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The Impact of Globalization on the Composition of the U.S. Farm Labor Pool and its Implication for Occupational Safety and Health

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Globalization has led to change in virtually every aspect of economic life. Among the many changes have been alterations in migration patterns as tens of millions of migrants moved to seek jobs in other countries. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) that entered into force on Jan. 1, 1994, allowed the free movement of capital, but prohibited the free movement of migrant labor. Nevertheless, the political changes that accompanied it, such as the modification of the Mexican Constitution's Article 27 regulating land tenure, contributed to the movement of peasants from the land to the cities, to the border, and to the United States. The National Agricultural Workers survey conducted by the US Department of Labor has collected data on the demographics of farm workers since 1989 and in 1998 an occupational health supplement was added by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). This data provides information showing that following the passage of NAFTA there was a sharp increase in the migration of younger, inexperienced, unaccompanied and undocumented male farmworkers. Between 1994 and 1997 the percent of undocumented farm workers rose from 35% to 52%. The percentage of farmworkers who were new to agriculture rose from 11% in the 1989 to 1993 period to 24% in the 1994 to 1997 period and the percent Mexican-born new workers increased from 57% to 73%. This has important implications for occupational safety and health potentially placing these highly vulnerable workers at increased risk for injury and illness.

Learning Objectives: At the end of this presentation the participant will understand the demographic changes in US farm work and will understand how trade agreement have impacted on labor markets.

Keywords: Occupational Injury and Death,

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Organization/institution whose products or services will be discussed: None

I do not have any significant financial interest/arrangement or affiliation with any organization/institution whose products or services are being discussed in this session.

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