

ing. For example, on one of the farms I visited, apple trees were planted only three feet apart, an economy of space that was unheard-of two decades ago. As a result, we can expect to see the continued alteration of the agricultural landscape as the land required for food production shrinks. "I've seen an increase in the number of new farms every year," observed a relatively new farmer, but he continued, "our impact on the land is another question because we don't take up the space that dairy farms do. Whether we'll be able to preserve open space in the Hudson Valley is a long shot."

Preserving open space and safeguarding working farms require different strategies that may be at odds with one another. A recurring topic among my interviewees was the high price of land, which is both a barrier to those who want to get into farming and an enticement for existing farm owners to sell to developers. One young farmer claimed that California's Napa Valley is the only other place where agricultural land is as expensive: "The soil is good here, but whether you want to put in a farm or build a house, it still goes for the same price." For this reason, conservation easements may keep farmland intact and prevent development, but they do not make land more available to farmers. Describing the challenges of farming on the "suburban frontier," one respondent bemoaned the estate buyers from New York City who were eager to preserve their open views, and who regularly leased sections of their land to garner agricultural discounts on their property taxes. Adamant that such practices would not save the region's farming, he declared, "We are creating a larger class of tenants and sharecroppers, and that's not right. I know that's our history in this country, but it doesn't get you to the best place for the land and food and agriculture." Some of these tenants are the new generation of younger farmers driven by the zeal of the food movement. And while leasing land does not carry the stigma that it did a century ago, the conundrum for the tenant farmer is the same as it once was: Do I invest in improving the land when my claim to it is so insecure?

The Workers

LABOR CONDITIONS, PATERNALISM,
AND IMMIGRANT STORIES

CHARMED AND PERSUADED BY THE aesthetics of agrarianism, food writers sustain the belief that local agricultural activity is superior in almost every respect to the industrial food system. Indeed, in this regard "local" is sold as a commodity, one laden with assumptions that often go unexamined. We want to see our local/small/family farmers as much more than merely businesspeople. We expect them to produce a range of diverse crops, to either practice organic farming or the safer use of chemicals,¹ to have fewer animals than CAFOs (Concentrated Animal Feed Operations), and to allow their animals to roam freely and graze on grass. Farmers should also be land stewards who sustain regional foodsheds. As for the farm products, we know they are much fresher (picked yesterday!) and tastier than those we purchase at the supermarket. Given the constant reinforcement of these benefits, it is easy to see how consumers conflate local, alternative, sustainable, and fair as a compendium of virtues against the demonized factory farm. Consumers cannot be faulted for this; they are simply mimicking the attitudes of food movement leaders like Michael Pollan, who argues that there are two essential categories of farming: industrial and pastoral. The latter, considered the source of all virtue, is referred to with the interchangeable terms "'organic,' 'local,' 'biological,' and 'beyond organic.'"² But where does farm labor fit into this division of good and evil?

Food writers do discuss the wages and conditions of farmworkers, but usually only in relation to the industrial food system. For example, in her memoir of her family's year of eating local, Barbara Kingsolver addresses the poor pay and conditions of U.S. farmworkers and cites their national average annual income of \$7,500.³ Clearly, readers are intended to be upset by this and feel grateful that local farms offer a more highly paid alternative. This fits

neatly with the idea that food ethics as championed by its leading proponents should include concern for the workers' conditions. A food ethic inclusive of labor concerns is also on display in the work of other popular food writers, such as Eric Schlosser, who excoriates the poor conditions of strawberry workers and meat-packing workers in industrial farms and meat-processing facilities.⁴

Since the general reader rarely gets to hear about labor conditions on local farms, what are the most important things to know? My analysis of Hudson Valley farms shows that many of the labor practices mimic those of the dominant food system. Additionally, these farms foster paternalism, a significant component of labor control that is unique to small-scale agriculture. There are in fact several overlapping factors that combine to create and sustain extreme vulnerability in the labor force. These factors help to explain why farmworkers largely accept, almost without questioning, the poor working and living conditions offered on the region's farms and why they do not organize to change their situations.

In this chapter I offer a picture of those regional conditions based upon the farmworkers' own words. Their testimony speaks to their immediate situation while invoking the historical and structural factors that have shaped and determined their livelihoods. To fill in the stories, I have added background on the regional labor market, a detailed analysis of work conditions, an account of the structure of this farm labor market, and a discussion of the intersection between immigration experiences and farmworkers' fears. I also explore the paternalistic price of proximity to explain common labor practices on regional farms.

BACKGROUND AND WORKER CONDITIONS

The average size of farms in the Hudson Valley is 143 acres, and in New York State it is 197 acres.⁵ The region has a concentration of fruit, vegetable, and horticultural (FVH) farms, with primarily seasonal jobs that tend to offer the poorest wages and working conditions. These jobs were traditionally filled by migrant workers.⁶ Many workers, including those I interviewed, were housed directly on the farms in "labor camps," a common term for housing created for farmworkers, such as trailers, barracks, or houses. The work performed by the farmworkers interviewed for this study includes a broad range of tasks: picking fruit, cutting vegetables, planting, packing,

hauling boxes, sod landscaping, managing other workers, and preparing food. However, the vast majority of workers interviewed—nearly 90 percent—were primarily engaged in planting, harvesting, and packing.⁷

The farm labor market in the Hudson Valley, and in New York in general, has changed significantly since the early 1980s. Farmworkers today are less likely to be migrants, and increasing numbers settle year-round in New York.⁸ Undocumented Latinos, mostly Mexicans, have largely replaced African American and Caribbean workers, who were the primary work force for the better part of the mid-twentieth century. In addition, workers today are largely undocumented, whereas before 1980 the majority were citizens or in possession of a green card. The Hudson Valley is unique in New York and among agriculture-intensive states for its lack of reliance on labor contractors, who act as middlemen for hiring, supervising, and paying workers.

Those who want to read about horrific labor exploitation will find examples in the pages that follow. My field research certainly turned up evidence of labor and human rights abuses, but my primary goal is not to offer an exposé of this wrongdoing. Instead, I aim to present a deeper, contextual analysis of the typical work experience of farmworkers on these local farms and the many factors that have shaped it. Violations of labor law were common, however, and I list some of them here to give a sense of their range and severity. In 1995, twenty-two duck workers were fired and evicted from their homes on a labor camp with the help of local police. A case brought by Farmworker Legal Services of New York on behalf of the workers led to their reinstatement in the jobs. In 1997, forty onion packers were unlawfully fired after requesting a pay raise. All except the worker spokesperson were hired back following a lawsuit. In 2002, four upstate New York farmworkers escaped from a labor camp where thirty workers were held in locked barracks at gunpoint and threatened with violence if they complained. The contractor overseeing the workers pleaded guilty to federal charges of forced labor and human trafficking. In 2003, cabbage workers were shot at while working in the fields. Two local teenagers with rifles were charged with the shooting. The charges were dropped in 2004 when the workers were out of state and not given appropriate notice to return in time for a hearing date. In 2004, a van accompanying a cross-state farmworker march with a "justice for farmworkers" banner in its window was shot at while it was parked overnight in a rural town.

Although such incidents are not everyday occurrences, news about them spreads fast and serves as a lesson to other workers. In this way, such abuses

helped to discipline workers who may have thought about taking steps to address their own concerns. On one farm I visited twelve workers had recently been let go; the rumor around the camp was that the workers had complained about their housing. Tellingly, the replacement workers were thought to be housed in a local motel, which bred resentment among those who continued to reside in the farm's labor camp. For the workers I spoke to, whether the rumor was truth, exaggeration, or fabrication was less important than their belief that the scenario was likely. Similar unverified stories came to me from workers on most farms. It was apparent that both truths and half-truths fed into workers' perceptions about how they might be treated themselves and contributed to their reluctance to challenge their employers.

In a more typical scenario, a woman engaged in apple packing, which is supposed to be easier than field work, told me, "You are dead by the end of the day; your arms and your feet ache because of standing all day." One field hand told me he thought dogs were treated better than he was; he then worried about telling me too much. Caveats like this were not uncommon, and many workers said they were reluctant to share stories about their work conditions. They commonly used phrases such as "I better not say" and expressed fear of getting in trouble. Repeatedly, however, I was informed that their work was very difficult, and the vast majority detailed how they suffered in particular from adverse weather conditions, as most were expected to work in both the rain and extreme heat. In terms of overall treatment, workers on about one-third of the farms I surveyed (32.2 percent) reported that they were not treated respectfully. Not a few described their harrowing treatment and compared their working conditions with those of slaves. Yet these were workers who returned year after year to toil on behalf of their disrespectful employers because job security and a guaranteed source of income outweighed all other concerns.

The average total annual income for workers surveyed was \$8,163 in 2001 and \$8,078 in 2002. These figures include wages from Hudson Valley farm work⁹ and, for 36 percent of respondents, additional income.¹⁰ This very low income level was well below the 2002 U.S. Federal Poverty Guidelines for a family of three (\$15,020).¹¹ When I interviewed workers again in 2008 and 2009, their wages were slightly higher. These findings correspond to other studies, such as the 2011 report on U.S. food workers, which found that 93 percent of agricultural workers interviewed earned a poverty or subminimum wage.¹² While the federal minimum wage in 2002 was \$5.15 an hour,

the average hourly rate for those interviewed was \$6.92, with almost half earning between \$6 and \$7 an hour.¹³ While 84 percent of workers expressed that they should be paid more, I was surprised by the modest amount they desired, on average \$8.53 an hour, with a range of \$6.50 to \$18.00. Farmworkers' indigence is perpetuated by the fact that agricultural employers are held to different labor standards than other employers; for instance, growers in New York State are exempt from paying overtime. In addition, farm work is seasonal, and so even if it is well paid in season, the net income over the course of a year does not compare well with other low-skilled jobs in the United States. With regard to pay, many workers told me that it simply was not possible to be paid more, nor were many comfortable asking for a raise. Workers and employers did tell me of situations where workers did ask for increased pay, and some received it, but I heard just as frequently that those who had asked for raises were told to leave if they were not satisfied.

Inconsistency was a perennial feature of these agricultural jobs. Workers reported fluctuations in the hours and days they worked from week to week. Although this is due to the fact that farm work is heavily dependent upon both seasonal demands and weather, such unpredictability also leads to economic instability. When asked how many hours they worked, more than half reported that their hours varied greatly, but the rough average for a typical week was forty-nine hours. Workers engaged in apple packing told me they regularly logged forty hours a week, whereas harvesters reported eighty- to ninety-hour workweeks for several months in a row. They told me they often worked from six in the morning until 10 or 11 at night, with a midday break to return home for lunch but little time for dinner, which was consumed in the fields. Not entirely believing this, I drove past the farm on several occasions to verify these work hours and indeed saw harvesters leaving the fields after dark and continuing to work in the packing house past 10 p.m. The farm's bookkeeper informed me that hours above fifty or so were not on the books and would never appear in official data. Overall, almost half of those I interviewed reported regularly working more than five days a week.¹⁴ Many workers—both field workers and those working as packers—reported being yelled at or rushed when on break while the American-born members of the labor force could take breaks whenever they wanted. There was a consensus that more breaks should be allowed when working in extreme heat.

When workers compared their situations to those of their native-born counterparts with manufacturing jobs or working as mechanics, they complained that they did not receive paid sick days. None of the workers I met

received paid sick days. Although the consensus was that employers were generally understanding when it came to employees needing time off when they were sick or had a family emergency, workers owned that they rarely missed work, and several mentioned that their boss would be annoyed or angry when anyone was too sick to show up. Again and again I heard about those who went to work with a fever or a severe cold. This corresponds with data that shows that 53 percent of U.S. food workers go to work ill.¹⁵ Workers also compared their situations to those of their white, U.S.-born coworkers, most of whom did not harvest or pack but worked as mechanics or tractor drivers or in similar positions. An apple packer mentioned that whites could go home without a problem if they were feeling even a little sick. One worker told me he lost his job when he hurt his back while an American coworker was allowed to return and take it easy after an injury. Guest workers reported that their peers had been sent to their home country after being injured on the job and had to fight to be reimbursed for medical expenses. Several workers reported that their boss paid for hospital bills only to deduct the money from their paychecks. No one was provided with health insurance, although low-cost clinics were available for farmworkers. Pesticide exposure was a widespread concern. One family described how they tried to stay in their trailer and kept their children inside for two days straight in order to avoid exposure after they noticed that the pesticides being sprayed in the fields made them feel weak.

Almost all the workers I met lived in farmer-provided housing, including some who lived rent-free, since, as they told me, it was very difficult to pay for nonfarm rental housing on their wages. In the labor camps I visited, the housing varied widely, ranging from trailers and cement-block barracks to large rooming houses, which were sometimes divided into apartments. Some were well maintained and offered ample space for dwellers, but many were run-down and crowded. The trailer of one guest worker was meticulously clean and boasted many comforts. In contrast, on a neighboring farm, a small two-bedroom trailer in disrepair housed eight workers and had four bare mattresses piled up in the living room. Some housing was entirely unadorned, with the most personal items on display the workers' discarded boots, while others had many personal touches, including posters, photographs, party favors from baptisms and *quinceañeras*, and an array of cooking utensils. In another trailer a worker had amassed an abundance of plants and a fish tank.

Securing adequate accommodations was an acute problem for most of my interviewees. Although 60 percent saw no need to change anything about their housing, this was not an indication that they had clean and well-kept

accommodations. Rather, it reflected their willingness to tolerate poor housing conditions: windows replaced with cardboard, missing screens, broken outdoor lights, mold in bathrooms and kitchens, peeling or missing flooring, and leaky roofs. Of course, their reluctance to complain could also be related to workers' expectations when they compared their New York housing to that in their home countries, but there, proper insulation from the cold was not a concern. In many instances I saw clearly inadequate shelter in which the occupants nonetheless insisted that they would "change nothing." In one case, where eight workers shared a room and slept on thin, bare, filthy mattresses, not one saw fit to complain. In another instance, workers did not even report that they lacked mattresses to sleep on, a detail that only surfaced after I pursued the topic. Apparently they were so afraid to ask their employer for beds that they opted to sleep on the floor. Reluctance to demand such basic necessities displayed the psychology of extreme compliance and sacrifice that is shaped by their situation.

Nonetheless, I encountered no end of ambivalence about whether their sacrifices were worth the wages and whether the economic benefits outweighed the social deficits. One apple packer attested to what he had gained and lost while employed as a farmhand. He explained, "I have built a house; well, I should say a mansion, because I made it to my liking. It cost me a lot of money, a lot of money. But it also cost me separation from my family, which is the thing I love the most." He was unable to live with his family in this mansion back in Mexico as long as he needed to work in the United States to earn money for their upkeep. Another pointed to the acute economic difference between the United States and their homes. "You can buy a blender here without even thinking about it, but in my country you would need to save for two or three weeks. Here, in one week, you can even save enough to buy a TV." (Not every interviewee reported having such surplus income since they sent such a large percentage of their wages home.) His coworker was equally conflicted, saying, "It's complicated. I know that I am better economically here, but we are so lonely, it is depressing," and he continued by describing feeling alienated from American culture.

More challenging than the work, without a doubt, was the workers' general sense of loneliness and separation from their families. Gloria, a twenty-two-year-old Guatemalan woman broke into tears while recalling how much she missed her home. She spoke to her mother often by telephone, but she said that she never related her sadness or complained about the work. Like others who downplayed their hardship, Gloria's overriding goal was to optimize her

income even as she was acutely aware of her meager earning potential.¹⁶ No one harbored illusions about the United States as a land of opportunity. As a former farmhand summarized it, “Everyone talks about the American dream, but for us it’s more of a nightmare.” When asked if they would want their children to follow them into farm work, workers answered with a resounding “no” in almost every case, and many remarked on the suffering they had endured. One apple picker asserted conclusively, “There is no future in the fields; there is only money.” And it did offer that. Ninety-five percent of the workers I interviewed sent money home, and two-thirds did so on a monthly basis or even more frequently. The average remittance was \$513 a month, a figure representing roughly one-half of an average worker’s monthly take-home pay.

STRUCTURE OF JOBS

Considering the nature of the tasks, the wages, the hours, and the seasonality of farm work, it should not be surprising that historically this sector has been the reserve of immigrants, whether European indentured servants, chattel slaves from Africa, refugees from economic and political violence, or immigrants seeking a better opportunity. Growers have also hired citizen workers, who have been marginalized socially and economically because of the poverty and institutionalized racism that comes with the job. Though the payrolls of some of the region’s farms include a few highly skilled workers and perhaps a farm manager employed at higher salaries, the vast majority of farmworkers have generally been wage laborers, employed for seasonal tasks such as harvesting. Consequently, the evolution of the farmworker job category has been shaped by the vulnerability of those who were hired to its ranks. However, to consider the reproduction of farm labor inequality as based solely on the prior poverty and the desperation of its prospective work force would be to ignore other factors, which include the labor laws governing farm work, the short-term nature of the work, rural isolation, the impact of guest worker programs, and the absence of union organization.

Excluded from Labor Laws

Farmworkers in most states, including New York, do not enjoy the same legal protections as most other workers.¹⁷ The exemption of the agricultural industry from New Deal labor legislation relegated farmworkers to a lower, separate

category of laborer and guaranteed that they would be much more vulnerable to exploitation than their waged counterparts in other industries. They were excluded from collective bargaining protections, overtime pay, and the right to a day of rest. Until 1999, New York’s farmhands were not covered by the state minimum wage but were subject to a different, lower standard. Moreover, child farmworkers do not have the same protections as children in other industries.¹⁸

In addition, smaller farms are held to lower labor standards. If a grower in New York has fewer than five workers on the clock, a portable toilet need not be supplied as long as workers have access to transportation to sanitation facilities. The rationale for these exceptions is that the costs of higher standards would put too large a financial burden on small farmers. The upshot is that the farms that are the most idealized by those in the food movement are not required to offer the same labor protections as larger enterprises in the industrial agricultural system.

The exemption of agricultural workers from labor laws dates to an era when the southern Democrats’ lock on national electoral politics was unsailable, resulting in white supremacist politics that assured the perpetuation of a low-wage, southern, black work force.¹⁹ The National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) of 1935, which established certain collective bargaining protections (such as requiring employers to recognize and negotiate with unions), did not include domestic and agricultural workers, because their work forces were predominantly black.²⁰ These workers were also left out of the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act, which instituted workplace practices such as the forty-hour workweek and a federal minimum wage.²¹ Orphaned from collective bargaining protections, farmworkers were unable to organize to counter the ill effects of the other legislative exclusions, including wage protections. The continuing legal neglect of agricultural laborers was a direct result of their lack of political power and the contrasting clout of farmers’ organizations.

It is important for those interested in ethical eating to understand that it is not only the violation of labor laws, but also, and perhaps more importantly, the institutional marginalization of agricultural workers—including the denial of basic labor and human rights—that reproduces their inequality in the workplace and confines them to substandard working conditions. Following the letter of the law can still result in extreme exploitation. Consider the field workers I met who logged ninety hours a week at fifty cents above the minimum wage, or the dairy worker who milked cows for sixteen hours a day, six days a week, at \$8 an hour. These were normal work regimes for months at a time, not the result of the pressures of harvest time for a few weeks. Workers

who raised the ducks for the prized delicacy foie gras told me that they clocked in for three four-hour shifts a day with four hours off in between; this schedule was repeated twenty-four hours a day for many weeks at a time. The result was a cycle of eighty-four-hour workweeks, with no time for prolonged sleep, and all of it at a flat pay rate without overtime compensation. Foie gras producers insisted that they needed one worker who was dedicated to the same ducks throughout the feeding cycle to limit the stress on the animal and assure the quality of the final product. The stress on the workers, however, who might go for months without more than a four-hour break and three and a half hours of sleep at a time, was considered secondary to the health of the ducks.

The plight of these workers was featured in a 2009 article by *New York Times* columnist Bob Herbert, who quoted the owner of Hudson Valley Foie Gras as saying about his employees, "This notion that they need to rest is completely futile. They don't like to rest. They want to work seven days." Herbert reported that a New York Farm Bureau spokesperson concurred.²² Among the flood of readers' comments was one particularly biting response: "One can't help observing how the owner and the Bureau have conspired to render silent the mouths of both the geese and their feeders—one genetically, the other by coercion."²³

Rural Isolation

Workers housed on or near farms generally found themselves in a state of isolation—both geographic and social—because they were confined to hidden labor camps without much access to transportation. Cloistered from the local communities, they were unlikely to have neighbors aside from the farmer's family. Studying the spatial distribution of Latinos in the United States, one scholar noted a trend in rural areas: Latinos are clustered with other Latinos on a local basis, but they are segregated from other racial and ethnic groups.²⁴ In addition, rural areas that have seen a recent surge in Latino populations do not have the well-entrenched support networks, services, and advocates found in traditional immigrant gateway cities.²⁵ The Latinos that I interviewed reported that the families and friends who helped them find jobs in the United States did offer them a community of peers, but this semblance of a social network also reinforced their isolation by separating them from their host communities.

Workers' isolation was exacerbated by their lack of access to transportation, a particular obstacle in rural locations where public transportation is

virtually nonexistent. Moreover, the vast majority were unable to obtain a driver's license legally due to their immigration status. Eighty-five percent of those in my study relied on their friends, family, employer, or a paid ride for their basic transportation needs. It was quite common for a grower or chief laborer to bring workers into the local town to shop for food, but this rarely happened more than once a week; weekly transportation is required on farms that hire H-2A guest workers but not on others. "A person who doesn't have a car is a person who doesn't have feet," according to two Columbia County migrant workers I spoke to. Their possession of a vehicle allowed them to travel from farm to farm along the East Coast each year, but they joked, "We only have licenses from God." Those who do have cars are pressured not to use them. Employers with whom I spoke had advised their workers to stay as close to the labor camp as possible. Although farmers were looking to protect their employees (and themselves) with this advice, it had the effect of further isolating new immigrants from local communities. One field hand reported that some states, such as Florida, would issue a license plate when a passport is presented as identification, but this was not allowed in New York. Despite the advantages they conferred, out-of-state plates attracted too much attention in the small towns of the Hudson Valley. This was certainly true for some of the farmhands I met, whose license plates were stolen from their cars and the inflammatory slogan "Immigrants Leave!" scrawled on their car windows.²⁶ When a repeat of this incident occurred, they contacted the police and found themselves under suspicion and fingerprinted—in essence, criminalized—even though they were reporting being victims of a crime.

Guest Workers: Taught to Be Quiet

New York has been employing foreign guest workers since World War II, primarily from Jamaica, but more recently from Mexico.²⁷ The state currently admits about three thousand foreign guest workers a year to work on farms. Before receiving approval to hire guest workers, an employer must demonstrate that no viable domestic workers are available; they do so by posting job listings in newspapers and on Internet job sites. Guest workers can be in the country for up to a year. To prevent unfair competition with domestic workers, the federal government sets an Adverse Effect Wage Rate (AEWR), which is higher than the federal or state minimum wage, often by several dollars; in 2012 the hourly AEWR for New York was \$10.56 for field workers.²⁸

Despite significant reforms in the structure of these programs, the guest workers I interviewed were in a particularly confined situation that has been described as state-sponsored quiescent labor,²⁹ and they had limited options for remedying their problems. Legally in the country on work visas that were tied to a specific workplace, they were not able to terminate employment with the same ease as undocumented workers, and their retention in contracted work largely depended on their employers' positive assessments. Consequently, they had less incentive to complain about their work situations. Moreover, the economic and supervisory relationship between employer and guest worker was more complicated than that between employer and undocumented worker. The country sending the guest worker has a high stake in providing "good" workers—defined by my interviewees as those who did not complain or ask questions—since the bureaucratic apparatus for supplying and monitoring workers generates revenue and provides jobs in the home country. Countries sending workers also have liaisons in the United States to monitor and help guest workers, yet my interviewees reported how the monitors had threatened not to readmit workers to the program by reminding them that others were standing in line for the opportunities. In addition, workers who became ill or injured, who asked for different job assignments, or who complained were likely to be marked as "problematic." A forty-something Jamaican guest worker who had been working in the United States since 1980 summarized how he and his coworkers dealt with problems on the job: "Sometimes we don't. We are taught to be quiet."³⁰

Among all my interviewees, Jamaican guest workers were by far the most cautious. Their responses were often as brief as possible, and some divulged that they could not comment on some of my questions because of fear of their bosses. The most common refrain among guest workers was that they had to follow the rules and do what they were told, whether it was in the contract or not. As Watson, a former guest worker, explained, "Most of the farmworkers that are on the contract don't want to speak to people." He and other former guest workers were much more open than those currently enrolled in the program. Indeed, during one interview Watson, who is now a U.S. citizen and employed on the same farm, kept interrupting to urge a guest worker to tell the truth and elaborate on his answers. As he later explained, "If the guest worker breaks the contract, they lose the job. Whereas I can tell the boss, 'Do it yourself.' Boss and I can get pissed at each other and later we break it down and we compromise. If the boss gets on my nerves, we joke. Guest workers can't do this." For Watson, the ability to disagree with the boss was a matter

of basic respect. Another former guest worker recounted that he had not been called back after he had questioned his benefits related to missing work for a week due to an injury. "If they find you are too sensible or too smart," he observed, "you don't have any chance on the contract, so you have to cover up your wisdom and your sensibility." Such comments reflected the pressure on guest workers to maintain good conduct, but they also spoke to the institutionalized modes of controlling and disciplining the workers' emotions, intelligence, and opportunities to communicate.

Union Neglect

One structural factor that inhibits collective action among the state's farmworkers is the absence of union organizing efforts. Despite the high visibility of West Coast organizing efforts by the United Farm Workers of America, as well as the more recent Coalition of Immokalee Workers in Florida, the primary channel for low-wage worker dissent—the labor union—has been mostly inaccessible to farmworkers.³¹ From the union perspective, organizing such workers is logistically difficult and expensive, particularly when they do not even have collective bargaining protections. The strategic obstacles to organizing farmworkers were intensified in states like New York, where the growing season is short, farms hire comparatively few workers, and geographic dispersion hinders worker solidarity. Even where high concentrations of workers and longer growing seasons exist, such as in California, unionization was deterred due to a surplus of agricultural workers, fiercely antiunion growers, and the influence of coordinated farm owners on rural representatives in the state legislature. This created a significant twentieth-century division between field and factory, with agricultural workers trapped in a state of extreme disadvantage, and urban industrial workers' conditions and wages improving over time. The disparity only intensified as the gap between them in skill level, job security, union attention, organizing successes, and legal protections grew. Until the mid-twentieth century, most unions identified agricultural workers as unorganizable.³²

PATERNALISM: THE PRICE OF PROXIMITY

For the most part, the circumstances of Hudson Valley farmworkers directly mirror the circumstances of low-wage immigrant workers around the United

States, including those on corporate industrial commodity farms. However, one aspect that is different is the paternalism that thrives on the small family farm as a primary mode of worker control. I argue that this paternalism stems from the intimacy between workers and employers on smaller farms, resulting in a "price of proximity" for the farmhands. Workplace paternalism by employers can be understood as an intimate but extremely hierarchical relationship in which the employer's control extends into workers' everyday lives, affecting even their personal and recreational habits.³³ In a paternalistic setting, employers typically extend benefits to workers in return for good behavior and loyalty.³⁴ Such benefits revolve around individuated relationships that address workers' material and psychological needs.³⁵ On the small family farms I surveyed, the system of paternalism was relatively complex: there were varying degrees of benefits, which resulted in different levels of involvement in and control over worker habits and behavior.

These benefits extended far beyond the work contract and could include material perks such as free farm products, as well as occasional help, for example, in resolving a problem facing workers' children. More significant assistance might include helping a worker secure a green card or offering protection from immigration officials. The benefits to workers were irredeemably disproportionate to what they might provide for themselves, meaning that employees were not in a position to reciprocate, and the disparity in power that is bolstered by such benefits helped to create and reinforce quiescence within the work force.³⁶ Workers are encouraged to develop an image of a benevolent boss and reciprocate in the only way they can: with good behavior in the workplace. This results in worker loyalty and ultimately minimizes labor costs.³⁷ Conversely, workers who do not deliver good behavior might find themselves ineligible for such benefits.

The most prominent examples of paternalistic employer relations in the United States date to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when methods for controlling free black workers, the poor, and new immigrants evolved on southern farms and in southern mill towns. These specific systems of planter and industrial paternalism no longer exist. After World War II, machines not only replaced workers, but they also standardized agricultural production in a way that served to discipline workers.³⁸ Mill town work culture was dismantled due to the pressures of modernization, and was replaced by rationalized industrial practices that could better compete in the growing international market.³⁹ Yet remnants of paternalism are still in place and have taken on a more contemporary form: while planter control was based on

racialized inequality, and that of the mill owners was founded on workers' poverty, today legal status plays the most important role in reinforcing the hierarchies between bosses and workers.

Additional factors feed into paternalism. Because this kind of relationship draws on their personal knowledge about individual workers, employers need to know the first names of their employees and have some intimacy with the details of their lives.⁴⁰ Workers must perceive the employer as having authority or esteem beyond just ownership of the means of production.⁴¹ For Hudson Valley farmworkers, status factors such as national origin, citizenship status, social class, level of formal education, language spoken, and skin tone played a determining role in the dynamics between workers and their white employers. Inequality resulting from these factors was further exacerbated by the disparity in levels of "membership" workers could hold in both their communities and the political system as a whole; furthermore, workers' limitations in these areas often directly coincided with race in mostly white rural towns.⁴² Paternalism typically thrives when the jobs on offer are a significant step up from what workers previously held. In this sense, the nineteenth-century mill owner would be perceived as rescuing his employees from more vulnerable positions and offering a "path toward economic and social stability."⁴³ Similarly, today's Hudson Valley farm jobs offer relatively valuable income opportunities to poor, low-skilled immigrant workers, most of whom have limited formal education, to support their families in a way not feasible if they had stayed in their home countries.

Conditions for paternalism were especially ripe on Hudson Valley farms. First, hand labor is the norm, and so the workplace entails close management of manual labor tasks. The harvesting of easily bruised fruits and vegetables is traditionally difficult to mechanize, and when machines do exist the price can be beyond the budget of the region's farms. Nor are there one-size-fits-all harvesters suitable for farms with diverse crops. Contrast a farm with diverse crops, for example, with a monocrop farm in California's Central Valley that makes use of mechanical harvesters to help process six million pounds of carrots daily.⁴⁴ Second, grower paternalism relies on intimate personal relationships. All of the farmers I interviewed were directly involved in managing their workers and knew them all individually. In the Hudson Valley there is an absence of farm labor contractors, or middlemen who mediate labor relations for farmers, including doling out responsibilities and pay to workers. They are more common on the larger farms in Western New York and on industrial commodity farms around the United States. Without contractors

or middle management, the farmers give more personal attention to employees and can be more sympathetic to their daily situations.⁴⁵ Third, as the business literature on small firms highlights, paternalistic labor relations are common in family enterprises.⁴⁶ Small family businesses usually do not have middle management, and on farms in particular the vast majority of employees are wage laborers.⁴⁷

In the Hudson Valley, which is increasingly a regional agricultural system that feeds local food markets, the intimacy of employer-employee relationships creates for the workers what I call a “price of proximity” that makes them vulnerable to labor control. The consequence of this price is the reinforcement of paternalistic power disparities between workers and farmers and a labor regime that serves to deter collective action. Is this the same personal attention in the workplace that is promoted by food writers as integral to the virtues of local food? In many respects, yes, and it bolsters a type of labor control that is less likely to exist when the farmers do not have a direct role in supervising workers. The hands-on contact with and care in producing food that is the stock-in-trade of the farmers’ market and the foodie magazines translates directly into labor paternalism in the fields.

Since place functions to communicate social identity, control over employee housing is another key element of the labor regime. When an employer is in a position to regulate both their employees’ work and home, paternalism is an even stronger force. On the one hand, offering free housing to workers, permitting their nonworking family members to live on the farm, and allowing workers to use grower-owned vehicles for transportation can be perceived as beneficial. On the other hand, such practices directly reinforce power hierarchies, impede collective dissent and action, and generate new kinds of inequality.⁴⁸

For farmworkers who lived in labor camps there was an implicit and explicit understanding of employer involvement, not only in the employees’ work lives, but in their personal and recreational habits as well. Social life usually took place on the farm premises, where, on Friday or Saturday evenings, it was common to see workers gathered around cases of beer piled high. Soccer matches were an occasion for socializing, and more than one farm I visited had a regulation-size soccer field. The intimacy established between workers and employers in this environment creates a relationship in which the latter has much more control over workers than they would if the workers lived off the farm. Like live-in domestic workers, employees were on call at all times.

The proximity of work and home also has radical consequences for workers’ identity and for their economic and social opportunities. Labor camps highlight the power structure of the agricultural industry. Located on farm property, the camps were highly segregated spaces that rendered the outside world all but inaccessible. The degree of isolation is not unlike the experiences of those in inner-city ghettos who have little contact with other social groups.⁴⁹ In addition, most farmworkers were newcomers to the United States with significant language barriers, and so they were cautious about interacting with the public. Employers often discouraged their workers from taking trips off the farm in the name of protecting them, but this only reinforced their isolation from local communities and solidified their dependence. Workers’ missed opportunities were extensive, ranging from access to local amenities and knowledge that could be gained from media and community bulletin boards to social capital from making contact with others. In addition, farmworkers received little local media coverage, especially in comparison with the farmers who employed them. Self-empowerment through networking, collective action opportunities, or political action was generally closed off for those who could not move freely beyond the orbit of the camps. The wife of one farmworker told me that she left the farm only to clean houses and visit the grocery store, and her children left only to attend school. Although her husband owned a pickup truck that he drove around the farm, he rarely took his family anywhere because he did not have a driver’s license and did not want to put his family at risk.

In a more subtle manner, housing reinforces social rank through the quality of the home interior and exterior⁵⁰ and through landscaping in the neighborhood⁵¹ or urban setting.⁵² The hierarchy that existed between growers and workers was not only based on their respective status as boss/worker and owner/tenant, but it was also reinforced by poverty (the average hourly rate for those interviewed was \$6.92), legal status (71 percent were undocumented and 21 percent were guest workers), race (99 percent were foreign born), education (the average grade completed was sixth), literacy (80 percent reported they could read and write but demonstrated very low literacy), and proficiency in English (for Latin American-born workers, the average self-reported English-language level was 1.2 on a scale of 0 to 5).

In contrast with their workers, New York growers were usually white, land-owning, educated citizens. The attendant power differential between the two groups was embodied in their respective domiciles. For example, one orchardist’s two-story brick house, which housed her single family, was

located close to farmworkers' trailers, some of which housed up to eight workers in two bedrooms. A material symbol of their power, the employers' homes, although not on the scale of southern planters' mansions, were almost always much larger and of a much superior quality to what was provided for workers. Farmers also understood that labor camps could sequester workers from a community that does not want to see them. "Having them down the lane keeps them out of people's faces," observed a Dutchess County farmer, who added, "it keeps them quiet." Trying to picture his workers living on the town's main street, he remarked, "I think people would frown upon it."

For employees whose housing was tied to their jobs, labor control also extended to nonwork locations and hours. The relationship embodied in the labor camp was one of dependence on the employer, not only for shelter, but also for safety. This holds true for most workers whose housing is tied to their jobs, but it is heightened when workers' families live with them in grower-owned housing. Almost a third of my interviewees had wives who lived with them, and more than a fifth lived with their children. Although a grower may be driven by moral sentiment in permitting families to live in the labor camp, for the worker, the need to keep his job affected the housing and livelihood of his entire family, including child care or schooling. So although families were somewhat more expensive and inconvenient for employers to accommodate, the workers' dependence on the farmers resulting from their family obligations was exploited in a way that was not the case for single males. Though most of my interviewees were grateful for free or low-cost housing, they acknowledged that the circumstances made it difficult for them to consider living off the farm, no matter how uncomfortable they might be. The prospect of paying market-priced rent was a huge deterrent, as was the difficulty of obtaining references, credit, or funds for a security deposit.

Although employers were required to supply housing and transportation for guest workers—the most basic subsistence benefits offered through paternalism—the same was not true for other workers, for whom such benefits were rarely formalized in writing. The majority of my interviewees lived in free housing, but most of these arrangements were casual and could change at a moment's notice. On one farm I visited the workers' rent had been increased midseason, while on others workers had been required to pay for benefits that were previously free, such as electricity, heat, and telephone and television services, with little warning of the change and no opportunity to contest the additional costs. Another benefit that was not formalized was ready access to farm produce, though, again, this perk could be withdrawn at

the whim of the employer. Much rarer was the farmer who had allowed workers to create a chapel, which was visited weekly by a priest.

Employer-employee intimacy meant that growers often helped workers with their problems, most of them related to money or other resource shortages. This assistance comprised the second, more significant layer of benefits, beyond basic subsistence, that could be supplied through paternalism. Several workers told me that they had received advances on their salaries to help with family emergencies. One farmer paid the round-trip airfare for his Jamaican guest worker to return home for his mother's funeral (the worker reported that the contract had no system in place for such family issues, which he thought was unfair). Another boss helped secure a place and a scholarship at a private school for his farmworkers' child who was being bullied in the local public school. Other examples included helping workers obtain the cheapest flights home, responding to a complaint from a local bar about drunken workers, developing an insider relationship with local police to ensure immunity for minor traffic infractions, and holding a job for a favored worker when he returned home for a year. All of these actions by Hudson Valley farmers are examples of the paternalist employer who is in a position to "help," and there was no shortage of testimony from employees about how they felt indebted for the assistance.

An even higher level of benefits was promised to some of the undocumented workers. Many had been promised assistance in securing visas. I heard of one case in which a green card was successfully procured and another in which previously undocumented workers returned as guest workers. News about these cases traveled far and wide, and they gave (mostly false) hope to other undocumented workers. Employees also saw farmers as their protectors, especially in the face of hostile community members. In this regard, being cloistered in the labor camp was perceived as a clear advantage. Another significant benefit that a farmer mentioned was the possibility of selling the farm to some of his favored workers, a proposal that he had discussed with them. Offers and protections such as these comprised a third layer of paternalistic benefits.

Paternalism also allowed farmers to manipulate the loyalty of their workers. On one Hudson Valley farm, the grower was in the red and uncertain he would survive the season. He had discussed the situation with the workers, who agreed to defer receiving wages until the farm was able to support them. This particular farm owner otherwise seemed to be generous in his treatment of these year-round workers, paying year-end bonuses, for example. However,

he crossed a line (and violated the law) by asking wage laborers to forgo their earnings for the good of the enterprise. This conundrum was further illustrated by a full-time orchard worker who, when I asked how he would resolve a particular problem with the boss, said, "Honestly, I wouldn't know what to do, because the boss is a good person and gives us a home and doesn't charge us rent."

Paternalism, of course, is based on a system of punishments as well as benefits. Workers told me that those who were not wholly compliant with management might be offered fewer hours, assigned to more arduous tasks, or be denied raises when others received them. I was told that when pay was dependent on piecework rather than an hourly rate, growers penalized less favored workers by giving them less productive tasks, for example by assigning them apple trees that had already been picked over a few times.

When a grower went the extra mile for an employee, was it an act of goodwill or an expression of labor control? In reality, there was no way of separating these intentions. Many farmers cared about their workers on a personal level, and they recounted specific examples of how they had tried to improve the quality of life of their workers, especially when they faced personal hardships. Farmers appeared to be earnestly proud of the opportunities their jobs offered to those who were so poor. I had no reason to doubt these sentiments, any more than the workers themselves who believed in the authenticity of their employers' concern. But this species of benevolence is inseparable from the exercise of labor control by nature of the employment relationship, and, when all is said and done, paternalism serves to benefit the farmers' businesses. Take, for example, the farmer who was aware that community members looked at his workers with suspicion. He explained that he coached his workers to drive slowly and be respectful in stores and urged them not to cause trouble. As he put it to me, "I've got to be careful. I don't want them to have any problems, and I don't need to lose a work force." In this comment, his concern for both his workers and his business was equal and almost indistinct.

Arguably, the key to understanding labor paternalism is analyzing why workers seem to consent to such relationships. One of the arguments of this book is that farmworker inequality is a long-standing structural component of the agricultural sector. Growers reinforced this inequality through hiring practices when they favored vulnerable workers who would not complain. A second factor is that workers had already risked so much to find these jobs. Consider how much workers had at stake. One Salvadoran woman borrowed \$10,000 to get to New York in 2000; a Guatemalan reported the transit cost

at \$5,000 in 1999, and by 2008 it was \$7,000. In 2007 the going price for the short trip across the Mexico–United States border was between \$1,500 and \$3,000, not including the next leg of travel to New York. Many of these immigrants had borrowed, scrimped, and sacrificed to get to New York in the first place, and as a result they felt responsible not only for respecting the investment they had made, but also for promptly paying off debts to family members. In addition, they sent much-needed remittances home to their families for food, clothes, homes, and education. Family and friends from home were able to see how far the remittances went, and so they were motivated to provide the same. The outcome was workers recruiting others for the same jobs, or what Charles Tilly called "opportunity hoarding."⁵³

Finally, paternalism itself complicated the employment relationship for workers, because the perceived inequality is mitigated by the caring acts of employers.⁵⁴ Paternalism could be interpreted as kindness or even affection. As long as workers were seen to benefit, such a relationship was legitimized, but it clearly masked inherent conflicts about their labor conditions.⁵⁵ "I am obligated to do what the boss says," remarked an Ulster County apple worker, "so I work the hours he says, because he is giving me everything." In more extreme instances workers identified with their employers and adopted their boss's viewpoint and sense of self-interest.⁵⁶ Explaining why he would not want to join a union, one worker explained that it "might hurt the boss."

Growers whom I interviewed found it easy to justify paying no overtime by pointing out that workers had free or low-cost housing and access to farm products. Many told me that they knew from personal interactions that their workers were, in fact, satisfied with their jobs. On the other hand, some of their comments also displayed their awareness that such benefits, when extended to vulnerable and dependent workers, were a useful form of labor discipline. In particular, the existence of the labor camp highlights the lack of workers' autonomy and brings into relief not only the distinctions in social rank between employee and employer, but also the extent to which workers' lives (and sometimes those of their families) are entirely dependent on their good behavior in the workplace.

NOT JUST ANOTHER IMMIGRANT STORY

Paternalism is one among many mutually reinforcing factors that deny those who grow and harvest our food the opportunity to voice their concerns

about poor working conditions. The lack of protective labor laws, the seasonal nature of the work, rural isolation and lack of community, and the structure of the guest worker programs all inhibit workers from acting to change their situations. An important cause *and* effect of these factors is the lack of political influence wielded by workers themselves. This was true for twentieth-century citizen farmworkers, particularly African Americans and migrants, and the problem is exacerbated today by the fact that so many of New York's agricultural workers are noncitizens.⁵⁷ Only 8 percent of the workers I interviewed were citizens or held a green card; 71 percent were undocumented; and the remaining 21 percent were guest workers. Although undocumented workers have populated the country's farms for the better part of the twentieth century, their concentration in the Hudson Valley and New York agricultural labor market is relatively new, dating to the mid-1980s.

The immigrant composition of the farm work force directly informs the workplace. Virtually all of the workers I interviewed were foreign-born. The most common places of birth were Mexico (two-thirds) and Jamaica (one-fifth), and roughly three-quarters of the workers were from Latin America. Workers' anxiety about their undocumented legal status combined with their aspirations to return to their home countries permanently influenced their decision to accept their situations without complaint. In particular, workers' plans to return to their home countries allowed them to rationalize their situations through habitual comparison of their current lives with their lives there, rather than with those of other U.S. workers. In addition, poor English-language skills, low levels of formal education, and a lack of job skills constrained workers' job opportunities. In general, these factors led to a willingness for self-sacrifice that limited making plans for the future.

During one typical farmworker family gathering after work, brothers-in-law Javier and Raúl, who belonged to the 22 percent of workers I met who traveled along the East Coast migrant stream every year, described their experiences. As we talked, the sounds and smells of dinner preparations permeated the room, a baby cried, a son required a ride home from sports practice, and a teenager lolled on the couch. We were seated at the kitchen table, which was clearly too small to accommodate the five adults and seven children who lived in this four-bedroom trailer. As Javier discussed the two families' annual itineraries, which took them from Florida oranges to New Jersey blueberries to New York apples and back again, Sonya, his teenage daughter, wrapped her arms around his neck. As Javier described his wages

and hours—\$7.50 an hour for packing apples while Raúl earned \$8.50 in the fields—she massaged his face. Sonya and her three siblings were his reason for stringing together these workplaces. It was for their well-being and their futures that he endured the traveling, tolerated the low wages, and suffered the dirt that clung to his rough skin. He had adjusted to the cold New York autumns, but he had not adapted well to the daily fear of being deported and separated from his family. As he carefully removed Sonya's fingers from his cheeks and chin, he leaned in toward the table and explained, "We only ask that you let us work. I like being in this country, but not in the shadows, like they say here. I'd like to drive around without any fear, and go to Mexico and back. Obviously I'm not a citizen, but I think we have some rights as human beings."

Demographic change in the Hudson Valley mirrors the nationwide movement of Latinos to small rural towns.⁵⁸ Typically, the immigrant's path to incorporation, indeed Americanization, is through economic success.⁵⁹ Yet the rural job market offers only low-wage jobs, which are staffed by poorly educated, undocumented immigrants with poor English-language skills.⁶⁰ In other words, rural employment is not offering the sort of opportunities that have typically led to the social mobility of immigrants.⁶¹ Moreover, the undocumented tend to earn less than other workers, and one study found that they were more likely to be paid below the minimum wage, twice as likely to be cheated out of their wages, and that wage theft on the part of employers was more acute for them than for other workers.⁶²

As among any population of the undocumented, fear of the immigration authorities was by far the most common concern. It pervaded every aspect of the life of one fruit packer, who commented on the depressing omnipresence of this kind of anxiety. "It affects me in every way. I don't feel at liberty to drive. I can't go everywhere I would like. I am always afraid of being found by immigration." Workers like him usually kept a very low profile, which often meant not going out at nighttime, when their activities might have been perceived as suspicious by prejudiced law enforcers and locals.⁶³ Not everyone, however, was afraid of deportation. For some it would result in a long-needed visit home, while others insisted they would simply return to the United States after a few weeks. Many of my interviewees had friends and family who had been deported, and a few had undergone the rather abrupt experience themselves. "They just grab you and send you home," one said. Yet most of those I spoke with were quite nervous about being caught. Media coverage amplified the fear with sensational depictions of workplace raids.

One worker asked, "Haven't you seen on TV how they come to your door and then just take you away?" Furthermore, I heard widely circulated stories about immigration officials stationed at a Walmart, paying unannounced visits to labor camps, or creating checkpoints on roads. One worker described how his nephew was deported after he ran a red light: "He wasn't drunk or anything; he was just coming from work." Many also told me they were often stopped by the police and asked for legal documents. As one worker put it, "If they want, they can do anything with us; they really don't like us."

Aside from the fear of being randomly accosted by immigration officials, many were also concerned about being turned in by a neighbor, their employer, or a coworker. Even when workers thought employers would not dream of calling the immigration authorities, they clearly believed that their legal status greatly influenced the work relationship. Consequently, employee protest was rare, and walkouts, strikes, or collective complaints almost unheard-of. I found plenty of support for the perception that fear of deportation directly influenced behavior on the job. For example, fifty-one-year-old Alejandro from Mexico, who had been working in the East Coast migrant stream for three years, told me, "We are treated like unknown people but are not fugitives. We come here to do farm work because we do not have jobs at home. . . . We are not paid well and cannot ask for more." I heard from a worker on another farm about how their fear drives them to accept the work conditions offered. "They treat us like nothing; they only want the work. . . . Whether we like it or not, we have to like it." Even when they acknowledge this state of fear, many public observers consider the migrants' plight to be just another chapter in the hard-knock story of immigration and point to the remittances sent home, residences built, children's educations paid for, and other projects that the undocumented manage to fund with their wages. Javier eloquently summed up the predicament that many others had described to me: "When I am alone, I think, 'Even if the cage is golden, we are still locked up.'"

Food writers are fond of the notion that local farms play a role in creating community,⁶⁴ but that communitarianism clearly does not extend to the laborers. Because the undocumented prefer not to be noticed, they inhabit an underworld concealed from local communities and cut off from any avenue for accumulating social capital.⁶⁵ A worker I tutored at an ESL program in Dutchess County shared with me that although he had been living in the center of town for eight months, I was the first white person to speak with him. Farmworker families are also affected. Inez, an apple packer, lamented

that her teenage children were not allowed to go out with their friends. "We're very afraid about the police getting them. My daughter wants to go to parties, the movies, the mall, but we don't let her. It's hard because they want to have fun, but it's better not to go out, for the fear that . . ." At this point Inez shook her head and grimaced, thinking about the dreadful consequences.

These farmworkers, many of whom were recent arrivals in the United States, evaluated their economic and social reality in comparison to their original homes and not in relation to other U.S. workers. This helped them rationalize their poverty-level wages and working conditions, which, they were well aware, would not be accepted by U.S. citizens. A day's pay at home was often less than the U.S. minimum hourly wage. Mostly poor and with little formal education, they hailed from rural areas in Mexico and Central America, where a lack of resources was the norm. "I used to have my own potato farm, but [now] there is no water. Nothing happens with land that is dead," reported an apple picker. Many explained to me that when they lived in their home country, all of their wages went toward purchasing food. Income from their U.S. jobs provided relatively well for families left at home. Many workers had built houses, dug wells, installed electricity and plumbing, and contributed to community-building projects from their wages. As a result, they were largely appreciative of the opportunity to earn poverty-level wages here that purchased a life of comfort there. This was reinforced constantly since they were very likely to work alongside others from their hometowns.⁶⁶

Economic comparisons to their home countries make little sense for those who live in the Hudson Valley year-round. There is an increasing trend toward immigrant farmworkers settling in New York State.⁶⁷ My interview data attests to these longer sojourns in the Hudson Valley, in spite of many workers' initial intention to return home after a few years. When asked about their five- and ten-year plans, 75 percent of my interviewees said they planned to return to their home countries permanently.⁶⁸ Almost half of the workers had wives in their home country, and a little more than half had children there. Only 7.2 percent expected to continue working for the same employer. Six years later, however, I identified almost half of workers on the same farms and heard about another dozen who had gone home and were planning on returning to the farms the following year. None of the farmworkers I reinterviewed six years later had plans to return home in the next two years. Asked whether he had imagined he would still be on the same farm six years after

our initial interview, a man whose wife and four children lived in Mexico acknowledged, "I never imagined I was going to last this long. . . . Now all my children are studying at home, and it's a lot of money. I had no other choice than to stay here. Earning in dollars here is better for us than earning in pesos there. So there you go."

Anyone familiar with the aspirations of newly arrived undocumented workers know that almost all plan to spend only a few years—*un par de años*—in the United States but end up staying much longer. There are many reasons for these prolonged stays: some get hooked on footing just one more bill, such as for medical expenses, schooling, or home improvement projects; others plan to save a larger nest egg; and some cite the improved opportunities for their U.S.-based children or pressure from their kids as a reason to stay. For example, a vegetable worker told me he planned to return home "soon." When I reminded him that he was repeating what he had said to me six years earlier, he laughed, "Of course! You always have to have this idea in your mind of returning soon." His plan had been to save money to build a home, but nine years and two children after he first arrived in the United States, he had not saved a penny; the portion of his pay that he had sent to his parents before he got married was now redirected to new household expenses in the United States. "I currently have nothing," he lamented. "Here you spend dollars, not like at home, where the money goes further. . . . You honestly cannot save money here. We always say we are going to return, but we don't because of the kids or another reason."

There is very little opportunity for advancement in farm work, and the workers I spoke to identified many obstacles that stood in their way of securing a better job.⁶⁹ Among those singled out were the absence of opportunities and a lack of job skills. Low levels of education and literacy constrained their search for better jobs and prevented them from acquiring jobs in service sectors such as retail.⁷⁰ The lack of English-language skills severely inhibited workers' ability to find jobs and advance in them. It prevented them from communicating effectively with colleagues, managers, and employers, and it generally prevented them from assimilating into communities outside their kin networks. One worker summed up what many explained to me: "No skills, no education. I can't read well; I can't do better." Many of these obstacles were related to workers' poverty and lack of resources for learning skills at home, as well as their reluctance to invest what little free time they had in acquiring these skills while in the United States.

Today's farmworkers are often regarded as participants in just another immigrant story, a tale characterized by family separation, hard work for low

pay, and sacrifice, all in the name of improving the prospects of the next generation. Although some of these themes rang true for the workers I interviewed, comparing them with immigrants of earlier periods is misleading. Opportunities to earn citizenship and to climb the job ladder are much more tightly circumscribed today than they were in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The subjects of my study had little opportunity for job advancement or to earn a green card or citizenship, even though so many were settling permanently in the United States. Perhaps more important is that although the individual workers might return home or find better work in construction, landscaping, restaurants, or domestic jobs, their farm jobs would quickly be taken by new immigrants, creating a cycle that would further institutionalize the vulnerability and poverty of the state's farm work force. This is not just another immigrant story; this is a story about reproducing inequality among the workers whose labor is fundamental to food provision. Any code of ethical eating that ignores this perpetuation of injustice is highly selective, if not morally hollow. A comprehensive food ethic would privilege individual human workers as much as animals and the environment.