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ABSTRACT

The hourly wages of migrants in Wayne County, New York in 1968 were higher than state or Federal legal requirements. However, for many migrant workers, the irregularity of migrant employment made it less profitable over the harvest than a steady job at the lower legal rates. Moreover, a person who could be employed at a steady job as a nonagricultural laborer in Florida (the home state of many Wayne migrants) would be better off doing so than coming to Wayne as a migrant. This was true because his potential hourly wages, regularity of employment, and, consequently, total earnings were likely to be less in Wayne. This report provides information on the income migrants earned in Wayne County, New York in 1968. A discussion of some of the easily committed errors in the measurement and interpretation of the earnings of these workers is also provided. (Author/NQ)

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EARNINGS OF MIGRATORY FARM WORKERS IN WAYNE COUNTY, NEW YORK: 1968

by

HERRINGTON J. BRYCE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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THE NEW YORK STATE CENTER FOR MIGRANT STUDIES

The New York State Center for Migrant Studies is an independent organization devoted to professional research in the areas of education, employment, community relations and other aspects of the conditions of migrant labor in the State of New York.

The principal purposes are to initiate studies relevant to understanding and improving the conditions of the migrant, and to publish and disseminate these studies. The New York State Center for Migrant Studies, co-sponsored by the New York State Education Department's Bureau of Migrant Education, John Dunn, Chief, and the State University College of Arts and Science at Geneseo, New York, Robert W. MacVittie, President, was founded in February 1968.

This study has been recommended for publication by the Publications Committee of the Executive Council of the Center as an important contribution to the understanding of the migrant problem. It has been approved by the Executive Council of the Advisory Board of the Center except as specifically indicated and supercedes all previous drafts released for private circulation prior to publication. However, the interpretations and conclusions of the study are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position of the Center.

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SUMMARY OF EARNINGS OF MIGRATORY FARM WORKERS IN WAYNE COUNTY, NEW YORK: 1968

The hourly wages of migrants in Wayne County are higher than state or federal legal requirements. However, for many migrant workers the irregularity of migrant employment makes it less profitable over the harvest than a steady job at the lower legal rates. Moreover, a person who could be employed at a steady job as a nonagricultural laborer in Florida (the home state of many Wayne migrants) would be better off doing so than coming to Wayne as a migrant. This latter point is true because his potential hourly wages, regularity of employment and, consequently, total earnings are likely to be less in Wayne. These findings might provide one reason why growers have been experiencing increasing difficulties in attracting the migrant's they wish although they might pay higher rates than are legally required.

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PREFACE

A man's income is probably the most significant determinant of his ability to meet the present and future needs of his family. This study will provide some information on the income migrants earned in Wayne County, New York in 1968. It will also provide a discussion of some of the easily committed errors in the measurement and interpretation of the earnings of these workers. Since the study does not pretend to be definitive, it will conclude with suggestions for further research.

A number of individuals and organizations contributed to this effort. The New York State Center for Migrant Studies at the State University College, Geneseo, New York, provided the financial support. Barbara Bourne served as administrative assistant. Barry Levenson, Michelle Citron, Karen Holmgren, Mary Ellen Krober, and Jackalyne Pfannenstiel served as statistical assistants. Dr. Frank Puffer wrote the computer programs, and the data were processed at the Worcester Polytechnical Institute in Worcester, Massachusetts. Susan Stearns typed the manuscript. Dr. Roy S. Bryce offered many useful suggestions. Dr. Roger C. Van Tassel and the Department of Economics at Clark University accommodated the conducting of this research by providing time and facilities. Dr. David Martin, Chairman of the Department of Economics at the State University College, Geneseo, introduced me to this area of research and provided helpful suggestions and criticisms. My wife, Beverly, served in every feasible capacity. To all these and the countless other persons and organizations which contributed to this study, I owe my deepest gratitude. They share no responsibility for its outcome.

Herrington J. Bryce

Worcester, Massachusetts

March 13, 1969

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This study began in June. 1968. with the financial assistance of the New York State Center for Migrant Studies at the State University College at Geneseo The original objective was to present a fairly definitive analysis of the economic well-being of migrants based upon interviews of 100 growers and 1000 migrants in Wayne. Orleans, Ontario and Monroe Counties, New York. The date for its completion was set at February 1, 1969. Within a couple of weeks. the complexity of the task and the difficulty of obtaining qualified personnel to do the interviewing became clear. This led to the more sober ambition of studying the earnings of as many migrants as possible within Wayne County only.

This report is the result of nine months of research. Three of these months were spent by this author making daily visits (for about nine hours each) to farms in Wayne. In many ways, this was a very short time for a study of this nature; yet, the deadline was important in view of the current interest in the topic. The study is not definitive. It is intended to provide some needed insight into the earnings of migratory farm workers in Wayne County, New York in 1968; to point out some of the major pitfalls in the measurement and interpretation of these workers; and finally, to suggest areas for further research.

The migrants in this study are blacks who live in Florida and who come to New York State during the summer to pick fruit. They comprise the great bulk of the migratory farm labor force in Wayne County. Puerto Ricans and a few whites account for the remainder.

Contrary to popular belief, these migrants do not "follow the crops." They are people who pick fruit and vegetables in Florida. When they are through there, they come straight to Wayne. They generally arrive in full force by the first half of July and leave by the first of November. They do not stop to work on their way to or from Wayne.

Wayne County is located along the southern shores of Lake Ontario. It has a population of nearly seventy thousand, about sixty per cent of whom are in agriculture. Its major crops are cherries and apples. Among the other crops which migrants harvest are pears, prunes and tomatoes. It is officially estimated that the peak population during the harvest is about 2,100 migrants.(1) Consequently. Wayne is second among New

1. This figure which includes blacks, Puerto Ricans and a few whites is estimated by the New York State Division of Employment in Farm Labor Annual Report, 1967 and 1968.

York State counties in terms of migrant population. It hosts fourteen per cent of all migrants in the state. Suffolk County has just a few more migrants than Wayne.

Migrants in Wayne County work under one of three basic arrangements. The migrants with which this research is concerned live on a single farm, work primarily for a single grower and are paid by checks written by him. The crew leader on these farms serves as a recruiter, general foreman and as a disburser of paychecks. Other migrants work under a contractual arrangement with a contractor who sells migrant services to farmers, gets paid in a lump sum and then pays the migrants in cash or by check. The other type of migrant, the Puerto Ricans, comes under contractual arrangements made and supervised by the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. For simplicity and to avoid confusion, the last two classes of migrants are excluded from this study.

Another omission of the study relates to imputed and real income. That is to say, this study does not estimate the extra benefits which a migrant obtains from the housing growers provide or the deduction from earnings which result from the transportation expenditures of migrants. It was intended that these estimates be made, but it was discovered that a fair analysis of imputed income requires a wholly separate investigation. Serious questions concerning the justification, method, and significance of such estimates must be answered. Therefore, this study refers solely to cash or money payments from growers to migrants.

These omissions do not, in the estimation of this author, constitute major limitations of the study. As a matter of fact, these omissions avoid some of the pitfalls of migrant studies—that of confusing distinctly different types of employment arrangements and that of making tenuous assumptions (or inadvertent omissions) about hidden benefits or costs.

The major limitation of the study comes from the fact that it relies heavily on data from certain large growers who might, indeed, be in a position to pay highest. It is not based on a true cross-section of farms. This resulted from the lack of personnel and time which were needed to gain the cooperation of individual growers and migrants and to collect the necessary data.

Yet, the study might have something worthwhile to show. For each of the seventeen-week period of the harvest, it will: (1) show the weekly and converted hourly earnings of migrants; (2) compare these hourly earnings with the federal agricultural minimum wage, and the proposed state agricultural minimum wage; (3) estimate the amount of money earnings a migrant who could be employed as a laborer in Florida sacrifices by leaving Florida to come to Wayne County; (4) compare a migrant's earnings over the harvest with those of workers who have steady or regular employment; and (5) estimate the

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amount migrants lose because of the irregularity of their employment.

The next chapter of this study will focus on some of the major pitfalls in the measurement and interpretation of migrant earnings and will describe the attempts made to avoid them. It will be followed by the analysis of migrant earnings. The concluding chapter offers five suggestions for further research on migrant earnings.

Summary and Conclusion

Some of the common pitfalls encountered in a study of the earnings of migratory farm labor have been pointed out. This study has tried to avoid these pitfalls; yet, some limitations remain. Among these are that the study is based on a small, nonrandomly chosen sample of migrants working on a few large farms; that it focuses only on money income; and that it is reliant on the records of growers. Bearing these limitations in mind, the findings can be summarized and the implications of the study can be stated below.

The analysis of the weekly earnings and hourly wages of migrants reveal the following:

1. Migrant earnings vary widely from week to week during the harvest. From a low $40 in the first week, it reaches a high of $123 in the final week.
2. Hourly rates, like weekly earnings, vary widely from week to week. At its lowest it is 80c, and at its highest it is $2.45.
3. Over the entire harvest, migrants may net 47c more per hour than the federal minimum for agriculture; and 22c more than the proposed state minimum for agriculture.
4. Assuming that an individual migrant could be employed in his home state of Florida at the prevailing rate for laborers, he sacrifices an average of 45c an hour for every hour he works over the seventeen-week harvest in Wayne.

The analysis of the total earnings of migrants at the end of the harvest shows the following:

1. The average migrant earns $1122.
2. A worker who has a steady job at the lower federal minimum for agriculture or at the proposed state minimum for agriculture, might nevertheless earn more than a large number of migrants over the period of the harvest. This is due to the irregularity of migrant employment.
3. A migrant who could get a steady job as a laborer in his home state of Florida is likely to sacrifice at least $410 by coming to Wayne. This is due both to the irre-

gularity of employment and the lower wages in Wayne.

4. The cost of the irregularity of employment to the average migrant during the season is likely to be nearly $370.

The hourly wages of migrants in Wayne County are higher than state or federal legal requirements. However, for many migrant workers the irregularity of migrant employment makes it less profitable over the harvest than a steady job at the lower legal rates. Moreover, a person who could be employed at a steady job as a nonagricultural laborer in Florida (the home state of many Wayne migrants) would be better off doing so than coming to Wayne as a migrant. This latter point is true because his potential hourly wages, regularity of employment and, consequently, total earnings are likely to be less in Wayne. These findings might provide one reason why growers have been experiencing increasing difficulties in attracting the migrants they wish, although they might pay higher rates than are legally required.

CHAPTER II

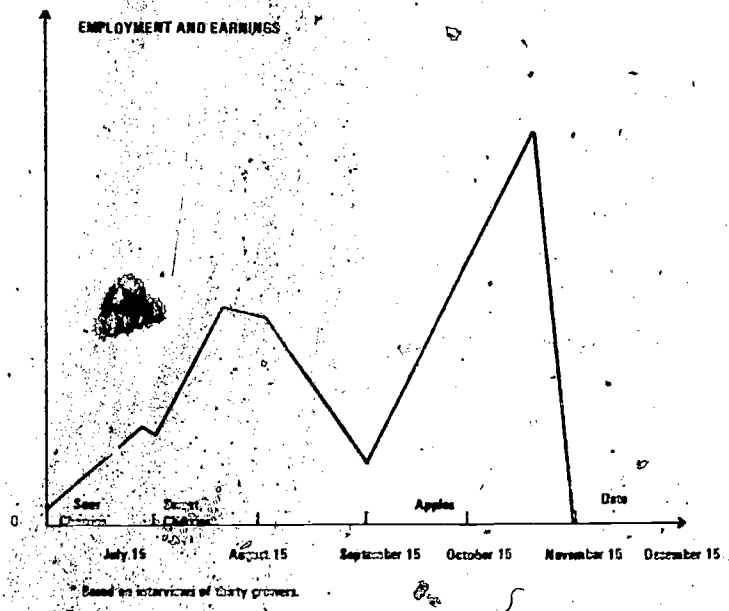
THE MEASUREMENT AND INTERPRETATION OF THE EARNINGS OF MIGRATORY FARM WORKERS

This section describes some of the common pitfalls in the measurement and interpretation of the earnings of migrant workers, and the attempts made to avoid them in the present study. Because of the nature of these pitfalls, no delusions are held that all have been entirely skirted.

The Irregularity of Employment: Weekly Fluctuations in Employment and Earnings

A common error which is committed in the interpretation and measurement of migrant earnings is the assumption that accurate judgment can be made based on the amount earned in a single or even a few weeks of the harvest. Weekly fluctuations in the earnings of migrant workers make it fallacious to assume that one or a few weeks are typical of the harvest. One reason for the variation in earnings is the seasonal aspect of the harvest.(1) In Wayne County, New York, for example, the major crops are cherries and apples. Figure 1 shows that sweet cherries are picked in early July and employment might be good for

FIGURE I
APPROXIMATE VARIATION IN EMPLOYMENT AND EARNINGS ON FRUIT FARMS IN WAYNE COUNTY, NEW YORK: 1930*



* Based on interviews of thirty growers.

(1) See footnote (1) on next page.

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about ten days. Employment may drop slightly for a few days and then improve around the fifteenth of July and reach a peak by early August. Between middle August and middle September, employment drops significantly; it rises and remains good until the first day or so in November. As the picking of cherries is highly mechanized, the period of greatest continuity of good employment is the apple harvest -especially the month of October. During the slack employment periods, some migrants on small farms might do hourly work. Those in larger and more organized crews may travel to other counties to work. In any case, the demand for migrant labor during certain periods of the harvest is low, and earnings fall.

Coupled with the seasonality of harvesting, the rate paid for the harvesting of various crops differs. The piece-rate for sweet cherries, for sour cherries, for apples harvested early in the season and for apples harvested late may all be different. Moreover, there may be one rate for picking a fruit to be sold fresh and one for picking the same fruit to be processed. Further, the rate for picking a fruit from a tree may be different from the rate for retrieving the same fruit from the ground. Since these activities are not performed in the same proportion each week, fluctuations in earnings might occur.

Another factor which causes fluctuations in the earnings of migrant workers is the readiness of the crop for harvest. During the first few days of the harvesting of any crop, picking is selective so as to avoid the trees and fruit which are not ready. This selection process reduces productivity and earnings.

The work habits of some migrants may also cause fluctuations in earnings. Many migrants have very little commitment (or reason for commitment) to a set work schedule or to a single grower. Consequently, a migrant may decide to work three days in one week and six in another or he might work two hours one day and ten the next. Likewise, he may change his employer or choose not to work because of unsatisfactory conditions of employment, housing, or wages. Fluctuations may also be the result of weather conditions. Excessive mist, heat, or rain will reduce productivity, the total number of hours worked, and earnings.

All these factors make it fallacious to consider one or a few weeks as typical of migrant earnings. This study will cover a span of seventeen weeks, beginning July 1 and ending November 1. This period covers the entire harvest for the main crops

1. For statistical examples of seasonal variations in harvesting of crops, see Gladys K. Bowles, The Hired Farm Working Force U. S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Economic Report 98); Crops Requiring Seasonal Hired Workers, (U. S. Department of Labor); and Aura Rapton, Seasonal Work Patterns of the Hired Farm Working Force of 1964 (U. S. Department of Agriculture, 1965).

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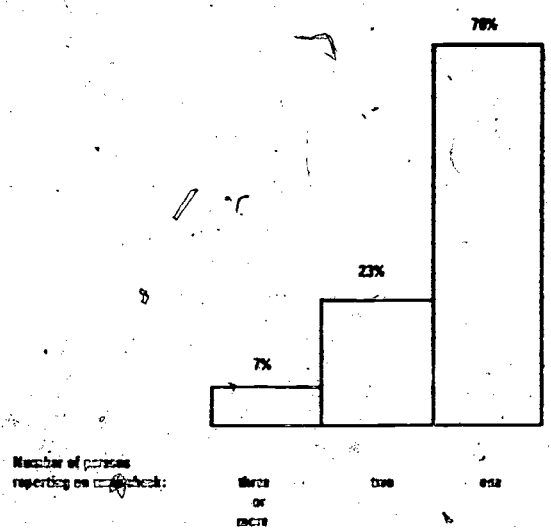
of cherries and apples in Wayne County. In considering the total earnings of a migrant at the end of the harvest, some stringent conditions will be set up. These will be discussed in the section dealing with total earnings.

Joint Reporting

A man, his wife, and his children will frequently work as a unit. This means that although payroll records bear only the name of the head of the household, they really reflect the labor and earnings of the total family—not just a single individual. Chart 1 shows that 30 per cent of the migrant heads of house-

CHART I

JOINT REPORTING IN MIGRANT HOUSEHOLDS IN WAYNE COUNTY, NEW YORK: 1966



hold who were interviewed indicated that their checks reflected the labor of more than one person. Thus, a major pitfall in measuring and interpreting migrant earnings is attributing the earnings of a multiple-person productive unit to a single individual. This leads to an overstimation of the earnings of indivi-

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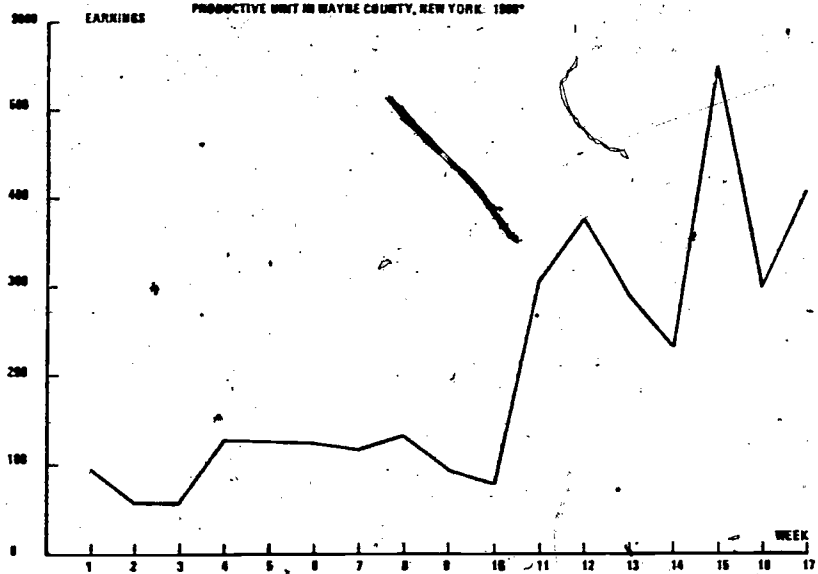
duals. For example, the earnings in Figure 2 are impressive, but they belong to a family all reporting on the same check.

FIGURE 2

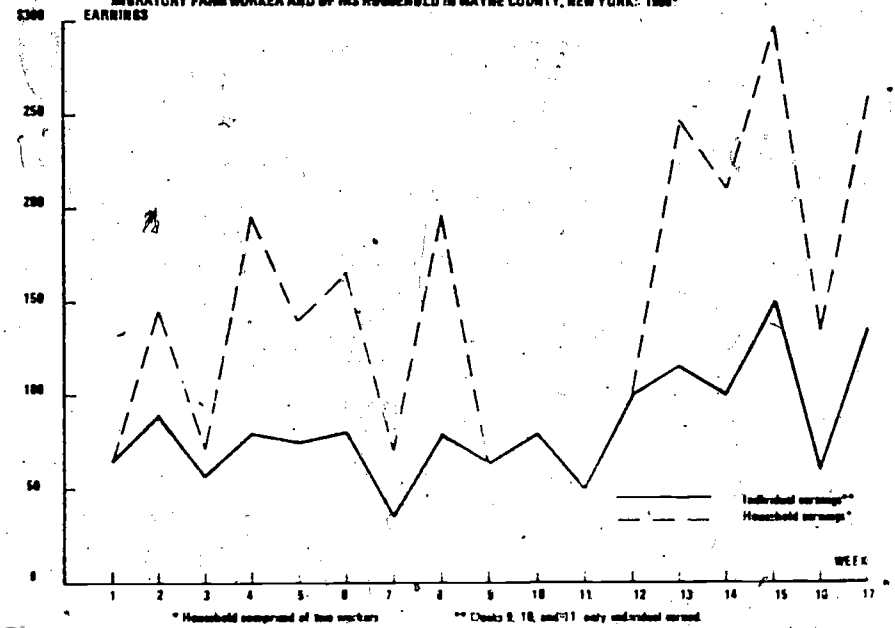
EARNINGS RESULTING FROM MULTIPLE-PERSON PRODUCTIVE UNIT IN WAYNE COUNTY, NEW YORK: 1966*



*This family is made up of about three workers.

FIGURE 3

A COMPARISON OF EARNINGS OF AN INDIVIDUAL MIGRATORY FARM WORKER AND OF HIS HOUSEHOLD IN WAYNE COUNTY, NEW YORK: 1966*



* Household composed of two workers

** Checks 9, 10, and 11 carry undivided earnings

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On the other hand, when each member of the household is paid separately, it is frequently impossible to identify its members to determine the income of the household because all its working members might not use the same surname. This might lead to an underestimation of the earnings of a household. Figure 3 gives an example of the discrepancy.

The present study tries to avoid this pitfall by eliminating those persons who were involved in joint reporting from the sample.

Multiple Employers

The use of earnings data obtained from a single grower is likely to lead to an underestimation of the earnings of a migrant. A migrant might work for several growers during a harvest, and there is frequently no centralized bookkeeping of his earnings. Away from home, a migrant usually lives on a grower's property. This grower is his main employer. However, once harvesting for this grower is completed, the migrant might go to another farm in the area to work while maintaining his residence and obligations to his main employer. His main employer frequently will not have a record of how much the migrant earned while working for others. Consequently, the use of the payroll record of a single grower may result in the underestimating of migrant earnings.

To avoid this pitfall, growers from whom payroll data were obtained were asked if they loan or borrow migrant services. In addition, migrants and crew leaders were asked to indicate which growers they worked for during the harvest. In the one case where there was clear evidence that migrants worked for more than one grower, the amount earned per migrant did not significantly affect earnings. It is therefore fair to assume that the problem of multiple employers has been avoided in this study.

Gross and Net Earnings

The earnings of migrant wrokers can frequently be misinterpreted unless it is specified that the figures are gross or net of certain adjustments. The deduction of social security, rental fees, or repayment of debt could substantially reduce the apparent earnings of a migrant. Thus it is necessary to distinguish between the gross earnings of a migrant worker and his net earnings after adjustments if a serious error in measure-

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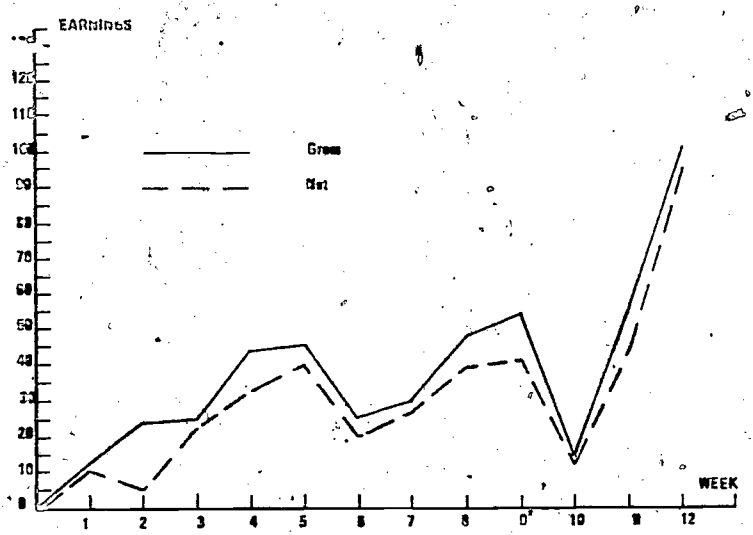
ment is to be avoided. Figure 4 which is based on the we. ly

FIGURE 4

AN EXAMPLE OF THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GROSS AND NET WEEKLY EARNINGS OF A MIGRANT*



*Based on actual payroll data for a single migrant in Wayne County, New York, 1959. About 93 percent of the difference between gross and net earnings in this case is due to the repayment of loans for groceries; the remainder is due to rental fee, repayment of transportation (approximately 5.4 per cent) and social security (4.4 per cent).

earnings of a single migrant illustrates the varying margin of error which can be committed when gross and net earnings are confused.

In this study, only gross earnings are used. Thus, not even the 4.4 per cent social security has been deducted. The interested reader who wants to calculate "spendable income" (gross earnings minus social security) may do so from the data provided in this study by multiplying by 0.956; the result is "spendable income."

Disuniformity in Method of Payment

There is no uniform way of paying migrants. Payment is usually on a piece-rate basis for picking, and on an hourly basis for other chores. Moreover, as stated earlier, the going piece-rate varies from crop to crop. It may also vary from farm to farm and among orchards on the same farm, depending upon the difficulty of reaching the fruit.

There are also subtle differences in the unit in which the efforts of migrants are measured; for example, in the case of cherries, migrants are paid by the pail while for apples they are paid by the basket, box, bin or crate. Pails, baskets, boxes,

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bins or crates differ in size. Sometimes these differences are sizeable. One grower might use an eigbt-quart pail and another a twelve-quart pail. One might use a one-bushel basket and another an eighteen or twenty- bushel bin. Even when two containers of the same size are used, there might be differences in when one is considered full.

The comparability of earnings might also be affected by the way migrants are paid. Some are paid by cash, others by check. Sometimes a grower pays a lump sum to a crew leader or contractor who in turn disburses the funds to individual migrants. The degree of accuracy in the transactions and in the type of records kept under these three systems are likely to vary.

To the extent that no attempt is made to compare rates of pay among growers or among crops, the present study is not affected by the units in which pay is measured. This influence occurs when piece-rate pay is converted to hourly terms. This is done by assuming that during the key weeks of the harvest (those times when piece-rate applies) migrants work 50 hours a week. This is based on interviews of over a hundred migrants about 90 per cent of whom claimed to work about 9 to 10 hours a day during the week and 4 to 5 hours on Saturday. This is roughly 55 hours a week. As a comprise, 50 hours was decided upon since growers, crew leaders, and some migrants, said that the absentee rate on Saturday was high.(2) It should be noted that the migrants in this study are all paid by the grower and by check even though a crew leader might deliver the checks.

The Bonus System

To induce migrants to remain until the end of a harvest, growers use a "bonus system." Sometimes this system is based on withholding a part of the worker's earnings until the end of the season. Other times the bonus will be in excess of the going piece-rate. The going rate might be $4.00 a bin, but at the end of the season another twenty-five cents may be paid for each bin picked. In measuring and interpreting the weekly earnings of migrants, the amount as well as the type of the bonus system must be taken into account if earnings are to be accurately measured.

To the extent possible, an attempt was made to ascertain the kind of bonus system used in each farm; and weekly figures have been adjusted accordingly. Otherwise, the bonus is reflected in the earnings of the last weeks of the harvest when they were paid.

Comparability Over Time

Perhaps one of the most dangerous pitfalls in interpreting the earnings of migrant workers is the temptation to generalize

2. There is no time-keeping on farms, and therefore no record of the actual number of hours worked by migrants.

from one year to another. Table 1 offers an example of how much wages might vary for the nation as well as for an individual state from month to month and year to year. Different crop conditions from one year to the next will frequently affect

TABLE 1

AVERAGE FARM WAGE RATES: NEW YORK STATE AND UNITED STATES, QUARTERLY: 1964-66

Area and Month	Average Wage Rates Per Hour 1/ 1966	1965	1964
	Dollar	Dollar	Dollar
United States			
January	1.24	1.19	1.14
April	1.28	1.18	1.14
July	1.26	1.17	1.13
October	1.18	1.09	1.01
Annual average	1.23	1.14	1.08
New York			
January	1.28	1.22	1.21
April	1.30	1.24	1.22
July	1.32	1.25	1.22
October	1.34	1.26	1.24
Annual average	1.32	1.25	1.23

1/ Without board or room.

Source: William Metzler, Ralph Loomis, and Nelson Le Ray. The Farm Labor Situation in Selected Areas, 1965-66. Agricultural Economic Report No. 110, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

the earnings of migrants. On the other hand, a bad crop or increased mechanization of farms might reduce employment and earnings. The seasonal variation in harvesting mentioned earlier, could cause earnings to vary monthly or even weekly.

A major mistake can be avoided if the reader remembers that no attempt is being made to measure earnings before or after 1968. The study pertains to 1968 only. However, the methodology, the questions raised, and the suggestions made, may serve as useful guides for future study. The broad implications of the study (rather than its specific details) should serve as guides for public policy.

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Comparability Over Geographic Regions

Migrant earnings are not the same across the nation. Farm wages are highest in the West Coast and lowest in the South.(3) Maitland and Fisher have shown that there is a wide regional difference in the cash wage of farm workers (not all of whom are necessarily migrants). In some areas, like Texas and Florida, the supply of labor is the most important reason for this variation. In other areas like Maine and the Lake Ontario region of New York State, the demand for labor is the most important explanatory variable. In other areas, like Washington and part of Oregon, neither demand nor supply variables are of crucial importance.(4) Other factors which might cause migrant earnings to vary across the nation are the crops harvested, the state minimum wage for migrants, and the extent to which farm workers are imported. This latter factor is important, since aside from the federal and state minimum wage laws, there is a minimum which growers must pay domestic migrants if they intend to import foreign workers. This minimum varies from state to state.(5) These factors give rise to the possibility of serious error if migrant earnings are generalized from one region to another.

This study is limited to migrants who work on cherry and apple farms and who work directly for a grower rather than a contractor or crew leader. It is not recommended that the findings be generalized to migrants working on small farms or farms specializing in other types of crops, or to farms in other regions.

Comparability of Farm and Nonfarm Earnings

Farm and nonfarm earnings are not strictly comparable. Unlike the nonfarm sector, growers frequently provide housing to migrants at no rental fee or at a nominal fee. A judgment must be made regarding the money value of this housing. How much is this housing worth to the migrant? How should we compute its value to them? Should a method which reflects a fair rate of return to investment in migrant housing be chosen over one which reflects the amount migrants are willing and able to pay for similar housing on the open market? Are such houses available in the open market? Should it be assumed that the value of such housing was discounted by growers in the determination of their wage offer? These are not easy ques-

3. "The Migratory Farm Worker." Monthly Labor Review, June 1968, pp. 10-12.
4. Sheridan T. Maitland and Dorothy Fisher. Area Variations in the Wages of Agricultural Labor in the United States, (U. S. Department of Agriculture, Technical Bulletin No. 1177, March 1958).
5. Phyllis Groom. "Today's Farm Jobs and Farmworkers," Monthly Labor Review April 1967, p. 2.

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tions to answer. Yet, some judgment is necessary if a comprehensive picture of migrant earnings is to be drawn.

Unlike the nonfarm sector, growers frequently make or underwrite loans to migrants at no direct charge. These loans are most frequently made to cover transportation cost from the South to the North or to cover grocery bills. The cost and risk associated with the loans for grocery and similar type expenditures should be considered part of the earnings of migrants. Expenditures for transportation to and from the South is a cost for the transfer of labor; i.e. a travel rather than a commuting expense and should, as in the nonfarm sector, be met by the employer. (6) In the farm sector, this cost is paid by the migrant (often through a loan from the grower). The failure to deduct this cost when measuring and interpreting the earnings of migrants will lead to an overestimation of their real earnings.

Earnings in the farm and nonfarm sectors differ in another way. Earnings in the farm sector are not buttressed by fringe benefits which are typical in the nonfarm sector. A migrant earns only when he works. If he is sick or if it rains, his productivity and number of hours worked might fall, and so might his earnings. Migrants have no unemployment insurance, or sick leave. Although there was a national minimum wage of $1.15 in 1968 which rises to $1.30 in 1969, this minimum is frequently of limited relevance since most migrants on fruit and vegetable farms are paid on a piece-rate basis for most of their work. Thus, when comparing the earnings of migrants with those of nonfarm workers, it is important to remember the high, unprotected risk associated with migrant earnings.

Owing to the difficulties associated with estimating imputed income, this study deals only with cash or money income. This plus the unprotected risk of migrant employment should be kept in mind especially when migrant earnings are compared with those of nonagricultural workers.

Summary

This chapter has discussed major pitfalls in the measurement and interpretation of migrant workers. It has attempted to show that: seasonal as well as other fluctuations in migrant earnings mean that no single week or two may be taken as typical; joint reporting makes it difficult to distinguish the contribution of an individual from that of a family; the payroll record of a single grower might not give the total earnings of a migrant; gross earnings are frequently well above net earnings; the method and rate of pay vary by crop, chore, and unit of

6. It has been estimated that a third of all migrants travel 400 or more miles from home to farm and one fifth travel a thousand or more miles. "The Migratory Farm Worker," Op. Cit., pp. 10-12.

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measurement of work; the bonus system distorts weekly earnings; the earnings of migrant workers are not strictly comparable over time, region, or with nonnfarm earnings.

The study attempts to avoid these pitfalls: (1) by analyzing earnings over a seventeen-week period; (2) by concentrating on migrants who are not involved in joint reporting, or multiple employment; (3) by dealing with gross rather than net earnings; and (4) by allocating the "bonus" over the relevant weeks. The reader is reminded that no attempt is being made to generalize the findings over time or region, or to assume that farm and non-farm earnings are strictly comparable.

The findings of this study appear in chapter III.

CHAPTER III

THE WEEKLY, HOURLY AND TOTAL EARNINGS OF MIGRATORY FARM WORKERS IN WAYNE COUNTY, NEW YORK 1968

This chapter presents estimates of migrant earnings in Wayne County in 1968. Weekly, hourly and total earnings for the harvest are shown. Comparisons are made with state and federal minimum requirements and with earnings of laborers in Florida. Two questions which will be of concern are: How much money income would a person sacrifice should he work as a migrant in Wayne when he could have worked as a laborer in Florida? How much income does a migrant lose because of the irregularity of his employment?

The discussion will refer to the weekly median earnings or wages of migrants. This means that 50 per cent of all migrants who worked in a particular week earned less and 50 per cent earned more than the stated amount. The number of migrants reporting earnings varies from week to week because employment varies. (1) The date corresponding to each week of the harvest is shown in Table 2 which also shows the number of migrants reporting earnings for that week.

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1. The total number of weeks worked by some migrants is shown in Table 3.

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TABLE 2

KEY TO WEEKS AND SAMPLE SIZE

Week Number	Date	Number of Workers in Sample*
1	July 7 - 13	58
2	14 - 20	76
3	21 - 27	78
4	28 - Aug. 3	66
5	Aug. 4 - 10	65
6	11 - 17	60
7	18 - 24	57
8	25 - 31	57
9	Sept. 1 - 7	47
10	8 - 14	57
11	15 - 21	74
12	22 - 28	85
13	29 - Oct. 5	87
14	Oct. 6 - 12	89
15	13 - 19	87
16	20 - 26	83
17	27 - Nov. 1	48

*Sample size varies because the number of workers reporting some earnings each week varies.

Weekly Earnings

The earnings for each week of the harvest in Wayne is shown in Figure 5. It can be seen that earnings often vary widely. Starting from $40 in the first week, it rises to $86 by the fourth, falls to $38 by the ninth, and rises to $123 by the seventeenth and final week. This see-saw effect is reflective of

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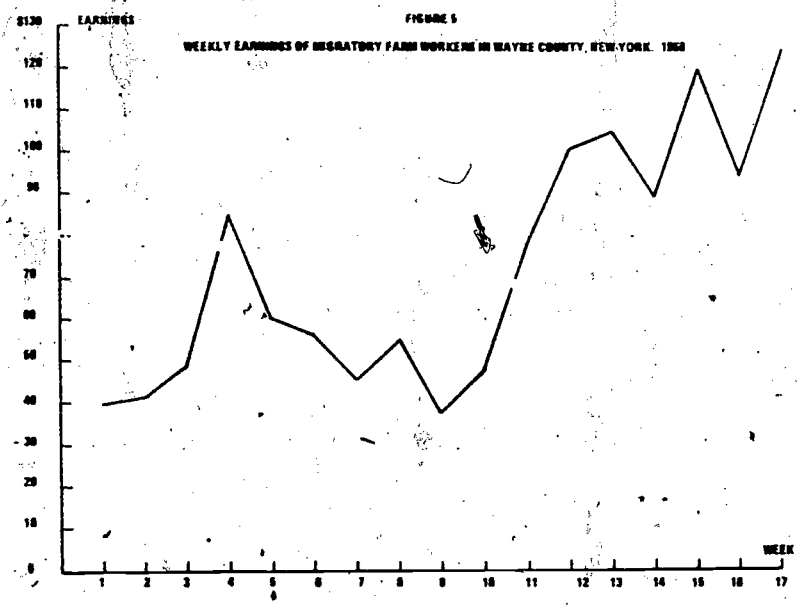

the weekly variation in employment and differences in crops picked. In the first four weeks or so, cherries are harvested; and, increasingly this is done by machine. From the fifth to about the tenth week, there is little harvesting except for some prunes, pears, and peaches. Many workers do hourly work, and there is significant drop in employment due to the fall in the demand for labor. From the tenth to the seventeenth week, apples (which are the major hand-picked crop) are harvested. Employment and earnings during this period are highest. The peak occurs around the final week because of the rush to complete harvesting before the migrants return to Florida.

Hourly Wages

As was stated earlier in Chapter II, migrants are paid on a piece-rate basis for picking and on a hourly basis for other chores. Since most of these nonpicking chores are performed from the fifth through the tenth week, an hourly rate is paid during these weeks. It was found that on the average, this rate was $1.50 an hour. A piece-rate applies from the first through the fourth week and from the eleventh through the seventeenth week. To convert the piece-rate pay to hourly terms, the earnings for each week are divided by 50. This 50, as stated in Chapter II, represents the number of hours which the typical

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migrant works during the apple and cherry harvests. Figure 6 shows the results. It indicates that hourly wages vary from a low of 80c in the first important week of the season to $2.45 in the seventeenth and final week. The mean of these hourly earnings over the seventeen-week period is $1.62.(2)

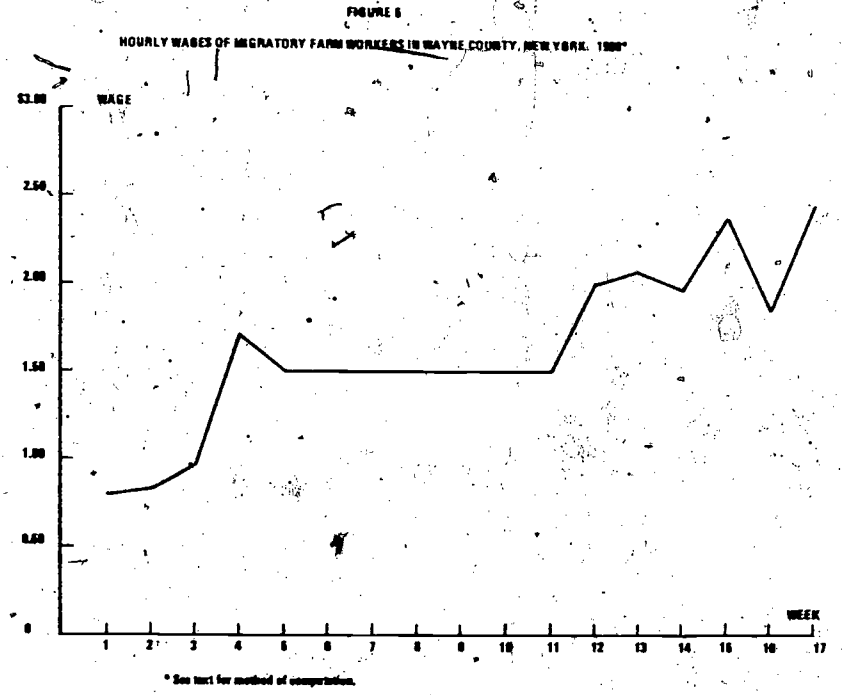

FIGURE 6

HOURLY WAGES OF MIGRATORY FARM WORKERS IN WAYNE COUNTY, NEW YORK, 1956*

* See text for method of computation.

A Comparison of Hourly Wages with the Federal Minimum Wage for Agriculture

The federal minimum wage for agriculture is $1.15 an hour. This minimum applies to farms which used 500 or more man-days of labor in any quarter of the preceding calendar year. There are no special overtime rates.

2. This is computed by summing the hourly earnings for each week and dividing by seventeen.

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FIGURE 7

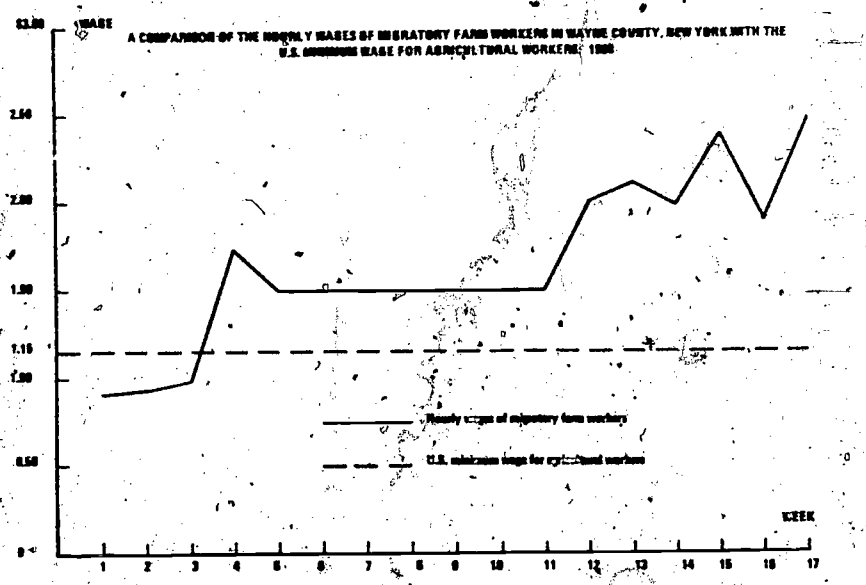

Figure 7 shows how migrants' hourly wages compare with the federal minimum wage for each of the seventeen weeks in Wayne. The federal minimum wage is shown as a straight line. It is seen that the hourly wages of migrants are above the federal minimum except for the first three weeks when migrants earn 80c, 85c, and 95c per hour, respectively. At the lowest point, migrants earn 35c per hour less than the federal minimum. For most weeks in the harvest, however, migrant wages are more than the federal minimum and this difference reaches its peak in the seventeenth and final week when the federal minimum is exceeded by $1.31. Over the seventeen-week season, the mean weekly wage of migrants ($1.62) is 47c per hour more than the federal minimum.

A Comparison of Hourly Wages with the State Proposed Minimum Wage for Agriculture

New York State does not have a minimum wage law governing agriculture. A bill for $1.40 per hour was introduced by the Governor in 1968 and was defeated. A similar bill has recently been introduced by him, proposing a $1.40 hourly rate effective October 1, 1969, which would rate to $1.50 as of February 1, 1971. The law would affect farms with an annual payroll of $1200 or more. (Editors Note: The bill was passed by the Legislature on April 25, 1969.)

FIGURE 8

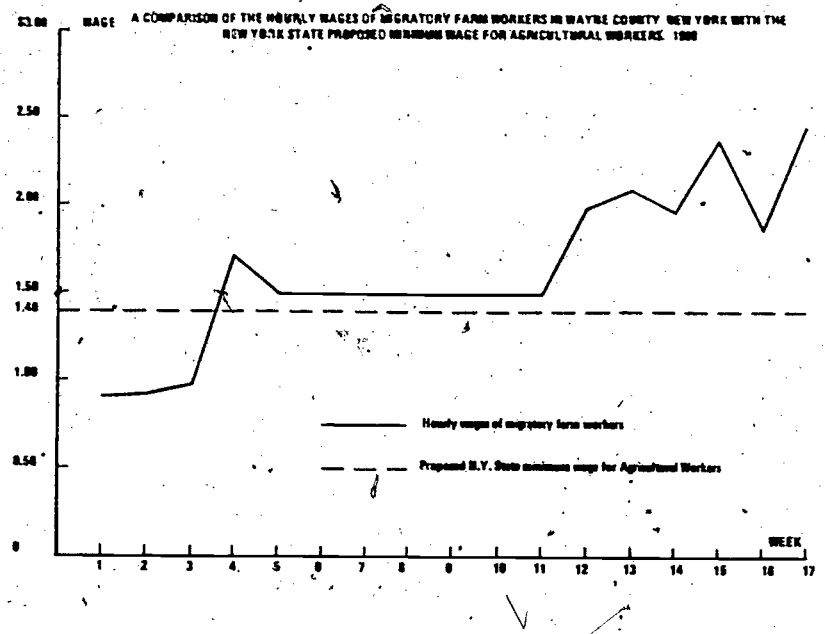

Figure 8 shows how the 1968 hourly wages of migrants would compare with the $1.40 minimum—assuming that it was in effect in 1968. The proposed state minimum is shown by a straight line. It is seen that with the exception of the first three weeks of the harvest, the average migrant earns more than the proposed state minimum. From 60c below the proposed minimum in the first week, by the final week migrant wages rise to $1.05 above the minimum. Over the season, the mean weekly wage of migrants ($1.62) exceeds the proposed state minimum by 22c per hour.

A Comparison of Hourly Wages in Wayne with Probable Wages in Florida

When workers leave their home state of Florida to work in Wayne, this might well involve a sacrifice in money earnings. That is to say, these workers could possibly have gotten more money in Florida than they got in Wayne. How much does a migrant sacrifice? This question is a little difficult to answer because it requires the assumption that if a migrant had remained in Florida, he would have had a job at the prevailing rate.

Interviews of migrants indicate that for the great majority of them, this assumption is dubious. Most migrants do not leave jobs to come to Wayne. Most are employed in Florida only during the citrus fruit harvest which begins after they leave Wayne. In short, it appears that most migrants would be unemployed should they choose to remain in Florida during the

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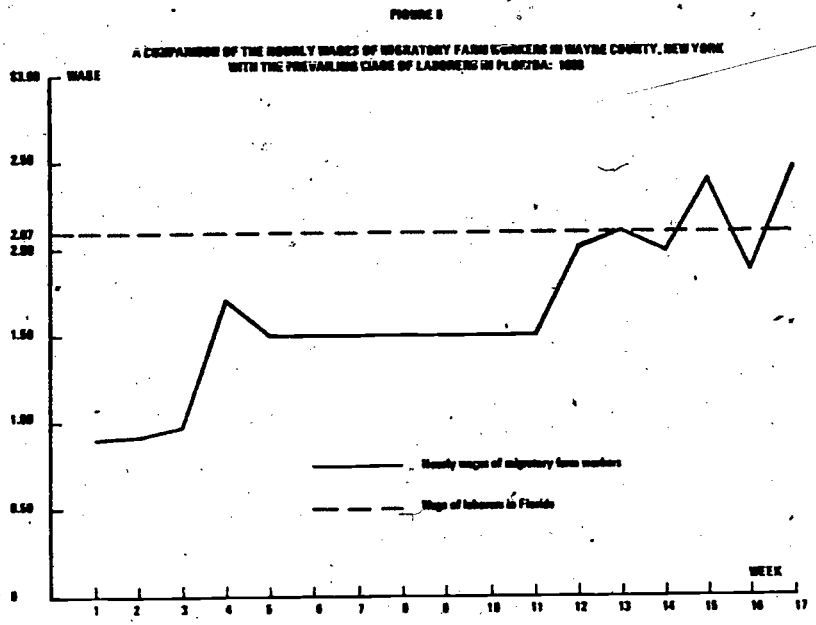
seventeen weeks of the Wayne harvest. Moreover, if wages in the occupations in which migrants could be employed in Florida change with the demand and supply of workers, competition among many migrants for employment could cause the prevailing wages in these occupations to be lower.

All this does not mean that an individual migrant could not be employed in his home state of Florida at the prevailing rate; for he could. All that is being cautioned is that what may be a valid assumption for an individual is not necessarily valid for a group. Since it may be assumed that an individual migrant could be employed in Florida at the prevailing rate, the next step is to select the occupation in which he could be employed. In this study it is assumed that at best the migrant who remains in Florida would be employed as a laborer since most migrants have low industrial skills.

The hourly wages as a migrant in Wayne are represented by the fluctuating line in Figure 9 while the prevailing wage



for nonagricultural laborers in Florida ($2.07) is represented by the straight line. (3) It is seen that with the exception of the thirteenth, fifteenth and seventeenth weeks of the season, the worker would earn less per hour worked in Wayne than he

3. August 1968 wage estimates for the Florida area appear in te Area Wage Survey prepared by the U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics of the U. S. Department of Labor.

could in Florida. At one extreme. the first week, he is $1.27 below his probable Florida earnings; at the other. the final week, he is 39c above. The general conclusion to be drawn is that the migrant who could work in Florida but who chooses to work in Wayne might be sacrificing an average of 45c an hour for each hour he works.

Total Earnings for the Harvest

The previous section was concerned with the weekly and hourly earnings of migrant workers. It was seen that these vary from week to week, that the hourly rates are generally above the federal minimum for agriculture, about even with the proposed state minimum for agriculture, but below Florida's prevailing wage for laborers. This section will deal with the total earnings of migrants for the harvest.

It will be recalled that migrant employment might be very irregular due to the inadequate demand for their services during certain periods of the harvest or due to their decision not to work. This irregularity might mean the loss of several hours, days or weeks of employment. (4) Moreover, some migrants may work very long hours during several weeks of the harvest. All these effects are reflected in the total earnings to be presented in this section. These effects obscure any simple relationship with the hourly or weekly earnings presented in the last sections. For example, the mean hourly wage over the harvest as estimated in this study is $1.62. This is important information in itself. However, it does not give any indication of a migrant's total earnings for the harvest. His total earnings will vary with the number of hours, days and weeks he works. Accordingly, the total earnings to be shown in this section reflect to a significant degree the irregularity of employment—the total number of hours, days, and weeks a migrant may not work for one reason or the other.

The total earnings to be shown are those of migrants who worked at least the first two and last two weeks of the harvest and at least a total of twelve weeks. These migrants can be assumed to have been in Wayne for the entire harvest. To concentrate only on migrants who worked each of the seventeen weeks would be very misleading since it would suggest that adequate employment is always available. In at least five weeks of the harvest, as suggested earlier, this is not true.

4. The inefficient organization of work and use of migrants are an additional reason for the loss of time by migrants.

Table 3 shows the total earnings of the migrants who meet the conditions set above. It is seen that the total earnings at the end of the 1968 harvest in Wayne range from just under $500 to just over $1800. The median (average) earnings is $1122.

TABLE 3

THE NUMBER OF WEEKS WORKED AND THE RANKING OF MIGRATORY FARM WORKERS BY SIZE OF TOTAL EARNINGS FOR THE HARVEST IN WAYNE COUNTY, NEW YORK: 1968*

Rank	Earnings (dollars)	Number of Weeks	Rank	Earnings (dollars)	Number of Weeks
1	498	12	22	1149	12
2	581	13	23	1158	16
3	627	16	24	1214	14
4	635	13	25	1265	16
5	639	15	26	1284	13
6	678	15	27	1328	17
7	682	15	28	1375	17
8	689	14	29	1454	17
9	723	16	30	1464	17
10	730	16	31	1478	17
11	804	16	32	1554	15
12	839	16	33	1617	17
13	896	13	34	1643	13
14	930	13	35	1662	17
15	1066	13	36	1670	15
16	1068	13	37	1681	16
17	1073	15	38	1687	17
18	1082	12	39	1738	17
19	1086	16	40	1751	17
20	1118	12	41	1814	13
21	1122	17**			

* All the workers whose earnings are listed are considered to be in Wayne for the entire harvest. Variations in number of weeks worked are attributed to the irregularity of employment. See text.

** Median (average) total earnings for the harvest.

A Comparison of the Total Earnings of Migratory Farm Workers with Those of Workers with Regular Employment

This section focuses on the underlying effects of the irregularity of migrant employment. Comparisons will be made between a migrant worker and a person working a regular forty-hour week over the seventeen-week period. It will be assumed, alternatively, that such a person's hourly earnings are $1.15 (the federal agricultural minimum); $1.40 (the proposed state agricultural minimum); $2.07 (the prevailing wage for Florida laborers) and $1.62 (the mean hourly rate for migrants in Wayne as estimated in this study). How do the total earnings of migrants compare with the total earnings of these workers?

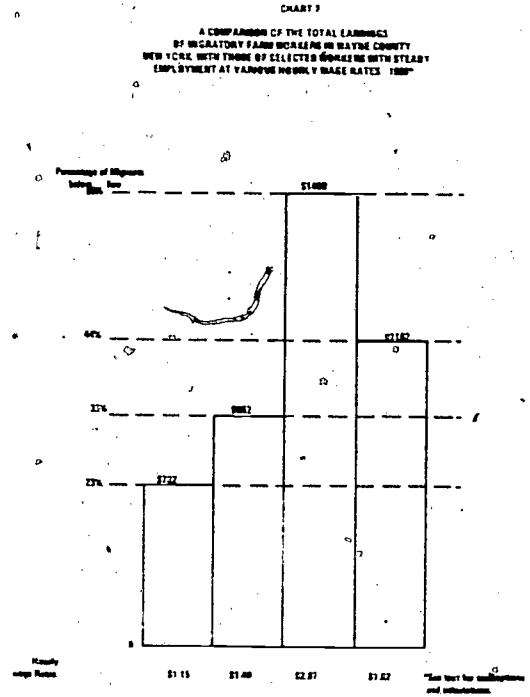


Chart 2 indicates that 23 per cent of the migrants earn less than a worker with steady employment at the federal agricultural minimum; 32 per cent earn less than someone who has a regular job at the proposed state agricultural minimum; 44 per cent earn less than a worker with a steady job at the mean

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hourly rate paid migrants in Wayne; and 65 per cent earn less than the laborer with steady employment in Florida.

The cost to the average migrant resulting from the irregularity of his employment in Wayne is estimated to be about $370. (3) The total money sacrifice the average migrant might make should he come to Wayne rather than work in Florida as a laborer at the prevailing rate is estimated to be at least $410 (4)

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3. This estimate is derived by subtracting $730 (the median earnings of those below $1102 from $1102 which is the amount a person with steady employment would earn at the mean migrant rate of $1.62 per hour).

4. This estimate is derived by subtracting $998 (the median earnings of those below $1408 from $1408 which is the amount a person with steady employment would earn at the prevailing rate for laborers in Florida).

   The actual cost to a migrant might be much higher even if he gets free housing from growers because the migrant still has to pay transportation cost and frequently sends money home to pay rental on is apartment there so as to secure it for his return.

CHAPTER IV

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH ON THE INCOME OF MIGRATORY FARM WORKERS

This study deals with a limited facet of migrant earnings. There are several other facets which should be investigated if a full appreciation of the earnings of these workers is to be gotten. This chapter will suggest five deserving areas of research. It is hoped that these proposed studies will be conducted not primarily to satisfy curiosity, but to render a service to all.

The Adequacy of Income

Presumably a study of the earnings of migratory farm labor recognizes that a man's income is probably the most important determinant of his ability to meet the present and future needs of his family. Simply looking at the size of his income alone, however, offers no indication of how adequately a man might be able to satisfy these needs. The adequacy of his income depends upon such considerations as the size, age, and sex composition of his family. Clearly, a man with twelve children requires more income than a man with one. A man with school-age dependents requires more than a man whose children are not yet in school.

The adequacy of income also relates to the price-level in the area where one lives. The cost of living varies from region to region in the United States. This concern with adequacy requires a comparison with some benchmark (such as the poverty line) which will show how the actual earnings of a migrant compare with what he needs to meet the minimum requirements of his family in the area where they live. No such comparison could be made in this study since it did not deal with the annual income of migrants.

The Ability to Pay More

It is frequently said that migrant workers are exploited. To economists, this implies that they are paid less than their contribution to the increase in society's well-being—the abundance of food. One aspect of migrant income which deserves serious consideration, is the extent to which exploitation does occur. To what extent is the migrant paid less than his contribution to our enjoyment of an abundance of food? To what extent does this difference, if any, appear in the profits of growers, processors, retailers? What is the capacity of these groups to pay more? Do migrant workers subsidize our food consumption? Answers to these questions will permit the establishment of an appropriate relationship between what a migrant earns and what he contributes to the society's well-being. This is one way to determine a "fair" wage for migrants.

The Reduction of Irregularity of Employment

This study has provided evidence that the irregularity of migrant employment is a major reason for their relatively low total earnings over the harvest. Moreover, it is during the slack periods that migrants are most vulnerable to exploitation; i.e., since employment is scarce, unreasonably low wages may be offered. Accordingly, it would be meaningful if a study could be conducted to provide an evaluation of alternative ways of reducing the irregularity of employment of migrants. Such an investigation should look into the entire conditions of migrant employment including the providing of unemployment insurance and guaranteed employment at adequate wages.

The Determinants of Earnings

One of the findings of this study is that migrant workers differ widely in their earnings even though they are picking the same crop at roughly the same rate. Through somewhat more sophisticated statistical techniques than those used in this study, it would be worthwhile to uncover the explanation for these disparities. A number of possible explanatory factors may be investigated. The productivity of migrants and the factors which influence it should be of central interests, since migrants are frequently paid on a piece-rate basis. Among the factors which influence a migrant's productivity might be his age, his experience, and his satisfaction with working and living conditions. If the role of these factors in determining the earnings of a migrant is understood, it might be possible to increase his income through them.

The Family as a Productive Unit

Migrant families are frequently composed of many children. Growers often prefer to employ a male migrant who brings his family along because this reduces his chances of leaving before the harvest is completed and supposedly increases his work efforts. On the other hand, a man who brings his family frequently poses a problem to growers, because children use the living space which could go to more productive workers. Some migrants may choose to bring along their children under the assumption that they contribute to family earnings. There have been reports of children foregoing educational opportunities in order to work with their parents. Further, in some circles it is believed that migrant parents have large families under the assumption that the greater the number, the greater the earning power. Two important questions for future study are: How much does an additional child contribute to the total earnings of a migrant household? Are the additions to family income attributed to these children worth the sacrifice?

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APPENDIX

TABLE 1

EARNINGS OF MIGRATORY FARM WORKERS IN WAYNE COUNTY, NEW YORK, JULY 7 TO AUGUST 3, 1968

Earnings (dollars)	Week of: July 7 - 13	14 - 20	21 - 27	28 - Aug. 3
	Number			
1 - 9	9	4	4	0
10 - 19	2	14	9	1
20 - 29	9	12	6	1
30 - 39	9	7	7	0
40 - 49	7	7	13	2
50 - 59	5	2	12	8
60 - 69	4	8	14	10
70 - 79	7	10	4	5
80 - 89	2	2	3	14
90 - 99	2	3	3	5
100 - 109	1	1	1	3
110 - 119	0	5	1	6
120 - 129	1	0	0	5
130 - 139	0	0	0	3
140 - 149	0	0	0	1
150 - 159	0	0	0	2
160 - 169	0	0	0	1
170 - 179	0	1	1	1
180 - 189	0	0	0	0
190 - 199	0	0	0	0
200 - 209	0	0	0	0
210 -	0	0	0	0
Total	58	76	78	68
Median (dollars*)	40	41	49	85

* Rounded to nearest dollar.

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APPENDIX

TABLE 2

EARNINGS OF MIGRATORY FARM WORKERS IN WAYNE COUNTY, NEW YORK, AUGUST 4 TO 31, 1968

Earnings (dollars)	Week of: Aug. 4 - 10	11 - 17	18 - 24	25 - 31
	Number			
1 - 9	5	0	1	1
10 - 19	12	1	4	0
20 - 29	9	2	6	5
30 - 39	3	7	12	8
40 - 49	0	11	15	7
50 - 59	3	15	10	15
60 - 69	4	3	2	4
70 - 79	7	1	3	9
80 - 89	9	10	0	6
90 - 99	2	4	2	0
100 - 109	3	2	0	1
110 - 119	1	1	2	1
120 - 129	5	1	0	0
130 - 139	0	1	0	0
140 - 149	0	1	0	0
150 - 159	1	0	0	0
160 - 169	1	0	0	0
170 - 179	0	0	0	0
180 - 189	0	0	0	0
190 - 199	0	0	0	0
200 - 209	0	0	0	0
210 -	0	0	0	0
Total	65	60	57	57
Median (dollars*)	101	56	44	55

* Rounded to nearest dollar.

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APPENDIX

TABLE 3

EARNINGS OF MIGRATORY FARM WORKERS IN WAYNE COUNTY, NEW YORK. SEPTEMBER 1 TO OCTOBER 5, 1968

Earnings (dollars)	Week of: Sept. 1 - 7	8 - 14	15 - 21	- 22 - 28	29 - Oct
	Number				
1 - 9	11	11	0	0	0
10 - 19	1	2	6	4	2
20 - 29	3	4	2	3	1
30 - 39	9	7	4	3	1
40 - 49	0	6	5	6	3
50 - 59	7	8	5	5	9
60 - 69	4	11	9	2	5
70 - 79	9	5	6	6	7
80 - 89	0	2	6	7	7
90 - 99	0	0	5	6	2
100 - 109	2	1	7	7	15
110 - 119	1	0	5	3	9
120 - 129	0	0	5	8	4
130 - 139	0	0	4	7	7
140 - 149	0	0	1	5	2
150 - 159	0	0	0	3	2
160 - 169	0	0	2	2	3
170 - 179	0	0	0	1	1
180 - 189	0	0	1	3	1
190 - 199	0	0	1	2	2
200 - 209	0	0	0	0	2
210 -	0	0	0	2	2
Total	47	57	74	85	87
Median (dollars*)	39	48	79	100	104

* Rounded to nearest dollar.

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APPENDIX

TABLE 4

EARNINGS OF MIGRATORY FARM WORKERS IN WAYNE COUNTY, NEW YORK, OCTOBER 6 TO NOVEMBER 1, 1968

Earnings (dollars)	Week of: Oct. 6 - 12	13 - 19	20 - 26	27 - Nov. 1
	Number			
1 - 9	0	0	0	0
10 - 19	3	0	2	1
20 - 29	4	3	3	0
30 - 39	2	0	5	0
40 - 49	6	1	6	0
50 - 59	5	2	7	1
60 - 69	9	6	8	4
70 - 79	7	3	7	2
80 - 89	9	9	2	2
90 - 99	9	8	5	5
100 - 109	9	5	13	5
110 - 119	2	7	5	3
120 - 129	6	8	4	3
130 - 139	3	2	7	4
140 - 149	4	7	1	4
150 - 159	5	5	1	5
160 - 169	2	4	1	1
170 - 179	2	3	3	4
180 - 189	1	2	2	3
190 - 199	1	2	0	0
200 - 209	0	1	0	1
210 -	0	9	1	0
Total	89	87	83	48
Median (dollars*)	89	119	93	123

* Rounded to nearest dollar.

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APPENDIX

TABLE 5

AVERAGE HOURLY RATE AND NUMBER OF HOURS WORKED BY MIGRATORY FARM WORKERS IN WAYNE COUNTY, NEW YORK, 1968: BY WEEK

Week Number	Date	Average Hourly Rate*	Average Number of Hours Worked
1	July 7 - 13	$0.80	50
2	14 - 20	0.82	50
3	21 - 27	0.98	50
4	28 - Aug. 3	1.70	50
5	Aug. 4 - 10	1.50	41
6	11 - 17	1.50	37
7	18 - 24	1.50	29
8	25 - 31	1.50	37
9	Sept. 1 - 7	1.50	26
10	8 - 14	1.50	32
11	15 - 21	1.50	53
12	22 - 28	2.00	50
13	29 - Oct. 5	2.08	50
14	Oct. 6 - 12	1.98	50
15	13 - 19	2.38	50
16	20 - 26	1.86	50
17	27 - Nov. 1	2.46	50

It is assumed that the average worker worked 50 hours a week during the first through the fourth and the twelfth through the seventeenth week of the harvest; and that the average hourly rate during fifth through the eleventh weeks is $1.50.

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