

RURAL MIGRAT

Florida: Housing, Flo-Sun

FARM WOF

Volume 5, Number 1

January 1999

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Florida's Advisory Council on Farmworker Affairs in November 1998 issued a fact sheet that asserted that 300,000 people work for wages in Florida agriculture, that 87 percent are Hispanic and they have an average of six years of schooling.

The Coalition of Immokalee Workers in December discussed plans for a strike of tomato pickers; in 1997-98, the Coalition organized a 30-day hunger strike among some pickers to push for higher wages. A November 12, 1998 meeting between growers and farmworkers led to an agreement with at least two Immokalee growers, Pacific Land Co. and Nobles Farm Inc., to increase the piecerate wage by five cents to 45 cents for a 32-pound bucket; other tomato growers are expected to match the wage increase. Garguilo is paying 50 cents a bucket.

Some workers from Mexico are being caught as the vans and trucks carrying them to Florida are stopped. A Penske rental truck with 28 illegal workers bound for Naples was stopped in mid-December in New Mexico, for example: the workers were expected to repay \$1,000 to smugglers after their arrival in Florida. Earlier, 30 workers in a rental truck headed to Palmetto were stopped by the INS in New Mexico; they were to pay \$200 to \$300 each upon arrival.

A group of southwest Florida vegetable growers have formed a task force to discuss housing issues in Immokalee and then forward suggestions to Governor-elect Jeb Bush in January 1999. Jay Taylor, president of Taylor & Fulton Inc., a Palmetto-based vegetable grower in Manatee County and a member of the task force, said that he houses all his workers in concrete duplexes with three bedrooms and two baths.

In 1996, Florida bought muck farms surrounding Lake Apopka for \$91 million to end pollution run offs and 2,000 farm workers lost their jobs. It took one year to buy the farms and shut them down; very little support has been provided to displaced farm workers.

Clarence Anthony, an ex-migrant worker who has been mayor of South Bay, Florida since 1984, was elected president of the National League of Cities in December 1998. As a teen, Anthony migrated with his family up and down the eastern seaboard. In 1994, South Bay Growers (US Sugar) mechanized the cane harvest, eliminating 1,000 jobs; Anthony persuaded Florida to build a 1,300-bed prison in South Bay, a city of 4,000.

Flo-Sun. Time magazine in November 23, 1998 ran a story on corporate welfare, highlighting the Flo-Sun Corporation run by four Fanjul brothers, Alfonso, Jose, Andres and Alexander. The Fanjul family arrived in Florida just as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers flood control project to control the flow of water in the Florida Everglades made farm land available. The acreage of sugar cane increased from 50,000 acres in 1960 to more than 420,000 in 1998, including 180,000 acres farmed by Flo-Sun.

Time noted that migrant legal organizations call Flo-Sun one of the worst farm employers: "in a class by themselves" in violating labor laws. US sugar imports are regulated by a quota system--the US price is two to three times higher than the world price-- and the largest quota is held by the Dominican Republic. The largest Dominican Republic sugar producer is the

Fanjul family, through Central Romana Ltd, which ships about 100,000 tons of raw, duty-free sugar each year to the US. The Fanjul operation is accused of exploiting Haitian workers in the Dominican Republic.

Bill Maxwell, "Bush acts on behalf of farm workers," New America News Service, December 31, 1998. Michael McCormack, "Growers band together to address farmworker housing issues," Naples Daily News, November 25, 1998.

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