Michigan Unemployment
Compensation Commission

Employment Service Division
Farm Placement Section

CHARACTERISTICS OF MIGRATORY FARM LABOR IN MICHIGAN

Functions of Michigan Unemployment Compensation Commission in Farm Labor Program

The expiration of the Emergency Farm Labor Act at the end of 1947 returned the Farm Placement Program to the United States Employment Service and to the several state security agencies under the original provisions of the Wagner-Peyser Act of 1933. The functions required under this Act are:

1. To provide a year-round farm labor recruitment and placement for agricultural workers, farm operators, and food processing industries.

2. To recruit seasonal workers whenever needed.

3. To facilitate the transfer of migratory workers from other states and countries whenever the local market cannot supply sufficient workers to meet seasonal requirements.

4. To furnish information about Michigan crops and farm labor developments to growers, processors, farm workers, and employment service offices.

5. To develop agricultural job openings for unemployed, experienced farm workers.

Organization of Farm Placement Program of Michigan Unemployment Compensation Commission

Immediately following the return of the Farm Placement Program to the United States Employment Service and to the security agencies, a Farm Placement Section was established as a specialized unit in the Employment Service Division of the Commission to carry out the farm placement functions specified in the Wagner-Peyser Act. This Section is concerned entirely with problems related to the employment of agricultural workers, in accordance with recommendations obtained from representatives of Michigan growers and food processors.

A Farm Labor Advisory Committee of twelve members, representing the major crop and food processing associations of the State, the Michigan Grange, the Michigan Farm Bureau, and the Michigan State College, was established to insure effective representation of interested groups on policy matters relating the recruitment and placement of farm workers.

The Farm Placement Section is staffed by a Chief of Farm Placements, a Farm Labor Analyst, two supervisors of farm placement operations (each of whom directly supervises farm placement operations in approximately half of the area of the State), and eight crop area specialists. The latter are stationed in areas characterized by crop similarity, so that each may become expert in the labor problems incident to a series of related crop activities.

Recent Trends in Seasonal Labor Requirements

The labor requirements for the production and processing of these crops are impressive. Seasonal labor needs at the peak of 1943 totaled 50,000. This total rose to 56,000 in 1944, to 58,000 in 1945, 59,000 in 1946 and 62,000 in 1947. The ideal weather conditions of 1948 eliminated the overlapping of crop activities and reduced seasonal labor requirements to 50,000. In 1949, the needs for seasonal labor rose to an all-time high of 64,600, when hot weather hastened the rate of maturity for many crops.

Migratory Labor Pattern

Records kept on migrant farm labor entering Michigan at Benton Harbor show that farm workers from 37 states entered at this point in 1949, the majority coming from the South Central States.

Texas leads the states in the number of workers supplied to Michigan. Approximately 16,000 Latin-Americans, 10,000 of whom were contracted for sugar beet activities by Michigan Field Crops, Incorporated, arrived in the State between May 15 and July 15. These workers, traveling in trucks and automobiles which band together in small caravans, entered Michigan through the border cities of Monroe, Coldwater, Adrian and Benton Harbor. The contracted beet workers followed direct routes to the sugar beet areas in eastern and southern Michigan, while the free lance Texans took the main routes up through the central and eastern part of the State into the muck and truck crop areas.

The States which rank next in order of the largest amount of labor supplied to Michigan were: Arkansas (4,600), Missouri (4,200), Kentucky (4,000), Louisiana (1,200), Georgia (600), Tennessee and Mississippi, (each 400) and all other states (400).

About 10,000 southern migrant workers follow the tree and fruit harvests, coming into Michigan at Benton Harbor and Coldwater. This labor followed the central and western highways and worked as far north as Traverse City for the cherry crop. Approximately 3,000 migrant workers were directed into the fruit areas of southeastern Michigan for the harvesting activities, which began about August 25, and continued to November 1.

Another large group of migrants (5,800) who performed the stoop-type work, entered Michigan at Coldwater, Adrian and Monroe, and were directed to areas requiring such activities as weeding, hoeing and harvesting processing crops.

Migrant farm laborers from other states depended upon the Employment Service to a large extent to help them find jobs. Many migrants had one or two contacts but upon completing these commitments turned to the Employment Service offices for placement on other farm jobs.

Other Sources of Labor Supply

Michigan obtained recertification for 127 Jamaicans early in 1949. Later in the season 100 Jamaicans were transferred from Wisconsin to Michigan to assist with the bumper fruit crop in southeastern Michigan. During October 224 foreign workers were in the State and by December 1, all but 65 had either been repatriated or transferred to other States.

Early in October the Employment Service recruited 194 Puerto Ricans to supplement the low labor supply for sugar beet harvesting. These workers were returned to eastern and southern states by November first.

Michigan's 1950 labor force was augmented by the recruitment of 5,300 Puerto Ricans. A large increase (30 % over 1949) in sugar beet acreage and a limited supply of Texas-Mexican labor were the principal factors in developing a new source of stoop type labor.

There is no labor coming into the State which is in competition with domestic or local workers.

Destination of Workers Leaving the State

The first large out-migration of workers occurs after completion of the cherry harvest. Approximately one-third of the Texas-Mexican labor force in this State leaves as soon as the cherry harvest is completed and migrate to other Great Lakes States and a few southward into the cotton States.

Many of the fruit workers who come to Michigan are share croppers from Southern States and these people return to their farms in the South after early apple and peach harvests in Benton Harbor are completed.

The final out-migration takes place after the completion of the sugar beet and apple harvest and workers go directly to the southern cotton states.

Problems of Farm Labor Recruitment

Although Michigan has a dynamic agricultural industry, it cannot compete for its labor supply with the huge manufacturing industries of the State. The skills required for most seasonal crop activities are less complex than those in manufacturing, accounting in large part for a substantial wage differential. The commitments of urban industrial workers for living expenses are closely related to industrial wage levels. This factor is a serious obstacle in the recruitment of urban labor for farm work. In addition, the seasonal patterns of urban employment in Michigan do not dovetail with the periods of peak labor demand in agriculture. Also, the average seasonal farm job lasts only about two weeks in a specific area, and steady employment in seasonal crop activities requires a mobile labor force. Consequently, seasonal farm employment provides no general solution for unemployment among urban workers, and Michigan agriculture must depend to a large extent upon other states for its seasonal labor supply.

However, a relatively high degree of success was achieved in recruiting urban labor for farm jobs in 1949, owing in part to some increase in unemployment in a number of Michigan industrial centers. Most of the workers recruited from the cities were comparatively new to the city; they had neither acquired the top skills in manufacturing nor had they started the purchase of urban property. Nearly two-thirds of these workers had prior experience in farm work. In some industrial areas, workers readily accepted farm employment because of transportation supplied by growers or arranged by the Farm Placement Section in cooperation with crop associations.

Michigan is also at a disadvantage in recruiting farm labor because of its geographical position. It is bounded by the Great Lakes on three sides and migrant workers are obliged to enter and leave at the southern border. This means that out-of-state workers have a tendency to merge toward the south about mid-season so they will be in a position to move as soon as crops mature in the southern states.

However, the majority of the recruitment and placement problems arise from the nature of the agricultural industry itself. The types of crops grown in the State and the sequence in which they are harvested have a great influence on the labor supply problem.

Since Michigan labor demands for spring activities come at a time when a large volume of migrant labor is moving about looking for work, the early placement and recruitment problems are not too difficult. However, in 1949, shortly before the spring activities were completed, cherries were ready to harvest. With the beginning of this crop activity, workers deserted their jobs and rushed to the cherry region. A seasonal labor force, consisting of approximately 48,000 workers, was concentrated in the cherry and bush fruit areas of western Michigan during the period between July 15 and August 10.

Farm labor recruiters representing growers' associations in other areas of Michigan and in bordering states converged on this region to secure workers for crop activities which immediately follow the cherry harvest. Bidding for labor became highly competitive and a large number of migratory workers left the State immediately after the cherry harvest necessitating an intensive recruitment campaign to obtain sufficient labor for later crop activities.

Other recruiting and placement problems occurred in isolated localities, which were far from the regular migratory routes. Farm placement personnel were compelled to develop a labor force from the neighboring towns and villages which would adequately meet the needs of growers. The organization of such a force required much time in arranging transportation, concentration points, and other detailed arrangements, and required cooperation from growers, school authorities, and civic groups in towns which supplied the labor. One of the outstanding examples of this type of development was in the Alpena vicinity, which, being located far north of migratory routes found itself short of labor for the berry and snap bean harvests. An intensive recruiting program over a wide radius was successful in securing an adequate labor supply, accounting for 31,726 separate placements during the harvest season.

Labor demands for the fall activities coincided with those of the states of origin of many migratory workers. A bumper crop of cotton attracted many of the migrant workers, whom Michigan depended upon to assist with the harvesting of sugar beet, muck, potato and fruit crops, where nearly 60 % of the labor needs were for stoop type workers. The labor requirements for the 1949 fall harvesting activities were met only after weeks of intensive recruitment in many states.

Housing Facilities

There has been an appreciable improvement both in the number and type of housing for farm workers during the past five years. Cottage and barrack type housing are principal kinds of dwellings. Occasionally, tents are used when crops exceed the average yields and more workers are required. Housing is furnished and no charge is made to the workers. Nearly all housing includes stoves, benches, bunks or cots, and in some, growers furnish fully equipped housing. The City of Benton Harbor has a modern housing project which consists of 60 separate family units with modern laundry, showers and cooking facilities.

Some of the most difficult problems in housing arises from the lack of education of workers. A few workers destroy property and others have practically no concept of regulations governing sanitation and health. However, the majority are rapidly learning and are becoming appreciative of efforts growers are making to insure them comfort and healthful surroundings.

Transportation Facilities

Latin-Americans are usually transported by crew leaders. Many of these leaders are paid one cent per mile per worker from their home to place of employment. The most common type of transportation is by truck which is covered by a tarpauli seats are provided along the sides of the truck with space left for bedding and other equipment. Many of the crew leaders are employed as crew supervisors and workers usually reimburse the leader for their transportation. These crew leaders usually act as the contracting agent for the workers in their group. Crew leaders often put their trucks to work in hauling crops to the processing plants. Workers entering southwestern Michigan are in crews and family groups come with their cars and many singles come by public transportation and by hitching rides. Single workers are the hardest ones to place because of the housing situation.

Workers Contact With Employers

Approximately 60 % of the Texas-Mexicans are recruited by Michigan Field Crops, Incorporated. This Association releases surplus workers, after the members are fully supplied with labor, to the Michigan State Employment Service for placement in other crop activities during the mid-season. Another 25 % are free lance workers. The remaining 15 % is recruited through the Michigan State Employment Service. However, free lance workers depend to a large extent upon the placement facilities of the Michigan State Employment Service.

Southern migrants — other than Texas-Mexicans — are obtained through clearance, by employer contact and free lance. Approximately 60 % are free lancers but depend upon Information Centers and other Employment Service facilities such as Weekly Labor Information Bulletins and Farm Labor Guides. These workers make extensive use of the Farm Placement Service after they arrive in Michigan.

Michigan Unemployment
Compensation Commission.

Planning, Research
Statistics Division

MICHIGAN

AGRICULTURAL AND FOOD PROCESSING INDUSTRIES SEASONAL LABOR FORCE FOR 1950.

Month	Total Labor Force	Total Out-of State Labor	Percent Out-of State Labor	AGRICULTURAL		FOOD PROCESSING		PRINCIPAL ACTIVITIES REQUIRING SEASONAL LABOR
				Total	Out-of State	Total	Out-of State	
May 15	7,100	1,600	22.5	6,500	1,550	600	50	Sugar beet blocking, thinning and hoeing - - setting-out tomato, celery, green pepper, melon and onions - - cultivating vegetable and muck crops - - spraying tree and bush fruits - - harvesting asparagus and strawberries. Processing asparagus and strawberries.
May 30	12,500	3,500	28.0	10,900	3,300	1,600	200	
June 15	27,950	14,900	53.3	25,750	14,100	2,200	800	Sugar beet blocking, thinning and hoeing - - cultivating and hoeing truck and muck crops - - spraying tree and bush fruits - - harvesting strawberries, green peas, sweet cherries, bush fruits and vegetables. Processing strawberries, bush fruits, green peas and sweet cherries.
June 30	55,100	35,830	65.0	48,950	32,280	6,150	3,550	
July 15	52,850	32,940	62.3	46,000	29,140	6,850	3,800	Cultivating truck and muck crops - - thinning fruits harvesting bush fruits, sweet and sour cherries, green peas, vegetables, cucumbers, snap beans, early apples and early potatoes. Processing cherries, bush fruits, peas, snap beans and cucumbers.
July 30	64,500	35,800	55.5	56,900	32,000	7,600	3,800	

OUT-OF-COUNTRY WORKERS IN MICHIGAN 1950.

June - - - - 5,730 Puerto Ricans #
July - - - - 5,364 Puerto Ricans

Need for 5,300 Puerto Ricans certified by Michigan State Employment Service; recruitment conducted by Puerto Rican Employment Service and contracts negotiated by Michigan Field Crops, Inc. Additional Puerto Ricans recruited from other states by Michigan Field Crops, Inc.

ORIGIN OF MIGRATORY WORKERS IN MICHIGAN'S 1950 FARM LABOR FORCE DURING PEAK WEEK IN JULY.

State	Approximate Number of Workers
Texas	15,100
Arkansas	4,500
Missouri	4,000
Kentucky	2,800
Louisiana	1,100
Georgia	500
Tennessee	650
Mississippi	500
Oklahoma	300
Other	1,000

FARM PLACEMENTS JANUARY - JULY, 1950. MICHIGAN

Month	Placements
Total	67,706
January	139
February	136
March	240
April	542
May	3,458
June	15,796
July	47,395

MICHIGAN

AGRICULTURAL AND FOOD PROCESSING INDUSTRIES
SEASONAL LABOR FORCE FOR 1949.

Month	Total Labor Force	Total Out-of State Labor	Percent Out-of State Labor	AGRICULTURAL		FOOD PROCESSING		PRINCIPAL ACTIVITIES REQUIRING SEASONAL LABOR
				Total	Out-of State	Total	Out-of State	
May 15	8,200	2,600	32%	7,200	2,600	1,000	0	Sugar beet blocking, thinning and hoeing - - setting-out tomato, celery, green pepper, melon and onions - - cultivating vegetable and muck crops - - spraying tree and bush fruits - - harvesting asparagus and strawberries. Professing asparagus and strawberries.
May 30	14,200	8,800	62	13,150	8,800	1,050	0	
June 15	33,200	19,350	58	31,600	19,150	1,600	200	Sugar beet blocking, thinning and hoeing - - cultivating and hoeing truck and muck crops - - spraying tree and bush fruits - - harvesting strawberries, green peas, sweet cherries, bush fruits and vegetables. Processing strawberries, bush fruits, green peas and sweet cherries.
June 30	42,800	23,050	54	39,650	22,800	3,150	250	
July 15	63,300	31,800	50	57,600	31,200	5,700	600	Cultivating truck and muck crops - - thinning fruits - - harvesting bush fruits, sweet and sour cherries, green peas, vegetables, cucumbers, snap beans, early apples and early potatoes. Processing cherries, bush fruits, peas, snap beans and cucumbers.
July 30	64,600	30,400	47	56,400	29,700	8,200	700	
Aug. 15	54,700	20,300	37	48,300	20,000	6,400	300	Cultivating vegetable and muck crops - - harvesting peaches, early apples, plums, pears, tomatoes, cucumbers, snap beans, truck crops, muck crops, bush fruits, early potatoes, sweet corn, and green lima beans. Processing apples, plums, pears, cucumbers, snap beans, tomatoes, green lima beans and vegetables.
Aug. 30	51,700	20,400	39	46,700	20,100	5,000	300	
Sept. 15	45,600	16,700	37	39,900	16,300	5,700	400	Harvesting apples, peaches, grapes, plums, pears, potatoes, cucumbers, snap beans, lima beans, mint, onions, vegetables, sweet corn, tomatoes, and muck crops. Processing fruits, cucumbers, snap beans, lima beans, tomatoes and vegetables.
Sept. 30	35,600	10,050	28	30,900	9,800	4,700	250	
Oct. 15	35,000	10,500	30	27,900	10,200	7,100	300	Harvesting apples, grapes, potatoes, vegetables, onions, green lima beans, red beets, sugar beets and processing fruits, vegetables and sugar beets.
Oct. 30	27,700	7,750	28	21,200	7,525	6,500	225	
Nov. 15	12,900	5,400	41	9,265	5,400	3,735	0	Harvesting apples, potatoes and sugar beets and processing fruits, vegetables and sugar beets.

FOREIGN WORKERS IN MICHIGAN
1949

May - September	124 Jamaicans
October - - - -	224 Jamaicans
November - - -	91 Jamaicans
December - - -	65 Jamaicans

ORIGIN OF MIGRATORY WORKERS IN MICHIGAN'S
1949 SEASONAL FARM LABOR FORCE
DURING THE PEAK PERIOD

State	Approximate Number of Workers
Texas	16,000
Arkansas	4,600
Missouri	4,200
Kentucky	4,000
Louisiana	1,200
Georgia	600
Tennessee	400
Mississippi	400
Other	400

FARM PLACEMENTS
JANUARY - DECEMBER, 1949.
MICHIGAN

Month	Placements
Total	144,096
January	70
February	109
March	189
April	1,470
May	2,255
June	14,157
July	50,555
August	46,363
September	19,229
October	8,425
November	1,168
December	106