

Out of sight, out of mind: an update on migrant farmworker issues in today's agricultural labor market

OUT OF SIGHT, OUT OF MIND

An Update on Migrant Farmworker Issues
in Today's Agricultural Labor Market

By

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Prepared for the

National Governors' Association
Washington, DC

Raleigh, NC

March 1985

PREFACE

Although much has been said and written on the subject of migratory agricultural workers in recent decades, the National Governors' Association's Committee on Human Resources has identified the need for better, more up-to-date information on the conditions affecting these individuals, their human service needs, their employment opportunities, and the responses of various states toward alleviating the myriad of problems they face.

To satisfy these information requirements, the Association has commissioned this brief, containing relevant and current information on migrant farmworkers and the hardships they encounter plus a concluding section on major unresolved issues and proposed solutions. Findings in this document were extracted and synthesized from a wide range of studies and field reports compiled during the past decade by a host of state and federal agencies, private research firms, and various recognized experts in the fields of agricultural economics, farmworker advocacy, program service delivery, and other disciplines. In addition, telephone interviews were conducted to obtain supplementary material from a number of authors, researchers, and informed observers of migratory agricultural workers nationally.

This brief will be shared with participants and used as a working document for background and discussion purposes in a series of three upcoming NGA conferences on migrant farmworker issues to be held during April-May 1985, with one to be conducted in each of the nation's three traditional migrant streams. The first, in the Western stream (Seattle, WA), is scheduled for April 16-17, and will be followed by similar sessions in the mid-Continental stream (Austin, TX) on May 9-10 and the Eastern stream (Raleigh, NC) on May 21-22.

NGA Policy Framework

In reviewing the contents of this document, readers should note that the National Governors' Association has adopted several policy positions on issues of particular significance to migrant farmworkers. These include positions on federalism, education, health services, and employment and training, as summarized below:

- **Federalism:** The Governors remain convinced that certain principles must continue to guide the revitalization of the federal system. Among these, a central tenet is that the federal government has a special role and responsibility to assist the states in meeting the needs of special populations such as refugees, migrants, and Indians.
- **Education:** Under the U.S. Constitution, education is a function reserved to the states; NGA recognizes, however, that in matters of overriding national concern -- those not limited to any single state or group of states -- the federal government does have both an interest and a responsibility. In carrying out that responsibility, the federal government must recognize the primacy of the states, while also allowing for flexibility and the opportunity for cooperative federal/state involvement. One of the limited number of areas belonging in this category of shared

responsibility involves special populations that are "at risk" in standard educational programs. These students include the handicapped, those with limited English proficiency, the educationally disadvantaged, migrants, refugees, institutionalized youth, and residents of Indian reservations.

- Public and Mental Health Services: Effective community-based public health services improve the well-being of our citizens and prevent illnesses that otherwise require expensive medical services. The Association is concerned that the current cost and institutional bias of the major publicly-financed medical care programs has diminished our national capacity to provide community-based public health services. Public health services are especially critical for low income individuals and families who are ineligible for Medicaid or other health care coverage. NGA therefore believes that renewed emphasis on the provision of community-based public health services should be an integral element of cooperative federal/state initiatives to improve the health of the nation's citizens and the efficiency of its delivery systems.
- Employment and Training: In the nation's employment and training system, the federal government must assume responsibility for certain activities -- either by performing these functions itself, or by providing the funds for their performance through delegation of authority to another level of government, as appropriate. Included in this category is the provision of federal government support for programs serving (a) migrants, (b) refugees, and (c) native Americans.

Contents of the Brief

To provide readers with a frame of reference for subsequent sections, Chapter I offers an overview on the nature and extent of major problems affecting migrant farmworkers, and a synopsis of laws and regulations that influence their lives immeasurably. Chapter II provides the best information currently available on migrant farmworker demography, socio-economic standing, and labor force attachment.

Chapter III examines the traditional migration streams in the East, West, and Midwest, but concentrates on the continuing erosion of these familiar patterns and on the factors underlying this change. Chapter IV summarizes the best information currently available with respect to selected program services and support efforts targeted to migrant workers, while Chapter V presents major conclusions and modest recommendations for consideration by conference participants and others.

As with any undertaking of this type, there were many additional points that could have been made -- and numerous other subjects that might have been treated -- had time and space permitted. This brief is merely a point of departure for further discussion and examination of major issues, and is by no means intended as a finished product covering all the relevant points and citing all the pertinent data on a most complex and often misunderstood subject.

A special note of thanks is extended to Fernando Alegria, NGA Research Associate, for his guidance and close support throughout this effort. The author is also indebted to the many individuals who supplied materials and served as sounding-boards during the writing process. Your considerable

contributions are both very much appreciated and duly credited throughout the text. Overall interpretations and other opinions, however, are (for better or worse) the responsibility of the author alone.

Ed Dement
March 1985

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I. Background and Perspective

By far, the most comprehensive review of migrant farmworker problems to be conducted in recent years was that performed in 1977-78 by the Task Panel on Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers, under the aegis of the President's Commission on Mental Health. The panel's membership was balanced to reflect both the geographic and cultural diversity that exists within the domestic farmworker community and to represent the professional disciplines of medicine, psychology, sociology, education and training, and community organization. Its work -- which was completed early in 1978 -- focused on seven areas of vital concern affecting farmworkers and their families, including equity of protection under the law, child welfare and education, manpower and employment practices, environmental issues, health, and mental health.

The product of that effort, a 130-page volume entitled Task Panel Report: Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers, was published in February 1978 but still stands as one of the most complete and authoritative documents ever produced concerning the plight of domestic migratory agricultural workers in the United States.¹ Because the 1978 Task Panel Report is extraordinary both for its coverage of topics still relevant and for its thorough treatment of a most complex but poorly-understood subject, it provides an excellent frame of reference for the issues and subjects discussed in subsequent sections of this brief.

A. Magnitude of Migrant Farmworker Problems

The executive summary of the 1978 Task Panel Report begins with the following statement:

It is the conclusion of Panel members that despite the several billions of dollars that have been spent by the Federal government over the past 15 years, American farmworkers and their families still live and work under conditions which are cruel and harsh by any standard: They are ill-housed, ill-clothed, undernourished, face enormous health hazards, are underpaid, underemployed, undereducated, socially isolated, politically powerless, excluded from much of the worker-protective legislation that other

American workers take for granted, and unable to compete in the labor market for the higher wages that would permit them to resolve their own problems or ameliorate the bleak reality of their existence. Indeed, to speak of the "mental health needs" of the farmworker seems almost a luxury when their physical and economic needs are so acute and so profound.

And yet, we must speak of their mental health needs, not only because this is our charge, but because it is our view that these needs are frequently the result of systemic stresses which put farmworkers at enormous and continuing disadvantage in our society. Locked in such a terrible cycle of poverty and despair, it is a tribute to their strength and fortitude that they survive at all. But they do survive, and while they do not prosper, our economy prospers as a result of their commitment to their work and to the work ethic. We must ask ourselves, as a Nation, whether we are willing to continue to deny to the farmworker the opportunities for self-fulfillment that are the true measures of mental health.²

The panel members found agreement with those who maintained that the historic failure of Federal programming to meet the needs of migrant farmworkers stemmed both from lack of coordination and from fragmentation of programs designed to help them, as well as from widespread failure to enforce existing laws designed to protect these individuals. They also contended, however, that the very lack of a rational system was, in itself, a kind of system.

Certainly, the duplication, overlapping, and lack of coordination in Federal programs results in the failure to address farmworkers' needs in any comprehensive manner; and most assuredly, their lives would be improved by the strict enforcement of existing laws. However, these failures must be viewed within a larger framework as part of an unwitting and often irrational system that isolates farmworkers from the mainstream of American life and which perpetuates their dependency and powerlessness.

A major factor contributing to the difficulty of reaching and serving migrant farmworkers is that they are almost perpetually separated from the rural communities of which they should be a part -- separated by their own mobility as they travel from place to place in search of employment.

They move from one community to another, a part of none -- forever outsiders, isolated from the life of the community, living outside its boundaries in filthy labor camps, always moving as the crops ripen and the next harvest beckons. Nor are they able to establish a community within the migrant stream: Each season, they may travel with different companions, dependent upon the vagaries of weather, crop failures, equipment breakdowns, and other factors over which they have no control.

The task panel also addressed the problems faced by the families of

gratory agricultural workers:

Often their families move with them, the children attending one school after another, or working the fields to help the family earn enough money to survive. Schooling, at best, is a stop-and-start sporadic process -- one from which many drop out, discouraged by what they perceive as their failure, thus decreasing their chances to alter their lives substantially. Their sense of self-worth and self-esteem suffers as a direct result; many come to feel that they are dispensible, and of little value.

It is the panel's view that an agricultural system which permits, even unintentionally encourages, the separation of the farmworker from the life of the community is a system which causes more human misery than can be justified under any circumstance.

Moreover, the panel concluded that unlike other American business and industrial sectors, the burden of providing the human services which migrant farmworkers and their families so desperately need falls not upon agricultural employer, but upon the taxpayer who must assume the costs providing these services.

In no other industry have the economic risks been shifted so directly from management to the public, which must compensate, through the provision of human services, for the abuses which the farmworker endures as a result of the agricultural industry's failure to attend to the needs of its own work force.

Finally, the panel noted that over the years, the plight of migrant workers had been brought forcefully to public attention on several occasions -- each time, producing a public outcry that soon died out because few people ever questioned the system itself, or the need for our society to depend on migrancy as an essential component of its agricultural system. Before presenting its exhaustive list of specific recommendations, furthermore, the panel made the following bold pronouncement:

The panel believes this system must be confronted. We believe that it is within our national capability to reduce our dependence on migrancy through rigorous studies of agricultural labor supply and demand that will enable us to predict with much greater accuracy the need for agricultural labor for specific crops in specific regions at more or less specific times. We believe it is possible to eliminate much of the migration which produces such stresses in the lives of migrant farmworkers and their families, and to begin, as a Nation, to implement programs that have as their goal the integration of the farmworkers into American society.

In addition to the foregoing observations and conclusions, the Task Report carefully examined many aspects of farmwork migrancy in the

United States, covering everything from demographics to migration patterns, and from health hazards to legislative efforts to remedy an array of persistent problems. While time and space limitations preclude a detailed review of the panel's findings in this brief (not to mention the dozens of corroborative findings from other studies and reports of the past decade), the following encapsulated summaries from the 1978 report help to illustrate and explain further the magnitude and seriousness of the problems presently facing migrant farmworkers, their families, and those attempting to serve as their helpers and advocates.

Deterioration of Traditional Migrant Streams

- Farmworkers migrating interstate in pursuit of employment tend to travel in three main "streams" -- the Eastern, Midwestern, and Western streams described further in Ch. III. However, there is not so much patterned or uniform geographic migration as is commonly thought to exist. Seasonal migration is a much more complex, unpatterned, and unpredictable phenomenon than is generally perceived, and field studies portray a continuing deterioration of these traditional streams.³

Weak Data Base

- Statistics on migrancy and migrant characteristics are confusing, contradictory, and often unreliable. The nation's information base is exceedingly weak and is at best controversial. This situation is complicated by the fact that various federal agencies utilize differing methods for counting and different standards for eligibility; moreover, the populations of migrant and seasonal farmworkers often overlap.⁴
- The lack of reliable demographic and socioeconomic data on both migrant and seasonal farmworkers and their families hampers service delivery programs to an extraordinary degree.⁵

Unequal Coverage Under the Law

- Low wages and lack of employment (oversupply of labor) have been characteristic of agricultural employment historically. But the farmworker condition has, in recent years, become worse relative to other segments of the labor force as ownership of land has become concentrated in the hands of fewer and fewer individuals and large corporations. Moreover, federal minimum wage provisions did not cover farmworkers until 1966, and even now many employers are specifically excluded if they use less than 500 person-days of agricultural labor in a calendar quarter, or do not engage in interstate commerce.⁶
- Farmworkers are unique in American society in their categorical exclusion from federal and state statutes which guarantee the ability to earn a decent wage, work under tolerable conditions, and bargain for employee rights and benefits.⁷

- While technically eligible for many general programs providing services to the working poor, farmworkers receive these benefits in numbers greatly disproportionate to their need and real eligibility. Less than 10% of farmworker families received public assistance in 1976, although 46% of all farmworker households earned less than \$3,000 that year.⁸
- The supply of farm labor has been greatly influenced by U.S. immigration policies which, in the past, have created the net effect of producing an oversupply of laborers. This has directly and negatively affected the power of domestic farmworkers to bargain collectively for fair wages and decent working conditions.⁹

Housing and Living Conditions

- The housing conditions confronting farmworkers, especially migrants, are deplorable. Most housing that is available is clearly inadequate, unsanitary, and lacking the basic essentials for a decent environment. The problem is most critical in the migrant stream, where dwelling units are usually provided by the grower and are considered as part of the workers' wages. These usually consist of one small unit per family, and are often without plumbing or electricity.¹⁰
- Migrant children by the thousands not only live in poverty, go hungry, and suffer from malnutrition, but in addition live incredibly uprooted lives such as no other American children -- and few children in other countries -- ever experience. These children become dazed, listless, and numb to anything but immediate survival. Migrants present a special and awful problem, even when compared to other underprivileged groups.¹¹

Working Conditions

- Uncertainty and unpredictability characterize the lives of farmworkers, especially migrants. The irregularity of farmwork is the result of numerous contributing factors such as weather and crop failures, uncertainties regarding the number of workers needed, the character of the market, and rates at which processors are accepting commodities, but few of these factors are understood by workers. There is no point in planning one's life as a result, because plans have no meaning.¹²
- Farmworkers are especially vulnerable to exploitation by irresponsible farm labor contractors and crew leaders, and in no other labor system known in contemporary America does any set of supervisory individuals have such virtually unrestrained control over the lives of others. The illegal and often too-violent means by which crew leaders manage the lives of their crews -- through abuse, physical brutality, and debt peonage -- cannot be dismissed as acts of atypical villains, but are in fact systemic.¹³

Physical and Mental Health

- Migrant farmworkers suffer from communicable and degenerative diseases at rates far exceeding those of the general population. Infant mortality rates are higher, life expectancy is lower, and they suffer from tuberculosis, influenza, pneumonia, and other infectious diseases at significantly higher rates than do other groups in society.¹⁴

- The farmworker population is one of those elements of the "working poor" considered most at risk for mental disorder within the United States. A pervasive problem, however, is that mental health centers established to serve migrants are not being used. Directors of community mental health centers are often unaware of the existence of migrants, and the farmworkers are not aware of their need for services.¹⁵
- The deliberate recruitment of deinstitutionalized mental patients into the migratory stream is a particularly odious practice, especially in the Eastern migrant stream.¹⁶

Education

- Farmworkers are among the most educationally disadvantaged groups in our society. On average, they have no more than a sixth-grade education, and the rate of enrollment in schools is lower for farmworker children than for any other group in the country.¹⁷
- Farmworker children have astonishingly poor educational attainment. The nonfarmworker child has roughly a 96% chance of entering the ninth grade and an 80% chance of entering the twelfth; the farmworker child, by comparison, has only a 40% chance of entering the ninth grade and an 11% chance of entering the twelfth.¹⁸

Adequacy and Effectiveness of Services

- Farmworkers who migrate interstate or intrastate in pursuit of work are frequently and understandably confused regarding their eligibility for service programs, and their own confusion is often matched by the bewilderment of agencies and service delivery agents themselves. The result is the exclusion of substantial numbers of migrants from services, or the shunting of needy individuals and families from one agency to another.¹⁹
- Categorical service programs for farmworkers have arisen without clear policy directions; these programs have been uncoordinated, channeled through diverse agencies that often have not been responsive, are expensive, cumbersome, and lack adequate measured objectives, and are largely unevaluated as to their effectiveness either as separate programs or as components of a national system of comprehensive service delivery. By any outcome criteria, federal categorical programs must be counted as having failed to effect substantial improvements in the lives of farmworkers, whose general condition has not improved in the time these programs have been in existence.²⁰

It would be difficult indeed to imagine any set of negative circumstances involving any segment of the U.S. working force that is more complex, multifaceted, and deeply-rooted than those affecting migrant farmworkers. For a time, it appeared that some of these problems, while not disappearing, at least were affecting a constantly-shrinking pool of individual workers and families, as the size of the agricultural workforce in general -- and the migrant workforce, in particular -- was declining throughout the 1950's and

1960's. It now appears, however, that the number of domestic migrants has stabilized at roughly one-quarter million persons for most of the past decade, as technological advances and worker displacement have been offset by expansion of labor-intensive, hand-harvesting activities elsewhere.

While it is apparent that not all -- and perhaps not even a majority -- of the 217,000 migrant farmworkers counted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's 1983 biennial census are beset by such pernicious problems as those described above, it seems inescapable that at least 100,000 probably are. For them, the difficulties they face may be intractable, and may also help explain why informed observers and study groups such as the Task Panel on Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers have gone so far as to call for the outright elimination of much of the migration that historically has been an essential component of our agricultural system.²¹ Indeed, stabilization and decasualization of the agricultural workforce in America may be the only viable long-term solution to what has thus far proved to be a largely insoluble problem.

B. Laws Affecting Migrant Farmworkers and Their Families

According to noted agricultural economist James S. Holt, social and legislative policy toward agricultural workers and the hired agricultural labor market was for decades a policy of laissez-faire. Agricultural workers were originally excluded from virtually all protective labor legislation of the New Deal and post-New Deal eras, partly because of the political power of agriculture and partly because of the general perception that such protection was unneeded in agriculture and rural employment generally.²²

Since the 1960's, social welfare and labor market policies have begun to take explicit notice of farmworkers with targeted programs of supportive services and labor market intervention efforts. This trend has been evidenced by a gradual but continuing erosion of agricultural exemptions in general labor legislation, by specific legislative and regulatory actions aimed at protecting farmworkers (such as the Farm Labor Contractor Registration Act), by the provision of special support programs (including migrant education, housing, health, and related services), and by specific attempts at agricultural labor market intervention (first through CETA and now through JTPA) to provide employment and training opportunities for migrants wanting to "settle out" of the stream or upgrade their skills in agriculture.

Despite these efforts, the fact remains that U.S. farmworkers -- and migrants, in particular -- still do not receive the full protection of coverage afforded to almost all other members of the domestic labor force. According to Holt, while agricultural worker exemptions in general labor legislation have been reduced since the early 1970's, they have by no means been eliminated. Even such a bedrock of worker protection as Social Security has separate qualifying criteria for farmworkers; and, while coverage under Social Security is rather comprehensive for those who qualify, coverage under federal minimum wage and unemployment insurance statutes is still remarkably limited. At present, compulsory unemployment insurance coverage is afforded only about one-third of hired farmworkers, and minimum wage protection is extended to only about one-half. Furthermore, farmworkers still receive no overtime protection under the law.²³

While general labor law directly regulates the practices of covered employers, most federal special purpose legislation and regulations intended to protect farmworkers have attempted to regulate labor market intermediaries (such as the Employment Service and farm labor contractors) rather than the primary employers themselves. As discussed later, these strategies have sometimes had perverse and unintended effects upon both workers and those being regulated. One example involves the federal/state Employment Service (ES), which in 1974 was ordered both to improve employment services to farmworkers and to step up enforcement of farm labor standards. The unfortunate effect, however, has been that employers have virtually ceased to use the ES as a labor exchange vehicle for farmworkers. Similarly, the crew leader certification requirements of FLCRA seem to have penalized legitimate operators as much or more than hard-core violators, who largely evade the law with relative impunity.²⁴

In its 1978 report, the Task Panel on Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers identified dozens of federal statutes either exempting or offering less than full protection for farmworkers. These included:

- The Fair Labor Standards Act, which was amended in 1974 but still covered only two percent of the nation's 1.4 million farms, and whose child labor provisions continue to offer less protection for children in agriculture than for any other segment of the population.
- The National Labor Relations Act, which protects the rights of employees to organize and bargain collectively, but specifically excludes farmworkers.

- The Federal Unemployment Tax Act, which provides income to workers during periods of unemployment, but excludes most hired farmworkers.
- The Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA), whose standards on housing, pesticide use, occupational safety, and health are largely inadequate, ignored, or unenforced as they pertain to hired farmworkers.
- The Farm Labor Contractor Registration Act, which allegedly had failed to register the vast majority of farm labor contractors operating nationally.
- The Federal Environmental Pesticide Act of 1972, which supposedly protects farmworkers from pesticides and toxic substances, but which provided no accessible mechanism for workers to file complaints.

These and other findings led the Task Panel to conclude that "the most urgent first step in the implementation of a national policy as it affects farmworkers must be their full coverage under the law." To quote further:

Without the same legal coverage and protections available to industrial and other workers, farmworkers cannot begin to hope that their living and working conditions will change, nor that their lives will improve. The failure of federal and state agencies to strictly enforce existing law, and the lack of adequate legal representation for farmworkers, compounds this lack of protection.²⁵

Aside from the obvious inequities of protection under federal statutes, the Panel also addressed the issue of farmworker under-participation in federal noncategorical assistance programs such as child welfare, AFDC, food stamps, and health protection. "Overall," the panel concluded, "farmworkers do not receive services generally available to the working poor commensurate with their need and eligibility."

The fact that these observations still have currency today is underscored by statistics compiled by the National Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs and covering the 69,649 migrants and seasonal workers enrolled in CETA Title III programs nationally in Fiscal 1983. Of those, 99.7 percent were economically disadvantaged, 97.3 percent were at or below the federal poverty level, and 82.1 percent were unemployed at their time of enrollment. Yet, only 5.6 percent were receiving AFDC assistance, and just 3.4 percent were receiving Unemployment Insurance (UI) payments. (It should be noted, however, that in many states, particularly in the South, two-parent families are ineligible for AFDC.) Furthermore, the Association has documented that of all CETA Title III farmworker program participants from 1979-84, less than two percent were receiving UI compensation at the time of enrollment.²⁶

As bleak as the situation may appear, there is evidence of gradual progress toward removing the legal exclusions that historically have discrimi-

nated against domestic farmworkers. Moreover, there have been particularly encouraging signs of increased sensitivity and responsiveness to farmworkers on the part of a significant number of states in recent years. Several have extended minimum wage coverage to farmworkers, while others (California, Minnesota, and Rhode Island, as well as Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and the District of Columbia) have all adopted stricter UI standards than federal law requires for farmworkers. Presently, Texas is said to be on the verge of broadening its UI coverage for farmworkers as well.

All 50 states have worker compensation laws, but as of 1976, only 21 states provided coverage to agricultural workers injured on the job, and of these only four treated farmworkers in the same manner as other workers. By 1981, the list of states providing coverage to farmworkers had grown to 26 (with 13 of them providing full coverage), and Texas joined the growing list of covered states in 1984.²⁷

While much remains to be done before the equity issue with respect to farmworker coverage under the law is fully resolved, it is especially heartening to see that states, governors, and legislatures are increasingly taking the lead in addressing this problem.

II. Migrant Farmworker Demographics

In reviewing the past ten years' literature on migrant farmworkers, two facts are evident: First, that there is substantial disagreement among the experts as to how many migrants are employed either part-time or full-time in American agriculture in any given year, and second, that the existing mechanisms for counting migrant agricultural workers are largely inadequate to the task -- often producing misleading data that seem to be sorely lacking in specificity on characteristics and socio-economic conditions.

This is by no means a new phenomenon. In The Slaves We Rent, Moore noted in 1965 that the U.S. government does a better job of counting migratory birds than counting the millions of farmworkers who harvest and produce our crops.²⁸ Further, a 1977 report by Rural America, Inc. (subtitled, The Statistical Annihilation of Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers by Federal Agencies) documents that there has been a systematic undercount of migrant farmworkers over time, and attempts to account for the wide discrepancies evident in the official estimates of farmworker populations from the five major and three minor federal statistical systems that purport to count their numbers.²⁹

Unfortunately, the limited data available today appear to be no more complete or reliable than those of ten and twenty years ago. That caveat notwithstanding, this section of the brief summarizes what is currently said to be the best available information on migrant numbers, ethnicity, socio-economic standing, and other relevant characteristics.

A. Numbers and Ethnicity

Currently, the U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates there are approximately 2.5 million hired farmworkers employed in American agriculture, of whom roughly 217,000 (or 8.7 percent) are classified as migrants -- persons who left home overnight to do farmwork in another county or state with the intention of eventually returning home.³⁰

If these numbers are accurate, then migrants clearly do not comprise

a large proportion of either the total U.S. workforce (less than one percent) or even the hired agricultural workforce (less than nine percent). Moreover, it appears that the total number of migrants (at least as counted by USDA) nationally has stabilized since the late 1970's at a level of slightly under a quarter-million workers, following 25 years of steady decline between 1949 and the mid 1970's.³¹

It is insightful to view migrant employment trends in the larger context of all U.S. agricultural employment. In 1950, for example, hired domestic agricultural workers numbered 4.3 million nationally, but this total was only 2.7 million by 1979, actually stabilizing at around 2.6 to 2.7 million throughout most of the 1970's.³² The trend for migrants during the same period was quite similar: Their numbers dropped from 422,000 in 1949 to 217,000 in 1979 (a decline of almost 50 percent), but stabilized in the 1970's after having fluctuated throughout the 1950's and 1960's. Thus, by official counts, migrants have in recent years constituted a fairly constant 8-9 percent of the hired agricultural workforce, although this is down appreciably from the 10-14 percent levels generally prevailing during the 1960's.

As for ethnicity, the official numbers do not support the popular image of most hired farmworkers as being poor, minority-group migrants. As documented in an article entitled "Unscrambling the Hired Farmworker Stereotype," USDA reported in 1979 that the typical U.S. farmworker is more likely to be white, a nonmigrant, and part of a family with annual income of \$10,000 or more.³³ In 1981, Whitener and Coltrane also concluded that racial and ethnic minorities do not constitute the major portion of the nation's hired workforce.³⁴ Of the 2.7 million hired workers counted in 1979, about 75 percent were white, 12 percent were Hispanic, and 13 percent were Blacks and persons of other origin. Regional variation in ethnicity was reported, however: Over half (53 percent) of all hired farmworkers in California, Arizona, and Nevada were Hispanics, while 34 percent in the South were Blacks. Elsewhere, hired farmworkers tended to be predominantly white.

According to Whitener and Coltrane, ethnic composition of the 1979 migrant workforce was somewhat different from that of farmworkers in general: Migrants, while not predominated by minorities, were indeed more likely to be members of minority groups than nonmigrants. In 1979, USDA found that about 62 percent of all migrants were white, 27 percent were Hispanics, and 11 percent were Blacks and others. Nonmigrants, by comparison, were 75 percent white,

11 percent Hispanic, and 14 percent Blacks and others.³⁵ These findings were further corroborated and supported in Whitener's 1982 report, entitled Migrant Farmworkers and Their Attachment to the Labor Force, which states that minorities account for only about 38 percent of the total migrant workforce, and that most of these are Hispanics.³⁶

The difficulties with statistical accuracy referred to previously are well illustrated by the following examples, all found during the course of reviewing current farmworker literature for purposes of this brief:

- For the past two years, various agricultural researchers and writers have mentioned repeatedly that the number of domestic migrants took a precipitous dip between 1979 and 1981, falling from 217,000 to 115,000 (a decline of 47 percent) in only a two-year period. That erroneous latter figure apparently originated from USDA's 1981 Hired Farm Working Force Household Survey (done biennially by the Commerce Department's Census Bureau).³⁷ That survey -- which sampled 58,000 households nationally, including 1,555 containing persons who did farmwork in 1981 -- produced findings that are still being cited today in documents still in the draft stage but forwarded to the author for purposes of this review. USDA officials now concede, however, that the 1981 estimate was in substantial error, and that their subsequent 1983 survey (which as yet remains unpublished) turned up an estimated 217,000 migrants nationally -- precisely the same level as in 1979.³⁸
- A recent and comprehensive farmworker survey in California found that of the 600,000 persons who earned agricultural wages in that state in 1983, only 150,000 were involved in year-round jobs while the remaining 450,000 were migrant and seasonal workers in various field crops and fruits and vegetables. Of these, fully 40 percent (or 180,000) were migratory workers -- half of them U.S. citizens who follow the crops, and the others largely comprised of legal immigrants and "cross-border migrants" with residences in Mexico.³⁹
- In Florida, the nation's second largest employer of hired farmworkers, the State Migrant Labor Office estimates that the state has or attracts between 100,000 and 300,000 migrant farmworkers annually.⁴⁰
- In Texas, a 1976 survey by the Governor's Office of Migrant Affairs found almost 376,000 migrants and dependents in that state alone.⁴¹ A more recent report states that while the number of migrant families in Texas has decreased with the elimination of seasonal jobs in the Midwest and Great lakes regions in recent years, as many as 50,000 to 300,000 workers still make the annual trek north.⁴²

Perhaps the only conclusion to be safely reached at this point is that there are considerable differences between the official federal counts and those developed independently by some states, and that the likelihood of federal undercounting of the nation's migrant farmworker population appears to be considerable indeed. However, at least part of the difference in the

various counts may be attributable to "double-counting" by the states during intrastate migration.

B. Socio-Economic Characteristics and Labor Force Attachment

Migrant farmworkers are not a homogeneous group and so cannot be easily characterized. Consequently, the stereotype of low-income, middle-aged, and Hispanic or Black applies to only a small percentage of migrants. The total number of migrants, furthermore, is small and most of them undertake migrant farmwork for only part of the year.⁴³

A revealing commentary on the current data-generating efficiency of our government is the fact that as of this writing, the latest available details on U.S. migrant and nonmigrant farmworker demographics are from the year 1981. Moreover, this information derives from the same 1981 USDA survey which underestimated the number of migrant workers nationally by at least 50 percent. Although the USDA survey material has been presented previously by many other writers, and despite the inevitable questions that must now be raised concerning its overall validity, it is nevertheless the most recent national information available.

The 1981 survey found that migrant farmworkers, like their non-migrating counterparts, were mostly white males, under age 25, who spent most of the year outside the labor force as students. Better than half the migrants worked fewer than 75 days at farmwork during the year, and only 37 percent performed hired farmwork as their primary occupation for the year. According to USDA, fully 50 percent were not even considered to be in the labor force; that is, they either attended school the remainder of the year, were housewives, or were retired or disabled persons. (In 1979, less than one-third fit that category.) Moreover, only 38 percent of all migrants were heads of households, according to the 1981 data.⁴⁴

To put the demographics of migrancy into context, it is useful to review the characteristics of all hired farmworkers as well: For example, hired farmworkers generally have lower educational levels than most other occupational groups. In 1979, hired U.S. farmworkers (age 25 and older) had a median educational level of just 10.4 years, compared with 12.5 years for the total U.S. workforce in the same age range.⁴⁵ Educational attainment for minority farmworkers was even lower: Hispanics had a median educational level of only 5.4 years, while Blacks and others had only a slightly higher

level of schooling (7.7 years). Whites, by comparison, had completed a median 12.3 years of school.

Using data from the 1981 USDA survey, Pollack and Jackson found that all hired farmworkers had a median educational level of 11 years -- a level clearly inflated by the large numbers of students who perform farmwork during school breaks. Hispanic workers surveyed in 1981 had the lowest educational levels (7.1 years), while Blacks and others had a median of 9.6 years. Whites averaged 11.7 years, but only 14 percent of all Hispanics (and 25 percent of Blacks and others) had completed 12 or more years of education.⁴⁶ Nationally, about 40 percent of all migrants surveyed in 1981 had completed high school; of these, roughly 40 percent also had some college education. Other migrant workers had relatively low levels of education, however: One-third (34 percent) had less than a ninth-grade education, and seven (7) percent were considered functionally illiterate (having less than five years of school.)

Annual earnings for all farmworkers in 1981 averaged just \$4,299 -- the lowest of all occupations in the U.S., and only a third of the national non-farm average of \$13,270. Hispanic farmworkers averaged \$5,340, whites \$4,288, and Blacks and others \$3,358. Overall, farmwork accounted for 80 percent of all earnings of Hispanics and Blacks, but only 50 percent of earnings for whites. Farmwork earnings of Hispanics averaged \$4,319 -- almost twice the amount for farmworking Blacks (\$2,628) or whites (\$2,359). Males earned almost double the amount paid to females for all farmwork (\$4,829 vs. \$2,526), and heads of households earned nearly three times more than other working household members (\$6,876 vs. \$2,434). Nationally, migrants earned an average of just \$3,995 from both farm and nonfarm employment in 1981 (down considerably from the 1979 average of \$4,852), with about 68 percent of those earnings derived from farmwork.

Farmworkers generally exhibited relatively weak attachment to the agricultural labor force in 1981, averaging just 98 days in farmwork. Casual workers (employed less than 25 days per year) and seasonal employees (25 to 74 days worked) made up 61 percent of the farming workforce, while another 12 percent worked between 75 and 149 days. Altogether, 73 percent of the 1981 agricultural workforce spent less than 150 days in farmwork that year, while 11 percent were considered to be regularly employed (150 to 249 days) and 16 percent worked year-round (250 days or more). Although casual and seasonal workers represented 73 percent of all hired farmworkers in 1981, they accounted for just 27 percent of total worker-days reported. Regular and year-round workers made up only one-fourth of the agricultural workforce, but ac-

counted for almost 75 percent of all worker-days employed. Overall, however, USDA found migrants to be quite similar to other non-migrating farmworkers -- mostly young males who spent only a small portion of their time at farmwork, probably to supplement other sources of income.⁴⁷

Analyzing the trends over the decade of the 1970's, USDA concluded that there were more whites in farmwork in 1979-81, while the numbers of Blacks and others had decreased by 38 percent. (No data were available on Hispanics for that period of time.) Ages also changed, with USDA reporting more 18-to 34-year-olds employed while the numbers of both younger youth (ages 14-17) and older workers (over age 45) declined. Overall, hired farmworkers were being employed more days per year by 1979-81 than they had been ten years earlier. Finally, while the largest numbers of farmworkers were in agriculture less than 25 days per year, their numbers had decreased by 17 percent over the decade. By comparison, the number of regularly-employed workers (150-249 days) was up by two-thirds during the ten-year period, while year-round workers had increased by one-third.

To the extent that USDA's 1981 data are reliable, they indicate stronger attachments to farmwork as a primary source of earnings for a higher percentage of farmworkers, a lessening of agriculture's dependence on short-term, casual labor, and an expansion in total number of worker-days from 198 million in 1969-71 to 257 million in 1979-81 (an increase of over 28 percent). This is due in part to increased farm size and concomitant requirements for larger pools of hired labor to supplement family workers, but is also doubtlessly a function of the explosive growth in demand for fresh, hand-harvested fruits and vegetables in recent years.⁴⁸

C. Interpreting the Meaning Behind the Numbers

The "official" evidence available from federal sources in recent years suggests strongly that the characteristics of migrant workers in U.S. agriculture do anything but fit the stereotype of a homogenous group of hundreds of thousands of low-income, mostly-minority, middle-aged workers in need of government protection and exhaustive support services. Indeed, USDA's more recent publications point out that not all migrants live in California, Texas, or Florida and follow the annual streams. Instead, as many as one-third reside in the Northeast and North Central States, and most travel less than 500

miles while employed in agriculture; only 15 percent travel 1,000 miles or more in pursuit of farmwork. As a group, migrants receive about two-thirds of all annual income from farmwork. And they are as likely to be working in "field crops" (tobacco, cotton, and grains) as in fruits and vegetables on their longest jobs.

It is essential for those who advocate help and assistance to alleviate the plight of truly educationally and economically disadvantaged migrants to know precisely who it is they are concerned about, and where those individuals are. In that respect, Whitener's 1982 report entitled Migrant Farmworkers and Their Attachment to the Labor Force is perhaps the most helpful document developed thus far. It contends that there is now a distinct typology of farmworkers that includes (1) those persons doing hired farmwork as their primary source of employment, (2) those engaged in nonfarm employment as their primary activity, and (3) those not in the labor force most of the year, as described below:⁴⁹

- The primarily farmwork group -- which includes roughly 37 percent of the migrants counted by USDA -- is most strongly attached to farmwork, and consists of persons who are highly dependent on agriculture for the major part of their earnings. Many have no other source of income. They work longer hours at farmwork and have higher farm-derived incomes, but show lower earnings overall because agriculture is still such a low-paying industry. They tend to be older, heads of households, and responsible for families. Most frequently, they are minorities (as many as two-thirds), and these are predominantly Hispanics living in the West. Most hold non-migrant farm jobs in addition to their migratory farmwork, but when they do migrate they are more likely to travel longer distances.
- The primarily nonfarm group -- which includes about 10 percent of all migrants -- has relatively little attachment to farmwork and receives only a small proportion of their total earnings from farmwork. Their overall earnings tend to be higher than the first group because they rely less heavily on low-wage farmwork as a source of income. They use farmwork mainly as an income supplement and, while nearly all their farmwork is migratory, they generally travel less distance than others. They are younger, more likely to be white, and live outside the West. Moreover, they generally bear little resemblance to the popular migrant image.
- The not in labor force group -- which accounts for a full 50 percent of all migrants counted by USDA -- does only a few days' work in agriculture annually, is mostly young, white, and composed of students and homemakers who live outside the West. Few in this group are heads of households, and most are simply earning extra spending money. Half of them are 14-17 years of age, and many travel long distances with their family units, contributing to family support. Clearly, some members of this group closely match the stereotypical migrant image, while many others clearly do not.

Thus, overall, migrants are only 37 percent primarily farmworkers, 10 percent primarily non-farm workers, and 50 percent short-term farmworkers not otherwise considered to be in the labor force. (The remaining three percent were unemployed the rest of the year.) Whitener concludes that the existence of these three groupings of migrants -- each with distinctively different characteristics -- suggests that limited data, speculation, and over-generalization have lead to the creation of a misleading image of migrant farmworkers and the types of work they do.⁵⁰

To the extent that policies are devised to alleviate the shameful plight of exploited, abused, underpaid, and generally deprived migrants, they should focus on those who are indeed less educated, more severely disadvantaged, and highly dependent on migratory farmwork. This would, by definition, direct attention to the primarily farmwork group, and to the younger members of the not in labor force group who are their dependents and family members and who travel with them.

Although the general characteristics of these "hard core" migrants have appeared to remain remarkably static over time, a major and continuing problem is that the national information base on migratory farmworkers is exceedingly weak; controversial, and often outdated by as much as three to four years even under the best of circumstances. Further, many agricultural economists and other informed observers contacted during the development of this brief have indicated that because of inherent sampling biases, the official federal surveys are capable of counting white, middle-class, farmworking students with great precision, while vastly underestimating the presence and proportions of mostly minority, "hard core" migratory farmworkers. While it is not the purpose of this brief to prove or disprove any of these divergent views, it is nevertheless apparent that the corpus of recent and current literature available for this review -- much of which is cited in subsequent sections -- tends to support the perceptions of those who dispute the statistical validity of USDA's projections.

III. Migration Patterns, Variations, and Trends

They are black, white, and brown Americans; recently arrived Haitian boat people who are new to exploitation, American-style; Mexicans who came here illegally at great cost and risk to vanish into the underground of the Eastern migrant stream, which stretches up the Atlantic seaboard from Florida to the Canadian border.

Another stream courses up the Midwest from Texas; a third arches from Texas to Arizona, California, and the Pacific Northwest . . . The streams keep moving, south to north and back again through each season. As autumn approaches, the Eastern stream flows out of Delmarva into New York for potatoes and apples. And more workers flood onto the fruited inland hillsides of Virginia, Maryland, and West Virginia to pick the apples that will be the jam on tomorrow's toast, and the filling of the pie.⁵¹

The Washington Post (August 1981)

A. Background on Traditional Migratory Streams

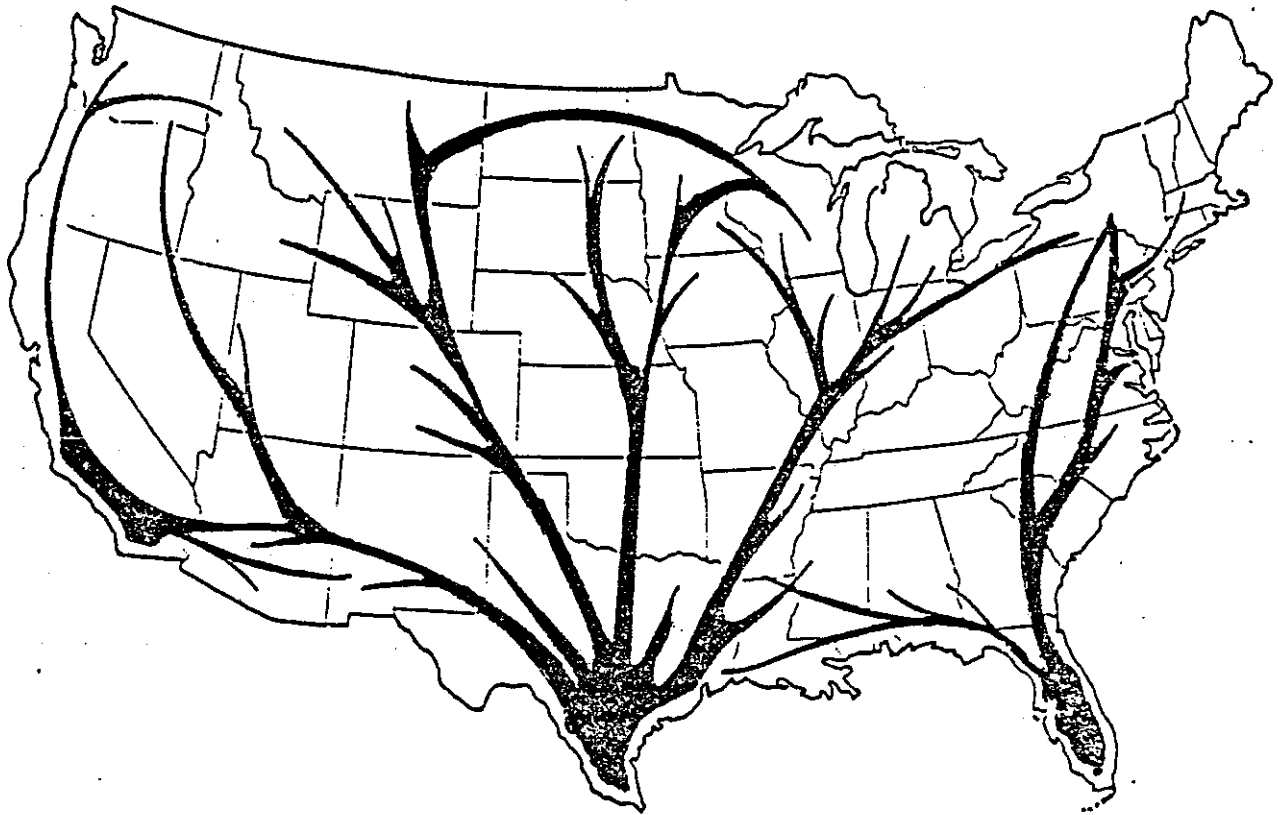
Until the mid-1970's, domestic farmworkers who migrated interstate in pursuit of employment tended to travel in three main "streams" -- the Eastern, Midwestern, and Western paths shown in Figure I. Of these, the Midwestern stream has traditionally been the largest and geographically most expansive.

Starting from their home bases in Texas, migrant workers following the Midwestern stream begin to move north in early spring to work in nurseries, followed by those who leave to tend and harvest fruits and vegetables and other perishable crops. These workers move to the North Central, Mountain, and Pacific Northwest states, followed by yet another movement of workers which originates in the Rio Grande Valley, migrates north through Texas, and then west to New Mexico, Arizona, and California. The third branch of the Midwest stream begins in Texas, migrates north, and terminates in Montana, North Dakota, New York, and Michigan. The Midwest stream is characterized by large concentrations of Mexican-Americans, and its farm laborers have tended historically to travel in family groups.⁵²

A second major migrant flow is the Eastern stream, which originates in Florida. It contains large numbers of Blacks who are joined by other migrants from Puerto Rico and Texas, as well as by seasonal farmworkers coming from

Figure I

**SCHEMA OF NATIONAL FARMWORKER
MIGRATION PATTERNS**



Source: National Migrant Information Clearing House, Juarez-Lincoln Center,
Austin, TX, August, 1974.

adjacent areas to help with the harvest. In recent years, they have also been joined by substantial but largely-uncounted numbers of immigrants from Jamaica, Haiti, and other Caribbean sources, and by increasing numbers of Cuban refugees.⁵³ The annual Eastern stream migration typically begins in early spring after the peak of the citrus harvest in Florida, as workers move as far northward as New England to harvest fruits and vegetables in the Atlantic Coast states. In November, the stream recedes and is relocated in Florida by December. Traditionally, workers in this stream have tended to be single males rather than workers traveling in family groups.

The third stream is the Western movement, which is concentrated in Southern California and the Pacific Coast states. Migrants in this stream tend to be predominantly Hispanic, but actually represent an amalgam of diverse population subsets, each with their own distinct characteristics. These include large numbers of single males who immigrate both legally and illegally from Mexico and Central America, Mexican-born workers with families living in the U.S. (i.e., "green-card" workers), and a third subset comprised of migrating U.S.-born Texas-Mexicans, California-born single and family workers, and a variety of other minorities from the Pacific Islands and Southeast Asia.⁵⁴ This stream harvests a wide variety of fruits and vegetables, and includes substantial numbers of legal "cross-border" migrants who maintain residences in Mexico but work legally in the U.S., as well as a large number of alien workers who enter the U.S. illegally to seek hourly wages that may exceed a full day's pay in Mexico.

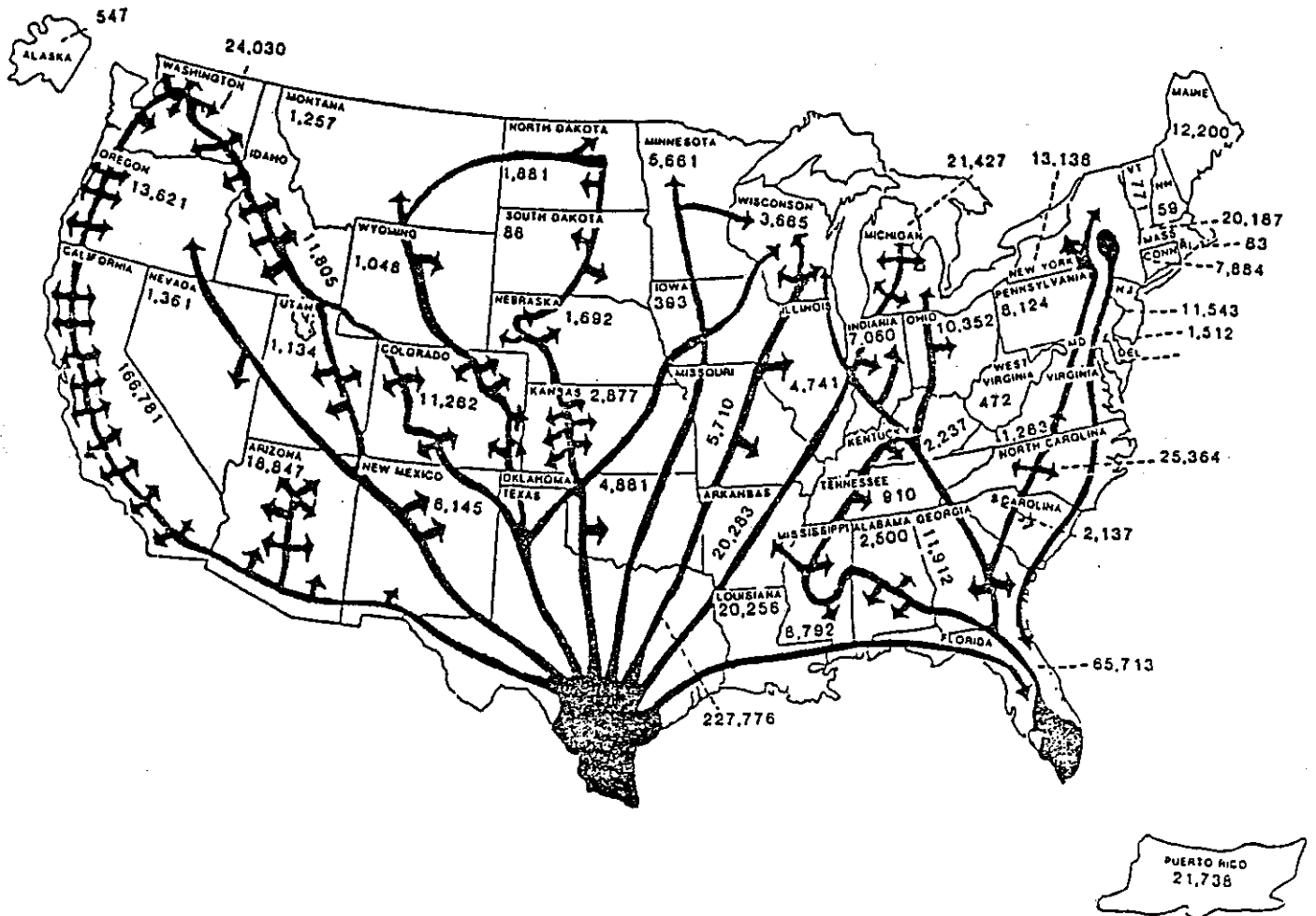
B. Migratory Variations and Factors Responsible

While it is helpful to use the conventional concept of three distinct streams of migration for purposes of general reference, there is no longer so much patterned or uniform geographic migration as was once thought to exist. Various studies and observations of the past decade indicate that migration is now a much more complex, unpatterned, and unpredictable phenomenon than is generally perceived. (See Figure II.)

As one indication of the erosion of traditional streams, the 1978 Task Panel report noted that migrants from Florida could be found in Washington State each April; moreover, Puerto Rican and Florida workers were found regularly in California, while California migrants were found in New Jersey and workers from Minnesota were found in Oregon.⁵⁵ In analyzing USDA's 1979 sur-

Figure II

NATIONAL MIGRATORY PATTERNS 1981



Source: Program for Migrant Children's Education: A National Profile.
National Association of State Directors of Migrant Education,
December 1984.

vey, Whitener found that as many as one-third of all domestic migrants live in the Northeast and North Central states, and that most migrants travel an average of less than 500 miles in pursuit of farmwork.⁵⁶ Finally, analyses of enrolled migrant schoolchildren have shown that many families not only do not move along historic "tracks," but also do not move in large groups.⁵⁷

Among the factors that contribute to broken or unusual migration patterns are natural disasters such as droughts and freezes, production cutbacks due to low prices, changing technology, and the availability of an overabundance of labor in some commodity markets. Clearly, the fragmentation of traditional migratory patterns intensifies in periods of oversupply and in periods of uncertain harvests. A more subtle (but perhaps even more fundamental) underlying cause for change, however, stems from the dynamics of the market forces at work in the labor-intensive, hand-harvested fruit and vegetable segment of U.S. agriculture. These and other factors influencing the nation's traditional agricultural migration patterns are discussed more fully below.

Advances in Technology

Unquestionably, technological change has exerted major and continuing influence upon agricultural production, harvesting, and marketing practices throughout the past three decades. In addition to the more obvious effects of advances in mechanical technology, however, there have also been profound changes occurring as a result of genetic engineering which has, in turn, contributed to considerable geographic redistribution of certain crops and labor demand centers.

Agricultural mechanization of the 1950's and 1960's displaced vast numbers of harvest workers nationally, especially in such commodity markets as fruits and vegetables, cotton, and tobacco. Aside from the numbers of farm jobs lost permanently, migratory patterns were interrupted and seasonal work sequences for individuals were broken -- especially on the Eastern Seaboard and in the Midwest.⁵⁸ In the North Central and Great lakes states, for example, frozen vegetable crops which were formerly hand-harvested became almost entirely mechanized and now require relatively little migrant labor.⁵⁹

The effects of mechanization were further exacerbated by changes in the geographic locus of many hand-harvested commodities. New technologies, both genetic and mechanical, either required or were favored by growing conditions

different from those prevailing in the past; moreover, they freed producers from the necessity of being accessible to large numbers of seasonal workers. The near-total concentration of processed tomato production in California is a vivid example of what occurred in just one commodity market.⁶⁰

With new growing methods, increased consumer demand, and more favorable growing conditions in the South and Southwest, production centers for hand-harvested fruits and vegetables have shifted dramatically since the 1950's. For example, the planted acreage for such hand-harvested commodities as grapes and strawberries has tripled in recent years, and per-acre yields have also doubled and tripled as a result of improved technology and longer growing seasons in such states as California, Arizona, Texas, and Florida. And, because these crops generate such intensive demand for hand labor, the effects on migration patterns are obvious: The demand for migrant labor in the Northeast and Midwest has dropped substantially, while increasing sharply in the South and West.⁶¹

The first immediate effect of mechanization during the 1950's and 1960's was to reduce total demand for hired farmworkers and migrants dramatically. That effect has now largely subsided, and as noted earlier, the numbers of both hired farmworkers and migrants nationally have stabilized for most of the past decade. Technology continues to alter hiring patterns and to eliminate jobs in harvesting, packing, and related activities, but labor-using expansion has clearly balanced labor-saving advances -- especially in the labor-intensive fruits and vegetables sector. Thus, while the numbers of migrants needed may be holding steady, the locus of their activity has changed considerably.

Disasters and Disruptions of the Growing Cycle

When natural disasters such as freezes, droughts, and major storms disrupt growing seasons and destroy crops, substantial federal aid is targeted to the farmer and agricultural industry. However, migrant farmworkers who perform daily work and are directly displaced by such disasters are largely overlooked. While growers can qualify for relief through the Small Business Administration, Farmers' Home Administration, and other sources, the majority of this assistance is directed to farmers rather than to laborers. The only program available to help workers is Federal Disaster Unemployment Assistance -- a program with good intentions, but also one which is generally beset with

delays in getting cash into the hands of those affected.⁶² This program is administered by State Employment Security Agencies in those localities for which the governor has requested (and the President has approved) Major Disaster designation.

Following the Texas freeze of December 1983, for example, it was February 1984 before the first applications for assistance were processed and checks mailed to 4,000 of 12,000 applicants. Over half the workers displaced received no payments until over two months after losing their jobs; even then, benefits averaged only \$45 per week for a maximum of 13 weeks -- this despite the fact that work was lost or diminished for many months afterwards.

Crop failures and weather-related disasters generally occur without warning, but can have economic impacts that are every bit as devastating to affected migrant farmworkers as plant closings and mass layoffs are to industrial workers elsewhere. When hailstorms destroyed most cotton and vegetable crops on the Texas High Plains in June 1982, they also caused the loss of an estimated 8,482 seasonal farm jobs affecting an estimated 2,827 families. Most of those workers -- like their counterparts in Florida during last year's citrus freeze -- had little alternative but to migrate elsewhere in search of other employment. Migrant farmworkers, however, get no pay while they are looking for work, and no compensation for forced travel.⁶³

In a typical disaster situation that occurs "upstream," migrants can find themselves suddenly out of work, without any form of income, and in completely unfamiliar surroundings where emergency relief may be almost unobtainable. And even temporary problems such as prolonged rainfall can make work unavailable or can affect production sufficiently to cause loss of jobs and trigger major alterations of normal migration patterns.

Market Forces

Another factor influencing domestic migrancy is the unprecedented demand of affluent, health-conscious consumers for fresh fruits, vegetables, and ornamental plants -- demand that few agricultural economists or farmworker advocates could have predicted fifteen years ago. Production to satisfy this demand is being concentrated on fewer and larger fruit, vegetable, and horticulture (FVH) farms, and these producers generally rely on word-of-mouth hiring and labor contractors to supply workers for critical harvesting tasks.

FVH farms differ in structure, reliance on hired labor, and production

methods from the field-crop and livestock segments of agriculture. It is within the FVH segment that U.S. farm labor problems are most confined. FVH operations are often referred to as "factory farms" because of their assembly-line characteristics which, in turn, create a fragmented job market that offers a relative few high-paying jobs to the youngest and most physically fit, a broad middle range offering wages to legal and illegal harvest workers, and a minimum wage that relies mainly on women, children, and older men. In many respects, FVH production epitomizes what USDA's Agricultural Employment Work Group has described as "a casual labor market characterized by absence of commitment and stability for both workers and growers."⁶⁴

FVH operations are scattered nationwide, but two states -- California and Texas -- accounted for 55 percent of national sales in 1982. Unlike most other farming operations, FVH farms are capital-intensive ventures dependent on hired seasonal workers to do much of the farmwork and almost all harvesting. These unique seasonal demands necessitate the hiring of anywhere from several dozens to several thousands of "strangers" for between two weeks and two months of intensive harvesting activity. Some California operations require 8-10,000 workers and offer hourly wages of \$0.00 to \$12.00 for top producers.

The demand of FVH farms for hand-harvest labor has many significant implications: First, it requires, almost by definition, a highly mobile workforce; i.e., migratory workers willing to follow the crops. This means that domestic migrants are being drawn increasingly to where the jobs are concentrated in the South and West, and away from the Midwest and North Central States. Moreover, it appears that the existence of well-paying harvest jobs in these states is proving to be a powerful inducement to attract both legal and illegal immigrants from across the Mexican border.

The fragmentation of FVH jobs also means that job demand is strongest for young males able to cope with constant stooping, climbing, and lifting. Most FVH harvest workers enter these jobs at 20 to 30 years of age, but their bodies cannot withstand the punishment of harvest work for more than five to fifteen years. Consequently, many FVH workers earn the highest wages of their working careers when they are very young, and must seek other employment as their physical strength wanes. This often necessitates mid-life career changes for those able to find other employment, or a future of ever-

declining farmwork income for those who cannot. Making a successful transition to another career is complicated, however, by the fact that the seasonal farm labor market is becoming increasingly isolated from nonfarm labor markets.⁶⁵

Effects of Immigration

Throughout the literature, two points surface repeatedly -- namely, that temporary foreign workers and an oversupply of legal and illegal immigrants have had a pronounced effect upon job availability for U.S.-born farmworkers, and that this subject area is one in which existing data are so speculative and imprecise that no one seems to be able to pinpoint the true extent of the problem. However, most observers agree there are substantial and increasing numbers of persons, mostly of Hispanic origin, who are employed in agriculture and who entered this country illegally. In fact, the Immigration and Naturalization Service reports the apprehension of about 100,000 illegal aliens in agriculture annually -- more than in any other industry.⁶⁶

Two further points seem clear: First, the problems relative to immigration are confined largely to the labor-intensive FVH segment of American agriculture. Second, the FVH harvest workforce increasingly includes fewer Americans and more immigrants, and some estimates have suggested that there may now be as many as 800,000 immigrant farmworkers in the U.S. -- half of them working in this country illegally.⁶⁷ For example, a soon-to-be-published 1983 survey of California farmworkers found that fully 80 percent were immigrants. Many California growers simply are not recruiting U.S. citizens to do their farmwork, and Mexican immigrants now perform an estimated 80 percent of all harvesting and 70 percent of all hoeing and thinning. U.S. citizens, by comparison, are concentrated in the areas of machine operation (30 percent) and sorting and packing (30 percent). Significantly, most of the California immigrants were not illegal workers, but rather documented "green card" immigrants and legal "cross-border" migrants with residences in Mexico and Central America.⁶⁸ Even so, the implications for U.S. domestic migrants are obvious: They must compete with a practically unending supply of immigrant labor for jobs in a decidedly casual labor market.

Although the effects of unrestrained immigration policy are perhaps most pronounced in California, Mexican immigrants are also becoming an increasingly important part of agricultural workforces in Texas and Florida -- the other two leading states in terms of FVH production. And there are indi-

cations from North Carolina, Washington, and New York that the Hispanic component of the farmworker population is increasing steadily. In Florida, the major change in farm labor composition is the growing importance of Caribbean refugees and Mexicans, but there are no reliable data on numbers or characteristics; similarly, there is no documentation of what is generally perceived as a sizable population of illegal Mexican workers in Florida's FVH workforce. One fact that is clear, however, is that fewer and fewer of Florida's U.S.-born farmworkers (most of whom are Black) are migrating northward each year; instead, they now dominate the state's citrus harvesting market.⁶⁹

One unique aspect of the Eastern U.S. farm labor market is its partial reliance on foreign harvest labor legally admitted under the H-2 provisions of the Immigration and Nationality Act to perform temporary farmwork. By all accounts, this is a highly controversial program -- with producers contending that H-2 workers are needed because of insufficient domestic labor supply, while critics maintain that these workers displace domestic migrant workers by reducing the numbers of jobs available to them. While the total numbers of H-2 workers are relatively small (roughly 18,000 in recent years), they are large enough to affect certain commodities in certain states. Florida's sugarcane harvest relies almost exclusively on 8,500 H-2 Jamaicans annually, while other foreign workers are utilized in apple and tobacco harvesting in several mid-Atlantic states.⁷⁰

Perhaps the only conclusion that can be reached concerning the impact of immigration on the domestic migrant labor force is that there is indeed a displacement effect, the extent of which cannot be pinpointed or described quantitatively because little or no documentation exists. A closely related and possibly even more significant result, however, is the growing Hispanic presence within the nation's hired farmwork labor force.

Clearly, Spanish is increasingly becoming the language of the fields, spoken by labor contractors and workers but not by farm operators or by most Black or white U.S. citizens or Asian immigrants in search of seasonal farm employment. The implication (and the reality, according to some Western observers) is that if an individual cannot speak Spanish, their prospects for obtaining migratory or seasonal farmwork are almost non-existent. By the same token, there is another implication for the career-change prospects of Hispanic farmworkers who inevitably must find other employment to maintain annual earnings after spending the years of early adulthood in the better-

paying range of FVH harvest jobs: Without having formal instruction in the English language, possibly combined with other prevocational preparation and job-seeking skills, they may face insurmountable obstacles when and if they attempt to make the transition to the world of nonfarm employment from which they are becoming increasingly isolated.

* * * *

Evidently, there are many complex and inter-related factors that tend to alter and influence migrant laborer job availability and migration patterns, although it is presently impossible to isolate causes and effects because of weak, outdated, or nonexistent documentation.

One fact is crystal clear, however: Four decades of foreign workers in the U.S. agricultural economy have driven most American workers who have options out of seasonal migratory farmwork. Hispanics are now shouldering the bulk of FVH harvesting responsibility in those states where production of fruits and vegetables is presently concentrated. Recruitment for available jobs is done largely through families and friends, and by labor contractors whose Mexican roots and residential connections enable them to muster hundreds of workers from villages in northern Mexico and Central America on short notice, and literally guarantee their arrival at harvest sites in northern California or Washington State within a 72-hour period.

Given the FVH market structure and prevailing recruitment practices, it appears that Black and white domestic migrants as well as U.S.-born seasonal farmworkers may face increasing difficulty in competing for future employment in this sector of the agricultural economy.

IV. Migrant Services

Since the mid-1960's, the federal government has provided an assortment of programs and services to alleviate the plight of migratory farmworkers. These have included special categorical programs targeted specifically to migrants and seasonal workers, as well as non-categorical programs designed to reach the nation's low-income population generally.

Conducting an exhaustive review of all such programs and the adequacy of the services they provide to migrant workers and their families was clearly beyond the scope of this review; moreover, any such effort would be hampered greatly by what appears to be a glaring lack of current, up-to-date national assessments of the extent and adequacy of such services.

This section synthesizes a variety of research findings from the late 1970's and early 1980's, and attempts to provide a frame of reference for further discussions in the areas of Employment and Training, Interstate Labor Exchange Services, Health and Housing, Education, and overall coordination among the various service providers.

A. Employment and Training

Migrant employment and training programs date back as far as the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 and the National Migrant Labor Program established in 1971 under the Manpower Development and Training Act. The current generation of employment and training services for migrants began, however, with Title III of the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA), which provided categorical funds for farmworker programs administered by the national office of the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) through a network of public and private farmworker assistance agencies in 48 states and Puerto Rico.⁷¹

CETA's Sec. 303 farmworker programs produced mixed results while spending \$679 million between 1974 and 1983. Early emphasis on training workers for jobs off the farms was widely criticized for excluding farmworkers who wished to remain in agriculture; moreover, critics alleged that participants were merely being offered low-wage, labor-intensive nonfarm jobs in exchange

for low-wage farmwork. Further, some studies showed that the costs of these programs were considerably higher than those offering comparable training for non-farmworkers. In retrospect, CETA's Sec. 303 programs were predicated on what proved to be a false hypothesis; e.g., that because the economic problems of migrant workers resulted from an oversupply of labor, federal employment and training policy could be used effectively to help reduce that supply. However, because of the fluidity that exists between agricultural and non-agricultural labor markets for unskilled workers -- and because of the "bottomless well" of new agricultural labor market entrants, both legal and illegal -- this ultimately proved to be an impossible task.⁷²

When the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) replaced CETA in 1983, the administrative structure for farmworker employment and training was left unchanged -- that is, a national program administered directly by DOL and operated independently of JTPA's mainline programming network administered by states and local Service Delivery Areas (SDAs) and Private Industry Councils (PICs). Another major difference is that while JTPA's mainline programs are subject to 15 percent limits on both administrative costs and training-related support, a 70 percent floor for training expenditures, and prohibitions against enrollee stipends and non-training support services, Sec. 402 migrant and seasonal farmworker programs may spend up to 20 percent for administration, 15 percent for non-training support, and a minimum of 50 percent for training. Moreover, Sec. 402 sets no specific limits on training-related support, and permits enrollee stipends of up to \$2.00 per hour. Thus JTPA's farmworker programs under Title IV can spend more for administration, more for support, and less for actual training than what is required of programs serving disadvantaged non-agricultural youth and adults.⁷³

Under CETA, farmworker training received between \$42 and \$75 million annually between 1974 and 1983, accounting for 25 to 35 percent of all federal farmworker assistance expenditures in the 1970's. In the main, CETA 303 programs provided intensive training in the mechanical arts (welding, automotive, construction, maintenance, and such), but did so only for a relative handful of the nation's agricultural workers.⁷⁴

Thus far, little information is available on early results and effectiveness of JTPA's Sec. 402 programs. Nationally, they are operated largely by the same contractors who ran CETA's farmworker programs, but there is now a new national emphasis on training participants for year-round work in agriculture. Also, there appears to be far less involvement of farmworker youth

under JTPA, because DOL's performance standards emphasize placement rates and costs; as a result, many Sec. 402 operators apparently have dropped efforts to train youth because doing so tends to drive up training costs and suppress placement rates.⁷⁵

A November 1984 DOL-sponsored evaluation of Sec. 402 programs produced the following data on enrollments from a sample of 11 contractors nationally: Among all participants in those programs during JTPA's first year, most (54.3%) were seasonal workers while far fewer (24.3%) were migrants. Most were Hispanics (65.3%) and Whites (23.1%), while Blacks (5.2%) and others (4.1%) were enrolled far less often. Most participants (58.3%) received training that was almost evenly split between classroom and on-the-job training, while others either received services only (19.1%) or direct placement (14.5%), and a small percentage (10.5%) were engaged in work experience activity.⁷⁶

This report found several other patterns relevant to migrant workers: While it was noted that Sec. 402 participants sometimes leave the programs during harvest season (when they can earn more by working than they can in training), reversion to agricultural employment was more prevalent among migrants than among seasonal workers. Further, migrants were found to require greater amounts of job-readiness training than other participants, and they may enroll and drop out of training or revert to farmwork several times before being placed successfully in positions where they will remain. Overall, characteristics that made job placement difficult were (1) low educational levels, (2) limited English-speaking ability, and (3) migrant status.

By far, the most profound difference between farmworker employment and training programs under CETA and JTPA, however, is that JTPA -- with its sharp reductions in funding for all programs -- has effectively reduced the level of funds available for farmworker training by an estimated \$40 million annually. The net effect of reduced funding for JTPA Sec. 402 compared with CETA Sec. 303, combined with the elimination of former CETA Title IV program set-asides for younger farmworkers, has been termed "devastating" by one of the nation's foremost farmworker advocacy organizations. First-year enrollment figures also confirm the dramatic drop in services levels: Compared with 69,649 migrant and seasonal workers enrolled in CETA's final year, only 24,181 enrollments were reported in Sec. 402 programs nationally during JTPA's first nine months. Of these, approximately 42 percent were migrant

workers, compared with previous levels of about 50-55 percent under CETA during the early 1980's.⁷⁷

B. The Inter-State Labor Exchange

One of the earliest attempts to structure and decasualize the agricultural labor market was the Wagner-Peyser Act of 1933, which established the cooperative federal/state Employment Service (ES) system with the principal objective of creating a labor market exchange available to all workers and employers. The Wagner-Peyser Act included a specific mandate for an agricultural placement function to match what was then a preponderance of small, seasonal agricultural employers with unskilled workers, particularly when labor demand and potential labor supply were located in different parts of the country.

The ES system has never brokered a large portion of total employment nationally (typically matching fewer than 10 percent of all farmworkers and farm jobs annually), although its level of activity with respect to agricultural matching has been almost twice the level of ES placements in nonfarm industries. It has, however, played a significant role in the seasonal farm labor market, in placing both local and migratory workers in some commodities and geographic areas.⁷⁸

ES has faced major and often-conflicting pressures and problems in its attempts to serve seasonal agricultural labor markets; employers often objected to ES for "hiring away" local workers with promises of jobs elsewhere, while local workers often objected to an influx of "outsiders" who competed for available jobs and whose presence tended to suppress prevailing wages. These pressures intensified during the 1960's, as the public expressed outrage at widely-reported abuses of migrant workers and as strong farmworker activists began to push for stricter enforcement of labor standards across the country.

These various pressures culminated in 1972 with the now-famous NAACP vs. Brennan case, in which DOL was charged with discrimination against farmworkers in providing ES services and with failure to enforce labor standards in seasonal farmwork. This litigation resulted in the "Judge Ritchey Court Order," which mandated an array of employment services to farmworkers as well as improved standards for jobs listed by ES. However, the only incentive for employers to comply with the order was the threat of withdrawal of ES services

in cases of non-compliance.

The Ritchey court order had the laudable intention of protecting farmworkers from employer abuse, but instead has had the perverse effect of further disorganizing an already fragmented labor market. The involvement of ES in the seasonal farm labor market has now all but ceased, as employers and workers alike now bypass ES in order to avoid what they perceive as increased likelihood of enforcement and regulatory harassment. According to Holt (1982), ES agencies in most states receive few interstate agricultural job orders other than those required to be filed by applicants for legally-admitted (H-2) foreign workers. It now makes few interstate farm placements, and apparently few intrastate placements as well.⁷⁹

Data that tend to support this view are found in a February 1985 DOL farmworker/advocate report which confirms that between FY '80 and FY '84, the number of interstate agricultural clearance orders received by ES nationally declined from 1,271 to just 576 -- a drop of 55 percent in a five-year period. The total number of workers requested through those orders also declined from 32,301 to 24,247 -- a reduction of 25 percent in the same period. Considering that there are approximately 2.5 million hired farmworkers in the U.S. currently, the level of interstate labor exchange activity handled by ES (the equivalent of less than one percent of all workers) is quite evident. Further, DOL's regional analysis of where these orders are originating supports Holt's contention that most are from employers required to file in order to be certified for H-2 alien labor utilization: Fully 81 percent of all orders nationally in FY '84 were from the Southeast, Mid-Atlantic, and Northern regions where H-2 laborers are used routinely to harvest sugarcane, tobacco, apples, and other crops in certain states.⁸⁰

Another view, expressed by DOL's farmworker monitor/advocate, is that the precipitous decline in ES agricultural placement activity in recent years is perhaps more attributable to other factors than to the Ritchey court order. These include shifts in production sites for certain crops, mechanization of formerly hand-harvested crops in the Great Lakes region, the availability of large numbers of undocumented farmworkers, and recent federal cutbacks in funding for ES operations nationally. Another factor cited is that some DOL regions have historically placed greater emphasis on ES farmworker placements than others, and that states with strong, aggressive farm placement units continue to play a significant role just as they did prior to the Judge Ritchey court order.⁸¹

While each of these observations undoubtedly has some validity, the fact remains that the ES role in today's agricultural labor market is minuscule by almost any standard. The major constraint to a more active role for ES in the future, moreover, is that most employers do not need to satisfy ES standards in order to obtain a seasonal workforce. Since recruiting by foremen and labor contractors through networks of friends and relatives provides the "flexibility" preferred by employers, most agricultural job matching is now done by word-of-mouth, and not through the federal/state Employment Service.⁸²

C. Health and Housing Services

The health problems facing migrant and seasonal farmworkers are so profound and extensive as to be almost legendary. The literature is filled with data demonstrating the degree to which farmworkers suffer from communicable and degenerative diseases at rates far exceeding those for other Americans. For example, the 1978 Task Panel on Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers concluded:

Despite recent progress . . . , the infant mortality rates for migrants still remain much higher than for the general population. Farmworkers have an unusually low life expectancy, and suffer from influenza, pneumonia, tuberculosis, and other infectious diseases at significantly higher rates than other groups; the incidence of malnutrition and childhood anemia is higher for migrants than for other subpopulations, and migrant births occur outside hospitals with far greater frequency than for the overall population. And the rate of hospitalization for accidents is twice as high as it is for the rest of the Nation.⁸³

The conclusion reached by the 1978 panel was that the health needs of migrant farmworkers were urgent, substantial, and largely unmet by existing programs. One major and abiding problem was that health care entitlements (such as Medicaid) had been virtually inaccessible to migrants because of residency requirements and other barriers. Moreover, the federal Office of Migrant Health estimated that only one-fourth of the migrant farmworker population was being served -- an estimate considered "generous" by many farmworker advocates.

Apparently, the problems remain as pervasive and intractable today as they did in 1978. Quoting from a recent position paper developed by the Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs:

Farm labor is grueling and dangerous work. Medical researchers say farmworkers have a life expectancy of 21 years less than the average American because their bodies are subjected to persistent

"insults" and exposure to pesticides in the fruit and vegetable fields where they work. The miscarriage rate for female farmworkers is seven times the national average.⁸⁴

Although it was beyond the scope of this paper to review health literature extensively, salient points and conclusions from several recent studies are insightful in terms of describing current needs and service inadequacies:

- A major study in Tulare County, California (1982) found the most common serious problems affecting migrants were anemia, high blood pressure, diabetes, tuberculosis, heart attacks, lazy eye, venereal diseases, paralysis, cancer, and dental problems. Most common minor conditions reported were bleeding gums, backache, nervousness, headaches, and strong anger.⁸⁵
- Of the 1,000 migrants surveyed in Tulare County, 29% suffered from some form of mild psychological distress, 28.5% had suffered injuries due to accidents, 24% of the women had suffered miscarriages, 19.6% had dental problems, 9.4% had orthopedic/musculo-skeletal problems, and 5.1% had respiratory problems.
- A 1983 research report on migrants in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas found that migrants' higher-than-average number of health problems are not only caused by migrant farmwork, but that their health status may cause them to enter the migrant labor force in the first place and also keep them in migrant farmwork from then on.⁸⁶
- A 1984 study of health patterns among migrant families in eight labor-intensive farmworker user states found that, in addition to a host of minor illnesses, the following major illnesses afflicted one or more members of families surveyed: Eye problems (35.2%), depression (23.1%), anemia (21.7%), arthritis (18.9%), hypertension (16.8%), kidney problems (14.8%), intestinal parasites (11.3%), heart problems (11.2%), ulcers (9.4%), and pesticide poisoning (4.3%).⁸⁷
- A 1981 Committee Report issued by The National Farmworker Policy project is filled with empirical and anecdotal evidence that pesticide poisoning is pervasive among farmworkers; that reporting of pesticide exposure incidents is rare, and that follow-up and enforcement is practically non-existent; that neither federal or state authorities demonstrate great concern for the problem; and that the real incidence of pesticide poisonings and attendant health problems may literally be 100 times greater than officially reported levels.⁸⁸
- A 1981 publication from the National Association of Community Health Centers, focusing on primary care service centers specifically designed to be responsive to the health care needs of migrant farmworkers, found multiple causes for widespread Medicaid ineligibility as well as significant and increasing frequencies of acute upper respiratory infections, ear infections, gastro-intestinal problems, and trauma. The increases in dermatological problems were attributed to pesticide exposure, and the increases among infectious diseases were found to be a function of the living accommodations and working environments of migrant farmworkers.⁸⁹

The 1984 survey of migrant family health patterns in eight states also made the discouraging observation that far too many migrants commonly encounter virtually all of the negative public health conditions that create many, if not most, of the differences in the health status of industrialized nations as compared to developing nations. That report concluded:

For all practical purposes, many migrants are still subject to Third World health and sanitation conditions, especially when they are migrating. Because of this, they are not only at increased risk for illnesses, but also produce an increased health risk for the areas in which they work. But it is a risk that they often have no control over and, given different conditions, would not choose to perpetuate, as can easily be seen from the data.⁹⁰

A more subtle but nevertheless unmistakable fact emerging from the literature is that the health and housing problems affecting migrant workers are closely and inextricably related. Consider, for example, the following excerpt from a 1981 Washington Post feature on the Eastern migrant stream:

The migrants live in squalid little camps, sometimes five or six in a single room, in barracks or huts that lack basic sanitary facilities. Few water outlets, leaky roofs, broken screens, rank mattresses, clogged latrines, gang showers, open garbage cans. Disease and sickness -- parasites, endemic diarrhea, dermatitis, tuberculosis -- are widespread. Smelly trash, bugs, filth are all about. The camps are inspected and certified before the season opens, then generally are not revisited by health inspectors after the migrants arrive.

Farmers who own the camps, and crewleaders who oversee them, are wary of visitors. Lawyers and social workers are denied access. Last month, growers expelled the Catholic nuns and migrant health service workers from the makeshift clinic they occupied on the big Westover camp south of here The Westover camp, once a World War II holding pen for German prisoners, has acquired such notoriety that migrants from as far away as Texas refuse to stay there.⁹¹

Current materials on the status and adequacy of migrant farmworker housing nationally is skimpy, at best. For background purposes, however, the 1978 Task Panel Report still provides the best available frame of reference.

The panel found ample documentation of the deplorable housing conditions of farmworkers, noting that most available housing is clearly inadequate, unsanitary, and lacks the basic essentials for a decent environment. Further, the problems were perceived as "most critical in the migrant stream, where dwelling units are usually provided by the grower and are considered as part

of the worker's wage." Often, the squalid conditions of farmworker housing, particularly in migrant camps, were known to contribute to disease, sickness, and the spread of infection; overall, the accommodations available to migrants were found to be generally reminiscent of pre-Civil War slave quarters.⁹²

The National Farmworker Policy Project's Committee Report (Fall 1980) also provided vivid documentation of widespread exploitative situations in which migrants occupied ramshackle rental units at exorbitant prices, were subject to eviction or forcible removal with little or no notice, and were often held in "debt peonage" by growers or labor contractors who charged them as much weekly to live in inferior, slum-like surroundings as they earned for their entire week's effort in the field. A particularly poignant story was supplied by a newspaper reporter who spent 10 days working incognito as a migrant laborer in North Carolina, but was broken physically and emotionally within a week's time.⁹³

Despite the problems that prevail generally, there are some hopeful signs: Some of the legal immigrants in the Western stream are said to be earning sufficient incomes to acquire better housing of their own, away from the farms themselves. Self-help housing and worker-owned housing cooperatives had begun to spring up in California by the early 1980's, and a number of the larger, more enlightened corporate growers and operators have begun to discover that by providing workers with better housing, they can reap considerable dividends in terms of increased worker stability and reduced annual turnover.

One example which has received widespread favorable publicity involved a large, diversified agricultural producer in South Florida which constructed an above-average, privately-financed project consisting of 192 family units, a church, day care center, post office, and laundry. There, seasonal workers are provided employment for about seven months of the year, and any family wishing to work elsewhere during the off-season can retain possession of its unit and resume occupancy upon their return. According to the company, turnover for employees living in the project has been reduced to less than two percent annually.⁹⁴

While these are encouraging developments, they are still very much the exception to a general pattern of inadequate housing for migratory farmworkers. According to Glover and Holt (1984), there continues to be a serious in-stream migrant housing problem nationally; moreover, the absence of any widely accepted inventory of the quantity or quality of in-stream housing not only hinders

assessment of the problem, but also frustrates efforts to devise farmworker housing policies.⁹⁵ Despite recent progress in some states and localities, there is still no occupational group in the United States as much in need of improved housing as migrant agricultural workers.

D. Education

The historically low educational levels of migrant farmworkers were noted earlier. Labor intensive hired farm jobs require few skills and little training, and workers with low educational attainment can compete effectively for these jobs. Indeed, the relatively greater dependence on agricultural employment by minority workers may be due to their lower levels of education and the consequent lack of alternatives to farmwork.⁹⁶

Migrant workers live and work periodically in all 50 states, and their children face a myriad of academic, health, and social problems due to the mobile nature of their lives. The educational development of these children is clearly a major problem: Typically, the children of migrant workers lag from six to eighteen months behind the expected grade levels for their age groups, and English is often a second language. The school experience is an unending series of moves to often-unfamiliar surroundings, thus preventing long-term relationships and discouraging educational continuity. The dropout rate is high, and in many instances the migrant student is also a migrant worker.⁹⁷

As with most other aspects of migrancy, data on migrant education needs and services are both limited and somewhat dated. The 1978 Task Panel Report, however, offers the following profile:

- In 1977, there were an estimated 800,000 migrant children in the U.S., and of these, as many as 300,000 were working child laborers.
- Despite the ethnic and cultural diversity among farmworker children, they share the common bonds of poverty, poor health care, substandard housing, and astonishingly low educational attainment. Despite the infusion of federal funds for migrant education, a 1977 study found that migrant students had only a 40 percent chance of entering the 9th grade, and only an 11 percent chance of entering the 12th grade. (Comparable percentages for non-farmworker children that year were 96 and 80 percent, respectively.)
- Migrant students are markedly behind other students in both achievement and grade levels by the time they reach the 3rd and 4th grades. Moreover, roughly three years were required for the average migrant student in some states to advance one grade level.

Educational opportunities for migrant youth were minimal until passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1965 established special education programs for migratory children. Since then, the education program for migrant children has evolved from a scattering of isolated tutorial programs to an interstate network serving over 600,000 youth annually.⁹⁸ Even so, the 1978 panel report concluded, "the Federal government has failed to develop a comprehensive education program for farmworkers and their families."

The current federal statute authorizing special migrant education programs is Chapter I of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act, which provided grants totalling \$232 million in 44 states in fiscal 1982. Although the education reforms of 1982 did much to reduce the paperwork involved in administering federally-funded programs, one unfortunate aspect of these changes was the elimination of educational program evaluation measures devised during the 1970's.

As a result, there is currently no sanctioned national method for the collection, analysis, and reporting of state service data on migrant education and other programs. In fact, the only available document providing a glimpse into current migrant student enrollments and activities nationally is one developed voluntarily by the testing and evaluation supervisor for Washington's State Department of Public Instruction.⁹⁹ That report, based on calendar year 1981 data from the nationwide Migrant Student Records Transfer System (MSRTS), was published in December 1984 and reveals the following insights on agricultural migrant students:

- In calendar 1981, MSRTS counted 231,000 transactions involving interstate migrant children, another 114,000 involving intrastate migrant students, and 257,000 former migrants who had "settled-out" of the stream during the preceding six years.
- The counts were admittedly duplicated as students moved from place to place and even within the same state, so actual numbers served were somewhat below the levels recorded. Moreover, the most mobile migrant children were also those least likely to be identified on MSRTS, while the settled-out formerly migrant children were most likely to be picked up and registered.
- For the 392,824 migrant students nationally who reported a grade level under MSRTS, 53% were in grades K-4, 32% were in grades 5-8, and only 15% were in grades 9-12. Further, just 2.1% of all students served were in grade 12.
- Among 42 states from which data was available, 13.7 percent of all school districts offered migrant education programs in 1980. States with highest percentages of school districts offering these programs were Florida (51%), North Carolina (50%), Georgia (47%), Delaware (38%), and Oregon (35%). California and Texas were each reported at 32%.

- Nationally, 226,000 migrant children were served in regular-year reading programs (38 states), while 177,000 were served in math programs (39 states) and another 124,000 received instruction in oral language development (25 states).

While these figures provide useful background, they have limited usefulness as indicators of how service levels compare with actual need, how many different youth are being reached, or what results are being achieved in terms of educational attainment. Presently, there is no uniform national system required for the collection and reporting of migrant education data, and no systematic or ongoing federal studies of migrant education programs are currently authorized or funded.¹⁰⁰ Efforts to assess adequacy of services are therefore stymied.

To gain better understanding of current migrant education issues in at least one state, the author contacted the writer of the MSRTS report who, in turn, offered the following observations on migrant education programs in the State of Washington:

- In school year 1983-84, some 15,850 migrant children (grades preK-12) were eligible for migrant education services; of these, 7,939 (50.4%) actually received instructional services. While some students who were eligible did not test below grade level and thus did not need special services, many of those in need of services apparently did not receive them.
- Reasons for not reaching a substantial portion of the eligible migrant education population include the fact that some are being served by other state and local education programs, some need services other than education (i.e., health care), some arrive at times when programs are not operating in certain areas, and many who are identified by recruiters never make it to school.
- That while it is almost impossible to pinpoint the specific educational results of any particular program or aspect of instruction, there has been a measured movement of migrant 4th-graders out of the lowest quartile of students tested and into the two middle quartiles. In 1979, for example, 36% of migrant 4th-graders tested were in the bottom 25% of all students, and 51% were in the two middle quartiles. By 1983, only 27% were in the lowest quartile, while 62% tested in the two middle categories.
- There has been substantial change in ethnicity among migrant students in Washington in the past five years. In 1979-80, 27% of these youth were White and 71% were Hispanic, with all others accounting for under 2%. By 1983-84, the mix had changed to 15% White, 82% Hispanic, 2% Asian, and 1% other.
- While there has been a decrease in overall school enrollment in the past five years, there has been a substantial increase in migrant enrollments during the same period. (In other words, the migrancy phenomenon is not simply "going away.")

To the extent that Washington's experiences are similar to those of other states, it would appear that while progress has been made, there remain a number of unmet needs and unresolved issues relative to migrant student education.

From the standpoint of student needs, it will be of prime importance to encourage migrant parents to get their children into available classes, and actually make the necessary provisions to get them to the schoolhouse door following initial contact and sign-up. Another important student consideration is to ensure that necessary health care and other support services are provided so that migrant children can function in the educational environment.

From the school administrators' view, there is obvious need (but no money) to coordinate migrant education programs across state lines to ensure consistency and continuity, and to establish national data collection and retrieval systems capable of producing a clearer picture of migrant students' educational needs, enrollments, and results than anyone has at the present time.

Finally, from the farmworker advocate's perspective, it will be vitally important to ensure that migrant education programs not be reduced or dropped altogether from the federal budget, as some have apparently suggested. If anything, there is urgent need for increased federal recognition of the importance of supplementary migrant education, and for funds to promote better coordination of these programs within and among the participating states.¹⁰¹

E. Coordination Among Service Providers

Speaking generally of the five federal categorical programs for migrant farmworkers (health, employment and training, housing, education, and Headstart), the 1978 Task Panel observed:

Categorical service programs for farmworkers have arisen without reference to a clearly articulated national policy regarding farmworker needs or the role of farm labor in the national economy. These programs have been uncoordinated; channeled through diverse agencies that often have not been responsive to the needs of the population; are expensive and cumbersome; lack adequate, measurable objectives; and have been largely unevaluated as to their effectiveness as separate programs or as parts of a national system of comprehensive service delivery.

Clearly, many of the problems with respect to coordination of these services stemmed from the fact that they were administered by different federal agencies using different allocation mechanisms and different service delivery

vehicles. Moreover, each of the separate programs tended to respond differently with respect to involving regional and State officials, farmworker organizations, and farmworker advisory or policy boards. And, to further compound the problems, funding for each of the federal categorical programs was based on different statistical profiles of the target population.¹⁰²

These factors and others led the panel to conclude:

It would hardly be possible to design a system of service delivery less responsive to the true numbers and needs of farmworkers, less amenable to coordination, or more administratively expensive. Given the variety of client definitions, the diversity of funding systems, and the varying mechanisms for including or excluding states, regional offices, or farmworker organizations in the planning and development of programs, it is not surprising that great inadequacies in service delivery exist at the local level, that in many areas programs overlap, or that serious imbalances exist in the availability of funds for some local programs as opposed to others We conclude that the present variety of funding mechanisms, combined with the differing jurisdictional mandates, results in program delivery systems that do not operate in the best interests of farmworker clients, and end by excluding many from needed services.

The panel further noted that sporadic efforts to coordinate existing programs had been made in the past, with varying degrees of success. However, such efforts had often resulted only in heightening the frustration of agency representatives and service delivery agents having genuine concern for farmworkers' needs, as they found themselves grappling not only with barriers to service, but also with the lack of responsiveness and lack of coordination of the categorical programs themselves.¹⁰³

Speaking more broadly of both categorical and non-categorical federal programs for farmworkers, the panel further concluded:

By any outcome criteria, the programs must be counted as having failed to effect substantial improvements in the lives of farmworkers during this time span. Laws, however noble in intent, are not enforced. Access to generic programs for the poor may have been improved, yet farmworkers still do not participate in these programs in proportion to their needs. Categorical programs overlap, duplicate services, and fail to address the needs of the total farmworker family in any comprehensive manner.

However, the temptation to view these efforts simply as failures of coordination must be avoided. The panel believes that the failures of Federal programs are the outcome of an agricultural system that continues to isolate farmworkers, keeps them locked in a continuing cycle of poverty, and prevents their full participation in our national life.¹⁰⁴

Because the information used to compile the 1978 report is now at least seven years old, these statements should not be construed as being necessarily representative of current conditions. No doubt, there have been substantive improvements with respect to service delivery coordination in some programs and in some geographic areas since 1977-78, especially in those states where effective farmworker advocacy and information networks have evolved. Also, within the past decade, a number of states have assumed responsibility for furthering progressive farmworker policies and initiatives begun at the federal level. As many as a dozen states (e.e., California, Florida, New York, North Carolina, and others) now have statewide Migrant Advisory Councils, appointed by their governors and dedicated to addressing the problems identified throughout this document.¹⁰⁵

Clearly, progress is being made, and conditions in some parts of the country are now considerably better than they appear to be elsewhere. It should also be noted, however, that there have been no further in-depth assessments of migrant service delivery coordination issues nationally since the 1978 Task Panel Report was published.

V. Conclusions and Recommendations

The problems faced by migrant agricultural workers have been with us for decades, and -- while receiving periodic, passing attention from the media, government, and the general public -- have largely defied solution in that time. The deplorable conditions that shape public perception on migrancy issues now appear to affect only a relatively small proportion of the U.S. domestic agricultural workforce, but these problems are clearly concentrated in the area of labor-intensive, hand-harvested fruit and vegetable production -- a market that is becoming increasingly splintered, both in terms of job structure and employer accountability, and also increasingly isolated from all other nonfarm labor markets.

While migrancy issues affect only certain farmworkers and are largely confined to a single production market, they are inextricably linked to the larger complexities of seasonality and inadequate worker protection -- issues that go to the very heart of the American agricultural production system. As a result, the problems of migrant farmworkers cannot be viewed in isolation, but instead must be approached and resolved within a much broader policy framework.

For now, the weight of existing evidence is that priority attention in addressing the human service and support needs of domestic agricultural workers should be directed at the "hard-core" of low income, often illiterate, mostly minority, and frequently exploited migrant farmworkers and their dependents -- and not to the thousands of mostly white, mostly middle-class, and mostly midwestern students and housewives who are engaged in agriculture no more than 25 days annually (but are still counted as migratory workers, according to USDA definition) and who, all too often, are portrayed in various publications as representing the "typical" migrant farmworker. It is crucial that decision-makers at all levels of government -- federal, state, and local -- recognize this point, and that available resources and efforts be targeted to those most in need of assistance.

There are a number of areas in which the states, in particular, can play an important role:

- Emergency Assistance: States can improve the provision of emergency assistance to migrants by supplementing the limited assistance available through federally-administered JTPA Sec. 402 programs, as well as by expediting the processing of Federal Disaster Unemployment Assistance payments to eligible migrant farmworkers in "major disaster" areas.
- Comprehensive Enforcement Systems: States could improve coordination and utilization of staff and resources through the development of comprehensive enforcement systems, as is already occurring in such states as Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and New Jersey.
- Housing: States can accelerate the development of adequate housing for migrants, as has been done through exemplary programs in Florida and California.
- Field Sanitation/Pesticide Protection: States should undertake the necessary legislative and administrative initiatives to provide workplace protection for migrants whenever applicable federal standards are inadequate (as has recently occurred in Texas).
- Worker Benefits: Whenever possible, states should take the necessary legislative actions to provide equitable worker benefits for migrants, such as the expanded Unemployment Insurance and Worker Compensation coverage now being offered by some.

Proposing solutions to the complex, multi-faceted dilemma of migratory farmworkers is made more difficult by a glaring lack of accurate, up-to-date, and verifiable information capable of presenting the true national picture with respect to almost any facet of the problem. The existing data base is pathetically inadequate at the national level, and this problem has only been exacerbated by recent budget cuts and by federal "paperwork reduction" provisions. As a result, there is a dearth of fresh information concerning migrancy in the 1980's, and there is substantial disagreement even among the experts concerning the true dimensions of the problem and the relative importance that should be attached to each of a wide range of concerns. On one point, however, there is near-unanimous agreement: The phenomenon of agricultural migrancy is not disappearing merely with the passage of time. Past labor savings that resulted from technological advances have been more than offset by strong growth in national demand for hand-harvested fresh fruits and vegetables. And although traditional migration patterns have changed over time, this only reflects a redistribution of the problem rather than a reduction in its scope.

Clearly, fewer and fewer American citizens are now engaged in long-distance agricultural migration. Most U.S. born workers with other options have already exercised them, and the gaps between labor demand and worker

supply are being filled increasingly by Hispanics from Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean Islands -- individuals already "conditioned" to the low prevailing wages for unskilled labor in those countries, and generally willing to endure almost any hardship to earn the comparatively higher rates paid in the United States. The devaluation of Mexican currency has only accelerated this trend, sending a flood of immigrant workers (both legal and illegal) across the U.S. border.

This perceptible change in ethnic composition of the fruit-and-vegetables harvest workforce has several important implications: First, it is clear that Spanish is rapidly becoming the "language of the fields," and that this in turn presents a formidable employment obstacle for non-Spanish-speaking Blacks, whites, and Asians who might otherwise pursue farmwork. Second, to the extent these workers and their dependents require special services, providers will be unable to assist, instruct, or communicate effectively unless they, too, are fluent in Spanish. Finally, it appears that while many of these Hispanic workers (including a high percentage of younger males) will earn good wages during the years of young adulthood, most will be unable to withstand the physically grueling pace indefinitely and will face either mid-life career changes or severely reduced earnings within five to fifteen years after entering the harvest workforce. There is little evidence, however, that employment transition services or instruction in English proficiency are being offered at levels in any way commensurate with the numbers of Hispanic workers who almost certainly will require them for sake of future economic survival.

Equity issues affect migrant farmworkers like no other American occupational group, and these can take such diverse form as "exemptions" under general labor law (minimum wages, unemployment insurance, worker compensation, and bargaining rights), service eligibility requirements that exclude migrants on the grounds of residency or family status, or inadequate enforcement of laws and regulations originally intended to offer a modicum of protection (such as OSHA and EPA standards). Significant changes have been slow in evolving, and many residual inequities have yet to be resolved. Moreover, federal immigration laws still permit the mass importation of temporary foreign harvest workers under conditions that undercut the domestic, migratory farmworker's job opportunities and his ability to earn wages.

There is clear, compelling evidence to suggest that those seeking to assist migrant farmworkers should use every means at their disposal to press

for the redress of inequities affecting all U.S. agricultural workers. There is no group in the nation facing so many legal and statutory barriers to equal protection under the law. Gradual progress has been made in recent years, however, much of it stemming from the activist movement of the late 1960's and early 1970's and from the federal initiatives launched subsequently. While the federal government clearly cannot solve all such problems, it should take action in those areas it can influence -- such as general labor law and immigration policy. More states, on the other hand, can and should be encouraged to follow the lead of those which in recent years have made conscientious efforts to correct past inequities and to better coordinate the delivery of crucial human services.

There is an almost universal need for more timely, accurate, and thorough research data and statistical documentation to define more precisely the nature and magnitude of current problems. Materials presently available often suffer from faulty data collection methods, differing terms and definitions, and a lack of currency; in addition, an over-abundance of conjecture and speculation sometimes tends to obscure the most pressing problems, while making it more difficult to ascertain which groups of individuals are most in need of assistance.

There is also a concomitant need for better focusing of energies and clearer ordering of priorities from within the broad community of agencies, institutions, and individuals concerned with migrant and seasonal farmworkers. At present, each of the various agencies and interest groups seems to have its own agenda, priorities, and area of specialization (i.e., legal assistance, training, health, education, enforcement of labor standards, pesticide control, worker safety, and the like). What seems to be missing is a sense of central purpose -- a unified voice in support of a common set of priorities. For now, the various advocates' diverse agendas almost seem to be competing with each other for national attention. Furthermore, they sometimes appear to be working at the margins of the problem, rather than combining their forces to alter the status quo in any appreciable way, to isolate areas where the worst problems really exist, or to determine what is working reasonably well and what is not. (As a result, technical violations of sharecropping practices involving fewer than 1,000 people in Ohio get national attention, while the fact that 10,000 farmworkers may be consuming drinking water from pesticide cups on any given day gets none.)

There exists a fundamental need for advocates not only to address the

problems and inequities that abound, but also to recognize, publicize, applaud, and encourage the "success stories" and progressive practices of those producers and growers who represent what's right in American agriculture. There is a growing body of information to suggest that enlightened agricultural managers and corporate decisionmakers can simultaneously maximize their own profits while also ensuring better working and living conditions for the harvest workforce on whom they must depend, both now and for the foreseeable future. Advocates must be as willing to lead by example and through positive encouragement as they are to criticize and protest situations over which neither growers, workers, nor government have had clear control or absolute responsibility.

Finally, it should be recognized now, if it has not been previously, that migrant workers do not follow the crops out of personal enjoyment or a desire to see the country, but out of sheer economic necessity. In so doing, they face individual and collective risks -- and both physical and psychological pressures -- that are unmatched by any group of workers in the country. A major cause of the hardships they endure is the casual nature of the market in which they work, and their chief economic problem is one attributable to lack of overall employment rather than to low wages per sé.

National policy attention sorely needs to be directed to alleviating the conditions which compound this problem by permitting an oversupply of legal and illegal immigrant labor and certified temporary workers who do not require the supports and benefits accorded to all other members of the U.S. employed workforce. Of equal importance, however, is the need for national policy-makers to pay closer attention to the constantly-evolving structure of the agricultural labor market (especially in the FVH sector), to demonstrate a commitment to continuing to provide the support services so desperately needed, and to begin now to anticipate future directions and problems rather than merely reacting whenever public outrage and resulting political pressures so dictate.

Barring unexpected catastrophies, American FVH producers will have bonafide needs for large numbers of temporary harvest employees for the foreseeable future. Problems associated with cyclical demands for a transient hired farm labor force are far from disappearing, and there are indications that the numbers of individuals engaged in migratory farmwork have not only stabilized in recent years, but may even be expanding. A looming issue, however, is

whether the future labor requirements of FVH producers will be met by U.S. citizens who need employment (and whose seasonal joblessness creates enormous social and economic pressures), or by hundreds of thousands of immigrants and temporary foreign workers who cross U.S. borders, almost unrestrained, to exacerbate what is already a most difficult set of circumstances.

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