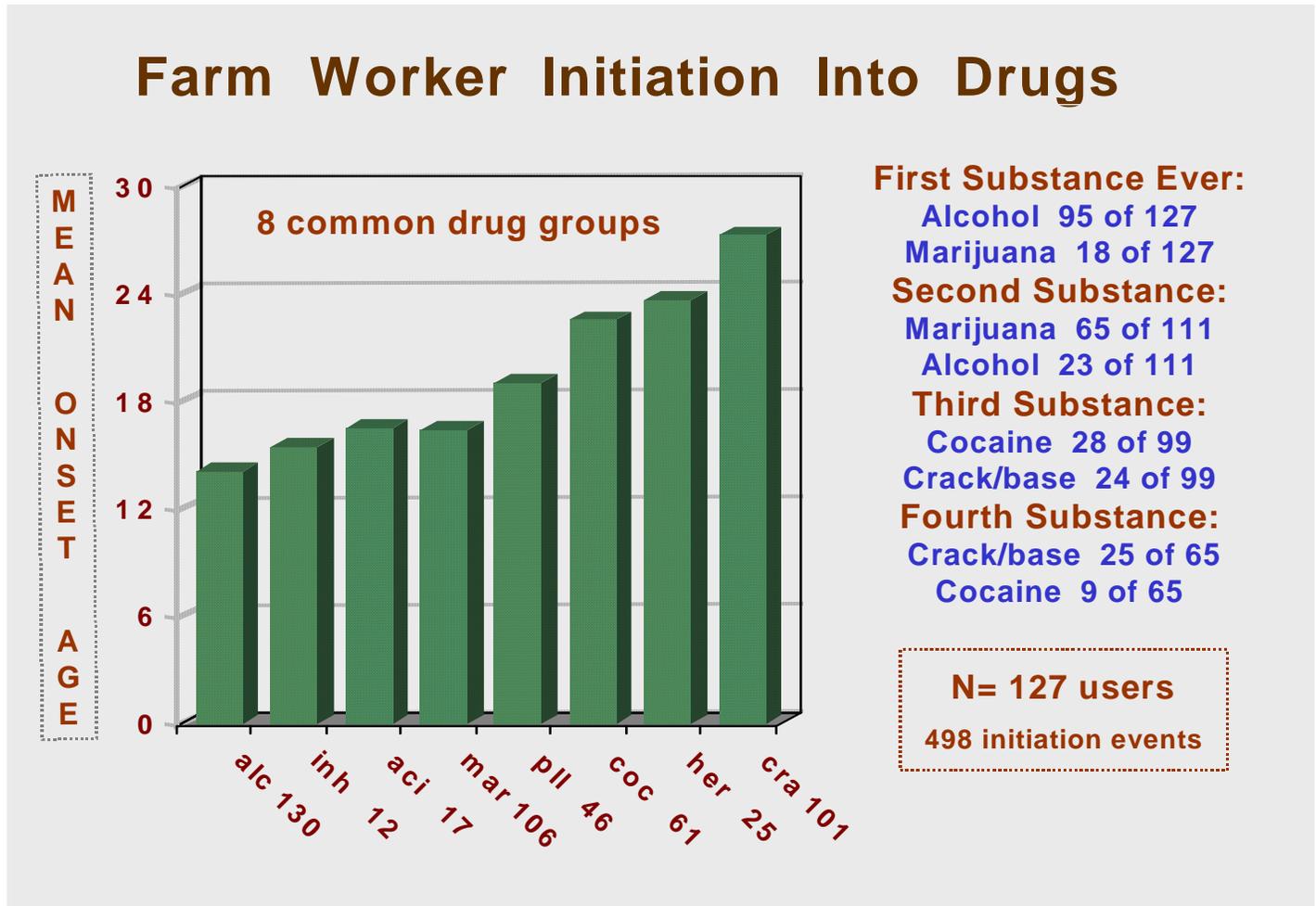


– Substance Use and Migrant Labor, Part One –

The number of substances reported “ever used” by 127 farm workers in a study conducted in three southern states (*Inscription in Drug Use among Farm Workers*) ranged from one (17 persons) to ten/more (6 persons); mean was 4.10 substances (median 4.0). Those born in this country reported a mean of 4-plus while those born outside the USA reported a mean of 3-plus substances. U.S.-born and transnational workers were similar in onset age of the first substance ever initiated (13.6 versus 13.7); not unexpectedly, considering they are older, the U.S.-born workers generally continued Initiation Events (trying new drugs) into their late 20s (27.3 versus 21.9, respectively).

Approximately 9.8% of these Initiation Events, and/or subsequent use, represent administration by injection.



The above chart shows continuing onset of new substances by agricultural workers from early teens into their late 20s for 498 instances of onset from a total of 528 Initiation Events. Some “drug groups” represent combinations of selected substances, such as commercial beverage alcohol (122 instances) plus *mescal* and other forms (8) = 130; marijuana (101 instances) plus hashish (5) = 106; crack-cocaine (93) plus smokable base (8) = 101; inhalants (9) plus solvents (3) = 12; heroin (14) plus opiates/opioids (11) = 25; and pills as unaltered amphetamines (37), sedatives (8), barbiturates (1) = 46. Thirty events from four substance groups were excluded, owing to fewer than ten per group: PCP or phencyclidine, speedball (cocaine plus heroin), methamphetamine, and thirteen instances of hallucinogen experimentation that included both natural plants and synthetic drugs. Thus, the total number of Initiation Events was 528.

Agricultural workers initiate new substances in a manner that replicates a common pattern often noted in the scientific literature. Among those who ever tried an illicit substance (7.9% of U.S. population in 2004, 8.3% of U.S. population in 2002: *National Household Survey on Drugs and Health*), alcohol is the first substance most people may try, before (for those who continue) initiating marijuana. Farm workers in *Inscription in Drug Use* followed this lifetime pattern for first (88.9% or 113 of 127) and second substance (79.2% or 88 of 111) initiated. Cocaine and crack-cocaine were substances they most often reported as third and fourth, but proportions were well under one-half of those who tried three/more and four/more substances (99 and 65 respondents, respectively: see chart).

Discussion is based on unpublished data from 6 primary sites in three states: *Inscription in Drug Use among Farm Workers* (funded by Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research; K.V. Bletzer, Principal Investigator). Chart is adapted from K.V. Bletzer, 2004, “Open towns and manipulated indebtedness among agricultural workers in the New South,” *American Ethnologist*, 31(4), pages 530-551.