

"The various proposals to extend Public Law 78 by administrative action of one kind or another fly squarely in the face of the decision made by Congress. These proposals must be, and they are, rejected."

*—Secretary of Labor
W. Willard Wirtz*

transportation industries.

Mechanical harvesting equipment has reduced the need for hand labor somewhat. The trend toward mechanization is reflected by the drop in the number of braceros who came to the U.S.—187,000 last year as contrasted to 467,000 in 1957. But agricultural researchers say full mechanization of most crops now harvested by hand labor is still years away. California is particularly dependent on single male migrants to supply such labor because its crops and large corporate holdings are unsuited to the family farm pattern followed in many other states.

Braceros are generally hired through growers' associations or on a contract basis from six weeks to six months. But these contracts can't be signed until state and Federal agencies determine that sufficient domestic labor isn't available and until the agencies investigate wages, hours, and housing.

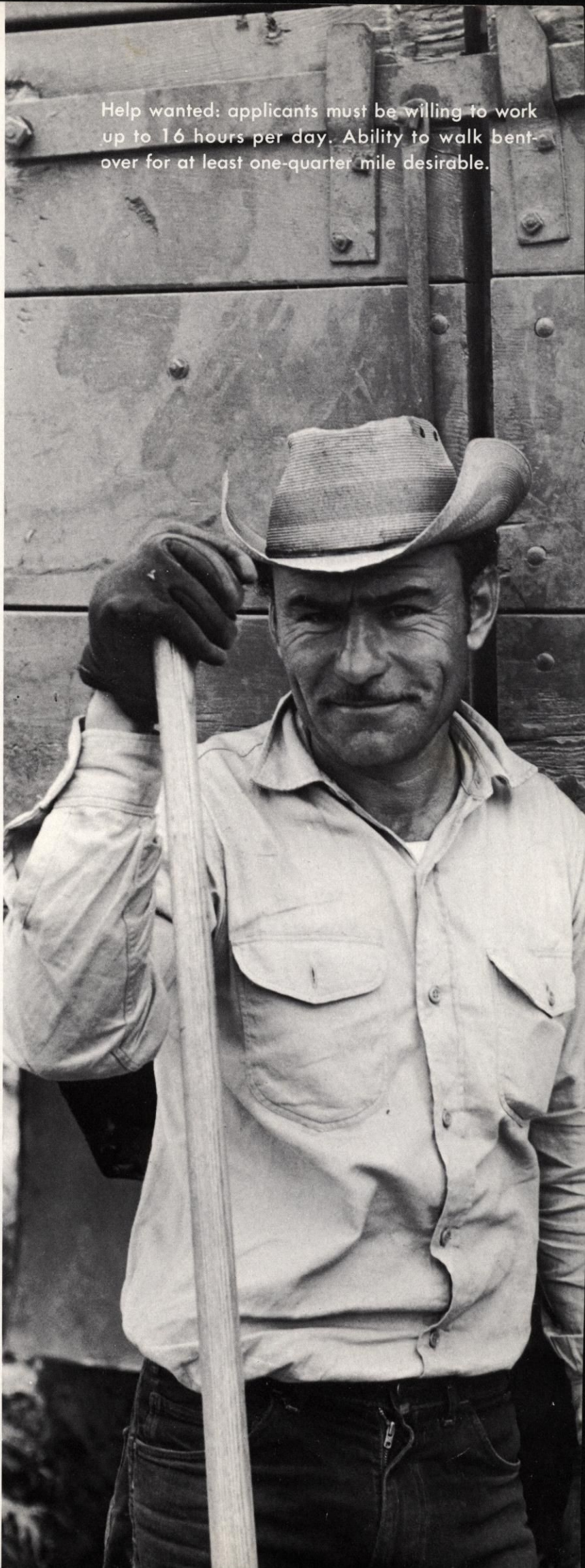
Arguments against the bracero program state that growers could attract more domestic workers by increasing wages. But growers maintain that higher wages don't attract domestic workers willing to perform the exhausting stoop labor required of a bracero to harvest many crops. For example, efforts to find substitute labor among California's unemployed have flopped. The results of one recruitment program that brought 1,200 men from Texas were, in the words of the Central California Association, "deplorable." Some 70% of the men either left their jobs after a short period or were incapable of doing the work.

To offset in part at least the effects of the end of the bracero program, some growers and state officials are considering taking advantage of a provision of the McCarran-Walter Immigration Act. The provision permits foreign labor to enter the U.S. on a temporary basis to work in a certain area, provided the U.S. Labor Department agrees there is a shortage in the area. But labor department officials are reluctant to expand this program while domestic unemployment continues to be a problem.

So as of January, there isn't any crystal-clear solution in sight. Perhaps the food processing industry can develop mechanical harvesters for cabbages, strawberries, asparagus and other crops which, up to now, have been suitable only for hand harvesting. As yet, such devices are still on the drawing boards. And unless many native-born Americans become willing to give up their relatively comfortable inside jobs to work in the fields, a major crisis may soon cast its deepening shadows over acres of ripening crops.

The bracero faces the future with uncertainty. Often barely able to read and write, he finds no work waiting for him in his native Mexico. He and his family spend the off-harvest months living on income obtained during northern crop season.

Help wanted: applicants must be willing to work up to 16 hours per day. Ability to walk bent-over for at least one-quarter mile desirable.



Libby, McNeill & Libby Organization Chart

