# We're All In!

## Working Together to Provide Services for Children Whose Parents Work in Agriculture

# Executive Summary

**Employers. Parents. Children. Communities.**

Everybody benefits when parents are able to access high quality, affordable care for their children while they work. For parents employed in agriculture, there can be major challenges finding acceptable options for the care of young children as well as supervised activities for older children when school is not in session. What makes agriculture unique is that production has seasonal demands, periods of high-intensity work, and variable work hours. There is often a shortage of workers, and some workers spend limited periods of time in a single location. Employers and parents want to generate income when there are jobs to be accomplished and neither wants children present in the worksite.

A study conducted in Washington state identified factors faced by employers and farm worker parents regarding child care and youth services. Key findings included:

- Children are occasionally brought to the worksite with or without the employers' knowledge because parents have no alternative care for them.
- More than half of all farm working parents are in need of child care and youth services.
- Benefits to employers when child services for workers are available include: more women available to work; and employees able to work more hours.

# Recommendations for Action

**Awareness. Opportunity. Education.**

- Raise awareness among employers of the mutual benefits of facilitating and supporting care and services for employees' children.
- Convene stakeholders to assess local concerns and strategize on opportunities to improve options.
- Share information about existing services and model programs.

**Child Care and Youth Services** outside the worksite may include traditional day care centers, employer-based day care programs, licensed home-based services, non-profit organization programs such as YMCA or faith-based group, after-school programs or neighborhood cooperatives, and local municipal parks departments. For infants to youth (to 14 years), care and services typically include educational and recreational activities, nutritional and hygiene oversight, and rest.

## What is the Issue?

- Agriculture is essential to the U.S. economy and the labor force required to conduct agricultural work is critical to its success.
- There are concerns regarding a shortage of skilled workers who are willing and able to perform agricultural work.
- Agricultural workers and their families are an integral part of the agriculture industry and their surrounding communities during peak work periods.
- More workers, particularly women, would be available to work additional days and hours if flexible options existed for child services, benefiting employers and workers alike.
- Employers do not want children brought to the fields or worksite while parents work due to safety concerns, distraction for parents, and potential risk of child labor violations.

## What is the Need?

- More and better year-round services for children (0 – 14 years) are needed in agricultural regions, benefitting children, parents, employers and rural communities.
- Because of the seasonal and fluctuating nature of agricultural work, services for children need to have flexible schedules and be affordable and accessible.
- Working parents need safe alternatives for their children so they are not left unsupervised or with limited recreational and learning experiences during the summer months when school is not in session.
- Migrant workers who arrive in the area for specific work need timely access to information regarding local services for children, if any exist.
- Children need to be safeguarded from work hazards and adverse environmental conditions. They deserve to be in a protective, nurturing, and educational setting.

## Who Benefits?

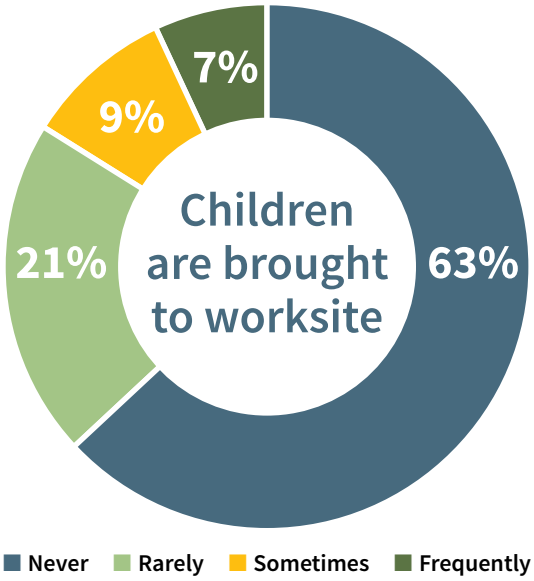
- **Employers** benefit by increasing the availability of an adequate and stable workforce, Improving their reputation, and reducing jeopardy related to child labor.
- **Workers**, whether migrant and seasonal or year-round staff, benefit when there are increased opportunities for employment combined with the peace of mind that their children are not in harm's way.
- **Children** and youth benefit from having safe and positive experiences either from child care programs or other recreational and learning activities.
- **Communities** benefit by knowing they are supporting the local economy through gainful employment and doing their best to enhance future opportunities for children.

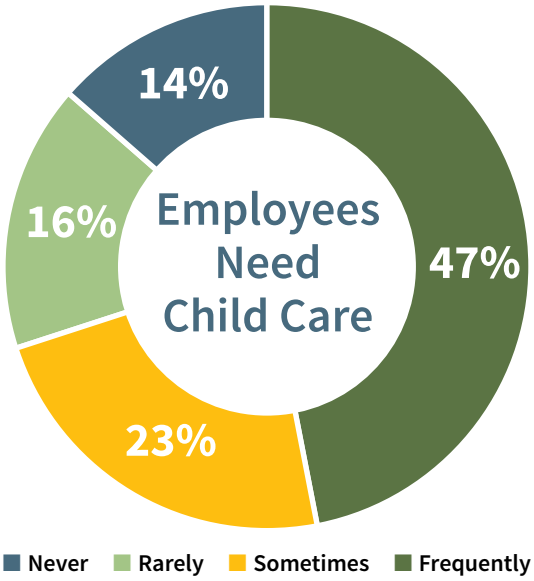
## Washington State's Experience

In 2014 a safety grant was awarded to Washington Growers League of Yakima, Washington, by the Agricultural Safety and Health Council of America (ASHCA) to explore issues surrounding the need for child care and safe-play resources for children as a way to keep kids out of the fields and receive supervised care and healthy activities. The project goal was to explore safe alternatives for children while their parents work, rather than to accompany them to the agricultural worksite. Results from this project will help support initiatives that: a) reduce jeopardy for employers by keeping children out of the work area, thereby reducing the possibility of child labor violations and the resulting consequences, such as embargo of crop products; b) create an opportunity to provide guidance on child labor and other regulations to employers; and c) create a partnership of stakeholder groups to collaborate in discussing and strategizing future long-term child care solutions for children, parents and employers.

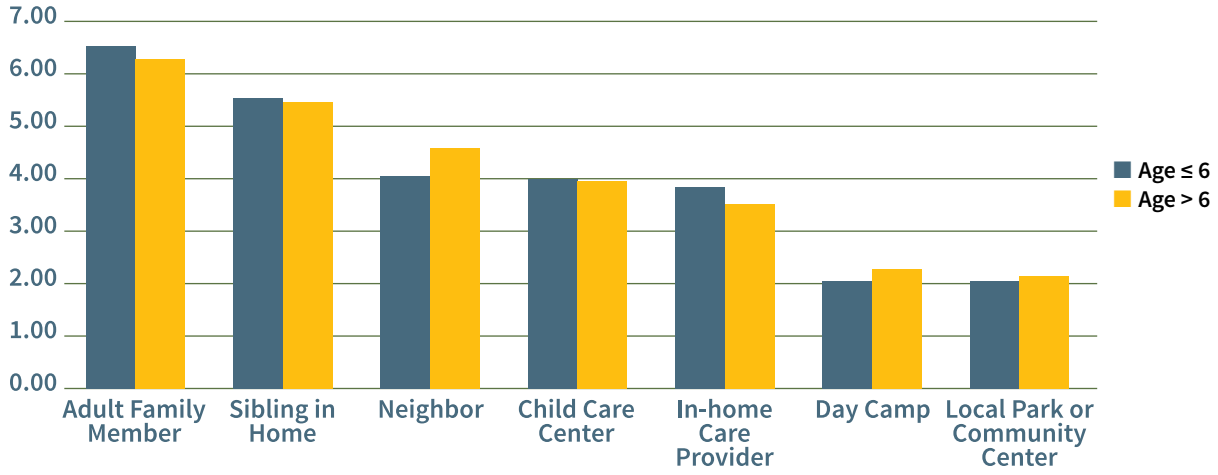
The methods of this project called for gathering perspectives of employers, as well as farmworker men and women with young children. On-site visits at a Western Washington berry grower and a Central Washington cherry grower consisted of interviews with representatives from management, followed by a focus group with workers at each site. Berry and cherry production farms were selected primarily because harvest is a high-demand period of time, occurring during summer months when school-age children are out of school. The focus groups were convened by convenience, based on participants' availability at the time of the site visit. They were comprised of migrant Hispanic women workers, although some men were also present. Additionally, a web-based survey regarding child care issues was completed by 42 employers. Results provided insights into current practice, needs and gaps, in addition to barriers and motivators for child care services, and recommendations for the future.

# Employer Perspectives

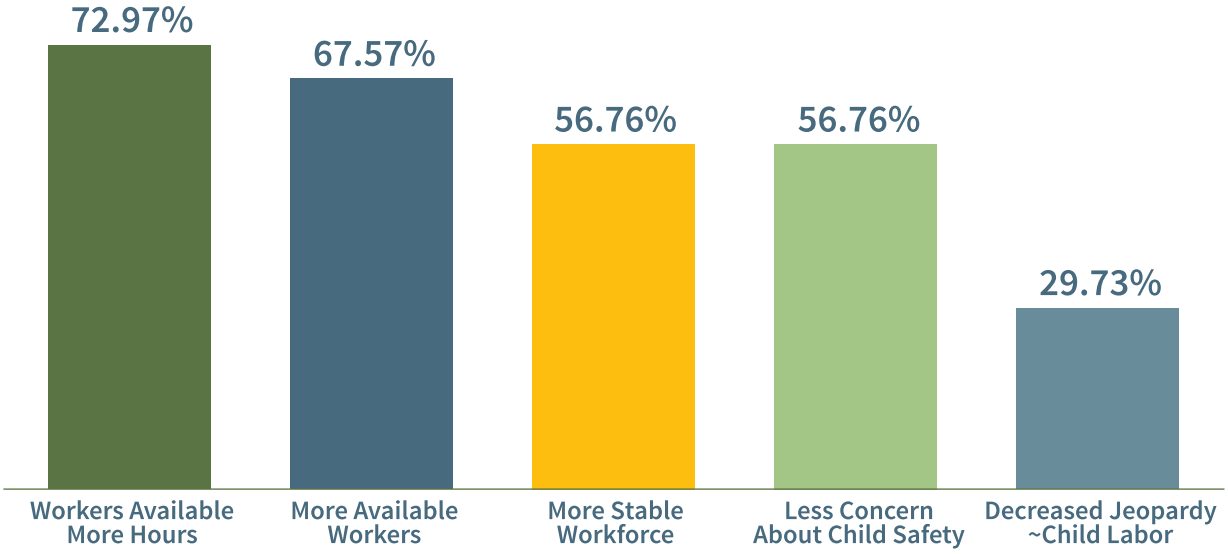


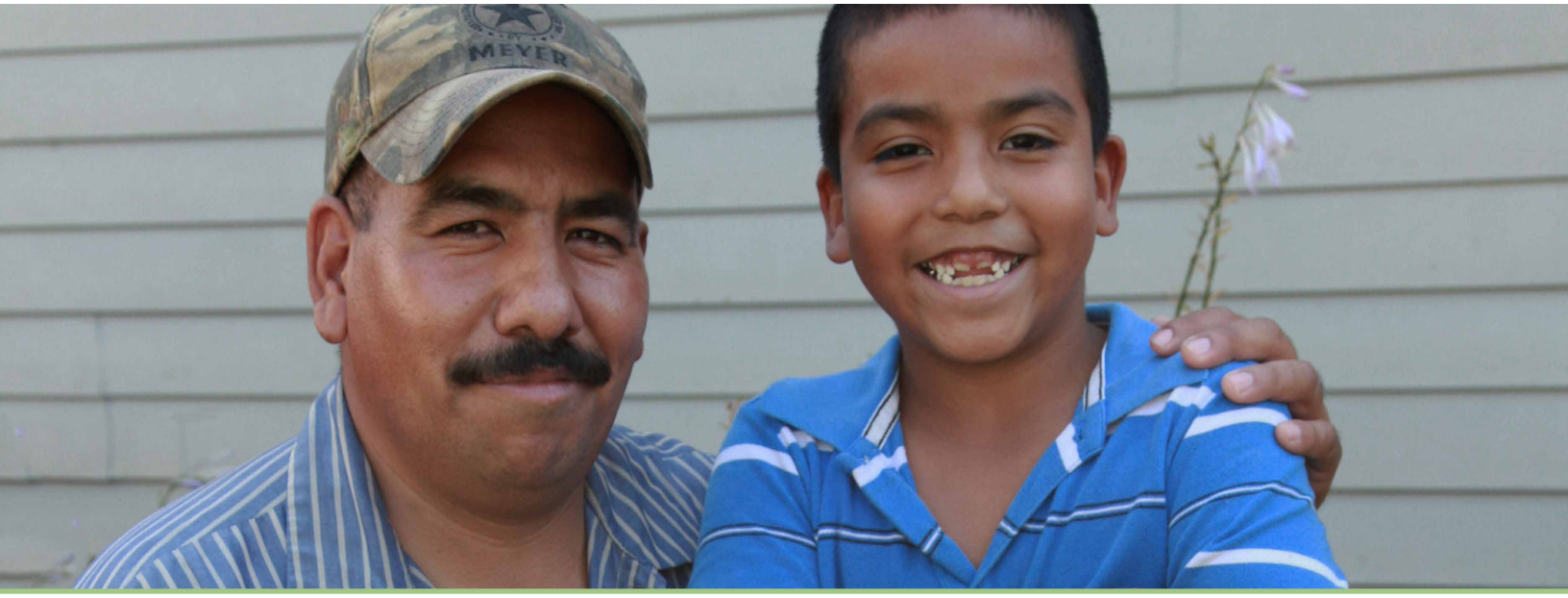



## Workers' Child Care Arrangements (ranked)

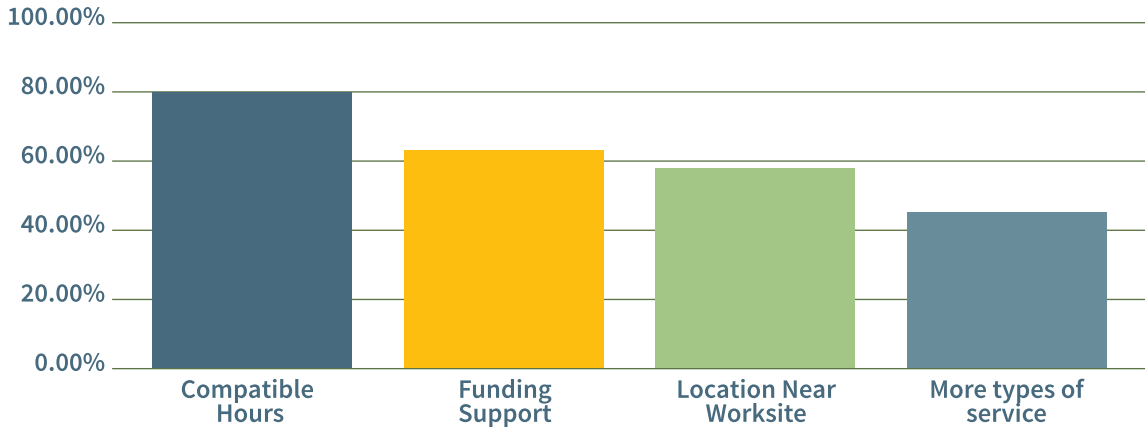


## Employer Benefits of Child Care




## Factors Needed to Improve Child Care and Youth Services



# Key Findings

- There are shared perspectives and values described by agricultural employers and farm workers regarding work, child care and youth services.
- Options for high quality, accessible child care for migrant and seasonal agricultural workers with children are limited and vary by region and locale.
- More women would be interested in agricultural employment if child care and youth services were available.
- Employers are willing to collaborate on local community efforts to provide and improve child care and youth services accessible to their employees.
- Federal and state funding support for child care services continues to decline, thus, the need for private-sector support is essential.
- Where there are successful programs providing child care and youth services for farm workers, these models could guide potential creation of new services in locations having commitment and collaboration among employers, community representatives and farm workers.
- Ideal child care and youth services would address the needs of children ranging in age from infant through youth up to 14 years; and be available for extended hours during the busiest work periods.

# Recommendations

- Community approaches for providing and improving child services should include all affected stakeholders - employers, non-profit organizations, churches, public health agencies, local municipal recreation programs and farmworker parents.
- At the local level, stakeholders should be convened to address current conditions and future opportunities to improve child care and youth services for agricultural worker families.
- Information regarding existing resources and “model programs” that provide child services for agricultural workers should be widely disseminated among agricultural businesses, worker advocacy groups and community leaders in regions of labor-intensive agriculture.
- Corporations involved in producing and distributing agricultural products should consider supporting programs for children of farm workers in their corporate giving programs as a demonstration of corporate social responsibility.
- Research is warranted to better understand several factors:
    - What are the range of services needed by different age groups, employers and workers?
    - What summer youth programs can be leveraged for farmworker children?
    - What are the components of ideal and model child care and youth services for farm workers?
    - What community groups are best suited to partner with local employers to provide services for farm worker families?
    - How can farm workers be empowered to use and improve local, existing child care options?
    - What would motivate employers to offer child care subsidies as an employee benefit?

# Want to lean more?

**Publications:**

Reschke KL (2012). Child Care Needs of Farm Families, Journal of Agromedicine, 17:208-213. - Summarizes information from many studies on urban and rural child services and describes the eight characteristics of model programs for farm parents.

Liebman AK, Mainster B, Lee BC (2014). Family Services for Migrant and Seasonal Farm Workers: The Redlands Christian Migrant Association (RCMA) Model. Journal of Agromedicine, 19: 123-129.

**Website:** www.childagsafety.org

**Video:** “Meeting the Needs of Farmworker Families” www.ashca.org/resources/videos

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**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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