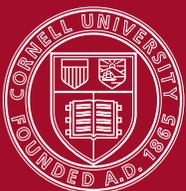


# Immigrants and the Community Community Perspectives

October 2005



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# Preface

**T**his report is the fourth in a series based on the research project “Integrating the Needs of Immigrant Workers and Rural Communities.” The first three reports in this series can be found at [http://rnyi.cornell.edu/poverty\\_and\\_social\\_inequality](http://rnyi.cornell.edu/poverty_and_social_inequality). The four-year project attempts to inform New York communities on the nature and consequences of increasing immigrant settlement. This project was sponsored by a grant from the United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Fund for Rural America (grant no. 2001-36201-11283) and the Cornell University Agricultural Experiment Station (grant no. 33452). The USDA funding was part of a larger effort to identify major population trends and their consequences for rural America. The goal of the four-year project is to provide information about the nature and consequences of increasing numbers of immigrants settling in New York communities.

Many upstate New York communities have experienced decades of population loss and economic decline. In the past decade, increasing numbers of immigrants have settled in many of these communities, which poses possible community development challenges and opportunities. Because each community must address these issues in its own way, this report is not intended to propose broad answers to the questions communities face but rather to make community members aware of changes in their populations and highlight issues they may choose to address.

This project benefited from the assistance of many individuals and organizations including collaborators from the Cornell Migrant Program and Rural Opportunities, Incorporated (ROI). Individuals associated with the Catholic Rural Ministry, the Independent Farmworkers Center (CITA), and

the Farmworkers Community Center (the Alamo) also provided valuable assistance. We were able to conduct this research because of support and encouragement offered at Cornell University by the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, the Division of Nutritional Sciences, and the Cornell University Agricultural Experiment Station.

As authors of this report, we accept sole responsibility for its contents and any errors contained within.

Max J. Pfeffer and Pilar A. Parra  
October 2005

# Highlights

- Immigration to rural communities in New York may be surprising. The foreign-born population doubled between 1990 and 2000 in the five upstate communities in this study. Most of the new foreign-born residents are of Latino origin, predominantly Mexican.
  - A small proportion of community members considered immigrants a burden, and about one-third thought of them as an asset, but most people were ambivalent about immigrants. A survey of New York State explored the same question with similar results; half of New Yorkers considered immigrants neither an asset nor a burden.
  - Few residents of the study communities felt that immigration should increase; about 40 percent said it should decrease a little or a lot, but most (50 percent) felt immigration levels should remain the same.
  - The most important concern regarding new immigrants in the five communities and in New York State as a whole is economic growth and job creation.
  - Overall, community residents are skeptical that immigrants bring businesses and jobs into their communities, but opinions about the economic impacts of immigration on the community are sometimes sharply divided. Some community residents view immigrants as competitors for their jobs. Others who have more education and are employed in managerial and professional occupations are more likely to consider immigrants an asset to their communities.
- Most people have little regular interaction with immigrants and are not aware of their needs or capabilities. Consequently, they do not have a clear opinion about the likely impacts of immigrants on their communities, nor do they have clear ideas about the potential role of immigrants in community development.
  - Immigrants need more opportunities to develop social ties to other community residents, and civic organizations offer means of promoting such linkages. In particular, communities need to do more to encourage forms of civic engagement that include immigrants.
  - Community efforts to promote language training and certain types of technical training could play an important part in furthering the social and economic integration of immigrants into the community and provide employers with a more qualified workforce.
  - The integration of immigrants into community life can be part of a larger community development strategy that attracts employers who need workers with particular skills.

# Introduction

As we have related in our previous reports, the populations of many rural New York communities are becoming more ethnically diverse. This diversification became especially noticeable in the 1990s with the upsurge in Mexican migration. When agricultural production is located in or near communities, immigrants often first come there as farmworkers. As indicated in our previous report *Immigrants and the Community: Former Farmworkers*, our research has shown that after a fairly short time (less than 10 years), many of the workers leave seasonal farm employment for more steady work in agriculture or other industries. For these workers a departure from agricultural employment often does not mean that they leave the communities where they work. In fact, many of them told us they would like to settle locally provided they can find work. The increasing tendency for Mexican immigrants to settle in the United States has been observed in many regions and in urban as well as rural areas.

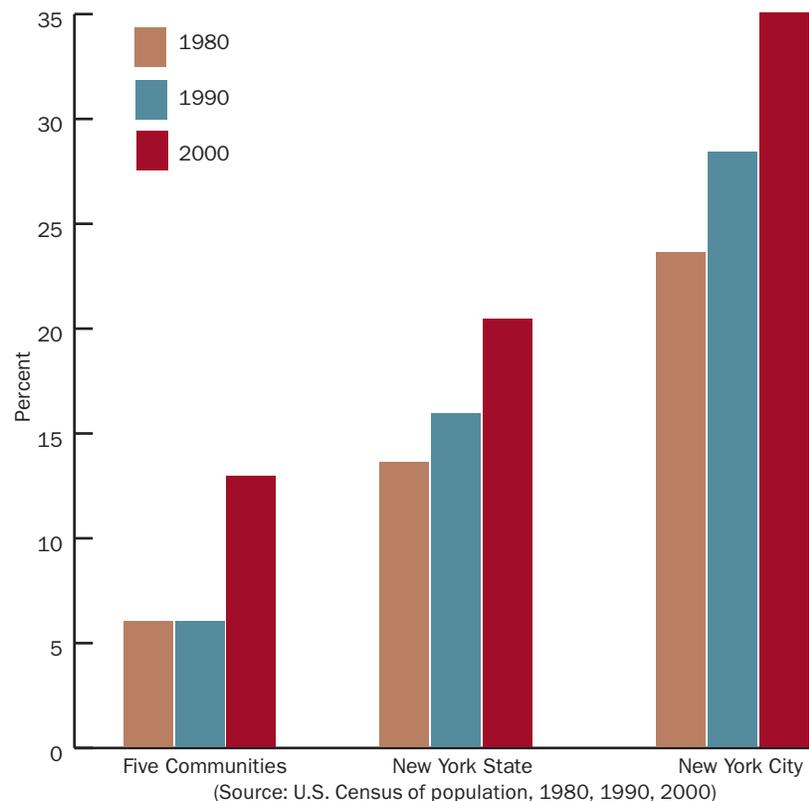
Diversifying communities are faced with a range of opportunities and challenges associated with this population change. However, this situation may be a source of confusion in communities that have only recently experienced increased settlement of immigrants. Relatively large immigrant populations have long been a core of large urban centers like Los Angeles and New York City. For example, more than 20 years ago persons born outside the United States made up nearly 25 percent of New York City's population, and by 2000 more than one-third of the city's population was foreign born. Certainly the city's population trends dominate those of New York State. But in the 1990s, even smaller upstate communities experienced marked increases in the foreign-born population. The foreign-born population, although still relatively small, doubled between 1990 and 2000 in the five upstate communities in our study (Figure 1). As

we pointed out in our previous reports, this change reflects the influx of Latino, mostly Mexican, immigrants.

The purpose of our study has been to document changes associated with the ethnic diversification of rural communities and to provide a factual foundation for community deliberations about how to capture opportunities and address challenges associated with this population change. To do this, we focused on five upstate communities that are heavily engaged in fruit and vegetable production with a strong presence of Mexican immigrants, many who first came to the area to work as farmworkers. Two communities are on the northern fringes of the New York City metropolitan area, and three are

in more rural areas of northwestern New York. In addition to interviewing farmworkers and former farmworkers, we convened seven focus groups with community residents who have no involvement in farmwork, and interviewed key informants and 1,250 randomly selected individuals living in these communities. The purpose of the community resident interviews was to assess their opinions about the immigrants and the newcomers' impacts on the communities. In addition, we added questions to Cornell University's Empire State Poll to assess how closely opinions in our five communities matched those of a statistically representative sample of the state's residents. We provide more details on data collection methods in the appendix.

**Figure 1. Proportion of population that is foreign born, five New York communities, New York State, 1980–2000**



# I. Immigrants: An Asset or a Burden?

**T**he issue of immigration and its impacts on American society is politically charged and often hotly debated in the national political arena. But the consequences of immigration are experienced most intensely at the local level. For this reason we asked community residents for their opinion about the presence of immigrants in their own communities. We asked, “Do you consider the new immigrants to be an asset or a burden to your community?” A very small proportion characterized immigrants as a burden. A somewhat larger proportion, about one-third, considered them an asset. The contrasting opinions are reflected in the following comments by community leaders:

*Communities react differently to the new immigrants; some are more welcoming and some are bad. This community has been more tolerant, but the welcomeness is not genuine—they make very clear where the line is in terms of how much you fit in.*

*The communities are just going to [have to] accept that it's going to be more diverse.*

*In this area there are persons very supportive of immigrant workers, and [they] try to help to get papers for the immigrant families working with them, and community members that perceive immigrants as the cause of community problems.*

But most people, about one-half, were ambivalent, characterizing the immigrants as neither an asset nor a burden. This observation is a bit surprising since about half of the U.S.-born respondents told us that they personally knew an immigrant from a foreign country who lived in their town. But most persons had very little regular contact with immigrants, as related by a key informant:

*Some people acknowledge seeing the immigrants around town; others claim that they hardly see any immigrants. But one thing that everybody has in common is that no one speaks with the immigrants.*

Without much regular contact, it is difficult for community residents to form an opinion about the immigrants.

Many community residents keep contacts with immigrants to a minimum. One of our informants characterized these contacts:

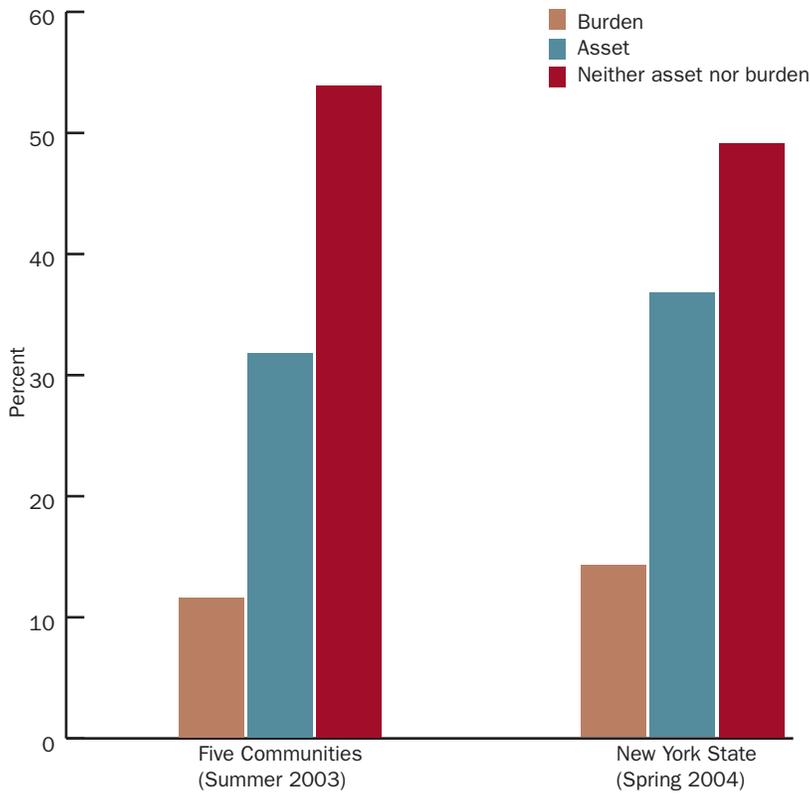
*Contacts between the White community and minorities or immigrants are mostly limited to the kind of unavoidable contacts that people have, so that would be work or shopping, but there is little socializing.*

When we asked a statistically representative sample of New York residents if they thought immigrants were an asset or a burden to their community, the responses were almost identical to those of our survey of residents living in the five communities in our study. In fact, the results of the statewide survey were the same for upstate and downstate (New York City and Long Island) residents. From this observation we can conclude that New Yorkers seldom see immigrants as a burden but generally feel ambivalent about their presence (Figure 2).



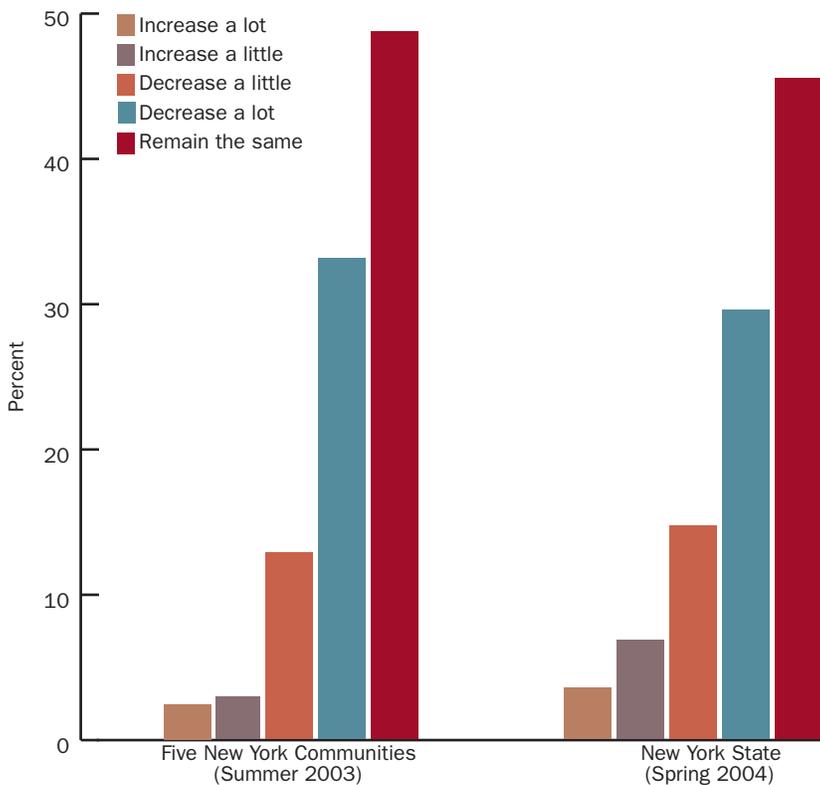
**Most residents of the five communities felt that the local population should stay the same. While not one of the communities in our study, the photo above shows that this sentiment is shared by other communities in New York.**

**Figure 2. Perception of immigrants as an asset or burden, five New York communities and New York State**



Few residents in our study communities felt that immigration should increase. A larger proportion felt that immigration should decrease—twice as many thought it should decrease a lot as thought it should decrease a little. Yet almost half the residents felt the level of immigration should remain about the same. That proportion was about the same as the percent who felt that immigration should decrease (a little or a lot). Thus, many community residents do not have a strong opinion about immigration levels, but those who do have an opinion are more likely to want immigration to decrease (Figure 3). Again, the results of the statewide poll are almost identical to the survey of the five communities. Very few New Yorkers would like to see immigration increase, and most would like it to stay the same or decrease.

**Figure 3. Attitude toward immigration, five New York communities and New York State**



While most people have not formed firm opinions about immigration, those who hold a positive or negative opinion are fairly clearly differentiated from one another. Also, the strongest opinions about the desirability of increasing the level of immigration to the United States are expressed by a small proportion of community residents. For example, more than 80 percent of those who consider immigrants to be a burden to the community felt that the number of immigrants coming to the United States should decrease. It is important to remember that few people think the immigrants are a burden to the community. In contrast, very few of those who considered immigrants to be an asset thought that the number of immigrants should decrease. Less than half of those who see immigrants as neither an asset nor a burden think that immigration should decrease. Once again this pattern holds statewide (Figure 4).

Whether community residents see immigrants as an asset or a burden colors a variety of their opinions about immigrants. An important example is opinion about immigrants and their relation to the economy. A leading concern in upstate New York is economic

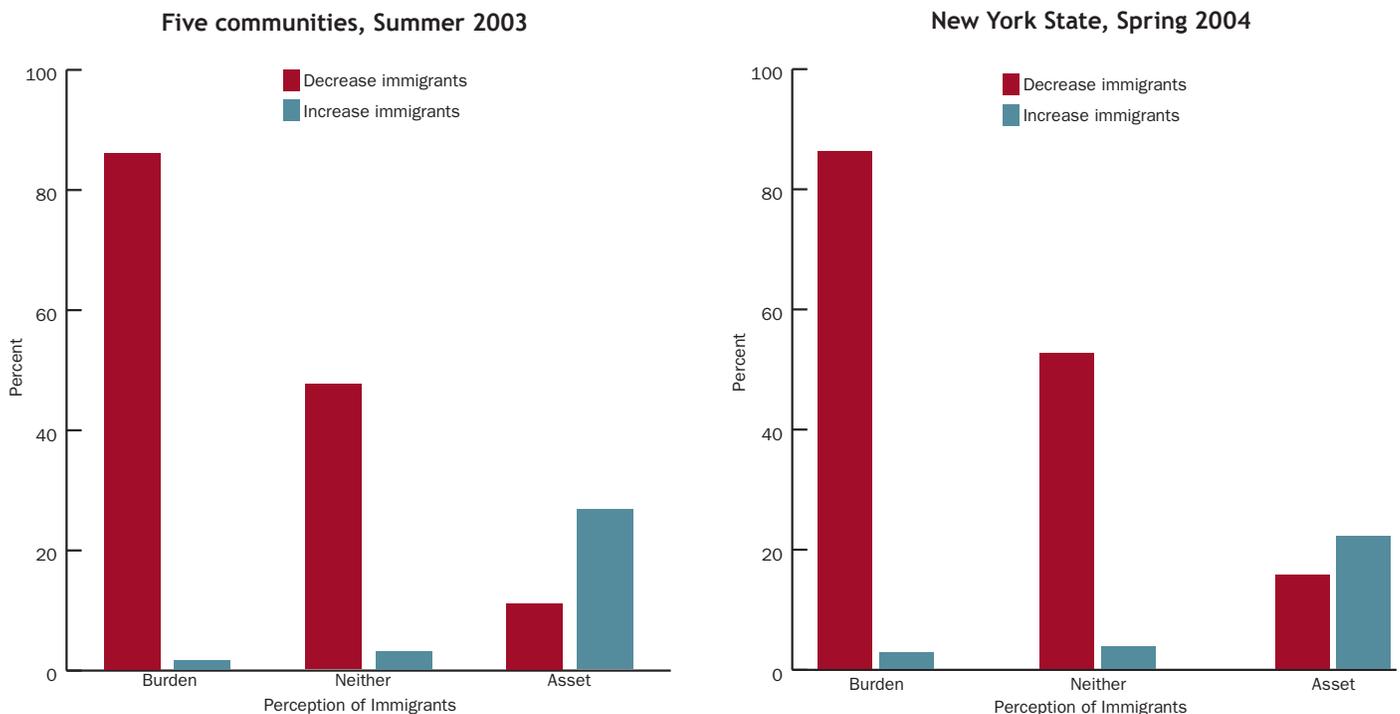
growth and job creation. When asked what they considered the most important issue facing New York State, the most common response by upstate New Yorkers in the Empire State Poll was the economy or jobs.



*“There is little industry in the area. In this community two large operations closed in the past few years, and two food processing plants left town some time ago.”*

*“The community is primarily agricultural, and its employment possibilities are limited.”*

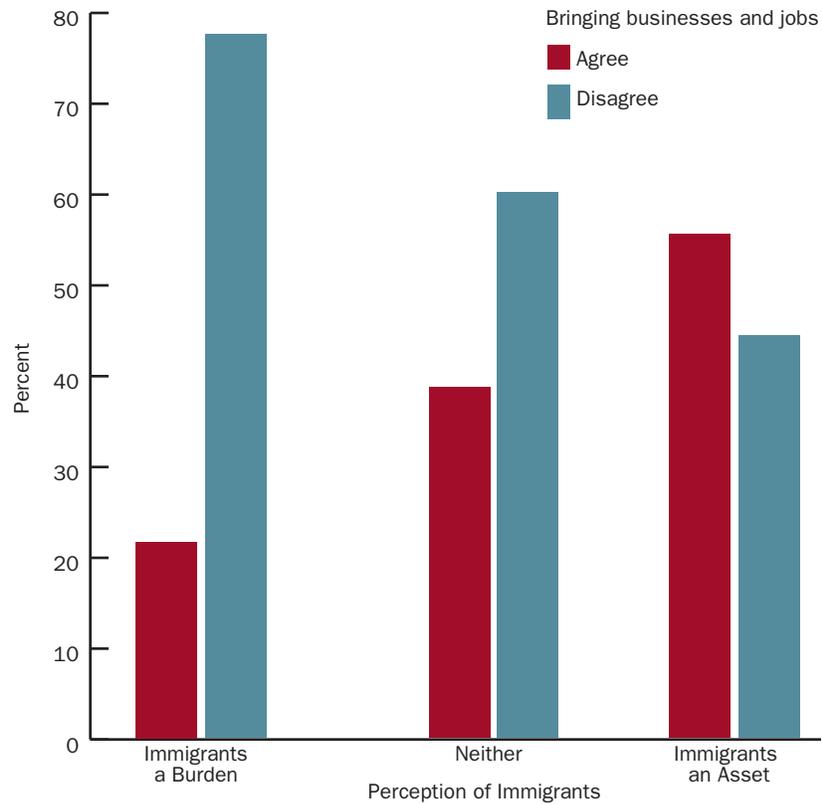
**Figure 4. Attitude toward immigration by perception of immigrants as asset or burden, five New York communities and New York State**



Given the importance of employment to upstate residents we asked residents of the five study communities if they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: “As a result of immigrants, new businesses and jobs have come to my community.” Those who see immigrants as an asset were optimistic about immigrants bringing new businesses and jobs. More than half agreed with the statement. In contrast, almost 80 percent of those who consider immigrants to be a burden to the community disagreed with this statement. Overall, however, a fairly high proportion of community residents disagreed with the assertion that immigrants bring new businesses and jobs (Figure 5). Given ongoing economic stagnation in upstate New York, it is not surprising that community residents are skeptical about immigrants being a catalyst for economic growth.

With strong concern about the economy and jobs, we wondered how strongly community residents’ perceptions of immigrants related to their own economic status and employment prospects. A number of indicators show that community residents who might be competing with immigrants for jobs are slightly more likely to see them as a burden to the community as those not competing (Table 1). For example, community residents who were unemployed were more likely to perceive immigrants as a burden. Those employed in production, transportation, construction, or maintenance occupations were almost twice as likely as those in professional or management occupations to see the immigrants as a burden. And those with lower levels of education were more likely to consider the immigrants a burden. Conversely, those who have better jobs or opportunities for employment in terms of these indicators are more likely to view the immigrants as an asset to the community. However, whatever economic characteristic of community residents we considered, only a small proportion considered immigrants to be a burden to the community.

**Figure 5. Belief that immigrants bring new businesses and jobs by perception of Immigrants as an asset or burden, five New York communities, 2003**



***“The big problem in the community is not limited or directly related to the Mexicans or the immigrants, but to the general economy being very poor. Several stores have closed down in the downtown area; the big stores like Wal-Mart and K-Mart come in and dry out the local businesses. There is little economic opportunity in the area.”***

**Table 1. Socioeconomic characteristics by perception of immigrants as an asset or burden to the community**

Socioeconomic Characteristics	Perception of Immigrants:			Total	N
	Asset	Burden	Neither Asset nor Burden		
<b>Income:</b>					
Less than \$35,000	28.8	13.2	58.0	100%	378
\$35,000 or more	34.4	10.1	55.5	100%	642
<b>Employment*:</b>					
Unemployed	22.0	17.1	61.0	100%	41
Employed	32.6	9.5	57.9	100%	644
<b>Occupation*:</b>					
Production/Transportation	33.8	15.6	50.7	100%	77
Construction/Maintenance	24.6	13.8	61.6	100%	65
Sales/Office	26.3	5.3	68.5	100%	95
Services	23.4	9.7	66.9	100%	124
Professional/Management	40.5	7.6	51.9	100%	262
<b>Education:</b>					
Less than 12 years	23.8	20.2	56.0	100%	84
12 years	25.8	13.2	61.0	100%	462
More than 12 years	37.6	8.9	53.5	100%	575
<b>Ethnicity:</b>					
White	31.3	12.5	56.2	100%	950
African American	34.8	5.8	59.4	100%	69
Latino	45.1	2.0	52.9	100%	51
Other	27.1	5.6	66.7	100%	36
<b>Age (years):</b>					
Less than 30	26.3	7.7	65.8	100%	129
30 to 44	31.0	9.8	59.1	100%	274
45 to 59	36.4	10.4	53.1	100%	335
60 or more	30.3	15.0	54.6	100%	353
<b>Gender:</b>					
Male	34.7	12.7	52.6	100%	510
Female	29.1	10.5	60.4	100%	611
<b>Place of birth:</b>					
United States	31.3	11.9	56.7	100%	1,057
Foreign country	39.0	5.1	55.9	100%	59
<b>Years lived in town:</b>					
Less than 5	39.1	10.4	50.4	100%	115
5 to 9	38.6	8.9	52.5	100%	101
10 or more	30.1	12.0	57.9	100%	898

\*Persons in the labor force

However, as we mentioned above, community residents who express opinions often have strong ones. We asked community residents, “In your opinion, what are the major challenges or needs your community faces in having new immigrants? As was the case in the statewide Empire State Poll, a common response was that a major challenge for

the community was to provide immigrants with employment. Boxes 1 and 2 (see pp. 10–11) list a variety of the positive and negative comments community residents made about the relationship between immigrants and employment. The differences between comments and many of the comments themselves are striking. Positive assessments often note

that immigrants take jobs that others in the community are unwilling to do:

*Immigrants bring cultural differences, which are good, bring in talent, and a lot of them are service people in jobs that others won't do, which is good.*

*The biggest challenge is for residents to understand why the immigrants*

*are here, and that they are doing really good work that Americans, especially young Americans, are not willing to do.*

On the other hand, more negative assessments noted the lack of adequate employment opportunities in the community:

*Immigrants' working for low wages makes it hard for American to get a job because immigrants would be hired first.*

*There aren't enough jobs to go around right now, it keeps the salaries down because there is always someone there to take a job.*

These examples illustrate strongly opposing assessments about the availability of jobs in the community. The types of comments listed in Boxes 1 and 2 are sometimes reported in the media and often animate discussions about immigration policy. But it is important to note that the most common response to the question of what was the most important issue facing their community in dealing with immigrants was *"don't know."* The fact is that most community residents have little regular contact with immigrants and do not know much about them.



***"We have plenty of new immigrants here, mostly Mexicans, opening stores and restaurants, but if you ask my neighbors about the new immigrants, they have no clue about the presence of Mexicans."***



***"Some residents see the new immigrant businesses as small potatoes, not as a new force in town or a force for revitalization, even though there is an active business sector made up by recent immigrants in our downtown. Other residents tend to be supportive of the minority businesses especially as a potential source of revitalization of the downtown."***

## Box 1. Encouraging opinions of community members about immigrant employment\*

- I would like to see the community help them attain skills to obtain higher-paying jobs as well as help them learn English.
- To have jobs for them; from what I have seen, these people want to work and deserve to be treated better by the community. If they want to just come in and get on welfare then they can stay where they are, we don't need them.
- Help to find jobs, help for the first steps when people need a driver's license, bank account, language, things like that.
- I do not see any need. They are capable of taking care of themselves. I think they do a very good job working on farms; they are here working hard to give their children what they cannot give in Mexico.
- Job opportunities, more job opportunities beyond farmwork and skilled opportunities and education, affordable housing, and acceptability among people in the community.
- Education—immigrants need more education so that they can get a job and the community being educated in regard to immigrants so that they have a better understanding of them.
- Finding them jobs, educating them, finding affordable housing and more recreation for after-work hours.
- Having enough work for them to do and having enough space for them to live; it would help the community if they would buy houses and pay taxes.
- Living in a farming community, immigrants are needed to get the crops in. Without them I don't think there are enough people to do the jobs. Mostly Hispanics do the work on the farms.
- Most of our immigrants here are Mexican, they benefit the local farm population, most of us wouldn't work for what they earn. I guess it would be good if we could provide them with more jobs so that they could support themselves.
- Getting them to blend in society, getting them jobs.
- Integrating them with the people in the community—language barrier is our biggest problem and we need more jobs.
- Getting them to adapt to our community, help them establish, help [get] their kids into schools, helping the immigrants to get jobs.
- Employment, homogenizing them into the society, help them to become Americans.
- Jobs, acceptance by the community, understanding, and more open communication. I think they have a lot of cultural things that our community could benefit from.
- The community has to be patient because they cannot speak English well; jobs and social services.
- Assimilation of the new immigrants, equity of employment opportunity and access to quality of life.
- They enrich the cultural experience and bring new skills; children broaden other children's views just by being in school with them. Finding jobs and getting a functional level of English.
- They are very important because immigrants are the ones who work.
- Immigrants want to work. The more they work, the more taxes they pay. Taxes are good for the city.
- Employment and not just minimum wage employment but good jobs to buy a house. It would help parties to communicate and dissolve prejudices.
- Equal opportunity; if they go to apply for a job they might get offered \$5.00 and someone else might get offered \$10.00, and they are offered different types of jobs, too.

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\* *In response to the question "In your opinion, what are the major challenges or needs your community face in having new immigrants?"*

## Box 2. Discouraging opinions of community members about immigrant employment\*

- They drive us out of work.
- If they take the jobs, someone here will lose out.
- They have everything; they are moving in and they are taking over.
- Jobs for them, I don't think there are enough jobs in the area for the amount of immigrants that are coming in.
- I would probably have to say jobs, they come over here and take jobs from people that live here all their lives, and if they don't take the jobs, they come over here and live on welfare.
- Employment: immigrants steal the jobs from people who have already lived here or were born here.
- Too many new immigrants, jobs taken from us, not enough housing.
- I am concerned with the fact we don't have enough jobs to go around for people already here.
- That they want too much for nothing, they don't want to work for anything, they want everything given to them, strain on welfare assistance.
- Immigrants will work for lesser pay so we will lose our jobs.
- Taking jobs that should go to the existing people in our community, taking over our free space, living in areas that could be used for housing for us, also there is a major drug problem.
- Immigrants are coming in for farmwork, they get welfare and medical services right away, plus free day care for them while they are working in the fields. It costs the county and the state a lot of money to provide these services. I have to pay for day care.
- Jobs and housing for immigrants, we live in a small community and we don't need others coming in because we don't have jobs for our own people.
- There is a conflict with poor Black Americans who live here and immigrants, with immigrants who are willing to take low-income jobs.
- They have no jobs, so they go on welfare and it's a burden to the taxpayer.
- Immigrants are not able to speak English and they cannot find jobs.
- Most are on welfare, or they are taking [our] jobs and the government gives them more breaks than us; they can come over here and get stores and shit, and I was in the service, do they help me? They come here and got stores all over the place in a month.
- Taking away jobs and [they] don't usually have a green card, a lot of illegals want to be here, don't want to speak English. If they don't like it here, go back home. If they don't like our flag go back home. I am not biased, but when people come here and try to take jobs, there are less jobs for the people that were born and raised here.
- They take jobs; we do a lot for the immigrants while they don't do much for Americans in return.
- Well, they very often go on public assistance, take away jobs, take away housing.
- They are taking jobs. The companies are paying them less because the immigrants won't say anything, then when you want a job, you have to expect less even though you expect more.
- They take the jobs away from people coming out of school in my community; they are subsidized by the government so employers pay them less and they get free housing.
- Communication barriers, problems with health care, don't pay taxes; and they get Medicaid, also take jobs.
- It's not fair to give jobs to these people and take jobs away from the people here. People come in and have to go on welfare because there are no jobs available.
- The immigrants in my area are poorly educated and not able to find jobs.

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\* *In response to the question "In your opinion, what are the major challenges or needs your community face in having new immigrants?"*

# II. Employment of Immigrants

As indicated in Boxes 1 and 2, those who expressed opinions about immigrants often mentioned their work ethic and the need for the immigrants to become integrated into the workforce. A look at some of the characteristics of immigrants and other community members helps to put these opinions in perspective. As we have indicated in earlier reports, agricultural employment is an important magnet attracting immigrants to the five communities in our study. For this reason we compare former farmworkers who have settled in the community with other foreign- and U.S.-born community members. The former farmworkers stand out as being younger, less educated, and more recent residents of the community. Perhaps most striking is that more than half the former farmworkers have less than 10 years of schooling, an important limiting factor in terms of potential economic achievement. The contrasts between other U.S.- and foreign-born community members are less pronounced (Table 2).

Despite these differences, the employment profile of the three groups is fairly similar. For example, the majority of each group is employed either full- or part-time, and the highest proportion in each group is employed full-time (Figure 6). Former farmworkers are more likely to be in the labor force, i.e., employed or looking for work, and a much smaller proportion is retired compared with others in the community. These facts can be attributed to the relative youth of former farmworkers compared with others in the community. But they do not do as well as other community members in securing employment. Former farmworkers are slightly more likely to be employed part time, and they are over three times more likely than other community members (U.S.- or foreign-born) to be unemployed. The employment profile shown in Figure 6 indicates that immigrants are not less interested in work but may have a harder time finding it.

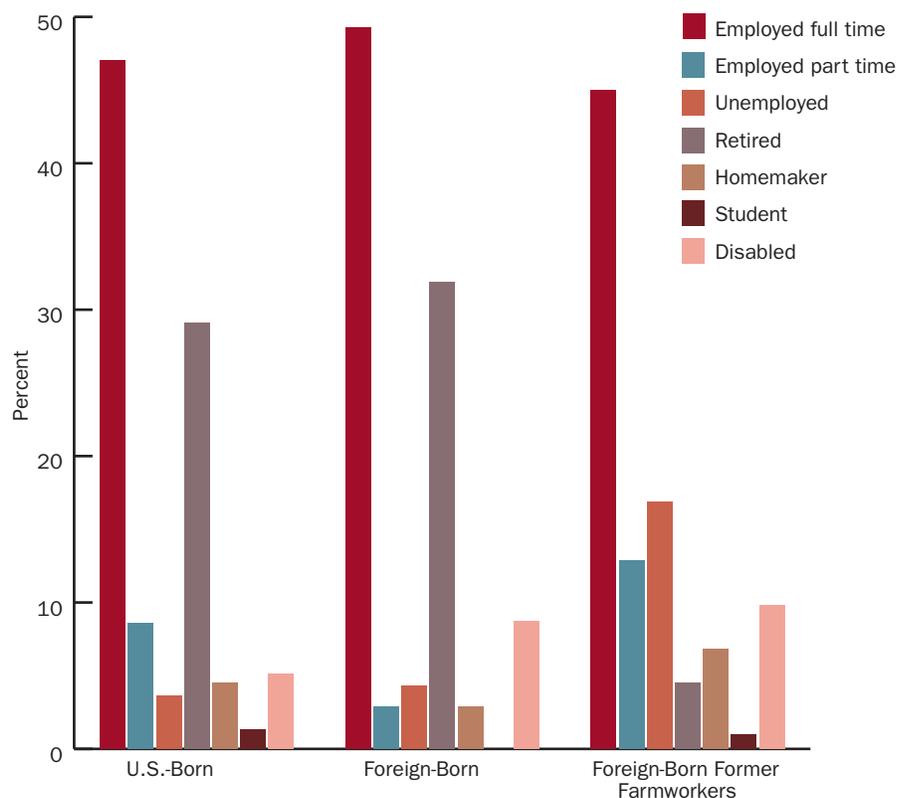
This observation is most true of former farmworkers who have recently arrived in the community and may encounter barriers to employment that requires certain educational credentials. As we

showed in our previous report *Immigrants and the Community: Former Farmworkers*, former farmworkers are concentrated in occupations that have lower educational requirements.

**Table 2. Selected characteristics of former farmworkers and other community members by ethnicity, five New York communities, 2003**

Characteristic	Foreign-Born	Other Community Residents	
	Former Farmworkers	U.S.-Born	Foreign-Born
Female (%)	41.4	56.0	51.4
Married (%)	67.4	54.6	65.7
Age (average years)	36.2	52.4	55.7
School attendance (average years)	8.4	13.3	13.2
Years attended school (%)			
Less than 6	31.3	0.7	5.8
6 to 9	27.7	1.8	4.3
10 to 12	24.7	5.6	7.2
More than 12	21.2	91.6	82.6
Years lived in town (%)			
Less than 5	36.4	9.7	21.4
5 to 9	39.1	8.3	12.9
10 or more	24.5	82.0	65.7
NUMBER	396	1,174	70

**Figure 6. Labor force status of U.S.- and foreign-born, five New York communities, 2003**



# III. Conclusions

As we have indicated in this series of reports, communities in New York and throughout the United States are becoming more ethnically diverse. An important source of this diversification is the influx of Hispanics, or Latinos, into regions where this group previously had not been found in noticeable numbers. In fact, Hispanics are the fastest-growing population segment in many rural communities in New York and other parts of the United States. In some cases, as in the five New York communities included in our study, if it were not for the growth of the Hispanic population, the communities would be losing population. In communities with a strong presence of agricultural production, farm employment is a strong magnet drawing immigrants to these rural and often unconventional destinations. Farmworkers in the five communities in our study and throughout the United States now are predominantly Mexican. The Mexican farmworkers increasingly are settling in New York with their families. Our research was motivated by a wish to understand the consequences of this change.

A central objective of this research project has been to generate information useful to communities as they deliberate about how best to integrate immigrants into the social and economic life of the community. The actions that communities take will in part determine whether immigrants become an asset or a burden to the community. But, as we have shown in this report, most community residents do not have a clear opinion about the likely impact of immigrants on their communities. Most people have relatively little regular interaction with immigrants and are not aware of their needs or capabilities. On the other hand, a relatively small proportion of community residents have strong opinions about the immigrants, and these are often at odds. The negative opinions are somewhat linked to community residents' positions in the labor

market, but in most cases even those who might be in competition with immigrants for jobs are ambivalent about whether immigrants are an asset or a liability for the community. The bottom line is that there is little clarity among community residents about immigrants and their potential role in community development.

The characteristics of the immigrants define what community actions are most appropriate to integrate them into the social and economic life of the community. Thus, an important element of our research has been to document some key characteristics of immigrants.

As indicated in our earlier reports, English language ability is a central element of successfully settling in the United States, and the immigrant farmworkers are aware of that. They are almost unanimous in pointing to learning English as a major challenge in working and living in the United States. In fact, those who have family in New York are much more likely to be able to get things they need to live here like a bank account or a car if they have English-language skills. Most of the Mexicans moving to New York come from poor rural areas where they typically receive no more than a primary school education. Thus, they have an educational deficit relative to people born and raised in the United States. Most important, they typically lack the educational credentials required to obtain better-quality jobs. Thus they come to live in New York communities with a particular set of attributes that structure the range of opportunities available to them.

These observations suggest that community efforts to promote language training and certain types of technical training could play an important part in furthering the social and economic integration of immigrants into the community, thereby creating a more qualified workforce. The encouragement of certain types of training also

could be part of an effort to recruit employers, addressing the most prominent concern of residents of upstate New York: jobs.

A key question driving our research has been whether immigrants will be an asset or a burden to a community. As already mentioned, most community residents are ambivalent about the immigrants' impact on the community. That is, they do not know whether the immigrants are an asset or a burden. This ambivalence reflects in part a lack of connection to the immigrants. Most immigrants and other community residents lack ongoing interactions with one another. Interactions that do take place not only improve other community residents' understanding of immigrants, they also help immigrants become integrated into the social and economic life of the community in some material ways such as the purchase of a car or home. However, as we indicated in our last report these interactions tend to be restricted to work, and the interactions typically take place between immigrants and others in the same economic circumstances.

Thus immigrants need more opportunities to develop social ties to other community residents, and civic organizations offer one avenue for such interactions. Social ties established in such venues offer some opportunities to gain access to needed goods and services. But overall, involvement in standard civic activities is low for both immigrants and other community members. Greater attention to the encouragement of civic engagement and new forms of it should be a priority goal of communities. Civic engagement is an important element of community development and should also be central to the social and economic integration of immigrants.

Communities that attract agricultural workers face particular challenges in integrating them into the community given their low education levels and lack of English language abil-

ity. Many of these farmworkers leave agricultural employment and settle in the community, typically less than 10 years after arriving. Will these new community residents be an asset or a burden to a community? This question will be answered by the types of actions communities take. Lack of active efforts to integrate the immigrants into the social and economic life of the community likely will result in the development of a group that is poor and marginal to the community's mainstream. Our research shows that many farmworkers who first came to the communities in the 1970s and 1980s remain marginal to the communities' mainstream. People who are not well integrated into community life typically have a low standard of living and do not contribute to the overall development of the community to the fullest extent possible.

Communities cannot overcome all the handicaps immigrants, especially farmworkers, might have, but they can take actions that help the immigrants become self-sufficient and more fully engaged in the life of the community. These actions include the promotion of English-language training, appropriate types of technical education, and the encouragement of various forms of inclusive civic engagement. The integration of immigrants into community life can be part of a larger community development strategy that attracts employers who need workers with particular skills. The diversity introduced by immigrants can also be a community asset that helps to draw other workers who value more varied community life. The diversification of New York communities offers a new resource in community development that deserves careful attention.



*"Most of the new immigrants are of Mexican origin; some have papers after the 1986 amnesty, but most don't. Immigrants are working not only in agriculture but in stores, hotels, and restaurants. Mexicans are working everywhere, and they are a pervasive part of the economy."*

# Appendix: Data Collection

**W**e conducted our study in five upstate New York communities. The three communities in northwestern New York are smaller and the area is more rural in character. The local economies rely heavily on apple and vegetable production, and there has been a significant loss of nonagricultural industry in recent decades. Two of the five communities are located in southeastern New York, about 50 miles northwest of New York City. The area specializes in apples and intensive vegetable production. The most distinctive feature of this region is the rapid urbanization of the countryside, coupled with the flight of businesses and established residents from the community centers.

The qualitative data we draw on come from 41 interviews with key informants and seven focus groups with long-term nonimmigrant residents in the communities. The focus group participants were identified and

recruited by collaborators from the Cornell Migrant Program, Cornell Cooperative Extension, the Catholic Migrant Ministry, Wayne County, the Independent Farmworkers Center (CITA), and the Farmworker Community Center (the Alamo). Our key informants also were identified by these sources and included political, business and religious leaders, police and school officials, farmers, and non-governmental social service providers. The quantitative data are based on interviews with randomly selected nonfarm community residents (N=1,250). Furthermore, some items in our survey of the nonfarm population of the communities were included in a statewide representative sample of New Yorkers (Cornell University Empire State Poll 2004, Immigration Omnibus Survey, N=820, Survey Research Institute, Cornell University).

The examination of the qualitative data provided the general guidelines

for the development of our survey instruments. We designed the questionnaire and pre-tested it. We reached nonfarm residents by telephone. Those interviewed could not have worked on a farm, owned a farm, or been farmworkers since 1980. Nonfarm community residents were identified by random digit dialing based on a complete set of telephone exchanges for each study community. Persons answering the telephone were asked to identify the household member 18 years or older who last had a birthday, and an interview was arranged with that person. This procedure randomized the selection of interviewees within households.

An additional data source for this study was the U.S. Census of the Population (1980–1990–2000).



# Notes

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