

COVID-19 RESPONSE IN WISCONSIN

*“The key to success in providing services to the farmworker community is partnership.”
Angelica Vasquez, Wisconsin’s State Monitor Advocate*

WISCONSIN FARMWORKER COALITION

Angelica is part of the **Wisconsin Farmworker Coalition** (the Coalition) that includes United Migrant Opportunity Services (UMOS), Inc. (a National Farmworker Jobs Program “NFJP” grantee), Family Health/La Clinica dba La Clinica de los Campesinos, Inc., the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection, the Department of Workforce Development (DWD), the Department of Public Instruction (DPI), the Department of Health Services (DHS), Madison Area Technical College, Milwaukee Area Technical College, and the Mexican Consulate. The purpose of the Coalition is to work to ensure the health, safety, and well-being of all farmworkers in Wisconsin.

The Coalition’s COVID-19 Response Steering Committee, through Angelica, brought in the Midwest Food Processors Association and other employer representatives to help address impacts of COVID-19 on farmworkers. The Steering Committee developed five subcommittees to address issue areas in Wisconsin. Issue areas include:

1. Outreach and prevention
2. Housing and workplace safety
3. Education /Telehealth & access to testing
4. Isolation/Quarantine
5. Safe service access to positive workers

Through the efforts of the Coalition, the Steering Committee, and the subcommittees, of which Angelica has played an important role, Wisconsin has been able to achieve several successes that support the health and safety of farmworkers. For example, the Coalition's partnership with Family Health/La Clinica connected them



with farmworkers and Family Health/La Clinica was able to provide numerous services to migrant and seasonal farmworkers (MSFW). They assessed 12 worksites, conducted 275 outreach services onsite visits, and educated over 2,481 MSFWs on COVID-19 prevention, detection, and safety. As of November 2020, Family Health/La Clinica tested 3,313 farmworkers for COVID-19, of which 194 workers tested positive (5.8%). Family Health/La Clinica in coordination with DHS and UMOS provided emergency services to those who tested positive and swiftly provided the resources necessary to support agricultural employers and the farmworkers who needed to quarantine and access health services.

FARMWORKER PROTECTIONS

Another great accomplishment coming out of Wisconsin regarding **protecting farmworkers**, occurred on April 14, 2020 when Wisconsin Governor, Tony Evers, directed the Secretary-designee of the Wisconsin Department of Health Services to issue Emergency Order (EO) #25 to impose safety measures related to COVID-19 for migrant labor camps. The EO was drafted with input from DHS, DWD, and the Coalition and was intended to address proper care for farmworkers with COVID-19 and reduce the spread of COVID-19 among farmworkers. The EO expired on June 13, 2020, but because the risks associated with COVID-19 for migrant workers continued, an Emergency Rule was necessary for the preservation of public health, safety, and welfare.

Emergency Rule 204 (EmR204) was promulgated under Wisconsin Administrative Code Ch. DWD 301 to create requirements for protecting migrant workers and prevent the spread of COVID-19. EmR204 expired on November 8, 2020, however DWD has requested a 60-day extension to continue protections into 2021.

FARMWORKER HEALTH PROTECTIONS

In another example, the Advancing a Healthier Wisconsin Endowment granted Family Health/La Clinica, in partnership with the Wisconsin Farmworkers' Coalition, \$322,420. This funding will be used over the next six months to develop a cohesive response to **protect the health of MSFWs**, their employers, and communities in Wisconsin through the development of education, resources, and guidance during COVID-19 to prevent and/or minimize the risk of transmission of COVID-19 among MSFWs and their employers. According to Angelica, it is the partnerships that have helped ensure a rapid and seamless response to the needs of farmworkers in response to COVID-19.

DIRECT SUPPORT

Additionally, Angelica has been active **supporting farmworkers and agricultural employers** directly. In one example, an apple orchard employer was reluctant to work with Angelica and provide the farmworkers on his farm access to services. After Angelica explained the services that are available including free workforce development and education services, as well as free COVID-19 testing from La Clinica, and shared the benefits of the services to the employer and the farmworkers, the employer agreed. The employer then reached out to Angelica to see if she could help him obtain better access to internet and broadband services for workers, a challenge in remote areas. He wanted to help the children of farmworkers access their education resources. Angelica connected him to DPI and was ultimately able to secure a mobile "hot spot" to get the farmworker children access to educational resources.

Governor Evers created a broadband taskforce and assigned a \$24 million grant to cover broadband coverage, which provide access to broadband services across Wisconsin. Angelica notes that this is the next step to ensure children have the same educational opportunities no matter where they are living and attending school.

The above examples demonstrate what is possible through partnerships. This collaboration and dedication made a tremendous impact on the lives of farmworkers and their families. It truly exemplifies the intent of the Monitor Advocate System: to ensure MSFWs have equal access to resources and protections. Thank you, Angelica, the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, and all who are contributing to this effort.