate that better quality, affordable housing is needed for most of the 66,292 farmworker households in Oregon.

## Recommendations

**Increase the supply of housing that farmworkers can afford.** A variety of different affordable housing options should be provided to serve diverse farmworker housing needs associated with household size and composition, tenure, need for temporary housing, and farmworker preferences. In our interviews, farmworkers described their housing preferences, including being spacious enough for their families, having outdoor space for children, being near family and other farmworkers, having a sense of community, enough privacy, and peace and quiet. When increasing farmworker housing, developers should also account for the need for commuting support for farmworker housing located in cities. Farmworkers whose housing is located at a distance from the farms they work on will need cost effective means to commute between home and work, which may take the form of public transit or transportation sponsored by employers or a nonprofit organization. The following is a list and description of types of affordable housing that should be considered for development and recommendations and considerations for each. Our team has also included specific funding recommendations for many of the housing types.



**Housing types most requested in interviews.** The following housing types were most mentioned by farmworkers, employers, and agency partners in our interviews with them as part of this study.

**2.1 Low-income rental housing:** Low-income housing was the most common type of additional housing requested by farmworkers in interviews. They requested more affordable housing that takes into consideration what they earn.

Funding recommendation: More public funding is needed to support income-restricted low-income housing. **OHCS should evaluate available resources to support development of additional income-restricted rental housing for farmworkers.**

**2.2 Seasonal housing:** Many workers we interviewed are migrant or seasonal workers, and do not work year-round. Migrant workers say they only stay in the area during the harvest season, and some said it is hard to find seasonal housing for a temporary stay. They requested more seasonal housing. Employers and agency staff also said there is a big need for this type of seasonal housing, especially for migrant workers. There are a variety of ways to provide seasonal housing. As seen in the case studies in Chapter 6, employers can come together to fund off-farm seasonal housing complexes operated by nonprofit partners.

Another idea is that small ("tiny") houses built on foundations or on wheels could also serve as temporary or permanent housing for individuals and households who desire privacy but do not want or cannot afford a large single-family home. Building codes and local regulations tend to present numerous legal and logistical barriers to siting and building these very small, detached dwellings. Local governments could consider modifying regulations to clarify definitions recognizing this type of housing, identify areas where this type of housing could be allowed, and improve development standards associated with building tiny homes and temporary tiny home communities. Partnerships tend to be used to help build these types of communities<sup>26</sup>.

Funding recommendation: It is challenging to finance affordable housing that is occupied by farmworkers for only part of the year. Fluctuating cash flow makes it difficult for the housing to generate enough income to cover fixed operating costs without some type of additional operating subsidy. Some developers have obtained operating cost subsidies through the USDA Rural Development program (such as the USDA 521 Rental Assistance) or other entities.<sup>27</sup> The State of Oregon could consider providing a similar operating subsidy to help boost the supply of seasonal housing available to farmworkers.

<sup>26</sup> Washington State ESSB 5383, July 28, 2019.

ESSB 5383 updated state law to enable the development of tiny house villages or communities throughout the state. This law defined tiny houses, directs the adoption of the updated residential building code. <http://lawfilesexternal.leg.wa.gov/biennium/2019-20/Pdf/Bill%20Reports/Senate/5383-S.E%20SBR%20FBR%2019.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> Yakima County Farmworker Housing Action Plan. 2011-2016. Washington Farmworker Housing Trust. June 2011.

**2.3 Housing for older people, single women, and families:** A smaller number of workers we interviewed requested more housing for older people, single women, and families. Housing for older people was requested more often, and included accommodations such as no stairs and more parking. One interviewee requested housing for women only, saying that many women are here to work without a partner, and that this would be helpful to them.

**2.4 Employer-provided housing:** A few farmworkers we interviewed requested more on-farm housing. They said they depend on this free housing to make ends meet. Some described good relationships with the employers that provide the housing.

Due to common descriptions of poor on-farm housing, the difficulty employers face building and managing housing, and the many other types of housing that may be developed to support farmworkers, we encourage OHCS to consider alternatives to the development of new employer-provided housing. There may be ways to increase access to good quality employer-provided housing that do not require building additional housing. Examples include:

**Shared employer-provided housing:** In interviews, several employers suggested housing sharing programs among employers. One employer had been approached by a neighboring farm and developed a rental agreement to use their housing in the off season when their cherry crew had gone. OHCS and partners should consider developing, testing, and funding an on-farm housing sharing model to connect employers with unused or under-used housing with farmworkers or employers in the area that need it. Housing providers may charge rent for the units (which could be subsidized). Connections to this housing could be a part of the services provided by farmworker housing liaisons. Housing providers should be registered and inspected by OSHA in order to participate.

**Portable temporary housing:** One employer suggested that portable temporary housing might be helpful for farmers and workers who need seasonal housing on farms, but do not need it year-round. They said this would help overcome barriers to building permanent structures which can be difficult to find approved sites for through local permitting and zoning departments. OHCS and partners should explore opportunities to obtain temporary portable housing units and consider developing or encouraging programs or businesses that can rent portable temporary housing to employers. (continues on next)

As one example, the Washington Growers League (WGL) worked to develop an OSHA-approved design for a 14x24 foot tent on a concrete pad with electricity<sup>28</sup>.

Washington State approved this housing for use for seasonal cherry picking only. FEMA may provide an opportunity to obtain portable temporary housing that could be purchased by government agencies, businesses, or nonprofits and rented to employers.

FEMA auctions off portable and temporary housing that was used for emergencies and that is no longer needed. If this housing were to be used, OHCS should work with OSHA and other partners to develop agreed upon standards and regulations for this housing and ensure it is inspected and approved. FEMA can be contacted at 1-800-621-3362 for more information.

**Improved conditions of existing employer-provided housing:** OSHA inspection of employer-provided farmworker housing for local US-based farmworkers should increase. Farmworkers often live in poor housing conditions, and many of the poor conditions described were in on-farm housing. In interviews, agency partners acknowledged that farmworker housing that is not registered through OSHA exists and is more likely to be in poor condition. OSHA staff said they lack staff capacity to enforce farmworker housing regulations outside of housing for H-2A workers unless they receive complaints. OSHA should increase investigation, inspection, and enforcement particularly of housing that is not registered. This may include increasing OSHA staff resources and collaboration with Oregon Employment Department and other members of OHCS's Agricultural Worker Housing Facilitation Team (AWHFT). OHCS should also consider incentives to support and assist with improvements to existing registered farmworker housing, such as tax exemptions or low-interest loans for rehabilitation of existing housing on farms.

**Funding recommendations for employer-provided housing:** In interviews, employers requested that OHCS increase funding and outreach for the AWHTC and offer grants program and low-interest loans for smaller and beginning farmers to develop new or improve existing housing.

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<sup>28</sup> Washington State Department of Health. "Temporary Worker Housing (Migrant Farmworker) Tents." <https://www.doh.wa.gov/LicensesPermitsandCertificates/FacilitiesNewReneworUpdate/TemporaryWorkerHousing/PermittedLandUse/Tents>

**Additional housing types recommended by our study team.** We also recommend OHCS and partners consider the following housing types as options to increase the supply of affordable housing. Although not mentioned as often in interviews, we feel these housing types also have high potential to help meet the need for farmworker housing.

**2.5 Community-based farmworker housing:** Much success has been had in Oregon developing and managing community-based farmworker housing through partnerships with community-based nonprofits. Examples of these experienced community-based nonprofits include the Farmworker Housing Development Corporation (FHDC), Community And Shelter Assistance Corporation (CASA of Oregon), and Bienestar. Much of this housing is located near local services and works to meet the housing preferences of farmworkers, including being spacious enough for their families, having outdoor space for children, being near family and other farmworkers, having a sense of community, enough privacy, and peace and quiet. Some farmworkers we interviewed had lived in farmworker-specific housing that included services. They said they appreciated the services and benefitted from them. Services received included Head Start, childcare, transportation (shared rides), and English language classes.

Importantly, according to our research, some farmworker-specific housing may not be affordable for farmworker households given their income. Developers and funders should consider opportunities to decrease rental costs further for farmworker-specific housing.

**Funding recommendations:** To reduce development cost and pass on savings to farmworker residents, housing developers could explore ways to reduce the cost of farmworker housing such as through high-efficiency design, modular buildings, etc.

We also recommend that OHCS and other government agencies increase support for farmworker-specific housing development by community-based organizations and for-profit developers. Affordable housing construction and the associated housing services across the U.S. are often delivered by non-profit agencies and developers. Local and state governments in Oregon currently provide development funds for farmworker-specific housing developments. Public partners (local, state, and federal jurisdictions) can increase their support for non-profit and for-profit partner development of farmworker housing through continued and increased development funding and tax credits, as well as through additional subsidies, incentives, and potential surplus land donations. For example, non-profits often need seed funding to begin the pre-development groundwork and funds to purchase land, and for-profits often need help navigating code regulations and the permitting process. When non-profit, for-profit, and public entities join forces through partnerships, they can make more of a collective impact towards achieving common goals since they can share expertise and resources and fill in gaps where needed. (continues on next)

In one partnership example, FHDC and their partners are beginning construction on Colonia Paz, a community of 24 affordable homes, in support of a “housing for all” vision in the City of Lebanon. This site was selected due to its proximity to agricultural employment and nearby community amenities such as schools, grocery stores, and medical facilities. Colonia Paz is supported by many partners including the Linn-Benton Housing Authority, City of Lebanon, CASA of Oregon, Nelson Capital, Pinnacle Architecture, LMC Construction, Kantor Taylor, USDA Rural Development, Umpqua Bank, Oregon Housing and Community Services, and Bank of Des Moines<sup>29</sup>.

**2.6 Off-farm rural farmworker housing:** Some farmworkers we interviewed said they want to live in rural areas, and many said it is important for them to live close to where they work. Employers also said it is very helpful to them if their workers are nearby when needed. We recommend that OHCS and partners work to develop and sponsor off-farm housing in rural areas funded in partnership between public agencies and employers and operated by community-based organizations. Both the Washington Growers League and a partnership between the Napa County Housing Authority and California Human Development Corporation have successfully implemented this model (see Ch. 6 case studies). This model reduces the conflict of interest and risk of farmworker exploitation inherent in employer-provided housing. It also allows employers to pool their resources to fund costly housing projects and eliminates the need for individual farmers to act as housing developers and managers, which is difficult, costly, and outside their area of expertise.

In Oregon, Statewide Planning Goal 10 and Exclusive Farm Use (EFU) zoning rules pose barriers to this type of farmworker housing development. To facilitate this model with high potential to support farmworkers and their employers, OHCS should explore possible exceptions to these rules to facilitate development of off-farm farmworker housing in rural agricultural areas. As one example of changing land use regulations to allow rural farmworker housing development, in 2002, Napa County, California voters approved a special land-use measure (Measure L), which allows landowners to dedicate agricultural land of less than 20 acres for construction of temporary farmworker housing and 40 acres for year-round farmworker housing and authorizes up to five dormitory-style camps to provide temporary shelter for up to 300 farmworkers. (see details of this process in the River Ranch Migrant Housing Center case study in Chapter 6 of this report)

**Funding and policy recommendations:** We encourage OHCS and partners to dedicate resources to working with state and local agencies to change land use regulations or provide regulatory exceptions to allow farmworker housing development off farms in rural areas. We also encourage financial support specifically for this type of housing development.

<sup>29</sup> Melton, Jamie. “Colonia Paz Breaks Ground, Brings Needed Affordable Housing to Lebanon, Linn County.” Farmworker Housing Development Corporation. May 22, 2021. <http://fhdc.org/2021/05/colonia-paz-breaks-ground-brings-needed-affordable-housing-to-lebanon-linn-county/>

**2.7 Middle Housing:** Middle housing includes townhomes, duplexes, triplexes, quadplexes, and cottage clusters. These housing types tend to be more affordable and are in short supply. This type of housing tends to be preferred by small households and those seeking lower maintenance living and affordable homeownership. In theory, these space efficient housing units can be more affordable than other units because they are smaller and more energy efficient and they use less land resources<sup>30</sup>. Cities larger than 10,000 are required to accommodate some or all of these housing types, per Oregon House Bill 2001. OHCS and partners should encourage farmworker housing developers to pursue these types of housing.

# 3

## Poor conditions of farmworker housing

Farmworkers often live in poor housing conditions, and many of the poor conditions described were in on-farm housing. Farmworkers, employers, and agency staff said market rental housing and some farmworker-owned mobile home units are also in poor condition. Employers we interviewed said poor conditions are often in unregistered on-farm housing, and those who are registered and trying to do the right thing are more harshly regulated when poor conditions are reported, while the unregistered poor housing goes unpunished. They said this disincentivizes farmers with registered housing to continue providing it.

## Recommendations

**3.1 Increase OSHA inspection of employer-provided housing.** As previously mentioned, OSHA inspection of employer-provided farmworker housing for local US-based farmworkers should increase. Particularly, OSHA should increase investigation, inspection, and enforcement of housing that is not registered through OSHA. This may include increasing OSHA staff resources and collaboration with Oregon Employment Department and other members of OHCS's Agricultural Worker Housing Facilitation Team (AWHFT).

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<sup>30</sup> Oregon House Bill 2001 seeks to moderate housing costs by bolstering housing supply and allowing the development of multiplexes, townhouses, and cottage clusters throughout many cities beginning in Summer 2022.

## 3.2 Improve conditions of existing housing.

**3.2.1 Funding for rehabilitation, repair, and replacement of employer-provided housing.** In interviews, most employers said at least some of their housing is old and in need of repair or replacement, and that financial support would help them improve this housing. Outreach for existing programs should also be increased. Many farmers we spoke to were not aware of OHCS financial assistance for employer-provided housing.

**Funding recommendation:** The State should consider creating or expanding incentives to support and assist with improvements to farmworker housing, such as tax exemptions or low-interest loans for rehabilitation of existing housing on farms.

### 3.2.2 Home repair and weatherization support for farmworker housing.

Another way to support the preservation of existing housing and improve conditions is to provide home repair and weatherization program support specifically for farmworker housing. This type of strategy traditionally focuses on owner occupied households and manufactured homes, which farmworkers do use, and eligibility could also be expanded to serve applicable farmworker rental housing. Home repair support and weatherization programs are common across Oregon and are currently being offered by at least one farmworker-specific organization, the Oregon Human Development Corporation (OHDC). OHCS manages Oregon's Weatherization Assistance Program, which is implemented in all 36 Oregon counties by community-based organizations, including Mid-Columbia Community Action Council (MCCAC) in Hood River County, Mid-Willamette Valley Community Action Agency (MWVCAA) in Marion County, Community Action Programs of Eastern-Central Oregon (CAPECO) in Morrow County, and Yamhill Community Action Partnership (YCAP) in Yamhill Counties. Other options include forging partnerships with local universities and trade schools to expand the volunteer base and possibly offer internships. Partnerships can also be explored with local rebuilding together nonprofits that provide free emergency plumbing repairs and critical systems repairs (such as electrical and structural repairs) and restore damaged roofs.

**Funding recommendation:** Increase funding to community-based organizations that serve farmworkers and provide weatherization services. Expand funding for community-based organizations currently providing home repair and weatherization services in counties with high farmworker populations with a requirement to use additional funding specifically for eligible farmworker housing, including rental housing.

**3.2.3 Mobile home park preservation and home repair for farmworkers who own mobile home units.** Quite a few farmworkers we interviewed live in mobile home units they own in a mobile home park, and many said their units were in poor condition. OHCS and partners can explore ways to preserve and rehabilitate mobile home parks and provide more support for low-income owners of mobile home units to repair their units. Any guidelines developed surrounding mobile home park preservation should also provide clear criteria around housing quality, environmental health and life safety standards.

# 4

## Burdensome rental application requirements

In addition to cost and availability barriers, rental application requirements prevent farmworkers from being able to access private rental housing. Barriers include the need for a valid social security number, high deposits, rental history, work history,

proof of stable employment, income requirements, credit history, and applications only in English. Of these rental application requirements, interviewees most frequently identified the need for a social security number as a barrier. Rental application requirements can also be discriminatory based on ethnicity, country of origin and race, etc. Lease terms requiring six to 12-month commitments can prevent migrant workers from renting due to a short duration for employment.

## Recommendations

### Reduce barriers posed by rental application requirements.

- Develop a program to provide special clearance, or co-signers, for farmworkers to satisfy these requirements.
- Offer incentives to rental associations or affordable housing complexes to waive certain requirements for farmworker applicants, or to accept OHCS vouchers for farmworkers.
- OHCS and other partner agencies and community-based organizations should provide education to rental housing providers and associations to raise public awareness on the importance of farmworkers and the barriers they face accessing rental housing. This work may help encourage more rental housing to accept and support farmworker voucher programs.



# 5

## Lack of access to home ownership

One in four farmworkers we interviewed said they want to own their own homes. They expressed frustration about barriers to the home buying process, including cost, work authorization status, and not knowing how to buy a home or where to get help. Farmworkers requested programs to help them achieve homeownership, including help finding homes to buy, help with loan applications, help learning about the home-buying process, and low-interest home loans for farmworkers.

## Recommendations

### 5.1 Support lower-cost alternative homeownership models.

- Support development of community land trusts that provide ownership opportunities for farmworkers, with the purpose of building wealth and ensuring that housing remains affordable over the long-term for farmworkers. The State or counties could study how to expand the use and availability of alternative forms of homeownership including cohousing and community land trusts (CLTs). With cohousing, a typical home is split between private and shared spaces (such as a kitchen).<sup>31</sup> CLTs are nonprofit, community organizations holding land permanently "in trust" for the benefit of people living in the community.
- Prioritize funding cooperative housing models for farmworkers that provide less expensive homeownership options. Housing cooperatives (co-ops) offer a more flexible legal structure to create owner-occupied attached housing and they tend to offer easier financial qualification standards. There are 11 housing cooperatives operating in California providing farmworkers an opportunity to collectively own their housing.<sup>32</sup> Limited-equity co-ops (LECs) can extend homeownership access to low and middle-income populations and guarantee permanent housing affordability. Homeowners who sell their homes must sell at an affordable price and to a qualifying low-income buyer to ensure that the housing remains affordable for another generation. Housing cooperatives can be created by renovating existing developments such as apartment complexes and mobile home parks. Additional incentives should be used to encourage private developers to develop these models.

<sup>31</sup> Stanton, Melissa. "6 Creative Housing Options." AARP Livable Communities. July, 2014. <https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/info-2014/creative-age-friendly-housing-options.html>

<sup>32</sup> Appenbrink, Nadine; Ansary, Raihana; Decker, Elizabeth; McQuillan, Kate; Nelson, Karla; and Picha, Emily, "Harvesting Opportunity: A Strategic Vision for Farmworker Housing and Microenterprise in Washington County" (2010). Master of Urban and Regional Planning Workshop Projects. Paper 8. [http://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/usp\\_murp/8](http://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/usp_murp/8)

## **5.2 Increase support for financial assistance programs to help farmworkers afford to buy homes.**

- Provide low-interest home loans for farmworkers.
- Increase funding for USDA Rural Housing Service programs (Section 502 direct loans) to help more farmworkers construct or purchase homes in rural areas without requiring a down payment.<sup>33</sup>
- Individual Development Accounts (IDA) are matched savings accounts (typically 3:1 matched saving ratios) assisting low-income households in accumulating assets to help finance the purchase of a first home. Adelante Mujeres, a Washington County-based organization that serves Latinx residents, has partnered with CASA of Oregon to offer an IDA program for participants in their Empresas Small Business Development Program.<sup>34</sup> Another model, referred to as Self-Help Enterprises, enables a farmworker family to exchange hours of labor building homes for down payment assistance towards the purchase of their own home. The San Joaquin Valley Self-Help Enterprise program helps are 100 families purchase a home annually.<sup>35</sup>

## **5.3 Provide or sponsor homebuying classes and individualized coaching for farmworkers.** This may include connecting farmworkers to realtors that specialize in helping farmworkers find homes.

## **5.4 Develop a program to vouch for farmworkers to help them satisfy loan application requirements.** Farmworkers face similar barriers applying for home loans as they face applying for rentals. Lack of work authorization was the most mentioned. OHCS and partners should consider programs to vouch for farmworkers to meet these requirements or encourage lenders to consider special requirement waivers for farmworkers.

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<sup>33</sup> US Dept of Agriculture. Direct housing loans. Rural development. Available at: [http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/HAD-Direct\\_Housing\\_Loans.html](http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/HAD-Direct_Housing_Loans.html). Accessed November 9, 2010.

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.adelantemujeres.org/small-business-development>

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.selfhelpenterprises.org/about-us/>

# 6

## Need for resources to help farmworkers find housing and connect to support in general

Farmworker interviewees said they do not know of any resources available to help them find housing. Employers and agency staff we interviewed also said workers primarily find housing by word-of-mouth,

and there is no dedicated resource for farmworker housing information. Farmworkers requested information on available and affordable housing be published somewhere, or to have help from an organization or liaison to help them find and access housing. Farmworkers recommended posting housing information at post offices, community centers, stores, Facebook, flea markets, and Hispanic restaurants.

Some interviewees also requested farmworker resource centers to help them access other general support resources and understand their rights. They said they would like centers to offer classes to help them learn English and how to buy homes. Many interviewees in Morrow County, and some in Hood River County, specifically asked for a center for agricultural workers.

## Recommendations

**6.1 Provide or sponsor liaison positions to help connect farmworkers with existing housing.** Ideally, liaisons would be housed at community-based organizations to facilitate outreach and communication with farmworkers. These liaisons could also help farmworkers access other available resources, such as existing programs that support low-income households in finding or improving existing affordable housing.

**6.2 Sponsor liaisons to curate, publish, update, and promote affordable housing information for farmworkers.**

**6.3 Support the development of farmworker resource centers.** Farmworkers we interviewed specifically requested centers in Morrow County and Hood River County. These should be operated by local community-based organizations.

# 7

## Challenges of employer-provided housing

Employers face many barriers to providing farmworker housing. These include high cost, difficulty meeting labor housing regulations, and difficulty with local permitting and zoning requirements. Employers and agency staff said the economic margins of farmers are very thin and the cost of labor is increasing. Indeed, our analysis of farm expenditures in the counties shows payroll costs have increased steadily over time. Interviewees said when regulations are more stringent, housing costs more, and this is a disincentive for them to provide it. They said the number of farms providing housing has decreased over time, largely due to increased housing regulations. Both employers and agency staff said decreasing regulation would encourage employers to build more housing, while increasing regulation will decrease housing they provide.

Some farmworkers said they cannot afford to pay for any housing based on their incomes, and that they were afraid to complain about poor housing conditions due to the fear of losing their jobs.

Agency staff and some farmworkers described problems with the power dynamic inherent in housing tied to employment. Many farmworkers lack work authorization, and some agency staff said this makes them particularly vulnerable to exploitation associated with their housing. Employers and agency staff we interviewed said there is employer-provided housing in the counties that is not registered with OSHA and may be in poor condition. OSHA and others said OSHA does not have enough capacity to inspect and enforce on all this housing.

# Recommendations

## 7.1 Consider alternative models to increase housing in rural agricultural areas.

Due to the many reports of on-farm housing in poor condition, the potential for worker exploitation inherent in employer-provided housing, the myriad barriers employers face in providing farmworker housing, and the many other opportunities to increase farmworker access to housing, we recommend that OHCS carefully consider how much of their limited resources they dedicate to the creation of new on-farm housing.

As mentioned in detail in section 2 of this chapter, there are a number of methods OHCS and partners can explore to increase access to farmworker housing in rural agricultural areas (see section 2 for more detail). Some employers we interviewed said providing housing for their workers is vital to attracting and retaining the workforce they need as the number of local workers decreases. These methods of increasing good quality affordable housing in rural agricultural areas may help attract and retain local workers employers need.

- Develop and sponsor off-farm housing near farms funded in partnership between public agencies and employers and operated by community-based organizations (see River Ranch case study in Chapter 6.)
- Develop, test, and fund an on-farm housing sharing model to connect employers with unused or under-used housing with farmworkers or employers in the area that need it.
- Work with OSHA to approve portable temporary housing for certain farmworkers and areas. This will include researching and obtaining approved units and working to develop or encourage programs or businesses to rent portable temporary housing to employers. Examples of this type of housing can be found in the Washington State temporary worker housing tents and FEMA portable housing that is sold at auction when it is no longer needed for emergency use.

## 7.2 For programs to increase new on-farm employers-provided housing, we recommend:

- Increase funding and outreach for the AWHTC, especially in Marion, Morrow, and Yamhill Counties where there is less knowledge of this program.
- Develop a grant program and low-interest loans for farmworker housing to help smaller and beginning farmers access funds to build farmworker housing.
- Review and update farmworker housing rules collaboratively with employers, rule-makers, and farmworker advocates to find a balance between the rules and what employers are able to provide.

# 8

## Lack of reliable data about farmworkers and their housing

This study encountered many barriers associated with measuring farmworker housing needs due to the lack of accurate and reliable data about farmworkers and their housing. Insufficient data about the number of farmworkers and their incomes makes it impossible to accurately quantify the need for farmworker housing. It is important to be able to quantify the need to track progress made in meeting the need over time.

### Recommendation

Collecting information about farmworkers is very difficult. A number of national agencies work hard to estimate the number of workers and their demographic characteristics even though full counts are lacking. **OHCS and partners may be able to support regular and coordinated data in partnership with government agencies and nonprofits.** It may be possible to organize data collection from most farmworkers at the county level through such coordination and support. These county-level numbers can be added to produce more accurate data at the state level. The data collected should include a count of the number of farmworkers, the number of farmworker households, the number of dependents and total number of persons in a household, farmworker annual household incomes, and information on housing conditions.

# Additional County-Specific Recommendations

It is important to recognize the unique context of farmworker housing in each county. These recommendations are based on county-specific observations and should be considered in addition to the general recommendations above.

## Hood River County

Farmworker housing in Hood River County is primarily on-farm housing, provided by employers. Many farmworkers interviewed in Hood River County mentioned poor on-farm housing conditions. However, some also mentioned good housing conditions provided by their employer. The primary population center in Hood River County is the City of Hood River, along the banks for the Columbia River. However, most agriculture occurs far from the city, in the higher portions of the valley towards Mt. Hood. Farmworkers living in the City of Hood River need to travel 30 minutes or more to get from the city to the farming area. The cost of housing in Hood River City and County is particularly high due to a booming tourism industry and shortage of available housing. In interviews, farmers in Hood River County said the Exclusive Farm Use (EFU) zoning of the area and the strict rules of the Hood River County zoning and building departments make it very difficult to find suitable locations to add on-farm housing in the county. Some interviewees said there are many unregistered and potentially hidden labor camps in Hood River County that could be in poor condition.

### Opportunities:

- Create off-farm farmworker housing higher in the Hood River Valley in smaller towns such as Parkdale and Odell.
- Potential for off-farm housing development in agricultural areas funded by employers and government, operated by community partner.
- If farmworker housing is developed in the City of Hood River, a transportation program will need to be included for rides to work.
- Potential opportunity for short-term temporary portable housing rental program
- Potential for on-farm housing sharing program. The differences in elevation between the upper and lower Hood River Valley create slightly different fruit harvest seasons for some orchards than others, allowing farmers to share workers.
- Workers in Hood River County requested a farmworker resource center to help them understand their rights, connect to housing, and take classes.

# Marion County

As the agricultural leader in Oregon, Marion County has the highest number of farmworkers and family members of any county and has the biggest projected need for additional farmworker housing units.

## Opportunities:

- Continue to increase farmworker housing in urban centers including Salem, Woodburn, and Keizer
- Consider development of farmworker specific subsidized housing in rural towns closer to agriculture areas
- Potential for on-farm housing sharing program. One employer said they rent their housing to a neighboring farmer when their migrant cherry harvesting crew is gone.

# Morrow County

Morrow County has a small population and few urban centers. Farmworker housing in Morrow County is primarily provided by one large employer, and this employer is not able to keep up with the demand for housing among their employees. They said many of their workers must live far away from work and drive or find rides into Boardman each day. Quite a few farmworkers are living in mobile home trailer units in RV parks in Boardman, and farmworkers we interviewed who live in them often said they are overcrowded or in poor condition.

## Opportunities:

- Farmworkers said they like the small town feel and community in the town of Boardman.
- Lack of farmworker housing is a significant hardship for employers in Morrow County. Potential for off-farm housing development in communities funded by employers and government, operated by community partner. (continues on next)



- Due to the current prevalence of RV parks and trailer units, possible opportunity to rehabilitate RV parks and increase homeownership cooperatives allowing farmworkers to access homeownership.
- Farmworkers requested a farmworker resource center in Boardman to educate them of their rights, offer classes, and provide connections to housing.

## Yamhill County

Although farmworkers live in both private rental housing and employer-provided housing in Yamhill County, employers we interviewed said there is not nearly as much on-farm employer-provided farmworker housing as there used to be. Some employers worried about the difficulty farmworkers might face travelling the distance from urban centers to agricultural areas.

### Opportunities:

- Continue to increase farmworker housing in urban centers including McMinnville and Newberg.
- Consider development of farmworker specific subsidized housing in rural areas closer to agriculture areas.
- Potential for off-farm housing in farming areas funded by employers and government, operated by community partner.

“I am happy to see that, increasingly, people care about farm workers. There is tremendous interest in where and how our food is grown.”

- Dolores Huerta

CHAPTER 6

# Case Studies

The Stamberger Outreach team compiled case studies of successful farmworker housing projects to serve as examples and inspiration for the State of Oregon as they work to increase options for farmworker housing. We have included case studies that exemplify innovative approaches that arose in our research findings and recommendations.

## **The case studies include:**

1. Brender Creek Housing Facility - Rental housing for migrant and seasonal workers developed and managed by the Washington Growers League and available to individual farmworkers, or for rent by employers.
2. San Jerardo Housing Cooperative - A farmworker housing cooperative collectively owned and managed by farmworkers in Monterey County, California.
3. River Ranch Migrant Center - Rental housing for migrant and temporary workers funded by self-taxed agricultural employers and managed by a nonprofit partner in Napa Valley, California. This case study includes examples of changing land use regulations to allow farmworker housing off farms in rural agricultural areas.

# Case Study 1:

## Brender Creek, Housing for Migrant and Temporary Farmworkers, Cashmere, Washington



*Photos by Washington Growers League.*

To compile this case study, we interviewed Mike Gempler, Executive Director of the Washington Growers League. For more information about the Washington Growers League and the farmworker housing they provide, see <https://growersleague.org/>.

## Brender Creek Characteristics

<b>Developer</b>	Washington Growers League, non-profit agricultural association
<b>Location</b>	6-acre site in rural Cashmere, Washington - 10 miles east of Wenatchee and a mile past the town of Malaga in Chelan County. The site is near orchards that employ farmworkers. It was formerly pastureland, privately purchased by Washington Growers League.
<b>Type</b>	Two-story apartment style buildings, new construction
<b>Units</b>	7 buildings, total capacity 200 people. Each floor has four, four-person bedrooms, central bathrooms, kitchen and living area.
<b>Management</b>	Washington Growers League, onsite manager
<b>Prices</b>	Rented per night, \$9-\$10 per person/per night (children free or discounted)
<b>Services</b>	on-site laundry, playgrounds and recreational areas, outdoor barbeque areas and pavilion, partner with local organizations who offer programs and services including English language classes and health clinics.
<b>Resident Eligibility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Earned \$3,000 the previous year in agricultural employment</li> <li>• Currently employed in agriculture</li> <li>• Income below 50% of Area Median Income (AMI) - Mike Gempler says income restrictions have not kept pace with increasing wages and are becoming more difficult for workers to meet.</li> <li>• Housing is only available temporarily for migrant and seasonal workers</li> <li>• A portion reserved for walk-ins, cannot turn anyone away under loan regulations</li> </ul>
<b>Development Funding Source</b>	<p>Washington State Housing Trust Fund (HTF) Loan.</p> <p>The Washington Legislature makes biennial appropriations in the capital budget and directs the Department on how to invest the funds. The Housing Trust Fund provides capital financing in the form of loans or grants to affordable housing projects through annual competitive application cycles. Applications are generally accepted once a year, but timing and frequency can vary depending on the size and nature of appropriations to the program by the Legislature.</p>

# Brender Creek Development Summary

The Washington Growers League is a nonprofit agricultural association with agricultural employers as its members. The WGL began developing farmworker housing in about 2005, driven by an extreme need for farmworker housing. Mike Gempler, the Executive Director of WGL said, "It's a need because so much of the rural housing stock is poor and in bad shape. [Farmworkers] need a decent place to live." He said when they started developing farmworker housing there were hundreds and thousands of migrant farmworkers, particularly working in cherries, camping illegally in orchards, in the woods, or along the river without sanitary facilities, garbage, or potable water because there was so little housing available to them.

Initially, WGL developed a "Rent A Tent program" to help provide shelter for cherry workers. The tent design was a 14x24 foot tent on a concrete pad with electricity and was approved by OSHA for temporary use. WGL was providing 80,000 bed-nights per year through the Rent A Tent program, but the structures were temporary and did not have air conditioning. WGL has since stopped providing this service and went on to create more permanent housing structures to better meet the need. To date, WGL has built three farmworker housing facilities with capacity for more than 800 migrant and temporary workers in Washington state. They provide on-site management for all three. Gempler says,

"We don't like the idea of 'bunk houses.' Typically, it was kind of like

barracks, where there was a big open room with bunk beds and central showers. We're not about that. That's a lower quality living experience. We're trying for something that is cost efficient, but enables people to have some privacy, enough room, and facilities that they can wash their dishes and cook when they need to, shower when they need to."

He says the Washington Growers League has used higher quality, longer lasting materials and design, and that their cost per bed is higher than what most employers are able to provide because their construction is heavier duty.

The Brender Creek Seasonal Housing facility was opened in 2015. WGL conducted a land search for parcels that would meet their needs and found the 6-acre pasture property inside the city limits of Cashmere, Washington. WGL was required to hold public hearings and obtain a conditional use permit through the City of Cashmere for their project. Residents voiced concerns, which Gempler says are common for their projects. Ultimately, Brender Creek was approved and built.

## Key Findings & Recommendations

### Financial

Gempler says their development model has the benefit of allowing employers to come together into an association to find financing

and do a project together, easing the financial burden and risk for individual employers who may not have the capital and expertise to develop their own housing. He says this is why it's helpful to have community-based organizations develop farmworker housing rather than employers alone.

Brender Creek pays for its loan and operating costs from the rental income it receives. It is able to earn enough income from rents, but cash flow is difficult because of the seasonality of workers who rent from them. Brender Creek needs at least 60 percent occupancy over the year to make the cash flow work. Gempler says, "I could rent every bed I have ten times in the middle of the summer, but they all need it at the same time. [In the off-season], I can't find anybody to live there. He said forestry workers sometimes rent in the winter months, which is helpful. He adds this cash flow difficulty is a barrier that keeps more of this type of seasonal housing from being developed.

Gempler also says that renting groups of beds to employers is helpful for their cash flow. Employers can rent by the month and by the room for their workers.

## **Renting Beds to Employers and H-2A**

Agricultural employers are able to rent beds for their workers at the WGL properties. Gempler says employers much appreciate their housing model and are very positive about it. He says, "They like that it's well managed, that we pay attention to detail, we keep things in repair, we're responsive and helpful to residents. They see it as a positive

environment. It's not just a motel they rent, it's a place that has standards."

When renting to employers, Gempler says coordinating leases with employers is difficult, and advises using as long of a lease as you can to ensure financial stability of the facility. He also says it's important for the housing management team to work with the growers and have a shared understanding of expectations for the growers and their employees. One method that has worked well for WGL is to have a liaison at the employer who can work with employees to communicate and solve any problems related to housing.

**According to Gempler, Washington state is seeing a big increase in the number of H-2A workers, and that these days, Brender Creek and other WGL housing are predominantly rented by employers to house H-2A workers.**

A single employer cannot rent more than 25 percent of the beds at a given time, and under their loan requirements, WGL must always keep beds available for walk-in workers. Gempler says without these

requirements, H-2A employers would easily rent all the WGL housing. However, he also says the number of walk-in non-H-2A workers that rent their housing has been steadily declining.

Gempler says it's very difficult for employers to find housing that is usable for H-2A workers because there isn't much temporary housing available on the market that is affordable. Agricultural employers in Washington are renting apartments and hotels for their workers, and the farm community has started to compete with other low-income housing. There is nothing vacant left to rehabilitate, and some cities are starting to put moratoriums on employers buying up and rehabilitating housing for their workers.

Gempler says banding together to provide housing as a group is very viable, but not many employers are pursuing this model. He says there is a controversy around whether or not public funds should be allowed to be used to help provide housing for H-2A workers. He feels the public should have a role, and that there need to be policy discussions around this because funding this housing is very difficult for employers, especially smaller and newer operations.

## **Resident Feedback and Community Relationships**

Gempler says farmworkers are generally happy with WGL housing, especially because it is so difficult for them to find housing, and hotel rooms are often not affordable for them. He says people seem to like the set up, and that the facility is clean and has rules. He says,

**“Safety is a big deal. You want to make sure you can lock your stuff up when you go to work. You want to have a place where there are standards for behavior, and people are treated with respect.”**

He adds that workers like the low cost per night and that there is an onsite manager who is there all the time.

Gempler says their residents' great track record of excellent behavior helps them gain community approval to build farmworker housing. He said, “It's difficult to site [these facilities]. People think their property values are going to go down because they'll have farmworkers around, and the racial aspect... If you have a community that's predominantly white, and then there are single Mexican males, [they think] they're going to chase their daughters around. So, we have to show our police records, and [for Brender Creek] we had the Chelan County sheriff write us a letter of endorsement. Every once in a while, we have a criminal, but by and large the people who stay in our housing are young to middle aged men who are really nice and even aspirational - a lot are working on learning English, or have some education from Mexico, and they are up here making some money so they can finish school. After [Brender Creek] was completed, people were pleased with the quality and reflection it had on the community.”



Gempler says farmworkers make great community members. They are connected with employers in the community, and they are here on business and working hard all the time. He says it has been helpful to have professional management people can call if there is any problem or concern about residents.

and can't be repaired right away, the housing needs to be shut down.

## **Maintenance and Construction**

Another important piece of advice from Gempler is the need to constantly be committed to maintenance. Serious maintenance issues can require housing providers to find alternate housing for workers until the issue is resolved, at great cost and disruption. He says housing providers should pay special attention to maintenance, take it seriously, and plan for it ahead of time.

Gempler also advises farmworker housing developers to include amenities that can be reasonably maintained or repaired. As an example, Gempler said WGL had provided state-of-the-art modern refrigerators for the units at Brender Creek, but when they broke, no one local knew how to repair them. They have since created a rule that if they can't buy a replacement of the item or repair it locally, they don't buy it. He also said they have found self-contained HVAC systems to be easier and cheaper to maintain than mini-split ductless heat pumps.

Gempler also recommends connecting to an existing wastewater treatment system if available, rather than building one for the complex. He says operating an independent sewer system is costly and if it breaks down

# Case Study 2:

## San Jerardo Farmworker Housing Cooperative, Monterey County, California



*Photos provided by Horacio Amezcuita*

To compile this case study, our team interviewed Horacio Amezcuita, General Manager of the San Jerardo Cooperative. Portions of this case study were also borrowed with permission from a previous 2002 case study by the California Coalition for Rural Housing<sup>36</sup>.

<sup>36</sup> Bandy, Dewey and Robert Weiner. "California's Farmworker Housing Cooperatives: Lessons on Farmworker Ownership and Management" (October 2002). [https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/8d7a46\\_e49363ed3e6b475dbdf9414e09475b81.pdf](https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/8d7a46_e49363ed3e6b475dbdf9414e09475b81.pdf)

# San Jerardo Characteristics

<b>Developer</b>	Local farmworker families and Central Coast Counties Community Development Corporation (CCCDC)		
<b>Location</b>	Cooperative is located on a 32.6 -acre site in Monterey County outside the Salinas city limits on Old Stage Road. Including the property across from the entrance on Old Stage Road, all surrounding land is active cropland.		
<b>Type</b>	Multifamily – rehabilitation, clustered single-story multiplex units		
<b>Units</b>	64 cooperative units		
<b>Management</b>	General Manager hired by members		
<b>Equity</b>	Limited Equity –shareholder’s equity increases on a prorated basis as the mortgage principal is paid down and the value of any shareholder improvements.		
<b>Share Prices</b>	\$30,000-\$38,000 (increased from \$20,000 in 2002)		
<b>Monthly Membership Dues</b>	<b>Unit Size</b>	<b>Monthly Dues</b>	<b>Number of units</b>
	2 Bedroom	\$260	2
	3 Bedroom	\$330	34
	4 Bedroom	\$480	28
<b>Services</b>	Childcare center, community center, convenience store, below- market farmworker rental housing		
<b>Resident Eligibility</b>	The State of California Department of Housing and Community Development’s Farm Worker Housing Grant Program (FWHG) mandates strong preference being given to lower income farmworker households for admission to the cooperative. A county use permit requires households derive at least 51% of income from agricultural labor at the time of occupancy. Continued employment in agricultural labor is not a condition of the use permit and households may remain in the cooperative if they leave agricultural labor. Original funding for the development of the San Jerardo Cooperative included a USDA RHS Section 515 loan, which also applied income eligibility requirements. However, in 2012, San Jerardo was able to refinance and move their mortgage loan to a local bank, removing those USDA eligibility restrictions. Per other local requirements, and in accordance with the values of the cooperative members, available units are offered to farmworkers and their family members as ownership, or as a below-market rate rental, as determined by the members.		
<b>Development Funding Sources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RHS Section 515 Rural Rental Housing Loan Program (RHS 515)</li> <li>• RHS Section 523 Rural Rental Assistance</li> <li>• Department of Housing and Community Development’s Farm Worker Housing Grant Program (FWHG)</li> <li>• Housing Assistance Council Grant</li> <li>• Campaign for Human Development Grant</li> </ul>		

# San Jerardo

## Development Synopsis

The development of the San Jerardo cooperative was initiated by a grassroots farmworker organization explicitly for the purpose of creating farmworker homeownership in early 1972. The group was formed as the result of a United Farm Worker (UFW) organizing drive. When the labor camp in which the farmworkers were living was sold, they lived in the streets of Salinas for over two weeks until they were relocated to temporary housing in the form of an unused USDA labor camp. The group then proceeded to secure ownership of the camp through a very unorthodox purchase. Christening their organization and property after the Mexican patron saint of gamblers, San Jerardo, the group formed a development partnership with the now defunct Central Coast Counties Development Corporation (CCCDC). Key leadership roles were played by CCCDC staff person Ed Moncreif and the leader of the farmworkers, Sixto Torres.

A cooperative structure for their future housing was chosen as a compromise. The families desired unrestricted ownership but a condominium or single-family project was infeasible due to the zoning on the land and lack of potential funding sources. The other alternative, rental housing, was equally undesirable because it would not provide the farmworkers with ownership or control. With assistance from California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA), CCCDC and the San Jerardo families fought a lengthy battle against the local school district and growers who opposed the cooperative. At the same time, they had to surmount numerous bureaucratic obstacles from federal and

state agencies. In the end however, their determination won out. Development rights were secured in 1975, the first ever funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Housing Services (RHS) agency – then FmHA - for a farmworker cooperative was committed in 1977 and construction of the 60-unit cooperative was completed in 1979.

## Current status and financial stability

In our 2022 interview, Horacio Amezcuita, the General Manager of San Jerardo, said the cooperative is strong and thriving financially. He said, “[San Jerardo] was built on an anti-poverty program, this program worked. It took years to see it, but now you can see it because the co-op is free of debt, the members manage their own financial status, their own property. They don't have to be regulated by the government anymore.”

“The most important thing is to look at the development of the second generation of farmworkers; We have doctors, accountants, people went to university, have good paying jobs. That's a very big step for [the] original farmworkers that could not even read and worked in the fields all their lives. They did a big sacrifice to get their kids to school.”

Amezcuita's father was one of the original farmworker members of the San Jerardo Cooperative.

## Key Findings & Keys to Success

1. Limited equity has kept share prices affordable, and farmworkers are able to afford living here.
2. Fifty percent of current residents are original farmworker residents from development in 1970s.
3. Members have chosen to use equity each month to keep dues low rather than saving equity for sale or transfer later.
4. Democratic decision-making has been important to success at San Jerardo.
5. Refinancing with a local bank to gain independence from government funding rules and costs was vital to the co-op's financial survival.
6. Training members and board in cooperative management and financial aspects has also been key. Outside training is available for this group and their manager is experienced.
7. Biggest ongoing challenge is rural location without public utilities, increases cost.

Amezquita estimates that the market value of San Jerardo has increased from \$5 Million in 2012 to around \$18 Million today. However, San Jerardo is a limited equity cooperative, and members' equity is tied to the original loan amount, rather than the current market value. This limited equity has kept the sales (membership) prices of units affordable. It is possible to change the cooperative to increase equity earned by members, but members have chosen to keep the limited equity model to keep housing affordable to farmworkers. Although the

equity is limited, it does increase over time. Rather than saving equity for when they sell or pass away, members collectively decided to use this equity each month to subsidize their monthly membership dues, keeping them affordable.

Amezquita says another very important aspect of the financial success of San Jerardo is the hard-won financial independence from government funding that took many years.

The original USDA RHS 515 mortgage regulations established minimum and maximum monthly carrying charges to be paid monthly by residents. Minimum or "Basic" monthly carrying charges were set at an amount necessary to service the RHS 515 mortgage and meet operating costs. The maximum, or "Market" monthly charges that can be assessed are established based on the operating costs and projected debt service if the low interest, RHS 515 mortgage subsidy was not provided. Within these constraints, cooperative members paid 30% of their income - less a utility adjustment - toward their monthly carrying charge. The RHS Section 521 Rural Rental Assistance

Program provides assistance in cases where the Basic carrying charges would exceed 30% of a household's adjusted income. This program pays the difference between 30% of a household's adjusted income and the monthly basic carrying charge. As of 2002, seventeen households received this assistance.

When Amezquita came to San Jerardo in 2005, the USDA was charging the cooperative "overages" because some members exceeded the loan's income restrictions, increasing the loan payments required. Because of this increase, the cooperative was struggling to afford its payments, and the USDA requested that San Jerardo increase the monthly membership dues to pay. Additionally, Amezquita said the USDA loans had a 9-10 percent interest rate when he arrived.

To reduce loan payments, keep their membership dues affordable, and eliminate the income restrictions on their cooperative, San Jerardo wanted to refinance their loan with a different bank and pay off their debt with the USDA. However, a drinking water contamination issue at their property kept them from finding a new lender who would approve them. It took seven years and funding help from local government to update the drinking water system.

Then, in 2012, San Jerardo refinanced their loan with a local bank who would give them a lower rate and remove the income eligibility and monthly carrying charge rules imposed by the USDA. It took another year and a half for the USDA to process the loan paperwork transferring the loan to the local bank.

Finally complete, Amezquita says the refinance saves San Jerardo members about \$70,000-\$90,000 each year over the USDA

loan. He says rather than sending this money to the government, members now keep this money themselves and use it to send their children to school, and otherwise get ahead financially. They also invest back into the cooperative for upgrades and maintenance. Members are currently saving money to purchase the nearby drinking water treatment plant that serves their property. Additionally, the cooperative has invested in training its members to conduct maintenance and upgrades to their property themselves, saving additional money.

Amezquita says many farmworker housing cooperatives are lost over time and return to market-rate housing because their management fails. He said there are often problems with the board or administrators making mistakes, and that it is very important to have training and education for the board and cooperative members to keep it strong.

Amezquita feels San Jerardo has been successful because of careful management and democratic decision-making. He said,

**"San Jerardo is successful because you have to educate the board and the members and have them understand the expenses, the income, the finances, the problems, and have a vote that has majority vote. And whatever they decide, people will be more happy than having the board decide for them."**

Amezquita came to San Jerardo with years of co-op management experience that many farmworkers do not have. He says the California Center for Cooperative Development has been extremely helpful in answering any questions he has had. They also offer trainings and webinars.

Amezquita advises cooperative housing developers, “There are so many ways [to build cooperatives], if you have land, you can start a brand-new project, but if you don’t have land, you can create co-ops with structures that are already built, and all you have to do is redesign them. That’s what we did here, we didn’t start from scratch, the camp was abandoned.”

# Case Study 3:

## River Ranch Migrant Housing Center, Napa Valley, California



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<sup>37</sup> Gail Wadsworth, Don Villarejo, Richard Mines, Ildi Cummins-Carlisle, Robert Wiener, and Edward Samson. "Farmworker housing study and action plan for Salinas Valley and Pajaro Valley." (June 2018) [https://donvillarejo.github.io/Fulltext/Farmworker-Housing-Study-and-Action-Plan-for-Salinas-Valley-and-Pajaro-Valley\\_2018-June.pdf](https://donvillarejo.github.io/Fulltext/Farmworker-Housing-Study-and-Action-Plan-for-Salinas-Valley-and-Pajaro-Valley_2018-June.pdf)



## River Ranch Characteristics

<b>Developer</b>	<b>Napa County Housing Authority</b>
<b>Location</b>	St. Helena, Napa County
<b>Type</b>	Dormitory-style, congregate housing
<b>Units</b>	60 beds, 30 2-bedroom units
<b>Management</b>	California Human Development Corporation (community-based organization)
<b>Prices</b>	\$14 per bed, per night
<b>Development Funding Source</b>	The \$3.4 million development cost of River Ranch Migrant Center was borne by three sources: \$1.2 million in Napa County redevelopment tax increments; \$1.56 million from the State Joe Serna, Jr., Farmworker Housing Grant Program; and \$645,775 from the Napa Valley Wine Auction. Given the very low incomes of the prospective residents, the absence of debt financing and dedication of land made the project financially feasible without the need for payment of debt service from bed rents.

### Services:

The residential quarters of River Ranch are arranged in two wings, 15 rooms per wing measuring approximately 10 by 12 feet, each room with separate beds (not bunks) and a small closet space. Each wing has its own shared shower and bathrooms. There are no kitchenettes in the room, but instead a commercial kitchen and dining room where lodgers receive three meals. There are also staff living quarters. In addition to communal dining facilities, the center offers a multi-purpose room, laundry, storage space, a mini-library, and literacy program. The foundation of the center was built using rammed-earth technology, reinforced soil tailings from wineries rather than lumber.

CDHC (the property manager) provides limited social services. The residents are overwhelmingly mono-lingual Spanish-speakers. Services include literacy programs and English-as-a-Second-Language. These are funded primarily by donations from the Napa Valley Farmworker Committee. The Committee consists of business representatives, vintners, farmworker advocates, religious leaders, and others. It oversees the annual Cinco de Mayo golf tournament, which generates about \$50,000, and writes small grant proposals to fund services and operations. CHDC also operates a vocational training program for day laborers in St. Helena open to lodgers. While job sites and some shopping are located within a 10-minute drive, most other services, such as health care, transit, and a full-service grocery store are 30 minutes or more away. There is no organized residents' council, but lodgers give direct input to the site manager and a tenant position exists on the Napa Valley Housing Commission, an advisory body to the Housing Authority.

### **Description of Residents and Eligibility Requirements:**

River Ranch operates like a hotel with a lodger fee per bed per night. All residents are single unaccompanied adults, almost all men. Occasionally, a father and son or other relative may share a room. Only one year did the center accommodate women for one night. A small number of women can be accommodated in a separate wing in three staff apartments with their own shower and toilet.

To be eligible, residents must present a recent paycheck stub showing that a substantial portion of income is earned from qualifying agricultural employment. In practice, however, some residents have not yet begun working or have not yet been paid when moving in and the lodging agreement grants a 30-day grace period to provide a stub. In some cases, the pay stub may be from a previous employer or labor contractor. Although it reportedly never happens, failure to present a pay stub after 30 days is legal cause for compelling a lodger to move out. Among current lodgers, 25 percent have extremely low incomes (0-30 percent of AMI), 50 percent are very low income (31-50 percent of AMI), and 25 percent are low income (51-80 percent of AMI).

While it is possible that a lodger's income from agriculture after initial occupancy could decline, according to CHDC, the system is self-regulating. The manager knows the residents intimately and strictly monitors compliance. The living conditions are spartan enough that lodgers are self-selecting and motivated to make as much money from agriculture as possible to send home. Labor contractors only bring in farmworkers, and, even though some of the men take construction and other kinds of work, the great majority of income is still from farm labor.

Generally, about 65 percent of lodgers live year-round or most of the year in Napa County, 30% come from outside of the county, and 5 percent from outside of the country. Some of those living in the county move to other centers, like Mondavi and Calistoga, when River Ranch closes in order to stay in the area until work starts again, and they can move back to the center. In other words, it is possible to spend the entire year in the county moving among the three centers. In contrast to the State's Office of Migrant Services centers, there is no requirement that lodgers be families and live more than 50 miles from the center. Rarely do workers originate from other states; most are arranged by farm contractors from other parts of California, like Madera and Fresno Counties. Even rarer are individuals migrating back and forth from Mexico.

There is no screening for immigration and citizenship as there are no federal funds involved. However, because of the presence of the State funding, lodgers cannot be limited just to those working in Napa County vineyards and living year-round or most of the year in the county.

## Development Context

The Napa Valley has long valued its agricultural heritage, anchored by its wine grape production which accounts for 98 percent of Napa County's \$737 million agricultural industry. In 1968, the "right to farm" was enshrined in the County with creation of California's first agricultural preserve to protect agricultural lands on the valley floor from urban sprawl.

Yet, the workers who were the backbone of the valley's world-famous wine industry often slept in makeshift camps along the Napa River and on the lawn of the Catholic Church in St. Helena. The last time the county conducted a farmworker housing needs assessment in 2012, agricultural employers were hiring an average of 5,000 workers annually and 7,000 during peak months. Only 7 percent of workers had year-round farmworker jobs, but most farmworkers still had strong ties to the county. Twenty-seven percent held permanent agricultural jobs in the county and 50 percent worked seasonally in agriculture and took other jobs in the county during the off-season. Thirty-four percent lived in apartments, 31 percent in farmworker centers, and 14 percent in mobile homes. Forty-five percent lived in overcrowded conditions.

In 1999, the wine industry made a voluntary donation of \$250,000 and pledged \$85,000 from the Napa Valley Wine Auction to Napa Valley Community Housing for farmworker housing. In 2000, however, continuing newspaper reports of poor treatment of farmworkers in what was dubbed "America's Eden" while wine production and income were rising, prompted creation

of a 14-member Farmworker Housing Oversight Committee, which estimated there were 200 to 300 beds for migrant workers in the county but that 1,200 to 1,300 were needed. Of the 10 existing migrant housing facilities at that time, most were open as few as three months during the peak season and ran at a deficit. In 2001, the housing authority erected yurts to house 40 migrant workers, but workers continued to sleep at the St. Helena church.

At first, many of the wineries responded that the workers were not their responsibility as they were hired and supplied via vineyard management firms. However, given the importance of agricultural tourism, the sight of farmworkers encamped in view was unacceptable on economic and moral grounds. As a result, starting in 2001, vintners, county officials, and local citizens undertook a series of additional, and groundbreaking, actions to further facilitate the production and operation of migrant housing:

2001 - Vintners sponsor successful state legislation, AB 1550, to authorize the creation of a County Service Area (CSA) and annual assessment of \$10 per planted vineyard acre (over 1 acre in size) for acquisition, construction, leasing, and maintenance of farmworker housing.

2002 - Vineyard owners create CSA No. 4 to tax themselves and raise an estimated \$360,000 annually, something that no other group of growers or, for that matter, any group of growers has yet voluntarily agreed to do in California. CSA 4 was renewed in 2007 and 2012.

2002 - Napa County voters approve Measure L, which allows landowners to dedicate agricultural land of less than 20 acres for construction of temporary farmworker housing and 40 acres for year-round farmworker housing and authorizes up to five dormitory-style camps to provide temporary shelter for up to 300 farmworkers.

2003 - 60-bed River Ranch Migrant housing center opened in St. Helena.

2006 - Calistoga and Mondavi Migrant housing centers built in 1950s and 1960s and later conveyed to the Napa County Housing Authority are completely refurbished. New dormitory wings added in each center with 30 bedrooms housing two persons each. State funding from Joe Serna, Jr., Farmworker Housing Grant Program with local matching funds from County Affordable Housing Trust Fund and CSA No. 4. 120 twin beds bought by Napa Valley Vintners, a nonprofit trade association.

2011 Napa Valley Farmworker Foundation, the first of its kind in the U.S., is formed by vintners and agricultural interests to raise funds to support education and professional development for vineyard workers and their families (although not used at the centers). Over \$3 million raised.

2017- Wine grape producers vote overwhelmingly to extend annual assessment for another five years and gradually raise the rate from \$10 to \$15 per acre in planted grape production.

2017 - After failed attempts in 2015 and 2016 to win operating funds in the State budget, Napa County successfully

sponsors AB 317 (Curry) in the State Legislature to provide a continuous annual earmark of up to \$250,000 in matching funds for the three migrant housing centers from the proceeds of SB 2, the Building Homes and Jobs Act.

## River Ranch Development Summary

Opened in May 2003, River Ranch Migrant Center was the first center enabled by and built after the passage of AB 1550 and Measure L. While vintner tax assessments from AB 1550 would provide ongoing gap funding to cover any deficits in center operating costs, construction could not start until county voters modified the county's Agricultural Lands Preservation Initiative and reduced the minimum acreage allowed for production of farmworker housing on agriculturally-zoned land. Once that was achieved, vintner Joseph Phelps was able to donate eight acres for the new facility.

Measure L reduced the minimum acreage requirement to two acres or more and authorized up to five centers in the county with dormitory-style buildings, each capable of housing 60 workers. While there was no organized opposition and it passed with 71% voter approval, Measure L allows land to revert to its original agricultural use if the camps close to assuage concerns about agricultural land preservation.

The 60-bed River Ranch center was built by the Napa County Housing Authority at a cost of \$3.4 million or about \$56,700 a bed. Since the center was located in the unincorporated county with no connections

to existing sewer and water systems, a well and septic system had to be built. Day-to-day management was sub-contracted to the California Human Development Corporation (CHDC), which had previously managed the Mondavi and Calistoga migrant centers. Together they have 180 beds. CHDC management of all three sites facilitates staggering and synchronization. Currently, each is open 11 months; when one closes the other two remain open. River Ranch closes at the end of December and reopens in February.

## Project operations and operating budget

River Ranch charges lodgers \$14 per night, which includes a bed, three meals, and use of all of the facilities in the building and on the grounds. The actual cost of housing and meals is \$29 a day. The difference is covered primarily by County Service Area funds from vintner assessments, which augments the amount lodgers pay to cover food, maintenance, and other operating costs. The CSA generates about \$450,000 annually, which is shared by all three centers. Napa Valley Wine Auction proceeds used to cover a portion of operating expenses but are now committed

to community health and children's education nonprofits.

Since at least 2015, the three centers have operated in the red. The gap has been covered by excess CSA 4 funds and contributions from local cities and private donors. However, the depletion of reserves and continued flow of other revenue sources were unsustainable. As a result, the lodger fee was raised from \$13 to \$14, the vintners agreed to raise their assessment from \$10 to \$15 per acre in wine grape production, and county officials sought support from the State. The \$250,000 continuous annual appropriation approved by the Legislature from the proceeds of SB 2 will stabilize the centers for the foreseeable future.

The operating budget for River Ranch for fiscal year 2017-18 shows that estimated revenue from 17,895 bed nights at \$14.00 per person per bed and staff rental revenue will not be sufficient to cover all operating expenses, leaving a deficit of nearly \$30,000. The gap will be filled with CSA funds.

Contracting the management of all three county migrant centers to the Santa Rosa-based CHDC enables the County to achieve significant economies of scale and cost savings.

River Ranch Migrant Center: FY 2017-18 Operating Budget	
<b>Revenue</b>	
Resident Rental Revenue	\$250,530
Staff Rental Revenue	\$8,640
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$259,170</b>
<b>Expenses<sup>xviii</sup></b>	
Salaries and Wages	\$155,883
Fringe Benefits	\$68,553
Operating Expenses	\$29,485
Indirect Expenses	\$34,381
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$288,302</b>
<b>Operating Surplus (Deficit)</b>	<b>(\$29,132)</b>

The Napa County Housing Authority's administrative overhead costs would be too high to operate the centers and provide competitive lodging fees within the payment ability of farmworkers. Its labor costs, including employee pensions and other benefits, for management, maintenance, and cooks are much more expensive than CHDC's. Moreover, CHDC can consolidate regional property management supervision, fiscal management, maintenance, and acquisition of food, equipment, and supplies under one roof and deploy staff and resources to all three centers more efficiently than if each center was run

separately. One full-time resident manager and a part-time maintenance person are deployed to River Ranch.

Since the Great Recession, when so many homes that rented out garages and sheds in backyards for living space went into foreclosure, the farmworker centers have realized increased occupancy and maintained that ever since (averaging 96% occupancy over the course of the year). In 2017, there was a serious labor shortage. After the end of the harvest, some lodgers leave chasing other work or go home, thereby reducing the number of lodgers sometimes to as low as 40. When they reopen in February, the center begins to fill up. The centers help to stabilize the labor force by keeping employees in place during the dead months. By-products of the labor shortage are that workers are receiving higher wages and growers are keeping workers on payrolls longer to perform restoration work from the October 2017 fires, weeding, and general clean-up so they will be around at the beginning of the new year.

## Lessons Learned

1. While Napa County has not solved its migrant housing problem, the initiative of local vintners, together with county and city officials, business and religious leaders, and farmworker advocates exemplifies what can be achieved when all parties pull together to meet migrant housing needs.
2. Even with a land dedication and no debt financing, the margin for operating off-farm migrant housing can be quite small given the low incomes and seasonality of migrant work. One thing to consider is whether or not to offer food service, which is expensive and a cost that is difficult to control, especially if other high-quality, reasonably-priced food service is located nearby.
3. Creation of a taxing district buoyed by a modest fee per cultivated acre, or some other form of grower self-assessment, can be the critical piece of funding that enables migrant housing centers to operate in the black. Funds raised can also leverage government and private contributions for the development and replacement costs of migrant housing.
4. Although the employment verification process used in River Ranch and the other Napa County centers appears to be working, operators of off-farm migrant housing may wish to impose more frequent screening when there are farm labor shortages and scarcity of other housing options.
5. Off-farm migrant housing using the River Ranch model has certain operational advantages over other models. Unlike on-farm, grower-owned

migrant housing, off-farm migrant housing owned by public and private nonprofit agencies is eligible for government grants and charitable donations and meets the needs of multiple growers. Unlike the State OMS centers, there is no requirement that

lodgers be families and live beyond 50 miles from the center.

6. Retaining a mission-driven, nonprofit organization like CHDC with a commitment to farmworkers to run multiple migrant centers can result in cost savings and efficiencies.

“It is sad to be in a country that is supposedly a first world country and we do not have the possibility of living in a house with good conditions.

- Migrant Farmworker,  
Hood River County

## CHAPTER 7

# Results of Farmworker Interviews



**One vital aspect of this study was to include the opinions and experiences of farmworkers in the recommendations to improve farmworker housing.** To ensure their opinions were included, Latine community liaisons conducted 80 individual phone interviews with farmworkers in Hood River, Marion, Morrow, and Yamhill Counties.

**Interview questions and recruitment strategies were reviewed by farmworkers, community liaisons, and Agricultural Workforce Housing Facilitation Team members.** Interviews were conducted in Spanish and included both qualitative (open-ended) and quantitative (closed-ended) questions. We also collected demographic information as part of the interview. Participants received a \$75 Visa gift card after their interview. Interviews were anonymous. Twenty farmworkers were interviewed in each county. About half were migrant workers and half seasonal/permanent workers (per OHCS definitions). Interviewees represented both men and women, and a diversity of housing experiences, ages, family types, and included indigenous workers. **Twelve farmworkers who participated in the study were recruited and paid to review the final study report, and their feedback was incorporated to improve it.**

## **The main objectives of the phone interviews with agricultural workers were to:**

1. Explore the housing needs and preferences of farmworkers, including experiences with services provided with housing, and the need for temporary emergency shelter
2. Learn about housing conditions experienced by farmworkers, including concerns about pesticide exposure
3. Identify barriers farmworkers face to accessing housing, and whether and how barriers to housing affect other aspects of farmworkers' lives
4. Hear about impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and recent Oregon heat waves and wildfires on farmworker housing and efforts to look for housing
5. Hear recommendations from farmworkers about how to improve farmworker housing, what would help them find housing, and what types of assistance they would prefer

# Summary of key findings & farmworker recommendations

## 1

### Housing Needs & Preferences

#### Farmworker needs when looking for housing

Interviewees most mentioned cost, conditions, and location as important when looking for housing. Additionally, Farmworkers living in employer-owned housing often said they live there because the housing is provided for free with their job, and some said they could not afford housing otherwise.

#### Farmworker housing preferences

When asked what they liked about their housing both now and in the past, farmworkers most mentioned having enough space, community and relationships, having good housing conditions, privacy, and peace and quiet.

#### Services included with housing

Some farmworkers we interviewed had lived in housing that included services. They said they appreciated the services and benefitted from them. Services received included Head Start, childcare, transportation (shared rides), and English language classes. Two interviewees said they appreciated the programs for children. One interviewee said the free childcare she received allowed her to “work with confidence” knowing her childcare was paid for and that she’d have enough money to cover her expenses. Two said they appreciated having transportation assistance because they didn’t drive or didn’t have a car. Noted drawbacks of programs included strict income and paperwork requirements, and lack of capacity (wait lists) for the services.

# 2

## Barriers to Accessing Housing

Most farmworkers interviewed said it is difficult for them to find housing. Cost was the biggest barrier most farmworkers said they faced when looking for housing. Cost, coupled with very low incomes and income instability, made it difficult for farmworkers to qualify for and keep their housing. Interviewees also often said that rental application requirements were too burdensome, that there was limited overall housing availability, and that they could not access homeownership due to their incomes and because they can't meet home loan requirements.

# 3

## Life Impacts of the Difficulty Finding Housing

Nearly half of participants agreed that the difficulty finding housing has negatively impacted other aspects of their lives. When asked to describe how it had impacted them, negative impacts on emotional well-being were the most reported including stress, depression, anxiety, fear, frustration, decreased sense of self-esteem, and feeling rejected by society. Interviewees also

mentioned conflicts with family, and financial impacts caused by taking time off from work and needing to pay high deposits.

# 4

## Impacts of COVID-19, Wildfires, Smoke and Extreme Heat on Housing

### COVID-19

One in four farmworkers interviewed said their housing was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Impacts included closures and restrictions keeping them from finding housing, getting behind in rent or house payments due to lack of work, and getting sick with COVID-19 or having to quarantine.

### Wildfire & hazardous air quality (smoke)

One in four farmworkers reported housing impacts from wildfires and hazardous air quality caused by wildfire smoke. Impacts included losing work and income and being evacuated or needing to relocate to find work. Some experienced health impacts from working in smoky conditions and had to seek medical treatment.

## Impacts of extreme heat

Farmworkers also reported housing impacts due to extreme heat. The most mentioned impact was losing work and income because farms shut down during the heat and crops were lost and not harvested.

## Emergency evacuation locations

Not many farmworkers interviewed had been evacuated. Most of those who had been evacuated said they went to stay with family. One said they were provided with a hotel room for COVID-19 quarantine, and a small number said they went to shelters when evacuated due to wildfires. Some did not know where to go.

# 5

## Housing Conditions

### Specific housing problems based on HUD standards

Interviewers asked farmworkers about 13 specific housing problems based on US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) housing standards and asked them to indicate whether or not they have each problem with their current housing (see chart on page 93 for full list of problems). Most interviewees said they had

problems on the list, and all items on the list were reported multiple times. Migrant and seasonal/ permanent workers reported most problems at similar rates.

The most reported on the list of specific problems were:

1. Not having enough privacy (83%, 66 out of 80)
2. Not having enough heat (65%, 52 out of 80)
3. Cracking, chipping, or peeling paint (64%, 51 out of 80)
4. Mold (59%, 47 out of 80)

## Housing conditions described

Many farmworkers talked about poor housing conditions. The most common housing problems farmworkers described were housing in disrepair, overcrowded housing, not enough privacy, not enough heat, and that bathrooms are shared or outdoors. Interviewees also mentioned insect and rodent infestations, being treated poorly by landlords, and unsafe living conditions in previous places they had lived. A number of workers said they want the government to help improve their housing conditions, and some ask that government come see their housing conditions to understand the need.

Although we did not specifically call out on-farm versus off-farm housing, many farmworkers pointed out problems with on-farm housing. Poor housing conditions and inadequate bathrooms were the most common problems that farmworkers described with on-farm housing. A number of farmworkers also noted that they had no choice but to live in free-on-farm housing because they do not earn enough to afford to live anywhere else. Some also mentioned

they were afraid to speak out about poor on-farm housing conditions for fear of losing their job or their housing.

Some farmworkers said they have a good relationship with their employer and good on-farm housing conditions. Workers who were happy with their on-farm housing described having all the basic amenities and employers who checked on them, made repairs, and made them feel cared for.

## Concerns about pesticide use

Interviewers asked farmworkers about pesticide exposure concerns around their homes. More than a third of farmworker interviewees said they are concerned about pesticide use around their housing, particularly about risks to their children and worries about long-term health impacts. This concern was shared by workers living both on-farm and off-farm.

## Unsheltered workers

Some farmworkers interviewed said they are living in cars or trucks because they cannot afford the cost of housing. Some said they had owned a home in the past but lost it because they got behind on payments. They reported that losing their homes had taken an emotional toll on them.

# 6

## Farmworker Recommendations to Improve Access to Housing & Housing Conditions

When we asked farmworkers what would help them find and access housing and what their recommendations are for agencies working to improve farmworker housing, the following themes emerged:

1. There is a crucial need for government to help farmworkers
2. Reduce the cost of housing
3. Provide information and resources on affordable housing
4. Increase farmworker pay
5. Create farmworker resource centers
6. Reduce rental application requirements
7. Increase available housing, including low-income housing, housing on or near farms, temporary housing, housing for older people, single women, and families
8. Help farmworkers achieve homeownership
9. Provide legal residency to help farmworkers access housing

# Detailed findings & farmworker recommendations

## 1

### Housing Needs & Preferences

#### Farmworker needs when looking for housing

To better understand housing needs, we asked farmworkers to describe what was most important to them when looking for housing. Interviewees most frequently mentioned cost, housing conditions, and location as important when looking for housing.

"I am currently living in a shared space to be able to live/survive. I am expecting a child and it has been very hard working and being able to afford where to live." – F, 32, seasonal/permanent worker, lives with five non-relatives, off-farm mobile home they own, Morrow County

**Cost:** Most farmworkers we interviewed said the cost of the housing and whether or not they can afford it is the most important thing they consider. Nearly half said it is a primary reason they live where they do now. Many farmworkers we interviewed said they earn very low wages and that it is especially hard to find housing they can afford.

**Conditions:** Farmworkers said they pay attention to conditions when looking for housing. Many said they want a comfortable space, and that they look for a place that has all the basic amenities, such as water, heat, light, a kitchen, and indoor bathrooms. Some specifically mentioned looking for air conditioning as summer temperatures have been increasing.

**Location:** Farmworkers also said location is important to them when looking for housing. Many said it was important to live close to their work. Others said it was important to live close to amenities like schools, medical care, and shopping. Some said it was important to live near their family.

Additionally, Farmworkers living in employer-owned housing often said they live there because the housing is provided for free with

their job. Some said they had no choice but to live in employer-provided housing because they could not afford housing otherwise. Some saw free housing as a perk and were comfortable living on the farm.

“[I live in] a cabin where my employer lets me sleep, inside a stable. I don't pay rent and they treat me well. If I have to go to work at another farm or packing house, they let me go. They are flexible with me and I feel at ease.” – M, 40, migrant worker, lives with six non-relatives including three children, on-farm employer-owned cabin, Yamhill County

## Farmworker housing preferences

When asked what they liked about their housing both now and in the past, farmworkers commonly mentioned having enough space, community and relationships, having good housing conditions, privacy, and peace and quiet. Some farmworkers said they have a good relationship with their employer and good on-farm housing conditions.

**Having enough space:** Farmworkers often mentioned that they prefer housing that is sufficiently spacious for them and their family to be comfortable. Many of these farmworkers said a bigger place is better for their children, providing them enough room to play.

**Community and relationships:** Farmworkers often talked about the community when asked about a place they enjoyed living.

Some talked about liking their neighborhood and friendly neighbors, and some said they enjoyed living near other farmworkers and their families. Many farmworkers interviewed in Morrow County said they enjoy living in the small-town community of Boardman.

“We are close to the river and love being around the families, small communities. I feel very united.” – F, 41, migrant worker, off-farm RV they own, Morrow County

**Good housing conditions:** Farmworkers said they had liked living in clean homes, places where the owners made repairs, and those with the basic amenities like heat, air conditioning, and newer fixtures. Some specifically noted the good conditions of the on-farm housing provided to them by their employer.

“In one of the ranches where I lived, the house was not so big, but I liked it because it had its toilet inside, the kitchen, bathroom, and only I used it. In cold weather I didn't have to go outside to use the bathroom.” – M, 30, migrant worker, on-farm employer-owned cabin, Hood River County

**Privacy:** Farmworkers also said they liked living in their own home or apartment and/or their own room. A few said they appreciated that the neighbors didn't bother them. Others said they like not having to share a bathroom with others.

**Peace and quiet:** Some interviewees said they appreciated living in calm, quiet, and tranquil places. The cities of Hood River and Boardman were specifically mentioned by

interviewees that live, or had previously lived, in those communities.

**Happy with on-farm housing:** Workers who were happy with their on-farm housing described having all the basic amenities and employers who checked on them, made repairs, and made them feel cared for.

"It's important who your [farm] owner is, and how they treat you. My current farm owner pays for all mortgage, and provides all the house basic (light, water, garbage), checks in on us. [I] feel cared about." – M, 54, seasonal/permanent worker, Hood River county

## Services included with housing

We also asked interviewees about whether they had lived in housing that included services, what kind of services they had access to, and what their experiences were with those services. Five farmworkers we interviewed had lived in housing that included services, and all of those interviewees said they appreciated the services and benefitted from them.

Services received included Head Start, childcare, transportation (shared rides), and English language classes. Two interviewees said they appreciated the programs for children. One interviewee said the free childcare she received allowed her to "work with confidence" knowing her childcare was paid for and that she'd have enough money

to cover her expenses. Two said they appreciated having transportation assistance because they didn't drive or didn't have a car. One interviewee said she used the transportation service to get to medical appointments and go shopping while her spouse was at work. Noted drawbacks of programs included strict income and paperwork requirements, and lack of capacity (wait lists) for the services.

# 2

## Barriers to Accessing Housing

To explore the barriers that farmworkers face accessing adequate housing, we asked interviewees how easy or difficult it had been for them to find housing, and what challenges they faced in finding housing.

Most farmworkers interviewed said it is difficult for them to find housing. Cost was the biggest barrier most farmworkers said they faced when looking for housing. Cost, coupled with very low incomes and income instability, made it difficult for farmworkers to qualify for and keep their housing. Interviewees also often said that rental application requirements were too burdensome, that there was limited overall housing availability, and that they could not access homeownership due to their incomes and because they can't meet home loan requirements.

**Cost:** Cost is the barrier farmworkers most mention that they face when looking for housing. Many farmworkers we interviewed



said they earn very low wages and cannot afford to pay much for rent. Some said they cannot afford to pay any rent and still be able to feed their families.

“The pricing of rent is really high. I can’t afford over \$1000 dollars a month plus other cost and food, and [on] a farmworker salary, it’s impossible - living paycheck to paycheck.” – M, 60, seasonal/permanent worker, on-farm house owned by employer, Hood River County

“If I pay for a room or apartment, I have almost nothing left from what I earn to feed my children.” - Migrant Worker, Marion County

**Income instability:** Many interviewees reported that their income is very unstable due to the seasonality of their work, unpredictable weather and harvest conditions, and the pandemic and wildfires in recent years. They said unstable and unpredictable incomes make it difficult to qualify for rentals and to make regular rent payments, leaving them vulnerable to losing their housing. The income of farmworkers we interviewed is so unstable that only 16 of 80 workers interviewed could tell us how much they earned in the previous 12 months.

“Since my wife and children are in Mexico, whether I have a job or not, I have to send them money. When there is no good harvest I don’t earn

money. For any problem (COVID, smoke, lack of water, too much heat, snowfalls) if I don’t find work, I don’t have money to send them.” – M, 40, migrant worker, lives with six non-relatives, on-farm employer-owned cabin, Yamhill County

“When I lived in an apartment, I had to pay rent even if I ran out of food and gas. The landlords don’t care if you are a farmworker or not. They want their pennies. We farmworkers never earn a steady income. It’s hard to rent. We are exposed to being kicked out if we fall behind on rent.” – M, 67, migrant worker, on-farm employer-owned cabin, Yamhill County

#### **Burdensome rental application**

**requirements:** Specific rental application barriers included the need for a valid social security number, high deposits, rental history, work history, proof of stable employment, income requirements, credit history, and applications only in English. Of these rental application requirements, interviewees most frequently identified the need for a social security number as a barrier.

“Where I used to work before, they wouldn’t pay me by check, and the apartment landlords wouldn’t accept letters from the employer, saying I couldn’t prove I worked. I had no work history.” –Yamhill County

“Being a new renter can be hard. It was very difficult because I arrived to a new community/new country with no history to state that I would pay for rent. [I was] able to seek help by word of mouth of people in community - what was available and who could maybe help me, usually a homeowner that might have a room available.” – M, 49, lives off-farm in a mobile home they rent, Morrow County

**Lack of available housing:** One in three farmworkers interviewed said there is not enough housing available for them. They mentioned long wait lists and heavy competition for the limited supply of housing available. Many mentioned that there is not enough affordable, low-income housing.

"They build houses, they ask us for interviews and parents' meetings, but then we see that the houses have already been sold to someone else, and farmworkers always get pushed further and further away. NO, it's not enough." – F, 24, lives with two children in off-farm single room in a 2-bedroom private rental apartment, Yamhill County

"Wherever you look, it is the same: there is nothing available, it is already rented..." – M, 28, migrant worker, lives with spouse and three children, on-farm RV he owns and parks on his employer's farm, Yamhill County

**Lack of access to home ownership:** One in four interviewees said they want to own their own homes. They expressed frustration about barriers to the home buying process, including cost, residency status, and not knowing how to buy a home or where to get help.

"Since we can't buy a house, we are always paying high rents. We work hard, and other people can buy a house. Farmworkers cannot. We need legal status and legal residency to buy a house."

# 3

## Life Impacts of the Difficulty Finding Housing

Nearly half of participants agreed that the difficulty finding housing has negatively impacted other aspects of their lives. When asked to describe how it had impacted them, negative impacts on emotional well-being were the most reported including stress, depression, anxiety, fear, frustration, decreased sense of self-esteem, and feeling rejected by society. Interviewees also mentioned conflicts with family, and financial impacts caused by taking time off from work and needing to pay high deposits. One interviewee mentioned negative educational impacts on the children of farmworkers. Another said it would be helpful for farmworkers to have counselors to help them overcome psychological damage.

"Living in some of the conditions lowers your self-esteem, and [there] is an emotional toll of leaving your home and then coming to live in worse conditions. Everything is based on how we live and that makes you change the way you feel about yourself and how we are valued." – F, 32, seasonal worker, lives with five non-relatives, in mobile home she owns, Morrow County

"I can't afford an apartment on my own... I have to live with my son even though I don't want to. ...I have no privacy and they use me

as a babysitter, I can't refuse. I don't like this situation, it makes me angry, and I know there is no other option. It is frustrating." – F, 54, Yamhill County

"Some farms don't give you housing. When that happens, I have to look farther away and I have to look for a ride to get there too. If I don't find one, I worry that the season will be over and I won't be able to work. It's just the fear of thinking that I won't be able to send money to my children in Mexico, it makes me sad and I cry." – F, 33, migrant worker, lives with six non-relatives, on-farm employer-owned cabin, Yamhill County

## 4

### Impacts of COVID-19, Wildfires, Smoke and Extreme Heat on Housing

During the course of this study, the COVID-19 global pandemic, catastrophic wildfires, and record-breaking air quality hazards affected farmworkers in Oregon. We asked each farmworker we interviewed how, if at all, these events impacted their housing.

### COVID-19 impacts on housing

One in four farmworkers interviewed said their housing was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Impacts included closures and restrictions keeping them from finding housing, getting behind in rent or house payments due to lack of work, and getting sick with COVID-19 or having to quarantine.

**Pandemic Closures/Restrictions:** Some farmworkers said they weren't able to find housing because rental offices were closed or wouldn't provide showings due to the risk of COVID-19 exposure. Difficulty finding shared housing was also mentioned.

"Hard to go out to find an apartment, and not being allowed to not be seen, was told I couldn't even be put on a waitlist, no one was being seen, I had to move in with family." – M, 36, migrant worker, Morrow County

**Lack of Work:** A number of interviewees said the pandemic caused them to lose work and go without pay. This made it harder to pay for housing and some got behind in payments. Some said they were afraid they would lose their housing.

"At the beginning of the pandemic we started looking for another place to live. Suddenly my husband was out of work because of COVID, and for one month he didn't work for us. His employer had to give him money out of his own pocket. And we already had to pay higher rent for a bigger place, plus the deposit. It affected us because of the pressure of not knowing what was going on and how long we were going to be out of work." – F, 32, seasonal/permanent worker, private rental duplex, Yamhill County

“Because of COVID...there was no work, and I had to travel farther to look for other farms. The [labor] contractors were not working either, and I had no way to communicate with the farm owners to look for work. I lost months of work. If there is no money, I get behind in my rent, there was a lot of paperwork to turn in to keep me from being evicted for non-payment.” - M, 34, migrant worker, Yamhill County

**COVID-19 Illness and Quarantine:** A number of farmworkers we interviewed said they themselves had gotten sick with COVID-19 and had to quarantine either in their home or away from work. Others had to quarantine because of COVID-19 exposure at their home or work. Some said being sick and/or quarantining caused them to lose work and pay. Having to quarantine also kept some workers from being able to look for other housing.

“Because of COVID, many people who worked on the same farm got sick, then my wife and children got sick because we lived there, and we all had to go to different parts of Portland and Vancouver. The clinic that took care of us found us a hotel for a few weeks. From there we did not return to the farm.” – M, 28, migrant worker, living in an RV he owns, Yamhill County

“I got sick with COVID and was in quarantine. Even though I wanted to work, I felt too weak to stand up. It affected me that I did not work. Many people on the farm got sick. As a

farmer, I can't afford to get sick. I have to work for a living.” – M, 56, migrant worker, living on-farm in cabin provided by employer, Yamhill County

## Wildfire & hazardous air quality (smoke) impacts on housing

One in four farmworkers reported housing impacts from wildfires and hazardous air quality caused by wildfire smoke. Impacts included losing work and income and being evacuated or needing to relocate to find work. Some experienced health impacts from working in smoky conditions and had to seek medical treatment.

“Also, because of the smoke, many of us got laid off. We wanted to work but the smoke was too much that we could not see well in the field, and we had to wait for days until it cleared. We lost our jobs.” – F, 33, migrant worker, Yamhill County

“During the heavy smoke we had to work much more covered (wearing PPE), we could not breathe, because the mask, the shield, goggles. My son got sick again with asthma and was in the hospital for two nights, I was very worried about him, and I felt very tired. I could not work.” – F, 37, seasonal/permanent worker, Hood River County

## Impacts of extreme heat on housing

Farmworkers also reported housing impacts due to extreme heat. The most mentioned impact was losing work and income because farms shut down during the heat and crops were lost and not harvested.

“Now in the heat, we start working at 5 am to 6 am I’m already sweating, at 10 am we have to stop because the heat does not let us continue. You can’t even touch the stairs, they burn, because they are made of metal. And... we don’t work until the next day.” – F, 37, seasonal/permanent worker, Hood River County

## Emergency evacuation locations

We asked farmworkers if they had ever been evacuated for COVID-19, wildfires, or smoke, and if so, where they had gone. Few farmworkers interviewed had been evacuated. Most of those who had been evacuated said they went to stay with family. One said they were provided with a hotel room for COVID-19 quarantine, and a small number said they went to shelters when evacuated due to wildfires. Some did not know where to go.

# 5

## Housing Conditions

### Specific housing problems based on HUD standards

Interviewers asked farmworkers about 13 specific housing problems based on HUD housing standards (listed in Exhibit 34) and asked them to indicate whether or not they have each problem with their current housing. Most interviewees said they had problems on the list, and all items on the list were reported multiple times.

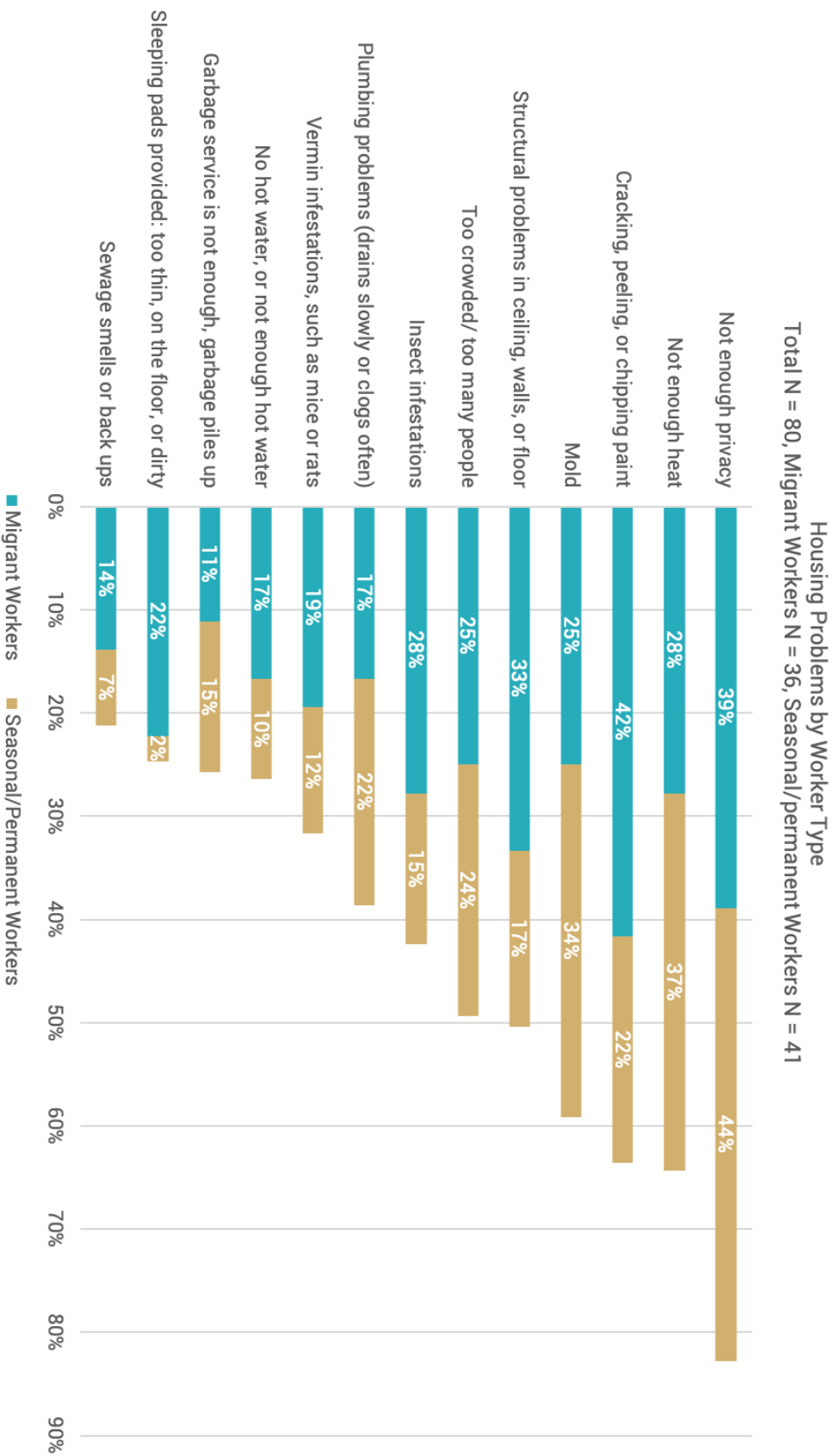
Migrant and seasonal/permanent workers reported most problems at similar rates, with the exception of “sleeping pads too thin, on floor, or dirty”, which was reported much more often by migrant workers.

The most reported on the list of specific problems were:

1. Not having enough privacy (83%, 66 out of 80)
2. Not having enough heat (65%, 52 out of 80)
3. Cracking, chipping, or peeling paint (64%, 51 out of 80)
4. Mold (59%, 47 out of 80)

### Exhibit 34. Housing problems by worker type.

Source: Stamberger 2021 farmworker interviews, Hood River, Marion, Morrow and Yamhill County



## Poor Housing conditions described

We asked farmworkers to describe problems with their current housing, as well as issues they had with places they had lived in the past.

The most common housing problems farmworkers described were housing in disrepair, overcrowded housing, not enough privacy, not enough heat, and that bathrooms are shared or outdoors.

- Interviewees also mentioned insect and rodent infestations, being treated poorly by landlords, and unsafe living conditions in previous places they had lived.
- A number of workers said they want the government to help improve their housing conditions, and some ask that government come see their housing conditions to understand the need. As one seasonal/permanent worker in Hood River County explained,

“We are people and front-line workers, of necessity, if the government could really see in what conditions we live would not be doing surveys at this point to know if we need better housing or not. It is obvious that we need housing.”

- Although we did not specifically call out on-farm versus off-farm housing, many farmworkers pointed out problems with on-farm housing. Poor housing conditions and inadequate bathrooms were the most common problems that farmworkers described with on-farm housing.
- A number of farmworkers also noted that they had no choice but to live in free on-farm housing because they do not earn enough to afford to live anywhere else. Some also mentioned they were afraid to speak out about poor on-farm housing conditions for fear of losing their job or their housing. As a seasonal/permanent worker living in employer-owned on-farm housing explained,

“A couple years ago on another farm, OSHA came once to check on us and told us immediately that we should not be living in these conditions, we had no heat in the middle of winter. We realized our home was not in great conditions, but we were afraid to question, not wanting to lose our jobs.”

## Detail about housing problems

**Housing in disrepair:** Interviewees often said that their homes are old, and that the owners could do more to repair them. Some farmworkers indicated that they live now or have lived in these conditions because it is all they could find or afford. Problems reported in current housing included a broken stove, insufficient heating and cooling systems, bad drinking water, electrical problems, a broken door, structural damage from a windstorm, roof problems, and plumbing problems. One worker said conditions are unsanitary. In past housing conditions, farmworkers talked about insect and rodent infestations and mold.

“There are many problems because the house is already old, the sink is bad, the door is broken, sometimes the water is dirty.” – M, seasonal/permanent worker, private rental, Marion County

“My current home needs repairs, the roof is broken, and needs electricity repairs. The trailer is very old.” – M, 21, Migrant Worker, owns mobile home rents space on farm, Morrow County

**Crowded housing:** Farmworkers also commonly mentioned crowded housing conditions. Farmworkers said they crowd into housing because they are not able to find or afford something more spacious. In crowded homes and apartments, interviewees talked about sleeping in the living room, the difficulty of sharing the bathroom, and not having enough space to cook. One participant is worried they will all be evicted for living with so many people to an apartment.

“We ran out of money and [have] debts. I am currently living with my cousins. Discomfort, and we are many. We cannot cook at ease, and if the owner finds out, we are evicted because it is not allowed that many people live in the apartment. Economically, we are not doing well, and we could be evicted at any moment.” – F, 22, living in private rental 1-bedroom apartment with nine relatives, Marion County

“We don’t have much space, only one bathroom for all 10 of us who live here. We are accommodated in the living room because there are no rooms.” – F, 22, permanent/seasonal worker, lives off-farm in private rental with 9 relatives including two children, Marion County

“There is only one kitchen and one bathroom for 20 people. There are 20 people in a single room.” – F, 43, migrant worker, lives with twenty people including her three children in on-farm cabin provided by farmer employer, Marion County

**Lack of privacy:** Many workers we interviewed said that they do not have enough privacy in their housing. Often this was related to crowded housing conditions and the need to share bathrooms.

“I am temporarily living in a trailer because it is harvest time, and the place is small. There is no privacy, no bathroom, no shower to bathe. We have to use the one in



the cabin.” – F, 38, migrant worker, on-farm sharing a trailer with her two children and one non-relative, Marion County

“We lived in a hotel style home that we had no privacy, and we didn’t have sometimes didn’t have the basic needs like water. There was one bathroom for 16 people.” – M, 21, migrant worker, Morrow County

**Insufficient heating and cooling:** Many farmworkers said they do not have enough heat in their homes. This was a problem in both current housing and past housing. Some said this was because the heater didn’t work well enough, and some said their housing had no source of heat. Some farmworkers said they had problems with not having AC in their homes, especially as temperatures increase due to climate change. As one seasonal worker in Morrow County described, “I have lived in trailer park where I rented a space, and [it] was in horrible condition. The home did not have heat, and we had to buy a small space heater.”

**Outdoor and shared bathrooms:** A number of workers said outdoor bathrooms are a major problem with on-farm housing and that indoor bathrooms are a basic necessity that should be included with all housing. Some said they are afraid to go out to use the bathroom at night, and one says she urinates in a bucket to avoid going out in the dark. A number of workers also said they did not like sharing bathrooms because there was a lack of privacy and sometimes they had to wait in long lines to shower or use the toilet.

“I don’t want to go out at night sometimes. I have to put a *vacinica* (bucket to urinate) in the room and take it out in the morning. It’s a drag every day. The older I get, the harder life gets”. - seasonal worker, on-farm employer-owned cabin, Hood River County

“In one of the ranchos or cabanas where I lived, because there was only one bathroom for men and one for women. In the morning we had to stand in line to use it. We lived about 30 people in that place and even to take a bath we had to wait in line.” – M, 30, migrant worker, Hood River County

## Concerns about pesticide use

Interviewers asked farmworkers about pesticide exposure concerns around their homes.

More than 1/3 of farmworker interviewees said they are concerned about pesticide use around their housing, particularly about risks to their children and worries about long-term health impacts.

This concern was shared by workers living both on- farm and off-farm.

**Risks to children:** Farmworkers said they are worried that airborne pesticides may harm their children. One worker said his

daughter had skin problems due to pesticide exposure.

“Because we live in the orchard, when they throw the chemicals we close the doors but I'm watching my children because there are dangerous chemicals and I'm afraid that my children will get sick.” - M, 30, migrant worker, on-farm employer-owned cabin, Hood River County

“I know our farms are getting pesticides and there are some that are harmful. There are farms with homes around that are getting sprayed. Some may think there's no damage but the air float/particles are going around. There are many children around close to the farms. I feel that there's damage.” – M, 36, migrant worker, Morrow County

**Long-term health impacts:** Interviewees who are concerned about pesticide use commonly worried about impacts on their own long-term health, including cancer and lung problems. Some described current health problems from pesticide exposure. One said it is important to understand that farmworkers have often been doing the same jobs for many decades, increasing their health risks.

“It affects my health, for the moment I have not gotten sick but I am afraid of getting cancer or other respiratory diseases, but I have no other option.” – F, 38, Migrant Worker, Marion County

“The strong chemicals are also a worry...because I am working around them, and being close to them, I can feel my lung burning sometimes, and [it] makes me afraid of the long- term damage. Even though sometimes we have a special equipment, I [am] constantly exposed.” – M, 37, seasonal/permanent worker, Morrow County

## Unsheltered workers

Some farmworkers we interviewed said they are living in cars or trucks because they cannot afford the cost of housing. Some said they had owned a home in the past but lost it because they got behind on payments. They reported that losing their homes had taken an emotional toll on them.

“I live in my truck. I can't afford to pay rent, it's too expensive. I didn't choose to live in my truck; circumstances led me to it. We pay a brother \$200 a month to let us bathe. It is not easy to live with a wife of so many years in the same vehicle where we transport ourselves. Years ago, I had a house with my wife, we were a few months late with the mortgage payment due to debts and we couldn't get the bank to understand us. We lost the house. I liked that house, because...I felt it was mine, I made repairs myself and I felt useful. I have had a hard time getting back on my feet emotionally since I lost it.” – M, 67, migrant worker, Yamhill County

# 6

## Farmworker Recommendations to Improve Access to Housing & Housing Conditions

When we asked farmworkers what would help them find and access housing, and what their recommendations are for agencies working to improve farmworker housing, the following themes emerged.

1. **There is a crucial need for government to help farmworkers**
2. **Reduce the cost of housing**
3. **Provide information and resources on affordable housing**
4. **Increase farmworker pay**
5. **Create farmworker resource centers**
6. **Reduce rental application requirements**
7. **Increase available housing, including low-income housing, housing on or near farms, temporary housing, housing for older people, single women, and families**
8. **Help farmworkers achieve homeownership**
9. **Provide legal residency to help farmworkers access housing**

### 1. Crucial need for government to help farmworkers

Many interviewees said they want the government to know there is a crucial need to help farmworkers. They indicated that they want the government to hear their voices and understand their difficulties. Some said their work is very hard, and they know how important their work is to keeping food on America's tables – yet, they feel unappreciated. Many said they were skeptical the government will help them, but that they were happy to have their opinions included in this study. These ideas are exemplified in the quotes below.

“I would appreciate if they came to the field to see how we work, and in what conditions we are. All day long in the cold or in the heat so they can see that we are not criminals. We just want to work. If any of us have done something wrong, God knows we are fixing it. Come and meet us.” – M, 57, seasonal/permanent worker, Yamhill County

“To the State and Federal [government], please support in a reform. We are souls in the dark. So many of us work hard and are living and working in many

conditions that deserve better... There has been some advancement, [but] there are still many challenges. We are bringing food to many homes and are always underseen.” - M, 47, seasonal/permanent worker, Morrow County

## 2. Reduce the cost of housing

Farmworkers asked that the government reduce the cost of rental housing, and that housing programs and developments for farmworkers consider the very low wages farmworkers earn when setting the cost of rent. One migrant worker in Hood River County described this in detail when he said, “I would tell them to build real housing for the workers. Here they have told us several times that they are going to build housing and they have done it, but in the end, they charge \$1,000, and we can't afford to pay that. I would like them to build it, but they should charge cheaply and see how much we earn. I am not saying that they should give it to us for free, but that we can afford it.”

## 3. Provide information and resources on affordable housing

Interviewees said they do not know of any resources available to help them find housing. They requested information on available and affordable housing be

published somewhere, or to have help from an organization or liaison to help them find and access housing. Farmworkers recommended posting housing information at post offices, community centers, stores, Facebook, flea markets, and Hispanic restaurants.

## 4. Increase farmworker pay

“Knowing people that have resources. Thankfully, we had a family member living in Hood River that knew a farm owner from him working and helped us build connection. Having a point person or resource center when we arrive to help us direct where there is current available homes and current need or work.” – F, 30, seasonal/permanent worker, Hood River County

Farmworkers in all counties asked the government to increase what farmworkers are paid. One participant specifically requested overtime pay. Farmworkers mentioned feeling unappreciated and underpaid for their very difficult and very important work. Many said increasing their pay would help them access housing.

“...The farmworker's work is very hard, and only people like us don't get a pay raise. ...Filling up a bucket with fruit for \$3.25 is very little money. I have... noticed that the food in the stores and

restaurants has gone up on price as well. We, as farm workers, cannot even buy a variety of groceries, much less go out to restaurants. The pay for farm workers should increase” – F, 61, seasonal/permanent worker, Hood River County.

## 5. Create farmworker resource centers

Some interviewees requested farmworker resource centers to help them access housing and other resources and understand their rights. Some mentioned needing help finding housing and accessing resources and services in the area. Others said they would like help understanding their rights, and classes to help them learn English and how to buy a home. Many interviewees in Morrow County specifically asked for a center for agricultural workers. As this migrant worker in Morrow County described, “Many new arrivals don’t have a place to stay, with nothing, and [would help] having a resource center, temporary stay. A community center, giving us workshops specifically for agriculture workers.”

## 6. Reduce rental application requirements

One in four interviewees asked for changes in the rental application requirements or process that make it hard for them to access rental housing. The changes they

requested were removing the social security number requirement, providing language help, and removing the requirements for credit history, rental history, and a need for a co-signer.

As one seasonal farmworker in Yamhill County explained,

“We came from California, and it took us a whole month to look for a house because we had no rental record. We always share housing in California, and they don’t give you a contract. In Oregon, they ask for a very long rental history. We had to live with another family very tightly for more than one month.”

**Remove social security number requirement:** Needing to have a valid social security number was among the most common barriers to accessing housing reported by farmworkers. Many indicated changing this requirement in rental applications would help them access housing.

**Provide applications and help in Spanish:** Some workers requested applications in Spanish. Others asked for translation or interpretation assistance when completing a rental application.

**Remove credit history, rental history, need for cosigner:** Some participants asked that the requirements for credit history, rental history, and the need for a cosigner be changed. Some said their type of work and

unstable income makes it difficult to qualify for an apartment. Some said they had no rental history to provide.

## 7. Increase available housing

One in three farmworkers interviewed said there is not enough housing available for them. They mentioned long wait lists and heavy competition for the limited supply of housing available. Farmworkers requested that additional housing be made available. The most requested housing types included low-income housing, farmworker-specific housing, and temporary housing for migrant and seasonal workers. Housing for older people, women, and families was requested to a lesser extent.

**Low-income housing:** Low-income housing was the most common type of additional housing requested. Farmworkers said they earn very little and cannot afford to pay much for housing. One interviewee said they cannot afford the rent at farmworker specific low-income housing. They requested more affordable housing that takes into consideration what they earn.

**Housing on or near farms:** Many workers live in free, on-farm housing provided by their employer with their employment. This was most commonly reported in Hood River County. Some farmworkers we interviewed requested more on-farm housing. Some say they depend on this free housing to make ends meet. Many said they want housing that is nearby where they work. A 67-year-old migrant worker in Yamhill County said,

“Years ago, there were farms where they included housing with work. We need places like that. We farmers used to come from Mexico to work for that reason - we didn't pay rent and that way we could save money. Today, there is no reason to work in the fields in this country, but it is the only thing I know how to do. I wish we could get those benefits back.”

**Seasonal housing:** Many workers we interviewed are migrant workers or seasonal workers, and do not work year-round. Migrant workers say they only stay in the area during the harvest season, and some said it is hard to find temporary-stay housing. They requested more seasonal housing. As described by a seasonal/permanent worker in Yamhill County, “The leases are for one year, and if you break the lease they fine you, they ruin your credit even more than it already is. It's like you are forced, chained, to be paying something you can't afford just to live there. What I earn is not enough for rent and utilities, and when I don't have work to do...I have nowhere to go.”

**Housing for older people, single women, and families:** A smaller number of workers we interviewed requested more housing for older people, single women, and families. Housing for older people was requested more often, and included accommodations such as no stairs and more parking. One interviewee requested housing for women

only, saying that many women are here to work without a partner, and that this would be helpful to them.

## 8. Help farmworkers achieve homeownership

Farmworkers in all counties said they want to own their own homes, but face barriers. One in four farmworkers requested programs to help them achieve homeownership, including help finding homes to buy, help with loan applications, help learning about the home-buying process, and low-interest home loans for farmworkers. One 29-year-old migrant worker in Yamhill County reflected on the

challenges of his home-buying experience, saying,

“Before I committed to this mortgage, I remember that the requirements to get a loan were very confusing. Lots of forms to fill out and understanding all of the [insurances] gave me a headache. I asked for help from a teacher at the Spanish-speaking school where my children go. She helped us understand and fill out the paperwork. I think the challenge is that no one is educated about mortgages and where to begin.”

## 9. Provide legal residency to help farmworkers access housing

One in four interviewees asked the government to grant farmworkers legal residency to increase their ability to access homeownership and rental housing in good condition. Numerous workers said they need legal residency to be able to qualify for a home loan. Others said legal residency will allow them to get a better-paying job so that they can

afford to buy a home, or rent housing in good condition. Several interviewees said they are qualified professionals who cannot work in their field without legal residency, while others said they had worked many years in farm work in this country and feel providing them with legal residency is only fair. A few workers said the government had promised them residency but had not delivered on this promise.

“To begin with, please consider that we as farm workers only want to work to support our families. Give us the opportunity to have a work permit. With that we can feel that we have a lasting job. Since we can't buy a house, we are always renting high rents. We work hard and other people can buy a house. Farmer workers cannot. We need legal status and legal residency to buy a house.” – F, 26, seasonal/permanent worker, Yamhill County

“We are tired of living like cows, in huts, because what we earn is not enough. There are many farmworkers who have professions from their country, but without legal residency we cannot work in this country. If they gave us the legality, we can demonstrate with work and teaching others what we know. I am an accountant and I have to settle for work in the field because I have no documentation to look for an office job.” – M, 56, migrant worker



“Our local seasonal crew has changed...we went from turning away a vehicle a day 10 years ago ...to now nobody shows up to look for work.”

- Marion County Employer

## CHAPTER 8

# Results of Employer Interviews

**Another important part of the study was to interview agricultural employers to hear their experiences and perspectives on farmworker housing and how it can be improved.** To include their perspectives, Jamie Stamberger and Latinx CELs liaison Sandra Valdez conducted nine individual phone interviews with agricultural employers in Hood River, Marion, Morrow, and Yamhill Counties.

Eight interviews were conducted in English, and one was conducted by Sandra in Spanish. We interviewed two employers in Hood River County, three in Marion County, one in Morrow County, three in Yamhill County, and one in Morrow County. Interviews included both qualitative (open-ended) and quantitative (closed-ended) questions. Employers we spoke to had a diversity of experiences in terms of how they employ farmworkers, how many and what types of workers they hire, whether or not they provide housing, and how their housing was funded.

## **The main objectives of the phone interviews with agricultural employers were to:**

1. Help understand the annual patterns of farm work employment in Hood River, Marion, Morrow, and Yamhill Counties
2. Explore changing farmworker demographics and availability and how these changes impact employers
3. Gauge employer sense of the need for farmworker housing
4. Gauge employer sense of the conditions of farmworker housing in their county
5. Learn about key challenges employer face in creating and maintaining farmworker housing, including impacts of COVID-19 and recent Oregon wildfires
6. Hear recommendations for overcoming these barriers, including best practices for funding mechanisms and government policies and programs

# Summary of key findings & employer recommendations

## 1

### Annual Labor Patterns

Employers we interviewed said peak labor demand typically occurs in June-August. A few said they are busiest in spring for weeding organic crops and tending hops. Another few said their busiest season goes into September or October. Most said this pattern is pretty common among farmers in their county.

Interviewees said their workers work between 50 and 60 hours a week during peak season. During off-season, they work 40 to 50 hours per week.

## 2

### Changing Farmworker Context

#### Fewer local farmworkers

Nearly all employers we interviewed said the number of local farmworkers has been noticeably declining in recent years, and that they expect the decline to continue. Nearly all said it is challenging for them to find enough workers and that competition for workers is high. As the number of workers continues to decrease, they said they expect farmers will adjust by continuing to mechanize their operations and move away from labor-intensive crops, and by increasing their employment of workers through the H-2A visa program. When asked what they thought was causing the number of farmworkers to decrease, nearly all employers mentioned competition from other farmers and other industries. Other reasons mentioned were COVID-19, existing farmworkers getting older and fewer younger people willing to do farm work, and changes to the immigration system.

#### Impacts on employers

Employers said the decrease in local farmworkers impacts them in important ways. They mentioned financial impacts including increased cost of labor, not being able to harvest their product, and not being able to find the skilled workers they need. Interviewees also said the lack of available

labor is causing them and others to mechanize as much of their farming operation as possible to reduce the need for labor. They also said the decline in local workers is causing a shift towards employing workers through the H-2A visa program, specifically from Mexico. They say the program is expensive and complicated, but necessary in order to ensure there is a labor force available when it is needed.

## 3

### **Farmworker Barriers to Accessing Housing**

A majority of employers we interviewed said it is difficult for farmworkers to find housing in their county. Cost and lack of available housing were the most mentioned barriers employers say farmworkers face. Employers also said that workers find housing by word-of-mouth, adding to the difficulty. One employer said rental application requirements and unstable incomes also make it difficult for farmworkers to access housing. A few employers mentioned transportation-related barriers caused by living off-farm and away from work.

## 4

### **Farmworker Housing Conditions**

#### **Where farmworkers are living**

We asked employers where farmworkers tend to live. Responses varied and were county-specific.

1. Employers in Hood River County said farmworkers there mostly live in free on-farm housing provided by their employers because there is no other housing available that farmworkers can afford. They said that if farmworkers are living off-farm, they are likely living in crowded conditions.
2. Although some of the employers we spoke to in Marion County provide on-farm housing, they also said there is very little on-farm housing in their area. They said most of their workers live in the cities and rent or own their homes, or share housing with family members.
3. The employer we interviewed in Morrow County said there is very little housing available for farmworkers there. Most of their workers live far away from where they work and need to drive in, carpool, or use the van service this employer provides.
4. Yamhill County employers said farmworkers live mostly in private rental housing and some in on-farm housing.

## Sense of farmworker housing conditions in their county

We asked employers about their sense of the conditions of farmworker housing in their counties. Most said the full range of conditions exist from poor to excellent, and several said they had heard stories about poor conditions. All employers we spoke to who provide housing said the condition of at least some of their housing could be improved.

Some employers we spoke to acknowledged that there is employer-owned farmworker housing in their county that has not been registered through OSHA that should be, and that some of this housing is in poor condition. A few farmers said they think OSHA should do more enforcement on those who are not complying with their registration program, and a few others said trying to work with employers to bring them into compliance without penalizing them was a better approach. Some felt it unfair that OSHA increases standards on those who are complying because of the actions of those who aren't.

## 5

### Impacts of COVID-19, 2021 Heat Wave, Smoke and Wildfires

We asked how COVID-19, the 2021 heat wave, and recent smoke and wildfires had impacted employers and their ability to provide farmworker housing. None of the employers that provide housing said they had ever had to evacuate their workers. Most said they had made it through the pandemic with relatively few cases or hospitalizations, but described a variety of other impacts due to COVID-19. When asked about the heat wave, many farmers talked about the new OSHA heat rules. One farmer said the 2021 heat wave “cooked our crops in the ground”. As a result of recent smoke and wildfires, employers described negative impacts on worker respiratory health, damage to crop products, and decreased income for them and their workers.

## 6

### Employer Barriers and Benefits of Providing Farmworker Housing

#### Benefits

When asked why they provide farmworker housing, most employers said they do it to attract and retain the workers they need in a market where competition for labor is high. They also said providing housing is a great benefit to their workers, increases workers' overall income, and in some cases provides

workers with housing that isn't otherwise available.

## Barriers to providing farmworker housing

We asked employers about their experience providing farmworker housing and what challenges, if any, make providing housing difficult. Nearly every interviewee that provides farmworker housing said the process is difficult. Cost was the barrier employers mentioned most. Next most common were regulations from OSHA and county building departments. Other barriers mentioned less often included high cost and low availability of land for development, rules around providing housing for families, and lack of available private rental housing to rent for their workers. One employer said the fear of unwanted attention from farmworker advocacy groups is a barrier that keeps some farmers from providing housing, and another said having to compete for builders with local housing development is a problem.

Most employers we talked to said OSHA regulations on farmworker housing make it difficult for them to provide housing. While most said they've had good experiences registering their housing with OSHA, they also described some OSHA rules as impractical and said they disincentivize employers to provide housing. The majority of employers said the new OSHA rules for heat and air quality make it harder for them to provide housing for farmworkers. Most employers were frustrated with the new heat rules, while a few employers expressed varying reactions to the air quality rules. A few also said they feel OSHA increases the regulatory burden on those who are registered and trying to do the right thing

rather than enforcing against owners of unregistered housing and employers who are not trying to follow the rules.

# 7

## Employer Recommendations for Farmworker Housing

### Need for more farmworker housing

Employers we spoke to said more farmworker housing is needed. They most mentioned a need for more affordable housing, on-farm housing, and temporary housing for migrant workers. A Hood River County farmer suggested portable temporary housing for migrant workers and thought this would be very feasible in their area. Another employer said there is a need for community-based housing, and one more said there is a need to modernize and add to existing housing.

### Improving farmworker access to housing

Some employers indicated a need for farmworker housing information to help farmworkers connect with available housing. They said farmworkers primarily find

housing by word-of-mouth and by driving around looking for it. One employer also said private rentals should be more flexible in their rental application requirements such as renters' insurance.

## Encouraging employers to provide farmworker housing

When asked what would make it easier for them to provide farmworker housing, employers most mentioned funding assistance. They most recommended tax credits for building housing, and they also suggested grants, and low-interest loans. Some also suggested increasing regulatory flexibility, considering how farmworker housing regulations can compound the economic challenges faced by farmers, and working in partnership with employers to help encourage on-farm housing. They also said making it easier to access land for farmworker housing development would help.

# Detailed findings & employer recommendations

## 1

### Annual labor patterns

Employers we interviewed said peak labor demand typically occurs in June-August. A few said they are busiest in spring for weeding organic crops and tending hops. Another few said their busiest season goes into September or October. Most said this pattern is pretty common among farmers in their county.

Employers said their workers work between 50 and 60 hours a week during peak season. During off-season, they work 40 to 50 hours per week.

## 2

### Changing farmworker context

#### Fewer local farmworkers

Nearly all employers we interviewed said the number of local farmworkers has been noticeably declining in recent years, and that they expect the decline to continue. Nearly all said it is challenging for them to find enough workers and that competition for workers is high. As the number of workers continues to decrease, they said they expect farmers will adjust by continuing to mechanize their operations and move away from labor-intensive crops, and by increasing their employment of H-2A visa workers.



"I've been seeing the trend for 30 years and started talking about it 30 years ago that we had to do something... but definitely over the last 5-10 years that problem has become accentuated... farm laborers, there are fewer and fewer of them... It's gotten worse, it's going to get worse. Nobody has workers." – Morrow County Employer

"Our local seasonal crew has changed... we went from turning away a vehicle a day 10 years ago from January to harvest, to a year or two later a car per week, to now nobody shows up to look for work."

– Marion County Employer

When asked what they thought was causing the number of farmworkers to decrease, nearly all employers mentioned competition from other farmers and other industries. Other reasons mentioned were COVID-19, existing farmworkers getting older and fewer younger people willing to do farm work, and changes to the immigration system. One employer in Morrow County felt that the farm labor shortage was partly due to the trend of people moving into the cities and away from rural communities.

**Competition:** Nearly all employer interviewees said they face strong competition for local farmworkers. They said they compete with other farmers, other industries like construction and wildfire fighting, and that labor contractors also compete with one another. Because competition for labor is high, some employers said they have to steal workers

from other employers by offering them higher wages. Some said they have problems with workers leaving their farm because they found higher wages somewhere else. One employer said they need agreed upon standards for negotiating wages among workers, labor contractors, and farmers. A few employers said the rise of cell phones has made it harder to keep workers because they can communicate better about which farms are paying the highest rates. They explained,

"We've trained the work force to negotiate everywhere they go. It's hard to know what it's gonna cost to harvest something... We negotiate with the individuals, but then the labor contractors have to get involved if they start demanding more pay... There's no organization to this other than what happens in the field. We have a plan where we pay a bucket price for the whole harvest, and if you stay with us the whole year, I pay a 20% bonus on buckets. But with that plan in place, I only paid \$2,500 in bonuses, because not that many stuck around. I guess my incentive isn't big enough."

"It's amazing how many people will leave a job because [they see] through social media someone is making more money, so they all bail on you and go do that. Where the communications weren't as quick and easy before, nobody knew what others crews were doing and where to go, so folks stayed a little longer in one place. With the speed of technology, there's speed of employment

shifts."

**COVID-19:** Some employers said COVID-19 has contributed to the shortage of farmworkers. A Yamhill County labor contractor we interviewed said border closures due to COVID-19 had also affected the number of workers available. He explained,

"Because of the COVID conditions, they closed the border (USA-Mexico) and did not let people through, even if they had their work permits. It was very difficult for me to find people available to work in the fields. For that reason, contractors like me suffer a lot. We just can't find people for the crops. There are simply no people."

**Shift away from farm work:** Several employers we interviewed said they think fewer people are going into farm work and the existing farmworker labor pool is growing older and aging out of farm work, or moving into better paying jobs. They said the children of farmworkers are not going into farm work.

**Changes to the immigration system:** Some employers said changes in immigration policies had made it harder to find farmworkers. One said President Trump's border closures had kept people from migrating to the U.S. for work. Another said the new rules around drivers' licenses have made it harder for workers to find rides to jobs.

## Impacts on employers

When we asked employers how the change in farmworker numbers has impacted them, they most mentioned financial impacts, a shift towards mechanization in agriculture

and away from crops that require hand labor, and a trend towards increased reliance on the H-2A visa worker program. The most mentioned financial impacts were increased cost of labor, not being able to harvest their product, and not being able to find the skilled workers they need.

## 1. Financial impacts

**Increased cost of labor and the impact of agricultural economics:** Most employers talked about the challenges posed by the increased cost of labor. They said they need to pay higher wages to compete for fewer local workers, and hiring H-2A workers is expensive because they are required to pay workers a certain approved wage and provide meals, transportation, and housing. One said they had to start hiring a labor contractor because fewer workers were coming to them looking for work.

They explained that the prices they receive for their goods are determined by market forces beyond their control, and that they are not able to increase labor costs without decreasing costs somewhere else. They said this limitation is driving the shift towards mechanization in agriculture, and is a prominent reason employers are resistant to increasing local farmworker wages.

Some employers agreed that farmworker wages should continue to go up, and others indicated they think farmworkers earn a good wage. Regardless of their opinion, employers said if they increase what they pay for labor, they need to decrease costs somewhere else. They said for many farmers this means investing in mechanization and increasing efficiency of their operation to cut down on labor and reduce costs. One farmer offered that if they are required to increase local farmworker wages, cuts may have to be made to other employee benefits for farmworkers such as health care, housing, and bonuses. An employer in Morrow County explained this challenge. They said,

**“Farmers are in a cost-price squeeze. We’re given the price that we get for our products, yet we can’t set the price we pay for inputs, and fertilizer and fuel are soaring in prices right now. We can’t do anything about that. We have to be more and more efficient on the farm, that’s our only way of staying in business. We can’t sell our products for more. It’s hard for farmers to say, ‘ok, we’ll pay more for wages’ because we don’t have a way of raising our prices to cover that increased wage. That’s just the way agriculture works.”**

A farmer in Hood River County used the COVID-19 pandemic as an example to further demonstrate the economic challenges of the agricultural economy. They said,

“If we have a large crop, the amount we earn

goes down, or we lose markets. We normally export 40% of our crops - if we close them we lose those markets. 2020 sales were hurt [because international markets were closed due to COVID-19]. This last year [2021] we switched a lot to domestic [markets], so it actually wasn’t too bad, but now it’s going the other way. We’re very vulnerable. You could be a year in arrears before you know you’re going bankrupt.”

**Not being able to harvest their product:**

Employers mentioned that lack of available farmworkers can make it difficult to get their product harvested, decreasing what they earn. One farmer explained that the risk of not being able to harvest is very stressful. They said,

“We’re not getting the crops [harvested] in a timely manner. Varies from [orchard] crop to crop how long you have to pick them. If you can’t get them [harvested], the potential value of them and longevity of marketing goes down. If you don’t get them off by certain dates, you may not get them off at all. [You] can’t even pay for picking if you use them for juice. Yeah, it causes stress, it’s awful. You put your soul in it for a whole year, if you can’t get it off [harvest] in time, it’s hard to sleep.”

**Not enough skilled workers:** Some employers said they need skilled workers to successfully harvest their crop or produce their product. They said the lack of workers means they need to hire whoever is available, sometimes resulting in lost product or increased labor cost to complete the job as needed. An employer in Yamhill County described this experience. They said, “[There is] less quality of workforce because they aren’t developing their skills - just hands, but might not be skilled. Harvest was a disaster for us. People showed up, but

when it came to harvesting, they were doing cherry picking type, [harvesting] the easiest stuff only. When you said 'let's go back', they said 'no' because they've had enough work. You're just happy to have people show up who are willing to do anything." Some interviewees said labor contractors also suffer from the lack of workers because they are not able to find enough workers to fulfil their contracts with farmers. This can result in lost wages for labor contractors and cause problems with the farmers' harvest. A labor contractor talked about how the lack of workers has affected his business, saying, "Someone like me who brings a small group of workers, and suddenly some workers no longer come with me because those other contractors offer them a little more money. I am left without people to do the work that I already have pending, and many times I look bad with the owners of the plantation. And I have even lost contracts myself."

## 2. Trend towards mechanization & away from crops that require hand labor

Interviewees also said the lack of available labor is causing them and others to mechanize as much of their farming operation as possible to reduce the need for labor. They said there is a trend away from crops that require a lot of manual labor, like cherries. However, farmers said they will always need people for some crops and industries that they have not figured out how to mechanize, like cattle operations and pear harvest.

"We're absolutely trying to come up with equipment to do the job. We're getting fewer and fewer [workers] every year, scraping by at harvest

time. If there are new farmers, they don't put in any crop in that takes labor."

"Long, long term, I think they'll have robots doing the milking and automated feeding systems, but we will always need people...we haven't come up with an automated way to help a cow deliver a calf."

## 3. Increased use of H-2A visa program to hire workers

Employers also said the lack of labor is causing a shift in the agriculture industry towards employing H-2A visa workers from outside the US, specifically from Mexico.

They say the program is expensive and complicated, but necessary in order to ensure there is a labor force available when it is needed. Some employers said one of the benefits of H-2A is that workers are contracted to you and can't go work somewhere else. Employers hope the government makes the H-2A program more affordable and easier to navigate. A farmer in Hood River County explained that the packing houses are hiring H-2A workers on behalf of local growers, making it easier for them to share workers. They said, "Some of

the packing houses here are managing the H-2A program for their growers. Through the packing house, it's easier for growers to share the H-2A workers. A local fruit coop does all the paperwork and recruiting."

Another employer has also used the H2B visa program and the TN visa program, conducting their own recruitment in Mexico and going through the process to achieve permanent legal residency for their employees. As they shared,

**"H-2A is the most expensive, most regulated labor program in the entire world. We have a required wage we have to pay them that is higher in Oregon and Washington than anywhere in the nation, we have to provide transportation, housing - and why can't we charge them for the housing?"**

In addition to cost and complicated regulations, other problems employers had with the H-2A program included unfairness to local workers, the effort needed to prove you can't find local workers, and difficulty finding temporary housing to rent that meets H-2A requirements. As farmer in Marion County explained, "We owe a lot to our domestic workers that do come back every year - [hiring H-2A workers] wouldn't be fair to them. We can't even put them in the same field - two different types of people. ...[local] can go home during the day and have worked here a long time, versus H-2A who haven't been there that long and [are] getting the same wages."

# 3

## Farmworker Barriers to Assessing Housing

A majority of employers we interviewed said it is difficult for farmworkers to find housing in their county. Cost and lack of available housing were the most mentioned barriers employers say farmworkers face. Employers also said that workers find housing by word-of-mouth, adding to the difficulty. One employer said rental application requirements and unstable incomes also make it difficult for farmworkers to access housing. A few employers mentioned transportation-related barriers caused by living off-farm and away from work.

**Cost:** A number of employers said farmworkers cannot afford the cost of housing in their county. Farmers in Hood River County said the overall cost of housing there is too high for farmworkers, that they have to have free on-farm housing to afford to stay in the area. One said, "It's very, very expensive for housing in Hood River County. People don't just come here and have an apartment or hotel for a couple months, that never happens. No chance they can afford private rentals." A Yamhill County employer also feels the cost of housing is beyond reach for farmworkers. They said,

“I don't know how people make what they need to survive based on what we're paying.”

Further demonstrating the low incomes earned by farmworkers, one labor contractor we interviewed said they see a big need for winter clothing, rain gear, and gloves for their workers and asked where they could find donations.

**Lack of available housing:** Employers commonly said there is not enough housing for farmworkers in their county. Employers in both Hood River County and Morrow County said their on-farm housing is always full and in high demand. A Yamhill County employer who is trying to hire H-2A workers and needs to provide them with housing said they cannot find housing that they can afford for their H-2A workers. One Marion County farmer said labor contractors and neighboring farmers sometimes ask to rent out the on-farm housing they have. However, another Marion County employer said they have had trouble filling their on-farm housing for the past few years. They feel this is because of COVID-19 and the shortage of local workers. A Morrow County employer described their housing shortage. They said,

“Boardman has had a housing shortage for decades. With the port of Morrow, there are 7,000-8,000 people who come to work here daily, and there is housing in Boardman for only 3,500-4,000 people. Our company built some apartments in Boardman, but they're priced so high our farmworkers can't afford to live

there. [For the farmworker housing we provide,] we always have a wait list and are always full.”

**Finding housing by word-of-mouth:**

Employers said farmworkers typically find housing by word-of-mouth, adding to the challenge of finding housing. They indicated there is no other system for farmworkers to find housing. As a farmer in Hood River County described, “It's difficult - they may have to go around and look for orchards and look for [housing]. It's hard to walk up to people and ask for work.”

**Difficulty with rental and homeownership requirements:**

One employer said farmworkers have difficulty meeting rental requirements such as the requirement for renters' insurance, and they have to find housing that has fewer requirements, but is often in poorer condition. They said farmworkers likely have difficulty buying homes because their income is so unstable.

**Transportation-related barriers:** A few employers mentioned issues farmworkers have with transportation to and from work. Employers in Yamhill and Marion Counties said that their employees tend to live off-farm and require transportation to get to work, which can be a burden for workers. They said many own cars, but that labor contractors also provide rides. One employer said they try to recruit workers closer to their farms to help reduce commutes. Another employer said on-farm housing helps reduce transportation issues. They said, “A lot of domestic workers have access to cars, but how do you get to work if you live in town [and don't have a car]? You gotta have a car or someone to drive, that hinders it too. If they live on the farm they're able to get to work.”

# 4

## Conditions of Farmworker Housing

### Where farmworkers are living

We asked employers where the farmworkers they employ tend to live. The responses varied and were county-specific.

#### Hood River County

Employers in Hood River County said farmworkers there mostly live in free on-farm housing provided by their employers because there is no other housing available that farmworkers can afford. They said that if farmworkers are living off-farm, they are likely living in crowded conditions to be able to afford the cost of living. Two employers in Hood River County mentioned that they share workers with other farmers in the area, and that workers may live in one employer's on-farm housing while working at another farm. The farmers we spoke to did not see a problem with housing workers while they worked elsewhere so long as their workers were available to them when they needed. They said there is no formal system for sharing housing among employers, it happens organically and by word-of-mouth.

#### Marion County

Employers we spoke to in Marion County said there is very little on-farm housing provided by employers. They said most of their workers live in the cities and rent or own their homes, or share housing with family members. Their workers drive their own cars or carpool to work. One farmer who provides on-farm housing for migrant workers allows a neighboring farmer to rent it for their workers during their off-season. They said this works because they have a good working relationship with the neighboring farm, but they would be unlikely to rent it out to someone they didn't know well.

#### Morrow County

The employer we interviewed in Morrow County said there is very little housing available, and they provide the only farmworker housing they know of in the county. They hire many workers each year, and are only able to provide housing for a small portion of them. They said that because of the housing shortage, most of their workers live far away from where they work and need to drive in, carpool, or use the van service this employer provides.

#### Yamhill County

Yamhill County employers said farmworkers live mostly in private rental housing and some in on-farm housing. One employer in wine grapes and blueberries explained that they see activity at labor camps in the area, but they aren't sure who is using them as most of their workers give residential addresses.

## Sense of farmworker housing conditions in their county

We asked employers about their sense of the conditions of farmworker housing in their counties. Most said the full range of conditions exist from poor to excellent, and several said they had heard stories about poor conditions. All employers we spoke to who provide housing said the condition of at least some of their housing could be improved. Some acknowledged they are aware of housing that has not been registered with OSHA. Several farmers explained that they treat their employees well and have become close with some farmworker families over generations.

**Heard of poor conditions:** One employer said they are aware of poor conditions in private rental units, and another said they've heard stories about overcrowding. One employer in Marion County said they've heard stories about poor conditions in labor camps. Conversely, one labor contractor we spoke to said they are not aware of any problems with housing conditions among their employees. One employer who provides housing said,

**“I am told frequently by others that we have some of the nicest housing in the area, which frightens me to think that’s the case.”**

**Some farmworker housing not registered with OSHA:** Some employers we spoke to acknowledged that there is employer-owned farmworker housing in their county that has not been registered through OSHA that should be, and that some of this housing is in poor condition. A few farmers said they

think OSHA should do more enforcement on those who are not complying with their registration program, and a few others said trying to work with employers to bring them into compliance without penalizing them was a better approach. Some felt it is unfair that OSHA increases standards on those who are complying because of the actions of those who aren't. As one Hood River County employer said,

“Some of the advocates were talking about terrible housing, and I asked about it, and the OSHA person said ‘these are unregistered units.’ My comment was ‘you updated the rules because of these bad conditions which only affect the people registering, not the unregistered – don't pile more rules on the rest of us.’ There needs to be enforcement on those people without trying to hammer on us doing the right thing.”

A few employers offered that others may not seek OSHA registration either because their housing doesn't meet OSHA standards or because employers aren't aware of the regulations. One employer in Marion County said they don't know anyone besides them that provides farmworker housing. They think a lot of Marion County's on-farm housing was shut down because it didn't meet OSHA standards.



**Treat farmworkers well:** Several farmers explained that they treat their employees well and have become close with some farmworker families over generations. One employer in Hood River County suggested that government agencies may not realize how well farmworkers are treated in their county. They said,

“When we had the legislators up here last week, I really think we opened up some eyes about how farmworkers are treated. Maybe we’re unique in this county the way we treat our workers. It’s not the dynamic people think it is, at least here. I go to their quinceañeras. We have a close relationship with our workers.”

## 5

### Crisis Impacts, Evacuations

We asked how COVID-19, the 2021 heat wave, and recent smoke and wildfires had impacted employers and their ability to provide farmworker housing. None of the employers that provide housing said they had ever had to evacuate their workers. Most said they had made it through the pandemic with relatively few cases or hospitalizations, but described a variety of more subtle changes in their operations due to COVID-19. When asked about the heat wave, many farmers talked about the new OSHA heat rules. One farmer said the 2021

heat wave “cooked our crops in the ground”. In terms of smoke and wildfires, employers described impacts to worker respiratory health, their crop products, and income for them and their workers.

**Impacts of COVID-19:** About half of employers we interviewed described a variety of impacts COVID-19 had on them and their workers. Most said they had made it through the worst part of the pandemic with relatively few cases or few hospitalizations. One labor contractor we interviewed said most of their farmworker employees got sick at the beginning of the pandemic, and that most have gotten vaccinated and have returned to about 60% of their workforce. One employer who hires many farmworkers said monitoring and tracking COVID cases became their full-time job during the pandemic. Another said they had to quarantine just one family, and that the financial assistance programs helped provide those workers with wages. One labor contractor said since the pandemic, their workers have mostly stopped carpooling to avoid spreading the virus, and most are driving their own cars to work. A farmer in Marion County said they haven't had as many workers staying in their on-farm housing because of COVID-19, but they also haven't had as much worker turnover. As they described,

“One thing I've noticed since COVID hit is we didn't have turnover like we used to - the same people stayed and worked most of the summer. They're concerned about their safety too, they've worked with the same people every day. The COVID rules meant folks had to be family or come over together. I can't put one worker in the same home as another worker from a different family.”

**Summer 2021 heat wave impacts:** When we asked about impacts of the 2020 heat wave, employers commonly talked about their frustrations with the new OSHA heat rules. One employer mentioned crop damage from the heat wave, saying the heat “cooked our crops in the ground.”

**Wildfires and smoke impacts:** One employer said they are in trouble if they have wildfires near their farm. Another labor contractor in Yamhill County said the smoke affected them and their employees. It was hard to breathe, it made it harder for them to find

“The smoke did affect the harvest because it was in the early months of the grape season. My group of workers, despite the difficult conditions of air pollution to breathe, we did work. We harvested the grapes, but when it was time to make the wine, it did taste like smoke, and the owners of the vineyard had to throw the wine away. It affected them and us too because we could not plant for next year. And when one thing is affected, the rest follows. If we don't have work, then we are in trouble with the expenses. We get limited in many areas. We have to look for fields to work in areas farther away. We drive longer. And that is a waste of time.”

work, and they got behind in their payments. As they described,

## 6

# Employer Barriers and Benefits of Providing Farmworker Housing

## Benefits

When asked why they provide farmworker housing, most employers said they do it to attract and retain the workers they need in a market where competition for labor is high. They also said providing housing is a great benefit to their workers, increases workers' overall income, and in some cases provides workers with housing that isn't otherwise available.

**Attracts and retains workers:** Employers said they provide housing to be competitive and attract the workforce they depend on to harvest their crops. They also said farmworkers living in their housing are more likely to be loyal to working for them, and providing housing gives them the security of knowing their workforce is onsite and available when they need them. One Hood River County employer said most farmers there provide on-farm housing, and they are not as affected by the worker shortage as those who don't provide housing. A cherry farmer in Marion County described how

providing farmworker housing helps continue a long-standing relationship with migrant workers from California. They said,

“Main reason [we provide housing] is for the seasonal cherry crew coming from California. We’ve had these crews since my grandparents were growing cherries in the 50’s. We’re trying to maintain what [housing] we have, trying to enhance them so the guys want to come back... We don’t want housing to be the reason that they don’t keep returning.”

**Provides benefits to workers:** Some employers said providing housing increases benefits for their workers, effectively increasing their income. Morrow County and Hood River County employers said workers may not be able to find housing at all in their counties if they did not provide it due to high housing costs and lack of available housing.

## Barriers to providing farmworker housing

We asked employers about their experience providing farmworker housing and what challenges, if any, make providing housing difficult. Nearly every interviewee that provides farmworker housing said the process is difficult. Cost was the barrier employers mentioned most. Next most common were regulations from OSHA and county building departments. Other barriers included high cost and low availability of land for development, rules around providing housing for families, lack of available private

rental housing to rent for their workers, fear of unwanted attention from farmworker advocacy groups, and having to compete with local development for available builders.

**Cost:** Employers who provide housing said construction and permitting was very expensive. Some also said the cost of ongoing maintenance is a problem. One said there are no financial incentives to help remodel or repair existing housing. They said you have to have a lot of available funds to create housing, and that many farms don’t have this funding. Several employers said farmworker housing is not an option for most beginning farmers because of the cost. Some said it can be hard to justify the cost of housing for the number of workers you’re able to house there. One employer is looking for private rental housing for their employees, but renting apartments for 12 months for workers who are only there for two months is too expensive. The following quotes help illustrate the challenges employers face funding farmworker housing.

“It’s a lot of time to monitor and send reports [for] the sewage system each month and [at the] end of the year, water tests five per year, filters in the units have to be changed every month. The HEPA filters aren’t cheap. It’s getting daunting. It’s just not panning out.”

“I guess that’s one of the biggest challenges: how do you justify \$500,000 to house 36 more people, and only use [the housing] 1-2 months out of the year? We don’t have that cash laying around. Most businesses would say: ‘You’re investing how much into something you hardly use? What is your ROI?’ Most companies wouldn’t [do it].”

## OSHA Regulations

Most employers we talked to said OSHA regulations on farmworker housing make it difficult for them to provide housing. While most said they've had good experiences registering their housing with OSHA, they also described some OSHA rules as impractical and said they disincentivize employers to provide housing. One employer said a lot of on-farm housing has closed down because the OSHA labor housing rules are too hard to meet. Some said they worry OSHA doesn't consider agricultural employers' needs and limitations when setting new rules. One farmer warned, "We get people that don't know what they're talking about coming in and laying down laws and won't work with us. As long as they do the process ... with working with us, fair-minded, it will be fine... If you got management that wants to come in and do it a different way and make it difficult to have housing, we'll have a problem."

A few also said they feel OSHA increases the regulatory burden on those who are registered and trying to do the right thing rather than enforcing against owners of

The majority of employers said the new OSHA rules for heat and air quality make it harder for them to provide housing for farmworkers. Most employers were frustrated with the new heat rules, while a few employers expressed varying reactions to the air quality rules.

unregistered housing and employers who are not trying to follow the rules.

**Reactions to new OSHA heat rules** - A majority of employers expressed their frustration with the new heat rules implemented by OSHA in 2021. Some employers we talked to said they did not see the need for the new heat rules either because they were common sense, were already meeting them, or not convinced we would see another heat wave of that magnitude. One employer explained that they take care of their workers, and some described actions they had taken to protect workers during the heat wave, including air circulation and window coverings in housing, making sure there is enough shade during the work day, providing Gatorade, and stopping work when it was too hot. Some employers felt the heat rules went too far in requiring that indoor temperatures be maintained at a maximum of 78 degrees. Others were frustrated at the need to implement new OSHA rules in the middle of their harvest season. One farmer described their frustration. They said,

"We had extreme heat this year, and someone died on a farm in the Willamette Valley, and so before you know it, we got new regulations right in the middle of our season. We've got new regulations brought on by an extreme event that may or may not have caused a problem on a farm. We've got to stop making knee jerk reactions. We can't change gears that fast in the middle of the season. We did the best we can to try and manage air movement, window coverings, shade... We've never seen temperatures like that in our lifetime... Will that happen again? It might. Will we be ready? Probably, because they made us set up the systems. We gotta quit making quick decisions on a dime for something that happens maybe

once in our lifetime.”

**Reactions to new OSHA air quality rules** - A few employers expressed varying reactions to the new OSHA air quality rules. One farmer says they agree with the smoke rules as long as they can get the respirators they need for their workers. Some others expressed frustration because they are not sure how to implement the new rules, or because of the expense of the HEPA filters required in their on-farm housing. As a farmer in Hood River County explained,

“I agree with the smoke quality thing. If they can get us the correct masks, that’s what we should do. We did have the air quality alerts that we can get on our phones now and know the situation. We need to do that, I don’t have a problem with that. If we can know when we need them or don’t, and if it gets really bad, we’ll shut down for the day. I don’t want to hurt these people. I’m out there all day with these people every day, and I’m older than all of them. I don’t want to die cause I’m working out there in smoke, that’s crazy.”

### **County zoning and permitting rules**

Many employers we talked to who provide farmworker housing described challenges with county zoning and permitting to get their projects approved. They mentioned difficulties siting sewer and water systems, getting the housing location approved, and with the county permitting process in general. Several employers said Exclusive

Farm Use (EFU) zoning codes have made it difficult to locate and build housing on or near farms. One farmer said they had to modify their housing plans so their housing could also be used as storage sheds in order to meet the county’s EFU requirements. As they described, “EFU zoning doesn’t allow for residential housing, so [our units] have been modified so they could be used as farm storage in winter time – we put garage doors on them. [It’s] not practical in terms of heating and cooling... Ideally, it’s not how we’d want them to be... It’s like living in somebody’s garage.”

### **Renting to families**

A few employers talked about the difficulty of the rules requiring farmworker housing to be available for farmworker family members as well as the farmworkers themselves. They said this a problem because they need more housing for the farmworkers they rely on to harvest their product, and if they house additional family members who are not workers, they have less overall capacity to house the workers they need. One employer said it is easier to provide housing for H-2A workers because they do not bring their families, making it easier to know you have the housing you need for the workers you need. They said they are working to provide housing specifically for H-2A workers, but the Oregon requirement to give those jobs to

local workers if they are interested, and also to house their dependents if requested, means they may ultimately have fewer beds available to workers. One Yamhill County employer said,

“Some folks would be concerned about having to house a family. I think as someone who has a business who hires workers...most of us have caring natures and know what’s right. And what’s right is to be able to offer family housing. We’re also working up against the constraints of not having enough housing.”

### **Lack of available private rental housing for H-2A visa workers**

Some employers we interviewed mentioned the difficulty finding affordable private rental housing to house their workers coming through the H-2A visa program. One employer says the struggle to find housing for when their workers arrive “keeps me up at night”.

Another employer said building new H-2A housing is too expensive, and they are struggling to find existing housing they can rehabilitate to meet H-2A standards. As they explained,

“We want to use the H-2A program more, but we can’t find affordable housing to house people. We’re working with [a local religious organization]... They want to trade restoration of [their] building for beds [for our workers] ...but this is too far away. We can’t find anything that can be turned into housing, and hotels don’t work unless you can ... cook food [there]. It’s too expensive to bring in food every day.”

“For the 20 families I have, [providing housing is] what keeps me up at night. I have 20 families coming... I don’t have housing for these people when they come...I can go to an apartment owner and say ‘Do you have 20 apartments?’ They’re not going to have them, so I’ll be on a waiting list. When one comes available, they won’t hold it for me. I have to rent it immediately and I don’t know when the family will be here. I have to put them in a motel until an apartment opens. It’s my biggest worry.”

## 7

### **Employer Recommendations for Farmworker Housing**

#### **Need for more farmworker housing**

Employers we spoke to said more farmworker housing is needed. They most mentioned a need for more affordable housing, on-farm housing, and temporary

housing for migrant workers. A Hood River County farmer suggested portable temporary housing for migrant workers and thought this would be very feasible in their area. Another employer said there is a need for community-based housing, and one more said there is a need to modernize and add to existing housing. As a labor contractor in Yamhill County explained,

“I think there is a need for more low-income apartments. I pay the workers a little more than the minimum hourly rate, but when the weather is too drastic, we lose a lot of work hours ... and that means we have to dip into our savings or fall behind on payments because we have to pay high rents. If there were more houses or apartments that workers could buy or rent more affordably, I think many of us would work more comfortably without so much pressure. When there are more houses, rents go down, I think!” – Yamhill County Labor Contractor

## Improving farmworker access to housing

Some employers indicated a need for farmworker housing information to help farmworkers connect with available housing. They said farmworkers primarily find housing by word-of-mouth and driving around looking for it. One employer also said private rentals should be more flexible in their rental application requirements such as renters' insurance. They explained, “I know it's not that easy [for farmworkers to

find housing], especially now with the requirements apartments have - having to have renters' insurance. A lot of them tend to find apartments that are owned by [small-time] owners, not big businesses, not managed by corporate groups. Those housing are always like the owners don't take care of the apartments, lots of cockroaches, etc.”

## Encouraging employers to provide farmworker housing

When asked what would make it easier for them to provide farmworker housing, employers most mentioned funding assistance. They most recommended tax credits for building housing, and they also suggested grants, and low-interest loans. Some also suggested increasing regulatory flexibility, considering how housing rules compound the economic challenges faced by employers, and working in partnership with employers to help encourage on-farm housing. They also said making it easier to access land for farmworker housing development would help.

**Funding assistance:** A number of employers we interviewed said financial incentives would encourage them to provide housing for farmworkers. Tax credits were mentioned most often, and some employers recommended grants and low-interest loans, especially for beginning farmers. One farmer also suggested tax credits for remodeling or maintenance of existing housing. Another said private housing investors might be able to help. Employers in Hood River County and Marion County were familiar with the Agricultural Housing Tax Credit (AHTC)

provided by OHCS, and were happy with the program. One said there should be more tax credit funds made available and that the funds go too quickly. Another said the tax credit program is only helpful to farmers who are earning money and may not be helpful for newer operations, or those with less income. Employers in Morrow County and Yamhill County recommended a tax credit program even though they had not heard of the AHTC. When they learned of the AHTC, they were eager for more information.

**Increasing flexibility in OSHA regulations:**

Many employers we interviewed said OSHA regulations can be impractical and make it difficult to provide housing. Some expressed concern that OSHA isn't willing to work with them and doesn't understand how changes in housing rules impact their already challenging economic situation. They suggested increasing regulatory flexibility, considering how housing rules compound the economic challenges faced by employers, and working in partnership with employers to help encourage on-farm housing. One said that farmworker housing is not "one-size-fits all" and rules should be flexible based on the type of housing provided. They said,

"Obviously there have to be regulations so farmworkers have a clean and safe place to live, but maybe have that arm of the labor housing division take a look at the regulations, and maybe work with farmers and farmworkers to find a better balance between strict regulations and practicality."

**Increasing access to land to build housing:** A few employers indicated help accessing land would help encourage them to build more farmworker housing. One farmer in Hood River County said that although Exclusive Farm Use (EFU) zoning is beneficial, it also makes it difficult to find land that can be used for farmworker housing. He said,

"It would be nice if we had some direction from the state on land use issues that can help us free up more of this ground we have to put housing on. I understand you don't want to put hotels in the middle of orchard land, but somehow, we gotta put some [housing] in without damage to the orchard land out here. The state in a lot of ways have done things to help us - they came down with all these EFU state laws to protect farm land, and it only works to protect them if the farms make money and can stay profitable."



“There’s more common interests than divisive interests. If the focus is on ‘what are the real outcomes that we want?’, there’s methods to get there.”

- Agency staff person

## CHAPTER 9

# Results of Agency Staff Interviews

To provide additional understanding of farmworker and employer issues, we conducted ten individual phone interviews with staff from agencies that support farmworkers or their employers and have particular knowledge of farmworker housing issues in Hood River, Marion, Morrow, and Yamhill Counties.

Agency staff were selected by OHCS project managers based on their specific expertise and breadth of knowledge.

## **Agency staff interviews included staff from the following agencies:**

- Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA)
- Oregon Occupational Safety and Health (Oregon OSHA)
- Oregon Housing and Community Services Department (OHCS)
- Oregon Employment Department (OED)
- Oregon Health Authority (OHA)
- Oregon Farm Bureau (OFB)
- Legal Aid Services of Oregon

## **The purpose of these phone interviews was to:**

1. Further explore changes in farmworker characteristics and availability and how these changes impact farmworker housing
2. Hear agency perspectives on the need for farmworker housing and farmworker housing conditions
3. Understand how the COVID-19 pandemic and recent Oregon wildfires have impacted farmworker housing availability and conditions
4. Identify key barriers to creating and maintaining farmworker housing and opportunities for overcoming these barriers, including best practices for funding

# Summary of key findings & agency staff recommendations

## 1

### Changing Farmworker Context

Many agency staff we interviewed said the number of farmworkers has declined, and they expect this trend to continue. In addition to the decrease in workers overall, staff said there are fewer migrant workers in the four counties and a shift towards more settled workers that have their families with them. Some interviewees clarified that although there is a decline in farmworker numbers, there are still many local farmworkers and their families in the area.

Agency staff said there has been a dramatic increase in the number of employers hiring workers from outside the US through the H-2A visa program. Interviewees said employers are also hiring labor contractors more often to help find workers. They also described a shift towards mechanization of farming tasks and away from more labor-intensive crops. Some staff voiced concerns about worker exploitation in the H-2A program and possible employer discrimination against local workers in favor of H-2A workers over whom they have more control. Some interviewees said employers are using labor contractors to avoid responsibility for recruitment, providing housing, and ensuring legal immigration status. Some are also concerned about possible abuses by labor contractors.

## 2

### Shifting Hiring Practices

# 3

## Farmworker Barriers to Accessing Housing

Many staff we interviewed said it is difficult for farmworkers to find housing. Barriers they described included:

1. Cost
2. Lack of available housing
3. Rental requirements that are difficult for farmworkers to meet
4. Language barriers
5. Housing too far from work
6. Racism and discrimination

# 4

## Farmworker Housing Conditions

Most agency staff we spoke to said there is a significant amount of farmworker housing in poor condition. They described overcrowding, old buildings with structural problems, pesticide exposure in on-farm housing, biting insect infestations, and lack of weatherization for hot and cold weather. Some agency staff said farmworkers don't speak out about poor conditions in

employer-provided housing because they fear losing their job or housing. Many also acknowledged there is farmworker housing that is not registered with OSHA that should be, and that this housing is sometimes in poor condition. One said there is a lot of unregistered housing in all four counties, and hundreds of hidden unregistered labor camps in Hood River County. They said problems with the OSHA registration and inspection process contribute to unregistered housing.

# 5

## Impacts of Covid-19, 2021 Heat Wave, Smoke, and Wildfires

A number of agency staff said COVID-19 decreased available housing for farmworkers, making it harder for farmworkers to find housing and for employers to house their workers. They said some employers lost workers they needed because they could not house them. Although we did not specifically ask about new OSHA labor and housing rules, agency staff expressed their differing opinions about them. Interviewees that work with employers said new OSHA rules about COVID-19, heat, and smoke make it more difficult for employers to offer housing, and one said the rules have stopped some employers from providing housing altogether. However, interviewees that work with farmworkers were in favor of increased rules for heat and smoke and mentioned problems with

overheated farmworker housing and respiratory health issues among farmworkers who were required to work in smoky conditions.

## 6

### **Benefits and Drawbacks of Employer-provided Farmworker Housing**

Agency staff described both benefits and drawbacks of farmworker housing provided by employers. They said employers provide housing in order to attract and retain the workforce they need. Another said employer-owned housing has benefits for farmworkers, especially migrant workers, including cheap or free rent, being close to work, no typical rental requirements such as rental history, and availability of temporary housing which can be hard to find otherwise. Quite a few interviewees mentioned problems with the power dynamic inherent in housing that is tied to employment. They said farmworkers often do not speak out about poor conditions in employer-provided housing because they fear losing their job or their housing.

## 7

### **Barriers to Creating Farmworker Housing**

When asked about barriers to providing farmworker housing, agency staff most mentioned cost and regulations. Interviewees most often described cost as a problem for employers, who they said struggle to afford housing within their often-small economic margins. Some also said public agencies simply don't have enough money to build the housing that is needed. Regulatory barriers included OSHA regulations, which some say have become too complex, and county land use regulations that make it difficult to get approval to build farmworker housing, especially in agricultural areas.

## 8

### **Agency Partner Recommendations for Farmworker Housing**

We asked agency staff for their recommendations to best improve farmworker housing, and we sorted their suggestions into three main categories. \* indicates most mentioned suggestions

## **1. Create more and better housing options for farmworkers**

- Add new farmworker housing, especially temporary housing for migrant workers\*
- Rehabilitate existing employer-owned housing to improve conditions
- Explore options for sharing on-farm housing when it is not in use
- Housing information, resources, and programs for farmworkers
- Conduct more funding outreach to employers and builders
- Provide overtime to farmworkers to help them afford housing
- Consider the intersections of health and housing, such as transportation and social determinants of health
- Use the results of this study to prioritize where to build farmworker housing
- Bring employer and farmworker advocates together to find solutions

## **2. Improve farmworker housing and labor regulations**

- Increase OSHA inspection of unregistered farmworker housing and conduct outreach to encourage registration\*
- Increase regulatory flexibility for employers to incentivize them to provide farmworker housing
- Increase regulation of labor contractors
- Make housing standards for local farmworker housing the same as housing standards for H-2A housing and private rental housing

## **3. Improve and increase funding mechanisms to promote farmworker housing**

- Improve funding program efficiency, transparency, and distribution to ensure funding is fairly allocated and supports better outcomes for farmworkers and employers\*
- Increase use of the Agricultural Housing Tax Credit (AHTC)

# Detailed findings & agency staff recommendations

## 1

### Changing farmworker context

Many agency staff we interviewed said the number of farmworkers has declined, and they expect this trend to continue. In addition to the decrease in workers overall, a number of agency staff said there are fewer migrant workers in the four counties and a shift towards more settled workers that have their families with them. Interviewees said there are fewer workers because farmworkers are growing older and aging out of farm work, while younger people, including the children of farmworkers, are choosing higher paying and less physically demanding jobs. One staff person we spoke to said tighter US-Mexico border security in recent years has also decreased the number of workers coming from Mexico.

Some interviewees clarified that although there is a decline in farmworker numbers, there are still many local farmworkers and

their families in the area. Some said there are more and more women going into farm work, and one said there are still many older farmworkers who intend to stay in farm work. One staff person said there are still many migrant workers coming up from California, and another said they expect to see more regional migration in the future, especially in areas like Hood River County where farmworkers cannot afford to live close to the farms.

## 2

### Shifting Hiring Practices

### Impacts of fewer workers on employer hiring practices

Agency staff described how the decrease in workers affects agricultural employers and their labor hiring practices. They said there is more competition for workers, and workers sometimes leave farms mid-job to work at another farm paying higher wages. They said there has also been a dramatic increase in the number of employers hiring workers from outside the US through the H-2A visa program, and because employers are required to provide housing for H-2A workers, there is also a dramatic increase in housing specifically for H-2A workers. Interviewees said employers are also hiring labor contractors more often to help find workers. They also described a shift towards mechanization of farming tasks and away from more labor-intensive crops, like cauliflower and broccoli, to reduce the need for labor. However, some also acknowledged an increase in some labor-intensive crops like hops and vineyard grapes.

## Concerns about use of the H-2A program

Some agency staff we interviewed voiced concerns about worker exploitation in the H-2A program and possible employer discrimination against local workers in favor of H-2A workers over whom they have more control. They said local workers are more likely to know their rights and leave if they are mistreated.

**Worker exploitation:** Some agency staff said employers prefer H-2A because they have a higher degree of control over H-2A workers that are contracted to them and rely on them for food, housing, and transportation than

they do over local workers, who can choose to leave if they are mistreated. Some said employers can push H-2A workers to work harder, and send them back home, usually to Mexico, if they refuse. They said workers are charged fees in Mexico to enroll in the H-2A program and charged fees by employers in the US to come back to work for them. One staff person we spoke to said they get abuse complaints from H-2A workers when they return to Mexico, but they are not able to enforce against employers after H-2A workers have left the country. As one interviewee described,

“The recruiting of the workers is a problem - recruiters are charging people for the opportunity to work in the US. A local grower is having workers pay him for the opportunity to come back to work with him again. These are the reasons growers prefer H-2A workers, even though this is illegal, it's hard to enforce the law on these dynamics.”



**Discrimination against local workers:** In order for an employer's H-2A application to be approved, federal law requires that employers give preference to local workers and prove that they cannot find local workers. Some agency staff said they are concerned that employers are going around these rules or rejecting local workers and discouraging them to apply for H-2A jobs because they prefer to hire through H-2A,

“When I see the application for an H-2A employer that is only requesting two workers or five workers, something is wrong with the picture. We at the employment system should be able to provide these workers. The [OED] agency is not doing its job as it should. The ag employer is happy because he’s going to get guys under their control who won’t say anything. You cannot tell me that we cannot provide the ag industry with a small group of workers.”

rather than hiring local workers. A staff person at the Oregon Employment Department said they are not adequately enforcing the rules requiring preference for local workers.

## Concerns about use of labor contractors

A number of agency interviewees said employers are hiring labor contractors more often to help find the workers they need. Some said as labor and housing rules have become more stringent, employers are also using labor contractors to avoid responsibility for recruitment, providing housing, and ensuring legal immigration status. However, some staff we talked to are also concerned about possible abuses by labor contractors. One interviewee said there is too little oversight and regulation of labor contractors. They had heard stories of labor contractor abuses like leaving farmworkers in hotels with no money because they were infected with COVID-19. Another interviewee said employers may not be as careful hiring labor contractors as they should. They said,

“Most farmers if they're using a [labor contractor] it's not to avoid paperwork... you're hiring them because they've got the workers. Are you dealing with a legitimate contractor? There are huge legal liabilities for [the employer]. But maybe their decision is, 'I've got to get this labor, I'm not going to scrutinize as closely as they should'. Might be the labor contractor, not the farmer.”

# 3

## Farmworker Barriers to Accessing Housing

Many agency staff we interviewed said it is difficult for farmworkers to find housing.

Barriers mentioned included:

1. Cost
2. Lack of available housing
3. Rental requirements that are difficult for farmworkers to meet
4. Language barriers
5. Housing too far from work
6. Racism and discrimination

The barrier interviewees most mentioned was housing costs that are too high for farmworkers to afford. Other prominent barriers included lack of available housing and high competition. Lack of temporary housing for migrant workers was specifically called out. One interviewee said farmworker-specific housing funded by OHCS programs is only required to provide one or two apartments for migrant workers, and this is not enough. Interviewees said rental requirements also make it difficult for farmworkers to access housing, including requirements for credit history, rental history, and a valid social security number. Some interviewees said the requirements for farmworker-specific housing can discourage workers from finding better jobs because they are required to maintain a low income

and employment in farm work in order to qualify for their housing.

# 4

## Farmworker Housing Conditions

Most agency staff we spoke to acknowledged there is a significant amount of farmworker housing in poor condition. They most commonly described poor conditions with on-farm housing, but some also mentioned problems with private rental housing, motels, and community-based farmworker housing.

## Sense of farmworker housing conditions

The poor conditions described by interviewees included overcrowding, old buildings with structural problems, pesticide exposure in on-farm housing, biting insect infestations, and lack of weatherization for hot and cold weather. Some agency staff said farmworkers end up in housing with poor conditions because they do not have a choice, and farmworkers do not speak out about poor conditions in employer-provided housing because they fear losing their job or housing. One interviewee described poor conditions they have seen in farmworker housing and expressed frustration that farmworker housing rules for local workers are less stringent than for the private rental industry and for H-2A worker housing. They said,

“Why doesn’t farmworker housing have the same regulations as market-rate housing? Why are there two standards? Why is it OK to live in shacks that are falling down? The regular public would not put up with an apartment that isn’t livable. ... People have no idea of the horrible conditions. There’s a labor camp in Washington County – the easiest way to explain it, if you’ve seen the holocaust movies, these long housing complexes the length of a football field, the length of a barracks, 12 feet wide and 150 feet long. In the middle is a hallway, and 10-foot by 10-foot rooms on each side - couples with their kids stay in them. If OSHA were to go there and see that, they would not let people live here.”

## Housing not registered with OSHA that should be

Many staff we spoke to acknowledged there is farmworker housing that is not registered with OSHA that should be, and that this housing is sometimes in poor condition. As one OSHA staff person explained,

One said there is a lot of unregistered housing in all four counties, and said there are hundreds of hidden unregistered labor camps in Hood River County. Several interviewees said there are problems with the OSHA registration system that contributes to the poor conditions of farmworker housing and the amount of unregistered housing. They said OSHA rules do not require buildings with five or fewer inhabitants to be registered, and hotels and

“From my own point of view, one of our major issues is the limitation on registration about what is and is not registered. This keeps us from knowing what is out there because so much falls between the cracks that we don’t know anything about unless we get a complaint. Farmworkers are not inclined to complain to anyone or OSHA about conditions. Unfortunately, the worst housing is not likely to be complained about, and we are not likely to know about it.”

motels are outside of OSHA jurisdiction. They said employers know about these rules and may house workers in hotels and motels, or have multiple buildings with the maximum of five workers. They also said OSHA inspects H-2A housing much more rigorously than housing for local workers because of more stringent H-2A housing rules, and because H-2A housing is on the rise. They said inspections of housing for local farmworkers are largely driven by complaints, and they rely heavily on employers to self-report they are complying with OSHA labor housing rules.

# 5

## Crisis Impacts & Emergency Shelter

### COVID-19 impacts on housing

A number of agency staff said COVID-19 decreased available housing for farmworkers, making it harder for farmworkers to find housing and for employers to house their workers. The COVID-19 social distancing rules required employers to provide more space per worker in bunk houses, and one interviewee projected this could reduce an employer's housing capacity by 50%. Some said this meant employers either had to find more housing for the rest of their workers, or lost workers they needed because they could not house them. They said the COVID-19 rules are discouraging employers from continuing to provide housing.

## Impacts of heat and wildfire smoke

Farmworker labor and housing rules have changed as a result of record-setting heat and poor air quality from wildfire smoke in recent years. Although we did not specifically ask about these new regulations, agency staff expressed their differing opinions about them. Interviewees that work with employers said new OSHA labor and farmworker housing rules about heat and smoke make it more difficult for employers to offer housing, and one said employers they know are no longer offering housing because the rules became too complicated. However, interviewees that work with farmworkers were in favor of increased rules for heat and smoke and mentioned problems with overheated farmworker housing and respiratory health issues among farmworkers who were required to work in smoky conditions. The following quotes demonstrate these differences in perspective.

“The wildfire and heat rules...are going to start making folks do different calculations if they want to comply, or move on. Some folks have completely shut down and moved on because the risk threshold is too high. ... [The new regulations have been] one of the bigger shocks to the system that has occurred ... since the big set of regulations in the early 2000's. Within the next year or two we'll know how many people are going

to continue to offer [housing].”

“During the pandemic and the fires last year, I got a call from ladies in Canby cutting broccoli - they told me they were throwing up and couldn’t breathe because of the smoke and COVID. I said, ‘Why don’t you go home?’ They said, ‘They’ll fire us if we go home.’ I called OSHA, and I was told that the level of smoke did not rise to the degree where an investigation was needed, nor would it be initiated.”

## Need for emergency shelter for farmworkers

One OSHA staff person said they have not heard of any significant evacuations related to COVID-19 or pesticide exposure. Some agency staff said they had heard of farmworkers being evacuated during recent wildfires. One said the influx of farmworker evacuees into Marion County caused a strain on housing resources. Some said there is a need for emergency shelter for farmworkers during wildfires, but that this is also needed for the rest of the population. One agency staff said there is a general need for emergency housing for farmworkers, while another said they don’t see a need to create additional housing that sits empty in case of an emergency.

# 6

## Benefits and Drawbacks of Employer-provided Farmworker Housing

Agency staff described both benefits and drawbacks of farmworker housing provided by employers.

**Benefits:** Interviewees said employers provide housing in order to attract and retain the workforce they need. They said this is particularly important to help employers compete for fewer numbers of local workers. One interviewee said some farmers go above and beyond farmworker housing requirements in order to attract workers, and that employers with poor housing have a harder time finding the workers they need. Another said employer-owned housing has benefits for farmworkers, especially migrant workers, including cheap or free rent, being close to work, no typical rental requirements such as rental history, and availability of temporary housing which can be hard to find otherwise.

**Drawbacks:** Quite a few interviewees mentioned problems with the power dynamic inherent in housing that is tied to employment. They said employers hold a lot of power over these workers because of the farmworker’s need for employment and difficulty finding housing they can afford. They added that farmworkers often do not

speak out about poor conditions in employer-provided housing because they fear losing their job or their housing. One interviewee said workers without work authorization are the most vulnerable.

# 7

## Barriers to Creating Farmworker Housing

When asked about barriers to providing farmworker housing, agency staff most mentioned cost and regulations. Interviewees most often described cost as a problem for employers, who they said struggle to afford housing within their often-small economic margins. Some also said public agencies simply don't have enough money to build the housing that is needed. Regulatory barriers included OSHA regulations, which some say have become too complex, and county land use regulations that make it difficult to get approval to build farmworker housing, especially in agricultural areas. One interviewee questioned whether or not government agencies want to continue to promote employer-owned on-farm housing. They said, "From the policy standpoint, you really have to look at [on-farm housing] and say, 'Why is it here? Where did it come from? And, is it something that should be maintained?' Do we want to make it easier for people to house people on-farm? Or, is it a practice we're trying to remove entirely,

and rather have a workforce residing locally and secure their own housing? If you want to offer more, you make it easier, if you want to offer less, you make it harder."

**Economic pressures on employers:** Quite a few agency staff talked about the economic pressures faced by farmers, explaining that their margins are often slim and the cost of labor and housing is high. Some said this pressure is leading to a decline in employer-provided housing, and they are concerned this trend away from employer-owned housing will continue. There was some disagreement, however, about the extent to which employers can't afford to improve their farmworker housing. One agency staff person said most farmers would offer better housing if they could afford it, but another said most employers care more about their bottom line than the humanity of their workers.

"Farmers' margins are very small. One thing if you spend any time with these growers, they are living in the exact same conditions as their employees... Working 24 hours a day every day, working side by side with their workers... Most of them care deeply, there just isn't money there."

"Employers worry about the bottom line and don't think that these people are human and give them dignity. Not all of them are like that, but a huge percentage of them are."

**OSHA regulations:** Many interviewees said OSHA housing regulations are a barrier and disincentivize employers from providing farmworker housing. Some said OSHA rules have become more tedious and complicated, and they are concerned there will be a further decline in housing provided by employers as a result. Staff that work with employers said farmworker advocacy groups present the picture that all housing provided by employers is in poor condition, which causes regulators to come down harder on those who are trying to do the right thing. They said it seems like OSHA increases rules and enforcement on those who are registered, while allowing poor housing conditions that are not registered to continue. One lawyer said they advise their clients to avoid providing housing because of the complicated regulations and liabilities.

**County land use regulations:** Some agency staff also said county land use regulations can be a barrier to creating housing. One

“Most farmers are doing everything they can to be above board and registered, but there are a lot of barriers. If I have a client telling me ‘I’m thinking about getting into housing’, I try and talk them out of it as their lawyer. When they’re spending thousands to defend themselves and they’re trying to do the right thing, but get in trouble for screens, for example... I advise them to really think hard about it.”

said the county permitting process is difficult. Another described how a county's cost-benefit analysis and pressure to preserve farmland make it difficult to get approval to build housing. They said this tension is strongest in Hood River County, but prevalent in other counties as well.

“A lot of zoning and planning in these counties don’t want to wrap up potential for higher tax base in something that is not going to be as economically beneficial. If you have an acre of land that could be used to produce a crop and [you’re] putting in six apartment complexes – that’s the tug and pull. The ag community has strong lobbying against these kinds of things; More land equals more food. There is a tension. This is most extreme in Hood River County, but true in others as well. In Morrow County you have other issues such as ground water and water availability issues. The more you put a strain on infrastructures like that, it plays a part in the overall thought process.”

# 8

## Agency Partner Recommendations for Farmworker Housing

We asked agency staff for their recommendations to best improve farmworker housing, and we sorted their suggestions into three main categories. \* indicates most mentioned suggestions

Increasing the amount, diversity, and quality of farmworker housing comprised the most common recommendations by agency staff.

### 1. Create more and better housing options for farmworkers

- Add new farmworker housing, especially temporary housing for migrant workers\*
- Rehabilitate existing employer-owned housing to improve conditions
- Explore options for sharing on-farm housing when it is not in use
- Housing information, resources, and programs for farmworkers
- Conduct more funding outreach to employers and builders

- Provide overtime to farmworkers to help them afford housing
- Consider the intersections of health and housing, such as transportation and social determinants of health
- Use the results of this study to prioritize where to build farmworker housing
- Bring employer and farmworker advocates together to find solutions

### 2. Improve farmworker housing and labor regulations

- Increase OSHA inspection of unregistered farmworker housing and conduct outreach to encourage registration\*
- Increase regulatory flexibility for employers to incentivize them to provide farmworker housing
- Increase regulation of labor contractors
- Make housing standards for local farmworker housing the same as housing standards for H-2A housing and private rental housing

### 3. Improve and increase funding mechanisms to promote farmworker housing

- Improve funding program efficiency, transparency, and distribution to ensure funding is fairly allocated and supports better outcomes for farmworkers and employers\*
- Increase use of the Agricultural Housing Tax Credit (AHTC)



# Create more and better housing options for farmworkers

## Types of housing needed

Agency staff said there is a need for farmworkers to have more options for their housing and said there is specific need for temporary housing for migrant workers, community-based farmworker housing, and low-income housing. One reminded housing developers to moderate their investments in housing to ensure resulting units are affordable to farmworkers. This same staff person also said there is a need for emergency housing for farmworkers.

## Sharing on-farm housing

Some interviewees suggested that sharing employer-provided on-farm housing could help meet the need for housing. They recommended exploring models or methods to incentivize sharing on-farm housing that may go unused for portions of the year. One said, "I'm thinking of some [employers] that have housing that could sit empty for a long time. Is there an incentive structure or policy change that would make it more palatable for an owner of housing to open it up for [other] crews to live there? ...Let's say I have 30 rooms, but no fall crops, but my neighbor does. How can we craft a system to where I can allow them to stay in my housing and work on their farm without it becoming a joint liability conundrum?"

## Improving existing housing

Several agency staff said it is important to improve the conditions of existing farmworker housing provided by employers.

They suggested that government funds be used to rehabilitate existing housing.

## Housing information, resources, and programs

Some staff said farmworkers need help finding and connecting to available housing and there is no dedicated resource for farmworker housing information. They also said there is a need for financial assistance to help cover rent, and vouchers from OHCS to help satisfy rental application requirements.

## Bring advocates together to find solutions

Both employer advocates and farmworker advocates we talked to expressed frustration with and questioned the motives of the "other side". Employer advocates said farmworker advocates tell the legislature that all employer housing is in poor conditions, resulting in increased regulatory hurdles for farmers who are trying to make ends meet and do the right thing. Farmworker advocates said employers are more interested in their bottom line than in the humanity of their workers. One agency staff person said they feel advocates are not as far apart on the issues as they may think, and that bringing the sides together could have a positive impact on farmworker

housing. They said,

“There’s more common interests than divisive interests. If the focus is on ‘what are the real outcomes that we want?’ there’s methods to get there. I don’t think that there’s a great sense of commonality ...versus competing interests...It’s a very hard concept because everyone comes from their own perspectives... [There’s] no evil or angel around those tables, but it gets clouded with where [we are] trying to go...”

## **Increase OSHA inspection of unregistered housing**

Increasing OSHA inspections of unregistered farmworker housing was among the most mentioned recommendations from agency staff. OSHA and DOE staff said there is a lot of unregistered housing they do not inspect, partly because they do not know about it and partly because they don’t have the staff capacity to conduct the inspections. They said housing for H-2A workers requires more inspections and has more strict requirements compared to housing for local (non-H-2A workers), and H-2A housing is increasing. One interviewee said the

problem lies in the legislature’s threshold for when housing requires registration. They said the threshold is insufficient and keeps OSHA staff from knowing about a lot of unregistered housing. One employer advocate said they think OSHA and DOL inspectors are afraid to approach known housing violators out of fear for their personal safety.

## **Improve and increase funding mechanisms to promote farmworker housing**

### **Increase transparency and diversify investments**

Agency staff we talked to commonly expressed concern about how government funds for farmworker housing are used. Some said emergency funds requested during the COVID-19 pandemic were not all used, and one person said how they were handled caused mistrust in the community. Staff we interviewed recommended being transparent and ensuring farmworker housing funds are ultimately put to use in the community where they were originally intended. One encouraged OHCS to use funding on diverse and creative interventions to help farmworkers access housing, rather than spending it all on tax credits and “pretty buildings”.

## **Expand tax credits and ensure they are being used fairly**

Some interviewees said more funds should be added to the OHCS Agricultural Housing Tax Credit (AHTC) program. They also said more outreach should be conducted with employers and prospective new housing developers to increase farmworker housing construction in rural areas.

Some staff had concerns about how much of the tax credits goes to specific groups: one was upset that tax credits provide funding to employers rather than farmworkers, while another said too much goes to community-based housing developers and not enough to employers. One said they have heard that tax credits are given to community-based housing developers who don't need them and sell them to banks rather than building housing. They asked OHCS to look closely at how tax credits are being distributed.

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# Appendix A.

## Demographics and Housing Market Characteristics in Study Counties

### Demographic Characteristics

Exhibit 35 shows that the general populations in the study area grew between 3 percent and 23 percent between 2000 and 2019.

#### Exhibit 35. Population, Oregon, Hood River, Marion, Morrow, and Yamhill Counties, 2000, 2010, 2019

Source: US Decennial Census 2000 and 2010, ACS 2015- 2019, Portland State University, Population Research Center.

				Change 2000 to 2019		
	2000	2010	2019	Number	Percent	AAGR
Oregon	3,421,399	3,831,074	4,129,803	708,404	21%	1.0%
Hood River	20,411	22,346	23,209	2,798	14%	0.7%
Marion	284,834	315,335	339,641	54,807	19%	0.9%
Morrow	10,995	11,173	11,303	308	3%	0.1%
Yamhill	84,992	99,193	104,831	19,839	23%	1.1%

Exhibit 36 shows that the population in the study area is expected to grow by 11 percent to 22 percent from 2020 to 2040, where Yamhill County is forecasted to experience the highest growth (22 percent change) and Morrow County is estimated to grow the least (11 percent change).

#### Exhibit 36. Population, Oregon, Hood River, Marion, Morrow, and Yamhill Counties, 2020 to 2040

Source: Portland State University, Population Research Center.

						Change 2020 to 2040		
	2020	2025	2030	2035	2040	Number	Percent	AAGR
Oregon	4,266,184	4,499,224	4,721,060	4,925,420	5,100,899	834,715	20%	0.9%
Hood River	24,406	25,483	26,561	27,668	28,723	4,317	18%	0.8%
Marion	349,121	369,983	385,366	397,723	407,818	58,697	17%	0.8%
Morrow	12,329	12,615	12,960	13,345	13,698	1,369	11%	0.5%
Yamhill	105,911	110,781	116,657	122,857	128,931	23,021	22%	1.0%

**Exhibit 37. Population by Age as a Percent of Total Population, Oregon, Hood River, Marion, Morrow and Yamhill Counties, 2015-2019**

Source: US Census Bureau, 2015-2019 ACS Table B01001.

Exhibit 37 describes the age group composition in 2015-2019 for the four-county area and the state.

	Oregon	Hood River	Marion	Morrow	Yamhill
14 to 17	21%	24%	25%	28%	22%
18 to 21	5%	5%	6%	5%	7%
22 to 34	18%	15%	18%	14%	16%
35 to 44	13%	13%	13%	12%	13%
45 to 54	12%	14%	12%	12%	12%
55 to 64	13%	13%	12%	14%	13%
65+	17%	16%	15%	16%	17%

All the counties having larger shares of Latino/Hispanic (of any race) above the state share. Morrow and Hood River Counties having the largest shares (31 percent to 37 percent) of Latino/Hispanic (of any race) population in comparison to the other counties.

**Exhibit 38. Population by Race as a Percent of Total Population, Oregon, Hood River, Marion, Morrow and Yamhill Counties, 2015-2019**

Source: US Census Bureau, 2015-2019 ACS Table B02001.

	Hood River	Marion	Morrow	Yamhill	Oregon
White Alone	89%	81%	90%	88%	84%
Two or More Races	4%	7%	5%	5%	5%
*Some Other Race Alone	4%	7%	5%	5%	3%
Asian Alone	2%	4%	1%	1%	4%
American Indian and Alaska Native Alone	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Black or African American Alone	1%	1%	*	1%	2%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander Alone	1%	1%	1%	*	*
Latino/Hispanic (Of any race)	31%	27%	37%	16%	13%

\*Note: Categories of race comprising less than one percent of the population are included in Some Other Race Alone.

## Household Characteristics

All counties had higher average household sizes than the state overall.

**Exhibit 39. Average Household Size, Oregon, Hood River, Marion, Morrow and Yamhill Counties, 2015-2019**

Source: US Census Bureau, 2015-2019 ACS 5-Year Estimate, Table B25010.

2.58	2.79	2.74	2.70	2.51
<u>Persons</u>	<u>Persons</u>	<u>Persons</u>	<u>Persons</u>	<u>Persons</u>
Hood River	Marion	Morrow	Yamhill	Oregon



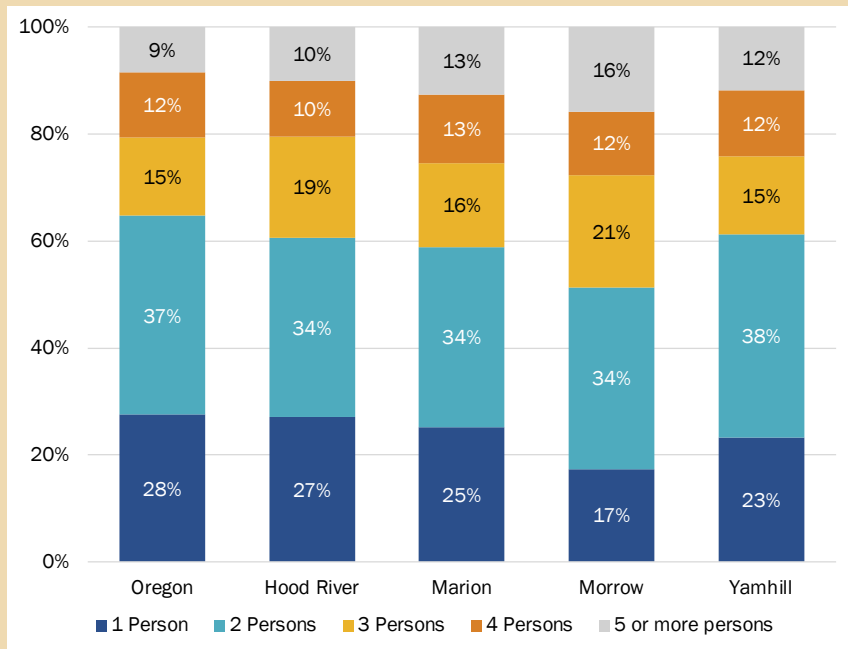
Between 39 and 49 percent of each county's households were households of three or more persons. This is a rate higher than the state overall (36 percent). All the counties have larger shares of 5 or more person households in comparison to the state rate too (by one to seven percentage points).

In particular, Morrow County has a high share of households with 5 or more persons.

The second highest, Marion County also tended to have larger households in comparison to the state, with an estimated 42 percent of households with three or more persons. Marion County also has the largest farmworker and farmworker dependent population out of the four counties.

**Exhibit 40. Household Size, Oregon, Hood River, Marion, Morrow, and Yamhill Counties, 2015-2019**

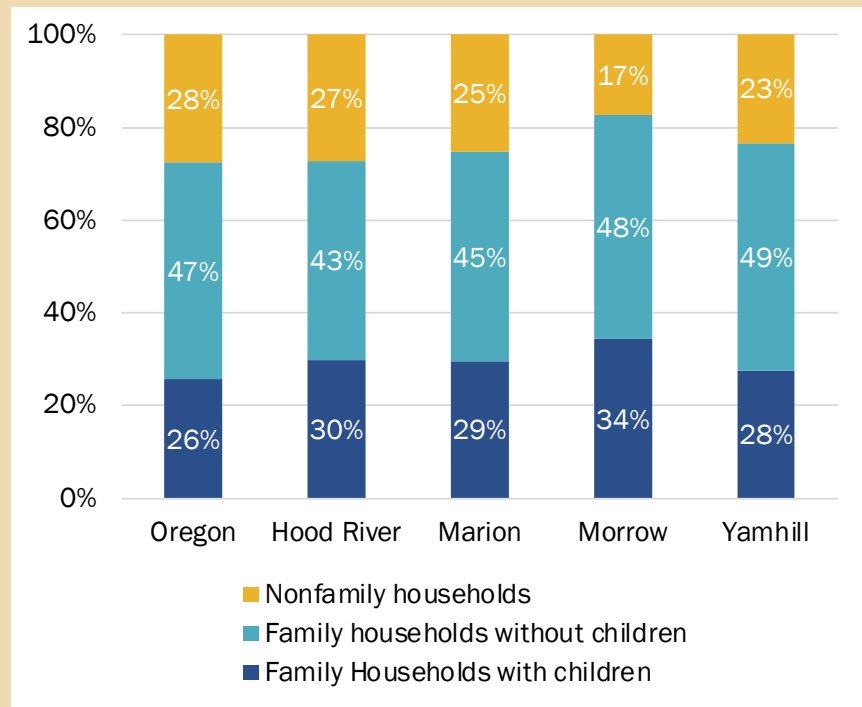
Source: US Census Bureau, 2015-2019 ACS 5-Year Estimate, Table B11016.



Morrow County had the highest share of Family Households with Children at thirty four percent and the lowest share of nonfamily households, at seventeen percent. Between 73 and 82 percent family households with and without children make up the majority of each counties' household makeup.

**Exhibit 41. Family and Non-family Households, Oregon, Hood River, Marion, Morrow, and Yamhill Counties, 2015-2019**

Source: US Census Bureau, 2015-2019, ACS 5-Year Estimate, Table DP02.



The four-county area tended to have a larger share of married with children households (20 to 26 percent) than the state's rate (18 percent).

**Exhibit 42. Marital Status of Family and Non-family Households, Oregon, Hood River, Marion, Morrow, Yamhill Counties, 2015-2019**

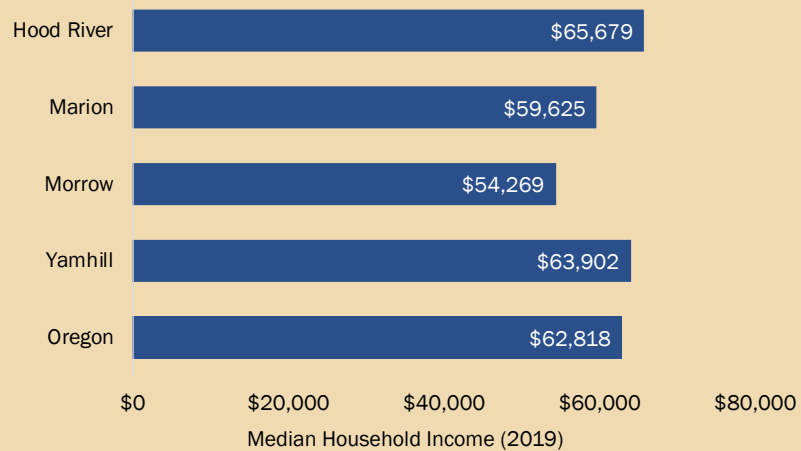
Source: US Census Bureau, 2015-2019, ACS 5-Year Estimate, Table DP02.

	Oregon	Hood River	Marion	Morrow	Yamhill
Married with children	18%	24%	20%	26%	20%
Married, no children	31%	29%	30%	35%	35%
Cohabiting couple with children	2%	1%	3%	4%	3%
Unmarried parent with children	5%	5%	7%	4%	5%

**Exhibit 43. Median Household Income, Oregon, Hood River, Marion, Morrow, and Yamhill Counties, 2015-2019**

Source: US Census Bureau, 2015-2019, ACS 5-Year Estimate, Table B25119.

Over the 2015-2019 period, Morrow and Marion Counties median household income was below that of the state. Yamhill and Hood River counties had higher median household incomes.



Income varies by race, with some communities of color having lower average household incomes than the overall average.

Householders that identified as Black, American Indian/Alaska Native, Latino (of any race), and people of Some other race alone had median household incomes below the averages in all counties.

**Exhibit 44. Median Household Income by Race/Ethnicity of the Head of Household, Oregon, Hood River, Marion, Morrow, and Yamhill Counties, 2015-20019**

Source: US Census Bureau, 2015-2019 ACS 5-Year Estimate, Table S1901.

Race / Ethnicity	Hood River	Marion	Morrow	Yamhill	Oregon
White alone	\$65,222	\$61,459	\$56,000	\$64,673	\$63,499
Black / African American alone	-	\$32,946	-	-	\$41,773
American Indian / Alaska Native alone	\$53,750	\$41,775	-	\$37,054	\$44,324
Asian alone	-	\$69,635	-	\$47,292	\$78,790
Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander alone	-	\$49,935	-	\$63,269	\$62,755
Some other race alone	\$66,346	\$48,153	\$38,333	\$52,663	\$54,401
Two or more races	\$72,898	\$51,199	-	\$75,274	\$55,555
Latino (of any race)	\$58,924	\$49,236	\$51,500	\$48,866	\$52,537
All Households Overall	\$65,679	\$59,625	\$54,269	\$63,902	\$62,818

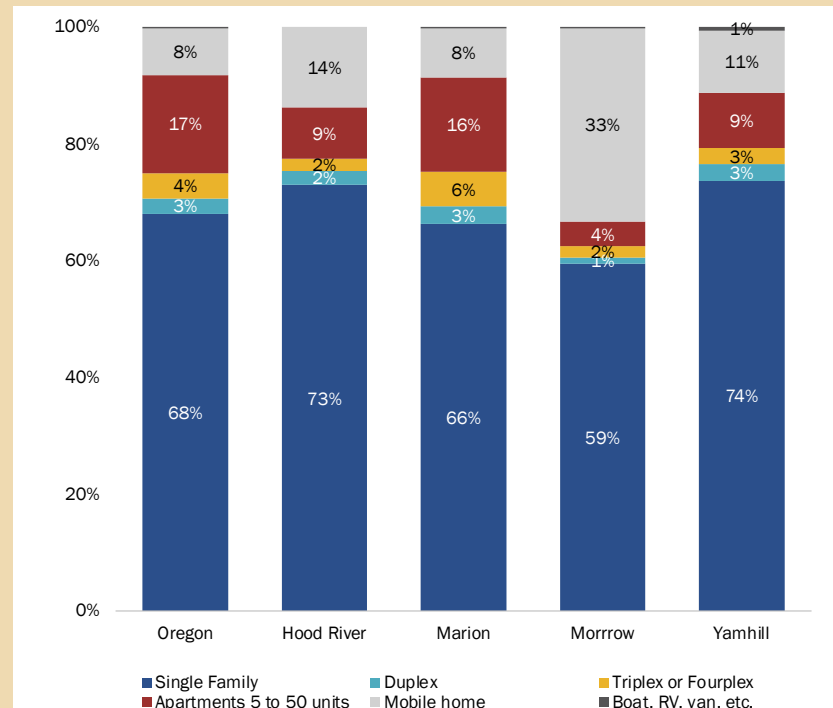
# Housing Market Characteristics

Fifty-nine to seventy percent of the study counties' housing stock was single-family detached.

Morrow had the largest share of manufactured housing (mobile homes) compared to the state and other counties at 33 percent.

**Exhibit 45. Housing Mix, Oregon, Hood River, Marion, Morrow and Yamhill Counties, 2015-2019**

Source: US Census Bureau, 2015-2019 ACS Table B25024.



**Exhibit 46. Detailed Housing Mix, Oregon, Hood River, Marion, Morrow Yamhill Counties, 2015-2019**

Source: US Census Bureau, 2015-2019 ACS Table B25024.

	Oregon	Hood River	Marion	Morrow	Yamhill
Single Family	1,202,443	7,234	83,640	2,753	28,776
Duplex	47,412	236	3,889	53	1,141
Triplex or Fourplex	75,750	210	7,391	86	1,044
Apartments	297,853	873	20,433	195	3,708
Mobile home	140,183	1,361	10,618	1,536	4,175
Boat, RV, van, etc.	5,260	-	239	10	225
<b>Total:</b>	<b>1,768,901</b>	<b>9,914</b>	<b>126,210</b>	<b>4,633</b>	<b>39,069</b>

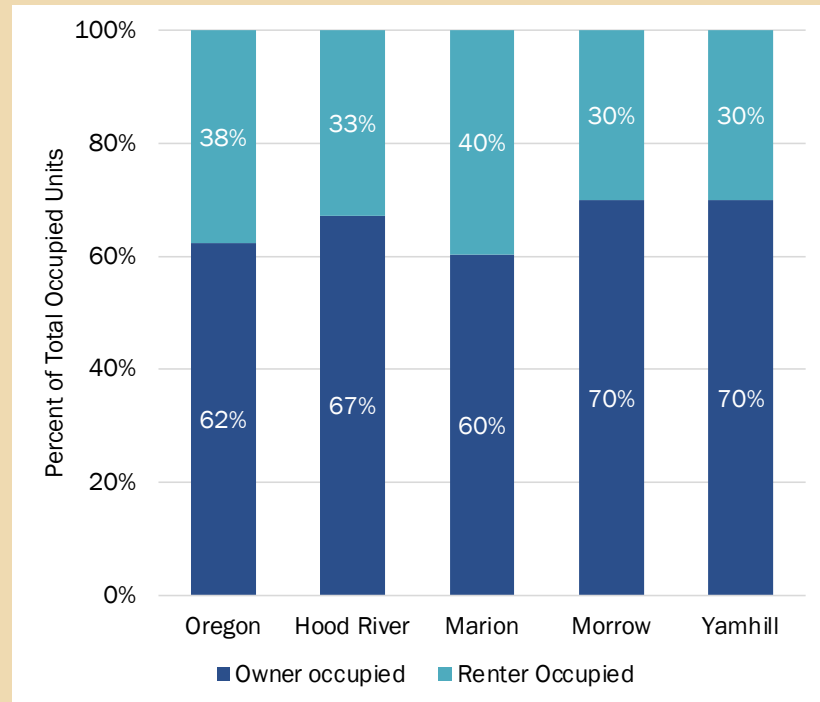
Note: The numbers in this table show the estimated number of housing units for each type of housing.

Hood River, Morrow and Yamhill County had a higher homeownership rate than Oregon.

Marion County had the lowest homeownership rate at 60 percent.

**Exhibit 47. Tenure, Occupied Units, Oregon, Hood River, Marion, Morrow, and Yamhill Counties, 2015-2019**

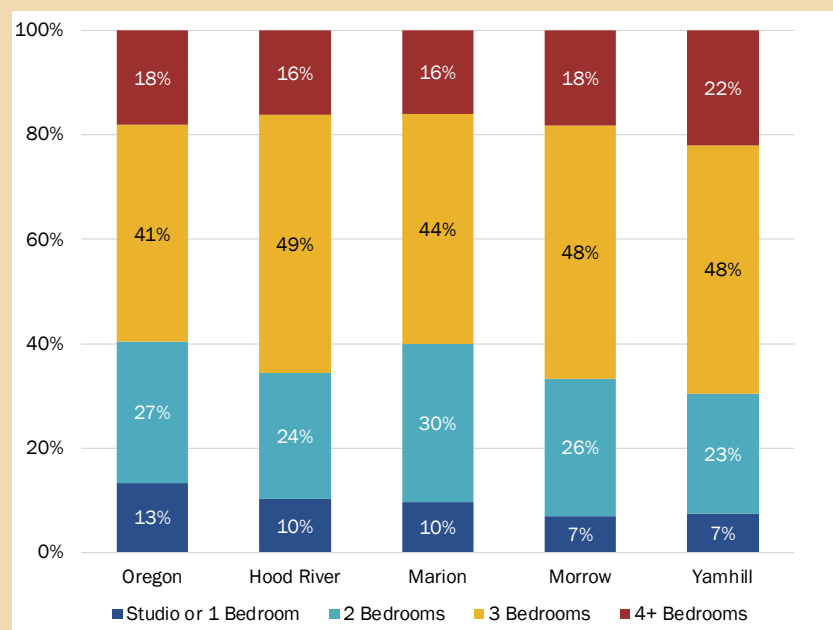
Source: US Census Bureau, 2015-2019 ACS 5-Year Estimates, Table B25003.



**Exhibit 48. Number of Bedrooms, All Occupied Units, Oregon, Hood River, Marion, Morrow, and Yamhill Counties, 2015 – 2019**

Source: US Census Bureau, 2015-2019 ACS 5-Year Estimates, Table B25041.

The majority of occupied units in Hood River, Marion, Morrow and Yamhill counties are three-bedroom units, from 44 to 49 percent of all occupied units, and higher than the state overall.



Hood River and Morrow Counties have higher vacancy rates than the state, while Marion and Yamhill have lower vacancy rates.

**Exhibit 49. Vacancy Rate, Hood River, Marion, Morrow, and Yamhill Counties, Oregon, 2015-2019**

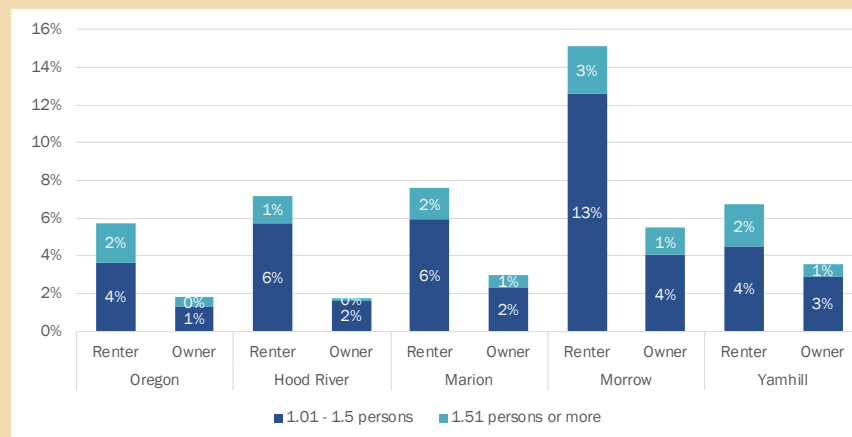
Source: US Census Bureau, 2015-2019 ACS 5-Year Estimate, Table B25002.



Renters in Morrow County (13%) are more likely than renters in the other study counties and the state overall (3% to 6%) to live in overcrowded living arrangements.

**Exhibit 50. Overcrowding, Occupied Units by Tenure, Oregon, Hood River, Marion, Morrow and Yamhill Counties, 2015-2019**

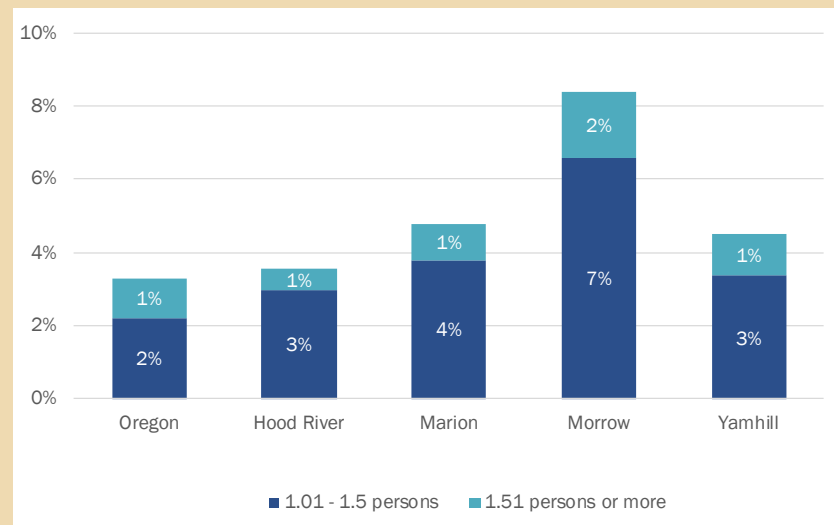
Source: US Census Bureau, 2015-2019 ACS 5-Year Estimates, Table B25014.



Morrow County residents are more likely to be overcrowded (9%) than residents in other counties and the state overall (3% to 6%).

**Exhibit 51. Overcrowding, Occupied Units, Oregon, Hood River, Marion, Morrow and Yamhill Counties, 2015-2019**

Source: US Census Bureau, 2015-2019 ACS 5-Year Estimates, Table B25014.

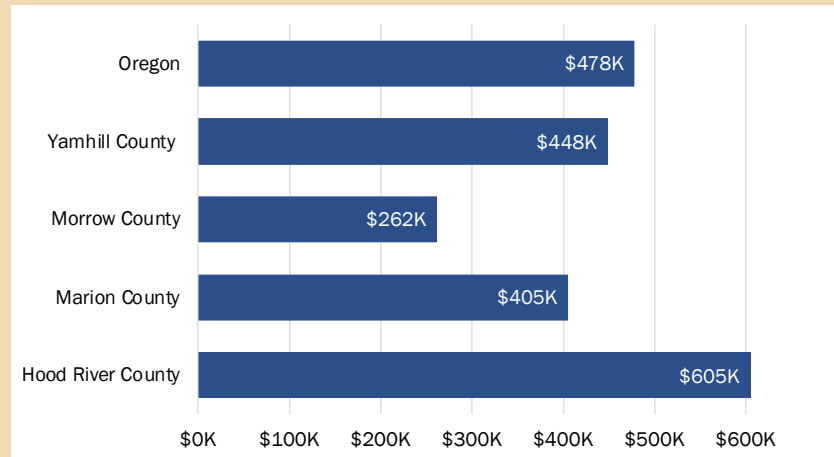


# Housing Costs and Affordability

Median sales price varied across the counties. Yamhill and Hood River Counties had higher median sales than the State overall while Morrow and Marion counties were lower.

**Exhibit 52. Median Sales Price, Oregon, Hood River, Marion, Morrow and Yamhill Counties, July 2021**

Source: Redfin



As shown in Exhibit 53, the median sales prices in all four counties and the state have increased just in the last three years from 2018 to 2021 by 23 to 37 percent. Housing sales prices have been escalating across the region consistently over the last decade.

**Exhibit 53. Median Sales Price, Oregon, Hood River, Marion, Morrow and Yamhill Counties, July 2018 and July 2021**

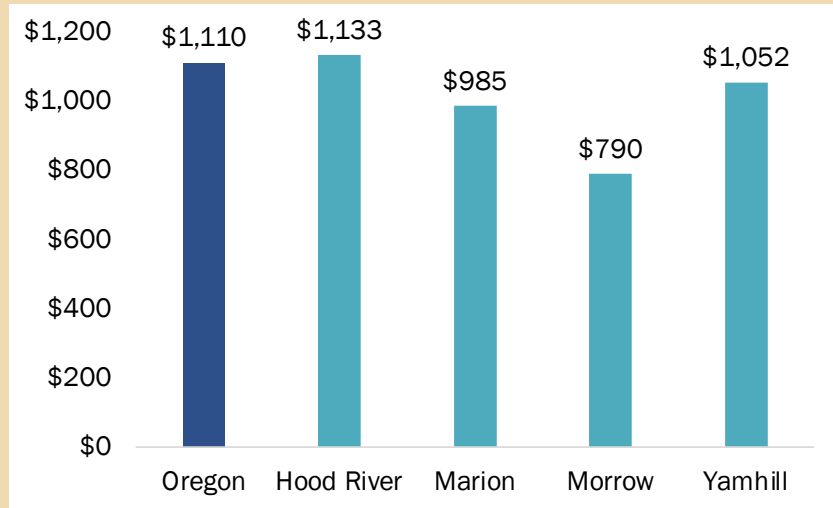
Source: Redfin

	2018	2021	Change	% Change
Oregon	\$353,400	\$477,800	\$124,400	35%
Hood River County	\$490,961	\$604,500	\$113,539	23%
Marion County	\$295,000	\$405,000	\$110,000	37%
Morrow County	\$195,900	\$261,500	\$65,600	33%
Yamhill County	\$329,000	\$448,450	\$119,450	36%

The median gross rent in Oregon was \$1,110 in the 2015-2019 period.

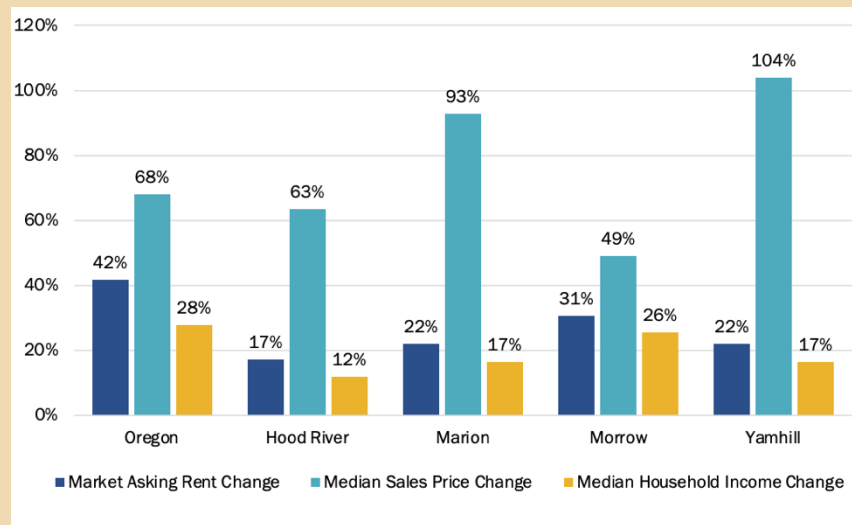
**Exhibit 54. Median Gross Rent, Oregon, Hood River, Marion, Morrow and Yamhill Counties, 2015-2019**

Source: US Census Bureau, 2015-2019 ACS 5-Year Estimate, Table B25064.



**Exhibit 55. Change in Asking Rents and Median Sales Prices Compared to Median Household Income, 2012-2019**

Source: ACS 2019 1 year, B25064, B25119, Redfin





Fair market rents were lowest in Morrow County at \$911.

**Exhibit 56. Fair Market Rents for a 2-bedroom unit, Oregon, Hood River, Marion, Morrow and Yamhill Counties, 2021<sup>38</sup>**

Source: HUD User Data, 2021

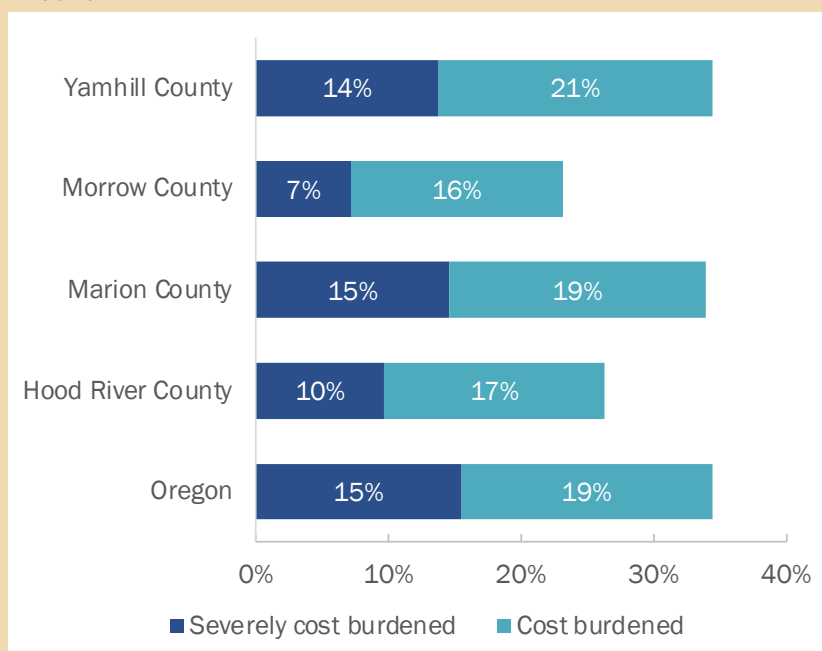
\$1,207	\$1,093	\$911	\$1,536
Hood River	Marion	Morrow	Yamhill

**Exhibit 57. Housing Cost Burden, Oregon, Hood River, Marion, Morrow and Yamhill Counties, 2015-2019**

Source: US Census Bureau, 2015-2019 ACS Tables B25091 and B25070.

Overall, about 34 percent of all households in Oregon were cost burdened.

Morrow and Hood River Counties had lower rates of cost burdened households at 24 percent and 27 percent.

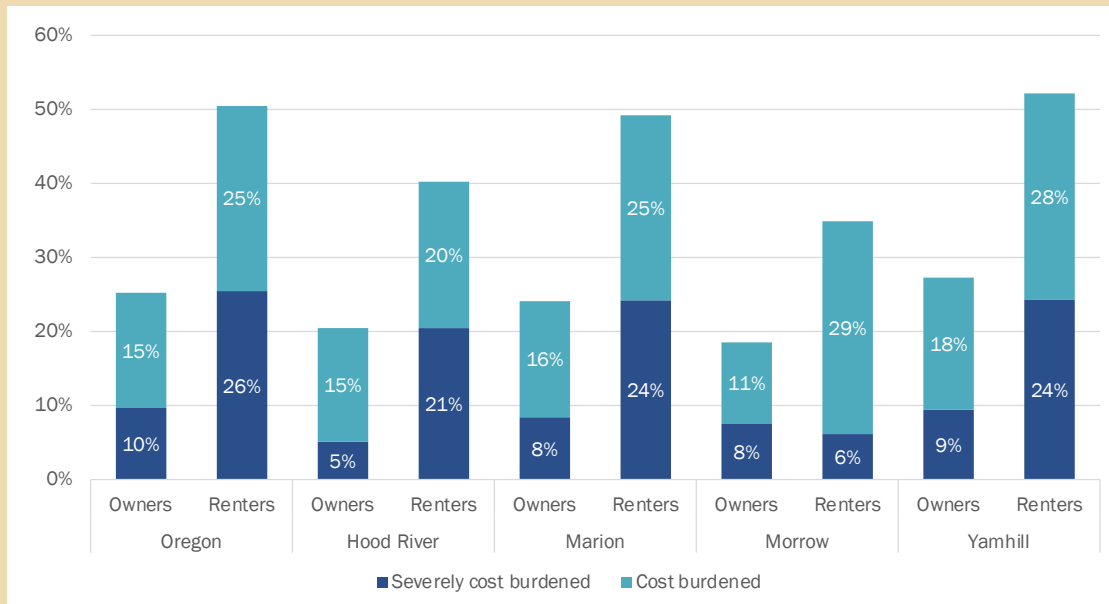


<sup>38</sup> The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) annually estimates Fair Market Rents for Office of Management and Budget (OMB) defined metropolitan areas, and each nonmetropolitan county. 42 USC 1437f requires FMRs be posted at least 30 days before they are effective and that they are effective at the start of the federal fiscal year (generally October 1). Fair Market Rents, as defined in 24 CFR 888.113 are estimates of 40th percentile gross rents for standard quality units within a metropolitan area or nonmetropolitan county.

Renters are much more likely to be cost burdened than homeowners. In the 2015-2019 period, about 51 percent of Oregon's renters were cost burdened or severely cost burdened, compared to 25 percent of homeowners. Twenty to twenty nine percent of renters in Hood River, Marion, Morrow and Yamhill Counties were severely cost burdened (meaning they paid more than 50 percent of their income on housing costs alone). (Exhibit 58)

**Exhibit 58. Housing Cost Burden by Tenure, Oregon, Hood River, Marion, Morrow and Yamhill Counties, 2015-2019**

Source: US Census Bureau, 2015-2019 ACS Tables B25091 and B25070.





## Agricultural Employer Interviewees

County	Types of Workers Hired	Crops/Industries	Direct employer or Labor Contractor	Provide housing?	Provide on-farm or off-farm housing?	Housing funding type
Hood River	Migrant, Seasonal/Permanent	Pears	Direct employer	Yes	On-farm	Privately-funded
Hood River	Migrant, Seasonal/Permanent, H2A	Pears, apples	Direct employer	Yes	On-farm	Mix of private and public (AWHTC)
Marion	Migrant, Seasonal/Permanent	Vegetable harvest (garlic, hops)	Labor contractor	Yes	On-farm	Mix of private and public (AWHTC)
Marion	Seasonal/Permanent		Unknown	No	NA	NA
Marion	Migrant, Seasonal/Permanent	cherries, hops	Both direct employer and labor contractor	Yes	On-farm	Mix of private and public (AWHTC)
Yamhill & Marion	Seasonal/Permanent	Yamhill: Vineyard, grapes, Marion: grapes, blueberries, cherries, hazelnuts	Direct employer	No	NA	NA
Yamhill	Migrant, Seasonal/Permanent	grapes, berries, hazelnuts	Direct employer	No	NA	NA
Yamhill	Migrant, Seasonal/Permanent, H2A	grapes	Both direct employer and labor contractor	No	NA	NA
Morrow	Migrant, Seasonal/Permanent, H2A	onions, dairy, potatoes, wheat, carrots, blueberries, corn, alfalfa, mint	Both direct employer and labor contractor	Yes	Both on and off-farm	Privately-funded

# Appendix C.

Maps of Known Farmworker Housing in Hood River, Marion, Morrow, and Yamhill Counties,  
Created by OHCS 2022

These maps display the locations of affordable housing projects in Oregon built specifically to house agricultural workers as of January 2022. The farm-based and community-based properties were compiled from inventories of projects that included funding from Oregon Housing and Community Services (OHCS.)

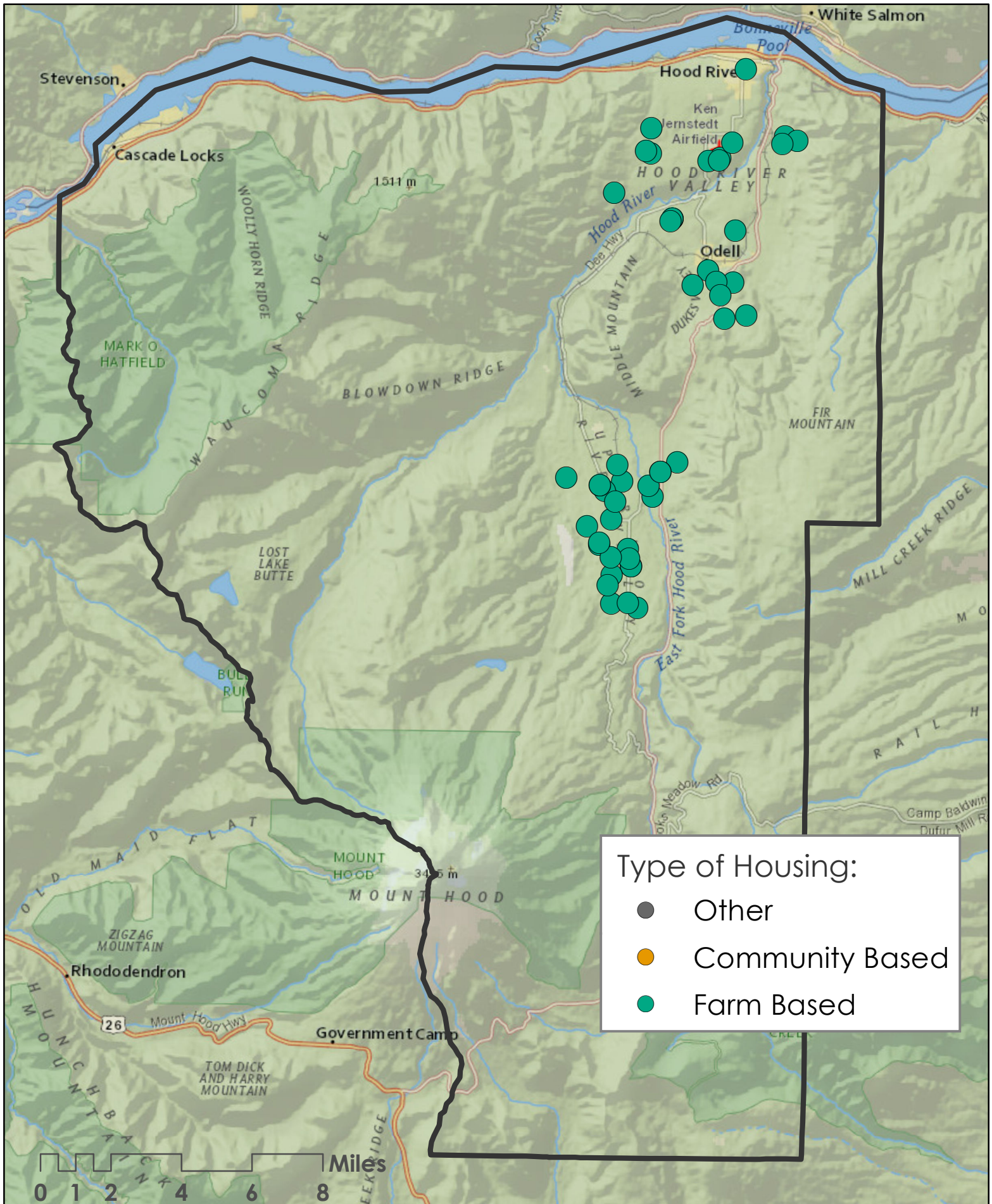
DISCLAIMER: This map was made for informational purposes only and was created with the best data available at the time of production. Oregon Housing and Community Services (OHCS) can not verify the validity of all the information provided to OHCS and, therefore, makes no representations or warranties, express or implied, regarding its accuracy, completeness, or usefulness for any product or process. OHCS cannot and does not guarantee that there will be no errors. OHCS assumes no legal liability or responsibility for loss or damage resulting from the use of this information.

## DEFINITIONS:

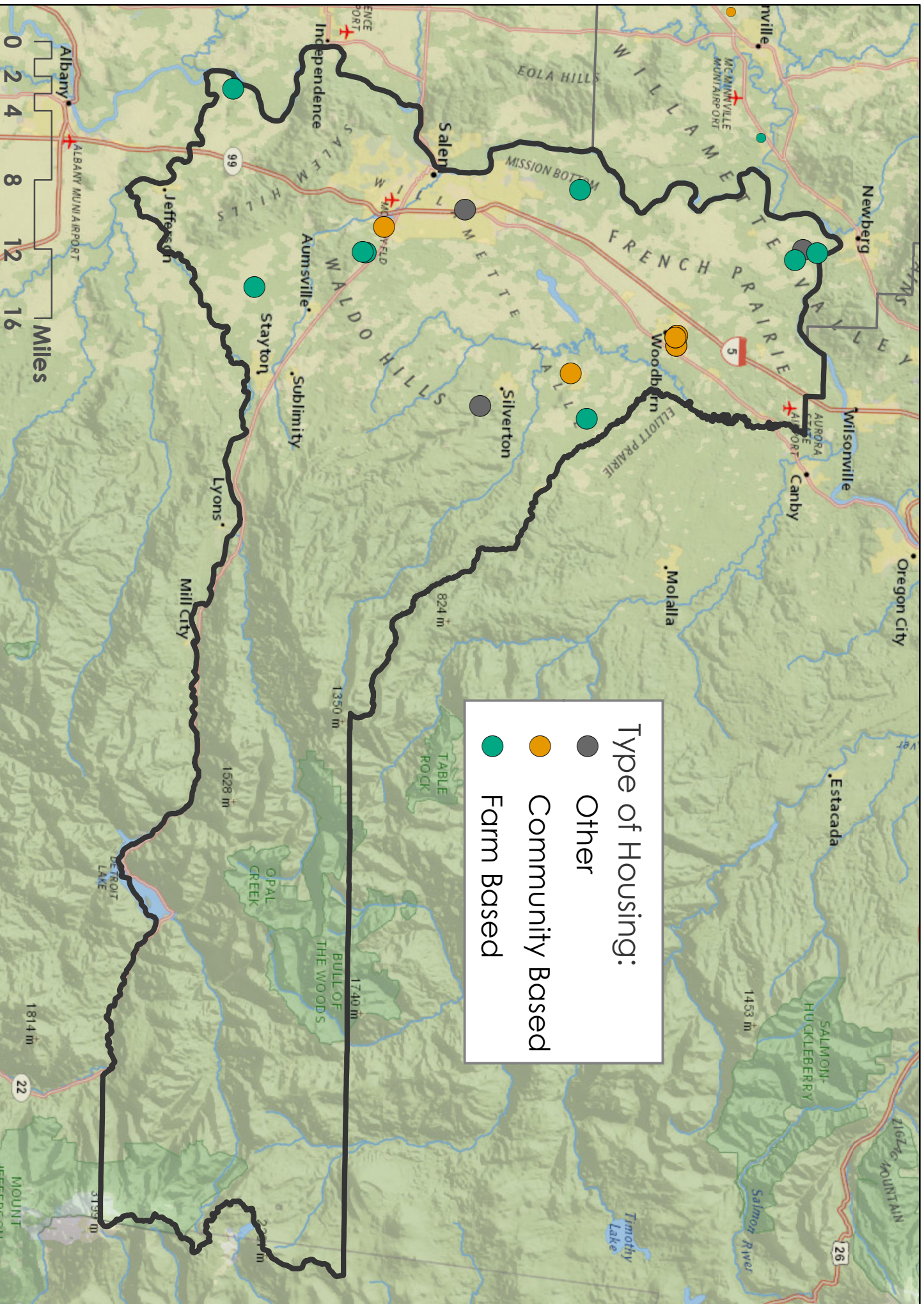
Farm-based, or "On-Farm" projects, are defined as any project that is physically located on farm land, or is owned and operated by a grower.

Community-based projects are properties that are targeted towards the agriculture labor force but do not meet the definition of farm-based.

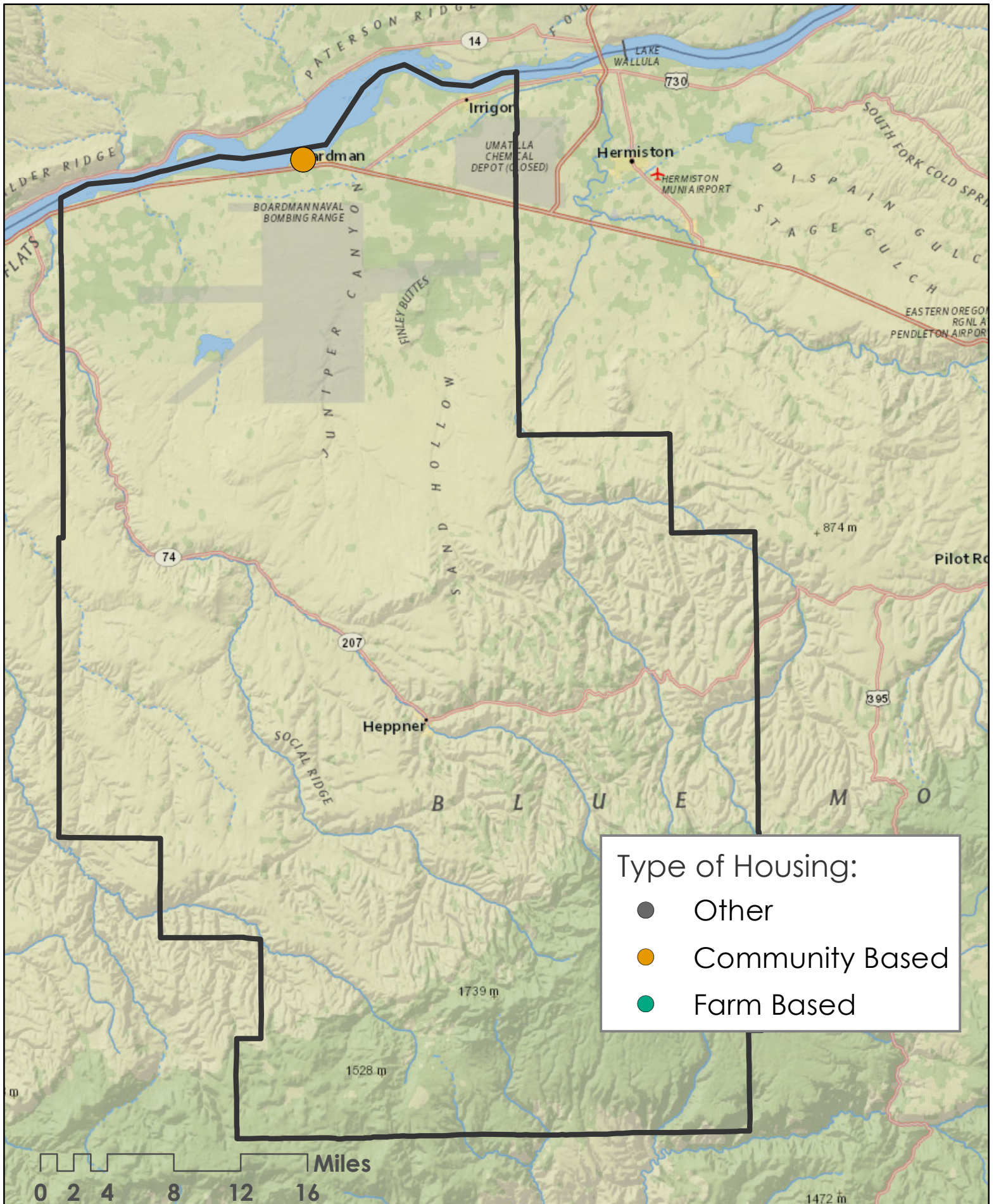
# Hood River County Agriculture Workforce Housing



# Marion County Agriculture Workforce Housing



# Morrow County Agriculture Workforce Housing





# Yamhill County Agriculture Workforce Housing

