

We Gather and Stand Together Project

Immigrant Workers in Ohio Survey Results

The following summary is based on interviews conducted in the spring of 2000 with 362 rural latino/a workers and their families in 31 Ohio counties, as well as a survey of 53 processing plants and rural industries. It describes the situation of the estimated 70,000 immigrant workers throughout Ohio.

- **Over half of Ohio's immigrants are staying year round to work in poultry or meat processing plants, plastic factories, coil wire/steel manufacturing, lumber mills and construction sites.**
- **Anywhere from 70-90% of these immigrants are undocumented having been recruited by industry contacts and smuggled across the border by "coyotes" (guides).**
- **Immigrants are leaving their countries due to overwhelming poverty, civil strife, and Hurricane Mitch devastation.**
- **Spanish speaking immigrants from Mexico (Chiapas, Oaxaco, Guerro) bring with them a strong Catholic heritage, however there is a growing number of Mayan immigrants coming from Guatemala for which Spanish is a second language and which Catholicism is not as prevalent.**
- **Majority of immigrants are single males, however, there is a growing number of families and evidence of unaccompanied children coming to work.**
- **The federal program allowing immigrants to receive "guest worker" status (H-2A permit) has not proved helpful for most Ohio workers (to complicated, and too few worker safeguards).**
- **Immigrants report abuses from not only employers (low wages, unsafe working conditions, poor health care coverage), but from "coyotes" and "contratistas" (crew leaders) who often extort money and require indentured servitude.**
- **Key needs identified included: education; housing; transportation; work permit/status; family unification; wages; medical insurance; and help for family back home.**

The "We Gather and Stand Together" Project is sponsored by Ohio Diocesan Rural Life Directors, Diocesan Hispanic Ministry Coordinators, and Department on Social Concerns Catholic Conference of Ohio. It is funded by the Catholic Campaign for Human Development.