

FARM SECURITY ADMINISTRATION
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Oregon--Washington--Idaho

DROUTH MIGRANTS

and

SEASONAL AGRICULTURAL WORKERS OF THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

A Social and Economic Problem

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FOREWORD

Concentrations of drouth migrants and agricultural workers who seasonally harvest Oregon, Washington and Idaho's specialty crops constitute one of the most acute yet least recognized of the Pacific Northwest's major social and economic problems. The Farm Security Administration presents in this paper a current study of the situation and an approach to finding a solution for some of its more serious aspects.

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A Social and Economic Problem

Influx of thousands of farm families from Great Plains drouth areas, increasing mobility of large numbers of unemployed and part-time workers, mechanization of agriculture and similar current social and economic trends are causing the problem of caring for the army of migrant workers who harvest the Pacific Northwest's specialty crops to become extremely acute. Lack of adequate sanitary, health, social and recreational facilities for these workers together with increasing competition for available employment and consequent reduced earnings is creating temporary rural slums in several sections of the region.

The problem must necessarily be approached from the standpoint of providing for a large percentage of drouth families who are being forced into migratory and seasonal agricultural labor through inability to establish themselves on farms, as well as to provide for the thousands who are resident or interstate migratory workers already in the region, and dependent in whole or in part on seasonal migratory work. It has been estimated that only 27 percent of the 21,000 migrating from east of the Rocky Mountains during the past two years, mostly due to recent drouths, have been able to establish themselves on going farms. The Pacific Northwest Regional Planning Commission estimates some 38,000 farm families have come into the three states since 1930, many of whom are dependent to some extent on seasonal agricultural work for their livelihood.

As part of its responsibility for the low-income and destitute farm family and farm laborer, as set forth in the Bankhead-Jones Farm tenant act administered under the United States department of agriculture, the Farm Security Administration has completed a study of the areas where heaviest seasonal concentrations of migratory workers appear. The purpose of this study is to set up the basis for defining this problem and inaugurating a long-time program to deal with or at least point the way to meeting some of the graver implications of the situation.

Oregon Seasonal Demand

A study of demand for labor in Oregon and its timing shows the heaviest concentration in Marion county, based on crops planted and crop timing, a load running to a peak in late June and early July and dropping off to a low point in August. There is a concentration of nearly similar peak in hop harvest during September, giving four months' variable work. This is for a longer time and more constant as to some part of the demand than in any other county. The Willamette valley counties of Benton, Clackamas, Lane, Linn, Marion, Multnomah, Polk, Washington and Yamhill are still under study, but the following parallel table of demand already appears:

Nonresident Daily Labor Force required to Harvest Major Seasonal Crops, Based on 1934-5-6 Data of Crop Land Harvested and as to Variety of Crops

Persons				Persons			
	Quar- ter	Willamette valley	Marion county		Quar- ter	Willamette valley	Marion county
May	3	2,530	760	Aug.	1	5,370	3,300
	4	5,100	1,530		2	1,620	1,040
June					3	1,243	940
	1	14,030	4,210		4	25,400	11,000
	2	20,450	5,310	Sept.	1	28,770	12,140
	3	25,020	5,040		2	38,500	13,920
July	4	31,660	4,510		3	3,070	2,000
	1	45,400	6,690		4	-	-
	2	25,680	4,110				
	3	20,200	4,680				
	4	11,060	4,730				

The Marion county relationship becomes obvious as that one of the nine counties composing Willamette valley, carrying the most constant high percentage of the Valley demand during the longest period.

Washington Seasonal Demand

Yakima valley, Washington, with its remarkable crop variety, its own apples, and adjacent Wenatchee, Chelan and Okanogan apple areas, shows a loading of demand in persons running by quarter months as follows:

	Persons			
May	1,714	2,295	1,959	1,884
June	2,363	4,136	4,185	4,675
July	4,501	4,376	2,624	1,772
August	3,265	3,810	4,413	4,869
September	30,979	32,851	17,740	6,000
October	15,960	21,189	23,400	20,094

(Landis, Brooks and George B. Herington)

This is followed by a quick drop off, variable with crop and weather conditions.

Idaho Seasonal Demand

The net demand in the Snake River valley, Idaho, appears to aggregate a quarter month total pattern similar to the following:

	Persons			
May	1,875	1,875	1,084	1,084
June	419	419	14,273	14,273
July	7,726	7,726	1,226	1,226
August	24,524	24,524	26,038	26,038
September	26,132	26,132	2,554	2,554
October	15,578	15,578	13,080	13,080

The concentrations appear to be extreme as to time length in Bonneville county from May 1 to October 31, in Twin Falls county in numbers but with constancy more pronounced from June to October in Ada, Canyon and Payette counties from May 1 to October 31 for a reasonably steady force, a variety of work and reasonably adjacent to the Malheur county, Oregon, concentration.

Other Seasonal Demands

Walla

There is a heavy seasonal demand in the Walla, Milton-Freewater and Athena areas which is growing greater. There is another seasonal demand in the Multnomah-Washington concentrated berry areas in Oregon during early summer. Another Oregon spot of heavy concentration, and one which will grow larger, lies in the Klamath Falls area, another to some degree in the Medford apple and pear area. The figures in Willamette and Yakima valleys quoted above run to a net demand over and above farm operators, family labor and regular hired labor. They do not carry into account the number of persons floating from job to job. The figures therefore represent around 80 or 85 percent of persons concerned.

Mobilization of Seasonal Workers

These people are mobilized year by year subject only to the variation in acreage or percentage of crop condition so that the pattern has become definite. Within the last two years the entrance into this country of a vast number of people from the drouth and eastern areas comprises a new group seeking support from this same work, namely, the distressed emigrants from east of the Rocky Mountains.

These people have a farm background, are anxious to work, are of good sound American stock, and in the main are intelligent and often well educated, but reduced to the most abject poverty. They are peculiarly in demand because of their willingness to work and quality of understanding that they are able to put into their work. But there is nothing for them except seasonal work indicated by the above pattern of demand. The winter period is one of considerable distress and may only be tided over by the meager earnings of these families from the seasonal harvest work available.

The temporary group in Washington, Oregon and Idaho will run close to 80,000 persons composed of some 19,000 families, including children. Caring for these people has been seriously impeded by regulations as to period of residence incident to the state relief acts. In many cases the grant program of the Farm Security Administration has been the only financial resource through which the acute periods of want have been approachable.

The aggregate total to date of recorded entrance into California of families of this type has been tallied at around 248,000 persons. This comes in on top of a seasonal migratory labor group already in the state dependent for support upon the crops and their variable seasons of harvest, amounting to a total of 100,000 to 125,000 people. As a consequence, in California the Mexican and Filipino labor doing "stoop work" in the fields has been very rapidly displaced, particularly within the last year, as there is not a situation in which nearly two and one-half people are available for every job normally to be done under the highly industrialized crop farm operation in California.

The next move for these people in desperation lies northward. There is no feasible means of controlling this more or less natural movement of people, who in their despair are seeking by movement to find a place where they may utilize their labor in a productive manner.

Living Conditions

The living conditions in which this ostracized horde of people are forced to accommodate themselves in their poverty are a matter of extreme concern. Earnings of these family groups as carefully sampled in California, Washington and elsewhere by careful investigation run normally from \$200 to \$400 per year for an entire family's support. As a matter of finding work and moving from short job to short job the automobile is a part of the family's equipment. Without the automobile, the family is stranded.

An examination of the rural slums and jungles into which these people have drifted will appall any person with social conscience. There is little or no medical attention for families living under serious conditions of exposure. Although undernourished, they often work long hours in the fields when there is work to do. They have only the most primitive cooking, sleeping and sanitary equipment. In short, their position is one of progressive despair. These are not isolated cases, but are present by the thousands.

Health Meance

There is an obvious lack of sanitary precautions in the jungles and rural slums in which these people gather. There is but the most meager provision for decent garbage disposal. Human waste is disposed normally in hastily built temporary toilets, generally roofless, and rarely with the least suggestion of fly prevention. The ditch bank and the bushes do for the balance.

These people, in abject poverty and undernourished are physically prone to afford lodgment for alimentary and other diseases. Exposure leads to a high incidence of pneumonia, and weakened physical stamina tends to produce carriers. These people wander from one rural slum to another. Every public health officer encountered and interviewed not only admits the meance but lives in fear of epidemics. The children, undernourished and often poorly developed, are an object of pity. Scant attention is given to water supply of approved source.

Assistance Must Be Given

These people cannot do much for themselves. Having sunk in poverty to these levels, they can emerge only by organized help. Rehabilitated, they regain self respect and rise above the state bordering on peonage into which conditions beyond their control have ~~gixx~~ driven them.

Various state laws give authority and assign responsibility, but with enormous peaks of concentration scattered all over a large area in temporary occupation, there are no local funds nor means available to establish competent forces of sanitary inspection personnel needed to cover the constantly migrating problem as it is presented year by year.

Only by concentration of residence established under decent rules of sanitary practice can a preventative status be achieved and the incidental approach to medical attention be brought on a practical basis. Continuance of the disease cycle from acquisition in unsanitary places to development in other unsanitary places or in towns to which the victims go after field operations cease is in itself a public menace, dangerous, present and unmeasurable.

The undernourishment arising out of tired people cooking poorly assorted foods under the most primitive conditions with the most meager utensils, aside from the meance of flies and undisposed garbage, is doing nothing to build up a

physical resistance to exposure, filth, disease, typhoid, smallpox, dysentery, pneumonia, mumps, measles and all the ills of unsanitary congregations.

Uncontrolled Social Meance

The situation is one of concentrated and primitive human life in the raw-- in its very aggregate a meance traveling uncontrolled, unchecked and unprevented through every possible contact. All of this is incidental to and present as a part of the making and culmination of the agricultural cycle by a section of displaced, intelligent American people, rendered helpless in their poverty and approaching a virtual peonage to be measured by the thousands of persons, of families and of children so growing up toward citizenship.

Outside the cycle of relief process established under various state organizations, bounded by limitations of state laws, there is no financial relief except through Farm Security Administration grant process. No remedy is offered in the divided technical state of responsibility in view of interstate problems or origin, except through provision of facilities decent and competent, leading to reestablishment of self respect and rehabilitation by means of decent quarters and facilities as proposed by that agency of farm person rehabilitation established by the Congress, the Farm Security Administration.

California Attacks Problem

X | The first effort on the Coast to attack this situation was made in California through the joint efforts of the social agencies of California and the Farm Security Administration in two experimental camps, one at Arvin near Bakersfield and the other at Marysville. These camps provide tent platforms, sanitary toilets, shower baths, facilities for parking the necessary family automobile and for working on it, and facilities for washing clothes by hand. In addition an assembly and recreation shelter are provided, and an incinerator for disposal of garbage. Among the most favorable adjuncts is the child clinic building, in which is housed the health nurse furnished by public authorities. Here services of public physician may be systematically concentrated. Sewage disposal, water supply, a manager's house, and a play ground for children are provided.

Self-Government Provided

The evolutionary development of a process of managing these camps was carefully worked out. Government by veto was finally vested in the camp manager. Government under a committee elected or recalled through the vote of the occupants has very intelligently solved various problems confronting these little democracies. Taken off the ditch bank as their only refuge and allowed to come into clean, decent, properly administered facilities, these people have realized that they are taking a step upward. They have asserted their good sense in every possible manner in their government of themselves within these camps.

X | So successful were the two experimental camps that California FSA officials now have ten of these camps in operation and under construction with a program of 15 more to be added in 1938 and 1939.

Small Camp Fees

The camper pays into a camp fund 10 cents for each day he stays in the camp with his family. He contributes a certain number of hours of labor toward policing the camp and doing the necessary work attendant upon its being kept in ship-shape manner.

It is interesting to note that the camp fund under the auspices of the camp government committee and the manager is used for purchase of milk for children, for some medical aid to persons seriously in need, for entertainment, for the purchase of supplies for the sewing units organized among the women in the camp, for aiding families in dire need, and such similar types of activities as present themselves.

Some local antagonism manifested by various groups has been almost completely overcome by the successful results attained. Farm Security Administration supplies a manager, a force of some two or three helpers who supervise policing, take care of the mechanical equipment and act in such manner that there is in each of the 24 hours a responsible person in charge. Original fear of concentration and attendant organization of agricultural helpers has been largely banished due to the fact that these people are on the way up and have regained the foundation of their self respect. As the people on the ditch bank have nothing to lose and everything to gain, the matter is one to be given serious thought in view of the great number of these people who are now among us.

Small Laborer's Cabins

One of the most interesting phases of this progressive operation in California has been found particularly applicable to the situation inherent in this region, namely, that of providing a considerable number of small farm laborer's cabins each with a half acre or so of available subsistence garden sites, through which the farm laborer aided by his family may maintain cultivation and acquire considerable economic help by raising and preserving foods. The result of this has been that these families have secured work from employers in the neighborhood, who could give to the small percentage of the total of people involved a nearly year around employment. These people availing themselves of these cabins are finding opportunities to rent better places and to become established in the various communities under a more substantial environment.

Early in 1937 20 of these cabins were built at Arvin, California, and the experiment started in a small way. It was so successful from the start that 100 cabins are now ready and occupied in three sites and some 1,600 more are being provided for on the total of 10 present camp sites and the 15 additional camp sites. A rental of approximately \$8.20 per month charged for the use of these cabins and gardens includes water and lights.

Stabilizes Labor Supply

The eagerness with which this opportunity for physical rehabilitation is availed of, the manner in which it supplies housing for a permanent force of always available labor with a full year cycle of earnings has been a matter of intense satisfaction.

The large farmer, during the period in which he is employing these people, may, and at times does, provide more or less decent camping facilities. Many of these camping facilities fall below reasonable standards of sanitation and housing. The small farmer does not have the capital with which to provide decent accommodations, yet requires the migratory laborer for the harvesting of his crop.

A peculiar experience in the California camps has been the lack of relief requirement for families so housed. The better earning facilities through their being known to be available for work in large numbers and subject to the call of various farmers. These camps work closely with the Farm Placement Bureau of the United States Employment Service in satisfying the needs of both employers and employees.

Similar Need in Pacific Northwest

Realizing we have a similar situation here, FSA officials of this region have closely watched the growth and evolution of this California operation and have been continually supplied with information as to its operation. As a consequence and because of a similarly acute situation with identical implications a program has been worked out for extension of the benefits of this system to Idaho, Oregon and Washington.

Exploration of the possibilities of obtaining appropriations for a series of similar facilities in these three states has been encouraging. It is at present limited by the necessity of providing title in the United States of the necessary land for constructing these camps.

Land First Requisite

Tracts of from 80 to 160 acres of land are required for a migratory labor camp, a portion of which must be arable land for subsistence gardens. The balance need not be fully arable, but must be above flood. The land should be so situated that an independent water supply may be had and sewage disposal provided. The location of such sites is in each case based upon centers from which the largest amount of work for the longest time and within the shortest distance may be available. These people work from five to fifteen miles away from the camp, leaving their families in the camp as a place of residence.

The matter of purchase of this land for the sites on which to build these camps becomes a definite measure of practical rural rehabilitation, as well as health protection and in checking the downward trend in living conditions of families required in the cycle of agricultural employment. In this way health, decency and order can be maintained in the communities dependent upon this type of agricultural labor.

Contemplated Program

The program for construction of a 400 family camp which we may call a standard camp consisting of 350 tent platforms and attendant facilities, plus 50 farm laborers' cottages and subsistence gardens will require about \$225,000 in addition to the cost of the site. Surveys of demand, of crop areas, and of need for these facilities have been carefully studied in each of the three states.

It is proposed to construct a standard camp in the neighborhood of Yakima, Washington; Caldwell, Idaho; and Salem, Oregon, as meeting most completely the demand, the work concentration and the longest period of work centered in these states.

Less complete and more seasonal facilities that still meet minimum standards of sanitation and management are contemplated for areas where work periods are short term or more variable. Cabin units might be added for such a number of families as can be reasonably assured of year around employment, to aid them in temporarily establishing themselves until they can become an integral part of the community.

Assets to the Region

The people for whom this program is planned are definitely among us and there is nothing to indicate they can be moved back to their place of origin. Many, particularly those from drouth areas have nothing to return for and left originally because they could not gain subsistence or a livelihood. They are

mostly people of good stock, reasonably well educated and in most cases, involuntarily here as a result of conditions over which they had no control. They are anxious to become a part of the community. Potentially they are a part of the future population of the three states and the quicker they can place themselves on a self-sustaining basis through practical measures of rehabilitation, the sooner they will become valuable assets to this region.

Camp facilities make it possible for those who come and go in the various localities to keep themselves clean and bring their children up under conditions reasonably conducive to good health. The children gain an entirely different viewpoint than that they are subjected to in the rural slums under present conditions of social ostracism.

To test these observations as to similarity in conditions as between Pacific Northwest and California conditions, Dr. Omer Mills, Regional FSA Economist, San Francisco, who has been closely identified with the entire development of the California program, was loaned to this region. After going over the situation in the field, he reported that, aside from the size, the fundamentals of the situation are essentially the same in both regions.

Summary of Present Plans

Present plans present a need for three standard camps each to have facilities for 350 families and 50 farm laborers' cottages and subsistence plots; and eight simple seasonal camps, four of which will have groups of about 40 farm laborers' cottages and subsistence plots. In all, about 3,000 families would have sanitary camping facilities during seasonal peaks of demand and 310 families would be provided successively with "step up" facilities or cabins and gardens to meet the need for year around work in the various sections.

It may be stated that in the solution of the land acquisition question lies the possibility of expending remedial measures. In addition to the cost of the land between \$650,000 and \$1,400,000, depending upon the acceptance of projects and funds available, will be needed for the program during the fiscal year 1938-39. This would lead to definite steps in meeting the problems involved in these serious concentrations of intelligent but largely destitute farm families.

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CREDITS

Credit is hereby given to related federal and state agencies and individuals whose studies and reports have made available much of the material used in preparation of this report.

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