



# FICS

Florida Institute for Community Studies, Inc.  
El Instituto de Estudios Comunitarios de la Florida

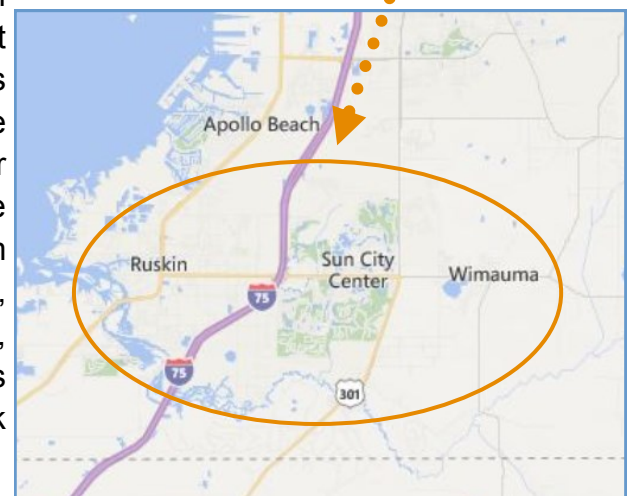
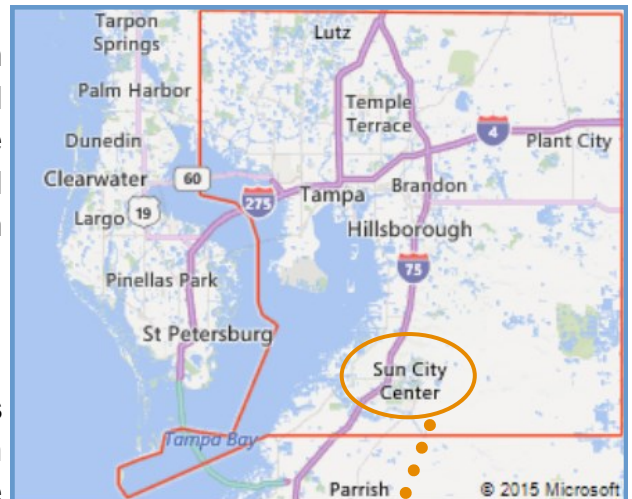
## “Campo a Casa – Farms 2 Homes” Project

### Summary

In the past 12 years that FICS has been working in South County, we have seen an increase in health concerns among migrant and seasonal farm workers, and a decrease in safety-related education. It is estimated that Hillsborough County is home to the highest population of migrant and seasonal farm workers in Florida (Abernathy, 2010). Documenting the existing health issues such as occupational and environmental health, and knowledge in these areas, will allow for an effective intervention aimed at reducing morbidity and mortality among farm workers and their families in South County.

### Challenge

Existing research shows that there are health risks to farm workers from chemical exposures with serious consequences for women’s reproductive health and subsequent birth defects (Rao, 2008). In addition, Svensson, et al. conducted a study that revealed increased occupational morbidity, such as falls, injuries to the eyes, lower back, and multiple organs (2013). Farm workers work full days under hazardous and stressful conditions, and are more prone to accidents such as crushing from farm equipment, accidental slicing with hand labor tools, and falling from ladders. Therefore, falls, cuts, amputations, and other injuries are common risks that migrant farm workers face in their daily work (Svensson, et al., 2013).



Maps of Hillsborough County (top) and South County, project focus area (bottom). Images courtesy of Bing.

## **Project Goals**

The objectives and purpose of the study was to document agricultural workers' health issues and perceptions of risk, and share this data with stakeholders and workers to design interventions.

## **Solution**

Fifty farm and nursery workers (hereafter referred to as workers) were surveyed and four stakeholders were interviewed in South Hillsborough County. Health issues, perception of risks, level of education, and work conditions were documented.

It was important to collaborate with USF COPH because of their experience analyzing data. USF COPH has a history of conducting research in our community and its surroundings.

## **Results**

The study revealed that the majority of workers have low education: 92% reported having a 6th-grade level of education or less. There are many obstacles that workers face when seeking health care. The main obstacle is the cost; 44% of workers reported that "health care is too expensive". The majority of workers (86%) pay for health care out of pocket. The second major obstacle is the barrier language; 30% reported that "doctors don't speak my language."

Other responses also indicated that workers delay seeking health care:

- 84% of workers seek medical attention only when they don't feel well
- Only 8% have seen a dentist in the last 6 months
- 22% have seen a dentist in the past year

Further, workers have a variety of health problems. Among respondents, 16% of workers and their families suffer from allergies, while 14% suffer from ear aches or ear infections. A lot of the work requires bending over, which supports the finding that 20% of workers have back pain.

The study revealed that there is very little preventive care among workers. Only 4% of workers receive yearly physical exams, 8% receive cholesterol checks and 8% receive blood pressure checks. The lack of preventive care is due to the reasons mentioned earlier: the cost of care and low education levels.

### ***Highlights from Stakeholder Interviews, on "What Impacts the Health of Workers"***

—"The work is hard and with harsh working conditions"

—"Lack of public transportation"

—"Lots of learning disabilities and ADHD in farm worker kids"

- "Heavy use of home remedies"

Even though workers work full time, the majority of them do not receive any benefits. For example, 66% of workers have done nursery or farm work for at least 5 years, but only 2% of employers offer health insurance and only 4% of workers are covered by unemployment insurance.

There are various laws that protect workers such as the Worker's Protection Standard and the Occupational Safety and Health Act, but they are not well enforced. Twenty seven percent of workers have direct contact with pesticides, of which 40% receive pesticide training. An alarming 70% of workers pay for all of their work equipment. If a worker is injured on the job, 2% are paid while recuperating. These laws require stricter reinforcement to protect the workers from occupational hazards.

### **Sustaining Success**

This study built on research by Svensson, et al. (2013) and Rao (2008), which showed there are serious health risk to farmworkers from hazardous working conditions and exposure to chemicals at work and at home. The next step in our work will be to disseminate our findings and recommendations to community members and stakeholders.

### **Recommendations**

Employers should strictly adhere to Hillsborough County farm safety regulations. All training should be offered in the workers' native language. Some of the recommended interventions include: increase preventive check ups, improve access to healthcare, eliminate mistreatment by crew leaders, and require employers to provide work tools and potable water.

### **Citations**

Abernathy, Laura. 2010. *The Need For Farmworker Housing In Florida*. University of Florida. Accessed June 23, 2015 at [http://flhousingdata.shimberg.ufl.edu/docs/RMS\\_FW\\_w\\_cover.pdf](http://flhousingdata.shimberg.ufl.edu/docs/RMS_FW_w_cover.pdf).

Rao, Pamela. 2008, *Reproductive Health Effects of Pesticide Exposure. Issues for Farmworker Health Service Providers*. Farmworker Justice. Accessed June 23, 2015 at <http://www.farmworkerjustice.org/sites/default/files/documents/Reproductive%20Health%20Effects%20of%20Pesticide%20Exposure.pdf>.

Svensson, Måns; Urinboyev, Rustamjon; Wigerfelt, Anders; Lundqvist, Peter; Littorin, Margareta; and Albin, Maria. 2013. *Migrant Agricultural Workers and Their Socio-Economic, Occupational and Health Conditions – A Literature Review*. Social Science Research Network. Accessed June 23, 2015 at [http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2297559](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2297559).

**Funding provided by:**  
**Florida Department of Health in Hillsborough County, Community Health Division,**  
**Office of Health Equity**

**Web Site**

hillsborough.floridahealth.gov

The findings and conclusions in this success story are those of author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official position of the funding agencies or DOH-Hillsborough.

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