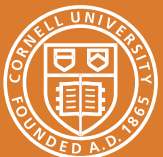


Immigrants and the Community

November 2004



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Preface

This report is the first in a series based on the research project “Integrating the Needs of Immigrant Workers and Rural Communities.” The four-year project attempts to inform New York communities about 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 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 communities aware of changes in their populations and highlight issues they may choose to address.

This project benefited from the work of many individuals and organizations. The impetus came from Kay Embrey of the Cornell Migrant Program. Her dedicated efforts to involve researchers in work dealing with farmworkers led to the formation of the research team that included Betty Garcia-Mathewson and Eduardo Gonzalez and the submission of the grant application to USDA. Embrey and Herb Engman also provided linkages to other collaborators, the most important of which was Rural Opportuni-

ties, Incorporated (ROI), which played a major role in conducting interviews for the project. Michael Attia did an exemplary job in managing the interviewing and quality assurance. Tammy Freeburg was critical in managing the collaborative arrangements between ROI and Cornell University. Others at ROI have played a variety of supportive roles and we are grateful for their help: Velma Smith, Jeffrey Lewis, and Stuart Mitchell. We also benefited from assistance provided by the Catholic Migrant Ministry, Wayne County, especially Sister Lucy Romero and Father Jesus Flores, the Independent Farmworkers Center (CITA), and the Farmworkers Community Center (the Alamo). Al Ronca of Schulman, Ronca & Bucuvalas, Inc., also provided valuable input on the community survey. 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 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
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Highlights

- From 1980 to 2000, New York State's white population declined as a proportion of the total population, the African American population increased slightly, and the Hispanic population grew steadily, largely owing to immigration.
- Hispanic immigrants are settling in rural communities nationwide. In the five upstate New York communities included in this study, Hispanics, who are mostly of Mexican origin, are the fastest-growing population segment. The pattern of population change in the five communities is the same as that for New York State as a whole.
- Today's agricultural workforce in New York and nationwide is predominantly of Mexican origin.
- In the five communities studied, the growing presence of Mexican immigrants is the result of increasing numbers of farmworkers and their families settling in the communities where they work.
- Foreign-born persons are more likely to settle in the United States if their spouse and children are with them, which was the case for 40 percent of farmworkers interviewed in this study.
- Foreign-born farmworkers reported that the major challenges to working in the United States are learning the language and gaining access to health services, education, and training. Other important challenges are finding places to socialize and learning the U.S. culture.
- Speaking English is an important prerequisite for obtaining goods and services and finding year-round employment. Approximately 40 percent of farmworkers reported they could understand and speak some English. Those who have been in the United States longer and are not currently working in agricultural jobs are more proficient in English.
- Immigrants who come to the United States to work in agriculture are from rural areas in their country of origin where they typically have few educational opportunities. More than half of the farmworkers surveyed reported having completed six or fewer years of education.
- Foreign-born farmworkers rely on friends and family to help with necessities such as opening a bank account, getting a driver's license, and obtaining other resources they need to become integrated into the social and economic life of the community. But the friends and family themselves often have limited access to resources.
- The majority of foreign-born farmworkers feel that the communities in which they live are welcoming. However, a significant minority has expressed mixed feelings about the communities' receptiveness of immigrants.
- Approximately half of nonimmigrant residents consider that the number of outsiders in their communities is "just about right," and more than half consider immigrants "neither an asset nor a burden." In general, nonimmigrant residents in the five communities are ambivalent about the presence of immigrants in their community. This sentiment is similar to that expressed by New Yorkers statewide.
- Eighty percent of nonimmigrant residents consider their communities to be open and supportive of new immigrants, compared with about 60 percent of foreign-born current and former farmworkers.
- Nonimmigrants list jobs, housing, and language skills as the main challenges for their communities in dealing with new immigrants.

Introduction

The 2000 U.S. Census of Population reported that population increases in many rural areas represent the settlement of foreign-born immigrants. Many rural communities are diversifying ethnically, and without the influx of these minorities their populations would be declining. One source of immigrants increasingly likely to settle in rural areas is agricultural workers. U.S. Labor Department data indicate that almost 80 percent of U.S. farmworkers are Mexican born. These workers are found in some of the most remote rural communities and are sometimes choosing to settle there. Often these workers are easily integrated into the communities, but at other times their presence creates tensions with long-time residents.

To help us understand the factors that both promote and limit the integration of immigrants into rural communities, we chose five New York agricultural communities in different economic and social contexts that have relied heavily on hired farm labor. Each

community has a minority population of some significance and a history of immigrant farmworkers settling there. The communities have African American and/or Puerto Rican in addition to Mexican populations.

Our qualitative data are drawn from interviews with key informants and focus groups with foreign-born farmworkers and former farmworkers. We also conducted focus groups with white non-immigrant residents in the communities. Key informants included political, business, and religious leaders; police and school officials; farmers; and non-governmental social service providers. The quantitative data include survey responses from three target groups: current foreign-born farmworkers, former foreign-born farmworkers, and nonfarm community residents. Furthermore, to compare our findings with similar ones from a statewide perspective, we drew on the Cornell University Empire State Poll 2004, Immigration Omnibus Survey (see Appendix).

Over the past 50 years the ethnicity of the farmworker population in New York has changed substantially. Until the early 1990s it was dominated by African Americans from the southern United States. Over the decades, a certain percentage of African Americans, Puerto Ricans, Jamaicans, and Haitians have settled in the communities where they worked, but today, the overwhelming majority of farmworkers settling in New York are of Mexican origin.

Historically, a large proportion of the agricultural workforce in New York has been migratory. African Americans moved back and forth from the South, Mexican Americans traveled back to Texas, and Jamaicans, Puerto Ricans, and others returned to their Caribbean homes after the harvest. Workers of Mexican origin, usually single men, typically came to the United States seasonally to earn money and send it home to their families. Once they accumulated the money they needed, they often returned permanently to Mexico. Historically, a portion of the migrant



African American former farmworkers:

"I'm up here from the state of Alabama and I came way back in the fifties, 1953. We had children and we weren't too happy about dragging them up and down the road so we decided to stay here."



Mexican immigrants settling in communities:

"Well, I think there is a pattern as on how we started to come here. Generally one comes first, the man or the woman, and then the rest of the family follows. There is a separation in most cases at the beginning. I think we are all looking for ways to live a little bit better than what we live in Mexico or other Central American countries."

workers from each ethnic group settled in New York communities. Typically, they moved there with their immediate families, but often they were joined by extended families and friends.

The ethnic composition of New York's farmworker population shifted from predominantly African American in 1989 to overwhelmingly Hispanic (i.e., Mexican) in 2000. These changes are reflected in the changing ethnicity of individuals screened for eligibility to participate in Rural Opportunities, Incorporated (ROI) programs under the auspices of the National Farmworker Job Program in New York. The results of ROI client screening provide a useful indicator of changes in New York's farmworker population. In 1990 about 50 percent of ROI's client base was African American, but by 2000 African Americans made up less than 30 percent of the workforce. Hispanics (mostly Mexicans) made up almost 70 percent of the farm workforce in 2000, and this proportion has continued to grow. Whites accounted for slightly less than 10 percent of the farm workforce throughout the 1990s (Figure 1).

ROI data also show that between 1989 and 2000 farmworkers become less likely to migrate out of state between agricultural seasons and more likely to still be seasonally employed but remain in the state between seasons. This is consistent with the observation that more farmworkers are settling in New York communities (Figure 2).

The communities in this study were selected because farmerworkers have long had a significant presence there. They range from relatively small and rural localities to peri-urban ones bordering the greater New York City metropolitan area. As in many communities nationwide, Hispanics are the fastest-growing population segment in all these communities.

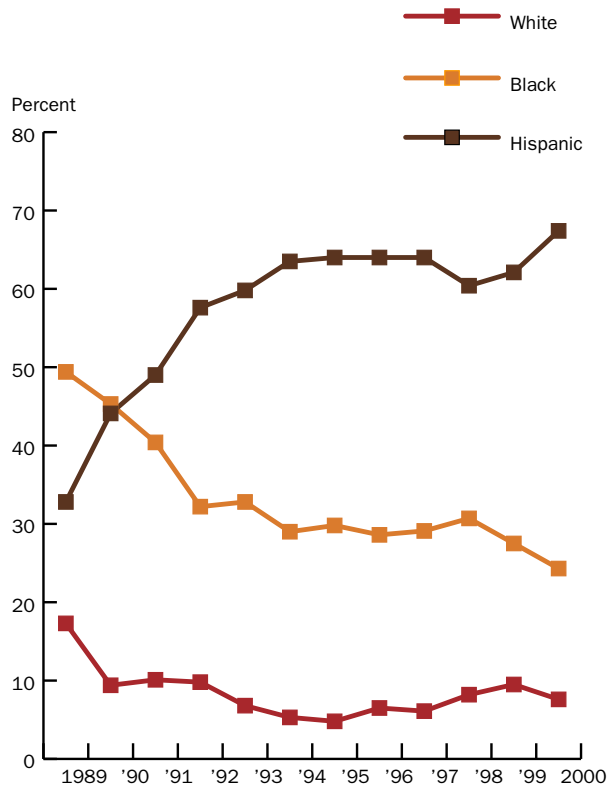
The U.S. Census of Population for 1980, 1990, and 2000 shows that proportionately the noninstitutionalized minority population in these communities is growing, while the white population is declining slightly. Overall, Hispanics and African Americans account for the population growth that occurred from 1980 to 2000.

The Hispanic population growth rate over the past two decades (69.9 percent from 1980 to 2000) was higher than that of African Americans (29.6 percent). The population of whites declined slightly (-2.3 percent). While these shifts in the ethnic composition of the population cannot be attributed exclusively to changes in the farmworker population, they are consistent with the changing composition of the New York farm workforce described above (Figure 3).

This changing composition is similar to that in New York State as a whole. Across the state, the white population has declined noticeably and the African American population has increased slightly. The Hispanic population has increased steadily since 1980 and by 2000 nearly equaled the number of African Americans (Figure 4).

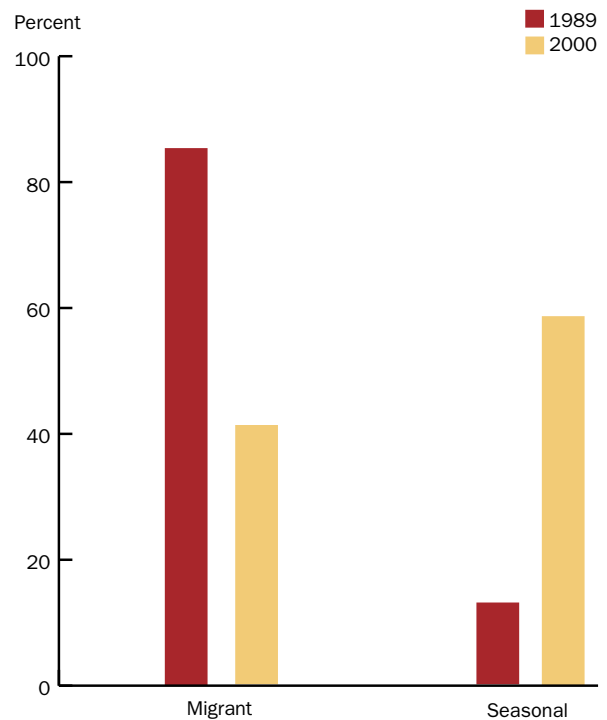
New York census data show that since 1960 there has been an obvious increase in the foreign-born population both in very urban places (i.e., New York City and its suburbs) and the most rural areas. Statewide census numbers are consistent with the population changes observed in the communities studied (Figure 5).

Figure 1. Farmworkers by race/ethnic group, New York, 1989–2000



(Source: Rural Opportunities, Inc.)

Figure 2. Migrant and seasonal farmworkers in New York, 1989–2000



(Source: Rural Opportunities, Inc.)

Figure 3. The changing population of five New York communities

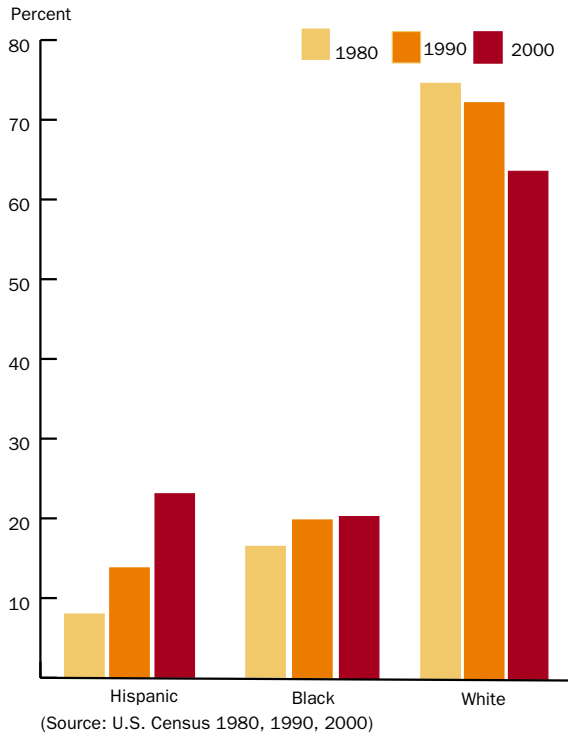


Figure 4. White, black, and Hispanic population change in New York, 1980–2000

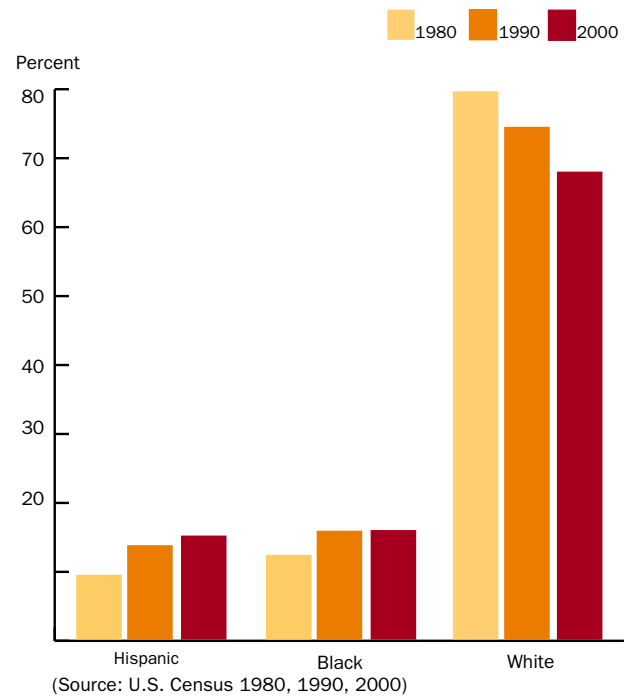
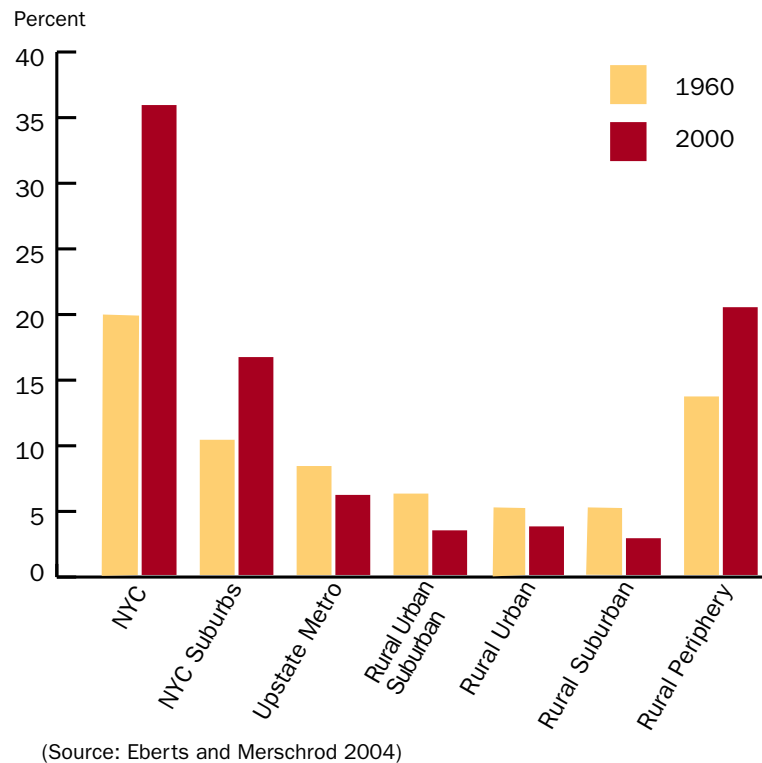


Figure 5. Foreign-born population in New York by type of county, 1960 and 2000



I. Immigrant Settlement and Intent to Settle in New York

The Hispanic population has grown significantly throughout the United States in the past two decades. Mexican immigrants, in particular, are found in both large and small communities in every region of the country. While immigrants have always had a significant presence in urban centers like New York City, Chicago, and Los Angeles, more recently they have settled in rural America in increasing numbers. In rural New York, a growing number of farmworkers and their families are settling in the communities where they work. As with many previous immigrant groups, the desire for a better life and the hope for better opportunities for their children is a powerful incentive for Mexican immigrants to become permanent residents of the United States.

People who wish to migrate to the United States and find employment most often draw on connections to family and close acquaintances. Foreign-born individuals who have left the farm workforce are most likely to have some family in New York (66 percent) and in the United States (almost 90 percent). Those who currently work in agriculture are less likely to have family present, but the proportion who do is still high (nearly 60 percent in New York and 70 percent in the United States) (Figure 6).

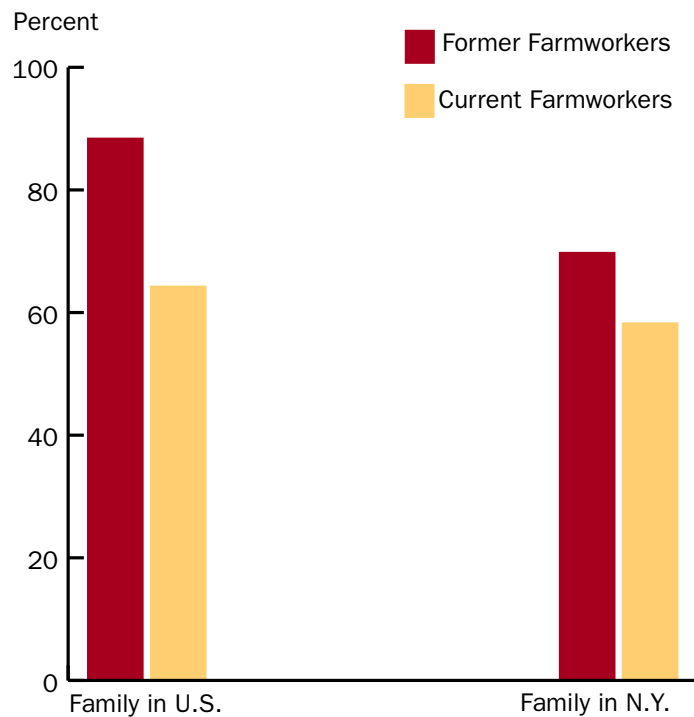
Studies have shown that immigrant farmworkers who have brought their families with them are more likely to decide to settle permanently in the United States. Sixty-seven percent of foreign-born former farmworkers have a spouse and children in the United States compared with about 40 percent of current farmworkers. Sixty percent of foreign-born current farmworkers are single males who are oriented to their homes in Mexico (95 percent of current farmworkers are Mexican) and are typically migrant workers. Although farmworkers with family in New York are a minority, they are a sizeable one that is likely to be settling there.

Immigrants who have brought their families to New York and wish to settle



"I want to stay here because of my son; he has more opportunities to study here, to learn another language, to make a career much better than in Mexico."

Figure 6. Former and current foreign-born farmworkers with family present in the United States and New York



in the state face many obstacles in establishing themselves in a community. Their first priority is to make ends meet, which usually means finding a job to replace or supplement seasonal farm employment.

Farmworkers we interviewed reported that finding year-round employment was an important condition for settling in New York. Once workers have economic security, applying for citizenship and buying homes reflects the desire to settle in New York. Overall six percent of workers interviewed found year-round employment in nonagriculture jobs, and 10 percent applied for citizenship or immigration. Those with a spouse present were more likely to have applied for immigration papers, found a job outside agriculture, and purchased a house (Figure 7).

Home ownership is an important part of American life. It signifies individual success and stability and in some ways represents an investment in and commitment to the community of residence. It is also considered a basis for the accumulation of wealth in the United States. Building equity through home ownership is important to ensure economic well-being at an older age and a means to pass wealth to the next generation. In the five communities studied, 74 percent of the U.S.-born population with no farmwork experience owned homes. This proportion contrasts starkly with former and current farmworkers. Of the U.S.-born former farmworkers, 12 percent reported owning their own homes. These findings show that most former farmworkers have little accumulated wealth across the generations as well as poor earning potential owing to relatively low levels of education, few job skills, and seasonal employment that limits total annual income.

A small proportion of foreign-born former farmworkers own a house (13 percent), and an even smaller proportion of foreign-born current farmworkers are homeowners (less than 3 percent). Lack of language proficiency, lower levels of education and job skills, and low annual income levels characteristic of foreign-born farmworkers may limit their ability to own a home (Figure 8).

Figure 7. Foreign-born farmworkers with and without spouse in the United States

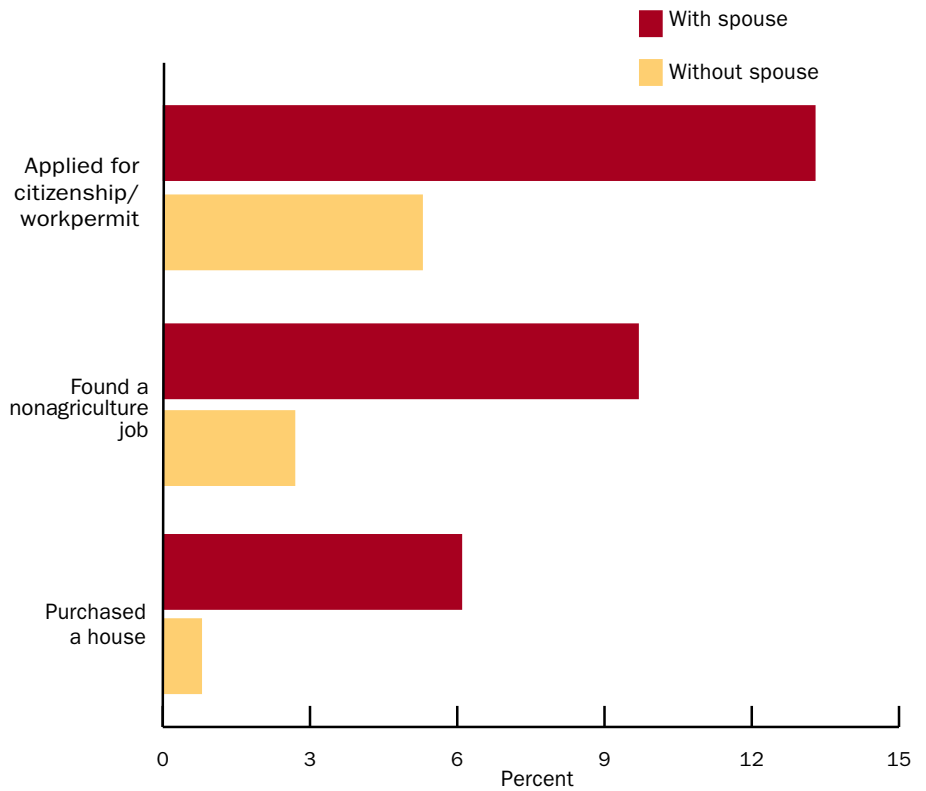
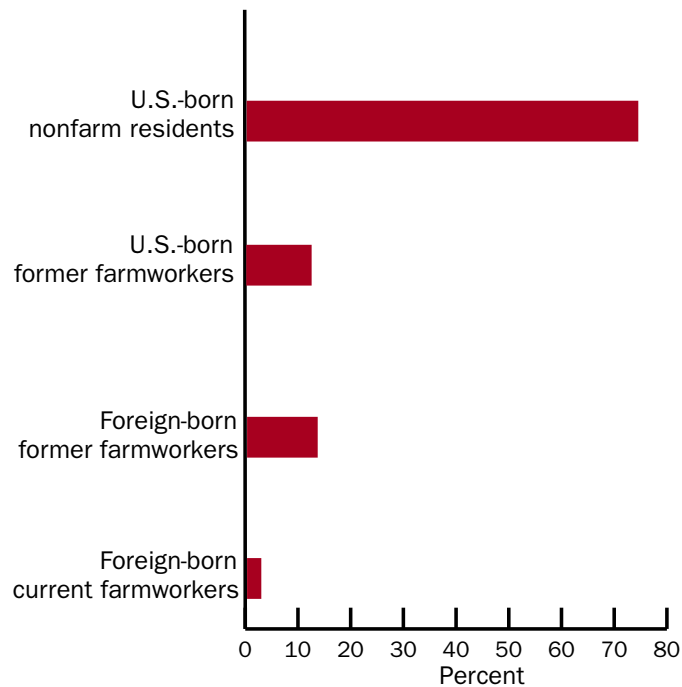


Figure 8. Home ownership



II. Characteristics of Immigrants

Ability to speak English enables immigrants to obtain goods and services independently and to explore opportunities to establish themselves in the economic and social life of their community of residence. English language ability also appears to be an important prerequisite for obtaining year-round employment outside of agriculture. More than 75 percent of immigrants formerly employed as farmworkers report understanding and speaking English, but fewer than 50 percent of foreign-born farmworkers report understanding English, and only about 33 percent speak the language. About 49 percent of foreign-born former farmworkers could read English and 45 percent could write in English. Approximately 10 percent of current farmworkers could read or write in English (Figure 9).

Immigrants who have been employed in agriculture tend to have relatively little formal education. Most current farmworkers come from rural villages in Mexico where school attendance is normally six or fewer years. In contrast, about 70 percent of foreign-born former farmworkers had more than six years of education, indicating that level of schooling, together with English language ability, may enable immigrants to tap employment opportunities outside agriculture. Number of years of formal schooling completed, a key screen used by employers in evaluating job applicants, may prevent foreign-born farmworkers settling in the United States from obtaining nonfarm employment (Figure 10).

We asked foreign-born farmworkers: “In your opinion, what are the major challenges and needs you have working in the United States?” The respondents were allowed to state whatever came to mind. The pattern of responses indicated a strong interest in obtaining employment, housing, and health services and developing the skills and knowledge to access them. Ninety percent of farmworkers we interviewed



Language: *“They gave some English classes, but the schedule did not work for us because we finish work late.”*

Adult education: *“Some of us, we don’t even know how to read in Spanish, I am one of those....It is difficult to go to learn English.”*

Single men and families: *“Most of us are working here in agriculture and have our families in Mexico.”*

“Others bring their families, but it is hard when you don’t find jobs.”

wanted to learn English. More than 50 percent desired education and/or job training, and more than 30 percent expressed an interest in learning about U.S. culture. These findings indicate that the most common concerns are associated with employment, housing and health care, and the skills needed to obtain them. While a large proportion of respondents did not mention access to transportation or lack of immigration documents, lack of transportation could mean the loss of one’s job, and problems with immigration documents present the risk of deportation, both serious concerns to those affected (Figure 11).

Figure 9. English language ability of foreign-born current and former farmworkers

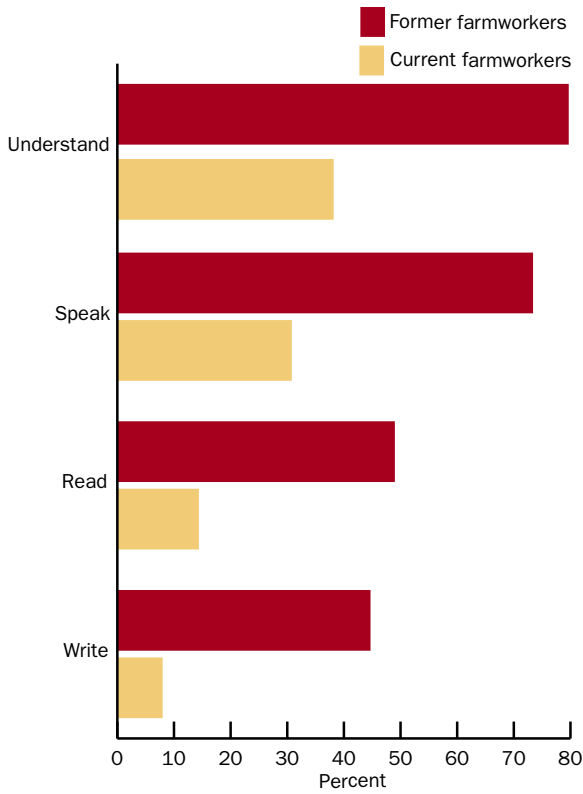


Figure 10. Years of schooling of foreign-born current and former farmworkers

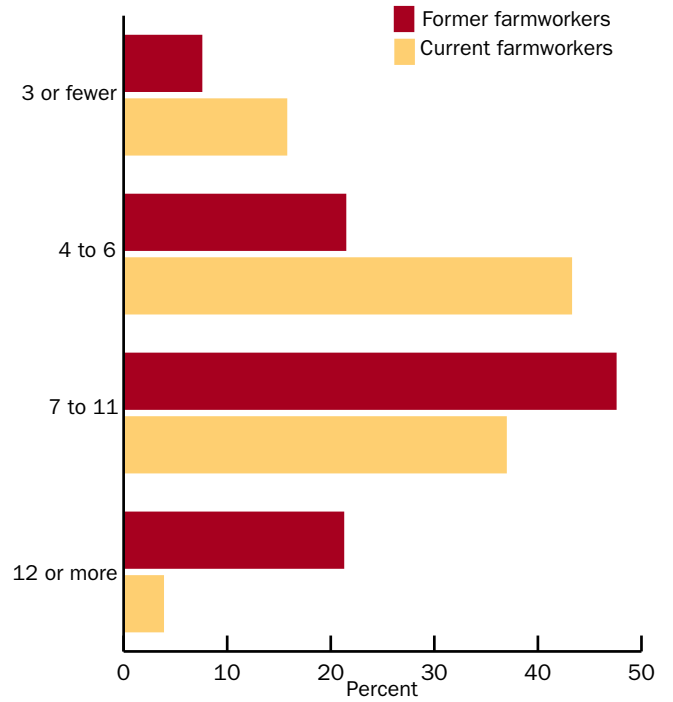
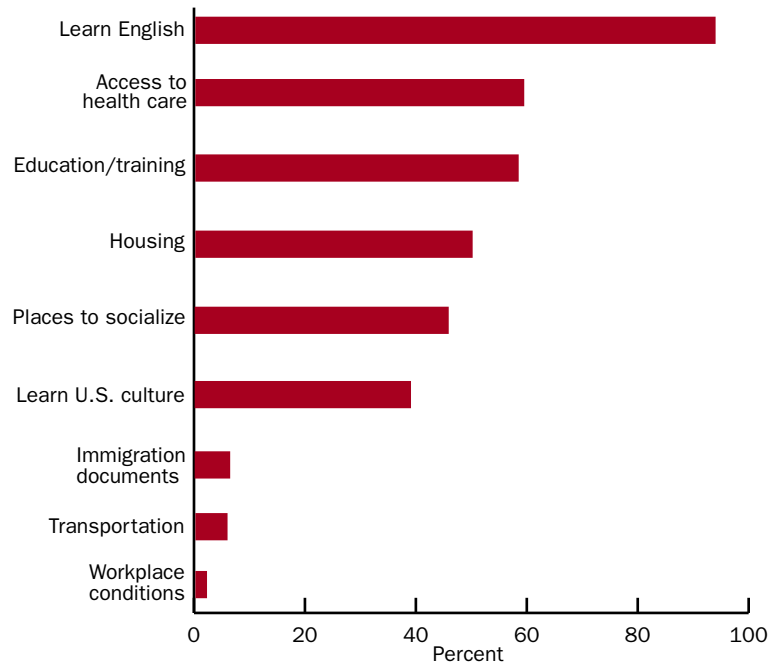


Figure 11. Major needs identified by foreign-born farmworkers



III. Challenges for Immigrants

Most Americans take for granted having a driver's license, car, and bank account. But immigrants must rely on others such as crew leaders, friends, or agencies for transportation, check cashing, and shopping. For example, 72 percent of workers depended on others to go shopping, 58 percent needed help cashing a check, and about 40 percent needed help to go to a clinic. Few current farmworkers (6 percent) had opened a bank account by themselves or with the help of others (Figure 12).

Immigrants who have left farm employment become more self-reliant and are less likely to depend on others to meet their everyday needs. Approximately 68 percent had opened a bank account, cashed a check, or gone grocery shopping by themselves (Figure 12).

Foreign-born farmworkers who wish to settle in New York rely heavily on others to gain access to everyday needs. Friends and family are the most common source of assistance in opening a bank account, going to a doctor's office or clinic, cashing a check, or going shopping.

Employers offered some assistance: about 20 percent of foreign-born farmworkers reported that their employers helped them go shopping; 28 percent received help from employers in cashing a check; and less than 10 percent had their employers take them to a clinic. Some clinics offer transportation, and about 10 percent of farmworkers reported that they had received such assistance. However, almost no farmworkers reported that townspeople helped them meet their needs (Figure 13).



"To open a bank account one has to have a Social Security number; we cannot have credit; people know we carry the money...we suffer robberies."



"Without transportation you cannot do anything. I have to pay \$10 to \$20 for the taxi or the ridetero."

Figure 12. Form of access to selected needs, foreign-born current and former farmworkers

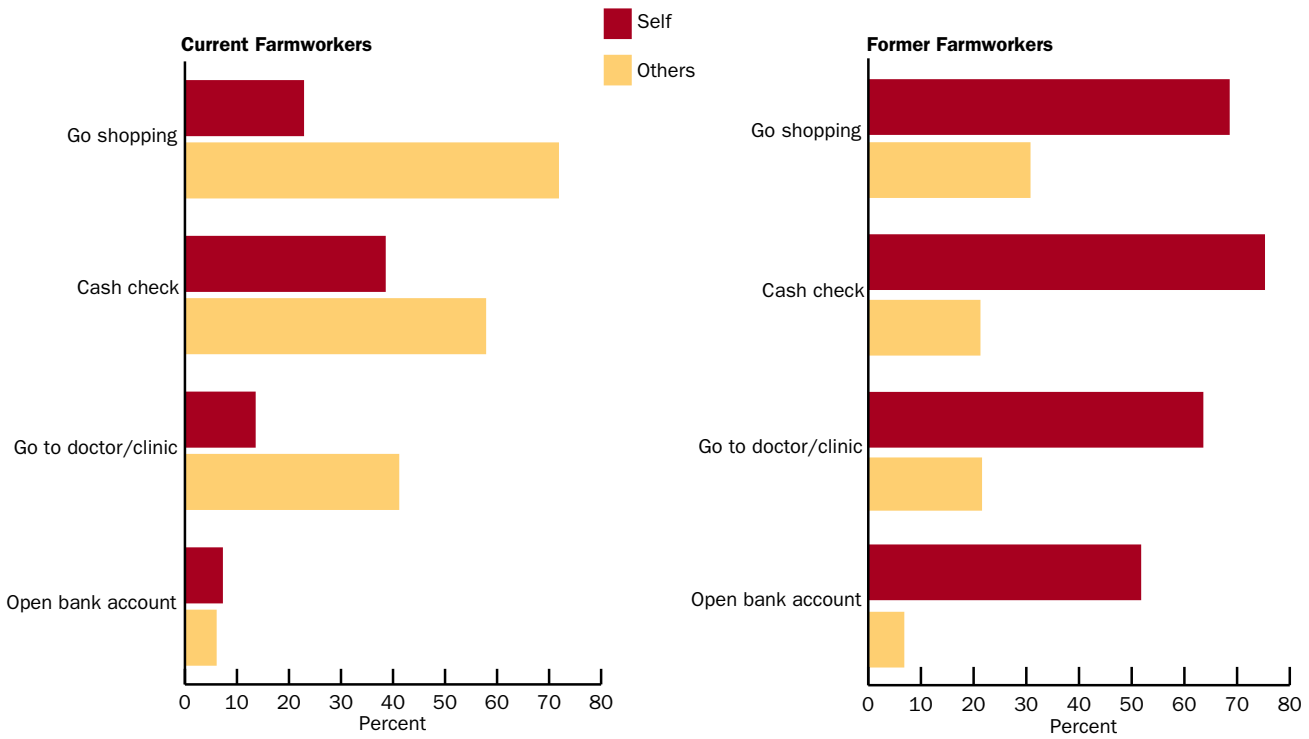
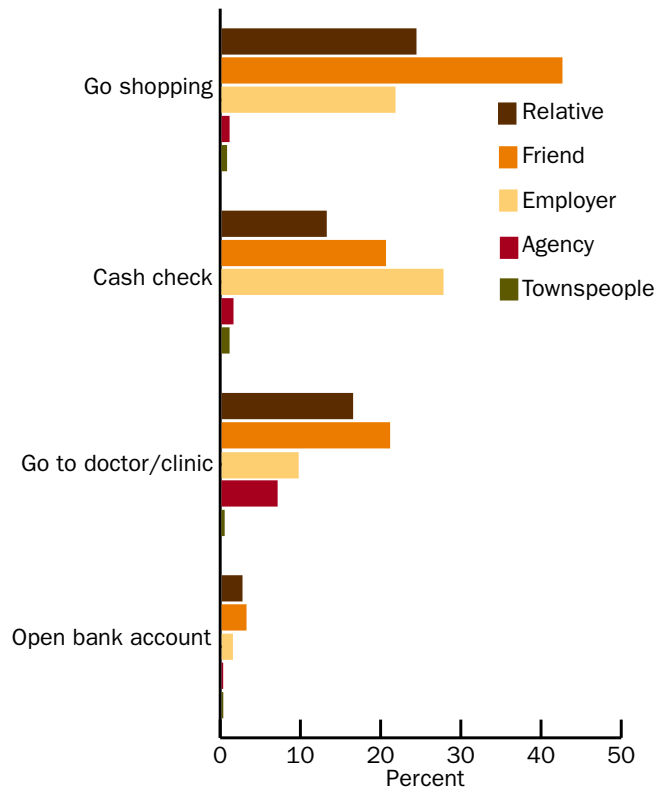


Figure 13. Source of help to gain access to selected needs by foreign-born farmworkers



IV. Immigrants' Experiences in the Community

A. Immigrants' Perceptions of the Community

The decision by immigrants to settle and become productive community members is in part influenced by their experiences in the host community. Do the newcomers perceive the community to be welcoming? Do they believe that the community offers them opportunities to become integrated into the social and economic life?

We asked farmworkers three questions. During the past 12 months:

- When you come to work in the area would you say that you feel welcomed and appreciated by the local residents?
- When you needed to cash a check have people in town been helpful and courteous to you?
- Have people in the stores treated you with respect?

The majority of the immigrant farmworkers we interviewed responded “sometimes” to these questions, indicating that they had a mixed reception. A sizeable minority, almost 40 percent, responded “often” to each question. Few immigrant farmworkers responded “never” (Figure 14).

Seventy-one percent of all foreign-born individuals interviewed reported that they had been exposed to insensitive or insulting remarks about language ability. Fewer (36 percent) had been exposed to insensitive or insulting remarks about their immigrant status or racial/ethnic background (Figure 15).

B. Nonimmigrant Residents' Perceptions of Immigrants

How do nonimmigrant community members view immigrants who work and live among them? The nonimmigrants' reactions reflect their expectations about the size and quality of the community, their assessment of their community's receptiveness, and their

opinions of the immigrants. Each of these considerations influences their overall opinion of the potential contributions of immigrants to community vitality.

The reactions of community members to immigrants need to be placed in the context of their attitudes about population growth more generally. We asked community members, “Thinking not just about your town but rather about the United States as a whole, do you think that the number of foreign immigrants coming into the United States should be increased, decreased, or remain about the same?” Forty-seven percent of nonimmigrants responded that the U.S. population would be ideal if it stayed about the same. Slightly more than one-third (36 percent) felt that the nation's population should be decreased a lot to achieve the ideal. Altogether almost 50 percent felt the population should decrease. Only about 4 percent of non-immigrant community members felt the U.S. population should increase to reach the ideal size (Figure 16).

A representative statewide survey of New Yorkers, the Empire State Poll conducted by Cornell University, elicited similar responses. The most common response was that the population of the United States would be ideal if it stayed about the same, and a sizeable proportion felt that the nation's population size should decrease. There were no differences in the responses of those living in New York City or upstate. Overall, New Yorkers do not favor population growth (Figure 16).

We asked nonimmigrant community members about their own community in relation to newcomers: “Would it be better for your community if it had more outsiders moving into it, fewer outsiders moving into it, or are there just about the right amount of outsiders living in the town?” Similar to attitudes about national population change, 47 percent of nonimmigrants responded that their community was



“just about right.” A slightly larger proportion felt the community would be better off with fewer outsiders (30 percent) than more outsiders (23 percent) (Figure 17).

Given New Yorkers' sentiments about population change, do they consider immigrants to be an asset or a burden? Communities face this question as they begin to deal with growing numbers of immigrants and ethnic diversification. Whether community members perceive immigrants as an asset or a burden may affect their receptiveness to newcomers. Some key informants acknowledged the changing economic realities of New York communities. One informant told us: “Many people would like a traditional downtown like in the fifties. . .but this is not going to happen.” Others noted the economic potential associated with the growing immigrant presence: “Hispanic businesses, especially, are a potential for the revitalization of the downtown.”

Nonimmigrants tend to be ambivalent about the presence of immigrants in their community. When asked, “Do

Figure 14. Foreign-born farmworkers' perceptions of community receptiveness

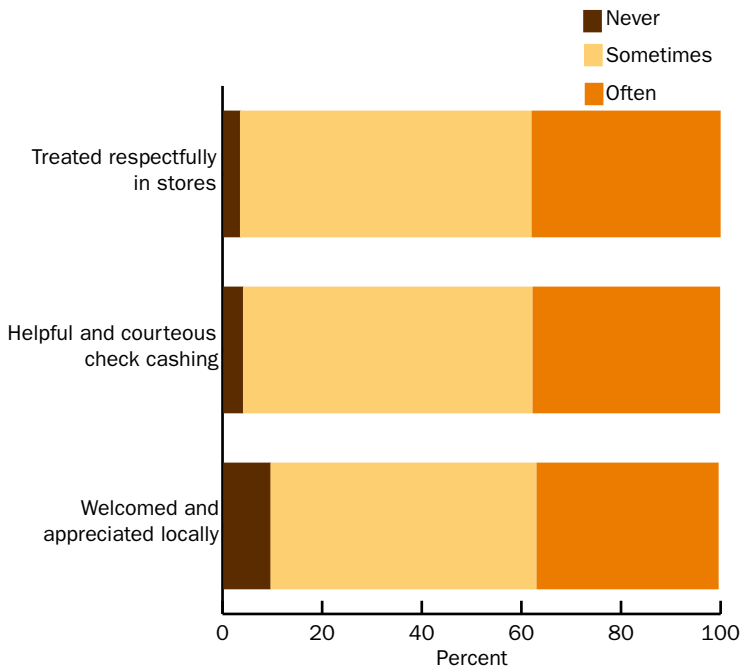


Figure 15. Exposure to insensitive or insulting remarks, foreign-born current and former farmworkers

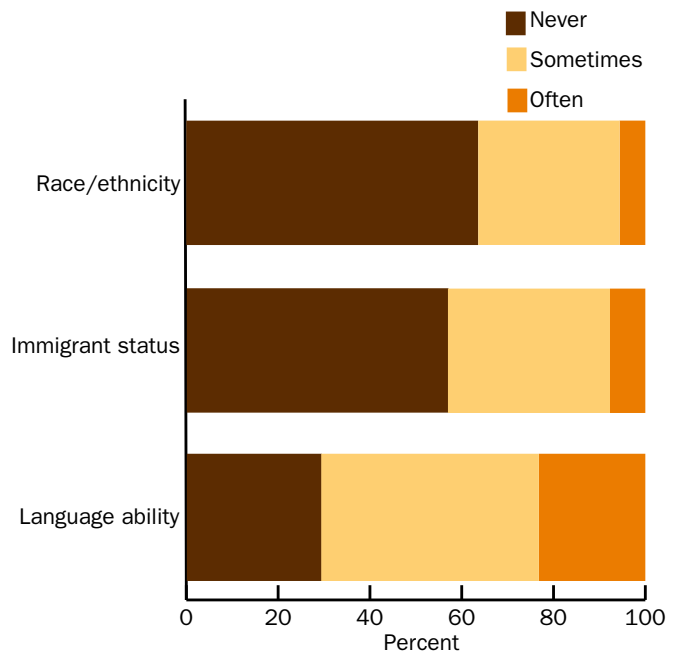


Figure 16. Nonimmigrants' attitudes about immigrants coming into the United States

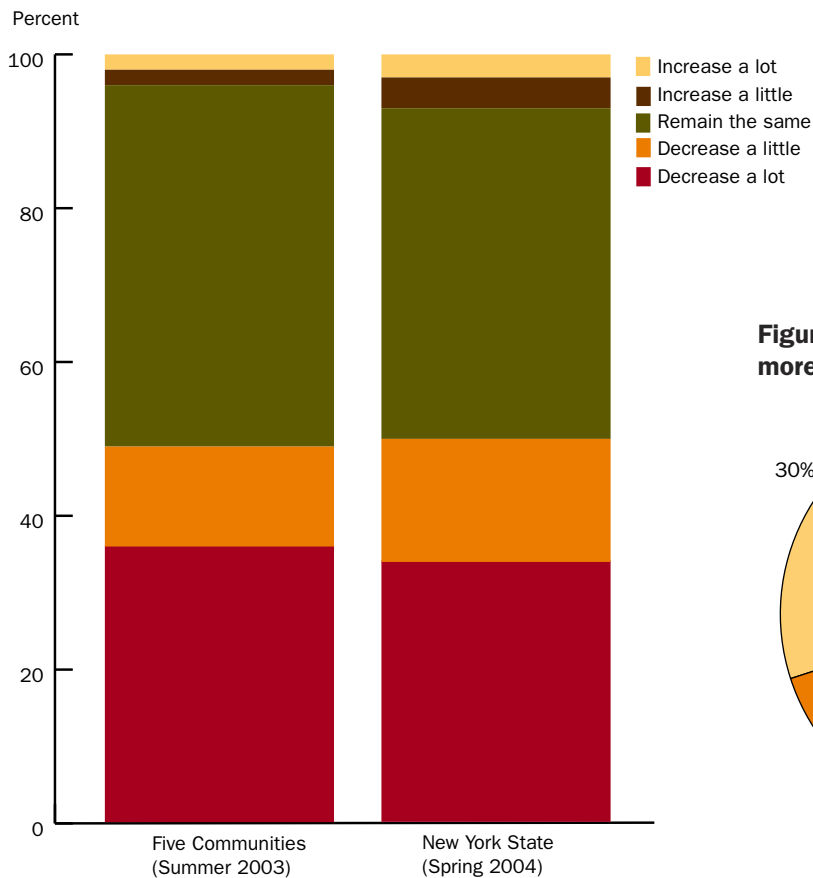
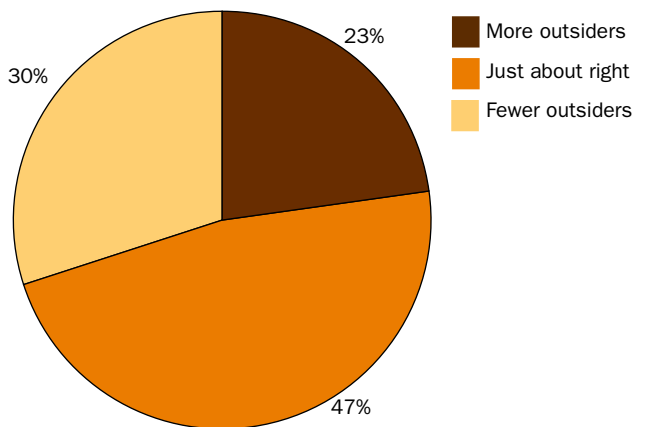


Figure 17. Nonimmigrants: Community better with more or fewer outsiders?





"The language barriers are a major problem."

"Some newcomers can read neither English nor Spanish."

"This new population that comes in is very different... They have a reputation of being hard-working, family folks."

you consider the new immigrants to be an asset, a burden, or neither an asset nor a burden to your community?" the majority responded that immigrants were neither an asset nor a burden, but more thought they were an asset (31 percent) than a burden (12 percent). Results from the Empire State Poll are almost identical to those for the communities in our study. Only a small proportion of nonimmigrants consider immigrants to be a burden, but the majority is ambivalent (Figure 18).

We asked community members whether they agreed with the following statements:

- As a result of the immigrants, new businesses and jobs have come to my community.
- As a result of the immigrants, some social problems, such as robberies, fights, and drunken driving have increased in my community in the past five years.
- I feel comfortable with the presence of new immigrant residents in my community.
- The community I live in is open and supportive of new immigrants.

Almost 80 percent of nonimmigrants

agreed (strongly or somewhat) that their community is open and supportive. About 70 percent agreed (strongly or somewhat) that they personally felt comfortable with immigrants. The majority, almost 60 percent, disagreed (strongly or somewhat) that immigrants bring social problems to the community. Community members are more divided about the economic impacts of immigrants. The majority of nonimmigrants disagreed (strongly or somewhat) that immigrants bring new businesses and jobs. But a fairly large proportion (about 40 percent) agreed with this statement (Figure 19). This pattern of responses shows that nonimmigrants are divided as to the economic impact of immigrants, consistent with the general ambivalence expressed when asked whether immigrants are an asset or a burden.

We asked foreign-born farmworkers and former farmworkers and nonimmigrants if they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: "The community I live in is open and supportive of new immigrants." Nonimmigrants have a more positive image of their communities' receptiveness to immigrants than do the foreign-born. Almost 80 percent

of nonimmigrants agreed (strongly or somewhat) that their community was open and supportive of new immigrants, compared with 65 percent of the foreign-born. While the assessments of both the foreign-born and nonimmigrants are predominantly positive, differences in their perceptions of the communities are noticeable. The less positive assessment by immigrants suggests that their experiences may be somewhat mixed (Figure 20).

The experiences of immigrants and nonimmigrants differ in distinctive ways that may be rooted in life experiences, culture, education, and language ability. Racial and ethnic differences are a distinctive feature of U.S. culture, which is evidenced by nonimmigrants' exposure to insensitive or insulting remarks about race or ethnicity. Sixty six percent reported exposure (sometimes or often) to such remarks. In contrast, about 64 percent of the foreign-born reported that they had never been exposed to such remarks. This lower proportion of reported exposure may be related to lack of English language proficiency, isolation from nonimmigrants, and lower sensitivity to such comments. On the other hand, immigrants are highly sensitive to insulting or insensitive remarks about language ability. About 75 percent of the immigrants reported exposure (sometimes or often) to such remarks, compared with 53 percent of nonimmigrants (Figure 21).

We asked nonimmigrant residents: "In your opinion, what are the major challenges or needs your community faces in having new immigrants?" All answers were recorded and are listed in Figure 22 from the highest proportion to the lowest. We asked the same question in the Empire State Poll to have a statewide comparison with the five communities.

Thirty percent of both community respondents and Empire State Poll respondents reported providing employment as their community's main challenge. Housing and language are the second biggest challenges (approximately 15 percent) for both community and poll respondents.

Most nonimmigrants are relatively unaware of immigrants in their communities and have little contact with them. Foreign-born farmworkers seldom receive help from nonimmigrant community members. About 10 percent of nonimmigrants reported helping immigrants go shopping, and less than 5 percent reported helping immigrants cash a check, go to a doctor's office or clinic, or open a bank account. Most immigrants rely on family and friends for such assistance, but the latter themselves often have limited knowledge of or access to needed resources (Figure 23).

These observations raise important questions. Would a community be better off if immigrants were more well integrated into its social and economic life? If so, how can the community facilitate such integration?



An immigrant business next to an empty storefront

Figure 18. Nonimmigrant residents and statewide poll: "Immigrants, an asset or a burden?"

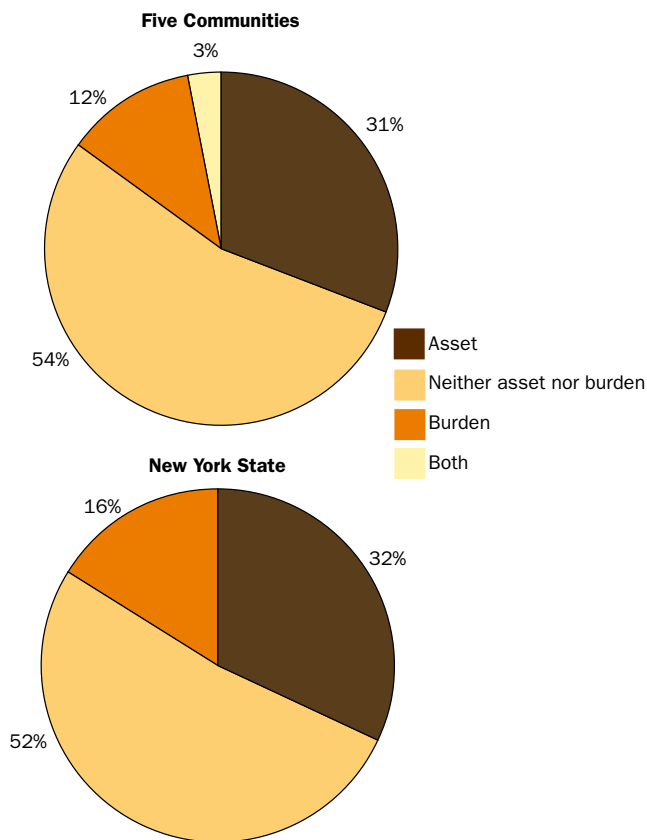


Figure 19. Nonimmigrants residents' perceptions of the communities' relations with immigrants

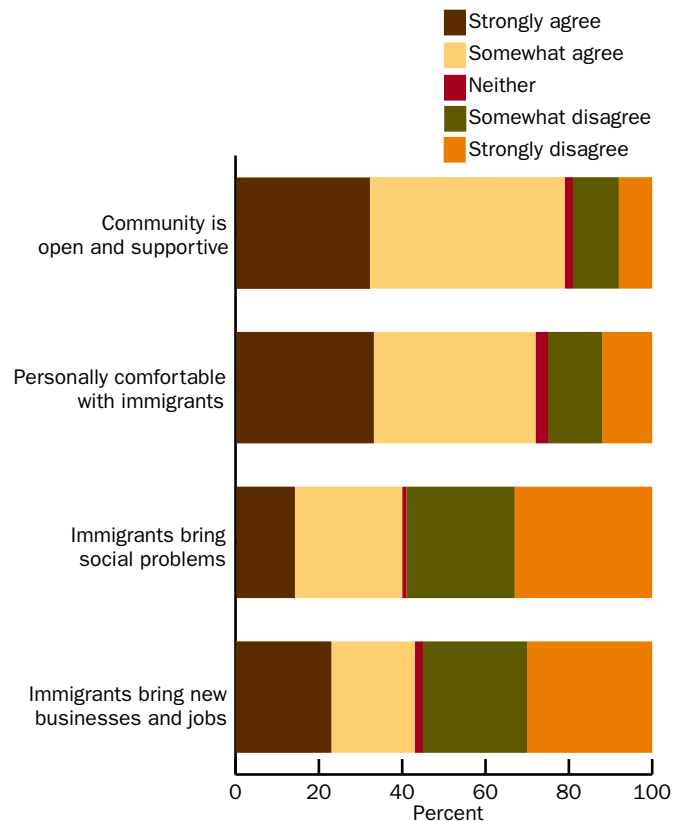


Figure 20. Perceptions that the “community is open and supportive of new immigrants”

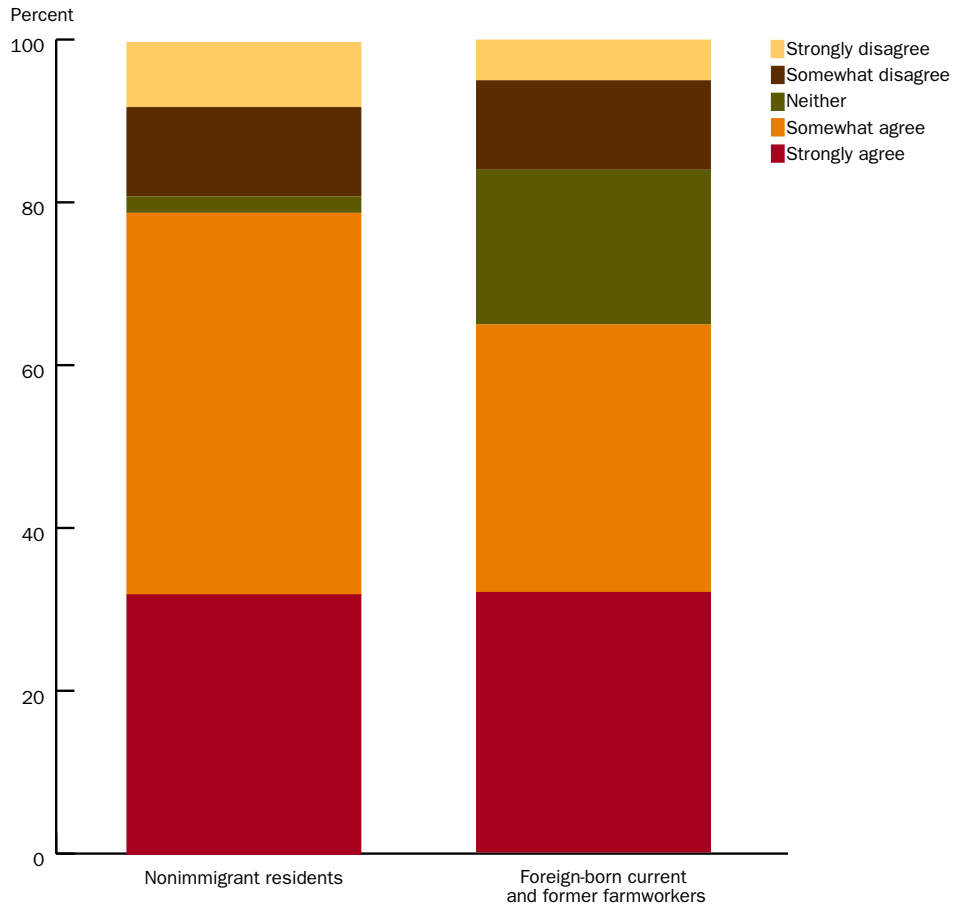


Figure 21. Exposure to insensitive or insulting remarks

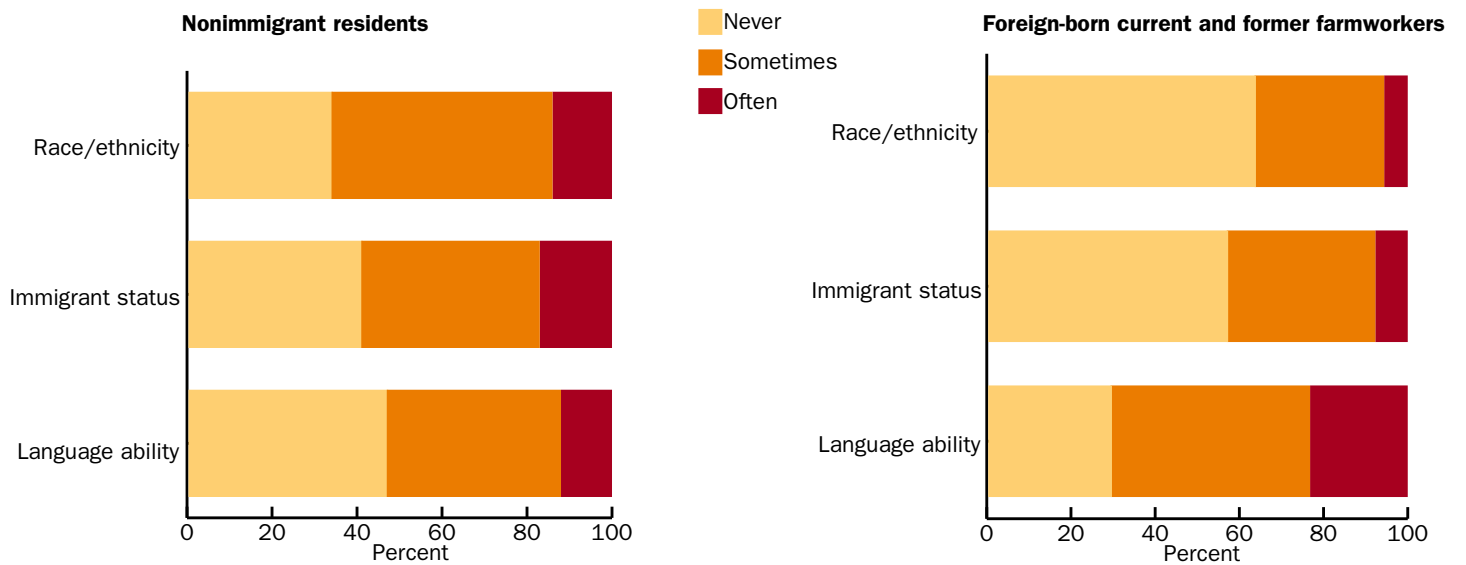


Figure 22. Nonimmigrants residents' perceptions of major challenges in having new immigrants

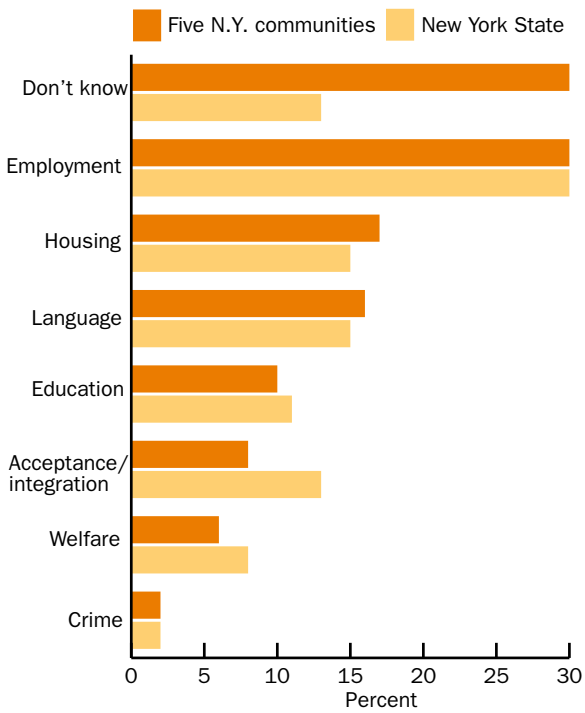
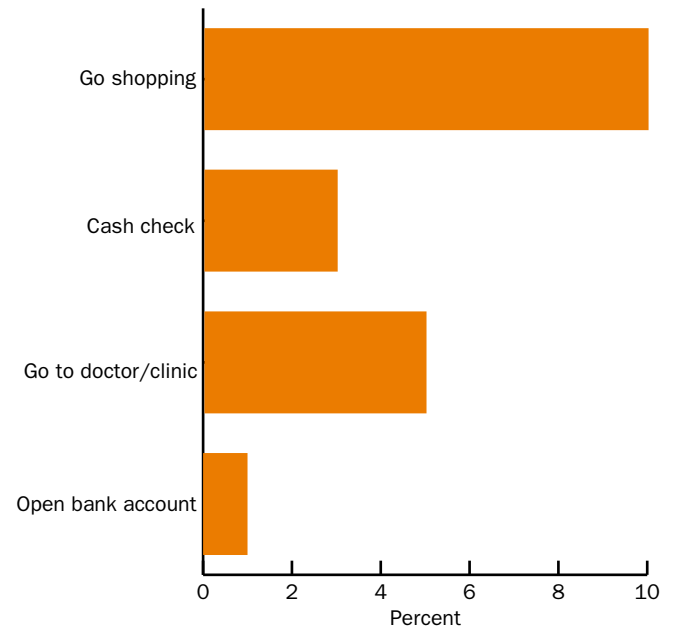


Figure 23. Nonimmigrant residents who reported helping immigrants



Conclusions and Recommendations

Population loss and economic stagnation or decline have been pervasive in upstate New York for decades. The ethnic diversification of New York State has stemmed the ongoing population decline in certain communities, but will the appearance of immigrants lead to renewed community development opportunities?

The results of our research indicate that New Yorkers are ambivalent about population growth, the presence of newcomers, and any opportunities the latter represent for stimulating employment and economic growth. The ambivalence we observed is generally rooted in a lack of information about immigrants in the community. This point should be a key consideration as communities evaluate their options for the future.

One of the most striking observations in our research was the lack of interaction across ethnic boundaries. This isolation of ethnic groups was true of all the communities we studied. Typically this separation was caused less by hostility than by lack of opportunities for meaningful interaction. Because of this separation, community members are relatively unaware of the needs and aspirations of others in the community, especially of immigrant farmworkers. Farmworkers often live in labor camps, and many community members have become accustomed to thinking of them as migrants who come and go with the seasons. But a growing proportion of them are settling in New York communities. They like the resources the communities offer (e.g., a safe environment and good schools) and usually have a positive assessment of the communities' openness to them.

Whether foreign-born farmworkers decide to settle in New York and become integrated into the social and economic life of the community hinges largely on their ability to find year-round employment and gain access to certain benefits. Ninety percent of foreign-born farmworkers said they needed to learn

the English language, and a majority felt they needed to learn more about U.S. culture. These findings point to the importance of communication and mutual understanding.

Language barriers were recognized as a major hindrance to integrating immigrants into the local community, but lack of awareness of the needs, aspirations, and concerns of others could also limit integration. We found numerous instances of misunderstanding between immigrants and nonimmigrants that easily could have been corrected through communication.

Are immigrants an asset to a community? This question is central in this report, but each community should address this question directly. We recommend that communities actively take stock of their changing population and the resources and needs they have. Awareness of their different experiences and perceptions of the community may

help immigrants and nonimmigrants come together in mutually beneficial ways. This stock taking, which can include community forums or surveys, affords opportunities to build social relationships between different segments of the population. Community to community information exchange may be a means of drawing on collective wisdom about the development potential represented by immigrants.



"The [Mexican] economy is bad, even for those who have studied, you don't find jobs...you have to come north. It is the only option one has, to come here, work and move your family ahead."

"We came here because the economy is different in our country. It is better here. As for me, I have two girls that were born here. I did not have the opportunity to become someone, maybe they will."

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Appendix: Data Collection

Understanding the integration of immigrants into rural communities is a demanding methodological task. Our research took into account the time sequence of immigrant assimilation, the demographic and cultural characteristics of the immigrant groups, and the destination community. To fully understand these complex factors, we compared former farmworkers who have settled in rural communities with current foreign-born farmworkers.

We 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 non-agricultural 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 18 focus groups each with between 4 and 15 male and female participants (149 total). We conducted seven focus groups with Mexicans (three with groups of migrant workers and four with persons who had settled in our study sites), two groups of Puerto Ricans, two groups of African Americans, and one group of Haitians and Jamaicans. The African American and Puerto Rican participants were former farmworkers who had settled in our study sites, and the Haitians and Jamaicans were current farmworkers who lived in community farmworker housing. Information about the Puerto Ricans and African Americans is not presented in this report (with the exception of Figure 8) because we have focused only on foreign born current and former farmworkers. We also conducted 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 were also identified by these sources and included political, business and religious leaders, police and school officials, farmers, and nongovernmental social service providers. The quantitative data include survey data for three target groups: current farmworkers (N=582), former farmworkers (N=656), and 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 three questionnaires for each target population. To assess the accuracy of the survey instrument, we pretested the three questionnaires on 150 individuals. One survey was directed at “current farmworkers,” defined as agricultural workers who may or may not cross state lines to carry out their work but were currently working on an agriculture-related job (including anyone that works on dairy or horse farms part of the year or combining packinghouse and farmwork during the year). The second survey group was “former farmworkers,” defined as a person who has not done farmwork in the past year and does not plan to do farmwork this year. It also included people whose parents have done farmwork in the past. The third survey group, “nonfarm residents,” were reached by telephone interview and had to be individuals who, since 1980, have not worked on a farm, owned a farm, or been farmworkers. 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.

We identified current and former farmworkers with the assistance of collaborators at Rural Opportunities, Incorporated (ROI). ROI works with farmworkers and other underserved populations in rural and/or agricultural areas in four northeastern states and Puerto Rico, and is active in each of our study communities. Most important for our study, ROI administers the U.S. Department of Labor’s National Farmworker Job Program. Thus ROI is in regular contact with farmworkers at workplaces and residences (both on-farm and off-farm residences). Bilingual ROI personnel completed interviews with farmworkers in conjunction with regular program recruitment and administrative contacts. Given ROI’s large client base in New York, this method of selection was a productive means of identifying and recruiting farmworkers for interviews. This selection method excludes farms and residences not accessed by ROI. Practical sample selection alternatives would have resulted in similar or perhaps more pronounced selection biases. Given the difficulties in identifying and locating the farmworker population, we feel confident that our selection method yields a fairly accurate representation of the farmworker population in the five communities.

ROI maintains a list of past participants in the National Farmworker Job Program. We identified former farmworkers from this list as a starting point for locating this target group. Bilingual ROI staff attempted to contact persons on this list. Those who were successfully contacted were interviewed and asked to provide contact information for other community members they knew to be former farmworkers. This method of identification overlooks individuals who left the area and results in some selection bias, but there is no practical solution to this problem. ROI employees conducting and supervising interviews were trained by the authors, and quality control was carried out by ROI supervisors and the authors. Requests for interviews were rarely refused.

Additional sources for this study were the U.S. Census of the Population (1980–1990–2000) and the Rural Opportunities Incorporated client base data.

