

A LISTENING – LEARNING COLLABORATION  
BETWEEN EQUITABLE FOOD INITIATIVE,  
CIERTO GLOBAL AND &WIDER

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**THE IRÉ  
PROJECT:  
How Mexican  
Workers  
Define Ideal  
Recruitment  
and  
Recruitment  
Priorities**

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APRIL 2021





# Executive Summary

The Innovación en Reclutamiento Ético (IRÉ) Project was initiated by Equitable Food Initiative (EFI) to generate insight on how farmworkers who are recruited for jobs on fresh produce farms in the United States, Canada and Mexico would redesign the recruitment experience. Resourced and supported by EFI and implemented by Cierro Global and &Wider, this project created an opportunity to learn about worker experiences and how workers define ideal recruitment.

The project included three phases of data gathering. Phase 1 made use of a combination of in-person and telephone interviews with workers to generate worker views on what constitutes better recruitment. This stage involved 652 interviewees. For Phase 2, a mobile phone survey generated actual worker experiences and gathered data from 441 survey respondents. Phase 3 used telephone interviews to test ideal recruitment models and approaches across 203 interviewees to identify what workers most prefer and why.

Insights transcended the recruitment process. They also encompassed the ideal journey, landing, integration into life on the farm, and the journey home.

The project found that workers design their ideal recruitment experience around the hazards they currently encounter in the recruitment process. The most pronounced trend shows that many workers feel stuck and unable to leave the farm, even under exploitative circumstances. Another common experience for workers is the expectation of covering their own travel costs to and from the farm, which generates a significant financial burden for many. Workers also experience threats and exploitative promises at the hands of farm managers and supervisors. Those working outside of a guest worker program report worse experiences, including unfair contracts, docked wages and unsafe journeys.

When workers were asked to define ideal recruitment, the most common priorities were:

1. clear and trustworthy information
2. a supportive community of workers
3. a means of ensuring safety on three levels: physical safety, financial safeguards from unexpected fees and expenses, and protection from threats and exploitative promises.

Insights from this report will help stakeholders across the fresh produce industry to build a more positive recruitment experience for workers.



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# Introduction

The Innovación en Reclutamiento Ético (IRÉ) Project was conducted to investigate the experiences of Mexican workers who were recruited for jobs on fresh produce farms in the United States, Canada and Mexico, as well as gather their suggestions for improving the recruitment process. The project launched in August 2020 and was concluded in March 2021.

This report summarizes the collaborative work undertaken by the three partner organizations: Equitable Food Initiative (EFI), Cierito Global and &Wider. The insight gathered provides a clear picture of workers' experiences, priorities and hopes for a better recruitment journey from country of origin to place of employment and back home again.

The project partners hope this report does justice to the time, personal stories, suggestions and priorities so generously offered by those interviewed and surveyed.



**The insight gathered provides a clear picture of workers' experiences, priorities and hopes.**

# Project Partners



With the objective of gathering insight into the experiences of farmworkers who are recruited to work on U.S., Canadian and Mexican fruit and vegetable farms, a three-way partnership was formed between EFI, Ciertoglobal and &Wider. Each partner brought critical expertise and access needed for implementation of The IRÉ Project:

## **Equitable Food Initiative**

EFI was created by leaders in the supply chain who wanted increased assurance around working conditions and food safety. These visionaries knew that training and supporting farmworkers on the front line would create a culture that could eventually revolutionize the industry.

A nonprofit certification and skill-building organization, EFI seeks to increase transparency in the food supply chain and improve the lives of farmworkers through a team-based approach to training and continuous improvement practices. The organization brings together growers, farmworkers, retailers and consumers to solve the most pressing issues facing the fresh produce industry. Its unparalleled approach sets standards for labor practices, food safety and pest management while engaging workers at all levels on the farm to produce Responsibly Grown, Farmworker Assured® fruits and vegetables.

[equitablefood.org](http://equitablefood.org)

## **CIERTO Global**

CIERTO Global is a certified farm labor contractor that recruits, trains and places experienced agricultural workers from Mexico on farms in the United States. Its mission is to create a professional agricultural workforce that is skilled and certified and brings added value to the food supply chain.

CIERTO protects the interests of growers, workers and retailers in numerous ways – from recruitment using trusted networks across Mexico, to ensuring the proper filing of H-2A petitions, to training and managing all the details necessary to ensure full labor contract compliance. [ciertoglobal.org](http://ciertoglobal.org)

## **&Wider**

To support business owners, buyers, certification bodies and others interested in using data to improve workers' lives, &Wider enables worker reporting and gathering of insight directly and anonymously from workers themselves across global supply chains. Established in 2014, the company works across four sectors and over 30 geographies with numerous partners, with the vision to make working conditions visible at scale in order to encourage and measure improvements. [andwider.com](http://andwider.com)

In the context of the project, the partners played the following roles:

<b>PARTNER</b>	<b>ROLE</b>
Equitable Food Initiative	Fundraising and reporting to funders; overall coordination
CIERTO Global	Fieldwork and support of researchers; collection of phone numbers for mobile phone survey
&Wider	Research design; training of researchers; mobile phone survey; data analysis; report writing

While this division of roles suggests mutually exclusive effort, all partners were involved in strategy and outputs throughout the process.

# Methodology

The project focused predominantly on gaining insights into current recruiting realities and sourcing suggestions for ideal recruitment from Mexican workers who have been recruited to fruit and vegetable farms in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

In order to achieve the defined objectives, three distinct phases were undertaken, each with its own focus and data collection method:

<b>PHASE</b>	<b>FOCUS OF THE DATA</b>	<b>SAMPLE SIZE (of which X were CIERTO Global clients)</b>	<b>DATA COLLECTION METHOD</b>
1	Ideal recruitment	652 (236)	In-person interviews (352) and telephone interviews (300)
2	Past/present experiences of recruitment	441 (365)	Mobile phone survey
3	Redesigning recruitment: models and priorities	203 (130)	Telephone interviews

For phases 1 and 3, which invited workers to design ideal recruitment and highlight priority changes they would wish to make to recruitment practices and processes, the interviews were either face to face or by telephone. Phase 2, which gathered current experiences in recruitment, made use of an anonymous mobile phone survey to avoid the risk that sharing sensitive information might trigger victimization or stigma for participating workers or the researchers who conducted the interviews.

Nonetheless, past and present personal experiences with recruitment were also gathered during the interviews, and these were included in the analyzed data and hence in the insights shared in this report. Please note that the tools used for data collection – the interview guides and survey – are included in the appendices at the end of the report.

## **Data tables and charts**

The data tables and charts in this report focus only on those questions and responses that can be classified as problem areas. For example, a survey question might ask, “*Did you feel like you had the option to leave the job if you felt unsafe or if the terms and conditions of your contract were not being met?*” If the response was “no,” it indicated the worker was in a negative or problematic situation. Since this project was seeking issues that may need resolving, those perceived to be problematic by workers were of primary importance in the analysis process.

# Project Setting and Participants

The IRÉ Project took place amid the COVID-19 pandemic, which informed the data collection methods and the sampling undertaken. Originally, the project was envisioned to involve two stages of in-person interviewing in selected communities in and around Mexico City. However, measures undertaken in Mexico to contain the spread of the coronavirus led to a change in project participation. Some Phase 1 interviewing (approximately 55%) was conducted face to face. The remaining interviews for Phase 1 and all interviews in Phase 3 took place via telephone. Phase 2 used a mobile phone survey, which was designed as a remote solution for gathering data on recruitment experiences.

Because of pandemic restrictions, interviewers had to rely on CIERTO Global's existing network to access sufficient workers to interview. Project participation by a significant number of workers recruited by CIERTO Global resulted in a sampling bias that is apparent in the data and insights reported here.

Due to the timing and hard work of the researchers who conducted the interviews, the Phase 1 sample was far more diverse, with just 36% of the overall sample being connected to CIERTO. As a result, this data set features rich insights about recruitment practices beyond CIERTO.

Wherever possible, questions were designed to compensate for bias by asking workers to comment on recruitment norms rather than merely sharing their own personal experiences. Many workers interviewed also referred to their experiences prior to working with CIERTO Global.

While the "CIERTO experience of recruitment" is apparent in this data, there is also sufficient insight into recruitment experiences at the hands of other agricultural labor contractors.

## Further project limitations

In addition to the sampling bias and the need to conduct much of the interviewing in phases 1 and 3 via phone, a different but related limitation exists. The workers who participated in this project were ones who were confident enough to accept the invitation to be interviewed by a stranger about the sensitive issue of recruitment, and ones who owned or had access to a mobile phone.

It can be assumed, then, that the data set lacks insight from workers without mobile phones and those who were not comfortable with the interview process. This cohort of workers who did not or could not participate is also likely to be a cohort subjected to worse recruitment practices because of lower confidence levels and marginality. So, it is important to remember that the insights reported here, especially those relating to the most unethical recruitment practices, are likely to have been described in different terms and with higher frequency by those most vulnerable to harmful practices.



## Recruitment fees

One final limitation to consider: It was noticeable that what the project partners define as recruitment fees was different from what workers may have defined as recruitment fees. The former was a broader definition than that commonly understood by the majority of workers who participated in the project. Hence this report, while respecting the data provided by workers in response to direct questions about recruitment fees, also explored unexpected expenses that would be defined by the project partners as fees incurred during the recruitment process.

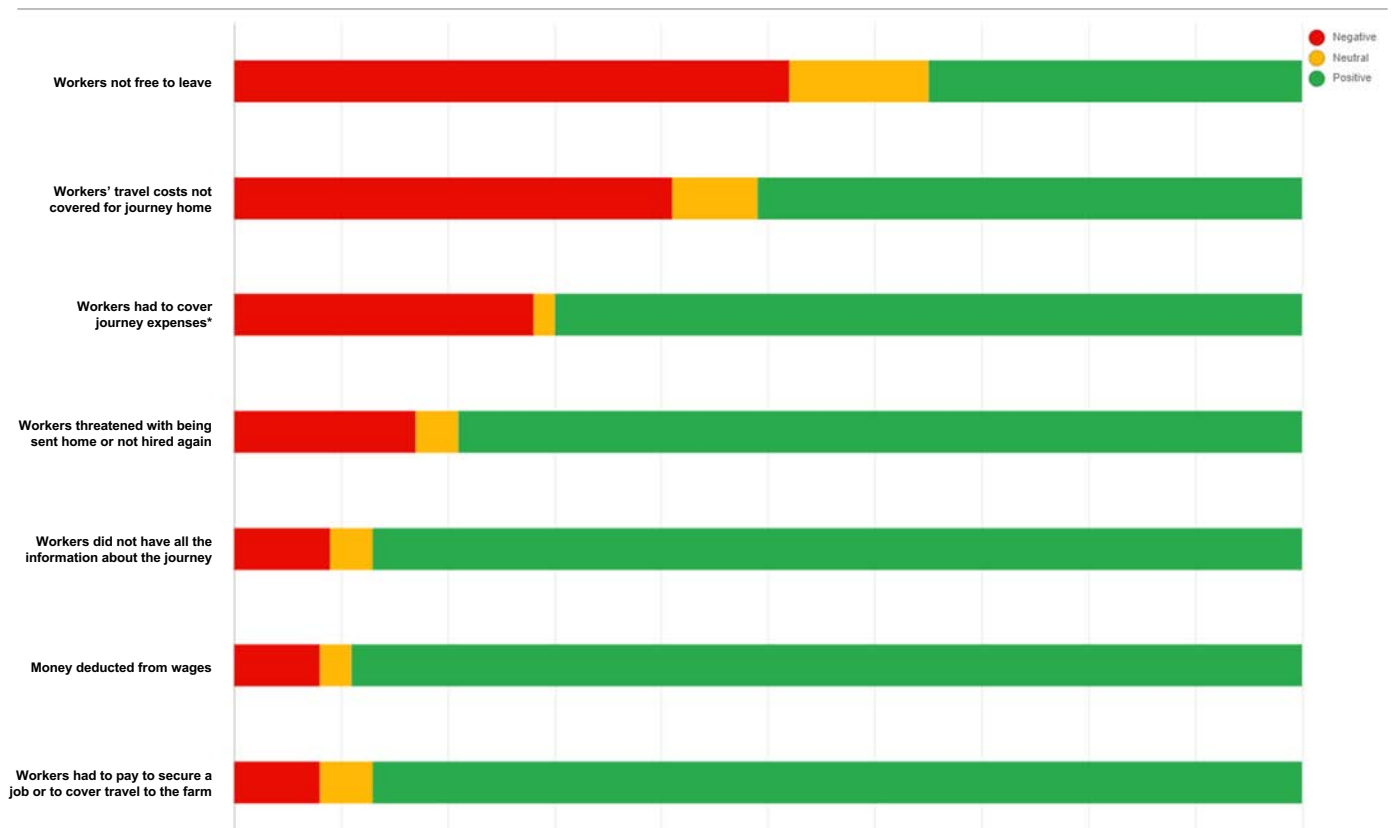
# What We Learned

## Current realities

The survey conducted by mobile phone, which included 441 respondents, gathered demographic information and identified and measured a range of personal experiences of agricultural workers from Mexico who were recruited to travel for employment on fresh produce farms. This phase of The IRÉ Project included a series of 20 multiple-choice questions that helped establish the current realities of the recruitment process. Trends apparent in the survey data were supported by examples and stories offered during in-person and phone interviews. The combination of charts, tables and quotes in this section presents a picture of workers' circumstances and top issues of concern.

In analyzing the survey data, a color-coded system of red, yellow and green indicated if responses to questions showed that workers found themselves in negative situations that they perceived as problematic. A problem area was identified, for example, if it showed that a worker wasn't free to leave the job or didn't have all the information about the journey to the farm. Overall, seven survey questions identified key problem areas, as summarized in Chart 1.

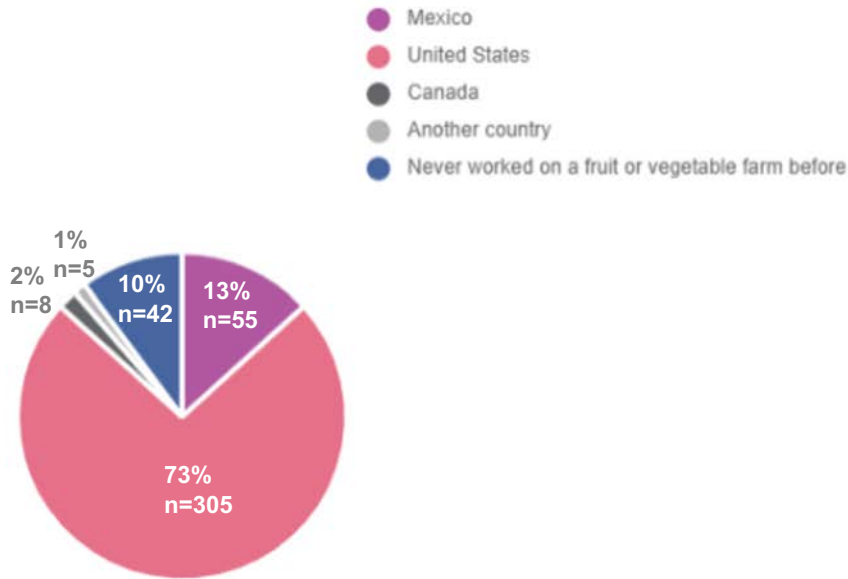
**Chart 1:** Top problem areas for Mexican workers recruited to work on fruit and vegetable farms in the United States, Canada and Mexico



\* Workers who covered any or all of the journey expenses, including food, lodging and travel costs to and from the farm.

Respondents had been recruited for farm work in several different countries. The following chart indicates the proportion of surveyed workers from Mexico who were recruited to farms in the United States, Canada, Mexico and elsewhere.

**Chart 2:** Proportion by destination of respondents recruited for farm work



Below, Table 1 goes into further detail, summarizing the results for all issues or indicators flagged by workers as needing attention. Results are also presented by country of destination (where the employing farm is located).

**Table 1:** Comparison by destination of recruited worker experiences

Worker Experience	% of Recruited Workers (n=415)*	% From Recruits to U.S. (n=305)**	% From Recruits to Canada (n=8)**	% From Recruits to Mexico (n= 55)**
Workers reported that they were not free to leave	49	52	25	42
Workers' travel costs had to be covered for journey home	43	44	50	41
Workers had to cover journey expenses	30	28	50	49
Workers did not have all information about the journey	14	8	25	28
Workers threatened with being sent home or not hired again	18	18	12	23
Workers reported not having received a clear contract	10	5	12	30
Workers reported that money was deducted from wages	9	7	12	23
Workers reported having had an unsafe journey	9	5	12	25
Workers had to take out a loan to pay a recruitment fee	10	8	25	15
Workers reported not having clear and accurate information about farmworker jobs	5	4	12	8
Contract terms and conditions not as expected	12	8	12	28
Workers had to pay recruitment fee over the past year	7	6	12	9
Workers had to pay to secure a job or to cover travel to the farm	9	9	12	11

\* All workers who responded to the question, "If you have been recruited for a job on a fruit or vegetable farm, where was the farm?"

\*\* Includes respondents by destination.

## **Workers heading to Mexican farms report more challenges**

When reviewing the results of the mobile phone survey, workers headed to jobs on Mexican farms clearly reported worse experiences in terms of travel, contractual terms, and threats or exploitative promises while working on the farm, compared with their peers heading to work on U.S. farms.

Workers across the board reported having to cover the cost of traveling home, but 49% of workers heading to Mexican farms (as compared with 28% of workers heading to U.S. farms) were expected to cover food, lodging and any other expenses associated with the journey to and from the farm. This difference was not unexpected given that most journeys to work in the U.S. are significantly longer than to Mexican farms.

In comparison to their counterparts heading to the United States, a higher proportion of surveyed workers heading to Mexican farms reported negative experiences associated with quality of information about the journey, safety during the journey, payment of recruitment fees, contract clarity or altered contractual terms, wage deductions and threats of not being re-hired. In short, the recruitment, journey, contracting and treatment on the farm were all perceived as more unclear and exploitative on Mexican farms than on U.S. farms, according to the workers answering the mobile phone survey. However, the number of participating workers heading to U.S. farms (n=305) was six times higher in this project than the number heading to Mexican farms (n=55), so these results may well conceal the range of circumstances that may apply on different farms in the Mexico.

Ultimately, the data showed that no matter which location was the destination for workers – and no matter if respondents were part of a guest worker program – their struggles were most explicitly with:

1. Feeling unable to leave, even when feeling unsafe or when contract terms were not being honored.
2. Having to cover journey expenses, particularly expenses related to the return journey, but also for the journey to the farm.
3. Being threatened with being sent home early or not being hired again.

## Workers feeling unable to leave

The overall data set highlights the hard reality that migrant workers feel unable to simply “vote with their feet” and leave if and when they are unsafe or experiencing exploitation. This was apparent in the data gathered in response to the following question (the first worker experience listed in Table 1):

*“Did you feel like you had the option to leave the job if you felt unsafe or if the terms and conditions of your contract were not being met?”*

This experience of being stuck and vulnerable in difficult circumstances is more pronounced for some than others. Those workers heading to farms in the United States and Mexico seemed more affected than those heading to Canada. Male workers experienced this issue more (55%) than their female counterparts (29%), as did those who were not part of a guest worker program.

This metric essentially measures vulnerability, given that workers who perceive themselves as unable to leave even when the circumstances of their new job are exploitative are also more likely to be exploited. These workers are under more pressure (for a host of reasons not measured in this survey) to stay in their new job regardless of the circumstances – contractual terms, demands, respect or lack thereof, quality of housing provided and more.

One of the most striking features of the mobile phone survey data set is the different experiences reported by workers who were part of a formal guest worker program versus those who were not. Table 2 illustrates these differences.

**Table 2:** Comparison of guest worker program experiences to those not in a guest worker program (only indicators with negative responses greater than 20% are included)

Worker Experience	% of All Workers	% From Guest Worker Program (n=277)	% of Those Not in Guest Worker Program (n=15)
Workers reported that they were not free to leave	49	52	33
Workers' travel costs had to be covered for journey home	43	42	20
Workers had to cover journey expenses	30	25	53
Workers reported not having received a clear contract	10	3	40
Workers reported that money was deducted from wages	9	7	33
Workers did not have all information about the journey	14	7	33
Contract terms and conditions not as expected	12	5	26
Workers threatened with being sent home or not hired again	18	17	26
Workers reported not having clear and accurate information about farmworker jobs	5	2	20
Workers reported having had an unsafe journey	9	4	20

While more workers participating in a guest worker program felt stuck than others when facing exploitation or feeling unsafe, workers who were not in a guest worker program were more likely to have to cover travel expenses.

Workers not covered by a guest worker program

Of survey respondents, 12% were not in a guest worker program. As is apparent in Table 2, workers not participating in a guest worker program were more prone to other negative experiences, including:

- unexpected contract terms and conditions
- money deducted from wages for unclear reasons
- incomplete information about the journey to the farm
- inaccurate and unclear information about jobs
- journeys that were unsafe

These issues, reported by the particular cohort of workers that were not in a guest worker program, were in stark contrast to the top overall concerns that had been identified in Chart 1.

**Chart 3:** Top problem areas for participants who were not part of a guest worker program

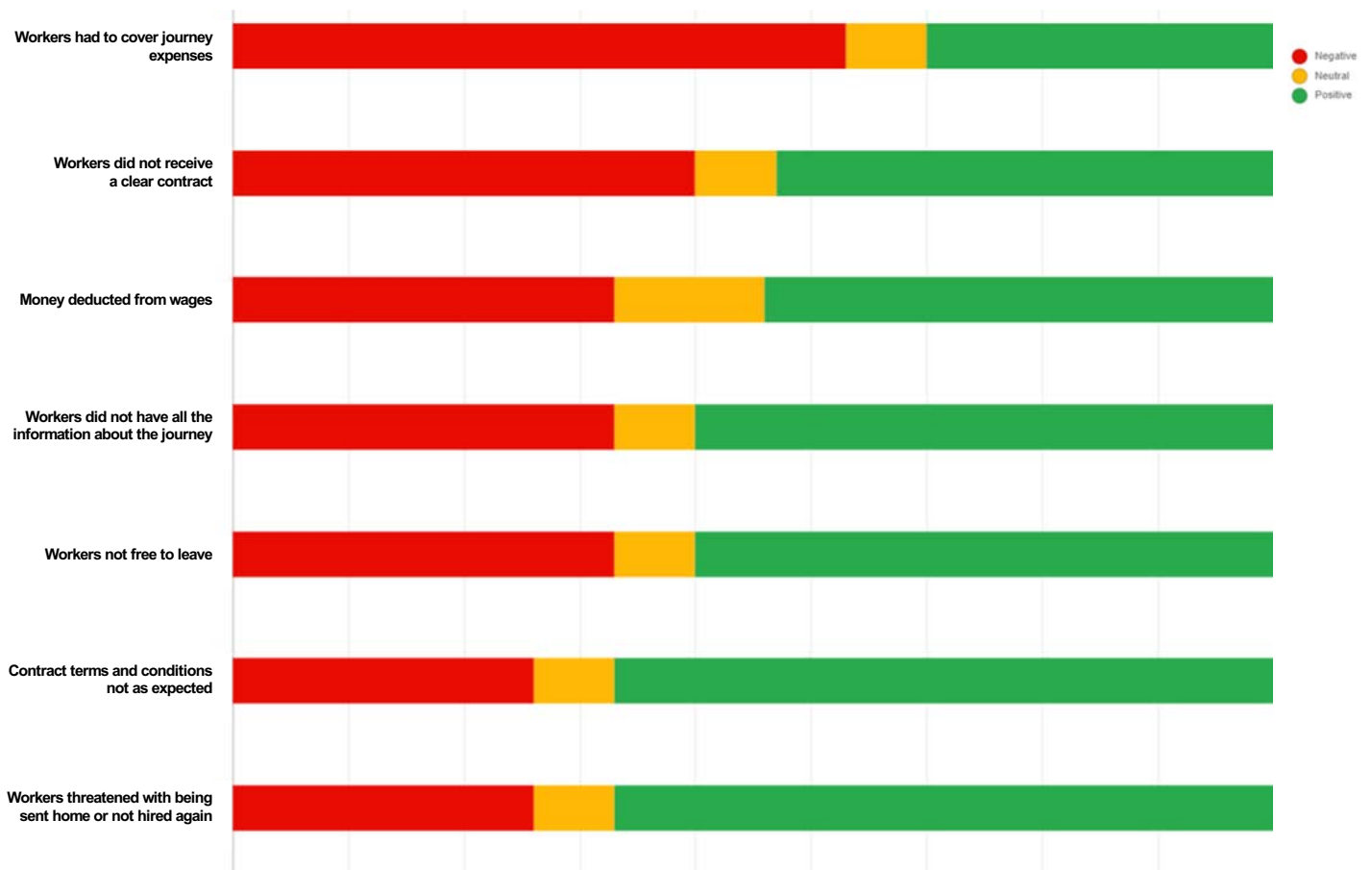


Chart 3 highlights the reality that these workers had to cover their journey expenses, given that no official process would trigger the Employer Pays Principle whereby employers recruiting in a foreign country are obligated to pay for recruitment-related costs, including travel expenses to and from the farm.

Some of the workers who experienced being recruited to farms in the United States and Canada but who were not part of a guest worker program recognized the protections such a program visa would afford them:

- *"Me gustaría que me dieran una visa por temporada, ya que he ido sin papeles y uno se arriesga al cruzar la frontera. Con las compañías da mas seguridad..."*

*Translation: "I would like them to give me a seasonal visa, since I have gone without papers, and one takes risks when crossing the border. With the companies you have more security..."*

- *"El no tener visa hace que vivamos con miedo, que en cualquier momento venga la policía y nos entregue a la migración. Es mejor tener papeles."*

*Translation: "Not having a visa makes us live in fear, that at any moment the police will come and hand us over to immigration. It is better to have papers."*

These findings indicate a strong need to further investigate how such workers can be supported and protected from damaging recruitment experiences, even when such workers cannot or choose not to participate in a guest worker program.

### **Workers having to cover journey expenses**

Negative reports from workers about having to pay travel costs came up frequently. As shown in Table 1, 30% of respondents reported that they covered expenses such as food, lodging or travel costs to and from the farm, and 43% had to cover expenses for the journey home.

Workers heading to Canada were burdened (50% of responses) by having to cover all of their journey expenses. This clearly constitutes a priority when addressing the needs of workers heading to Canada. However, it is important to note that the sample of workers that reported being recruited for farm work in Canada was very low, at 2% (or eight workers) of the project total of 415 workers.

Additionally, workers participating in a guest worker program (see Table 2) appear to be better protected from travel expenses than their counterparts who are not entering through this channel.

### Costs and experiences related to recruitment fees

Given the sampling bias mentioned in the Methodology section, it is unsurprising that data was limited for the questions measuring the extent to which survey respondents were currently paying recruitment fees. See Table 3 for detailed results for every indicator relating to recruitment fees.

**Table 3:** Comparison of recruitment fee issues perceived to be problematic by workers

<b>Worker Experience</b>	<b>% of All Workers</b>	<b>% From Those in a Guest Worker Program</b>	<b>% From Those Not in a Guest Worker Program</b>	<b>% From Those Heading to U.S. Farms</b>	<b>% From Those Heading to Canadian Farms</b>	<b>% From Those Heading to Mexican Farms</b>
Workers had to take out a loan to pay recruitment fee	7	7	13	6	40	11
Workers had to pay recruitment fee over the past year	5	4	13	4	20	8
Workers had to pay to secure a job or to cover travel to the farm	8	8	6	7	20	11

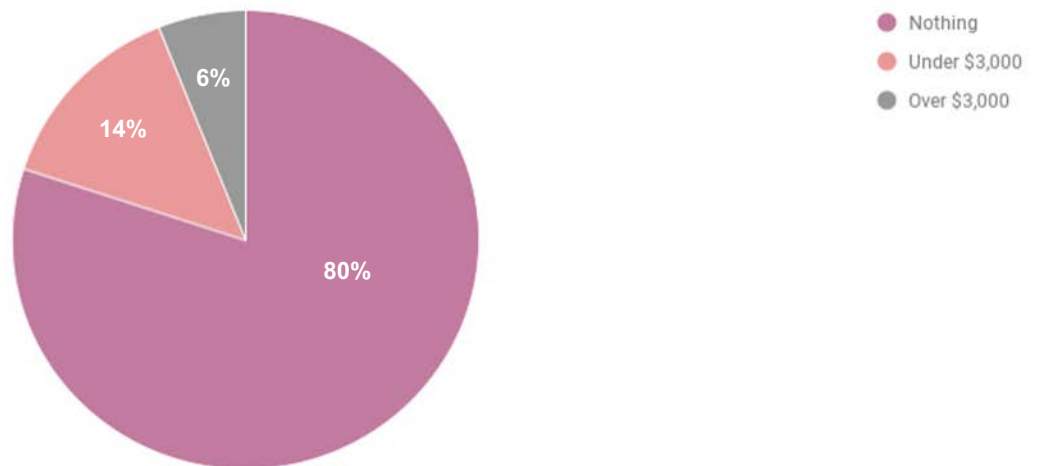
It is noteworthy that, while just a small proportion of the workers overall reported heading to Canadian farms, 40% of these respondents reported having to take out a loan to pay recruitment fees. The picture generated by this survey data set nonetheless testifies to the fact that 83% of respondents were workers recruited by CIERTO Global, which has worked hard to combat recruitment fees and systematically protect workers recruited by CIERTO from such fees. Given this context, it is no surprise that the clear majority of survey respondents reported no expectation to pay any recruitment fees.

In response to the multiple-choice question of expectations and norms for recruitment fee amounts (*How much do you expect to pay in recruitment fees to get a job on a farm?*), the results read as follows and are shown in Chart 4:

- 80% of respondents (321 workers) selected nothing (no fee)
- 14% (57 workers) selected under \$3,000
- 6% (25 workers) selected over \$3,000



**Chart 4:** Percentage of workers expecting to pay various recruitment fees (403 total respondents)



However, in the interview data gathered during phases 1 and 3, interviewers noted many of the respondents remarking about recruitment fees even when they were not directly asked to report about them, which provided useful insights. The team quantified cases that specifically mentioned a recruitment fee, a fee charged for the contract, or processing fees when workers responded to the question, “How could the process be made less expensive for people like yourself?”

- While 31% of responses contained some statement about not currently paying any fee or any expenses related to the hiring process or recruitment journey, many directly attributed it to being recruited through CIERTO.
- 25% of responses contained a statement indicating that recruitment fees are frequently charged, saying for instance that the journey would be less expensive if:
  - recruiters did not charge them a fee
  - the contract process was free
  - the procedure for hiring was free

- Within the data gathered in response to this question, some respondents also shared stories of times they were charged fees to secure employment, noting times they were tricked, kidnapped and/or robbed by recruiters:

*"Si tienen que pagar lo harán pero que los contraten y no sea un fraude ya que se da mucho en sus comunidades donde llegan falsos contratistas que los apuntan y no se los llevan a trabajar."*

*Translation: "If you have to pay you will, but then you should be hired, and if not it is fraud; there is a lot [of fraud] in our communities, where false contractors arrive who sign you up and do not take you to work."*

- Also included in this pool were responses like, "You always have to pay to secure the work, and you just pay because the work in the United States is better than in Mexico."

Separately within the data pool responding to this same question about making the journey less expensive, the number of workers who mentioned wanting reimbursement for expenses such as transport, food or visa was also quantified. These expenses would not generally be considered a fee paid for a job but could be considered recruitment fees according to the Employer Pays Principle. From the Phase 3 sample size of 203:

- 26% of responses mentioned that the journey would be less expensive if food and/or lodging was paid for
- 25% of responses mentioned that it would be less expensive if transportation was paid for
- 14% of responses mentioned that the visa and document processing costs should be reimbursed/covered by the employer to make it less expensive
- 27% of responses mentioned that the employer should pay for all or even half of the expenses that come up during the hiring process

The following quotes help further illustrate how commonplace recruitment fees remain, outside of the protective relationship of a professional labor contractor or an employer that recruits directly and does not charge fees but does pay for travel expenses during the recruitment journey:

- *"Aunque la compañía hace parte de los gastos, después se los descuentan poco a poco cuando empiezan a trabajar, pero vale la pena porque hay trabajo y el dinero les rinde más que en México."*

*Translation: "Even though the company covers part of the expenses, after we begin working they discount our paychecks little by little; but it is worth it because there is work, and the money goes further than in Mexico."*

- *"La mayoría de los reclutadores cobran pero que les den oportunidad de pagar hasta que empiecen a trabajar."*

*Translation: "The majority of recruiters charge a fee, but they should give you the opportunity to pay it off once you begin working."*

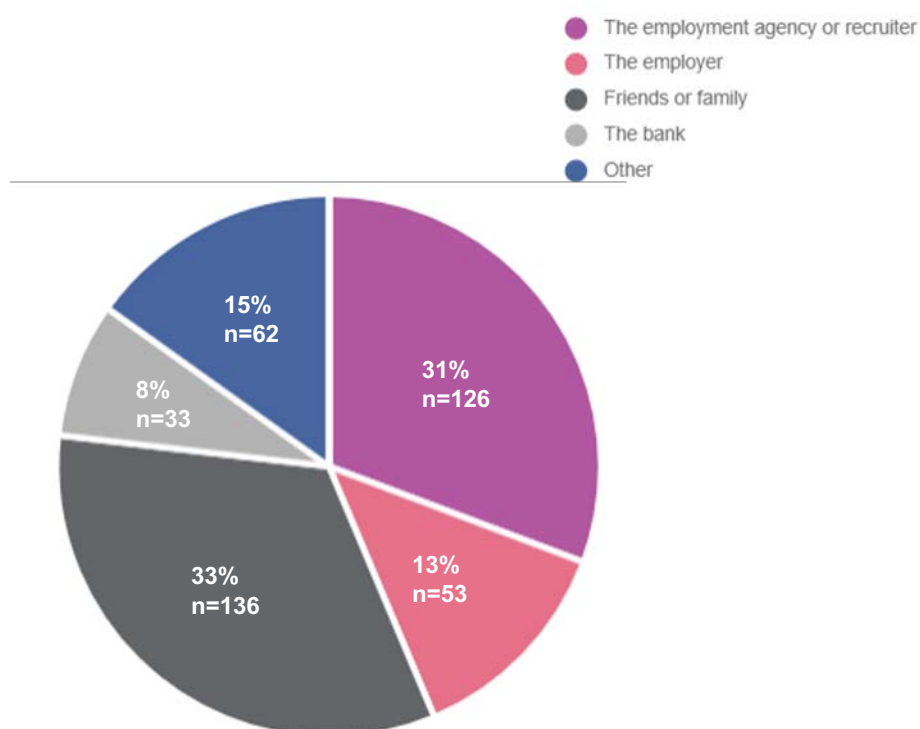
- *"No sabe qué pueden hacer porque ahorita les estan cobrando 7000 dolares, aunque no estan de acuerdo los pagan pero que los contraten ya que la economía está muy difícil."*

*Translation: "You don't know what can be done really, because (for example) they charge \$7,000 now, and even though you don't agree with it, you have to pay to get hired because the economy is really difficult."*

#### Workers who borrowed money to pay recruitment fees

Given the prevalent accounts of recruitment fees in the Phase 1 interview data, which drew from a more diverse sample than the later project phases, it is interesting to consider where workers would go for loans to pay such fees. In the mobile phone survey during Phase 2, more than 40% of lenders were associated with hiring bodies, including the employment agency, the recruiter or the employer. Another 33% relied on family or friends for loans. See Chart 5 for further details.

**Chart 5:** *Source of loans to farmworkers for covering recruitment fees (410 total respondents)*



In the Phase 3 data, workers were asked about how they covered unexpected expenses that arose during the recruitment journey, and within these responses there were also some relevant references to loans and the risks that they entail; for instance:

- *"Pedimos prestado y nos genera intereses que despues tenemos que pagar, y es muy triste porque a veces no hay trabajo y no sabemos que hacer."*

*Translation: "We borrow [money to pay fees] and it generates interest that later we have to pay, and it is very sad because sometimes there is no work and we do not know what to do."*

## **Workers being threatened**

Returning to the mobile phone survey results, another of the top indicators of concern to workers was the threat of being sent home or not hired again by their farm employers. Nearly 1 in 5 respondents had experienced this type of threat. The question asked, in full, was:

*“Were you ever threatened with being sent home or not being hired back the following season?”*

One worker heading to a farm in Canada and nine workers in Mexico reported such threats. The issue of threats was investigated in more detail in Phase 3 with the following question:

*“Workers have told us that sometimes employers can threaten them if they don't do this or do that, and that they could be sent home early, could get less pay or not be invited back next season. Do you think this happens often?”*

- 143 responded yes (70%)
- 59 responded no (29%)

Interviewees were also asked, *“Workers have also told us that sometimes they are told if they do extra hours or pay a fee, that the employer will keep a job for them next season. Does this often happen?”*

- 97 responded yes (48%)
- 101 responded no (50%)

From the above results, it would seem that threats may be more common than exploitative promises. However, promises remain prevalent nonetheless, with almost half the interviewees confirming that they happen “often.” Both are strongly associated with the behavior of the ranch supervisor or crew boss – these roles were often mentioned in connection with threats and exploitative promises.

## **Summary of current circumstances**

In short, the project data revealed that workers experience recruitment as a process in which:

- Many workers feel stuck and unable to leave if they land on a farm where they feel unsafe or where contractual terms are not honored.
- Some workers are burdened by the costs of travel to and from the farm.
- Workers often experience being threatened by their employer and/or recruiter – whether threatened to be sent home or not hired again – as a means of being controlled.
- Respondents working outside of a guest worker program report more negative experiences when it comes to:
  - unexpected contract terms and conditions
  - money deducted from wages for unclear reasons
  - incomplete information about the journey to the farm
  - inaccurate and unclear information about jobs
  - journeys that are unsafe



## Defining the ideal

Given the issues identified by the mobile phone survey, it is unsurprising to find that workers who participated in Phase 1 interviews frequently spoke from a negative perspective when illustrating their ideal scenarios of how recruitment could and should optimally work. Essentially, when asked to describe the ideal, many workers used bad experiences to define what they would consider a far better experience of recruitment. Why is this important? If good is defined according to bad, the resulting model is about avoiding the bad. This avoidance is exactly what was found in the IRÉ data.

The workers who participated in this project associated bad recruitment with five central factors:

- **Lack of clarity** refers to a shortage of clear, trustworthy information on all aspects of recruitment, including the journey, landing well and settling into a new job on a fruit or vegetable farm. Lack of specifics in the recruitment process led workers to feel ill-informed and under-prepared.
- **Lack of community** is a shortage of social capital, or a circle of workers who support one another and provide peer to peer advice, a listening ear and friendship on the farm itself. This resulted in a common experience of isolation and vulnerability in the process of finding a job, traveling to the job and settling in to live and work on the farm itself.
- **Lack of physical safety** is defined both in terms of health and security and is supported by the prevalence of physical insecurity and health-related vulnerability throughout the recruitment process (from engagement with questionable agents to meeting locations on the journey to falling ill or getting injured on the farm).
- **Lack of transparency on costs** refers to the prevalence of unexpected fees and expenses leading to a state of indebtedness.
- **Threats and exploitative promises** involve managers and supervisors seeking to control workers on the farm.

These five challenges can be described in positive terms with three key priorities:

- Clarity
- Community
- Health and financial safety

These three priorities together constitute the thread that binds all the data gathered on the project and the learning distilled from that data.

### **The call for clarity – ideal recruitment requires clear, trustworthy information**

In the data collected, workers shared the need for comprehensive and clear recruitment information from a credible source. As a means of illustrating the urgent need for better transparency and better information from trusted sources, workers shared accounts of how they and others had been duped.

- *"En el contrato todo parecia legal, pero entregamos todo y dimos dinero y todo fue mentira siempre cambiaba de empleados y solo la empresa desapareció. Queremos que ya no pase eso."*

*Translation: "In the contract everything seemed legal, but then we agreed to everything, and we gave money – and everything was actually a lie. The employees changed, and the company disappeared. We want that to stop."*

How can organizations protect workers from these types of experiences? In Phase 1, workers stressed the importance of better information. In Phase 3, workers were asked to offer greater specificity about the best sources of information and what the recruitment information should include. The following details were gathered.

#### Recruitment information from a trusted source

The information channels considered most trustworthy were (multiple options could be selected):

- 61% Recruitment Office or Recruitment Agency
- 46% Friends and Family
- 41% The Church

The above are considered trustworthy because they are institutions with a physical presence, or they are familiar. All of these sources of information also lend themselves to online and offline access.

It is notable that in Phase 3 workers confirmed that the parish and church offer neutral space where there is trust and safety for gathering and vetting how information comes to the workers. There was a clear sense that because workers could trust the protective intention of those working for the church the information coming through this channel would be vetted and therefore trustworthy.

When it came to how recruitment information could be most optimally packaged and shared, workers considered person-to-person interactions most trustworthy, with a clear preference for people who were familiar over strangers. Next came the information available through an office or physical facility, which granted perceived credibility or professionalism. When receiving information from a stranger outside of the institutional or office environment, workers were more trusting of information from a stranger who appeared “serious” or more professional, whether due to attire, how they spoke or their information format and credentials. In short, workers viewed trusted information as coming from people they knew or formal professional sources.

At its best, recruitment information is:

- in Spanish
- complete
- readily available
- with someone available to answer any clarifying questions

Although Facebook and other social media channels were commonly considered untrustworthy, an online source was nonetheless one of the fastest, easiest and most frequently used options. However, workers stipulated that such channels needed to be facilitated by a trusted source, and all information would need to be “authentic.”

#### But what constitutes authentic, genuine, truthful and transparent information?

Here, workers were instructive in their responses: High-quality, reliable information should ideally include items such as photographs and videos of the farm and living quarters.

- *"Realmente lo que necesitamos es que lo que esten mostrando sea la verdad, las fotos por ejemplo, y que en realidad si nos ayuden y no solo este escrito en un papel".*

*Translation: "Really what we need is that what they are showing is the truth, the photos for example, and that really helps us, not only what is written on paper."*

Genuine information was ideally provided directly by the employer. Workers reiterated that the ideal situation was to have a direct line of communication with the employer. When they did, the employer was considered more trustworthy. It also gave workers a means to cross-verify the information the recruiter gave them (in case the employer was not recruiting them directly). Workers also wished to have all contract terms and costs of the recruitment journey known upfront. The added value of a direct channel of communication with employers also meant that workers could ask questions and have doubts addressed:

- *"La información se da de manera clara y se aclaran las dudas al momento y es mas confiable."*

*Translation: "The information is given clearly, and doubts are clarified at the moment and it is more reliable."*

Also invaluable to workers in the recruitment process was information about untrustworthy agents and employers whom they should avoid. In this context, they wished to know:

- Where scamming and charging were more likely or happened frequently
- Those who charged fees
- How to avoid being cheated or charged recruitment fees
- Legitimate employers and those that were fake

With comprehensive, clear, direct information about the farm, the job, contractual terms and costs direct from the employer or through a trusted contact or institution, workers would be set to have a better recruitment experience. This information would enable them to be better equipped for, and more confident about, the coming journey and job.

#### Widespread support for an online community for information sharing

In Phase 3 of this project, the following proposal – informed by the insight gathered from Phase 1 – was shared with each interviewee for evaluation:

*“When it comes to getting job information virtually (not in person but perhaps via Facebook, WhatsApp or another network), what if you could join an online community of workers or an online group on an existing social networking site, where workers could share job information and recommend particular employers, agencies, recruiters and websites? This would allow you as a community of workers to share trusted information and trusted contacts, and protect yourself and other workers from unreliable information from unreliable sources. What do you think of this idea?”*

Of the 203 responses to this question, 147 workers (72%) supported the idea, while 53 (26%) were against it. What follows are a few of the quotes illustrating the widespread support in the Phase 3 interview data:

- *"es muy buena la idea ya que el nuevo integrante se contactaria por medio de un conocido"*

*Translation: "The idea is very good since the new member would have contact through an acquaintance."*

- *"compartiendo e intercambiando experiencias con el grupo"*

*Translation: "There is a need for sharing and exchanging experiences with the group."*

- *"Antes de llegar al lugar de trabajo, vemos el contrato y lo leemos en grupo, para ver qué cosas han cambiado y si algo nos parece le comentamos al que esté a nuestro mando y nos resuelva cualquier duda."*

*Translation: "Before we arrive at the workplace, we can see the contract and read through it together as a group in order to see if anything has changed, and if something seems different we can tell the person in charge to resolve any doubts."*

A consistent theme in the data was that workers trusted hearing from other workers about their experiences; they valued the feedback of peers. The interview data found the same perspective on the benefits of engaging with peers about contract terms.



Interviewees were invited to improve on the online community idea and discuss how it should work. Following are suggestions compiled from the interviews:

- Workers indicated that local contacts and news sources were much more trustworthy (from friends/family to community to region, the preference was to not cast the net too wide). Workers suggested having multiple online groups that were regionally based in order to ensure safety:
  - *"Que solo fueran personas de mi region, porque si pongo de otro estado corro el peligro de que me engañen."*  
  
*Translation: "That there are only people from my region, because if I am involved with people from another state I run the risk of being deceived." (Phase 3 interviewee)*
- Workers valued the thoughts, opinions and feedback of other workers when it came to evaluating a job opportunity, suggesting that worker evaluations of jobs, recruiters and employers would be popular.
- Workers articulated the need for an easy avenue to ask questions and receive truthful answers in a timely manner. This suggests that a chat function supported by an information partner could be helpful. There may also be an opportunity to enable workers to ask and answer questions as peers.
- Workers suggested that access to the community should be password protected or perhaps require a login; it *"must be private."* Others suggested having limited access via a vetting or verification process. One worker suggested only giving access to people who had previously been hired, thereby excluding ill-intending outsiders. One more suggested that an invitation from a trusted friend or family member should be the only way to join, thereby ensuring that the community grows through trusted contacts and referrals only.
- There was a broader preference for a WhatsApp group as opposed to a Facebook group, as many workers either did not have Facebook accounts or simply did not trust Facebook. If the community were to be run through WhatsApp, one worker suggested having it administered through the local church (the number of the church office). However, some were critical about using WhatsApp, claiming that comments and conversations may be limited, and information threads may be hard to find later. This suggests that careful consideration be given to how information can easily be found regardless of time and place.
- Workers suggested there be specific people in charge to oversee the information and moderate the functioning of the group, again introducing a safeguard or gatekeeper to protect the online community from exploitative parties.
- Workers also suggested including some sort of direct access to the online community by representatives of the farms who were offering work (in order to resolve questions directly with the employer).
- Some workers proposed using the group merely to establish contact with other workers, particularly in case other workers did not have online access; the group could be used to organize in-person meetings to share more detailed information, thereby introducing a hybrid model of online and offline access to information.

- Finally, certain workers were also concerned about ensuring that an online community was not exclusionary. They proposed that, for those who did not have easy access to the internet or a phone connection, the need for trustworthy information exchange be met by organizing meetings through the church. Again, workers tended to fall back on institutions they perceived to be trustworthy and protective.

It should be noted that many workers articulated the need, in the Phase 1 data, to be guided through the process of getting all the necessary paperwork done in advance of the journey. Such a function could also be addressed in the design of an online platform for workers.

### **The call for community – a supportive landing on the farm**

Workers highlighted several ways the current process of landing on a farm and settling in constituted a struggle, and the ideal picture they painted with their suggestions resolves these struggles. There were three main areas where workers seemed to struggle the most and therefore had the most suggestions, namely:

1. housing
2. preparation for the job they would be in
3. social integration

Workers wished their housing facilities to be comfortable, clean and complete or fully equipped with the basics so they didn't need to go and find missing essentials in an unfamiliar environment.

Given that workers were clear on what they needed when it came to housing, the following question was used in Phase 3 to generate more detail on other suggestions that had emerged:

*What if we could be sure that workers arrived to start their new job in the best possible way? Imagine if you had the following experience:*

*– Workers had a support person or mentor, who guided you throughout the journey and helped ensure you*

- *traveled safely*
- *arrived in the correct place safely*
- *ensured that you understood the rules and requirements related to your housing and work on the farm*
- *helped with organizing all the training you needed to do your work on the farm*

*– Workers enjoyed the support of a community of workers: Workers like yourself are encouraged and supported to develop friendships or engage with some form of community before the work begins on the farm (whether on the journey itself or on arrival). This would mean you would ideally be able to live and work with friends – or at the very least know a few people who will be living with you in worker housing.*

*– Each worker is given all of the tools and PPE she or he needs for the work: Workers do not have to pay for or find these items once they arrive.*

*What do you think of these three priorities when it comes to landing well (contact person, community and having everything you need for the work)?*

There was clear support for the above model: 142 out of 203 interviewed workers (70%) liked this model. Some workers made further suggestions – that the mentor could also provide the following support:

- Translation and help with “communication”
- Information about the journey and help resolving any challenges or questions that arise
- Defending rights and helping ensure they are not taken advantage of – essentially someone who will watch out for their best interests each step of the way

It was therefore extremely clear that a mentor or central point of contact familiar with the farm and local amenities, who could help workers settle in, would have an important role to play in the ideal recruitment process.

#### Social ties to support landing on the farm

Beyond respondents' clear support for a secure online community with curated information from trusted sources and the potential to source information and advice from peers, there was also a call for organizations to create the experience of community throughout the recruitment process, because it would lend the recruitment experience a human quality. The quote below ties this humanizing contribution of a community to worker productivity, which is a powerful point raised by multiple workers:

- *"Es de suma importancia ya que al hacer comunidad, la vida es más fácil y agradable, además pueden ayudarse a resolver dudas o problemas de trabajo y así aumentar la productividad."*

*Translation: "It is of the utmost importance since by creating community, life is easier and more pleasant, which can also help solve doubts or work problems and thus increase productivity."*

This relationship between productivity and community should be further investigated using well-designed monitoring to measure the extent that community contributes to productivity. Such data could help to unlock resources to optimize community support for workers throughout the recruitment process and across all available formats and mediums.

Workers wished to participate in a respectful, trustworthy, safe and social community that enabled the establishment of friends or companions. However, while defined as an ideal for many, this desire did not apply to all, which signaled the need for social opportunities to be offered, without pressure, in or around farms where workers are employed.

In Phase 3, which focused on enabling workers to build and evaluate models for ideal recruitment, all workers who were interviewed were asked the following:

*"When it comes to having social opportunities to meet other workers and make friends before the work starts, is this also important to you?"*

The data shows 187 (92%) gave a “yes” response.

These interviewees also offered the following comments:

- Working together is easier, and more productive, as a team.
- Living together, you can become like family.
- In general, social relationships build trust, help you feel supported, build confidence.
- You share experiences, you can form friendships.

There was a small minority (11 respondents) for whom social opportunities were not important, and five did not respond to this question. Some explained by stating that “work is work,” and they were not there (on the farm) to make friends.

When asked, “*And do you have any ideas about how it could be made easier for workers like yourself to meet other workers?*” some suggested that social meetings could be organized or added to the end of training sessions, or that social interaction could be enabled through the creation of a WhatsApp group for all those working on the same farm.

### **The call for health and financial safety**

The data indicated key vulnerabilities that made workers less safe, vulnerabilities that would need to be addressed in an ideal recruitment model. Regarding the journey to the farm:

- Physical safety risks when traveling alone were noted, which suggests that traveling in a group or with a guide who could ensure safety would be more ideal.
- If the mode of transport were by bus, inappropriate meeting points (like deserted areas or those in the “wrong neighborhoods”) rendered workers vulnerable to being attacked or robbed. Ideal recruitment should by extension involve safe meeting places in safe areas.

### Health and safety protections at work

With respect to suggestions for safeguarding physical health and safety during the journey and on the job, workers suggested ideally:

- being told about the dangers of the job in advance
- being given the safety protocols to be followed (such as not spraying workers with pesticides)
- being provided medical insurance or some sort of medical support during their contracts (and during the recruitment journey)

In Phase 1, there was frequent mention of workers ideally wishing to have health insurance, as well as a few references to life insurance. Workers explained this need as follows:

- *"Si es muy importante, ya que nosotros al estar lejos de nuestras familias corremos el riesgo de enfermarnos o de algun accidente que nos lleve a perder la vida y ellos deben quedar protegidos ya que nosotros somos el principal proveedor"*

*Translation: "Yes, it is very important; since we are far from our families, we run the risk of getting sick or having an accident that leads us to lose our lives, and we must be protected since we are the main provider [for the family]."*

- *"Si, es muy importante contar con estos dos tipos de seguros ya que nos ayudarian en caso de enfermarnos o de algun accidente y asi nuestras familias estarian protegidas en caso de que fallezcamos en el lugar de empleo o durante el trayecto del mismo."*

*Translation: "Yes, it is very important to have these two types of insurance since they would help us in case we get sick or have an accident because our families would be protected in case we died at the place of employment or during the journey."*

In the Phase 3 interviews the importance of medical and health insurance was quantified, and an overwhelming 97% of respondents said it was important. When asked about barriers workers faced when attempting to get medical coverage and care, some highlighted the pandemic as a major challenge. The vulnerability to catching the coronavirus would almost inevitably feature in the minds of many workers heading to take up jobs on farms as essential workers in the United States, Canada and elsewhere in Mexico. Perhaps given this backdrop and the possibility that workers traveling outside their usual social bubble would catch the virus meant that the need for health insurance was even more pronounced than it would otherwise have been.

#### Financial safeguards against unexpected costs

In addition to the concern for physical safety, there was also much discussion on how workers could best be protected from unexpected costs and hidden fees. Workers wished to be safe from financially extractive practices that emerged during the process of securing a job, during the journey to the farm, once on the farm, and even during the journey home.

In both Phase 1 and Phase 3, workers often commented about paying too much along the journey and consequently having to take out loans, possibly from people who charged high interest or maintained power over them in the longer term.

Workers were asked in Phase 3: *"What about unexpected expenses, if and when these come up: What expenses sometimes come up on the journey from home to the farm that are surprising? What do workers typically do in these situations to cover these unexpected expenses? How could you and other workers be better protected from paying these kinds of unexpected fees or expenses in the future?"*

In response to this question:

- 40% of respondents mentioned unexpected food and/or meal costs
- 22% of respondents mentioned unexpected transportation costs
- 16% of respondents mentioned unexpected hotel/room costs

It is interesting to note that the CIERTO Global model came up frequently in the responses, with a lot of workers referring to the model as ideal because CIERTO workers do not have to pay for the journey. In Phase 3, which included 64% CIERTO Global clients, 24% of respondents stated they did not experience any unexpected expenses.

There was also frequent reference to a deposit being paid. It was unclear who was being paid or how the deposit functioned. A deposit was not part of the CIERTO model so respondents were referring to a practice used by other recruiters.

More generally, many workers seemed resigned to the reality of having to cover unexpected or burdensome costs during the recruitment process. There were many comments in the data noting that the fees to be paid were “just the way it is,” and sometimes suggestions about how expenses could be reduced contrarily focused on just paying the fees because they had to be paid every time, which wouldn’t change:

- *“Estan de acuerdo en pagar cuota. Dicen nada es fácil ni es de gratis, pero que les hagan un préstamo y pagar al iniciar a trabajar.”*

*Translation: “They agree to pay a fee. They say nothing is easy or free, but to make them a loan and pay when they start working.”*

- *“Que tendira que pedir prestado y con intereses.”*

*Translation: “You will have to borrow, and with interest.”*

The financial burden of recruitment fees (which workers report are still common), document processing costs, travel costs and medical costs incurred whether on the journey or on the job helped to explain why workers needed to take out loans. The results from the mobile phone survey relating to loans (see Page 19) provided useful context. An ideal recruitment model may need to address the need to either avoid these costs or find transparent and fair sources of credit for workers to protect them from more exploitative borrowing terms that may be applied by recruitment agencies, employers and loan sharks.

## Protection against threats

Beyond the call for protections to health and safety, social support becomes all the more important if workers need protection against employers or recruiters who threaten them in a variety of ways.

In interview data from Phase 1, workers revealed that they experienced threats at the hands of employers on the farms. These accounts were investigated in more detail in Phase 3.

The data showed that when threats were made, they most often occurred this way: The employer, ranch supervisor or crew boss told workers that if they didn't do X, they would not be paid fully, or would not be able to come back [the following season or the next year]. These pressures also took the form of cunning incentives: The employer, ranch supervisor or crew boss would promise that if the worker did extra hours or paid a fee, then the employer would keep a job for that worker for next season.

Here is another slightly different case of the practice of selling favors on the farm:

- *“Sí lo he visto muchas veces. Dicen que cuando llegues tráeme tanto y vas a tener trabajo, y que si quieres salir rápido es tanto y sales rápido. Sí ha sido muy frecuente.”*

*Translation: “Yes I have seen it many times. They say that when you arrive, bring me so much [money] and you will have a job, and that if you want to leave quickly it is this much [money] and you leave quickly. Yes it has been very frequent.”*

Given the underlying purpose of The IRÉ Project, which is to harness the power of workers' suggestions to redesign recruitment, interviewees were then asked, *“How could workers be protected from these types of threats?”*

The following suggestions were made:

1. Threatened individuals should report their experience to someone trustworthy who is in a position to protect them and support resolution, namely someone from the recruitment agency, the “authorities,” a labor organizer or worker advocacy group, the employer’s human resources person or social worker, the ranch manager or an anonymous channel.
2. Workers should know the rules of the ranch, which suggests that ranches list rules that prohibit threatening behavior.
3. Workers should come to know the labor laws and their entitlements under those laws and have contracts for all workers that legally protect them from threats.
4. Workers take legal action from Mexico against the employer, telling the recruiter and the agency, which can help with such legal actions.
5. Workers organize as a group, which is then better able to protect individual workers from threats.
6. Workers simply tell other workers. This last suggestion could be connected with the model of running an online community for workers, discussed earlier.

Workers suggested it was crucial to know that they can report a threat and not be retaliated against. Ideally, the ranch would have a human resources department, or workers would be able to report directly to the boss or ranch owner so they don't need to go to a field supervisor who might also threaten them.

- *"Que si la misma persona no habla o no se quejan no van a tener en cuenta eso, siempre va a pasar lo mismo o pasarán ellos lo mismo. La comunidad de trabajadores sería necesaria para pasarse esa info y apoyarse y que no caigan en eso."*

*Translation: "If the same person does not speak up or does not complain, [the employer] will not take that into account, and the same thing will always happen or the same will keep happening to them. The community of workers would be necessary to pass this information on and support each other so that others do not fall for it."*

Some respondents noted feeling fearful of reporting incidents to the employer due to risk of retaliation, and they suggested telling someone outside of the ranch or farm or using an anonymous channel:

- *"Si me exigen trabajar obedezco, con tal no me envíen a México. Pero si es posible quejarse anónimamente de eso y sea escuchado y eso realmente sirva, eso haría."*

*Translation: "If they tell me to work, I obey as long as they don't send me back to Mexico. But if it is possible to anonymously complain about that and be heard and that really works, that would do."*

From the above discussion it is apparent within the confines of this participant population of workers with experience of recruitment onto farms in the United States, Canada and Mexico that threats, incentives and the selling of favors (special jobs or rapid departures) remains commonplace and that workers perceive of such as a very real risk when they are recruited. Hence, ideal recruitment needs to ensure that such behaviors are prevented. If and when such incidents occur, workers need safe channels for reporting and for accessing protection and remediation.





# Concluding Comments

The IRÉ Project supports the need for a new recruitment model that prioritizes clarity, community and safety for workers from the moment they seek information about possible job opportunities on farms or ranches until they board buses or planes to return home safely. Protection is a prominent theme in workers' suggestions. Top of mind are the COVID-19 pandemic; widespread awareness of workers being deliberately or unintentionally misled, misinformed, deceived and cheated; journeys to and from the farm that are socially isolating, unsafe and costly; the sense of being lost and displaced on arrival; vulnerability to illness and injury; and being under-equipped, ill-prepared and bullied.

The three study phases show respondents seeking:

1. clear and trustworthy information
2. a functioning community of workers to deliver peer-to-peer support and learning
3. systems for ensuring safety on three levels:
  - a. physical safety from injury and illness
  - b. financial safeguards from unexpected fees and expenses
  - c. protection from threats and exploitative promises

The extraordinary efforts of eight dedicated researchers resulted in three rich data sets from which much information was harnessed. Workers generously gave their time to focus attention on the need for a more transparent, supportive and protective recruitment experience from inquiry to journey home. Project partners have listened to, analyzed and distilled the experiences, challenges and suggestions that workers have thoughtfully contributed during the three phases of data gathering. The open sharing of insights will help stakeholders all across the fresh produce industry to build and indeed normalize a more positive recruitment experience for workers in the years to come. Recruitment processes designed by workers and based on listening to workers will lead to better recruitment grounded in personal and social experiences that will benefit workers and employers alike.

**A LISTENING – LEARNING COLLABORATION  
BETWEEN EQUITABLE FOOD INITIATIVE,  
CIERTO GLOBAL AND &WIDER**

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**THE IRÉ  
PROJECT:  
Appendices**



## Appendix 1: Interview Guide for Phase 1

QUESTION ORDER	INDICATOR (data topic)	CONTENT
Intro	Intro (project)	<p><i>I am here (or I am calling) on behalf of Equitable Food Initiative, which is a nonprofit organization that brings together growers, farmworkers, retailers and consumers to transform agriculture and improve the lives of farmworkers.</i></p> <p><i>In an effort to better understand the realities that fresh produce agriculture workers face during the recruitment process, and support efforts to improve the recruitment experience for workers, EFI is conducting research in different communities across Mexico through this project, called Innovación en Reclutamiento Ético (IRÉ).</i></p> <p><i>I would like to ask you a few brief questions and record your answers to these questions. Your answers will never be linked to you personally but will be added to a very big collection of ideas, which will be used [by EFI] to build better support for recruitment and the journey to a new workplace for people like yourself.</i></p>
Consent	Specific focus (questions), Consent	<p><i>Workers like yourself are often recruited and then follow a certain journey from their homes to a new workplace.</i></p> <p><i>Let's treat this whole experience as one, starting from recruitment all the way safely to the new workplace.</i></p> <p><i>Many have a difficult experience at each stage: being recruited, the journey, and arriving and starting in their new job.</i></p> <p><i>Imagine that you had the power to change this, and to make the experience better for individuals like yourself.</i></p> <p><i>Would you be willing to help me now by answering six questions about how this experience could be improved?</i></p>
	1 Recruitment ideals	Let's start with recruitment – with hearing about and getting a job on a fruit or vegetable farm in the U.S., Canada or Mexico. Ideally how could a person like yourself learn about and get a job?
	2 Journey enablers	Then there is the journey from home to the new place of work. What would you change to make that journey easier for each individual worker?
	3 Landing well	Then there is the final stage, when the individual arrives and starts their job. What can be changed to help each individual to land safely and easily in their job?

	Support 4 suggestions	<p>What kind of help or support could be offered to people like yourself to make this experience (from recruitment, along the journey and into the job) easier?</p> <p><i>Probing questions to support workers who cannot think of an answer to the broader question:</i>  A) <i>What are the most difficult parts of the recruitment experience for the individual worker?</i>  B) <i>What help would be needed to make this/these difficult parts much easier for the individual worker?</i></p>
	Protection 5 suggestions	How could the experience be made safer for people like yourself (from recruitment through the journey to landing in the job)?
	Resourcing 6 suggestions	How could the process be made less expensive for people like yourself?
	7 Other	Is there anything else that could be improved when it comes to how recruitment and the journey to a workplace works for most workers?
	Mobile survey, Mobile phone sharing, Consent	<p><i>Thank you for sharing your time and ideas with me. Your responses will remain confidential and will be included in a much bigger set of responses from many other workers from a range of communities around Mexico.</i></p> <p><i>On top of these interviews with these questions you have just answered, we will also be running a short mobile phone survey in a few weeks with different questions. These questions today focused on what an ideal recruitment, journey and landing experience could look like. But the mobile phone survey will focus on the real experience you and other workers have had of recruitment, the journey and landing into a new job .</i></p> <p><i>The set of questions to be asked by mobile phone will take just 5 to 7 minutes and can be taken in whatever language is most comfortable for you. On the call, you would not have to use your voice or say your name; you would simply need to press 1 for yes, 2 for no or 3 for don't know in response to 20 simple questions. There is also an option to dial-in directly to this number if you miss our call and still want to participate.</i></p> <p><i>[Admin has support materials/poster/card to show them how it works.]</i></p> <p><i>We are hoping to have as many people participate in this mobile phone survey as possible, to better understand current realities in order to work on making improvements for a better recruitment, journey and landing experience.</i></p> <p><i>Would you be willing to participate in this phone survey? If yes, may I please have your mobile phone number? This will only ever be used for this short call to ask these 20 simple questions.</i></p> <p><i>If you would like to think about it for longer, here is some further information and a number to call if you choose to participate. And would you be willing to share these [information cards] also with your friends and family who work in agriculture so that they can have the option to participate as well?</i></p>

## Appendix 2: Mobile Phone Survey for Phase 2

THEME/QUESTION TYPE (filter)	DASHBOARD LABEL	QUESTIONS	RESPONSE OPTIONS
Demographic question	Are you male or female?	Are you male or female?	1=male, 2=female, 3=other
Demographic question	Demographic age 15	How old are you?	1=under 15 years old, 2=15 to 40 years old, 3=older than 40
Demographic question	Worker recruited for a job on fruit or vegetable farm?	Over the past year, have you been recruited for a job on a fruit or vegetable farm in the U.S., Canada or Mexico?	1=yes, 2=no, 3=don't know
Demographic question	Country worker recruited for?	If you have been recruited for a job on a fruit or vegetable farm, where was the farm?	1=Mexico, 2=United States, 3=Canada, 4=another country, 5=never worked on a fruit or vegetable farm before
Demographic question	Worker part of a guest worker program with work visa?	Were you part of a guest worker program that provided a work visa?	1=yes, 2=no, 3=don't know
Demographic question	Who lends money to farm workers for recruitment fees?	If you or other farmworkers you know have had to borrow money to pay recruitment fees (money to secure a job), who usually lends the money to the farmworker?	1=the employment agency or recruiter, 2=the employer, 3=friends or family, 4=the bank, 5=other
Recruitment information	Clear and accurate information about farmworker jobs?	In your experience, has the information you have received about farmworker jobs on farms been clear and accurate?	1=yes, 2=no, 3=don't know

<b>Financing recruitment &amp; travel</b>	<b>Workers had to pay to secure a job or to cover travel to the farm?</b>	If and when you found a job you wanted, would you have to pay a fee to ensure the job was kept for you or to cover travel to the farm?	1=yes, 2=no, 3=don't know
<b>Financing recruitment &amp; travel</b>	<b>Workers had to pay recruitment fee over the past year?</b>	The money charged by a person or agency in order to secure a job is called a recruitment fee. Over the past year, have you had to pay a recruitment fee to work on a farm?	1=yes, 2=no, 3=don't know
<b>Financing recruitment &amp; travel</b>	<b>Workers had to take out a loan to pay recruitment fee?</b>	Over the past year, have you had to take out a loan to pay a recruitment fee?	1=yes, 2=no, 3=don't know
<b>Financing recruitment &amp; travel</b>	<b>Amount workers expect to pay in recruitment fees?</b>	How much do you expect to pay in recruitment fees to get a job on a farm?	1=Nothing, 2=Under \$3,000, 3=Over \$3,000
<b>Journey</b>	<b>Workers had all information about the journey?</b>	When it came to traveling to the last farm you worked on, did you have all the information you needed about where you were going?	1=yes, 2=no, 3=don't know
<b>Journey</b>	<b>Workers had to cover journey expenses?</b>	Did you have to cover expenses relating to food, lodging or transportation on your journey to or back from the farm?	1=yes, 2=no, 3=don't know
<b>Journey</b>	<b>Workers had a safe journey?</b>	Did you feel safe throughout your journey to the farm?	1=yes, 2=no, 3=don't know
<b>Employment contract &amp; pay</b>	<b>Workers received a clear contract?</b>	When you arrived at the farm were you given a contract that you understood clearly?	1=yes, 2=no, 3=don't know
<b>Employment contract &amp; pay</b>	<b>Contract terms and conditions as expected?</b>	Were the terms and conditions of the contract the same as what you were told before you left home?	1=yes, 2=no, 3=don't know
<b>Employment contract &amp; pay</b>	<b>Money deducted from wages?</b>	Was money taken off your wages for unexpected or unclear reasons?	1=yes, 2=no, 3=don't know
<b>Free from threats &amp; free to leave</b>	<b>Workers free to leave?</b>	Did you feel like you had the option to leave the job if you felt unsafe or if the terms and conditions of your contract were not being met?	1=yes, 2=no, 3=don't know
<b>Free from threats &amp; free to leave</b>	<b>Workers threatened with being sent home or not hired again?</b>	Were you ever threatened with being sent home or not being hired back the following season?	1=yes, 2=no, 3=don't know
<b>Financing recruitment &amp; travel</b>	<b>Workers' travel costs covered for journey home?</b>	Were the full costs of returning home paid for by the employer?	1=yes, 2=no, 3=don't know

## Appendix 3: Phone Interview Guide for Phase 3

QUESTION ORDER	INDICATOR (data topic)	WHAT LISTENING TO WORKERS HAS TAUGHT US THUS FAR...
Intro	Intro (project)	<p><i>I am here (or I am calling) on behalf of Equitable Food Initiative, which is a nonprofit organization that brings together growers, farmworkers, retailers and consumers to transform agriculture and improve the lives of farmworkers.</i></p> <p><i>In an effort to better understand the realities that fresh produce agriculture workers face during the recruitment process, and support efforts to improve the recruitment experience for workers, EFI is conducting research in different communities across Mexico through this project, called Innovación en Reclutamiento Ético (IRÉ).</i></p> <p><i>I would like to ask you a few brief questions and record your answers to these questions. Your answers will never be linked to you personally but will be added to a very big collection of ideas, which will be used [by EFI] to build better support with recruitment and the journey to a new workplace for people like yourself.</i></p>
Consent	Specific focus (questions), Consent	<p><i>Workers like yourself are often recruited and then follow a certain journey from their homes to a new workplace and then back to their homes.</i></p> <p><i>Let's treat this whole experience as one, starting from recruitment all the way safely to the new workplace and then returning home.</i></p> <p><i>Many have a difficult experience at each stage: being recruited, the journey, arriving and starting in their new job, and getting back home after the season is over.</i></p> <p><i>Imagine that you had the power to change this, and to make the experience better for individuals like yourself.</i></p> <p><i>Would you be willing to help me now by answering a group of questions about HOW this experience could be improved?</i></p>

1	Recruitment ideals	<p>Let's start with recruitment – with hearing about and getting a job on a fruit or vegetable farm in the U.S., Canada or Mexico. We learned that workers get information about job opportunities from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Radio</li> <li>- Recruitment Office or Recruitment Agency</li> <li>- Office owned by the farm</li> <li>- Church</li> <li>- Friends and family</li> <li>- Social media (such as Facebook)</li> <li>- WhatsApp</li> <li>- Community authorities or community leader</li> <li>- Newspaper</li> <li>- Person who comes to my village or neighborhood</li> </ul> <p>Which three sources of information do you most trust? Why?</p>
2	Recruitment ideals	<p>When it comes to getting job information virtually (not in person but perhaps via Facebook or WhatsApp or another network), what if you could join an online community of workers or an online group on an existing social networking site, where workers could share job information and recommend particular employers, agencies, recruiters and websites for job information?</p> <p>This would allow you as a community of workers to share trusted information and trusted contacts, and protect yourself and other workers from unreliable information from unreliable sources.</p> <p>What do you think of this idea?</p> <p>How would you make it even better?</p> <p>If you do not have easy access to the internet or a phone connection, how might you be able to connect with a community you trust to get job information?</p>
3	Recruitment information about jobs	<p>When it comes to which job information you get, imagine if you were provided with all the following information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Photographs of the workplace and housing</li> <li>- A physical address and contact details (so you can share with family)</li> <li>- Training that will be provided about the work you will need to do</li> <li>- Tools and equipment you will need in order to do the job (what will be provided)</li> <li>- A contract and contacts of someone to clarify doubts about the contract</li> </ul> <p>Is this all the information you would need? Is there any other information that's important but missing from this list?</p>



4	Recruitment information, other	<p>In the first stage of this project some workers suggested that taking out medical and life insurance is really important, to cover them and their families during the journey and while they are working on the farm.</p> <p>Do you think this is important, and why?</p> <p>But what makes this difficult for most workers at the moment?</p>
5	Journey enablers	<p>Imagine that workers like yourself were to make a journey from home to the farm that was both comfortable and safe. What if that journey:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- was made with a group of workers traveling together</li> <li>- was using direct transportation all the way to the farm or the nearest town or village closest to the farm</li> <li>- involved safe meeting places at the beginning and end of the journey</li> </ul> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What do you think of the above journey?</li> <li>2. How would you further improve on it?</li> <li>3. And, by the way, what would make a meeting place safe (the place where you meet to catch, for example, the bus to take you to the farm)?</li> <li>4. Does this change for the journey home?</li> </ol>
6	Landing well	<p>What if we could be sure that workers arrived to start their new job in the best possible way? Imagine if you had the following experience:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- If workers had a support person or mentor, who guided you throughout the journey and helped ensure you traveled safely, arrived in the correct place safely, ensured that you understood the rules and requirements related to your housing and work on the farm, and also helped with organizing all the training you needed to do your work on the farm.</li> <li>- Workers enjoyed the support of a community of workers: workers like yourself are encouraged and supported to develop friendships or engage with some form of community before the work begins on the farm (whether on the journey itself or on arrival). This would mean you would ideally be able to live and work with friends – or at the very least know a few people who you will be living with you in worker housing.</li> <li>- Each worker is given all of the tools and PPE she or he needs for the work – workers do not have to pay for or find these items once they arrive.</li> </ul> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What do you think of these three priorities when it comes to landing well (contact person, community and having everything you need for the work)? Anything missing?</li> <li>2. Would this approach (having a contact person or mentor) be helpful? How else could such a support person or mentor help workers like yourself with landing well?</li> <li>3. When it comes to having social opportunities to meet other workers and make friends before the work starts, is this also important to you? And do you have any ideas about how it could be made easier for workers like yourself to meet other workers?</li> </ol>

7	Support	<p>When it comes to what workers need support with, from earlier interviews with workers we learned that workers would like support with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- getting all the necessary paperwork done in advance of the journey</li> <li>- getting training for the job where possible in their communities</li> <li>- getting all contracts and documents translated in Spanish</li> <li>- returning home safely after the season is complete</li> </ul> <p>Does the above list reflect your needs too? Are there any other things with which you would like support?</p>
8	Financial resources	<p>What about unexpected expenses, if and when these come up?</p> <p>What expenses sometimes come up on the journey from home to the farm that are surprising?</p> <p>What do workers typically do in these situations to cover these unexpected expenses?</p> <p>How could you and other workers be better protected from paying these kinds of unexpected fees or expenses in the future?</p>
9	Protection against bad practices	<p>Workers have told us that sometimes employers can threaten them if they don't do this or they do that, they could be sent home early, could get less pay or not be invited back next season. Do you think this happens often? How could workers be protected from these types of threats?</p> <p>Workers have also told us that sometimes they are told if they do extra hours or pay a fee the employer will keep a job for them next season. Does this often happen? How would you suggest workers can avoid this problem in the future?</p>
Closing	Thank you	<p><i>Thank you for sharing your time and ideas with me. Your responses will remain confidential and will be included in a much bigger set of responses from many other workers from a range of communities around Mexico.</i></p> <p><i>We wish you a good 2021, and we hope that the improvements we make with the support of this research will also help to improve your experience of recruitment, in time.</i></p>