

Labor Shortage in the PA Mushroom Industry

Worker and Employer Perspectives

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Objectives

- 1 Assess the **scale and scope of impacts of the labor shortage** on mushroom farm businesses.
- 2 Examine **factors that motivate workers** (particularly harvesters) **to stay or leave a farm.**
- 3 Identify **similarities and gaps between worker and employer perspectives** on the labor shortage.

Background

Chester County, Pennsylvania is home to an estimated **68 commercial mushroom farms**, producing two-thirds of all U.S. mushrooms (Holliday, 2018). Historically mushrooms were picked by single Latino migrant men; today Latinx families are settled in the area and both women and men work in harvesting. However, **employers have identified a widespread labor shortage** as the principal threat to the future of their businesses.

Methodology

Worker Interviews

- Sept-Nov, 2018
- 60 interviews
- 6 farms
- All in Spanish
- Conducted at worksite
- 25 to 45 minutes
- Socio-demographics, advantages/disadvantages of job, occupational safety, immigration concerns

Farm Owner Survey

- Feb-March, 2019
- 20 valid responses
- Online
- 15 to 30 minutes
- Size, extent and impacts of labor shortage, retention and recruitment efforts

Findings

Workers

Table 1. Job roles of interviewed workers (N=60)

JOB	Women	Men	All
Harvester	14	33	47
Weigher/ Packer	0	1	1
Supervisor	1	5	6
Cleaning, maintenance	0	3	3

Table 2. Family status of interviewed workers (N=60)

FAMILY STATUS	Total (N=60)
single - no children	17%
single - with children in US	8%
single - with children in home country	3%
married - no children	3%
married with spouse and majority of children in US	57%
married with spouse and majority of children in home country	12%
Totals	100%

Figure 1. Reasons to continue working on the farm as harvesters (N=44)

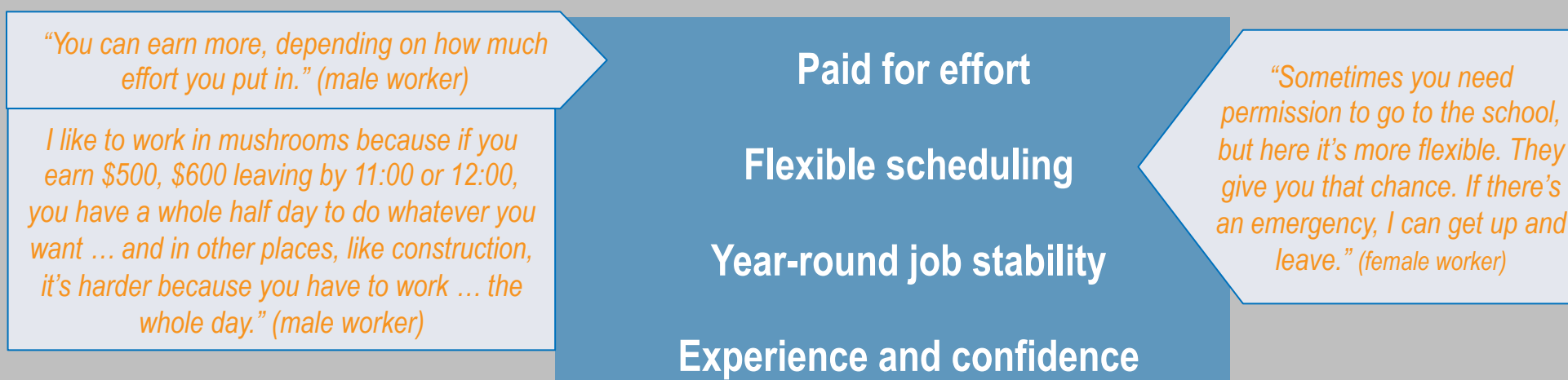
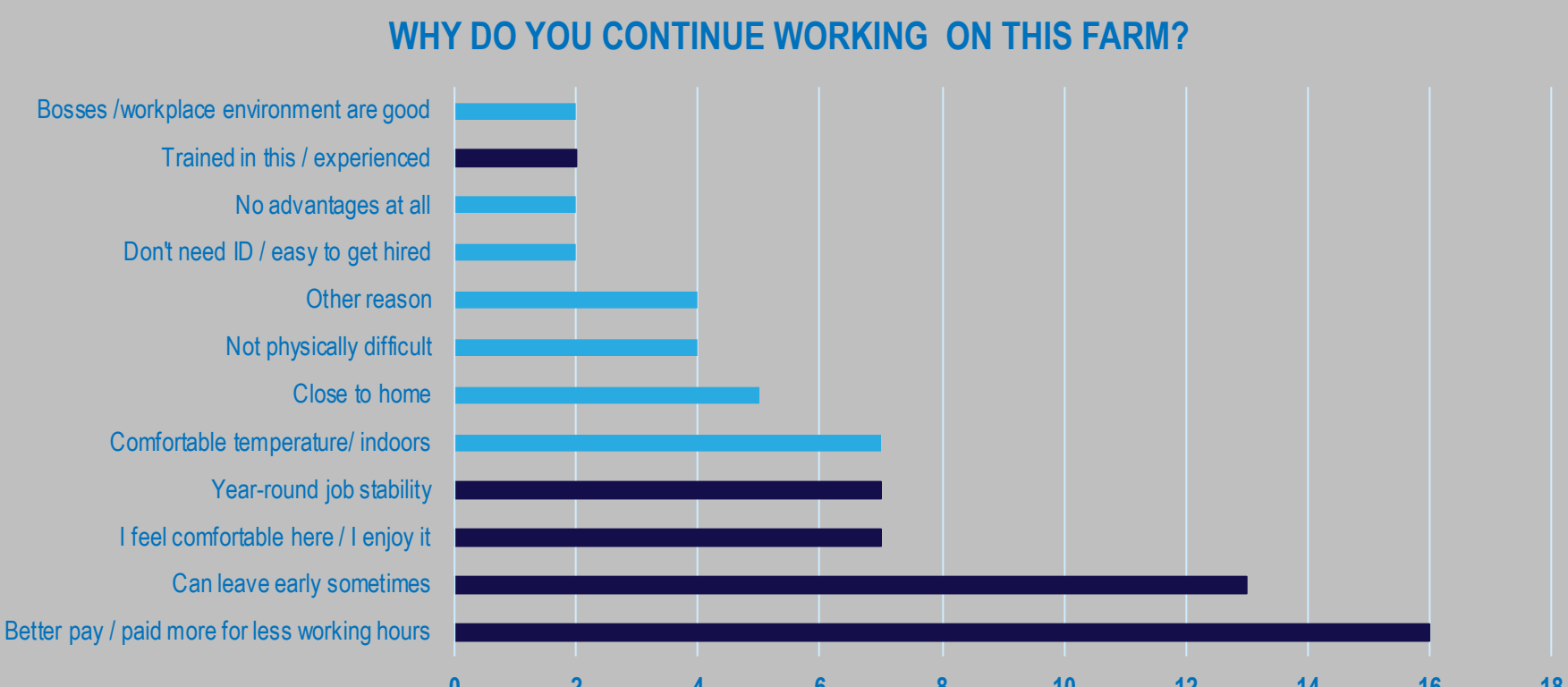
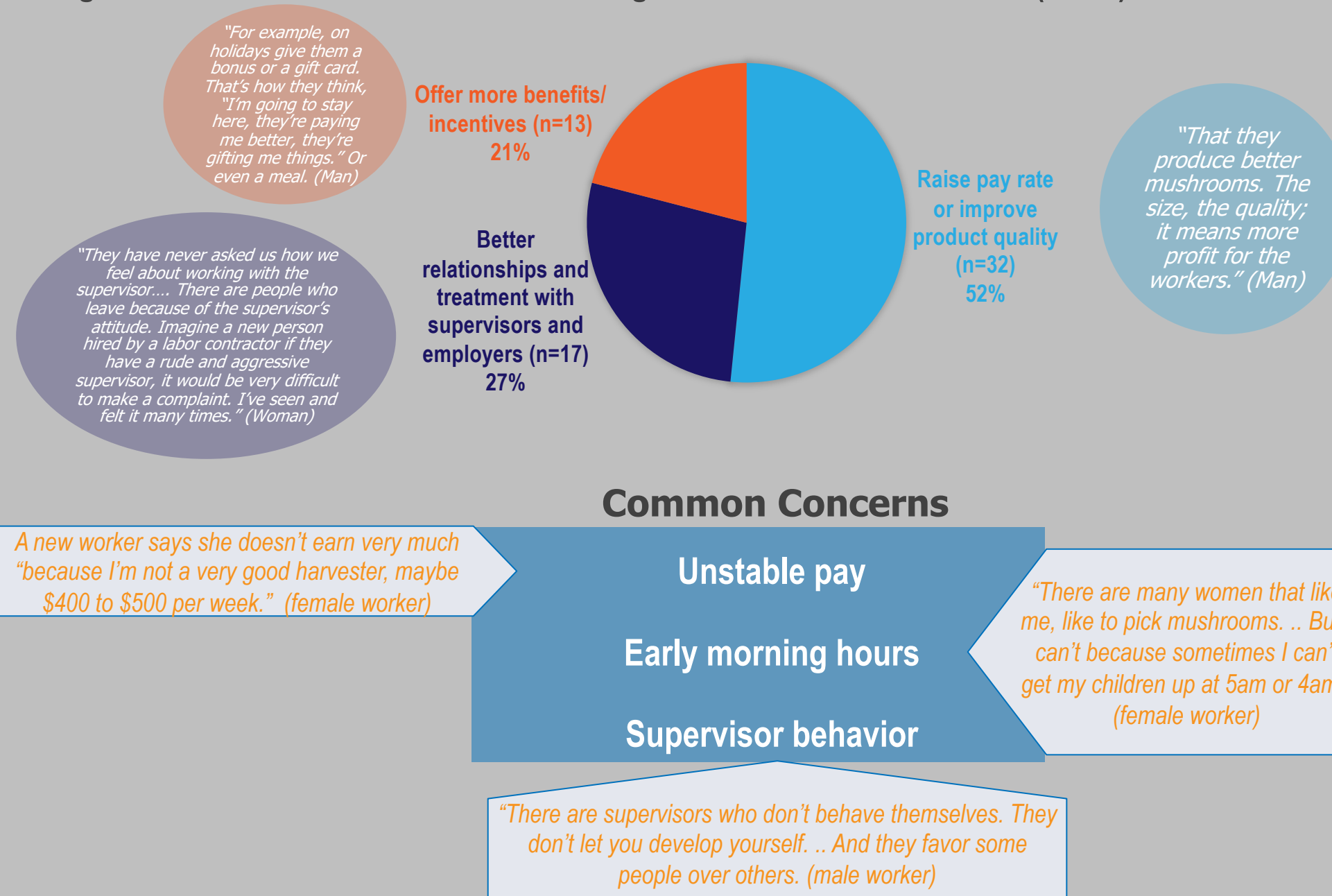


Figure 2. Motivations to continue working on the farm as harvesters (N=44)



Farm Owners

Table 3. Role in business (N=20)

Role	n
Owner/ partner	12
General manager	6
Human resources (HR) director	4
CFO	1

Figure 3. Severity of the current labor shortage (N=20)

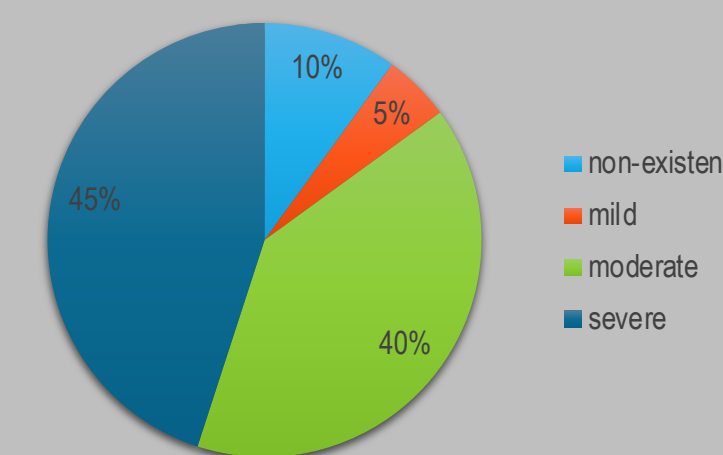
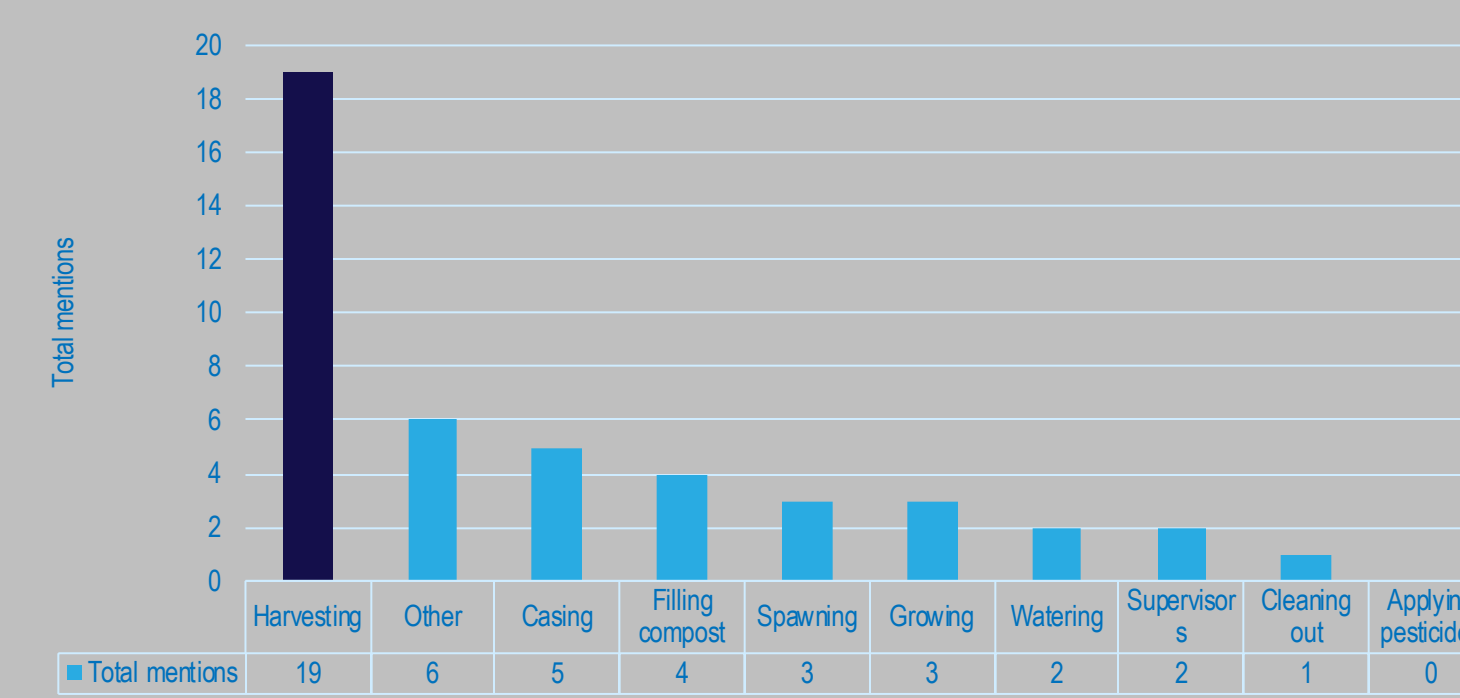


Figure 4. Positions currently experiencing a labor shortage (N=19)



Successful Retention Strategies (N=13)

Themes	Mentions	Selected quotes
Raise wages	6	"...raises helped retention"
None	2	"none that have made a real difference"
Additional benefits	1	"401k. ..." Includes a company match.
Health benefits	1	Medical/Dental Benefits PTO Plan
Housing and transportation	1	"...transportation to work, housing"
Changes to work schedule	1	"Probably night shift differential..."
Bonus	1	"We pay an extra penny for harvesters for 1 year tenure, it is reset if they leave and come back"
Social events	1	"social events make people happier..."
All above	1	"All that have been noted above."

Unsuccessful Retention Strategies (N=9)

Themes	Mentions	Selected quotes
Promotions	3	"Promotions. Our top level supervisors have been with us a very long time."
Change of work schedules	2	"the changing of schedules make people feel that we favor one person over another"
All worked	2	"All worked well."
Other	2	"Helpers work but they seem to come and go and hurts to create good continuity"

Conclusions

- 1 Many employers consider the **labor shortage to be severe**, especially for harvesting positions.
- 2 Harvesters' **motivations** to stay on a farm are partly based upon **factors that impact pay**. However, **65% live with their families here**. Therefore, **flexibility with scheduling to facilitate childcare** is perceived as an advantage, and the very **early morning starting hours** are seen as a drawback.
- 3 Workers and farm owners **agree on the importance of raising pay and providing benefits/ incentives** to improve employee retention. Yet, **workers put more emphasis on difficulties with scheduling and supervisors** than employers. Similarly, Garcia (2006) indicates that "satisfaction with employer" is one factor that contributes to workers leaving or staying in the mushroom industry.

Concerns	Workers	Farm Owners
Raising Pay is an effective retention strategy.	✓	✓
Benefits/ Incentives: receives a parallel emphasis from both groups.	✓	✓
Scheduling	✓ Stressed over early morning hours and long working days.	✗ Reported little success with scheduling changes as a retention strategy.
Supervisors	✓ These relationships are a main concern	! Not mentioned. Merits attention

References

- Garcia, Victor. "Observations from the Field: The SAW Program and the Mushroom Industry in Southeastern Pennsylvania," 2006. https://migration.ucdavis.edu/cf/more.php?id=200_0_2_0
- Holliday, Joan. "Largest Mushroom Farm in the Mushroom Capital." Southern Chester County Weeklies, July 22, 2018. https://www.southernchestercountyweeklies.com/news/largest-mushroom-farm-in-the-mushroom-capital/article_81bf19ad-1cc5-5596-b1ff-2ed766067502.html

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