

Dept. of Workforce Development: Robust Wisconsin labor laws protect state's migrant seasonal farmworkers

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MADISON – Each year, Wisconsin welcomes approximately 5,000 seasonal agricultural migrant workers to the state to help plant, harvest, and package the wide variety of agricultural products Wisconsin has to offer.

This [International Migrants Day](#), celebrated annually on December 18, the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (DWD) is highlighting programs and protections for migrant and seasonal farmworkers in Wisconsin, including DWD's work to administer state and federal regulations for seasonal agricultural labor in the state.

“Wisconsin is one of the few states in the nation with state laws providing additional protections for migrant workers employed in seasonal agricultural work,” DWD Secretary-designee Amy Pechacek said. “I’m proud of our agency’s efforts to ensure that migrant workers who come to Wisconsin are protected. The contributions of this essential workforce to Wisconsin’s economy and our communities cannot be overstated.”

Seasonal agricultural migrant workers in Wisconsin travel from their primary residence and come to Wisconsin for not more than 10 months. In Wisconsin, most migrant workers travel from Texas and Mexico; there are families and generations of workers who come and work for the same employers year after year.

They work alongside local Wisconsin residents and provide the workforce that small

and larger agricultural employers need to be successful. Migrant farmworkers are a vital part of how food gets from Wisconsin's fields to tables across the U.S. and are a part of every step in the horticultural process: they hand pick crops; drive tractors and trucks; fix machinery; irrigate fields; process crops, can and package food; and more. At the end of the season, migrant workers make plans for next year with their employer and travel back to their primary residence.

Wisconsin's migrant labor laws require all migrant labor camps to be certified by DWD. Migrant labor contractors must apply and be certified, and migrant workers must receive a written recruiting disclosure statement and a migrant labor worker agreement. State migrant labor law also includes requirements related to hours worked, wages and wage statements, and hygiene and sanitation for workers in the field.

DWD staff conduct outreach to migrant seasonal farmworkers where they live and work to ensure they are receiving these protections and equitable access to services. This includes meeting with migrant seasonal farmworkers in farm fields, food processing plants, and migrant labor camps to connect them with programs and wrap-around services provided at Wisconsin job centers. DWD's outreach efforts also connect migrant workers with a local contact they can reach out to if there are issues with their employer or migrant labor contractor.

In addition to enforcing Wisconsin's migrant labor regulations, DWD staff members take complaints related to workplace and employment concerns and make referrals to the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) Wage and Hour Division, DWD Equal Rights Division, U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), and other regulatory agencies.

The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) also serves as a resource to the state by promoting quality food, healthy plants and animals, sound use of land and water resources, and a fair marketplace. DATCP staff interact with migrant workers on the farm and through contacts made to the [Wisconsin Farm Center](#). DATCP Farm Center staff members offer farmers and agriculture workers the opportunity to ask questions, and connect them to resources such as industry groups, educational organizations, and other stakeholders who support Wisconsin's agriculture economy. DATCP is proud of Wisconsin's diverse migrant workforce and supports workers in accessing services through DWD and other partner agencies.

“From tending animals, to harvesting vegetables, to staffing the processing facilities that turn out Wisconsin cheese, meats and prepared foods, migrant workers help drive Wisconsin’s \$104.8 billion agricultural economy,” said Randy Romanski, secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection. “One in nine Wisconsin jobs are in agriculture, and migrants are crucial to filling these positions. They are a crucial part of Wisconsin’s agricultural past, present and future.”

Migrant and seasonal farmworkers in Wisconsin can reach out to DWD staff at any time to share concerns about their employment, employer, or migrant labor contractor. They also may receive assistance with finding a new job, employment training and other employment services. To learn more about DWD’s Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers program or to contact local program staff, visit DWD’s [Services for Migrant Seasonal Farm Workers](#) website.