

Introduction

“That’s the house that I am building! Those are the mango trees,
there are three of them! That’s my little house!”

SAMUEL

HUNCHED OVER A SMALL KITCHEN TABLE encircled by plastic lawn chairs, Samuel and Hector zoomed in to the map of Jaltenango de la Paz I had located using my smartphone. From a run-down single-wide trailer in the northernmost part of Vermont, we gazed upon the street-view rendering of their small village in the state of Chiapas, Mexico. Focusing in on the house that Samuel was building with his earnings from *El Norte*, we could see, in full color, the result of the remittances that he regularly sent home. With these dollars-turned-pesos, he also sent his dreams of eventually returning and raising a family, surrounded by the region’s coffee fields and Mayan communities. Together, the three of us virtually strolled through the images of village streets sent from more than three thousand miles away. We marveled at the detailed images of homes and businesses, of people and of cars. As we crossed each intersection, Samuel and Hector argued about what had been built since each of them had made their long journeys north, and what was no longer there. As time and space were flattened onto the glowing screen, the connections between these two distinct locales came into sharp relief, along with an understanding of how their food systems are intimately intertwined. For Samuel and Hector, who have come to the United States to work in Vermont’s dairy industry, Jaltenango was both ever-present and a million miles away, ripening mangoes and hungry Holsteins competing for their labor, care, and attention.

Over the past twenty years, farmworkers like Samuel and Hector have moved to the picturesque rural countryside of Vermont to find work in the dairy industry. For some, this northern state is just the most recent stop in a long line of impermanent and unstable employment in the United States. For others, family networks have brought them directly to Vermont's rolling green hills and milking barns from their homes and fields in Mexico and Central America. Samuel, in his early forties, had migrated to the United States three times, previously working in landscaping and other seasonal jobs in South Carolina. Three years before we sat down for an interview at his kitchen table, he followed his brother to Vermont to secure the chance of year-round employment that the dairy industry promises. Samuel's nephew Hector, on the other hand, came directly from Chiapas just one year earlier to reunite with his mother, two U.S.-born brothers, and other members of his extended family. After paying off the debt he had accrued to pay for his crossing, he too planned to start saving for the family he hoped to have one day. For these two men, Vermont's often harsh climate stands in stark contrast to Jaltenango's lush green mountains. At first glance, their landscapes and agrarian economies could not be more different. However, what connects them is deep and complex: the political-economic interdependencies and migration networks that are inherent in the globalized industrial food system.

In *Life on the Other Border*, I unravel these interdependencies and follow these networks as I explore the intersections of structural vulnerability, food security, and the politics of visibility in the lives of migrant farmworkers in the northern borderlands of the United States. This book focuses on Latinx farmworkers who labor in Vermont's dairy industry, aiming to illuminate the complex and resilient ways these workers sustain themselves and their families as they simultaneously uphold the state's agricultural economy.¹ I argue throughout the following chapters that multiple forms of vulnerability and marginalization conspire to leave farmworkers like Samuel and Hector never fully satisfied with their sustenance or their living conditions, even as their labor contributes to the livelihoods of farmers and the well-being of consumers across the food chain. In these borderlands, anxiety and fear continue to shape the lives of migrant workers long after they have endured the trauma of crossing into the United States from Mexico. At the same time, Vermont's farmworkers are looking towards unprecedented possibilities for achieving food justice and food sovereignty, in large part because of worker-led grassroots organizing. This organizing builds upon decades of farmworker activ-

ism and labor movements, from the United Farm Workers (UFW) grape boycotts to more recent campaigns by the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW). Although this ethnography is situated in Vermont, it is not a unique case. Across the U.S. food system—in the fields, slaughterhouses, fast-food kitchens, and canneries—it is the immigrant worker who feeds the nation. What is particular to this story is how the reality of Vermont's dairy sector rubs against—and is erased by—its carefully constructed image and branding.

Vermont is widely seen as an agrarian utopia where socially responsible brands like Ben & Jerry's and Cabot Creamery Cooperative have flourished. It is also a place where the local food movement has taken firm hold of the consumer imagination and purchasing power, as described by anthropologists Heather Paxson in her work on artisanal cheese in her ethnography *The Life of Cheese* (2012) and Amy Trubek in her work on *terroir* in *The Taste of Place* (2008). It is within this imagined agrarian utopia that migrant workers labor and live in the state's shadow economy to sustain industrialized food production while experiencing everyday discrimination and difficulty satisfying their most basic needs. In presenting a portrait of this shadow economy, *Life on the Other Border* examines how the broader movements for food justice and labor rights play out in an agricultural sector where systemic inequality is continually reproduced by the demands of an industrialized food system and the contradictions of racialized and misaligned agricultural and immigration policies. Of course, labor exploitation is not new to Vermont's food system, or any food system. Wherever food is harvested, cooked, served, or thrown away, there is someone working for too little and for too long. And, as food systems scholars have argued, this pattern of inequality does not follow a simple binary of local/organic = good and global/conventional = bad.² In the pages that follow, I continue with this project of demystifying and challenging these binaries in a place where the local is intimately bound with the global. A place where men like Samuel and Hector tirelessly work to produce dairy products bearing the wholesome Vermont brand, even as they are often sustained by foods with little cultural or nutritional value.

Building upon more than six years of community-based ethnographic research, *Life on the Other Border* explores the following interrelated questions: *What are the social, political, and economic factors that bring Latinx migrant dairy workers into the state of Vermont, and what factors shape their lives while here? How do Latinx migrant dairy workers access food and negotiate*

the reproductive labor associated with accessing and preparing foods within the household? How has the broader Vermont community responded to the presence and the needs of this workforce amidst an ever-changing political and social climate? As I engage with these questions, I connect data gleaned through participant observation, food security surveys, and interviews with farmworkers and key stakeholders working with the farmworker community with an analysis of the broader structures that shape our food systems from the local to the transnational scale. Understanding the social, political, and economic dynamics that bring Latinx workers into Vermont and those that shape their living and working conditions once here is essential. It is essential because they are the cornerstone of an agricultural economy so marked by its proximity to an international border and particular racialized histories. This border is a place where insiders and outsiders are defined, where some bodies matter more than others, and where the labor of some food workers is visible and celebrated, while the labor of others is hidden and exploited.

BORDERING VISIBLE BODIES

In this book, I develop and engage with a framework of Bordering Visible Bodies, weaving together a diverse set of theoretical threads that allow me to investigate: (1) the border as a process—of bordering—and as a physical site of structural vulnerability, violence, and resilience; (2) the politics of visibility that are at play in Vermont’s agricultural economy and working landscape; and (3) the embodied experiences of workers who have crossed borders and reside within them. I use this framework to contextualize and understand the food-related practices within migrant households, because they provide a critical vantage point for illuminating how the relationships between people and their basic needs move from intimate embodied experiences, through household and social reproduction, and outwards towards social and political institutions. As the editors of *Food Across Borders* remind us, “Food is a great way to understand what borders do: the bodily, societal, cultural, and territorial transformations that occur as physical sustenance flows across, or stops at, a boundary.”³

There is an exceptionally rich body of literature on borders and borderlands, and in a post-9/11 world, borders and border-making are particularly salient as we theorize power relations, injustice, and in/exclusion. As we find ourselves in a moment of intensified focus on the U.S.-Mexico border and the

demonization of those who cross over it, borders demand our attention. In my engagement with border theory—or better, border theories—I have been inspired by a line of transdisciplinary thinking that stretches from the recent work of Anssi Paasi to the canonical work of Gloria Anzaldúa. Anzaldúa, who pioneered—and queered—feminist borderlands scholarship, describes the borderlands as those spaces that are “physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy.”⁴ This view emphasizes that the borderlands are markers of difference and of closeness, of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, and of sovereignty of the nation-state and of individual bodies.⁵ More than twenty years later, Paasi extends this line of thinking (though he fails to credit Anzaldúa) through his examination of borders as discursive and technical landscapes of control.⁶ He argues that “borders should not be seen solely as phenomena located at the ‘edges’ of territories, but rather ‘all over’ territories, in innumerable societal practices and discourses.”⁷ Although Anzaldúa and Paasi both claim that borders permeate all social relations and discourses, they also emphasize that the discourses and practices of border-making are concentrated at physical boundaries, particularly those dividing nation-states.

Some border scholars have taken to using the term *bordering* to describe the inclusionary and exclusionary processes and practices of border-making. I have found this idea productive in better understanding the marginalization of farmworkers in Vermont. Johnson and his colleagues offer a useful definition of this concept:

Bordering reflects politics in many ways. It is not only a politics of delimitation/classification, but also the politics of representation and identity that come into play. Bordering separates and brings together. Borders allow certain expressions of identity and memory to exist while blocking others. Respectively borders are open to contestations at the level of state and in everyday life.⁸

Within the scholarship on borders and migration, the bordering that unfolds at the U.S.-Mexico border has garnered much anthropological attention, with notable contributions coming from Ruth Behar (1993), Leo Chavez (1998), Jason de León (2015) and Seth Holmes (2013). While these scholars do not explicitly use the term “bordering,” these books illustrate the depth that anthropology offers through their rigorous examinations of border violence

and the complex ways that borders are enacted and embodied by Latin American migrants. These are significant and tragically beautiful pieces that have pushed my thinking in deep and productively uncomfortable ways.

And yet, *Life on the Other Border* offers something different. By extending northwards and drawing attention to a border region that has remained largely invisible in borderlands scholarship, I show how historically and socially contingent processes of bordering come to shape the minds and bodies of migrant workers in the food system. This bordering is inextricable from the politics of visibility that marks Latinx farmworkers in Vermont's dairy industry as the Other, as those who do not belong but whose bodies provide the invisible labor necessary for the state's agricultural economy to stay afloat. My analysis draws upon data collected both before and after the 2016 U.S. presidential election. In the pages that follow, I draw attention to this new political reality and how an increasingly hostile anti-immigrant discourse at the national level impacts the well-being of Vermont's farmworkers on the local level.

Often characterized as a "new" or "nontraditional" destination for Latinx migration, the increasing migration of workers from Mexico and other Latin American countries into Vermont's dairy industry began in the late 1990s, a period coinciding with an unprecedented scaling up of dairy production. The presence and everyday struggles of these workers are emblematic of the rapidly changing dynamics within Vermont's rural landscapes. Within these landscapes, the structural inequalities connected to race, ethnicity, and citizenship leave Latinx migrant workers simultaneously invisible in the workplace and hypervisible in public settings. This contradiction has significant implications for accessing basic needs like food, health care, and safe housing.⁹ Although the academic treatment of the politics of visibility runs broadly across disciplines, my treatment of this topic is informed by a body of work that examines how (in)visibility is produced, denied, and struggled for and by immigrant bodies in specific spaces and places.

Whether the physical site is the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, downtown Nashville, farmworker housing projects in Oregon, the streets of Perry, Iowa, or in day labor sites in California, Latinx bodies continue to be marked as the Other.¹⁰ This bordering of Latinx bodies has multiple motivations and outcomes: it is enacted as a defense of hegemonic whiteness; it reflects a deeply entrenched fear of "polluting" immigrant bodies; and it provides the terrain for struggles over visibility and recognition.¹¹ Licona and Maldonado point to the complex and often competing dimensions of visibility:

Within dominant populations, visibility is often experienced as positively coded. To be visible in community spaces means to be included, to have a voice that gets heard, to have access to institutions and resources. By contrast, in the present context of entrenched anti-immigrant hostility and heightened immigration enforcement, for Latin@s (immigrants and non-immigrants), visibility is often negatively coded: it often entails standing out as an ‘unbelonging’ presence, being the subject of surveillance and policeability, of criminalizing, pathologizing, and otherwise alienating discourses and practices.¹²

As I build upon and extend the scholarship on the politics of Latinx visibilities, I provide my own answer to the question raised by Monica J. Casper and Lisa Jean Moore: “What can account for the fact that certain bodies are hyper-exposed, brightly visible, and magnified, while others are hidden, missing, and vanished?”¹³ By attending to the experiences of workers in our food system, my answer—in short—is that hierarchies and inequalities in agricultural labor reproduce and are reproduced by varying degrees of visibility. The invisibility of immigrant workers has material consequences—both for workers and the eventual consumers—and hiding the bodies and suffering of food workers is symbiotic with what Henry A. Giroux has termed the “biopolitics of disposability.”¹⁴ Indeed, as Sidney Mintz argued decades ago, the exploitation and invisibility of workers is not external to food production, but rather a precondition of it.¹⁵

For dairy workers in Vermont’s border region, the international border manifests itself in everyday decisions about the risks of leaving the farm and becoming visible to U.S. Border Patrol versus exercising one’s autonomy and right to mobility. For most, the risks of being detained and possibly deported do not outweigh the benefits of continued employment, resulting in a dependency on others for accessing food and medications, inequitable access to health care, and mental health consequences such as anxiety and depression. Throughout the years that I have studied migration in Vermont, the most common term that Latinx immigrants use to describe their experience has been *encerrado* (enclosed)—which refers to the feeling of being trapped behind the borders of the farms themselves. This term, *encerrado*, has appeared repeatedly in my conversations with Samuel and Hector, whose words opened this chapter, as well as in conversations with women like Sofía who faced surveillance from Border Patrol that discouraged her from attending prenatal appointments while she was pregnant with her second child. These forms of bordering, and the resulting feelings of being imprisoned and

invisible, extend the violence and vulnerability produced at the national border all the way down to the borders around the farm that people confront on a daily basis.

The majority of Vermont, including more than 90 percent of the state's residents, falls within the one-hundred-mile expanse where Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers have the authority to stop and search travelers without reasonable suspicion or a warrant.¹⁶ The hypervisibility and assumed undocumented status of Latinx workers in this nontraditional destination of migration puts them at risk for compounding experiences of structural vulnerability and inadequate and irregular access to many basic needs and social connection. These anxieties tend to intensify the closer to the northern border one is living and working, because the concentration of active U.S. Border Patrol agents increases with closer proximity to Canada. While the one-hundred-mile expanse is indeed significant, the "primary operating domain" of Border Patrol is said to be within twenty-five miles of the Vermont-Canada border, meaning that most routine enforcement takes place within a much smaller region of the state. This primary operating domain encompasses three of the four border counties (Grand Isle, Franklin, and Orleans) that are home to a significant number of the state's dairy farms employing Latinx workers.

For farmworkers in rural areas of the state, a trip to the grocery store or to a doctor's appointment is cause for significant worry and fear. Merely speaking Spanish in public has been used as a cause for community members to call ICE officers. Indeed, just two weeks after arriving in Vermont, Hector was detained at a store when he was seen shopping for items for his little brother's birthday party. This set off a round of complicated and costly steps through immigration courts and detention centers, exacerbating the debt that he had already accumulated for his passage into the United States. At the time of writing, Hector is currently awaiting a final decision about what lies ahead for him, but for now he continues to work as so many food- and farmworkers do around the nation, plagued by feelings of anxiety and uncertainty.

There is yet another side to this politics of visibility. Since 2009, the living and working conditions of Latinx workers in Vermont's dairy industry have become more visible to the broader public. This increased visibility has followed a number of high-profile events and important farmworker-led organizing efforts for food justice that have challenged the erasure of Latinx farmworkers. These events include the death of a young Mexican farmworker while working with heavy farm machinery in late 2009, the detention of



MAP 1. Map showing one-hundred-mile and twenty-five-mile border zones. Map prepared by Syracuse University Cartographic Laboratory and Map Shop. Reprinted with permission from Rutgers University Press.

farmworker activists and subsequent organizing around racial profiling within local and state law enforcement, and legislation approved in 2013 that grants driver's privilege cards to all residents, regardless of citizenship status. Most recently, farmworker activists involved with the organization Migrant Justice and their allies have campaigned to reconfigure the supply chain of some of Vermont's most well-known food corporations through the "Milk with Dignity" campaign. This campaign, which has attracted national attention, builds upon a successful model of worker-driven social responsibility pioneered by the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW). Even with this growing visibility, Latinx migrants continue to experience a great deal of fear, isolation, and anxiety in their daily lives due to their status in Vermont as invisible workers in what some scholars have called a "carceral landscape".¹⁷ For many workers, particularly those close to the border, Vermont's dairies resemble prisons where the line surrounding the farm becomes the most proximate border that may or may not be crossed.

Amidst these complicated dynamics, local politicians and dairy farmers have become more vocal about the industry's dependency on Latinx farmworkers and the need for policy reform. This dependency became especially poignant in September 2011, when two undocumented workers were detained after the car they were riding in was pulled over for speeding by state police near Middlesex, Vermont. One of these workers, Danilo Lopez, had become widely known throughout the state for his activism and criticism of the Secure Communities Program.¹⁸ Both workers were subsequently transferred to Border Patrol authorities and detained. This event escalated later that same afternoon, when five local activists came to protest at the state police station near Middlesex, arguing that requesting documentation during a routine traffic stop was a clear violation of the recently passed policy of Bias-Free Policing. After forming a human blockade to stop the vehicle transporting the two detainees, three of the five activists were arrested for disorderly conduct, though they were all shortly released. Later that same evening, then Governor Peter Shumlin ordered an immediate internal investigation into the traffic stop.

This case took an interesting turn later that fall when Shumlin went on public record about his views on the presence of undocumented workers in the state. He asserted, "We have always had a policy in Vermont where we kind of *look the other way* as much as we can . . . I just want to make sure that's what we're doing" (emphasis mine). The governor then continued with a matter-of-fact observation that Vermont farms simply "can't survive without

workers from outside America. It's just the way it is."¹⁹ As might be expected, this statement set off a round of contentious debates and commentary on migrant labor that has not dissipated to this day, and any local coverage on farmworker issues is sure to produce a heated thread of commentary about the importance and the assumed illegality of these workers. More importantly though, this statement is also an explicit reinforcement of the conditions that keep migrant farmworkers invisible, reproducing the processes of bordering that keep their laboring bodies out of sight and, for many, out of mind.

A DISTINCTIVE RURAL PLACE?

Understanding the lives of migrant workers in Vermont's dairy industry demands that we consider the links between emigration from Latin America and the devastation of rural livelihoods following the implementation of neoliberal reforms such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Neoliberalism is a political economic philosophy that asserts the primacy of the market in attending to human needs and well-being, and reorients the state towards the facilitation of market mechanisms.²⁰ The state often cedes its power through allowing corporate interests to advance this philosophy with the objective of increasing efficiency and allowing for the free flow of capital. NAFTA, as a state-backed trade agreement, aimed to facilitate the flow of capital and goods across the borders in North America. Following the passage of this agreement, scholars estimate that anywhere from 1.3 million to more than 2 million Mexican farmers were forced off their lands, pushed to the urban centers of Mexico as well as north of the U.S.-Mexico border to find work.²¹ While much has been said about the dumping of U.S. corn on the Mexican market and consequent emigration, less attention has been paid to the political-economic histories and transnational impacts of the deregulation of Mexico's dairy industry amidst the increasing consolidation and concentration of the U.S. dairy industry. As with corn production, these neoliberal reforms were facilitated by NAFTA, an agreement that flooded Mexico with U.S. subsidized milk, often in powdered form.²² And, as with corn, small-scale dairy farmers on both sides of the border have endured assaults to their livelihood and market volatility because of these reforms.²³ The U.S. Dairy Export Council, central in lobbying for these policies, comprises many dairy giants that operate in Vermont,

including Dairy Farmers of America, Inc., Dairy Marketing Services, Dean Foods, and HP Hood.²⁴ These same players now profit from the labor of Latinx migrants who had little choice in their home countries other than to move in search of work.

As the U.S. state with the highest dependence upon a single commodity for agricultural revenue, Vermont has experienced significant shifts in the labor force that toils amidst the rolling hills and red barns that still dominate the pastoral working landscape.²⁵ According to the Vermont Dairy Promotion Council, Vermont currently sells more than 321 million gallons of milk each year, with 70 percent of agricultural sales coming from this single product. Approximately 80 percent of the state's farmland is dedicated to supporting dairy production, whether for dairy lots, for pasturing, or for growing feed crops. Dairy also accounts for six thousand to seven thousand jobs (more than any of the state's key private employers), providing \$360 million in wages and salaries.²⁶ As of 2016, there are an estimated one thousand to twelve hundred Latinx migrant dairy workers in Vermont, and the vast majority—approximately 90 percent—of these workers are thought to be undocumented.²⁷

The dairy industry has long been central to the state's agrarian image and this image is touted with great regularity in the marketing of the state's agricultural products and the celebration of its rural livelihoods. However, the role of farmworkers from Latin America in creating these products and maintaining the working landscape is rarely acknowledged. In many ways, this failure to acknowledge the contributions of Latinx workers in Vermont's dairy industry is similar to the historical and contemporary erasure of Mexican-origin agricultural workers that Mario Sifuentez describes in his book *Of Fields and Forests*.²⁸ As Sifuentez describes in his rich and deeply personal environmental and labor history of the supposed progressive "ecotopia" of the Pacific Northwest, it is often in these assumed "green" locales where immigrant and migrant workers remain the most invisible and marginalized. However, just as Sifuentez describes in his analysis of worker mobilization and the formation of the farmworker union *Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste* (PCUN), Vermont's farmworkers are actively challenging this marginalization.

The erasure of farmworkers in Vermont is exemplified in the recent publication entitled *Milk Matters* cited previously. This sixteen-page publication prepared by the Vermont Dairy Promotion Council intends to illuminate the economic significance of dairy in the state but includes just one photo of

a Latino farmworker and a mere two sentences about the “complex labor and immigration issues” that dairy farmers face. While the report is comprehensive in other ways, these kinds of representations render Latinx farmworkers and their labor largely invisible while upholding the image of Vermont as an idyllic and progressive state maintained only by the sweat and endurance of U.S.-born farmers. As scholars have shown, this image of Vermont’s working landscape has been carefully produced alongside a long history of exclusionary politics and cultural boundaries based on race/ethnicity, social class, and national origin.²⁹ The struggles of Latinx farmworkers comprise the most recent chapter in the industry’s history of hiring workers who will toil for substandard wages and in less-than-desirable conditions. Nevertheless, the discursive production of Vermont as a “distinctive rural place” steeped in Yankee values of hard work, modesty, and wholesomeness continues to circulate, drawing thousands of people into the state annually to engage in agri-tourism and to consume the state’s bounty.

Once comprising primarily small-scale family farms, Vermont’s dairy industry has been subjected to the same pressures of consolidation and concentration that pervade the U.S. food system as a whole. The image of the small family dairy farm that is invoked to sell the Vermont brand is now little more than a myth, since neoliberal policies and market volatility make small-scale dairy farming next to impossible. Over the past seventy-five years Vermont has lost more than 90 percent of its dairy farms. In the 1940s there were approximately eleven thousand dairy farms in the state; in early 2018 this dropped to fewer than seven hundred fifty.³⁰ Since the economic crash of 2008, Vermont’s dairy farmers have faced unprecedented financial and environmental challenges, including high feed prices, unstable milk prices, and irregular weather patterns. This decline has spelled disaster for thousands of Vermont’s dairy farmers, who, as of early 2018, earned roughly the same amount for fluid milk as they did in the late 1970s, even as the costs of production have multiplied. In February 2018, Agri-Mark, a Massachusetts-based cooperative that owns Cabot Creamery, sent their farmers a letter with information for suicide prevention hotlines along with their milk checks.³¹

Yet Vermont is currently producing milk at record levels, supporting trends that demand surpluses of fluid milk like the increased consumption of Greek-style yogurt and the manufacturing of whey protein, a by-product that is often more profitable than the cheese and yogurt from which it comes.³² While a sizeable number of dairy farms (82 percent) have fewer than two hundred cows, economic conditions have pushed Vermont’s dairy farms



FIGURE 1. Cows in Vermont morning mist. Photo by Jessie Mazar.

to become larger, with bigger herds to become more efficient and remain profitable, and to use more intensive milking technologies and schedules. The increased production of milk in the state, which comes at significant ecological and social costs, is directly facilitated by Latinx farmworkers who migrate in search of employment and the chance at a better life for their present and future families. This shift is reflective of national and international trends in the food system, where immigrant labor has become more central to production and profits, even if these workers are afforded little in the way of legal protections or the possibility of upward mobility.

The demographic changes that have occurred in Vermont over the past twenty years with increased migration from Latin America entail significant considerations with respect to the programs, agencies, and retail outlets that provide food, health care, and other basic needs to Vermont's residents. This book traces the impacts of these demographic shifts in a state that remains largely invisible in the scholarship of migration and borders. In neighboring New York State, the experiences of Latinx migrant workers living in rural areas have been examined from multiple angles.³³ These studies illuminate the lived realities that Latinx migrants face in a state where the federal border has become increasingly "Mexicanized" since 2001, amidst concerns of terrorism and lax surveillance.³⁴

Like most agricultural sectors across the nation, the dairy industry in the state has grown increasingly industrialized since the 1950s. This industrialization has resulted in the consolidation of thousands of small family farms into a much smaller number of large farms. The technologies and labor practices associated with milking have also shifted to become more uniform, mechanized, and less amenable to small-scale family farming. Across the U.S. dairy industry, hiring Latinx workers has become more commonplace alongside the mounting ecological, technological, and financial challenges of farming, and Wisconsin, California, and upstate New York have seen similar demographic changes in the dairy workforce to those taking place in Vermont.³⁵ As of 2017, a significant number of Vermont's dairies employed migrant laborers, with 68 percent of Vermont's milk coming from farms that rely on immigrant workers (with a yearly sales of \$320 million) and 43 percent of New England's milk supply coming from these farms.³⁶ Based on their study of Spanish-speaking workers on 293 dairies in New York, Vermont, and Pennsylvania, researchers predicted that within just a few years the majority of the dairy workforce in these states would be Spanish-speaking.³⁷ While Latinx workers in Vermont's dairies do not yet form a majority, their economic role in the industry remains significant.

FARMWORKER INJUSTICE GROWS IN EVERY FIELD

As U.S. food production has grown increasingly industrialized, the consolidation of small family farms into larger and often vertically-integrated farming operations has grown more commonplace. Since the end of World War II, these consolidation and industrialization processes have been spurred by a growing influence of large-scale agricultural corporations that now dominate most food production and distribution in the United States and abroad. Along with this consolidation, hiring laborers from off the farm has become the primary strategy of meeting the production needs of farming operations where labor needs exceed local labor availability. In Vermont, there is a particular dearth of local residents, especially younger individuals, available and willing to work the kinds of dairy jobs that immigrant laborers hold. Immigrant workers labor in nearly all sectors and scales of the food system, from the smallest family farms to the largest corporate food operations, from diversified farms to enormous dairy operations. In a nation where the food industry accounts for 13 percent of the total gross domestic product, the

contribution of farmworkers is clearly significant to the nation's overall economic well-being.³⁸

While Mexican workers have labored on U.S. farms since the drawing of the U.S.-Mexico border, the reliance on hiring farmworkers from outside the United States intensified much later with the institution of the Bracero program in 1942. Largely in response to labor shortages brought about by U.S. involvement in overseas wars, the Bracero program brought an estimated four million hired laborers from Mexico into the fields and farms north of the border. In response to concerns over labor abuses associated with the program, an increased presence of undocumented labor, and the growing significance of labor organizing by the National Farm Workers Association and the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee, the program was officially ended in 1964. Since the end of the Bracero program, the United States has sought to manage the needs for guest workers through the H-2A Temporary Agricultural Worker program, though this too has been an inadequate and unsustainable solution, particularly within the dairy industry with its year-round labor needs.³⁹

The growing reliance on nonfamily farm labor since the end of World War II has been significant. For instance, the percentage of hired and contract workers providing agricultural labor (measured in the percentage of hours) increased from 25.3 percent in 2003 to 41.0 percent in 2016 alone.⁴⁰ It is exceedingly difficult to pinpoint the total number of hired farmworkers laboring in the United States, given the off-the-books nature of many of these work arrangements. Additionally, given the increase of mechanization in the food system, the United States has experienced an overall decrease in the total number of farm laborers, so this proportional change is likely even more dramatic. According to the Bureau of Economic Analysis, the total number of wage and salary workers in crop, livestock, and related support activities was estimated at 1,344,000 in 2016, a figure that reflects a higher rate of growth in the number of contract workers compared to those hired directly.⁴¹

Given the high mobility and unauthorized status of many of these workers, it is not surprising that estimates of the number of foreign-born farmworkers are not consistent across sources. While the Southern Poverty Law Center estimates that roughly 62 percent of farmworkers in the United States are undocumented immigrants, NAWs data estimates that roughly half of all hired crop farmworkers lack official authorization to work in the country.⁴² The top four nations sending undocumented farmworkers are Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.⁴³ From nations like these, both unau-

thorized and authorized farmworkers are pushed north by poverty, violence, political instability, food insecurity, and a lack of viable employment. Given the cultural diversity of farmworkers from Latin America, it is difficult to generalize about demographic factors and pre-migration experiences, but farmworkers tend to be less likely to speak English than other migrant laborers, and according to the National Center for Farmworker Health, the average level of completed education among farmworkers is the eighth grade.⁴⁴

Despite these divergent data statistics, it is clear that a majority of these workers are male, with most estimates agreeing that only 18–28 percent of all hired farmworkers are female.⁴⁵ Many popular representations of farmworkers characterize them as seasonally employed and following various crop harvest cycles, but in reality, only about 12 percent of farmworkers work in this fashion.⁴⁶ Since the attacks of September 11 and the subsequent militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border, foreign-born agricultural workers have become less likely to engage in circular migration to and from their home nations as they once were, because of the increasing risks of crossing the border.

Despite the significance of farmworkers in upholding the national agricultural economy, the economic conditions of farmworkers remain substandard. Seasonal farmworkers are often even more disadvantaged in the labor market than farmworkers who remain settled.⁴⁷ According to a recent report, only 13.5 percent of workers earn a livable wage across food sectors from production through retail, while for agriculture and nursery workers surveyed, this rate was 0 percent.⁴⁸ The poverty rate among farmworkers is much higher than average for salary and wage workers, and according to recent data, over three-fifths (61 percent) of the farmworker population lives below the poverty line.⁴⁹ Farmworkers are also particularly vulnerable to both wage theft and violations of minimum wage regulations. Based on surveys conducted by the Food Chain Workers Alliance, 92.9 percent of all workers experiencing wage theft were Latinx agricultural workers.⁵⁰ Research completed by the organization Migrant Justice has shown that Vermont's farmworkers are no exception, with 20 percent of workers surveyed reporting that their first paycheck was illegally withheld and 12 percent of workers reporting not being paid on time.⁵¹

Latinx farmworkers also disproportionately experience irregular and inconsistent work, with double the unemployment rates of all wage and salary workers.⁵² On the flip side, farmworkers are also more likely to have schedules that exceed fifty hours per week, especially during peak agricultural seasons. Undocumented workers are unable to access federal and

state-based programs for the poor, including SNAP benefits, housing assistance, disability and unemployment, Medicaid, or SSI. This is despite the fact that they pay billions into these federal programs annually.⁵³ Besides these inconsistencies and economic realities, farmworkers do not typically have access to unemployment insurance, workers' compensation, or disability benefits. This demonstrates how farmworkers often work in a "shadow economy" where they are vulnerable to the whims of unscrupulous employers, unable to assert their rights and, for all practical purposes, beyond the protection of labor laws that protect the rest of us from abuse, discrimination, and wage cheating in the workplace.⁵⁴ These lack of protections are particularly troubling given the hazardous working conditions that many farmworkers experience.

With the high number of undocumented workers on U.S. farms comes a preponderance of unsafe working conditions and labor abuses. Agricultural work is widely considered to be one of the most hazardous sectors of the economy, and safety and health concerns in the workplace are often exacerbated by unsafe and unhealthy living conditions. The occupational fatality rate for farmworkers was five times higher than the rate for any other worker in 2009.⁵⁵ Female farmworkers encounter these struggles in addition to even greater wage inequalities. And in many cases, they also experience sexual harassment and abuse. According to a recent study, as many as 80 percent of female farmworkers experience sexual violence; and they often fear reporting these crimes because of a generalized fear of police and other authorities.⁵⁶ The dairy industry is particularly unsafe given the size of milk cows and the hazardous working conditions produced by high levels of animal waste and mechanized equipment. The 2009 death of José Obeth Santiz-Cruz was a poignant and tragic reminder about these conditions, when he was strangled after his clothing got caught in a gutter cleaner.

Sadly, it is estimated that only one-tenth of farmworkers have health insurance.⁵⁷ This lack of protection is troubling given that a lack of adequate sanitation facilities, coupled with heavy exposure to pesticides and other agricultural chemicals, is a pressing and often deadly challenge confronting farmworkers. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, there are an estimated ten thousand to twenty thousand cases of diagnosed pesticide poisonings among farmworkers each year.⁵⁸ Prolonged pesticide exposure is linked to a wide range of illnesses and health conditions, including infertility and reproductive health problems, cancer, birth defects, skin problems, Parkinson's disease, and neurological damage.⁵⁹ In the dairy industry, expo-

sure to the hazardous chemicals used to clean and sanitize milking equipment is a constant reality, and it is rare that employers and employees have clear and consistent lines of communication about their proper use and disposal.

Over my time conducting research in Vermont, I have repeatedly listened to stories of individuals migrating from Mexico to work in the dairy industry at ages as young as fourteen. These workers, often men, show the cumulative and embodied effects of their labor only a few years later, their bodies wracked with aches and pain. Yet children and youth receive fewer legal protections in agricultural work than in other sectors. For example, while workers in non-agricultural sectors must be eighteen to perform hazardous tasks in the workplace, the minimum age for workers in the agricultural sector is sixteen. The legal protections against child labor are certainly complicated by the lack of documentation status of many workers, leaving factors like age to be overlooked by employers in their hiring processes.

Forced labor is a persistent and troubling problem within the agricultural sector, and farmworkers are often vulnerable to physical and verbal abuse and threats of deportation if they do not follow strict orders from their employers. Since the late 1990s, cases of forced, indentured, and enslaved agricultural workers have made national headlines. Through the ongoing anti-slavery campaign led by the CIW, the enslavement and abuse of more than one thousand workers in Florida, Georgia, and the Carolinas have been investigated and prosecuted since 1997. While enslavement and forced labor have not been reported in Vermont's dairies, wage theft or delays in pay are commonly reported problems, leaving many workers vulnerable to the unreasonable demands of their employers to continue work without proper compensation.

Given these troubling conditions, it is necessary to highlight the discontinuities between legal protections and the actual experiences of farmworkers. Although there are state regulations designed to protect farmworkers, nearly all major federal labor laws that were passed during the New Deal under the administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt specifically exclude farmworkers. These exclusions, and their effects, should be seen as concrete forms of institutional racism. This is because they were largely motivated by concessions to southern congressmen firmly entrenched in the Jim Crow era who were invested in the ongoing exploitation of Black workers and other minorities working in agriculture.⁶⁰

Laws that would be particularly helpful to farmworkers, including workers' compensation, mandatory breaks, and overtime pay regulations, do not apply to workers in this sector of the economy. Moreover, "under federal law,

a farmworker may be fired for joining a labor union, and farm labor unions have no legal recourse to compel a company or agricultural employer to negotiate employment terms”.⁶¹ Although agricultural employers and farm labor contractors must abide by the Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act, this act does not cover some of the most pressing challenges that have been described above. It does, however, state that workers must be paid what and when they are due and that the terms and conditions of the employment must be disclosed. For undocumented workers there is little recourse to ensure that these standards are met.

HARVESTING A DIFFERENT PRODUCT: WHAT MAKES DAIRY WORK UNIQUE

This book focuses on migrant farmworkers in Vermont’s dairy industry because they face a set of everyday challenges distinct from workers in other sectors of the food system. At the same time, they are constrained by some of the very same structural inequalities that make food-related jobs some of the nation’s most unsafe and underpaid. The year-round nature of milk production, in comparison to other sectors of farm labor, presents a different set of realities and limitations for those employed in the dairy industry. Unlike workers following seasonal schedules of planting and harvesting, migrant workers in this industry are excluded from federal seasonal work programs such as the H-2A visa program. This differential access to authorized work in the U.S. food industry is reflective of the deeper contradictions embedded within agri-food commodity chains, where immigrant workers are simultaneously indispensable and disposable. Organizations like the Food Chain Workers Alliance (FCWA) and CIW have documented and challenged these contradictions, drawing attention to the fact that food-related jobs, from production through disposal, are often filled by workers with limited access to the benefits and protections associated with U.S. citizenship. Vermont-based Migrant Justice, a farmworker-led organization that is a member of the FCWA, is working to challenge these inequities and bring greater agency and justice to the lives of dairy workers.

The vast majority of the research on farmworkers focuses on those working in seasonal agriculture. However, there are a few key studies that examine the experiences of migrant dairy workers in states such as New York and Wisconsin, and one study that attempts to take a global perspective.⁶²