Afterword: Comparing Today and 20 Years Ago:
The Indigenous settle but harsh conditions remain.

The migration of indigenous Mexicans to California began during the Bracero Program (1942-1965). It re-emerged after 1970, fueled in part by the recruitment of southern indigenous workers for the winter vegetable industry in Northwest Mexico, which grew rapidly in the 1960s due to the completion of irrigation projects in Sinaloa and Sonora and the displacement of winter vegetables from Cuba after the revolution. Stage migration to the United States via Northwest Mexico was the principal route through which individual village networks from southern Mexico came to migrate to the United States. Of course, once such migration was established, subsequent migration occurred directly from the sending village—and neighboring villages—to the U.S. destination. Starting in 1989, a project at the California Institute for Rural Studies (CIRS), funded by the Ford Foundation, began to research the extent of this migration and the living and working conditions of the migrants.[1] This research led to a dialogue with California Rural Legal Assistance, which created a program of indigenous outreach workers to assist the indigenous farmworkers in their own languages. It also led to an effort to identify and train interpreters for court proceedings. Finally, it provided assistance to the incipient organizational efforts of the migrants, helping them to gain access to institutional resources and philanthropic funding. The current study, the IFS, has furthered these earlier efforts.

How has this population of migrants changed—with respect to their numbers and the working and living conditions they face—in the two decades that have elapsed?
The earlier study focused on the Mixtecos, since they were the dominant group, though some data were gathered on other language groups. The current study shows that Mixtecos are still the dominant indigenous group working in rural California, accounting for an estimated 53 percent of indigenous Mexican farmworkers.[2] However, it also shows that there are many other indigenous groups—speaking a total of 23 languages—including a sizeable Zapoteco population that accounts for 26 percent of those identified, as well as a significant Triqui presence of almost 10 percent. Though it was well known that there was a large Zapoteco population in urban Los Angeles, their presence in California agriculture was found to be small by the canvassers in 1991. And though the earlier studies found a few Triqui villages, at that time most of the migrant Triquis were working in Baja California, as they had not yet moved up into California to a significant degree in 1991.

In 1994, Runsten and Kearney, based on the 1991 canvass of many rural California regions, counted about 7,000 Oaxacan immigrants in 47 California towns from 201 Oaxacan villages. The canvass allowed them to make an estimate of about 21,000

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[1] Zabin, Carol, (Coordinator). 1992. *Migración Oaxaqueña a los Campos Agrícolas de California: Un Diálogo*. Current Issue Brief, 2. La Jolla: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies. Zabin, et al. 1993. Runsten and Kearney 1994.

[2] Note that the current study, though seeking to encompass all indigenous immigrants from Mexico, still omits indigenous immigrant workers from Guatemala or other Latin American countries.

Mixteco farmworkers in California in 1991, along with 5,500 children, for a total of 26,000 Mixtecos in rural California.

In the current IFS study, we estimated that there were 53,600 indigenous immigrant farmworkers from the 342 towns where we actually collected population estimates from people who originated in these towns. In addition, indigenous informants identified the names of 156 other indigenous villages with a presence in California agriculture, however these towns were identified without estimates of population and so they were left out of our state-wide population estimate. Moreover, by comparing the hometown lists gathered in 1991 and 2008, we discovered another 100 towns that were found in 1991 but missed in 2008 entirely. In total, then, there were over 250 towns that we knew had a presence in rural California but for which we did not have estimates. This led us to conclude that our estimate based on the 342 towns for which we did have estimates could only be considered a partial estimate of the total population.
As a consequence, we turned to the twenty year old National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS) of the U.S. department of Labor to make estimates of the total population. Our resulting point estimates from the NAWS for indigenous farmworkers were 31,800 in the 1991-95 period and 117,850 for the 2004-2008 period (See Appendix III for details). These are very consistent with the estimates from the canvassing done in 1991 by the CIRS and the count made in 2008 by the current IFS research. The estimates confirm a rapid growth over these two decades.

There has also been a clear increase in the proportions of women and children in this population—from 17 and 22 percent, respectively, in 1991, to 25 and 35 percent in 2008—which would be expected as the population becomes more settled in California. Including the children, we estimate that there are at least 165,000 indigenous immigrants in rural California, originating in about 600 Mexican towns and villages. Comparing the data gathered in 1991 and in 2008 confirms the anecdotal evidence that U.S.-bound migration has spread to hundreds more indigenous villages, involving many more language groups.

Turning to wages and working conditions in California agriculture, the earlier studies found that the indigenous had more short-term jobs, were more likely to migrate for work, were more likely to experience non-payment or underpayment of wages, and were subject to more side payments—such as paying for rides or tools—than were mestizo Mexican farmworkers. This appears to have changed little, as agricultural labor market conditions deteriorated in the 1980s and have remained depressed.

- In 1991, the indigenous workers interviewed reported being paid less than the minimum wage in 25% of their jobs during the prior year, and 47% had at least one job that paid less than the minimum. In 2008, 33% were being paid less than the minimum wage in their current job. Although the minimum wage has risen, the respect for it has not.

- In both 2008 and in 1991, the indigenous were found to be facing harsh working conditions, such as being required to pay for rides to work. In 1991, 28% of the

indigenous said they had to pay for a ride to work from their employer as a condition of their job. In 2008, 25% paid for such a ride

- In 1991, 26% of the indigenous surveyed said they had not been paid in at least one job. In 2008, of the indigenous surveyed who mentioned a legal complaint, 27% cited non-payment or underpayment of wages.

The indigenous farmworkers are still occupying the jobs at the bottom of the labor market, the short-term tasks or the most labor-intensive tasks, such as harvesting, hoeing, pruning, and thinning. Their increased presence has manifested itself in a spreading out across the geography of California agriculture, occupying these tasks in more and more areas. For example, while the indigenous were a small part of the work force in Watsonville strawberries 20 years ago, now the indigenous are the dominant labor force there, just as they were already the dominant group in Santa Maria strawberries in the earlier period. Their presence in strawberries has no doubt made possible the continual expansion of California strawberry acreage in recent decades. The crops that they work in—grapes, strawberries, citrus, vegetables, tomatoes, tree fruit—are the very same crops that have been seeking a constantly replenished labor force for many decades.