idrc
Identification & Recruitment
Consortium
Working with Employers
TX MEP SYSTEMS

idrc
Identification & Recruitment Consortium

Partnering with Texas Agricultural Producers:

A Field Guide for TXMEP ID&R Recruiters and Staff

Program Authority

Title I, Part C, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) — federally mandated, TEA-administered

Audience

TXMEP ID&R recruiters serving Texas agricultural regions, 2025–2026 program year

Purpose

Equip recruiters to approach, build trust with, and sustain partnerships with Texas growers and producers

Remember You have Resource Already Available:

Agriculture Portal

Access the Texas Portal Here: https://sites.google.com/view/texas-idrcagricultureresourcel/home

Farmworker Numbers Maps

View Numbers of Ag Workers By County https://drive.google.com/file/d/1IMbuph3-ziPbFi30Mlc-eZkO2Xx_hM6J/view

Agriculture Visualization Tools

Understand more by county what agriculture is in each county Texas Ag Visualizations

Why This Partnership Matters — and Why It Works

The Core Mission

TXMEP identifies and enrolls every eligible migratory child (ages 0–21) in Texas, with agricultural employers serving as the primary gateway to those families. TEA has formally requested all school systems assist in meeting this federal requirement.

The Value Proposition for Growers and Producers

MEP is a **zero-cost, non-regulatory, employer-neutral** educational support service that adds no administrative, financial, or legal burden to any operation.

The Retention Argument

Workers whose children are enrolled in MEP are more stable and more likely to return season after season — directly addressing the **#1 pain point** of Texas ag employers. The more supported a worker feels, the higher the retention rate over time.

The Regulatory Firewall

MEP recruiters are employees of the school system or ESC — not immigration, labor, OSHA, or any enforcement agency — and this distinction must be communicated clearly in every interaction.

Why This Partnership Matters — and Why It Works

Growers Gain

A trusted community partner and free workforce benefit that improves retention

TXMEP Gains

Fulfillment of its federal mandate and COE data to drive program funding

Workers Gain

Free educational resources, tutoring, health coordination, and school enrollment support

Children Gain

Services they are legally entitled to that can change their educational trajectory

Understanding Your Audience: The Texas Grower Mindset in 2025–2026

Extraordinary Pressures in 2025–2026

Texas growers face compounding stressors: rising costs, labor shortages, drought, H-2A burdens, and immigration enforcement anxiety. At least nine dairies were hit with I-9 audits in a single weekend — the industry is on high alert.

Their Default Posture Toward Visitors

Deep skepticism toward anyone perceived as government-affiliated, especially after firsthand experiences with ICE audits, labor inspections, or OSHA visits.

What They Fear Most from a Recruiter Visit

1. Immigration enforcement trigger
2. Labor disruption during peak operations
3. Legal or regulatory exposure
4. Worker unrest or distraction

Understanding Your Audience: The Texas Grower Mindset in 2025–2026

What They Respond To

- Respect for their time and operations
- Knowledge of their commodity and seasonal cycle
- A clear "what's in it for me" message
- Referrals from trusted community contacts
- Consistency — the same face returning

The IDRC Principle Every Recruiter Must Internalize

> "At this moment of the relationship, we need Ag-Business more than Ag-Business needs us — behave that way." — IDRC Training Material

Required Mindset Shift

You are not an inspector or government agent — you are a community partner offering a free benefit, so approach every interaction with both confidence and humility.

2025–2026 Texas Agricultural Landscape:
Know the Industry You're Walking Into

$150B

Total Economic Impact

Texas agriculture's annual contribution to the state economy — leading the nation in cattle, cotton, hay, sheep, wool, goat, mohair, and horse production

4.1M

Cotton Bales (2024)

Texas upland cotton forecast — a 52% increase over 2023, with 3.4 million acres harvested (up 62%)

18B

Lbs. of Milk (2025)

Texas dairy output from approximately 705,000 cows — supporting 250,000+ direct and indirect jobs statewide

$887M

RGV Ag Production

Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr, and Willacy counties combined agricultural production value (2022)

400K+

H-2A Positions (2025)

Certified nationwide — up 185% over the past decade, reflecting persistent domestic labor shortages that make worker retention critical

$300M+

Texas Citrus Impact

Annual economic impact of the citrus industry — Texas is the 3rd-largest citrus producer in the U.S., almost entirely located in the Lower RGV

Sources: USDA NASS Texas Annual Statistical Bulletin 2024; USDA Annual Crop Production Release Jan 2025; Texas Association of Dairymen; Texas A&M AgriLife Extension LRGV Report; Texas Farm Bureau H-2A Report 2025

Sector Deep Dive:
Five Key Texas Industries Where MEP Families Work

1

Cotton — West Texas / Panhandle / South Plains

Harvest season runs **September–November**; families commonly follow the harvest corridor northward from South Texas — **peak MEP recruitment window: August–October.** With 4.1 million bales forecast in 2024 (up 52%), this is a significant and growing population of potentially eligible families.

2

Citrus & Produce — Lower Rio Grande Valley

Citrus harvest runs **November–April**; vegetable harvest is year-round with peaks in fall and spring. Texas is the 3rd-largest citrus producer in the U.S. ($300M+ annual impact), and growers under water/freeze stress are unusually receptive to worker-support resources.

3

Dairy — Erath County / Deaf Smith County / Panhandle

Year-round, 365-day operations producing 18 billion pounds of milk in 2025 from ~705,000 cows — domestic labor is insufficient for these physically demanding roles. Immigrant workers are essential, and their families are highly likely to be MEP-eligible.

4

Livestock / Cattle — Statewide

Texas leads the nation in cattle inventory; feedlots, ranches, and processing operations employ significant migrant labor with **spring and fall** as highest-priority windows. This sector is geographically distributed, requiring recruiter zone mapping before outreach begins.

5

Nursery / Greenhouse — RGV, East Texas, Hill Country

Year-round, labor-intensive operations — the RGV hosts the largest fruit and vegetable seedling transplant nursery in Texas (Tropical Star, Alamo TX — 33 greenhouses on 34 acres). H-2A usage is high in this sector, and workers arriving under H-2A visas are very likely to have MEP-eligible children.

Operational Pressures Growers Face Right Now: Understanding the Situation

RGV Water Crisis

A complete lack of irrigation water in 2024 would have caused an estimated **$495.8 million in direct revenue loss**. Mexico's water treaty deficit is an existential threat for RGV citrus and vegetable growers.

Labor Retention Crisis

Domestic workers are not filling agricultural roles even at elevated wages — the H-2A program has grown **185% over the past decade** as evidence of this structural shortage.

H-2A Cost Escalation

The 2025 AEWR combined rate is **$18.12/hour** — up 3.2% from 2023 — with regional averages rising 4.5% and growing administrative complexity adding further burden.

Citrus Industry Contraction

Freeze damage, water shortages, and market pressures are forcing many long-established RGV citrus operations to exit entirely. Approach remaining growers with awareness and empathy.

Immigration Enforcement Anxiety

More than **27% of Texas farmworkers are immigrants**; I-9 audits at Texas dairies in early 2025 put growers on high alert toward any government-adjacent visitor.

What MEP Is — and What It Is NOT: Your Non-Negotiable Talking Points

✅ MEP IS

- Federally funded educational support under Title I, Part C, ESSA — administered via TEA and regional ESCs
- **Zero cost** to grower, worker, or family — 100% U.S. Dept. of Education funded
- **Voluntary** — no compliance obligations, no records inspected, no employer mandates
- Eligible for children ages 0–21 whose families moved in the past 36 months for ag or fishing work
- Immigration-status neutral — status is **never reported** to any enforcement agency

Services Provided Include

- Tutoring and summer academic programs
- Early childhood and Head Start coordination
- Assessment prep and school supplies
- Health visit coordination and ESL resources
- MEP school advocacy for families

❌ MEP IS NOT

Not Immigration Enforcement

No connection to ICE, DHS, or CBP — immigration status is irrelevant and never collected for enforcement.

Not a Labor Inspection

Recruiters have zero authority over OSHA, I-9 verification, wage compliance, or any labor regulation.

Not a Union or Advocacy Effort

MEP is employer-neutral — no labor relations, worker organizing, or workplace advocacy of any kind.

Not a Burden on Growers

No paperwork, no reporting, no liability

Pre-Visit Intelligence: Research Before You Knock

Map Your Territory

Use the IDRC Ag Portal, USDA Census of Agriculture profiles, and mapping tools to identify farms, processors, and H-2A operations in your zone.

Build Employer Profile Folders

Document commodity, owner/manager name, contact info, workforce size, and COEs generated in the past 36 months for each target operation.

Find Your Warm Introduction

A referral from a trusted contact — Extension agent, Farm Bureau rep, or church leader — is exponentially more effective than a cold call.

Assign Consistent Contacts

One recruiter should own each grower relationship. Rotating staff undermines trust and signals disorganization.

Learn the Commodity Basics

Know enough about the operation's commodity and harvest cycles to hold a credible conversation — growers immediately notice.

Prepare Your Materials

Bring bilingual brochures, a one-page MEP overview, COE forms, and a list of local services relevant to that workforce.

Seasonal Outreach Calendar: When to Visit, When to Wait

Strategic Timing by Season

FALL (Sep–Nov) — HIGH PRIORITY: Cotton harvest in West Texas and citrus pre-harvest prep in RGV make this a prime COE completion window. Best time for cotton gin and field labor outreach.

WINTER (Dec–Feb) — MODERATE: RGV citrus harvest peaks and dairy operations run year-round. Focus on relationship-building visits; avoid cold outreach December 20–January 5.

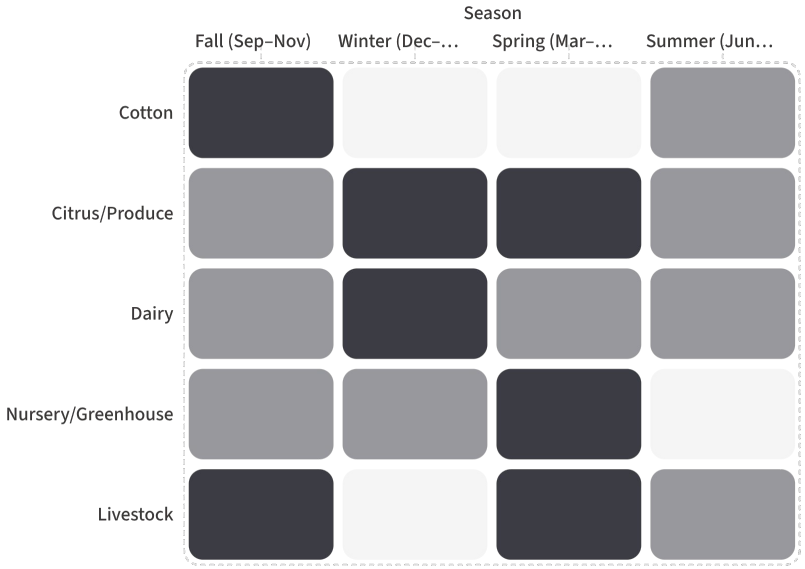
SPRING (Mar–May) — HIGH PRIORITY: RGV vegetable harvest, nursery transplanting, and new H-2A arrivals create excellent outreach opportunities. Prioritize H-2A housing site visits and nursery operations.

SUMMER (Jun–Aug) — MODERATE: Focus on pre-harvest prep and OSY outreach at processing facilities. Schedule farm visits before 9 AM or after 4 PM to avoid peak heat.

Best Times of Day

- **Farm visits:** 6:30–9:00 AM or 4:00–6:00 PM
- **Dairy operations:** 8–11 AM or 1–3 PM (between milking shifts)
- **Processing facilities:** Coordinate with HR during non-peak hours

Outreach Priority Matrix by Sector & Season



Scale: 1 = Low, 2 = Moderate, 3 = High priority; darker cells indicate higher-priority outreach windows.

Gatekeeper Navigation: Getting Past the Front Gate

Who You Will Encounter

- **Farm owners/operators** — often the on-site decision-maker
- **HR managers** — process-oriented; respond best to email
- **Foremen/supervisors** — gatekeepers to workers; powerful allies
- **Labor contractors** — can unlock access to entire crews at once
- **Front-desk staff** — redirect politely to the decision-maker

The Dual-Contact Strategy for Large Operations

Email the Plant Manager AND the HR Director separately. If one responds, tell the other: *"The Plant Manager suggested I contact you."*

Association Leverage

Texas Farm Bureau, AgriLife Extension, and industry associations host regular grower meetings. A single 10-minute presentation can open dozens of doors with instant credibility.

If You Are Turned Away

Leave a bilingual brochure, ask to post a flier in the break room, and request permission to call back in 2–3 weeks. Every "no" is a "not yet" — document and return on schedule.

Cold Call vs. Warm Introduction: Always Pursue Warm First

Small farms and agribusinesses are far more receptive when you open with a community connection: *"The [growers association / Extension agent / Farm Bureau] mentioned your operation."* Invest in warm introductions before attempting cold contact.

Channel Strategy by Target Type

Small Farm Owner

Brief phone call first, then an in-person follow-up visit.

Large Operation / HR Dept.

Email a one-page overview first, then call within 5 business days.

Labor Contractor

Warm introduction via AgriLife or Farm Bureau is essential — cold contact rarely succeeds.

Processing Facility

Skip unannounced visits; use email plus a follow-up call as standard protocol.

The Tiered Ask Framework: Maximizing Every Grower Interaction

Level 1 — Direct Worker Access

Permission to speak with workers before/after a shift, during a break, or at lunch.

Level 2 — Orientation / Survey Access

Permission to conduct a brief eligibility survey or present at new employee orientation.

Level 3 — Flier Posting

Permission to post bilingual MEP fliers in the break room, bathroom, or on-site porta-potties.

Level 4 — Leave Materials, Schedule Follow-Up

Leave program materials with owner or HR and confirm a follow-up call within 1–2 weeks.

Level 5 — Supervisor Intermediary

Engage a foreman or supervisor who can follow up with interested families on your behalf.

Level 6 — Referral to Other Growers

Ask: "Who else in the area might benefit?" — every partnership should yield at least one new introduction.

For H-2A housing sites, request permission to visit worker housing after hours — a high-yield environment — and document every interaction in your ID&R log regardless of outcome.

The Elevator Speech & Opening Scripts: Exact Language for Every Scenario

Universal 30-Second Opener (Farm Owner)

> "I'm with an educational program through the Department of Education that provides free resources for children of agricultural workers. Many families who move for seasonal work find their kids fall behind in school — we help close those gaps at no cost to you or your workers. Since you work with a mobile workforce, I'd love a few minutes to share what we offer."

Labor Retention Opener (HR Manager / Large Operation)

> "I'm [Name] with the Texas Migrant Education Program. We support workers' families with free educational services — tutoring, school enrollment help, and early childhood resources. Workers who have their family needs met are more focused and more likely to stay — would it be possible to speak with them during a break?"

Community Connection Icebreaker

> "I was speaking with [Extension Agent / School Principal / Farm Bureau contact] and your operation came up — they thought you'd be a great partner for what we're doing in the community."

Key Language Guidance

Avoid "Migrant" Initially

Use "agricultural workers" or "seasonal workforce families" instead until trust is established.

Defer "Government" Language

Use "Department of Education program" rather than "government program" in the opening exchange.

Lead with Their Pain Point

Open with labor retention or worker stability — the grower's business interest — before explaining MEP mechanics.

Defer "Federal Funding" If Unprompted

Be honest if asked, but allow the relationship to establish before volunteering funding details.

Objection Handling: Turnkey Responses to the 6 Most Common Grower Concerns

1

Objection 1: "Is this immigration enforcement?"

"Absolutely not — we are employees of an educational organization with no connection to ICE, DHS, or any enforcement agency. Immigration status has no bearing on eligibility and is never reported to any government agency."

2

Objection 2: "I don't want my workers distracted or disrupted."

"We work entirely around your schedule — before a shift, during lunch, or after hours. We'll be in and out in 15–20 minutes and won't interfere with any work activity."

3

Objection 3: "What's in it for me? Why should I let you on my property?"

"Workers who know their children are supported are more focused, more stable, and more likely to return next season. You're offering a free retention benefit to your workforce at no cost to you."

4

Objection 4: "I don't want any legal or regulatory exposure."

"There is zero legal or regulatory obligation — grower participation is 100% voluntary. We don't inspect records, review employment documents, or create any compliance requirements."

5

Objection 5: "My workers won't want to talk to you."

"When the employer introduces us as a community resource — not a government inspector — workers are very receptive. Would you be willing to let your foreman make that introduction?"

6

Objection 6: "I already tried this and it didn't work out."

"Can you tell me what happened? We want to make sure we're doing this right for your operation and are committed to being a long-term partner, not a one-time visitor."

Memorize these responses and practice with a colleague — hesitation during objections destroys the trust your opening worked to build.

On-Site Protocols: Conducting Effective Worker Outreach

Professional Conduct Standards

Dress appropriately for a farm environment and respect all posted safety protocols without exception. Your conduct reflects on every future TXMEP recruiter — one unprofessional visit can close a site for years.

Working with Large Groups

Find the supervisor first, explain your purpose, then address the group directly

> "I am here to find workers who have been in the area less than three years and have children or are under 22. Raise your hand if that describes you."

Engage those who raise their hands immediately and personally — do not wait for workers to approach you.

If the Group Is Too Large

Pass a sign-up sheet and follow up within **48 hours** — every hour of delay reduces the probability of successful contact.

COE Completion Protocol

Complete the Certificate of Eligibility **on-site whenever possible** using only the current TEA-approved template. If not feasible, collect complete contact information and finalize within 24–48 hours — COEs with missing required fields are a compliance risk.

Materials to Bring on Every Visit

Bilingual MEP Brochures

English and Spanish at minimum, plus additional languages appropriate to the workforce.

COE Forms

Bring paper originals and a digital backup using the current TEA-approved template only.

Local Services List

County-specific tutoring, health clinic, ESL, and Head Start enrollment information. Findhelp.org is excellent

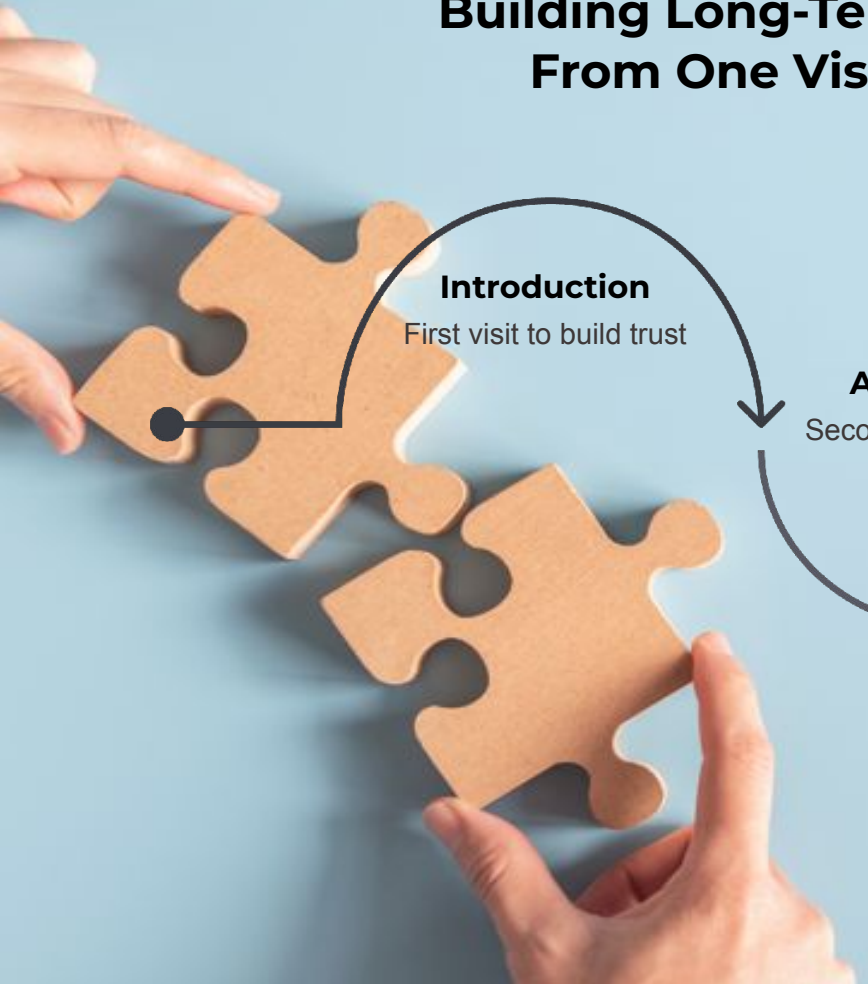
Business Card / Contact Sheet

Your name, phone, email and a way for worker follow-up.

Peer Referral Technique

After completing a COE interview, always ask: *"Do you know of any other families who recently moved here for work? We want to make sure their children have access to these resources too."* Workers' social networks are consistently the most productive source of referrals to eligible families beyond what employer access alone can reveal.

Building Long-Term Grower Partnerships: From One Visit to Ongoing Access



Introduction

First visit to build trust

Access & COE

Second visit to complete worker access

Formalize Partnership

Ongoing orientation integration

Building Long-Term Grower Partnerships: From One Visit to Ongoing Access

The goal of every grower relationship is eventual integration into the operation's new employee orientation — systematic access to every new worker who arrives, the most likely MEP-eligible population on-site.

Deliver Value at Every Interaction

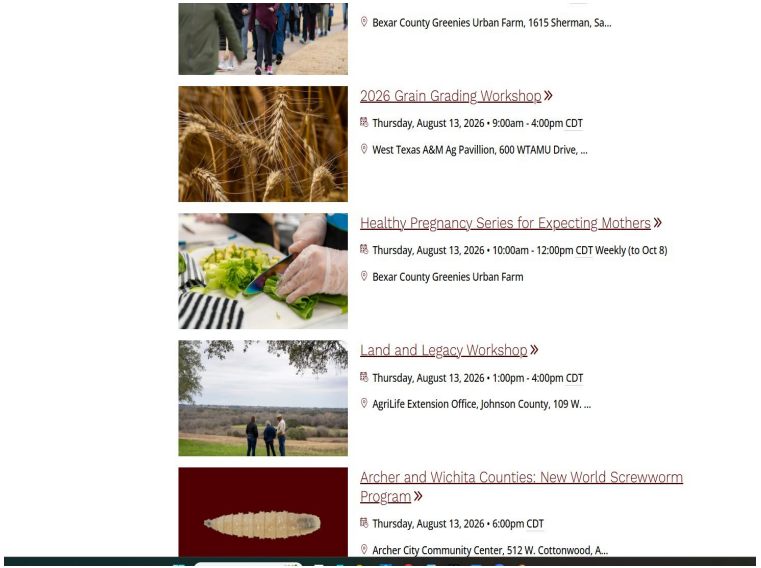
Bring something useful each visit — bilingual safety signs, ESL schedules, Head Start timelines, or health clinic hours. Growers remember partners who add value unprompted, not those who only ask for access.

Leverage Agricultural Associations

Texas Farm Bureau, AgriLife Extension, Texas Cotton Producers, and Texas Citrus Mutual carry trust that government programs rarely do. Presenting at their meetings or being listed as a partner resource dramatically increases recruiter credibility.

Attend AgriLife Extension Events

Attending AgriLife field days and workshops — even without a speaking slot — positions you as a community member rather than an outside visitor.



counties.agrilife.org

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension County Offices

Directory

[By District | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H | I | J | K | L | M | N | O | P | Q | R | S | T | U | V | W | X | Y | Z | Urban]

- A
  - Anderson County
  - Andrews County
  - Angelina County
  - Aransas County
  - Archer County
  - Armstrong County
  - Atascosa County
  - Austin County
- B
  - Bailey County
  - Bandera County
  - Bastrop County
  - Baylor County
  - Bee County
  - Bell County
  - Bexar County
  - Blanco County
  - Borden County

Your Action Plan: 30-Day Launch Checklist for Grower Outreach

Week 1 — Intelligence Gathering

Map all farms, H-2A operations, packing houses, and processors using IDRC Ag Portal and USDA county profiles. Build employer folders for your top 10 targets and identify 3 community connectors for warm introductions.

Week 2 — Outreach Initiation

Contact your 3 community connectors, send emails to top 5 large operations, and call top 5 small farm owners. Prepare bilingual materials and confirm one AgriLife or Farm Bureau event to attend.

Week 3 — First Visits

Conduct 3–5 grower visits using the tiered ask framework, targeting at least Level 2 access at each. Document all interactions in the ID&R log within 24 hours and begin COE completions immediately.

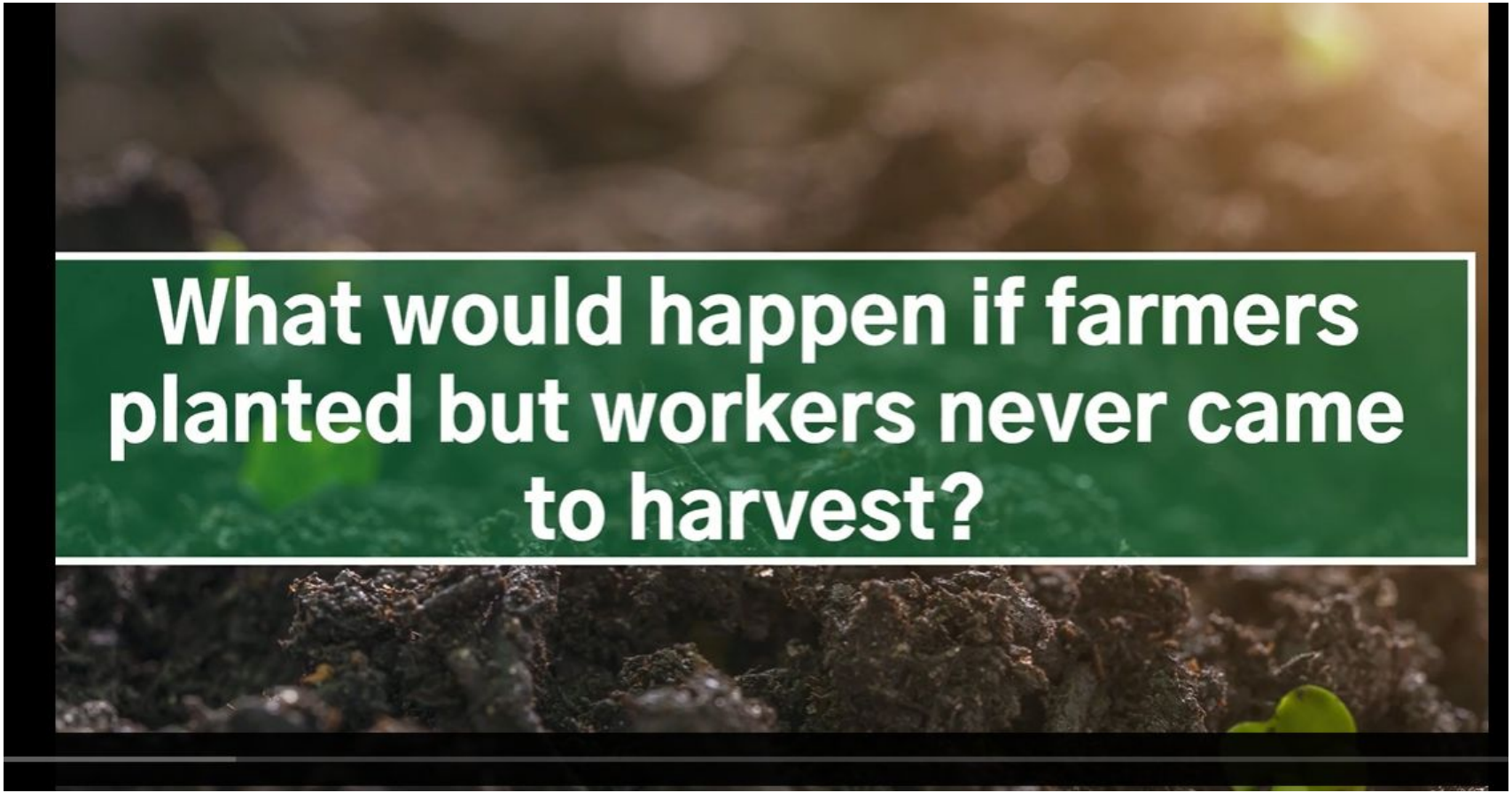
Week 4 — Relationship Building

Return to Level 1 growers for worker interviews and ask each contact who else to connect with. Attend your scheduled community event and verify TX-NGS encoding is current and complete.

Ongoing Monthly

Maintain one new grower introduction and one return visit per week, plus one community meeting per month. Conduct quarterly reviews of the ID&R log against seasonal goals and TEA compliance benchmarks.

Every eligible child you enroll connects a family to services they are legally entitled to — this work is the foundation of a strong program


What would happen if farmers planted but workers never came to harvest?

Its a challenging time
for US agriculture.

THERE IS A PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN OF FARMWORKERS.

Human Resource Manager or Plant Manager,

I wanted to reach out to you all and see if we could set up a time to talk in the near future. I work for a program funded through the Department of Education in the state of Missouri that has resources for the children of mobile farmworkers and ag processors. As children move with their families they often fall behind in school. We have resources to help those that have moved in the last three years overcome those gaps. Many farmers and meat processors are not aware of these resources and they can be a great resource for the children of your workers. We work with schools across the state as well as community partners and we are trying to help get the word out to the agriculture community. Please let me know when you would have some time to discuss these free resources.

I look forward to talking with you at your convenience. Please feel free to give me a call or email me some times that would work for us to connect.

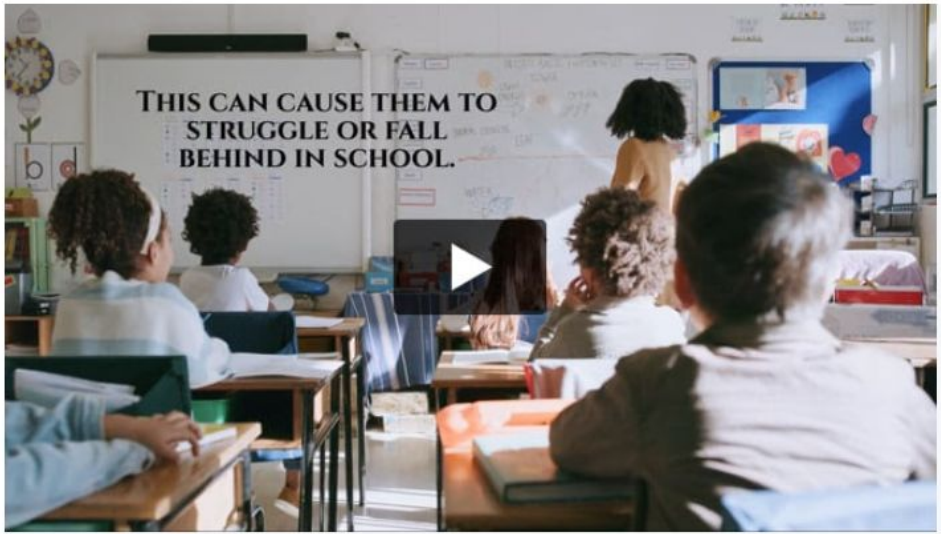
In 1966 Congress
created a program
called Migrant Education.
00:00
vimeo

Human Resource Manager or Plant Manager,

We are reaching out to see how we can share resources with you that are available for many of your workers. There is a program for children who have moved in the last three years who have parents who work in agriculture. This program is free and funded through the Dept of Education here in Missouri. The resources are focused on helping children with gaps in their education due to mobility to help overcome those challenge areas.

Unfortunately many meat processing plants and the farming community in general are not aware of these resources. We are trying to do more direct outreach outside of schools to help our community and agriculture partners be aware so it can be shared with their workforce. We would love to find out when would be a good time to share more information about these resources with you.

I look forward to talking with you at your convenience. Please feel free to give me a call or email me some times that would work for us to connect.



Access all of
our videos here

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Thanks in advance

Add your contact info here.

Reply Forward

Questions?

Contact Information

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