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CALIFORNIA

post season

FARM LABOR REPORT

1948

STATE OF CALIFORNIA
DEPARTMENT
OF
EMPLOYMENT

FARM PLACEMENT
SERVICE

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B. Employment Requirements

In 1948, the total farm work force varied from 310,600 in March to 510,000 in September. The make-up of the work force was as follows:

Type of Worker	March	September
Farmers and unpaid family.	130,000	164,000
Hired domestic workers:		
Year-round	103,000	100,000
Temporary.	70,000	238,500
Mexican Nationals on contract. . .	7,600	7,500
TOTAL	310,600	510,000

Of the above total for September, it is estimated that approximately 225,000 workers were engaged in the major seasonal operations. The seasonal labor significance of California crops is indicated by the fact that five crops--cotton, grapes, peaches, prunes, and tomatoes--require in excess of 30,000 workers at their respective peaks; and that two of these--cotton and grapes--use more than 50,000 workers.

A minor peak of seasonal employment occurs in late spring when the late Imperial Valley harvests overlap with fruit and vegetable thinning and early harvests in other parts of the State. The major peak occurs in the fall, usually in early September, when the harvests of grapes, peaches, pears, prunes, figs, Valencia oranges, almonds, tomatoes, and several other crops overlap.

California's seasonal labor requirement pattern is subject to several variables which affect labor recruitment. These include the weather influencing seasons and yields; the labor supply which may enable acceleration of harvests after crop maturity; the shifts in plantings for annuals such as cotton and tomatoes; and differences in the disposition of the crops which determines the amount of necessary handling prior to marketing or processing.

In 1948, several factors contributed to an abnormal peak season. First, the maturity of most crops was about two weeks late because of the dry spring. However, after maturity, most crop harvests progressed rapidly with a favorable labor supply, so that completion dates were not necessarily two weeks late. The grapes reached a peak about September 20th instead of the 5th. Because there was less overlapping with earlier crops for the above reason, and later crops were still slow in maturing, the September labor demand was slightly lower than in recent years.

The peak season was further complicated with expansion of cotton production by at least 25 percent between 1947 and 1948. The cotton harvest started October 1 and rose to a peak employment of about 90,000 workers in November. Because of the cotton overlap with late fall crops such as walnuts, tomatoes, and wine grapes, the peak extended into late October, and when revised estimates are available, the number working in major crops in October may be found to have exceeded the number working in September. Work force estimates,

placed in school, and continues on, being accelerated in late November and December when the cold weather hits the San Joaquin Valley and work opportunity begins to slacken. Most of these workers follow the crop harvests in succession, going up the coast after the potatotes are finished in Kern County in May, working in cherries, apricots, hops, peaches, pears, grapes, and tomatoes, and completing their work in cotton in the San Joaquin Valley. The California residents who are classed as seasonal migrant workers will follow the same general pattern.

As a service to migrant workers, the Department of Employment prepared and distributed 75,000 road-map sized folders entitled, "Information for the farm worker". (See Exhibits.) The folder includes a detailed map of California crop areas, together with timetables showing seasons and crops in each area and supplementary information regarding suitable workers, available housing, etc. The folders were distributed by local offices, information stations, and--through the cooperation of the Bureau of Plant Quarantine--by inspectors at the State borders. Folders seen in the possession of some workers brought others into the farm labor offices with request for copies. This fact and the number of requests for replacement of lost copies indicate that migrants were finding the information of practical value. It is believed that it also increased their confidence in the Department of Employment as a reliable source of other farm labor information leading to job opportunities.

During 1948, the only domestic nonresident workers brought into California under contract were three small groups of Navajo Indians contracted for in Arizona. An attempt was made to bring in a group of 400 additional Navajo Indians, but they were unavailable at the time needed. The Indians brought to California proved to be good workers and no social problem was presented, but very few would remain longer than five weeks. This seems to be a characteristic of the Navajo Indians and, therefore, limits their work opportunities in California agriculture.

3. Other Sources

During 1948, California employed a maximum of 11,000 Mexican Nationals as a supplementary labor force. These workers were used principally in Southern California in the Imperial, Coachella, and Palo Verde Valleys, and in the harvest of the Valencia orange crop in Southern Coast citrus districts. Their use in other areas was on a very limited scale and was confined to stoop labor jobs that are extremely difficult to fill with domestic workers.

D. Mechanization

Mechanization has not yet affected the over-all work force in California so far as numbers are concerned, because reduced labor requirements through mechanization have been largely offset by expanded production, particularly in such crops as sugar beets and cotton. Mechanical shakers now in use in prune and nut crops have reduced materially the numbers of workers needed for this operation.

V. Foreign Labor

A. During 1948, approximately 65 different employer associations request certification of need for 24,611 Mexican Nationals, which certifications were approved. Although the labor needs of these associations were generally agreed to have been met satisfactorily, roughly only 11,000 Mexican Nationals were used in the State.

B. The above employers' requests for certification of need were approved by the Department and by the United States Employment Service. No approvals at the State level were disapproved by the United States Employment Service. Only one request approved locally was disapproved at the State level. At the local level, employers for whom it seemed likely that possible requests would be disapproved, were successfully discouraged from making such requests.

Several approved requests for certification of need were approved conditionally for work scheduled 90 days hence, and were made subject to review and possible cancellation if an adequate supply of domestic labor developed as the time of need approached. In many cases the number needed was reduced and in a few cases the total request was cancelled, as was the request for 5,000 workers by the San Joaquin Valley Labor Bureau. In several instances, employers voluntarily cancelled or reduced the number of workers requested. Further reduction in requested numbers occurred by the time of actual employment because of border conditions restricting the availability of workers for importation.

It is believed that the prescribed procedure for certification of need for Mexican Nationals provided adequately for insuring a possible labor supply where crop losses might have occurred with a shortage of domestic labor. At the same time, even though certifications of need had been approved for larger numbers, the Department successfully limited actual use of foreign workers to the point where job opportunities for domestic workers were not significantly jeopardized.

C. The total number of Nationals employed was approximately 11,000. (See Exhibit for the number of foreign workers employed by months in 1948 and recent years.)

D. The use of Mexican Nationals in California met with some opposition from the National Farm Labor Union and other labor organizations. Protests were received on the basis that Mexican Nationals were displacing domestic workers and/or were causing wages to be depressed. A meeting was held in Fresno with representatives of labor and interested employers to discuss and clarify the policy of the Government with respect to the recruitment of Nationals.

In a few instances, employers who had placed orders for domestic workers as required prior to requests for Nationals attempted to cancel the domestic worker order with the Employment Service upon receiving the Nationals. In line with the Department policy, these employers were required to keep such orders active and to hire qualified domestic workers as they became available.

Employers met with a number of problems in the recruitment of Mexican Nationals in Mexico. One was the delay in the initial opening and the subsequent closings of the Boarder to recruitment. One was the slow processing of individual workers. Waiting employers argued among themselves over who should have priority in securing workers, each tending to place his need above that of others. This made it difficult for Government agencies concerned to expedite the processing and delivery of workers. Some employers were dissatisfied with the laborers received, claiming that they had no opportunity to select qualified individuals for themselves. Some workers were accused of wanting a trip only at the employer's expense. Greatest employer dissatisfaction was expressed with the labor recruited at interior points where less qualified workers were available.

It is estimated that the repatriations, plus A.W.O.L.'s before expiration of contract, totaled about 25% of all Nationals imported into California. This resulted in a financial loss to the growers, and they felt that the individual Mexican National should be made more responsible in fulfilling his contract and should incur certain penalties if he fails to abide by it.

Employers reported that there seemed to be a difference of interpretation of the International Agreement and the individual contract by the different Mexican Consuls throughout the State. This lack of uniformity caused some misunderstanding. It was felt that the Mexican Government should clarify the interpretation of the individual worker agreement as it affects the Mexican Consuls.

It is apparent that the manager's position in a few employer associations is dependent upon the use of imported labor, and in a few instances has possibly delayed post-war adaptation of facilities and working conditions to the use of domestic workers.

In a very few instances, associations with Mexican Nationals contracted through the Office of Labor ignored the requirement that such workers be repatriated prior to December, 1947. Permission to recontract the workers was granted under the International Agreement of February, 1948, for a period of six months. Repatriations of the workers at the end of the contract period were slow and incomplete by the end of the year. However, it is believed that as these Nationals are returned to Mexico, the employers will not request certification of need for additional men, primarily because the expense to the employer now involved, which prior to 1948 was borne by the Government.

E. The costs to employers for the importation is expected to reduce the use of foreign labor in 1949 if a favorable supply of domestic workers is available. Some employer associations have indicated that due to delays and uncertainties in securing the men, and the limitations on the duration of contracts, imported labor was proving too costly. As in 1948, the availability of an increasing number of domestic workers will also tend to reduce the number of Mexican Nationals actually imported, even though employers may continue to request them as an insurance against a possible labor shortage.