

FAQ's

1. Q: How many states were involved?

A: The following states received *braceros* in between the years of 1942-1964:

1. Arizona¹
2. Arkansas²
3. California³
4. Colorado⁴
5. Connecticut⁵
6. Delaware⁶
7. Georgia⁷
8. Idaho⁸
9. Illinois⁹
10. Indiana¹⁰
11. Iowa¹¹
12. Kansas¹²
13. Louisiana¹³
14. Michigan¹⁴
15. Minnesota¹⁵
16. Mississippi¹⁶
17. Missouri¹⁷
18. Montana¹⁸
19. Nebraska¹⁹
20. Nevada²⁰
21. New Jersey²¹

¹ Galarza, Ernesto. *Strangers in Our Fields*. Washington, D.C.: Joint United States-Mexico Trade Union Committee, 1956 (7).

² Mize, Ronald L. "The Invisible Workers: Articulation of Race and Class in the Life Histories of Braceros" Diss. U. of Wisconsin-Madison, 2000. (172)

³ Galarza, 7.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Driscoll, Barbara A. *The Tracks North: The Railroad Bracero Program of World War II*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996. (115)

⁶ Ibid, 144

⁷ Mize, 172

⁸ Galarza, 7.

⁹ Driscoll, 143

¹⁰ Mize, 172

¹¹ Driscoll, 142.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Mize, 172.

¹⁴ Driscoll, 113.

¹⁵ Mize, 172

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Driscoll, 143.

¹⁸ Galarza, 7.

¹⁹ Driscoll, 142.

²⁰ Galarza, 7.

²¹ Driscoll, 144.

22. New Mexico²²
23. New York²³
24. Ohio²⁴
25. Oklahoma²⁵
26. Oregon²⁶
27. Pennsylvania²⁷
28. South Dakota²⁸
29. Tennessee²⁹
30. Texas³⁰
31. Utah³¹
32. Washington³²
33. Wisconsin³³
34. Wyoming³⁴

2. Q: What were the sending regions in Mexico?

A:

1. Aguascalientes
2. Baja California
3. Campeche
4. Chiapas
5. Chihuahua
6. Coahuila
7. Colima
8. Durango
9. Distrito Federal
10. Guanajuato
11. Guerrero
12. Hidalgo
13. Jalisco
14. Mexico
15. Michoacán
16. Morelos
17. Nayarit
18. Nuevo Leon
19. Oaxaca

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid, 115.

²⁵ Ibid., 143.

²⁶ Galarza, 7.

²⁷ Driscoll, 144.

²⁸ Mize, 172

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Galarza, 7.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Mize, 172

³⁴ Ibid.

20. Puebla
21. Queretaro
22. Quintana Roo
23. San Luis Potosi
24. Sinaloa
25. Sonora
26. Tabasco
27. Tamaulipas
28. Tlaxcala
29. Veracruz
30. Yucatan
31. Zacatecas

3. Q: What is the percentage of braceros per state?

A: Roughly 94 percent of all braceros employed in United States could be found in just five states: California, Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, and Arkansas. Of those, California and Texas held the predominant share comprising over two-thirds the total number of braceros.

4. Q: Who administered the program?

A: Over the course of its 23-year history, administrative responsibilities for the Bracero Program fell to multiple government agencies. The War Manpower Commission took the lead by directing the Department of Agriculture in June 1942 to fill the wartime labor shortage by whatever means including the recruitment of Mexican laborers. At the time, the Departments of Agriculture, State, Justice, and Labor actively took part in negotiating the program's establishment and would later gain responsibilities with the program's start.

For instance, the State Department coordinated the renewal agreements between Mexico and the United States. The Department of Labor verified labor shortages, certified growers to hire braceros, established procedures for farm labor recruitment, and set the prevailing wage for laborers per region. The Immigration and Naturalization Services, however, served as the primary face of the U.S. government to braceros as it directly managed the arrival, processing, and departure of braceros. Additionally, these agencies organized their efforts with the assistance of local and state authorities.

Similar to the United States, regulation of braceros by the Mexican government included several agencies whose duties changed over time. The Secretaría de Gobernación, then the Dirección de Asuntos de Trabajadores Agrícolas Migratorios managed the state quota system to ensure the proper number of workers at recruitment sites. Other agencies responsible included the Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, Secretaría de Gobernación, Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social, state governors, and local presidentes municipales of counties providing workers.

5. Q: What were the crops they worked on?

A: Braceros picked crops in numerous fields throughout the U.S. Over time, some crops became more “Bracero-dependent” than others, which meant that growers depended on bracero labor for a successful harvest. These bracero-dependent crops were typically found in regions employing high numbers of braceros such as California where citrus became largely reliant on this foreign labor supply. Some of the most “bracero-dependent” crops included tomatoes, cotton, lettuce, asparagus, grapes, sugar beets, cucumbers, lemons, peaches, oranges, melons, and strawberries.

6. Q: What did the men need to register?

A: Mexican men had to go through many procedures in order to register and even be considered for the Bracero Program. First and foremost, the men had to obtain a *permiso*, an official document affirming that the holder was a citizen in good standing, from his local town or city official. This document gave the person the right to enter into the selection process. Once at the recruitment centers, applicants have to show that they have complied with Mexican military service laws. It is in this matter that men are then allowed to apply for the program.

However it was not always this simple. Many of these men had to pay various fees and *mordidas* (bribes) along the way in order to begin, expedite or continue the application process. Some “free braceros”—those unable to receive a *permiso* from their city officials—used their “laborer services” as bribery. For instance, in the processing center of Empalme, Sonora, some men picked up to three thousand tons of cotton without pay. These men did this in hope of moving their applications forward and starting the recruitment process. This usually meant the endurance of numerous examinations, and waiting for the growers to enter their order for labor.

Source: Gonzalez, Gilbert. Guest Workers or Colonized Labor?: Mexican Labor Migration to the United States. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2007.

7. Q: What were the public laws associated with the program?

A: The Bracero Program was a series of executive agreements and public laws. The first Mexican-United States agreement was signed on July 23, 1942 by representatives of both countries—from México, Ernesto Hidalgo, representative of the Foreign Affairs Ministry and Abraham J. Navas, Esq., representative of the Ministry of Labor and from the United States Joseph F. McGurk, Counsel of the American Embassy in México, John Walker, Deputy Administrator of the Farm Security Administration, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), and David Mecker, Deputy Director of War Farming Operations also from the USDA. The program became operational after an exchange of notes between officials of the United States Embassy and Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Mexico City. On April 29, 1943, the United States Congress enacted Public Law 45, officially endorsing the Bracero Program as a wartime relief program. After the end of World War II, Public Law 78 enacted on July 12, 1951 continued the importation of Mexican contract laborers.

Source: Calavita, Kitty. Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S. New York: Routledge, 1992 & Kirstein, Peter N. Anglo over bracero: A history of

the Mexican worker in the United States from Roosevelt to Nixon. San Francisco: R and E Research Associates, 1977.

8. Q: What was the role of labor union or what was the role the UFW?

A: Braceros were not part of labor unions, but braceros affect the unionization of domestic farm workers, and vice versa. When farm workers attempted to organize around the injustices they faced in the fields, growers used braceros as strikebreakers. In turn the drive and ultimate success of labor unions, and particularly the AFL-affiliated National Farm Laborer's Union, made the braceros appear as unnecessary and therefore their time in the United States was called to an end in 1964.

Source: Wells, Miriam J.. Strawberry Fields: Politics, Class, and Work in California Agriculture (Anthropology of Contemporary Issues). Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996.

9. Q: Why is the short handle hoe an important symbol?

A: According to sociologist Douglas L. Murray, the short-handled hoe—*el cortito*—was a symbol of oppression. Growers argued that stoop laborers were smaller than the ordinary Anglo, and were therefore built for this type of work. Moreover, the short-handle hoe was used by many of these growers as a form of control and supervision over their workers. Supervisors would know when a worker was not working by how often they stood up. The result of these growers' racist beliefs was that many workers suffered from minor back pain to physical disability. On April 7, 1975, an administrative edict banned the tool from use in California fields.

Source: Murray Douglas L. "The Abolition of El Cortito, the Short-Handled Hoe: A Case Study in Social Conflict and State Policy in California Agriculture." Social Problems 30.1 (1982): 26-39.

10a. Q: What were the main articles and guarantees that braceros had under the Labor Agreements?

A: The initial 1942 labor agreement creating the Bracero Program served as the blueprint for future agreements negotiated over the following two decades. The agreement outlined several obligations contractors had to braceros: the payment to braceros of the prevailing wage for native workers performing a given task; employment for at least three-fourths of the time in a contract period; adequate and sanitary free housing; affordable meals; occupational insurance at employer's expense; free return transportation to Mexico at contract's end.

10b. Q: What were the main items found in a Standard Work Contract?

A: The bilingual Standard Work Contract provided the scope of the bracero's work. Items included in Standard Work Contracts were the agreed upon wage, the region and counties of work, the term of contract, the hiring organization, and signatures (or fingerprint) of the bracero, the hiring contractor, and representatives of the U.S. Department of Labor and the Mexican government, typically the local Mexican consulate.

11. Q: What was “operation wetback” and its relation to the bracero program?

A: Operation Wetback refers to the I.N.S. 1954-55 public repatriation campaign against illegal aliens and undocumented workers—“wetbacks”—residing in the United States. Between 1944-54, “the decade of the wetback,” over 1 million estimated illegal aliens entered the United States. In response, the INS Commissioner, Gen. Joseph Swing, organized Operation Wetback, resulting in the repatriation of over 1.3 million illegal aliens. Scholars dispute that number claiming heavy estimates of “voluntary” departures. The INS Border Patrol utilized buses, trains, ships, and airplanes to transport illegal aliens to Mexican officials who completed the trip into interior Mexican states.

Operation Wetback greatly impacted the Bracero Program. Prior to Operation Wetback, growers often relied on both braceros and illegal aliens. Following the mass deportations, however, growers dramatically increased the hiring of braceros to insure an adequate labor supply during harvest time, especially in Texas. Following Operation Wetback, there was an unprecedented growth in bracero contracts issued.

12. Q: What was the role of the Church in the program?

A: The role of religion varied between communities, over time, and according to differing beliefs. By sheer number, braceros largely practiced Catholicism, and the Mexican Roman Catholic Church held firm views against the Bracero Program. The Catholic Church feared the program would break up families while tempting braceros with vices and immoral behavior.

In the United States, protestant groups which previously held outreach efforts to Mexican-American communities extended their works to braceros. Responding to these inroads, the Catholic Church formed camp committees responsible for organizing religious practice and appropriate social activities. Catholic priests sometimes followed and returned with groups of braceros to the United States.

Over time, social activism became an important religious component. While some priests focused on their pastoral duties, others attempted to fight for the improvement of bracero working conditions. Priests and religious leaders already engaged in union-organizing efforts, at boycotts, and strikes similarly supported efforts to extend protections to braceros.

13. Q: Why did the Bracero Program end?

A: Many factors contributed to the end of the Bracero Program. One of the biggest influences was the ideals of the Civil Rights Movement and the unionization of domestic farm workers. People within these movements called attention to the fact that the Bracero Program did actually depress the wages of domestic workers, and conversely influenced citizens’ employment, or unemployment. Furthermore the mechanization of many agricultural businesses meant that less labor was needed and therefore farmers used less braceros. Moreover, when farmers could not secure braceros, many turned to illegal immigration. With all of these factors affecting the Bracero Program, Congress decided to not renew the program.

Source: Wells, Miriam J.. Strawberry Fields: Politics, Class, and Work in California Agriculture (Anthropology of Contemporary Issues). Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996.

14. Q: Did other countries participate in similar agreements with the United States? If so, which were they?

A: During World War II, the United States also obtained workers from other countries than Mexico through temporary contract labor agreements. Jamaica, Bahamas, British Honduras (now known as Belize), Costa Rica, Barbados, and Newfoundland, Canada agreed to send smaller numbers of agricultural and industrial workers to the United States (Driscoll, Barbara, 58).

Source: Driscoll, Barbara A.. Tracks North : The Railroad Bracero Program of World War II. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999.

Like employers from the west coast, east coast employers voiced that they, too, were experiencing wartime manpower shortages. Therefore the United States signed an intergovernmental agreement in April of 1943 that brought unskilled laborers from the British Isles of Jamaica, Barbados, the Bahamas, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, and Dominica. This program became known as the British West Indies (BWI) Labor Program. It lasted from 1943 to 1947. Thirteen east coast states participated in the program, with Florida receiving most of the workers. During the years of 1947-1952, it was converted into a temporary workers program in where the contracts were negotiated between U.S. employers, the employees, and their native nations. The U.S. government did not take part.

Source: Vernon M. Briggs Jr.. "Guestworker Programs: Lessons From the Past and Warnings for the Future" Faculty Publications - Human Resource Studies (2004).

15. Q: Were there similar guest worker programs in the United States prior to the bracero program?

A: The Immigration Act of 1917 contained a provision in where "temporary" workers could enter the country from Western Hemisphere nation considered inadmissible. In May of that year, the United States officially entered World War I and a temporary guest worker program for unskilled Mexican workers was created. Men over the age of sixteen, who could not read, were commissioned and rules were set in order to protect both citizen workers and Mexican workers. Even though the war ended in 1918, the program continued until 1922. During its life span, a total of 76,862 Mexican workers entered from the United States. In later years, this program came to be referred as the "first bracero program."

Source: Vernon M. Briggs Jr.. "Guestworker Programs: Lessons From the Past and Warnings for the Future" Faculty Publications - Human Resource Studies (2004).

16. Q: What is H2/H2A visa and what are the differences and similarities to the Bracero Program?

The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 created various entry categories for nonimmigrant workers. Among these categories was the H2 visa for “other temporary workers.” The program was created after the decline of the British West Indies Labor Program in order to supply the labor that many farmers had become dependant on across the East Coast. With the legalization of millions of unauthorized immigrants, the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 also subdivided the H2 visa program into “agriculture” (H-2A) and “non-agriculture” (H-2B). Simultaneously, the mechanization of the sugar crop industry reduced the demand for Jamaican workers, and most of the H-2A visa recipients became Mexican laborers working in agriculture.

Source: Cravey, Altha. "Desire, Work, and Transnational Identity." *Ethnography* 6.3 (2005): 357-383.

However, even though the H2/H-2A visa programs did not directly stem from the Bracero Program, they are similar to the Bracero Program. For instance, workers have to be contracted before traveling to the United States and the company needs to show that there is a labor shortage. Moreover, even though rules and regulations have been put in place to control the program, many of the workers were/are still exploited by their employers.

Source: http://www.usvisa.com/h-2_visa.shtml

Other differences also exist. The Bracero Program was a bi-national agreement between the United States and Mexico that was handled at various points by the War Manpower Commission, the Department of Agriculture, the Department of State, the Department of Labor, the Department of Justice and the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs. On the other hand, the H2/H2-A visas were created as national policy and are supervised by the Department of Labor and the Department of Homeland Security.³⁵ Moreover, since the Bracero Program was created as a bi-national agreement, there were no instated quotas. The H2 visas, however, have a fixed quota system. Lastly, during the Bracero Program, braceros were allowed to stay within the United States up to eighteen months. Once those months passed, the workers had to return to Mexico, but they were allowed to come back right away if they were recontracted. With H2 visas, workers are allowed to stay in the United States up to three years, but they have to return to their country of origin and cannot enter the United States for at least six months.

17. Q: What is a MICA card?

A: The United States Department of Justice issued the Alien's Laborer Identification Card, or MICA card, to braceros after they had completed their contract. These cards established returning braceros as good workers and were a form of identification for workers within the braceros. However, braceros could not use this card to cross the U.S.-Mexico border. There is no set theory as to why MICA cards were called as such but there is a high possibility that the name derived from the fact that these cards were laminated, or *enmicada*.

³⁵ Before the creation of the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Justice, through Immigration and Naturalization Services supervised the distribution of the H2 visas.

Source: Immigration and Naturalization Service, Department of Justice notice about MICA cards (11/25/1955). www.braceroarchive.org

18. Q: How did Mexico protect its citizens working in the Bracero Program?

A: From the outset, the Mexican government sought to insure the safety and protection of its citizens working abroad. For example, the 1942 agreement provided preliminary protections for braceros by mandating sanitary and hygienic living conditions, empowering Mexican Labor Inspectors to oversee working conditions, and allowing the Mexican consulate access to braceros.

In one of its strongest attempts to protect its citizens, the Mexican government blacklisted Texas from 1943-1947 following complaints about its discrimination of Mexican laborers as well the hiring of illegal aliens over braceros.. The Mexican government attempted to insure a minimal standard of worker protections by threatening to revoke approval for braceros to work in particular states, which sometimes caused state governments to seek working condition improvements.