

WORKER SHORTAGES ANECDOTES FROM
ACROSS AMERICA

Washington state produce. Without immigrant workers, Washington state growers would have to shut down an estimated 50 percent of their operations. In an average year, the state produces \$15 billion worth of apples, cranberries, raspberries, hops and other produce. And according to the calculations of agricultural economist Jim Holt, the 18,000 immigrants employed in Washington produce in 2008 sustained 63,000 non-farm jobs in the surrounding economy.ⁱ

Wisconsin dairy. According to Sandi Zirbel, a dairy farmer with 635 cows in Green Bay, WI, without immigrant workers, she would be operating at less than 20 percent capacity. The industry's difficult conditions and long night and weekend hours make it nearly impossible, she says, to attract American workers. Immigrants now account for 40 percent of the labor force on Wisconsin dairy farms, the largest economic sector in the state. Nationwide, according to the National Milk Producers' Federation, foreign workers are responsible for nearly two-thirds of U.S. milk production.ⁱⁱ

North Carolina vegetable farming. Sweet potato farmers like Matt Hamilton and Lonnie Johnson are feeling the effects of the H1N1 flu, which has caused the Mexican government to delay processing of H2A farmworker visas. In 2009, Hamilton made do with seven workers, compared to 35 the year before. Johnson got by with five workers instead of 30. Even with 12 percent local unemployment, native-born workers aren't taking farm jobs in North Carolina. The sweet potato harvest usually nets \$300 million annually for the state, and while figures for 2009 are not yet available, profits are expected to decrease due to labor shortages.ⁱⁱⁱ

U.S. agriculture moving to Mexico. Driven in part by labor shortages, U.S. direct investment in Mexican agriculture increased sevenfold between 2000 and 2008. In the last year alone, members of the Western Growers Association – a group that produces half the nation's fresh produce – doubled the number of acres they farm in Mexico, employing an estimated total of 20,000 workers south of the border rather than in the U.S.^{iv}

Massachusetts tourism. Failure to fill low-end seasonal jobs at local resorts cut short the 2009 summer season on Nantucket, according to the island's Chamber of Commerce. The quota for seasonal H2B workers had already been filled by the time several island hoteliers applied. And according to resort owners, local students prefer résumé-building internships to dishwashing and housekeeping, with those who are willing to do low-end jobs generally available for less than half the April-to-October summer season. The result: tax receipts on 2009 tourism revenue in Massachusetts are expected to be well below the \$554 million collected in recent years.

Michigan tourism. Hotels on Mackinac Island could not recruit enough workers to operate at full capacity last summer, even as unemployment across the state in Detroit rose to 19 percent. The Mackinac City Chamber of Tourism estimates that four large hotels and twenty mom-and-pop businesses went out of business as a result.^v

Maryland crab processing. Crab-picking plants have been operating shorthanded since 2007, when Congress's failure to renew the H2B returning-worker exemption effectively cut the number of seasonal visas available nationwide in half. About a third of the state's seafood processors have shut down as a result. And last summer, an additional dozen plants – roughly half the remaining number – were on the verge of shutting, saved only by the last-minute August release of an additional 25,000 visas. Among those who would have been affected by the closings, according to U.S. Rep. Frank Kratovil: not just seafood producers and their families, but also Americans working in local restaurants, regional trucking concerns, community banks and an array of other industries.^{vi}

Louisiana fishing industry. Kevin Voisin, marketing director for oyster processor Motivait Seafood, says that at one time his company employed 30 H2B workers in a total workforce of 100. But the last of the foreign workers went home in 2008 year because they couldn't renew their visas, costing the company \$1 million in sales.^{vii}

Restaurant growth. According to the National Restaurant Association, the restaurant industry is expected to add an additional 1.8 million positions in the next decade, boosting its workforce by 14 percent. But the native-born U.S. workforce is expected to grow by only 10 percent in this period, and the 16-24 year old workforce that fills most restaurant jobs is not expected to grow at all.^{viii}

North Carolina skilled and semi-skilled labor. The North Carolina Commission on Workforce Development projected in January 2007 that over the next decade the state would add 700,000 new jobs. By 2017, NC is expected to be short more than 15,000 workers for jobs requiring a BA or higher, and short nearly 19,000 workers for jobs requiring community college or career technical training.^{ix}

Washington, D.C. construction. In the past four years, Washington, D.C. had to delay construction of the Convention Center and Nationals Park because thousands of prospective employees did not have needed training in construction, maintenance and other skills.^x

U.S. manufacturing. According to the 2009 Talent Shortage Survey by Manpower, Inc., one in five U.S. employers (19 percent) reports difficulty finding workers with the skills to fill available jobs. Shortages are particularly acute in the manufacturing sector and among businesses seeking to hire engineers. The share of employers having difficulty finding skilled workers is higher in the U.S. than in Ireland (5 percent), Spain (8 percent) and the U.K. (11 percent).^{xi}

K-12 educators. Over half of the nation's 3.4 million teachers are expected to retire in the next ten years, and there are not enough new education graduates in the pipeline to replace them. Among young people entering the teaching profession today, a full third leave within three years – so shortages will be a perennial problem for years to come.^{xii}

Maryland teachers. For several years now, Baltimore City public schools have had trouble filling teaching positions in math, science and special education. To close the gap the city has hired 600 teachers from abroad – more than 10 percent of its K-12 instructors.^{xiii}

Computer-science and engineering pipeline. Despite projected needs for high-end technical workers, foreigners account for two-thirds of the students in computer science and engineering programs at American universities and more than 40 percent of U.S. science and engineering PhDs.^{xiv}

Microsoft. Even with unemployment at 10 percent, the Washington-state-based IT giant reports more than 2000 openings for highly skilled workers. In 2007, driven in part by labor

issues, the company opened a software development center across the border in Vancouver, Canada, a country that places no numerical limits on visas offered to foreign workers.^{xv}

Nursing nationwide. Because of a shortage of new nursing graduates, more than three-quarters of nurses hired since 2001 have been age 50 or older, and hospitals are turning increasingly to foreign-born nurses, who now account for 16 percent of the RNs working in the U.S.^{xvi}

Primary-care physicians. Health-care analysts predict a shortage of 140,000 physicians by 2020 – 40,000 of them in primary care alone. The number of American medical students going into primary care has fallen by over 50 percent in the last ten years.^{xvii}

Unemployment rates. Despite growing national unemployment rates, labor markets in some specialized occupations remain tight. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports unemployment rates of 2 to 3 percent – two-thirds lower than in the economy as a whole – in education, health care and science and engineering fields. Since the beginning of the recession, the health-care sector has added 631,000 jobs.^{xviii}

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- ^{iv} *The Associated Press*, [Some U.S. Farms Outsourced To Mexico](#), 5/27/08; *Christian Science Monitor*, [New Pressures Force U.S. Farmers South of the Border](#), 7/15/2008.
- ^v Telephone interview with Joseph Leighio, President, Mackinac City Chamber of Tourism, 10/27/09; [Michigan Labor Market Information](#); Bureau of Labor Statistics, [Michigan Unemployment](#), July 2009.
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- ^{xviii} ACIP, "H1-Bs: Critical to Innovation & Growing Our Economy," 9/8/09; Bureau of Labor Statistics, "News Release: Employment Situation – December 2009," USDL-09-1583.