

# California COVID-19 Farmworker Study

<http://covid19farmworkerstudy.org/>

Athena K. Ramos, PhD, MBA, MS, CPM

# Farmworkers face COVID-19



<https://youtu.be/x7TCsaRWwTM>



# Background

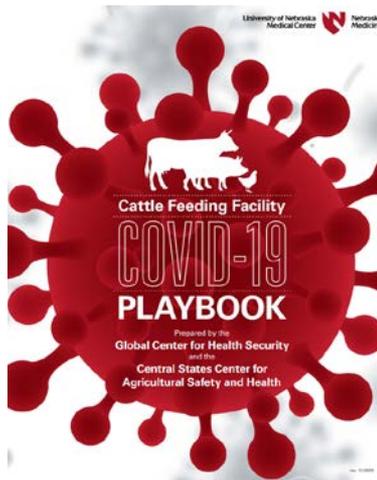
About 1.2 million people are employed in agriculture, forestry, or fishing in the U.S. (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019).

Agriculture is a dirty, dangerous, and demanding (3-D) industry that employs a large number of immigrants and racial/ethnic minority workers. Even pre-pandemic, the industry had high rates of occupational illnesses and injuries.



# “Essential workers”

- Agricultural workers are considered “essential workers.”
- U.S. government mandated that essential industries remain operational to ensure an adequate food supply.
- Farms across the country have experienced large COVID-19 outbreaks, and both agricultural employers and farmworkers have been worried about the spread of COVID-19 throughout the industry.



Early in the pandemic, a UNMC team developed a tailored playbook for the cattle feeding industry with best practices to control transmission as well as contributed to CDC/NIOSH guidance for agricultural employers.

[https://www.unmc.edu/healthsecurity/\\_documents/Cattle-Feeding-Facility-Playbook-FINAL.pdf](https://www.unmc.edu/healthsecurity/_documents/Cattle-Feeding-Facility-Playbook-FINAL.pdf)



# Farmworker COVID-19 risks

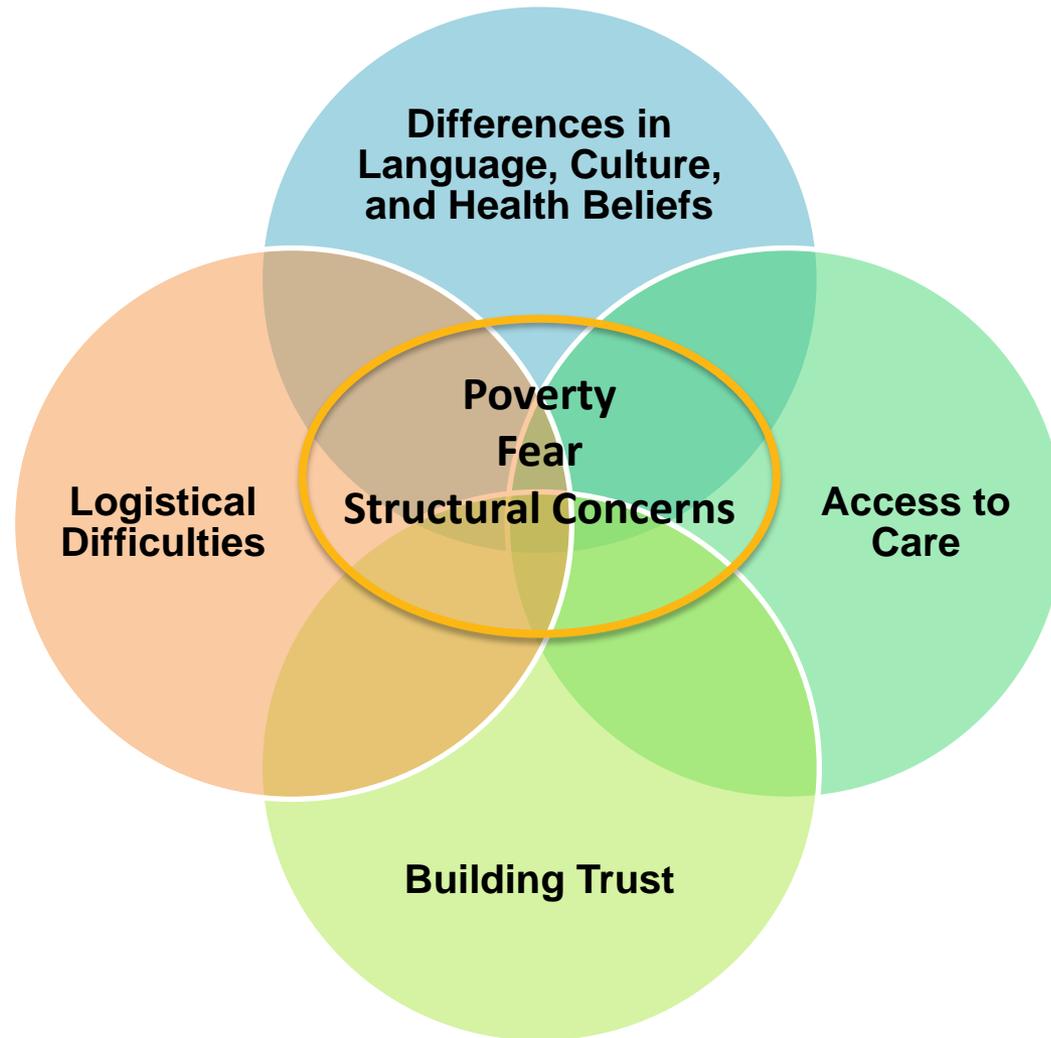
Farmworkers have an increased risk of contracting COVID-19 due to:

- Close contact with other workers (proximity/distance)
- Long periods of time in close contact with others (duration of contact)
- Shared equipment, tools, and vehicles
- Shared housing and/or transportation

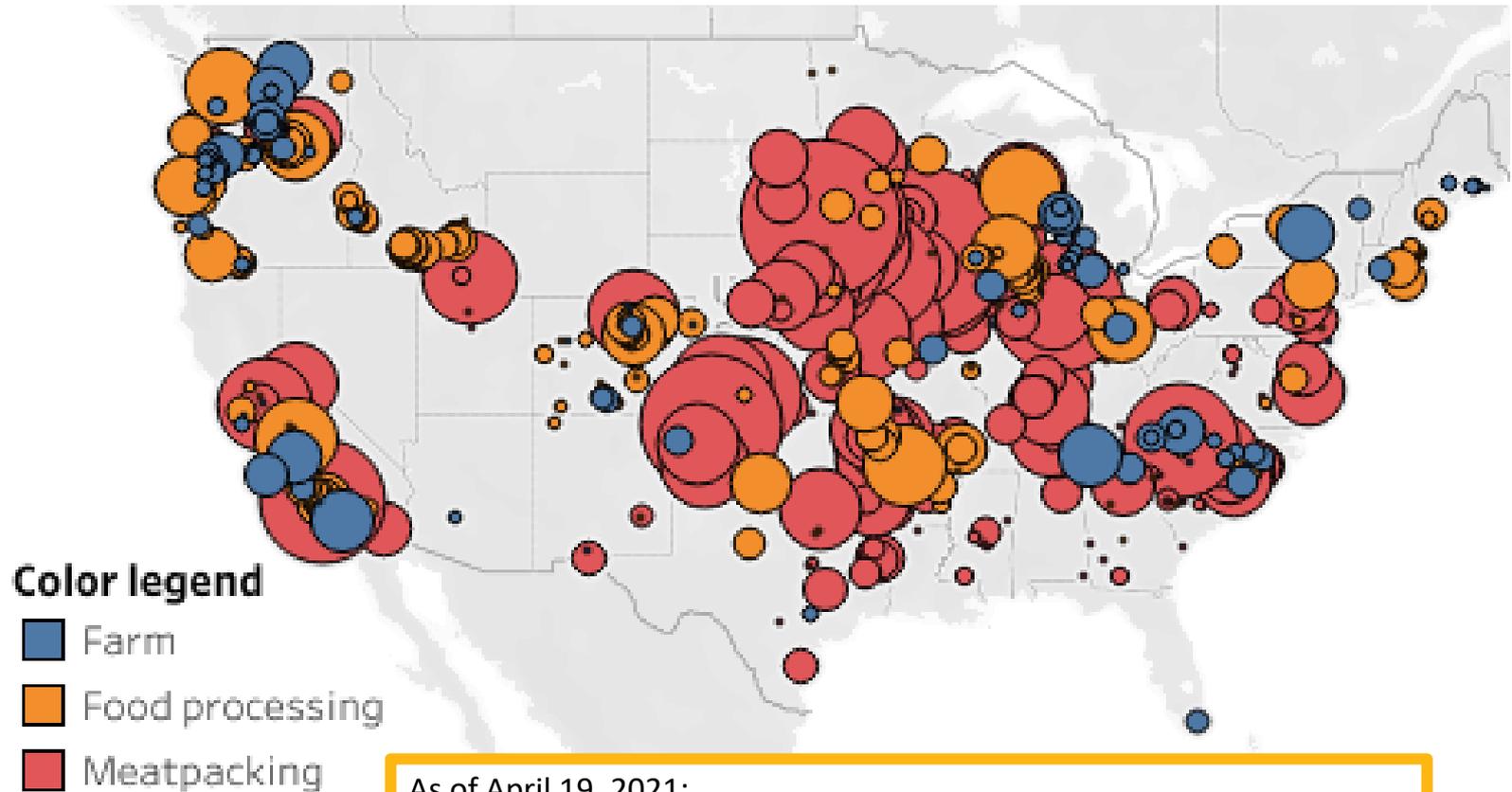
Farmworkers face additional social and job-related conditions that may increase their risk such as limited sanitation facilities, job-related respiratory exposures (i.e., dust, pesticides), mobile lifestyle, low health literacy, limited language appropriate and accurate health information, and limited access to testing and treatment resources.



# Challenges for farmworkers



# COVID-19 outbreaks in the agrifood system



# CA COVID-19 Farmworker Study: Methods

Two phase study:

1. Survey to document the immediate impacts of COVID-19 in the agricultural workforce (May-July 2020; 915 participants)
2. In-depth follow-up interviews with agricultural workers to track social, economic, and mental health impacts of the pandemic (August-October 2020; 63 participants)

Collaboration between numerous community-based organizations and researchers and was facilitated by the California Institute for Rural Studies.

51 surveyors; Conducted phone calls to farmworkers

Inclusion criteria: 18 years old+ and worked for wages in California agriculture during the pandemic (starting March 15, 2020)

- Did not include H-2A workers



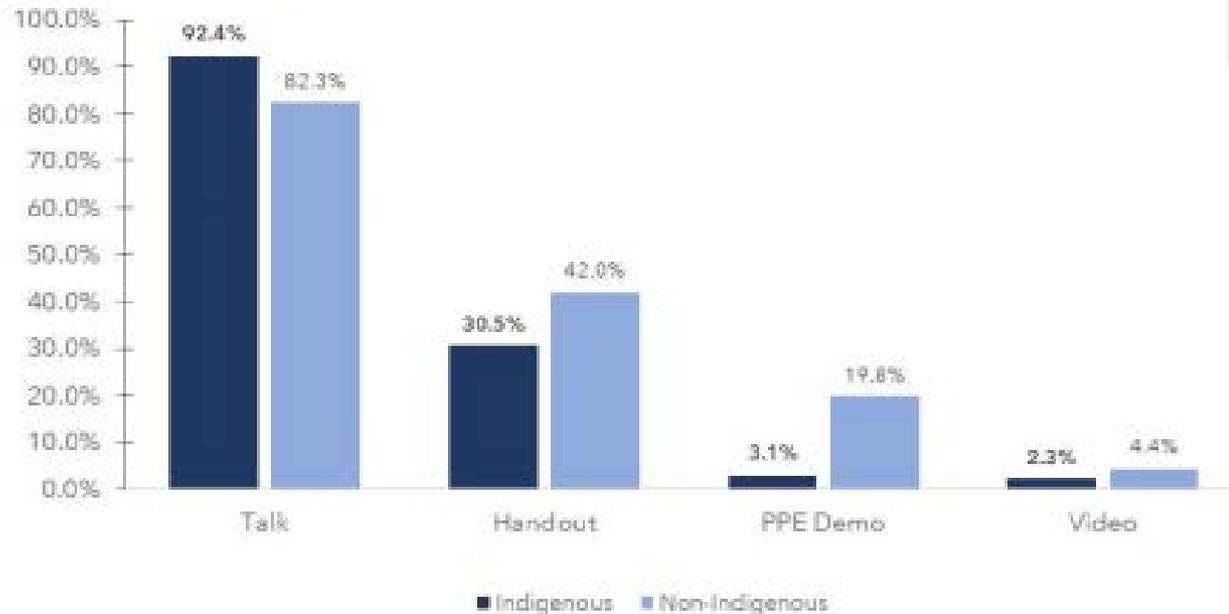
# CA COVID-19 Farmworker Study: Demographics

Variable	N (%)
Gender	
Male	465 (52)
Female	435 (48)
Age (median)	38
Nativity	
Mexico	834 (93.3)
U.S.	38 (4.3)
Central America	22 (2.5)
Employer type	
Farm labor contractor	492 (57.5)
Grower/Farmer	286 (33.4)
Packing house	78 (9.1)



# CA COVID-19 Farmworker Study: Findings

TYPE OF COVID-19 TRAINING BY INDIGENOUS SPEAKERS VS NON-INDIGENOUS SPEAKERS



They should provide training in Spanish and in an oral chat because not all of us read.

- Pedro, age 64



# CA COVID-19 Farmworker Study: Findings

No, where I work masks are not given. They tell us everyone needs to bring their own. They tell us if we want to work, we have to bring and if not, there is no work.

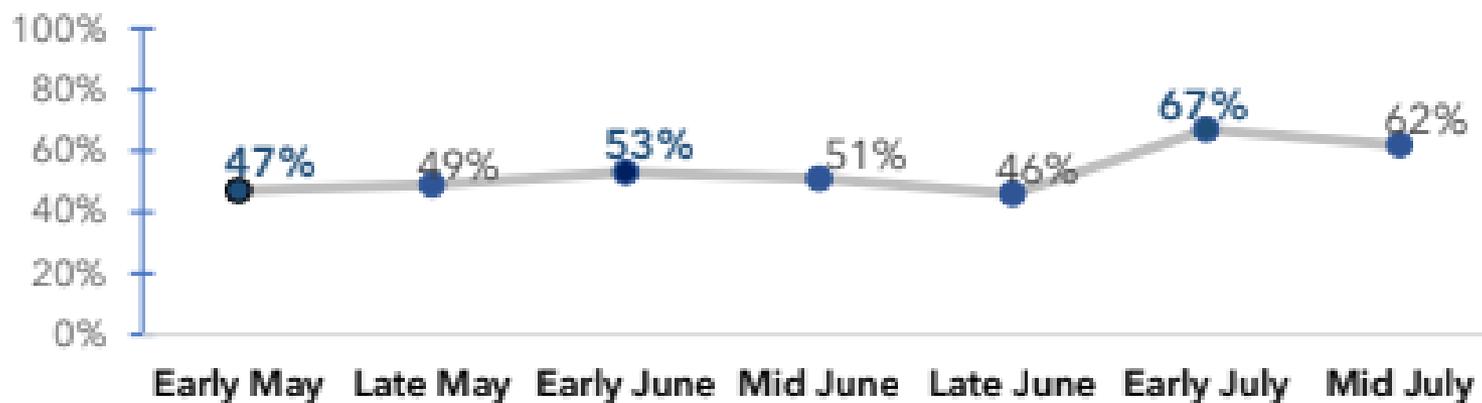
- Gerardo, age 36

PROVISION OF MASKS BY EMPLOYER TYPE



# CA COVID-19 Farmworker Study: Findings

INCREASING TREND OF LOST WORK TIME AND INCOME (MAY-JULY, 2020)

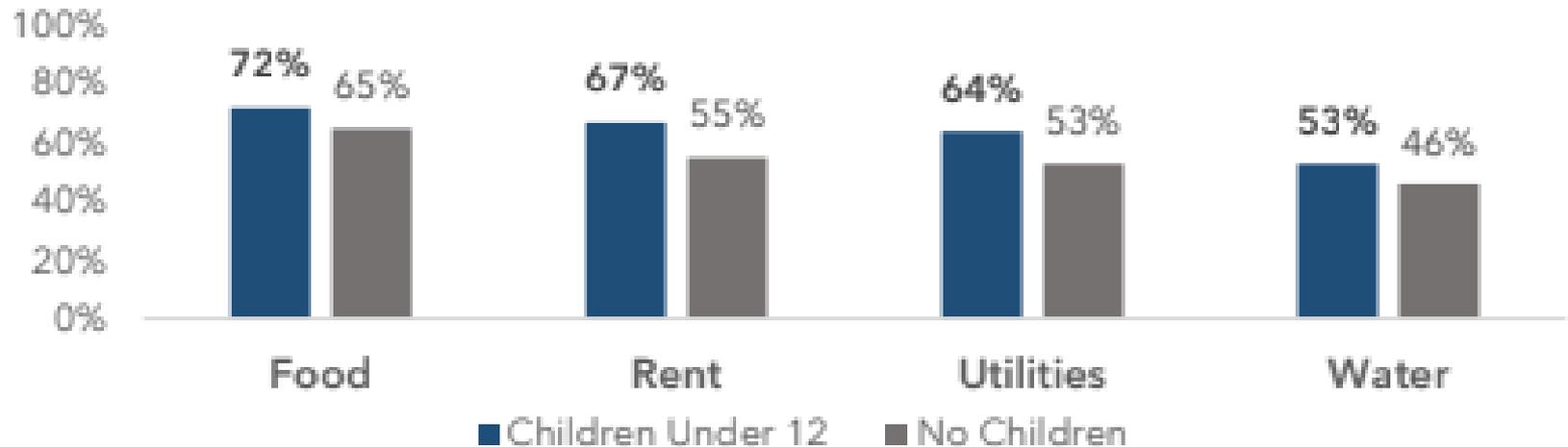


# CA COVID-19 Farmworker Study: Findings

We've had difficulty paying for car insurance, phone bills, internet, and everything else. There is little help for us.

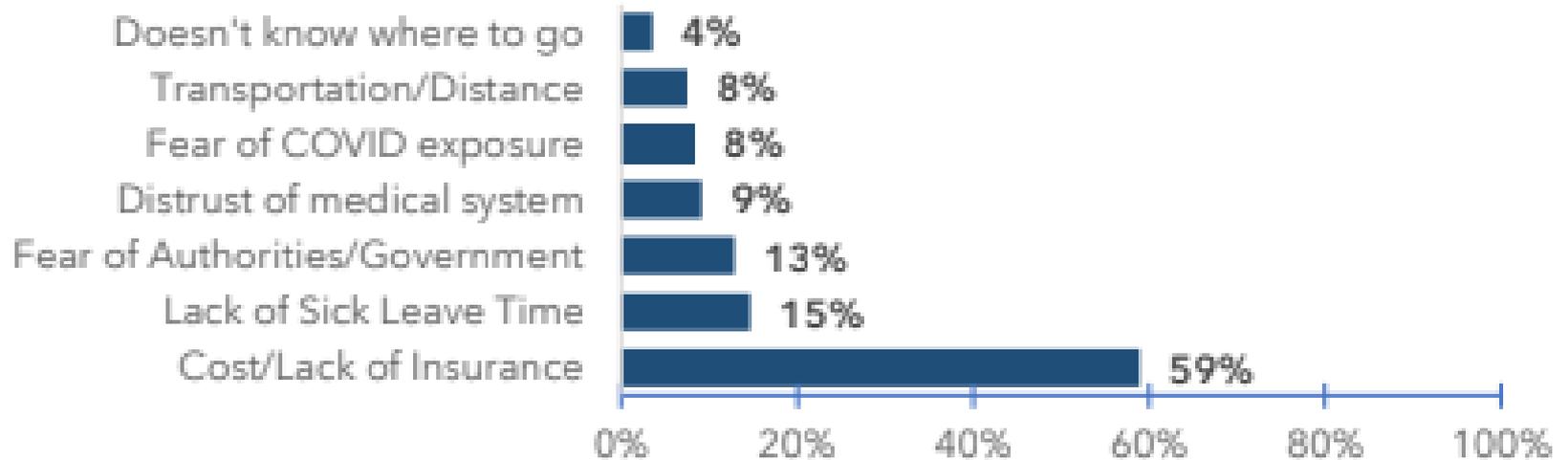
- Rosa, age 27

## HIGHER HARDSHIPS TO PAY FOR BASIC NEEDS AMONG HOUSEHOLDS WITH CHILDREN



# CA COVID-19 Farmworker Study: Findings

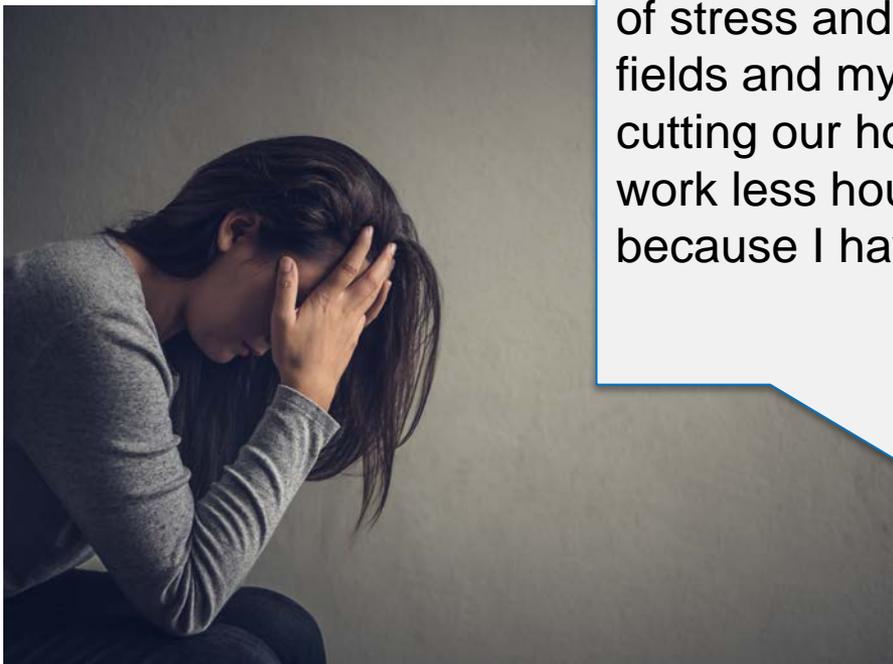
## REPORTED HEALTHCARE BARRIERS



# CA COVID-19 Farmworker Study: Findings

COVID-19 is affecting me emotionally, economically because I'm worried about how I'm going to pay my bills. It's causing me a lot of stress and anxiety. Even still, I work in the fields and my job isn't permanent. Now they're cutting our hours at work for COVID-19. We work less hours and I can't work everyday because I have to take care of my son.

- Patricia, age 29



# CA COVID-19 Farmworker Study: Discussion

## Farmworkers:

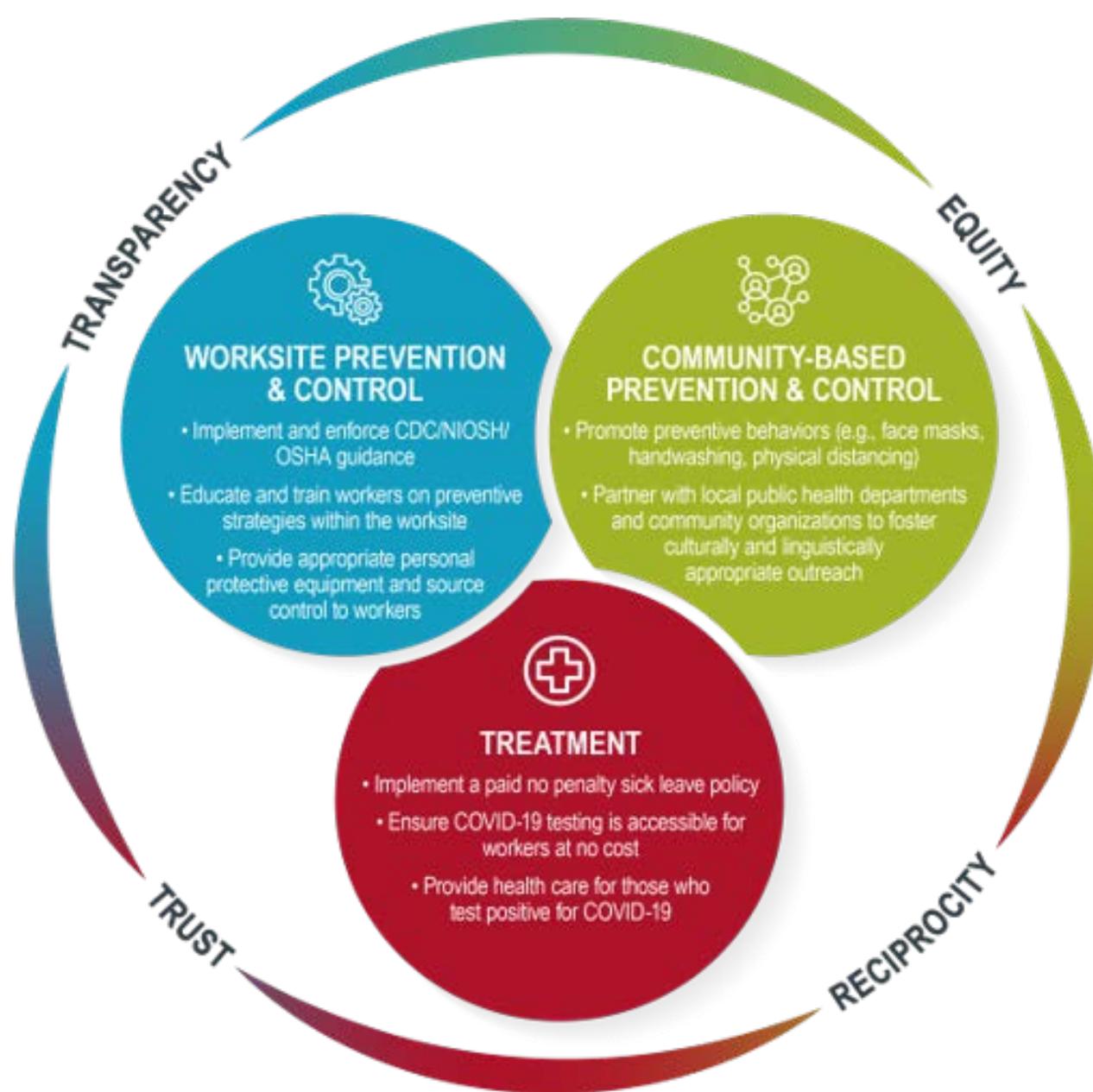
1. Experienced dramatic loss of work and income during the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Lack healthcare access and experience fear using medical services.
3. Are vigilant about COVID-19 prevention practices outside of the workplace.
4. Report low number of employers providing masks and face coverings.
5. Have valuable suggestions to improve workplace COVID-19 prevention efforts.
6. Are systematically excluded from important safety-net programs, which heightens their vulnerabilities and those of their family members.



# CA COVID-19 Farmworker Study: Recommendations

1. Expand and simplify access to income and safety net resources and services that move beyond education and overcome barriers for farmworkers, regardless of documentation status.
2. Expand healthcare access and coverage regardless of documentation status.
3. Engage farmworkers and farmworker serving CBOs to design and implement direct services, workplace safety, education, and outreach that will meet local COVID-19 needs.
4. Expand and simplify access to disaster income and safety net relief for farmworkers, regardless of documentation status.
5. Ease the barriers for farmworkers to report COVID-19 related complaints, protect against retaliation, and bolster health and safety enforcement and compliance agencies.
6. Address language barriers by including visual education along with Mexican Indigenous, Asian, and non-academic Spanish languages in culturally appropriate literacy levels.





# CA COVID-19 Farmworker Study

Materials from the California and Oregon COVID-19 Farmworker Study are available online:

<http://covid19farmworkerstudy.org/data/>

For more information about the study:

Ildi Carlisle-Cummins

Executive Director

California Institute for Rural Studies

[icarlisle-cummins@circsinc.org](mailto:icarlisle-cummins@circsinc.org)



# Questions?

**Athena Ramos, PhD, MBA, MS, CPM**

Assistant Professor

Center for Reducing Health Disparities

Department of Health Promotion

College of Public Health

University of Nebraska Medical Center

Omaha, NE 68198-4340

(402) 559-2095

[aramos@unmc.edu](mailto:aramos@unmc.edu)

 @athenakramos

