Texas Workforce Commission

WIOA COMBINED STATE PLAN

APPENDIX 4

Agricultural Outreach Plan

In Texas, one out of every seven working Texans (14 percent) is in an agriculture-related job. The average age of Texas farmers and ranchers is 58 years. Moreover, Texas has more women and minority farm operations than any other state in the nation. The unique needs of migrant and seasonal farmworkers (MSFWs) are best understood in light of Texas' agricultural activity.

The economic impact of Texas agriculture on the national scene is significant. Texas is the third-leading agricultural-producing state overall, behind California and Iowa. Texas leads the nation in the number of farms and ranches, with 248,800 covering over 130 million acres, and leads the nation in value of farm real estate. Additionally, Texas leads the nation in the production of cattle, cotton, hay, sheep, goats, wool, and mohair.

Rural lands, including privately owned forest, total 144 million acres, which is 86 percent of the state's total land area. Twelve percent of Texas' population resides in rural areas, and 98.5 percent of Texas farms and ranches are family farms, partnerships, or family-held corporations.

Texas Agricultural Regions

Texas ranked sixth overall in value of agricultural exports in 2012, and eighth in fresh vegetable production, accounting for 2.1 percent of the U.S. total. Texas' fresh vegetable production was valued at $439 million, in terms of cash receipts that same year. The leading counties for vegetable acres harvested were Hidalgo, Starr, and Cameron. Other important counties were Frio, Uvalde, Duval, Webb, Hale, and Zavala. Texas also ranked tenth in fruit and tree nut production, with production valued at $190 million.

Land preparation, planting, irrigating, and harvesting are ongoing activities. Therefore, agricultural employment occurs at numerous locations and at any time during the year. Usually, employment for farmworkers begins in the Lower Rio Grande Valley region, served by the Lower Rio Grande Valley and Cameron County Workforce Development Boards (Boards), and the Winter Garden and South/Central region, served by the Middle Rio Grande Board, and moves northward to the Texas Panhandle as the agricultural season progresses. Workers who follow this crop pattern may also migrate to other states.

Review of Prior Year's Agricultural Activity in Texas

For the Program Year 2015 (PY'15) Agricultural Outreach Plan (Plan), the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) has used the most recent complete and readily available data. Although Texas regions support a wide variety of agricultural activities, data is not collected by a single entity using consistent time frames and methodologies. Data is limited for agricultural activities, such as producing wheat, grain, and other crops, and labor-demand production, such as cotton ginning. Furthermore, available data sources do not collect production and forecast data based on a federal program year; for the purposes of this plan, calendar years are used when there is no other data available. TWC is working with agricultural associations and other sources to improve on the data available for future plans.

Table 1 summarizes the agronomic crop production statistics for each of Texas' primary growing regions for Calendar Year 2012 (CY'12) and CY'13. CY'14 data is currently unavailable. Regional production statistics for horticultural crops are also unavailable at this time. For agronomic crops, the vast acreages of grain and row crops in the high plains and rolling plains

make up most of the 11.3 million acres planted in the plains region. The eastern region of the state accounted for the bulk of the rest of agronomic crop production in Texas. Agronomic crops are typically less labor intensive, because more capital machinery is used in planting and harvesting as compared to most horticultural crops.

Table 1. Texas Agronomic Crop Production by Region, 2012–2013

Region	**Area Planted (in acres) in 2012**	**Area Planted (in acres) in 2013**	**Area Harvested (in acres) in 2012**	**Area Harvested (in acres) in 2013**	**Main Crops**
Lower Rio Grande Valley	614,600	539,600	590,400	344,400	sorghum, cotton
Winter Garden and South/Central	1,810,100	1,754,400	1,149,840	951,200	sorghum, wheat
Plains	10,569,700	11,163,300	5,906,100	5,564,400	cotton, corn, wheat, sorghum, peanuts
Far West	402,700	619,300	131,700	232,000	cotton, alfalfa hay
Eastern	3,684,900	3,869,700	2,917,280	2,860,710	corn, sorghum, rice, soybeans, wheat
Other, Not Specified	146,000	352,700	70,180	326,890	
State Totals	**17,228,000**	**18,299,000**	**10,765,500**	**10,279,600**	

All data is from National Agricultural Statistics Service, USDA, and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service.

Review of Prior Year's Agricultural Worker Activity in Texas

The Lower Rio Grande Valley has the most labor-intensive production, accounting for the majority of horticultural crops in Texas, followed by the Winter Garden and South/Central regions. However, horticultural crops are grown throughout the state. Table 2 provides data on Texas vegetable production and average monthly labor with crop information for CY'13 and CY'14. Fruit and vegetable production is typically the most labor intensive.

Table 2. Texas Vegetable Production and Average Monthly Labor, 2013–2014

Crop	**Calendar Year 2013**			**Calendar Year 2014**		
	Acreage	**Labor**	**# of Months**	**Acreage**	**Labor**	**# of Months**

Crop	Calendar Year 2013			Calendar Year 2014		
	Acreage	**Labor**	**# of Months**	**Acreage**	**Labor**	**# of Months**
Citrus (1,000 Boxes)	8,876	5,256	8	9,685	5,735	8
Onions	9,700	1,400	4	9,000	1,299	4
Cucumbers	2,000	1,750	3	2,400	2,100	3
Cantaloupes	1,900	305	2	2,300	370	2
Watermelons	23,000	859	6	20,000	747	6
Cabbage	6,100	623	9	6,200	633	9
Tomatoes	900	675	11	780	585	11
Spinach (Fresh)	1,300	312	4	1,500	360	4
Squash	1,900	577	1	1,500	455	1
Peaches (Tons)	8,250	206	3	3,800	95	3
Carrots	1,600	65	3	1,400	57	3
Sweet Corn	2,100	63	5	2,950	89	5
Pecans* (1,000 Pounds)	28,000	84	3	60,000	180	3
Honeydews	650	72	2	150	17	2
Potatoes	17,700	260	4	20,600	303	4
Sweet Potatoes	800	17	3	900	20	3
Chili Peppers	3,200	1,200	5	3,100	1,163	5
Bell Peppers	780	1,312	6	95	160	6
Pumpkins	260	10	N/A	724	27	N/A
Total	**74,144**	**15,072**		**73,170**	**14,416**	

All data is from National Agricultural Statistics Service, USDA, and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service.
*Pecans are an alternate-year crop.

Projected Level of Agricultural Activity in Texas for the Coming Year

As seen nationally, some areas that historically have had high concentrations of agricultural work have experienced industry reduction relative to other types of work, such as in the oil and gas, construction, and retail industries. With that, there also has been a shift in the labor market.

While some workers and their families who have long performed agricultural work are now being employed in nonagricultural industries, other workers are struggling to identify transferable skills that will allow them to obtain nonagricultural jobs. Texas is designated as an agricultural supply state, yet many agricultural employers face diminishing laborers to meet demand. With other employment options available that may be less physically taxing, and fewer immigration controls in place, more workers seek nonagricultural jobs. The state's major citrus growers' associations have expressed concern that the labor shortage is one of their most critical issues.

Projected Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers in Texas

According to data from the National Agricultural Statistics Service, USDA, and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, TWC estimates 289,600 MSFWs in the coming year. Although it is possible that jobs may be lost due to natural disasters and other adverse events, the number of MSFWs who reside in Texas is anticipated to escalate. Currently, there are more than 9,200 active agricultural employers in Texas, based on the North American Industry Classification System codes reported for each employer's unemployment insurance (UI) tax accounts.

Table 4 lists job postings for agricultural employers in Texas for PY'14 and PY'15.

Table 4. Wagner-Peyser Act Services to Agricultural Employers

Agricultural Employers	PY'14[2]	PY'15[~~3~~2]
Job Postings[1]	~~1,116~~2,410	~~2,008~~1,081
Job Openings	~~5,818~~14,309	~~10,472~~6,325
Job Openings Filled	~~2,189~~2,604	~~3,940~~853
Percent Job Openings Filled	~~37.62~~18.1%	~~37.6~~13.5%

[1] Number of job postings does not accurately reflect the number of employers because employers may file multiple postings within a year. Each posting may contain multiple job openings.

[~~2~~]~~PY'14~~ [2]PY'14 & PY'15data represents the July 1–~~December 31~~June 30 period.

[~~3~~]~~PY'15 projections are based on 90 percent of PY'14 annualized figures.~~

Agricultural Employers (H-2A Only)	PY'14[1]	PY'15[1]
H-2A Job Orders Received	422	517
H-2A Job Orders Certified	369	408

[1]PY'14 and PY'15 data represents the October 1–September 30 period.

Economic, Natural, and Other Factors That Affect Agriculture

There are several economic, natural, and other factors that affect agricultural production in the state. These are in no particular order of importance, and more than one issue may exist at any given time:

- The cost of fuel;
- Secondary sources of income related to energy production;
- Varied weather patterns, e.g., going from really dry years to really wet years, has a huge impact, and with a state as large as Texas, that typically varies by parts of the state;
- Tax policy as it relates to succession from generation to generation—the high average age of farmers is part of this issue;
- Various environmental policies enforced by the Environmental Protection Agency and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality;
- Immigration law and enforcement, particularly as it impacts the availability of labor for fruit and vegetable production, but also in other agricultural sectors;
- Invasive species coming from other parts of the United States or from other countries that can negatively impact the productive capacity of Texas agriculture;
- The changing nature of U.S. agriculture domestic policy to a more crop-insurance–based program;
- The conversion of agricultural land to developed land, whether for housing or commercial uses; and

- Water availability impacted by things like weather, the increased need for urban water, and issues related to the U.S.-Mexico water treaty.

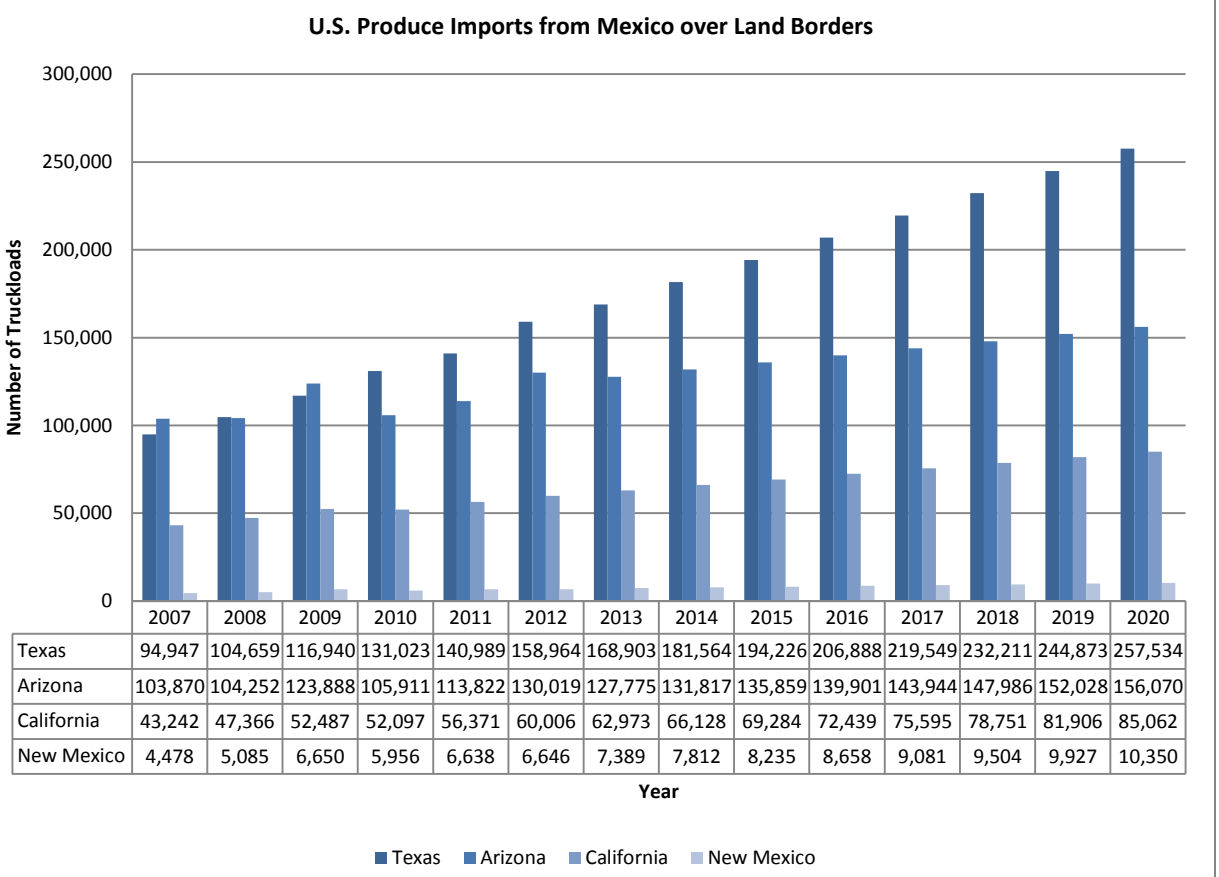
Economic Impact of Imported Fresh Produce from Mexico

Produce imports from Mexico fuel significant economic activity in Texas' Lower Rio Grande Valley. The United States imported $7.78 billion of fresh and frozen produce, with more than 98 percent entering by land ports between Mexico and Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California. When considering only fresh fruits and vegetables, which is more than 90 percent of the total, imports reached $7.65 billion. About 45 percent of U.S. fresh fruit and vegetable imports worth $3.44 billion entered through Texas land ports. Over the next five to seven years, produce imports from Mexico are expected to grow, with the majority of this growth coming into the United States through Texas.

Based on a linear trend forecasting approach, as shown in Figure 1, it is estimated that U.S. produce imports from Mexico via truck will increase nearly 32 percent. Most of this growth will occur through Texas ports, with imports expected to grow by 62 percent. By 2020, Texas is projected to account for slightly more than half of all U.S. produce imports from Mexico. This growth in imports has implications throughout the border economy, and the Texas economy in particular.

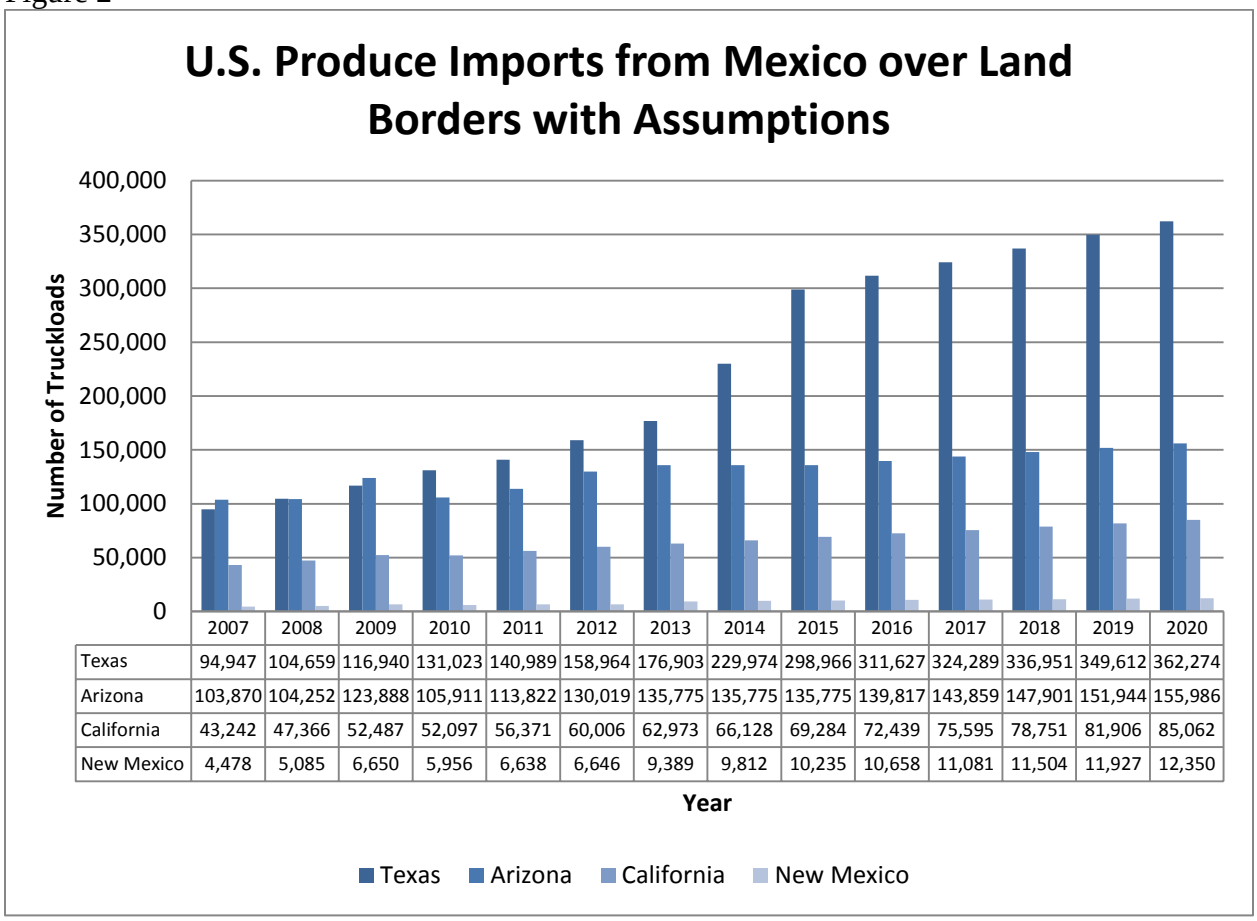
Concurrently, U.S. interest rates are expected to rise, causing the dollar to appreciate, which may spur even more imports. The improvement to Mexican Federal Highway 40 between Mazatlán and Reynosa will reduce transportation time by six or more hours between Mazatlán and the Lower Rio Grande Valley and shave $500 to $1,500 off truck transportation costs per load. Actual import data through mid-August 2013 revealed that year-to-date total imports compared to 2012 were up by 13.8 percent nationwide, and Texas was up by 26.2 percent. Fruit and vegetable imports from Mexico are projected to grow to 615,672 truckloads by 2020, or a 73.1 percent increase over 2012. Texas ports, mainly in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, will handle nearly 59 percent of these imports, at 362,274 truckloads. Incorporating this information with input from industry experts from U.S. shippers and brokers and Mexican exporters, a revised forecast was developed, as shown in Figure 2. This forecast incorporates a 30 percent growth rate for Texas imports for 2014 and 2015 before returning to the previous trend.

Figure 1



	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Texas	94,947	104,659	116,940	131,023	140,989	158,964	168,903	181,564	194,226	206,888	219,549	232,211	244,873	257,534
Arizona	103,870	104,252	123,888	105,911	113,822	130,019	127,775	131,817	135,859	139,901	143,944	147,986	152,028	156,070
California	43,242	47,366	52,487	52,097	56,371	60,006	62,973	66,128	69,284	72,439	75,595	78,751	81,906	85,062
New Mexico	4,478	5,085	6,650	5,956	6,638	6,646	7,389	7,812	8,235	8,658	9,081	9,504	9,927	10,350

Figure 2



	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Texas	94,947	104,659	116,940	131,023	140,989	158,964	176,903	229,974	298,966	311,627	324,289	336,951	349,612	362,274
Arizona	103,870	104,252	123,888	105,911	113,822	130,019	135,775	135,775	135,775	139,817	143,859	147,901	151,944	155,986
California	43,242	47,366	52,487	52,097	56,371	60,006	62,973	66,128	69,284	72,439	75,595	78,751	81,906	85,062
New Mexico	4,478	5,085	6,650	5,956	6,638	6,646	9,389	9,812	10,235	10,658	11,081	11,504	11,927	12,350

Estimated Economic Impact

The economic impact of produce imports on agricultural and farmworker activity in Texas is compelling, as shown in Figure 3. Direct economic activity attributed to the produce import industry was $136.9 million during 2012, requiring an additional $148.6 million from supporting industries for a combined impact of $285.5 million. By 2020, this impact is expected to grow to $312 million in direct activity and $338.7 million in supporting activity, for a total $650.7-million ripple throughout the Texas economy. Direct output will be led by the truck transportation and warehousing sectors ($90.6 million each); followed by sorting, grading, and packing ($76.5 million); and customs brokers ($54.3 million).

About 6,920 jobs will be required across Texas to support import operations. Sorting, grading, and packing required 2,086 jobs; warehousing, 1,087 jobs; truck transportation, 746 jobs; and customs broker services, 450 jobs.

Figure 3. Summary of Economic Activity from U.S. Produce Imports from Mexico over Land Borders, 2012 and 2020 Forecast with Industry Input

	Texas	
	2012	**2020F**
Total Truckloads	158,968	362,274
Direct Economic Output	**Million Dollars**	
Sorting, Grading, and Packing	$33.6	$76.5
Truck Transportation	$39.7	$90.6
Customs Brokers	$23.8	$54.3
Warehousing	$39.7	$90.6
Total Direct Economic Output	$136.9	$312.0
Total Supporting Economic Output	$148.6	$338.7
Total Economic Output	$285.5	$650.7
Total Jobs Supporting Produce Imports	3,037	6,920

All data is from Agricultural Marketing Service, USDA and Department of Agricultural Economics, Texas A&M University/Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service/Texas A&M AgriLife Research

MSFW Characteristics

MSFWs are a unique and very important segment of society and of the U.S. economy. Although they are invisible to mainstream eyes, they are the hands that bring us our daily bread, fruits, vegetables, meat, poultry, and fish. The migrant lifestyle is fluid, as workers and their families follow harvests, often across state lines. High mobility, language barriers, cultural isolation, and low literacy are just a few of the many reasons driving their high vulnerability within our society.

The most recent statewide data from PY'14 is below and shows approximately the number of MSFWs by farmworker category:

Farmworkers	PY'14[1]Total Available for Service
Migrant	1,507
Seasonal	4,437
Year-round	4,520
Total MSFWs	9,603

Characteristics of MSFWs include the following:

- Education: the educational level among MSFWs tends to be low
- Language: general lack of ability to speak and read English
- Economic Status: the income level of MSFWs frequently falls below the poverty level
- Citizenship: large percentages are citizens of Mexico or of Mexican descent

Problems/issues facing MSFWs with disabilities include the following:

- The mobility of migratory workers, which often means that they do not remain in one location for a time sufficient to receive needed social services;
- A large majority of MSFWs lack command of the English language, therefore, they are unable to communicate effectively with social services counselors and other individuals involved in delivering much-needed services;
- The limited vocational skills of many MSFWs;
- No public transportation available in most rural communities; and
- Limited access to medical services to include available medical services during off-work hours (agricultural-seasonal cycle) and limited access to medical coverage.

Board staff and Workforce Solutions Office staff are also developing and sharing strategies to address the following:

- Low skills in education/literacy/language/computers—Workforce Solutions Office staff is trained to identify signs and behaviors that indicate a job seeker with education/literacy/language/computer barriers. Staff provides one-on-one assistance to those needing individual service.
- Spanish-language brochures covering the available range of services are provided by Workforce Solutions Offices designated as MSFW-significant and bilingual. Featured services include Adult Education and Literacy programs, which provide English language, math, reading, and writing instruction designed to help individuals succeed in the workplace, earn a high school equivalency certificate, and/or enter college or career training.
- Workforce Border Alliance—Boards throughout the Texas border region join together to overcome MSFW literacy/language barriers; the collaboration has resulted in creative and effective progress toward meeting the employment and public assistance needs of MSFWs.
- Workers lack transportation to the worksites—Board staff and Workforce Solutions Office staff work with local community- and faith-based organizations and other entities to provide temporary transportation services during peak production seasons.
- Child care for field workers—Workforce Solutions Office staff works with local community- and faith-based organizations and other entities to provide temporary child care during peak production seasons.
- Lack of trust in government/social service agencies and changes in local service delivery systems—Social service organizations sponsor fairs at which Workforce Solutions Office staff provides information regarding local services available to farmworkers and their families. Fairs include attractions such as entertainment, door prizes, and refreshments donated by participating and sponsoring entities. Other sponsored events include employer job fairs, which encourage trust and social capital between MSFWs and the outreach staff.
- Limited knowledge of social and workforce services—Workforce Solutions Office staff shares information with MSFWs regarding the public services of various entities in the local community. Board staff and Workforce Solutions Office staff simultaneously engage in developing partnerships with educational, housing, and support services, and other community assistance.
- Access to computer information and long-distance telephone services—Boards provide computers in public locations (usually county courthouses or libraries) and encourage community- and faith-based organizations to refer MSFWs to these resources. Additionally, MSFWs can call Workforce Solutions Offices toll-free to inquire about or access services.

- Electronic service resources—Boards provide up-to-date information to agribusiness, rural areas, and colonias through online systems such as TWC's website and WorkInTexas.com, TWC's online job-matching system. These systems ensure easy access to information and user-friendly data, and allow communication through public access automation points.

Outreach Activities

The MSFW outreach program takes the full range of employment services directly to where MSFWs live and work, if and when they are unable to come to the Workforce Solutions Offices. The MSFW outreach program provides the framework necessary for Workforce Solutions Office staff to locate, contact, and enhance the employability of MSFWs in Texas. Outreach specialists may provide other assistance at the point of contact or at the Workforce Solutions Office. If needed services are not available through the Workforce Solutions Office, outreach specialists then make referrals to other agencies and organizations that provide appropriate assistance.

TWC and Workforce Solutions Offices' goals are to ensure that MSFWs are offered employment services, benefits, and protections, including counseling, as well as testing and job training referral services, qualitatively equivalent and proportionate to services provided to non-MSFWs.

Outreach specialists assist with work registration and job leads, information about the complaint system, and assistance with submitting complaints and referrals for support services. Outreach specialists in certain Workforce Solutions Offices have iPads and laptops, and thus are better equipped to provide live job searches and job posting referrals.

Year-round outreach activities are conducted in MSFW-significant Workforce Solutions Offices. Workforce Solutions Office staff responsible for outreach gains familiarity with the labor market and needs of local MSFWs. To be most effective, outreach specialists must understand the issues unique to MSFWs and have English- and Spanish-speaking capability.

Outreach specialists:

- contact MSFWs to explain the services available at Workforce Solutions Offices;
- notify MSFWs of job openings and of their rights and benefits under state and federal employment-related laws;
- provide information on the Employment Service (ES) complaint system, including sexual harassment;
- assist MSFWs in filing work registrations/applications, preparing worker complaints, and arranging appointments and transportation;
- provide information about services available through electronic means and how to access this information;
- identify qualified MSFWs seeking employment, according to guidelines of the federal regulations at 20 CFR Parts 651, 653, and 658. The initial and follow-up outreach contacts are made to assist MSFWs in becoming employed or improving their employability;
- contact agricultural and nonagricultural employers, program operators, community- and faith-based organizations, and education and training providers on behalf of MSFWs;
- present information to school students about migrant education programs in the state;
- outreach with local public and private community agencies and MSFW organizations to establish community referral networks;

- provide advocacy group presentations;
- coordinate with other office partners in serving MSFWs;
- distribute MSFW-assistance brochures;
- perform joint outreach and recruitment missions with National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP) grantees;
- attend staff training conducted by U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) Employment and Training Administration (DOLETA), Wage and Hour Division;
- present and participate in meetings with the Texas A&M University's Colonias Program and Center for Housing and Urban Development (this includes the Promotora program);
- solicit jobs, training opportunities, and employment-related services for MSFWs;
- provide agricultural and nonagricultural employers with information, services, and assistance related to labor issues and needs;
- accept job postings while performing outreach activities in the field;
- refer MSFWs to the nearest Workforce Solutions Office to receive services;
- if there is a job or jobs available for referral, refer qualified MSFWs from the MSFW Outreach Log and from previous contacts through follow-up activities; and
- when there are no job openings available for referral of MSFWs to suitable employment, select qualified MSFWs from the MSFW Outreach Log and offer a job development plan to enhance the MSFWs' applications with additional/transferable occupational skills, and matching options for nonagricultural jobs.

Technical Assistance

To ensure that outreach and Board staff receive technical assistance and professional development in order to improve services to MSFWs, training and technical assistance is provided to include:

- MSFW equity performance indicators—proper identification and coding of MSFW customers;
- setting up local benchmark or baseline targets for Equity Indicators and Minimum Service Levels performance measures;
- strategies in strengthening collaboration with Texas Workforce Solutions partners and other organizations serving MSFWs in the area;
- basic summary of farmworker rights;
- Workforce Solutions Office coordination and intake procedures;
- MSFW carry-over applicants (active file in WorkInTexas.com) and the impact on Equity performance measures;
- MSFW Program: service delivery, outreach, and reporting;
- WD Letter 41-10, National Electronic Job Registry for H-2A Temporary Agricultural Job Posting;
- complaint procedures related to MSFWs to include informal resolution;
- program integration strategies for MSFWs;
- Agricultural Recruitment System (ARS) procedures and consequences;
- establishing local community partnerships (e.g., bringing community groups together formalizing the traditional migrant subcommittee groups and coalition meeting groups);

- identifying opportunities to coenroll/integrate program design with Motivation Education and Training, Inc. (MET), Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) §167, NFJP grantee with other Workforce Solutions Office services;
- efforts to develop local, regional, and state planning strategies for workers in the agricultural industry, with emphasis on supply and demand areas of the state;
- coordinate agricultural business forums. The intended focus of these forums would be relative to pertinent issues that affect both agricultural employers and workers to include laws that affect the agricultural industry sector;
- coordinate a pre-harvest forum for MSFWs through the migrant education, workforce, community, and farmworker organizations;
- facilitate and coordinate the engagement of the agricultural industry into the workforce investment system, assist in the creation of jobs within the agricultural industry (permanent/year-round), and determine the viable need for a skilled workforce in an effort to increase wage gain earners; and
- develop strategies to increase opportunities for the MSFW summer youth program to implement goals and objectives that include a tracking system, coenrollment, and coordination with MET's youth program.

The Texas workforce system supports the delivery of core services within local communities to assist those individuals who need education and training in order to obtain the basic skills that will enable them to obtain sustainable employment and become self-sufficient. Workforce Solutions Office staff receives professional development activities to ensure each staff member is knowledgeable about core programs to provide high-quality services to both job seekers and employers.

The State's Strategy for Coordination with the U.S. Department of Labor's National Farmworker Jobs Program Grantees and Other Agencies and Groups

TWC entered into a statewide memorandum of understanding (MOU) with MET, effective January 31, 2014, and extended through February 28, 2019. As the DOLETA-designated grantee, MET operates NFJP in Texas. This MOU assists in establishing and demonstrating effective outreach coordination coupled with increasing registration activities by MET staff and ES staff.

Referral and placement of the MSFW customer remains a challenge for states' workforce systems. The ability to share responsibility for this constituency and efficiently coordinate available resources can leverage local areas' mutual capacities as well as improve the customer service experience. Texas encourages coenrollment of MSFW customers in services provided by TWC, the Boards, and MET. The Texas State Monitor Advocate (SMA) examines coenrollment activity during an annual review of each MSFW-significant Workforce Solutions Office.

The advantages of TWC's statewide MOU with MET include:

- a streamlined information exchange process, which improves the currency and accuracy of shared information;
- coordinated activity among organizations, including immediate services;
- planned participation in joint outreach and recruitment efforts designed to increase customer identification and expand services for MSFWs;

- increased staff awareness about emerging issues within the MSFW community;
- a vehicle for periodic review and assessment of the quality of services; and
- continued increase in coenrollments with TWC's and Texas Workforce Solutions' NFJP partners. This collaborative effort has helped to expand the opportunities available for MSFW customers.

Services for Farmworkers and Agricultural Employers

To meet agricultural employers' needs, Texas Workforce Solutions will continue to improve the agricultural referral process, including, but not limited to:

- integrating services for farmworkers and agricultural employers and workers;
- identifying workers who are job-ready when arriving at the worksite;
- providing employers with industry information, farmworkers' rights, and support services;
- engaging agricultural employers to determine short- and long-term employment and training needs;
- assisting employers in analyzing state and local peak production seasons and recruiting an adequate labor supply;
- collaborating and coordinating with the Texas Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, to increase viability and sustainability in agricultural areas of the state; and
- using the job-matching process for temporary agricultural work on an intrastate and/or interstate basis through ARS.*

*Texas is primarily a labor supply state for ARS.

TWC has created a variety of communication resources to support Texas Workforce Solutions partners in providing meaningful service to agricultural employers and farmworkers. These communication resources are intended to help find solutions to their employment and training needs. TWC provides these resources in several ways, such as:

- electronic service;
- media and printed information; and
- organizational coordination.

Additionally, TWC's Agricultural Services Unit (ASU) partners with agricultural associations to provide educational seminars for employers. ASU distributes information on various employment topics such as the ES complaint system. TWC may assist in locating resources and speakers for these educational events. Through these seminars and other interactions with agricultural employers, TWC strives to expand and improve ASU services.

ASU also produces the *Texas Directory of Farm and Ranch Associations*. This annual publication lists contact information for state organizations with agricultural business interests.

This and other resources are available on TWC's website at http://www.twc.state.tx.us/svcs/agri/directory.pdf. Additionally, TWC's website links to numerous agriculture-related reports.

Agricultural employer and farmworker services are based on each Board's service delivery plan. The plan details programs that the Board provides through Workforce Solutions Offices under its direction. Additionally, Boards have established Business Services Units (BSUs) to reach out to

employers. BSUs strive to understand the needs of their business communities, including agricultural employers, by collaborating with MSFW outreach workers, community partners, chambers of commerce, and industry associations.

BSUs are charged with helping businesses recruit qualified farmworkers and helping job seekers gain employment suited to their skills. The Boards address the following issues:

- Lack of transportation to worksites—Board staff and Workforce Solutions Office staff work with community- and faith-based organizations and other entities to provide temporary transportation services during peak agricultural seasons.
- Limited knowledge of state/federal employment laws and regulations—Workforce Solutions Office staff hosts forums to educate employers and agricultural crew leaders on state/federal laws and regulations.
- Lack of efficient use of local human resources—Workforce Solutions Office staff facilitates communication among growers, such as cooperatives, on farmworkers' specific needs. One resource is the AgriLife County Extension Agent.
- Lack of skilled workers—Workforce Solutions Office staff coordinates short-term training on local crops and farming (e.g., forklift certification, food safety, and commercial driver's license (CDL)).
- Lack of facilities/staff to screen and interview potential farmworkers—Workforce Solutions Office staff provides space in the Workforce Solutions Office for agricultural employers to interview workers. Workforce Solutions Office staff also provides intake and referral activities at the growers' locations.
- Limited administration of farm labor contractors—Workforce Solutions Office staff provides forms and instructions for completing crew leader registration, ensures that farm labor contractors' registration cards are current, and maintains crew leader logs in the Workforce Solutions Offices.
- Limited or inadequate housing—ARS requires employers to provide no-cost housing to workers who cannot reasonably return to their place of residence after work each day. This is one of the challenges employers face when using ARS, especially in providing housing options suitable for families. TWC participates in MET's Regional Farmworker Housing Summit; MET is the housing grant coordinator for the NFJP grantee under the WIOA §167 housing grant for Texas. This regional summit illustrates the valuable collaboration undertaken with housing authority municipalities and nonprofits throughout Texas.

MSFWs in Texas often face poverty, low academic achievement, limited English proficiency, and inadequate job training and readiness, as well as various social problems. The Texas workforce system's approach focuses on those barriers to acquire and retain productive employment. To this end, Workforce Solutions Offices reaffirm existing community partnerships and continuously establish new community partnerships to meet the needs of local businesses and MSFWs, while providing job seekers with job search workshops, job placement services, referrals, and support services.

Organizational Coordination

Boards receive assistance from ASU in implementing strategies that address these issues through coordination among federal and state agencies and private organizations. ASU's efforts encourage the use of ARS to link employers needing agricultural labor in Texas with MSFW

supply. Using ARS enables employers to recruit workers without the use of foreign labor, which is particularly critical in light of the cap on the number of H-2B workers allowed to obtain visas and the complexity of the H-2A process.

ASU also collaborates with Boards in developing innovative ways to serve agricultural employers and engage communities in economic development. To these ends, ASU coordinates and facilitates Agricultural Employer Forums (Forums) in partnership with agriculturally significant areas of the state, including the Lower Rio Grande Valley, Middle Rio Grande, Upper Rio Grande, and South Plains Boards, and TWC's SMA. The Forums are a cooperative effort between federal and state governments and the private sector to keep the public informed on pertinent issues that impact agricultural employers and workers. The Forums may cover laws that affect the agricultural sector, as well as provide education and outreach and information on regulations to spur greater compliance by employers and better working conditions for agricultural workers. Depending on the needs of agricultural associations and employers, the following agencies may participate:

- Texas Department of Agriculture
- Internal Revenue Service
- U.S. Social Security Administration
- U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
- U.S. Department of Justice/Office of Special Counsel
- Texas Health and Human Services Commission
- TWC's Tax Department
- DOL, Wage and Hour Division
- DOLETA
- U.S. Department of Homeland Security
- U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement
- MET, Inc.
- Agricultural institutions of higher education
- Local and regional water allotment and irrigation districts

(B) Review and Public Comment. In developing the AOP, the SWA must solicit information and suggestions from NFJP grantees, other appropriate MSFW groups, public agencies, agricultural employer organizations, and other interested organizations. Additionally, at least 45 calendar days before submitting its final AOP, the SWA must provide a proposed plan to NFJP grantees, public agencies, agricultural employer organizations, and other organizations expressing an interest and allow at least 30 days for review and comment. The SWA must:

- **consider any comments received in formulating its final proposed AOP;**
- **inform all commenting parties in writing whether their comments have been incorporated and, if not, the reasons therefore; and**
- **transmit the comments and recommendations received and responses with the submission of the AOP.**

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Review and Public Comment

Transmission of this Combined State Plan includes assurances that interested parties were given an opportunity to review and provide public comment on the state AOP; such parties include, but are not limited to, WIOA §167 NFJP grantees, other appropriate farmworker groups, public agencies, agricultural employer organizations, and other interested employer organizations.

Performance Indicators Reflecting Equity

TWC will continue to work with Boards to maintain and improve performance for the equity ratio indicators and minimum service-level indicators. For the last several years, Texas met all five equity ratio indicators and continues to see strong performance in this area. Five of the seven minimum service-level indicators were met for PY'14, as of June 30, 2015. During SMA's visits in PY'13, the monitor discussed performance for these measures with Board management, Workforce Solutions Office management, and MSFW outreach staff.

Boards with MSFW-significant Workforce Solutions Offices have received monitoring reports that recommend improvement and enhanced service delivery to MSFWs. Monitoring efforts during PY'14 have focused on the changes in performance resulting from the PY'13 recommendations.

Meeting the placement minimum service-level indicators for PY'15 may pose challenges for TWC, as experienced in PY'14. The following conditions contribute to this challenge:

- Current MSFW minimum service-level indicators place MSFW labor supply states, such as Texas, at a disadvantage. The high placement rate of 42.5 percent of registered MSFWs is unrealistic and unattainable, because of the mobility of MSFWs—many workers travel to take jobs in other states.
- Traditionally, MSFWs reside in areas that experience the highest rates of unemployment.
- Many states do not require UI claimants filing interstate claims to register in the local job-matching system or to participate in the UI availability-for-work requirement.
- Wages are depressed in areas with high unemployment, pushing migration of local workers to other parts of the state and other states.
- Traditionally, much of the work performed by MSFWs has been paid on a piece-rate basis.

Performance standards are based on placements at an hourly rate, thus excluding placements paid by piece rate. Therefore, reported performance does not accurately reflect all activity in the wages at placement category. Workforce Solutions Office staff can increase placements and meet the minimum service-level indicators by taking the following steps:

- Develop strategies to serve MSFWs by:
  - emphasizing services that will result in more MSFWs being placed in agricultural and nonagricultural jobs;
  - providing local agricultural peak season plans to assist agricultural employers and engage in the agricultural sector, while creating job placement initiatives for MSFWs;
  - referring MSFWs to Workforce Solutions Office services; and
  - stressing the use of electronic, self-service systems to encourage MSFWs to take an active role in their job search.

- Coordinate with Workforce Solutions Office partners to foster an effective outreach program—including maintenance of the MOU with MET and other farmworker organizations and community partners.
- Promote economically self-sustaining, year-round jobs through skills development under NFJP, MET, and curriculum development with local community colleges.

MSFW-Significant Workforce Solutions Office Affirmative Action Plans

DOLETA has designated the Edinburg, Mission, and Weslaco Workforce Solutions Offices (Lower Rio Grande Valley Board) as representing the top 20 percent of MSFW activity nationally. These Workforce Solutions Offices have developed and implemented affirmative action plans to ensure that staff continues to reflect the local MSFW population.

The composition of TWC's ES staff at these Workforce Solutions Offices has not significantly changed during the past 10 years; however, there has been some turnover in outreach specialists. TWC and the Texas workforce system have announced job vacancies through various farmworker organizations, including MET, TWC's NFJP partner. Most ES staff members are long-term employees familiar with MSFWs' employment issues and sensitive to their needs. Approximately 70 percent of ES staff in these significant locations have at one time worked in or been involved in agriculture and are familiar with the industry. Staff has traditionally worked closely with outside agencies, organizations, and workforce service providers to coordinate services for MSFWs. Additionally, staff is familiar with ongoing agricultural activities and trends, employment-related issues, and the laws and regulations that protect this population.

Assessment of Progress

An assessment of progress is noted throughout Appendix 4 of the Combined Plan. The following explanation expands upon other achievements and achievement gaps of the previous AOP.

Statement of Consideration Given to the State Monitor Advocate

SMA has had the opportunity to review and comment on the AOP. SMA contributed to the design, scope, and priorities of this AOP as a method of continuing to serve and meet the needs of Texas' agricultural employers, workers, and industry.