Modern Agriculture: The Impact of Farming Practices on Labor and Nutrition

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Abstract

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*Keywords:* agriculture, agribusiness, conventional farming, organic farming, migrant labor
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The introduction of the paper begins on its own page. The title of the paper should be centered at the top of the page. There is no need to include a heading for the introduction. Indent each paragraph and double-space everything throughout the paper. The paper should be typed in 12 point Times New Roman font. The thesis statement will be the last part of the introductory paragraph.

**Working Conditions**

Farm work is an extremely demanding job. While reporting on the commercial tomato industry in Florida, Estabrook (2011) interviewed a migrant worker from Mexico, Emilio Galindo. Galindo informed him that farm work is often inconsistent and unreliable, with workdays lasting 12 hours or longer. Galindo’s workday usually begins around 4:00 a.m. when he and other workers arrive at a central location in hopes of receiving work on a foreman’s crew (Estabrook, 2011, p. 100). Even if picked for a crew, a worker will sometimes have an hour-long bus ride to the field where he or she will be working for the day. Once there, the work is repetitive and backbreaking. Since many farm working positions pay based on productivity, workers are incentivized to work quickly, without regards to their health. Galindo explained to Estabrook that while working like this, “Your knees hurt the most. Then your legs and your back” (p. 101). Additionally, farmworkers are encouraged by their bosses to pick as much as they can in a day, so breaks are often minimal. A farmworker’s day is often long and physically demanding.

Moreover, despite typically long hours and exacting labor, many farmworkers do not enjoy the same protections that safeguard labor in other sectors. Farmworker Justice (n.d.) explained that while agricultural workers’ wages are protected under the Fair Labor Standards
Act (FLSA), workers are not entitled to overtime pay, and small farms that employ fewer than seven people are not required to adhere to the FLSA’s minimum wage standards. This means that agricultural workers are often not compensated for time spent traveling to and from farms or time spent waiting for instructions and work to begin at the farm site. Estabrook (2011) elaborated on the agricultural pay system:

The thirty thousand tomato harvesters who work in Florida are typically paid at least partially on an antiquated “piece basis,” meaning they receive a set amount of money for every container of fruit they pick. Technically, the law says that they are paid must equal at least the minimum wage…. [But] the system is plagued by fraud. [A representative] of the Southern Poverty Law Center said that her organization has prosecuted numerous cases where field bosses falsely recorded fewer hours on time sheets than a crew member actually worked. (p. 99)

The lack of protection under legislation combined with dishonest wage reporting by bosses contribute to keeping farmworkers’ wages well below the poverty line—$10,000-$12,000 annually, according to U.S. Labor Department reports (as cited in Estabrook, 2011, p. 100). This systematic wage theft, in addition to the long hours and strenuous working conditions typical of farm labor, creates a work environment that continuously disadvantages migrant workers.

Quality of Produce

There is a correlation between the appearance and color of food and taste (Wei, Ou, Luo, & Hutchings, 2012). Expectations about food appearance also affect taste or perceived taste. Christensen (1983) claimed, “ Appropriately coloured foods were perceived to have a stronger intensity of flavor and better quality than inappropriately colored foods” (as cited in Wei et al., 2012, pp. 61-62). For produce such as tomatoes, the maturity of the food when picked also
impacts taste. In order to withstand harvesting, packaging, and shipping, commercial tomatoes are picked before they are fully ripe, giving them a firmer texture and longer shelf life.

Recommendations suggest that tomatoes are picked when they are in the Mature Green 2 phase, meaning the locular jelly, the part of the tomato that contributes to taste, has begun to form (Suslow & Cantwell, 2013, para. 1). Workers then expose the tomatoes to ethylene gas to give them the rich, red color associated with sweetness (Estabrook, 2011; Wei et al., 2012). It is important to note that although ethylene gas helps to ripen tomatoes after they are picked, prematurely picked tomatoes will not ripen, and therefore not develop an appetizing taste, off the vine.

Further complicating matters of taste and quality, Estabrook (2011) showed that, in Florida, the Florida Tomato Committee controls much of the tomato industry. The Committee sets the standards for “the exact size, color, texture, and shape of exported slicing tomatoes” (Estabrook, 2011, p. 123). These specifications help to regulate the quality of produce available to consumers. However, Estabrook noted that for all of the Florida Tomato Committee’s emphasis on the look of a tomato, “nowhere do the regulations mention taste—it’s simply not a consideration” (p. 124). Even when, or especially when, confronted with a tomato that exceeds other Florida varieties in taste, the Florida Tomato Committee can limit the sales and exportation of the produce beyond Florida. When Joe Procacci developed a tomato that could withstand the growing conditions in Florida and that tasted good, he aptly named it UglyRipe. These tomatoes were “asymmetrical, lumpy, and deeply creased” (Estabrook, 2011, p. 122), exactly the kind of tomatoes the Florida Tomato Committee works to prevent being sold outside of Florida. Procacci finally won a lengthy court battle against the Florida Tomato Committee, who staked their argument on an outdated document, Federal Marketing Order 966, and can now sell his produce
outside of Florida. This shows one of the ways that industry giants such as the Florida Tomato Committee work to limit competition between growers, resulting in tasteless produce for consumers.
References


