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## Lessons Learned Developing an Extension-Based Training Program for Farm Labor Supervisors

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## Lessons Learned Developing an Extension-Based Training Program for Farm Labor Supervisors

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### Abstract

This article outlines a four-step model for developing a training program for farm labor supervisors. The model draws on key lessons learned during the development of the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Farm Labor Supervisor Training program. The program is designed to educate farm supervisors on farm labor laws and to support compliance with workplace regulations critical for the safety of farmworkers and the economic sustainability of agricultural industries. Attentive to building partnerships, assessing needs, tailoring the curriculum, and conducting evaluations, the model can be applied elsewhere to address the farm labor issues confronted by specialty crop growers in other states.

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## Introduction

In conducting a farmworker housing assessment, the Shimberg Center at the University of Florida estimated that there are 100,000 migrant and seasonal farmworkers in Florida (Shimberg Center, 2013). These workers annually produce and harvest more than 470,000 ac of citrus, 150,000 ac of fresh-market vegetables, 10,000 ac of strawberries, and 4,000 ac of blueberries (U.S. Department of Agriculture [USDA] National Agricultural Statistics Service [NASS], 2015a, 2015b, 2015c). At least 200 hr of manual labor are required to plant, grow, harvest, and pack the yield (1,400 25-lb cartons) from a single acre of fresh-market tomatoes. Between 50 and 60 hr of manual labor are required to harvest an acre of oranges (University of Florida Food and Resource Economics Department, 2010). Collectively, these commodity groups account for nearly \$5 billion, or 60%, of Florida's total farm gate sales (USDA NASS, 2013).

Growers of these commodities rely on a flexible and skilled labor force to perform tasks such as planting,

pruning, and harvesting in often difficult environmental conditions. The labor force is culturally diverse, and its members may lack legal documentation and may be vulnerable to many workplace risks (Martin, 2013; Pena, 2012). Farm labor supervisors (FLSs), a group that includes crew leaders, harvesting contractors, and farm operators, are responsible for managing this workforce.

There is a pressing need to train FLSs to increase compliance with farm labor laws (Roka, Asuaje, & Thissen, 2011). In Florida, independent farm labor contractors (FLCs), such as certain FLSs, must obtain both federal and state licenses. However, the educational threshold for acquiring a license is low. The federal Department of Labor (DOL) does not require one to pass a test to earn an FLC license. The state Department of Business and Professional Regulations (DBPR) requires only first-time applicants to pass a test (Everhart, 2015). Neither the DOL nor the DBPR requires FLCs to earn continuing education units to renew their licenses. In addition to DOL, other federal agencies, such as the Department of Transportation, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), and Environmental Protection Agency, have regulations pertaining to farmworkers. Prior to 2010, University of Florida Extension did not have in place a comprehensive regulatory compliance training program that addressed farmworker pay, vehicle and workplace safety, discrimination, harassment, child labor, or human trafficking.

This article presents a four-step model for developing an Extension-based training for FLSs. After discussing the role of FLSs, we describe training programs prior to 2010, highlight partnerships and data collected to design an initial program, and then summarize how participant feedback was used to revise the program. Finally, we outline our vision for the program's future and its applicability to Extension programming nationwide.

## **Role of FLSs**

Seasonal and migrant farmworkers are organized into crews of 10 to 30 people. The crew is supervised by a crew leader who also may be responsible for recruitment, payroll distribution, transportation, and housing. In many cases, Florida crew leaders are licensed independent contractors who operate singly or as part of a larger FLC operation. Labor supervisors who are farm employees do not need a federal or state FLC license, even though they may perform many, if not all, of the same functions as independent FLCs.

The labor contractor model offers economic benefits for both workers and growers. Workers affiliated with labor contractors secure more consistent daily employment, especially when production shifts to different growing regions (Billikopf, 1997; Pena, 2012). Growers avoid the costs of managing large numbers of workers beyond the times when there is intense demand for field labor (Polopolus & Emerson, 1991; Vandeman, Sadoulet, & de Janvry, 1990).

Serious problems arise when labor contractors and/or farming operations fail to abide by workplace safety and employment laws. Violations place farmworkers in physical and economic jeopardy. Agricultural employers face statutory fines as a result of violations, and if violations are litigated in civil court, the financial losses can become more significant. Moreover, poorly treated workers generally are less productive, thereby adversely affecting both growers' production costs and workers' income (Billikopf, 1996, 1997, 1999, 2001).

## **Training Programs Prior to 2010**

Prior to 2010, most farm labor education for supervisors was limited to outreach forums restricted to the regulatory scope of the specific agency running the training. For example, DOL and DBPR focused primarily on

wage and hour issues. The Florida Highway Patrol Vehicle Compliance Unit offered workshops on vehicle and driver regulations, and the federal EEOC initiated its "farmworker initiative" to prevent discrimination and harassment of farmworkers. In some cases, grower organizations, such as the Gulf Citrus Growers' Association, jointly sponsored these workshops (Hamel, 2004).

The most prominent grower-led farm labor workshop in Florida has been the Agricultural Labor Relations Forum. Since 1974, this annual event has been sponsored by a consortium of agricultural commodity associations, including the Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association and the Florida Farm Bureau Federation. The forum is a day-and-a-half program that features nationally recognized labor law attorneys and other farm labor experts who address farm labor regulatory issues. Some topics, such as wage and hour compliance, are repeated annually, whereas other topics, such as guest worker (H-2A) regulations and I-9 audits, have been added in recent years. Forum attendees are mostly members of the sponsoring associations.

As we developed an FLS training program, we looked at what other states required in terms of licensing and trainings. Although all independent FLCs across the United States must obtain a federal DOL license, only 12 states require a state license: Arizona, California, Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Maryland, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, South Carolina, and Washington. Of these states, only California, Florida, and Oregon require a new FLC to complete a test. California is the only state that requires additional training beyond the initial entrance test. Before they can renew their annual license, California FLCs must complete an 8-hr workshop called the Agricultural Employer Training and Update (State of California, 2011). Furthermore, every 2 years, California FLCs must pass a "rules and regulations" examination (CA.gov, 2015).

## **Developing a Training Program for FLSs**

Given these antecedents, we followed a four-step process that can be adopted by other states/regions facing similar issues.

### **Step 1. Form Stakeholder Partnerships**

Extension has long emphasized the importance of obtaining diverse stakeholder input in developing effective educational programming (Archer et al., 2007; Infante-Casella & Kline, 2003; Morse, Brown, & Warning, 2006). Establishing an advisory committee helps build partnerships across the continuum of farmworker interest groups, including employers, worker advocates, and regulators. In addition to DOL, DBPR, and EEOC representatives, we interact with personnel from various state government agencies, including the Florida Agency for Workforce Innovation, Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Florida Department of Transportation, and Florida Department of Health.

Our first advisory committee was organized in Immokalee, Florida. As our training efforts expanded around Florida, separate advisory committees were organized in each location. These committees helped us understand differences in labor requirements and FLC responsibilities by region and crop. For example, we learned that in Immokalee, most citrus and tomato workers are transported from town to farm fields in FLC-owned vehicles, whereas strawberry workers near Plant City, Florida, arrange their own transportation. Conversely, many strawberry growers provide worker housing, which is not as common in Immokalee.

### **Step 2. Conduct Data Collection and Needs Assessment**

Data were collected through a series of meetings with key constituencies in 2009 and 2010. The data guided the initial design of our program. Growers' primary concerns were with wage and hour regulations and their potential liability as joint employers with FLCs. These concerns were reinforced by investigators from DOL and DBPR, who said that minimum-wage violations and inaccurate recording of compensable time were common in agricultural operations.

Farmworkers expressed concerns about fair and regular wages. Interestingly, workers did not associate crew leaders with money. Instead, they consistently defined "good" crew leaders as those individuals who conveyed respect and concern for their workers' overall welfare.

Licensed FLCs expressed a desire to be compliant with farm labor laws but felt "overwhelmed" by the sheer number of regulations and were concerned that they were "not up-to-date" on the current laws. They felt challenged by new food safety and field sanitation regulations and were unsure as to what exactly constituted "compensable wait time." Worker safety was a serious concern—in particular, how to balance worker safety with a piece-rate system that encourages a rapid pace of harvesting. FLCs also were aware of the negative public perception related to how farmworkers are treated in Florida but were frustrated that the entire FLC community was viewed in the same negative light.

In 2010, we surveyed 48 crew leaders in Immokalee. Their feedback, summarized in Table 1, provided important insights into how to design a training program and led us to offer bilingual training, an early fall training calendar, and a classroom environment sensitive to individuals with limited experience with formal education.

**Table 1.**  
Demographic Characteristics of Farm Labor Contractors  
in Immokalee, Florida ( $n = 48$ )

| <b>Characteristic</b>                           | <b>Value</b> |
|---|--------------|
| Male  | 87%          |
| Parents were crew leaders                       | 44%          |
| Experience as a farmworker                      | 45%          |
| Initial job was a driver                        | 11%          |
| Primary language is English                     | 8%           |
| Can speak Spanish                               | 100%         |
| Migrate out of Florida between November and May | 65%          |
| Average age (years)                             | 48           |
| Average years of formal education               | 6.5          |
| Average years of experience as crew leader      | 16           |

### Step 3. Design and Implement Initial Curriculum

Input from advisory committee members, interviewees, and stakeholders, along with feedback from a series of

trial sessions in spring 2010, led us to present our first training program as a series of four classes, each with 4 hr of educational content:

1. General Administration—FLC registration, wage and hour regulations, field sanitation, and joint employment;
2. Transporting Workers—DOT regulations (including driver qualification files), bus inspections, hours-of-service logs, and drug and alcohol testing programs;
3. Agricultural Safety—protection against pesticide exposure and heat stress, basic first aid, and safety around agricultural equipment; and
4. Personnel Management—legal aspects of managing people (discrimination and harassment), personnel management basics, and stress management.

The complete program was taught three times from September to November 2010. Classes were conducted in English and Spanish at the Southwest Florida Research and Education Center near Immokalee. The programs in September and November were presented over 2 consecutive days; the October program was spread across 4 consecutive days. Although the 4-day schedule provided a more relaxed educational experience, most participants preferred the more condensed 2-day format. Participants received a certificate of attendance for each class they attended. If they attended all four classes, they received a certificate of completion. A total of 603 training contacts, the number of people who took at least one class, were completed during fall 2010 (Table 2). A total of 129 people attended all four classes.

Positive feedback from stakeholders encouraged us to provide the same curriculum in 2011 as a 2-day program delivered twice at three locations. Despite the increased number of training dates and locations, the total number of training contacts and individual participants decreased slightly in 2011 (Table 2). The number of companies sending supervisors to the program, however, increased from 37 to 61 (Table 2).

**Table 2.**

Training Contact Statistics for the Farm Labor  
Contractor Training Program, 2010 and 2011

| <b>Variable</b>                                   | <b>2010</b> | <b>2011</b> |
|---|-------------|-------------|
| Number of training contacts by class <sup>a</sup> |             |             |
| General Administration                            | 154         | 142         |
| Transporting Workers                              | 169         | 149         |
| Agricultural Safety                               | 146         | 151         |
| Personnel Management                              | 134         | 138         |
| Total number of training contacts                 | 603         | 580         |
| Number of training locations                      | 1           | 3           |
| Number of scheduled training dates                | 3           | 6           |
| Number of individuals                             | 182         | 178         |
| Number of companies                               | 37          | 61          |

*Note.* Classes in 2010 and 2011 were 4 hr each.

<sup>a</sup>Training contact is defined as one person taking one class.

## Step 4. Revise Program According to Participant Feedback and Formal Evaluation

Participant feedback and a formal program evaluation after 2011 led to substantial changes in the program content and teaching methodology. Additionally, we identified a need to change the program name. Our training program initially targeted FLCs and was named Farm Labor Contractor Training. Although more than 70% of 2010 and 2011 participants were licensed FLCs, we realized that the program content was applicable to a wider range of people, including farm employees and administrative staff. Payroll and human resources employees do not directly supervise fieldworkers, but their knowledge of farm labor rules and regulations is vital to ensuring compliance within the farming operation. Hence, we renamed the program Farm Labor Supervisor Training.

Participant feedback encouraged us to increase flexibility regarding when and where the program was offered and to narrow the focus of individual classes to more closely match interests of attendees. In response, we repackaged the initial training curriculum into shorter, more topic-focused classes. We replaced the General Administration class with a 2-hr class on wage and hour regulations. The topic of workplace discrimination and harassment had made up roughly 50% of the Personnel Management class and thus became the subject of a stand-alone class called Human Resource Compliance. Many of the 2010–2011 participants appreciated the material in the Transporting Workers class but felt the information was limited to a farm's administrative personnel. Therefore, starting in 2012, we offered a 4-hr DOT Audit class, which addressed the administrative aspects of managing farm labor vehicles and drivers. A new class, Safe Driving, was created to address issues more suitable for bus drivers and other field supervisors, including vehicle safety, vehicle inspections, and defensive driving techniques. Shorter, more topic-focused classes increased our ability to adjust educational material to specific locations, schedule training sessions before or after work hours, and accommodate the programming calendars of county Extension agents.

In 2012 and 2013, a 1-day, four-class core program—Wage & Hour Rules, Human Resources Compliance, Pesticide Safety, and Safe Driving—was taught in eight locations across south Florida. In addition, a new class developed by a county Extension colleague, Emergency Preparedness, was added to the curriculum portfolio for 2013. This class was taught outside the FLS core program and was offered on two occasions at the Immokalee training location. In total, the number of training contacts increased to 1,098 and 1,557 in 2012 and 2013, respectively; the number of individuals attending training classes and the number of companies sending at least one person increased to more than 300 and 100, respectively (Table 3).

**Table 3.**

Training Contact Statistics for the Farm Labor Supervisor Training Program, 2012 and 2013

| <b>Variable</b>                                   | <b>2012</b> | <b>2013</b> |
|---|-------------|-------------|
| Number of training contacts by class <sup>a</sup> |             |             |

|                                    |       |       |
|------------------------------------|-------|-------|
| Wage & Hour Rules                  | 293   | 434   |
| Human Resource Compliance          | 264   | 317   |
| Pesticide Safety                   | 279   | 292   |
| Safe Driving                       | 262   | 337   |
| DOT Audit                          | 0     | 12    |
| Emergency Preparedness             | 0     | 165   |
| Total number of training contacts  | 1,098 | 1,557 |
| Number of training locations       | 8     | 7     |
| Number of scheduled training dates | 8     | 18    |
| Number of individuals              | 337   | 302   |
| Number of companies                | 104   | 103   |

*Note.* Classes in 2012 and 2013 were approximately 2 hr each. DOT = Department of Transportation.

<sup>a</sup>Training contact is defined as one person taking one class.

Following 2011, instructional design was improved with assistance from consultants at the University of Florida (UF) Center for Instructional Technology. They helped us sharpen our learning objectives with action verbs that described demonstrable knowledge, comprehension, and application of information (Bloom, 1956). Slides were modified to reduce the number of words and include more graphics. More case studies were developed to facilitate small-group discussions and interactive learning.

A formal evaluation was conducted during the 2012 training season by a team from the UF Agricultural Education and Communication Department. The evaluation assessed the effectiveness and quality of the training program by measuring reception to and knowledge gained from the seven trainings offered that fall and by comparing educational outcomes to program components (Morera et al., 2014a, 2014b). The formal program evaluation indicated that most participants found the quality of the experience to be high or very high, both in terms of overall satisfaction and likelihood of implementing what was learned. Results of statistical analysis indicated that, on average, posttraining knowledge test scores were significantly higher than pretraining knowledge test scores. However, participants attending classes delivered in English scored significantly higher than those attending classes delivered in Spanish. The difference in knowledge gains was due in part to variations in content and delivery of educational materials (Morera et al., 2014a). Before the start the 2013 training season, we revised all Spanish language translations for accuracy and clarity, created instructor manuals, and held instructor workshops to improve quality of both the English and Spanish classes.

Although the number of training contacts in 2012 and 2013 more than doubled from 2011, the number of different FLS classes was limited primarily to just four core classes. Other FLS classes, such as FLC Basics, Equipment Safety, and Rules for Drivers, were not being offered, nor were they requested. In an attempt to increase the number of FLS classes being taught, we introduced the Certificate of Farm Labor Management (CFLM) in fall 2014.

The purpose behind the CFLM is twofold: to encourage participants to sign up for additional FLS classes and to provide professional recognition to those individuals who demonstrate a knowledge base with respect to farm labor management. To earn the CFLM, a person must complete eight FLS classes, of which Wage & Hour, Human Resource Compliance, and at least one safety class are required. The complete list of FLS classes offered in 2014 and 2015 is shown in Table 4. The 1-day core program was presented in four locations, but the number of classes taught at the Immokalee location increased from three to 10. A total of 18 people earned the CFLM during fall 2014 (Table 4). Total number of training contacts decreased in 2014 to 606 but rebounded to 903 in 2015, when 10 FLS classes were offered at four locations. A total of 22 people earned the CFLM in 2015 (Table 4).

**Table 4.**

Training Contact Statistics for the Farm Labor  
Supervisor Training Program, 2014 and 2015

| <b>Variable</b>                                      | <b>2014</b> | <b>2015</b> |
|--|-------------|-------------|
| Number of training contacts by class <sup>a</sup>    |             |             |
| Wage & Hour Rules                                    | 101         | 159         |
| Human Resource Compliance                            | 101         | 85          |
| Pesticide Safety                                     | 25          | 23          |
| Safe Driving   | 55          | 64          |
| DOT Audit  | 19          | 13          |
| Emergency Preparedness                               | 37          | 0           |
| FLC Basics   | 0           | 141         |
| Equipment Safety                                     | 19          | 33          |
| Rules for Drivers                                    | 102         | 148         |
| Management Communications                            | 101         | 122         |
| First Aid  | 28          | 52          |
| CPR/AED  | 18          | 63          |
| Total number of training contacts                    | 606         | 903         |
| Number of training locations                         | 4           | 4           |
| Number of scheduled training dates                   | 14          | 20          |
| Number of individuals                                | 205         | 280         |
| Number of companies                                  | 48          | 59          |
| Certificate of Farm Labor<br>Management <sup>b</sup> | 18          | 22          |

*Note.* Classes in 2014 and 2015 were approximately 2 hr each. DOT = Department of Transportation. FLC

= Farm labor contractor. CPR = cardiopulmonary resuscitation. AED = automated external defibrillator.

<sup>a</sup>Training contact is defined as one person taking one class. <sup>b</sup>Certificate of Farm Labor Management started in 2014.

## Future Directions

Future goals of the FLS training program are to strengthen content and teaching effectiveness, to measure behavioral changes attributable to the training, and to enhance "professional" stature among FLSs. New subject material will evolve as new ideas and needs are identified by program participants and advisory committee members. For example, prior to the 2014 training season, our advisory committee requested that we develop a new class, Management Communication, to help supervisors more effectively communicate job expectations while at the same time minimize interpersonal conflicts.

Measuring behavioral changes at the workplace is important for documenting the extent to which our training has increased regulatory compliance and, ultimately, the extent to which working conditions of farmworkers improve. If our training program is impactful, we should be able to observe a decrease in the number and severity of regulatory violations found by federal and state regulatory agencies. Further, we should be able to document behavioral changes through field research and policy changes within the farming organization.

An underlying presumption of this training program has been that those FLSs who have a heightened sense of professionalism are more likely to be in compliance with farm labor regulations and, consequently, provide a better working environment for their workers. Offering of the CFLM is a first step in that "professionalization" process. The next step is to have a creditable third party attest that CFLM holders actually implement correct policies and procedures in their operations. By integrating regulatory requirements across multiple agencies, a third-party audit could provide a comprehensive approach to compliance, much in the way that Mallory, White, Morris, and Kiernan (2011) offered guidance to farm service providers in their Reading the Farm training program.

The farm labor issues confronted by Florida workers and growers are similar to those in other regions where specialty crops are grown. Washington state apple growers, South Carolina peach farmers, and Pennsylvania sweet corn producers rely on substantial numbers of seasonal and migrant workers to perform physically demanding jobs at relatively low rates of pay. The program we have been developing in Florida is transferrable to other specialty crop production regions.

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