

Agricultural Employment Discussion #1

11/4/19

Attendees:

Representative Thom Harnett, Representative Bill Pluecker, Representative Mike Sylvester, Commissioner Laura Fortman, Nancy McBrady, Julie Ann Smith, Mike Guare, Jan Morrill, Donald Flannery, Carolyn Russo, Ian Yaffe, Jenni Tilton-Flood, Richard Brzozowski, Sean Douglas, Ryan Wilson, Jorge Acero, Bart Hutchinson, Isaac Gingras and Mike Roland.

There was considerable discussion of the effects the proposed changes in employment law might have on workers and employers in agricultural enterprises. A major theme arose early: the need for data on agricultural employment in Maine in order to inform our discussion. The following specific data points were requested:

- Numbers employed/hours worked in Maine, by
 - seasonal vs year-round
 - ft vs pt
 - students?
 - OT (by season?)
 - Include aquaculture?
- Wage (average/range?), by
 - product/crop
 - occupation
 - location
 - hourly vs piece rate?
 - Effect of rent (if included), other “non-monetary” remuneration?
 - Paid vs “unpaid” labor
- Number of farms in Maine, by
 - Product/crop(s)
 - Size
 - Location
 - Value
- Income/profitability of farming (or lack thereof?),
 - Capital/ROI
 - mechanization/efficiency
 - relative cost of labor
- Violations (other than minwage & OT?) in agriculture employment

(Did I identify these correctly? Were other items mentioned that should be added?)

The following possible sources of data were mentioned (and are being explored as noted):

- Dyson School survey, link provided by Jenni Tilton-Flood (thanks, Jenni!):
<http://publications.dyson.cornell.edu/outreach/extensionpdf/2016/Cornell-Dyson-eb1612.pdf>
- USDOL data available regarding federal minimum wage violations in recent years? (BLS staff reaching out to US W&H)
- USDOL's National Agricultural Workers Survey (Nancy McBrady and Jorge Acero offered to explore this and other currently existing data on agriculture in Maine)
- MDOL/Center for Workforce Research and Information (will attend and provide data at next meeting)

(Again, what did I miss or get wrong?)

The conversation eventually turned toward the barriers agricultural workers face regarding organizing in their common interests and acting collectively to improve conditions in the industry. Someone asked what workers other than agricultural employees are excluded from legal protections (such as the National Labor Relations Act) for concerted activities. Mike Guare (and possibly others?) offered to bring an answer to our next meeting.

We agreed to meet again within about a month to continue the conversation.