

Somos un Equipo: A partnership to increase URMC provider awareness of farmworkers and improve local farmworkers' healthcare access



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Introduction

Approximately 100,000 farmworkers play an integral role in New York's agricultural industry, without which farms, dairies and feedlots would struggle to meet production demands. Farmworkers are particularly vulnerable to medical problems due to lack of healthcare access, low socioeconomic status, and workplace hazards. The National Center for Farmworker Health reports that 37.6% of agricultural workers are uninsured and 71.6% live below the national poverty line (National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS), 2017). In the most NAWS report, the most common barrier when facing accessing healthcare was that visits were too expensive: about 1 in 4 farmworkers paid for their last health care visit out of their own pockets; of those farmworkers 20 percent were uninsured so paid the whole fee, and 5 percent had insurance so their out-of-pocket expense was likely a co-payment (NAWS, 2017). Pesticide exposure, heat and sun exposure, toxic dust inhalation, repetitive strain injuries, and dangerous tools and machinery contribute to poor physical health outcomes. Strenuous hours and isolation impact the mental health of farmworkers, with one study of local dairy workers reporting depression prevalence of 80% (Fox et al, 2017).

Healthcare professionals interact with this population in several healthcare settings; and it is essential that farmworkers receive the same access to and quality of care that other patients do. Currently, agricultural workers report facing disproportionate barriers compared to the general population (NAWS, 2017; Fox et al, 2017). Therefore, medical students and clinicians must be aware of this patient population, receive training to address their unique health needs and build sustainable partnerships with farmworkers themselves to address new needs as they arise. Farmworkers must also be empowered to call on healthcare workers for support as they know their own needs best and are essential partners to develop community driven solutions.

Anecdotally, as a first-year medical student new to the Rochester area, I received no formal teaching about the surrounding farmworker communities. It was not until my time volunteering with Fingerlakes Community Health and the Alianza Agricola that I realized that a major agricultural economy existed a short drive from the hospital. I learned from the farmworkers the specific healthcare needs of their community and how difficult it was for many of them to access the URMC healthcare system. It was clear that there was a gap in healthcare access and quality that needed to be addressed. Workers also stated they had little connection with the URMC system to work on these issues collaboratively. This was a specific opportunity in which I could leverage my position as a medical student to amplify the voices of farmworkers to increase awareness and understanding with the long-term goal of increasing access.

This project is a multi-year effort to establish sustainable partnerships between the URMC system and local farmworkers in order to

- increase provider awareness of the farmworker communities
- increase access to healthcare for farmworkers.

Im/Migrant Worker Health Conference

Conference Objectives

- Gain an awareness about the im/migrant worker communities in upstate NY and their barriers to healthcare.
- Acquire new skills to foster providing competent care to im/migrant workers
- Engage with individuals who provide activism and advocacy for the im/migrant worker community, building partnerships for sustainable collaboration

Conference Content:

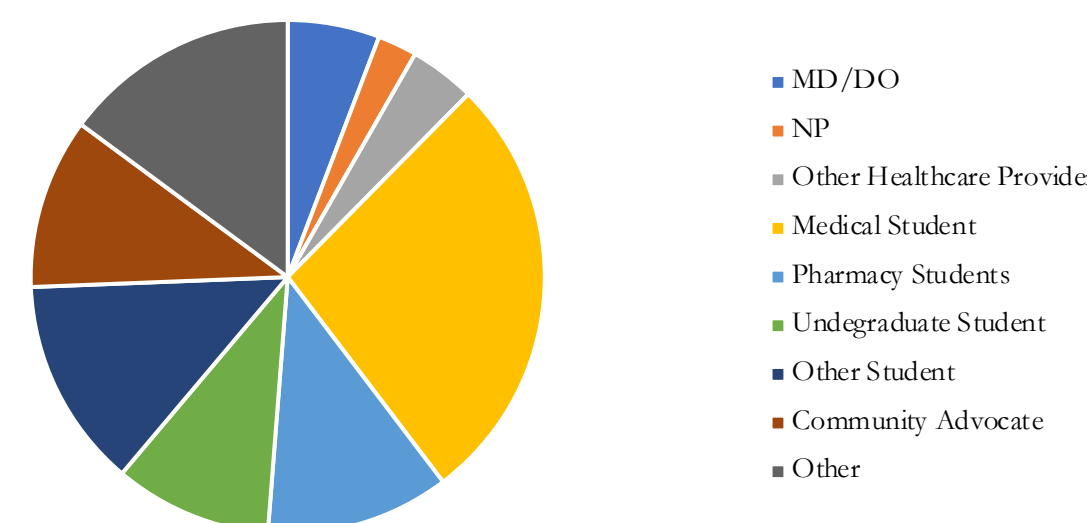
- Full day of programming that included: an introductory lecture about the hazards and exposures faced by farmworkers, a keynote address given by im/migrant farm workers, two sets of breakout sessions, and closing remarks.
- Ten total breakout sessions with topics ranging from health and immigration policy to considerations in clinical practice. Participants attended 2 breakout sessions in smaller groups.
- Ten organizations tabled during lunch,

Evaluation Methods

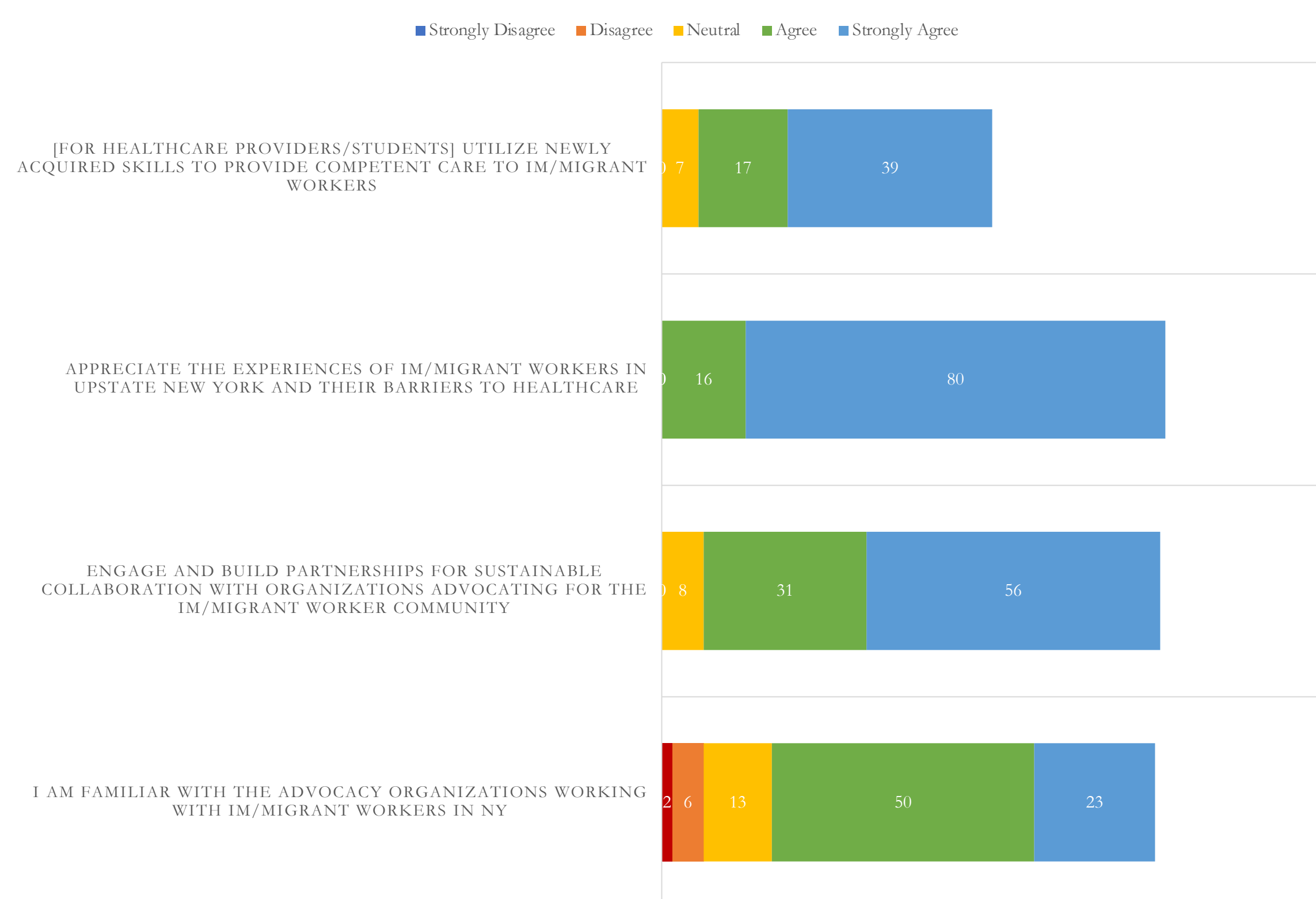
- Anonymous pre-conference and post-conference pencil-and-paper surveys for participants that primarily served to evaluate the efficacy of the educational objectives of the conference
- Also collected information about participants' occupations and evaluations of each individual breakout session.
- The pre-survey was distributed upon registration and collected upon entry to the opening session. The post-survey was distributed at the beginning of the closing session and collected at the end of the session.

Results:

- A total of ## participants attended the conference
- Of those, 126 completed CME surveys which tracked educational objectives.



POST CONFERENCE SURVEY AS A RESULT OF ATTENDING THIS CONFERENCE, I AM BETTER ABLE TO:



Conclusions/Impact

- We successfully developed a diverse team of stakeholders who can identify collaborative solutions to address our shared goals to increase awareness of farmworkers and increase their access to healthcare.
- Awareness: Overall this project has increased awareness of farmworker communities at URMC which was demonstrated through formal evaluation of the Im/migrant Worker Conference and anecdotally by increase in discussion of this topic within URSMD.
- Access: This partnership has increased access to healthcare for farmworkers, most specifically during acute needs that arose during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- On a personal level, these projects gave me a connection to the local community when I was newcomer in town, provided some of my best mentors both in medicine and in community advocacy, challenged my Spanish language skills and built my cultural humility. Some of the folks I work with are now close family friends – we celebrate one and others birthdays, explore the public market together and go on walks even in the middle of February. I am beyond grateful.

Community Partners

The community partners within this work have been the backbone of support and creativity in this process. In addition to the Alianza Agricola and University of Rochester School of Medicine and Dentistry, numerous organizations support this project.

Below are organizations involved with both the Im/migrant Worker Health Conference and the COVID-19 Mask and Food Drive



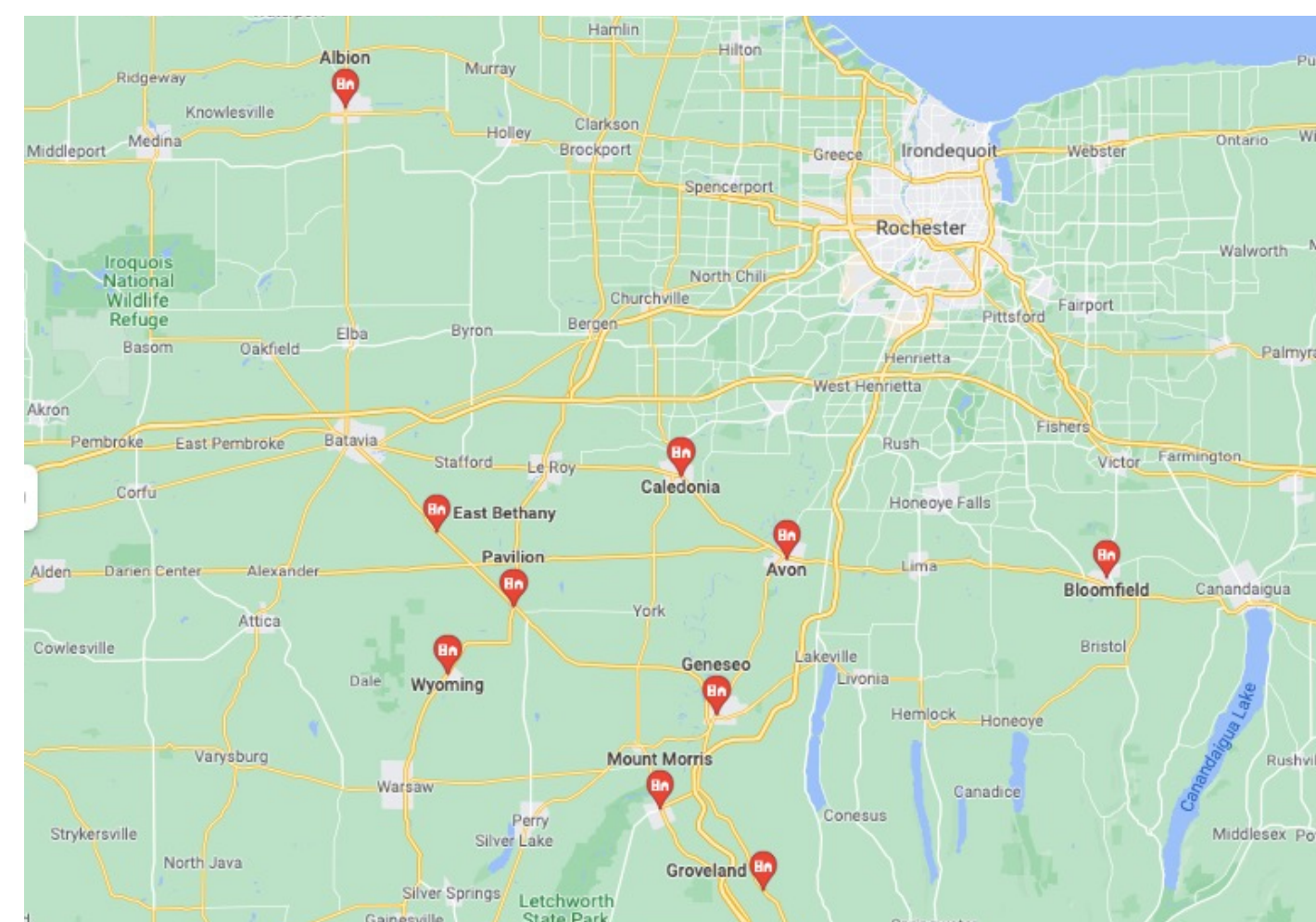
COVID-19 Mask + Food Drive

The Need:

Farmworkers were deemed essential during the COVID crisis. However, they received minimal tools to protect themselves and many employers preferred they did not leave the farms for fear of infection from outside exposure. This restriction was emotionally devastating and also limited the farmworker's ability to access basic needs. The Alianza reached out with an identified shortage of food among its members. During the Spring of 2020, I organized food and mask drives for members in partnership with community organizations. Medical students helped collect donations and then distribute them directly to farmworkers. The initial two distributions were based in Rochester. As the partnerships continued, the Alianza started working directly with the community organizations with specific requests throughout the summer of 2020. This shift was made to ensure sustainability of the partnerships in the future, beyond the initial acute crisis in Spring 2020.

Outcomes:

- Donations from 6 different community organizations
- Over 50 volunteers (including 32 medical students).
- One hundred and fifty workers and their family members received donations
- Donations were delivered to 11 different counties



Sustainability

It is essential that this project continues through personal and institutional relationships. There is always more information to share and education to be done. Additionally, as the COVID pandemic continues, access to care continues to be incredibly challenging in new ways.

However, this project has struggled with sustainability due to limited time and resources of leaders who were predominantly medical students and farmworkers. As with any project, the COVID-19 pandemic had an immense impact on the ability to collaborate. This most directly impacted the efforts to increase awareness through education events, as most focus was put into increasing access as acute needs arose.

Acknowledgements

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Resources