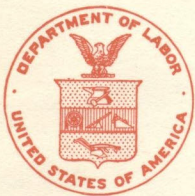


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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

JAMES P. MITCHELL, Secretary

BUREAU OF EMPLOYMENT SECURITY • UNITED STATES EMPLOYMENT SERVICE

ROBERT C. GOODWIN, Director

Washington 25, D. C.

Housing for Migratory Farm Workers

By HORACE L. ARMENT

Manager, Ontario Local Office

Oregon Unemployment Compensation Commission

THE need for farm housing in this area did not become acute until after World War II. Following the opening of the Owyhee reclamation project in 1935, settlers were busy clearing the land of sagebrush, constructing homes and farm buildings. The older portions of the valleys were principally planted to hay, grain, pasture, field corn, and other crops not requiring extensive hand labor. The Farm Housing Administration built a permanent type of farm labor camp at Nyssa, the center of the sugar beet industry and maintained spike tent camps in the outlying areas during the peak of the growing season.

During World War II, the War Food Administration took over the farm labor problem. Additional tent camps were provided for Mexican nationals, prisoners of war, Navajo Indians, Jamaicans, relocated Japanese-Americans in various combinations and rotations. The old CCC camps at Ontario and Sunset Valley were used for housing. This labor was engaged principally in the sugar beet industry.

The transplanted Japanese-Americans gave great impetus to the growing of high-cash row crops in addition to sugar beets—crops such as early potatoes, onions, sweet corn, and strawberries, which require large amounts of hand labor in cultivation and harvesting.

In 1943, the Malheur Farm Labor Sponsoring Association was formed to certify, recruit, and house seasonal farm labor. After the war, this organization soon realized the need for a definite program to provide adequate housing for seasonal migratory farm workers.

Competition Entered the Picture

Conditions had changed. No longer were farm workers available under the grim conditions of a war agency. Labor was free to come and go. Competition for workers entered the picture. Wages, working conditions, and, above all, housing became major factors in attracting and keeping adequate workers. No labor pool existed in the area so migratory labor seemed the only answer.

Because housing was the major problem, the association undertook a long-range program. The members assessed themselves \$1 per acre of all crops grown, to finance and set in motion this important plan. This was later reduced to an assessment for row crops only. An intensive campaign for members was organized. The campsite in Vale was purchased in

1943, that at Adrian in 1946, and at Ontario in 1951. All these sites were supplied with 14- x 14-foot squad tents over wooden frames. Most were loaned from the old War Food Administration. In addition, several surplus CCC buildings were purchased for the Vale and Adrian camps. *[see picture page 26]*

To further the program and improve the housing, all the rentals and assessments not used in maintaining the camps were used to build permanent-type housing to replace the tent frames as rapidly as money became available.

In addition to these sources of revenue, the Potato Growers Association has been allocating to the camp fund its portion of money collected by a 1½-cent tax on each 100 pounds of potatoes marketed after the adoption of the Oregon potato marketing law of 1949. This amounted to \$5,000 last year for new buildings.

Gradually the old and expendable is being replaced by the new and permanent. Old furniture is being continually replaced with new and better.

The following status report for 1955 is typical of the progress and sound management being exercised and is taken verbatim from the camp report.

Malheur (Adrian) Camp—nine tent frames, 12- x 14-foot, were converted into cabins. The interiors were finished and the exteriors of four cabins were improved. At the end of the year, 10 additional tent frames were in the process of being converted.

Ontario Camp—four 16- x 16-foot cabins were constructed. Concrete floors for four more cabins were run, with plans for actual construction in the spring of 1956.

Vale Camp—one outbuilding constructed.

The tent frames at the Malheur and Ontario camps will be completely converted to cabins in 1956.

Additional garbage cans and stoves were purchased.

A power mower was purchased to keep grass and weeds down around cabins.

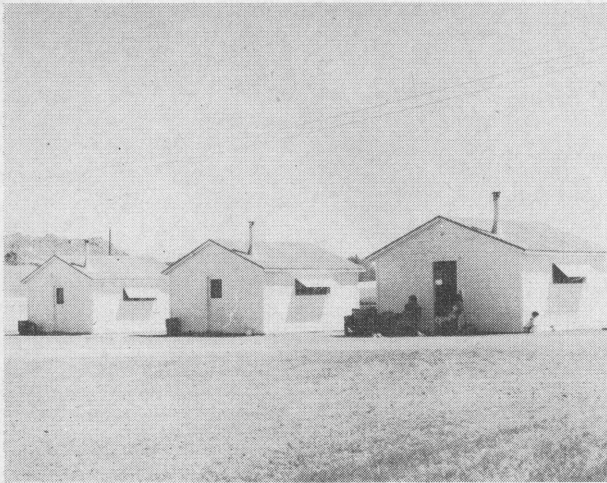
A program for replacement of mattresses.

All camps need to be regradeled and plans formulated toward landscaping the camps.

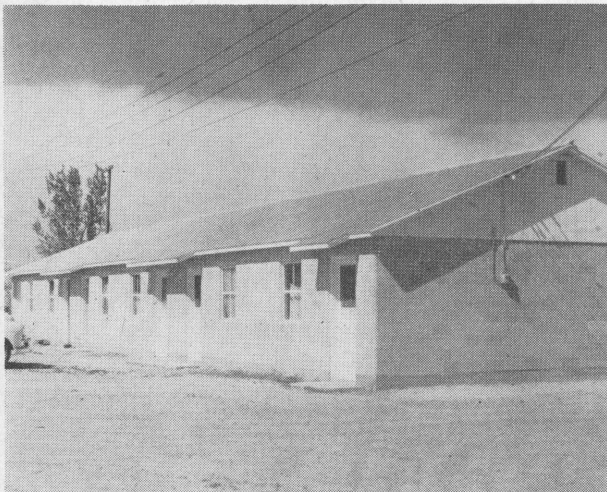
Housing and rents from each camp:

	<i>Per week</i>
Malheur (Adrian):	
10 tent frames	\$2. 50
16 cabins, 12- x 14-foot	4. 50
6 2-unit apartments	7. 00
Ontario:	
4 tent frames	3. 50
12 cabins, 16- x 16-foot	5. 00
6 2-unit apartments	7. 00
Vale:	
3 tent frames	2. 50
3 run-down cabins	2. 50
12 cabins, 16- x 16-foot	5. 00
2 10- x 15-foot cabins	3. 50

Typical of the recently constructed housing units for farm migrants * * *



Vale camp.



Adrian camp.



Ontario camp.

All the cabins and tents are furnished with stoves, beds, mattresses, tables, chairs, and iceboxes. In addition, electricity and water are furnished. Adequate laundry facilities, shower rooms and toilets are centrally located and supplied with hot water at no additional cost to the tenants.

During 1955, a total of 588 migrants were registered at the three camps. The camps not only provide good housing; they also operate at a profit. The net operating profit for (1955 was \$4,821.75). All of this net, plus the Potato Association assignments and the sponsoring membership dues, is put back into the enterprise to improve the housing.

No Easy Task

While the accomplishments of the association have been remarkable, the ends achieved were not easily come by. The principal obstacle has been the indifference of some farmers themselves to associate and contribute to the program. In this respect the enterprise may have been too successful. Users of labor take it as a matter of course. We hear the remark, "I get all the labor I need, so why should I pay for it?" or "I paid my dues last year, but Joe Doaks who never has been a member got just as much labor out of the camp as I did." The answer, of course, is that the nonmembers are carried by those who do participate.

Nevertheless, the whole program is an example of what can be done. The most measurable and striking accomplishment of the association is that from nothing in 1943, the camps and physical assets have grown to a value of some \$80,000 in 1955. Among the more important results have been the supplying of adequate labor and the encouragement of farmers, growers, and processors to produce more and higher cash-value crops.

A tribute to the good housing and the success of the program came from Dr. David Sencer. He and Dr. James Hitzrot, with their staff of 16 attendants, conducted an examination and fact-finding program for the Oregon Board of Health and the Idaho Department of Health. To quote Dr. Sencer, "The cleanliness we find here in these camps is a real credit to the community. There's less sickness among the migrants and all-round better living * * * the area is unusual, the migrants come back to work here as many as 6 or 7 years in a row. Some of them work for 6 months out of the year here."

One of the assistants added, "The fact that the cottages here are very clean probably accounts for the higher health standards."

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