

Vermont's Migrant Dairy Labor: Interim reports from projects to address needs and improve well-being



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Past Research on Vermont Dairy Farm Labor

- Dairy Farmer Occupational Spanish
 - 91 farmers between 2007 and 2010
- Dairy Farmer Interviews
 - 2010, 73 farms statewide
 - 2018, 71 farms statewide
 - 2021, 29 farms statewide (Covid Response)
- Latino Dairy Farmworker Interviews
 - 2010 : 33 Latino workers (and 21 US workers)
 - 2016: 173 Latino farmworkers were surveyed on 116 unique farms
 - 2018 and 2019: 67 Latino farmworkers from 40 unique farms
- Public Opinion surveys (Vermonter Poll)
 - 2010-2021



Primary Stressors for Vermont Latinx Dairy Workers

- Migration related issues (higher than other migrant farmworker studies)
- Concern about being injured on a dairy farm (6th highest concern in 2016 and 2018)
 - More than 40% of respondents (n=67) were moderately or extremely stressed about being injured)
 - 46% had been previously injured
 - 31 respondents described their injury – 75% were injuries from cows
- Other stressors relate to social isolation
 - -- Being away from family, friends and community
 - -- Not being able to speak English or be understood when speaking Spanish



Current Dairy Projects

- Dairy Farm Safety
 - Farmer short survey
 - Farmworker extended interviews in Vermont and New York State
 - Farmworker Safety training progra
- Farmworker housing
 - Outreach, facilitation repairing farmworker housing
- Migrant Farmworker Mental Health
- Assessing the transition from Cow Dairy to Goat Dairy

Farm Health and Safety Project



STATE OF VERMONT

Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets

NORTHEAST DAIRY BUSINESS INNOVATION CENTER

- Funding for on-farm safety trainings in Spanish or English
- Aims to improve understanding of threats/risks to farm health
- Trainings will be guided by farmworker and farmer interest, as well as exploration of new training needs, approaches and outcomes



The University of Vermont



Photo 1: A 23-year-old Hispanic laborer died after being crushed between the frame of a skid steer loader and the scraper attachment on the loader lift arms at a rendering plant. The manual and warning signs at the site were available in English only.

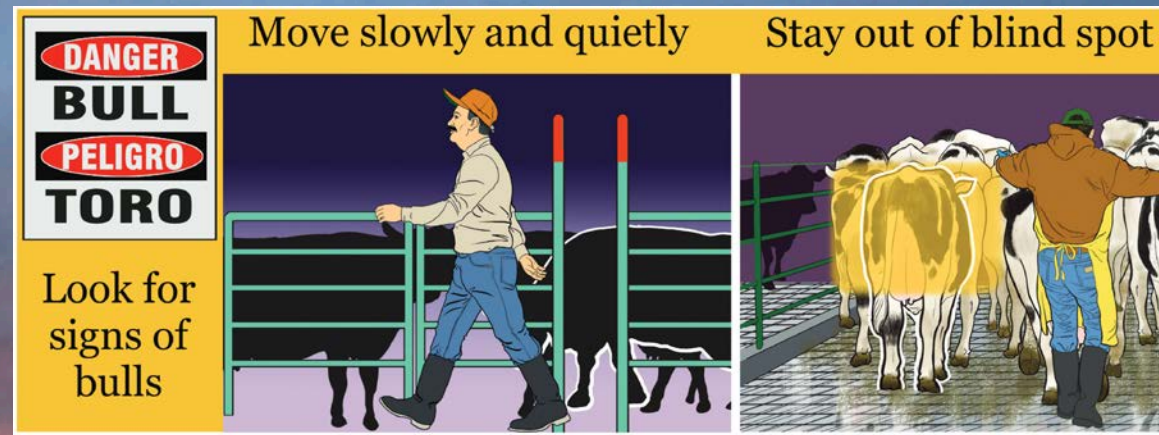
Farmworker Interviews to date

- 58 surveys completed to date
 - 27 farms in Vermont
 - Interviews by County
 - Franklin - 14
 - Addison - 12
 - Orleans - 7
 - Orange - 5
 - Other Counties in Vermont - 6
 - 6 farms in New York (Otsego County)
 - 14 interviews
- Data entered from 41 surveys in Vermont



A few highlights from 41 surveys entered

- 18/41 farmworkers received some safety training when they began work on their current farm
 - 33% were trained by a co-worker
 - 28% by the farmer
 - 28% by a professional
- 56% reported receiving no safety training on the current farm
- 90% (n=40) said they would be interested in additional safety training



Prior injury while working in dairy

- 59% of workers (n=41) have had some prior injury working on dairy farms
- Of those injured
 - 50% saw a doctor
 - In most cases the farmer paid for the doctor
 - 27% still suffer from that injury

Farmworkers prioritize different training interests than do farmers

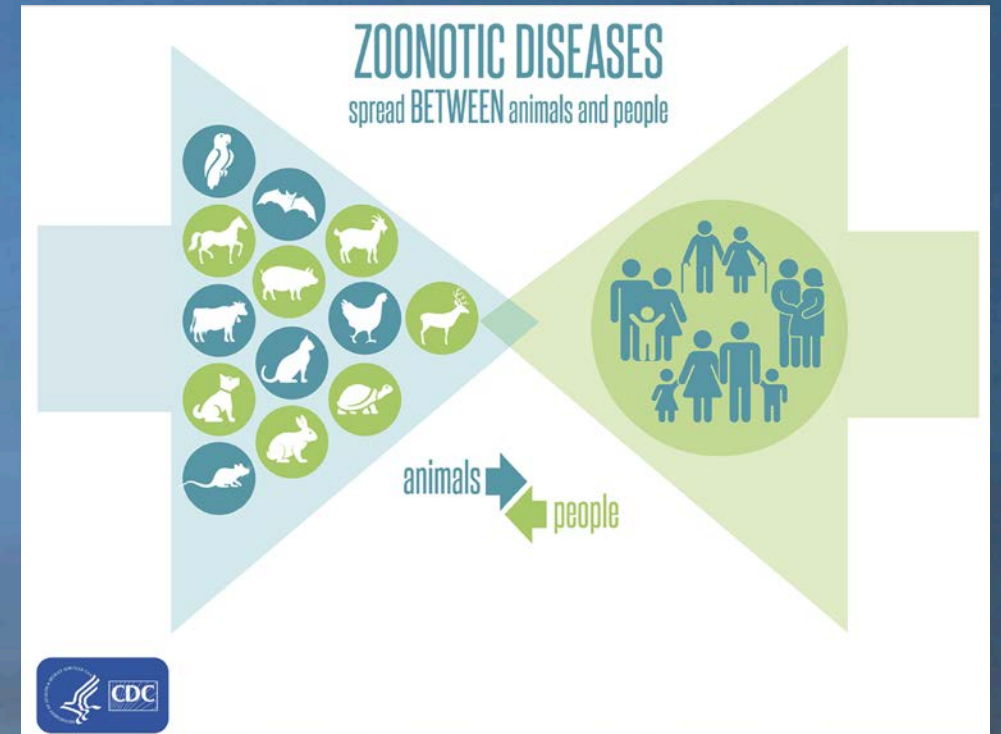
Areas of greatest interest to farmworkers :“extremely important”:

- Personal Protective Equipment: 63%
- Chemical Safety: 63%
- Milk Parlor Safety: 59%
- Animal Handling: 49%
- Covid: 46%
- Needle Safety: 42%
- Down Cow: 39%
- Skidsteer: 37% *(39% actually drive a skidsteer and of those 50% said training was extremely important)*



Migrant workers are interested in a broad range of training

- Animal to human disease transmission (zoonotic disease)
 - 73% have never received any training on zoonotic disease while working in dairy
 - 51% are very interested and 46% are somewhat interested in receiving training
- 73% said they are interested in learning more about personal practices to reduce stress



Mental Health Promotion

Dario described living isolated with no-one nearby to visit and working all the time meant that he often would go from work to the house and back to work without connecting with anyone off the farm. He often felt “stressed, isolated, and bored.” He had never heard of yoga and meditation before. He met an outreach staff member a few times when the weather was nice last year and then did some sessions virtually. He says that yoga “helped his body relax after the stress and exhaustion of daily work.” The meditation helps him “concentrate his mind and let go of the things that are bothering him.” Dario doesn’t have a lot of time in his day and prefers to do sessions with someone else. Dario says he feels “happier and lighter” after doing both yoga and meditation and that both have helped with his sleep – something that was a challenge for him previously.

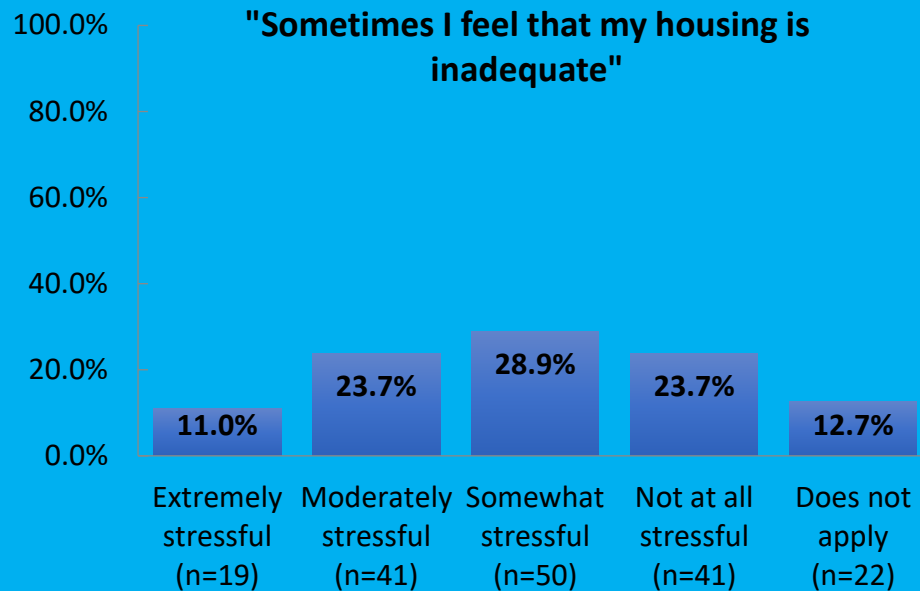
Farm Trainings:

- Began in Addison County last week
 - 18 farms currently being scheduled
 - Goal is 25 farms in Vermont and 25 farms in NYS
 - Based on response in Vermont we anticipate demand well in excess of 25 farms in Vermont
- Farmworker training is much more common in NYS than Vermont
 - Scale of farms → Increased OSHA regulation
- Recommendation: Sustain funding for farmworker safety programs, particularly for new farmworkers



Farmworker Housing Background:

"Sometimes I feel that my housing is inadequate"



Housing is one of the most common non-wage benefits provided to workers on dairy farms (2018)

Latino Workers	100% received housing and utilities
US Workers	Housing provided by 62% of farms, Utilities provided by 53% of farms



Substantial interest and engagement across agencies and organizations around farmworker housing

- **Multiple on-line multi-agency/organization meetings**
 - **23 unique stakeholder organizations and individuals in March '21**
 - **Unusually broad interest from groups that have not worked together in the past**
- **Next stakeholder meeting this Friday 2/3 from 10:30-noon**

Vermont Farmworker Housing Program


First round of funding:

\$500,000 in loan capital funding from Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB) to Champlain Housing Trust (CHT)

UVM Extension is assisting with outreach for the project

Program overview:

- Interest free loans of up to \$30,000 for a broad range of repairs
- Loans will be forgiven by 10% a year over ten years
 - Housing must be maintained and used for farmworker housing.
- Annual certification from the farm owner
- Two site visits during the 10 year term.
Program information and CHT contact information must be posted in the house



Vermont Farmworker
HOUSING REPAIR LOAN PROGRAM

OVERVIEW

- › Funding available to make health and safety repairs/improvements to farmworker housing
- › Loans for up to \$30,000
- › 0% interest, and forgiven over 10 years, as long as the improved housing continues to be used for farmworker housing
- › Repairs/improvements can include, but are not limited to:
 - wastewater systems
 - air sealing and insulation
 - plumbing upgrades
 - noise mitigation measures
 - overcrowding relief
 - mold remediation
 - roof replacements
 - electrical upgrades
 - food prep and storage improvements
- › Application Deadline: April 29, 2022. If funds are available following April 29th, applications will be accepted on a rolling basis

ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible for a loan, an applicant must:

- Be actively engaged in farming
- Have a demonstrated need for affordable resources to address their farmworker housing needs

To qualify, the loan applicant will:


- be under the USDA income threshold for federal programs
- explain why conventional financing for farm labor housing is unavailable or infeasible for the farm business.
- Own employee housing currently in need of health and safety improvements

The enrolled housing unit must be an existing permanent or semi-permanent structure owned by the farmer. Owner-occupied farm dwellings are not eligible.

- Verify that such housing is currently, or will be upon completion, and will continue to be occupied by farm employees

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION to be included as part of the Eligibility Application

- Three years of tax returns, including all business and farm income schedules
- Certification attesting to farm operations
- Narrative from application
- Repair checklist
- Deed showing ownership of housing
- Property tax bill
- Regional Coordinator site visit checklist for occupied housing; or farmer narrative for housing to be occupied by workers upon completion
- Draft scope of work and estimated budget
- Copy of contractor contacts, if available
- Copy of any applicable permits, if available

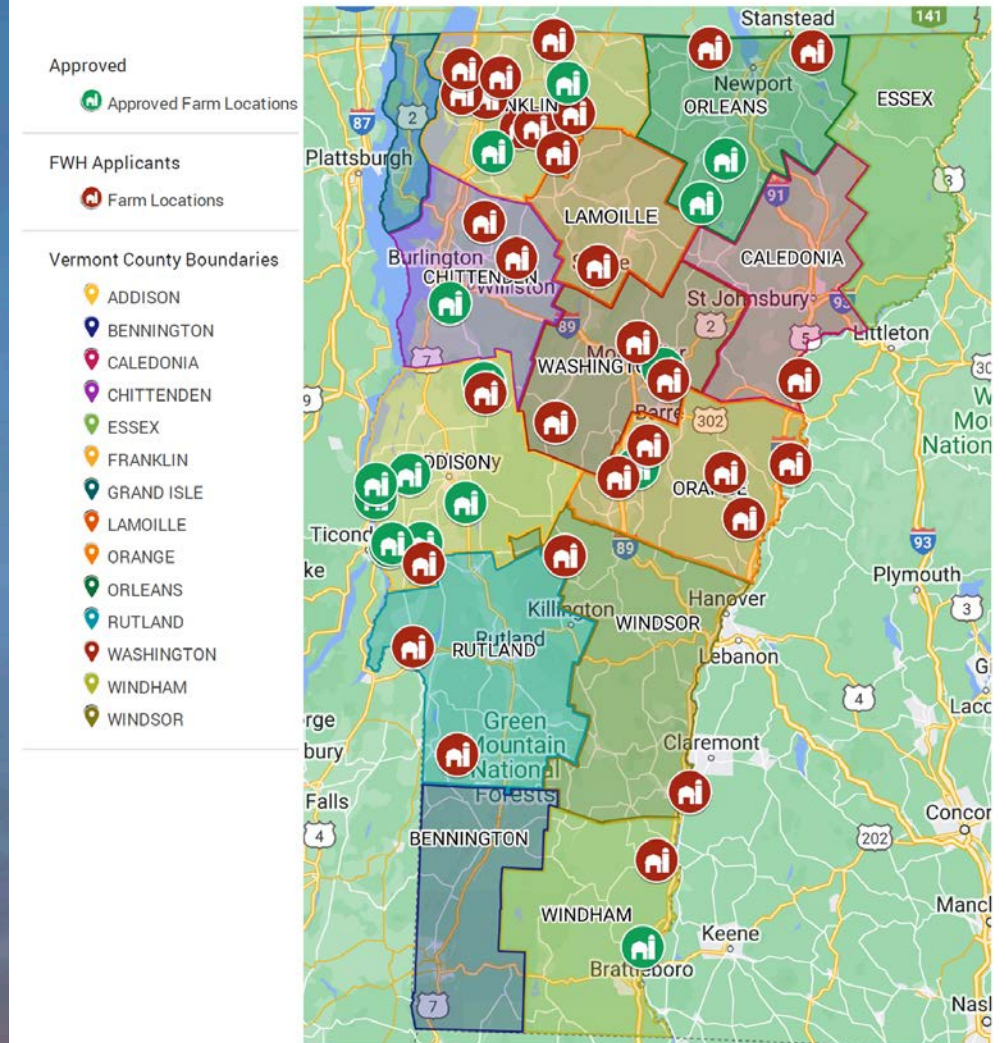


Response to Program has been strong

- 45 farms submitted applications (exceeded available funding)

- 19 projects approved on 15 farms
- Types of farm businesses
 - 10 dairy
 - 3 vegetable
 - 1 fruit
 - 1 flower
- Improves housing for between 110-135 farmworkers

Farmworker Housing Repair Loan Program Applications and Approved Projects



Current Status of Projects: Round 1

- Several farms have more than one project
 - 8 applications have completed contracting and have begun construction
 - 4 are already close to finishing the project
 - 7 completing estimations from contractors
 - 2 preparing property reports prior to signing contracts
- Most farms will be covering costs over \$30,000 to complete the project
 - 4 farms will be covering costs significantly greater than \$30,000.



Round 1 Projects

Applications:

- Windows & doors – 19%
- Insulation – 11.5%
- Structural repairs – 11%
- Electrical Repairs – 11%
- Plumbing – 9.6%
- Bathroom – 9.6%
- Kitchen – 9%
- Roof – 7.7%



- Funded projects
 - Windows and doors
 - Electrical and plumbing issues
 - Insulation
 - Roof repairs
 - Septic systems

Second Round of funding and projects: Repair Program

- Expansion of farmworker housing repair program
 - \$774,000 in funding estimated to repair an additional 25-26 projects
 - Similar structure to Round 1 loan program
 - Eligible, unfunded applicants from Round 1 will be invited to resubmit
 - Early outreach has found additional, new demand from farmers

Second Round of funding and projects: Whole House Replacement Pilot Program

Eligible replacement projects include:

- (i) existing pre-1976 mobile home or home is otherwise past its useful life;
 - (ii) housing units located in barns or other agricultural (non-residential) structures;
 - (iii) existing over-crowded housing; or
 - (iv) existing housing cannot be brought into compliance with the rental housing code regardless of cost as determined by CHT staff.
-
- Loans can go up to \$120,000,
 - \$30,000 will be forgiven in the same manner as in the repair program.
 - Remaining balance is secured with a mortgage on the property.
 - 0% interest loans and payment is deferred until sale or housing ceases to be used for farmworkers.

Preliminary Findings and Recommendations

- Substantial need to improve farmworker housing
 - Repair program is needed and can be expanded
- Whole house replacements/renovations are required on several farms visited
- Substantial demand from farmers for funding assistance
 - Interest in CHT loan program structure
 - Expansion of this model could help farms address the need to provide on-farm housing
- Other weatherization and energy efficiency programs are challenging for farm businesses to access or have long wait times.

Farmworker Mental Health

Funded by the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets through the USDA Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network. VAAFAM is partnering with the Farm First program on this grant

- UVM Extension's role is to understand current access to, utilization of, satisfaction with and unmet need for mental health services for these populations.
- The project has produced one draft white paper for comment and held one well-attended stakeholder meeting

Availability & Utilization of Mental Health Counseling

- At least 23 children from 16 families currently in Vermont connected with farm work traveled via land from Mexico or Guatemala
 - Some traveled with a parent but many with another family member or relative to be reunited with a parent
- Many experienced weeks or in some cases months of detention at the border, temporary holding units and/or in homes for unaccompanied minors prior to reunification with a parent after years of separation
- Migrant Health and Migrant Ed have been unsuccessful in identifying Spanish speaking counselors who serve children and youth
 - Cost, transportation, parent work schedules, language & stigma among many barriers

Preliminary Assessment

Mental Health Continuum Model



World Health Organization Definition of Mental Health "is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community."

Majority of mental health services in Vermont are in focused on the "thriving" end of the spectrum:

- Health care prevention and access to health services
- Food security
- Education
- Workers Rights
- Access to resources
- Housing
- Workplace safety

Services for more serious mental health issues and crisis are extremely limited:

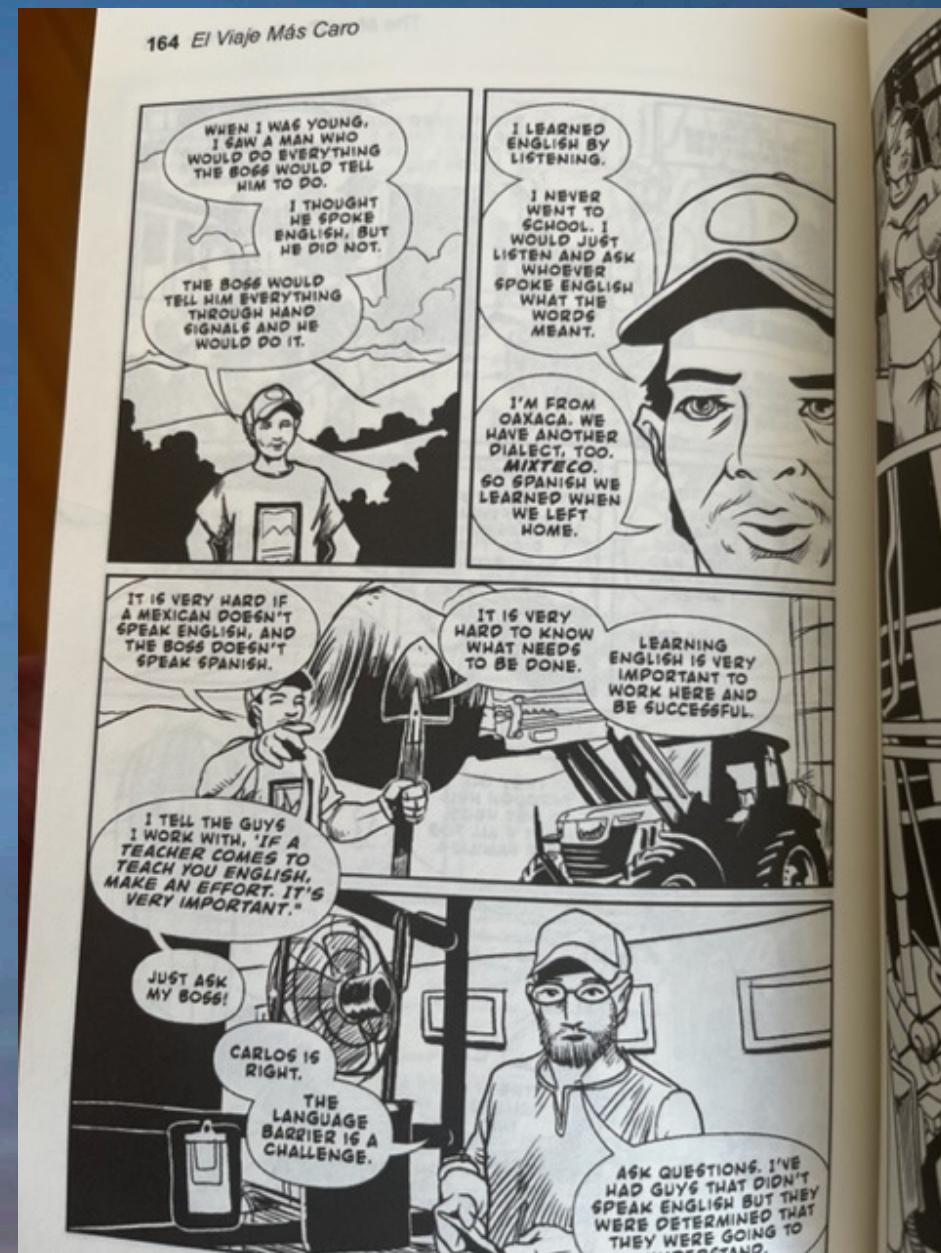
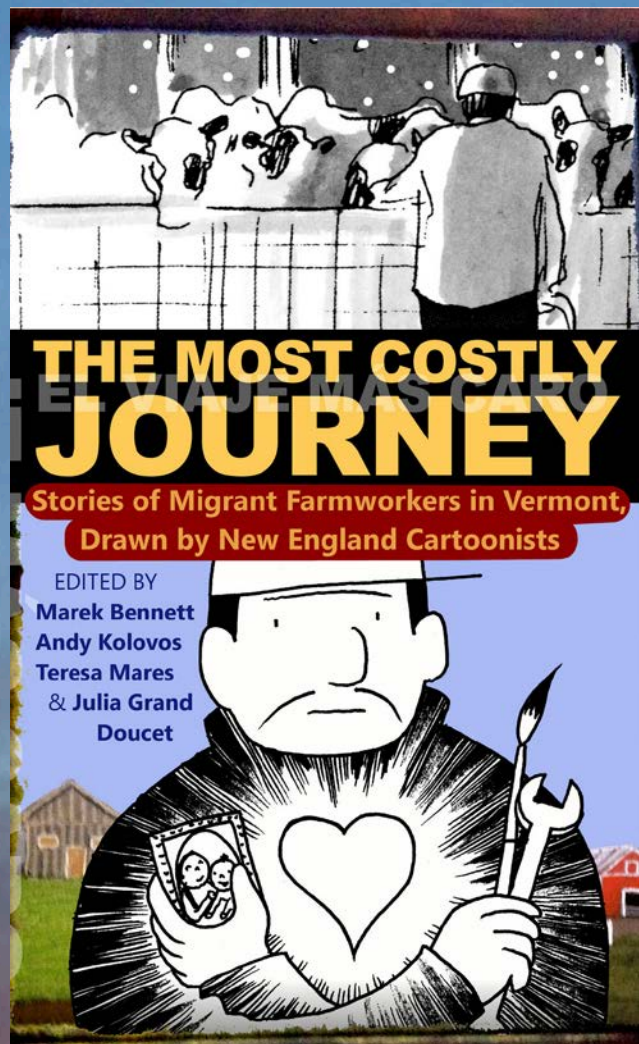
Open Door Clinic now has a bi-lingual clinician

Findings:

- Increased availability of free & accessible Spanish-speaking counselors resulted in 171% increase in patients utilizing services in 2020 to 2021
- Additional 74% increase 2021 to 2022

Source: Open Door Clinic & UVM Extension Migrant Health

For those interested in learning more about migrant workers The Most Costly Journey is highly recommended



Cow Dairy to Goat Dairy Research

- UVM Extension/Center for Rural Studies project funded by Vermont Creamery and the Northeast Dairy Business Innovation Center
- Interviewing existing goat dairies
 - Issues, challenges, opportunities
 - Interest in scaling up
- Assessing interest in cow dairy farmer in moving to goat dairy
- Develop a financial calculator to help dairies evaluate the financial costs and benefits of moving from cows to goats
- Organizing farm visits to existing goat dairy farms in Spring 2023



Preliminary findings

Interviews are still in process and results will be available in June.

- Cow to goat transition is not a simple answer for cow dairies.
 - Some farms have found fluid goat milk profitable but others have not.
- Some challenges:
 - Disease and herd health is a significant challenge affecting profitability. Increased technical assistance will be required for farms moving from cows to goats.
 - Goat dairies that have been able to access value-added markets have found some success relative to those who ship fluid milk.
 - We've found some interest among cow dairies interested in becoming goat dairies but it has been limited
- Based on Vermont interviews a financial will be read for for testing at the end of Feb.
 - A 12-Month Projected Profit and Loss Statement
 - Capital Investment Calculator & Projected Cash Flow Statement
 - Ability to test scenarios

- Questions and Comments?

