

# How Many Michigan Farmworkers Could Get Regularized Under New Legislation?

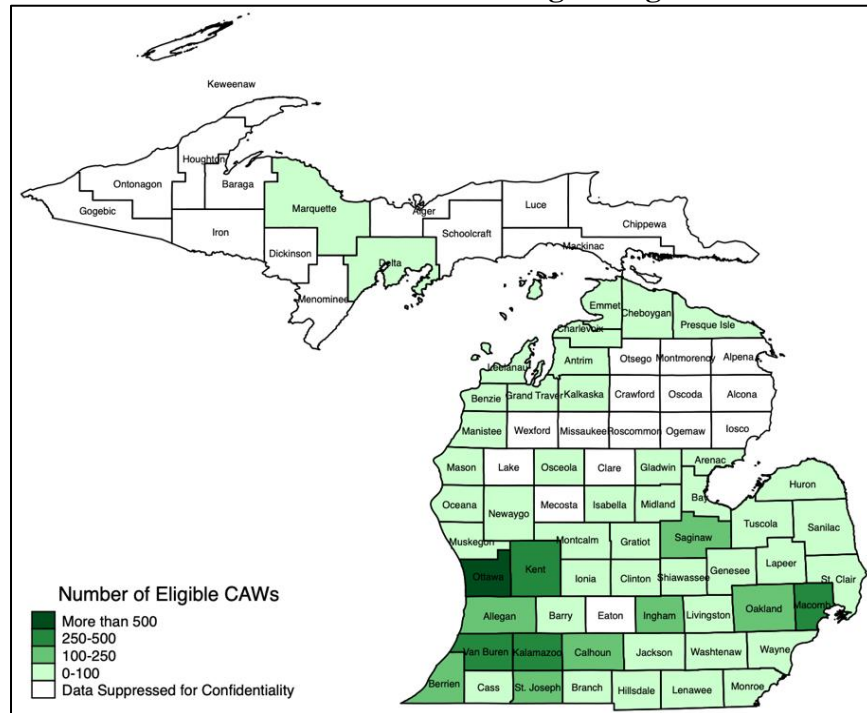
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An important part of the farm labor policy discussion revolves around the employment of undocumented farmworkers. Recently proposed legislation known as the Farm Workforce Modernization Act (FWMA) would provide a pathway to legal status for undocumented farmworkers. In this article, we estimate the number of undocumented Michigan crop farmworkers who would be eligible for legal work authorization by the recently proposed FWMA.

Under Title 1 of the FWMA, undocumented crop workers who have worked in US agriculture for at least 180 days over the last two years would receive legal work authorization under a special Certified Agricultural Worker (CAW) status. Our analysis uses data from the National Agricultural Worker Survey (NAWS) to estimate the share of the workforce that would be CAW eligible and the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) to estimate the number of crop farmworkers employed in the state. Combining these data sources provides us with the information required to estimate the number of farmworkers who could get regularized in Michigan.

According to the 2022 QCEW, there are about 20,000 full-time equivalent non-H-2A crop production jobs on the books of Michigan farm employers. However, due to worker turnover throughout the year, the number of individual farm employees is higher than 20,000. As such, our estimates are conservative in nature and provide estimates of the minimum number of farm employees that could become regularized under the FWMA.

**Figure 1: Number of Farmworkers in Michigan Eligible for CAW Status**



We estimate that at least 5,000 undocumented crop farmworkers could become eligible for CAW status throughout the state. The leading counties are Ottawa with at least 730 CAW eligible workers, 460 workers in Kent County, 330 workers in Macomb County, 310 workers in Kalamazoo County, and 260 in Van Buren County. Figure 1 shows the number of crop workers eligible for CAW status by county across the state of Michigan. A majority of the eligible crop workers work in the southwestern part of the state. Estimates for CAW eligibility of the remaining counties can be found in the second column of the online table found at [https://www.zachrutledge.com/uploads/1/2/5/6/125679559/online\\_table.pdf](https://www.zachrutledge.com/uploads/1/2/5/6/125679559/online_table.pdf).

### Access to Green Cards

Under Title 1 of the FWMA, CAW eligible crop workers would be able apply for permanent resident status (a green card) if they continue to perform farm work in the US. CAW eligible workers who have performed at least 10 years of US farm work could apply for permanent resident status in 4 years if they continue to work in US agriculture for at least 100 days per year, and those who have performed less than 10 years of US farm work could apply for permanent resident status after 8 years.

The share of the crop workforce in the Lake region that would be eligible for a green card in 4 years is about 12%, which is 47% of the CAW eligible workforce. This share translates to at least 2,400 Michigan crop production farmworkers that could obtain a green card in 4 years. Figure 2 displays the number of crop production employees in each county that could obtain a green card in 4 years. The leading counties are Ottawa County with at least 340 workers, Kent County with 220 workers, Macomb County with 160, Kalamazoo County with 150, and Van Buren County with 120. Estimates for green card eligibility after 4 years for the remaining counties can be found in column 3 of the online table.

**Figure 2: Number of Farmworkers Eligible for Permanent Resident Status After 4 Years**

