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* The attached paper on migrant shelter is an attempt to
 * generate discussion, and new approaches, to the decades
 * old problem of decent housing for migrant farmworkers.
 * There is only passing mention of seasonal, nonmigratory
 * agricultural workers, or of elderly, retired or disabled
 * farmworkers. The principal thrust of the paper is in
 * the development of housing in user states, and not home
 * base areas. But it is a starting point from which a
 * complete program can be developed.

* We would very much appreciate your critical comments on
 * the proposal. Please call or write Jon Linfield at the
 * Housing Assistance Council, (202)842-8600.

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Resource ID#: 1748
Proposal for Migrant Shelter

A PROPOSAL FOR MIGRANT SHELTER

For nearly twenty years the Housing Assistance Council has worked with local migrant service agencies, with local farmers and growers, with state and local government, and with the Farmers Home Administration in an effort to develop adequate housing for farmworkers. It has been frustrating, and largely unsuccessful. Neither necessary funding nor workable, practical programs have existed. This brief paper is an effort to commence again with a demonstration which may suggest a sound program for the future.

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The most recent survey (in 1980) of the national need for migrant farmworker shelter indicated a shortage of nearly 800,000 units. More rigorous enforcement of health and sanitary standards since that time have meant the loss of even more private labor camp units, while the only federal farmlabor housing program has financed, since 1980, fewer than 5,000 new units, virtually all of those in states with nearly year round need for farm labor. The existing farmlabor housing program administered by the Farmers Home Administration in the U.S. Department of Agriculture, is wholly inadequate to the task.

Funded at roughly \$22 million in FY 1990 - half loans and half grants - the Section 514/516 farmlabor housing program simply cannot meet the need. Furthermore, the nature of the program financing virtually necessitates year round occupancy of the units which are built, making it totally impractical in agricultural areas with a labor demand of only three or four months.

There is very real need for migrant shelter in those regions of the country with short growing seasons -- generally the northern tier of states from Utah across to Maryland and North. The need there is every bit as great as the need for year around housing in home based states. Farmworkers, families with children as well as single workers, literally have no shelter in many places. They sleep in cars, in culverts, in the fields they harvest, in abandoned animal sheds, in tents, and when they can afford it, in cheap motels where they can at least clean up every week or so.

Two things are needed: a six fold expansion of the present 514/516 farm labor housing program which would finance about 2,500 year round units annually; and, a new program which would finance shelters, at about half the cost of year round units, across the northern tier of states. Such shelters would be required to meet modified health and sanitary standards established by the Farmers Home Administration in 7 CFR 1924(a)(Exhibit I). A program to finance 10,000 migrant shelter units annually would cost about \$250 million.

To make a very modest beginning toward meeting the housing needs of a significant group of employees critical to our agricultural

production, the Congress must expand our farm labor housing program by about \$350 million annually.

But perhaps most important, even as the Congress addresses the problems of housing migrant farmworkers, is the necessity of securing sufficient, current data on the scope of the problem. No one denies the lack of shelter. No one seriously suggests that the problem be ignored. Most states with any significant population of farmworkers has a state agency charged with the responsibility of providing aid to migrants, and most states have one or more private migrant assistance organizations. The Federal government has the Interagency Committee on Migrants, comprised of representatives from the Departments of Agriculture, Education, Health and Human Services, Justice, Labor, the Environmental Protection Agency and others, all agencies with some responsibility for migrant farmworkers.

All these groups have something in common beyond their responsibility or concern for migrants - a profound ignorance of the population to whom they provide services. We do not know their numbers, their race, their ages, their educational levels, their incomes, their morbidity from a dozen different diseases, or even their mortality rate. All we have are guesses, some informed, some not.

The U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census and the U.S. Department of Agriculture are the principal sources of data on the agricultural labor force. Both these agencies have acknowledged that farm laborers are undercounted. According to the Census bureau, the poor, Blacks and Hispanics, males, and Southerners are the four groups that suffer a preponderance of undercounting. These four groups are also over-represented among farmworkers: most farmworkers are low-income; a majority are Hispanic or Black (despite the Census reporting of a White majority); and majorities of farmworkers are also male and from the South or Southwest.

A major reason for the farmworker undercount is that the decennial census is taken in early April. There are few harvests and little other agricultural work requiring hired labor underway in that period in most of the nation. But the numerous census questions on a respondent's occupation refer to the job or jobs held "last week." Since in March there are few people doing farm work, farmworkers are undercounted. Their most recent job or their job last week was almost certainly not farm work, and would not represent most of the work they have done during the past year.

Farmworkers are the lowest-paid occupational group in the country, but we know less about them than soybeans. For example, Agricultural Statistics, an annual volume published by USDA and the principal source of farm labor information, contains hundreds of pages of data on crops and livestock but very little on farmworkers. The 1985 volume has five tables on hired farm labor and 533 tables on grain, feed, cotton, tobacco, fruits and vegetables, cattle and dairy products, poultry, oilseeds and other commodities.

It is of course too late now to make any changes in the current decennial census, but the Bureau of Census must be instructed to make changes in their procedures for the year 2000 census. In the interim a new housing census should be undertaken, to determine both the migrant shelter need and the suitable stock which currently exists to meet that need. Another survey -- another sample -- simply will not do. It needs to be an on-site census.

Such a census need not be complicated or expensive and should be conducted by each State Migrant Office, under the direction of the Bureau of Census. It should be completed not later than the growing and harvest season of 1993.

Each state desiring to participate in the migrant shelter program (discussed later) would be asked to develop an outline of agricultural crops within the state which utilize migrant labor. It would describe at a minimum, the crop to be harvested, the normal month(s) when migrants are utilized for either harvest or cultivation, by location within the state and county.

Upon receiving such an outline, the Bureau of Census would develop a protocol for a census in that state. It would of course include a count of out of state farmworkers at the period of peak work in each of the areas within the state identified in the state's outline of agricultural crops. A sample of perhaps 20% of the workers should be asked to respond to a brief questionnaire (and paid a nominal sum for their cooperation, in lieu of lost time). The questionnaire should identify, at minimum, their permanent place of residence, place of immediate residence, family characteristics, estimated personal and family income from farm labor, and from all other sources.

The second task is to identify all of the housing available for migrants within the work area -- perhaps a 30 mile radius -- and evaluate its suitability using the health and sanitary standards established in 7 CFR 1924(a)(Exhibit I).

Based upon the data developed by the census, each state would then be asked to develop a detailed plan for the location of additional labor housing units, if any, needed within the state to fulfill the need for safe, decent sanitary shelter for migrating farmworkers. Each plan would provide the number and type of units recommended at each location, the approximate cost for land, supporting infrastructure, and cost per unit. The plan would additionally suggest the local agency (public or community-based private nonprofit) which might be expected to operate and maintain the property year-round, and the annual cost of that management, including an offset of the per diem rent payment made by each worker/family.

The Migrant Shelter Program itself would be funded by specific appropriations administered by either the Secretary of Agriculture or the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development. Any state desiring to participate would submit its state migrant shelter plan, with supporting detail, to the Secretary with a request for funding assistance. The Secretary would be authorized to make grants of money to each participating state

for 100% of the development and construction costs, except for any land and infrastructure cost, which would be borne by the state. The Secretary may further enter into agreements to reimburse the local management agent for up to 75% of annual operation and maintenance costs for so long as the housing was needed for farm labor housing.

Both because such an increased expenditure in the present budgetary and political climate is unlikely, and because this is a new and untried program, the appropriate way to start would be with a demonstration program in three or four states. It should be set up to resolve, so far as possible, the following questions:

1. The response of the various states, and state agencies, to such a program. It would, of course, require a relatively long-term commitment of some money and a great deal of time and effort, both for the census and more particularly the development and operation of the housing itself.
2. The response of local governments and nonprofits in the areas in which (presumably) the housing is needed. In some places the opposition of local communities has been the biggest obstacle to providing migrant housing.
3. The cost, to each state, of developing the outline of agriculture crops within the state.
4. The cost, to the state and to the Bureau of Census of designing, conducting and analyzing the census.
5. The availability and cost of suitable sites for building such housing, in the areas in which the housing is needed.
6. The development costs, separated by those to be born by the state (access road, water and sewer extensions, if necessary and anything else not located on the housing site proper), and those to be born by the Federal grant (all site roads, walk-ways, parking and recreational areas, excavation, fill and grading, exterior lighting and all utility hookups.)
7. The cost of each unit built to the standard set forth in 7 CFR 1924(a)(Exhibit 1), and the acceptable revisions to those standards which would result in a lower cost shelter.
8. The cost of furnishing each unit with the minimum requisite beds, tables, chairs, cooking and eating utensils, and the cost of providing laundry facilities for each 20 residents to be housed.
9. The cost of constructing one general, multipurpose building which might be used for administrative purposes, day care, recreation, job training, health clinic or other constructive purpose.
10. The receptivity of local social service agencies toward the provision of services to migrants and migrant families

while actually living in the housing.

11. The weekly and seasonal cost of operating the facility while in use, including all salaries, utilities, repairs, and professional charges, along with the income from rents and any other source.

12. The off-season cost of maintenance, repair, utilities security, and the cost of both closing and reopening the facility at the end and at the beginning of the period of occupancy.

The costs of such a demonstration would be modest, and the information gained, (even if not everything listed above) would be invaluable at such time as a full-scale program might be undertaken -- the one suggested here, or any other modified, as the demonstration might indicate.

The estimated cost of such a demonstration, conducted in four states, and building 1,000 units on a minimum of ten separate sites, would be about \$30 million. \$5 million the first year to commence the census; \$10 million in years two and three to complete the census and commence the construction; and \$5 million in year four, to complete the construction and commence the maintenance contracts with the local managing agents.