

# Research paper on effect of strict immigration policies on california agriculture...

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## **Immigration Policy Effects on California Farming.**

Introduction.

The United States of America has immigrants that are either authorized or unauthorized. The unauthorized or illegal immigrants are important for the development of the nation's economy. The illegal immigrants provide about 5-6 percent of the U. S labor force. Any changes in the immigration policies will have both direct and indirect effects on all the sectors of the economy including agriculture. There is an estimated 7 million unauthorized immigrants working in the U. S. (Abelardo 1). The citizens hold different stands regarding the issue. There are those who believe that immigrants better themselves while enriching the country, while others believe they are a detriment to the economy of the nation.

The United States agriculture sector relies heavily on immigrants to provide labor. Fifty percent of the hired crop workers in the agriculture sector are unauthorized workers. In the agricultural sector, the illegal immigrants are critical if production is to be maintained leave alone increased. This is because the sector is entirely dependent upon unauthorized immigrants who are working in the nation. Growers and labor unions have recently put the figure of illegal immigrants working on U. S farms at 70 percent (Center for Immigration Studies 1).

Majority of the unauthorized immigrants are composed of foreign-born or nonpermanent residents in the United States. However, there are persons who hold the above status, but are authorized workers by virtue of holding nonimmigrant visas such as the H-2A workers. The effect of the immigration

policy on labor intensive Agriculture in California includes both positive and negative. If immigration policies are stricter, it will create a labor shortage (Martin 1). This is especially so in the agriculture sector which relies on illegal immigrants for most of the farm activities including planting, crop management and harvesting.

Majority of the illegal immigrants are not properly educated, most have high school education or less. The lack of papers and qualification limits the kind of work they can be employed to perform. Consequently, most of them end up performing manual jobs with a good number finding employment in the agriculture segment. Enforcing policies that reduce illegal migration into California will directly limit the number of workers seeking employment in the agriculture sector.

Strict immigration policies will result in an increase in the production costs. Labor is a major factor of production. Although some of the production processes can be mechanized, some cannot and have to be performed by people. Farmers have to pay more to produce agricultural products. It will also affect the California farmers because not all of them can afford to continue farming. The risk of remaining in farming when there is unpredictable labor supply will cause some of the farmers to exit from the farming business. California is involved production of many agricultural products, such as fruits and vegetables which require time-sensitive processes. For example, planting, crop management in the farm and harvesting are all practices that must be done on time in order to realize maximum output. Crop losses will result due to limited labor. The unavailability of labor will increase the risk of production causing farmers to

either limit the amount they grow or abandon the production altogether. Strict immigration policies in California will increase the wage rates in the agricultural sector (Thomas 1). The labor available will have many options to choose from including seeking work in nonagricultural sectors. Eliminating illegal immigrants in the state will create scarcity yet the demand for the labor resource will still remain the same. Although the people lack higher education, they can still get jobs in other sectors such as security and cleaning jobs. Scarcity will drive the wage rate upwards as the farmers compete with other employers in recruiting the limited employees available. The farmers will be forced to offer better terms to employees in order to attract and retain them. The alternative is to hire authorized workers such as the H-2A workers. The farmers will be required to meet the special minimum wage rate and also meet housing requirements.

Strict immigration policies will cause an increase in the prices of agricultural commodities. The result of increased production costs is felt by the consumers who have to pay higher prices for the goods. Crop losses will be experienced because some of the critical processes are not performed in time. Farmers will not absorb the increased costs of production alone; they will pass them down the line to consumers. The prices will also increase because of reduced production of the goods. When the production costs increase, some farmers exit from production. High risks of production such as crop losses will cause farmers to reduce the amount of production. This translates to fewer agricultural products reaching the market. The demand of the products has not changed, yet the supply of the goods has reduced resulting in an increase in prices.

Strict immigration policies will reduce the number of unauthorized workers that depend on the government for social security funding. This will be through availing of more opportunities for the local populace to self-actualize as there will be more and better jobs more so for the youth. This will also lower the pressure on social amenities such as schools and hospitals thus reducing the pressure on social security funds.

## **Effects of Flexible immigration Policy on California Agriculture.**

When immigration policies are flexible it will lead to an increase in the rate in which immigrants enter the U. S. This translates to a high number of employees available to work in the California Agricultural sector leading to increased productivity. Farmers can choose the most qualified employees to hire and can also engage in long-term employment and specialization. The farmers can train the employees and increase their knowledge and expertise in specific areas. The workers can also grow and develop themselves in certain jobs improving the services that they provide in the sector.

Flexible policies will lead to low wage rates both in the agricultural as well as other segments of the economy, and this is because there will be very many workers yet there is no commensurate increase in available opportunities.

This translates to higher numbers of employees seeking after the same jobs.

The farmers will tend to offer lower wages because they know that the pool of employees is inexhaustible. It is also expected that when the supply of labor is so high the wage rates decline because the farmers have a wide selection.

Flexible immigration policies in California will contribute to the displacement

of domestic workers (Dixon 1). When the supply of labor from the illegal immigrants is high, the U. S citizens will miss certain job opportunities. This is because the unauthorized workers are willing to accept job offers with poor terms of pay. In the absence of illegal immigrants, the agricultural jobs will be offered to domestic workers and to other authorized workers. When unauthorized workers flood the market, they compete for the same jobs with domestic workers. Job displacement is a serious concern because it can increase the rates of unemployment in the state. The displacement workers happen at a ratio of 1: 1, meaning for everyone unauthorized worker that is hired; a local worker is displaced. Consequently, the higher the number of unauthorized workers that are hired, the higher the number of domestic workers that are displaced.

Flexible immigration policies will contribute to increased productivity in the California Agricultural sector. Illegal immigrants provide over 50% of the labor required by farmers in California. The GDP contribution of the agriculture sector is dependent on continued improvement of productivity. When farmers can readily access labor, they will achieve high production rates. Labor a main factor of production, its availability is paramount especially to production activities that cannot be mechanized. The wealth of California farmers will continue to increase with an increase of illegal immigrants in the state. Although illegal immigrants benefit from the state funds, they contribute more than what they take from the state. They are involved in the making of wealth, products, goods and services that raise more income for the state than what they receive from the state.

Flexible immigration policies in California will support low production costs in

the agricultural sector (Devadoss 890). Farmers can engage in production without fears of scarcity of labor. Crop losses due to lack of persons to perform the necessary activities will be eliminated. When farmers can access cheap labor, they can concentrate on how to increase productivity and how to improve on production. The final effect on the agricultural sector is that farmers will engage in farming activities without the risk of labor scarcity. The availability of labor will allow farmers to produce and supply agricultural products at reasonable prices. The Consumers of agricultural produce grown in California will not have to bear any added costs arising from high labor costs incurred during production. It will also allow farmers to invest in production and aim at reaching maximum levels of output in their farms. Consequently, there will be mass production of goods even those that are labor intensive since they are supported by unlimited supply of labor from the illegal immigrants. When there is a high supply of goods to match the demand in the market, then prices stabilize.

In conclusion, Agriculture in California relies heavily on illegal immigrants to perform many of the production processes. Regardless of the direction the state takes concerning the immigration policies; different effects will result. The state can decide to enforce policies that are strict or flexible to immigration thereby, increasing or decreasing the flow of illegal immigrants into the state. The effects to agriculture in California can be either positive or negative whose perspective is put in consideration.

## **Works Cited.**

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