

Men less likely to see food as national security issue amid pandemic

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Credit: Scott Warman

On average, men not only showed less empathy toward temporary agricultural laborers, known as H-2A guest workers, but also were less likely to see food supply and production as issues of national security,

according to a study led by a Washington State University researcher.

This particular finding relating to gender stood out from the rest of the study's results. The survey was conducted before and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The study was published in the journal *Applied Economic Perspectives and Policy* by Jeff Luckstead, WSU Assistant Professor in the School of Economic Sciences, and Rodolfo M. Nayga and Heather A. Snell, both at the University of Arkansas.

The gender anomaly notwithstanding, the study found that on average, people did shift their views toward food being a national security issue during the pandemic. They were also more empathetic toward H-2A workers because of the crisis.

Researchers found that gender played a strong role in other ways, too. On average, men believed that stay-at-home orders and related economic impacts were not justified. Men were also found to have viewed the shelter-in-place restrictions as an over-reaction on the part of local and state officials. Respondents' political views on immigration did not change, the study found.

"The surprising part was how gender played a strong role in influencing responses," Luckstead said. "It was the only statistically significant factor for all the questions we asked."

Specializing in agricultural trade and policy analysis, Luckstead also studies immigration and its role in agriculture and food production.

Luckstead and his co-authors posed nine questions to the pool of respondents. The questions were broken into two sets: questions asked before and during the COVID-19 outbreak, and questions asked only

during the pandemic.

Among other questions, the researchers asked respondents to rank their bias on immigration policy from very liberal to very conservative. They also asked the importance respondents placed on agricultural food production during the coronavirus crisis.

Other questions explored whether or not shelter-in-place orders were a matter of over-reacting or under-reacting, and whether or not any economic damage caused by stay at home orders was justified.

The researchers screened out respondents who made more than \$50,000 annually, those with advanced degrees, and retirees.

"We wanted to sample a domestic audience who would most likely be candidates for agricultural field work," Luckstead said. He added that domestic workers in his survey categories are vastly under-represented in the agricultural field work economy.

In terms of the big picture, Luckstead added that it is important to understand how low-skilled domestic workers in this labor pool view food, food-production, and supply, especially in the context of a pandemic.

Because these domestic workers are largely underrepresented in ag field work, it is important to understand why they aren't working in these labor sectors, particularly given the high employment rates stemming from the COVID-19 crisis.

"It is interesting to see that while attitudes generally shifted because of the pandemic, gender really stood out as a significant difference in attitudes," Luckstead said.

More information: Jeff Luckstead et al, Labor Issues in the Food Supply Chain Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic, *Applied Economic Perspectives and Policy* (2020). [DOI: 10.1002/aepp.13090](https://doi.org/10.1002/aepp.13090)

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