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For more information
Rod Ritcherson
rod.ritcherson@umos.org
608-334-2220

Department of Labor Awards \$1.7 Million Contract to Assist Farmworkers in Illinois

The U.S. Department of Labor recently awarded a \$1,746,897, per year, National Farmworker Jobs Program/Career Services and Training contract to UMOs, a Wisconsin-based, non-profit corporation. The 5-year contract will be implemented state-wide in Illinois.

The National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP) was created by Congress in response to the chronic seasonal unemployment and underemployment experienced by migrant and seasonal farmworkers. Funding from the program assists workers, and their families, achieve economic self-sufficiency through supportive and training services while employed in agriculture, or through acquisition of higher job skills that result in higher wages.

UMOS will provide a full range of services, including basic and individualized career services, training, on the job training, youth services, housing, and other supportive services. Targeted populations are both youth and adult.

UMOS will open 4 office locations in areas with higher concentrations of farmworkers in the northern, western, central, and southern areas within the state: Rock Island area, Champaign, Marion/Mt Vernon area. The 4th location is not yet confirmed. Employment opportunities will be posted online through the Illinois Workforce system.

“We are excited about this new opportunity to provide services to migrant and seasonal farmworkers in the state of Illinois,” says Lupe Martinez, President and Chief Executive Officer, UMOs. “This targeted migrant and seasonal workforce has been deemed essential to continue to meet the nation’s food supply needs.” UMOs, headquartered in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, also operates the National Farmworker Jobs Program in Missouri and Wisconsin.

UMOS will establish partnerships with the local workforce investment system, including the state Department of Economic Security, Illinois' workforce area boards and their respective WorkNet Centers, community colleges, and approved Workforce Investment Opportunity Act (WIOA) vocational training providers.

UMOS also plans to collaborate with the State Monitor Advocate to coordinate outreach to farmworkers who migrate to Illinois each year, and to high school seniors and community college students, as well as rural community residents who do not migrate from state to state for work but work in seasonal agriculture jobs within Illinois.

For fiscal year 2019, there were approximately 2,500 migrant and seasonal farmworkers certified to work in Illinois. "We will support program participants' goals in advancing their careers. UMOs Case management staff will screen participants for interest, aptitude, education, readiness, and motivation prior to setting them on a chosen career path which requires training," stated Martinez.

The UMOs customer-centered service delivery approach will emphasize career paths with targeted industry sector training that is linked to the state's regional labor market growth industries. Targeted industries include occupations within the transportation, manufacturing, construction, and healthcare industries, all of which provide jobs that pay family supporting wages and offer economic stability for migrant and seasonal farmworker families. UMOs staff will engage employers and employer/industry groups to ensure the program and the training options provided are meeting local workforce demands.

For more information call 1-800-279-UMOS.

UMOS is a non-profit, advocacy organization that provides programs and services which improves the employment, educational, health and housing opportunities for under-served populations.