

Why you should care about labor issues in food production

Maggie Gray

Adelphi University

SUSTAINABILITY?

“They don’t eat
the workers.”

OBSTACLES TO TELLING WORKERS' STORIES

THINKING ABOUT
HOW WE TREAT:
ANIMALS
THE EARTH
WORKERS

QUESTIONS

Why do we imagine worker conditions are good?

Why don't workers address their problems?

THE LOCAL TRAP

&

THE PRICE OF

PROXIMITY

An aerial photograph of a farm in the Hudson River Valley. In the foreground, two tall, cylindrical metal silos with domed tops stand prominently. To their right, a portion of a large barn with a green corrugated metal roof is visible. In the middle ground, several long, dark-roofed barns are situated. The background shows rolling green hills under a clear blue sky.

HUDSON RIVER VALLEY FARMS

THE PEOPLE AND THE PRIDE BEHIND THE PRODUCE

BY JOANNE MICHAELS

PHOTOGRAPHS BY RICH POMERANTZ

INTRODUCTION BY U.S. CONGRESSMAN MAURICE HINCHEY











Research 2000-2013

INTERVIEWS

- 113 workers 2002, 35 repeat interviews 2008-09
- 12 former workers 2008
- 24 worker advocates 2003 & 2009
- 18 farmers 2009
- State legislators and aides, lobbyists, farmer organizations, and farmworker service providers

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

- Farm conferences, farmers' markets, farm labor meetings, advocacy events.

WORKER CONDITIONS

THE EXTREME

THE INDIVIDUAL

THE EVERY DAY

THE STRUCTURAL

Some Worker Conditions

- No overtime pay
- No day of rest
- No collective bargaining protections
- Low pay
- Long hours
- Difficult tasks
- Repetitive tasks
- Dangerous equipment
- Pesticide exposure
- Lack safety training
- Extreme heat/cold
- Lack of respect
- Feel trapped on farms
- Fear being fired
- Fear being deported
- No job mobility
- No sick days
- No vacation days
- Child labor laws looser in Agriculture
- Poor housing

QUESTIONS

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THE LOCAL TRAP



Courtney Dudley, Hudson Valley & Jeff Minton for the NYTimes in CA's Central Valley: just harvested carrots.





Jeff Minton for the NYTimes, CA's Central Valley.



Photo by Courtney Dudley, of a Hudson Valley worker.



Vincent Laforet for the NYTimes, CA's Central Valley tomato harvest.



Photo by Courtney Dudley, Hudson Valley squash harvesters.

LOCAL TRAP

Conflating local and
wholesome.

Romantic Agrarianism.

ORGANIC

FARMERS AND CHEFS OF THE HUDSON VALLEY



PHOTOGRAPHS BY

Francesco Mastalia

PREFACE BY
Gail Buckland

FOUNDED BY
Mark Buffalo

INTRODUCTION BY
Joan Dye Gussow

Organic: Book Description

The Hudson Valley, New York has become an epicenter for the local, organic, sustainable food movement. With its rich agricultural land, the awareness for sustainable living, and the growing demand for local, organic food, the farm-to-table, locavore movement has become a way of life in the Hudson Valley.

Organic spotlights the Hudson Valley as a region at the forefront of this movement and features the portraits and words of the dedicated farmers who are committed to growing and producing food using sustainable methods.



edible HUDSON VALLEY

Celebrating Local Foods of the Hudson Valley & Catskills, Season by Season

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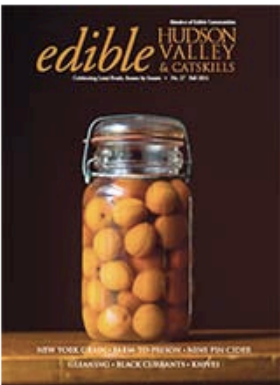
Welcome to Edible Hudson Valley, the quarterly magazine that celebrates the local, seasonal foods of the Hudson Valley and Catskills.



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EY

by Season

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Welcome to
the quarterly
celebrates the
of the Hudson

ROMANTIC AGRARIANISM

Farmers are economically independent & self sufficient

Farming is intrinsically a natural and moral activity

Farming is the fundamental industry of society

QUESTIONS

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THE PRICE OF PROXIMITY

THE WORKERS

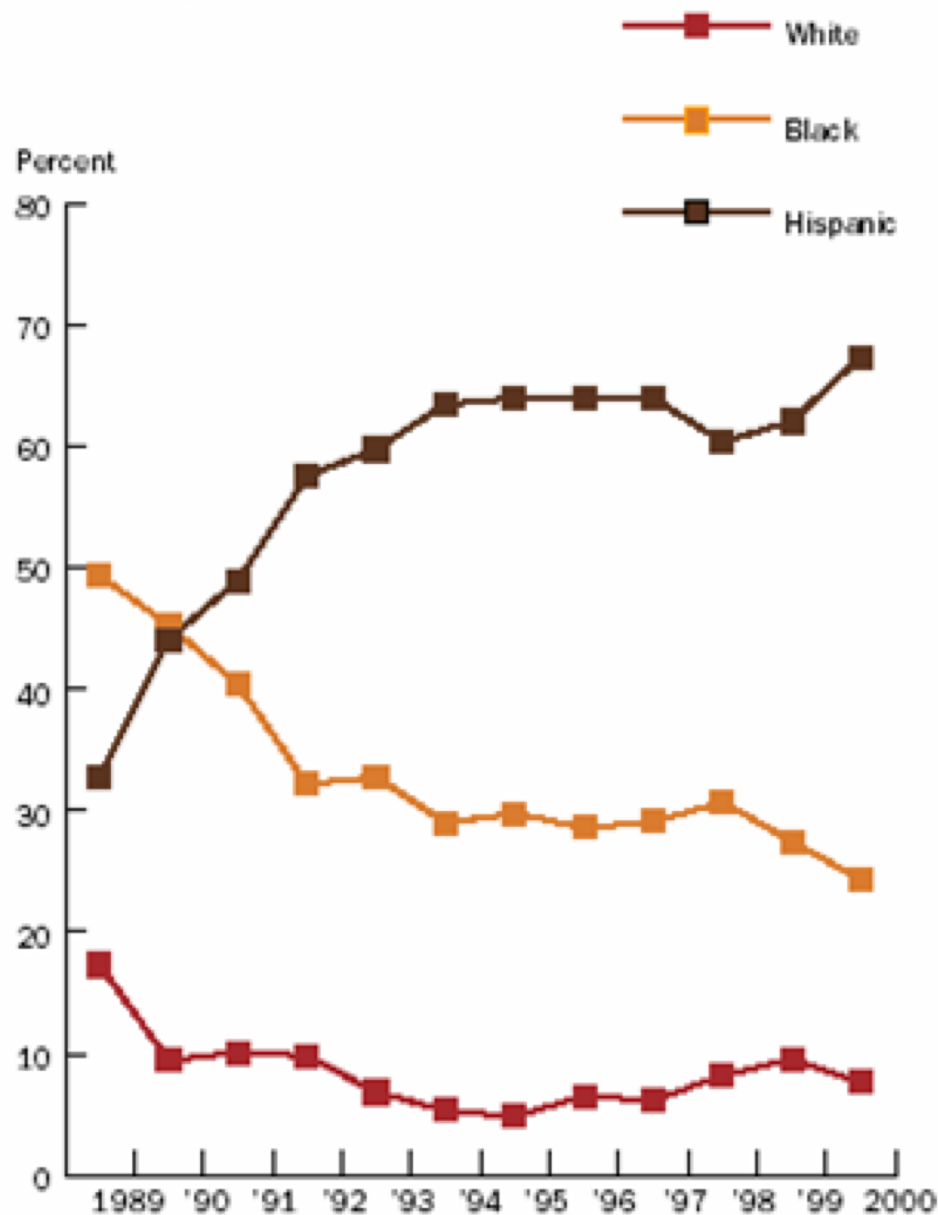
Demographics

Structural constraints

Power dynamics &

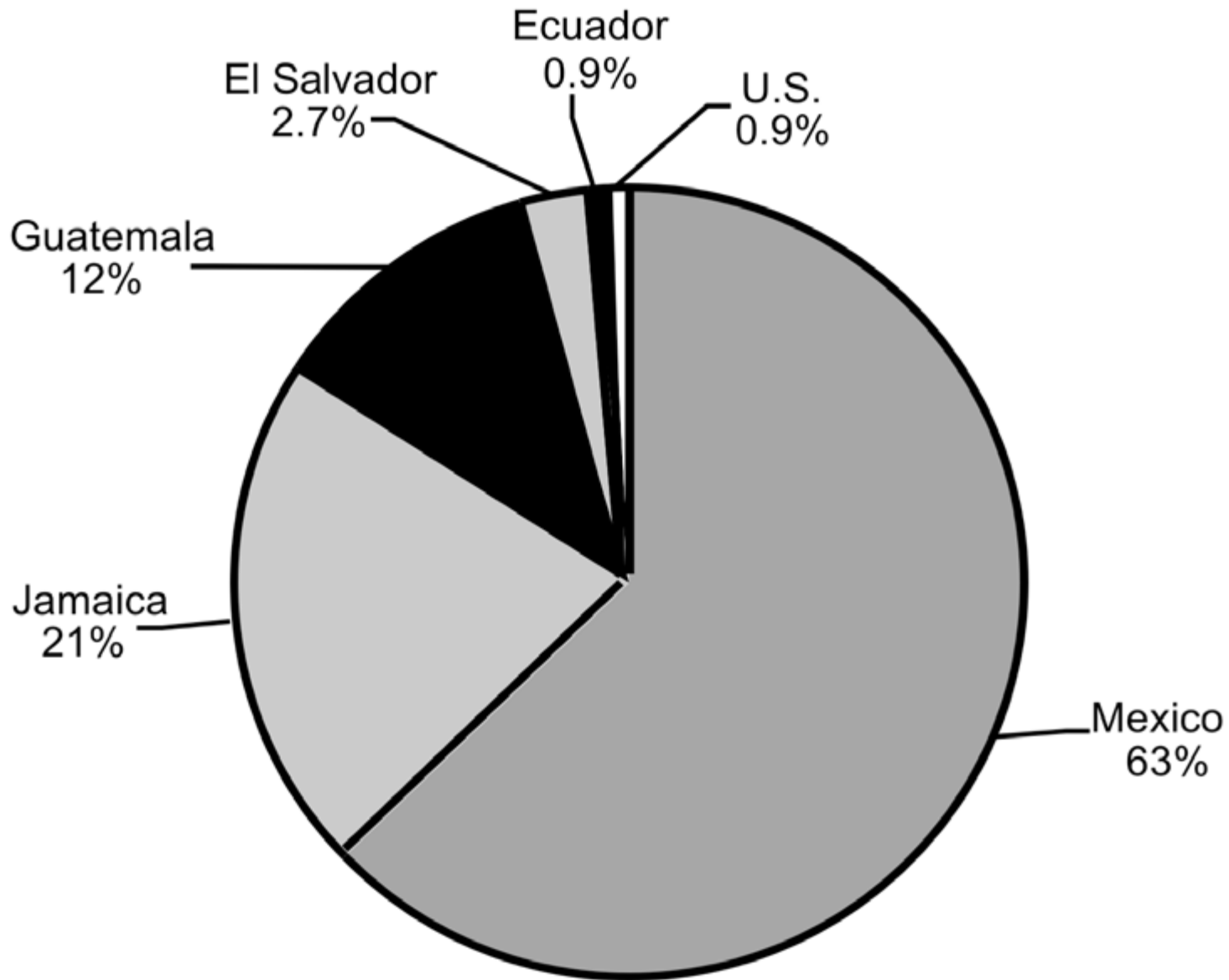
Paternalism

Figure 1. Farmworkers by race/ethnic group, New York, 1989–2000

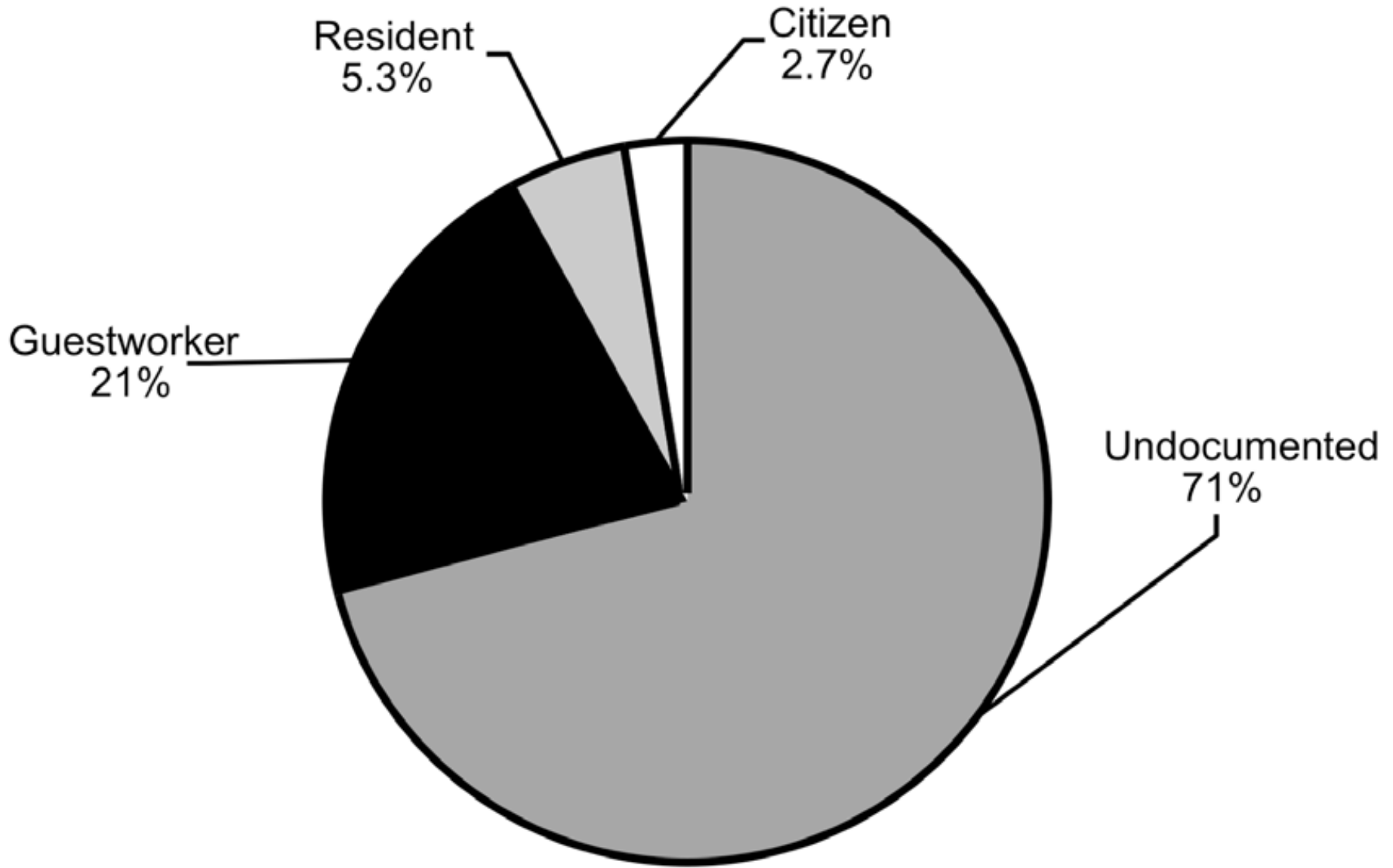


Max J. Pfeffer and Pilar A. Parra. *Immigrants and the Community*. Cornell University, 2004

Hudson Valley Farmworkers: country of origin

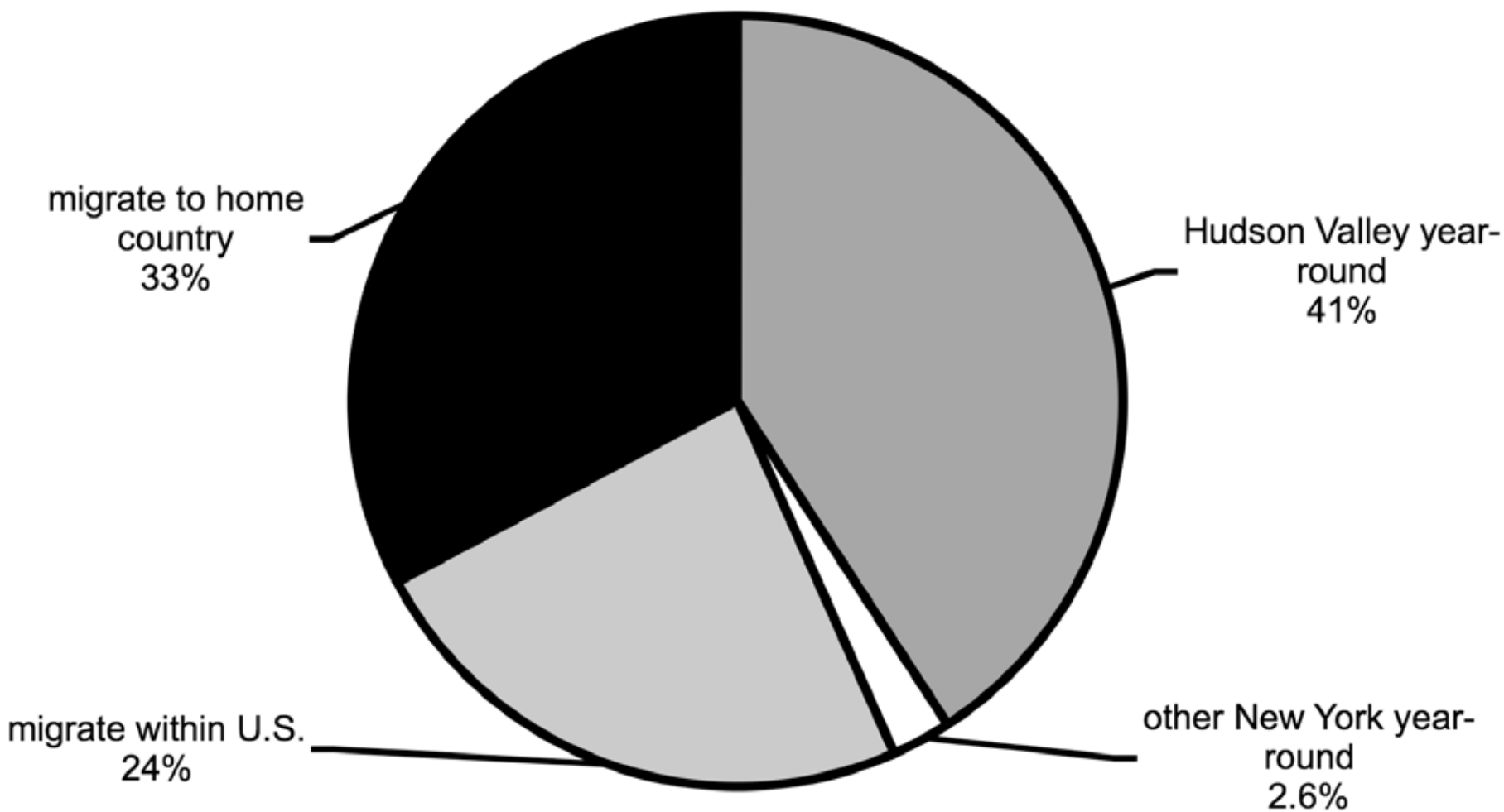


Hudson Valley Farmworkers: Legal Status



Hudson Valley Farmworkers: migration pattern (for seasonal jobs)

Jamaican-born workers were likely to secure work in other states before moving to New York, the majority of Latin American-born workers came directly to New York upon arriving in the U.S.



WHY DON'T WORKERS ADDRESS THEIR PROBLEMS?

- Historically marginalized.
- Excluded from labor laws, experience rural isolation and union neglect, and have non-citizen legal status.
- Reluctant to address their situations due to these structural factors which create fear.
- Working under paternalism which acts as a form of labor control.

Price of Proximity: Paternalism

Intimate, extremely hierarchical relationship in which the employer's control extends into workers' everyday lives affecting even their personal and recreational habits.

Price of Proximity: Paternalism

Degrees of benefits.

Complex!

Form of labor control.

RECAP

LOCAL TRAP creates a false binary that local farms are wholesome and industrial factory farms are evil. This influences how the public thinks.

PRICE OF PROXIMITY are historically marginalized, excluded from labor laws, and work in paternalistic settings—they are afraid to complain.

What is to be done?

- Tap into the food movement's comprehensive food ethic to promote labor concerns.
- Prime consumers to ask questions.
- Question the sustainability of workers' livelihoods.
- Get farmworker stories in the food media.
- Find worker movements to learn from.



LABOR and the LOCAVORE

The Making of a Comprehensive Food Ethic

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