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MEDIA CONTACT

Sandra Baltazar Martínez

Latina Futures 2050 Lab

sbmartinez@chicano.ucla.edu

UCLA Report Finds Washington State Employers' Use of H-2A Visa Loopholes May Be Displacing Local Farmworkers

The state has seen H-2A agricultural worker recruitment increase by nearly 1,000% since 2008, raising concerns about job access and economic security for local workforce.

LOS ANGELES (August 10, 2026) — A new report released by [UCLA's Latina Futures 2050 Lab](#) in collaboration with the [UCLA Latino Policy and Politics Institute \(LPPI\)](#) finds that some Washington State employers are using the H-2A temporary agricultural worker program in ways that may reduce job access, hours, and economic security for local immigrant farmworkers, with particularly severe impacts on women.

Washington has seen some of the fastest growth in employer use of the H-2A program in the country. Since 2008, H-2A participation in the state has increased by about 1,000%, and in 2024, nearly 36,000 H-2A workers were employed on Washington farms, accounting for close to 30% of the state's agricultural workforce and nearly 10% of all H-2A workers nationwide. The growth is taking place in an agricultural industry that generates more than \$21 billion annually and has long depended on local immigrant farmworkers.

The report is authored by [Rosa María Navarro](#), a sociology doctoral candidate at UC Santa Cruz and Latina Futures 2050 Lab fellow.

Navarro's study draws on 75 interviews with farmworkers, advocates, attorneys, growers, and state officials, as well as 179 surveys of immigrant farmworkers across Washington State.

Among the key findings:

- Some growers are using H-2A recruitment loopholes as a primary hiring mechanism rather than a last-resort labor program. The report finds that many growers have shifted domestic recruitment almost entirely to online job postings placed on the Washington State Employment Security Department (ESD) website, even though local workers have historically accessed farm jobs through in-person applications, Spanish-language radio and newspaper ads, farm signage, or direct contact from supervisors, including through WhatsApp.
- State enforcement actions show that employer misuse of the H-2A program has displaced local immigrant farmworkers. The Washington State Attorney General's Office (AGO) has filed multiple lawsuits alleging discrimination against local workers and unlawful replacement with H-2A labor, including cases involving women farmworkers.
- Women farmworkers are disproportionately affected by these hiring practices. The report finds that they are especially vulnerable to displacement because women are more likely to face caregiving responsibilities and rigid scheduling barriers that make it harder to compete for work under employer-controlled hiring systems.
- Evidence from enforcement actions by the AGO corroborates patterns identified in interviews and surveys, demonstrating that misuse of the H-2A program has facilitated the displacement of local immigrant farmworkers. In recent years, the AGO has filed multiple lawsuits alleging discrimination against local workers and unlawful replacement with H-2A labor.
- Local farmworkers report reduced hours, lower earnings, and growing economic insecurity. Across interviews and surveys, workers described fewer job opportunities, shorter workweeks, reduced pay, and rising housing and food instability.

"Farmworkers have long been one of the most marginalized workforces in the United States. This research helps document how employer reliance on the H-2A program, combined with weak recruitment rules, is affecting the livelihoods of local workers and the communities that depend on agricultural employment," Navarro said. "The research also demonstrates how importing labor negatively affects women farmworkers since they carry most of the caregiving responsibilities. Women's work schedules, for example, tend to be

less flexible than a man's because they need to pick up children from school or stay home when their child is ill. When employers prioritize H-2A recruitment over meaningful local hiring, women who have worked in agriculture for years can be pushed out of jobs they depend on."

The study also found that most local workers are unaware of farm jobs that are posted online through the Washington State ESD website.

"Many workers reported that they had never used, and could not easily access, the state's unemployment security website," Navarro added. "Most importantly, many local immigrant farmworkers are undocumented and therefore do not qualify to apply through ESD, meaning this recruitment method effectively excludes them from jobs they have historically performed."

To strengthen Washington's agricultural workforce and local economy, Navarro recommends expanding labor protections for farmworkers, improving statewide data collection on the farm labor force, closing H-2A loopholes, strengthening oversight of local recruitment requirements, and investing in emergency rental assistance programs for all workers facing economic hardship. The report emphasizes that these reforms should protect local workers without weakening protections for H-2A workers.

Produced through Latina Futures 2050 Lab, a [UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center \(CSRC\)](#) initiative developed in partnership with LPPI, the report reflects the Lab's commitment to advancing policy research and supporting emerging scholars. [Read the full analysis here](#) or visit <https://tinyurl.com/34hr8rxr>. To download the report, [click here](#) or visit <https://tinyurl.com/4aa6kycf>.

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About Latina Futures 2050 Lab

[Latina Futures 2050 Lab](#), a research initiative spearheaded by the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center (CSRC), was created in 2022 in collaboration with the UCLA Latino Policy and Politics Institute (LPPI). Funded by a \$15 million California state budget allocation, Latina Futures seeks to increase knowledge and insight through applied policy research on the contours of the economic, political, and social lives of all women and girls living in the United States over the next several decades. To learn more, visit www.chicano.ucla.edu/research/latina-futures-2050-lab

About the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center

The UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center (CSRC), founded in 1969, is an established leader in the development of scholarly research on the Chicano-Latino population in the United States. For more information, visit chicano.ucla.edu.

About UCLA Latino Policy and Politics Institute

The UCLA Latino Policy and Politics Institute is a non-partisan research institute that seeks to inform, engage, and empower Latinos through innovative research and policy analysis. LPPI aims to promote equitable and inclusive policies that address the needs of the Latino community and advance social justice. latino.ucla.edu.