

TEXAS WORKFORCE COMMISSION

WIOA COMBINED STATE PLAN
APPENDIX 4

AGRICULTURAL OUTREACH PLAN

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Assessment of Need

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 also 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, 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.

As per data from the National Agricultural Statistics Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Texas Department of Agriculture, and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, the top 10 commodities in terms of cash receipts are cattle and calves, cotton, dairy products, broilers, greenhouse and nursery, corn, sorghum grain, wheat, chicken eggs, and cottonseed. The economic impact of the food and fiber sector totals more than \$100 billion, and cash receipts, including timber, total \$25.4 billion annually. Additionally, Texas totaled nearly \$5.75 billion in agricultural exports to foreign countries during 2013.

Texas' National Rank for Selected Commodity Exports:

1	Cotton and cottonseed	\$1.4 billion
2	Beef	\$906 million
3	Hides and skins	\$351 million
3	Cattle	\$223 million
3	Pecans	\$65 million
4	Rice	\$137 million
6	Poultry meat	\$398 million
6	Milk and milk products	\$326 million
9	Wheat	\$329 million
10	Feeds and fodders	\$225 million
10	Grain products	\$141 million
11	Fresh fruits	\$25 million
12	Fresh vegetables	\$55 million
12	Seeds for planting	\$32 million
13	Corn	\$125 million

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 regions, 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 latest 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	

Source: 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
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

Crop	Calendar Year 2013			Calendar Year 2014		
	Acreage	Labor	# of Months	Acreage	Labor	# of Months
Bell Peppers	780	1,312	6	95	160	6
Pumpkins	260	10	N/A	724	27	N/A
Totals	74,144	15,072		73,170	14,416	

Source: 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. Good examples include the Eagle Ford Shale boom in the Winter Garden region and the Cline Shale in West Texas. Oil and gas employers have a relatively large demand for qualified employees. Yet they find few qualified applicants, in part because the local MSFW population lacks the relevant transferable skills and training.

The industrial shift has created a challenge for agricultural employers, as well. 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.

Economic Impact of Imported Fresh Produce from Mexico

Produce imports from Mexico fuel significant economic activity in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas. 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 below in **Figure 2**, 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 in the Lone Star State 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, particularly the Texas economy.

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 of 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; Texas is 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 2

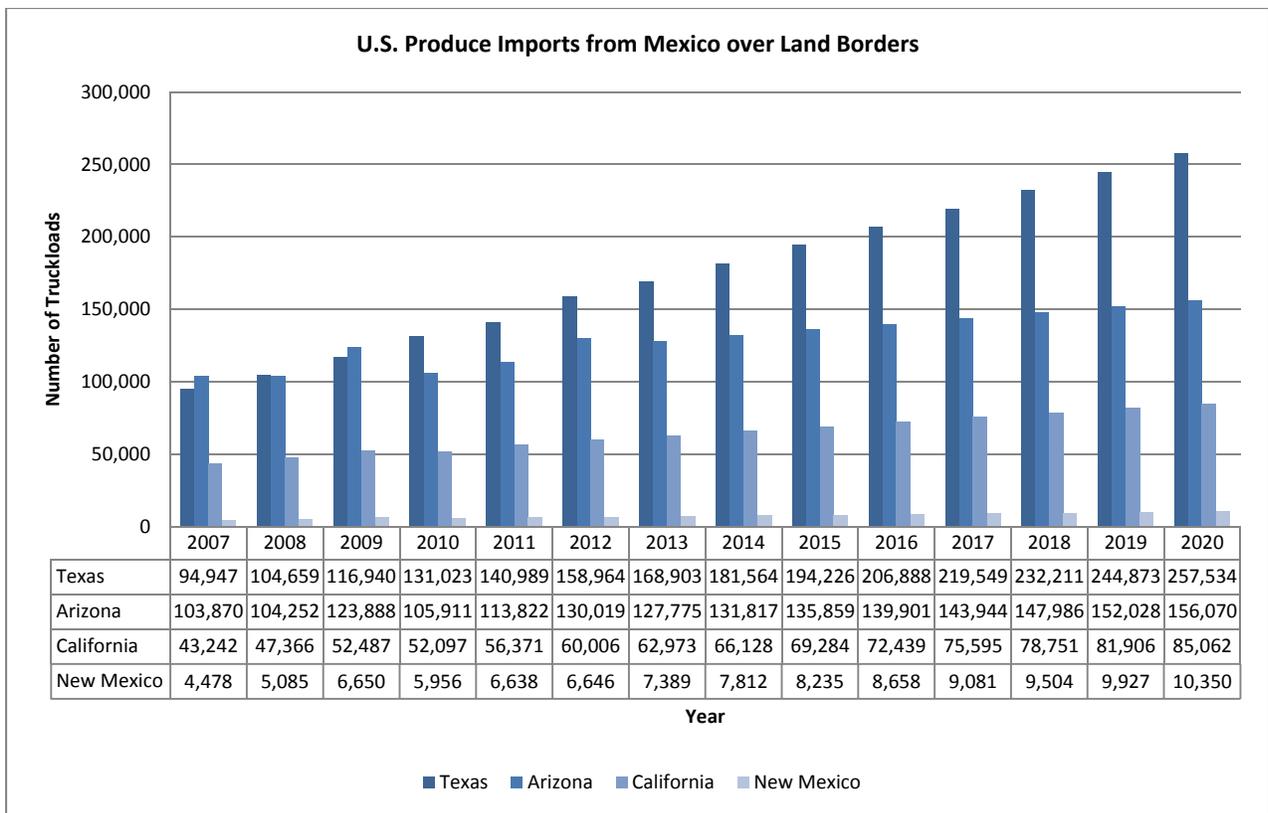
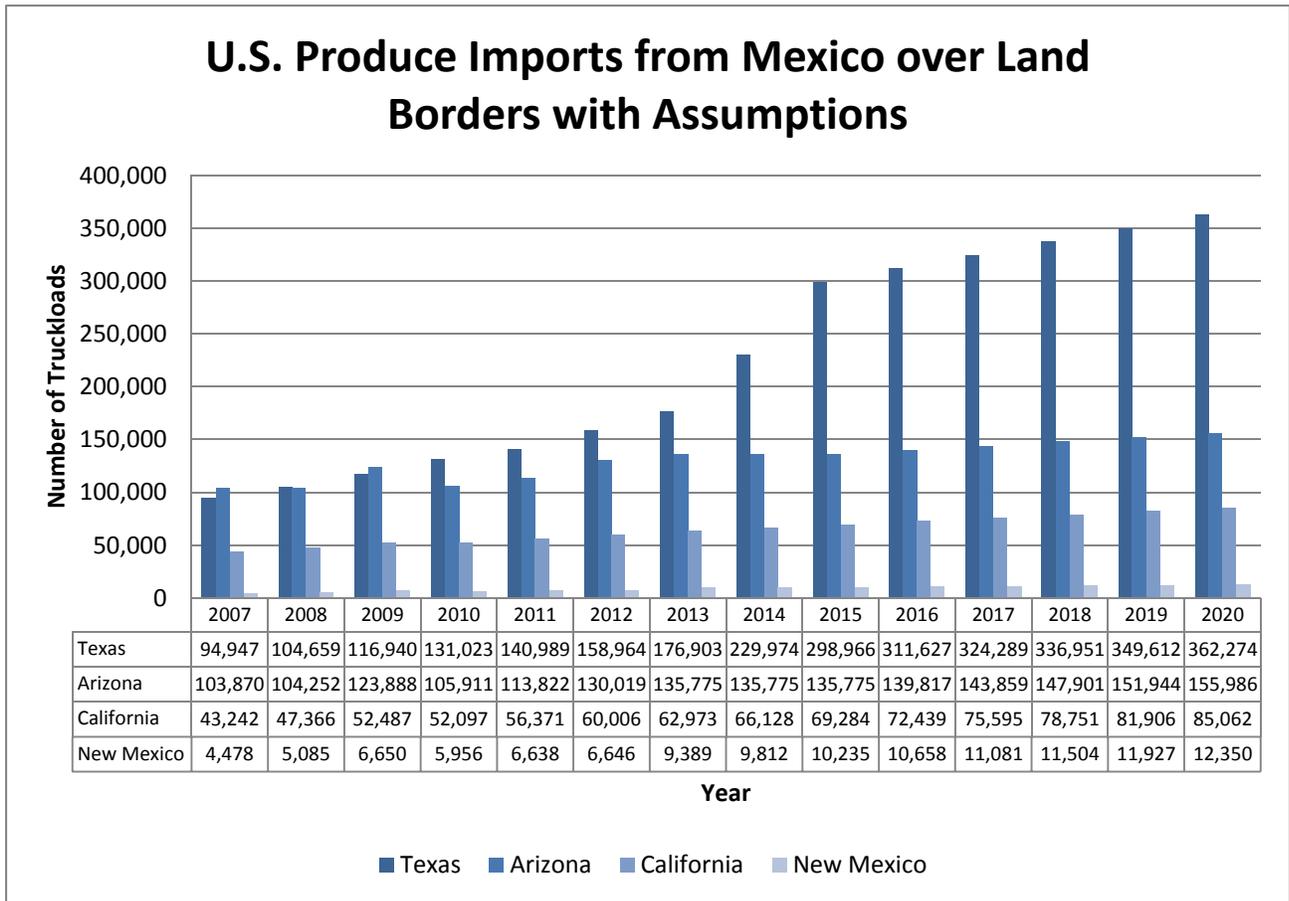


Figure 3



Estimated Economic Impact

The economic impact of produce imports on agricultural and farmworker activity in the state is compelling. 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 \$312.0 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.

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

Texas		
	2012F	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

Sources: Agricultural Marketing Service, USDA and Department of Agricultural Economics, Texas A&M University/Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service/Texas A&M AgriLife Research

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
Job Postings ¹	1,116	2,008
Job Openings	5,818	10,472
Job Openings Filled	2,189	3,940
Percent Job Openings Filled	37.62%	37.6%

¹Number 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.

²PY’ 14 data represents the July 1–December 31 period.

³PY’ 15 projections are based on 90 percent of PY’ 14 annualized figures.

Wagner-Peyser Act: Services to MSFWs through Texas Workforce Solutions

Texas is one of the top five states with an estimated high level of MSFW activity year-round. The U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration (DOLETA) has designated Texas as a significant MSFW supply state. As a result, Texas operates an outreach program to locate and contact MSFWs who are not reached by everyday Workforce Solutions Office intake procedures. Outreach program staff includes the state monitor advocate, assistant state monitor advocate, and MSFW outreach specialists (outreach specialists) who fill 9.75 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions.

Funding Levels

TWC has approved additional Employment Service (ES) funding for the MSFW-significant Boards, as well as two local workforce development areas (workforce areas) with significant MSFW populations. Funds are allocated to workforce areas with the highest number of MSFWs in Texas, with the distribution based on the relative proportion of the unduplicated count of MSFWs served (i.e., receiving a qualified service) by pertinent Boards during the program year.

TWC recognizes that the demand for workforce services is increasing across all populations. Dedicating ES funds specifically for MSFW outreach activities can be a challenge because of this population’s proportionate need for employment and support services, and protections. Therefore, the Texas workforce system is leveraging additional funds to promote and increase program outreach and integration of all Workforce Solutions Offices’ programs.

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, testing, and job training referral services, qualitatively equivalent and proportionate to services provided to non-MSFWs. This includes an internal monitoring system, outreach, complaint processing procedure, and performance measures and indicators of compliance for MSFWs. 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.

Numerical Goals

Outreach specialists will contact a minimum of 12,073 MSFWs during PY'15. Eleven (9.25 FTEs) outreach specialists are assigned to the MSFW-significant and bilingual Workforce Solutions Offices (**Table 5**). The Cameron County and South Texas workforce areas operate a voluntary MSFW outreach program with two specialists (1.25 FTEs); these two workforce areas are not designated as MSFW-significant.

Table 5. Staffing and Minimum Performance Levels for PY'15

Cameron County Workforce Development Board

Area/Service Location	Staff	Contacts per Year	Staff Days Worked	Contacts by other Agencies
Brownsville*	0.5	653	130.5	**
Harlingen*	0.5	653	130.5	**
Board Total	1.0	1,305	261.0	**

Lower Rio Grande Valley Workforce Development Board

Area/Service Location	Staff	Contacts per Year	Staff Days Worked	Contacts by other Agencies
Raymondville	0.5	653	130.5	**
Edinburg	1.0	1,305	261.0	**
Weslaco	1.5	1,958	391.5	**
Mission/Rio Grande City	1.5	1,958	391.5	**
Board Total	4.5	5,874	1,174.5	**

Middle Rio Grande Workforce Development Board

Area/Service Location	Staff	Contacts per Year	Staff Days Worked	Contacts by other Agencies
Eagle Pass	1.0	1,305	261.0	**
Board Total	1.0	1,305	261.0	**

South Texas Workforce Development Board

Area/Service Location	Staff	Contacts per Year	Staff Days Worked	Contacts by other Agencies
Laredo***	0.25	326	65.25	**
Board Total	0.25	326	65.25	**

South Plains Workforce Development Board

Area/Service Location	Staff	Contacts per Year	Staff Days Worked	Contacts by other Agencies
Floydada/ Plainview ****	1.0	1,305	261.0	**
Muleshoe	1.0	1,305	261.0	**
Board Total	2.0	2,610	522.0	**

Upper Rio Grande Workforce Development Board

Area/Service Location	Staff	Contacts per Year	Staff Days Worked	Contacts by other Agencies
Fabens	0.5	653	130.5	**
Board Total	0.5	653	130.5	**

STATEWIDE TOTALS

	Staff	Contacts per Year	Staff Days Worked
Statewide Total	9.25	12,073	2,414.25

*Workforce Solutions Office not designated as MSFW-significant, but has a voluntary MSFW outreach program in place to serve MSFWs. Cameron County has been changed to half-time position for the Harlingen Workforce Solutions Office. Floydada Workforce Solutions Office closed its location, and outreach is being provided out of the Plainview Workforce Solutions Office.

**Currently, there are no contracts in place with other agencies to perform MSFW outreach activities.

***Conducts outreach only during the peak agricultural seasons (April–August).

****During PY’14 (August), the Floydada Workforce Solutions Office closed permanently. The Plainview Workforce Solutions Office will continue to provide outreach activities for Floydada, Plainview, and the surrounding three administrative areas of Lockney, Hale, and Lamb counties.

Workforce Solutions Offices that are de-designated, because of not meeting the 10 percent MSFW registration target, work to locate and contact MSFWs within their workforce areas through public radio and/or news media.

The State's Strategy

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 Motivation Education and Training, Inc. (MET), effective January 31, 2014, and extended through February 28, 2019. As the DOLETA-designated grantee, MET operates the National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP) in Texas. This MOU assists in establishing and demonstrating effective outreach coordination coupled with increasing MET and ES staff registration activities.

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 workforce areas' mutual capacities, as well as improve the customer service experience. Texas encourages coenrollment of MSFW customers in services provided by TWC, Boards, and MET. The state monitor advocate 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; and
- a vehicle for periodic review and assessment of the quality of services.

TWC and Texas Workforce Solutions continue to increase coenrollments in concert with NFJP. This collaborative effort has help to expand the opportunities available to MSFW customers.

Outreach Strategies

MSFWs in Texas often face poverty, low academic achievement, limited English proficiency, and inadequate job training and readiness, as well as various social problems. Texas Workforce Solutions' approach focuses on those barriers to acquiring and retaining productive employment. To this end, Workforce Solutions Offices establish 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.

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

- **Low skills in education/literacy/computers**—Workforce Solutions Office staff is trained to identify signs and behaviors that indicate a job seeker with education/literacy/language barriers. Staff provides one-on-one assistance to those needing individual service.

Additionally, Spanish-language brochures covering the range of services available are provided by Workforce Solutions Offices designated as MSFW-significant and bilingual. Highlighted 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 diploma, 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 worksites**—Board 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 fieldworkers**—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 provide 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, all of 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 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 farmworkers 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 agribusinesses, rural areas, and colonias through TWC’s website and online job-matching system, WorkInTexas.com. These options ensure easy access to information and user-friendly data, and allow communication through public access automation points.

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 endeavor to:

- 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 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 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 NFJP grantees;
- attend staff training conducted by U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and DOLETA, Wage and Hour Division;
- present and participate in meetings at the Texas A&M University, Colonias Program Center for Housing and Urban Development Community Centers (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 job development to enhance the MSFWs' applications with additional/transferable occupational skills and matching options for nonagricultural jobs.

Based on prior-year performance, for the purposes of obtaining job orders, conducting job developments, and providing assistance in using TWC's WorkInTexas.com, the expected number of agricultural and nonagricultural employers to be contacted through outreach during PY' 15 is 520.

MSFW Services

Workforce Solutions Office staff and outreach specialists will continue their efforts to fully integrate and coordinate MSFW services that are qualitatively equivalent and quantitatively proportionate among Workforce Solutions Offices. The Workforce Solutions Office site manager directs the activities and assignments of TWC's ES staff, ensuring the presence of outreach specialists at Workforce Solutions Offices. All Workforce Solutions Office staff and outreach specialists are responsible for identifying MSFWs who may benefit from available services and programs. Workforce Solutions Office staff and outreach specialists provide MSFWs with information on such services as:

- how to acquire literacy, basic education, and the workplace skills necessary to meet workplace requirements;
- how to acquire the occupational skills necessary to meet workplace requirements for long-term employment;
- how MSFW youth can acquire the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to make the transition into meaningful and productive careers;
- how to understand and use the automated self-service delivery system;
- how to access labor market information on existing and emerging high-demand occupations;
- how to access local, state, and nationwide job openings;
- remote and long-distance referrals accommodation;
- referrals to educational and skills training services; and
- referrals to support services, including subsidized child care, transportation, and financial assistance.

Services for Farmworkers and Agricultural Employers

To meet agricultural employers' needs, Texas Workforce Solutions will continue to improve the agricultural referral process through actions 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; and
- collaborating and coordinating with the Texas Department of Agriculture Rural Development to increase viability and sustainability in agricultural areas of the state.

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 employers and workers find solutions to 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. TWC may assist in locating resources and speakers for these educational events.

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 included 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 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 job seekers so they can obtain employment suited to their skills. Boards address the following issues:

- **Lack of transportation to worksites**—Board 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 and federal laws and regulations.
- **Lack of efficient use of local human resources**—Workforce Solutions Office staff facilitates communication between 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 and 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.
- **Limited or inadequate housing**—The Agricultural Recruitment System (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, and this regional summit illustrates the valuable collaboration undertaken with housing authority municipalities and nonprofits throughout Texas.

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 the agricultural recruitment system to link employers needing agricultural labor in Texas with MSFWs. Use of the agricultural recruitment system 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 the 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 workforce areas, as well as TWC's state monitor advocate. 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
- U.S. Department of Labor, Wage and Hour Division
- U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration
- 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

Other Requirements

Statement of Consideration Given to the State Monitor Advocate

The Texas State Monitor Advocate (SMA) has had the opportunity to review and comment on the agricultural outreach plan. The SMA contributed to the design, scope, and priorities of this plan as a method of continuing to serve and meet the needs of Texas agricultural employers, workers, and industry.

Review and Public Comment

Transmission of the Combined State Plan (Plan) includes assurances that interested parties were given an opportunity to review and provide public comment on the Plan; such parties include,

but are not limited to, WIOA §167 National Farmworker Jobs Program grantees, other appropriate farmworker groups, public agencies, agricultural employer organizations, and other interested employer organizations.

Assessment of Progress

An assessment of progress is noted throughout this Plan section. The following explanation expands upon other achievements and achievement gaps in the previous Plan.

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. Texas met all five equity-ratio indicators and five of the seven minimum service-level indicators for PY' 14, as of June 30, 2015. During the state monitor advocate'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 unemployment insurance (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 to 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 a 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 searches.
- Coordinate with Workforce Solutions Office partners to foster an effective outreach program—including maintenance of the MOU with MET.
 - Promote economically self-sustaining, year-round jobs through skills development under NFJP and 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 Texas Workforce Solutions have announced job vacancies through various farmworker organizations, including MET, TWC’s NFJP partner. Most ES staff members are long-term employees who are familiar with MSFWs’ employment issues and are 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.

Workforce Solutions Office staff continues to provide all workforce services in Spanish, as needed. All ES staff members identify themselves as Spanish speakers, and a significant portion of workforce service provider staff also speaks Spanish.

The Edinburg, Mission, and Weslaco Workforce Solutions Offices staffing is at, or above parity with, the population and civilian labor force, and TWC will continue to monitor staffing. Should the need arise, TWC will contact community-based agencies and MSFW organizations, including the state’s NFJP partners, to coordinate efforts to recruit Hispanics and MSFWs for existing vacancies, and maintain a pool of qualified applicants.