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1948 Annual Report
Farm and Food Processing Labor

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By: Nelson F. Hopper,
Superintendent of Farm & Food Processing Labor

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3. Interstate.

Migrant harvest workers, principally from the southern states, make up the largest force of out-of-area seasonal labor. Additional transient workers from Kentucky, W. Virginia, and Ohio move into western New York for the fruit harvest. This year it has been estimated that 16,661 southern migrants came to New York. In comparison this represents approximately 3,300 more workers over the 1947 estimate. While the estimated number of Pennsylvania migrants, 2,296 decreased slightly when compared with 1947.

For additional data on southern migrants, refer to the attached supplementary report entitled "A Report on Southern Migrants Coming to New York State."

4. Other Sources

a. Foreign Workers. During the year, 590 foreign workers were used in New York State. The majority of this group, approximately 61 per cent, were Jamaicans and 39 per cent were Bahamian workers. Of the total number of foreign workers in the state, about 451 were imported for seasonal operations, the balance were carried over from the winter of 1947.

These workers were located in eleven different counties within the state with the larger numbers in Genesee and Rockland Counties.

b. Puerto Ricans. For the first time New York growers imported workers from Puerto Rico for agricultural work. These workers were brought in under a contract between the employer and a labor contractor. Their importation was approved by the New York State Department of Labor and the Puerto Rican Department of Labor. Under this arrangement, 1,051 workers were imported.

Opinions vary as to the ability of these workers to do the work assigned. In the picking of apples, difficulty in handling ladders was observed, and heavy work, such as loading potatoes proved to be difficult. They appeared to do well when doing harvesting jobs on the ground, but were often reluctant to pick snap beans.

One of the largest problems encountered was the turnover or loss of workers during the short time they were here. Being citizens of the U. S., they were free to leave their employer by disregarding their contractual agreements. Losses of this kind ran from 15 to 30 per cent of the total number of workers brought in by a single employer.

Many of these workers adapted themselves readily to the various tasks assigned. Although a large loss of workers was experienced by some employers, growers have indicated that those workers who remained rendered good performance.

C. Mechanization and Improved Methods of Cultivation.

Mechanization and more efficient methods in production has had some affect on seasonal labor requirements. It is expected that in certain areas this affect will be noticeable in the years to come; for example, improved sprays and dusts for killing weeds in vegetable crops, particularly lettuce and onions, will eliminate much hand labor. Mechanical onion toppers, mechanical pickers for sweet corn going into processing, and beet pullers are a few of the devices to lower seasonal labor requirements; and at the same time provide greater efficiency in operations.

D. Shortage Areas.

The supply of seasonal labor in general was adequate throughout the year. However, difficulties were encountered in several areas during peak harvesting periods. Had not a dry period reduced crop yields in Orleans, Genesee, Niagara, Dutchess, Columbia, and Ulster Counties, shortages would have occurred. Major crops affected included tomatoes, sweet corn, and apples.

While the snap bean area indicated a need for additional workers, during late August housing accommodations were not available. On August 23, the Puerto Rican Government prohibited the further importation of agricultural workers to the United States. At that time three contracts were pending, two with Farm Labor Cooperatives in the Hudson Valley and one in Wayne County.

IV. Employment Service and Community Efforts in the Recruitment of Farm and Food Processing Labor.

A. Local Recruitment.

1. Seasonal. During May and June, members of the local Employment Service offices visited many of the schools in the larger cities for the purpose of encouraging youth of legal age to assist with the harvesting of crops. Talks to youth were given in assembly periods. The guidance offices of each school also cooperated by calling students' attention to the need for additional seasonal workers. Posters, and "throw-away" leaflets were prepared and distributed throughout the schools.

General news releases which pointed to the statewide problem on the need for local domestic workers were written by the Information Service of the Employment Service. With these general news releases were the releases prepared by the local offices, which kept the public informed on local conditions and labor needs for the area.

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Efforts in late fall to refer Puerto Rican workers from New York State to job opportunities in Florida produced only negligible results. Lack of transportation funds on the part of the workers being the main barrier. However, experience indicates better results could be obtained if opportunities were publicized well in advance of need.

FOREIGN LABOR

During 1954, the Division of Employment received orders from nine employers, requesting 1,498 foreign workers. This represents a decrease of 7 percent in employers' estimated needs over 1953. These workers were to be employed in ten counties of the state. Peak foreign labor employment occurred in September when 1,275 such workers were employed.

The foreign labor force employed in New York State during the 1954 season was equally divided between workers from Jamaica and from the Bahamas. About two-thirds of these workers were engaged in seasonal vegetable activities and the balance in fruit activities. Exclusive of Canadians, demand for foreign workers in New York State begins about May 1, with the largest period of importation occurring early in September with the beginning of the apple harvest. The need for these workers continues through the fall with most of them returning home or to other agricultural employment in Florida by November 30.

During 1954 one new cooperative, Mid-Hudson Fruit Growers Cooperative was organized. Three labor cooperatives now exist in Ulster County, one employing Puerto Ricans in vegetables, and two employing foreign labor for fruit harvest and packing activities.

The State Farm Labor Advisory Committee recommended during the 1954 fall meeting that over-winter use of these workers be reduced; growers responded with a 10 percent reduction.

The farm labor cooperative in northern New York employed a total of 85 Canadians for the harvest of potatoes and apples. In addition about 36 Canadian workers are employed on dairy farms in Franklin County.

SPECIAL SERVICES

FARM LABOR BULLETIN

In 1954 the Farm Labor Bulletin prepared in the Central Farm Labor Office for the purpose of providing interested persons with up-to-date information related to farm labor became a more useful tool beyond the boundaries of our state as well as within.

EMPLOYMENT OF SEASONAL HIRED WORKERS in Agriculture and Food Processing and Agricultural Placements, by Month New York State, 1954 /1

Month	AGRICULTURAL EMPLOYMENT				AGRICULTURAL PLACEMENTS		FOOD PROCESSING EMPLOYMENT		
	Total	Domestic		Foreign	Seasonal	Total	Total	Local	Non-Local
		Local	Non-Local						
I	II	III	IV	V	VI		VII	VIII	IX
January	208	-	110	98	220	434	-	-	-
February	101	-	10	91	79	316	-	-	-
March	150	25	20	105	106	465	-	-	-
April	276	130	47	99	695	1,109	-	-	-
May	5,138	3,390	1,535	213	1,988	2,404	944	944	-
June	12,272	6,328	5,448	496	11,902	12,347	3,807	3,425	382
July	32,912	13,128	19,001	783	35,707	36,324	8,399	6,432	1,967
August	46,260	13,440	31,977	843	46,754	46,976	11,357	9,240	2,117
September	45,686	15,263	29,148	1,275	26,815	27,112	16,110	13,096	3,014
October	32,954	12,188	19,695	1,071	19,223	19,592	14,048	11,260	2,788
November	2,454	185	1,911	358	5,511	5,758	820	252	568
December	476	300	-	176	579	816	125	125	-

/1 Source: E.S. 223 for columns II-V; VII - IX
E.S. 209 for column VI

/2 Employment data shown for each month represent the number of seasonal workers employed on the last normal work-day during the first half of the month. The number of placements is the total for each month. 1954 agricultural placements total 153,653 of which 149,579 were seasonal placements.