



**WASHINGTON**

State Independent Living Council

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P.O. Box 45343 Olympia, WA 98504 360-725-3695 [www.wasilc.org](http://www.wasilc.org)

## **Position: Migrant and Seasonal Farm Workers MSFW**

Washington State Independent Living Council  
Romel Mackelprang, Chair  
Robert Honan, Executive Director

It is the position of the WA SILC that MSFW with disabilities are entitled to services and the investment in their lives afforded to other populations in Washington state. Access to Independent Living resources to Migrant and Seasonal Farm Workers (MSFW) with disabilities and their families, including those provided by Centers for Independent Living, will directly improve their lives while benefiting all members of the State of Washington. In order to fulfill this responsibility to this segment of the population, cultural, language, and geographic barriers that severely limit resources must be eliminated. (Approved by the SILC: April 25, 2008)

### **Background**

Migrant and seasonal farmworkers (MSFW) are a unique and very important segment of society and of the U.S. economy. Though they are invisible to mainstream eyes, they are the hands that bring us our daily bread, fruits, vegetables, meat, poultry, and fish. The migrant lifestyle is fluid as workers and their families follow harvests, often across State lines. High mobility, language barriers, cultural isolation and low literacy are just a few of the many reasons driving their high vulnerability within our society.

Definitions of Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers (MSFW's)

As defined by the department of labor under the 1997 *Workforce Investment Act*, a MSFW is either: a migrant farmworker, a seasonal farmworker, or a migrant food processing worker:

***Seasonal Farm worker*** - a person who, during the preceding 12 months, a) worked at least an aggregate of 25 or more days (or parts of days) in farm work, b) earned at least half of his/her earned income from farm work, and c) was not employed in farm work year-round by the same employer.

***Migrant Farm worker*** - a seasonal farm worker who is required to travel to do the farm work so that he/she is unable to return to his/her permanent residence at the conclusion of the work day.

***Migrant Food Processing Worker*** - a person who during the preceding 12 months, a) worked at least an aggregate of 25 or more days or parts of days in which some work was performed in food processing, (as classified in the 2002 North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) definitions 3116, 311421, 311941 and 311411 for food processing establishments), b) earned at least half of his/her earned income from processing work and c) was not employed in food processing year round by the same employer, and d) was required to travel such that the worker was unable to return to his/her permanent residence at the conclusion of the work day.

As defined by the 1998 Rehabilitation Act (Section 304), MSFWs are, a) not regularly or permanently employed at one location, b) and the majority of their household earnings proceed from employment within the raw food production and/or distribution.

### Characteristics of MSFW's

- Education: the educational level amongst MSFW's tend to be low
- Language: lack of the ability to speak English
- Economical Status: the income level of MSFW's frequently falls short below the poverty level
- Citizenship: Large percentages are citizens of Mexico, or of Mexican decent

### Problems/issues facing MSFW's with disabilities

- The mobility of migratory workers, which often means that they do not remain in one location for a time sufficient to receive needed Independent Living services.
- A large majority of MSFW's lack command of the English language, therefore, they are unable to communicate effectively with Independent Living counselors and other individuals involved in delivering much needed services.
- The limited vocational skills of many MSFW's.
- The difficulty faced by some MSFW's in accessing Independent Living services, because of location of IL Centers in such are usually not located near MSFW employment sites and residence, and because MSFW's are either unaware of, or reluctant to seek IL services.
- Limited interagency referrals between IL and other social services and health agencies
- Failure of IL staff to full understand the culture of some MSFW's
- Lack of appropriate training programs, particularly programs with bilingual instructions
- No public transportation available in most rural communities
- Limited access to medical services to include available medical services during off-working hours (agricultural-seasonal-cycle). Limited access to medical coverage.

- Disabilities are widespread in the migrant farmworker population because of a number of factors, including the dangerous and physically demanding nature of farm work, exposure to toxic pesticides, and dangerous farm equipment. The psychological burden of alienation and poverty often lead to depression, alcoholism, low self-esteem, and other mental wellness issues. Infrequent professional medical care, coupled with a lack of information on health and wellness, usually leads to mismanaged and severe illness related to the effects of a variety of diseases predominant among this population-group including: diabetes, arthritis, heart disease, job related-injuries, and kidney disease to name but a few

Recommendations for implementation of comprehensive Independent Living services:

To meet the needs of MSFWs with disabilities, targeted independent living resources are needed. These include

- Information, including written forms should be made available in Spanish:
- Providers of independent living services should be adequately resourced to provide Bilingual/Bicultural services. This may include IL personnel with MSFW specific caseloads.
- Outreach to MSFW/Latino Community, particularly in areas not currently being served by Independent Living Centers
- Establish a State priority to serve MSFW's by committing State-level person(s) are assigned for assuring that state-level activities are implemented, such as advocacy for MSFW with disabilities and interagency collaboration to establish working agreements for coordinating services to MSFWs
- Provision of transportation Services.
- Prioritizing the development of future IL centers in the proximity of MSFW communities and in counties with high percentages of MSFW's.

