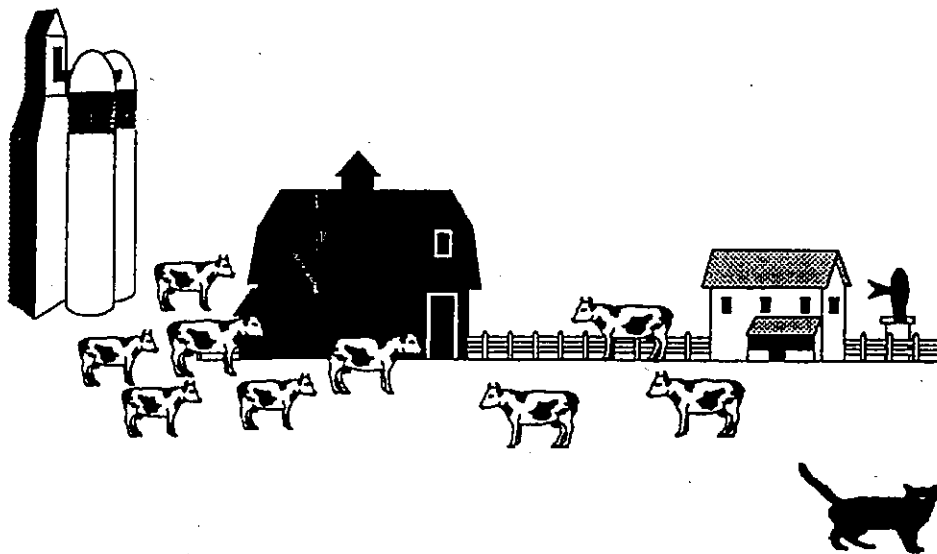


Resource ID#: 4849

Migrant Farm Labor Housing: Southeast Florida  
Survey/Report

# MIGRANT FARM LABOR HOUSING

## SOUTHEAST FLORIDA SURVEY/REPORT



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**MIGRANT FARM LABOR HOUSING  
SOUTHEAST FLORIDA SURVEY/REPORT**

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Glades Area Migrant  
Housing Coalition

Indian River Regional  
Migrant Housing Coalition

# INTRODUCTION



## INTRODUCTION

In recent years there has been renewed concern over the plight of migrant and agricultural workers; particularly as regards to housing conditions.

While migrants account for a minor share of total agriculture and related agri-business payrolls in Southeastern Florida, theirs is a critical function; for, unless crops are adequately harvested all previous efforts will have been for nought. Subsequently, it is in the best interests of the agricultural community to promote the betterment of conditions for the migrant and resident agricultural workers. Likewise, since agriculture is a "basic" sector of the areas economy its prosperity, or lack thereof, affects the overall health and vitality of the greater community.

Today, Hispanics, primarily Mexican, constitute a very large majority of the Southeastern Florida farm labor force. What has stayed the same over the years, however, have been the socioeconomic factors that impact this group of people: low education levels, substandard housing, poverty, occupational hazards, and arduous physical work. These conditions increase the farmworker family's risk, and rates, for certain diseases and injuries, yet they face a host of barriers in obtaining health care. These barriers include inadequate incomes, cultural and language differences, and an ever-changing address. Access to government and social service agencies is impeded by these and other barriers as well.

The housing situation for migrant farmworkers has been aggravated by the recent closing of many migrant labor camps forcing many migrants to seek housing within the urban areas. Despite the criticism aimed at labor camps, the majority of these offer better housing conditions than the urban "slum" areas where most farmworkers are forced to live. Some of the more serious problems are rooming houses, which include; overcrowding caused by "doubling-up" in order to meet high rental rates charged for living units which are often sub-standard or, at best, marginal; facilities designed as rooming houses being occupied by families; and inadequate or inoperative sanitation facilities.

## CONSTRAINING FACTORS

While the basic cause of the low income housing problem may be the inability of low income persons to afford better housing, this is not always the case. In many instances the poor are paying more for their shelter than necessary but lack access to better housing because they lack proper credit or credit is unavailable to them; are ignorant of federal subsidy programs; or few, if any, local builders operate within the low-cost housing market.

Constraints to solution of the agricultural housing problem can be summarized as follows:

- Few local developers/builders are interested in the low cost housing market due to government red tape, added costs, and slim profit margins.
- Land prices as well as construction costs have skyrocketed.
- Rural sites require expensive site development.
- Existing land use plans and zoning ordinances virtually exclude agricultural housing development in the more rural areas where land is cheaper.
- Land availability in some areas are non-existent.
- It is financially unsound for a private developer to build housing to accommodate a six-month peak season occupancy.
- The uncertainty of long range housing demand within this market segment is not conducive to the investment of private capital.
- Whenever a low income housing project, particularly oriented towards the migrant segment, is proposed, the emotional reaction of residents of nearby communities adversely affects the normal give-and-take of a rezoning hearing. The result is stricter adherence to regulations than would be the case for more conventional types of development.

Review of previous attempts to resolve, at least in some small part, the shortage of adequate housing for migrants and agricultural workers including determination of factors which have mitigated against the success of such ventures in the recent past.

## SOCIAL-ECONOMIC FACTORS

The social and economic situation and character of the migrant agricultural farmworker in Southeast Florida has been a subject of expanded study in recent years. The following findings will reflect the social worker/academician viewpoint as these persons represent the typical sources of virtually all published works on the migrant situation.

- The average migrant family is large, between 4.3 and 4.7 migrants with household sizes ranging from 1-16 persons.
- On the average there are approximately 1.6 adult workers and 2.5 children per household.
- Adult educational levels are very low, averaging between 6 and 7 years of schooling; 91% of all adult migrants had received less than a high school education and fully 9% of the heads of household have had no schooling whatsoever.
- Spanish speaking migrants have the lowest levels of educational attainment.
- 7% of Florida's adult migrant population could not read, and one-half of the Spanish-speaking migrants speak English poorly or not at all.
- Approximately one-half of the migrant population was not aware of programs of assistance for which they qualified.
- Just under one-third of out-migrant households have no form of transportation thereby limiting mobility and, subsequently, employment opportunities.
- The outlook for increased income in future years is always bleak for the migrant farmworker.
- While most Americans receive relatively stable incomes on a regular basis thereby allowing a measure of security, the day-to-day nature of migrant labor does not afford such regularity. Without the assurance of a stable weekly income, budgeting becomes impossible necessitating the purchase of commodities on an "as needed" or "money-available" basis.
- In periods during which earnings are regular, the "day-haul" psychology prevails. Up until recently virtually all agricultural workers were paid daily, necessitating a day-to-day economy and life style.

While this is, for the most part, no longer the case, the "day-haul" psychology prevails since the majority of migrants now working were raised under these conditions.

### HOUSING CONDITIONS

The trend over the past ten years has seen fewer workers housed in labor camps while the number of persons engaged in agricultural work has increased. Part of this increase is due to more workers bringing their families with them. Some family members of permanent residents are supplementing the family income by becoming part-time agricultural workers.

In addition to migrant labor camps, many persons are housed in farm labor housing and rooming houses. The greatest portion of these people live in rooming houses primarily concentrated in Ft. Pierce and the Belle Glade area. Following are some of the major problems associated with these facilities:

- A major problem in labor camps and multi-family housing designed with central toilet facilities is the maintenance of these facilities. Operators complain of the never-ending job of unstopping and cleaning toilets while occupants show little interest in keeping shared facilities clean.
- Where families are allowed to rent rooms without sinks and other kitchen facilities, many health problems are encountered due to the use of pails for water supply, kerosene stoves for cooking, inadequate fire protection, poor food handling practices, and improper food storage which contribute to insect and rodent infestations.
- Crowded conditions combined with the lack of adequate sanitation facilities add to the health problems of seasonal agricultural workers.
- Landlords find that they can reap large profits from the rental of substandard housing to desperate families, many of whom will "double-up" in crowded quarters in order to afford the price. Two small rooms without running water may rent for \$50.00 or more per week. Larger apartments or houses may rent for over \$500.00 per month.

## **REGIONAL MIGRANT FARMWORKER COALITIONS**

The Regional Migrant Farmworker Housing Coalitions were organized to serve the Indian River Citrus Region, (Martin, Okeechobee, St. Lucie, Indian River counties) and South Florida to include (Palm Beach, Broward, Dade, Monroe, Collier, Glades, Hendry, and Lee) counties. Established in late 1991 the membership roster includes over 130 members and 3 active committees. The Indian River Regional Migrant Housing Coalition meets quarterly while the Glades area Migrant Housing Coalition meets monthly.

The purpose of the coalitions are to solve the problems relating to migrant labor housing and the health of the migrant farmworker. With the influx of laborers in Southeast Florida over the next few years, as a result of expanded agribusiness, we must posture ourselves to be able to work as a team to reduce the migrant housing problem to a workable level. To do this we must have open communications with industry leaders, regulatory agencies, and migrant housing representatives.

### **THE COALITIONS MEMBERSHIP INCLUDES:**

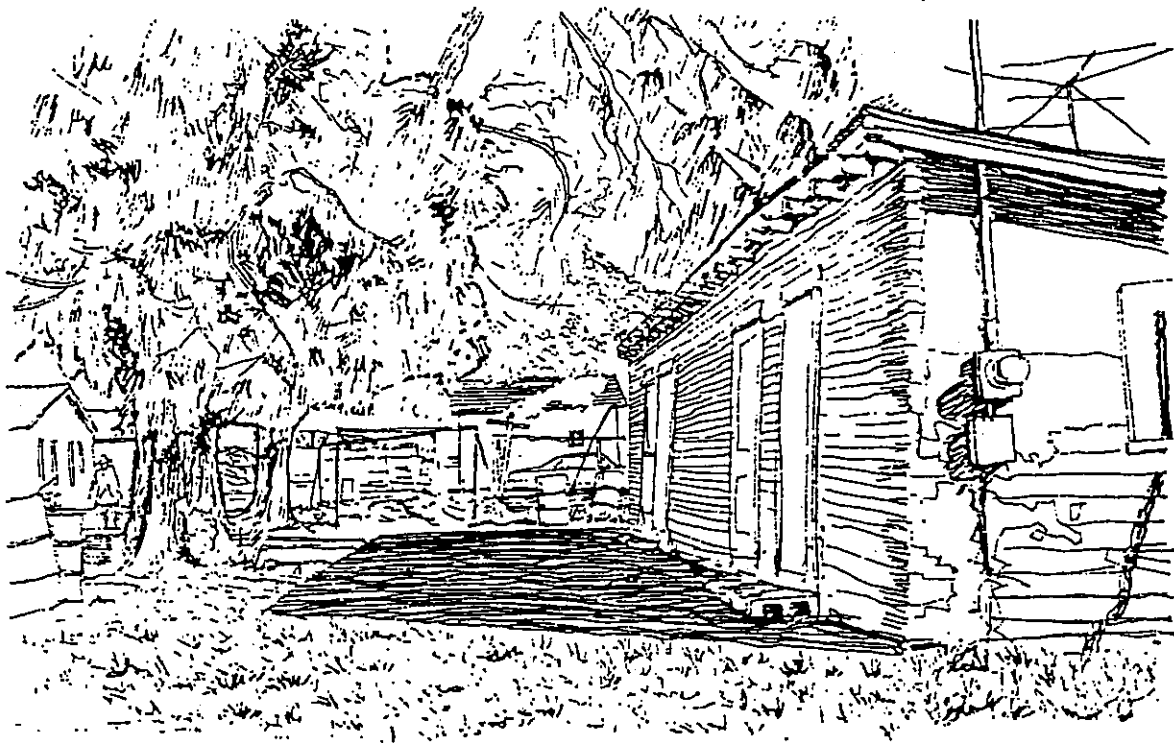
1. HRS Migrant Housing Program staff.
2. City and County Code Enforcement.
3. City and County Fire Inspectors.
4. Migrant Housing Owners and Operators.
5. Organizations representing migrant farmworkers.
6. Public Health Professionals.
7. Members of the Indian River and Gulf Citrus Leagues.
8. U.S. Department of Labor and OSHA Representatives.

### **THE GOALS FOR THE COALITIONS ARE TO:**

1. Provide migrant housing program awareness.
2. Progressive activities on long-range planning for low cost migrant housing.
3. Provide information to help permit existing migrant housing not permitted by any other regulatory agency.
4. Improve communications and education to migrant families on health and housing issues.
5. Exchange ideas and information with coalition partners.
6. Form committees to work on specific issues.



# PERCEPTIONS



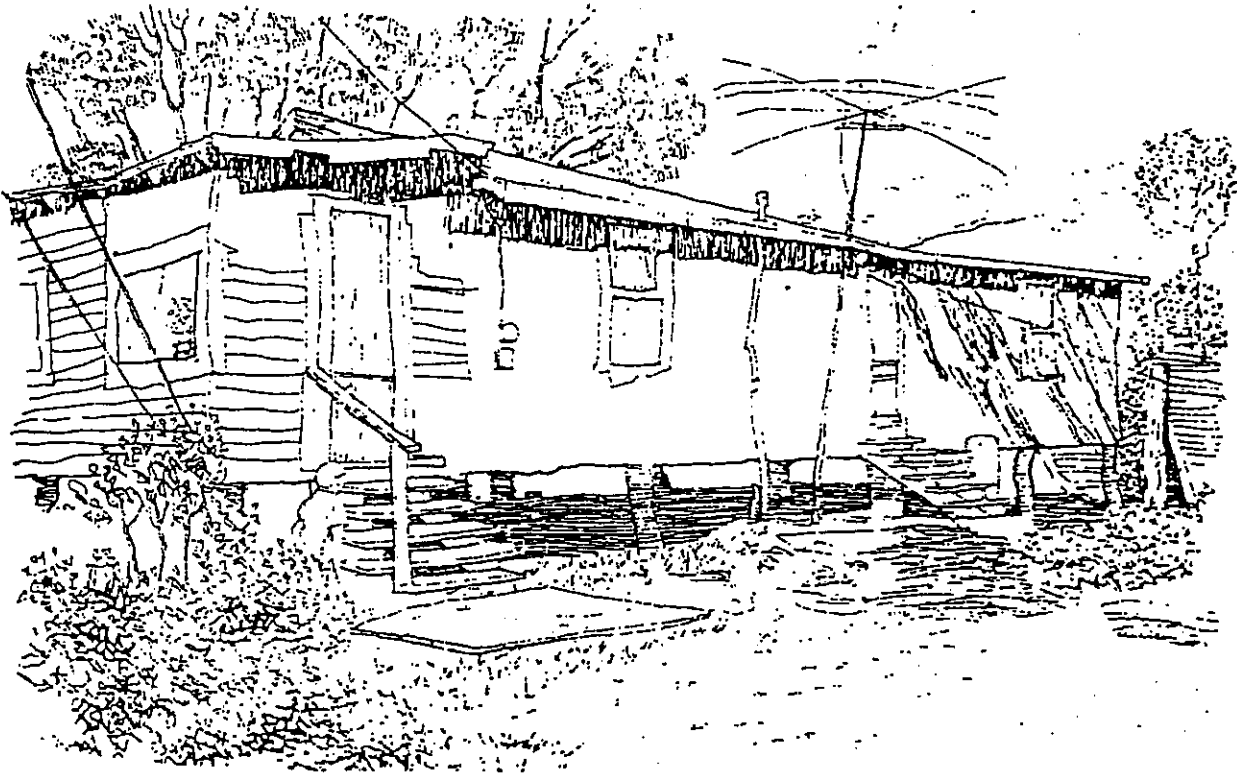
# PERCEPTIONS

(Can get in the way of communication)

WHO OR WHAT	GROWER	W'KER	GOV'T	ADVOCATE	MEDIA
WORKER	Not my employee	Not paid well	Demanding	Mistreated	Great Story!
GROWER	Over regulated	Land barrons	Looking for way out	Root cause of every problem	Great Story!
RULES IMPOSED ON THIS INDUSTRY	Too many	Not enough	What problem -- we know them	Not enforced even if they exist	Great Story!
WAGES	They get more than we get	They get more than we	Does it comply?	Is it enough to support a family.....?	Great Story!
WORKING CONDI'S-housing & safety	We do more than any other industry	These should be provided	Do they comply?	Why not do more -- like housing for families?	Great Story!
D.O.L.	"Gov't"	Who?	W-H ETA OSHA	Does little	Great Story!
WHO IS THE EMPLOYER	Crewleader	Who pays me?	Either AGER or the FLC	DOL needs to pursue AGERS	Great Story!
LEGAL SERVICES	Intruders	Helper	A pain	A god send	Great Source of Info
MY PERCEP'N of MY PERCEP'N	I am correct	I am correct	I am correct	I am correct	Over-rides all others

NOTE: The idea here is not to criticize any of us. We are all "guilty" of perceiving one another via our own view of what reality should be. The point the above attempts to make is perception creates expectation -- e.g., if I don't do what you think I should do, you feel I have done nothing. Unless and until we can change this, real communication is unlikely.

# SUMMARY



## SUMMARY

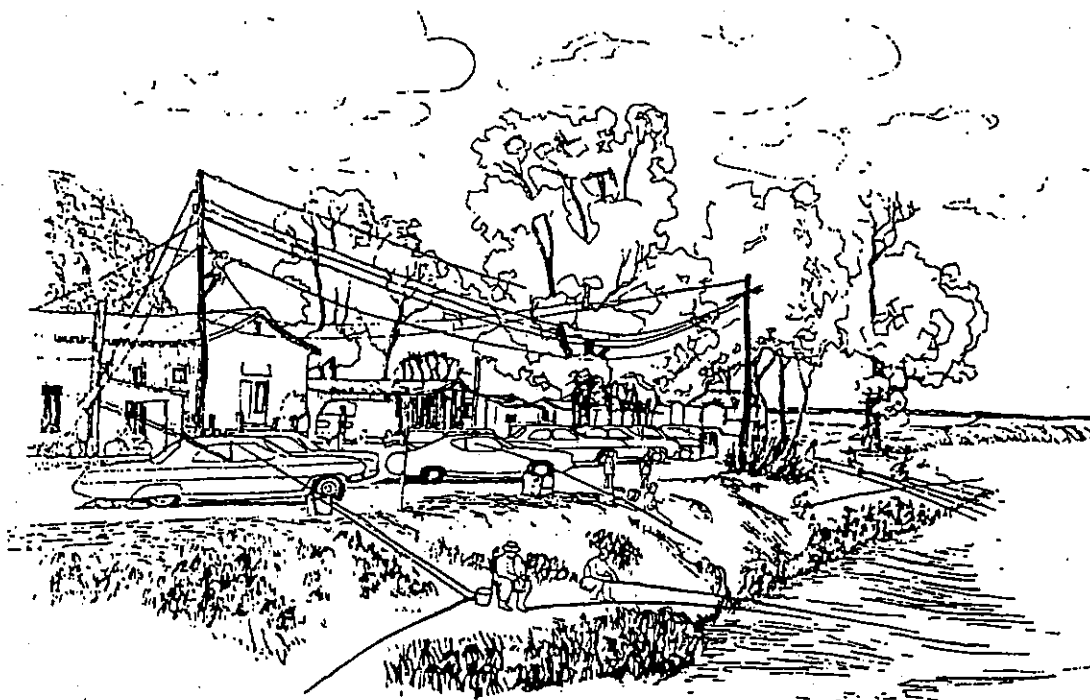
The mission of the Glades area and the Indian River Regional Migrant Housing Coalitions are to ensure low-cost affordable migrant housing that meets or exceeds minimum housing standards as provided for existing and new structures in Chapter 10D-25 Florida Administrative Code.

The following is a brief outline of the logical steps which must be followed if new migrant housing is to be considered:

- Identify through local surveys and other available data whether a need actually exists for additional migrant housing.  
The problem of enforcement must be addressed if a negative need is shown to exist in an area flooded with migrants living in non-permitted housing.
- Thoroughly investigate possible sources of government backed funding. Conventional sources of money will not lend unless they are assured through personal guarantees of the participants that they will be repaid. Getting this type of guarantee from individuals will be impossible.
- If a government source can be identified, the type of vehicle necessary to obtain the money must be explored and identified. From what we know, a non-profit corporation will probably be necessary. At this point in time, a group of incorporators must be identified along with initial seed funding for the corporation.
- If a "need area" is identified, the politics, zoning, and building statutes must be addressed.
- If all the above are satisfied, a re-hab project or un-built site can be located within the need area. Before any purchase or option contract can be negotiated, the "financing vehicle" and necessary seed funding must be solidly in place.
- Once a contract is negotiated, a select group of people within the "financing vehicle" must immediately start the long process of meeting all of the requirements necessary to gain the end funding. Among other things, this will require a complete set of plans and specifications, cash flow statements, etc.

The support and cooperation of other agencies and agriculture industry leaders adds to bring the migrant housing program to a higher level. Communications is the necessary first step in any successful endeavor. If we can solve the problems relating to Migrant Labor Camps and Residential Migrant Housing and improve the living conditions of migrant farmworkers than we have accomplished our goals.

It is anticipated that HRS County Public Health Unit's in Southeast Florida will permit more farmworker housing facilities during the 1994-95 permit year. We must continue to provide monitoring, surveys, program awareness, and progressive activities on long-range planning for low-cost migrant housing.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS/DATA SOURCE

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Florida Department of Education

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