Faculty Profile: Alexandra Hill

Alexandra Hill joined the Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics at the University of California, Berkeley as an assistant professor of Cooperative Extension in July 2023. Prior to this role she worked as an assistant professor of Agricultural Economics at Colorado State University. She earned her Ph.D. in agricultural and resource economics from UC Davis in 2019, and she holds master's and bachelor's degrees in agricultural and consumer economics from the University of Illinois Champaign-Urbana.

Her research centers around the U.S. agricultural workforce and seeks to demonstrate how a variety of factors impact worker well-being, quantified in terms of income or health, and how these factors then impact businesses, in terms of key performance indicators like productivity, output quality, profits, and workplace injuries. Hired farmworkers contribute greatly to the racial, ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic diversity of U.S. agriculture; however, they are frequently not treated equitably, and face a multitude of economic, physical, legal, and emotional hardships in their personal and professional lives. Hill’s research seeks to dismantle these inequities by finding avenues through which employers and policymakers can enhance worker well-being and cultivate a more prosperous agricultural industry.

The availability of appropriately skilled workers when and where they are needed is critical for the viability of agricultural businesses. Hill’s work on agricultural labor supply centers around understanding and documenting the factors that influence potential employees’ willingness to work for agricultural businesses and how this has changed over time.

One of her current projects studies the reduction of follow-the-crop migration among U.S. agricultural workers. The project defines local and migrant labor market areas geographically and shows how reduced mobility among farmworkers mediates how agricultural operations can respond to environmental stressors and government policies.

Hill’s work related to employee productivity seeks to identify payment schemes and other workplace policies that can increase both business profitability and worker incomes. In recent work, she showed that increases in the piece-rate wage paid to harvesters can cause them to work more quickly, delivering higher quantities, but also potentially leading to lower quality—measured as the percentage of output without any defects. She is also exploring whether employers can increase worker incomes, output, and quality by offering bonuses tied to both output and quality, rather than a traditional quantity-based, piece-rate payment.

Efforts to ensure the continued health and well-being of the agricultural workforce are beneficial for workers and are also essential for the sustainability of the industry. Using improved surveillance and monitoring, Hill is working to improve our understanding of the hazards associated with agricultural work.

In recent work, she documented the undercounts of nonfatal injuries and illnesses among U.S. agricultural workers in national data sources. She is now working with collaborators at UC Davis and the Western Center for Agricultural Health and Safety to produce more accurate and detailed estimates of agricultural injuries and illnesses in California so that policymakers and industry stakeholders can make more informed decisions to improve workplace health and safety.

Hill is also interested in understanding how policies impact and shape the agricultural sector. She is currently working to document how California’s recent overtime regulation for agricultural workers impacted the state’s crop workforce in terms of working hours and pay as detailed in her recent ARE Update article “California’s Overtime Law for Agricultural Workers: What Happened to Work Hours and Pay?” She is also conducting research on the potential implications of immigration reform policies—including the farm workforce modernization act—for agricultural employees, employers, and the industry.

When Ali is not researching or traveling, you will find her jogging (slowly) in the Berkeley hills, rock climbing, or training Muay Thai.

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