



When Farm Work Hinders Schooling

Wage-Hour investigators collect age and educational data from working minors

We have all heard successful persons say, "I worked when I was a kid and it didn't hurt me." But how often have we stopped to consider that it is the exceptional individual speaking and not one of the "run-of-the mill" variety?

Certain kinds of work are good for young people but work which interferes with school is harmful. Studies which have been made indicate that thousands of children doing agricultural work are not in school for all or a significant part of the school year according to the Department of Labor's Wage and Hour and Public Contract Divisions.

The question whether children who do not attend school regularly are able to make normal educational progress has been discussed many times in connection with the need for section 13 (c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act. This is the section of the act which prohibits the employment of minors under 16 years of age in agriculture during hours school is in session in the district where they are living. In order to have current factual information on the educational attainment of children who work in agriculture during school hours, it was decided to obtain school-grade completion information from minors found working on farms by Wage-Hour investigators during regular employee interviews. Some youngsters interviewed were working on more than one farm so they may have been counted more than once.

This report is limited to those children found on farms in investigations closed between July 1 and

December 31, 1952. Local boys and girls made up 54 percent of the 4,251 children found working and migrant youngsters, 46 percent. Children who return to their permanent homes at the end of each day's work are classified as local and all others as migrant. The majority of these young workers were under 14 years of age, in fact 68 percent of them were under 14, and 32 percent were 14 and 15 years old.

There are omitted from the accompanying table 245 minors who were too young to be expected to have completed a school grade, and 217 for whom no school information was available.

Below Average Progress

The table clearly indicates that many of these working youngsters have made less progress in school than average. A child of 8 years should normally have completed the first grade of school, one of 9, the second or third, and one of 10 the third or fourth, and so forth, with completion of 1 grade each year. The source of normal attainment used was the Retardation Chart (age-grade) based on the U. S. Office of Education pamphlet 83, dated April 11, 1941.

The table shows that 46 percent of the children were below normal in grade completion. This 46 percent below normal is over 3 times as great as the 15 percent shown in the age-grade distribution of rural school children of the United States in the latest available study by the U. S. Office of Education. (The study was made back in 1927.)

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