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Migrants: Programs, Problems In Work, Health, Education

a portrait of migrant laborers and their families

About 4,900 migrant workers come to Minnesota every year for seasonal farm work. They do sugar beet thinning and hoeing; asparagus transplanting, hoeing and snapping; vegetable hoeing and harvesting; cucumber picking; and potato and sugar beet harvesting. Some also work in vegetable and potato warehouses and drive trucks and tractors.

The majority of them are from Texas and are of Mexican descent. For nearly all of those who come north, Minnesota is the first state of employment after they leave their home state. More than 4,400 of them work in the sugar beet fields and are recruited through private recruiting facilities, so that they come to Minnesota without benefit of having their work scheduled for them under the annual worker plan. (The annual worker plan assists migrant workers in planning their seasonal work itineraries and provides employers with information on worker intentions.)

When the field work is done in Minnesota many of the migrants go on to Wisconsin to pick cucumbers and cherries. Others go to Illinois for the cucumber and tomato harvest; to Indiana, Iowa, or Ohio where the tomatoes are ripe; or to Michigan to pick cherries. Some return to Texas and the cotton fields. A few go to Colorado for the peach crop and some to North Dakota for the potato harvest. About 500 to 600 remain in Minnesota from spring into fall. Some return to Minnesota from other states in the fall for the potato and sugar beet harvest.

The 4,900 migrant workers who come to Minnesota compare with 1960 U.S. Public Health Service estimates of 11,800 for Wisconsin, 46,500 for Michigan, 7,500 for Illinois, and 800 for Iowa. Texas itself tops the nation for the

number of migrants employed in agriculture, 95,600 followed by California with 59,700. The number of migrants employed dwindles to 200 for Vermont, the lowest number estimated for the 47 states reporting migrant farm labor employment.

47 States Need Them

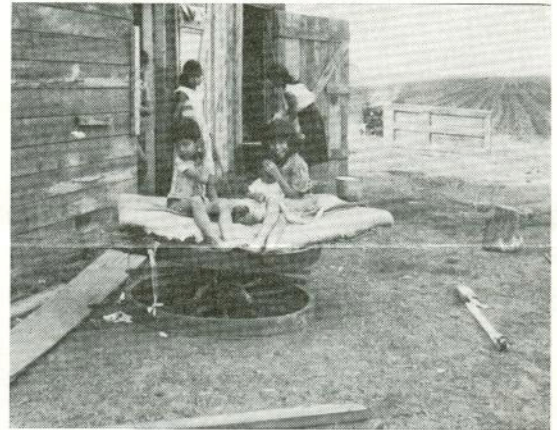
The agricultural economy of almost every state in the nation in varying degrees requires many migrant workers to help cultivate and harvest various crops. Out of 3,068 counties in 47 states, 943 have as many as 100 domestic agricultural migrants at the peak season, according to the U.S. Public Health Service. In the entire nation, only Rhode Island requires no migrant workers.

There are 11 counties in Minnesota estimated to have 100 or more domestic agricultural migrants at the peak of the normal crop season. They are: Clay, Faribault, Freeborn, Kandiyohi, Marshall, Norman, Polk, Redwood, Renville, Sibley, and Steele. The heaviest concentrations are in Polk (2,100 persons estimated, 1,500 of whom are workers) and Clay (1,400 persons estimated, 1,000 workers), according to the U.S. Public Health Service.

Migrants in lesser numbers also come to the following counties: McLeod, St. Louis, Carver, Anoka, Hennepin, Lyon, Brown, Martin, and Pennington.

Migrant workers are defined as out-of-state domestic workers who come to Minnesota to be employed in one or more crop activities here and perhaps also in other states prior to their return to their home state.

Most of these workers bring their families with them and travel more or

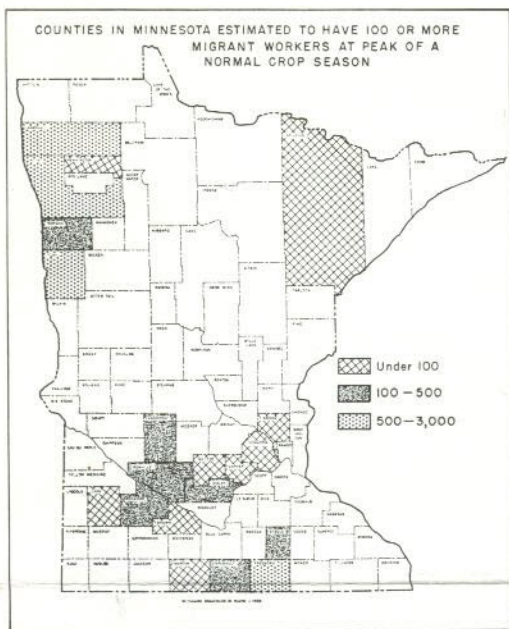


HOUSING for migrants in Minnesota ranges from newly constructed barrack-type facilities to abandoned farm houses and one-room cottages. While generally adequate, about 50 per cent of these dwellings need some type of improvement.

less as a family group in cars, pick-up trucks, or station wagons. The average group consists of 11 persons, with 7.8 of them workers. In 1959, for example, the 650 crews or groups who came to the state represented 1,090 families, and included 5,100 workers and 2,550 children 16 years of age and under. Five hundred of these children were 14 or 15 years of age and therefore eligible for employment. There were 910 children under six years of age.

In addition to the Texas-Mexican, foreign workers are recruited and brought into the state when domestic labor is unavailable for such work as snapping sweet corn, picking cucumbers, or cutting cabbage. In 1960, 99 Mexican nationals and 153 workers from the British West Indies were imported to do work that an adequate number of domestic workers were unwilling to accept. The 252 workers so employed is in contrast to the 1,284 who were brought to Minnesota in 1957. All of the Bahamians were hired to snap sweet corn for canning. All of the foreign laborers worked in the southern part of the state; none in the Red River Valley beet fields in the northwestern area. The 99 Mexican nationals who

(Continued on page 2)



INFORMATION concerning counties in the state with 100 or more migrant workers was obtained from a December 1960 report entitled *Children in Migrant Families*. The report was produced by the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare—Social Security Administration and the Children's Bureau. Data on counties shown on the above map to have less than 100 migrant workers was obtained from the Minnesota Department of Employment Security.

Migrant Workers—continued

came to Minnesota compare to 315,846 who entered the United States in 1960 under the Mexican farm labor program.

The foreign worker has more legal protection relating to his employment than do the citizen workers. The Mexican national is guaranteed work for at least three-fourths of his employment contract period. Unless he is offered at least 64 hours of work in a two-week period he is guaranteed subsistence. The U.S. government guarantees payment of his wages. Transportation and subsistence en route are provided. The domestic migrants are not guaranteed any of these benefits, although some employers do provide a transportation allowance under certain conditions. Too, requirements for insurance and the enforcement of provisions for housing and facilities are more specific and more effective for the foreign national than for domestic workers.

Their Annual Earnings Are Low

Economically, the migrant farm worker occupies the lowest level of any major group in the American economy, according to a report of the U.S. Department of Labor. His earnings are unpredictable, but they are relatively low. Among migrant households in southern

Texas, with an average of 6.5 members of whom three were workers, average annual earnings were \$2,256 in 1956. The median income of all U.S. households in that year was \$4,783. Interviews with Texas-based families in 1959 indicated that the average annual income of these migrant households was still \$2,256.

The differential between the wage rates paid regular farm workers and those doing the most casual type of agricultural work has increased substantially over the past ten years, largely because the work in which migrant workers are normally employed requires less skill than the steadily increasing skill and responsibility required of regular farm workers.

Domestic migrants, as well as other agricultural workers, are specifically excluded from the wage and hour provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act and consequently have practically no protection under federal minimum wage laws. In Minnesota, however, the average daily earnings of migrant workers is relatively good. According to figures released by the U.S. Department of Labor, the state ranks sixth in the nation, with average daily earnings of \$7.34 per migrant worker. For some specific crops, daily wages are considered to be high. New developments in the growing of sugar beets, for example, have enabled some migrant workers to earn as high as \$18 a day hoe trimming.

In 1954, Social Security coverage was extended to large numbers of seasonal agricultural workers for the first time. As a result of changes made in the law in 1956, a farm worker was covered by Social Security if he was paid \$150 in cash from any one employer or if he worked for an employer for 20 or more days during the year. However, the actual number of migrant workers in the state covered by Social Security is unknown.

When contacting the migrant workers on their future work schedules, representatives from the district offices of the state department of employment security familiarize migrants with the Social Security laws as well as laws governing education and residency. These representatives also inform migrants of the various health, medical, and welfare resources available in the surrounding area.

Migration to Minnesota for crop activities begins as a trickle about the last week in April. The peak periods of employment are during the months of June and July. It begins to taper off in August, and by the last week in Octo-

ber nearly all of the Texas workers and foreign nationals have returned to their homes.

However, even at the week of peak employment, the migrant workers represent only about half of the total number of persons engaged in the following selected seasonal agricultural crops: nursery, asparagus, sugar beets, vegetables, onions, green peas, and berries. In 1960, for example, the first week in July saw a total of 9,717 seasonal agricultural workers so employed, with 4,636 of them local workers and 122 from out of the area; the balance of the agricultural labor force included 4,825 Texas migrants, 100 from other states, and 34 from Mexico. By the week of August 5, the total labor force in the selected seasonal agricultural employment, as reported by the Minnesota Department of Employment Security, had shrunk to 5,649, with 5,126 of them local workers and 43 workers from out of the area. There were only 446 Texas migrants and 34 Mexicans at work in Minnesota at that time.

Employment Trend is Downward

The total peak employment of migrant workers of 4,825 in 1960 compares with 8,125 in 1950. Then, as now, most of them worked in the beet fields; 4,216 in 1960, 5,525 ten years ago. The additional 1,265 workers employed in Minnesota in 1950 to hoe and harvest vegetables (other than asparagus, onions, green peas, and sweet corn) is in contrast to 66 so employed at peak employment in 1960.

The trend is also downward in the employment of foreign and out-of-country labor. The year 1951, a record year, saw 3,142 such workers brought into the state, with 1,839 of them from the British West Indies and the remainder from Mexico. In 1960, only 153 British West Indians and 99 Mexican nationals were needed at the peak employment period.

The man-hours needed to produce all crops in Minnesota have been reduced more than 50 per cent since 1940. Farmers hire fewer regular farm workers and for shorter periods. They need men with greater mechanical skill. They prefer workers who can live in their own homes.

With the use of combines and mechanical forks for harvesting green peas, more local workers are willing to do this type of work. The availability of local workers eliminates the need for housing and feeding facilities. The use of potato combines and the availability of large modern warehouses for more orderly handling of potatoes have

reduced the number of agricultural workers needed; and more and more local workers, many of them women, are accepting combine sorter jobs.

Mechanization in such specific crop activities as sweet corn snapping and green bean picking has either reduced substantially or eliminated the need for migrant workers. Ten workers are now needed to harvest the same acreage of potatoes for which 40 were needed 15 years ago. Where one worker was needed to cultivate seven acres of sugar beets four years ago, one worker handles 15 to 20 acres today. In harvesting corn, 250 mechanical picker operators are now doing the same amount of work as 1,000 men hand picking.

The need for migrant workers will continue its downward trend as growers continue their mechanization and increasingly employ such labor-saving practices as the use of monogerm sugar beet seed and herbicides.

In addition, a vigorous statewide youth employment program is in many instances filling the needs of growers for seasonal farm labor. For example, the Minnesota State Employment Service, through its local offices in the beet growing areas, is encouraging the hiring of local youth for sugar beet thinning and hoeing during the summer vacation months. Recruitment of workers within commuting distance of their job eliminates problems associated with transportation, housing, and food. With youth labor, this also gets rid of off-duty supervision.

Since nearly 100 per cent of the sugar beet acreage in the Red River Valley and 50 per cent in southern Minnesota is now mechanically thinned, more local labor is willing to engage in this crop activity. The importance of this crop to the state's economy is illustrated by the fact that the 1960 acreage of 80,700 yielded enough sugar beets to give Minnesota second ranking among all states in the nation growing this crop.

The success of the youth employment program is indicated by the fact that in the Twin Cities area, for example, there is no longer any need during the summer months to hire out-of-state labor to cultivate and harvest the vegetable and berry crops.

In 1959, for example, a total of 2,659 youths 12 years of age and over registered for employment in the market garden program in the Minneapolis, Hopkins, and Anoka areas.

Hybrid seed corn detassling is another opportunity for youth employment. Of the 3,989 workers employed at the peak of detassling in 1959, more

than 90 per cent were youth who commuted to the fields on a day-haul basis under a well-supervised, well-regulated employment program.

The kind of crop determines the number of migrant workers needed. Of the 4,420 workers in 1960 during the week of peak employment engaged in thinning, hoeing, and weeding the sugar beets, 4,216 were from Texas and 24 from Mexico. Recruitment of interstate migratory workers for the beet fields is by sugar company licensed recruiters in Texas.

Their Work is Largely Stoop Labor

Nearly the entire labor force needed for the asparagus fields consists of Texas workers. In 1960, of the 554 workers needed during the week of peak employment, 516 came from Texas. Here, mechanization has been partially offset by increased acreage.

Potatoes are grown largely in the Red River Valley, the Hollandale area, and Hennepin county. Ten years ago, 10,690 workers were needed at the peak of the harvest. Primarily because of two-row potato combines, 1,553 workers were needed for the harvest during the 1960 peak employment week (September 30) and only 252 were from Texas.

About half of the laborers needed for the onion crop come from Texas; 161 migrants in the total force of 382 during the peak week in 1960. During the harvest in September, a total of 336 workers were employed, including 116 Texans. It was also necessary to recruit 24 Mexican nationals because, increasingly, more Texas migrant families go home for the starting of school.

In mixed vegetables the peak week saw 684 workers employed; 61 of them from Texas and ten from Mexico.

The more than 300 Minnesota establishments growing horticultural specialty crops valued at over \$2,000 annually employed 2,053 workers at the peak of employment in 1960, but only 25 from out of the area and 49 Texas migrants were hired for these activities, compared to 1,979 local workers.

Most of the cucumber acreage is located in Kandiyohi, McLeod, Sibley, Redwood, Renville, and Todd counties, with the bulk of the crop harvested by family labor; only about 450 of the estimated 2,500 acres were harvested by hired workers in 1960.

Sweet corn required 884 workers during the peak employment week (August 26.) However, only 15 Texans, 20 Mexicans, and 153 Bahamians were needed for the hand picking for fresh market and canning. The Bahamians were employed by the one canner in the

state who does not harvest sweet corn mechanically. The unavailability of domestic workers in 1960 to do the job made it necessary to authorize the processor to employ Bahamians because few domestic workers are willing to accept hand snapping jobs.

No migrants are employed for the strawberry or raspberry harvest, centered largely in areas served by the Hopkins and Minneapolis offices of the state department of employment security nor for corn detassling.

Mechanical forks and pea viner combines have affected the composition of the labor force and the number of workers needed for harvesting peas. In 1960, 88 per cent (2,003 workers) of the total 2,282 were local and no foreign workers have been employed since 1958. Labor from states other than Texas has been recruited in recent years. In 1960, for the first time, 99 workers were recruited through the Mississippi State Employment Service for the pea harvest and the men were brought to Minnesota by bus.

These, then, are the migrants that come to Minnesota. They are among the hundreds of thousands of migratory agricultural workers who are an essential part of the harvesting of much of the nation's crops.

Number of Migrant Workers and Crop Activity Reported By Local Area Offices, Minnesota Department of Employment Security-1960

Area Office	Crop	Number of Migrant Workers
Albert Lea	asparagus, onions, cabbage, sugar beets, potatoes, and other mixed vegetables	635
Crookston	sugar beets, potatoes	1,882
Fairmont	sugar beets, nursery	250
Hopkins	mixed vegetables, sugar beets, potatoes	60
Mankato	sugar beets	84
Marshall	sugar beets	120
Moorhead	sugar beets, potatoes, onions	850
New Ulm	sugar beets, sweet corn, cabbage, radishes	168
Owatonna	asparagus, vegetables	150
Thief River Falls	sugar beets	462
Willmar	sugar beets	239
	Total	4,900