

THE BRACERO PROGRAMS

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THE BRACERO PROGRAMS

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the  
North Texas State University in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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Denton, Texas

August, 1965

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The bracero programs of the 1942-1964 period have been the subject of a large amount of controversy. This struggle goes on at the present time and will continue into the future. On one side of the conflict are farm organizations, grower associations and large scale farming interests, favoring worker importation. On the other side are the labor unions, religious groups and civic organizations, representing the interests of domestic workers and opposing the use of foreign labor. The positions taken by these two sincere and well-informed groups are diametrically opposed. One side insists that foreign workers are necessary to the production of the nation's food and fiber while the other is just as certain that native workers will do the work required when paid a reasonable wage. This thesis will attempt to explore the principal issues involved in the controversy.

The hired farm labor force is divided between those farm workers having full time jobs in one locality and a smaller group of migratory workers who travel with the crops from place to place. The migrants are further separated into two distinct groups, American citizens and foreign workers. In this century the largest group of foreign agricultural workers

in the United States has been Mexican "braceros." Most of the braceros have entered this country legally as contract laborers; however, other migrants have arrived illegally. The latter group, not entering under the provisions of the bracero programs are known as "wetbacks" and do not qualify as braceros in the sense that the word is normally used, but in a broader sense, all Mexicans employed as migratory workers are braceros.

Mexican workers, although constituting only a small part of the overall labor force, have been an important factor in the seasonal farm labor market. The bracero programs present an opportunity for meaningful study because they have had an important and direct effect both on domestic migratory workers and on producers of food and fiber. The migrants merit study because their poverty is so extreme that most of them are living only on society's fringe and any national policy adversely affecting the welfare of migratory workers deserves careful examination. The other group significantly affected are growers who either hire bracero labor or compete with other employers hiring such workers. The economic condition of the nation's family farmers is a matter of concern to large numbers of United States citizens and also merits investigation.

The primary purpose of the study is to examine the bracero programs and to describe the effect they have had on domestic migrants and other groups. A secondary purpose is

to determine if they can be justified on the basis of real need. Additionally, there is hope that this study will add to the public awareness of the migrants' plight and, in a small way, contribute to a just solution to their problems.

The primary source of data used in this study is government documents, including committee hearings and reports of both the Congress and the Senate. Reports of the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, and Labor, along with presidential commission and committee reports, are also important sources. Additionally, books, interviews, newspapers, and periodicals were used. Two books deserve special mention here because they are excellent choices for further reading in this area. They are The Grapes of Wrath, by John Steinbeck, and Factories in the Field, by Carey McWilliams. Neither was utilized as a source because both relate to the pre-war years, while this study concentrates almost exclusively on the 1942-1964 period. Of the works cited, the best sources on the problems of migratory labor are Migratory Labor in American Agriculture, a 1951 Report of the President's Commission on Migratory Labor, and Senate Report Number 167, of 1963, entitled The Migratory Farm Labor Problem in the United States. The most complete coverage of the bracero programs is Merchants of Labor, by Ernesto Galarza. For more details about the seasonal farm labor market, The Harvest Labor Market in California, by Lloyd Fisher, is an excellent source.

The study consists of six chapters, the first of which is this introduction. Chapter II considers the various forces influencing the farmers' need for migratory labor, the seasonal farm labor market, and the effects of the bracero programs on agriculture. Chapter III considers the bracero programs as related to Mexico and Mexican workers. Chapter IV describes the problems of domestic migratory workers and the effect of the bracero programs on seasonal farmworkers. Chapter V describes the history of Mexican immigration into the United States prior to World War II and the entry of Mexican workers from 1942 to the end of 1964 under the bracero programs and by other methods of entry. Chapter VI contains the conclusions of the study on the justification of the bracero programs and the related question of the possibility of higher wages for farmworkers. The thesis ends with an evaluation of remedial action for the problems of migratory workers.



## CHAPTER II

### AGRICULTURE'S CHANGING DEMAND FOR LABOR

#### Forces Affecting Farm Labor Demand

There are three major trends in agriculture's labor requirements. Two of these increase and the third diminishes the demand for seasonal hired labor. First is the changing institutional pattern of farm ownership in the United States. In 1935 there were 6.8 million farms in this country; however, there were only 3.7 million in 1961. Furthermore, the next twenty years will likely see the number reduced to 1.4 million, according to a leading authority.<sup>1</sup> In 1959 forty-nine per cent of the nation's farmland was owned by 3.7 per cent of the agricultural operators. The average size of these farms was 4,048 acres. Significant is the fact that the food and fiber grown on the most productive three per cent of the farms exceeds that of the least productive seventy-eight per cent.<sup>2</sup> With fewer, but larger farms, the grower has a seasonal requirement for hired help, while in former years the small family farmer was able to operate his farm almost exclusively

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<sup>1</sup>Edward Higbee, Farms and Farmers in an Urban Age (New York, 1963), pp. 8-9.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

with family labor. This change increases the need for hired seasonal agricultural workers.

Second, in addition to the growing population which increases the demand for food, the changing dietary habits of the American consumer tend to increase the need for hand labor. Foods, such as lettuce, tomatoes, and strawberries, which require large amounts of hand labor, are readily available twelve months out of the year. Formerly, these foods were only eaten seasonally. In addition to the greater availability of fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables and the increased problem of the need for weight control which contributes to greater consumption of fruits and vegetables, there is another important factor. This is the increased purchasing power of the American consumer, which makes it possible for the average citizen to afford food which was considered luxurious in former times.

The third major influence on the demand for farm labor counteracts the two previously mentioned. This is the increased use of mechanized equipment to replace hand labor and is of central importance to the study of the bracero programs.<sup>3</sup>

#### The Farmers' Need for "Stoop Labor"

The supply of labor is of serious concern to growers of fruits and vegetables. Large amounts of temporary, rather

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<sup>3</sup>Mechanization is more fully discussed in a later section.

than permanent, labor are required. In many areas the peak seasonal labor demand is greater than the local supply. Farmers have become dependent on migratory workers to perform much of the seasonal labor. The scope of the problem is illustrated by the fact that 3.5 million acres of vegetables are harvested annually.<sup>4</sup> The growers' need for labor at harvest time is nearly insatiable. This is because perishable fruits and vegetables will spoil when not harvested at the right time; moreover, other crops are subject to damage by changing weather conditions. In other cases the value of the harvest will decline if the farmer does not get his crop to market at the time the price is highest.

The type of labor needed by growers in large amounts is called "stoop labor." This work includes harvesting, hoeing, weeding and thinning.<sup>5</sup> Vegetables requiring large numbers of workers to perform such tasks are artichokes, asparagus, lima beans, beets, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbages, cantaloups, carrots, cauliflower, celery, sweet corn, cucumbers, eggplant, garlic, lettuce, onions, green peas, green peppers and tomatoes.<sup>6</sup>

The farmer growing crops that require large amounts of hand labor is understandably very concerned about the

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<sup>4</sup>Earle E. Gavett, Labor Used to Produce Vegetables, Estimates by States, 1959, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Economic and Statistical Analysis Division, Statistical Bulletin No. 341 (Washington, 1964), p. 1.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

availability of workers. Most American citizens aspire to a higher standard of living than farmworkers are able to afford, with the low wages paid agricultural laborers. Employers of farm labor generally appear to be sincere when they assert that they can not pay higher wages to their workers because they receive such small returns from the crops that they sell. Agricultural spokesmen have abundant evidence to prove that farmers are unable to pay higher wages. They point out that growers are in a cost-price squeeze with the ratio of expenses to income increasing and profits decreasing.<sup>7</sup> Statistics offered by a farm organization show that the ratio of expenses to gross farm income has grown from 61.1 per cent in 1952 to 68.1 per cent in 1962.<sup>8</sup> In most cases the farmer has no control over the price he will receive for his crop and is forced to accept whatever the market offers.

A cause of dissatisfaction among farmers is the fact that they receive much less than the consumer pays for food items. In fact, the growers receive less than half the amount paid by consumers in the grocery stores.<sup>9</sup> The price to the

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<sup>7</sup>U. S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, Hearings, Importation of Foreign Agricultural Workers, 89th Congress, 1st Session (Washington, 1965), p. 197, Statement of Matt Triggs.

<sup>8</sup>U. S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Agriculture, Hearings, Mexican Farm Labor Program, 88th Congress, 1st Session (Washington, 1963), p. 30, Statement of Matt Triggs, citing Department of Agriculture data.

<sup>9</sup>Frederick V. Waugh, Demand and Price Analysis; Some Examples from Agriculture, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Economic and Statistical Analysis Division, Technical Bulletin No. 1316 (Washington, 1964), p. 19.

consumer is the total of the amount paid to the farmer plus additional charges for processing and distribution. The aggregate demand for food in the post-war United States is highly inelastic to price changes; however, because of the possibility of substituting one food for another, individual foods have greater elasticity of demand than food products in general.<sup>10</sup> This is significant because it indicates that growers would get a higher price for their product if production could be reduced. In the short run the quantity available to be harvested is determined by the amount planted and grown during the season. What is actually harvested depends on the market price and the cost of harvesting. Although the average individual farmer is in no position to affect the short run supply, growers do affect the long run supply by growing more or less of a product.

It is understandable that growers in the Southwest should turn to Mexico as a source of seasonal workers. Mexican laborers have traditionally worked in the fields of the developing agriculture in the border states. This is especially true of the agricultural areas located near the international boundary.<sup>11</sup> It is common knowledge that Mexico possesses a vast reservoir of workers willing to perform "stoop labor" at low wage rates.

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 15, 19-20.

<sup>11</sup>U. S. President, Truman, Commission on Migratory Labor, Migratory Labor in American Agriculture (Washington, 1951), pp. 73-74.

### Mechanization in Agriculture

Changing technology in agriculture is of great significance to the study of the bracero programs. Mechanization, first appearing in land preparation and in planting, upset the traditional balance that had existed in the need for harvest and pre-harvest labor. Before the application of machinery to agriculture, there was no need for supplemental harvest labor. Typically, the farmer and his family did all of the work involved in producing crops. The introduction of the riding plow, the corn planter and the wheat drill made it possible for a farmer to grow more than he could harvest. The use of tractors multiplied the grower's ability to plant and cultivate a larger number of acres. Between 1917 and 1960 the number of tractors increased from 51,000 to five million.<sup>12</sup> Implements used in tilling were developed to complement the tractor. The reaper and the threshing machine, both appearing near the middle of the nineteenth century, reduced labor in the grain harvest, but encouraged the use of migratory harvest hands. The combine and the mechanized corn picker, in widespread use by 1940, greatly reduced the need for seasonal labor in harvesting grain.<sup>13</sup>

Recently developed equipment and techniques have reduced the need for stoop labor in the production of cotton, fruits,

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<sup>12</sup>Higbee, p. 10.

<sup>13</sup>Milton M. Snodgrass and Luther T. Wallace, Agriculture, Economics, and Growth (New York, 1964), p. 131.

nuts and vegetables. The rapid increase in harvesting cotton by machine has been phenomenal. In 1959 only thirty-three per cent of Texas cotton was machine harvested, compared to eighty-one per cent in 1963.<sup>14</sup> Research has produced a tomato-picking machine which replaces fifty workers. Tree shakers and other devices are being used to harvest fruit and nuts. Additionally, plants are being developed, through research, that are more adaptable to machine harvesting than present varieties.<sup>15</sup> Other crops significantly affected by increased mechanization are sugar beets, spinach, beans, beets, carrots and potatoes.<sup>16</sup> In addition to increased mechanization, a further reduction in the requirement for hand labor has become possible by the use of recently developed chemicals to control weeds.<sup>17</sup> Not only can the undesirable vegetation be destroyed when it appears on the surface, but the use of chemical sprays and granules can also kill the weeds before they emerge from the ground.<sup>18</sup>

The use of mechanized equipment and modern methods of weed control have contributed to an increasing productivity

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<sup>14</sup>Texas Council on Migrant Labor, "Mechanization and the Texas Migrant," Austin, 1964, pp.1-2. (Mimeographed.)

<sup>15</sup>"Migrants and Machines," The New Republic, Vol. 145 (July 24, 1961), p. 8.

<sup>16</sup>Texas Council on Migrant Labor, loc. cit.

<sup>17</sup>Gavett, p. 9.

<sup>18</sup>"What's Next in Weed Killers," Farm Journal, Vol. 85, Part 1 (May, 1961), pp. 34, 89.

of farm labor. In 1800, when a sickle was used in harvesting, fifty-six hours of labor were required to grow and harvest an acre of wheat. Twenty man-hours were needed per acre in 1880 when a horse drawn reaper was used. In modern times only two hours are necessary to grow an acre of wheat on the Great Plains. Recent years have seen a big change in the cotton harvest. Where formerly forty workers were used in picking cotton by hand, one mechanical cotton picker can now do the same work.<sup>19</sup> The two decades from 1939 to 1959 witnessed a substantial reduction in the amount of labor required to grow and harvest an acre of vegetables. The average number of man-hours needed was reduced from 147 in 1939 to 112 in 1959. In the same period the pre-harvest labor time was reduced from sixty-six to forty-three hours and the harvest labor diminished from eighty-one to sixty-nine hours. Significantly in the same 1939-1959 period, average yields per acre increased from 7,500 pounds to 11,100 pounds.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, improved plants, seeds, fertilizers and insecticides have also contributed to greater productivity in agriculture. Yields per acre of crops such as corn, wheat, peanuts, potatoes and sugar cane have increased significantly in the post-war years.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Higbee, p. 9.

<sup>20</sup>Gavett, p. 10.

<sup>21</sup>Higbee, p. 6.



The increased productivity of agricultural labor contributes significantly to the ability of a smaller number of farmers to feed our growing population. About sixty-five per cent of the people lived on the farm 100 years ago.<sup>22</sup> In 1962 only 7.7 per cent of the United States population resided on farms.<sup>23</sup> It is estimated that by 1980 probably less than five per cent of all Americans will work in agriculture.<sup>24</sup>

#### Significant Aspects of the Seasonal Farm Labor Market

An understanding of the farm labor market is necessary before reaching a decision as to the need for foreign labor or the availability of domestic workers. The seasonal farm labor market is largely an unorganized market. It is unorganized in the sense that during peacetime there has been, despite the efforts of the United States Employment Service, no effective system of bringing workers and employers together at the right time and place. During both world wars the farm labor market was organized by the government to insure an adequate labor supply.<sup>25</sup> An additional exception to the above generalization is the recent activity of the

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>23</sup>Snodgrass and Wallace, p. 88.

<sup>24</sup>Higbee, p. 4.

<sup>25</sup>Harry Schwartz, Seasonal Farm Labor in the United States (New York, 1945), pp. 21-23.

Labor Department in bringing workers and jobs together under the annual worker plan.<sup>26</sup>

Another significant feature of the farm labor market is the lack of competition among growers in the same area. Rather than competing to attract workers, they often combine to recruit workers and to agree on wage rates. In order for the growers to hold to the agreed wage levels and not to compete among themselves, an abundant labor supply is necessary. An excess of labor at the times of greatest seasonal need frequently is an even greater guarantee to the grower that raising wages would not become necessary. Farmers have ample reason to attract as many workers as possible into their areas at the time of peak need.<sup>27</sup> An example of the growers' attitude toward competing for seasonal labor was given by a spokesman for the Vegetable Growers Association while appearing before a congressional committee. As a northern grower he was concerned about the effect that termination of the most recent bracero program would have on Texas migratory workers who had worked in the North Central states in previous years. He predicted that farmers in Texas and in the far West would enter into competition

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<sup>26</sup>U. S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, The Migratory Farm Labor Problem in the United States, Report No. 155, 89th Congress, 1st Session (Washington, 1965), p. 31.

<sup>27</sup>Schwartz, Seasonal Farm Labor, pp. 20-72-73.

for these workers.<sup>28</sup> The prospect of growers having to pay a competitive wage to their workers probably was a very distressing innovation.

There are other reasons, in addition to low wage rates, for farmers' wanting large numbers of workers available when seasonally needed. As previously mentioned, perishable fruits, vegetables and other crops which could be damaged by weather changes must be harvested at the proper time, and because of wide fluctuations in market prices within a season, the growers try to ship their produce at a time the market offers the highest price. A further advantage offered by a labor surplus is that crops can be grown which appear to be most profitable without requiring that the grower give consideration to the availability of labor.<sup>29</sup>

Many of those who believe that there is an adequate farm labor supply in this country at the present time would agree that during both world wars foreign labor importation was required. There is, however, evidence indicating that even this need was not acute. Assistant Secretary of Labor Post attributed the farm labor shortages of the World War I period to unsatisfactory wages and working conditions. He pointed out that states paying fifty to seventy dollars monthly had no farm labor shortages. Reports of a farm labor

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<sup>28</sup>House, Hearings, Mexican Farm Labor Program, p. 96, Statement of Charles M. Creuziger.

<sup>29</sup>Schwartz, Seasonal Farm Labor, pp. 74-75.

shortage came from those states paying only fifteen to forty dollars monthly. According to Post, "Two-thirds of the farm labor shortage is imaginary and the other third can be remedied . . ." <sup>30</sup> Similarly, in the early years of World War II many of the alleged labor shortages were not caused by insufficient labor to produce food and fiber. The changing from the pre-war condition of a low paid farm labor force, accustomed to frequent unemployment and under-employment to the war-time labor market, created much of the reported labor shortage. <sup>31</sup> One can conclude that the need for foreign labor was exaggerated during both world wars. If the government had spent as much money reallocating workers out of labor surplus areas as was spent on the World War II labor importation program, the domestic labor supply might have been adequate. The mere possibility of foreign labor being unnecessary at a time when millions of men were under arms suggests that domestic labor would have been adequate in the post-war period.

Once a crop has matured all of the costs of raising the crop, except for harvesting, have already been incurred.

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<sup>30</sup> Harry Schwartz, "Agricultural Labor in the First World War," Journal of Farm Economics, Vol. 24 (February, 1942), p. 180, quoting Assistant Secretary of Labor Post.

<sup>31</sup> Wayne D. Rasmussen, A History of the Emergency Farm Labor Supply Program, 1943-47, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Agriculture Monograph No. 13 (Washington, 1951), p. 14, citing memorandum from Roy C. Smith, Bureau of Agricultural Economics, to Fred Stephan, War Manpower Commission, January 27, 1943.

Costs related to planting and cultivation, along with taxes, interest, and rent, are in the nature of fixed costs as the farmer faces the harvest. If the crop is not harvested, all of the previous investment will have been lost. To avoid a total loss the grower will want his crop harvested.<sup>32</sup> The number of man-hours required to harvest the crop is determined by the size of the crop and the workers are normally paid by a piece-rate. Thus, the farmer has no reason not to concentrate the harvest into the shortest possible period, using large numbers of workers. There would be no advantage to spreading the harvest over a longer period, employing a smaller number of workers.<sup>33</sup> This will explain some of the reported "labor shortages" as well as part of the high rates of unemployment among migratory agricultural workers. "Labor shortage" may merely mean that there are not enough workers to harvest the crop of every grower on the same day. It does not necessarily mean that there are not enough workers to harvest the crop before it spoils.

There is no question that the grower would want to harvest the crop if the total pre-harvest and harvest costs were less than the market value of the crop. The difference would be the farmer's profit. It would also be true that the grower would gain by harvesting the crop even if the

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<sup>32</sup>Schwartz, Seasonal Farm Labor, pp. 67-69.

<sup>33</sup>Lloyd H. Fisher, The Harvest Labor Market in California (Cambridge, 1953), p. 152.

total cost exceeded market value. This is because a large share of the cost is normally pre-harvest cost. Not harvesting would result in a complete loss. As long as the market value is greater than the harvest cost, the farmer would minimize his loss by harvesting.<sup>34</sup> The grower permitting his crops to spoil in the field is normally faced with a market price lower than the cost of harvesting. This has often happened to fruit and vegetable growers. Furthermore, in order to maintain the market price, they do not always harvest all of their crop. Leaving the part of the crop having little market value because of low quality is not uncommon among producers of fruits and vegetables.<sup>35</sup>

Theoretically the grower concerned with maximizing his profit or in minimizing his loss would, in the absence of an abundant supply of foreign labor, offer whatever wage was required to attract domestic workers. Bearing the above facts in mind, the article in the Denton Record-Chronicle of May 4, 1965, reporting crops spoiling in the fields, is certainly interesting. A spokesman for strawberry growers reported that a labor shortage existed. Labor union officials pointed out that workers were being offered only a fifty-six dollar a week minimum wage and that more workers would be available if the pay were higher. A spokesman for the growers encouraged the schools to have a strawberry picking vacation,

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Schwartz, Seasonal Farm Labor, p. 19.

housewives to leave the home for the field, and soldiers to come from Fort Ord on three day passes. No mention was made concerning what the school children, housewives, and soldiers would earn by the hour.<sup>36</sup> More details of the strawberry crisis were reported on May 7, 1965. This article reported that Tom McNamara, of Salinas Strawberries, announced the abandoning of 1,000 acres of strawberries worth an estimated five million dollars because of a lack of workers. He reported having only 451 of the 3,000 workers needed.<sup>37</sup> An article appearing on May 10, 1965, confirms that Tom McNamara, a partner in Salinas Strawberries, Inc., the largest grower of strawberries in the world, had abandoned 480 acres of strawberries and threatened to plow them under unless more workers became available. The article also reports that the Governor of California had been asked to permit the inmates of two prisons to pick strawberries.<sup>38</sup>

Using the figures provided by Tom McNamara and assuming his ten million dollar strawberry crop requires 3,000 pickers, further assuming that the payment of nearly all of the value of the crop to harvest workers was preferable to total loss of the crop, to minimize his loss McNamara would offer a wage high enough to attract workers. He would be able to spend up to ten million dollars for the harvest. Dividing

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<sup>36</sup>Denton Record-Chronicle, May 4, 1965, p. 2.

<sup>37</sup>The Dallas Morning News, May 7, 1965, Sec. 4, p. 1.

<sup>38</sup>The Dallas Morning News, May 10, 1965, Sec. 1, p. 12.

the value of the crop by the number of workers required yields a figure of \$3,333 per worker. This \$3,333 figure is about three times greater than the annual income of the average migratory farmworker. This leads to the conclusion that an offer to workers somewhere between the amount they are now earning and a \$3,000 salary for the strawberry harvest period might produce enough workers and permit the harvest to proceed. Thus, his action does not appear to be economically rational. If McNamara did not make a profit, at least he would minimize his loss.

There is reason to believe that some of the growers are not really trying to hire workers. They may be more interested in trying to build a case for future bracero importation. An article in The Wall Street Journal of April 26, 1965, reports Gilbert L. Simonson, an official of the United Packinghouse, Food, and Allied Workers Union, as questioning the sincerity of grower claims regarding the efforts they are making to hire domestic workers. He pointed out that approximately one-third of those unemployed in Los Angeles had previously been farmworkers. He saw no reason why improved wages and living conditions would not lure them back to farmwork.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, according to an article in The Dallas Morning News of May 10, 1965, the Mexican-American Unity Council reported that three thousand workers would be made available if minimum standards of wages and housing were

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<sup>39</sup>The Wall Street Journal, April 26, 1965, p. 7.



met. The same article reports that a recruiting effort by a San Jose, California, church group had found 120 workers, but that the grower demand for workers had slackened.<sup>40</sup> Evidence of frequent instances of workers making themselves available for work in response to grower offers and then finding that there is no real demand for their services is well documented in the testimony of Walter Simcich, of the California Labor Federation, before the Senate Committee on Agriculture.<sup>41</sup>

#### Effects of the Bracero Programs on Agriculture

In addition to the braceros and domestic migratory workers, who will be discussed in subsequent chapters, those most affected by the importation of foreign workers were the nation's farmers. Available statistics indicate that only a small proportion of farmers have a major interest in cheap farmworkers. A 1960 congressional report asserts that fifty per cent of all farms in this country used no hired labor and that thirty-five per cent of the remaining farms spent less than \$500 annually for labor.<sup>42</sup> It would appear that this was not the group benefiting from bracero importation. According to the same report, seventy per cent of all

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<sup>40</sup>The Dallas Morning News, May 10, 1965, Sec. 1, p. 12.

<sup>41</sup>Senate, Hearings, Importation of Foreign Agricultural Workers, pp. 239-243, Statement of Walter Simcich.

<sup>42</sup>U. S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Agriculture, Farm Labor Program, Report No. 1642, 86th Congress, 2nd Session (Washington, 1960), p. 17.

agricultural labor costs were borne by five per cent of the nation's farms. Only two per cent of the farms used imported labor.<sup>43</sup> A more recent congressional report points out that the small family farm, growing the same products in which large numbers of braceros are used, has been hurt in two different ways. First of all, the smaller farm has a difficult time competing with a larger farm employing cheap foreign labor. Secondly, low cost labor makes it possible for the large farms to expand production, which lowers the market value of the crop in question.<sup>44</sup> The same report gives an example of family farms being adversely affected by the bracero program. Growers of strawberries in Arkansas, Kentucky, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Virginia have been forced to reduce production because of falling prices. At the same time growers like McNamara, using largely bracero labor, doubled their production. Domestic farmworkers were used in Indiana on the tomato crop. Greatly increased production by big bracero-employing farms was accompanied by a forty per cent decline in Indiana's tomato production during the 1950-1960 period.<sup>45</sup> Matt Triggs, an official of the American Farm Bureau Federation, arguing before a congressional committee

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>44</sup>U. S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Agriculture, One-Year Extension of Mexican Farm Labor Program, Report No. 722, 88th Congress, 1st Session (Washington, 1963), p. 25.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., pp. 25-26.

that small farmers as well as big farmers benefitted from the use of foreign workers, reported that large farmers were in a better position to mechanize and to recruit domestic workers than were small farmers.<sup>46</sup> Ample evidence is available to refute the Farm Bureau's implication that small farmers were the main beneficiaries of the bracero program; however, even more important was the definite competitive advantage bracero employers enjoyed over the average farmer, who used only family labor or domestic hired labor. The labor of the farmer and his family was worth no more than the value of the bracero labor against which they were competing, according to a farmer who formerly employed braceros.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>House, Hearings, Mexican Farm Labor Program, p. 36, Statement of Matt Triggs.

<sup>47</sup>Frank Persyn, "The Local Farmers' Viewpoint on the 'Plight of the Migratory Worker,'" Address given before the Catholic Council for the Spanish Speaking, San Antonio, Texas, March 16, 1961. (Mimeographed.)

## CHAPTER III

### THE BRACERO<sup>1</sup>

#### The Bracero in Mexico

Understanding why the bracero comes to the United States requires an appreciation of conditions in the land of his origin. From the time of conquest by Spain to the revolution of 1910, the people of Mexico were largely in a state of peonage and bound to the land. The 1910 revolution ended this feudal-like society. The Mexican people had become accustomed to being exploited and living at a subsistence level.<sup>2</sup> Even today, rural Mexico is primitive and most of the people are still close to a subsistence standard of living. Agriculture employs outmoded methods of production and trade is facilitated by means of barter, rather than by use of money.<sup>3</sup> One measure of a nation's development is the state of its educational system. In 1960 more than one-third of the Mexican people

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<sup>1</sup>Bracero is a Spanish word meaning arm. Its usage is comparable to that of the English word hand, which is used to indicate a worker, a hired hand or a farm hand. This study uses the term to identify a worker of Mexican nationality.

<sup>2</sup>Nathan L. Whetten and Robert G. Burnight, "Internal Migration in Mexico," Rural Sociology, Vol. 21 (June, 1956), pp. 140-141.

<sup>3</sup>U. S. Department of Labor, Labor in Mexico, Bureau of Labor Statistics Report No. 251 (Washington, 1963), p. 1.

were illiterate, a significant improvement from the two-thirds that could not read and write in 1930.<sup>4</sup>

Mexico, like the United States, is experiencing a change in labor required for agricultural production. Although the number of agricultural employees is increasing, it is a declining percentage of the population. The proportion of the population engaged in producing farm products is declining. There has been an increasing substitution of capital for labor since World War II.<sup>5</sup> This has caused a serious problem for Mexico in the form of a larger rural labor force than can be employed on the farm. In 1959 the Mexican Department of Agrarian Affairs, while studying unemployment and underemployment among agricultural workers, found that approximately 2,500,000 farm laborers were employed only 145 or fewer days a year. Many workers are employed only at harvest time. Underemployment is the main cause of braceros wanting to work in the United States.<sup>6</sup> In most cases braceros come from poor rural areas or from among concentrations of agricultural workers who have settled in the cities.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>5</sup>Clarence A. Moore, "Agricultural Developments in Mexico," Journal of Farm Economics, Vol. 37, Part 1 (February, 1955), pp. 76-77.

<sup>6</sup>U. S. Department of Labor, Labor in Mexico, pp. 39-40.

<sup>7</sup>Richard H. Hancock, The Role of the Bracero in the Economic and Cultural Dynamics of Mexico; A Case Study of Chihuahua (Stanford, 1959), pp. 124-129.

Insufficient employment opportunity in the rural areas has caused a large scale rural to urban migration within Mexico from 1910 to the present time. This movement has occurred at an accelerated rate in recent years. According to the Mexican Census of 1950, eighty per cent of those who had changed their residence within Mexico had moved into an urban municipality.<sup>8</sup> This increasing rural to urban migration has resulted in greater underemployment in cities. Most of the unemployed farmworkers lack the training and skills necessary to qualify for urban employment.<sup>9</sup>

The low wage levels in Mexico are evidence of the poverty existing there. The Mexican minimum wage as established by States and municipalities varies both by occupation and geographical area. Stated in United States currency, the legal minimum daily wage for the years 1958 and 1959 averaged sixty-three cents. Rural minimum wages, which are more applicable to the bracero, are even lower than the overall average minimum wage. Richard H. Hancock, a student of the problem and the source for the preceding information, indicates that the actual wages paid are sometimes even less than the legal minimum.<sup>10</sup>

The low earnings, evidenced by the minimum wage levels, do not fully indicate the poverty in Mexico. The problem

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<sup>8</sup>Whetten and Burnight, pp. 141, 149.

<sup>9</sup>U. S. Department of Labor, Labor in Mexico, p.40.

<sup>10</sup>Hancock, p. 29.

is made even more serious by extensive unemployment and under-employment. Hancock cites a government publication written by Martha R. Lowenstern, which credits Ruiz Cortines, former President of Mexico, as indicating on May 24, 1954, that twenty-nine per cent of the Mexican labor force was under-employed and that many workers in seasonal industries were unemployed more than seven months a year.<sup>11</sup>

Employment in the United States has the potential of making a tremendous change in the life of the individual Mexican. A typical bracero as described by Ernesto Galarza, a leading authority on the bracero programs, is married and lives with his wife and four children in Rancho de la Mojonera, Michoacan. Working as a farm hand, he earns thirty-two cents a day in United States currency. He has hopes of earning eight to fifteen dollars a day in the United States. The possibility of bringing home five hundred dollars after two months in this country has been suggested to him by a recruiter of braceros. To earn as much in Mexico would take at least four years.<sup>12</sup> Understandably, the prospect of high earnings attracts braceros to the United States.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 40, citing "Labor in Mexico" by Martha R. Lowenstern, United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Foreign Labor Information Series No. 11, 1958, p. 22.

<sup>12</sup>Ernesto Galarza, Strangers in Our Fields, 2nd ed. (Washington, 1956), pp. 2-3.

<sup>13</sup>Hancock, p. 24.

The importation of Mexican workers into the United States had a significant effect on Mexico's economy. If the braceros had not been employed in this country, they probably would have added to unemployment in Mexico. In addition to the beneficial effect bracero earnings had on the workers and their families, Mexico benefitted in another way. The earnings sent back to Mexico by the workers provided about thirty million dollars annually in foreign exchange.<sup>14</sup> The importance of these earnings to the Mexican economy is indicated by the fact that they were second only to tourism as a source of dollars.<sup>15</sup>

#### Bracero Conditions in the United States

Considerable difference of opinion exists regarding how well the bracero fares while working in this country. Generally, those favoring Mexican worker importation find the bracero to have been treated and paid well while working here. Those supporting this position refer to the program as a type of foreign aid program which helps braceros become independent farmers in Mexico.<sup>16</sup> Those opposed to importing workers from Mexico find that the bracero has been poorly treated and underpaid. The book, Strangers in Our Fields, by Galarza, is almost completely concerned with the subject

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<sup>14</sup>The Dallas Morning News, February 22, 1965, Sec. 1, p. 12.

<sup>15</sup>House, One-Year Extension of Mexican Farm Labor Program, p. 14.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 32.



of employers violating the bracero's contractual rights. Galarza cited one source, a Los Angeles newspaper, describing the braceros as slaves.<sup>17</sup> There is reason to believe that, although the Mexican worker generally earned more money by working in this country,<sup>18</sup> denial of the rights and protection promised in the individual worker's contract and international agreements<sup>19</sup> was widespread. Evidence exists indicating that this problem existed from the beginning of the bracero program during World War II.<sup>20</sup> According to Jones, although the number of official complaints was small, those able to speak with the braceros in their own language found that they had many grievances.<sup>21</sup>

Most important to the bracero was the amount he earned while in the United States. His earnings depended both on wage rates and the amount of employment. Galarza reports a wide range in the earnings of individual workers. The highest two-week paycheck that he found was \$154.00, the lowest was a case where no money was paid because deductions for food and insurance exceeded earnings. Galarza reports that net

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<sup>17</sup>Galarza, Strangers in Our Fields, p. 11, citing El Angelino, March 4, 1949, p. 1.

<sup>18</sup>House, One-Year Extension of Mexican Farm Labor Program, p. 14.

<sup>19</sup>The worker contract and international agreement are discussed in detail in Chapter V.

<sup>20</sup>Rasmussen, pp. 226, 228.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 228, citing Robert C. Jones, Mexican War Workers in the United States, p. 13.

earnings, after deductions, of slightly more than fifteen dollars a week were more typical.<sup>22</sup> There is no question that the bracero worked for low wages. A South Texan who formerly employed both "wetbacks" and braceros reports that the cost of bracero labor was only slightly greater than that of "wetback" labor.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, a Senate report indicates that some employers paid Mexican workers twenty-five to thirty cents an hour.<sup>24</sup>

Lack of adequate employment opportunity was a serious bracero problem. Since the bracero was here primarily to earn money and his stay was limited by the period of his contract, unemployment would understandably be a cause of complaint. Galarza found some workers unhappily reporting that they were offered work only every other day.<sup>25</sup> This is remarkable if one recalls that the bracero was in the United States because of an alleged labor shortage. As an example of how this affected the size of workers' paychecks, Galarza shows one worker's weekly earnings after deductions, for a four week period. They were \$45.70, \$6.48, \$6.03, and \$2.88.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Galarza, Strangers in Our Fields, pp. 38, 39.

<sup>23</sup>John G. McBride, Vanishing Bracero, Valley Revolution (San Antonio, 1963), p. 18.

<sup>24</sup>U. S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, Mexican Farm Labor Act Extension, Report No. 1045, 84th Congress, 1st Session (Washington, 1955), p. 1.

<sup>25</sup>Galarza, Strangers in Our Fields, p.37.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

Estimates also vary widely on the amount of money that the typical bracero was able to send or take back to Mexico. Hancock estimates that the average in 1956 and 1957 was \$175.00 out of \$500.00 earned in a three and one-half month period.<sup>27</sup> A Senate report estimates that the average bracero was able to return \$180.00 to Mexico after a stay in this country of about six months.<sup>28</sup> Galarza points out that although some braceros were fortunate enough to return to Mexico with significant savings, most of them failed to accomplish this purpose. Many braceros were not able to earn enough to meet the expenses connected with their trip. Moreover, the additional earnings required to support their families in Mexico were not realized by some workers. A bracero working forty-eight hours a week at seventy cents an hour would have had net earnings of only about twenty dollars a week after deductions for food and insurance. A married bracero would require about ten dollars a week to send home to his family. The bracero's incidental expenses would require about \$2.50. This would leave the worker about \$7.50 a week to apply toward his cost of getting employment in the United States. The bracero's cost of coming to the United States averaged forty dollars, according to Galarza. This went for necessary expenses in Mexico,

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<sup>27</sup>Hancock, p. 37.

<sup>28</sup>House, One-Year Extension of Mexican Farm Labor Program, p. 32.

including payments to government officials incident to registering for a contract, transportation to the contracting center, and subsistence while waiting at the contracting center.<sup>29</sup>

Among the violations of the bracero's contractual rights, many were connected with the type of dwelling provided for him. Housing for braceros often had little similarity to that described in the work contract and was sometimes unsuitable for human habitation. Galarza reports that frequently the substandard former "wetback" and domestic migrant housing was used for braceros. In other instances, braceros were found to be living in buildings recently used to quarter animals. Furthermore, quarters were found without screens on the windows, with leaky roofs, with cracks in the walls, without adequate sanitary facilities, without stoves for heating during the winter, and without sufficient space. In some cases braceros were housed in tents.<sup>30</sup> McBride reports that, although the housing described to qualify for authorization to obtain braceros often resembled hotels, the quarters actually provided were cotton storage houses, tents, and vegetable sheds. Sometimes the braceros lived in patches of brush under tarpaulins formerly utilized by wetbacks.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Galarza, Strangers in Our Fields, pp. 35-36, 39.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., pp. 22-24, 27-29.

<sup>31</sup>McBride, pp. 13-14, 16-17.

Eating was a big problem for braceros working in the United States. According to the international agreement food was supposed to be provided at cost; in no case was the cost to be greater than \$1.75 per day. Additionally, the bracero was to have the option of preparing his own food, with utensils and facilities to be provided by the employer at no cost to the bracero. Galarza's study shows that often braceros were denied the right to cook for themselves, with cancellation of their contracts the only alternative to eating in the commissary. The feeding of braceros was a profitable business for concessionnaires. In small camps a labor contractor frequently operated the kitchen. Where the feeding of braceros was operated for profit, there was a resultant tendency to skimp on food. This could explain the reason for part of the worker's complaints about bad food as well as cases of food poisoning. Another cause of worker complaint was the inability of many of the kitchens to prepare food to suit the Mexican taste.<sup>32</sup> The feeding of braceros by firms operating for a profit was clearly in violation of the international agreement.

The Mexican workers' right to elect representatives to protect their interests, although provided for in the international agreement, was frequently denied them in practice. Galarza presents evidence that, in some cases, not only would the employer refuse to recognize the spokesman for the

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<sup>32</sup>Galarza, Strangers in Our Fields, pp. 40-43.

workers, but also that often the spokesman would be either sent back to Mexico or to another camp. This threat of repatriation sufficed to keep the braceros a docile group.<sup>33</sup> Where they were not in a position to discuss their contractual rights with their employer, they really had no rights. Similarly the President's Commission reported that the absence of a means of resolving differences between workers and employers was an important cause for large numbers of braceros going home prior to completing their contracts.<sup>34</sup>

The worker contract and international agreement was also violated in respect to transportation and health. Overcrowding, speeding, and the use of unsafe vehicles resulted in numerous bracero injuries and deaths which strict enforcement of the Mexican workers' rights could have prevented. Regarding health, the workers were required to pay for health and accident insurance in the form of payroll deductions; however, they didn't have a copy of the policy and knew little about its benefits. There were cases of braceros going without medical care or paying for it with their own money when the policy would have covered them. Galarza offers evidence that, not only did the workers' contracts and the international agreements fail to protect the braceros, but

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., pp. 70, 73.

<sup>34</sup>U. S. President, Truman, p. 45.

also that those braceros with considerable experience working in this country placed little faith in them.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Galarza, Strangers in Our Fields, pp. 18, 56-58.

## CHAPTER IV

### DOMESTIC MIGRATORY WORKERS

#### The Migrant Problem, A Continuing Problem

Among the various groups affected by the bracero programs, domestic migrants were of major importance. No study of the bracero is complete without a description of the native worker whose employment and problems he shared. The lives of American migratory farmworkers, when compared to the way of life of most Americans, are characterized by "self-perpetuating conditions of illiteracy, insecurity, and poverty."<sup>1</sup> There were approximately 400,000 domestic migratory agricultural workers in 1964.<sup>2</sup>

Migratory workers are not limited to any one part of the nation. Illustrative of the national scope of this problem is the fact that, in 1964, thirty-seven states employed a thousand or more migrants at the peak of their season. The states leading in the employment of domestic migratory workers are California and Michigan, each of which employed more than

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<sup>1</sup>U. S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, The Migratory Farm Labor Problem in the United States, Report No. 167, 88th Congress, 1st Session (Washington, 1963), pp. 1, 2.

<sup>2</sup>U. S. Department of Labor, Farm Labor Developments (Washington, 1965), p. 16.



50,000 domestic migrants in 1964. The same year both New York and Texas employed more than 20,000, and Oregon, Kansas, Washington, Florida, New Jersey, North Carolina, and Ohio employed more than 12,000 each at seasonal peak.<sup>3</sup> Migrant workers travel three principal routes. For the most part, those based in Florida and California move north with the crops into the New England States and the Pacific Northwest respectively. The third major migration, and the one of greatest importance to this study, begins in Texas and goes generally northward into the North Central and Rocky Mountain States. Texas migrants also work in many of the states along the East and West coasts.<sup>4</sup>

An increasing amount of the nation's farm work is being done by machine and the size of the farm labor force has declined significantly; however, the number of migratory farmworkers changed little during the 1950 to 1961 period.<sup>5</sup> Agricultural economists report that seasonal laborers will continue to be needed in large numbers, even though the overall requirement for farm labor will continue to decline.<sup>6</sup>

The continued presence of the migrant will mean the persistence of the problems associated with migratory labor.

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>4</sup>Senate, The Migratory Farm Labor Problem, 1963, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., citing United States Department of Agriculture, "Advance Report, The Hired Farm Working Force of 1961."

<sup>6</sup>State of Texas, "Report of the House Interim Migrant Labor Subcommittee" (Austin, Texas, 1962), p. 9.

These include unemployment and underemployment, low earnings, child labor, inadequate education, transportation, crew leader and labor contractor malpractice, poor housing and sanitation, ill health and the adverse effect of importing foreign labor.

#### Unemployment and Underemployment

The temporary character of the farm work performed by migratory labor results in much seasonal unemployment. This is a leading migrant problem. Unemployment has been a grave matter for the economy as a whole in recent years and is even more serious for hired farmworkers.<sup>7</sup> In 1964 such workers, including migrants, averaged 9.3 per cent unemployment as compared to 5.2 per cent for workers in general. This disparity is even greater in regard to underemployment. In 1964 those working less than full time averaged 6.7 per cent in agriculture as compared to 3.3 per cent in other occupations.<sup>8</sup> This probably understates the problem because migratory workers withdraw from the work force during the slack season. Thus they are not counted among the unemployed.

Domestic migratory workers, considered separately from other farmworkers, averaged working 123 days in agriculture

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<sup>7</sup>U. S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, Extension of Mexican Farm Labor Program, Report No. 391, 88th Congress, 1st Session (Washington, 1963), p. 13.

<sup>8</sup>U. S. Department of Labor, Farm Labor Developments, p. 35.

in 1960 and only 109 days in 1961.<sup>9</sup> In 1962, with economic expansion, employment increased to 116 days of farm work. The inclusion of non-farm employment brought the total days worked to only 137 according to the estimate of a student of the migrant problem.<sup>10</sup>

### Migrant Earnings

The low pay which migrants receive for their labor is another serious problem. Nationally, in 1961, the migratory worker averaged \$6.25 a day while working in agriculture and \$8.40 a day while working in non-agricultural occupations.<sup>11</sup> In Texas \$5.14 was the average daily earnings of migratory farmworkers, as reported by a Texas legislative study. The Texas average was not the lowest in the country, but was low compared to other states which employ Texas migrants. The states listed paid the following daily average to farmworkers:

	Average earnings per day
Arizona	10.70
California	8.84
Washington	8.39
Illinois	7.94
North Dakota	7.75
Minnesota	7.34
Wisconsin	7.16
Michigan	6.64
Idaho	6.20
Colorado	5.35 <sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>U. S. Department of Agriculture, The Hired Farm Working Force of 1961 (Washington, 1963), p. 10.

<sup>10</sup>Fay Bennett, "Still the Harvest of Shame," The Commonweal, Vol. 80 (April 10, 1964), p. 85.

<sup>11</sup>U. S. Department of Agriculture, p. 12.

<sup>12</sup>State of Texas, p. 19.

The hourly wage rate in Texas for domestic migratory workers varies from time to time and from place to place. Wages of fifty cents an hour or less were cited as common by Congressman Henry B. Gonzalez<sup>13</sup> and by witnesses appearing before a United States Department of Labor hearing in Dallas, Texas, in 1964.<sup>14</sup>

The low wage level in the Lower Rio Grande Valley area of Texas was evidenced in the opposition of farmers in the area to the establishment of a seventy cent minimum wage for braceros in 1962. The number of braceros employed in Texas in 1962 was 36,289, a significant reduction from the 135,515 used in 1961.<sup>15</sup> This drastic reduction in bracero employment was imputed to the seventy cent wage by a student of the bracero problem. The same source reported that not a single bracero was used in the Lower Rio Grande Valley cotton harvest in 1962.<sup>16</sup> The cotton was principally harvested by

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<sup>13</sup>U. S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, Hearings, Migratory Labor Bills, 88th Congress, 1st Session (Washington, 1963), p. 123, testimony of Henry B. Gonzalez.

<sup>14</sup>Donald C. Allen, unpublished notes taken at United States Department of Labor hearing on criteria for the importation of foreign agricultural workers, Dallas, Texas, December 4, 1964.

<sup>15</sup>Senate, Extension of Mexican Farm Labor Program, p. 15, citing administrative reports, Bureau of Employment Security.

<sup>16</sup>Senate, Hearings, Migratory Labor Bills (1963), p. 125, testimony of Father John A. Wagner, of the Bishop's Committee for the Spanish-speaking, an expert on the subject of migratory labor problems.

machine. Domestic workers including some Negroes from East Texas were employed.<sup>17</sup>

The wages earned by migratory farmworkers are insufficient to support the workers and their families. In 1958, Archbishop Robert E. Lucey,<sup>18</sup> of San Antonio, Texas, estimated that one dollar and forty cents per hour would be required to provide a family with a living wage in the San Antonio area, providing that the family did not have a large number of children. For a large family more money would be required.<sup>19</sup> In 1964 the migrant workers of Texas did not approach that figure.

The low annual incomes of migratory farmworkers may better serve to illustrate the inadequacy of their earnings than hourly or daily wages. Substandard migratory incomes are the result of low hourly and daily wages combined with a high incidence of unemployment and underemployment.<sup>20</sup> The

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<sup>17</sup>McBride, pp. 67, 72-73.

<sup>18</sup>Archbishop Robert E. Lucey of San Antonio, Texas, has long been interested in the problems confronting the impoverished Spanish-speaking population of Texas and has been a leader among those who have worked to improve their conditions.

<sup>19</sup>Catholic Council for the Spanish-speaking, Report of the Ninth Regional Conference (San Antonio, Texas, April 15-17, 1958), p. 5, address by Archbishop Robert E. Lucey.

<sup>20</sup>U. S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, Hearings, Migratory Labor, Vol. 1, 87th Congress, 1st Session (Washington, 1961), p. 453. "The Condition of Farmworkers in 1960," Report to the Board of Directors of National Sharecroppers Fund, Inc., included in appendix of hearings.

average migratory farmworker earned a total of \$514 a year from all sources in 1949 according to a Department of Agriculture study cited in the report of the President's Commission on Migratory Labor.<sup>21</sup> By 1961, this had grown to a total of \$902 a year, \$677 coming from farmwork and \$225 coming from non-farm employment.<sup>22</sup> A Texas study completed in 1962 estimated that a migratory worker would earn approximately \$700-\$800 a year from farmwork.<sup>23</sup> A 1962 income of \$1,200 was reported by a San Antonio based migrant worker appearing before a United States Senate hearing in 1963. The \$1,200 represented the combined earnings of the migrant, his wife, and his mentally retarded son.<sup>24</sup> The same man reported slack season earnings of \$15 from January to April, 1963.<sup>25</sup>

Their meager annual incomes suggest an unbelievable poverty level among domestic migratory farmworkers. A Texas study suggests that when annual incomes are considered, the family income should be considered as a whole, because usually the family works as a unit, combining its income. An average family income of a little in excess of \$2,000 per year is

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<sup>21</sup>U. S. President, Truman, p. 125.

<sup>22</sup>U. S. Department of Agriculture, p. 13.

<sup>23</sup>State of Texas, p. 18.

<sup>24</sup>Senate, Hearings, Migratory Labor Bills (1963), p. 138, testimony of Augustine Castillo.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 127.

estimated by the Texas study.<sup>26</sup> This is only two-thirds of the \$3,000 family income which is usually considered to be the poverty level. Since transportation expenses must be paid out of the migrants' income, the actual amount spent for family living is even more below the poverty level than the \$2,000 amount would indicate. An article in a leading newspaper illustrates how difficult migratory life can be on a low income. A farmworker and his family were discovered on a New England highway without fuel, without money, and starving. They had left Florida several days before on the way to a job on a northern farm. In order to have gasoline for the trip, the family had not eaten since leaving Florida.<sup>27</sup>

#### Child Labor

The combination of low income and other factors compels young children to enter the labor force. Furthermore, the constant mobility of the family prevents school attendance by the children. In 1961, 111,000 migratory farmworkers were fourteen to twenty years of age.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, 51,000 workers were ages ten through thirteen.<sup>29</sup> In addition, children under the age of ten work in the fields beside their parents. Five and six year old child workers were reported by the President's Commission on Migratory Labor.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>State of Texas, p. 19.

<sup>27</sup>New York Times, July 25, 1960, p. 47.

<sup>28</sup>U. S. Department of Agriculture, p. 49.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>30</sup>U. S. President, Truman, p. 161.

State laws generally permit child labor in agriculture when it does not interfere with a child's education. The Texas Child Labor Law specifically exempted agricultural labor from coverage until amended in 1963.<sup>31</sup> The federal child labor law prohibits the employment of children under sixteen during school hours. United States officers attempting to enforce the federal law have little success, according to a Texas legislative study.<sup>32</sup>

In addition to the previously mentioned economic compulsion and the weak enforcement of child labor laws, there are other reasons for children to work in the fields with their parents. Often children are safer, when accompanying their parents, than they would be if they were left elsewhere unattended. Also, according to the President's Commission, some farmers choose to employ children;<sup>33</sup> this speeds up the harvest by increasing the size of the work force. And, of course, children will usually work for low wages.

Agriculture, the third most dangerous industry in the United States, subjects children to risk of occupational injury. The incidence of accidental deaths is greater only

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<sup>31</sup>Texas Council on Migrant Labor, Memorandum of October 8, 1963, pp. 1-2. (Mimeographed.)

<sup>32</sup>State of Texas, pp. 38-39.

<sup>33</sup>U. S. President, Truman, pp. 161-162.



in construction and in the extractive industries.<sup>34</sup> Of agricultural injuries to children under sixteen, a California study reports that one-third occur while picking or cutting fruit.<sup>35</sup>

#### The Inadequacy of Migrant Education

Migratory child labor not only deprives children of their legal right to an education but, also, perpetuates illiteracy, unemployability, and poverty among the adults emerging from this system. Many states, including Texas, permit school age children to work in agriculture even during school hours, the work allegedly being wholesome and beneficial to the child. In some states, non-resident migratory children are not included in the coverage of the state laws requiring school attendance.<sup>36</sup> In many states, including Texas, entire school districts are completely closed during peak harvesting periods.<sup>37</sup>

Insufficient effort has been made to get the children of migratory workers into school. Not a single truant officer was found attempting to compel migratory children to

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<sup>34</sup>Senate, The Migratory Farm Labor Problem, 1963, p. 10, citing "Accident Facts," National Safety Council, 1961, p. 23.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., citing "Work Injuries in California Agriculture," California Department of Industrial Relations, Division of Labor Statistics and Research, 1961, pp. 30, 34.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., pp. 10-11.

<sup>37</sup>Senate, Hearings, Migratory Labor, Vol. 1, 1961, p. 155, statement of Mary Condon Gereau, Assistant Secretary of Rural Education, National Education Association.

attend school, asserts a Texas legislative study. The same source quotes a Lamesa school official as saying:

I doubt if we have half of the school-age cotton-pickers in school. If they want to come to school, that's fine. If they don't, we leave them alone. I don't know what we'd do if all the migrant kids were in school. We're not as crowded as expected, but we are full.<sup>38</sup>

It was stressed that the situation in Lamesa was typical of other areas covered in the study. The educational process is interrupted when a child is working in the field instead of being in the classroom. Most non-migratory children, being permanent residents of a community, are protected by state compulsory attendance laws.<sup>39</sup>

There is an established relationship between lack of full time school attendance and the low educational levels of Texas migratory workers.<sup>40</sup> The Texas study found that not more than half of the children were in school in the areas where their parents worked. Their long absence from their permanent residence precludes taking full advantage of the educational opportunity offered there. The migrant's children come to school about two or three months late and often leave six to eight weeks prior to the end of the school year. Although the typical Texas child receives nine months of

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<sup>38</sup>State of Texas, p. 37.

<sup>39</sup>Senate, The Migratory Farm Labor Problem, 1963, p. 10.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 8, citing an address by Governor Price Daniel of Texas, March 8, 1962.

schooling a year, the migrant child can expect only about five months of schooling and frequently less than that.<sup>41</sup>

Among migratory children, forty per cent of those eight years old were below their normal grade level, while eighty-seven per cent of those fifteen years old were below grade level, according to the President's Committee.<sup>42</sup> Similar findings were reported in a 1961 Colorado study of 345 migrant children. Sixty-seven per cent of the children, most of whom were between the ages of six through eleven, were behind their age groups and thirty-six per cent were behind two or more years.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, of 214 Texas migratory children in the age group of fourteen to sixteen, only four were in grades nine to eleven, normal for this age group. Most migratory children are two to five years behind their age groups. The child is likely to drop out of school as he becomes older and falls farther behind.<sup>44</sup>

Typical of migratory children are the children of a San Antonio laborer. His children will probably always be handicapped because of their migratory background. The head of the family found employment and settled in San Antonio

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<sup>41</sup>State of Texas, pp. 26-28, 39.

<sup>42</sup>U. S. President, Eisenhower, Committee on Domestic Migratory Farm Labor, Second Report to the President on Domestic Migratory Farm Labor (Washington, 1960), pp. 16-17.

<sup>43</sup>Senate, The Migratory Farm Labor Problem, 1963, p. 7, citing Potts, "Providing Education for Migrant Children," Colorado State Department of Education, 1961, p. 63.

<sup>44</sup>State of Texas, p. 26.

after twelve years of migratory farmwork. The oldest boy, at the age of sixteen, had not attended school in five years and didn't know how to read. He was unemployed and looking for work. The youngest boy, at the age of fourteen, was able to read a little, but was so far behind in school that he did not plan to continue. The daughter, nearly nine, was still in the second grade and was learning how to read.<sup>45</sup>

The problems of educating migratory children are enormous. Not only are they below the attainment level of the class they enter, but they are also unfamiliar with the subject matter being studied. Two third-grade teachers reported that several days were required to familiarize the children with what the class was currently studying. The teachers added that few migrant children were interested in catching up with the class because they knew that they would be there only a short while. Moreover, the migrant children of Mexican descent usually have a language problem and frequently are without funds to purchase workbooks.<sup>46</sup>

The Texas legislative report is highly critical of the failure of Texas schools to educate the migrants. It holds that crowded classrooms, caused by the arrival of migratory children into an area, do not excuse educators from their obligation to the migrants. Attendance of migratory children should be both encouraged and compelled.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., pp. 24-26.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

The educational attainment of adult migrants indicates that, if universal education is a social goal, society has failed miserably. Approximately one-third of Texas migratory workers have never attended school and only five per cent have been educated beyond the elementary school level, with a typical educational attainment of grades three to six. Similarly, in a group of 1,333 migrants, only sixteen per cent of those aged twenty to twenty-four had ever attended school; two per cent of those forty-five and older had completed elementary school; and sixty-eight per cent of the same age group had never been in school.<sup>48</sup>

#### Migrant Transportation

Transportation is an important problem for migratory workers because they travel vast distances in their work. Of 127,000 Texas migrants in 1962, 36,000 remained within the state and 91,000 moved into other states. The scope of the transportation problem is indicated by the fact that in 1962, Texas migrants worked in thirty-six states.<sup>49</sup> Until 1957 no federal safety regulations existed relating to the transportation of migratory workers. Since then, the Interstate Commerce Commission has regulated trucks and busses engaged in interstate transportation of farmworkers.<sup>50</sup> The

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., pp. 26-27.

<sup>49</sup>Senate, Hearings, Migratory Labor Bills (1963), p. 119, statement of John A. Wagner.

<sup>50</sup>U. S. President, Eisenhower, pp. 14-15.

Commission is authorized to establish rules regarding comfort of passengers, qualifications of drivers, the number of hours that a driver can operate the vehicle, and the safety of the vehicle itself. In 1961 the Commission made a check of 106 motor vehicles transporting 1,582 migrants. In sixty-seven of the 106 vehicles serious mechanical defects were found. In the case of migrants traveling with their own families in private vehicles, the Commission has no regulatory power.<sup>51</sup> Use of unsafe vehicles endangers both the migrant passengers and other highway travelers.

The traffic accidents resulting in the injury or death of migratory workers are disproportionately frequent when compared to the accident rate of the total population. The causes of these accidents are unsafe vehicles often operated by careless and incompetent drivers. Language difficulties are contributory to the incompetence of the drivers. Because of the large number of migrants often riding in a vehicle, the rate of injuries and deaths is greatly out of proportion to non-migratory accidents.<sup>52</sup> In addition to the accidents which take place on the highway, many transportation accidents, including fatal ones, occur on or in the vicinity of farms.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>Senate, The Migratory Farm Labor Problem, 1963, pp. 23-24.

<sup>52</sup>Texas Legislative Council, Transportation of Migrant Labor in Texas, No. 54-4 (Austin, 1956), p. 1.

<sup>53</sup>U. S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, Hearings, Migratory Labor, Part 2, 86th Congress, 2nd Session (Washington, 1960), p. 1613, citing "Work

### Crew Leaders and Labor Contractors

Labor contractors contribute extensively to the problems of the migrants. They often provide transportation as well as serving as middlemen between the employers and workers. The crew leader's main function is finding employment for the members of his crew. In addition, the crew leader often provides other services, such as food and shelter. The labor contractor serves the farmer by assuming management responsibilities, such as hiring, supervising and paying the workers. This aids the farmer by relieving him of these tasks.<sup>54</sup>

The migrant worker may never have any personal contact with the farmers in whose fields he works. Often the migrant's only contact is with the crew leader. A spokesman for the American Friends Service Committee indicates that the well-being of the migrant and his family depends on the character and ability of the crew leader.<sup>55</sup> The typical crew leader is a responsible person; however, there are some who abuse their trust. Because of their reliance on crew leaders, the migrants are an easy target for those who would exploit them.<sup>56</sup> Among

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[Footnote 53, continued] Injuries in California, 1959," California Division of Labor Statistics and Research, May, 1960.

<sup>54</sup>U. S. President, Truman, pp. 90-91.

<sup>55</sup>U. S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, Hearings, Migratory Labor, Part 1, 86th Congress, 1st Session (Washington, 1959), p. 610, statement of Marianna C. Alcock.

<sup>56</sup>Senate, The Migratory Farm Labor Problem, 1963, p. 11, citing U. S. Department of Agriculture, "Survey of Farm Labor Crew Leader Practices," 1960.

the abuses practiced by crew leaders are making false claims in regard to employment possibilities,<sup>57</sup> wages and conditions of work, as well as charging excessively for services and collecting compensation from both the employer and the migrant for the same service.<sup>58</sup> Crew leaders have often cheated migrants out of their earnings by underpaying them and on occasion by abandoning them without paying them for their work.<sup>59</sup> Some crew leaders have deducted social security taxes from the workers without reporting and paying the tax to the government.<sup>60</sup>

#### Housing and Sanitation

Housing and sanitation are also matters of serious concern to the migrant. Although the housing fails to meet minimum standards, there have been, according to the President's Committee, more improvements made in this area than in any of the other migrant problem areas.<sup>61</sup> Similarly a United States Senate report describes migrant housing as "poor or sub-standard."<sup>62</sup> The incidence of labor shortages in an area

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<sup>57</sup>U. S. President, Truman, p. 91.

<sup>58</sup>U. S. President, Eisenhower, p. 11.

<sup>59</sup>Senate, Hearings, Migratory Labor, Vol. 1 (1961), p. 427, "Survey of Farm Labor Crew Leader Practices," 1960, included in appendix to report of hearings.

<sup>60</sup>U. S. President, Eisenhower, p. 11.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., pp. 13-14.

<sup>62</sup>Senate, The Migrant Farm Labor Problem, 1963, p. 21.



was directly attributed by the President's Commission to inadequate housing which failed to meet standards of decency.<sup>63</sup>

Migrant housing and sanitation were found to be extremely inadequate and substandard by a recent Texas legislative report which describes one migrant camp as follows:

The camp, like many, was situated near the gin. Rooms for a family were about ten feet by twelve feet in dimension. The first room visited was occupied by a mother and father, their two children, and his mother. There was scarcely any working space, since practically all the room was taken up by the beds. Every inch was utilized including the ceiling, from which hung a television set. The man of the house said they had been there since July (this interview was in October) and been one of the first families to arrive, thus had obtained one of the better rooms--it had screens on the windows. Most rooms had no screens. There was one door and one window to the room.

There were two out-door faucets for 32 families, no shower facilities, no laundry facilities. The outdoor toilets were of the usual type . . .<sup>64</sup>

Migratory farm workers need greatly improved sanitary accommodations, such as toilets and washing facilities, located both in the fields and in the housing areas. Problems of sewage disposal and water supply require solutions.<sup>65</sup> In most cases Texas Public Health authorities were unable to effectively regulate housing and sanitary conditions in the areas where migrants were living.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>U. S. President, Truman, p. 150.

<sup>64</sup>State of Texas, pp. 95-96. An outdoor toilet is usually referred to as an outhouse or privy. No running water is required. Typically in the summer it is odorous and attracts flies.

<sup>65</sup>Senate, The Migrant Farm Labor Problem, 1963, p. 15.

<sup>66</sup>State of Texas, p. 59.

### Migrant Health

Not surprisingly, the substandard housing and sanitation described above contribute to a high incidence of sickness. The President's Commission reports a higher death rate and a higher rate of disabling illness among migratory workers than among the rest of the population.<sup>67</sup> Health problems are more serious for the migrants than for most people because of their low incomes, poor housing, exposure, and lack of knowledge of modern medical and sanitary practices.<sup>68</sup>

The diet of migratory workers also contributes to their health problems. The President's Commission indicates that corn meal and rice, both lacking in vitamins, are an important part of the migrant diet. A survey made by a physician at a migrant camp in Mathis, Texas, found that in the previous six months, ninety-six per cent of the children above nursing age had gone without milk and that in the same time period eighty per cent of the adults had not consumed meat.<sup>69</sup>

Often migratory children are without the benefit of immunization. In 1962,<sup>aa</sup> a Kansas study found that fifty per cent of the children had not been immunized against polio or

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<sup>67</sup>U. S. President, Truman, p. 153.

<sup>68</sup>Senate, The Migrant Farm Labor Problem, 1963, p. 5.

<sup>69</sup>U. S. President, Truman, p. 154.

diphtheria and that seventy-one per cent had not been vaccinated against smallpox.<sup>70</sup>

The scope of the migrants' unmet health needs is demonstrated by the fact that about one out of every five individuals, in a group of twenty-five migrant families who were interviewed during a government survey, were found to be in need of medical care. These families, who returned to Texas after their annual migration, had health problems which included infections, asthma, pregnancy and childbirth, chronic leg pains, diabetes, and nervous conditions.<sup>71</sup> Other studies of Texas migrants report frequent skin infections, positive reactions to tuberculin tests, and high infant and maternal mortality rates.<sup>72</sup> The death rate for migratory children is approximately double that of other infants and is directly related to the lack of prenatal and postnatal care.<sup>73</sup>

Diarrheal disease, the incidence of which could be reduced by improved sanitary and health practices, appears annually among the migrants. Since these workers travel both

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<sup>70</sup>Senate, The Migrant Farm Labor Problem, 1963, p. 5, citing Kansas State Board of Health, "The Role of the Health Department in Providing Day Care and Health Services for Children of Migrants," 1962, p. 9.

<sup>71</sup>Senate, Hearings, Migratory Labor, Vol. 1 (1961), p. 458, "Special Consultant's Report on Health Problems Relating to Farm Workers and Their Families," submitted by Donald Hartling, Technical Consultant to the Subcommittee, included in appendix of hearings.

<sup>72</sup>State of Texas, pp. 72-73.

<sup>73</sup>Senate, The Migrant Farm Labor Problem, 1963, p. 5.

intrastate and interstate, the health of a large section of the nation is endangered.<sup>74</sup>

The Plainview, Texas, diphtheria epidemic of a few years ago illustrates how migratory diseases can affect the health of an entire community. Of the seventy persons who had diphtheria, forty-three were local residents. The epidemic, which began with seven cases among migrants, could have been prevented with immunization.<sup>75</sup>

In addition to the human misery and suffering caused by the health problems of the migratory workers, a financial problem is created for the hospitals in the areas of heavy migrant concentrations.<sup>76</sup> Some of the areas in which migrants work have no public health facilities.<sup>77</sup> In other areas these workers frequently do not qualify for available public assistance.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, few migrants are able to carry health and accident insurance.<sup>79</sup>

#### The Adverse Affect of Bracero Importation

In addition to the difficulties previously discussed, migratory workers have another problem seriously affecting

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>75</sup>State of Texas, p. 70.

<sup>76</sup>Senate, The Migrant Farm Labor Problem, 1963, p. 6.

<sup>77</sup>State of Texas, p. 58.

<sup>78</sup>U. S. President, Truman, p. 155.

<sup>79</sup>State of Texas, p. 55.

their welfare. This arises from the annual importation of thousands of Mexican nationals to work in agriculture. Both the wages and employment opportunities of native migratory workers have been affected adversely. In recent years most of the imported farm workers have entered the country under the provisions of Public Law 78.

The adverse effect of imported labor on domestic migrants has contributed to the opposition of labor unions, religious groups and certain civic groups to the labor importation program. For the same reason the program has been opposed by the United States Department of Labor during the administrations of both President Eisenhower and President Kennedy.<sup>80</sup> In his message which accompanied the signing of the bill to extend Public Law 78 in 1961, President Kennedy said:

The adverse effect of the Mexican farm labor program as it has operated in recent years on the wage and employment conditions of domestic workers is clear and cumulative in its impact. We cannot afford to disregard it. We do condone it. Therefore, I sign this bill with the assurance that the Secretary of Labor will, by every means at his disposal, use the authority vested in him under the law to prescribe the standards and to make the determinations essential for the protection of the wage and working conditions of domestic agricultural workers.<sup>81</sup>

There are some farmers who would rather employ imported workers, instead of United States citizens. There are several

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<sup>80</sup>Senate, The Migrant Farm Labor Problem, 1963, p. 12.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., p. 13, citing President Kennedy's message of October 3, 1961.

reasons for this preference, besides the fact that the bracero will work for low pay. The braceros "represent an assured work force of premium adult male labor."<sup>82</sup> They are an assured work force in the sense that they cannot leave the farmer who contracted them in search of a better job. They are premium workers in the sense that they are adult males, selected on the basis of physical health. The bracero is docile because he fears losing his job, which would mean that he would be sent back to Mexico.<sup>83</sup> An additional advantage to the farmer is that providing housing for the braceros who are not accompanied by their families is generally less expensive than providing family quarters, which domestic migrants usually require.<sup>84</sup>

The bracero was allowed to work in various capacities under Public Law 78. He was not restricted to unskilled "stoop labor" tasks. Braceros have operated machinery and worked as cowboys. Not only have braceros picked fruit and vegetables, but they have also packed them for shipment to market. The consultants to the Secretary of Labor concluded in their report that domestic packinghouse workers have been displaced by braceros.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup>U. S. Department of Labor, "Mexican Farm Labor Program Consultants' Report" (Washington, 1959), p. 4. (Mimeographed.)

<sup>83</sup>House, One-Year Extension, p. 26.

<sup>84</sup>U. S. Department of Labor, "Mexican Farm Labor Program," p. 4.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., pp. 4, 6.

The use of braceros in Texas at the same time Texans are working in other states is evidence of displacement. Texas employers have been heavy users of braceros,<sup>86</sup> while at the same time most of the seasonal agricultural work in the Mid-West is performed by Mexican-Americans from Texas.<sup>87</sup>

Not only has Public Law 78 resulted in a geographical displacement of American migratory workers, but the law has also caused additional unemployment among domestic workers. In 1962, 175,000 braceros were employed in the States of California, Texas, and Arkansas. In 1962, these same states had 611,000 unemployed domestic workers.<sup>88</sup> The implication is that had no foreign workers been employed, fewer domestic workers would have been unemployed.

The use of imported farm workers has also adversely affected domestic migratory workers by compressing the work to be done into a shorter period of time by the use of a greater than necessary number of workers assigned to the work. This can reduce the length of seasonal need for migratory workers, who average less than 130 days per year of farmwork, by utilizing greater numbers of workers at the time of greatest need.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup>House, One-Year Extension, p. 13.

<sup>87</sup>Senate, The Migrant Farm Labor Problem, 1963, p. 14.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid.

<sup>89</sup>U. S. Department of Labor, "Mexican Farm Labor Program," p. 4.

Addressing itself to the question of the adverse effect that imported labor has had on domestic workers, the President's Commission on Migratory Labor concluded that imported farm labor had pushed down domestic wage rates and had been detrimental to native workers. The report pointed out that, during the Second World War, California, which used sixty-three per cent of the legally imported Mexican workers, increased its cotton wages 136 per cent. Texas, blacklisted by the Mexican government and therefore using no legally imported labor, raised its cotton wages 236 per cent. In 1949, California received only eight per cent of the braceros and increased its cotton wage rate fifteen per cent, while Texas, using forty-six per cent of the braceros, lowered its cotton wage rate eleven per cent. Wages are inversely related to the importation of foreign labor.<sup>90</sup> Similarly, a more recent study covering the 1953-1962 period found that wages in areas using large numbers of braceros tended to stay the same, go down, or rise but little compared to areas which used no or few Mexican workers, even though a wage increase would be expected as a result of a shortage of labor in part of the area studied.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup>U. S. President, Truman, pp. 56-59.

<sup>91</sup>House, Hearings, Mexican Farm Labor Program, 1963, pp. 303-304, statement of Edward P. Eichler on behalf of Americans for Democratic Action.



No attempt is made to charge the importation of foreign farmworkers into the United States with complete responsibility for the plight of domestic migratory workers; however, it would appear that Public Law 78, along with the other programs permitting foreign farmworkers to enter the United States, contributed significantly to the problems of domestic workers. In 1962, approximately 225,000 braceros were either contracted or recontracted under Public Law 78. This clearly would have had an important effect on the wages earned by the 1,817,000 domestic farmworkers in the United States in 1962. A United States Senate report concludes that, "The basic difficulties of our domestic workers have been extended and intensified by the annual importation of tens of thousands of Mexican nationals."<sup>92</sup>

In addition to the previously described effects of the bracero programs on farmworkers and small farmers, some localities have been affected in still another way. The business community in areas using large numbers of braceros has been adversely affected by the importation of foreign labor. Offered in evidence are the 250 businesses that failed during a recent nine year period in the Imperial Valley of California. Assuming that bringing 15,000 braceros into the area displaced an equal number of domestic workers and that the native workers had about 35,000 dependents, the

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<sup>92</sup>Senate, Extension of Mexican Farm Labor Program, pp. 14, 17.

local merchants lost 50,000 customers. The braceros generally sent their money back to Mexico rather than spending it in town.<sup>93</sup> Similarly, the braceros coming to Texas resulted in domestic workers leaving to earn and spend money in other states.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup>U. S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Agriculture, Hearings, Extension of Mexican Farm Labor Program, 87th Congress, 1st Session (Washington, 1961), p. 261, statement of Ben Yellen.

<sup>94</sup>Ruth Graves, "Research Summary on Effects of the Bracero Program," submitted to Texas Committee on Migrant Farmworkers, January 11, 1961, p. 14. (Mimeographed.)

## CHAPTER V

### BRACERO PROGRAMS

#### Mexican Immigration Prior to World War II

The presence of Mexican workers in United States agriculture did not begin with the bracero programs of the 1942-1964 era. The findings of the President's Commission in 1951 indicate that farm workers from Mexico have constituted the largest foreign element in the agricultural work force for several decades.<sup>1</sup> The employment of large numbers of Mexican nationals by American farmers can be explained by the relative ease with which they were able to enter this country. Sharing a common frontier facilitates entry into the United States from Mexico. Additionally, until recent years the government has not effectively controlled Mexican immigration.<sup>2</sup> William Madsen, a student of the problem, indicates that during the early history of Texas, Mexicans could enter the state whenever they wished to do so. The regulation of immigration did not begin until the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> This resulted in the border being more of a gateway than a barrier.

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<sup>1</sup>U. S. President, Truman, p. 37.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>William Madsen, Mexican-Americans of South Texas (New York, 1964), p. 25.

The immigration law passed in 1917 established quotas to limit immigration from most countries; however, along with the other countries of the Western Hemisphere, Mexico was exempted from the provision which established an upper limit on the number of her citizens permitted to emigrate to the United States.<sup>4</sup> The 1917 law required permanent immigrants to pay a ten dollar consular fee and an eight dollar head tax. The passing of a literacy test was also required.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to the flow of regular immigrants, contract workers were brought in from Mexico. Although the contracting of foreign workers by employers in the United States was prohibited by the 1885 immigration law, late in the nineteenth and early in the twentieth centuries representatives of Texas growers annually went to Mexico, contracting workers and providing for their transportation.<sup>6</sup> Section three of the 1917 law also prohibited the entry of alien contract labor, but the ninth proviso of section three permitted workers to be recruited in Mexico as an exception.<sup>7</sup> This exception gave the Commissioner General of Immigration the discretionary

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<sup>4</sup>Clay L. Cochran, "Hired Farm Labor and the Federal Government," unpublished doctoral thesis, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1950, p. 91, citing John R. Commons and others, History of Labor in the U. S., 1896-1932 (New York, 1935), Vol. III, pp. 25-28, 30.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>6</sup>Carey McWilliams, Ill Fares the Land; Migrants and Migratory Labor in the United States (Boston, 1942), p. 250.

<sup>7</sup>Senate, Extension of Mexican Farm Labor Program, p. 2.

power, providing the Secretary of Labor approved, to admit contract workers into the country.<sup>8</sup>

The second decade of this century witnessed a significant increase in immigration by Mexican citizens. During the years 1911-1920, 219,004 Mexicans entered the United States, a marked increase from the 49,642 of the preceding ten year period.<sup>9</sup> The stated number of immigrants is the official figure for the 1901-1920 period. Since the border patrol was not created until 1924, numerous illegal entries must also have taken place, the precise number of which is impossible to determine. Cochran suggests that actual immigration could possibly have been twice as large as the official figure.<sup>10</sup>

Two special factors contributed to the increasing immigration of the 1910-1920 period. The first factor was United States entry into World War I, which resulted in a greater demand for Mexican workers by American employers. The second factor was the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1920, which, according to an official of the Bishop's Committee for

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<sup>8</sup>U. S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, Importation of Foreign Agricultural Workers, Report No. 214, Part 2, 82nd Congress, 1st Session (Washington, 1951), p. 3.

<sup>9</sup>Cochran, p. 93, citing "Handbook of Labor Statistics," U. S. D. L., Bureau of Labor Statistics (1941), p. 288. (Counter-migration is discussed below.)

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 94.

the Spanish-speaking People, forced large numbers of displaced persons to come to Texas.<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, Carey McWilliams indicates that the revolution resulted in thousands of peons being driven North to the United States. Additionally the completion of the Mexican Railway in 1910, which provided an improved method of transportation, contributed to the increased immigration after 1910.<sup>12</sup>

During World War I large numbers of contract workers were brought into the country from Mexico. Enforcement of the ban on contract labor in the immigration law was suspended. Moreover, the head tax and the literacy test were also suspended.<sup>13</sup> Approximately 73,000 were imported to work in agriculture, mining, and on the railroads during the 1917-1921 period.<sup>14</sup> Large numbers of these workers were contracted by southwestern growers.<sup>15</sup>

During the 1921-1930 period, the number of immigrants from Mexico far exceeded the movement of 1911-1920. The official number was 459,287, which was more than twice the

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<sup>11</sup>Speech by Rev. John A. Wagner, "Spanish-speaking People, Today's Challenge," National Convention of American G. I. Forum of the United States, Los Angeles, California, August 14, 1959. (Mimeographed.)

<sup>12</sup>McWilliams, p. 249.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 250.

<sup>14</sup>U. S. President, Truman, p. 37.

<sup>15</sup>Senate, Extension of Mexican Farm Labor Program, p. 2.

219,004 of the preceding decade.<sup>16</sup> The actual immigration was much greater than the official figures would indicate. The estimate of the President's Commission is that legal and illegal immigration from Mexico in the 1921-1929 period totaled one million.<sup>17</sup> The significance to Texas of virtually unregulated Mexican immigration is indicated by the increase in the number of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans residing in Texas between 1900 and 1930. The number in 1900 was 71,062. In 1930 it was 683,681, of whom more than thirty-eight per cent were foreign born.<sup>18</sup>

The economic welfare of domestic agricultural workers was worsened by the flood of Mexican workers into the United States. Many of the new arrivals were employed in agriculture. Even in the absence of Mexican immigration, there would have been a labor surplus in many agricultural areas, particularly in the South and in the northern New Mexico area. If the braceros had not been employed, workers from the labor surplus areas would possibly have been drawn to the developing agriculture of the Southwest by the high wages which employers in a labor shortage area would have had to pay in order to get workers. Instead of agricultural wages being depressed by the presence of large numbers of foreign

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<sup>16</sup>Cochran, p. 93, citing "Handbook of Labor Statistics," 1941, p. 288.

<sup>17</sup>U. S. President, Truman, p. 37.

<sup>18</sup>McWilliams, p. 247.

workers, the wage for farmworkers might have risen in the developing areas. At the same time the movement of workers out of the labor surplus areas might have removed or reduced the depressing effect that a labor surplus exerted on wage levels in the labor surplus areas.<sup>19</sup>

The 1930-1940 period saw a reversal of the previous trend. Rather than immigrating to the United States, Mexicans were going back home. Their return was caused by the widespread unemployment brought about by the depressed conditions of the time. Nearly 500,000 residents of Mexican origin left the country during the 1929-1940 period.<sup>20</sup> There was a return movement to Mexico even before 1929. The number of immigrants involved was far less than in the 1929-1940 years. According to the Commissioner General of Immigration, 90,112 immigrants returned to Mexico in the 1910-1929 period.<sup>21</sup>

#### Immigrants, Commuters and "Wetbacks"

In addition to the bracero programs, which the last half of this chapter will discuss in detail, there are other ways in which Mexican workers entered the United States. These additional methods of entry are significant because of the

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<sup>19</sup>Cochran, pp. 93-94.

<sup>20</sup>U. S. President, Truman, p. 37.

<sup>21</sup>Paul S. Taylor, "Critique of the Official Statistics of Mexican Migration to and from the United States," International Migrations, Vol. II, edited by Walter F. Wilcox (New York, 1931), p. 585.



numbers of workers involved and the fact that they continued to take place at the same time as the bracero programs. One of these means of entry is completely illegal, one is partially legal, and one is legal; however, in considering the economic effect of the various means of entering the country, there appears to be little difference among them. The legal means of entering the United States is under the provisions of the immigration law. The entry of those known as commuters<sup>22</sup> has both legal and illegal aspects. The methods of entering the country used by those called "wetbacks"<sup>23</sup> is illegal. This section will discuss the three groups in some detail.

The Immigration and Nationality Act, known as Public Law 414, provides for immigration by those who wish to take up residence in the United States. Mexico, not limited by a quota, has provided large numbers of immigrants. Mexican immigration during the 1941-1960 period averaged 18,020 per year. The years 1961-1963 witnessed increasing immigration. In 1961 the number entering was 41,476, rising to 55,805 in 1962, and 55,986 in 1963.<sup>24</sup> Not only was the number of

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<sup>22</sup>Commuters are those who live in Mexico, but work in the United States. Some return home every day, others stay for a longer period. Their entry is legal; their employment is often illegal.

<sup>23</sup>"Wetbacks" got their name because many of them entered the United States illegally by fording or swimming the Rio Grande River. This study uses the term to mean a Mexican who entered the United States illegally.

<sup>24</sup>U. S. Department of Justice, Annual Report of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1963 (Washington, 1964), p.46.

immigrants growing, but also the number of visa applications on file at American Consulates in Mexico increased from 63,475 in 1961 to 140,511 in 1962, indicating even greater immigration in future years.

According to Robert Sayre, a State Department official, the reason for larger numbers of Mexicans attempting to gain permanent entry into the United States was that the bracero program did not offer employment to all of the workers seeking jobs.<sup>25</sup> Large numbers of the immigrants are farm-workers. According to the Mexican Ambassador to the United States, an estimated 32,000 farm workers received visas in 1961, increasing to about 40,000 in 1962. These workers came to the United States on the strength of jobs offered by growers. The Ambassador expressed concern for the welfare of these immigrants. He reported that there was an inadequate supply of permanent year-around jobs. He also suggested that their employment as migratory agricultural workers would result in their becoming an economic burden because of a need for public assistance during periods of unemployment. Some would return to Mexico between jobs, becoming a burden there; while others would become a burden in the United States.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>House, Hearings, Mexican Farm Labor Program, p. 39, statement of Robert M. Sayre, Acting Director of the Office of Caribbean and Mexican Affairs, Department of State.

<sup>26</sup>House, One-Year Extension, pp. 7-8, citing a letter from the Mexican Ambassador to the United States Secretary of State, June 21, 1963.

There is reason to believe that the immigration law was being used by growers to permit the entry of seasonal workers. Furthermore, according to a Senate report, it appeared that an effort was being made to bypass certain provisions in the bracero program which attempt to protect both braceros and domestic agricultural workers.<sup>27</sup> Section 212(a)(14) of Public Law 414, the immigration law, gives the Secretary of Labor the power to exclude foreign laborers from entering the country, if he finds that United States citizens are available to do the work in question or if he finds that domestic workers would be adversely affected by the employment of foreign workers.<sup>28</sup> The authority vested in the Secretary of Labor by Public Law 414 is the basis for a new policy which has the effect of limiting Mexican immigration. This policy has been implemented since July, 1964. Instead of the thousands issued annually in previous years, only hundreds of visas had been granted from July, 1964, to February, 1965. In the event that domestic workers are available for the job, no visa would be issued. Moreover, if the wage offered the Mexican worker was not adequate to support the worker and his family, no visa would be issued.<sup>29</sup>

Section 101(a)(15)(h) of Public Law 414 permits the entry of workers coming into the country for temporary

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<sup>27</sup>Senate, The Migratory Farm Labor Problem, 1963, p. 36.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 35, citing Public Law 414 of 1952.

<sup>29</sup>The Dallas Morning News, February 5, 1965, Sec. 1, p. 3.

employment. Agricultural workers from several countries have entered the United States under this provision and it could be applied to Mexican workers as well. When the Secretary of Labor finds that domestic workers are not available, he makes a certification under the authority given him in Section 214(c) of Public Law 414, permitting entry of those workers requested by employers.<sup>30</sup> At the end of 1964 about 15,000 British, West Indian, Japanese, and Filipino workers were in the United States under Public Law 414.<sup>31</sup>

Commuters from Mexico are the second group significantly affecting the supply of agricultural labor in the United States. Like the legal immigrants, not all commuters work in agriculture. However, many of the commuters engage in farm work in the border areas and to a lesser extent in areas far removed from the border. Some commuters, instead of returning to Mexico each night, stay in this country for long periods of time.<sup>32</sup> Fred Schmidt, a student of the problem, confirmed that the commuter problem was not limited to the border areas when he reported that commuters have been found working in California agriculture as far north as Los Angeles County.<sup>33</sup> Some of the commuters have been admitted to the

<sup>30</sup>Senate, The Migratory Farm Labor Problem, 1963, p. 35, citing Immigration and Nationality Act, Sec. 214 (C), 66 Stat. 169 (1952), 8 U. S. C. 1184(C) (1958).

<sup>31</sup>U. S. Department of Labor, Farm Labor Developments, p. 6.

<sup>32</sup>Senate, The Migratory Farm Labor Problem, 1963, p. 35.

<sup>33</sup>Interview with Fred H. Schmidt, Dallas, Texas, April 16, 1965.

United States as immigrants and have a legal right to cross the border and work in this country. They choose to reside in Mexico because of the lower cost of living there.

Most commuters are not legally qualified to work in the United States. Those admitted temporarily, under the provisions of Section 101(a)(15)(B) of Public Law 414 as tourists or to transact business, are here legally, but may not accept employment. Many border residents commute across the border under the provisions of this section and are illegally employed.<sup>34</sup> The labor department estimates that 50,000 commuters work in this country.<sup>35</sup> This is enough workers to have a significant economic effect. The commuter, living in Mexico, where the cost of living is less than in the United States, is able to work for lower wages than domestic workers require. Working at low wages they adversely affect native workers by displacing them.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, commuters adversely affect domestic workers to the extent that they depress wage levels by a willingness to work for low pay. Even those working in cities affect the agricultural labor force by displacing domestic workers, forcing them into farm work where they tend to depress wages.

The adverse affect large numbers of foreign workers have had in Laredo, Texas, was described by Jose H. Vasquez, a

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<sup>34</sup>Senate, The Migratory Farm Labor Problem, 1963, p. 35, citing Public Law 414 of 1952.

<sup>35</sup>The Dallas Morning News, February 5, 1965, Sec. 1, p. 3.

<sup>36</sup>The Dallas Morning News, February 17, 1965, Sec. 1, p. 12.

resident of the Laredo area. According to Vasquez, Laredo is the most poverty-stricken city in the United States. The unemployment rate is over thirteen per cent. More than half the families earned less than \$3,000 a year, generally considered to be the poverty level.<sup>37</sup> The median income of heads of households, who averaged four members, was \$1,256 in 1960.<sup>38</sup>

The termination of the bracero program at the end of 1964 has resulted in large numbers of former braceros establishing residence in border communities in order to acquire a border-crossing card which will permit them to become commuters. If they do not receive the card permitting entry, they may resort to illegal immigration.<sup>39</sup>

Mexican workers entering the country illegally are the third group which contributed significantly to the supply of agricultural labor. These workers are usually referred to as "wetbacks," but one author uses the term "aerialists" to distinguish between those who entered the country by climbing over fences in New Mexico and Arizona and those who walked or swam across the Rio Grande.<sup>40</sup> The exact number of these

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<sup>37</sup>Allen, unpublished notes, statement of Jose H. Vasquez.

<sup>38</sup>U. S. Department of Commerce, United States Census of Population, 1960, Texas, Final Report PC(1)-45C, General Social and Economic Characteristics (Washington, 1962), p. 417.

<sup>39</sup>The Dallas Morning News, February 17, 1965, Sec. 1, p. 12.

<sup>40</sup>Madsen, p. 25.

workers is impossible to ascertain because of the nature of their entry into this country. Once they are here, because they are subject to deportation, they attempt to make themselves as inconspicuous as possible. The President's Commission estimated that a minimum of 400,000 "wetbacks" engaged in migratory farm work in 1949. Their significance is indicated by the estimate that they constituted forty per cent of the migratory agricultural workers in the United States.<sup>41</sup> Galarza cites reports of the Immigration and Naturalization Service supporting a figure of 1,108,900 "wetbacks" in 1954. This was the high point of the movement.<sup>42</sup> The estimate of a Texas grower is that almost seventy thousand were in the Lower Rio Grande Valley region of Texas in 1954.<sup>43</sup>

Prior to World War II the number of illegal border crossers was relatively small and most of them were concentrated in the part of the United States bordering on Mexico. After the war larger numbers were involved and they entered almost all areas of the country.<sup>44</sup> The main source of "wetbacks" was the border areas. Undoubtedly some also came from the interior of Mexico. Many that entered Texas came from the

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<sup>41</sup>U. S. President, Truman, p. 69.

<sup>42</sup>Ernesto Galarza, Merchants of Labor (San Jose, 1964), p. 59.

<sup>43</sup>McBride, p. 5.

<sup>44</sup>U. S. President, Truman, pp. 69-70.

Reynosa and Matamoros areas, located just south of the border, populated with about one and a half million people. Their extreme poverty permitted them to be drawn to the agricultural jobs north of the border, even though the wages offered them were low by United States standards.<sup>45</sup>

Farmers in the Rio Grande Valley area of Texas developed a dependency on the abundant supply of "wetbacks" willing to work for low pay. McBride relates how the cotton ginners in his area would harvest cotton for their customers. Each cotton gin would employ up to 1,000 illegal immigrants to harvest the cotton. "Wetbacks" deported by the border patrol were replaced with other newly arrived "wetbacks."<sup>46</sup>

The border patrol appeared unable to cope with the "wetback" problem. Truman Moore, in a periodical article, reports that the border patrolmen had orders from Washington not to hinder the movement of illegal immigrants into the country at harvest time.<sup>47</sup> For the most part, according to McBride, the patrol, not able to stop their entry, concentrated on containing the "wetbacks" in the border areas. They established check points on the highways leading to the interior.<sup>48</sup> The ineffectiveness of measures used to guard the border

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<sup>45</sup>McBride, p. 1.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., pp. 3-4.

<sup>47</sup>Truman Moore, "Slaves for Rent, the Shame of American Farming," The Atlantic Monthly, May, 1965, p. 120.

<sup>48</sup>McBride, p. 2.



against illegal entry is illustrated by a "wetback" who reported, according to Madsen, that he was caught and deported fourteen times. He was interviewed while in the United States, apparently for the fifteenth time. This also illustrates the determination of the "wetback" to work in this country.<sup>49</sup>

The "wetback's" life in the United States was a miserable one, judged by American standards. As an illegal immigrant, he was constantly subject to deportation. He was also subjected to exploitation, as evidenced by the wages for which he was willing to work. Galarza reports that in 1940, "wetback" wages of sixty cents a day with no room or board provided were common. The same source reports a Labor Department official as asserting in 1950 that "wetbacks" were willing to work for as little as fifteen cents an hour in the Lower Rio Grande Valley area of Texas. Forty cents an hour was reported as a "wetback's" wage in California's Imperial Valley in 1954.<sup>50</sup> McBride describes "wetback housing" consisting of a "patch of brush" and a few tarpaulins as being "luxurious."<sup>51</sup> The "wetback" had none of the protection, such as minimum standards for wages, housing, and sanitation, that was extended to the bracero working here under contract.

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<sup>49</sup>Madsen, p. 25.

<sup>50</sup>Galarza, Merchants of Labor, p. 30.

<sup>51</sup>McBride, p. 4.

An argument frequently used in support of a legal plan for the importation of Mexican farmworkers is that such a plan all but ended the "wetback" movement. Illustrative of this point of view is Congressman Gathings' description of proposed legislation to import agricultural workers from Mexico as "antiwetback legislation."<sup>52</sup> Gathings is an important member of the House Committee on Agriculture.

Opponents of importing foreign workers point out that not until 1955, long after the 1951-1964 program of worker importation began, was the illegal immigration significantly reduced. This happened after increased manpower and equipment became available to the border patrol. Supporters of this viewpoint suggest the possibility that the worker importation program had little to do with solving the "wetback" problem.<sup>53</sup>

A Texas grower who formerly employed "wetbacks" relates how the illegal workers were removed from the valley area of South Texas. According to McBride, the border patrol, working with increased manpower and additional equipment, removed the "wetbacks" from the valley and shipped them back to Mexico. Furthermore, legally imported workers did not end the "wetback" problem. In fact, it was only after the

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<sup>52</sup>U. S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Agriculture, Hearings, Extension of Mexican Farm Labor Program, 86th Congress, 2nd Session (Washington, 1960), p. 1, remarks of Congressman E. C. Gathings.

<sup>53</sup>House, One-Year Extension, p. 33.

loss of illegal workers that growers along the border in South Texas began the widespread use of legally imported workers.<sup>54</sup>

The illegal employment of large numbers of illegal immigrants had an effect similar to that of the commuters previously mentioned. The President's Commission reports that the "wetback invasion" affected both the wage levels and the employment opportunities of domestic workers in the Lower Rio Grande Valley area of Texas.<sup>55</sup> McBride reports that most valley farmworkers left the area to work in places where they didn't have to compete with "wetbacks."<sup>56</sup>

When the program for importing Mexican farmworkers ended in 1964, there was concern in both this country and in Mexico that "wetbacks" would again cross the border in large numbers. The Mexican Ambassador to the United States evidenced this concern in 1963 when he expressed the hope that both governments would take action to contain the "wetback" movement if the contract labor program was terminated.<sup>57</sup> According to a recent report, there is little reason to fear renewal of large scale illegal immigration, because both the

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<sup>54</sup>McBride, pp. 4-8.

<sup>55</sup>U. S. President, Truman, pp. 70-71.

<sup>56</sup>McBride, p. 3.

<sup>57</sup>House, One-Year Extension, p. 9, citing a letter from the Mexican Ambassador to the United States Secretary of State, June 21, 1963.

United States and Mexico have taken "emergency measures" to keep the "wetbacks" from crossing the border.<sup>58</sup>

This ends the discussion of Mexican entry into the United States during the 1942-1964 period, other than by means of the bracero programs. The next section returns to the World War II years and the Mexican contract labor program of that time.

#### The 1942-1947 Bracero Program

The program of importing Mexican workers into the United States during World War II was in response to the requests of growers. The original requests made in 1941 were denied. However, in 1942 an agreement was signed with Mexico permitting their workers to enter the United States to work in agriculture.<sup>59</sup> This marks a new phase of migration known as the bracero program.

The agreement, dated July 23, 1942 and made effective by an exchange of notes on August 4, 1942, contained provisions designed to protect both Mexican and domestic workers. The most important of these provisions are included in the following summary. Mexican workers were not to suffer discrimination or to serve in the military. Round trip transportation expenses were to be guaranteed the worker, along with living

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<sup>58</sup>The Dallas Morning News, January 3, 1965, Sec. 1, p. 4.

<sup>59</sup>Rasmussen, pp. 200, 202, citing United States Department of State, "Temporary Migration of Mexican Agricultural Workers," Executive Agreement Series, No. 278 (Washington, 1943).

expenses while traveling. Braceros were not to be used to displace domestic workers or to depress the prevailing wage levels. The worker was to have a contract in Spanish with an agency of the United States Government. The government was to be the employer of the braceros. Contracts between the government and the growers were to be executed to guarantee the terms of the international agreement. Wages paid to the workers were to be the prevailing wage paid for similar work in the area; however, no wage less than thirty cents per hour was to be paid. Provision for a savings fund was made so that part of the workers' earnings would be sent back to Mexico. Workers were to be free to purchase goods and services wherever they wished to do so. Conditions of housing, sanitation, and medical services were to be the same as those of domestic workers employed in the same area. The Mexican workers were to be protected in the event of occupational diseases and accidents with the same guarantees enjoyed by domestic workers. The right to select a representative to be their spokesman in dealing with employers was expressly guaranteed to the Mexican workers. The Mexican Consuls were charged with the responsibility of protecting the rights of the workers. Additionally, the international agreement provided for a subsistence allowance to be paid to unemployed braceros. For seventy-five per cent of the work days, workers not working because of unavailability of work were to be paid a three dollar a day subsistence allowance. For the remaining

twenty-five per cent of the work days, Sunday not being counted as a work day, subsistence was to be the same as that provided native workers.<sup>60</sup>

The international agreement guaranteed Mexican workers the same conditions of housing, sanitation, and medical services enjoyed by domestic agricultural workers. A previous chapter showed that this was almost meaningless because native farmworkers have little protection in these areas.

Authority for contracting braceros during the 1943-1947 period was based on the ninth proviso of section three of the 1917 immigration law.<sup>61</sup> The executive agreements made between the two governments were less formal than treaties.<sup>62</sup> Public Law 45 of 1943, 229 of 1944, 529 of 1945, 521 and 707 of 1946, 40 and 76 of 1947 provided appropriations necessary to finance the program.<sup>63</sup>

The agreement between the United States and Mexico was modified several times during the 1943-1947 period. The amended agreement of April 26, 1943, provided that hygienic housing be provided at no cost to the worker. An additional change provided that, during periods of unemployment not caused by unwillingness to work, housing and subsistence were

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<sup>60</sup>Ibid., pp. 202-204.

<sup>61</sup>U. S. President, Truman, p. 41.

<sup>62</sup>Galarza, Merchants of Labor, p. 48.

<sup>63</sup>U. S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on The Judiciary, Study of Population and Immigration Problems, Special Series No. 11 (Washington, 1963), pp. 39-42.

to be provided without cost to the worker during twenty-five per cent of the contract period. During the other seventy-five per cent of the contract period, the workers were to receive the three dollars a day guaranteed by the original agreement. An important 1944 change was the provision for free subsistence on any working day that a worker willing and able to work was not employed more than four hours. In 1945 the agreement was further modified to provide that the cash subsistence allowance be paid at the end of the payroll period, instead of at the end of the contract period. The withholding of this allowance had caused many complaints by the workers. An additional 1945 change provided that at least eight hours employment was necessary in order for a day to be counted a workday.<sup>64</sup> In 1946 the two governments made important modifications in the program based on informal agreements. The minimum wage was raised from thirty to thirty-seven cents an hour and workers were guaranteed at least \$33.60 every two weeks. Furthermore, subsistence was required to be given the braceros on any working day that they were not offered employment for more than four hours. Additionally, no workers were to be transferred to another location without first being paid all wages due them.<sup>65</sup> In 1947, the last year of the program, an agreement was made

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<sup>64</sup>Rasmussen, pp. 207-210, citing government correspondence.

<sup>65</sup>House, Study of Population, p. 31.

that workers were to be provided food at cost, the charge not to be greater than \$1.50 per day.<sup>66</sup>

The 1942-1947 bracero program was different from later arrangements for the recruitment of Mexican labor in two important ways. First, administrative responsibility was shifted from the Department of Agriculture to the Department of Labor after 1947.<sup>67</sup> Second, the federal government paid the cost of importing the farmworkers.<sup>68</sup> Later the employers would bear this cost. Importing farmworkers cost the government twenty-four million dollars in 1944.<sup>69</sup>

Originally the recruitment of workers was done at the National Stadium in Mexico City. In 1943 the Mexican Government requested that recruitment be decentralized, giving residents of other parts of Mexico an opportunity to be employed in the United States and also to terminate the influx of workers into Mexico City searching for employment. After an interim period of recruitment in the States of Guanajuato, Jalisco, and Zacatecas, the final selection of workers was carried out at Irapuato in the State of Guanajuato. The Mexican Government assigned quotas to the states based on

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<sup>66</sup>Ibid., citing 1947 Mexican-American Agreement respecting the temporary migration of Mexican agricultural workers.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>68</sup>U. S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Agriculture, Continuation of Mexican Farm Labor Program, Report No. 2357, 85th Congress, 2nd Session (Washington, 1958), p. 2.

<sup>69</sup>Moore, p. 120.



the amount of unemployment in each state. Recruitment crews went into the outlying areas and selected the braceros to be sent to Irapuato after giving them a preliminary physical examination. At Irapuato an x-ray examination was given and the workers were vaccinated. Prior to departure for the United States several documents had to be executed. These included the individual worker agreement, an identification card provided by the Mexican Immigration Service and the entry card provided by the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service.<sup>70</sup>

The number of braceros admitted during the 1942-1947 program totaled 219,600. The importation began with 4,203 workers in 1942, increasing greatly to 52,098 in 1943 and further increasing to 62,170 in 1944. The number imported in 1945 was 49,454. This decreased to 32,043 in 1946 and further decreased to 19,632 in 1947.<sup>71</sup>

The entry of braceros into the various states was controlled by both the Mexican and United States Governments. Twenty-four states employed Mexican farm workers under the program. All of the imported agricultural workers from Mexico were employed in the Western and Mid-western parts of

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<sup>70</sup>Rasmussen, pp. 214, 216-217, citing government correspondence.

<sup>71</sup>Senate, The Migratory Farm Labor Problem, 1963, p. 30, citing United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Employment Security.

this country. California was the leading employer of braceros during this period.<sup>72</sup>

Mexican workers were an important part of the farm labor force in this country during World War II. They worked at such varied occupations as picking fruit and cotton, cultivating sugar beets, and herding sheep.<sup>73</sup>

Texas has a long history of discrimination against Mexicans and Mexican-Americans. Discriminatory practices toward the Latin-American population of Texas include refusal of service by business firms, discrimination in hiring, segregation in public schools and the denial of the right to vote and serve on juries by some counties.<sup>74</sup> The resentment caused by this discriminatory treatment resulted in Mexico blacklisting Texas during the 1942-1947 period. No braceros were permitted to leave Mexico destined for Texas;<sup>75</sup> however, Mexico allowed the legalization of the 55,000 wet-backs who were in the state in 1947.<sup>76</sup> Mexico relented in another way as well when provision was made for braceros to enter Texas from other states where they had been working.

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<sup>72</sup>Rasmussen, pp. 22-4226, citing government correspondence.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., p. 224. This is not a complete listing of work performed by braceros. It is intended only to illustrate the multitude of agricultural jobs they filled while in the United States.

<sup>74</sup>Pauline R. Kibbe, Latin Americans in Texas (Albuquerque, 1946), pp. 271-272.

<sup>75</sup>Galarza, Merchants of Labor, p. 56.

<sup>76</sup>U. S. President, Truman, p. 39.

Despite the fact that the Mexican Government provided for this movement from other states, no braceros took advantage of the opportunity because Texas was a low wage area offering little attraction to Mexican workers earning more money in other states.<sup>77</sup>

#### The 1948-1951 Bracero Program

The importation of Mexican farmworkers was continued after the termination of the 1942-1947 bracero program, but in a substantially different form, the ninth proviso of section three of the 1917 immigration law was the only statutory authority for the new program. International agreements, dated February 21, 1948 and August 1, 1949, between the United States and Mexico became the basis of the new understanding. Additional agreements were made on a less formal basis in 1950 and 1951.<sup>78</sup>

As previously stated, the most important difference between the 1942-1947 and the 1948-1951 programs was that in the latter period the United States government did not contract or recruit the workers. The contract was between the worker and the employer. Furthermore, the government did not guarantee compliance with the contract terms.

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<sup>77</sup>Rasmussen, p. 224.

<sup>78</sup>House, Study of Population, pp. 33-36, citing Mexican-American agreements of 1948 respecting the temporary migration of Mexican agricultural workers.

The changes in the agreement regarding wages were necessary because of the position of the United States Department of Labor that it lacked statutory authority to fix a minimum wage rate.<sup>79</sup> During the previous program such authority had existed in the form of supplementary legislation. According to a student of the problem, Congress permitted that authority to expire because of the high cost of operating expenses borne by the government.<sup>80</sup> A congressional report recommending termination of the program suggested that a permanent system for the recruitment of foreign workers be established.<sup>81</sup> The session of Congress which let the law die was considered to be responsive to grower pressure. In fact, one author describes the Eightieth Congress as "strictly a Farm Bureau Congress."<sup>82</sup> The signing of the 1946 agreement, only a few weeks after the 1942-1947 program ended, suggests that worker importation with little government regulation was the kind of permanent system desired by employers of braceros. This implication is

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<sup>79</sup>U. S. Statutes at Large, Vol. LXII, Part 3, International Agreements Other Than Treaties, Temporary Migration of Mexican Agricultural Workers, February 21, 1948 (Washington, 1949), p. 3892.

<sup>80</sup>Robert Dennis Tomasek, "The Political and Economic Implications of Mexican Labor in the United States Under the Non-Quota System, Contract Labor Program and Wetback Movement," unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1958, p. 146, citing 1950 hearings of House Committee on Agriculture.

<sup>81</sup>U. S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Agriculture, Farm Supply Program, Report No. 70, 80th Congress, 1st Session (Washington, 1947), p. 2.

<sup>82</sup>Angus McDonald, "Return of the Joads," New Republic, Vol. 117 (July 21, 1947), p. 30.

supported by the assertion of the National Farm Union in 1948 that the agreement resulted from pressure exerted by large-scale growers.<sup>83</sup>

Other important changes may be summarized as follows. The braceros were not guaranteed a minimum wage or minimum earnings. A bond was required to guarantee the worker return transportation to the place in Mexico where he was contracted. The three dollar per day subsistence allowance for days unemployed during three-fourths of the contract period was discontinued. Employers of "wetbacks" were not to be permitted to contract workers under the program. In 1949 the agreement was changed to permit "wetbacks" then in the United States to be contracted. Also in that year procedure was agreed upon regarding the withholding of braceros from areas discriminating against them. In the same year Hermosillo, Chihuahua, and Monterrey were designated as recruiting centers. Additionally, a procedure was established to determine if the worker contract had been violated and the provision for a savings fund was discontinued. In 1950 a change was made in the contracting of "wetbacks." They were to be returned to Mexico before being contracted.<sup>84</sup> Thus the 1948-1951 bracero program offered far less protection to the Mexican workers

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<sup>83</sup>"Summer Brings the Mexicans," Commonweal, Vol. 48 (July 2, 1958), p. 275.

<sup>84</sup>House, Study of Population, pp. 33-35, citing Mexican-American agreements of 1948 and 1949 respecting the temporary migration of Mexican agricultural workers.

than that of the 1942-1947 period. The absence of a guaranteed minimum wage put the braceros at the mercy of the employers.

The recruiting of workers in 1948 without Mexico's permission, contributed little to improving Mexican-American relations. This situation arose because recruitment in the interior failed to provide enough braceros, while at the same time, many workers appeared at the border. In October of that year thousands of Mexican workers entered the United States illegally. The border patrol, rather than deporting the "wetbacks," handed them over to growers wanting their labor. This unilateral recruitment, without the participation of Mexico, resulted in Mexican termination of the 1948 agreement.<sup>85</sup> The new agreement reached in 1949 permitting the legalization of "wetbacks" was mentioned above.

The total workers contracted during the 1948-1950 period was 209,845. The number by years was 35,345 in 1948, 107,000 in 1949, and 67,500 in 1950.<sup>86</sup> The total contracted does not indicate the actual number of workers recruited within Mexico and brought to the United States. As previously indicated, many listed as being contracted in 1949 and 1950 were "wetbacks" who were legalized by being given a contract.

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<sup>85</sup>U. S. President, Truman, p. 54.

<sup>86</sup>House, Study of Population, p. 37, citing data from Bureau of Employment Security, United States Department of Labor.

In fact, 87,220 of those listed as contracted in 1949 were illegally in this country.<sup>87</sup>

The distribution of bracero labor among the states in the 1948-1950 period was not the same as that in 1942-1947. In 1949 California employed only eight per cent of the braceros contracted compared to sixty-five per cent in 1945. Texas, New Mexico, and Arkansas, using virtually no braceros in 1945, employed seventy-nine per cent of the legally imported Mexican workers in 1949. The states using braceros during the 1943-1947 program were high-wage states; during the 1948-1950 program low-wage states predominated.<sup>88</sup>

The Mexican government was not satisfied with the bracero program of the 1948-1951 period. A principal cause of this dissatisfaction was that the United States government did not guarantee employer compliance with the individual work contract.<sup>89</sup> An additional cause was that private employers preferred not to recruit in the interior of Mexico because that would increase their transportation costs. Instead they recruited in or near the border areas. Mexico wanted the workers to come from areas with high unemployment rates in the interior. It was this dissatisfaction with grower recruitment that led Mexico to recommend changing the system so that

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<sup>87</sup>U. S. President, Truman, p. 53.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., pp. 54-55.

<sup>89</sup>Senate, Importation of Foreign Agricultural Workers, p. 3.

an agency of the United States Government would be responsible for recruiting and protecting the contractual rights of the bracero. This was suggested at an International Conference early in 1951.<sup>90</sup> The threat of Mexico to end the program encouraged rapid legislative action in this country. The resulting law provided for greatly increased participation by the United States Government in the worker importation plan.<sup>91</sup>

#### The 1951-1964 Bracero Program

The bracero program of 1951-1964 was more formal and involved greater government participation than that of the 1948-1951 period. The statutory authority for the importation of Mexican farmworkers was Public Law 78.<sup>92</sup> The 1952 establishment of a Bureau of Migratory Labor Affairs in the Mexican Department of Foreign Relations indicated a more formal attitude toward the program by Mexico.<sup>93</sup>

The main provisions of Public Law 78 of July 12, 1951, may be summarized as follows. The law was an amendment to the Agricultural Act of 1949. Section 501 permitted the Secretary of Labor to recruit workers from Mexico to aid in the production of those agricultural products considered necessary by the Secretary of Agriculture. Additionally, the

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<sup>90</sup>Senate, Extension of Mexican Farm Labor Program, pp. 2-3.

<sup>91</sup>Senate, Importation of Foreign Agricultural Workers, p. 3.

<sup>92</sup>House, Study of Population, p. 36.

<sup>93</sup>Galarza, Strangers in Our Fields, p. 6.



Secretary of Labor was to operate reception centers for receiving and housing the workers, to provide transportation to and from recruitment centers in Mexico, to provide the workers' subsistence during transportation and at the reception centers, to assist the workers and the employers in negotiating work contracts, and to guarantee employer compliance with the terms of the contracts respecting payment of wages and the furnishing of transportation. Section 502 provided that no employer was to be permitted workers unless he agreed to pay the United States government for any costs arising from the guarantee of the employer's contracts. The employers were additionally required to pay the government up to fifteen dollars per worker to cover the cost of subsistence and transportation. Section 503 provided that no workers were to be recruited unless the Secretary of Labor certified a shortage of domestic workers existed at the time and place the foreign workers were to be employed and that efforts had been made to recruit domestic workers, offering them the same terms offered to the foreign workers. Under the same section the Secretary of Labor was required to certify that the importation of foreign workers would not adversely affect the wages and working conditions of domestic farmworkers. Section 504 provided that no bond would be required. This meant that the employer was not to be held liable if the worker failed to leave the country. Additionally, employers "knowingly" employing illegal aliens were not to be allowed

to continue the contracting of workers. Section 505 permitted the entry of Mexican workers without the payment of a head tax. They were also exempted from the social security and income taxes. Section 506 authorized the Secretary of Labor to enter into agreements both with Federal and State agencies and to cooperate with the Secretary of State when necessary regarding agreements with Mexico. Section 507 defined agricultural employment to include horticulture and the ginning, compressing, and storing of cotton. The packing, canning, freezing, and drying of seasonal agricultural products were also included.<sup>94</sup>

A new migrant labor agreement was also concluded between the United States and Mexico in 1951. The main provisions of that agreement are included in the following summary. Negotiations regarding the program were to be carried out only between the two governments. Migratory stations were to be established by the Mexican government at Aguascalientes, Guadalajara, Irapuato, Monterrey and Chihuahua. The United States was to establish reception centers in the Brownsville, Laredo, El Paso, Nogales, and Calexico areas. Transportation and subsistence between the migratory stations and the reception centers were to be provided at the expense of the United States government. This was also to apply to the return trip. Mexico reserved the right to withhold braceros from employers

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<sup>94</sup>U. S. Statutes at Large, Vol. LXV, Public Law 78, July 12, 1951 (Washington, 1952), pp. 119-121.

not complying with either the international agreements or the individual worker's contract. Employers of aliens illegally in the United States were not to be permitted to recruit Mexican workers, and workers were to be withdrawn when an employer was found to employ illegal aliens. The agreement authorized the United States Secretary of Labor to withhold or revoke certification when the employer failed to comply with the provisions of the international agreement or of the work contract respecting the employment of illegal aliens or inadequate standards of housing, sanitary facilities, or drinking water. The workers were not to be employed in areas discriminating against Mexicans. Workers from Mexico were not to displace or adversely affect workers of the United States. The work contract was to govern the employment of all legally admitted agricultural workers and was not subject to individual modification by either the worker or the employer, nor joint modification by worker-employer agreement. The worker was to be permitted to select the type of farmwork and the employer for whom he would work. The work contract was to be for a period of from six weeks to six months. The wages earned by the bracero were to be the prevailing wage in the area earned by domestic workers doing similar work or the wage specified in the work contract, whichever was greater. The wage paid was to be adequate to cover the worker's cost of living. No wage affected by the employment of illegal workers was to be certified as the

prevailing wage. The Mexican Consuls in the United States and representatives of the Secretary of Labor were to insure that the braceros were receiving the correct wages. The employer was to guarantee the Mexican worker an opportunity for employment three-fourths of the work days during the contract period. Workers were to be free to elect a representative to maintain contact with the employer, who was required to recognize the representative. Provision was made for extending the contract period and transferring workers to other employers. Employer compliance with the agreement and work contract respecting wages and employer furnished transportation to and from the reception center was guaranteed by the United States government. Moreover, the government was to see that Mexican workers received protection under the laws of the United States. Private employment agencies and labor contractors were to be excluded from participation in the program. Both governments were to attempt to end the illegal entry of workers.<sup>95</sup>

The individual worker contract served to extend additional protection to the Mexican worker. Under the contract the employer was to furnish hygienic and uncrowded housing with adequate sanitary facilities; bedding was also to be furnished. The employer was to provide for medical care and

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<sup>95</sup>U. S. Treaties and Other International Agreements, Volume II, Part 2, Migrant Labor Agreement of August 11, 1951 (Washington, 1952), pp. 1968-1986.

compensation necessitated by job-connected illness or injury. Skilled operators of vehicles and equipment were to be paid the prevailing wages for such work. The first forty-eight hours of work on a piece-rate basis should yield no less than the hourly rate. The same should hold true for workers performing work requiring a new skill. Tools were to be furnished to the worker without cost. Transportation was to be in vehicles meeting safety standards equal to those required for common carriers. Both transportation and subsistence while traveling were to be provided at the expense of the employer. The employer was also required to carry insurance to protect the bracero during the journey. Furthermore, fuel for heating, along with potable water, was to be furnished and both were to be easily accessible to the workers. The agreement included a minimum guarantee of employment for the contract period. During three-fourths of the work days, if the braceros were not offered work or if less than eight hours of work were offered, they were to be paid the amount they would have earned working full time. On any day, except Sunday, the workers were to receive free subsistence if they were not offered more than four hours work. The braceros were given the right to shop wherever they wanted. Food was to be furnished at cost, not to exceed \$1.75 per day. The worker was to have the option of preparing his own meals. The employer was to furnish the necessary utensils and facilities, whenever restaurant facilities were lacking. The employer was to

take steps to protect the bracero from immoral and illegal influences.<sup>96</sup>

During the course of the program, Public Law 78 was extended and amended several times. The main changes are included in the following summation. In 1953 the law was extended until December 31, 1955. Because the two governments could not come to terms on a new agreement at that time, provision was made in the law for unilateral recruiting should negotiations fail to produce a new agreement. The 1955 legislation extended the law until June 30, 1959. The new requirement that the Secretary of Labor consult with both employers and workers in determining questions of adverse effect and availability of domestic workers was the most significant change of that year. In 1958 the law was extended to the end of 1960; in 1960 it was extended to June 30, 1961, in both cases without amendment. The 1961 amendments included the prohibiting of Mexican workers operating equipment and being employed in other than seasonal occupations. Additionally, employers were required to offer domestic workers the same working conditions offered braceros. This was not to apply to housing, transportation, subsistence, insurance and work guarantees.<sup>97</sup> The 1961 extension was to December 31, 1963.<sup>98</sup> The law was ultimately extended to and allowed to

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<sup>96</sup>Ibid., pp. 1987-1996.

<sup>97</sup>House, Study of Population, pp. 39-41.

<sup>98</sup>Senate, Extension of Mexican Farm Labor Program, 1963, p. 12.

expire on December 31, 1964.<sup>99</sup> For a law that was originally enacted in 1951 because of a temporary shortage of labor alleged to exist in connection with the war in Korea,<sup>100</sup> it enjoyed a remarkably long life.

Changes were made in the international agreement of 1951 during the course of the program. The most important of the 1952 amendments designated the Secretary of Labor as being solely responsible for determining the prevailing wage and required employers to keep sufficient and accurate records. Additionally, the location of recruiting and reception centers were partially changed. In 1953 no changes were made in the agreement. In 1954 Monterrey, Chihuahua, and Empalme were designated as migratory stations and Eagle Pass, El Paso, Nogales, and El Centro were designated reception centers. The 1955 and 1956 amendments were relatively minor. The 1957 minimum standards of housing were prescribed. The 1958 agreement provided for non-occupational health insurance to be paid for by the worker. Additionally, the braceros were to be covered by the Mexican social insurance law. The 1959 and 1961 agreement contained only minor changes. The most significant of the 1962 amendments provided that the contract wage would be no less than the adverse effect wage.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup>U. S. Department of Labor, Farm Labor Developments, p. 1.

<sup>100</sup>Senate, Extension of Mexican Farm Labor Program, p. 12.

<sup>101</sup>House, Study of Population, pp. 38-41, citing Migrant Labor Agreement of 1951, as amended. The adverse effect wage was a bracero wage rate at a high enough level that domestic wage rates were supposedly not affected by bracero employment.

Typically, the Mexican worker's first act toward getting into the United States as a bracero was the payment of mordida<sup>102</sup> which would permit his name to appear on a list of potential braceros. Additional mordida was necessary to assure him a contract. Even after payment for a contract, the worker still had to wait at the contracting center for his turn to undergo a preliminary physical examination and be cleared by Mexican military and police officials. The length of this waiting period depended on the demand for braceros in the United States and the number of workers on the approved list. It might be only a day or two or it might last for several weeks. Being on the list of those to be examined did not guarantee that he would be selected.<sup>103</sup> The bracero who was rejected would have lost his investment and go home much poorer if not penniless. Furthermore, if he had borrowed the money invested in mordida, transportation, and living expenses while waiting for the preliminary examination, he would be in debt. The lucky bracero, after meeting the requirements of Mexico, was handed over to American authorities stationed at the recruitment center in Mexico where he was given another physical examination. He also needed clearance by the Department of Justice. Passing these hurdles, the bracero was then transported to a reception

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<sup>102</sup>Mordida is the payment of a fee in return for a service rendered by a public official. In Mexico mordida is a widespread custom.

<sup>103</sup>Galarza, Strangers in Our Fields, pp. 2-4.



center in the United States where additional health and security procedures were accomplished, after which he was eligible to be selected by an employer or his representative. The individual work contract was executed by the worker, the employer or his representative and officials of both the United States and Mexico. After this final formality, the worker was transported to the camp of the grower or the camp of the grower's association.<sup>104</sup>

The major expenses of the government in importing Mexican workers during the 1951-1964 period were ultimately borne by the employers. This included the cost of transportation and food from the time the bracero left the migrant station to the time he was placed with an employer at the reception center. The growers repaid the government for these costs in the form of a fifteen dollar per worker contracting fee. The expenses involved in guaranteeing employer compliance with the agreement and worker contracts remained with the government.<sup>105</sup>

In order to protect the wage levels of both braceros and domestic workers, the agreement required the payment of the prevailing wage. The inadequacy of this provision to protect wage levels is indicated in the following statement from a report to the President. "Farm employers meet in advance of

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<sup>104</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>105</sup>Senate, Extension of Mexican Farm Labor Program, p. 4.

the season and decide on the wage they intend to pay."<sup>106</sup> Where the farmers were not able to set the wage arbitrarily, the prevailing wage would be the wage normally paid. If the workers in an area were largely "wetbacks" or braceros who replaced "wetbacks," the wage paid braceros would be the wage formerly paid to "wetbacks."<sup>107</sup> Use of the prevailing wage concept as a means of protection for domestic and alien workers can be judged largely successful only if the goal was to maintain the then existing low wage level; however, if the goal was to protect the workers from the low wage levels set by illegal migrants, it was a failure.<sup>108</sup>

After the program had been in existence for several years with a nominal wage of fifty cents per hour, investigators found that piece workers were not all making that much. In 1958 the Bureau of Employment Security applied the fifty cent minimum to workers paid a piece work rate, as well as to those paid by the hour. Only the least productive ten per cent of the piece rate workers could be paid less than fifty cents.<sup>109</sup> In 1962 minimum bracero wages were established by the Secretary of Labor based on the adverse effect concept. This was an attempt to set bracero wages at a high enough rate so that the wages earned by domestic workers would not be

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<sup>106</sup>U. S. President, Truman, p. 59.

<sup>107</sup>U. S. Department of Labor, Mexican Farm Labor Program, pp. 6-8.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

depressed by bracero wages. Employers of Mexican workers were required to offer domestic workers wages equal to those paid braceros. The amount varied by state from sixty cents to one dollar per hour.<sup>110</sup> The adverse effect wage rate in Texas was seventy cents per hour.<sup>111</sup>

The number of workers imported under the 1951-1964 program began with 192,000 in 1951,<sup>112</sup> increasing each year until 1956 when the total reached 445,197. The number averaged slightly in excess of 435,000 workers in the 1957-1959 period. The years 1960 to 1964 were years of decreasing importation. The number admitted in 1964, the last year of the program, was 177,736.<sup>113</sup>

Mexican workers were employed in twenty-one different states in 1962. The leading bracero-employing states that year were California and Texas, followed by Arizona, Colorado, Arkansas, Michigan, and New Mexico. Mexican labor was used in large numbers in the production of vegetables, fruits, cotton, and sugar beets. More than 10,000 braceros were used in the producing of tomatoes, cucumbers, strawberries, cotton and sugar beets at the time of peak Mexican employment

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<sup>110</sup>U. S. Department of Labor, Farm Labor Developments, p. 5.

<sup>111</sup>House, Study of Population, p. 48.

<sup>112</sup>Since the 1951 bracero program replaced the 1948-1951 program in the summer of 1951, part of the 192,000 farmworkers brought in in 1951 were imported under the earlier program.

<sup>113</sup>U. S. Department of Labor, Farm Labor Developments, chart opposite p. 1.

in those crops. Most significant in 1962 was the employment of 44,400 braceros at one time in the tomato crop.<sup>114</sup>

A group of workers known as "specials" were employed on year-round jobs. They numbered about 20,000 and were mainly employed in the States of Texas and New Mexico. They were skilled workers, instead of the "stoop laborers" usually associated with the worker importation program. Their contracts were renewed every six months, making their long stay in this country possible.<sup>115</sup>

The Mexican worker importation program was the cause of considerably controversy in the United States. In opposition to the growers who employed braceros were church groups, labor unions, civic and veterans organizations, family-farm groups, and consumer groups. One source, in addition to describing the program as an immoral aid to the strong in exploiting the weak, claimed that one poverty-stricken group was being forced to compete against another poverty-stricken group. This resulted in even greater poverty.<sup>116</sup>

Additional controversy was caused by the differences in responsibility and orientation of the Secretary of Labor and the Secretary of Agriculture, particularly during the Eisenhower administration. A Senate report points out that Public

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<sup>114</sup>House, Study of Population, pp. 44, 46, 48, tables 5, 9, and 12, citing Bureau of Employment Security data.

<sup>115</sup>U. S. Department of Labor, Mexican Farm Labor Program, p. 5.

<sup>116</sup>House, One-Year Extension, p. 34.

Law 78 authorized the Secretary of Labor to recruit braceros when the Secretary of Agriculture deemed it necessary for the production of agricultural products.<sup>117</sup> Despite large surpluses of certain commodities, there is no known case of the Secretary of Agriculture ruling that foreign labor was unnecessary in a specific crop. The Mexican Farm Labor Program Consultant's Report points out that the Secretary of Labor had the responsibility to protect the wages of domestic workers from being adversely affected by the importation of foreign workers.<sup>118</sup> Inasmuch as the Secretary of Labor could not control the flow of migrants, his assignment to annually import hundreds of thousands of foreign workers and at the same time protect the wages of domestic workers from being depressed was an impossible assignment. In the absence of the authority to administer farm wages, there was little he could do to protect domestic workers. What the Secretary of Labor finally did was to require that before a grower could become eligible for foreign workers, he must first offer domestic workers the prevailing wage in the area of employment,<sup>119</sup> as well as some of the benefits offered

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<sup>117</sup>Senate, The Migratory Farm Labor Problem, 1963, p. 32.

<sup>118</sup>U. S. Department of Labor, Mexican Farm Labor Program, p. 6.

<sup>119</sup>House, Hearings, Extension of Mexican Farm Labor Program, 1960, p. 55, statement of T. Hume Dixon.

braceros.<sup>120</sup> This action by the Secretary of Labor resulted in criticism by spokesmen for farm groups. It was suggested that the Secretary of Labor was attempting to regulate farm wages.<sup>121</sup> It should be remembered that the Secretary of Labor was not regulating the wages of farmworkers in general, but was instead insisting that a fair offer be made to domestic workers before a grower's request for foreign labor would be approved. Nevertheless, this led to a public dispute between Secretary of Labor Mitchell and Secretary of Agriculture Benson.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup>Ibid., p. 10, statement of Matt Triggs.

<sup>121</sup>Ibid., p. 55, statement of T. Hume Dixon.

<sup>122</sup>"Dispute in the Cabinet," The Commonwealth, Vol. 70 (September 25, 1959), p. 534.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### The Bracero Programs Were Unjustified

The advocates of the importation of foreign farmworkers claim that the bracero program is essential to United States farmers. This presupposes that an adequate farm labor force does not exist within this country. Illustrating that assumption is a report of the United States Congress which, in referring to Public Law 78, states that "it has supplied farmers with workers that were not available from the labor force of the United States. Experience has shown that most American labor is unwilling to accept seasonal agricultural employment."<sup>1</sup> Similarly, a spokesman for an organization of cotton growers claims that braceros are needed due to an inadequate supply of domestic workers willing to work at "any reasonable wage."<sup>2</sup> Congressman George H. Mahon, of Texas, whose district has been a large user of braceros, supports this point of view. According to Congressman Mahon, farmers use imported workers not out of preference for the bracero

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<sup>1</sup>House, One-Year Extension, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup>House, Hearings, Mexican Farm Labor Program, p. 115, statement of Ed Dean, Plains Cotton Growers, Inc.

but for the reason that not enough native workers make themselves available.<sup>3</sup>

Addressing themselves to the question of a need for foreign workers in agriculture, the opponents of the use of foreign labor insist that domestic workers are available. Rural unemployment and underemployment are extensive, more extensive than in non-rural areas and, asserts a congressional report, domestic workers have an acute need for the work which has been done by foreign nationals.<sup>4</sup> Secretary of Labor Goldberg, speaking in 1961 before a congressional committee, reported that the combination of rural unemployment and underemployment represents 1,400,000 completely unemployed workers.<sup>5</sup> Mechanization is reducing the number of hired farm jobs. Instead of bringing in foreign workers, the actual requirement of rural areas, according to a Senate report, is for additional job openings for domestic workers.<sup>6</sup> The United States Department of Labor reports that, in the 1947-1962 period, three million farm employee and farm family member jobs were lost and by 1975 an additional 1,500,000 jobs will be gone.<sup>7</sup>

As previously stated, the type of work for which allegedly too few domestic workers are available is called "stoop labor."

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 84, statement of Congressman George H. Mahon.

<sup>4</sup>House, One-Year Extension, p. 24.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., citing former Secretary of Labor Arthur Goldberg.

<sup>6</sup>Senate, Extension of Mexican Farm Labor Program, p. 14.

<sup>7</sup>House, One-Year Extension, p. 24.



According to a congressional report, not many American workers are willing to do this work.<sup>8</sup> How important is the "stoop labor" feature as a deterrent to the large number of former farmers and farmworkers who would otherwise constitute an abundant pool of available labor? The spokesmen for the growers claim that unwillingness to perform "stoop labor" is an important reason for the alleged unavailability of domestic workers. Evidence indicates, however, that they have not been available, in most cases, because of the wages offered rather than the nature of the work. There is no question that working all day in a stooping, squatting, or kneeling position is difficult and disagreeable work that most people would prefer to avoid. However, the Senate report previously mentioned asserts that domestic workers will do "stoop labor" and points out that native workers do this labor in areas not using braceros. Illustrating this is the tomato harvest which has used large numbers of braceros in California, but tomatoes are harvested all over the nation by native workers. Furthermore, in recent years most of the cotton harvesting not done by machine has been performed by domestic workers. The vast majority of farms in the United States use no foreign labor.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Willard Wirtz, Secretary of Labor in the Johnson administration, has indicated that the "stoop labor" problem has been exaggerated and concludes that domestic labor has

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>9</sup>Senate, Extension of Mexican Farm Labor Programs, p. 14.

been and is available for this work.<sup>10</sup> The House report cited above claims that domestic workers have been unjustifiably slandered by growers who, while defending the need for braceros, assert that native workers are lazy and undependable. The same source reports that, although the growers attempt to justify the use of braceros because of the need for "stoop laborers," farmers resented congressional action forbidding the use of braceros as skilled operators of machinery.<sup>11</sup>

To many observers of the farm labor market, it seems odd that farmers can offer low wage rates to their workers and expect an abundant supply of laborers to respond to their job offers. When not enough workers make themselves available for work at low wages, the farmers then turn to the government and request that foreign workers be imported to overcome the alleged labor shortage.<sup>12</sup> Agriculture has traditionally paid relatively low wages to its workers. In most cases, according to the Consultants to the Secretary of Labor, agriculture has avoided competing with other industries for labor.<sup>13</sup> Normally, a labor shortage in an industry would indicate that wages should be raised to a point high enough to attract a sufficient

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<sup>10</sup>House, Hearings, Mexican Farm Labor Program, pp. 16, 17, testimony of Secretary of Labor, Willard Wirtz.

<sup>11</sup>House, One-Year Extension, p. 30.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>13</sup>U. S. Department of Labor, Mexican Farm Labor Program, p. 4.

number of workers. The employers of agricultural labor give no indication that they consider raising wages as a solution to their labor problems.<sup>14</sup>

There is abundant evidence to indicate that, if the growers raised wages, more workers would become available. Illustrative of this was an increase in domestic migratory wages which occurred in connection with a seventy cent minimum wage for braceros in 1962. This produced a larger supply of domestic workers.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, a report of the United States Congress finds that the 1962 bracero wage increase resulted in a small increase for native workers, which, in turn, motivated more domestic workers to accept work in agriculture.<sup>16</sup> Surveys made by the United States Department of Labor indicate that the number of workers willing to migrate would be greater if the monetary reward were to be increased. Higher wages would provide agriculture with sufficient workers.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, the study made by the Institute of Industrial Relations of the University of California at Los Angeles demonstrates that more workers become available when wages and working conditions improve.<sup>18</sup> Higher wage

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<sup>14</sup>House, One-Year Extension, p. 27.

<sup>15</sup>Senate, Extension of Mexican Farm Labor Program, p. 15.

<sup>16</sup>House, One-Year Extension, p. 27.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 28-29.

<sup>18</sup>Senate, Hearings, Importation of Foreign Agricultural Workers, p. 308, statement of Sarah H. Newman, General Secretary, National Consumers League.

offers, along with aggressive recruitment by the Labor Department, has provided enough domestic workers to replace the braceros formerly employed in California and Arizona during the first three months of 1965. It was not necessary to resort to interstate recruitment to provide these workers.<sup>19</sup>

One authority supports the argument that higher wages will not necessarily yield more workers. He suggests that if the married male worker earned enough money to support his family, his wife and children would be less likely to work. Low wages paid to male workers keep women and children in the labor market.<sup>20</sup> Thus, according to this a priori line of reasoning, for a higher wage to produce greater numbers of workers, the assumed loss of the women and children from the labor force would first have to be replaced. Thus, to attract this many new workers into agriculture would require a much higher wage rate than most farmers are willing to pay. Although the inadequacy of the married male workers' earnings may contribute significantly to the availability of women and child workers, there is no supporting evidence to indicate that there would be a mass exodus out of agricultural employment resulting from a wage increase. The higher earnings could be used to provide an improved standard of living for the farmworker's family. Moreover, if the wage increase resulted in mothers and their children leaving the fields,

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<sup>19</sup>U. S. Department of Labor, Farm Labor Developments, p. 9.

<sup>20</sup>Fisher, pp. 17-18.

more children would be in school and more mothers would be at home caring for their young children. This is generally considered to be a more desirable situation than to have them working in the fields.

Ample evidence is available indicating that domestic workers are willing to do farm work when offered a living wage. The bracero programs were unnecessary. Furthermore, they were undesirable because of their effect on domestic agricultural workers and family farmers.

#### Wages Paid Migratory Farmworkers Can Be Increased

Growers generally insist that paying higher wages to their employees is not possible because of declining farm incomes. Relating the wages paid workers to the return received by farmers for their products seems entirely logical to the employers of agricultural labor. Illustrative of this point of view are the remarks made by Congressman Poage of Texas. He compared picking cotton for fifty cents per hundred pounds during his youth with the wage paid in 1960, which he indicated was approaching three dollars per hundred pounds. The value of cotton at the time of his boyhood ranged from ten to twelve cents a pound, while in 1960 the value of cotton was thirty cents a pound. If the relationship of wages to cotton prices remained the same in 1960 as it was in the 1910 to 1920 period, the worker would only receive about one and a half dollars for picking one hundred

pounds of cotton. The worker is getting a higher percentage of the market price and the grower a smaller share than in the earlier period.<sup>21</sup> The viewpoint expressed above, although appearing quite reasonable to farmers, ignores the factor of increasing farm productivity. The farmer may realize larger profits, even though his unit cost of harvesting has increased, because of lower cultivation costs. If both harvesting and cultivation costs increased, greater production per acre could still yield adequate profits.

Most students of the problem agree that farm income is depressed because of overproduction of agricultural products. Faced with declining farm incomes, the farmer has three alternatives: (1) He can increase his profits by cutting costs, greater mechanization, or cheap foreign labor; (2) He can increase his income, possibly, through government subsidy, although fruit and vegetable producers receive no subsidy at this time; (3) He can withdraw from agricultural production when remaining in agriculture is no longer profitable. In the absence of a foreign labor importation program, the farmer has virtually no choice but to pay a wage high enough to attract domestic workers. This would be true to the extent that his agricultural production requires hired labor. This would be true until the cost-price squeeze reached the point that remaining in agriculture was no longer desirable.

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<sup>21</sup>House, Hearings, Mexican Farm Labor Program, p. 203, remarks of Congressman W. R. Poage.

On the other hand, if production costs were to be reduced by the annual importation of tens or hundreds of thousands of foreign workers willing to work for wages lower than those paid to domestic workers, instead of being compelled to leave agriculture, the grower would be encouraged to remain in farming, or even to expand his operation. As long as low farm income is the result of overproduction, additional production will further reduce that income. The importing of low cost foreign labor has, according to a congressional report, in fact, resulted in greater production and has lowered the price received by farmers.<sup>22</sup> This has had an adverse effect on most farmers. This is especially true of those growers producing crops raised in surplus amounts because of the use of bracero labor; however, those producing other commodities, not employing imported workers, have also been adversely affected to the extent that productive resources were reallocated to the growing of previously non-surplus crops.

The termination of Mexican farm worker importation can possibly be the beginning of a chain reaction which will permit farm employers to pay a wage high enough to attract domestic workers. The following supports this conclusion. A spokesman for a group of Texas growers reported that they cannot afford to pay higher wages in order to recruit more

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<sup>22</sup>House, One-Year Extension, p. 25.

workers.<sup>23</sup> A West Texas cucumber grower alleged, at a Labor Department hearing, that citizen workers were undependable and that he needed foreign workers.<sup>24</sup> Without agreeing that native workers are generally undependable, one can concede that the supply of workers available to him at a low wage were possibly unwilling to remain in his cucumber fields until the completion of the harvest. The most significant part of this gentleman's statement was the assertion that no cucumbers would be grown on his farms if he could not use bracero labor.<sup>25</sup> Apparently cucumber acreage has been reduced recently in West Texas. An article by the farm editor of a leading Texas newspaper reported that sixty acres of cucumbers were being planted by a pickle producer in Farmers Branch, Texas. One of the reasons given for this innovation was that the cucumber acreage contracted in the Plainview, Texas area had been reduced from 1,800 acres in 1964 to 450 acres in 1965. The reduction in cucumber planting was attributed to an anticipated labor shortage in that area.<sup>26</sup> This decrease in production, if it becomes sufficiently widespread, could significantly affect the supply of cucumbers. Assuming that the well-being of society is not threatened by a reduction

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<sup>23</sup>Allen, unpublished notes, statement of John Shepard, Lubbock Production Credit Association.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., statement of Deith Jorde, Jorde Farms, Hereford, Texas.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., statement of Keith Jorde.

<sup>26</sup>The Dallas Morning News, May 9, 1965, Sec. 1, p. 28.



in the supply of cucumbers, the farmer who decides not to grow them because of an inadequate labor supply at current wage rates, is not threatening the public welfare. Faced with prospects for a loss rather than a profit from the viewpoint of his own self-interest, the farmer is certainly making the right decision. Indeed, under such circumstances, he would be well-advised not to plant any more cucumbers than he could harvest personally. There is no reason that the preceding discussion of the cucumber market could not be applied to any other crop not yielding a high enough price to permit worker employment.

Consideration of the farmer's ability to pay a wage high enough to attract workers has, until now, not taken into account the possibility that part of the wage increase could be absorbed by growers. In some cases higher wages could be paid out of profits. An example of a firm apparently not suffering a cost-price squeeze is the Di Giorgio Fruit Corporation. The profits of this firm increased from \$458,711 in 1962 to \$2,110,000 in 1963.<sup>27</sup> Admittedly, not all farmers are in a position to absorb higher wage costs, but, on the other hand, some are in a position to pay more.

The possibility of consumers paying higher prices without significantly reducing the quantity of food and fiber

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<sup>27</sup> Senate, Hearings, Importation of Foreign Agricultural Workers, p. 225, supplement to the statement of Secretary-Treasurer of the California AFL-CIO, Thomas L. Pitts.

purchased is also worthy of consideration. The demand for farm output, although it varies by commodity, generally fluctuates much less than the price of farm products.<sup>28</sup> According to D. Gale Johnson, the cost of food will increase as a result of reduced food production after termination of the bracero program. There will also be additional substitution of capital for labor in the form of greater use of mechanized equipment.<sup>29</sup> There is reason to believe that consumers would willingly pay higher prices for food. A leading spokesman for consumers asserts that they are ready to bear part of the cost necessary to improve the lives of farm workers.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, labor officials report that the labor movement would not object to paying an additional four cents along with every supermarket dollar, an amount which they indicated would permit the doubling of all farmworkers' wages.<sup>31</sup> There is additional evidence supporting the viewpoint that a small increase in the amount paid by the consumer would allow significantly higher wages for farm workers. The paying of one additional dollar per family for cotton goods would permit a twenty cent per hour wage increase

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<sup>28</sup>D. Gale Johnson, "Policies to Improve the Labor Transfer Process," American Economic Review, Vol. 50, Part 1 (May, 1960), p. 403.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 411.

<sup>30</sup>Senate, Hearings, Importation of Foreign Agricultural Workers, pp. 306, 308, statement of Sarah H. Newman, General Secretary, National Consumers League.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 208, statement of Thomas L. Pitts.

for all labor used to produce cotton. An additional one cent per head of lettuce would permit farm laborers working in the production of lettuce an hourly raise of one dollar.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, in 1961, Frank L. Fernback, a labor union economist, cited Department of Labor statistics when he asserted that a ten per cent wage increase for all farmworkers would have but little affect on consumer purchases. For example, the average family would spend an additional fifty cents a year for cotton goods; the cost of lettuce would increase by one-tenth of a cent per head.<sup>33</sup> Many farmworkers have received more than a ten per cent wage increase since 1961 and few consumers have stopped buying because of high food and cotton prices.

#### The Bracero Program After the Termination of Public Law 78

The termination of Public Law 78 on December 31, 1964, did not rule out the possibility of bracero entry into the United States. Public Law 414, the immigration law, continues to provide authority for workers to come from Mexico for temporary employment. Before a grower's request for foreign workers will be approved by the Department of Labor, the employer must prove that he has made reasonable efforts

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<sup>32</sup>House, One-Year Extension, p. 30.

<sup>33</sup>House, Hearings, Mexican Farm Labor Program, p. 76, testimony of Frank L. Fernback, Department of Research, American Federation of Labor--Congress of Industrial Organizations, citing Department of Labor statistics.

to obtain native workers. To fulfill this requirement the farmer must, in addition to an aggressive recruitment effort, make an offer to domestic workers at least equal to that to be offered braceros. This must include housing, transportation and a minimum hourly rate of pay. The lowest wage permitted varies by state. It is \$1.40 per hour in California, \$1.25 in Arizona, and \$1.15 in the states of Arkansas, New Mexico and Texas.<sup>34</sup> By June, 1965, the Secretary of Labor had allowed the entry of 3,500 braceros, all of whom were certified for employment in California.<sup>35</sup>

Growers accustomed to employing foreign workers have not yet conceded that ending Public Law 78 was a permanent termination of large-scale bracero importation. These farmers have traditionally been a powerful pressure group and, except for their recent defeat on the bracero program, have exerted more pressure on the federal government than labor, religious and civic groups. Furthermore, migratory workers are almost powerless in protecting their own interests through political action because few of them vote.<sup>36</sup> There is no reason for complacency among those opposed to foreign worker importation.

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<sup>34</sup>Regulations Governing Applications for Foreign Workers for Temporary Agricultural Employment in the United States Under the Immigration and Nationality Act, included in Senate, Hearings, Importation of Foreign Agricultural Workers, pp. 3-5.

<sup>35</sup>The Dallas Morning News, June 6, 1965, Sec. G, p. 2.

<sup>36</sup>Tomasek, pp. 280-283.

The tactics used by the growers to win support for renewal of large scale bracero employment include trying to create a fear of increasing food costs. The consumer has been led to believe that higher prices for hand picked vegetables are the result of terminating the Mexican labor program.<sup>37</sup> George L. Mehren, Assistant Secretary of Agriculture, denied that price increases for vegetables were caused by a shortage of farm labor. He explained that growers had forced up the price of lettuce by holding part of the crop off the market. The same source predicted that prices would be lower in July and August because of an expected increase in the production of fresh vegetables.<sup>38</sup>

Large numbers of high school boys have been recruited into the "A-Team Corps" by the Department of Labor to do farm work under a program called "Athletes in Temporary Employment." By the middle of June, 1965, most of them have not yet been placed with employers.<sup>39</sup> The Texas Employment Commission expected that jobs formerly held by braceros would become available. Farmers have exhibited little interest in employing these young workers. An estimated 5,000 youths are seeking farm work. Unable to find employment within the State of Texas, some have been successful in finding work in

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<sup>37</sup>Denton Record-Chronicle, May 26, 1965, p. 1.

<sup>38</sup>San Antonio News, June 14, 1965, Sec. A, p. 6.

<sup>39</sup>The Dallas Morning News, June 15, 1965, Sec. A, p. 5.

Arizona.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, the Director of the California Department of Employment reported that 1,000 to 1,500 resident students were unable to locate agricultural jobs and that recruitment of workers from other states was being discontinued because of a labor surplus. According to the AFL-CIO News, the farmers now concede that they have more workers than they can use and predict that the braceros presently employed in California will soon be sent back to Mexico.<sup>41</sup> A grower of sugar beets in the State of Kansas indicates that Americans will do "stoop labor." This farmer asserts that high school girls, working at the wage earned by braceros, are doing a better job than that performed by the formerly employed Mexican workers.<sup>42</sup>

The end of large scale worker importation has significantly affected agricultural wage levels. Increases of from twenty-five to fifty per cent are reported. These wage increments are greater than the total raises of the past ten years. Some of the young workers are leaving the California fields because they are being paid piece rates instead of the hourly wage they believed promised to them when they were hired.<sup>43</sup> This indicates that the higher wage

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<sup>40</sup>The Dallas Morning News, June 4, 1965, Sec. A, p. 8.

<sup>41</sup>AFL-CIO News, June 26, 1965, pp. 1, 8.

<sup>42</sup>The Dallas Morning News, July 1, 1965, Sec. A, p. 24.

<sup>43</sup>AFL-CIO News, June 26, 1965, p. 8.

levels may not hold permanently. If the wage rates fall so low that sufficient workers are no longer attracted to farm work, the newspapers will probably once more be filled with articles about reported "labor shortages."

#### Remedial Action to Aid Migratory Workers

The conditions under which domestic migratory workers live indicate a need for remedial action by government. Legislation has already been enacted specifically for the purpose of solving the problems of crew leader malpractice, health, and child labor.

The Farm Labor Contractor Registration Act, passed by the Eighty-eighth Congress, is designed to correct the abuses which had occurred under the labor contractor and crew leader system. Under the law crew leaders are required to register annually with the Department of Labor and provide information regarding their conduct, method of operation and proof of liability insurance on the vehicles used to transport migrants. Additionally, they are required to be fingerprinted. The registration certificate can be denied to crew leaders "knowingly" misinforming migrant workers about employment terms and conditions, or for failure to fulfill agreements made with farm operators and migratory workers. The act, which became effective on January 1, 1965, should be an effective tool to protect farmers and workers from unscrupulous contractors operating in interstate commerce.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Senate, The Migratory Farm Labor Problem, 1965, pp. 15, 17.

Additional legislation, possibly by state governments, is required to regulate those working within only one state.

The Migrant Health Act of 1962, passed by the Eighty-seventh Congress, was designed to improve the health of migratory farm families. Grants by the Public Health Service had been made for sixty health projects in twenty-nine states and Puerto Rico by March 1, 1965. State and local health departments in Texas have received eleven grants totaling \$437,732. This money has been used for family clinics, nursing, sanitation, health education and dental care in the Laredo, Lubbock, Plainview and Southwestern Texas Health Departments. Part of the money has also been utilized by the State Department of Health.<sup>45</sup> Most of the counties of Texas have received no direct federal aid to assist in providing health care for migrants. The three million dollars authorized annually for migrant health,<sup>46</sup> although a good beginning and much better than no program at all, falls far short of meeting the migrants' health needs. The American Public Health Association estimates that a minimum of eleven million dollars a year is required to provide necessary services to seasonal farmworkers and their families. This would involve a yearly expenditure of eleven dollars for each of the estimated one million migrants,

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., pp. 6, 8.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 1963, p. 5.



which is only ten per cent of the amount spent by the average American in 1962 for medical and dental care.<sup>47</sup>

The labor of children in agriculture under sixteen years of age is prohibited by the law of both the federal government<sup>48</sup> and the State of Texas.<sup>49</sup> Neither law is adequately enforced. Texas has no specified agency to implement the state law and a Labor Department official disclosed during an interview that few violations of the federal child labor law are found in agriculture. The official expressed the opinion that few violations occur on farms and, therefore, compliance officers are more efficiently utilized in other fields. Of the 122 enforcers of the Fair Labor Standards Act, only ten living in rural areas are actively concerned with violation of the part of the law respecting child labor in agriculture.<sup>50</sup> There is no question that the business and industrial sectors of the economy yield more violations per enforcement officer and that the allocation of the compliance staff is logical; however, there appears

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 1965, p. 9, citing American Public Health Association, "Evaluatory Study on Operations of the Migrant Health Program Under the Migrant Health Act," December 30, 1964.

<sup>48</sup>U. S. Department of Labor, Wage and Hour and Public Contracts Divisions, Handy Reference Guide to the Fair Labor Standards Act (Washington, 1964), p. 10.

<sup>49</sup>Texas Council on Migrant Labor, "Texas Migrant Labor During 1963; An Overview," 1964, p. 3. (Mimeographed.)

<sup>50</sup>Interview, Joseph P. McAuliffe, Jr., June 1, 1965, Dallas, Texas.

to be need for a larger enforcement staff. Both state and federal governments should employ enough enforcement officers to insure compliance with child labor laws. These officers should follow the harvest in much the same manner as do the migrants.

Another area in which additional remedial action is necessary is migrant transportation. The regulations of the Interstate Commerce Commission appear to give adequate protection to migrants working in more than one state. Texas regulates busses traveling within the state, but fails to extend the same control to trucks used to carry migrants.<sup>51</sup> The Texas Legislature should take action to meet this need.

Problems of migratory worker unemployment have been reduced by two different but related actions of the labor department. First, the termination of large scale bracero importation has created additional job vacancies for native workers. Second, the Bureau of Employment Security has begun to play a more active role in bringing workers and employers together. This includes interstate placement involving the cooperation of the employment services of both the labor demand and the labor supply states.<sup>52</sup>

An approach to the solution of the problems of migrant education, housing and sanitation has been made by the Area

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<sup>51</sup>Texas Council on Migrant Labor, "Texas Migrant Labor," p. 4.

<sup>52</sup>Interview, Robert E. Ragan, June 1, 1965, Dallas, Texas.

Redevelopment Act of 1961, the Man-power Development Training Act of 1962 and the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. These laws, while not specifically designed to meet the needs of seasonal farmworkers, have applicability to their problems. The Area Redevelopment Act, administered by the Department of Commerce, is an attempt to reduce the economic problems of areas with chronic and large-scale unemployment. Under this law loans and grants are made to businesses and local governments to aid and stimulate urban renewal and to create employment opportunities. Additionally, training programs are established for the unemployed.<sup>53</sup> As of June 30, 1964, the Area Redevelopment Administration had approved training projects for 515 Texas workers.<sup>54</sup> Among the Texas trainees were sixty farm machinery operators and fifteen irrigators.<sup>55</sup> Thus, impact of this law on the migratory farmworkers of Texas, although beneficial, has not been significant.

The Manpower Development and Training Act, administered by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, is designed to assist the unemployed by training them in

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<sup>53</sup>Edward Y. George, "Can ARA, MDTA, and EOA Solve Our Rising Unemployment Problem?" Bentley Business and Economic Review, Vol. I, No. 1 (Fall, 1964), pp. 42-43, citing Public Law 27, 87th Congress, May 1, 1961.

<sup>54</sup>U. S. Department of Commerce, Annual Report of the Area Redevelopment Administration of the United States Department of Commerce (Washington, 1964), pp. 46-47.

<sup>55</sup>Report prepared by the Area Redevelopment Administration, January, 1963, included in Senate, The Migratory Farm Labor Problem, 1963, p. 80.

marketable skills.<sup>56</sup> In Texas 1,267 trainees were approved for training during 1964; however, it is unlikely that many of them were migrants because only five per cent of those trained in 1964 had a background of agricultural employment. Further evidence that few, if any, migrants were included is the fact that only 6.7 per cent of those receiving instruction had less than an eighth grade education. The 1963 amendment, which provided for a twenty week course in basic education for those in need of pre-vocational education,<sup>57</sup> indicates an awareness among government officials that many of the unemployed were being deprived of training because of illiteracy. This program would be of great significance to the migrant if it were made available to him. Both basic education and vocational training courses should be offered at places where migrants live during the slack seasons.

The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, passed by the Eighty-eighth Congress, is an attempt to reduce poverty in the United States. The act is very broad in scope and several sections could be used to attack the migrant problems. Title II provides for local community action programs to extend opportunities for education, training and employment to the poor and impoverished. The federal government stimulates

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<sup>56</sup>George, p. 45, citing Public Law 415 of the 87th Congress, March 15, 1962.

<sup>57</sup>U. S. Department of Labor, Manpower Research and Training Under the Manpower Development and Training Act of 1962 (Washington, 1965), pp. 24, 34, 64.

state governments, local governments and private agencies to participate in the war on poverty by making federal funds available for local programs. Projects are especially encouraged in areas with a high incidence of poverty and unemployment. Title III provides special attention for rural poverty. Means to solve the migrant problems of housing, sanitation, education and day care of children are specifically included in Section 311 of the act. Section 603 of Title VI provides for the recruitment of volunteers to work on many projects among which are assisting in programs to meet migrant health and education needs. Title V provides federal aid in financing low cost housing for migrants.<sup>58</sup>

The effect of the Economic Opportunity Act in solving migrant problems cannot be fully evaluated at this time because the implementation of the act began only recently. A federal grant of \$106,800 was made in April, 1965, to finance the staffing of the Texas Office of Economic Opportunity.<sup>59</sup> The most significant of the programs undertaken in Texas is the establishment of the Camp Gary Job Corps Center, to offer vocational training courses. The average educational attainment of the Camp Gary students is nearly grade nine.<sup>60</sup> This is about twice that of the average migrant and

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<sup>58</sup>Senate, The Migratory Farm Labor Problem, 1965, pp. 62-71 (excerpts of Public Law 452 of 88th Congress, included in Appendix C of Report).

<sup>59</sup>The Dallas Morning News, April 28, 1965, Sec. 1, p. 7.

<sup>60</sup>The Dallas Morning News, May 21, 1965, Sec. 1, p. 4.

indicates that not many migrants are included. Migrants could benefit from such training and possibly a few of the students have migratory backgrounds. As of May 21, 1965, two Youth Corps programs had been established in Texas to provide employment for high school students with the purpose of encouraging the pupils to stay in school. The Tarrant County Program probably includes few migrants, but the one in San Antonio involving 962 students more likely assists some migratory families.<sup>61</sup> As of April 9, 1965, community action programs had been approved for Corpus Christi, Austin and San Antonio. Seventy-six other Texas cities and counties have either applied or are planning to apply for such programs.<sup>62</sup> These projects should be of benefit to migratory farmworkers. "Project Head Start" provides eight weeks of pre-school training for underprivileged and culturally deprived five and six year old children to prepare them for entry into the first grade.<sup>63</sup> Such training will give them a better opportunity to succeed in school. The bulk of the migrants are not in their home towns during the summer when this course is offered and will be little affected. A program which should be of benefit to migratory workers is basic education for adult illiterates. This will meet an urgent need because if we educate only the children, illiteracy will continue among the adults until death. Texas is due to

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<sup>61</sup>Fort Worth Star-Telegram, May 21, 1965, Sec. II, p. 5.

<sup>62</sup>The Dallas Times Herald, April 9, 1965, Sec. A, p. 8.

<sup>63</sup>The Dallas Times Herald, May 19, 1965, Sec. A, p. 27.

receive a \$1,400,000 federal grant for this purpose to supplement \$640,000 raised by the state.<sup>64</sup> Since society did not educate the migrant as a child, partial restitution could be made to the adult migrant through programs of adult education. New skills will be needed by migratory workers if they are to avoid the chronic unemployment and under-employment which characterizes seasonal agricultural work. Even remaining in agriculture will require training to operate the new equipment which will be used on the highly mechanized farms of the future.<sup>65</sup>

The needs of the impoverished people living in farming areas are not being met as well as those of city residents. One reason for this is that rural communities have been slow in establishing community programs and asking for funds. The Office of Economic Opportunity has approached the problem of insufficient rural participation by extending additional assistance to rural communities in setting up programs.<sup>66</sup>

The State of Texas has taken action on its own initiative in one migrant problem area. To partially remedy the long absence of migratory children from school in their home towns, intensive six month courses have been established by five of the large school districts of the Lower Rio Grande Valley area. By lengthening the school day, the normal nine month

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<sup>64</sup>The Dallas Times Herald, April 9, 1965, Sec. A, p. 8.

<sup>65</sup>Senate, The Migratory Farm Labor Problem, 1963, p. 9.

<sup>66</sup>The Wall Street Journal, April 20, 1965, p. 1.

school year's work has been covered in only six months. The plan appears to be very successful, permitting the young migrants to get a better education than before and still migrate with their parents. Additional South Texas school districts are expected to adopt the same program.<sup>67</sup>

A serious problem for which little or nothing of a remedial nature has been done is the inadequacy of the migratory workers' income. If the migrant earned enough to support his family, most of the other migrant problems would disappear. The protection of social and labor legislation which tends to safeguard the incomes of most American workers has been denied to the migrants, along with other farmworkers. Migratory workers are not covered by the minimum wage law of the Federal Government and are also excluded by most state minimum wage laws. Legislation should be enacted extending coverage to farmworkers. Most workers are protected by federal law in their right to organize unions and to bargain collectively, but not agricultural workers. They should have this right. No other large group of workers, suffering from extended periods between jobs, are denied the benefits of unemployment compensation. The migrants need this protection more than most workers, and it should be extended to them. Workmen's compensation should be available for injured agricultural workers. Most of the nation's work force have this

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<sup>67</sup>Texas Council on Migrant Labor, "Texas Migrant Labor," p. 3.



protection, even though few are employed in more dangerous occupations. Denial of the above protection to migratory workers contributes to their poverty and makes them economically second class citizens. Migrants are being exploited by the rest of society. Most Americans earn enough money to buy food harvested by the migrants; however, few migrants are able to enjoy many of the goods and services produced in abundance by this affluent society. The average citizen gives little or no thought to the cost in human misery of the cheap strawberries he can afford to put on his shortcake.

The burden of shame for the nation's treatment of the migrant rests upon all Americans who permit the existence of such conditions among the migratory workers. The federal government for years permitted the importation of large numbers of foreign laborers to compete against domestic migratory workers for the available jobs. This tended to drive down wage rates. Instead, the government should have been helping the migrants by giving them minimum wage laws and collective bargaining rights. The states, in most cases, instead of providing unemployment and workmen's compensation for the migrant, failed to act. Texas has been much more concerned about "States' rights" than about States' responsibilities. Illustrative of this is the plaque on a wall of the State Capitol Building commemorating States' rights; there is no accompanying plaque as a reminder of States' responsibilities.

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