AT RISK AND UNDER-PROTECTED:
CALIFORNIA IMMIGRANT LATINOS AND THE
COVID-19 CRISIS IN LOW WAGE WORK

A presentation to the California Latino Caucus
Informational Briefing on Latinos, Work and COVID-19
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Today we will share research that indicates the need for a shift in public discourse on COVID-19 policy. Key findings suggest that:

1. The pandemic has led to many more Latino deaths than have been accounted for, particularly among immigrants.
2. Latino compliance with public health mandates is no different than that of non-Latinos.
3. Stronger enforcement and education around workplace rights and health and safety is vital for mitigating COVID-19 spread.
COVID-19 DEATHS

- In California, **Latinos** have experienced a greater increase in pandemic-era deaths than any other group.
- For Latinos there were **35.9% more deaths** in 2020 than in 2019. Whites had the lowest increase (6.1%).

![Figure 1.1 Excess deaths, by race (California)](chart.png)

• **Immigrant Latinos** experienced the greatest increases in deaths—despite average health.

COVID-19 DEATHS

- Fourteen counties experienced an over 50% increase in immigrant Latino deaths.

Figure 1.3 Immigrant Latino excess deaths, by county (California)

Source: UC Merced Community and Labor Center analysis of California Department of Public Health - California Vital Data, March-August 2019-2020
While efforts for mitigating the COVID-19 crisis have focused on education around **individual-level behavior** (e.g. mask-wearing, avoiding crowds, social distancing)…
PUBLIC HEALTH BEHAVIOR

UC Merced research has found no evidence that Latinos do not follow individual-level public health mandates.

Rather, Latinos are financially vulnerable and work in low-wage environments not conducive to public health mandates.
Our Fresno Speaks study (Almeida et al. 2020) examined nearly 2,400 Fresno residents’ experiences with COVID-19 and individual-level compliance with public health mandates.
Fresno Latinos’ compliance with public health mandates was the same as that of other groups, between 86 and 92% (with a 95% confidence interval, and 2% margin of error).
Rural immigrant Latinos experienced financial insecurity, worked in environments with unsafe practices, and said they did not speak out due to fear of retaliation (Young et al. 2020).
California Latinos comprise a large proportion of the essential jobs not conducive to social distancing—especially food chain jobs.

Across the US, only 16.2% of Latinos are able to work from home—the lowest rate of any group (EPI, 2020).

Figure 3. Percent of Essential Industries that is Latino (California)

Source: UC Merced Community and Labor Center analysis of US Census Bureau American Community Survey 2014-2018 Public Use Microdata (PUMS) data
Agricultural and food processing workers have a uniquely disadvantaged profile. Agricultural and food processing workers have high rates of being immigrant, non-citizen, earning low wages, and living in large or multiple family households.

### Table 1. Characteristics of Farmworker Households (versus all others), California only

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ag worker</th>
<th>Food proc</th>
<th>All other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demographics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>94.1%</td>
<td>63.1%</td>
<td>37.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Immigrant</td>
<td>78.8%</td>
<td>50.5%</td>
<td>33.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-citizen</td>
<td>66.4%</td>
<td>31.0%</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Earnings</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Median salary and wages</td>
<td>$21,005</td>
<td>$32,316</td>
<td>$40,394</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Household Size</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons per household</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subfamily rate (per 100 households)</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>9.0</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Household Structure</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>% of single adult households</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults per household</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of households with 1+ child</td>
<td>62.3%</td>
<td>47.8%</td>
<td>32.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of households with 2+ children</td>
<td>44.6%</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children per household</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Worker Households</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>% of households with 2+ workers</td>
<td>62.8%</td>
<td>65.9%</td>
<td>39.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employees per household</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of households</td>
<td>175,669</td>
<td>184,169</td>
<td>12,802,904</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: UC Merced Community and Labor Center analysis of IPUMS: American Community Survey 2019 data
The profile of disadvantaged immigrant workers in essential frontline industries leaves them vulnerable to workplace health and safety non-compliance.

Prior to the pandemic, some industries already had a long track record of workplace health and safety non-compliance (Padilla and Flores 2020). This is especially true in the Central Valley’s meatpacking industry.
Across the last five years, the Central Valley’s meatpacking industry has accounted for **two of every three** (68 of 105, or 64.8%) of the state’s inspections related to meatpacking accidents, complaints or whistleblower-related investigations (Padilla and Flores 2020).
WORKPLACE HEALTH AND SAFETY

At the same time, the Central Valley’s meatpacking industry has had nearly the lowest rate of violations issued per inspection in the state—suggesting a greater need for enforcement (Padilla and Flores 2020).

![Graph showing violations per inspection in the Central Valley's meatpacking industry](source: UC Merced Community and Labor Center analysis of US Department of Labor-Occupational Safety and Health Administration 2015-2020 data)
• **Non-compliance** with workplace health and safety measures has seeded some of the state’s **largest COVID-19 outbreaks** in agriculture and meatpacking.

• In early May, an outbreak in Kings County-based Central Valley Meat Company accounted for **virtually all** of the county’s **hundreds** of COVID-19 cases (Bolanos 2020).
April
Merced County Public Health Department (MCDPH) first notified of multiple COVID-19 cases in the Foster Farms facility.

June
MCDPH find workers at Foster Farms testing at a 40% positivity rate (8 times the county’s 5.3 positivity rate) and two deaths. July 13 MCDPH decides to involve the state.

August
First Cal/OSHA site visit. MCDPH finds Foster Farms did not adopt June 29 recommendations and issues two directives. Foster Farms does not comply. On August 27 after 392 positive cases and eight worker deaths, Foster Farms is ordered to shut down. Local, state, and federal agencies meet.

September
Foster Farms shuts down, reopens, and then implements MCDPH directives.

FOSTER FARMS LIVINGSTON OUTBREAK
CONCLUSION

• In conclusion, we find that:

• First, California immigrant Latinos have had far greater COVID-19 era increases in death than any other group.

• Second, California Latino deaths are not due to lack of individual-level compliance with public health mandates.

• Third, industries with low-wage, immigrant Latino workers have a long track record of health and safety non-compliance—and such industries are now at greater risk of COVID-19 spread.
• We recommend:
  • **First, education** efforts need to focus on **workplace-related** behavior, such as workplace health and safety education, **worker rights** trainings, and the use of compliance-related **mechanisms**.
  • **Second, stronger enforcement** around workplace health and safety standards, as well as **inter-agency** collaboration.
• Our July 2020 brief, *Hidden Threat*, found that county-level COVID-19 positivity rates were correlated with a prevalence of large and low-wage households.
Nearly all (14 of 15) counties with a high prevalence of large and low-wage households had positivity rates above 8%, and virtually no (2 of 37) other California counties had positivity rates above 8%.