

## Introduction

Vermont prides itself on being a national role model in developing innovative models for community-supported, ecologically responsible agricultural practices. However, Vermont's largest sector of agriculture, the dairy industry, has increasingly relied on Latinx migrant farm laborers who face significant challenges. Due to a lack of a year-round agricultural visa program, most farmworkers on Vermont's dairy farms are unable to receive proper documentation. This circumstance has a significant impact on migrant workers, particularly those living and working closer to the border, as those areas fall within federal jurisdiction of US immigration enforcement. In these borderlands, surveillance is intensified and so the pressure to be invisible is heightened. The current availability of agricultural visas is limited to seasonal migrant farmworkers, and because dairy is year-round work, farmworkers in the dairy industry are barred from accessing proper documentation. Increased patrolling along the northern border results in extreme isolation, fear, and the inability to access basic human rights. For migrant workers on Vermont's dairy farms, just taking a trip to the grocery store is to risk deportation.

The three objectives of this research:

1. Understand current gaps in food access for Latino/a farm workers on Vermont's dairy farms
2. Quantify food insecurity among Latino/a farm workers and identify effective and realistic approaches to increased food access
3. Support and develop initiatives to provide farm workers with greater access to healthy, culturally familiar food



From a 2015 interview:

*"Well, I have to think about what I have here, because if I don't have things, now that I can't go to the store whenever, I have to cook with what I have... In Mexico there are many stores nearby, so if we need something, we go to buy it, but here, no. Here I have to buy for 15 days' worth, and if we run out of ingredients, I have to do what I can... here we can buy the food that we want... The problem is that we cannot leave."*

-Juana, age 40, from Mexico

## Findings from HFSSM surveys

100 Individuals Surveyed (75 men, 25 women)  
18% of households classified as food insecure  
Low Food Security: 14 households  
Very Low Food Security: 4 households

Geographic impact on food security- proximity to the border impacts food access.

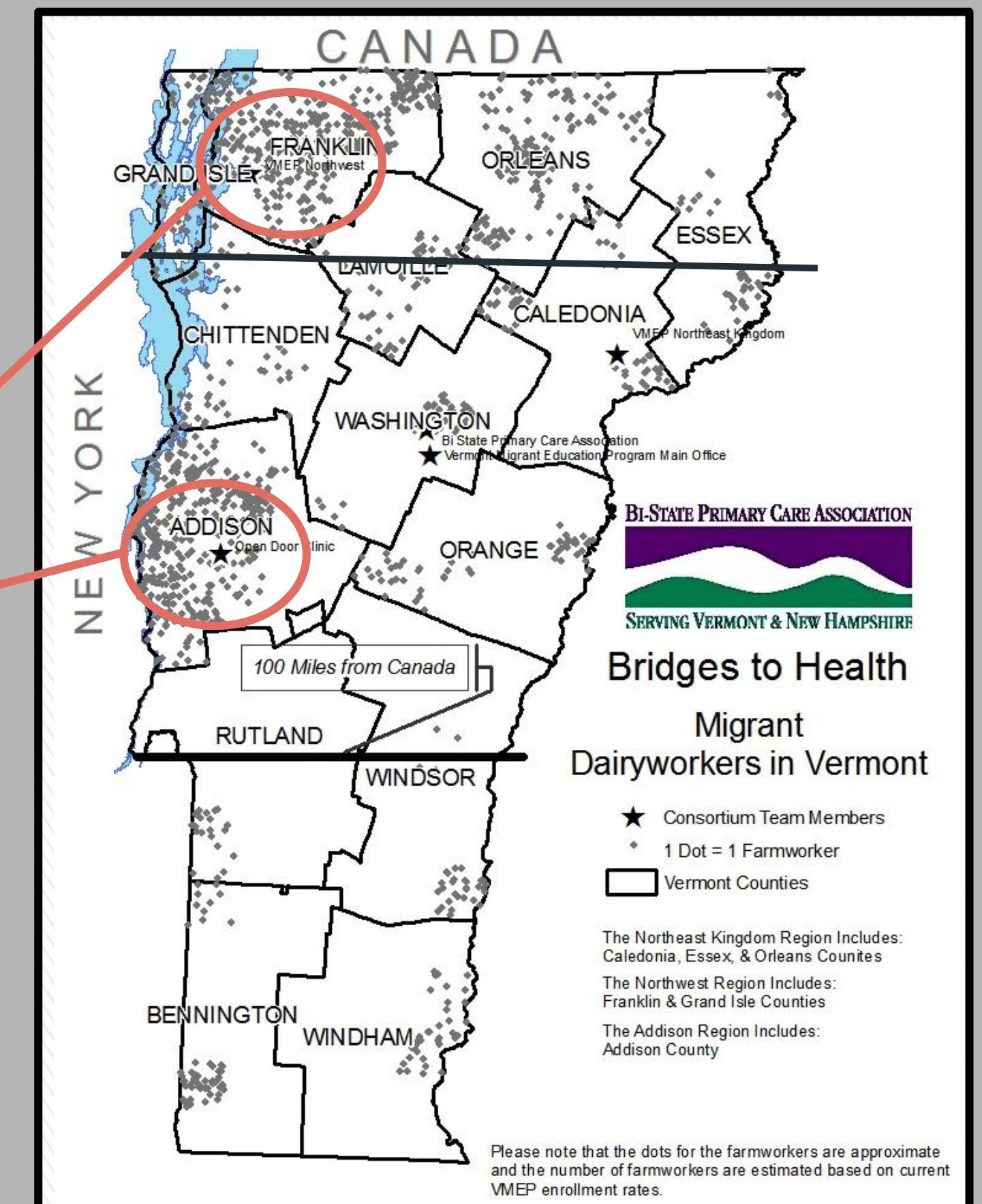
Franklin/Grand Isle (n: 33)  
18.2% are food insecure

Addison County (n: 51)  
15.7% are food insecure

2014 National Average of 14% food insecurity  
2012-14 Vermont 3-year Average of 13%

Other survey data:

- Average Household Size: 4.4
- 25 % have children < age of 18 in household
- 95 from Mexico, 3 from Guatemala, 1 from Belize, 1 from Puerto Rico



## Methods

Ethnographic fieldwork

- Conducted 400 hours of participant observation
- Recorded and analyzed 61 pages of typed field notes using Atlas TI
- Conducted, transcribed and analyzed 30 in-depth interviews with farmworkers (n=20) and community stakeholders (n=10)
- Analyzed 15 interview transcripts conducted in 2006 through the Vermont Folklife Center for an exhibit called the Golden Cage Project, which includes interviews with dairy farm owners and migrant farmworkers

Qualitative Data

- 100 of the USDA Household Food Security Survey Modules (HFSSM)

## Huertas

*Huertas*, meaning kitchen garden in Spanish, is an applied gardening and community based food access project. This gardening project germinated in response to the variety of pressures on undocumented farmworkers in northern Vermont: pressure to be invisible, fear of border patrol, and lack of mobility. The garden project offers a reprieve where migrant farmworkers can access fresh vegetables and herbs that remind them of home. Through connecting farmworkers with volunteers, materials, and the permission from the dairy owners to plant these gardens, *Huertas* aims to address the disparities in access to nutritious food while simultaneously bridging the barriers of isolation and social inequalities.

Feedback from interviews:

*"Now I go outside and listen to the birds sing. I feel more free, like I'm in the fields in my village. The memories of what it was like there come back."* -Lourdes, age 33, from Mexico

*"Well, here my favorite is my work, no more than this. And beyond that, I like to plant tomatoes, chilies, radish, squash, this is not to sell products, it is just for the home... I like when people come to visit, to feed them. It is not a business. This food, it is a gift of the earth, for everyone. It is not meant to be a business."* -Tomás, age 62, from Mexico

*"Because we have the garden, there are fresher vegetables: fresher tomatoes, all of the food is more fresh. And during the winter, well what we find at the grocery store is mostly refrigerated or in the cooler and sometimes we do not find the same things as what we plant."* -Yasmin, age 33, from Mexico

*"Having a huerta here I'm saving money. I'm saving when I get tomatoes, everything that I plant - the onions, tomatoes, chilies, all of it that I sow, so then I don't have to buy it at the store, so there I am saving money. And also I am also cultivating it, everything is so fresh, in the time that it is good, in the summer, and it's really nice to know I will have it from the plant and I bring it in and cook it"* -Fernando, age 53, from Mexico

## Impacts on Farmworker Food Access in Vermont

- Absence of a year round visa
- Proximity to the US-Canada border
- Dependence on third party for food access
- Rural isolation
- Busy work schedules
- Language barrier
- Lack of transportation/mobility

Undocumented migrant farmworkers on Vermont's dairy farms, particularly up north, often describe their life here as *encerrado*, which translates to "locked in", "enclosed", or "penned up". Because they are unable to be in the public sphere, for fear of deportation, they must rely on others for food. A 2010 survey by Naomi Wolcott-MacClausland through UVM Extension found that in border counties 96.2% of migrant farmworkers rely on someone else to go to the store for them. In addition to these grocery runs, which happen every 15 days to 2 weeks, farmworkers purchase food through an underground from mobile food vendors, who sell culturally familiar foods. These vendors often drive down to New York or New Jersey to find the desired foods to sell on dairy farms in Vermont.

