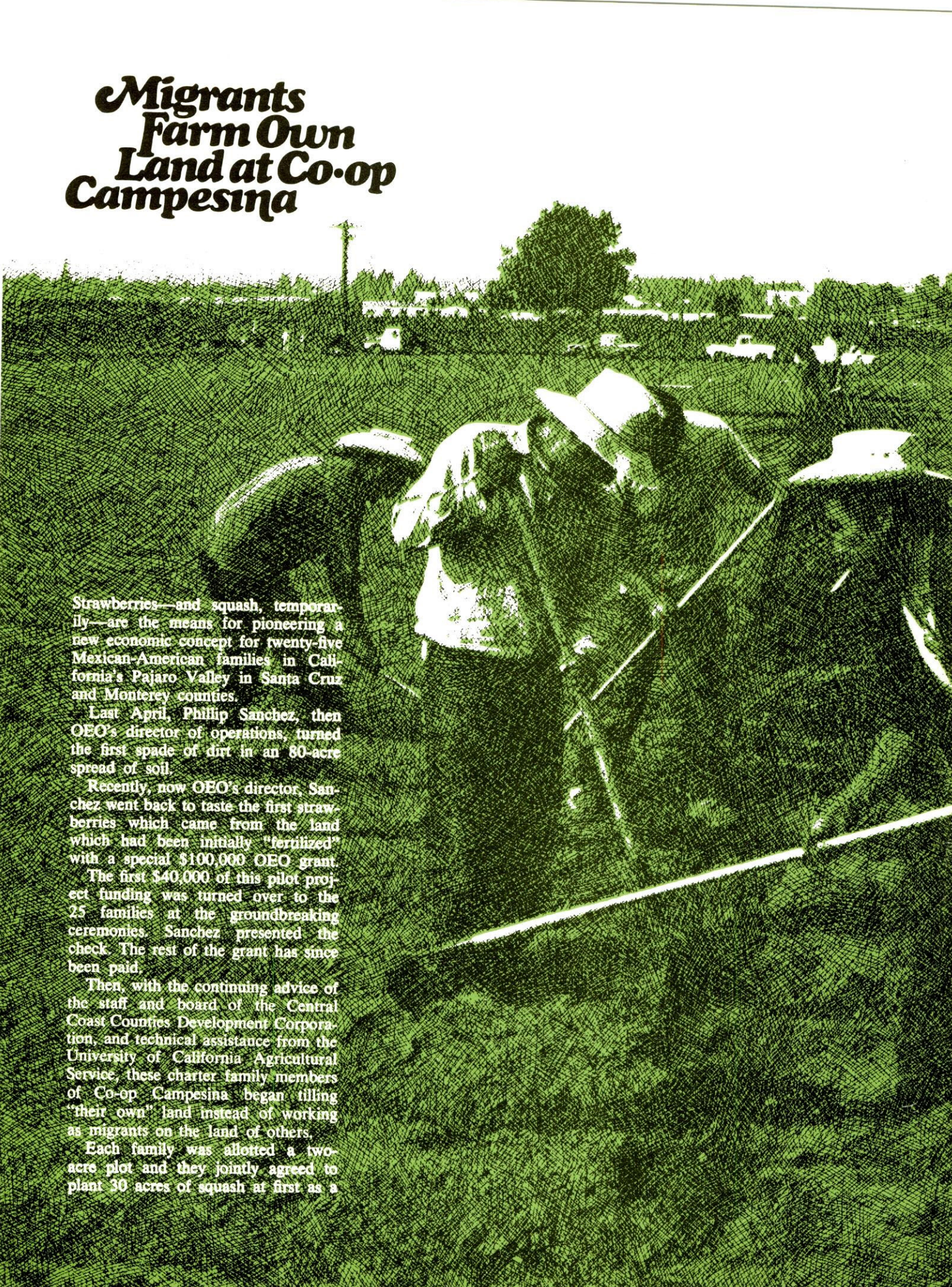


Migrants Farm Own Land at Co-op Campesina



Strawberries—and squash, temporarily—are the means for pioneering a new economic concept for twenty-five Mexican-American families in California's Pajaro Valley in Santa Cruz and Monterey counties.

Last April, Phillip Sanchez, then OEO's director of operations, turned the first spade of dirt in an 80-acre spread of soil.

Recently, now OEO's director, Sanchez went back to taste the first strawberries which came from the land which had been initially "fertilized" with a special \$100,000 OEO grant.

The first \$40,000 of this pilot project funding was turned over to the 25 families at the groundbreaking ceremonies. Sanchez presented the check. The rest of the grant has since been paid.

Then, with the continuing advice of the staff and board of the Central Coast Counties Development Corporation, and technical assistance from the University of California Agricultural Service, these charter family members of Co-op Campesina began tilling "their own" land instead of working as migrants on the land of others.

Each family was allotted a two-acre plot and they jointly agreed to plant 30 acres of squash at first as a



Two young girls box squash which was initially planted as quick money crop before strawberry season began.



This young lad continues to plant but can't keep his eyes away from the camera.



A priest blesses the land before the squash crop was planted.



The whole family, from oldest to youngest, help plant first strawberries.



"quick money" crop until the strawberry season arrived. (Only 13 of the 25 families planted squash.)

Though each family worked its own plot, seeding, fertilizing, and marketing and use of equipment was done jointly. Each plot was checked as to production.

The first squash harvest came last July and August.

Cash returns are in on the first squash planting and the results indicate that each of the 13 families earned about \$2,176. Some 903, 30-pound boxes of squash were taken from each cultivated acre.

Strawberry planting and limited picking on the larger acreage has only just begun but about 115 acres will be planted to strawberries by mid-1972, and should return about \$600,000 in gross sales, it is estimated.

Based on net return, each of the 25 participating Mexican-American families, two-thirds of whom were below the poverty level before the project, can expect to earn about \$10,000 each.

Overall, Cooperative Campesina is a pilot model of a self-sustaining economic entity through which the low-income rural poor can use to elevate themselves above the poverty level.

And though OEO pioneered the concept and initial funding, it was not alone in giving financial assistance to the formerly poor migrant families who banded together.

After the Farm Home Administration declined to participate, Wells Fargo joined in with an \$150,000 crop loan which will be repaid from strawberry sales in 1972.

And while Cooperative Campesina has still a way to go, it appears headed toward reaching its goal of giving "the farmworker or sharecropper the same economic independence enjoyed by the majority" of Americans.

Following groundbreaking last April, Phillip Sanchez, right, director of the Office of Economic Opportunity, watches as Teresa Morales, left, and Alfred Navarro, director, Central Coast Counties Development Corporation, place a strawberry plant into the ground.

