

Theme Overview: Consequences of New Immigration Policies for the U.S. Agricultural Sector

Stephen Devadoss

JEL Classifications: J43, J61

Keywords: Deportation, Economy, Undocumented workers

DOI: 10.22004/ag.econ.371481

Introduction

Immigration policy has been at the forefront of public policy, particularly during national elections. Donald Trump, in his 2024 election campaign, promised to carry out the largest deportation of illegal migrants in US history. To uphold his promise and achieve this goal, President Trump has signed many executive orders aimed at reducing the number of illegal immigrants in the United States (Bustillo, 2025; Gutiérrez-Li, 2025), and the Trump administration budgeted \$170 billion for immigration enforcement in the One Big Beautiful Bill (American Immigration Council, 2025).

In implementing Trump's policy, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), charged with domestic enforcement, expedited the arrests of undocumented migrants by employing more than 5,000 personnel, and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) asked for 21,000 National Guard troops to help ICE operations (Ainsley et al., 2025). Initially, ICE embarked on deporting illegal immigrants with criminal records in big cities. However, large-scale raids on a meat-packing plant in Omaha, Nebraska (Ashford, 2025) and California farm fields (Arcand, 2025), which received nationwide coverage by news media, triggered significant work disruptions. Furthermore, many undocumented workers are terrified and do not show up to work because of the fear of being apprehended (Meyersohn and Yurkevich, 2025), which economists call the "chilling" effect (East et al, 2023).

Under the background of these deportation policies, the purposes of this theme are to assess (i) the current farm labor market with a focus on labor scarcity, (ii) the importance of the H-2A program to US agriculture and the need to strengthen it by making it easier for farmers to procure more guest workers, (iii) the effect of mass deportation on the US farm sector and the economy, and (iv) the role of programs such as Secure Communities,

Articles in this Theme:

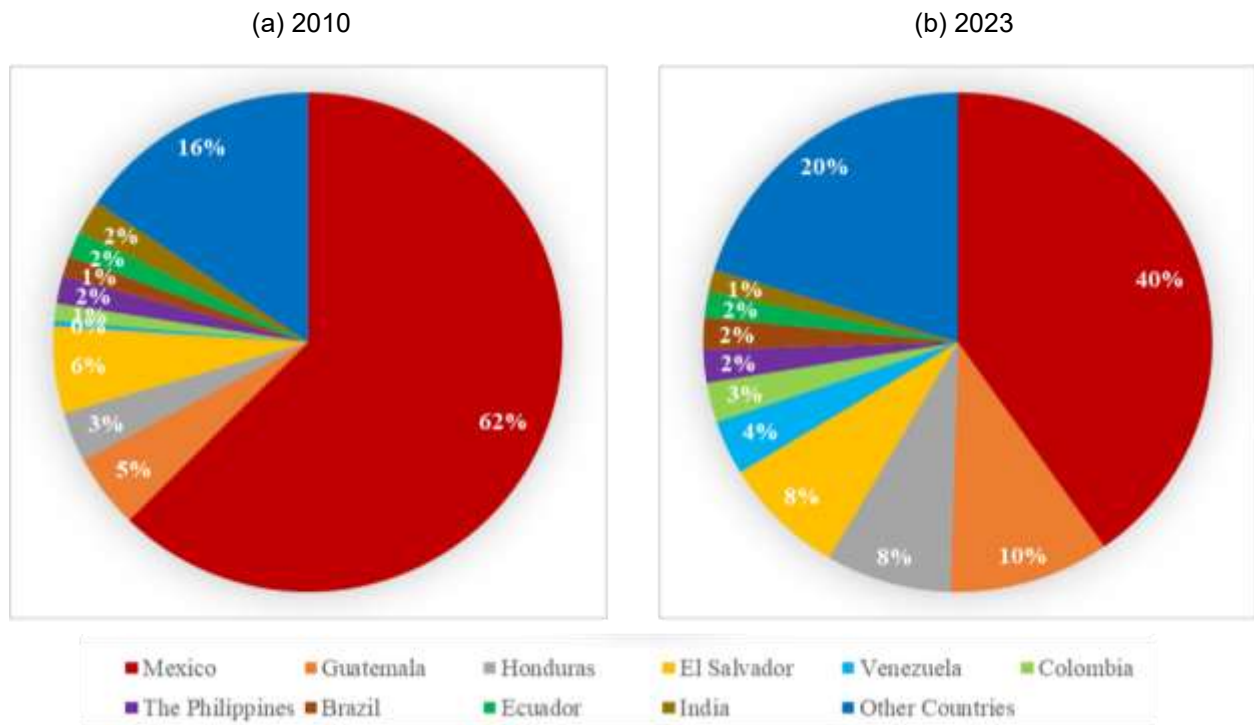
- [Trump, Migration, and Agriculture](#)
Philip Martin and Zachariah Rutledge
- [Growth in H-2A Workers' Employment in US Agriculture](#)
Stephen Devadoss and Jeff Luckstead
- [Breaking Down the Deportation Strategy: A Look at Policies, Costs, and Potential Consequences](#)
Alejandro Gutiérrez-Li
- [Economic Effects of Mass Deportations](#)
Angel Aguiar and Stephen Devadoss

287(g) agreements, E-Verify, and state-specific policies and their impact on labor supply, particularly in the agricultural sector. The four articles in this theme address these issues.

Origins of Migrant Workers

Until a decade ago, most undocumented workers came from Mexico. Charlton and Taylor (2016) observe that the farm labor supply from rural Mexico to the United States has been dwindling because of improvements in rural education, lower birthrates, and better employment opportunities in Mexico, adding to labor shortage woes in the US farm sector (see also Luckstead and Devadoss, 2019). Now, the composition of undocumented workers from various countries has changed. Mexico supplied 62% of these workers in 2010, but its share has shrunk to 40% because of the increase in undocumented workers coming from Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Venezuela, and Colombia (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Top Ten Origins of Unauthorized Immigrants in 2010 and 2023



Source: Van Hook (2025).

In this theme issue of *Choices*, Martin and Rutledge observe that the major short-term effects of the implementation of Trump 2.0 immigration policies include disruptions from ICE enforcement actions, fear in immigrant communities, and more H-2A guest workers. They note that if ICE enforcement continues, mechanization and mechanical aids (M), the number of migrant H-2A workers (M), and fresh fruits and vegetables imports (I) are all likely to increase.

The article by Devadoss and Luckstead discusses the serious problem of chronic labor scarcity in labor-intensive agricultural sectors. Since the goal of the guest-worker program is to alleviate these labor shortages, the number of H-2A workers employed under this program has been steadily growing. Farm labor contracts are instrumental in this increase due to their effectiveness in recruiting productive workers. The authors conclude that the guest-worker program will become more important, at least in the short run, to farmers and businesses in need of low-skilled workers as a result of the Trump administration’s policy of deporting undocumented workers. They also discuss the need for streamlining recruitment so that farmers can readily employ these workers and the higher cost of employing guest workers.

The article by Gutiérrez-Li summarizes the Trump administration’s immigration policy, trends in deportations, and the role of programs such as Secure

Communities, 287(h) agreements, E-Verify, and state-specific policies, costs, and their impact on labor supply and the economy.

Economic Impacts of Deportation

A study by the American Enterprise Institute and The Brookings Institution predicts that total net migration to the United States could reach a negative 525,000 in 2025 because of a stark decrease in border crossings (Montoya-Galvez, 2025), deportation of unauthorized workers, and fewer issuances of green cards and H-1B and student visas (Edelberg, Veuger, and Watson, 2025). This report concludes that the United States has not experienced such a negative net flow of immigrants since before 1960. This decline in the workforce will have adverse effects on the US economy, leading to a 0.3%–0.4% decline in GDP. Rebecca Shi, the CEO of American Business Immigration Coalition, notes that ICE nationwide raids are creating harm to local economies and communities and industries that depend on migrant workers for their operations (Meyersohn and Yurkevich, 2025).

In view of the adverse economic effects, the article by Angel and Devadoss presents a general equilibrium analysis to assess aggregate impacts (production, domestic sales, imports, and exports) of a scenario with a 50% deportation of undocumented workers on labor-intensive sectors and the overall US economy. They find

that this policy causes substantial declines in output and productivity in agriculture, construction, and hospitality sectors, with secondary effects on other industries and the overall GDP. Their findings underscore the economic risks of aggressive deportation policies and the importance of balancing immigration enforcement with labor market realities.

Public View of Trump's Immigration Policies

Public support for President Trump's immigration policies toward deporting migrant workers has shifted in recent months, as evident from the nationwide protest in June 2025. The public backlash and nationwide protests led President Trump to reconsider his policies of removing these immigrants and call on DHS Secretary Kristi Noem to stop the immigration raids; ICE then halted its raids at farms, restaurants, and meat-packing plants (Nichols, 2025). Furthermore, the DHS introduced a policy of paying \$1,000 to unauthorized workers for self-deporting themselves, which seems to be cheaper than the deportation of one worker at a cost of \$17,121 (Department of Homeland Security, 2025).

A comprehensive CBS News poll reported that in March 2025, 54% of Americans approved of President Trump's handling of immigration policies, but in July 2025, 56% disapproved of his policies, and 52% of Americans think that the Trump administration is deporting more people than they expected. The Republican political base strongly supports Trump's immigration policies, but the rest of the American public does not as much: 91% of Republicans approve of the Trump administration's deportation of illegal migrants, and 86% of Democrats disapprove of his policy (Salvanto, De Pinto, and Khanna, 2025). The same poll also revealed that 56% of Americans believe that Trump's administration is deporting people who are not dangerous criminals.

Unintended Consequences

Undocumented workers generally complement other factors in many sectors of the economy; therefore, removing these workers will affect the jobs for US-born workers too (East, 2024). Undocumented migrants also contribute to local demand, and removing these workers

will adversely hurt local businesses in many rural areas. Furthermore, these workers do pay taxes, and the elimination of these workers will lower tax collections. For instance, the Bay Area Council Economic Institute (2025) reports that mass deportations in California could reduce the state's GDP by \$275 billion and lower tax collection by \$23 billion.

Another unintended consequence is that the fear and anxiety among the migrant population due to ICE raids has prompted many parents in the migrant communities not to send their children to school (Franco, 2025). A study by Thomas S. Dee of Stanford University found a 22% increase in student absenteeism in the California Central Valley due to ICE raids (Franco, 2025). The states of Washington and Illinois also experienced similar absenteeism.

Finally, some undocumented workers, who are unable to work, have curtailed their remittances back to their home country (Angel and Devadoss, 2025). From January 1 to July 1, 2025, Mexicans working in the United States have sent about \$2 billion (about 5.5%) less in remittances to their relatives in Mexico (Resendiz, 2025).

Conclusions

If large-scale deportation continues, it will exacerbate the chronic labor shortage in the labor-intensive farm sector. Mechanizing farm operations is needed to alleviate labor shortages; however, research and development for mechanization has been going on since the 1980s, with very limited success. Therefore, mechanizing farm operations is a long-term solution, and not an immediate solution. The other alternative is to streamline the guest worker program to make it easier for farmers to hire H-2A workers. However, farmers have been complaining that H-2A workers are costly and time-consuming to procure (Luckstead and Devadoss, 2019; Devadoss and Luckstead, 2025). Imports of farm products to meet US consumer needs are another avenue, particularly if domestic production is curtailed due to a lack of labor. However, Trump's tariffs will make the imports very expensive, increasing grocery prices that will add woes to US consumers who are already saddled with high food price inflation.

For More Information

- Ainsley, J., R.J. Reilly, A. Smith, K. Dilanian, and S. Fitzpatrick. 2025, June 4. "A Sweeping New ICE Operation Shows How Trump's Focus on Immigration Is Reshaping Federal Law Enforcement." *NBC News*. Available online: <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/justice-department/ice-operation-trump-focus-immigration-reshape-federal-law-enforcement-rcna193494>
- American Immigration Council, 2025, July 14. "What's in the Big Beautiful Bill? Immigration and Border Security Unpacked." Available online: <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/fact-sheet/big-beautiful-bill-immigration-border-security>
- Angel, A., and S. Devadoss. 2025. "Effects of Mass Deportation of Undocumented Workers on the U.S. Agrifood Sector and Economy." *Journal of Agricultural and Resource Economics*. Forthcoming. <https://doi.org/10.22004/ag.econ.369147>
- Arcand, C. 2025, July 1. "Trump's ICE Carveout for Farm, Hotel Workers Sparks GOP Backlash." *Fox News*. Available online: <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/critics-sound-off-against-trumps-temporary-pass-migrant-farm-hospitality-workers>.
- Ashford, M. 2025, June 11. "Immigration Raid at Omaha Meatpacking Plant Spurs Protests, Stokes Fear in the City." *NPR Morning Edition*. Available online: <https://www.npr.org/2025/06/11/nx-s1-5429790/immigration-raid-at-omaha-meatpacking-plant-spurs-protests-stokes-fear-in-the-city>.
- Bay Area Council Economic Institute. 2025. "The Economic Impact of Mass Deportation in California." Bay Area Council Economic Institute. Available online: <https://www.bayareaeconomy.org/report/economic-impact-of-mass-deportation-in-california/>
- Bustillo, X. 2025, January 20. "Trump Signs Sweeping Actions on Immigration and Border Security on Day 1." *NPR Politics*. Available online: <https://www.npr.org/2025/01/20/g-s1-43650/trump-inauguration-day-one-immigration>
- Charlton, D., and J.E. Taylor. 2016. "A Declining Farm Workforce: Analysis of Panel Data from Rural Mexico," *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*. 98(4):1158–1180. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ajae/aaw018>
- Devadoss, S., and J. Luckstead. 2025. "Growth in H-2A Workers' Employment in US Agriculture." *Choices* 41 (1). <https://doi.org/10.22004/ag.econ.371483>
- East, C. 2024. September 18. "The Labor Market Impact of Deportations." Brookings Institute. Available online: <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-labor-market-impact-of-deportations/>
- East, C.N., A.L. Hines, P. Luck, H. Mansour, and A. Velasquez. 2023. "The Labor Market Effects of Immigration Enforcement." *Journal of Labor Economics* 41(4):957–996. <https://doi.org/10.1086/721152>
- Edelberg, W., S. Veuger, and T. Watson, 2025, July 2. *Immigration Policy and Its Macroeconomic Effects in the Second Trump Administration*. American Enterprise Institute. Available online: <https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/immigration-policy-and-its-macroeconomic-effects-in-the-second-trump-administration/>
- Franco, M.E. 2025. "Immigration Raid Fears Trigger Latino Student Absences as Experts Warn of Consequences." *NBC News*. Available online: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/fear-immigration-raids-latino-student-absences-school-ice-rcna223093>
- Gutiérrez-Li, A. 2025. "The Unseen Workforce: How Immigration Enforcement Could Shake the U.S. Economy." *Choices* 40(3):1–6. <https://doi.org/10.22004/ag.econ.362692>
- Luckstead, J., and S. Devadoss. 2019. "The Importance of H-2A Guest Workers in Agriculture." *Choices* 34(1):1–8. <https://doi.org/10.22004/ag.econ.287142>

- Meyersohn, N., and V. Yurkevich. 2025, June 14. "America's Migrant Workers Are Terrified to Work but Unable to Stay Home." *CNN Business*. Available online: <https://www.cnn.com/2025/06/13/business/ice-workplace-raids-home-depot>
- Montoya-Galvez, C. 2025, May 23. "Trump Administration Planning to Send Hundreds of Border Agents to Support ICE Arrests in U.S. Interior." *CBS News*. Available Online: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-ice-arrests-border-agents/>
- Nichols, A. 2025, July 11. "Trump Frantically Called Noem to Halt Deportations as Protests Raged: Insider." *Raw Story*. Available Online: <https://www.rawstory.com/noem-deportations-protests/>
- Resendiz, J. 2025, September 2. "Mexico Missing \$2 Billion in Remittance Income Through July." *BorderReport*. Available online: <https://www.borderreport.com/regions/mexico/mexico-missing-2-billion-in-remittance-income-through-july/>
- Salvanto, A., J. De Pinto, and K. Khanna. 2025, July 20. "CBS News Poll Finds Support for Trump's Deportation Program Falls; Americans Call for More Focus on Prices." *CBS News*. Available online: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/cbs-news-poll-trump-deportation-program-prices/>.
- US Department of Homeland Security. 2025, May 5. "DHS Announces Historic Travel Assistance and Stipend for Voluntary Self-Deportation" Available online: <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2025/05/05/dhs-announces-historic-travel-assistance-and-stipend-voluntary-self-deportation>.
- Van Hook, J. 2025, February 4. "Who Are Immigrants to the US, Where Do They Come from and Where Do They Live?" *The Conversation*. Available online: <https://www.yahoo.com/news/immigrants-us-where-come-where-194233772.html>.

About the Authors: Stephen Devadoss is the Emabeth Thompson Endowed Professor with the Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics at Texas Tech University.

Acknowledgments: I would like to acknowledge Choices Editor, Zhengfei Guan, for asking me to lead and edit this theme and for valuable comments of this theme overview.

Trump, Migration, and Agriculture

Philip Martin and Zachariah Rutledge

JEL Classifications: J08, J43, J61, J68

Keywords: Agriculture, Employment, Farm, Farmer, Farmworker, H-2A, Immigration, Imports, Wages

DOI: 10.22004/ag.econ.371482

Agriculture and Farm Labor

The Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) is an administrative database that gathers a near census of employment and earnings across all North American Industry Classification (NAICS) codes (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2025a). The QCEW gathers information from all employers who must report employment and wages to their respective state unemployment insurance (UI) authorities. The 115,000 US agricultural employers (NAICS code 11) employ an average of 1.2 million workers, including an average of 850,000 in crops (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2025a). UI covers an estimated 85% of US farm employment, suggesting that there are 1.5 million average or year-round equivalent jobs in US agriculture. Some 2.5 million workers fill these jobs, including 2 million workers who were born in Mexico. These Mexican-born US farm workers comprise three groups: 850,000 are legal Mexican-born farm workers, 850,000 are unauthorized, and 300,000 are legal H-2A guest workers (Martin, 2024; Justice in Motion, 2025). The ratio of unique workers to average jobs is 1.7 due to seasonality and turnover.

According to the National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS), most unauthorized farm workers arrived in the 1990s and early 2000s when they were in their 20s and 30s (US Department of Labor, 2025). These workers are now in their 40s and 50s, settled in one place, and aging out of hand-labor tasks that require climbing, stooping, and lifting. Their US-educated children usually shun seasonal farm jobs.

Unauthorized migration rose during the Biden administration, but few of these newcomers became crop workers. Figure 1 shows the number of unauthorized farm workers employed in US agriculture for less than a year before being interviewed in the NAWS was over 20% in 2000 and 5% in 2021–2022 (US Department of Labor, 2025). The NAWS finds an experienced and settled farm workforce.

Farming has two major subsectors: crop and animal agriculture. Crop agriculture accounts for three-fourths of US farm employment and almost all seasonal farm jobs. Figure 2 shows average UI-covered employment in crop agriculture, which is comprised of the sum of direct hire crop production (NAICS code 111) and crop support services (NAICS code 1151) on the left axis and crop support employment's share of total crop agricultural employment (NAICS 1151 ÷ [NAICS 111 + 1151]) on the right axis between 2000 and 2024. Average crop employment has been relatively stable at about 850,000 over the past two decades, but a rising share of crop workers, almost 40%, are now brought to farms by nonfarm crop support employers, mostly farm labor contractors.

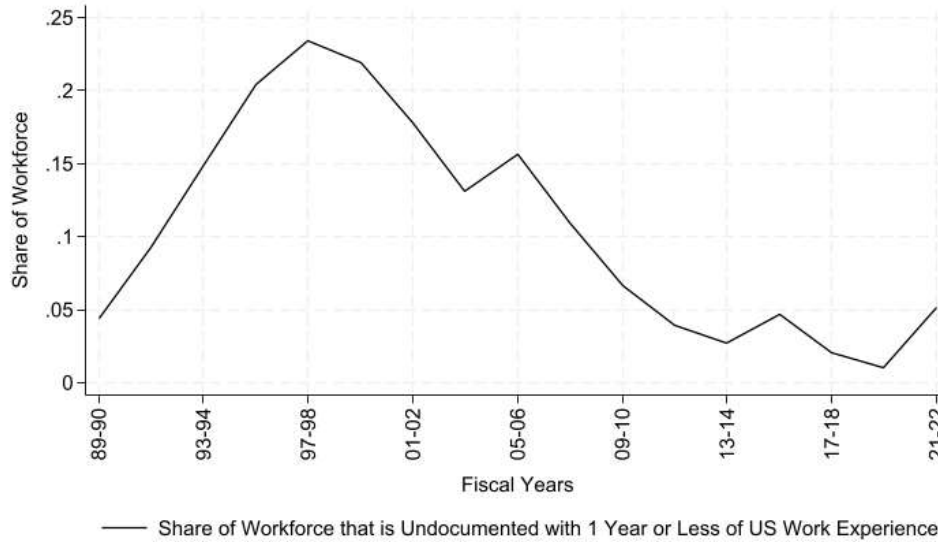
Farm worker earnings of \$18 an hour are two-thirds of the average nonfarm earnings of \$31. Rising farm labor costs lead to labor-saving mechanization (see Figure 3). If Trump 2.0 migration policies increase farm labor costs, the mechanization, migration, and import (MMI) adjustments are likely to accelerate: faster development of labor-saving machines and deployment of mechanical aids, more migrant guest workers, and more imported fresh fruits and vegetables from lower-wage countries.

Figure 4 shows that fruit and vegetable imports increased by over 500% over the past three decades. Mexico is the largest source of imported fruits and vegetables, followed by Chile, Peru, Colombia, Brazil, Guatemala, and Canada.

Trump Migration Policies, Immigration, and H-2A

President Trump signed several Executive Orders (EOs) on the first day of his second term, including the EO “Protecting the American People Against Invasion” by curtailing access to asylum and the EO “Securing the Border,” which resumed construction and repair of fences and walls on the Mexico-US border.

Figure 1. Share of Newcomers Who Are Unauthorized Farmworkers

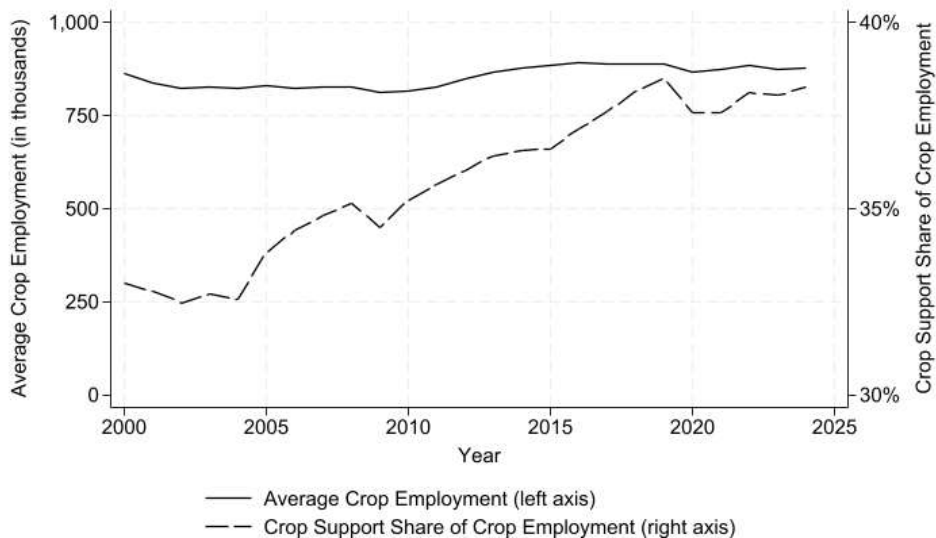


Source: National Agricultural Workers Wages (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2025a).

The number of foreign-born US residents increased by 8.2 million under President Biden, more than during the previous three presidents combined (see Figure 5). The newcomers include immigrants, foreigners who received a temporary legal status, and unauthorized foreigners. Even though some Biden-era newcomers have agricultural backgrounds, few became US farm workers. Instead, most went to cities where they had friends or relatives and sought year-round nonfarm rather than seasonal farm jobs (Rural Migration News, 2025a).

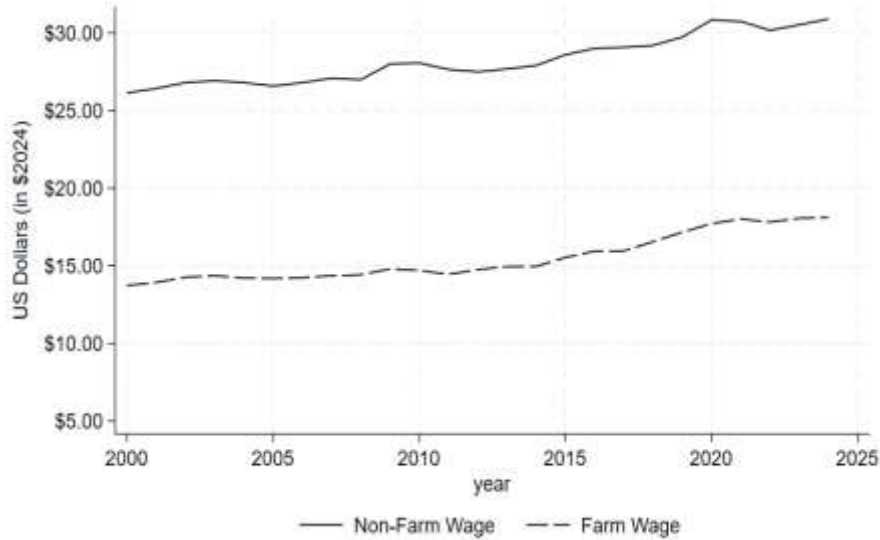
Because the upsurge in immigration did not yield a significant number of new farm workers, the H-2A program expanded from 275,000 jobs certified in fiscal year 2020 to 385,000 in fiscal year 2024 and is likely to top 400,000 in fiscal year 2025. The combination of an aging, settled farm workforce and few newcomers makes the H-2A program a major source of new farm workers.

Figure 2. Average Employment: Crop and Crop Support Services



Source: Quarterly Census of Employment Survey (US Department of Labor, 2025).

Figure 3. Real Farm and Nonfarm Hourly Wages (in 2024 dollars)



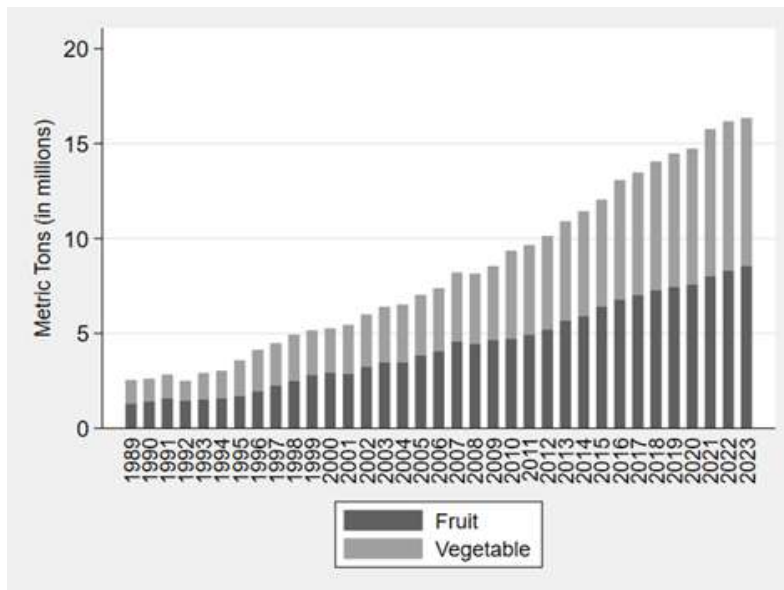
Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics (2025b) and USDA NASS (2025).

The H-2A program allows US farm employers who anticipate shortages of seasonal workers to be certified by the Department of Labor (DOL) to recruit and employ H-2A workers to fill farm jobs that last for up to 10 months. Certified employers submit petitions to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) that, after approval, are forwarded to the Department of State (DOS) consulates abroad, where H-2A visas are issued to the H-2A workers recruited by employers.

Certification means that DOL agrees with the employer that:

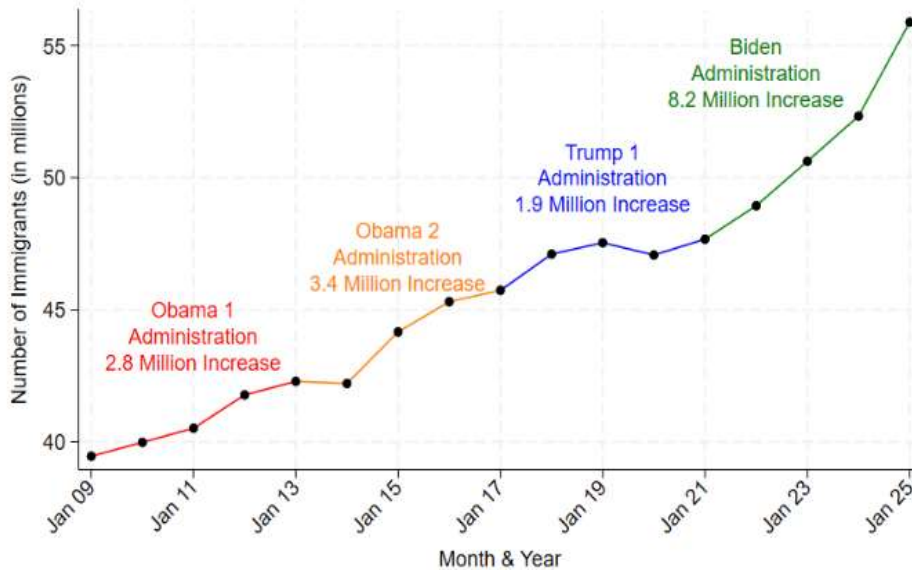
- (A) There are not sufficient US workers who are able, willing, and qualified, and who will be available at the time and place needed, to perform the labor or services involved in the petition and
- (B) The employment of the alien will not adversely affect the wages and working conditions of workers in the United States similarly employed.

Figure 4. Specialty Crop Import Quantities by Crop Type (1989–2023)



Source: USDA FAS (2025).

Figure 5. The Foreign-Born Population Rose by 8.2 Million Under Biden



Source: Current Population Survey, January Samples (Flood et al., 2025).

The major test of the US labor market is a job order that describes the job and offers the Adverse Effect Wage Rate (AEWR), a minimum wage established by DOL to prevent adverse effects on US workers. AEWRs in 2025 range from \$15 to \$20 an hour across states, higher than the federal or state minimum wage in every state (see Figure 6). Few US workers apply for the “H-2A jobs” that are advertised on the government website seasonaljobs.dol.gov.

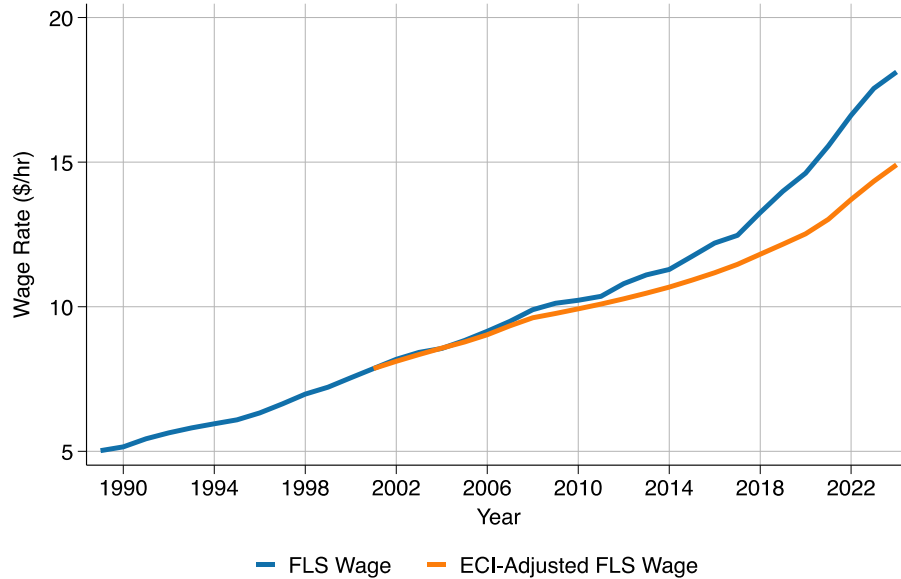
Farmers complain that the H-2A program is bureaucratic and costly. Employers must begin the process at least 60 days before their need date, cooperate with State Workforce Agencies to try to recruit US workers, and have the free housing they must provide to H-2A workers inspected before workers arrive. Employers pay all costs incurred by H-2A workers, including the cost of securing a visa at a US consulate abroad and transportation to the US, so that farmers have at least \$1,500 invested in each H-2A worker upon arrival

Figure 6. 2025 AEWRs and Change from 2024



Source: USDA Farm Labor Survey (USDA NASS, 2025) and VGN (2025).

Figure 7. FLS Average Earnings Rose Faster Than Employment Cost Index Wage and Salary Costs over the Past Decade



Note: Applies the Employment Cost Index for all wage and salary private industry workers to adjust FLS hourly earnings each year since 2001 (USDA NASS, 2025; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2025c)

(Castillo, Martin, and Rutledge, 2024). While in the US, the cost of housing and rides to and from the workplace ranges from \$10 to \$30 a day.

Farm employers want to reduce the cost of H-2A workers by freezing the AEWR. The AEWR for farm job titles is the average hourly earnings of directly hired field and livestock workers reported by farmers to the USDA's Farm Labor Survey (FLS) the previous year. Over the past decade, FLS average earnings have been increasing faster than the Employment Cost Index for nonfarm workers (Figure 7).

The 2025 AEWR for nonfarm job titles such as agricultural truck drivers and construction workers who work on farms is drawn from DOL's Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS) program, which collects data from nonfarm employers. When DOL used the OEWS to set AEWRs for nonfarm H-2A job titles in 2023, AEWRs for some agricultural truck drivers doubled from \$15 to \$30 an hour.

The bipartisan Farm Workforce Modernization Act approved by the House in 2019 and 2021 would cap annual AEWR increases at 3.25% while the government studied the need for AEWRs to protect US farm workers; other proposals would set AEWRs at 10% or 15% more than the applicable federal or state minimum wage. Some farm employers want DOL to define and measure adverse effects before establishing an AEWR, which would give employers and other stakeholders an opportunity to affect the definition of adverse effects and the methodology to measure adverse labor market effects.

California sheep and goat herders provide a natural experiment in employer adjustments to higher labor costs. Almost all of California's 350 herders who care for flocks of 500–1,500 animals are H-2A workers from Peru and Mexico. California raised the minimum monthly wage for range herders with 24/7 work schedules by 120% over six years, from \$2,200 a month in 2019 to \$4,820 a month in 2025.

The range of the herder wage increase was triple the increase in the state's minimum wage, which rose 40%, from \$11 (for businesses with fewer than 25 employees) or \$12 to \$16.50 an hour. In 2025, California H-2A range herders earn more than H-2A workers with 40-hour workweeks who harvest fruits and vegetables at the AEWR of \$19.97 an hour, which is about \$3,450 for 4.33 weeks a month.

US workers are not filling California herder jobs, despite annual salaries of almost \$60,000 a year plus free housing and food. Instead, California ranchers are adjusting to higher labor costs by increasing the number of animals each herder cares for, switching to hourly wage systems and paying the AEWR for 40 or 45 hours a week, or going out of business.

In October 2025, the US Department of Labor announced a rule that changes the data source and methodology used to generate the AEWRs, claiming that it will save employers about \$2.5 billion per year. These new changes will likely be challenged in court.

Farm employers want other changes to the H-2A program, including allowing employers with year-round

Figure 8. Americans Believe That Deportations Could Increase the Prices They Pay



Note: Numbers listed in yellow are the percentage of respondents for each question asking whether the deportation of immigrants living in the US illegally would increase, decrease, or have no effect on prices. Data were obtained from a Pew Research Center report (Noe-Bustamante and Krogstad, 2025).

labor needs to utilize the H-2A program and issuing H-2A workers with multiyear visas, permitting the staggered employment of H-2A workers in a single contract, and reducing the domestic employee recruitment period to 30 days (Rutledge and Rickman, 2024). Some employers want an electronic application processing platform and a TSA-style precheck program for H-2A employers who are in compliance with regulations.

Short-Term Impacts

The major short-term impacts of Trump's migration policies are fear and confusion. Border encounters fell from a peak of 250,000 in December 2023 to less than 10,000 a month in mid-2025, but this drop had few effects on the farm labor supply because few unauthorized newcomers become farm workers. However, over 40% of Americans believe that mass deportations will increase food prices (see Figure 8).

The fear arises from well-publicized efforts to arrest unauthorized foreigners inside the US, including the 1.2 million foreigners with final orders of deportation. DHS has taken the gloves off Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers, instructing them to arrest all unauthorized foreigners they encounter when seeking foreigners convicted of US crimes.

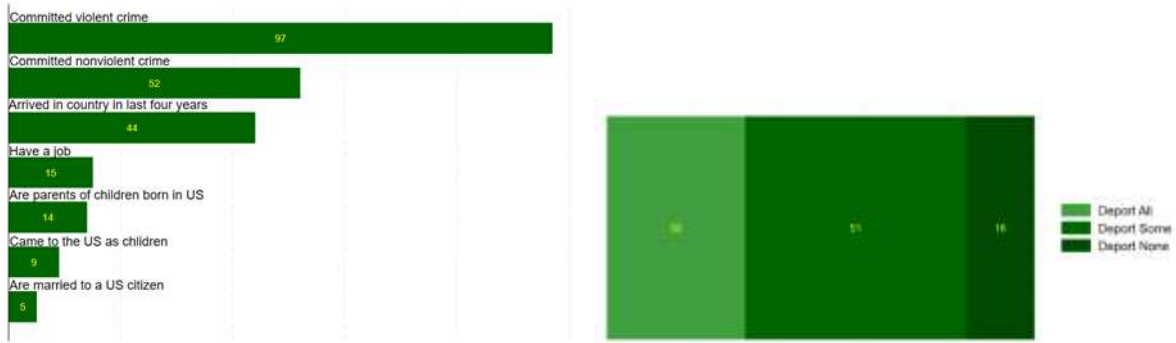
Most Americans want foreigners convicted of US crimes deported, and many support deporting unauthorized foreigners who arrived in the past four years (see Figure 9). Support for deportation declines sharply for unauthorized foreigners who have US jobs, US-born children, or US spouses.

To provide insights into the labor supply effects of Trump's deportation policies, we utilized ICE arrest data to map out the recent increase in ICE arrests across the United States, revealing a sharp increase in the first six months of 2025 (see Figure 10). However, according to the Current Population Survey (Flood et al., 2025), agricultural employment has remained relatively stable during the first eight months of 2025 relative to 2024 (see Figure 11).

There is fear and confusion in many immigrant communities. For example, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in March 2025 began to enforce a long-standing requirement that non-US citizens 14 and older who are in the US for at least 30 days must register or face fines of \$5,000 and possible imprisonment. Most foreigners who enter the US legally are registered when they obtain visas or are admitted at ports of entry. Those who entered the US illegally can register online using Form G-325R and make an appointment to provide fingerprints. Unauthorized foreigners who register are easier to identify and deport, but DHS can arrest nonregistered foreigners encountered when conducting enforcement operations.

Migrant advocates and NGOs have developed know-your-rights cards, hotlines, and apps, and rapid response networks to alert migrant communities about the presence of ICE agents. After enforcement actions in agricultural areas, some farm workers do not show up to work until the ICE agents depart. So far, ICE-induced changes in farm worker behavior have been short-lived. However, sustained immigration enforcement actions could prompt unauthorized farm workers to move elsewhere.

Figure 9. Most Americans Want Some Unauthorized Foreigners Deported



Note: Numbers listed in yellow are the percentage of respondents for a question asking whether immigrants living in the country illegally should be deported (left) and whether undocumented immigrants with certain characteristics should be deported if they answered “Deport Some” to the previous question (right). Data were obtained from a Pew Research Center report (Noe-Bustamante and Krogstad, 2025).

There are several special cases. Immigration agents can search for unauthorized foreigners without warrants “within a reasonable distance from any external boundary of the United States,” interpreted as within 100 miles of the US border with Canada and Mexico. This makes border-area farms in Arizona, California, and Texas, as well as in northern New York and Vermont, subject to warrantless searches.

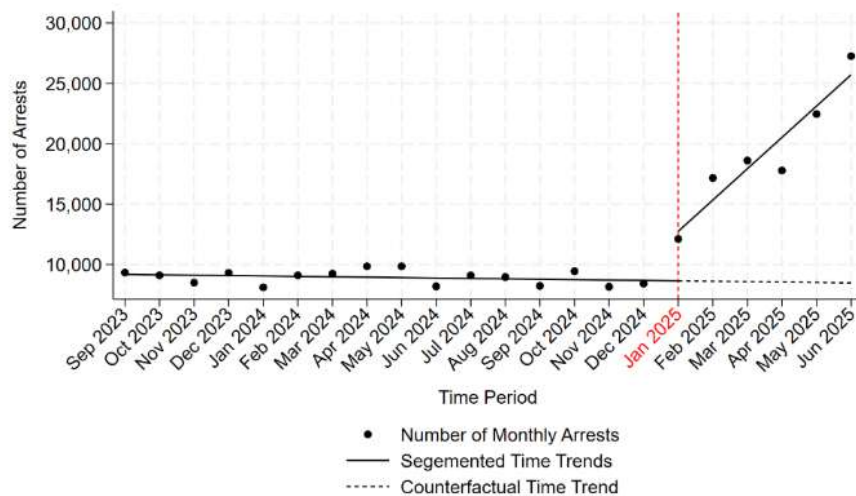
Cannabis is a Category One drug under the Federal Controlled Substances Act, and non-US citizens under 21 are not allowed to work in cannabis, even if state laws make cannabis production and possession legal. Over 360 employees of a large and vertically integrated cannabis grower, Glass House Cultivation, were arrested in July 2025 because they were not US citizens, including 11 minors, ranging between 14 and 17 years old (Lange, 2025).

Long-Term Impacts

The long-term impacts of Trump's migration enforcement policies include increased farm labor costs and faster MMI responses of more mechanization, more migrant H-2A workers, and more imports of labor-intensive commodities from lower-wage countries (Charlton, 2025). The choice between M, M, or I depends on many factors, from technology to trade and migration policies to consumer preferences, as illustrated by the adjustments of raisin grapes, apples, and tomatoes (Rural Migration News, 2025b).

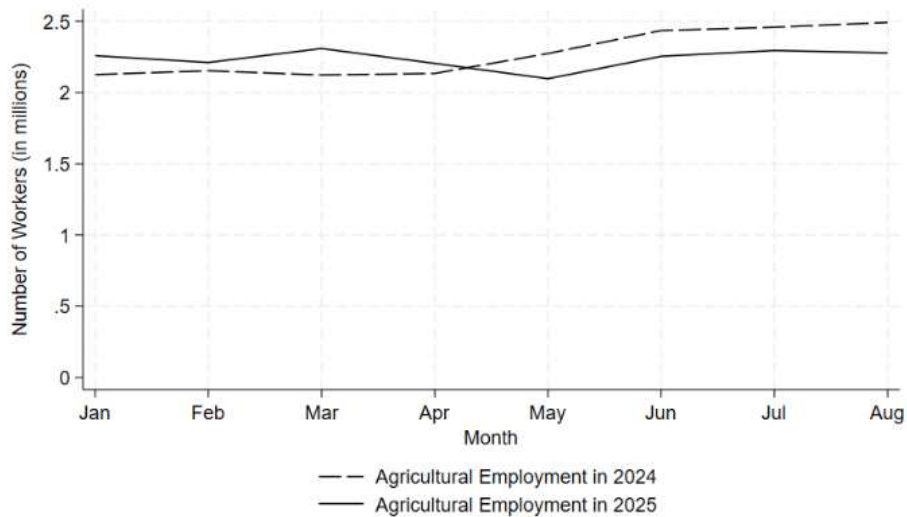
Labor-saving mechanization is the universal response to rising farm labor costs. Both public and private projects aim to develop harvesters that replace hand pickers in apples, strawberries, and other crops. Developing

Figure 10. ICE Arrests



Source: Deportation Data Project (2025).

Figure 11. Agricultural Employment, 2024–2025



Source: Current Population Survey (Flood et al., 2025).

machines to replace hand workers is difficult. Success requires a systems approach that combines:

- biology, the development of plants, vines, and trees whose produce ripens uniformly, so the machine needs to make only one pass through the field
- modified farming systems such as high-density dwarf apple trees that are planted in rows with limbs trained on wires to make the fruit more visible, so that orchards resemble vineyards (Karkee et al., 2025)
- machines or robots to detect and detach the desired fruit or vegetable quickly and without damaging trees and vines (Vougioukas et al., 2025)

The economic feasibility of robots depends on (i) their cost, (ii) efficiency (the share of marketable produce picked by the machine), and (iii) pick cycle time (the time required to pick and convey an apple or berry (Charlton et al., 2024). To compete with humans, machines must be efficient and fast, since humans are highly efficient at picking marketable produce. Current machines are not efficient or fast enough to compete with hand workers, including H-2A workers, who cost about \$30 an hour in wages, housing, and other costs. However, rising farm labor costs combined with biological, farming, and engineering advances are likely to create a situation within a decade where machines are as cheap as hand workers.

An alternative to machines is more migrant H-2A workers. The number of H-2A workers is increasing as settled farm workers age out of farm work and their US-educated children find nonfarm jobs. Employing H-2A workers means higher labor costs and free housing, transport to and from work sites, and recruitment and other expenses. However, H-2A workers are typically

younger and more productive than settled unauthorized workers in hand-harvesting jobs, and their contracts provide insurance that workers will be available when needed.

The third option is for farmers to change to less labor-intensive crops, as from labor-intensive fruits to tree nuts. Such a switch could mean that more citrus, table grapes, and berries are imported from lower-wage countries. Fresh produce imports account for 60% of US fruit consumption and 40% of vegetable consumption (Zahniser, 2023). Mexico is the source of half of US fresh fruit imports and two-thirds of US fresh vegetable imports (Astill, Ruiz, and Zahniser, 2024). Over 800,000 workers are employed on Mexican farms that export fresh produce to the US (University of California-Davis, 2025). If the US reduces fruit and vegetable imports, the employment of farm workers in the US could increase.

The US imports about \$65 billion and exports about \$35 billion worth of horticultural commodities a year, making horticultural imports about 40% of US farm imports and 20% of US farm exports (Russel and Kenner, 2021; Kenner, Jiang, and Kaufman, 2023). The leading horticultural imports include avocados and tomatoes, each worth \$3.5 billion, bananas worth \$2.5 billion, and blueberries, table grapes, and bell peppers, each worth about \$2 billion (Rural Migration News, 2025c). The fastest-growing US imports include avocados, raspberries, blueberries, and strawberries as producers abroad learn how to lengthen their seasons so that they can export almost year-round. Trump's immigration policies could increase the trade deficit for specialty crops, which could prove to be counterproductive to his tariff policy.

Conclusions

Donald Trump promised to raise tariffs and deport unauthorized foreigners, and President Trump took steps to implement both promises. The early effects of Trump's trade policy changes are more apparent than the effects of the migration policy changes; after six months, there have not been widespread farm labor or food shortages (Greenberger, 2025; Allwork, 2025).

There are many reports of fear and confusion among farm employers and workers, but few reports of crops left unharvested, wage spikes, or supermarkets without fresh fruits and vegetables. For example, according to the Current Population Survey (Flood et al., 2025), agricultural employment was stable between January 2024 and August 2025. However, those affected by Trump 2.0 migration and trade policies bemoan the uncertainty of not knowing whether migration changes are temporary or permanent, making planning difficult.

If enforcement policies ramp up gradually and farmers adjust to rising farm labor costs with more mechanization, more migrant H-2A workers, and crop changes that allow imports to increase, Trump's migration enforcement policies could be a nonevent for consumers. Labor-saving mechanization and mechanical aids, migrant guest workers who are more productive than US workers in hand-labor tasks, and imported fresh fruits and vegetables from lower-wage countries may keep the supply and prices of fresh fruits and vegetables stable.

The story may be different for individual farmers who change crops or go out of business due to higher labor costs, and for farm workers who lose their jobs and are deported. However, as with Trump 2.0 policies in other areas, there is little evidence so far of the catastrophic results that some predicted.

For More Information

- Allwork. 2025, January 21. "Looming Mass Deportations Could Leave U.S. Farms with Labor Crisis." Available online: <https://allwork.space/2025/01/looming-mass-deportations-could-leave-u-s-farms-with-labor-crisis/>
- Astill, G., B.A. Ruiz, and S. Zahniser. 2024. "Growth in Mexico's Horticultural Exports to the United States Continued Even as New U.S. Food Safety Laws Took Effect." *Amber Waves*. Available online: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2024/october/growth-in-mexico-s-horticultural-exports-to-the-united-states-continued-even-as-new-u-s-food-safety-laws-took-effect>
- Castillo, M., P. Martin, and Z. Rutledge. 2024. "Whither the H-2A Visa Program: Expansion and Concentration." *Choices* 39(1):1–9. <https://doi.org/10.22004/ag.econ.344747>
- Charlton, D. 2025. "Immigration Enforcement and the US Agricultural Sector in 2025." AEI. Available online: <https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/immigration-enforcement-and-the-us-agricultural-sector-in-2025/>
- Charlton, D., S. Devadoss, R.K. Gallardo, J. Luckstead, and S. Vougioukas. 2024. "Economic Viability of Robotic Fruit Harvesters to Reduce Large Seasonal Labor Demands: Analysis of Gala and Honeycrisp Apples." *Journal of the Agricultural and Applied Economics Association* 4:70–87. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaa2.70000>
- Deportation Data Project. 2025. "ICE Arrest Data" [dataset]. Available online: <https://deportationdata.org/index.html>
- Flood, S., M. King, R. Rodgers, S. Ruggles, J.R. Warren, D. Backman, A. Chen, G. Cooper, S. Richards, M. Schouweiler, and M. Westberry. 2025. "IPUMS CPS: Version 12.0" [dataset]. IPUMS. <https://doi.org/10.18128/D030.V12.0>
- Greenberger, C. 2025, January 27. "How Mass Deportations Could Gut the US Food System." *Atmos*. Available online: <https://atmos.earth/how-mass-deportations-could-gut-the-us-food-system/>
- Justice in Motion. 2025. "H-2A Agricultural Workers." Available online: <https://www.justiceinmotion.org/h2a>
- Karkee, M., S. Voudiokas, S. Devadoss, and S. Bhusal. 2025. "Mechanization Efforts in Fruit Tree Pruning and Thinning." *Choices* 40(2): 10-15. <https://doi.org/10.22004/ag.econ.356843>
- Kenner, B., H. Jiang, and J. Kaufman. 2023. *Outlook for U.S. Agricultural Trade: November 2023*. USDA Economic Research Service FAS Situation and Outlook Report. Available online: <https://ers.usda.gov/sites/default/files/laserfiche/outlooks/108032/AES-126.pdf>
- Lange, T. 2025. "Glass House Brands Provides Updates to Recent ICE Raids at 2 Cannabis Cultivation Sites." *Cannabis Business Times*. Available online: <https://www.cannabisbusinesstimes.com/us-states/california/news/15752135/glass-house-brands-provides-updates-to-recent-ice-raids-at-2-cannabis-cultivation-sites>
- Martin, P. 2024. *Migrant Labor and US Agriculture*. Negative Population Growth, Inc. Forum Paper, Part 2. Available online: <https://npg.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/2024-MigrantLaborAndUSAgriculture-FP.pdf>
- Noe-Bustamonte, L., and J.M. Krogstad. 2025. *American's Views of Deportation*. Pew Research Center. Available online: <https://www.pewresearch.org/race-and-ethnicity/2025/03/26/americans-views-of-deportations/>
- Rural Migration News*. 2025a, January 13. "Trump 2.0 and Farm Labor." Available online: <https://migration.ucdavis.edu/rmn/blog/post/?id=2996>
- . 2025b, July 16. "Deportations, Farm Workers, and Consumers." Available online: <https://migration.ucdavis.edu/rmn/blog/post/?id=3043>
- . 2025c, July 16. "California Agriculture and Farm Workers, 1975-2025." Available online: <https://migration.ucdavis.edu/rmn/blog/post/?id=3042>

- Russel, D., and B. Kenner. 2021. "Horticultural Imports Drove U.S. Agricultural Imports to New High in Fiscal Year 2021." *Charts of Note*. USDA Economic Research Service. Available online: <https://ers.usda.gov/data-products/charts-of-note/chart-detail?chartId=102472>
- Rutledge, Z., and S. Rickman. 2024. *Summary of the 2023 Michigan State University Farm Labor Conference: Understanding and Addressing Agricultural Labor Challenges in the United States*. Available online: <https://ageconsearch.umn.edu/record/342307?ln=en&v=pdf>
- US Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2025a. "Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages" [dataset]. Available online: <https://www.bls.gov/cew/downloadable-data-files.htm>
- . 2025b. "Average Hourly Earnings of Production and Nonsupervisory Employees on Private Nonfarm Payrolls." Available online: <https://www.bls.gov/data/home.htm>
- . 2025c. "Employment Cost Index" [dataset]. Available online: <https://www.bls.gov/eci/>
- US Department of Agriculture Foreign Agricultural Service (USDA FAS). 2025. "Trade Data" [dataset]. Available online: <https://www.fas.usda.gov/data/trade>
- US Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Statistics Service (USDA NASS). 2025. "Farm Labor Survey" [dataset]. Available online: <https://quickstats.nass.usda.gov>
- US Department of Labor. 2025. "National Agricultural Workers Survey" [dataset]. Available online: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/national-agricultural-workers-survey>
- University of California, Davis. 2025. *California Farm Labor: The ALRA at 50 - Summary Report*. Gifford Center for Population Studies. Available online: <https://gifford.ucdavis.edu/events/>
- VGN (Vegetable Growers News). 2025, July 9. "Soaring AEWL Costs: Adverse Effect Wage Rates Harming Growers." Available online: <https://vegetablegrowersnews.com/article/aewl-rates/>
- Vougioukas, S., M. Karkee, S. Devadoss, R.K. Gallardo, and D. Charlton. 2025. "Mechanization Efforts in Fruit Harvesting." *Choices* 40(2): 3–9. <https://doi.org/10.22004/ag.econ.356842>
- Zahniser, S. 2023. "Imports Make Up Growing Share of U.S. Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Supply." *Charts of Note*. USDA Economic Research Service. Available online: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/charts-of-note/chart-detail?chartId=107008>

About the Authors: Philip Martin (plmartin@ucdavis.edu) is a Professor Emeritus with the Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics at the University of California-Davis. Zachariah Rutledge (rutled83@msu.edu) is an Assistant Professor with the Department of Agricultural, Food, and Resource Economics with Michigan State University.

Acknowledgments: Philip Martin and Zachariah Rutledge gratefully acknowledge support from a cooperative research grant from the USDA's Office of the Chief Economist (award number 58-0111-25-017). The findings and conclusions in this publication are those of the authors and should not be construed to represent any official USDA or U.S. Government determination or policy.

Growth in H-2A Workers' Employment in US Agriculture

Stephen Devadoss and Jeff Luckstead

JEL Classifications: J43, J61

Keywords: Deportation, Farm-labor shortages, H-2A Workers, Undocumented Workers

DOI: 10.22004/ag.econ.371483

Many labor-intensive agricultural sectors that require hard physical work have been experiencing chronic labor scarcity. To meet the labor demand in these sectors, the US government introduced the H-2A guest-worker program in 1986 under IRCA (Luckstead and Devadoss, 2019). From 1997 to 2005, the annual growth rate of H-2A workers' employment did not increase significantly (Figure 1). However, starting from 2011, the employment of these workers accelerated at a much faster pace.

The growing need for H-2A workers arises from several factors: Undocumented farm workers who came in the 1990s are reaching retirement age or have already retired (Martin and Rutledge, 2025), the children of these workers are generally US-educated and shun farm jobs (Martin and Rutledge, 2025), the number of domestic farm workers has shrunk (Önel and Farnsworth, 2016), entry of undocumented workers from Mexico to the United States has fallen since the Great Recession in 2008 (Passel and Krogstad, 2024), workers in Mexico have shifted from farm to non-farm sector work (Charlton and Taylor, 2016), networking with Farm Labor Contracts (FLC) enables farmers to hire guest workers with less paperwork (Simnitt and Castillo, 2025),¹ and the fact that ICE has begun aggressively enforcing immigration laws (Martin and Rutledge, 2025). Consequently, farmers have been relying more heavily on H-2A workers, particularly since 2008.

With the Trump 2.0 immigration policy of deporting undocumented workers, the guest-worker program will likely become more important, at least in the short run, to farmers and businesses in need of low-skilled workers. This article provides a detailed analysis of the current state of the US farm workforce, with a focus on H-2A workers who are a plausible replacement for the dwindling unauthorized workforce. Specifically, the

objectives of this study are to (i) present the composition of the farm workers in the United States, (ii) discuss the states and sectors that rely on guest workers for operations, (iii) analyze the increasing trend in the guest-worker wage rates, and (iv) highlight the need for streamlining the recruitment and hiring of guest workers so that producers can readily employ these workers.

Composition of Farm Labor

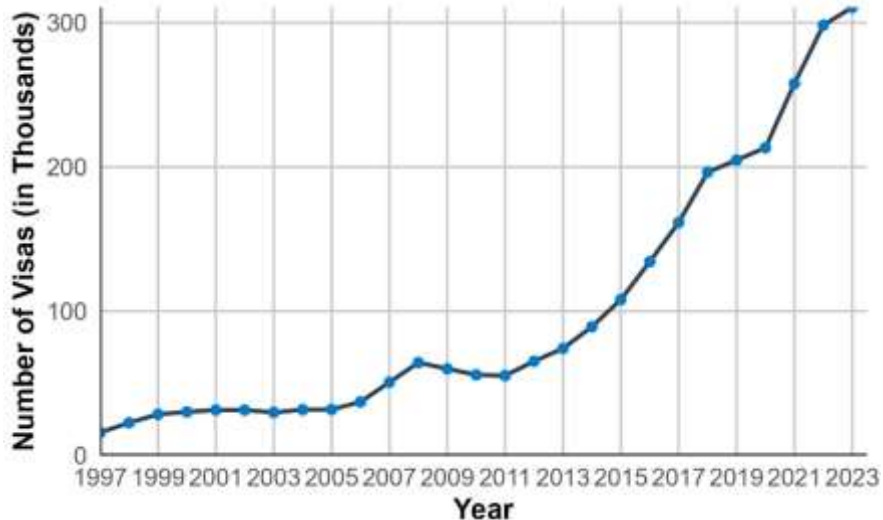
The US farm workforce comprises four groups: Native US-born citizens, foreign-born legal workers, foreign-born undocumented workers, and H-2A workers. In 2022, the direct on-farm employment in the US agricultural sector was 2.6 million workers (Kassel, 2023); of these workers, about 2 million originated from Mexico (Martin and Rutledge, 2025). Out of the 2.6 million direct on-farm employees, the number of legal farm workers is 1.48 million, which comprises US-born (820,040), US naturalized (167,960), permanent residents (198,264), and guest workers (298,336).² These numbers imply that the number of unauthorized workers in agriculture is 1.12 (= 2.6 – 1.48) million. These data indicate that US-born workers are only 31.5% of the total US farm workforce, indicating that farmers need to rely on a non-US-born workforce to complete their farm operations.

In crop production, the number of guest-worker visas issued in the United States reached more than 310,000 in 2023 (Figure 1), comprising 12.4% of crop workers, though the number of certifications by the US Department of Labor for hiring guest workers is 378,513 (Rural Migration News, 2024a). Labor-intensive crop production employs more guest workers, with H-2A workers generally accounting for 15%–20% of the workforce in these crops. As illustrated in Figure 1, the

¹ H-2A employment share for all agricultural production through farm labor contracts expanded from 13% in 2007 to 44% in 2020 (Castillo, Martin, and Rutledge, 2022).

² These numbers are calculated based on statistics from Rosenbloom (2022), Fung et al. (2023), Kassel (2023), Castillo (2024), and the US Department of Labor (2025b). Note that the permanent residents are based on statistics for crop workers (Castillo, 2024) and not for the agricultural sector as a whole.

Figure 1: Annual Number of H-2A Visas Issued



Source: National Agricultural Workers Wages (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2025a).

growth of guest workers underscores the importance of these workers for labor-intensive operations.

H-2A Program

US Citizenship and Immigration Services oversees visa issuance to guest workers. These workers are employed in seasonal jobs (primarily in crop production) and work for the period authorized in the labor certification (typically between a few months and up to one year), with an average of six months (US Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2025). However, the work period may be extended one year at a time for a maximum of three years, with a new labor certification for each extension. After completing the three-year work permit, a guest worker must leave and reside outside the United States for 60 days before reapplying for work under the H-2A program. Temporary departure from the United States during their H-2A authorized period will not count toward their three-year limit. For more details about the H-2A program, see Luckstead and Devadoss (2019).

State-Level H-2A Employment

Table 1 reports the certification of applications for H-2A workers for the top 10 states from 2008 to 2024. The top 10 states employ 71.3% of all guest workers in 2024. From 2008 to 2014, farmers in North Carolina applied for the most certifications because, right after the introduction of the H-2A program in 1986, North Carolina farmers found that hiring H-2A workers through Farm Labor Contracts (FLCs) was the most effective way to procure the needed workers (Clemens, 2013). However, starting in 2016, Florida (with 32,697 certifications) surpassed North Carolina (with 29,495 certifications). Since then, Florida has been the largest employer of guest workers because of the effective use of FLCs (Önel and Farnsworth, 2016) and established networks

in foreign countries. In addition, Florida is also a leading agricultural state with major crops such as citrus, vegetables, and fruits, which require many low-skilled workers for planting, harvesting, and processing. In 2024, Florida employed almost twice the number of H-2A workers as the second-place employer, California.

Interestingly, despite its large fruit, nut, and vegetable production, California has not been a leading employer of H-2A workers because of the availability of undocumented workers (Pew Research Center, 2016) and the regulatory barriers and costs (Wei et al., 2024). However, California's employment of these workers has expanded over the years, and it is currently the second largest employer of guest workers. Washington, with its large production of fruits (apples and stone fruits) and vegetables (onions, asparagus, and potatoes), is currently the third-largest employer of guest workers. Georgia, because of its peach, vegetable, and berry production, has always been a top-four employer of guest workers. By contrast, North Carolina moved to the fifth position in 2024 as the other states increasingly employed more guest workers. This trend in the employment of guest workers highlights the need for these workers by the larger fruit-, nut-, and vegetable-producing states.

Many of the leading states (Kentucky, Virginia, Arizona, and Idaho) that employed more H-2A workers in 2008 are not even among the top 10 employers in 2024. By contrast, Washington, Texas, Michigan, and Arkansas were not leading employers of these workers in 2008, but they were among the top 10 employers by 2024 because of greater demand for low-skilled workers in specialty crop production.

Table 1. Top 10 H-2A Certifications by State, 2008–2024

2008		2011		2014		2017		2020		2022		2024	
State	No.	State	No.	State	No.	State	No.	State	No.	State	No.	State	No.
NC	16,977 16.6%	NC	17,281 19.18%	NC	24,136 17.67%	FL	39,397 17.54%	FL	60,124 21.85%	FL	80,707 21.76%	FL	80,936 21.08%
GA	6,342 6.2%	LA	6,927 7.69%	FL	17,033 12.47%	NC	31,301 13.93%	CA	27,707 10.07%	CA	49,869 13.45%	CA	42,953 11.19%
LA	5,761 5.63%	GA	6,769 7.51%	WA	14,922 10.92%	WA	28,391 12.64%	WA	26,186 9.51%	WA	31,297 8.44%	WA	34,475 8.98%
KY	5,756 5.63%	FL	5,795 6.43%	GA	9,681 7.09%	GA	20,291 9.03%	GA	23,397 8.5%	GA	27,794 7.49%	GA	31,058 8.09%
FL	5,659 5.53%	WA	5,073 5.63%	CA	7,372 5.4%	CA	17,112 7.62%	NC	19,739 7.17%	NC	22,387 6.04%	NC	24,946 6.5%
CA	5,245 5.13%	KY	4,814 5.34%	KY	6,680 4.89%	LA	7,673 3.42%	LA	9,916 3.6%	MI	13,097 3.53%	TX	14,392 3.75%
NY	4,239 4.14%	VA	4,102 4.55%	LA	6,527 4.78%	KY	7,359 3.28%	NY	8,424 3.06%	LA	12,417 3.35%	MI	13,536 3.53%
VA	4,217 4.12%	NY	4,074 4.52%	VA	5,031 3.68%	NY	6,929 3.08%	TX	7,638 2.78%	TX	11,909 3.21%	LA	12,664 3.3%
AZ	4,062 3.97%	CA	2,950 3.27%	NY	4,764 3.49%	VA	4,872 2.17%	MI	7,186 2.61%	NY	9,802 2.64%	NY	10,300 2.68%
ID	3,877 3.79%	AR	2,950 3.27%	MS	3,723 2.73%	MS	4,689 2.09%	KY	6,774 2.46%	AZ	8,327 2.25%	AR	8,572 2.23%

Notes: The percentage refers to the share of guest workers' employment in that state in that year.

Source: US Department of Labor (2025).

Sectoral-Level H-2A Employment

Guest workers are employed in many sectors of agriculture (see Figure 2). Based on 3-digit NAICS codes, crop production accounts for 45.3% of the certified H-2A workers, followed by support activities (e.g., basic irrigation tasks, equipment cleanup, general tasks to assist with farm operations) with 38.3%. Nonclassified (e.g., certifications that are classified with fewer than 3 digits for the NAICS codes or that do not fall under NAICS code 11 (the Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting sector)) sectors represent 12.3% of certified H-2A workers.

Animal production accounts for only 4.1% because most jobs in this category are year-round, and guest worker visas are not available for annual jobs.

Figure 3 decomposes the employment of guest workers in the Crop Production category. Vegetable & Melon and Fruit & Nut production employ almost 60% of guest workers because of their labor-intensive cultivational operations, such as harvesting delicate fresh produce (Vougioukas et al., 2025). For example, in Florida orange cultivation and Georgia onion production, more than 50% of the farm laborers are guest workers (Martin and Rutledge, 2025). Simnitt and Castillo (2025) report that, in Florida, 75% of H-2A workers were hired through FLCs in 2023. The larger employment in these crop productions is also observed by Castillo, Martin, and Rutledge (2024), who document a steady shift in H-2A workers from field and livestock work to fruit and

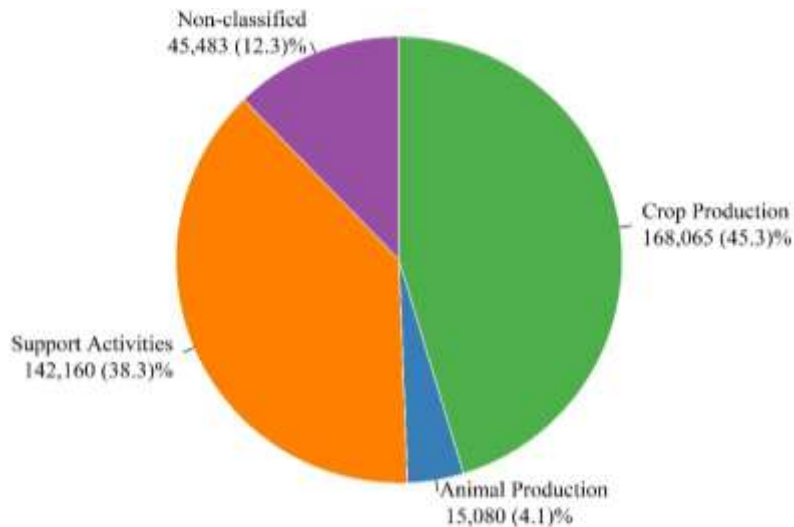
vegetable cultivation. Other crops (20.6%) and the Greenhouse, Nursery, and Floriculture sector (12.5%) also employ guest workers because of limited mechanization in their production. However, Oilseed and Grains (row crops) rely heavily on mechanical operations and use fewer guest workers.

H-2A Wage Rates and Costs

The Department of Labor determines the H-2A wage rate—known as the adverse effect wage rate (AEWR)—in each of the 17 regions based on the previous year's wage data from field and livestock workers as surveyed by the USDA's farm labor survey (Rutledge et al., 2025). When a farm hires H-2A workers, it must pay the minimum wage specified by the AEWR to guest workers and domestic workers for similar work. Rutledge et al. (2025) show that AEWR can be above or below the non-H-2A wage rates because AEWR is set based on the previous year's field and livestock workers' wage rates from the Farm Labor Survey. Therefore, the current year's labor market conditions can cause the non-H-2A wage rate to fluctuate, which can be higher or lower than AEWR. The US Department of Agriculture announced that it would discontinue the Farm Labor Survey wage rate to set AEWR (Garza, 2025).

Table 2 presents the AEWR for the top five states that employ guest workers. The AEWRs are the highest in California and Washington and the lowest in the three southeastern states. In all five states, AEWRs have increased on average by 20% annually, which is generally higher than wage increases for workers in

Figure 2: H-2A Workers' Employment in Various Sectors, 2022



Source: US Department of Labor (2025).

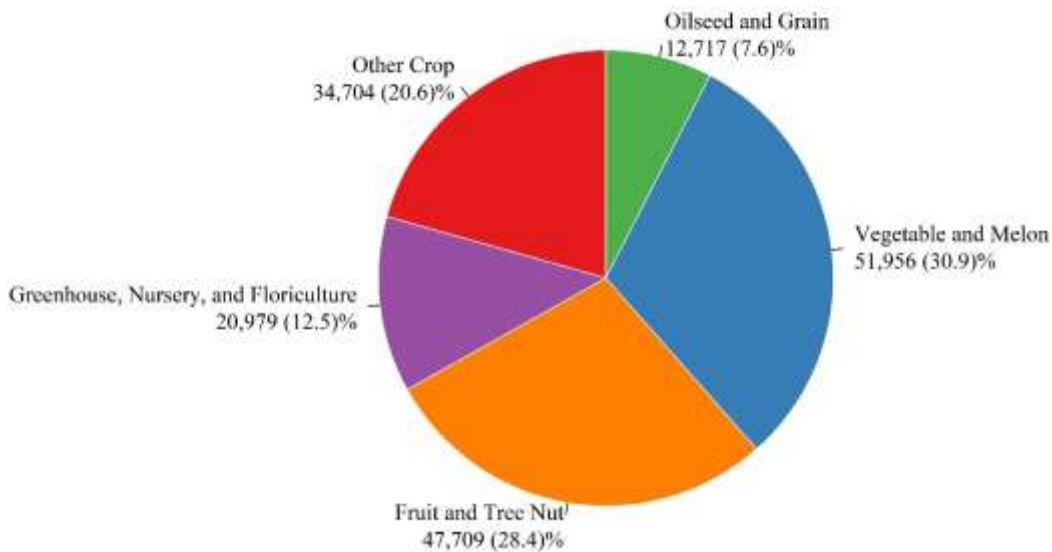
other sectors of the economy. This indicates the farm labor shortfalls (i.e., demand outpaces the available farm labor pool). AEWRs in California and Washington are generally higher (by 11%–21%) than those in the southeastern states because of the higher cost of living and greater demand for farm workers in these two states. Many farmers find that these large increases in wage rates are unsustainable, and they struggle to earn positive profits.

In addition to AEWR wage rates, employers must provide guest workers with round-trip transportation between the border/airport and the worksite, housing accommodations, transportation between the residence

and on-site work, and rides to grocery stores and religious services. These additional costs make H-2A workers more expensive than domestic or undocumented workers.

Table 3 compares the cost of employing an H-2A worker versus a native worker. Hiring an H-2A worker requires about \$2,000 for government and processing fees, transportation from the home country to the worksite, and housing in the US consulate (Castillo, Martin, and Rutledge, 2024). In addition, employers pay about \$10,000 for an H-2A worker for housing and transportation at the worksite. Employers do not have to incur these two costs for hiring domestic workers.

Figure 3: H-2A Workers' Employment in Crop Production, 2022



Source: US Department of Labor (2025).

Table 2. Adverse Effect Wage Rates (\$/hr) for Top 5 H-2A Employing States

	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	2024
California	5.90	6.24	7.27	8.56	10.25	11.33	14.77	19.97
Washington	5.42	6.41	7.64	9.03	10.85	12.42	15.83	19.82
Florida	5.16	6.33	7.25	8.07	9.20	10.19	11.71	16.23
North Carolina	4.33	5.50	6.98	8.24	9.59	10.32	12.67	16.16
Georgia	4.29	5.66	6.72	8.07	9.11	10.00	11.71	16.08

Sources: Whittaker (2008); Federal Register (2024) and various issues.

However, employers pay a payroll tax of about \$1,625 per year for a domestic worker, but not for employing an H-2A worker. Since the wage bill is about the same for both types of workers (\$16,250 for 125 days at the rate of \$130 per day), an H-2A worker costs about \$10,375 more than a domestic worker. Guest workers are generally younger and more productive than older native and undocumented workers, particularly for farm operations that require manual work (Rural Migration News, 2024a). Consequently, if a guest worker is about 20% more efficient than a native worker (Castillo, Martin, and Rutledge, 2024), the cost difference between guest workers and domestic workers narrows.

The advantage of employing an undocumented worker is that the employer does not incur the \$12,000 in procurement, housing, and transport, and possibly the payroll tax, incurred for the H-2A worker. In addition, the wage payments for an undocumented worker are lower than those of a guestworker or native workers. This emphasizes the underlying reason for employers to hire undocumented workers over the other two types of workers. However, since most new unauthorized workers seek nonfarm jobs in big cities, the demand for guest workers continues to rise.

Need for Improving the Guestworker Program

Two opposing views emerge in hiring H-2A workers (Önel and Farnsworth, 2016). Employers view the H-2A program as expensive and cumbersome, and they prefer a simplified, streamlined, and less expensive hiring process for these workers. By contrast, worker advocates call for stronger enforcement of recruitment, housing, and wage protections to prevent exploitation of guest workers.

From the employers' point of view, improving the operation of the H-2A program by simplifying the cumbersome paperwork and streamlining the recruitment process would help farmers hire adequate guest workers. In particular, farmers would like to lower the cost of employing H-2A workers by directly sponsoring visas, as in Canada, and not providing free housing and transportation or partial payments, as in Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom (Martin and Rutledge, 2025). Farmers also prefer guest workers to be employed year-round for several years, so that a stable labor supply is available for operations such as dairy farms. Worker advocates will not positively view many of the employers' preferences for hiring guest workers, particularly lower wage rates and not paying for housing and transportation.

Conclusions and Implications

Labor-intensive agriculture has experienced chronic labor scarcity, and many crops go unharvested (Devadoss and Luckstead, 2008; Luckstead and Devadoss, 2019). The immigration policies of Trump 2.0 are exacerbating this labor scarcity problem. If the Trump administration continues to deport undocumented farm workers, labor-intensive agriculture could face a serious labor shortfall, and, in the short run, farmers will likely have to rely on H-2A workers to complete their operations. President Trump himself asserted that he wants to help farmers by slowing down deportation (Madhani and Spagat, 2025), but the actions of ICE and other administration officials in June and July 2025 are counter to this sentiment (Nichols, 2025; Nobles, 2025). Furthermore, the guest-worker program is well-suited to the Trump administration's immigration policy of deporting undocumented workers and bringing them back legally to work in the United States (Gamboa, 2025).

Table 3. Cost of Employing an H-2A Versus a Domestic Worker

Expenses	H-2A Worker	Domestic Worker
Cost of procuring	\$2,000	\$0
Housing and transport at worksite	\$10,000	\$0
Wage bill for 125 days at \$130/day	\$16,250	\$16,250
Payroll taxes (at the rate of 10%)	\$0	\$1,625
Total cost	\$28,250	\$17,875

Source: Rural Migration News (2024b); Castillo, Martin, and Rutledge (2024).

With AEWG wages growing at about 20% a year and H-2A workers becoming unaffordable, the deportation of undocumented workers could increase labor costs. This higher cost could be passed on to consumers who are already beset with food price inflation. If fresh produce prices keep increasing sharply, more fruit and vegetable imports are likely (Naing, Devadoss, and Hi, Forthcoming).

A potentially long-term outcome is that farmers will need to mechanize (Bampasidou and Salassi, 2019; Önel et al., 2025) and adopt labor-saving technologies for weeding, pruning, and harvesting (Vougioukas et al., 2025; Karkee et al., 2025) to reduce labor costs (Charlton et al., 2025). While artificial intelligence may

increase the rate of innovation in these areas (Önel et al., 2025), if wages become too high without any new labor-saving technology, farmers may have to switch from more labor-intensive crops to less labor-intensive crops to reduce labor costs (Rural Migration News, 2024b).

Though immigration policy is a national issue, farmers and growers are heavily impacted by policies that restrict migrant workers. Therefore, immigration policy and the need for immigrant farm labor will continue to be at the forefront of public debate.

For More Information

- Bampasidou, M., and M.E. Salassi. 2019. "Trends in U.S. Farm Labor and H-2A Hired Labor: Policy and Related Issues." *Choices* 34(1):1-6. <https://doi.org/10.22004/ag.econ.287146>
- Castillo, M. 2024. "Legal Status of Hired Crop Farmworkers, Fiscal 1991–2022." USDA Economic Research Service. Available online: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/chart-gallery/chart-detail>
- Castillo, M., P. Martin, and Z. Rutledge. 2022. *The H-2A Temporary Agricultural Worker Program in 2020*. USDA Economic Research Service Economic Information Bulletin EIB-238.
- . 2024. "Whither the H-2A Visa Program: Expansion and Concentration." *Choices* 39(1). <https://doi.org/10.22004/ag.econ.344747>
- Charlton, D. 2024. "The Farm Workforce Modernization Act and Warnings from Previous Immigration Reforms." *Applied Economic Perspectives and Policy* 46(3):934–953. <https://doi.org/10.1002/aep.13458>
- Charlton, D., S. Devadoss, R.K. Gallardo, J. Luckstead, and S. Vougioukas. 2025. "Economic Viability of Robotic Fruit Harvesters to Reduce Large Seasonal Labor Demands: Analysis of Gala and Honeycrisp Apples." *Journal of the Agricultural and Applied Economics Association* 4(1): 70–87. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaa2.70000>
- Charlton, D., and J.E. Taylor. 2016. "A Declining Farm Workforce: Analysis of Panel Data from Rural Mexico." *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* 98(4):1158–1180. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ajae/aaw018>
- Clemens, M.A. 2013. "International Harvest: A Case Study of How Foreign Workers Help American Farms Grow Crops and the Economy." *Partnership for a New American Economy and the Center for Global Development*. Available online: <https://research.newamericaneconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/nc-agr-report-05-20131.pdf>
- Devadoss, S., and J. Luckstead. 2008. "Contributions of Immigrant Farmworkers to California Vegetable Production." *Journal of Agricultural and Applied Economics* 40(3):879–894. <https://doi.org/10.22004/ag.econ.47265>
- Escalante, C., and C. Taylor. 2024. "Protecting H-2A Worker's Rights and Welfare." *Choices* 39(1). <https://doi.org/10.22004/ag.econ.344741>
- Federal Register. 2024, December 16. *Notices*. 89(241): 101628. Access online: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2024-12-16/pdf/2024-29549.pdf> Various issues.
- Fung, W., K. Prado, A. Gold, A. Padovani, D. Carroll, and E. Finchum-Mason. 2023, September. "Findings from the National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS) 2021–2022 A Demographic and Employment Profile of United States Crop Workers" US Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration, Office of Policy Development and Research. Research Report No. 17.
- Gamboa, S. 2025, April 11. "Trump Floats Plan for Undocumented Farm and Hotel Workers to Work Legally in the U.S." *NBC News*. Available online: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/trumpfarmworkers-hotel-workers-undocumented-legal-rcna200722>
- Garza, F. 2025, September 17. "Farmworkers Already Face Harsh Conditions. Now They May Have to Deal with a Pay Cut." *Grist*. Available online: <https://grist.org/labor/farmworkers-face-harsh-conditions-now-theyre-eyeing-a-pay-cut/>
- Karkee, M., S. Vougioukas, S. Devadoss, and S. Bhusal. 2025. "Current Status of Mechanization in Fruit Production: Part II – Pruning and Thinning." *Choices* 40(2):10–15. <https://doi.org/10.22004/ag.econ.356843>.
- Kassel, K. 2023. "Agriculture and Its Related Industries Provide 10.4 Percent of U.S. Employment." USDA Economic Research Service, Macroeconomics & Agriculture. Available online: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/chart-gallery/chart-detail?chartId=58282>
- Luckstead, J., and S. Devadoss. 2019. "The Importance of H-2A Guest Workers in Agriculture." *Choices* 34(1):1–8. <https://doi.org/10.22004/ag.econ.287142>

- Madhani, A., and E. Spagat. 2025, June 14. "Trump Curbs Immigration Enforcement at Farms, Meatpacking Plants, Hotels and Restaurants." *Associated Press*. Available online: <https://apnews.com/article/trump-immigration-arrests-pause-hotels-restaurants-farms-aa8f503a8d6d797021a70601e6a1d918>
- Martin, P., and Z. Rutledge. 2025. "Trump 2.0 and Farm Labor." *Choices* 40(1):1–8. <https://doi.org/10.22004/ag.econ.352156>
- Naing, S., S. Devadoss, and X. Hi. 2025. "Fresh Vegetable Net Imports Deepen U.S. Agricultural Trade Deficit." *Choices*. Forthcoming.
- Nichols, A. 2025, July 11. "Trump Frantically Called Noem to Halt Deportations as Protests Raged: Insider." *RawStory*. Available online: <https://www.rawstory.com/noem-deportations-protests/>
- Nobles, R. 2025, July 15. "Bipartisan Duo Introduces Bill to Give Some Migrant Workers Protected Status amid Trump's Crackdown." *NBC News*. Available online: <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/congress/bipartisan-bill-migrant-workers-protected-status-trump-crackdown-rcna218755>
- Önel, G., F. Brito, J. Gars, and C. Mullally. 2025. "Sensing, Thinking, Doing: AI's Growing Role on the Farm—and What It Means for Farm Work." *Choices* 40(3):1–9. <https://doi.org/10.22004/ag.econ.362690>
- Önel, G., and D. Farnsworth. 2016. "Guest Workers: Past, Present and the Future." *Citrus Industry*. University of Florida, UF/IFAS Citrus Extension.
- Passel, J.S. and J.M. Krogstad. 2024, July 22. "What We Know About Unauthorized Immigrants Living in the U.S." *Short Reads*. Pew Research Center. Available online: <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/07/22/what-we-know-about-unauthorized-immigrants-living-in-the-us/>
- Pew Research Center. 2016. "U.S. Unauthorized Immigrant Population Estimates by State, 2016." *Research Topics*, Feature. Available online: <https://www.pewresearch.org/race-and-ethnicity/feature/u-s-unauthorized-immigrants-by-state/>
- Rosenbloom, R. 2022, August 30. "A Profile of Undocumented Agricultural Workers in the United States." *Center for Migration Studies*. Available online: https://cmsny.org/agricultural-workers-rosenbloom-083022/#_ftn3.
- Rural Migration News*. 2024a, July 16. "H-2A: New Worker Protections." Available online: <https://migration.ucdavis.edu/rmn/blog/post/?id=2952>
- . 2024b, January. "H-2As: 5 STATES had 50% H-2A Jobs in FY23." *Migration Dialogue*, Blog 340. Available online: <https://migrationfiles.ucdavis.edu/uploads/rmn/blog/2024/01/Rural%20Migration%20News%20Blog%20340.pdf>
- Rutledge, Z., M. Castillo, T.J. Richards, and P. Martin. 2025. "H-2A Adverse Effect Wage Rates and U.S. Farm Wages." *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*. Forthcoming. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajae.12557>
- Simnitt, S., and M. Castillo. 2025. "Labor Contractors in U.S. Agriculture: Recent Trends and H-2A Program Usage." *Applied Economics Perspectives and Policy* 47:1298–1322. <https://doi.org/10.1002/aapp.13534>
- US Citizenship and Immigration Services. 2025. "H-2A Temporary Agricultural Workers." Available online: <https://www.uscis.gov/working-in-the-united-states/temporary-workers/h-2a-temporary-agricultural-workers>
- US Department of Labor. 2025. "Performance Data." Foreign Labor Certification: OFLC. US Department of Labor. Available online: <https://www.foreignlaborcert.doleta.gov/performancecfm>
- US Department of State. 2025. "Nonimmigrant Visa Statistics." Available online: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/legal/visa-law0/visa-statistics/nonimmigrant-visa-statistics.html> [Accessed June 10, 2025]
- Vougioukas, S., M. Karkee, Devadoss, S., Gallardo, K., and D. Charlton. 2025. "Current Status of Mechanization in Fruit Production: Part I – Harvesting." *Choices* 40(2):3–9. <https://doi.org/10.22004/ag.econ.356842>

Whittaker, W.G. 2008, March 26. *Farm Labor: The Adverse Effect Wage Rate (AEWR)*. CRS Report for Congress RL32861.

Wei, X., B.L. Campbell, H. Khachatryan, and R.G. Brumfield. 2024. "H-2A Workers in Demand in the Ornamental Horticulture Industry." Food and Resource Economics Department, UF/IFAS Extension FE1141. <https://doi.org/10.32473/edis-FE1141-2024>

About the Authors: Stephen Devadoss is the Emabeth Thompson Endowed Professor with the Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics at Texas Tech University. Jeff Luckstead is the Distinguished Professor of Agricultural and Resource Economics with the School of Economic Sciences at Washington State University.

Acknowledgments: We appreciate the helpful comments of two reviewers.

©1999–2026 CHOICES. All rights reserved. Articles may be reproduced or electronically distributed as long as attribution to Choices and the Agricultural & Applied Economics Association is maintained. Choices subscriptions are free and can be obtained through <http://www.choicesmagazine.org>.



Breaking Down the Deportation Strategy: A Look at Policies, Costs, and Potential Consequences

Alejandro Gutiérrez-Li

JEL Classifications: J01, J21, J43, Q10

Keywords: Deportations, Immigration enforcement, Labor supply

DOI: 10.22004/ag.econ.371484

Curtailing the number of undocumented immigrants and reducing future inflows is the top priority of the second Trump administration. To achieve these goals, the government plans to ramp up mass deportations, deter individuals from illegally coming to the United States, and increase the costs of legal immigration. Deporting individuals is both financially and logistically costly, and different policies have been passed over the years to achieve such goal both at the federal and state levels, with different degrees of success. At the same time, many individuals without legal authorization in the United States have been living in the country for many years (or decades) and are part of local labor markets in sectors in which recruiting domestic workers has proven to be a challenge. If mass deportations are carried out, and no alternative sources of labor or production are afforded to employers, the impact on industries like agriculture, construction, restaurants, and hospitality could be substantial, adversely affecting the entire economy.

This article examines recent trends in repatriations across multiple administrations, the countries of origin of most deportees, and the main reasons for their removal. Subsequently, we analyze policies used in the last two decades to carry out enforcement at the federal level, together with examples of state-level additional measures that have been implemented across the country. Importantly, the number of unauthorized individuals and their labor supply are not influenced by single policies or the combination of them, but rather by the degree to which the plethora of policies is enforced. We highlight some actions that the current administration is taking to increase removals as well as the practical costs of carrying out a large-scale deportation effort. The effects on sectors historically reliant on undocumented labor, as well as the entire American economy, are discussed at the end.

Repatriations

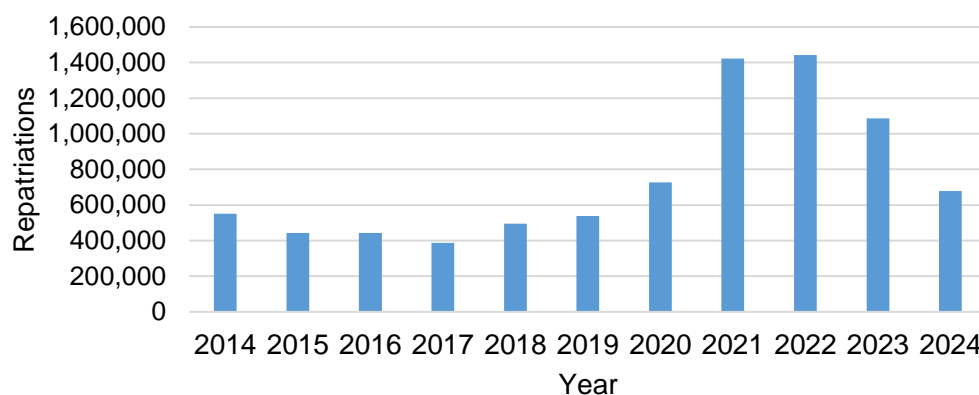
One key outcome associated with immigration enforcement is repatriation, defined as the process of sending a foreigner back to their country of origin or a third country.¹ Official statistics include, under this definition, administrative and enforcement returns, removals, and expulsions based on Title 42 (a temporary policy that allowed the government to quickly expel individuals based on health concerns during the COVID pandemic). In the last decade, more than 8,215,000 individuals were removed (Figure 1). During that time, repatriations peaked in 2022 thanks to a significant rise in expulsions based on Title 42. After the policy ended in 2023, the number of repatriations returned to comparable levels seen up to 2020.

In the last two decades, the overwhelming majority of deported individuals were from Mexico, the top source country of immigrants in the United States (Table 1), followed by citizens from the so-called “Northern Triangle” (Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador). Combined, individuals from these four countries represented close to 90% of all deportees, although citizens from 210 different nations were removed.

One argument traditionally used to politically justify stronger immigration enforcement and removals is that immigrants have high crime rates. As shown in Table 2, during 2003–2024, the most common reasons for deporting individuals were illegal entry, driving under the influence of alcohol, assault, traffic offenses, illegal reentry, and burglary. Approximately 50% of all deported individuals had no criminal conviction.

¹ If the individuals are forced out of the country (i.e. removed against their will), they are technically deported.

Figure 1. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Removals Nationwide, 2003–2024



Source: Data from the Office of the Homeland Security Statistics based on calendar year. Repatriations include Title 42 expulsions, administrative returns, enforcement returns, and removals. See the page below for the definitions of each category: <https://ohss.dhs.gov/topics/immigration/immigration-enforcement/monthly-tables> [Accessed October 18, 2025].

Immigration Enforcement Measures

Immigration enforcement has been implemented in the last two decades through multiple programs like Secure Communities, 287(g) agreements, E-Verify, and Omnibus Laws (Amuedo-Dorantes and Arenas-Arroyo, 2019). Secure Communities (SC) started in 2008 and was replaced by the Priority Enforcement Program (PEP) in 2014. The program was piloted during the George W. Bush Administration, and required agencies to establish concrete strategies for collecting biometric data of individuals who might be deemed a national security threat (Tokar, 2013). SC was based on information sharing, guaranteeing that fingerprints and other biometric data from detainees were checked with the Department of Homeland Security and the Federal Bureau of Investigation to assess whether individuals had prior criminal activity. SC entailed cooperation between local and state authorities and the federal

government. The program was rolled out in a staggered way all around the country. Data from the Transactional Records Access Clearing House at Syracuse University (TRACImmigration, 2025) show that, during 2009–2020, 761,509 individuals were removed nationwide through the Secure Communities Program (see Figure 2).² SC was discontinued by the Biden administration in 2021.

Most individuals removed under SC were located, not surprisingly, in states with large immigrant populations (Figure 3). Notably, almost 30% were found in Texas (225,739), followed by California (176,255), Arizona (58,709), and Florida (37,952). It is worth noting that, in each state, some localities or urban centers may decide to become “sanctuary cities,” which means that local authorities do not cooperate with the federal government in immigration enforcement actions. Such local rules tend to reduce the effectiveness of enforcement to different degrees.

Table 1. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Removals by Nationality: 2003-2024

Country	Removals
Mexico	3,373,405
Guatemala	649,935
Honduras	521,894
El Salvador	338,861
Dominican Republic	58,714
Brazil	58,663
Colombia	54,595
Ecuador	42,839
Nicaragua	34,352
Jamaica	23,839
Other	320,614
Total	5,477,711

Source: Data from TRACImmigration (2025). Title 42 removals are not included.

² The policy’s name was temporarily changed to the Priority Enforcement Program (PEP) from November 2014 to January 2017.

Cause	Total
No conviction	2,691,283
Illegal entry (INA SEC.101(a)(43)(O), 8USC1325 only)	499,021
Driving under the influence of liquor	255,903
Assault	171,077
Traffic offense	123,567
Illegal reentry (INA SEC.101(a)(43)(O), 8USC1326 only)	108,263
Burglary	83,174
Other	1,545,423
Total	5,477,711

Source: Data from TRACImmigration (2025).

Unlike SC, 287(g) agreements are of voluntary adoption. The programs were created in 1996 by the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act as an addition to Section 287(g) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), enacted in 1952, which explains their name (Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2025). The agreements give local and state law enforcement agents the power to exercise some immigration-related measures. Police officers operating in jurisdictions with a 287(g) agreement in place are allowed to interrogate and arrest immigrants without a warrant, jail individuals, and begin removal processes. As of February 2025, there were more than 150 287(g) agreements in place in counties in Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Kansas, Maryland, Massachusetts, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New York, North Carolina, South Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. About 140,000 individuals were removed from the country via 287(g) agreements between 2009 and 2024 (Figure 4).

E-Verify is an enforcement program of voluntary adoption by private employers and mandatory in most of the public sector. The program was created by the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act

(IIRIRA) of 1996 and was called the Basic Pilot Program until 2007 (Huang et al., 2022). In 2009 the government made E-Verify mandatory among federal contractors and subcontractors (Huang et al., 2022). It consists of online employment eligibility verification, by which employers check whether job applicants have work authorization by cross-checking information provided by the candidates with records from the Department of Homeland Security and the Social Security Administration. Prior versions of the Farm Workforce Modernization Act (a project to update farm labor rules, which has repeatedly failed to be passed into law) have included provisions to make E-Verify mandatory across all agricultural employers.

Omnibus laws are immigration enforcement measures taken at the state rather than the federal level. They usually grant officers the ability to ask individuals to show if they have legal status to be in the US and come in the form of single bills encompassing multiple provisions related to immigration (Anadón, 2023). The first such law was implemented in Arizona in 2010. More recently, Florida passed Bill 1718 into law. According to this piece of legislation, private businesses with 25 or more employees must implement E-Verify to screen all new workers. In addition, transporting undocumented immigrants and the use of false IDs to work became

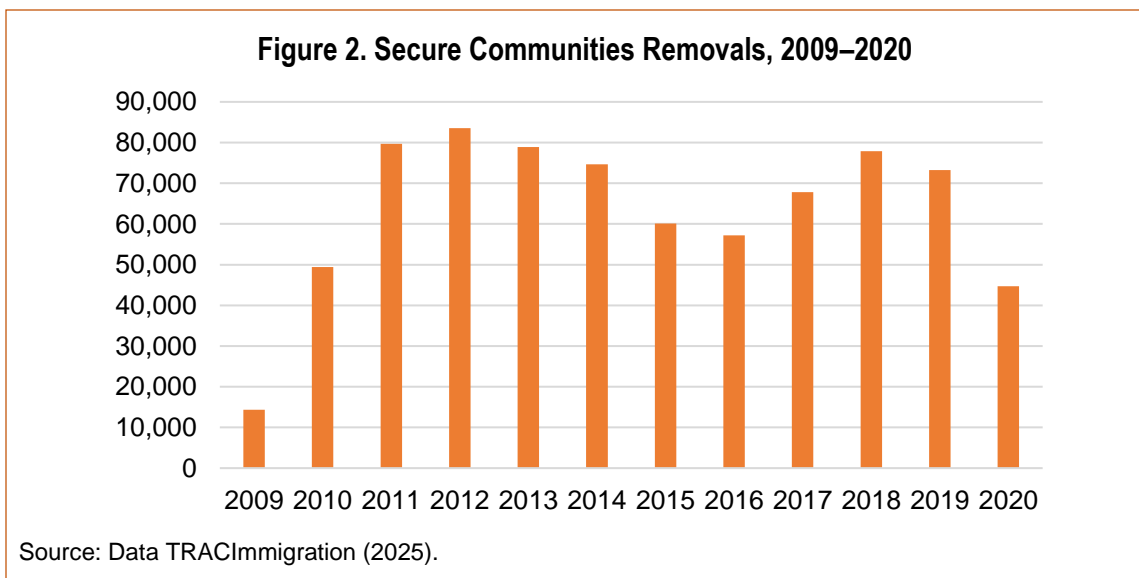
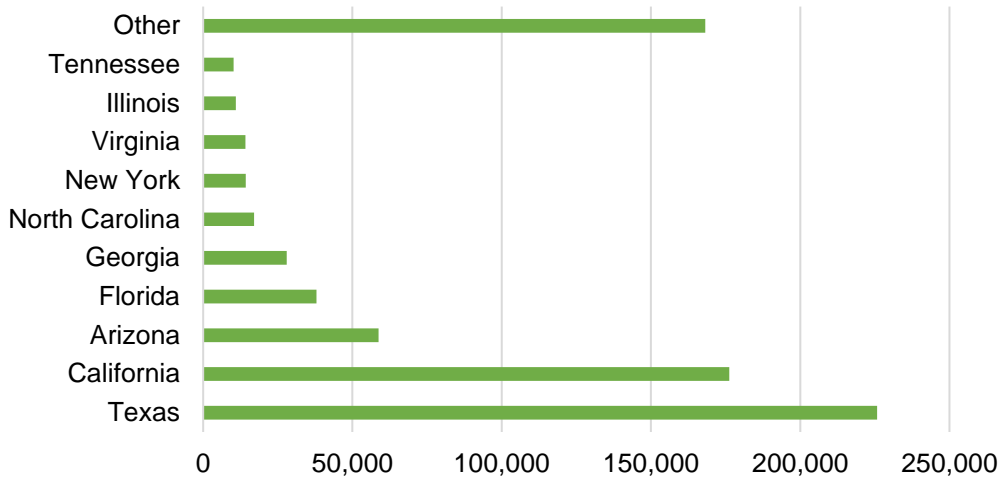


Figure 3. Top Ten States by Secure Communities Removals, 2009–2020

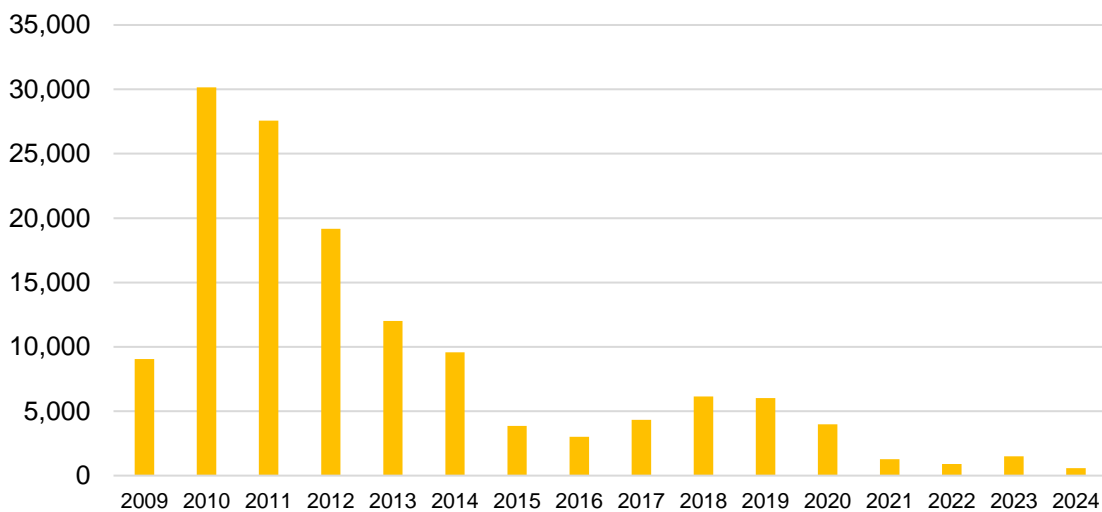


Source: Data from TRACImmigration (2025).

felonies. The law also punishes undocumented immigrants who drive with out-of-state licenses. Omnibus laws do not replace federal immigration regulations and can coexist with national-level policies. It is also worth mentioning that, in addition to immigration policies applicable nationwide or in individual states, other measures can be taken that indirectly end up impacting the stock and flow of immigrants into the United States. For example, during the COVID pandemic, the introduction of Title 42 stood out as a temporary measure put in place to quickly expel migrants encountered in states that border Mexico. The policy was in effect from March 21, 2020, to May 11, 2023,³ and was not designed as an immigration policy. Instead, the justification for its implementation was based on health-related concerns.

The adoption of policies like SC, 287(g) agreements, and E-Verify has been found to reduce the farm labor supply across the country and negatively impact the incomes of farmers (Kostandini et al., 2014; Luo and Kostandini, 2022; Luo, Konstandini, and Jordan, 2023). Similar effects are seen in other sectors heavily reliant on unauthorized labor, like construction and hospitality (Gutiérrez-Li, 2025). More generally, between 2020 and 2024, there were on average 352,000 deportations per year (Gelatt and Bush-Joseph, 2025), and the Trump administration wants to increase that number to 1 million. Given the limited amount of resources (budget, detention facilities, and officers) and their policy priorities, different administrations have shifted funds from interior to border enforcement (or vice versa) rather than addressing both at the same time.

Figure 4. 287(g) Program Removals, 2009–2024



Source: Data from TRACImmigration (2025).

³ Additional information on Title 42 removals and other enforcement policies can be found here:

<https://ohss.dhs.gov/topics/immigration/immigration-enforcement/monthly-tables>

Last, it is important to note that individuals' behavior is influenced by the combination of all policies in place. However, the key aspect people take into consideration is the degree to which they are enforced. Since major immigration enforcement programs generally require approval from Congress, the executive branch is somewhat bound by the existing policies. What matters in practice is whether and the extent to which policies are implemented. Gutiérrez-Li and Rubalcaba (2025) found that even in periods outside the activation of immigration enforcement policies, unexpected increases in enforcement intensity led to sharp, albeit temporary, reductions in the labor supply of farmworkers. According to the authors, above-normal levels of immigration-related arrests in a community can decrease labor force participation by as much as 3.2 percentage points and reduce weekly working hours by as much as 17% per month. Their results show that localized immigration enforcement exerts downward pressure on the agricultural labor supply even during periods when new policies are not being activated, especially in regions of the United States where labor-intensive agricultural production is widespread.

The policies explained above—SC, 287(g), and E-Verify, among others—have been used for many years to exercise immigration enforcement. In addition, the current administration has expanded its efforts to deport individuals by taking measures like allowing immigration agents to search and detain undocumented individuals in houses of worship, schools, hospitals, and other sensitive places (Bustillo, 2025). Likewise, the administration is taking efforts to force areas to eliminate sanctuary city policies (White House, 2025) and has built new prisons and detention facilities in states like Florida. Moreover, the government has announced the creation of a program for undocumented individuals to self-deport in exchange for a bonus or cash payment. According to the Department of Homeland Security, there will be a “historic opportunity for illegal aliens to receive cost-free travel, forgiveness of any failure to depart fines, and a \$1,000 exit bonus” to facilitate travel back to immigrants' countries of origin (or another country) through the CBP Home Mobile App (Department of Homeland Security, 2025).

Costs

Carrying out a major deportation effort involves two main types of costs. First, there are costs of production (CP), which refer to the negative impact of removing workers on production. In sectors like agriculture, reliance on undocumented workers is well known (Gutiérrez-Li, 2025; Hertz and Zahniser; Kostandini et al., 2014), as manual labor has become harder to find in some areas of the country. If employers in sectors in which domestic

workers are hard to recruit cannot automate their production processes or find other workers, production losses (like food rotting on farms or construction projects halting) are to be expected. Estimates of the impact of enforcement on key economic variables vary. However, several recent studies generally suggest negative effects. For example, according to the Budget Model at the University of Pennsylvania (<https://budgetmodel.wharton.upenn.edu>), mass deportations in the following four to ten years would lead to significant GDP losses (in the billions), wage reductions for both low- and high-skilled workers, and fewer jobs. Moreover, undocumented immigrants also pay taxes through their payroll and consumption within the United States, and their removal would translate into tax revenue losses. Similarly, a study from the Dallas Federal Reserve Bank (Orrenius et al., 2025) concludes that a reduction in net immigration to the United States will hamper GDP growth but could have a small impact on inflation, while researchers at the Peterson Institute for International Economics found, in addition, a negative association between deportations and employment (McKibbin, Hogan, and Noland, 2024).

The second main cost associated with enforcement relates to the actual financial burden of deporting individuals, including arresting and/or detaining migrants, processing them through the court systems, keeping them in jails, and their removal to their countries of origin or other nations via buses or flights. Providing a \$1,000 bonus and covering all the transportation costs for individuals to self-deport is potentially a cheaper option than forcibly removing them, but an onerous one in and of itself. The workforce needed at each of these steps includes ICE agents, security personnel, lawyers, judges, clerks, pilots, and police officers, among many others. Likewise, costs associated with deterrence and finishing the border wall are also considerable. US Immigration and Customs Enforcement does not currently have the personnel to carry out the ambitious goal of deporting millions of undocumented immigrants in the next few years. For this reason, the Department of Homeland Security is trying to rehire retired personnel by offering different perks, including \$50,000 signing and retention bonuses.⁴

Discussion and Concluding Remarks

Labor shortages have become a persistent challenge for sectors like agriculture, construction, health care, and hospitality, which have historically relied on undocumented workers (Gutiérrez-Li, 2025 and 2024a). Research has shown that, even in periods of crises and high unemployment, domestic workers are reluctant to take jobs in industries involving physically demanding tasks, like agriculture (Luckstead, Nayga, and Snell, 2022).

⁴ See this recent post found on the USA jobs website on August 8, 2025, for a Deportation Officer: <https://www.usajobs.gov/job/841738400>

In the context of a potential sharp increase in deportations, a significant reduction in the number of new illegal borders crossings, tightening of immigration enforcement in the interior, the end of programs allowing individuals from certain countries to live and work temporarily in the United States, a reduction in refugee admissions, a rise in self-deportations, and an increase in legal migration costs, the United States will likely experience a workforce contraction. Sectors already struggling to find workers could find themselves facing increased competition for a scarcer labor supply. In turn, this could push some companies out of business, lead to higher wage bills, and even result in temporary product and service shortages, as domestic production costs go up and the costs of imports rise due to tariffs and other barriers. New job creation and innovation could also be threatened if self-employed individuals are deported, as immigrants tend to be over-represented in the entrepreneurship sector (Gutiérrez-Li, 2024b).

While significant increases in labor costs will likely lead to disruptions and other challenges, long-run desirable changes could accelerate. First, investments in automation could increase. Secondly, artificial intelligence and other technologies could improve efficiency in production processes and reduce the need for manual, low-skilled labor, and at the same time foster demand for workers with a different skillset. Additionally, although unlikely, the exacerbation of labor shortages could open opportunities to pass immigration reforms, creating legal pathways to employ foreign workers in industries needing them in a more affordable way. In any case, the appetite for goods and services from industries currently employing undocumented workers is not expected to wane any time soon. On the contrary, the demand for fresh produce and housing is likely to rise with population and economic growth. Likewise, the aging of the current population will likely result in an increase in demand for healthcare services.

For More Information

- Amuedo-Dorantes, C., and E. Arenas-Arroyo. 2019. "Immigration Enforcement and Children's Living Arrangements." *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 38(1):11–40. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pam.22106>
- Anadón, I.J. 2023. The role of states in U.S. immigration: A study of population dynamics and subnational immigration laws. *Social Science Research*, 114, 102909. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2023.102909>
- Bustillo, X. 2025, January 20. "Trump Signs Sweeping Actions on Immigration and Border Security on Day 1." *NPR Politics*. Available online: <https://www.npr.org/2025/01/20/g-s1-43650/trump-inauguration-day-one-immigration>
- East, C.N., A.L. Hines, P. Luck, H. Mansour, and A. Velásquez. 2023. "The Labor Market Effects of Immigration Enforcement." *Journal of Labor Economics* 41(4):957–996. <https://doi.org/10.1086/721152>
- Gelatt, J., and K. Bush-Joseph. 2025, February. "Explainer: ICE Arrests and Deportations from the U.S. Interior." *Explainers*. Migration Policy Institute.
- Gutiérrez-Li, A. 2024a. *Feeding America: Feeding America: How Immigrants Sustain US Agriculture*. Rice University Baker Institute for Public Policy. <https://doi.org/10.25613/Z5BY-GZ22>
- Gutiérrez-Li, A. 2024b. "Home Country Work Experience and Immigrant Self-Employment in the United States." *International Migration Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01979183241262966>
- Gutiérrez-Li, A. 2025. "The Unseen Workforce: How Immigration Enforcement Could Shake the U.S. Economy." *Choices* 40(3):1–6. <https://doi.org/10.22004/ag.econ.362692>
- Gutiérrez-Li, A., and J. Rubalcaba. 2025. "The Effects of Ongoing Internal Immigration Enforcement on the U.S. Agricultural Labor." *Journal of the Agricultural and Applied Economics Association*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaa2.70026>
- Hertz, T., and S. Zahniser. 2013. "Is There a Farm Labor Shortage?" *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* 95(2):476–481. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ajae/aas090>
- Huang, K.M., D. Farnsworth, Z. Guan, and Y. Li. 2024. "E-Verify and Its Implications for U.S. Agriculture." *Choices* 39(1):1–10. <https://doi.org/10.22004/ag.econ.339723>
- Kostandini, G., E. Mykerezi, and C. Escalante. 2014. "The Impact of Immigration Enforcement on the U.S. Farming Sector." *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* 96(1):172–192. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ajae/aat081>
- Luckstead, J., R.M. Nayga Jr, and H. Snell. 2022. "U.S. Workers' Willingness to Accept Meatpacking Jobs Amid the Covid-19 Pandemic." *Journal of the Agricultural and Applied Economics Association* 1(1):47–60. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaa2.8>
- Luo, T., and G. Kostandini. 2022. "Stringent Immigration Enforcement and Responses of the Immigrant-Intensive Sector: Evidence from E-Verify Adoption in Arizona." *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* 104(4):1411–1434. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajae.12271>
- Luo, T., G. Kostandini, and J.L. Jordan. 2023. "Stringent Immigration Enforcement and the Farm Sector: Evidence from E-Verify Adoption Across States." *Applied Economic Perspectives and Policy* 45(2):1211–1232. <https://doi.org/10.1002/aapp.13269>
- University of Pennsylvania. 2025, July 28. "Mass Deportation of Unauthorized Immigrants: Fiscal and Economic Effects." Brief, Immigration. Budget Model.
- McKibbin, W., M. Hogan, and M. Noland. 2024. "Trump's Deportation Plan Would Cause Lower U.S. Employment and GDP Than Otherwise." *PIIE Charts*. Peterson Institute for International Economics.

- Orrenius, P.M., G. Ozor, M. Zavodny, and X. Zhou. 2025. "Declining Immigration Weighs on GDP Growth, with Little Impact on Inflation." Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas.
- TRACImmigration. "Immigration and Customs Enforcements Records Through July 2020." Transactional Records Access Clearing House at Syracuse University. Available online: <https://tracreports.org/phptools/immigration/secure/> [Accessed August 5, 2025]
- White House. 2025, April 28. "Fact Sheet: President Donald J. Trump Protects American Communities from Criminal Aliens." Available online: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/fact-sheets/2025/04/fact-sheet-president-donald-j-trump-protects-american-communities-from-criminal-aliens/>
- Tokar, E.L. 2013. "Unlocking Secure Communities: The Role of the Freedom of Information Act in the Department of Homeland Security's Secure Communities." *Legislation and Policy Brief* 5(1):103.
- US Department of Homeland Security. "CBP Home: Assistance to Voluntarily Self-Deport." Available online: <https://www.dhs.gov/cbphome> [Accessed August 2025]
- US Immigration and Customs Enforcement. "Partner with ICE Through the 287(g) Program." Available online: <https://www.ice.gov/287g> [Accessed October 2025]

About the Authors: Alejandro Gutiérrez-Li (alejandro-gli@ncsu.edu) is an Assistant Professor of Agricultural and Resource Economics at North Carolina State University.

Acknowledgments: The author has nothing to disclose.

©1999–2026 CHOICES. All rights reserved. Articles may be reproduced or electronically distributed as long as attribution to Choices and the Agricultural & Applied Economics Association is maintained. Choices subscriptions are free and can be obtained through <http://www.choicesmagazine.org>.

Economic Effects of Mass Deportations

Angel Aguiar and Stephen Devadoss

JEL Classifications: J21, J43, J61

Keywords: Deportation, Farm-labor shortages, H-2A workers, Undocumented workers

DOI: 10.22004/ag.econ.371485

Since taking office, the Trump administration has allocated more resources to the Department of Homeland Security to fulfill the campaign promise “to deport all immigrants in the US illegally over his four-year term” (Hesson and Hesson, 2024). Deporting all undocumented workers is difficult because many are employed in rural areas, and a network of employers, churches, and relatives may provide safe locations to avoid deportation. Public protests to these deportation policies, as evidenced by nationwide demonstrations in June 2025, are in support of undocumented workers, many of whom perform laborious jobs that many US citizens do not want to take on (Mukherjee and Krogstad, 2024; Devadoss and Luckstead, 2025b). In response to nationwide protests and well-publicized Immigration and Customs Enforcement raids, the presidential rhetoric has softened on deporting illegal migrants (Nichols, 2025). More recently, President Trump said he would let migrant workers stay on US farms and in the hotel industry (Reuters, 2025). In contrast, White House “border czar” Tom Homan noted that “work site enforcement operations are going to massively expand” (Meyersohn and Yurkevich, 2025).

Even though much of the deportation took place in big cities, a few highly publicized deportations of migrants in Omaha meat-packing plants and farm raids in California have undocumented workers on alert. Consequently, these raids have caused fear and anxiety among these workers, triggering workplace absenteeism (Arcand, 2025; Meyersohn and Yurkevich, 2025).

In view of these raids and increased workplace absenteeism, we consider a 50% deportation rate of unauthorized workers, which amounts to 3.83 million workers unable to come to work. Gutiérrez-Li (2025) notes that mass deportation could have significant consequences for the agriculture, construction, and hospitality sectors that have relied heavily on these workers. Because mass deportation would affect many sectors and reverberate to allied and subsidiary sectors of the US economy, a general equilibrium analysis is

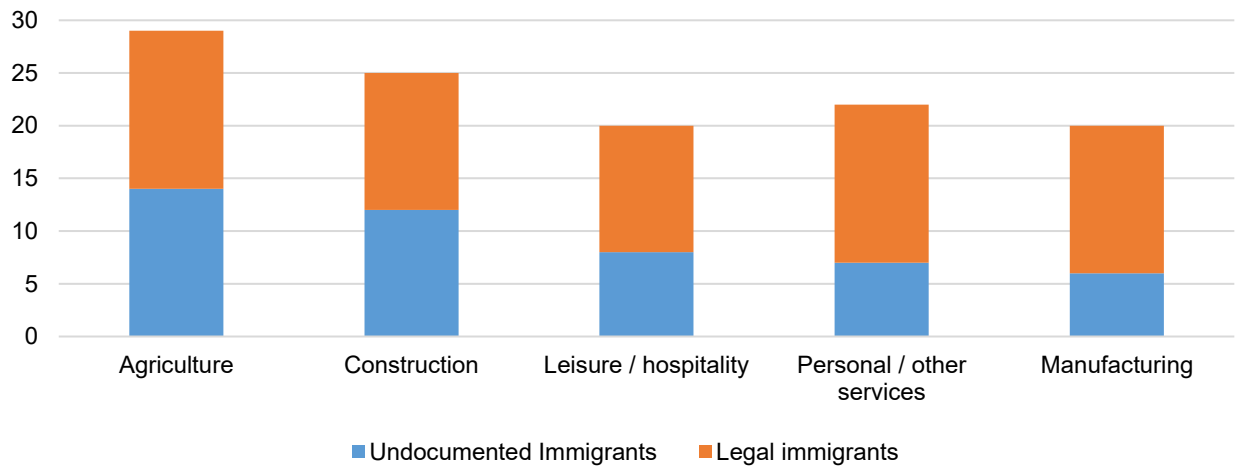
needed to determine the economy-wide impacts of this policy. Therefore, the goal of this article is to use a version of the GTAP (Global Trade Analysis Project) framework to quantify the impacts of Trump’s mass deportation policy on the US economy, with a focus on the agriculture sector.

GTAP Model

The GTAP framework considers a database and model of the world economy. Corong et al. (2017) introduce the latest changes to this multiregional model, where every country/region consists of multiple sectors, and countries are linked through bilateral trade. The GTAP model is an open-source model, and the database provides the country and sectoral dimensions and, more importantly, the initial baseline. For this study, we use the GTAP database version 11, which contains 141 countries and 65 sectors in each country. This snapshot of the world economy serves as the benchmark or initial equilibrium.

Aguiar et al. (2022) describe the many international inputs reconciled to compile the latest version of GTAP. The countries’ intersectoral relations in GTAP are calibrated using individual input-output tables (IOTs). In the GTAP database, macroeconomic data are used to update the IOTs, and balanced bilateral trade flows are used to connect countries, such that IOTs are adjusted to account for balanced trade and bilateral import tariffs and agricultural export subsidies. Domestic supports capture protection measures; agricultural and energy production values are accounted for to provide the best representation of the world economy for the reference year 2017. The standard assumptions include perfect competition and constant returns to scale. The production structure considers a combination of value-added and intermediate goods. Intermediate goods are differentiated between domestic and imported goods, and imported goods are differentiated by country of origin. It is in the value-added nesting that our model exploits the migration extension of GTAP (Walmsley, 2017). While in standard GTAP, all workers are assumed to be domestic, Aguiar and Walmsley (2025)

Figure 1. 2017 Share of Immigrants by Industry (as a percentage)



Source: Krogstad, Lopez, and Passel (2020).

identify the number of domestic and foreign workers in each of the 160 regions in GTAP. This extension differentiates domestic labor from foreign labor, and foreign labor is further differentiated by legal status. Following the methodology in Aguiar (2009), we calibrate the number of undocumented workers by industry using the estimates of Krogstad, Lopez, and Passel (2020), which match our reference year.

We use a 2017 reference year to model a recent policy scenario; though this is not ideal, it is the latest available data to calibrate our model. Since 2017, the single major event that has affected the world is the COVID-19 pandemic, and US unemployment reached its highest point in recent history at 15% but has returned to pre-pandemic levels and remains stable at around 4% (FRED, 2025). According to the USDA (2025), the size of the US agricultural workforce declined due to mechanization between 1950 and 1990, but has remained stable after 1990. Recently, the American Immigration Council (2024) has published shares of undocumented workers by industry based on the 2022 American Community Survey, consistent with the values we use.

Simulation Analysis

Because the exact number of the undocumented foreign-born population is not known, demographers use the residual method to estimate that between 10 million and 13 million undocumented immigrants reside in the United States. Since not all are of working age, we calibrate our model to the labor participation of the United States and follow the work published by The Pew Research Center, whose estimations are closer to the lower end of the undocumented population (see Krogstad, Lopez, and Passel, 2020). The Pew Research Center also provides information on the origin of undocumented migrants and on the distribution of undocumented workers in the United States across industries. According to Krogstad, Lopez, and Passel (2020), certain industries have a large share of undocumented workers in their labor force. Figure 1 shows that in 2017, agriculture and construction had the largest share of undocumented workers, but the total immigrant workforce did not exceed 30%. We use this employment information to calibrate our model (Aguiar and Devadoss, 2025).

Table 1. Real Output Changes (2017 USD, millions)

	Baseline	Updated	Percentage Change
Agriculture	465,471	459,874	-1.20%
Construction	1,535,424	1,509,531	-1.69%
Mining	523,914	521,538	-0.45%
Leisure/hospitality	1,223,362	1,202,166	-1.73%
Personal/other services	843,196	828,485	-1.74%
Manufacturing	6,521,504	6,429,932	-1.40%
Other services	22,172,314	21,915,154	-1.16%
GDP	19,479,580	19,241,184	-1.22%

Source: Author's results.

Table 2. Changes to Domestic Sales, Imports, and Exports (2017 USD, millions)

	Baseline	Percentage Change
Domestic sales		
Agriculture	387,814	-1.38%
Paddy rice	2,196	-1.35%
Cereal grains nec	49,620	-1.38%
Construction	1,532,073	-1.68%
Mining	465,634	-1.04%
Leisure /hospitality	1,107,773	-1.71%
Personal/other services	834,538	-1.74%
Manufacturing	5,205,155	-1.59%
Other services	21,563,859	-1.19%
Imports		
Agriculture	51,233	-0.95%
Paddy rice	2	-0.30%
Cereal grains nec	1,075	-0.99%
Construction	3,300	0.99%
Mining	161,578	-2.63%
Leisure /hospitality	97,455	-0.35%
Personal/other services	2,391	-0.29%
Manufacturing	2,120,636	-0.94%
Other services	447,811	-1.03%
Exports		
Agriculture	77,990	-0.33%
Paddy rice	442	1.04%
Cereal grains nec	11,614	0.16%
Construction	3,351	-4.37%
Mining	61,080	4.31%
Leisure /hospitality	115,589	-1.97%
Personal/other services	8,657	-2.28%
Manufacturing	1,352,658	-0.68%
Other services	596,399	1.97%

Source: Author's results. nec stands for "not elsewhere classified."

Results

Sectoral Output and GDP

In our scenario, we reduce the undocumented labor force by 50%, or 3.83 million, which will create a labor shortage and reduce production activities, leading to a decline in US gross domestic product (GDP) by 1.22%, or about \$237.65 billion. Overall, the effect of this deportation scenario is to reduce the output for all sectors (Table 1).

The estimated loss to GDP is consistent with the losses reported by other studies. Thierfelder, Robinson, and Hinojosa (2025) and McKibbin, Hogan, and Noland (2024) present larger GDP losses because they simulate that all undocumented workers will be repatriated; in the latter case, since they use a dynamic model, they find

that the US economy will follow a new path that is below the initial baseline. Edelberg et al. (2025) obtain smaller GDP losses using a model that is more detailed in their accounting of migration flows, as they estimate changes in net migration flows, considering inflows and outflows. Accounting for the inflow of migrants helps ameliorate the effects on GDP. It appears that the model used by Edelberg et al. (2025) does not account for the effects on other industries due to competition for the labor force as modeled by the current study and those by Thierfelder, Robinson, and Hinojosa (2025) and McKibbin, Hogan, and Noland (2024).

On aggregate, sectoral output is negative, where leisure and other personal services (which include those who work in private households)¹ endure the largest output reduction. Construction and agriculture also experience

¹ GTAP uses the International Standard Industrial Classification, where these services include Arts, entertainment and recreation; Other service activities; Activities

of households as employers; undifferentiated goods- and services-producing activities of households for own use.

large output reductions, which are affected not only by the loss of workers but also by the expected reallocation of resources. To compensate for the loss of workers, these sectors would have to hire workers from other sectors, putting pressure on wages and increasing the cost of production, which would lead to higher output prices. Increase in the labor costs is consistent with East et al. (2023), who examine the labor market effects of immigration enforcement and find that deportations would reduce the hourly wages of US-born individuals in the short term. This is not what we find in our model, which reflects medium- to long-term effects and considers additional factors of production.

Domestic Sales, Imports, and Exports

Given higher prices and a reduction in output, domestic sales and imports decrease. The domestic sales of personal services and leisure decrease the most, followed by construction and manufacturing (Table 2). Imports from mining and other services would decline the most. Imports are determined in the model by the level of substitution and price differentials. Although overall output declines, the reduction of domestic sales in certain sectors and price differentials across sectors provide opportunities for export growth. This is the case in mining, rice, and other cereals sectors; however, in overall agriculture, exports decrease as well.

Input Prices

The deportation policy causes labor shortages in many sectors of the economy. The model traces reallocation of resources (e.g., capital and workers of different skills) until the percentage changes in these input prices or rates of return are equalized. Producers expand the use of other inputs to compensate for the loss of these workers. The additional demand will increase the price of other inputs, causing an increase in the cost of production. We estimate a 1.36% increase in the real wage of low-skilled workers and a 0.6% increase for skilled workers because these workers are substitutes for undocumented workers to a certain degree. The higher wage rates in the United States due to deportation can have the unintended consequence of attracting foreign workers to illegally migrate to the United States (Devadoss and Luckstead, 2025; Thierfelder, Robinson, and Hinojosa, 2025). Given the reduction in production, other factor endowments (capital, land, and natural resources) experience their returns to decrease because these inputs are

complements to the undocumented workers. The results show that returns to capital decrease by 0.91% and land and natural resources by about 4%.

Contributions to Food Price Increases

Because of the reduction in undocumented workers, employers need to increase the demand for other workers. Given the low unemployment rate in the United States, the model is based on full employment, which means that employers compete for factors of production already employed in other industries. To attract workers into their industry, employers increase wages, which in turn raises the operating costs, leading to higher costs of production and subsequently prices of US goods, and thus exacerbating US inflation.

International Impacts of Mass Deportations

Our model tracks the relocation of migrants from the United States to their country of origin. Since most of the undocumented workers are from Mexico, the repatriation leads to more Mexican workers returning to their home country, implying an increase in the labor force in Mexico. With fewer migrants from Mexico in the United States, the remittances sent from the United States to Mexico after the deportation fall (Table 3). Total remittances from the United States decline by \$21.6 billion, the largest reduction in remittances to a single country is to Mexico (\$6.6 billion), followed by the remittances to the rest of the countries in the Americas (\$6.3 billion). If we combine the remainder of countries, excluding Mexico and the rest of the countries in the Americas, we find that remittances to the rest of the world drop by \$8.6 billion. Since the model captures changes in bilateral remittances, our simulation also reflects diminished remittances into the United States. The smaller changes are due to the influx of return migration, which reduces the wages in the home country, reducing the income and therefore the level of remittances.

Conclusion

A large-scale deportation of immigrant workers will lead to a decline in GDP. Because of the reduction in output, domestic sales and exports fall, and, to meet the shortages, imports increase. To mitigate the adverse impacts of the repatriation of migrant workers, the US government could expand its guest-worker programs (e.g., the H-2A), which is a temporary program for

Table 3. Change in Bilateral Remittances (USD, millions)

	US	Mexico	Rest of America	Rest of the World
US	0	-44	-5	0
Mexico	-6,630	0	-1	0
Rest of the Americas	-6,337	-4	-9	1
Rest of the world	-8,585	-18	-58	38

Source: Author's results.

seasonal work in agriculture (Devadoss and Gautam, 2025). Luckstead and Devadoss (2019) and Devadoss and Luckstead (2025a) provide details of this program that focuses on the agricultural industry. While expanding the H-2A program would also alleviate short-run labor shortages in agriculture, it is not available for nonseasonal sectors like dairy (Gutiérrez-Li, 2025).

Similarly, other industries are in need of workers, and temporary work programs could also address labor shortages in these industries. Congress must pass new regulations to satisfy the legal flow of workers for the US economy to grow.

For More Information

- Aguiar, A. 2009. "An Analysis of U.S. Immigration and Policy Reforms." PhD dissertation. Purdue University.
- Aguiar, A., M. Chepeliev, E. Corong, and D. van der Mensbrugghe. 2022. "The GTAP Database: Version 11." *Journal of Global Economic Analysis*, 7(2), 1-37. <https://doi.org/10.21642/JGEA.070201AF>
- Aguiar, A., and S. Devadoss 2025. "Effects of Mass Deportation of Undocumented Workers on the U.S. Agrifood Sector and Economy." *Journal of Agricultural and Resource Economics*. Forthcoming. <https://doi.org/10.22004/ag.econ.369147>
- Aguiar, A., and T. Walmsley. 2025. *GTAP-Migration (GMig2) for GTAP 11*. Purdue University, Global Trade Analysis Project (GTAP). <https://doi.org/10.21642/GTAP.RM38>
- American Immigration Council. 2024. *Mass Deportation: Devastating Costs to America, Its Budget and Economy*. <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/report/mass-deportation/>
- Arcand, C. 2025, July 1. "Trump's ICE Carveout for Farm, Hotel Workers Sparks GOP Backlash." *Fox News*. <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/critics-sound-off-against-trumps-temporary-pass-migrant-farm-hospitality-workers>.
- Corong, E.L., T.W. Hertel, R. McDougall, M.E. Tsigas, and D. van der Mensbrugghe. 2017. "The Standard GTAP Model, Version 7." *Journal of Global Economic Analysis* 2(1):1–119. <https://doi.org/10.21642/JGEA.020101AF>
- Devadoss, S., and U. Gautam 2025. "Implications of Mass Deportation for U.S. Vegetable Production." *Journal of Agricultural and Resource Economics*. Forthcoming. <https://doi.org/10.22004/ag.econ.369147>
- Devadoss, S., and J. Luckstead. 2025a. "Growth in H-2A Workers' Employment in U.S. Agriculture." *Choices*.41 (1).
- Devadoss, S. and J. Luckstead. 2025b. "Impacts of Deportation of Undocumented Workers on the Broiler Supply Chain." *Journal of Agricultural and Resource Economics*. Forthcoming. <https://doi.org/10.22004/ag.econ.364790>
- East C., A.L. Hines, P. Luck, H. Mansour, and A. Velásquez 2023. "The Labor Market Effects of Immigration Enforcement." *Journal of Labor Economics* 41(4):957–996. <https://doi.org/10.1086/721152>
- Edelberg, W., S. Veuger, and T. Watson. 2025. *Immigration Policy and Its Macroeconomic Effects in the Second Trump Administration*. American Enterprise Institute. Available online: <https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/immigration-policy-and-its-macroeconomic-effects-in-the-second-trump-administration/>
- Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. 2025, September. "Unemployment Rate." Available online: <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/UNRATE>
- Gutiérrez-Li A. 2025. "The Unseen Workforce: How Immigration Enforcement Could Shake the U.S. Economy." *Choices*, 40(3):1–6. <https://doi.org/10.22004/ag.econ.362692>
- Hesson, T., and T. Hesson. 2024, December 9. "Trump Aims to Deport All Immigrants in the US Illegally." *Reuters*. Available online: <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/trump-says-he-aims-deport-all-immigrants-us-illegally-2024-12-08/>
- Krogstad, J.M., M.H. Lopez, and J.S. Passel. 2020, June 10. "A Majority of Americans Say Immigrants Mostly Fill Jobs that U.S. Citizens Do Not Want." *Short Reads*. Pew Research Center. Available online: <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2020/06/10/a-majority-of-americans-say-immigrants-mostly-fill-jobs-u-s-citizens-do-not-want/>
- Luckstead, J., and S. Devadoss. 2019. "The Importance of H-2A Guest Workers in Agriculture." *Choices* 34(1):1–8. <https://doi.org/10.22004/ag.econ.287142>
- McKibbin, W., M. Hogan, and M. Noland. 2024. "The International Economic Implications of a Second Trump Presidency." Working Paper 20-24. Peterson Institute for International Economics.

- Meyersohn, N., and V. Yurkevich. 2025, June 14. "America's Migrant Workers Are Terrified to Work but Unable to Stay Home." *CNN Business*. Available online: <https://www.cnn.com/2025/06/13/business/ice-workplace-raids-home-depot>.
- Mukherjee, S., and J. Krogstad. 2024, October 21. "Most U.S. Voters Say Immigrants – No Matter Their Legal Status – Mostly Take Jobs That Citizens Don't Want." *Short Reads*. Pew Research Center. Available online: <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/10/21/most-us-voters-say-immigrants-no-matter-their-legal-status-mostly-take-jobs-citizens-dont-want/>
- Nichols, A. 2025, July 11. "Trump Frantically Called Noem to Halt Deportations as Protests Raged: Insider." *Raw Story*. Available online: <https://www.rawstory.com/noem-deportations-protests/>
- Passel, J., and J. Krogstad. 2024, July 22. "What We Know About Unauthorized Immigrants Living in the U.S." *Short Reads*. Pew Research Center. Available online: <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/07/22/what-we-know-about-unauthorized-immigrants-living-in-the-us/>
- Reuters. 2025, July 4. "Trump Says He Is Willing to Let Migrant Laborers Stay on US Farms." Available online: <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/trump-says-he-is-willing-let-migrant-laborers-stay-us-farms-2025-07-04/>
- Thierfelder, K., S. Robinson, and R. Hinojosa. 2025. "The Impact of US Deportation Policies on the US, Canadian, and Mexican Economies." *Journal of Policy Modeling* 47(3):746–767. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpolmod.2025.06.010>
- US Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service (USDA ERS). 2025. "Farm Labor." Available Online: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/farm-economy/farm-labor>
- Walmsley, T.L., L.A. Winters, and S. Ahmed. 2007. "Measuring the Impact of the Movement of Labor Using a Model of Bilateral Migration Flows." GTAP Technical Paper No. 28. Global Trade Analysis Project (GTAP), Purdue University Department of Agricultural Economics.

About the Authors: Angel Aguiar is the a Research Economist and Database Administrator with the Global Trade Analysis Project at the Department of Agricultural Economics at Purdue University. Stephen Devadoss is the Emabeth Thompson Endowed Professor with the Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics at Texas Tech University.

Acknowledgments: We thank the two reviewers for their useful comments.