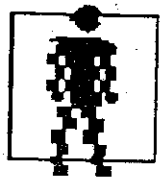
Homeless Farmworkers and Day Laborers

Their Conditions and Their Impact on the San Diego Region



A study of the documented workers who form the labor pool for San Diego's $770 million agricultural industry; the extent of their homelessness and associated conditions of poverty; their impact on the communities of North County and the northern region of San Diego city; and some of the efforts that are underway to improve conditions.

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I. OVERVIEW

San Diego County agriculture is in one of the most prosperous regions of the world, producing a $772 million crop last year, with a regional economical impact of $1.7 billion. Local agriculture is the source of top-dollar commodities which fill tables and are distributed throughout the state, the country, and the Far East.

The region's farms that produce this bounty - most are 10 acres or less - depend on tens of thousands of permanent and seasonal workers each year, almost exclusively of Hispanic origin. Many of these are migrant workers who travel legally or illegally across the U.S. border during peak seasons. Several thousand others, however, are permanent, legal residents who make San Diego their home during most or all of the year, earning minimum wages through farmwork and other day labor.

Most of these documented workers have no housing, and, as do most other homeless persons, they survive under appalling conditions. They live in the North County and north San Diego city regions, in fields, hillsides, canyons, ravines, and riverbeds, often on the edge of their employer's property. Some are crammed into rooms, hallways, and garages of rented houses, in packing houses or in storage sheds.

Together, rural and urban workers form the largest segment of this county's homeless population, and they have suffered from years of widespread neglect.

Up until the early 1980's, workers, their camps, and their substandard housing conditions were outside the sight of most local residents. They were an unobtrusive, barely known, part of the cultural and economical patchwork of North County and the north San Diego City region.

Today, the property lines of new housing tracts and shopping centers abut worker camps. Morning joggers cut through encampments and farmworkers cut across busy thoroughfares on their way to work. Spanish tiled patios overlook little communities made up of plastic tarps. The contrast is almost unbelievable.

The visual impact of the differences between two diverse socioeconomic populations has also been intensified by the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. Granting legal status to 53,051 workers and some dependents, the law freed immigrant workers from fear of deportation, allowing them to openly meet their daily needs and look to a better future.

The cultural and economic contrast presented by homeless workers will not subside naturally: the backbone of the county's agricultural and services industries will continue to be a large pool of people who are willing to labor for minimum pay or less, under living conditions which are unacceptable to the communities which they serve.

Report Summary

This report considers the particular problems and needs of homeless farmworkers and day laborers; their impact on the communities of North County and the northern region of San Diego city; and some of the efforts that are underway to manage or resolve these conditions.

The first response to the crisis of homelessness is the provision of short-term, emergency shelter, food and related survival-oriented services. Migrant workers are essentially excluded from the countywide emergency shelter system, which is already overwhelmed with the needs of urban homeless persons.

Permanent housing for single farmworkers is not available because of the high cost of land, and because of myriad other factors: planning and zoning impediments; neighborhood and landowner resistance; lack of public infrastructures in rural areas; preferences for families over single workers; and the small portion of workers' wages that remains for rent.

The local record for public-sponsored or grower-sponsored housing has been negligent, although there are recent exceptions which could inspire additional projects in both the public and the private sector. Several sources for federal and state assistance are available to assist local initiatives.

Regarding working conditions, fuller employment for migrants, their need to earn an adequate incomes, and protection of their rights as employees are crucial issues still to be resolved.

Workers remain socially isolated. They need assistance in overcoming their difficulty with communication, and in developing skills for self sufficiency and entry into mainstream society.

Health conditions among this population are critical. In addition to threats of injuries and illnesses, including communicable diseases, availability of services and access is hampered by costs, lack of transportation, and cultural differences. However, there has evolved a viable network of community clinics, community outreach groups and County - administered services and financing, which promises continued progress in meeting the health care needs of workers and their families.

Cultural and geographic isolation also presents particular difficulties to local law enforcement and the criminal justice system. The San Diego Police Department has initiated efforts to close this gap, hopefully setting an example for other jurisdictions to follow.

Mental health conditions among the migrant working population are believed to be affected by isolation and loneliness, often from family separation, and the stress of economic uncertainty. Most mental health needs of workers are not being addressed.

The housing dilemma is a self evident moral problem for all of us. To say they are better off here than they are in Mexico is both true and irrelevant.
— Father Marvin Bowers

Various priority community concerns have emerged with the increased proximity and awareness of migrants and their encampments. Discussed in detail, these are: public health and safety issues, including fire hazards, unsanitary conditions, and communicable diseases; high costs of illegal camp abatement; visibility of workers on public and private property; theft and other offenses; and concern over the continued influx of people who are extremely poor.

While the needs and issues accompanying the conditions of migrant workers have been largely ignored in the past, there is a increasing determination, and some success, within both the public and private sector to improve conditions, through state and national resources as well as local.

II. DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF HOMELESS AGRICULTURAL WORKERS AND DAY LABORERS

The subject of this study is North County's (and north San Diego city's) documented workers who are first generation Hispanics from Mexico, and, to a much lesser extent, from Central America.

Most workers are from southern Mexican villages wracked by extreme poverty. They are from Santiago, Naranjas, and, especially, Oaxaca, the home of the Mixtecs, a prehispanic indigenous group who speak their own native dialect *(Rural California Report, July, 1990)*. A much smaller percent are from Central America, fleeing political oppression as much as seeking economical gain.

> They often give "el monte" as their address. They mean in the brush or in the hills, anywhere that's not populated or cultivated.
> — Ramon S. Bodilla, Catholic Charities

Almost all workers are unaccompanied males, although family members are increasingly joining their working fathers and sons since documentation under the Federal Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 *(IRCA)*. Workers commonly return to their Mexican villages and their families during the late fall and winter months (a bus ride to Oaxaca is five days and $70 from Tijuana). Some have managed to move their families up to Tijuana, whom they join at "colonias" on weekends *(C. Smith, 1990)*.

Their mean average age is 35 and mean average years of school completed is 5.9. The life expectancy of a migrant agriculture worker is 49 years, as compared to the national average of 75 years *(U.S. Department of Health and Human Resources, 1990)*.

Most documented workers are employed in agriculture, although some are finding other types of urban employment less physically demanding, higher paying, and with better benefits. Many who try a hand at day labor still do some farm work during peak seasons *(C.Smith, 1990)*.

These workers are broadly referred to as "migrant" in this study because the term is used by most of the general population to describe this group. In fact, many are "immigrant" workers, since they are people who have come to a country to take up permanent residence. While they still commonly return to their native country each year, they have made San Diego their home.

III. AGRICULTURE AND OTHER LABOR-INTENSIVE INDUSTRIES DEPENDENT ON MIGRANT WORKERS

In addition to their proximity to the region, it is natural that workers have settled in San Diego County, where employment opportunities in agriculture have generally been good. The county's terrain and climate create a demand for year-round labor for producing a rich variety of agricultural products. In order of total value, these include indoor decoratives; avocados; ornamental trees and shrubs; eggs; bedding plants and turf; valencia oranges; tomatoes; lemons; strawberries; milk; carnations; roses; cattle and calves; and grapefruit.

The San Diego County Farm Bureau explains that "(H)igh value specialty crops and the terrain on which they are grown make San Diego agriculture labor intensive. Because of San Diego's climate, crop production tends to be year-round, with a relatively stable nonmigratory population serving as the basic labor force."

Besides understanding labeling instructions on pesticide containers, personal protection from pesticide exposure requires, at a minimum, freshly laundered clothing with long pants and sleeves and sturdy gloves. Hand-washing before and after meals should be the rule. Farmworkers often work stripped to the waist. Clothing is frequently worn more than one day without laundering and lunch is eaten in the fields without prior hand washing. Gloves, if available, are unwashed and torn but used throughout the season. In this situation, they can act as an occlusive dressing and increase pesticide absorption (K. G. Smith, 1986).

"The agricultural industry consists of 6,259 farms, with 58 percent (3,654) of these on 10 acres of land or less, and 4,238 (68 percent) grossing less than $10,000 in sales. In 1987 (the most recent reporting period), half of the farms (3,119) used hired farm labor, and 40 percent (2,478) used contract labor," reports the Bureau.

Contrary to mechanization's reduction of demand for human resources, farms continue to rely principally on manual labor. Furthermore, over the past 15 years, San Diego's production of labor intensive crops has increased measurably. Strawberry production has doubled, avocado production has tripled, citrus production has increased by 18 percent, and the county has strengthened its position as the state's leading producer of horticulture products.

In addition to the daily bounty local residents enjoy from agriculture (and its preservation of San Diego's rural setting), the benefits from migrant workers impact other ways as well. These include reduced homeowner maintenance costs, cultivations of landscapes, child care, restaurant services, brick laying, house cleaning, yard work, house improvement projects, textile production, tailoring, house painting, and car maintenance.

To classify these jobs as "unskilled" underplays the responsibility, dependability, vigor, and stamina they regularly require. In return, people in these positions are paid minimum wage, are likely homeless, and regularly face antipathy from the general community. The fact that these conditions are rooted in this region's traditional reliance on cheap labor does not lessen the positive impact that migrant workers have on the economy and on the quality of life enjoyed by San Diego area residents.

IV. THE PERMANENT LABOR POOL AND THEIR CAMPS

A. Introduction

Due to their tenuous living conditions and their geographical, linguistic, and cultural isolation, the extent of homelessness among this population can only be roughly estimated *(see next section)*.

Paid minimum wages, and, in some cases supporting families, only a very small portion of farmworkers and other day laborers are able to find housing. The majority instead live in "little communities" - encampments throughout the hillsides, canyons, river beds, groves, and fields along the highways of the North County and north San Diego city regions.

Housing in the camps consists of a variety of styles: (1) plywood structures covered with tar paper with/without floors; (2) corrugated plastic structures with/without floors; and, (3) platforms suspended from the trees on which individuals sleep with a canopy of plastic, paper, blankets, or tar paper. The workers prefer the wood structures to those constructed of plastic. The plastic has no insulating effects: Like polyester, it is either too hot or too cold. Efforts of families to join the wooden structures together create a row-house effect.

The actual number of camps in the county is impossible to document, and almost impossible to imagine. By all indications, there are at least 200, and probably more, at any given time. Camps range in size, occupied by a few to a few hundred people each.

Thirty seven of these camps are registered with the State of California as "active," and meet minimum health and safety codes. *(State Dept. HCD)*. Historically, the largest registered camp has been one in Fallbrook, housing 100 workers, and built during the national "Bracero Program," *(Alvarez, 1990)* whose era was from 1942 to 1964. In December, 1990, however, the 328-worker dormitory on the Harry Singh & Sons Farms in Bonsall became the largest of its kind in the county.

Most other unregistered camps, clearly the majority, are illegal and essentially unsafe. Many of these are regularly abated and razed for zoning, health, and safety violations. None of the camps contain potable water, gas, electricity, or waste disposal systems.

B. Population Estimates

Arriving at an estimate of the size of this region's documented farmworker population is extremely difficult. Judging how many migrant workers may be in a certain region is comparable to guessing the total number of people someone saw on their drive to work.

A short walk through the riverbeds and brushes along many of the region's highways, however, reveals an astounding juxtaposition of little communities quietly and unobtrusively existing within the range of traffic sound. One can only surmise that these groups are not being counted in any official estimates, since their ability to peacefully exist depends principally on the anonymity they are able to preserve.

Finding a general estimate of the migrant working population as a whole still falls short of knowing what portion is documented. Accompanying migrant workers' tenuous living conditions and their geographical, linguistic, and cultural isolation, are myriad ideas about the ebb and flow of undocumented workers crossing the U.S. border. Perhaps an official of the State Employment Development Department will be proven correct that "the actual number of workers will never be known until someone decides to either open the border or close it *(B. Rodriguez, 1990)*.

It enrages residents who have paid $500,000 for a view lot and what they view is farmworkers living in cardboard and plastic shacks
— Marta Erismann, Rural Community Assistance Corporation

Last year's official effort to grasp the size of this population, that of the U.S. Census Bureau's 1990 count, eventually exhausted itself over a series of repeated attempts to reach camp dwellers. Although published results aren't available as of this time, there are many allegations about the count and recount being a seriously flawed Census effort.

Meanwhile, an understanding of the size of the migrant farmworker population may only be possible through a composite picture pieced together from various estimates dealing with: (1) How many workers are needed each year; (2) How many workers in the region became documented; and (3) What is a likely ratio of workers who are documented to those who aren't.

1. *How Many Farmworkers Are Needed Each Year*

Estimates of workers needed can be made by calculating the number of people (full time equivalent positions) needed to prepare and harvest all of the county's crops. By these estimates, crops together generated the equivalent of 33,000 full time jobs in 1990 *(County Dept. Agriculture, 1990)*.

There is no certain way to extract the portion of these 33,000 "full time jobs" which are actually filled by migrant workers, since these totals include some farms whose labor is performed by owners or their family members. Furthermore, many of these jobs are seasonal only. Yet, most farms rely on outside labor. In 1987 (the most recent reporting period), half (3,119) used hired farm labor, and 40 percent (2,478) used contract labor *(County Dept. Planning and Land Use, 1989)*.

Just how big the migrant farmworker community actually is, counting both permanent and migrating workers throughout the county, can be drawn from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). According to a March, 1990 report issued by DHHS, "There are 45,694 immigrant farmworkers and dependents in San Diego County. An estimated 14,314 are permanent farmworkers and dependents, and 31,380 are seasonal farmworkers and dependents.

The suggestion that DHHS' statistics makes regarding the ratio seasonal workers to permanent workers (2:1) may prove to be more relevant and useful than the mathematical specificity of the department's conclusions.

2. *How Many Persons in the Region Became Documented*

Since the implementation of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA) many workers have become permanent residents. According to the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, 37,818 seasonal agricultural workers (SAWs) and their dependents were legalized in the North County region alone (about 70 percent of the 53,051 County total). While these figures include family members, percentages are believed to be small.

3. *What the Likely Ratio is of Documented Farmworkers to Undocumented Workers*

The U.S. Border Patrol has been variously quoted as estimating that 50 percent to 80 percent of workers in all encampments are documented. Among those who are urban day laborers, the ratio documented workers is believed to be much lower.

4. *Why There Should Be a Determined Effort to Estimate the Size of the Population*

Decisions concerning policies, planning, revenues, and programs will be still made with or without an understanding of how many migrant workers there are; how many are permanent residents, and how many are here for only short periods; and how many workers are homeless. The effectiveness and costs of those decisions, however, can be positively influenced by accurate and specific assessments beforehand.

Knowledge about the traditional urban homeless and its various subpopulations has increased since the early 1980's, and with it

measurable progress towards resolution. Beginning steps need to be taken towards gaining knowledge about homeless farmworkers and day laborers as well.

The Metropolitan Area Advisory Committee (MAAC) offers a compelling reason to take these steps: "There is no logical or moral reason to provide estimates of the extent of the homeless problem and then state that these figures do not include the 'working homeless.' These persons are legal residents of the U.S. and entitled to the same consideration as the traditional urban homeless" *(Juarez, 1990)*.

V. NEEDS OF HOMELESS WORKERS

Up until recently, limited attention has been given to the plight of the homeless worker by public and private agencies who otherwise target the needs of low-income persons, including the County's Community Action Partnership; the City of San Diego's Community Services Program and its Housing Commission; the County's Department of Housing and Community Development; the local FEMA Board, which allocates funds for emergency housing; United Way of San Diego County; and the San Diego Consortium/Private Industry Council, which administers federal funds for job training and development. It was only at the prodding of County Supervisor John McDonald and other North County representatives last year that the Regional Task Force on the Homeless included homeless documented farmworkers in its countywide estimates of the homeless population.

A. Emergency Shelter

The first-line response to traditional urban homelessness has been to provide emergency shelter. Of the 1,400 spaces in homeless emergency shelters throughout the county, however, very few are occupied by migrant Hispanic workers. Serving the "traditional homeless," shelters are overwhelmed in simply meeting the needs of 6,000 urban homeless persons, including youth on their own, veterans, abused women and children, intact families, single adults, mentally ill, and recovering substance abusers.

Shelters are inaccessible to farmworkers and day laborers because of distance from fields, language barriers and cultural unfamiliarity, and uncertainty regarding federal funding restrictions.

In addition, the effectiveness of shelter programs depends upon guests following a short-term "case-managed" plan for addressing the situations which caused them to be homeless. For agricultural workers, securing independent housing is not perceived as an attainable objective in the foreseeable future.

1. Progress In Developing Permanent Emergency Shelters

Only one project has been completed which offers emergency shelter to migrant workers, sponsored by the city of Oceanside. The program promises to be economically feasible and acceptable solution for other areas as well. With space for 21 people, workers are able to stay up to six months. *(see further description in section on "Local Record in Providing Housing").*

The region's second project may be a proposed shelter in the Carlsbad area, sponsored by the "Caring Residents of Carlsbad" and Catholic Charities. The group has been approved for $345,000 in State Emergency Shelter Grant (ESG) funds for developing a 50 - 60 bed facility, with a maximum stay of 30 days. While a specific site has not been located, "Caring Residents" is optimistic that the project can be completed within the 14 month deadline of the ESG grant *(Meehan, 1990).*

2. Inclement Weather Shelter Programs

Campsites are particularly harsh when wet and cold. The County's inclement weather shelter program, serving North County homeless persons at the Vista Armory, supervised by staff and volunteers North County Lifeline Services, is available to nearby workers during these times.

At least one other proposal for an inclement weather shelter program has surfaced, in a report of Poway's Migrant Worker Relations Committee. The committee recommends that provisional shelter be located "in church social halls, community centers and senior-citizen buildings, social and fraternal organizations and the Lake Poway pavilion *(Poway, 1990)*. There is no other known program, or proposed program, responding to the needs of workers and family members during cold or wet weather.

B. Housing

The most pervasive problem facing workers is lack of permanent housing. Despite a decade of unprecedented housing development, very little affordable housing is available in North County or any other location near farm and day labor opportunities.

1. Impact of IRCA

The Federal Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA) has changed migration patterns, and housing needs, of tens of thousands of farmworkers.

Prior to 1986, most farmworkers and day laborers migrated to and from Mexico along with the tide of farming seasons, bringing and taking with them temporary living conditions surrounded by squalor. Now legally in the United States on a permanent basis, they present a need for both temporary shelter and permanent affordable housing. While IRCA anticipated some of the educational and health needs of migrant workers, to the dismay of local public officials it ignored their needs for housing and job assistance.

2. Growers' Awareness of the Need for Housing

Since the passage of IRCA, some growers are finding their experienced workers leaving for other work. According to Rev. Rafael Martinez, who works extensively with agricultural workers through the North County Chaplaincy, "newly legalized agricultural workers are more likely to seek work outside the industry, hoping for better jobs and improved living conditions in the cities."

While the current, and perhaps long-term, over-supply of farmworkers likely encourages complacency regarding the personal conditions of their employees, growers may be more willing than before to consider housing as a way to keep a stable, year-round working force. A few local jurisdictions, particularly the City of Oceanside and the County of San Diego, are making it easier for growers to do so, by waiving fees and removing red tape accompanying housing development and maintenance.

3. Barriers to Worker Housing

The primary barrier to affordable housing almost anywhere in the San Diego region, of

course, is high costs of land acquisition and development. Obstacles which are particular to migrant worker housing, however, include: (a) planning and zoning; (b) landowners; (c) neighborhood resistance; (d) lack of infrastructure; (e) preferences for families; (f) only a small fraction of income available for housing.

(a) Planning and Zoning Impediments

Growers who may wish to provide housing for their farmworkers are put off by regulations and expense, according to the County of San Diego Department of Planning and Land Use (DPLU). "Land use (restrictions) treat farmworker housing units the same as other dwelling units. As most areas used for agriculture are designated for one dwelling unit or two, four or eight acres, and as most growers own parcels less then ten acres, for many growers it is impossible to provide housing on site for their farmworkers," according to DPLU.

Local zoning and planning ordinances generally prohibit families and groups of individuals from doubling up and sharing accommodations. Consequently, remote locations present the only alternative to living in an overcrowded houses, apartments or mobile units.

(b) Landowners' Reluctance To Rent To Farmworkers

Other than when in substandard condition, rental housing in the general market is unavailable to farmworkers and day laborers. Landowners object to overcrowding, with tenants doubling up or tripling up to pay the rent. Also, up to a year ago, there have been no owners willing to commit to public grant or loan conditions for building, acquiring, or rehabilitating affordable housing for workers.

(c) Neighborhood Resistance

Neighborhood resistance is a well-chronicled barrier to potential sites for farmworker housing. In spite of solid evidence that low income housing does not lower neighboring property values *(State Dept. Community Housing, 1988)* local residents rally against any suggestion of such housing near their neighborhoods. Debate continues among community planning groups as to where and how farmworker housing should exist. This categorical rejection of housing for farmworkers feeds on a variety of ideas concerning the characteristics and conditions of workers.

Misconceptions and fear sustain the pressure on county and other local public officials to keep farmworker (and particularly day laborer) housing off public land and outside residential zones. A common ground for agreement would seem to be on growers' property. However, even the respected grower Harry Singh & Sons had to withstand unrelenting objection to the eventual development of housing exclusively for their own workers on their own Bonsall property *(see "(4) (b) Grower-Sponsored Housing").*

(d) Lack of Infrastructure, and Moratoriums

A further barrier commonly cited in the development of farmworker housing are septic tank moratoriums in some areas where farm lands are located, such as in the Valley Center and Rainbow regions *(Empke, 1990).*

Coupled with lack of infrastructure for sewage, moratoriums preclude high density housing that is needed where large farming operations exist. The lack of public sewers in North County's rural areas may not be serious obstacles to farmworker housing, however, considering that small clusters of housing using septic tanks (for four or fewer farmworkers) are appropriate for the county's typically small farms (average size 10 acres). Growers are being particularly encouraged towards this direction through the County's current fee waiver program.

(e) Preferences For Families Over Single Workers

The tremendous unmet housing needs of single farmworkers is further compounded by the preferences that others have for family housing rather than housing for single males. The priorities of state and federal grant programs are sensitive to the

tendencies of local communities to object less to low-cost family housing than to low-cost housing for single men.

Growers, on the other hand, find housing projects less problematic when provided for single men rather than for entire families. Housing for single men also offer economies of scale in construction and utilities, especially in dormitory or barracks-style units.

(f) Only Fraction Of Income Available For Housing

There is an underlying assumption in discussions of farmworker housing that many workers won't spend their wages on rent, since their primary purpose for having migrated is to provide financial support for families left behind. Many are sending part of their earned income back home. Farmworker housing advocates object to the conclusion, however, that workers prefer the fields and canyons over paying rent, and feel it is similar to claims that many traditional urban homeless persons prefer their situation over being housed. More workers than is generally acknowledged would may be willing to pay rent if "affordable housing" were available *(Kelley, 1989)*.

4. Previous and Current Response to Housing Need

(a) Local Record In Providing Housing

Although no farmworker housing has been created through this agency to date, San Diego County's Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) is developing a project for 38 units of multi-family housing for farmworkers in the San Marcus area.

This $4 million project is being financed through a combination of federal, state, and local funds, including a proposed allocation of $500,000 from the City of San Marcos' redevelopment agency *(McGuigan, 1990)*.

Historically, San Diego County has not participated in the development or operation of farmworker housing, either through individual housing projects or through state-funded migrant housing centers. This tradition is rooted in decades of reliance on undocumented aliens as a temporary labor force for agriculture each year.

In other regions of the state there are 27 migrant housing centers comprised of 2,100 units which house over 6,500 farmworkers. These centers, provided by the State Office of Migrant Services, offer safe and affordable temporary housing and related services such as child care, summer school and medical services. None is located in San Diego County.

Several years ago the late State Assemblyman Bill Bradley (Escondido) made $1.4 million available for a farm labor center in San Diego, San Bernardino, and Riverside counties. However, San Diego County failed to flocate a suitable site, and the funds went to Riverside County.

It has been almost impossible to come up with any agreement on permanent affordable housing. State funds for permanent farmworker housing include provisions that housing must remain available for 20 years. With the potential that North County agricultural land holds for developers, growers refuse to tie up property far into the future. On the other hand, public officials are loathe (and, in some cases, prohibited) to invest taxpayer

money on a private landowner's land only to see that site turned over to some other use the following year.

The city of Oceanside is one of the few cities which has taken advantage of state funds, obtaining $100,000 for sheltering farmworkers. Oceanside is host to an estimated 3,000 to 5,000 agricultural workers each year *(Goodman, 1990)*. The city is leasing three mobile homes to a grower for $1 a year. Each unit houses seven workers. Growers provide each unit with gas, electricity, and water.

During this past year, the County of San Diego modified its General Plan and Zoning Ordinances to stimulate the development of private sector agriculture employee housing. A component of these changes involves the waiver of certain fees, with the County allocating $30,000 in Community Development Grant Funds to help supplement the anticipated loss in revenue. Within a few months of the program's test period, 17 applicants had sought permits, most for projects relating to housing for four employees or less *(Brandt, 1990)*.

Two important accompanying components to the County's fee waiver program are a density bonus program and contract compliance monitoring program *(G. Rodriguez, 1990)*.

In San Diego, the City's Housing Commission is attempting to assist in providing some farmworker housing in a northern region of the city, San Pasqual Valley. One project is on publicly-owned property leased to growers. Scattered across the leaseholds are 37 houses, 32 of which are subleased to employees and their families. Many of the houses are in squalid condition, and have failed the city's health and safety inspections *(Welsh)*.

The Commission has offered technical and financial assistance to the lessees to bring the houses up to code, through repair or replacement with new manufactured housing. In addition, a $100,000 revolving loan development fund has been set up for code improvement, although no takers have yet been found at the time of this report.

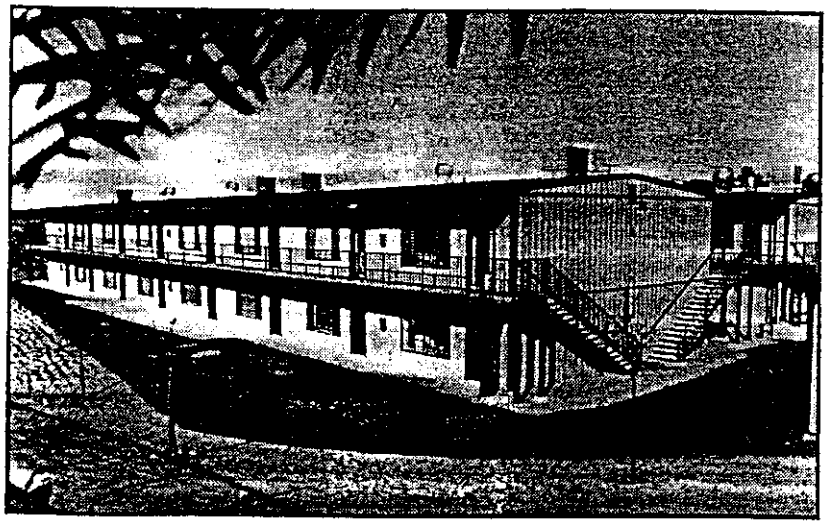
A second Commission project in San Pasqual regards the development of a small temporary farmworker campground of four to eight mobile home dormitory units, a separate laundry, kitchen and dining facility, and a recreation area. The commission is providing the plans and obtaining the conditional use permit at the request of Arid West nursery, who owns the property, and who will provide central bathroom and laundry facilities. The City of Poway is donating the mobile units.

In addition, the City of San Diego received $20,000 in federal Stewart B. McKinney funds to provide rental assistance to homeless families of farmworkers and day laborers. As of this report, no funds have been distributed.

(b) Grower-Sponsored Housing

Concerning grower-sponsored housing, there are only 37 active worker encampments in San Diego County which are registered with the State Department of Housing and Community Development *(Employee Housing Report)*. The remaining encampments, perhaps 200 or so, are illegal.

The most recent, and the largest housing project sponsored by a grower is the 328-worker Bonsall facility opened in December, 1990, owned by Harry Singh and Sons Farms.



The 25,000-square-foot employee housing project cost $2 million to develop. The main buildings contain sleeping rooms, a kitchen, dining room, recreation area, bathrooms and laundry rooms. Outdoor recreation includes a basketball court, volleyball court, picnic areas, and plans for a soccer field. Weekly rent is $16.50 for a shared room, and meals are $44.88 *(Metz, 1990)*.

According to the Singh's representative, the grower had to "plow through mounds of red tape these past few years;" pay $432,000 in local fees and hookups; and overcome stiff neighborhood resistance. Hearings uncovered fears ranging from potential murder and rape to unsanitary conditions and decrepit cars, and included suggestions that workers should instead commute daily from Tijuana. The grower gives credit to County Supervisor John MacDonald for arbitrating differences during the lengthy development process *(Metz)*.

> *At no other time in history have we thrown open the doors to such a mass migration without providing at least the barest support for the immigrants.*
> *— Report of the city of Poway Migrant Worker Relations Committee*

(c) Federal and State Funding and Support

There are several government programs which help provide farm-worker housing. At the federal level, the Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) makes loans and grants to finance the construction, rehabilitation or purchase of rental housing for farmworkers, as it is doing so with the County HCD's project in San Marcos. Grants of up to 90 percent of project cost are available, with the remainder loaned at 1 percent interest.

Loans are available to farmers and farmer associations. Both loans and grants are available to public and private non-profit corporations and to non-profit farmworker organizations. FmHA funds are a crucial resource for many California nonprofit groups dealing with the farmworker population. Money, however, is earmarked primarily for family housing, rather than for single workers housing.

FmHA has also broadened the definition of "migrant" to include permanent residents and has recently become more flexible in its distribution of grants and loans.

California's Farmworker Housing Grant Program (FWHG) provides up to 50 percent matching grants to local government agencies and non-profit groups for development costs of new or rehabilitated farmworker housing. The fund, intended as leverage for other funds, is available for both single and multi-family housing.

Another state resource for farmworker housing is the Office of Migrant Services. OMS (within the California Department of Housing and Community Development) provides temporary housing and other services to migrant families. Counties and/or grower associations furnish the land as an in-kind contribution. Families contribute 30 percent of their income towards rent, with other costs subsidized. Eligibility requirements include a six-month maximum occupancy limit.

There are also instances of federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds being made available for farmworker housing throughout the state. A total of only $50,000 has been allocated by local government in San Diego County, however.

(d) Progress Being Recorded in Other Regions

Contrasted with San Diego's past record for farmworker housing, other regions in the state together offer inspiration for creative projects which have combined public and private resources in meeting this need. For example:

In Sonoma County, an ordinance streamlines the permit process required of growers who want to provide housing. Using a "model bunkhouse" concept, housing design is standardized in order to

encourage grower efforts and reduce paperwork. Necessary permits can be obtained in two weeks *(Harkavy, 1990)*.

The California Human Development Corporation, a non-profit agency, built 52 clustered apartment units for farmworkers in Sutter County.

The Coachella Valley Housing Coalition in Palm Desert has developed numerous projects for farmworkers and other very low-income people, including new units, rehabilitation, preservation of subsidized housing and sweat-equity home ownership.

Self-Help Enterprises in Visalia has been serving farmworker and other poor families for 25 years through their new housing, rehabilitation and community development programs. With farmworkers comprising approximately 75-85 percent of their constituency, this non-profit has also promoted single-family home ownership through the use of housing co-ops.

Burbank Housing Development Corporation in Santa Rosa has built 130 multi-family dwelling units and is now building another 16-unit farmworker housing project.

C. Employment

1. The Need for Adequate Income

As previously mentioned, almost all farmworkers are men, with many supporting families back home. A few who have received legal status have since been joined by their families. Whether they are supporting their families in this county or in their Mexican villages, however, the wages earned by almost all migrant workers are inadequate for daily living. The prevailing hourly wage is $4.25 an hour.

Workers who take up urban day labor remain equally destitute. While able to earn $5 to $6.50 an hour from sporadic work opportunities, they are often employed fewer than 40 hours a week. Many who had achieved full time employment have been severely cut back this past year.

The fact that the U.S. minimum wage is five or six times higher than the prevailing wages in Mexico, which is, in turn, higher than most in Central America *(Portes, 1990)* does not reduce the profound inadequacy of wages at this level when living in San Diego. The comparison between the prevailing minimum wages here, and prevailing median wages in Mexico and Central America entices more migrants into the region. It is irrelevant, however, in assisting them to obtain anything but the lowest of living standards after they arrive.

2. Assistance in Finding Work

The need for workers to have a place to connect with prospects for employment has led to organized hiring halls in some parts of the state. The city of Encinitas, the only municipality in this region to establish a hiring hall, views the hall as a way to assist legal residents become stabilized, and as a way to cut down on complaints concerning the general nuisance of day laborers waiting on street corners.

Fifty to sixty workers arrive at the hiring hall daily. Half are placed in jobs. Since the facility opened, it has been used by an average of 16 different employers a day *(Carranza, 1990)*.

> *As one moves from one country to another... one begins to believe that there is something in common among jobs held by migrants in widely diverse geographic areas and very different historical periods; the jobs tend to be unskilled, generally but not always low paying and connote inferior social status; they often involve hard or unpleasant working conditions and considerable insecurity.*
> *—Alejandro Portes and Ruben G. Rumbaut*

The Encinitas center verifies for employers that workers are documented. The City of Los Angeles takes another approach. It offers public property for "hiring sites" instead of serving as a broker between workers and employers. The onus is placed on employers to check for documents. Immigration and Naturalization Services' (INS) Western Regional Commissioner has agreed to refrain from raiding job sites, so as not to imperil local solutions to curbside hiring problems *(C. Smith)*.

In addition to Encinitas' center, the city of Carlsbad is preparing for this region's second hiring hall, scheduled to be open by Spring, 1991.

Hiring halls and hiring sites both offer workers improved chances finding and negotiating employment (and sometimes even provision of lunch) through "open market bargaining." This approach also serves the interests of honest employers and homeowners in search of reliable help.

D. Protection of Rights as Employees

In spite of federal and state laws and regulations, farmworkers and day laborers fall prey to discrimination and employment abuses, including not receiving wages; exposure to accidents and injury; and exposure to pesticides.

The protection of workers against accidents and fatalities is especially critical in farmwork, an industry with high accident rates and a record of not covering employees with Workman's Compensation or State Disability Insurance. Equally troubling, farm employees' exposure to pesticides remains unresolved, both in the fields and near the fields. *(For further discussion on accidents, injuries, and exposure to pesticides, refer to the section on "Health Status and Medical Care Needs")*

Workers are sometimes paid below the legal minimum wage, or are required to work without pay during a "probationary period." Some are paid less than what was previously agreed upon. Many employers do not pay Worker's Compensation or State Disability Insurance. Most workers are unfamiliar with legal recourses.

According to Claudia Smith, attorney for the California Rural Legal Assistance in Oceanside, nonpayment of workers is on the upswing as the economy continues downward, especially with subcontractors and other smaller employers, who rely heavily on migrant workers. "In these times, marginal employers become even more marginal, and the payroll doesn't get paid," says Smith.

> *Without refrigerators to store food, and being so far away from stores, many men eat off catering trucks. Its expensive. At Ralphs you can get 5 cans of tomatoe sauce or 3 dozen tortillas for a dollar. Off the truck, peaches are 75 cents each. On payday, the trucks won't open up until workers pay off their credit. Half their paycheck goes to food.*
> *— Gloria Soto, California Rural Legal Assistance*

E. Difficulty With Communication, and Lack of Education

As are others in poverty, many workers are uneducated, and illiterate. Under the provisions of the immigration law, workers are not required to know English. Many are also illiterate in Spanish. Some from southern Mexico (Mixtecos) have their own dialect and do not even speak Spanish.

Workers not understanding English are handicapped in their ability to use public services, to obtain better jobs, to find shelter, and to assimilate into the local culture. They remain in an endless abyss of low pay, poverty, and homelessness, separated from opportunities for change.

In addition, the inexperienced ways and abject poverty of workers from distant villages roughly rubs against local laws and customs. To date there have been nominal efforts to meet the acculturation and educational needs of workers. ESL (English

as a Second Language) and other social and health related classes are held daily at the Encinitas Hiring Hall. Other public agencies have implemented ad hoc educational programs to encourage acculturation. Materials are printed in Spanish language to provide information on worker rights, criminal justice process, and community responsibilities.

ESL classes are coupled with other "survival skills" classes for migrant workers in a special North County program funded by United Way of San Diego County. Administered through a partnership of the Oceanside Community Action Corporation and Lifeline Community Services, the project provides assistance for farmworkers and day laborers in developing skills for self sufficiency and "entry into mainstream society."

F. Transportation

Immobility is a common problem for homeless agricultural workers. Many of the smaller campsites are within walking distances of fields, but are away from urban public transportation zones. Other camps are more than a hour's walking time from the fields.

Distances present daily barriers to purchasing food and goods at fair and reasonable prices, obtaining medical care, gaining access to training and other adult education classes, or using banking and credit union services. Small matters require loss of pay and extraordinary effort. Even access to work on public transportation, at $1.25 each way ($30 a month) requires careful budgeting.

In addition to encouraging more van transportation service, in its report on "The Working Homeless," the MAAC Project points out the need for a local transportation system linking major farms, employment centers, worker camps and essential services. MAAC also recommends that public bus service be routed near worker camps a few selected times each day *(Juarez, 1989)*.

G. Health Status and Medical Care

This section examines four areas as they apply to San Diego County's workers: (1) assessment of health needs, with emphasis on occupational hazards; (2) established health care services and accessibility to health care; (3) available health education; and (4) sources of financial assistance for this population. Discussion on communicable diseases and other critical public health issues is presented in "(VI) Priority Community Issues, (A) Public Health and Safety."

1. Assessment of Health Needs

Agricultural workers labor and live under some of the worst conditions of any group of workers in the United States. In addition to common medical ailments, such living conditions contribute to an increased risk of injuries, illnesses, and transmission of communicable diseases.

(a) Industrial Injuries and Illnesses

Trauma

Agriculture is the third most dangerous occupation in the United States, after mining and construction *(Farmworker Justice Fund, 1988)*. Many hazards are related to the use of tractors, harvesters, ladders, irrigation and other equipment and machinery. Field work involves much bending, lifting, and sustained awkward postures for extended periods of time (stoop labor).

Agriculture is a dusty occupation, and the lungs are usually the first organ to be exposed to these concentrations. The exact composition of dust is presently under study to determine its organic and inorganic components. Organic dusts are a major potential source of illness and disability in agriculture *(Schenker, 1990)*.

Other hazards include heat-induced illnesses and diseases related to exposure to ultra-violet radiation. Workers also run the risk of bee stings, snake bites, and being kicked by animals *(Maizlish, 1990)*. Those who take on day labor jobs in painting construction work, cement mixing, landscaping, etc. and may be faced with unfamiliar equipment and no orientation which sets them up for increased accidents.

Pesticides

An additional and more insidious hazard faced by agriculture workers is pesticide exposure. In California, where approximately 250 million pounds of pesticides are used annually, 92% is used in agriculture. In San Diego County, greater than 5 million pounds of pesticides were applied in 1985.

Migrant workers are exposed to toxic pesticides from many sources - the crops they cultivate and harvest, the soil the crops are grown in, and drift of toxic sprays that are being applied to adjoining fields or often to the very field in which they are working. Workers live in homes surrounded by fields which are heavily and repeatedly sprayed. Pesticides may be in the irrigation water or in the ground water from which their drinking water is drawn. And since they are more likely to consume produce very soon after harvesting they may get even more pesticide residue in their food than the general public.

Pesticide effects run the gamut of acute to chronic. Acute health effects of pesticides range from irritant effects on the eye and upper respiratory tract to contact dermatitis, to systemic poisoning which can progress to death.

Chronic effects of concern in pesticide-exposed populations include cancer, birth defects, neurotoxicity, and adverse effects on reproduction and fertility. Most workers have chronic exposure to low levels of many different pesticides (and "inert" ingredients) over a working lifetime. The extent and magnitude of chronic health problems from occupational and environmental exposure to pesticides is not known because appropriate studies have not been done *(Moses, 1989)*.

Besides understanding labeling instructions on pesticide containers, personal protection from pesticide exposure requires, at a minimum, freshly laundered clothing with long pants and sleeves and sturdy gloves. Handwashing before and after meals should be the rule. Farmworkers often work stripped to the waist. Clothing is frequently worn more than one day without laundering and lunch is eaten in the fields without prior hand washing. Gloves, if available, are unwashed and torn but used throughout the season. In this situation, they can act as an occlusive dressing and increase pesticide absorption *(Smith, 1986)*.

(b) Communicable Diseases

Potential problems in camps include the communicable diseases endemic in many countries of poor socioeconomic status with limited access to health care: tuberculosis, malaria, and intestinal parasites and illnesses, hepatitis, and sexually transmitted diseases. These diseases and related illnesses are discussed in *Section VI, (3) "Priority Issues, Communicable Diseases."*

(c) Maternal and Childhood Illnesses and Health Care Needs

Needs for maternal and child health care are increasing as more workers bring their families in the country. The level of

immunity to communicable diseases in San Diego County is negatively impacted by an influx of inadequately immunized children and young adults, according to the County Department of Health Services. In a measles outbreak last year, 40 percent of the reported cases were among the Hispanic population. Sixty percent of the immunization clinic patient loads at the Oceanside, Vista and Escondido Public Health centers are Spanish-speaking patients. Increasing numbers are expected in these immunization clinics, which are already straining current space and availability of bilingual staff.

The need for affordable prenatal care can also be expected to increase at a time when fewer resources for care are available for low income persons. A rise in the percentage of deliveries to mothers with no prenatal care may be resulting in more premature and low birth-weight babies, with resulting increased medical costs.

2. Health Care Services and Accessibility

Agricultural workers have a high level of health need and low level of health care, living on the "fringes" of society, far removed from community health care.

San Diego County's fiscal resources devoted to health have grown very slowly in the past. In 1987, however, the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act greatly assisted in providing thousands of dollars to local clinics offering primary health care services and substance abuse services to homeless populations.

Although legally documented, many migrant workers do not actively seek medical assistance when needed due to fear of authorities, language barriers, lack of education, cost, lack of transportation, and various beliefs in folk medicine *(Estrada, Trevino, & Ray, 1990; O'Brien, 1983)*.

(a) Community Health Care Clinics

Ambulatory care clinics are considered to be pillars of the indigent health care system, particularly with the absence of a "county hospital." Five clinics are identified as the primary care sites for the documented homeless migrant agricultural workers. They include: Escondido Community Clinic; Episcopal Community Services Family Health Centers, Oceanside and Encinitas; and Vista Community Clinics, on Vista Way and on Vale Terrace. Distances between clinics and camp sites are 10 to 25 miles.

Bilingual staff members are present at each of these facilities. Workers are treated for gastrointestinal disorders, parasites, musculoskeletal complaints, dermatitis, eye injuries, sexually transmitted diseases, various infections, dental complaints, and minor trauma *(T. Ream, November 8, 1990)*.

Follow-up care at the clinics is generally very poor, due the unwillingness of the worker to return, and the clinics' difficulty in contacting patients who have no address.

(b) Community Outreach Programs

Canyon Health Care Coalition

The Canyon Health Care Coalition is organized to improve access to and use of health care services to agricultural workers in the North County. The coalition has a van, and a case manager/driver to transport farmworkers to five north county clinics on a daily basis. Medical costs are paid by the Healthcare for the Homeless project, and, in some cases, MediCal and County Medical Services (CMS).

The driver of the van, a Mexican-trained physician, Gilberto Munoz, provides initial health screening, triage, and health education at the campsites. Since the inception of this service in May, 1990, Dr. Munoz reports that 960 migrant agricultural workers were transported for treatment.

North County Chaplaincy

The North County Chaplaincy Office offers assistance to workers by obtaining the free services of various community physicians and offering health education classes for families. Another service, occasionally provided, is health screening by volunteer physicians and nurses at the migrant camp sites *(R. Martinez)*.

Mount Carmel Outreach

The Mount Carmel Outreach Program uses volunteers (clergy, health professionals, and lay individuals) to visit the Rancho Penasquitas migrant camp each Saturday morning. Health screening is conducted by a physician and several medical students from UCSD.

(c) County Public Health Services

Public Health Services, County Department of Health Services, has traditionally extended its services to all county residents, regardless of legal residency status. Public Health nurses regularly visit encampments where families reside to assess health needs and provide information regarding health practices and medical resources. Nurses from the Oceanside Public Health Center offer classes for pregnant women who have no source of prenatal care. Public health nurses provide surveillance and assist in management of malaria conditions among persons living in encampments.

3. Health Education

Preventive health measures often fail to reach the migrant population. In eking ou ta daily existence in a strange culture, prevention is virtually nonexistent. There is a great need for health education within this group, but health educators, funding, and appropriate educational materials are a scarcity.

Language difficulties are also barriers to health care, as they are barriers to other critical services. Bilingual health care workers or translators are rarely present in doctors' offices and clinics. Written medical information - pamphlets, handouts, clinic schedules and locations of medical facilities - is often not available in Spanish, or not culturally relevant. Even when written material is available, its effectiveness is negated by the high rate of illiteracy among migrant workers.

4. Sources of Funding for Medical Care

Costs of medical services to workers is covered through at least four channels: County Medical Service; MediCal; private-pay; and other financial and medical assistance.

County Medical Service (CMS)

Because San Diego does not operate a county hospital, County Medical Services (CMS), Department of Health Services, contracts with both the public and private sectors to form a network of providers of health care to eligible medically indigent adults. As an additional part of this countywide integrated program, mental health, drug abuse, and alcohol abuse services are provided to CMS clients by divisions within the Department of Health Services (DHS).

CMS covers only medical services for serious health problems which may be life-threatening or disabling if not treated, and only to indigent persons who are documented county residents and are 21 to 64 years of age.

MediCal

MediCal pays for health care for needy and low income residents of California. However, the majority of migrant workers do not qualify *(G. Munoz, 1990)*. There have been severe MediCal eligibility reductions and transfer of responsibility of care of medically indigent adults from state to county governments. For example, the county only received 50% of the prior funding from the state in 1990 for a total of $21 million, which is a reduction from $80 million 3 years earlier. As a result, an even greater burden has been placed on the already-limited services available for workers.

Private Pay

Most workers pay for medical care with cash on a sliding fee basis established by the clinics. The clinics then in turn, attempt to obtain monies allocated under the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act of 1987 to make up the difference in cost.

Workers do not have private insurance coverage. No third-party insurance exists in the county for agricultural workers who cannot afford regular premiums *(J. Serafy, 1990)*.

Other Sources of Financial and Medical Assistance

These include Child Health and Disability Prevention and Treatment; Third Party Operating Agreement with UCSD; and "Proposition 99."

For those children of migrant workers, medical care can be provided through the Child Health and Disability Prevention and Treatment Program.

The County has designated the University of California Medical Center in San Diego (UCSD Medical Center) as the receiving hospital for indigent adults. However, it has been reported that few, if any workers seek care at UCSD Medical Center, most likely due to the inconvenient location of the hospital to the migrant campsites in North County.

Proposition 99, the Cigarette and Tobacco Products Surtax Fund (Assembly Bill 75) passed three years ago, is appropriating some funds to the State Department of Health Services, for use only through July 1, 1991. Some of this appropriation will be eligible for services to documented agricultural workers.

H. Police Protection

While farmworkers and day laborers are considered by many as generally law-abiding, their camps are often outside the purview of local law enforcement. Minor offenses such as fighting, theft, and public drunkenness are not likely to be drawn to the attention of authorities, who are culturally and geographically distanced from the camps.

Barriers to the legal system stem from inability to speak English, unfamiliarity with the criminal justice system, and distrust of law enforcement officers. Distances from urbanized zones and lack of telephones increase this isolation and the resultant under-reporting of crimes and medical emergencies.

There is a low conviction rate of offenders who commit crimes against workers. Those who do report crimes, such as having their possessions stolen while they are away during the day, lack a mailing address where they can be contacted to identify a suspect or testify in court. Few victims follow up initial complaints.

In order to encourage workers to contact police officers about more serious crimes, the San Diego Police Department does not detain workers solely on suspicions about their immigration status *(McDonnell, 1989)*. In addition, the department is offering an example of reaching out by distributing materials printed in Spanish explaining laws and procedures specifically relating to conditions concerning camp dwellers, and assigning a Spanish-speaking officer to regularly visit camps. This is in contrast of other law enforcement authorities who have accompanied the U.S. Border Patrol on camp raids.

I. Mental Health Services

Homeless agricultural and urban day workers are considered to be at high risk of suffering emotional and mental health problems. However, they are not necessarily believed to be suffering from mental illness at rates as high as those of the traditional homeless population.

Psychologically, however, life for migrant workers can be devastating. Isolation, loneliness, despair, and hopelessness can lead to anxiety, depression, and other disorders *(Munoz & Gretian, 1990)*.

The stress of economic uncertainty coupled with isolation in a foreign country and enduring family separation takes its toll. The process by which the Hispanic family is thought to protect or promote mental health has not been clearly articulated. Some authors contend that strong family supports lower the incidence of mental disorders and provide therapeutic functions such as anxiety reduction so that the need to seek outside help is considerably lessened *(Markides & Coreil, 1986)*. For most workers there are no family ties to protect them from stress. They are alone and remain isolated from the mainstream of society because of inadequate language skills and lack of understanding of social inter-system workings within this culture.

Isolated in camps away from town, they have little to do in the way of recreation when the work day is over. This can lead to alcohol use and abuse. Lone Mexican men drink twice as much as Mexican men living with their families, although drinking rarely interferes with work *(Villarejo, 1990)*.

According to San Diego County Mental Health Services (SDMHS), workers regularly go unserved by any mental health service. Lack of information regarding available services, the stigma of mental illness, shortage of bilingual services, and services with no cultural competence are among the many factors standing between this population and appropriate mental health care.

To help prevent mental illness, bilingual, culturally competent workers are needed to provide outreach services. According to SDMHS staff, preventive measures include: mental health promotion, through teaching of healthy coping mechanisms; early detection and appropriate treatment of mental disorders; and rehabilitation/ avoidance of complications and impairment.

Maintaining mental health also depends greatly on decent, affordable housing, and access to jobs which pay fairly. Achieving these reduces the risk of onset of mental disorders, concludes SDMHS.

VI. PRIORITY COMMUNITY ISSUES

The emergence of migrant workers as an important community issue seems to be primarily the result of the proximity of new housing tracts and commercial developments to campsites, and the legal documentation of workers who previously had to be out of sight. This has triggered the public's awareness and concern over conditions of workers and their camps, and the impact of their lifestyle and living arrangements on neighbors.

These issues, which often serve as a counter-force to attempts by public officials and administrators to respond to the needs of homeless workers, include: (A) public health and safety; (B) costs of illegal camp abatement; (C) visibility of workers on public and private property; (D) theft; (E) the continued influx of migrant workers; and (F) their economic dependence.

A. Public Health and Safety

At the top of concerns voiced by community residents are the health, safety, and esthetic threats that the camps are believed to pose to neighborhoods. Residents complain of health code violations, misdemeanors, and litter.

1. Fire Hazards

One of the major potential threats to nearby residents is fire. The majority of camps are located in canyons or in heavily treed areas where the vegetation is very dry. The chaparral environment of most canyons contains dense thickets of scrubby plants and dwarf trees which ignite and burn easily.

Camps are often difficult to access and have a limited water supply. The material used in constructing shelters is mainly wood and the shelters are often very close to each other. There is also an abundance of burnable garbage on the ground between the shelters.

Workers use candles or small propane lanterns for lighting. They use ground fires for cooking and warmth. These fires are usually only a few feet away from the wooden shelters. Abuse of alcohol in the evening when fire is usually used means these fires may be unattended. Although no major fires are known to have been started by camp dwellers, if a fire were to become out of control there would be little workers could do to prevent its spread. Without telephone services, they would also be unable to seek immediate help.

2. Unsanitary Conditions

Another concern voiced by local residents is the health risk associated with the unsanitary conditions of the camps, which are usually very crowded with dozens of people living in close proximately to each other. As many as five people may sleep together in a tiny wooden shelter. There is no planning associated with the camps so the layout of shelters is completely disorganized *(Nicky, 1990; K. M. Smith, 1990).*

The major health threat to the inhabitants of the camps and the local residents is the lack of controlled sewage disposal. Some of the camps have

portable chemical toilets and some do not. If a camp does have chemical toilets they are often not used. Human feces is evident on the ground in and around the camps, and in ponds or streams near the camps. Frequently this same water is also used for drinking and bathing. The lack of proper disposal creates the potential for ground water contamination and the spread of fecal related diseases *(Nicky, 1990; K. M. Smith, 1990)*.

There is often inadequate garbage disposal in the camps. Some may have a dumpster provided for garbage disposal but these are often not used. Most of the camps have an abundance of garbage on the ground between the shelters and in the surrounding areas. This environment provides an ideal habitat for rodents, although food is commonly hung safely in trees and camp residents report no problems with rats. Flies and other insects buzz through garbage, feces, and cooking facilities.

Lack of fresh drinking water naturally creates a health threat to the camp residents. Streams and ponds surrounding the camps are frequently used for bathing. If fresh water is not provided to camp residents they may drink the contaminated water from streams, ponds or irrigation ditches.

3. *Communicable Diseases*

Potential public health risks associated with camps are the same as communicable diseases endemic in many countries of poor socioeconomic status with limited access to health care.

Tuberculosis has been found to pose a significant problem for Mexican workers. *(Jacobson, Mercer, Miller, & Simpson, 1987)*. The rate of occurrence of T.B. is 17.5% for Hispanics in comparison with a rate of 4.5% for the white non-Hispanic *(Dowling, 1989)*. Studies also reveal that the prevalence of clinically active T.B. among the United States homeless population is 150 to 300 times higher than the national rate *(Gracey, 1988)*. The case rate of T.B. in California is higher than the national rate due to the number of foreign born residents *(Moser, 1990)*.

Although there are very few active cases of T.B. seen in the worker population in the San Diego area, statistics on the T.B. rate among this group is inconclusive. There is little disagreement, however, that workers live in conditions which favor the spread of respiratory infection.

In July and August of 1986 an outbreak of malaria involving sustained local transmission occurred in San Diego County. This outbreak represents both the largest outbreak of malaria in the United States since 1952 and the first outbreak since World War II involving sustained local transmission *(Maldonado et al., 1990)*.

In this episode, 28 people in Carlsbad met the case definition for malaria. These people included 26 workers and two local county residents *(Maldonado et al., 1990)*. For some, this outbreak illustrates the potential for the introduction of malaria in the San Diego area. Local transmissions have occurred during the past three years. The potential for mosquito-spread malaria will continue as long as infected persons lack adequate shelter.

Another potential public health risk associated with migrantfarm is the spread of intestinal parasites. Although data on the occurrence and transmission of intestinal parasites in this group is limited, available studies do show a greater prevalence of intestinal parasites than in the greater American population *(O'Brien, 1983; Unger, Incose, Culter, & Barlett, 1986)*.

Also associated with migrant farmworkers is the occurrence and transmission of intestinal infectious diseases. The most common intestinal infection seen among migrant farm workers is shigella *(Nickey, 1990)*.

Likely vehicles for transmission of intestinal diseases are foods that are served raw or are handled after they are cooked *(Martin et al., 1985)*. Camp occupants often have community cooking arrangements. Little attention is paid to the sanitary conditions of food preparation, or the assurance that food is properly cooked. There are also no facilities in which to refrigerate food prior to cooking. Produce can become contaminated through contaminated irrigation water *(Martin et al., 1985)*.

Health may also be threatened by careless practices regarding storage, dating, and handling of food sold off trucks and in other isolated, unmonitored places in or near camps *(Castro, 1990)*.

Other infectious diseases that may be present in the migrant farmworker population include the hepatitis B surface antigen and hepatitis A. Limited studies on the occurrence rate of hepatitis A & B among migrant farm workers show that the hepatitis B rate is similar to that of the United States population and that the hepatitis A rate is about three times higher than that of the United States population *(Fehrs et al., 1988; Nicky, 1990)*. Hepatitis B is spread through sexual contract and drug use: Hepatitis A is spread through feces.

The risk of AIDS may be increased in the Hispanic population by the practice of friends and neighbors injecting vitamins and medications. Needles are often used on more than one person. The risk of contracting AIDS and other STD's is also increased by the use of prostitutes in the migrant camps and a pattern of unsafe sexual practices. *(Marin, 1989)*.

Because of camp conditions, and resultant complaints, many camps are eventually closed down and torn down by officials, "...in which case the men simply move elsewhere and reconstruct their houses from boards and plastic salvaged from work-sites or from the trash" *(Obler, 1989)*.

Within the past year and a half, attention has been given to a worker encampment located in MacGonigle Canyon. The MacGonigle Canyon camp site is the largest in Rancho Penasquitas, with a population reaching 400 persons during peak seasons. As an alternative to closing down the camp, Rev. Rafael Martinez (North County Chaplaincy) successfully negotiated with the City of San Diego for the camp to remain open under controlled conditions.

Legal encampments can minimize abatement costs, improve the health and safety of the workers, and reduce tension between workers and neighboring residents, according to 1990 Deputy Mayor of San Diego Abbe Wolfsheimer, who advocated for the camp to remain open. Requirements now include chemical toilets, shelters for residents, a waste dumpster, potable water, an absence of standing water and combustible materials, a restriction prohibiting cooking within ten feet of vegetation and structures, and ongoing supervision of the camp. As an extension of this issue, the deputy-mayor set up the "First District Migrant Issues Task Force" to examine other conditions and issues relating to workers and their encampments.

In an attempt to reduce the chances for diseases, health educators and communicable disease investigators regularly outreach to field workers discussing signs and symptoms of sexually transmitted diseases (STD's) and encouraging follow-up at public health STD clinics. STD clinics in the North County are regularly attended by Spanish-speaking field workers.

Because of camp conditions, and resultant complaints, many camps are eventually closed down and torn down by officials, in which case the men simply move elsewhere and reconstruct their houses from boards and plastic salvaged from work-sites or from the trash — Richard M. Obler, MD, MPH

B. High Public and Private Costs of Illegal Camp Abatement

Another concern of local officials is cost associated with the abatement of the worker encampments. Health and public safety agencies such as the County Sheriff's Department and the County Department of Health Services have had to beef up their efforts to control the number, size, and activities of the encampments.

The costs of these efforts are born by both private property owners and the local tax base. It has been reported that in the city of Encinitas, for instance, approximately five hours of staff time is devoted to each illegal

encampment complaint. The city estimates that in 1989 private property owners paid $150,000 to remove the litter and debris from their property, with the public sector spending another $75,000 *(Encinitas, March 13, 1990)*.

C. Visibility of Workers on Public and Private Property

The presence of laborers on street corners, at bus stops, and on private property generates complaints to county and other local public offices. Workers who have obtained legal status are more openly looking for work, purchasing food and goods, or enjoying their time off. It's likely that others who are not documented are exercising these freedoms as well.

Reasons that the simple presence of workers leads to complaints are hard to pin down. For some neighboring residents, it is unsettling to have people around who have nothing: they may take something. As with all homeless populations, their apparent neediness is troublesome and unresolved. The reactions of neighbors parallel those often directed to homeless populations.

Attention is drawn to workers particularly between peak agriculture seasons when supplemental day work is necessary for scratching out a living. Public areas become hiring sites for persons seeking an additional day's work, and for employers seeking cheap labor. They are also gathering spots in the late afternoon. The City of Poway Migrant Worker Relations Committee suggests that residents would be less concerned if they were familiar with Hispanic socialization patterns that center around the 'town square' where men and women often congregate at the end of the work day".

Business and property owners are among the most vociferous in their concern about the public presence of farmworkers and day laborers. Workers present a stark socioeconomic contrast with other customers. Business owners feel a potential offense to other customers. In spite of complaints, workers are regular customers at many of these establishments: They are probably preferred over penniless urban homeless persons, who are persistently shooed away from commerce.

In addition to the complaints of businesses, property owners cite health and safety issues, along with fears that the neighborhood's quality of life and, perhaps property value, will be impacted.

Together these concerns, perceived or actual, significant or insignificant, apply pressure on local public officials to "do something" to reduce the visible presence of migrant workers.

D. Theft and Other Offenses

Awareness of the homeless worker population is accompanied by increased reports of theft of personal possessions, including food, small items, and bicycles. Confrontations between business owners and workers occur. Some businesses use private security guards to discourage theft, along with loitering, beer drinking, littering, and the congregating of small and sometimes larger groups on their property.

Verifiable information on incidents of theft involving migrant workers is scarce. Some believe that workers are often scapegoats for unsolved crimes. Divergent viewpoints quickly emerge from specific incidents. A worker riding a bicycle down a highway leads one person to conclude that it's probably stolen. Another person has heard that local youth sell their bikes to workers, reporting to their parents that the bike was stolen.

In its report to the City Council, the Poway Migrant Worker Relations Committee concluded its law enforcement and criminal justice research with the finding that "criminal activity among migrants is no more or less than that of the general population." The committee tracks perceptions of lawlessness among migrants as coming from activities that residents equate with crime: loitering and congregating in large groups, public drinking, and "looking suspicious" *(Poway)*.

Workers are themselves victims of theft, and of intimidation. Encampments experience thefts and robberies, particularly during times workers are in the fields, and sometimes from persons outside the camps *(Eckert, 1990)*.

Camp dwellers have also been targets of verbal abuse and vicious harassment such as shootings with paint pellets.

E. Continued Influx of Persons Who Are Economically Dependent

As economic conditions in the southern and central parts of Mexico deteriorate, there is little doubt that workers will continue northward. Mexico's young and vigorous population, with a median age of 15, will maintain a burgeoning demand for employment today and certainly into the next century.

More than 5.8 million legal immigrants entered the U.S. during the 1980's, according to the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service. The Census Bureau has estimated that about 200,000 undocumented persons enter the country every year. Even before 1990 Census counts are added, this past decade's immigration is the second highest in U.S. history, surpassed only by the period from 1901 to 1910, when 8.7 million people came to the U.S. *(SF Chronicle, May 1, 1990)* .

San Diego is a major gateway to the U.S.. This continuing flow of migrant and immigrant individuals and families raises concerns of San Diego's residents. The efforts of local officials to deal with the present conditions surrounding this impoverished population tend to be washed away by the realization that their numbers will not subside.

Included in this tide are several hundred - some think several thousand - Guatemalans and Salvadorans surviving in the county while seeking political asylum, whose legal status and eventual destination is unknown.

There is a common perception that the unchecked influx of migrant workers and political refugees with no monetary resources further strains an overburdened health and social services support system, and a sagging economy. With limited attention at the federal level, local residents fear that this unaddressed burden will permanently settle on the local tax base. There is no question that federal policies concerning immigration, and the political asylum process, have made significant demands and impacts upon county and city governments. A summary of the feelings of many local officials is summed up by the Migrant Worker Relations Committee in its report to the Poway City Council:

" With the abdication of federal and state authorities of their responsibilities in these areas of social services, housing, legal assistance, etc., other agencies must pick up the slack, and most often that agency is the city. . . The federal government, for all intents and purposes, has washed its hands of the ensuing impacts..."

Local legislators are becoming more determined to open up dialogue at the state and federal levels, to influence public policy and programs which place the state and federal governments in a more responsive position with migrant workers and the conditions surrounding them. U.S. Representative Ron Packard, for instance, is sponsoring legislation to develop an "impact aid" program for migrants, and San Diego Councilmember Abbe Wolfsheimer has scheduled a "multi-jurisdictional workshop" to help crystallize agreement on the direction that needs to be taken at all levels of government, as well as in the private sector.

VII. CONCLUSION

It was the purpose of this paper to examine the characteristics and living conditions of documented homeless workers; their impact on the communities of North County and the northern region of San Diego city; and local efforts that are underway to improve conditions.

The Task Force's Community Resources Committee has completed its research with only one clear conclusion: This region's agricultural and services industries are inextricably dependent on a large pool of documented, permanent workers who are paid less than it cost to live in the region.

Further conclusions on delegation of responsibility and direction for proceeding at this point would be inappropriate, and probably incorrect. It is the intent of the Regional Task Force and its Community Resource Committee to broadly distribute copies of this study, and, over the course of the next few months, elicit recommendations for action. Draft copies of these recommendations will be widely distributed as well, prior to the final adoption of this second report.

If you want to know what the situation is in terms of people coming up here from Mexico, and the hopes and aspirations these people have, read the "Grapes of Wrath," and substitute Mexican for Okie. That's the story right there.
—Father Marvin Bowers

The Regional Task Force's Community Resources Committee is especially interested in recommendations which may increase this region's capacity to respond to the following:

- Crisis assistance, particularly through greater access to emergency services that are already available.
- Alternatives for meeting housing needs. The most appropriate responses may not be through traditional design, zoning, or density, nor to everyone's satisfaction.
- Increased response to health needs, and to the need to protect the public's health. Illnesses, injuries, and public health threats are as real as the squalor in which these workers exist.
- Assistance with finding and retaining employment at a level sufficient for securing appropriate housing arrangements.
- Support in assimilating workers into the local culture, and granting them and their families access to education.
- Access to public transportation routes.
- A concerted and coordinated effort towards enlightened federal understanding of these issues, and, ultimately, an increased assumption of responsibility at all levels of government.
- A regional approach to resolving these common community issues.

While there is much to be done, San Diego county has recorded measurable success in meeting the needs of the urban homeless during this past decade. The 1990's could mark the beginning of similar achievements in responding to the urgent needs of the rural working homeless. There are certainly compelling human reasons to hope so.

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