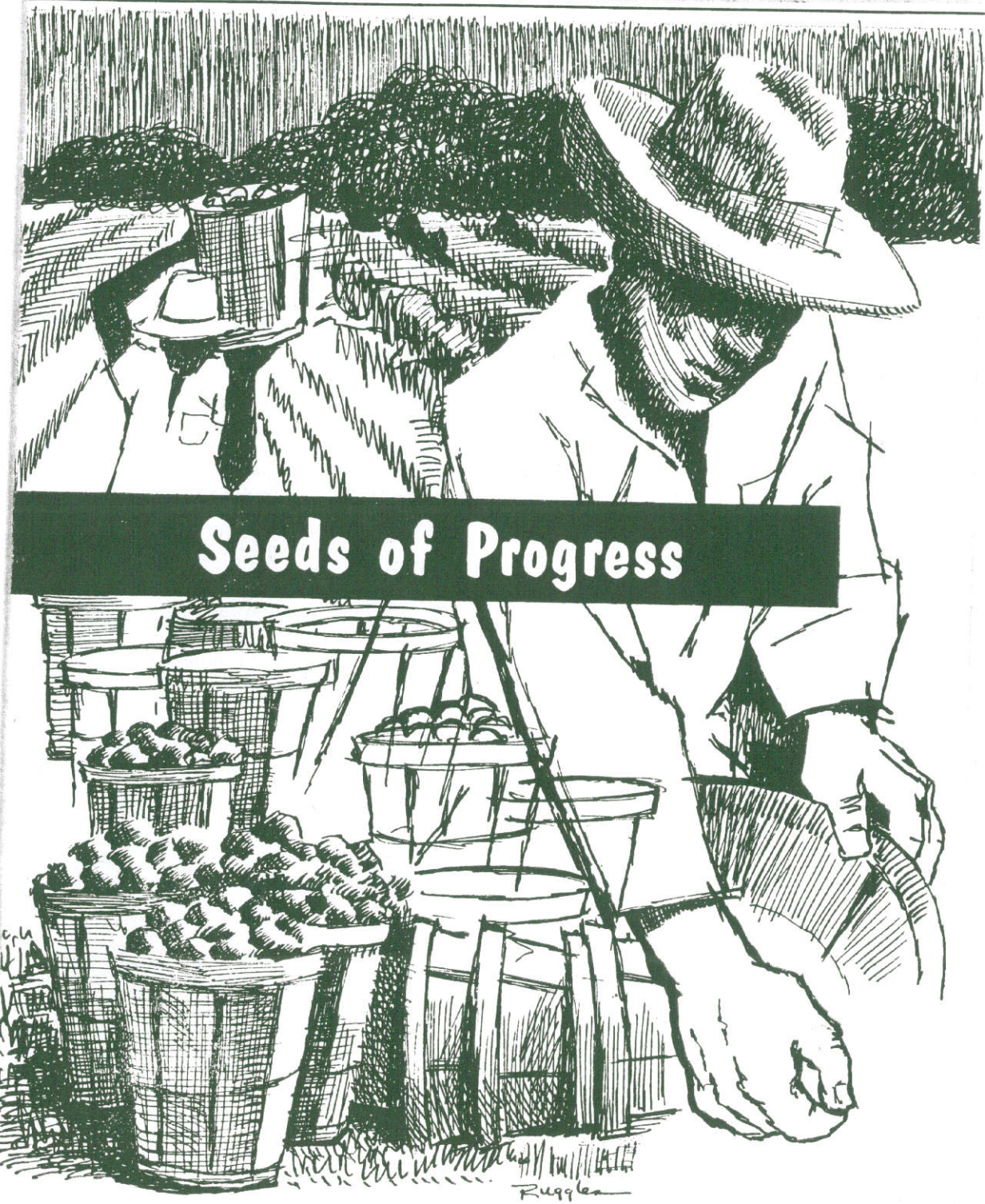


Public Health News

SEPTEMBER 1961

NEW JERSEY STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Seeds of Progress



The New Jersey State Department of Health

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THE ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE OF MIGRANT LABOR IN NEW JERSEY

By ALVIN W. STRING
*Chairman of the Board
Glassboro Service Association*

Farmers will be the first to agree that migrant workers are of great importance to New Jersey's million-dollars-a-day agriculture. About 50 percent of the workers in the harvest labor force are migrant workers. We have been a demand state and we will continue to be a demand state as long as we have this thriving agriculture.

Let us look back and see what has taken place in the source of our supplies of farm workers over the years. In this way, we will gain the perspective we need to appreciate where we are today.

In the early 1900's, our harvest workers, hundreds of them, were Italian immigrants—migrant families whose habit it was to come to the farms of South Jersey from the teeming cities of Camden and Philadelphia. They worked in family groups on the farms, and as time moved on, these same folks bought a great number of farms and today are themselves prosperous farmers employing migrants in their own family farm operations.

This illustrates that a land of opportunity was at hand for the migrant families of a generation ago in South Jersey.

Mechanization Requires More Farm Hands

As the demand for fruits and vegetables from our state increased, and the tractor took the place of the horse and plow, more and more harvest hands were needed. Farmers were compelled to look for another source of supply. The farmer was beginning to rely on migrants from the southern states brought in either by a crew leader or in smaller groups moving with their own transportation. This migrant stream continues to furnish a substantial supply of farm labor.

When this supply became inadequate, the New Jersey farmers began to look around for another source of labor to meet a tightening farm labor market. The search turned to Puerto Rico.

Our first 200 Puerto Ricans were brought to New Jersey in 1946. In 1948, the Glassboro Service Association was organized by South Jersey farmers to operate the Puerto Rican program. The farmers recognized their responsibilities to these people. They went beyond this, considering the spiritual needs of the worker thousands of miles from his home. Today, a Spanish-speaking priest is at the camp from April until the camp closes in November, seeing to it that the men can attend mass. He administers to their spiritual needs in other ways, counsels and comforts. Services are held at the camp. The priest has been provided with a mobile unit equipped with an altar for use on farms throughout the area.

A minister, furnished by the Council of Churches, also works with the Puerto Ricans, and aids in their recreational programs.

An infirmary is maintained which has 45 beds, a trained nurse on hand each day of the week, and a physician near at hand who spends three to four hours a day in the infirmary. He is also on call in case of an emergency. This past season, about 10,000 cases were treated, including out-patients.

There is another feature which makes our Puerto Rican labor program a little special, we think. There is a field staff employed by the Glassboro Service Association of six men with cars equipped with two-way radios. An interpreter travels with each field man at all times. If a problem arises on a farm, either the farmer or the worker may call the central office at the camp and the field

to see a new little home with new furniture. The house was of masonry construction, an obvious and sensible material to use in home construction in the tropics.

They had also purchased some land and had seven acres of sugar cane and three acres of tobacco. These crops looked as good as any we had seen. We then went on to Patillas to visit another family with seven children. In this home there were a new electric stove, electric refrigerator, new furniture, and a television set.

The circumstances of these families I knew personally. Dollars earned on New Jersey farms were helping to improve the living conditions of these families.

This is concrete evidence of the way standards of living have been raised, and some of the comforts of life brought to these large families in Puerto Rico.

This is certainly a testimonial to the free and open society of our country in an area where the Castro forces are at work trying to prove we are all wrong.

I have recited to you some of the history of the program, and some of the economic implications for a large part of the farm labor picture in our state. We think it is a sane program. Puerto Rican workers come here under Work Agreements, with guarantees arrived at through open discussion. Actually many of the men come back to the same farm year after year. We know that a large number of postal money orders are used by the worker to send money home regularly.

With further mechanization of agriculture, with the coming of the potato harvester, with the promising research and testing going into a tomato harvester, an asparagus harvester, the need for workers will diminish. This we know. The mechanical blueberry picker, the bean picker, the pickle harvester, are sure to come. Hand picking of fruits and vegetables will some day disappear. They may be 10 or 15 years off—but this is in the future. New vegetable varieties and new plants are being developed. They will be perfected in such a way that their ripening maturity and their growth will permit their mechanical har-

vesting. But this, I say again, is for the future. Meanwhile, we need our strong Puerto Rican program, for the fruit and vegetable industry still must operate with these valuable services here in New Jersey and on other fertile farms in the northeast.

I want to say this in closing—a program of migrant labor, devised on the initiative and out of the necessity of farmers—can and does work. We see it proved today in our program.

—O—

Seat Belts for Automobiles Purchased by U.S. Government

The General Services Administration of the Federal Government recently announced, through the Public Health Service, that it will require seat belt anchors for passenger safety and positive crankcase ventilation systems in automobiles which it purchases. It buys about 7,000 motor vehicles a year.

The ventilation system, known as a blowby device, reduces a motor vehicle's contribution to air pollution. Blowby emissions are, for the most part, hydrocarbons from unburned gasoline which blow by the piston rings and are vented into the atmosphere.

The Administration's requirements call for two seat belt anchors for the front seat and three for the rear seat.

Dr. Luther L. Terry, Surgeon General of the Public Health Service, stated that "the positive crankcase ventilation systems are highly desirable, reducing total automotive emissions of hydrocarbons by about 25 percent at a very nominal cost.

"As for seat belts," said Dr. Terry, "the best available statistics indicate that about 5,000 lives now being lost annually in automobile accidents could be saved through their universal use. Even more important, perhaps, are the many thousands of permanent disabilities and disfigurements that could be prevented by this means."