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Growing Needs for Farmworkers Arise as Mesoamerican Indigenous Worker Populations Increases in Sampson County

Indigenous speaking workers face barriers to linguistically appropriate COVID-19 information and access to care

North Carolina – The [National Center for Farmworker Health](#) (NCFH), in collaboration with [North Carolina Farmworkers' Project](#) and [Manos Unidas](#), Black River Health Services, published the [results](#) of 337 surveys with farmworkers and 9 in-depth interviews that detail farmworkers' working and living conditions in Sampson County, the state's largest county for agriculture.

Through in-depth interviews, the report found that the Mesoamerican Indigenous community is growing in the area and public health officials need to prepare for these communities so that they can access linguistically appropriate public health information when other infectious diseases arise.

“Every worker in the United States should have access to health and safety resources that keep them safe on the job,” **said Sarah Prager, Research and Evaluation Manager at NCFH.** “Indigenous workers in Sampson County deserve resources in their native language so they can access health services and social supports. Offering culturally relevant resources that support immunization against COVID-19 can help set the county's public health department up for success when combating other infectious diseases or flu season.”

The survey found that two in five workers (40%) in Sampson County identified as racially or linguistically Indigenous, a percentage about seven times higher than that of the national percentage of farmworkers that identify as Indigenous based on the National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS). A farmworker outreach worker that has been working in the area for over a decade pointed out that there has been increased international worker recruitment in areas of Mexico and Central America with high proportions of Mesoamerican language speakers. Nonetheless, Mesoamerican Indigenous communities have been working in North Carolina agriculture for decades – survey results found Indigenous respondents had been in or coming to the U.S. for 16 years on average.

Language access is an issue for Mesoamerican Indigenous-speaking workers. Survey results identified 11 different Indigenous languages spoken in the area, with the top languages being Mixtec, Tsotsil, and Purépecha. According to the survey, 38% of Indigenous respondents did not receive critical COVID-19 training in their preferred language compared to 26% of non-Indigenous respondents who did not receive training in their preferred language.

Interviews noted that outreach to this population has become difficult due to a lack of culturally and linguistically appropriate materials and resources. “Access to interpreters, I think that is a big challenge as well. Like FQHCs [federally qualified health centers], or like public hospitals that are federally funded, don’t have interpreters, they’re not available,” **said an outreach nurse in the area about the lack of interpretation and translation services in Sampson County.**

The assessment provided insight into the need for support to address the COVID-19 disparities experienced by Indigenous communities. Indigenous respondents had a lower proportion of being fully vaccinated (70%) and a lower uptake of booster dose (20%) compared to the non-Indigenous community in the county – 88% and 35%, respectively. This could be attributed to a lack of appropriate COVID-19 information or access to health care.

It is evident that individuals who speak an Indigenous language in Sampson County face additional barriers to accessing health care and support services than non-Indigenous language speakers may not experience. “Workers coming to this country to work should have access to essential health information in their native language, they already are isolated from their families and communities at minimum health departments should adapt health materials regardless of their proficiency level in Spanish or English”, **said Dr. Bethany Boggess Alcauter, Director of Evaluation and National Agricultural Worker Health Program at NCFH.**

The county has an opportunity to do right by farmworkers and agricultural producers by focusing targeted efforts to provide more access to vaccinations and other health resources to this growing population. Culturally and linguistically appropriate educational materials are needed to help this population stay informed and to be better served by outreach partners in the county. This in turn could benefit the area’s agricultural economy by decreasing labor shortages and decreasing disease incidence and medical costs.

This survey is part of the [Farmworker COVID-19 Community Assessments \(FCCA\) project](#) which interviewed local farmworkers, agricultural employers, and farmworker advocates. NCFH will release results for counties in Colorado, New Jersey, and Washington state later this year.

The quotes above are from the FCCA in-depth interviews, therefore due to privacy, all participant responses remain anonymous.

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The National Center for Farmworker Health (NCFH) is a private, not-for-profit corporation located in Texas dedicated to improving the health status of farmworker families. NCFH provides information services, research, training, and technical assistance to the agricultural community and migrant health centers nationwide, as well as organizations, universities, researchers, and individuals involved in farmworker health. For updates visit www.ncfh.org.

