



Agricultural and Seasonal Workforce Services Advisory Committee

Meeting details

Date: Wednesday, July 25, 2024

Time: 1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Location: Virtual meeting via Zoom

Physical address: **Employment Security Department**, 212 Maple Park Ave SE, Olympia, WA 98501

Committee members present

- Jon DeVaney
- Michael Gempler
- Delia Peña
- Jeff Perrault
- Michele Besso
- Rosalinda Guillen
- Elizabeth Strater (Proxy for Victoria Ruddy)
- Edgar Franks

Non-voting agency representatives

- Juan Gamez (DOH)
- Ignacio Marquez (WSDA)

Committee members/Non-voting agency representatives absent

- Uriel Iniguez (LNI)

ESD staff

- Joy Adams
- Bertha J. Clayton
- Vickie Carlson
- Petra Meraz
- Carlos Sandoval-Larios
- Josh Dye
- Alberto Isiordia
- Ish Maidadi

Summary

Meeting Recorded

This meeting was recorded and is available on <https://esd.wa.gov/newsroom/Ag-committee>

Welcome and Agenda Review

Employment Security Department (ESD) Policy Director, Joy Adams, welcomed everyone, reviewed the meeting agenda and asked if anyone had any questions. (See Addendum I.)

Roll Call – Vickie Carlson, Management Analyst, ASWS Office, ESD

Recording timestamp **00:01:19**

Joy Adams asked Vickie Carlson to take roll. Seven voting members were present at the time of roll call. (Quorum). Motion to approve both June 20th and July 17th meeting minutes:

- Mike Gempler, 2nd from Elizabeth Strater. Motion carries.

2024 ASWS Report Discussion & Vote – Bertha J. Clayton, ASWS Director

Recording timestamp **00:04:56**

Today's goal is to approve sections I, II & III of the 2024 ASWS Report; substance only. Additional discussion on part II recommendations/specific asks to the legislature. (See Addendum II.)

- Motion to approve part II with the substance that was discussed today: Michele Besso, Rosalinda Guillen 2nd, motion carries.

Recording timestamp **00:47:59**

- Motion to approve parts I & III of the 2024 ASWS Report; substance only: Michele Besso, Rosalinda Guillen 2nd, motion carries. Recording timestamp 00:58:31

Customer Experience Study Update (See Addendum III.)

Recording timestamp 00:58:59

- Lacey Jacoby, UX Researcher, Anthro-Tech Inc.
- Anusha Yadav, UX Researcher, Anthro-Tech Inc.

Good of the Order – Joy Adams

Recording timestamp 01:59:54

Action Items:

- Verify that the Anthro-Tech report can be linked in the 2024 ASWS Report
- Provide final Anthro-Tech report to committee post receipt on July, 31st

Future Agenda Items:

- Budget/Decision Package Review at the August 21st AC meeting
- September 18th meeting will be in person held at the WorkSource office in Union Gap.

Adjourned

Joy Adams thanked everyone for their continued active participation and for their commitment to this work. Meeting adjourned: 3:01 PM.

2024 Meetings


The next Agricultural and Seasonal Workforce Services Advisory Committee meeting is on:

- **August 21, 2024 – 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. – Zoom, 212 Maple Park Ave SE, Olympia, WA 98501**

Addendums

ADDENDUM I.

Agenda



AGENDA

Agricultural and Seasonal Workforce Services (ASWS) Advisory Committee
Thursday, July 25, 2024 | 1:00 pm – 3:00 pm | Zoom | 212 Maple Park Ave SE Olympia, WA 98501

TIME	TOPIC
1:00 pm	Joy Adams, Policy Director, Employment System Policy & Integrity Division, ESD <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agenda Review – Joy Adams • Roll call – Vickie Carlson, Management Analyst, ASWS Office, ESD • Approval of June 20th & July 17th meeting minutes • Motion(s) to Approve Part I, II and III of the 2024 ASWS Report <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Suggested motion language: <i>I move to approve 2024 ASWS Report section Part I</i> ○ Suggested motion language: <i>I move to approve 2024 ASWS Report section Part II</i> ○ Suggested motion language: <i>I move to approve 2024 ASWS Report section Part III</i>
1:45 pm	Customer Experience Study Update & Committee Discussion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lacey Jacoby, UX Researcher, Anthro-Tech Inc. • Anusha Yadav, UX Researcher, Anthro-Tech Inc.
2:50 pm	Good of the Order
3:00 pm	Adjourn: Next meeting: Wednesday, August 21, 2024, 1 – 3 pm, Zoom

Housekeeping



RECORDING ANNOUNCEMENT:

This meeting is being recorded. Please be advised that your image and voice will be captured and recorded during the videoconference. Your participation in this videoconference equals consent to be recorded.

ASWS Advisory Committee Business



- Roll call – Vickie Carlson, Management Analyst, ASWS Office, ESD
- Approval of June 20th & July 17th meeting minutes
- Motion(s) to Approve Part I, II and III of the 2024 ASWS Report

ADDENDUM II.

2024 ASWS Report - Part II DRAFT



Discussion

Motion to Approve

- Suggested motion language: I move to approve 2024 ASWS Report - Part II

2024 ASWS Report - Part I DRAFT



Discussion

Motion to Approve

- Suggested motion language: I move to approve 2024 ASWS Report - Part I

2024 ASWS Report - Part III DRAFT



Discussion

Motion to Approve

- Suggested motion language: I move to approve 2024 ASWS Report - Part III

ADDENDUM III.

Customer Experience Study Update



Employment
Security
Department
WASHINGTON STATE

Lacey Jacoby, UX Researcher, Anthro-Tech Inc.
Anusha Yadav, UX Researcher, Anthro-Tech Inc.

WASHINGTON STATE EMPLOYMENT SECURITY DEPARTMENT

Agricultural Recruitment Customer Experience Study: Phase II Findings and Recommendations

SUMMER 2024

anthrotech

Content

- ④ Introductions
- ④ Project Overview
- ④ Methods
- ④ Findings & Recommendations
- ④ Conclusion & Next Steps

Anthro-Tech Team

- ② Anusha Yadav, UX Researcher
- ② Lacey Jacoby, UX Researcher
- ② Becca Bonny, UX Project Manager
- ② Camy Naasz, Director of Human-Centered Design

ESD Team

- ② Olga Kondratjeva: Manager, Program Evaluation, Research, and Analysis, Division: Data Architecture, Transformation & Analytics
- ② Bertha Clayton: Director, Agricultural and Seasonal Workforce Services, Division: Employment System Policy & Integrity
- ② Craig Carroll: Business Operations Manager, Division: Employment Connections
- ② Gustavo Aviles: Chief Analytics Officer, Division: Data Architecture, Transformation & Analytics
- ② Vickie Carlson: Management Analyst, Agricultural and Seasonal Workforce Services, Division: Employment System Policy & Integrity
- ② Michael Luchini: Product Manager, Workforce Development, Division: Product, Planning and Performance
- ② Marissa Meyer: Product Analyst, Workforce Development, Division: Product, Planning and Performance
- ② Joy Adams: Director, Division: Employment System Policy & Integrity (ESPI)

Project Overview

BACKGROUND & STUDY GOALS

The problem

- ① The ESD agricultural recruitment system currently contributes very little to the apple, berry, cherry, grape, and pear production labor markets
 - After excluding ineligible foreign workers and those who do not qualify, ESD's internal system suggests that 68 individuals engaged formally with the ESD agricultural recruitment system (between October 1, 2022 and September 30, 2023).
- ② ESD is limited by state law, federal law and ESD policy in modifying internal recruitment systems to better align with how agricultural workers connect with agricultural jobs.



Opportunity

- ③ The ASWS Committee wants to understand the experience of farmworkers and employers with ESD's agricultural recruitment system; examine dynamics, gaps, and opportunities for improvement
- ③ Anthro-Tech's research is divided into two phases:
 - Phase I: Initial research to understand how farmworkers are getting jobs and how employers are finding workers
 - Phase II: More specific research during harvest seasons for the specialty crops and understanding more about ESD's role
 - Fall 2023 – apples, grapes, and pears in Yakima and Benton
 - Spring 2024 – berries and cherries in Whatcom, Skagit, and Yakima

Specific objectives for phase II

- ③ Align the research recruitment and timing with the harvest seasons for five specialty crops: cherries, berries, apples, pears, and grapes
- ③ Identify resources and tools that best support farmworkers and employers in the job search and recruitment process
- ③ Understand WorkSource's internal processes around job orders, referrals and recruitment
- ③ Identify the touchpoints between WorkSource offices and workers and employers
- ③ Identify specific, actionable recommendations that ESD can implement



Methods

RESEARCH METHODS, PARTICIPANTS, RECRUITMENT

Methods

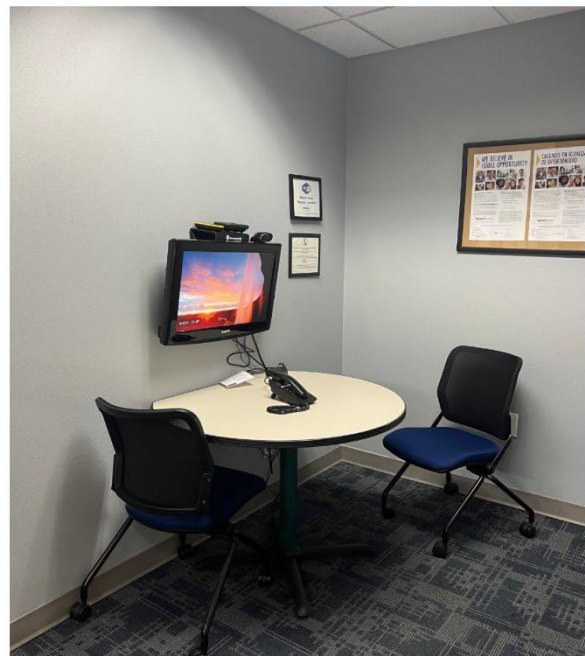
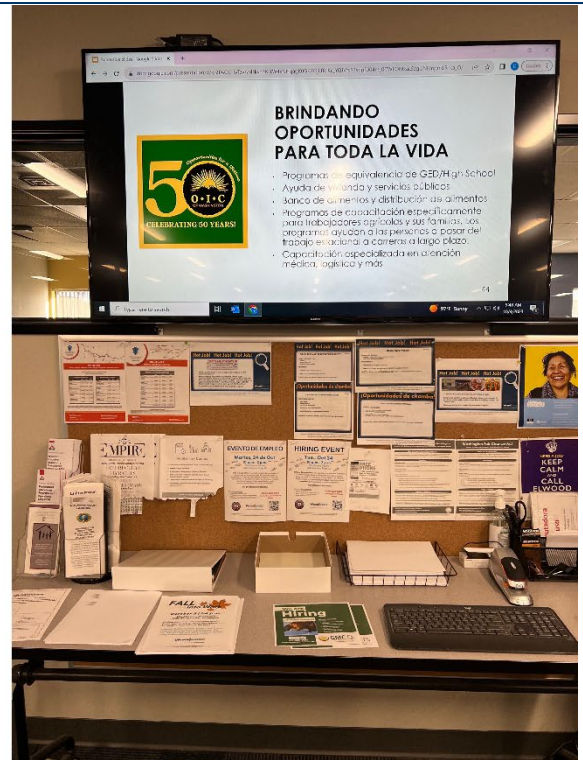
We used various research methods designed to gather qualitative data and insights:

- ① Remote 1:1 interviews with WorkSource staff at three offices
- ② Contextual inquiry with WorkSource staff at three offices
 - In-context observational research, job shadowing
- ③ Interviews with farmworkers
 - 1:1 in-person interviews conducted in Spanish and Mixtec languages
- ④ Interviews with employers and farm labor contractors
 - 1:1 in-person and remote interviews

Participants: WorkSource Staff

- ⦿ Eleven WorkSource staff interviewed in total
 - Six WorkSource office staff participated in remote interviews
 - Seven WorkSource office staff participated in in-person contextual inquiry / job shadowing*
- ⦿ All participants were from three WorkSource offices: Skagit, Columbia Basin, and Sunnyside

**One WorkSource staff participated in both remote interview and contextual inquiry*



(Left) Columbia Basin WorkSource Office entry area; (Right) Columbia Basin WorkSource Office call room with video conferencing.

Participants: Farmworkers

- ③ Ten farmworkers participated in in-person interviews
 - Recruited with support from MSFW Outreach Specialist and community partners
- ③ We screened potential participants based on the following criteria:
 - Currently living in Washington
 - Current employment in Whatcom, Skagit, Yakima or Benton counties
 - Experience working this year's harvest of eastern and western Washington specialty crops
 - Mix of H-2A experience

Participants: Employers & Farm Labor Contactors

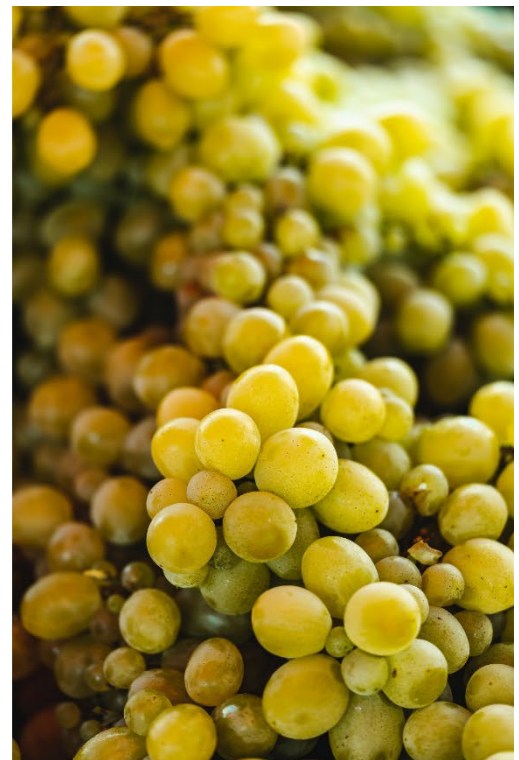
- ③ Five employers and three farm labor contractors participated in interviews
 - Recruited using various sources, including job fairs, WorkSource staff connections, door-to-door visits, phase I connections, cold calls, emails, and ESD project teams' contacts
- ③ We screened potential participants based on the following criteria:
 - Involved in recruitment
 - Currently working in Whatcom, Skagit, Yakima or Benton counties
 - Working in this year's harvest of specialty crops (apples, pears, grapes, berries, cherries)
 - Mix of H-2A experience
 - Mix of farm sizes
- ③ Defined employers and farm labor contractors by their role

Findings & Recommendations



Seven main themes

- ③ WorkSource processes
- ③ Employer and farm labor contractor operations and interactions with WorkSource
- ③ Role of farm labor contractors
- ③ Timeline and process of job search and recruitment during harvest season
- ③ Retention of domestic workers during harvest
- ③ Communication channels, barriers, and misconceptions
- ③ Impact of economic pressures and market dynamics in agricultural recruitment



WorkSource Processes

WorkSource offices that participated reported challenges with collecting and managing customer information

- ⊗ Participating offices store customer contact information in staff cell phones, which are not a reliable source

“Stuff like this happens all the time.”

— WorkSource staff member, describing losing all phone contacts after recent IT update

- ⊗ Recommendations
 - Document clear procedures for MSFW Outreach Specialists to regularly back up phone data (contact information)
 - Effectively provide important notifications and updates (such as from the IT Department) to staff working in the field

Employer and farm labor contractor operations and interactions with WorkSource

Employer recruitment processes are often separate and siloed for domestic workers in non-H-2A jobs and foreign workers in H-2A jobs

	Employer staff managing domestic worker recruitment for non-H-2A jobs	Employer staff managing H-2A program
Job title	Foreman, Crew Boss, Supervisor, Human Resources Assistant	Human Resources, Administration
Location	Farm, satellite office	Corporate office in city
Primary language	Spanish	English
Role	Recruit and oversee domestic workers; if employer owns multiple farms, work with other foremen to transfer workers among farms based on harvest needs	Manage H-2A administrative work, ensure employer follows regulations
Knowledge of H-2A	Minimal	Extensive
Main interaction with WorkSource	Request recruitment support for non-H-2A domestic roles	Provide job descriptions for WorkSource WA postings, manage WorkSource referrals, compliance

Employers have varying recruitment models

③ Three primary recruitment approaches:

- Community-Integrated Dual Recruitment
- Structured Departmental Recruitment
- Foreman/Supervisor-Centric Recruitment

“Our recruitment efforts are a mix. We rely on the H-2A program for a steady supply of labor, but we also tap into local networks, especially since my husband, the foreman, is well-known in the community.”

— Employer staff, community-integrated dual approach

“Our strategy centers on recruiting the best foremen. By offering profit-sharing and other incentives, we ensure they bring in top-notch crews. This method has worked well in maintaining efficiency and reliability.”

— Farm labor contractor, foreman-centric approach

Goals of providing services to employers vary among participating WorkSource offices

③ The main value of WorkSource services for employers is getting workers when they need them

“The relationships have changed, the expectations have changed. We’re a last resort. When they call, they say I need apple pickers now. We either get them or we don’t. We either make them happy or we don’t.”

— WorkSource Staff Member

③ WorkSource offices reported that H-2A referrals make it possible to visit employers and monitor the conditions and treatment of workers

③ Recommendations

- Define clearer goals for WorkSource's employer outreach
- More clearly explain employer services and how they benefit them
- Focus on improving business relationships with employers and clarify ESD's role as a consultant or partner, rather than just an enforcer

“It would be helpful to get support during that period [of labor shortage]... There is just not as many young people that want to do this kind of work and are moving up the economic ladder. I think longer term, labor shortage is going to be an issue. As far as ESD is concerned, they know those numbers better than anyone.”

— Farm Labor Contractor

Participating WorkSource offices reported that digital tools and communication do not match employer needs

③ Recommendations

- Where possible, prioritize employers' preferred methods of communication
- Clarify goals for WorkSourceWA use among employers and ensure this is clear to WorkSource staff
- Define the benefits of WorkSourceWA for employers, beyond its mandatory use for H-2A recruitment
- Reduce and simplify the steps to register for a WorkSourceWA account
- Consider how to better support employers logging on to WorkSourceWA, especially amid staff turnover

“Now we have WorkSourceWA, where employers have to register themselves. It’s a chore for them. They don’t want to.

If you convince them to do it, it’s difficult. It’s employer self-service. In order for me to support them, they need to create account with SAW credentials.

With [agriculture], it doesn’t fit in their world. They don’t have time to go out of the field and log into a system to create a job order for apple picking, you don’t see a lot of [agriculture] job orders except for H-2A which is a requirement. It’s a mandate and that’s how they get there.”

— WorkSource Staff Member



Role of farm labor contractors

Importance of farm labor contractors in agricultural recruitment is increasing

② Farm labor contractors support diverse needs

- Recruitment and hiring
- Managing equipment
- Compliance and administration
- Training and supervision

② Tackle administrative costs, regulatory requirements, and constant change through

- Management to adjust to market demands
- Strong community ties
- Financial incentives within business

“I think farm labor contracting is the future – growers and farmers themselves are getting older – their kids do not want to continue so they sell; the industry is changing.”

– Farm Labor Contractor

“Our strategy centers on recruiting the best foremen. By offering profit-sharing and other incentives, we ensure they bring in top-notch crews. This method has worked well in maintaining efficiency and reliability.”

– Farm Labor Contractor

Farm labor contractors play important role in specialty crop recruitment

② Particularly important for large and mid-size employers during specialty crop harvests

② Recommendations

- Provide educational resources on FLCs operations to support employers
- Facilitate networking and information sharing among employers
- Develop support programs for administrative and compliance challenges encountered by employers



Timeline and process of job search and recruitment during harvest season

In-person outreach and connections are critical to finding jobs and recruiting during harvest season

⦿ Recommendations

- Facilitate in-person connection between employers and prospective farmworkers before and during harvest season
 - This could be done by expanding outreach efforts to create more opportunities for early engagement and communication

“In every case, both domestic and foreign, there is a learning curve... there is an investment employers put into setting things up, so they do prefer to have people that would want to come back.”

– Farm Labor Contractor, on the value of recruiting returning workers

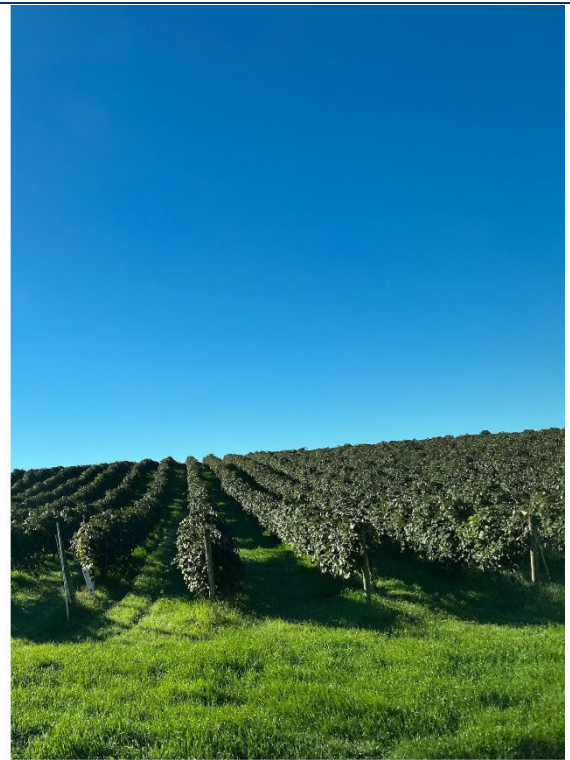
“[We] do not require workers to have prior experience— Anyone who shows up and can work.”

– Foreman, on his recruitment approach during harvest season

Hiring timeline during harvest season is unpredictable and often immediate

⊗ Recommendations

- Improve communication between employers and domestic farmworkers
 - For example, use non-digital resources (e.g., flyers), digital platforms (Facebook), community spaces, and local media (e.g., local radio) to advertise job opportunities quickly and efficiently



“I have relations that work there, and we were chatting, and they said it was a good job and that was it. Also in the radio, they announce a lot that they’re looking for workers. They say to call this phone number because they’re looking for workers and you can start right away... For this job, there was an application to fill out, they said yes, you can start working then or come the next day.”

— Farmworker, on their job search and application timeline

Simple and straightforward job application process is most effective during harvest

⊙ Recommendations

- Encourage employers and WorkSource (i.e., H-2A) to adapt job application processes to match the harvest hiring timeline

“For this company, there was an application to fill out, they said yes, you can start working then or come the next day. [How did you fill it out?] In person. [Did anyone help?] Yes, they fill it out and you must sign it. They had to read it to say you’re ok with it, that you’re going to work the full contract, that you will follow the terms of the H-2A contract, then you sign.”

— Farmworker, on their H-2A job application process

“They sent me an application, I needed to sign, and then I started the job. [What was the application like?] Not a normal application, name of the agency, the contact information, they had signed, I just needed to put my name and sign. [Did anyone help?] No, it’s all here in my mind.”

— Farmworker, on their job application process (not H-2A)



Retention of domestic workers during harvest

Recruitment during harvest is a challenge for employers due to the increase in seasonal demand for labor, emphasizing the need for flexibility in employment arrangements

⦿ Recommendations

- Encourage employers to provide training and skill development to farmworkers to attract them to jobs and increase retention
- Consider opportunities to streamline the H-2A contract process to make farmworkers aware of opportunities and reduce the barriers to access

“Generally, employers prefer to have workers through the contract—that is why the contracts are written the way they are. [Agricultural] recruitment is difficult—availability is a challenge—there are not as many people who want to do [agricultural] labor because it is hard.

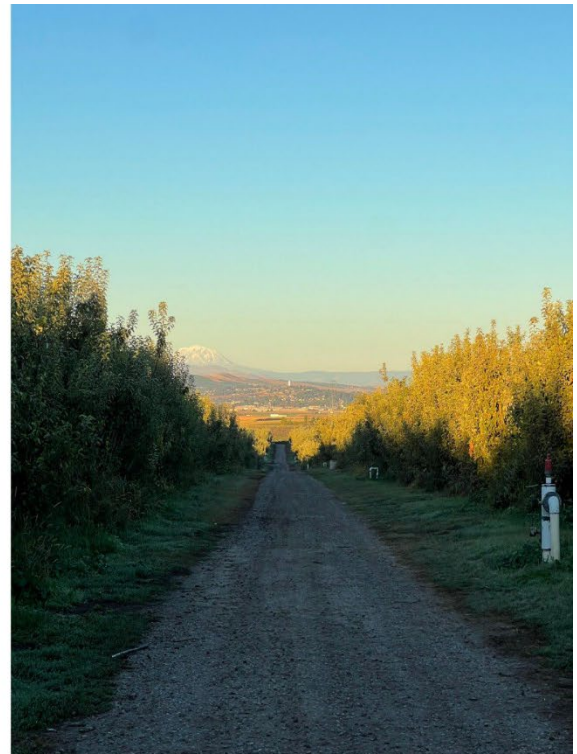
Employers feel this way too, if there are workers who are able, willing, and qualified, please send them. This program has gotten so expensive that if there are workers applying, you know, that’s kind of like the overarching message. Hey, if you do have domestic workers that want to apply for [agricultural] jobs, like send them to these job orders. And I think that’s like the overarching feeling amongst all H-2A employers—is yes, if you got workers, then send them.”

— Farm labor contractor

Retention of domestic workers can be improved by providing a better working environment

⦿ Recommendations

- Raise awareness amongst employers regarding the importance of supportive work environment for farmworkers, as farmworker well-being is vital for long-term retention
- Provide resources and training to employers to encourage fair working conditions and treatment of workers, emphasizing impact on farmworker retention
- Create and promote communication between employers and farmworkers to create transparency and trust (e.g., through the MSFW Outreach Specialist)



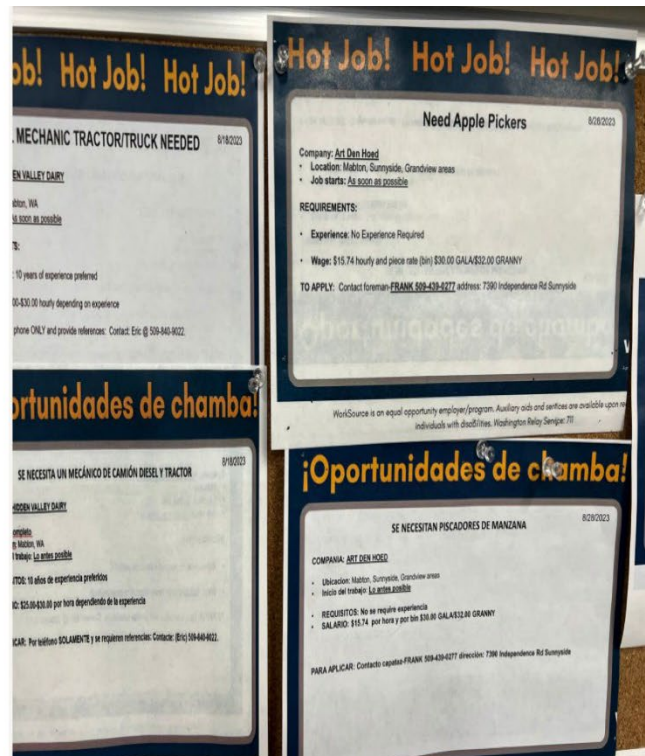
Communication channels, barriers, and misconceptions

Domestic farmworkers face a lack of communication and transparency about job expectation, contracts, and future opportunities

⊕ Recommendations

- Create simple non-digital resources (i.e. flyers) in Spanish to support farmworkers' job search
 - These should have critical information, where legally possible, such as pay, location, and contact information

(Right) Sunnyside WorkSource Office Hot Job! Board.



Generally, domestic farmworkers lack awareness of the H-2A program, ESD, or WorkSource

⊗ Recommendations

- Provide clear information about H-2A jobs, ESD and WorkSource, including non-digital resources
- Address misconceptions around H-2A jobs; create clear communication channels for everyone involved to address concerns, share information about job expectations, and be transparent with contract details
- Create simple non-digital resources (i.e. flyers) in Spanish with key information to support farmworkers in their job search

“This [WorkSource flyer] grabs my attention more because of the color. I see it’s looking for agricultural jobs which is interesting, but then I see it’s for H-2A workers so I can’t apply for that.

[Why not?] Because we’re here. It’s for people from Mexico. It’s too bad because the pay information is here, and the pay is good. [But you did an H-2A job before?] We worked alongside H-2A workers.

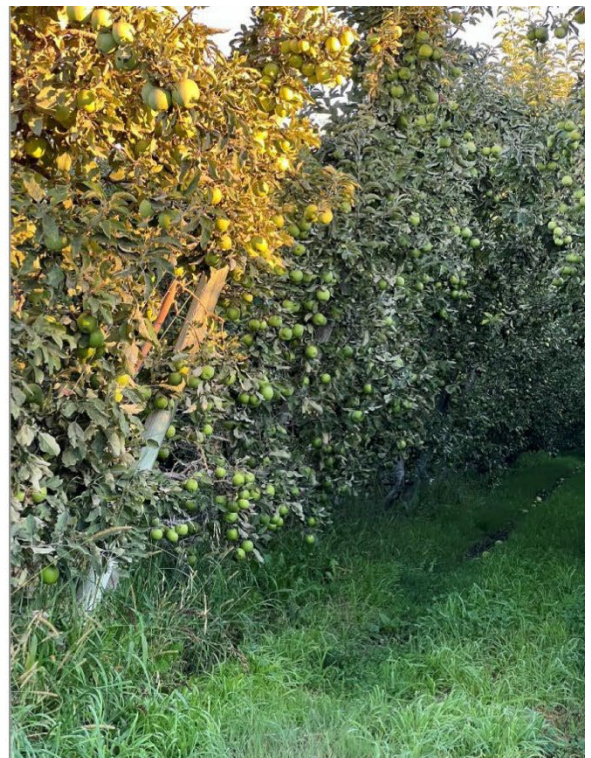
[Can local workers with documentation apply for H-2A jobs?] No, I have heard that’s only for foreign workers who are coming here to work from another country. We don’t qualify.”

— Farmworker, reacting to flyer

The role of outreach specialist(s) between domestic workers and employers important in addressing communication barriers

⊗ Recommendations

- Create a support system for MSFW Outreach Specialists (e.g., tools, resources, additional staff) to ensure their outreach efforts are supported and effective prior and during harvest season
 - Consider expanding the MSFW Outreach Specialist program to facilitate more outreach efforts



Impact of economic pressures and market dynamics in agricultural recruitment

Economic pressures restrict employers' financial flexibility

⊕ Recommendations

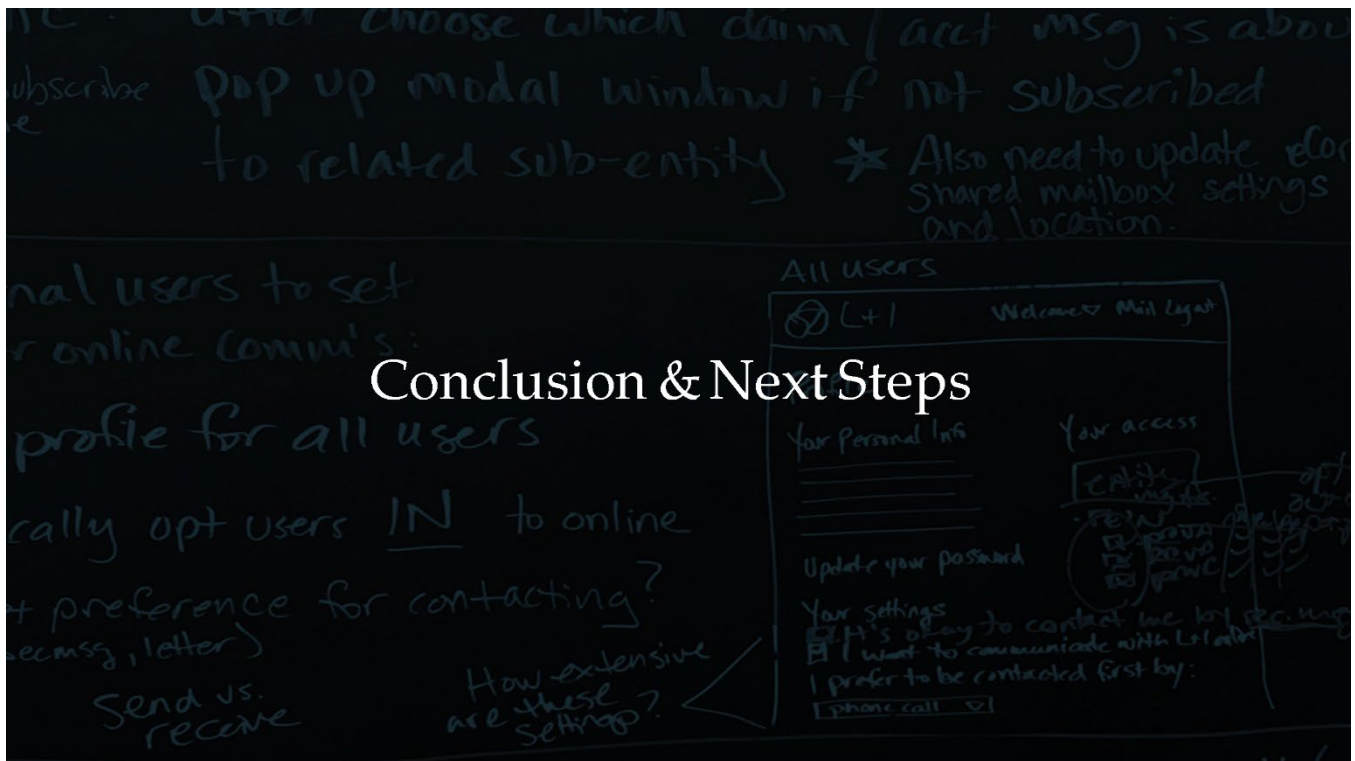
- Consider developing support programs to enhance financial flexibility for agricultural employers
- Continue improving recruitment and retention support to employers, and provide direct recruitment assistance for employers impacted by economic pressures

“Farmers are getting squeezed from both ends – by the buyers who set the prices and by the workers who need fair wages. It’s a tough balance to maintain.”

— Employer

“If we can’t get our cherries picked quickly enough because we can’t afford enough workers, we risk losing a significant portion of our crop. Last year, we had to let some cherries rot on the trees because we couldn’t compete with larger farms offering higher wages.”

— Employer



Conclusion and next steps

- ④ Findings point to both simple and complex challenges
- ④ We recommend ESD more clearly defines and implements goals for their role in agricultural recruitment in Washington for specialty crops
- ④ We recommend phased changes

Good of the Order



Action Items:

Future Agenda Items:

- Budget/Decision Package Discussion at the **August 21st** AC meeting



Agricultural and Seasonal Workforce Services ADVISORY COMMITTEE



Employment Security Department
WASHINGTON STATE

ASWS Advisory Committee Meeting

Wednesday, August 21, 2024

1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Zoom

Contact information

Joy Adams, Director of Employment System Policy & Integrity Division joy.adams@esd.wa.gov

Employment Security Department • Employment System Policy & Integrity