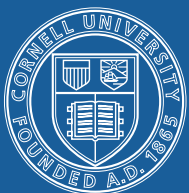


# Immigrants and the Community Former Farmworkers

September 2005



Cornell University

Max J. Pfeffer, Department of Development Sociology

Pilar A. Parra, Division of Nutritional Sciences

# Contents

Preface	1
Highlights	2
Introduction	3
I. Population Change and Farmworkers in Rural New York	4
II. Economic Integration	6
III. Social Integration	9
IV. Conclusions	12
Appendix: Data Collection	13

# Preface

**T**his report is the third in a series based on the research project “Integrating the Needs of Immigrant Workers and Rural Communities.” The first two 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. This settlement poses possible community development challenges and opportunities. Many of these immigrants are farmworkers or former farmworkers, and this report focuses on their integration into community life. 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 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  
September 2005

# Highlights

- The ethnic composition of the agricultural workforce in New York as a whole and in the five communities in this study has changed from predominantly African American to predominantly Mexican since the late 1980s.
  - An important factor in the community increased ethnic diversity is the settlement of farmworkers and their families. Many African Americans who worked on farms settled in the area in the late 1960s and 1970s. By the early 1990s a growing number of Latino farmworkers, mostly of Mexican origin, began to settle in the communities.
  - Compared with other community members, former farmworkers tend to be younger and to have lived in the community fewer years. Forty percent of the former farmworkers have lived in the community for 10 years or more, compared with 80 percent of the other community members.
  - Former farmworkers have an average of 9 years of schooling compared with 13 years or more for other community members.
  - The low education levels of the former farmworkers limit their ability to find jobs, especially better-paying ones. Former farmworkers are more likely to be unemployed (28 percent) compared with other community members (6 percent). Former farmworkers who are employed tend to be in lower-paying occupations (e.g., retail sales clerks, construction laborers), while other community members are employed in occupations that require higher levels of education and training (e.g., professional and managerial occupations).
  - The average household income for former farmworkers is less than half (about \$20,000) that of other community members (about \$46,000).
- The economic and social disadvantage of former farmworkers is reflected sharply in home ownership. Only 13 percent of former farmworkers own their homes, compared with 75 percent of other community members.
  - Differences in home ownership among African American and Latino former farmworkers are slight when compared with other community members of the same racial/ethnic background. Eleven percent of African American former farmworkers own a house compared with 50 percent of other African Americans in the community, and about 14 percent of Latino former farmworkers own a house compared with about 65 percent of other Latino community members.
  - Social ties to more privileged community members can benefit economically marginal former farmworkers. Former farmworkers who reported having a close White friend in the community were more likely to be employed, have slightly higher household incomes, and be homeowners. However, former farmworkers' friends are concentrated in a few relatively low paying occupations (e.g., construction worker, truck driver, and janitor). In contrast, larger proportions of other community members have close friends in a variety of higher-paying occupations (e.g., lawyers, doctors, real estate agents).
  - Participation in activities outside of work can facilitate the development of social relationships with different sectors of the community, which can help newcomers become integrated into the economic mainstream of the community. However, few community members, former farmworkers or others, are involved in civic activities.
- Community encouragement of civic activities that involve individuals from diverse social and economic backgrounds can play a role in increasing the social and economic integration of newcomers.

# Introduction

In the past two decades New York's population has become more ethnically diverse owing to immigration. In fact, the 2000 U.S. Census of Population showed that if it were not for increases in the foreign-born population, the total population of New York would be declining. Immigration always has been a central feature of New York City's population dynamics, but more recently, immigration also has been a feature of the state's more rural communities.

Most people migrate to rural New York to take jobs. In recent decades employment-related migration into rural New York has declined in many industries, but labor migration associated with agriculture has remained fairly constant over the past half century. The 2002 Census of Agriculture reports 67,886 hired farmworkers working on 10,494 farms. Nine hundred forty-four farms reported hiring migrant workers (defined by the census as workers whose employment required travel that prevented return to the workers' permanent residence each

day). The Census of Agriculture does not report the number of migrant farmworkers.

While the demand for farmworkers has remained strong, the ethnic composition of these workers has changed markedly over the past half-century. During this time, African Americans, Jamaicans, Haitians, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, and other groups have been a part of this workforce. Over time, some portion of the migrant workforce left farmwork and settled in rural New York communities. Today noticeable populations of African Americans, Mexicans, and others who formerly worked in agriculture can be found in rural New York.

As we reported earlier (*Immigrants and the Community: Farmworkers with Families*), a growing proportion of farmworkers with families is settling in rural communities. This trend may create both opportunities and problems for rural communities. In an effort to anticipate what these opportunities and problems might be, we

interviewed former farmworkers and other community members in five upstate townships. A look at the experiences of former farmworkers who have resided in the community for some time can help us understand the integration of new immigrants into rural communities.

Labor-intensive fruit and vegetable farms are an important part of each local economy included in this study. The townships are located in a range of settings: three communities are located in fairly rural areas in north-eastern New York, while two communities are found at the northern fringe of the New York City metropolis. In these communities we interviewed a variety of key informants, conducted focus group discussions with former farmworkers and other community members, and interviewed 656 former farmworkers and 1,250 other community members. Details about the collection of our data are found in the appendix.



"I came from Puerto Rico and I decided to stay here because I had year-round work in the packing plant. Then I brought my brother, got him a job and a place to stay at the camp, and we stayed. Later I got married; we have three children."

"We felt good about settling here because we worked here. The farmers paid very little, but we were happy because our children were already studying here, there was a better environment, our children were safe, while in the city it was dangerous."



"We came up from South Carolina to pick apples and then we would go back. When the children got older and went to school we decided to stay in one place."

"It's a big difference because we're from Florida. People are more welcoming up here. You got a little bit more money than you got down there. You got paid a little better and it was like we decided to stay here. You can leave your door open, there's less crime here in this area...there's a better education here for my grandkids than in Florida."

# I. Population Change and Farmworkers in Rural New York

As is true for the state as a whole, the populations of the five communities in our study have become more ethnically diverse in recent decades. Figure 1 shows that the White portion of the population has declined steadily since 1950, but the minority population has increased. Before 1980, the Black population grew most rapidly, especially during the 1960s. In the 1990s, Hispanics were the fastest-growing group. (Note: Hispanic heritage was not reported in the U.S. Census of Population before 1970.) These patterns of change coincide with the settlement of former migrant farmworkers in the communities.

New York's migrant farm workforce grew after World War II and became an important part of the state's agriculture. Over time, members of different ethnic groups that have been employed in farmwork have included African Americans, Jamaicans, Haitians, Puerto Ricans, and Mexicans. African Americans originally were the most important group in the East Coast migrant stream that originated in Florida, working its way up the eastern seaboard as the agricultural season progressed and ending in New York with the apple harvest. These migrant workers sometimes traveled with their families, and their children often attended local schools in New York. African Americans were the predominant group in New York's migrant farm workforce until the late 1980s. Former farmworkers in our study began to settle in the New York communities in sharply increasing numbers in the late 1960s (see Figure 2). The number of former farmworkers establishing residence in our study communities peaked in the mid-1970s and dropped to a trickle by the early 1990s. These changes coincide with the pattern of population change for the five communities reported in the U.S. Census of Population (see Figure 1). Over time, some of the workers left farmwork and

settled in the New York communities they had come to know when they were farmworkers. One African American who came to the area as a migrant farmworker, later settled in New York, and moved into factory employment said:

*We decided to stay here. We got better jobs here. The job market was bad down south. My wife got a good job with [a big company] and then I got in. I worked all around different plants, and in '81 got into the union.*

As the arrival of African Americans slowed, the influx of Mexicans settling in the communities skyrocketed. The latter trend has been observed nationwide and is associated with several factors. As shown in Figure 2, a few of the Mexicans employed as farmworkers in 2003 began to settle in New York communities in the late 1970s and 1980s, but there was a steep rise in the number arriving in the 1990s. In the 1980s, the Mexican government began structural reforms in agriculture that included the privatization of communal and ejido lands and the reduction of various subsidies to agricultural produc-

ers. These changes, in conjunction with the broader national economic crises in 1982 and 1994, disrupted Mexico's agricultural economy, resulting in further impoverishment of the farm population. A consequence of these changes was that increasing numbers of the rural poor left Mexico in search of employment in the United States.

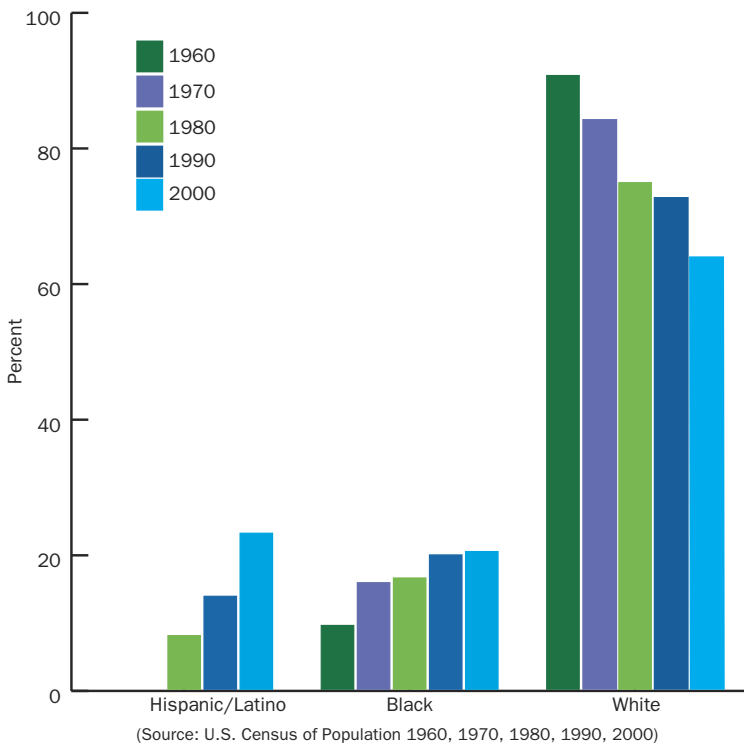
Since 1990, Mexicans have become the most numerous element of New York's farm workforce. Despite their recent arrival, they make up a large proportion of the population of former farmworkers in our study communities. This is because many Mexicans come to work in agriculture but then move out of agricultural employment in a decade or less. The continued predominance of Mexicans in the farm workforce indicates that large numbers of Mexicans continue to arrive to replace those who leave agricultural employment. If Mexicans continue to come to the United States in large numbers (and there is at present no indication that this movement will end soon), rural New York communities can expect their immigrant populations to continue to grow.



Stash Grajewski

**"One of the reasons we stayed here was because of the children. I had three, and all went straight through school."**

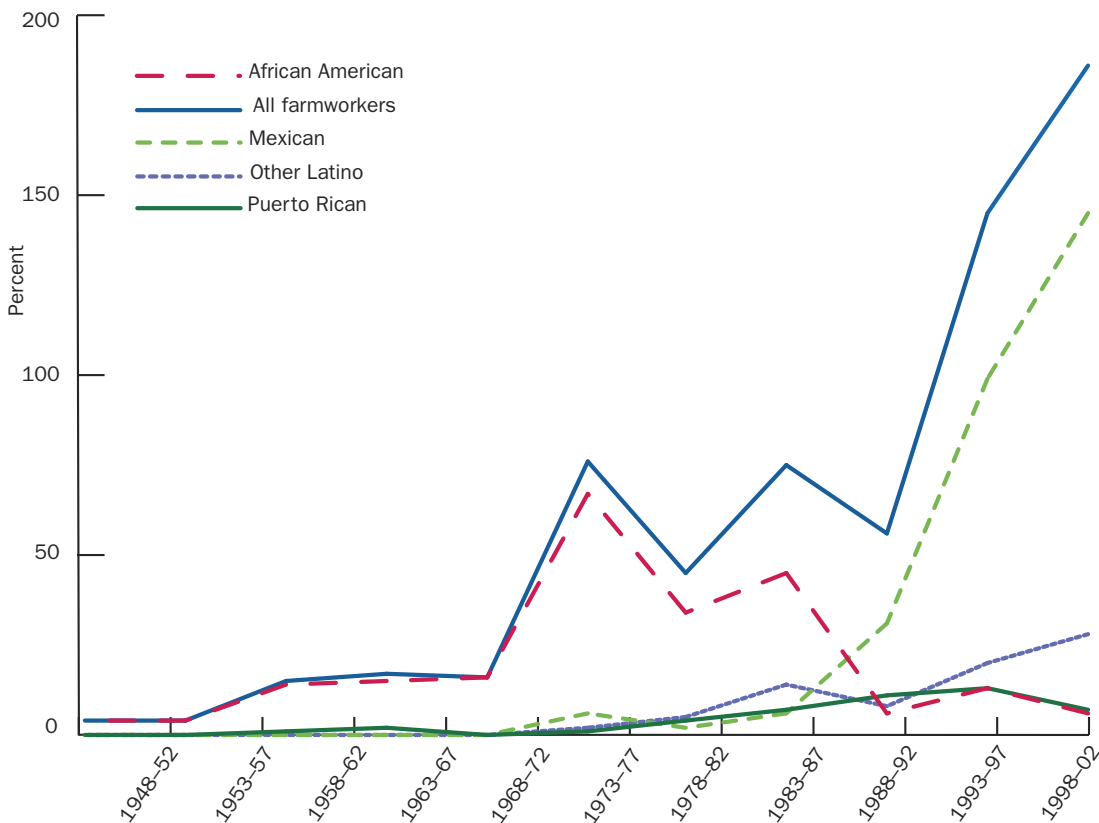
**Figure 1. The changing population of five New York communities**



Stash Grajewski

“When we arrived here during the '50s and '60s, you know, there was some discrimination—not at work but in the environment. But with the kids, no, in the schools the kids were treated well.”

**Figure 2. Year former farmworkers established local residence by ethnicity, five New York communities**



## II. Economic Integration

**F**armworkers settling in New York communities are distinguished from other community members in a number of ways. Ethnicity is one of the most visible differences. Other community members are overwhelmingly White, while former farmworkers are almost exclusively African American or Latino (see Table 1). Mexicans are the most numerous group of Latino former farmworkers. Because of the relative youth of the Latino former farmworkers, this group as a whole is on average about 12 years younger than other community members. Former farmworkers tend to have settled in the community more recently than other community members. For example, more than 80 percent of the other community members had lived in the community for 10 years or more, compared with less than 40 percent of the former farmworkers.

Perhaps the most telling difference is the average number of years of school attended. Other community members had attended school for more than 13 years, indicating that the average individual had completed high school and attended college for at least a time. Former farmworkers, on the other hand, had attended school for an average of nine years, indicating that most had not completed high school. With the declining number of low-skilled manufacturing jobs and the increase in semi-skilled or skilled employment in services and other occupations, completion of high school and additional education are increasingly important requirements for employment. This difference in education is an important marker of an enduring social class difference between farmworkers and other community members. In effect, educational attainment regulates access

to better-paying jobs and, by extension, a higher standard of living.

The disadvantages of former farmworkers are apparent in economic indicators such as employment, income, and home ownership.

**Employment.** Former farmworkers are more likely to be unemployed than other community members. More than 28 percent of the former farmworkers we interviewed were unemployed compared with 6 percent of the others. Full-time employment was especially difficult for the farmworkers to secure (Table 2).

**Income.** Former farmworkers who are employed are more likely to be in lower-paying occupations that require less education and training, such as those in the service sector (e.g., retail sales clerks) or construction and main-

**Table 1. Selected characteristics of former farmworkers and other community members, five New York communities, 2003**

Characteristics	Former Farmworkers	Other Community Members
Ethnicity (%)		
White	0.0	86.6
African American (not Latino)	36.3	6.2
All Latinos	63.7	4.8
Mexican	44.7	--
Puerto Rican	7.1	--
Other	11.9	--
All Others	0.0	2.4
Female (%)	39.6	55.8
Married (%)	60.4	55.0
Age (average years)	39.9	52.6
School Attendance (average years)	9.2	13.3
Years Lived in Town (%)		
Less than 5	23.0	10.3
5-9	40.3	8.6
10 or more	36.7	81.1
<b>Number</b>	656	1,250

**Table 2. Employment, average household income, and home ownership among former farmworkers and other community members, five New York communities, 2003**

Economic Achievement	Former Farmworkers	Other Community Members
Employment* (%)		
Full-time**	56.3	79.8
Part-time	15.2	14.0
Unemployed	28.5	6.2
<b>Number</b>	442	718
Household Income (average \$)		
	\$19,577	\$46,610
Housing (%)		
Own	13.1	75.0
Rent	80.4	20.9
Other***	6.5	4.1
<b>Number</b>	656	1,250

\*Employed or looking for work

\*\*Includes self-employed

\*\*\*Not owned and occupied without payment of rent

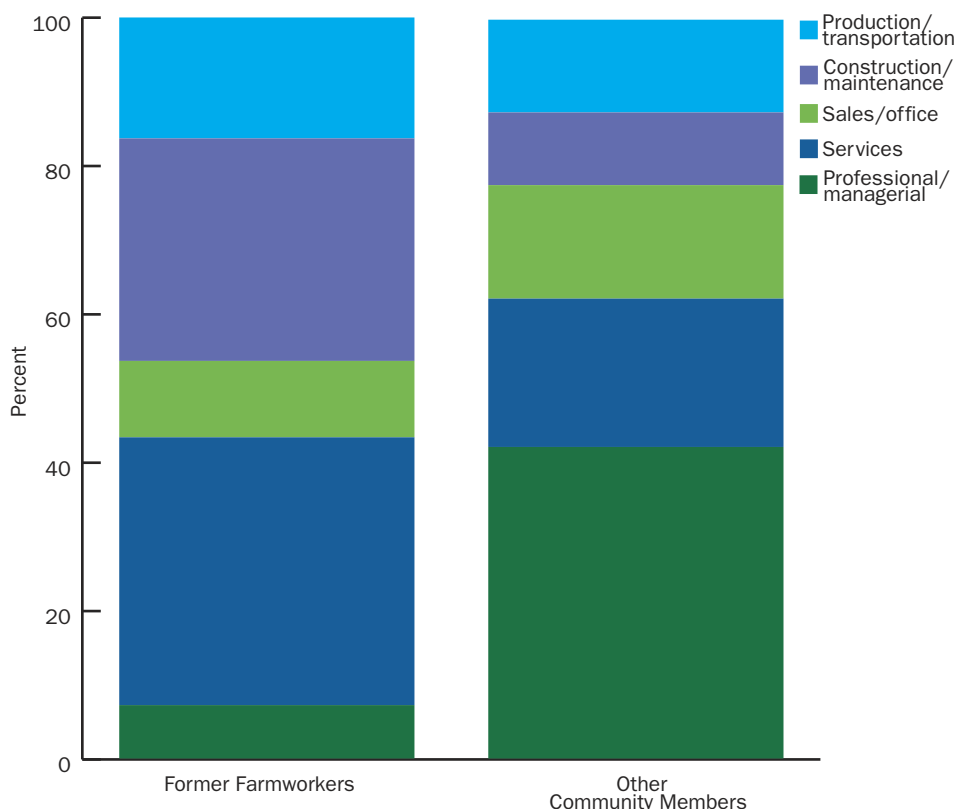


tenance (e.g., construction laborers). In contrast, the largest concentration of other community members is in higher-paying professional and managerial occupations. More than 40 percent of the other community members are employed in these occupations, which require higher levels of education and training (Figure 3). Given these employment differences, it is not surprising that incomes differ considerably. The average annual household income of former farmworkers was under \$20,000, less than half that of other community members.

**Home Ownership.** Finally, a much lower proportion of former farmworkers than other community members are homeowners. Only 13 percent of the former farmworkers owned their homes compared with 75 percent of the other community members (Table 2). The lower rate of home ownership is related to several factors, including the relative youth of former farmworkers, their more recent arrival in the community, as well as their lower levels of educational achievement and the associated economic limitations. Thus, it is difficult to say whether the lower rate of home ownership among former farmworkers reflects a permanent disadvantage or is simply a stage in the process of social and economic integration.

To get a clearer picture of the situation, it is useful to distinguish between African American and Latino former farmworkers. As indicated in Figure 2, African Americans are more likely to have settled in the community in the 1970s and 1980s, and Latinos are more likely to have taken up residence in the 1990s. Thus, African Americans have had more time to become established in the community. Ninety percent of the African American former farmworkers have lived in the community 10 or more years, compared with 27 percent of the Latinos. (see Table 3) In fact, more than one-third of the Latinos have lived in the community for fewer than five years. In addition, the Latinos are younger than the African Americans

**Figure 3. Percent employed by occupation, former farmworkers and other community members, five New York communities, 2003**



**Table 3. Selected characteristics of former farmworkers by ethnicity, five New York communities, 2003**

Characteristics	African American	Latino
Female (%)	35.3	42.0
Married (%)	48.9	66.7
Age (average years)	45.8	36.5
School Attendance (average years)	10.8	8.2
Years Attended School (%)		
Less than 6	0	19.6
6-9	25.4	48.7
10-12	63.0	23.9
More than 12	11.6	7.8
Years Lived in Town (%)		
Less than 5	2.6	34.7
5-9	4.7	38.2
10 or more	92.7	27.1
Has Close White Friend (%)	81.3	50.1
<b>Number</b>	235	421

on average (36 vs. 46 years). Perhaps most striking is the observation that about one-fifth of the Latinos had less than six years of schooling. None of the African Americans had so little education (Table 3). These differences show a consistent advantage for African Americans relative to Latinos.

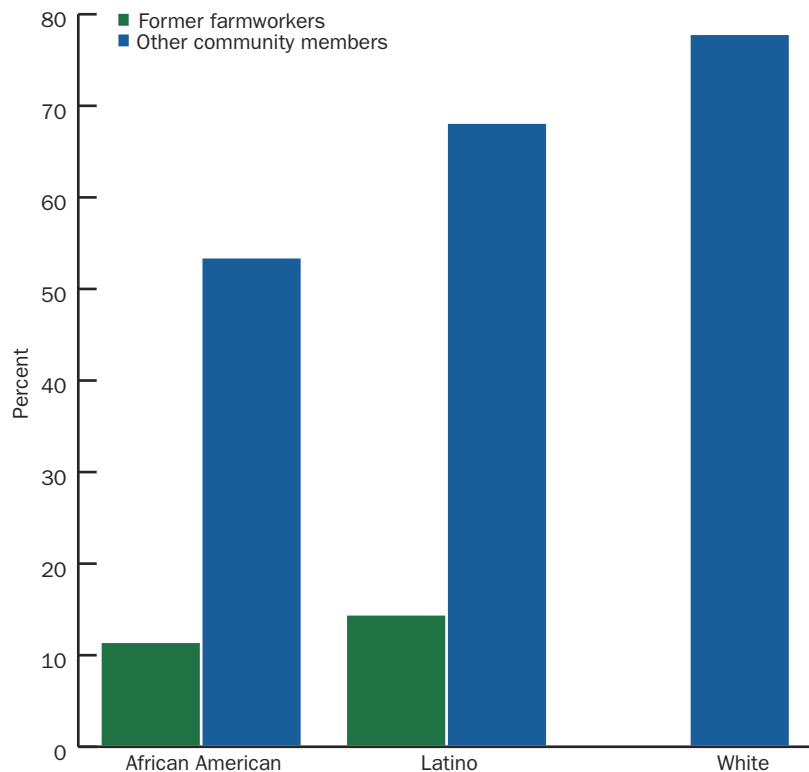
Despite these advantages, the African American former farmworkers are not doing better economically than Latino former farmworkers. They are almost twice as likely to be unemployed as Latino former farmworkers (Table 4). Some of this difference might be the legacy of discrimination against African Americans, but there is a far greater disadvantage associated with being a former farmworker. For example, differences in home ownership between African Americans and Latinos are slight compared with those differences between farmworkers and other community members. Figure 4 shows that other community members have a marked advantage in home ownership regardless of ethnic background. Still, almost 80 percent of White community members reported being homeowners compared with a little more than half of the African Americans.

**Table 4. Employment, average household income, and home ownership among former farmworkers, five New York communities, 2003**

Economic Achievement	African American	Latino
<b>Employment* (%)</b>		
Full-time**	47.0	60.4
Part-time	12.0	16.6
Unemployed	41.0	23.0
<b>Number</b>	134	308
<b>Household Income (average \$)</b>		
	17,070	20,976
<b>Housing (%)</b>		
Own	11.1	14.2
Rent	84.4	78.2
Other***	4.5	7.6
<b>Number</b>	235	421

\*Employed or looking for work  
 \*\*Includes self-employed  
 \*\*\*Not owned and occupied without payment of rent

**Figure 4. Percent of former farmworkers and other community members, who own homes, five New York communities, 2003**



# III. Social Integration

**W**hites make up almost two-thirds of the population of each community, and they hold the bulk of its economic and social resources. Thus we might wonder if former farmworkers could benefit by establishing close ties with the White community. White friends might be part of a set of social relationships that help former farmworkers gain access to a variety of economic resources. In this way social ties to Whites would represent integration into the community's economic mainstream. The majority of farmworkers—80 percent of African Americans and about half of Latinos—reported having a close White friend. The lower proportion of Latinos with White friends is likely related to their more recent arrival in the community.

Employment, household income, and home ownership all are strongly related to friendships with White community members. Persons with such friendships are more likely to be employed regardless of ethnicity. They also have slightly higher average annual incomes and are more likely to be homeowners (Table 5). In some cases, friendships with Whites lead to employment, better jobs, and home purchases. In others, having made these achievements creates opportunities to establish relationships with Whites. In either case, friendships with Whites



**“There aren’t many Puerto Ricans here anymore, now it’s more Mexicans. A lot of the families that come over here now are Mexicans. They work, and their children go to school here, and usually, since they are big families, they all work...if there is no work with the farmers they will work in other places. They all work.”**



**Table 5. Social relationships and employment, home ownership and household income among former farmworkers, five New York communities, 2003**

Selected Characteristics	African American		Latino	
	Has Close White Friend in the Community			
	No	Yes	No	Yes
Employed* (%)	46.2	62.0	70.4	83.9
Household Income (average \$)	13,807	17,821	19,383	22,109
Homeowner (%)	0.0	13.9	2.1	26.1
<b>Number</b>	44	191	210	211

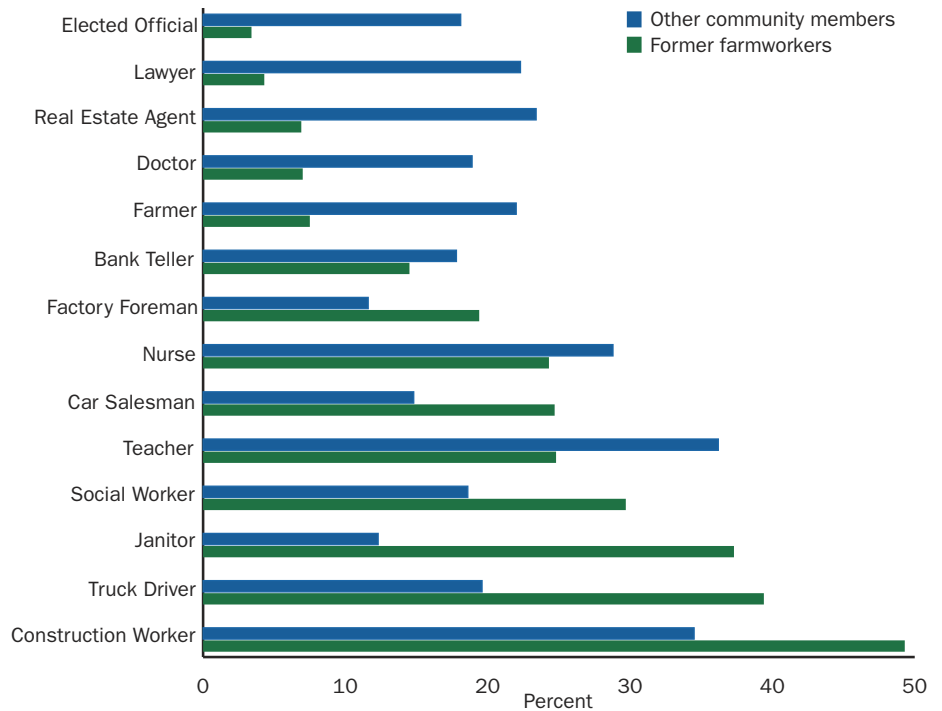
\* Employed or looking for work

and others who are better off economically indicate greater integration into the social and economic life of the community.

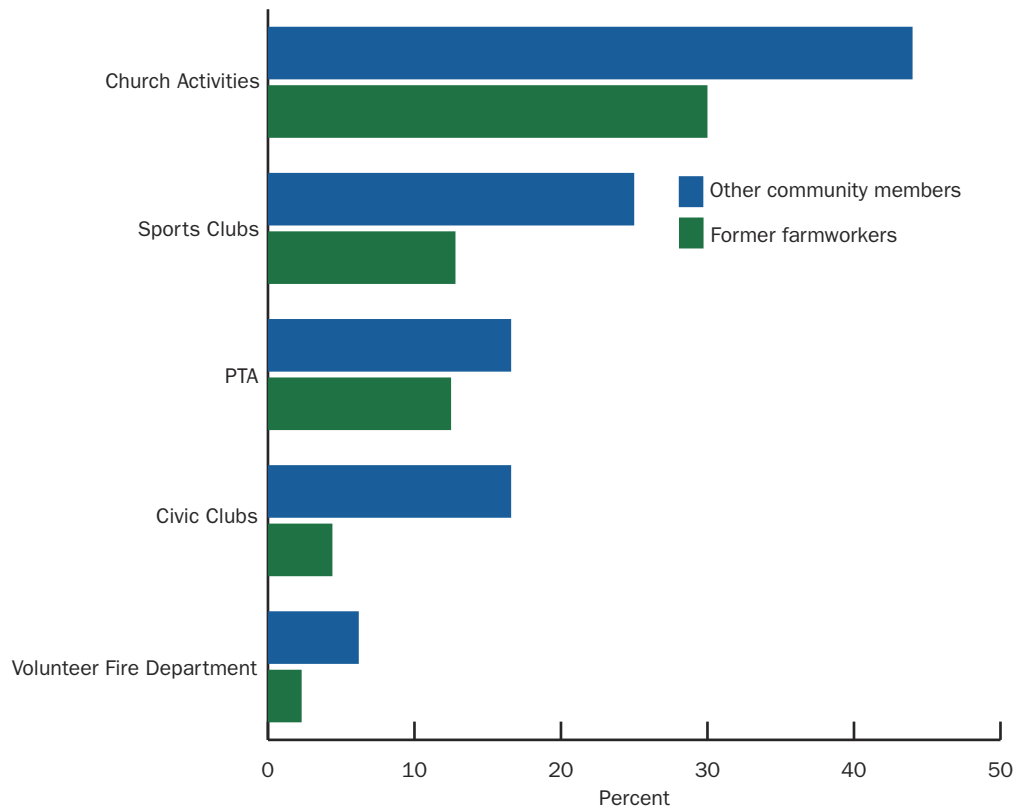
Despite the positive association between friendship with Whites and certain indicators of economic success, those who have White friends are not close to mainstream community standards for income and home ownership. One reason for this is that former farmworkers' friendships are concentrated among those with whom they work, and these people often cannot provide the information and access to resources needed to achieve a higher standard of living. Figure 5 shows that the former farmworkers' close friends are employed in a few occupations such as construction worker, truck driver, and janitor. Relatively few count lawyers and real estate agents as close friends. In contrast, other community members have close friends in a wide variety of occupations, and a higher proportion have close ties to individuals employed in occupations in which they can help with the purchase of a home (e.g., lawyers and real estate agents).

A practical question for communities interested in integrating newcomers into local social life is what venues might best promote friendships between groups, especially between minorities and the mainstream community. As already noted, employment is an important avenue for establishing relationships. But this opportunity is not available to everyone. Almost half of the former farmworkers in the five communities were not in the labor force (e.g., disabled or retired persons, homemakers, students) or were unemployed. Furthermore, friendships made on the job often are limited to those who are part of a similar social network and have access to the same limited set of economic resources. Outside of work, membership in civic organizations has the potential to provide a basis for establishing friendships across ethnic and social class lines. Our data show that individuals who participate in civic activities are more likely to have close White friends, but a fairly small proportion of both former farmworkers and other community

**Figure 5. Friends' occupations, former farmworkers and other community members, five New York communities, 2003**



**Figure 6. Civic participation of former farmworkers and other community members, five New York communities, 2003**



members are involved in civic organizations. The most common civic involvement is church activities. Thirty percent of former farmworkers and about 45 percent of others are involved in church activities. But church membership in the communities tends to divide along ethnic and social class lines. In contrast, a very small proportion of the community is involved in clubs (e.g., Lions, Kiwanis) or volunteer fire departments (Figure 6). Such civic engagement has declined throughout the United States, but new forms (e.g., environmental organizations) also are emerging and have become more popular volunteer venues. The challenge for communities that wish to increase interethnic ties is to foster civic organizations that attract community members from a wide range of social and economic backgrounds.



Immigrants are opening new businesses in many rural communities.

# IV. Conclusions

**F**ormer farmworkers are economically disadvantaged in comparison with other community members. This disadvantage remains large even when comparing former farmworkers with other community members of the same ethnicity. In fact, economic disadvantages between ethnic groups are smaller than those between former farmworkers as a group and other community members. There are striking similarities in the economic situation of former farmworkers from different ethnic backgrounds, and they are surprising given that some of the former farmworkers have lived in the community for a considerable number of years. Many of the same disadvantages that led them to rely on seasonal farm employment in the first place limit their ability to achieve the mainstream standard of living. The lack of education and credentials is one of the strong limitations on the economic advance of former farmworkers and is part of a complex of factors that makes this group a distinctive group that is marginal to the social and economic life of the community.

This marginality can take many forms, but we have tried to illustrate it by focusing on employment, household income, and home ownership. Compared with other community members, farmworkers fall short on each of these indicators. Home ownership is perhaps most symbolic of the broader

significance of the former farmworkers' economic disadvantage. It is an ideal in American society that about 60 percent of immigrants nationwide are able to achieve after living in the United States for 20 years. Home ownership represents a certain level of economic achievement, but beyond that it is also an important part of social integration. Investment in a home demonstrates a commitment to the community and an acceptance of responsibilities associated with community membership. The challenge for New York's rural communities is to assure that the people who have taken up residence more recently are given opportunities to progress in overcoming their disadvantage and become integrated into the community. Failure to achieve such progress will result in a social class permanently marginalized from the social and economic mainstream of the community. Such marginalization will mean that the newcomers cannot live up to their potential in contributing to the economic vitality of the community. It also will create the conditions for a variety of social problems such as crime, broken homes, and lower educational achievement of youth. Such problems place a burden on the entire community.

The economic development potential presented by the settlement of immigrants in rural communities is likely to be realized as the newcomers achieve

some degree of economic success. With this success they are likely to develop social ties with other community members. But such ties also can be an important factor in the ability of immigrants to become economically integrated into the community. Established community members are an important source of information about employment opportunities, good deals on cars, what is required to obtain a mortgage, who to contact about applying for a home loan, what types of assistance are available for low-income home buyers, and a variety of other practical matters. But former farmworkers need opportunities to develop such productive friendships. Community organizations need to play an active role in creating venues that attract community members from a wide range of social and economic backgrounds. Such venues can be an important meeting ground that promotes social and economic integration and creates new opportunities for community economic development.

# Appendix: Data Collection

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

We conducted our study in five upstate New York communities. 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 communities are located in southeastern New York, about 50 miles northwest of New York City. The area specializes in apple and intensive vegetable production. The most distinctive feature of this area 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 two sources: 41 interviews with key informants, and focus groups each with between 4 and 15 male and female participants who were former farmworkers. We conducted four groups with Mexicans, two with Puerto Ricans, and two with African Americans who had settled in our study sites. We also conducted seven focus groups with nonimmigrant long-term residents in the communities. The focus group participants were identified and recruited by collaborators from the Cornell Migrant Program, Cornell Cooperative Extension, the Catholic Rural Ministry, the Independent Farm Workers Center (CITA) and the Farm Worker Com-

munity Center (the Alamo). Our key informants also were identified by these sources. Key informants included political, business, and religious leaders; police and school officials; farmers; and nongovernmental social service providers. The quantitative data we report include survey data former farmworkers (N=656) and nonfarm community residents (N=1,250).

The examination of the qualitative data provided the general guidelines for the development of our survey instruments. We designed questionnaires for each target population. To assess the accuracy of the survey instrument, we pretested the questionnaires. The “former farmworkers” included persons who had not done farmwork in the past year and did not plan to do farmwork in the year of the survey. The survey of “nonfarm residents” was completed with telephone interviews of individuals who, since 1980, have not worked on a farm, owned a farm, or been a farmworker. Nonfarm community residents were identified by random digit dialing based on a complete set of telephone exchanges for each of the study communities. 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 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 Farm Worker Job Program. ROI maintains a list of past

participants in the 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 contacted successfully were interviewed and asked to provide contact information for other community members they know to be former farmworkers. This method of identification overlooks individuals who left the area and results in some selection bias in our sample, 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. Refusals of requests for interviews were infrequent.

Population data were drawn from published reports of the U.S. Census of the Population (1960, 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000).



EyeWire Images



Photos on back cover by University Photography (except where noted)