

Professor J. Edward Taylor
T Th 12:10-1:30
1227 Haring

ARE 150 Agricultural Labor

This course is an in-depth introduction to the economics of farm labor. We will begin by learning how economists study the role of labor in traditional agricultural systems dominated by agricultural households—a setting that describes the United States and other high-income countries historically and developing countries today. We will then learn about the transition of labor off the family farm, onto commercial farms; the emergence of “factories in the fields,” the peculiarities of farm labor demand, which create challenges for farmers and typically result in high poverty rates for farm workers and the rural communities in which they live; and the use of collective bargaining and other mechanisms to increase farmworker welfare. Eventually, domestic workers shift out of agriculture altogether. This happened historically in the United States and Europe, and it is now happening big time in developing countries around the world. As domestic workers leave agriculture, countries turn to immigration to meet their farm labor demands, and agricultural and immigration policy become intertwined. Today, the farm labor market intimately links U.S. farms with villages throughout Mexico, where most of North America’s hired farm workforce originates. The United States and Mexico are at a crossroads, however, as rural Mexicans leave farm work and farmers in both countries compete for a dwindling supply of farm workers. Our course concludes by considering the future of farm labor, including the very real possibility of “robots in the fields.”

Prerequisites: ARE 100A or ECON 100. Some background in statistics (ideally, econometrics) will be helpful, though it is not a prerequisite for the course.

This course has 4 requirements:

- 1) Read the text and supplemental readings, and attend class and sections. (You are responsible for material covered in class but not necessarily in the book.)
- 2) Problem sets: There will be three of these worth a total of 30% of your grade
- 3) A midterm exam, on material covered in the first half of class (30%)
- 4) A final exam, on material covered in the second half of class (40%)

Although it is difficult to enforce (1), doing (2) - (4) (not to mention the quality of our classes) depends on it. Above all, do not fall behind. Everything is cumulative, so unless you keep up, like in body surfing, it will be very difficult to get back on top of the wave!

Useful Information:

My office: 2107 Social Sciences & Humanities (SSH) Bldg.

My e-mail: jetaylor@ucdavis.edu

My office Hours: M 3-4 and T 3-4, 2107 SSH

TAs:

Huang Chen, email: hgchen@ucdavis.edu (Office hours: Thurs 2-4, SSH2143)

Heng Zhu, email: hwzhu@ucdavis.edu (Office hours: Fri 12-2 SSH2136)

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Course Outline and Readings

Readings: Diane Charlton and I are in the process of writing a textbook for this class, so you won't have to buy anything for this course. I will post each chapter on Canvas at least the week before we cover it. There will be some supplemental readings and other web resources, as well.

The week-by-week chapter breakdowns below are approximate, and they may change depending on our pace in the course. We will make sure you always know what is coming up and what to read for the next session(s). We will follow the Charlton & Taylor readings very closely. The problems set and exam dates will not change.

WEEK 1: The Farm Labor Problem (Chapter 1)

WEEK 2: Agricultural Labor Demand (Chapter 2)

WEEK 3: Labor in an Agricultural Household Model (Chapter 3)

PROBLEM SET 1 DUE: Thursday, April 20

WEEK 4: Agricultural Labor Supply (Chapter 4)

WEEK 5: Equilibrium in the Farm Labor Market (Chapter 5)

MIDTERM: Tuesday, May 16 (Covers Chapters 1 through 5)

WEEK 6: Farm Labor and Immigration Policy (Chapter 6)

WEEK 7: Farm Labor Organizing

PROBLEM SET 2 DUE: Tuesday, May 30

WEEK 8: Illegal Immigration, Agricultural Expansion and Rural Poverty (Chapter 7)

WEEK 9: Beyond Cesar Chavez (Chapter 8)

WEEK 10: The End of Farm Labor Abundance (Chapter 11) & Robots in the Fields (Chapter 12)

PROBLEM SET 3 DUE: Thursday June 8

FINAL EXAM: Wednesday June 14, 3:30-5:30 PM (Exam Group S)