

# Inadequate food facilities in NC migrant camps could cause illness

January 17 2013

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Farmworkers are at potential risk from food and waterborne illnesses because of the condition of cooking and eating facilities available to them, according to a new study from Wake Forest Baptist Medical Center.

Researchers from Wake Forest Baptist are the first to evaluate cooking and eating facilities in migrant farmworker camps to compare against established housing regulations. They found that the facilities fail to comply with regulations in a substantial number of camps. The study, which appears online today in the January issue of the [American Journal of Public Health](#), is part of an ongoing program of community-based participatory research at Wake Forest Baptist in conjunction with the N.C. Farmworkers Project, Student Action with Farmworkers and other clinics and organizations service state farmworkers.

"The structural, sanitation and pest infestation problems documented in these kitchens are interrelated," said the study's lead author Sara A. Quandt, Ph.D., a professor of epidemiology and prevention at Wake Forest Baptist.

The researchers investigated the cooking and eating facilities and collected data from 182 migrant farmworker camps in eastern North Carolina during the 2010 agricultural season. Observations were compared with 15 kitchen-related housing regulations specified by federal and state housing standards. They found violations of eight regulations in at least 10 percent of the camps across a [broad spectrum](#) –

structure, water supply, kitchen equipment, sanitation and pest infestation.

The findings are important because the cooking and eating facilities can have immediate and significant effects on the workers' health, safety and work capacity, Quandt said. "[Food contamination](#) during storage or preparation, lack of appropriate kitchen facilities, and undercooking can increase the risk of [foodborne illnesses](#). In the long term, absence of safe [food storage](#) or cooking facilities can prevent consumption of healthy foods, leading to elevated chronic disease risk."

A limitation of the study, which was supported by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (grant RO1 ES012358), Quandt said, is that data were only collected in eastern North Carolina and may not represent conditions of migrant camps in other regions.

Quandt said that greater enforcement of regulations, particularly when workers occupy the facilities during the agricultural season, is needed to protect farmworkers. "Farmworker housing is a potential source of exposures that threaten workers' health and safety," she said. "Inadequate cooking and eating facilities can compromise their ability to obtain the food needed to maintain the strenuous pace of work demanded."

Provided by Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center

Citation: Inadequate food facilities in NC migrant camps could cause illness (2013, January 17) retrieved 27 April 2024 from

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