

## **Job Search Lures Mexicans to Far Corners of U.S.**

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### **Body**

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Few places in the **United States** would seem less likely to attract Mexican migrant workers than Alaska.

But that's where Dr. Martin D'Giesecke Garcia headed after the peso devaluation wiped out his medical practice here and tripled his mortgage payments in 1995. He boarded a plane for Kodiak Island, where in a growing community of Mexican workers he found a **job** gutting cod on a trawler in the Bering Sea.

Rigoberto Ayala provides another example of how Mexico's migrant labor patterns are changing. Starting in 1984, Mr. Ayala traveled back and forth each year between his hometown, 50 miles east of Guadalajara, and Stockton, Calif., where he harvested sugar beets. But since 1991 he has been traveling instead to Hawaii to work in the pineapple and cane fields.

Over the decades, millions of **Mexicans** have headed from Guadalajara, and the vast agricultural region that surrounds it, north to traditional work sites like the lettuce fields of California, the cattle ranches of Texas and the restaurant kitchens of Chicago. But now Mexican workers are finding new frontiers, responding to a demand for cheap labor in parts of the **United States far** from its southwestern border.

Growing numbers are traveling not only to Alaska and Hawaii, but also to cultivate mushrooms in Pennsylvania, build offices in Atlanta, milk cows in Idaho, harvest tobacco in North Carolina, slaughter pigs in Iowa, manicure lawns in New Jersey, wash dishes in Michigan, clean fish in Maryland and bale hay in South Dakota.

As Jorge Durand, a University of Guadalajara demographer who has studied migration since 1980, put it: "Mexican workers are traveling to new areas, crisscrossing the **United States** in ways that break dramatically with traditional patterns."

The dispersion of **Mexicans** into virtually all 50 states has increased since 1986, when passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act legalized the status of more than two million **Mexicans** who had been working in the **United States** without documents. The law enabled them to migrate to remote regions without risking arrest, Mr. Durand said.

The trend has accelerated since the 1994 peso crisis, when many middle-class **Mexicans** began traveling north in **search** of work, demographers say. Those more affluent workers have found it easier to migrate into areas previously unexplored by their countrymen, because many have tourist visas and can afford air travel.

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Not counting migrant workers, there were 6.7 million Mexican-born people living in the United States in 1996, according to Jeffrey S. Passel, a demographer at the Urban Institute in Washington, a nonprofit research organization. The number of workers who travel seasonally between Mexican homes and American work sites can be only roughly estimated, he said, but it may be as large as two million. Mexicans are now America's largest immigrant group by far, he added, constituting 28 percent of the foreign-born population, up from 7 percent in 1970.

"There's an identifiable presence of Mexicans in all kinds of states where there's never been any before," Mr. Passel said recently at a Mexican Government-sponsored conference on Mexican migration. "This has really exploded since the 1990 census."

Ever since Mexican migration to the United States became institutionalized during World War II, when a Government-sponsored program brought thousands of farm workers north, California has been Mexicans' main destination.

But since California's economy plunged into recession and anti-immigrant fervor spread, many Mexicans have gone elsewhere, said Rudolfo Figueroa, a diplomat who directs a Mexican Government program to provide health, education and other services to Mexicans in the United States.

The new patterns are reflected in the increasing number of Mexican Government offices in the United States. They now total 54, many in unexpected places like Charlotte, N.C., and Buffalo. Since 1991, four consulates have been opened, in Orlando; Portland, Ore.; Santa Ana, Calif., and Douglas, Ariz.

"Many Mexicans who worked in California have gone east and north," Mr. Figueroa said, "provoking the growth of new Mexican communities in the center of the country and on the eastern seaboard. And that's obligated us to expand into areas that we didn't work before."

A consular office has also opened in Honolulu to serve the estimated 15,000 Mexicans now working in Hawaii. One is Mr. Ayala, 31, who said in a telephone interview from Maui that after migrating between his hometown of Ocotlan and Hawaii for six years, he had obtained American residency documents.

But he is not sure where he will settle. "That depends on whether I get married in Mexico or Hawaii," he said, adding that he had been laid off by a sugar company and was unemployed.

Anchorage has a new consular office as well. Some 20,000 Mexicans have settled in Alaskan cities including Juneau and Fairbanks, where most work in hotels and restaurants. There is also a contingent on Kodiak Island, where many clean fish in the 11 canneries, said Hugo Abel Castro, the Mexican consul in Seattle, who supervises the Anchorage office.

Among the Mexicans traveling to Alaska to work have been many unemployed teachers, lawyers and other professionals. One was Dr. D'Giestecke, who concluded after reading help-wanted advertisements placed by American fishing companies in a Mexican magazine in 1995 that a trip to Alaska might help him pay off his debts.

There were five American crew members on the Kodiak Island fishing vessel where he found work. The three others were Mexican: one experienced seaman, an agronomist and an accountant. The latter two had lost their jobs in Mexico.

After cleaning cod on the open sea for two months, Dr. D'Giestecke returned home with about \$3,000 in savings, which helped him reduce his debts, he said. Will he go back?

"If I need money I will," he said. "I have friends in Alaska now."

## Graphic

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## Job Search Lures Mexicans to Far Corners of U.S.

Photo: Mexican migrants are being dispersed ever **farther**. Angel Castillo, harvesting pineapples in Maui, is one of 15,000 Mexican workers in Hawaii. (Cory Lum for The New York Times)

Map of Mexico showing location of Guadalajara.

## Classification

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