

# LATIN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES



Call for Manuscripts for a Thematic Issue of *Latin American Perspectives*

## **Farmworkers in Latin America and the Caribbean**

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Agriculture contributes about 6% to the GDP of Latin America on average, and in some countries, more than 10%, such as Bolivia, Paraguay, Guatemala, and Honduras. It is also a significant source of employment. Countries such as Mexico and Brazil employ millions of workers. For instance, Brazil employs over 8% of its workforce in agriculture. While the employment conditions, social lives, and mobility/settlement patterns of Latin American farmworkers laboring in North America are increasingly well-studied, the conditions of waged agricultural workers within Latin America are not well documented in the English language, North American, academic literature.

The North America-centrism of scholarship on agricultural labor in the Americas may hinder a comprehensive understanding and theorization of the forms of exploitation, super-exploitation, social marginalization, mobility, contestation, and revolution that shape and undergird the agri-food system of the Western hemisphere. That is, leading scholars have shed much light on farm worker conditions through the lenses of ‘deportability’, symbolic and structural violence as constructed through hierarchies based on citizenship, ethnicity, and gender, and neoliberalization through state-sponsored agricultural guestworker visa programs. However, these leading approaches might not adequately capture on-the-ground conditions of waged agricultural labor in Latin America.

A long history of Latin American scholarship centers on examinations of the variable rate of exploitation and how this impacts the health, environment, and economics of the proletariat and peasantry. Farm labor in Latin America faces conditions of superexploitation as defined by Marxist dependency scholar Ruy Marini, whereby social positions align, heightening the extraction of surplus value from workers' labor power. For example, different patterns of mobility for paid agricultural work – ones that involve crossing different borders or not crossing national borders at all – might lend themselves to unique forms of worker control and surveillance that are not documented in the illegality/ deportability literature. Moreover, the role

of the state in the precarization of the labor force in Latin America differs from the forms of state involvement most often highlighted in North America; for example, through agrarian dispossession and informalization of labor, as opposed to through the creation of formalized guestworker visa programs.

The postcolonial Marxist Stuart Hall called for scholars to historicize these social positions concretely, recognizing how hierarchies like race morph across time and space. Thus, wage labor dynamics reflect territorial specific configurations of power, agrarian development trajectories, and social struggles. Recently, there has been increased attention on non-family agricultural wage labor, as well as the gendered and racialized aspects of labor exploitation, particularly among Indigenous populations, ciswomen, and migrant communities. However, there is a need for research efforts to situate contemporary agricultural labor relations within historical processes to better understand the conditions of exclusion and exploitation of farm laborers in the region.

We seek theoretically grounded critical research that addresses some of the persistent, intersectional gaps in our knowledge such as:

- I) Country-level data is lacking about the conditions, number, and demographics of ‘who’ the wage farm workers are. National surveys often ask about rural smallholders and do not capture migrant wage workers. Additionally, there is a lack of longitudinal studies examining how the working conditions of paid farm workers change over time, particularly in response to shifts in the global agri-food system, climate change, or changes in political and labor markets.
- II) Although migration patterns are well documented in the South-North flows, there is less research on South-South or intraregional flows and their social dynamics within Latin America.
- III) There is also space for a more detailed examination—beyond social movements—of labor agency, resistance, and organization, including the role of unions, cooperatives and informal networks among farm workers.
- IV) There is a need for intersectional and participative approaches for ciswomen, Indigenous populations, and Afro-descendants.
- V) Research gaps also exist in understanding hiring mechanisms, wage systems (and relationships), labor laws (and enforcement), and occupational health (e.g., exposure to hazardous chemicals).

Articles may address but are not limited to the following topics:

- How does farm labor compare across countries? For instance, who are farm laborers?
- What are the unique conditions and work experiences of Indigenous farmworkers in Latin America? Do they occupy a semi-peasant/semi-proletarian position due to land tenure rights concerning Indigenous *usos y costumbres* in certain national contexts? Are there

generational dynamics that condition the relationship of Indigenous Peoples to farmwork?

- What are the historical and emergent patterns of intra-national and international border crossing of migrant farmworkers? How are these patterns changing over time? What are their conditions? Rates of exploitation? How are forms of exploitation shaped by gender, age, ethnicity, and other identity factors?
- How do farm laborers exercise autonomy? What is the role of unions in farm labor? Cooperatives? What other forms of farm labor resistance/organizing are present, and which approaches have been successful? How are these approaches shaped by gender, age, ethnicity, and other identity factors?
- How does labor in agricultural production impact farm laborers' own food sovereignty? How do agribusiness-driven agricultural models shape workers' access to healthy, affordable food?
- What are the conflicts/tensions between different groups of farm laborers (Indigenous, Black, mestizo, etc.) within Latin American countries, and what are the consequences of these conflicts?
- What is the role of commodity chains in farm labor differences across the region? How does agribusiness and the concentration of control over commodity chains condition farm labor?
- Does the political party in power impact the conditions of farm labor? Or, what are the institutional apparatuses governing and regulating farm labor?
- What is the role of farmworker organizing in political struggle and social movements, such as the Landless Workers' Movements (MST) in Brazil or the National Unitary Agricultural Trade Union Federation (FENSUAGRO) in Colombia? How do they relate to other grassroots social organizations dealing with economic and social justice issues? Where have they helped shape broader left agendas either locally or nationally? What demands and strategies have been most successful?
- How does narco-violence, authoritarianism, and oligarchic paramilitarism shape farm labor, including trafficking?
- How do climate change, extreme weather events, and environmental degradation impact farm laborers in Latin America? Are certain groups more vulnerable due to socio-economic or racial/ethnic factors? How do exposure to pesticides, long hours, and extreme weather conditions impact their well-being?
- How does precarious farm labor impact mental and physical health, particularly for migrant and seasonal workers? How do gender and age influence health risks and access to medical care among farm laborers?
- How does transnational migration for farm labor affect family structures and caregiving in sending communities? What are the effects of social reproduction occurring in one country (e.g., where families and dependents remain) while economic production occurs in another (e.g., where migrant workers labor)? How do gendered expectations of care and household labor influence the decisions of farmworkers to migrate or remain in rural communities?

Contributions to this special issue might highlight other examples of contextual difference.

### **SUBMITTING MANUSCRIPTS**

To avoid duplication of content, please contact the issue editors to let them know of your interest in submitting and your proposed topic. We encourage submission as soon as possible, preferably by May 30, 2026 but this call will remain open as long as it is posted on the LAP web site.

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