

THE SEASONAL FARM WORKER
AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

A Report on the Use of Public Funds to Develop
and Support Community Organization Activities
Among Seasonal and Migrant Farm Workers in
California



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P R E F A C E

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This report is the result of a joint effort by John Flynn and Peter Lauwers on behalf of the American Friends Service Committee's Farm Workers Opportunity Project.

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Introduction

This special manpower report deals with the development of community organization activities among seasonal and migrant farm workers in Ventura County, California. These activities grew out of the counseling programs of the Farm Workers Opportunity Project, an experimental and demonstration Manpower Development and Training Act Project. The F.W.O.P. gave 208 seasonal farm workers an extensive and intensive basic education for thirty hours a week. Trainees received a training allowance while in school. The education program was supported by an individual and group counseling program that took place during the evenings and week ends. The seasonal and migrant farm workers in this area are almost all Mexican-Americans or recent Mexican immigrants. They live in labor camps owned by big ranches or in "rural fringe" barrios or ghettos which have an almost exclusive population of Spanish-speaking people.

The counseling program of the F.W.O.P. was mainly conducted by a Spanish-speaking staff that had a strong commitment to helping the farm worker community. Counseling was directed at both trainees and other farm workers of the area. The intensive group counseling program was established because of the belief that only through collective concern can seasonal farm workers improve their situation in our society. This group counseling gave rise to numerous community organization activities which are described in the report. Out of these group activities grew organizations such as buying clubs, the Alumni Association and the Santa Paula Crusade Against Poverty. The last mentioned organization has now incorporated and obtained a War on Poverty grant from the Office of Economic Opportunity for a migrant education project.

Group counseling is seen as a community development approach where counselors worked without preconceptions about techniques or even goals. The staff addressed itself to problems that were relevant to the farm workers.

The use of public funds for the development and support of community organization has come under attack especially from highly organized political and agribusiness groups. The need for the organization of farm workers into self-interest groups devoted to the betterment of the farm worker community is evident. The

staff of the Farm Workers Opportunity Project most strongly urges the federal government to assist seasonal farm workers in their self-organization through the funding of counseling and community development programs similar to those described in this report.



A staff meeting of the Farm Workers Opportunity Project, Spring 1965. "On the average, there were at least five full time counselors, although there were as many as seven counselors during the early days.....counselors were generally..... recognized leaders in the farm worker community..... (see p.10)

II - Background to the Farm Workers Opportunity Project (FWOP)

The Oxnard Experimental and Demonstration MDTA Project (The Farm Workers Opportunity Project) was funded in the midst of the great controversy that surrounded the termination of Public Law 73, commonly known as the bracero program. The project was funded as an attempt to solve the bracero problem by offering an opportunity to unemployed seasonal and migrant farm workers to learn skills that would enable them to settle into the Ventura County community and fill the job positions usually held by the Mexican National contract workers. This change, sometimes called the "Farm Labor Revolution" hit Ventura County in the spring of 1965. By the summer of the same year, it was all over. Local and migrant domestic farm workers had taken over the work that had been performed by the bracero. The change was dramatic, vast and swift. In 1964 upwards of 55% of the harvest activity in Ventura County was performed by more than 6000 braceros. Braceros had worked all year. In 1965 only 660 foreign contract workers were allowed into Ventura County and then for only two or three weeks.

The Oxnard Experimental and Demonstration MDTA Project (along with other manpower pilot projects in California) refused to back off from a strong and firm statement to the agricultural industry that public funds would be used to stabilize and develop a domestic work force capable of replacing all braceros. At the same time, thousands of domestic workers were, in fact, replacing braceros in the fields, with or without training. Agribusiness employers were faced with fait accompli of local and migrant domestics actually doing "bracero work." The growers were also confronted with a new concept; the government was funding projects which offered to educate and train a work force which would be both efficient and stable.

The history of the project during the summer of 1965 was that of offering counseling services to hundreds of farm workers contacted by the staff in Ventura County, surveying the farm worker population and striving to obtain the cooperation and support of the Oxnard Union High School district in order to provide a basic education program for farm workers. By this time, the project had obtained a radical reputation in the Ventura

County community. Most school trustees and administrators were reluctant to be involved with the program.

Finally, after widespread public controversy and debate, Oxnard Union High School District Board of Trustees voted 3-2 in favor of accepting the program on August 25, 1965. New classrooms were erected and on November 15, 1965, the first group of forty farm workers entered a course of basic education on the campus of the Oxnard High School.

During the next fifteen months, 203 MDTA trainees received a program of basic education supported by an intensive counseling program. Trainees attended school thirty hours a week for which they received a training allowance. Counseling took place in the evenings and on week ends.

By the winter of 1965-66, the emphasis of the program had shifted to reflect the new realities of the farm labor situation in Ventura County. The project sought to assure the complete elimination of foreign contract labor but also to set new patterns in ending migrancy in farm labor through establishing and strengthening community organization activities which used the trainees in the Farm Workers Opportunity Project as a "core" leadership group. The staff of the Project continued to provide stimulus and support for community development activities for farm workers throughout Ventura County.

Since the shift in direction, the Farm Workers Opportunity Project developed a reputation as a strong community action project. The 203 trainees in the program, together with their families, formed a core of progressive farm workers and rural poor who were willing to join established community organizations or form new organizations of their own.

At the same time, large numbers of former migrant workers learned self-help from their fellow farm workers who were in the program. Farm workers learned how to take advantage of education and skill training programs, how to settle into the community, how to become U. S. citizens and how to adequately take care of themselves and their families in an Anglo-Saxon dominated society.

The community development impact of the Farm Workers Opportunity Project continues to be felt in Ventura County through other War on Poverty programs that are designed to work with

the farm worker population. Many of these War on Poverty programs used staff and ex-trainees of the Farm Workers Opportunity Project to build new grass roots programs that promise to further the objectives of self-help and community development by, for and with the rural poor of the area.



Counselor Armando Lopez confers with a farm worker trainee of the Farm Workers Opportunity Project outside the Project office in the Colonia area of Oxnard. "Trust also grew because of the availability of the staff to assist the trainee and the community....This closeness was achieved by locating the office where the people lived." (see Section VI page 20)

III - The Seasonal Farm Worker and his Community

a) The Farm Worker in Ventura County

Most of the seasonal farm workers in this area of California are and have traditionally been, Mexican-Americans or Mexican Nationals. Before the end of the bracero system, December 31, 1964, some 6000 Mexican National workers had been brought in during peak harvest months to help pick the citrus and vegetable crops. Since then, the slack of the defunct bracero program has been taken up by domestic workers, local, immigrant (green carders) and migrant farm workers.

Ventura County probably has a typical seasonal and migrant farm worker population for California and the Southwest. Many of these farm workers are "green carders" or immigrants from Mexico. Many of these farm workers are Spanish-speaking American citizens. According to local employment officials, growers and farm labor contractors, possibly ninety per cent of the seasonal and migrant labor force in Ventura County is Spanish speaking or of Mexican extraction. This ethnic breakdown of the farm labor population was reflected in the Farm Workers Opportunity Project which took in ninety per cent Spanish-surname farm workers.

Chart comparison of Mexican-American percentage in the Ventura County population according to U.S. Census 1960, and of Mexican-American population of farm workers in the Farm Workers Opportunity Project:

VENTURA COUNTY

No. People	Spanish surname	17%	Other	= 83%
		33,980		166,020

FARM WORKERS OPPORTUNITY PROJECT

No. Trainees	Sp. Surname	= 91%	Other	9%
		189		19

"Green-card" immigrants, however, are not braceros. ("Green-cards" are the alien registration cards given to any legal immigrant upon entry into the United States.) Immigrants are permanent residents, nominally at least, of the United States, and have the same legal and constitutional protections and immunities as citizens. Many bring their families to permanent homes in this country though many more, at least among the farm worker segment of the population, appear to make a habit of working for harvests here and moving back to homes in Mexico for winter months and for the holidays. Statistics on this group are scarce.

VENTURA COUNTY SEASONAL FARM LABOR STATISTICS¹

COMPOSITION OF SEASONAL FARM WORKER FORCE

PRE- AND POST- BRACERO PROGRAM

1st week of April	Total Seasonal	Contract Foreign	DOMESTIC (includes "green- cards")		
			Inter- State	Intra- State	Local
1964	7250	3270	450	600	2530
		(3490 Mexican 180 Japanese)			
1965	4580	0	300	2200	2080
1966	5770	0	240	2370	3160
1967	5460	0	1550	1210	2700

SEASONAL FARM LABOR PEAKS:

WEEK ENDING:

TOTAL:

July 18, 1964	6870	(3700 Domestic) (3170 Foreign Contract)
July 17, 1965	7130	(All Domestic)
July 16, 1966	7360	(All Domestic)
July 15, 1967	4980	(All Domestic)

1. Statistics from California Department of Employment, Weekly Farm Labor Reports. Seasonal Farm Workers include domestic farm workers living in Ventura County yr. round and migrants

While the immigrant often changes his residence between two countries, he also has a greater social and economic stake in the United States society since he is free to come and go as he chooses. Braceros were restricted in their movement by rigid contracts. Immigrants, therefore, seem to be fertile ground for community organization and legitimate and needy targets for war on poverty, training and basic education programs.

b) Ventura County Farm Worker Communities:

The seasonal and migrant farm workers of Ventura County live in numerous farm labor communities scattered throughout the southern portion of the county. These farm workers and their families generally live in poor and substandard housing located in labor camps, in numerous small rural communities or in "barrios" or "colonias" that fringe the larger cities of Ventura County. Many of these ghetto communities are composed almost entirely (90% or more) of Spanish-speaking people, Mexican Americans or Mexican immigrants. The farm labor camps are usually owned by the large ranches and ranch corporations or by farm labor associations. The farm workers who live in these farm labor camps are therefore living in company housing at the pleasure of the employer or labor associations. Eviction from company housing is a frequent event for many seasonal farm workers.

Two of the three largest cities in Ventura County have large farm labor communities--Oxnard and Santa Paula. Smaller towns such as Fillmore, Saticoy, Moorpark, Piru and Port Hueneme also have sizeable concentrations of farm workers. Some of the large ranches such as Rancho Sespe have as many as 200 family housing units on their property which often house more than 1000 persons. Limoneira Ranch and Coastal Growers Farm Labor Camp in Oxnard are other large labor camps.

The largest of these farm labor communities in Ventura County is known as the Colonia of Oxnard which lies in an area to the east and north of the railroad tracks that curve through Oxnard in a semi-circle. Some of the characteristics of the Colonia should be mentioned here as being typical of the farm labor poverty areas. The average family income is

\$1,900 annually. Forty percent of the unemployment in Oxnard involves Colonia residents. Oxnard has 6.6 housing units per acre compared to 15.27 per acre in the Colonia with 32 percent of the housing units being overcrowded.

Five percent of the persons under 21 receive welfare aid while 18 percent of those 65 and over need welfare support. The overcrowding, poor health conditions, substandard housing and an estimated eighty five percent Mexican American population, is typical of thousands of rural farm labor communities throughout California and the Southwest.



Mexican-American migrant and seasonal farm workers busy at their "stoop labor" in Ventura County strawberry fields, 1966.

IV - The Counseling Program of the Farm Workers Opportunity Project

The Emergency Committee to Aid Farm Workers hired a staff of counselors to provide intensive group and individual counseling for the Farm Workers Opportunity Project. On the average, there were at least five full time counselors, although there were as many as seven counselors during the early days of the project. The counselors were generally individuals who were recognized leaders in the farm worker community or young men who demonstrated leadership potential. Antonio del Buono, one of the counselors, was generally recognized as a leader in the community-at-large and more specifically in the farm-worker community. Although Mr. del Buono at one time held the position of being a member of the Ventura County Grand Jury, he always maintained a very sympathetic and understanding ear to the problems of the poor. He was most instrumental in creating trust and understanding between the project and the community it served. Armando Lopez was chosen as a counselor because of his great leadership potential. Lopez spent time in the Colonia district of Oxnard where he gained a first hand understanding of the problems of the poor. Counselors maintained a program of group and individual counseling both for the 203 trainees in the project and the hundreds of other farm workers who came to the project office seeking help on myriad problems. Through the "grapevine" and by attending fiestas and community based meetings, these individuals learned of the project and the services it offered. Significantly, the project office was located in the Colonia area, which made project services easily accessible to the community.

Practically overnight, the office became a symbol of reform. The counseling program, both group and individual, reflected the needs and desires of the seasonal and migrant farm workers themselves. Flexibility was the key word for project counselors. Trainees often needed help and advice with personal problems at the beginning of the program, but as the counseling and education projects advanced, the trainees became more adept at taking care of themselves. This counseling program became the responsibility of the American Friends Service Committee after the summer of 1966.

Individual Counseling

During the early period of the Farm Workers Opportunity Project, the Project Director and the counseling staff encouraged the use of the traditional approach to counseling. The individual approach to "individual problems" used even today by most school districts, and both governmental and private agencies were not fulfilling the job of teaching farm workers the concept of working together to solve common problems. Labeled by one counselor as "advanced paternalism," this individual approach only made the trainees more dependent on the counselors. Certainly, it was much easier for the trainee to come to one of the five counselors for help in filling out a form, but if this process were repeated too many times, the trainee often became excessively dependent.

Undeniably, some individual counseling was necessary. During the early period of the project, each trainee met his counselor not less than once a week at a regularly appointed time. The regular meeting provided an opportunity for the trainee to visit with his counselor and discuss anything he desired. Some of the more timid students came out of their shells and started to talk about problems they had not discussed before. Moreover, the practice was a safeguard that assured that the counselors divided their time among all trainees so that no individuals were slighted. The counselors asked trainees to write autobiographies (in English) to indicate what they, as individuals, felt had most influenced their lives. The histories were then discussed in weekly sessions with the counselors. Counselors also had the opportunity to develop individual programs for workers, programs adjusted to individual talents and aspirations.

Some trainees, under counselors' guidance, started bank savings accounts. Many workers obtained library cards for the first time in their lives. Counselors would also discuss the reading that a student had done during the week. Some outstanding examples of individual progress could be observed on the part of some of the trainees. One student went to court on his own and filed a request that he be allowed an extension in his case and that the court appoint an attorney for him.

Another trainee successfully obtained the cooperation of local health authorities who removed a dead animal as a health hazard from under the trainee's house. These problems appear minor to some but they are of the type that daily burden seasonal farm workers and make for great unhappiness, expense to the worker, and in some cases cause workers to be jailed.

Group counseling

The shift in emphasis from individual counseling to group counseling emerged early in the program. Counselors had an average caseload of eighteen individuals. The counselors split their caseload into two sections of from eight to ten individuals, making two groups for each counselor. The counselor then held meetings with each group on a regular basis, usually every other week and on many occasions every week. These meetings were used for informal discussions in which the workers talked about their own concerns and anxieties in a relaxed and free atmosphere. Often these meetings were held in the homes or in the meeting room (which had sofas and arm chairs) of the Farm Workers Opportunity Project. Meetings often centered around such topics as: (1) The necessity of education in modern times; (2) The value of minority cultures in the American scene; (3) The plight of the farm worker; (4) Community problems--the lack of a fire station in the Colonia district; and (5) The high cost of food. Prejudices and biased attitudes often emerged in these group sessions. Many farm workers felt that the compulsory education law was unfair. Farm workers often feel that their children, when physically developed, should be allowed to work and help support the family. Others argued that if their children received a good education they would be able to get better jobs; therefore, they argued that the initial sacrifice would ultimately pay dividends. Many of the workers who were predominantly of Mexican descent felt a strong sense of inferiority. Having accepted the sense of alienation in an Anglo-American society, they often have little drive. Others, however, were positive and proud of their heritage. They helped others to realize that every culture has its strengths and weaknesses.

The group counseling sessions did what the individual counseling program could never accomplish. Group counsel-

ing brought about a new awareness among the trainees of their similarities and common bonds. As these individuals learned that each one is not unique in this society, they discover that many problems can be solved through group activities rather than by individual action. Once a problem was identified and felt by all to be serious, the communal apparatus for solving that problem then appeared. The counselor performed important functions by helping groups to identify significant common problems and by teaching them the rudiments of organization.



Counselor Armando Lopez provides "individual counseling" to a farm worker trainee. "The individual approach...was not fulfilling the role of teaching farm workers the concept of working together to solve common problems. Labeled by one counselor as "advanced paternalism", this individual approach only made the trainees more dependent..." (See page 11.)

V - Impact of Counseling on the Development of Community Organization Activities

The Project leadership's greatest concern was to develop in the trainees, individually and as a group, the kind of social, economic, and political power that other dimensions of society and special interest groups wield so successfully. The staff was not content with getting trainees a steadier job in agriculture or for that matter employment in a different field. It was not only concerned with teaching basic arithmetic, history, or English. For the question immediately raised by both staff and trainees: "Arithmetic for what? History for what? English for what?" As one of the trainees put it so succinctly, "Now I know English. Do I go back to the orchards and talk English to the lemons?" His expectations were too high for him to be relegated to the orchard. He could now see his potential. But, he also realized that his expectations would only be achieved by organizing at the grass roots level.

The Farm Workers Opportunity Project realized considerable success in organizing and developing grass roots leadership. Out of this leadership came buying clubs, the FWOP Alumni Association, the Santa Paula Crusade Against Poverty and the participation and leadership given by FWOP staff to the Community Action Commission's War on Poverty in Ventura County. Numerous aspects of FWOP community relations formed a skeletal framework of farm worker community organization. These formed the seeds of cohesiveness among the rural Mexican-Americans which gave them some solidarity vis-a-vis the surrounding "Anglo" middle class society.

The community organization activities of the project, the staff and trainees were many and varied. It is not possible to discuss all these community organizing programs in this report but we wish to present some of the most significant activities. These include:

- (a) Buying clubs
- (b) Student government
- (c) Fiestas, community meetings

- (d) Alumni Association
- (e) Santa Paula Crusade Against Poverty Inc.

In addition the report refers to the activities of staff members with the Ventura County Community Action Commission and the continuing development of community organizations.

(a) Buying Clubs

One of the highlights of the project was the responsibility the trainees undertook to organize meat and dairy buying clubs. These clubs approximated the co-operative buying system whereby members save money by buying food in groups rather than individually. At the outset of the educational program, eight trainees volunteered their spare time in obtaining discount food for their fellow students. Two students worked on the bread project; two worked to obtain reduced prices on eggs and milk, while two others tried to obtain a bargain on canned foods. The counselors remained in the background as the trainees did most of the organizing.

Two trainees "negotiated" a most significant arrangement with the Meat Cutters Local 506. Significant--because the trainees and the business agent worked together to fashion an identification card for FWOP trainees only. The card permitted the trainees to purchase meat at a ten percent discount in the local markets. The ten percent discount was impressive but the display of initiative and organization by these two imaginative trainees was seen as a most important learning experience both for the organizers themselves as well as their fellow trainees.

(b) Student Government

Early in the life of the project it was felt that a student government for the trainees in the program would be a true lesson in democratic processes and an opportunity for students to air their grievances and problems through organized channels. A majority of the trainees felt the need for a student government and suggested the election of class representatives through a regular election process.

Nominations were taken at the school during a luncheon recess. A week later a large evening dinner was held for all train-

ees, their families and the staff of the Farm Workers Opportunity Project. Elections were held for members of the student government at the end of this dinner event which included a film show, music and singing, presented by trainees who were professional level musicians. The dinner event was very successful and attracted the great majority of the students and their families with about 200 persons in attendance.

The student government taught the trainees that they could participate in decision making affecting their own futures. The student government held regular meetings, set up rules of student conduct and carried on business relating to the student body and their relationship with the Oxnard Union High School District. Some of the class representatives eventually met with the Superintendent of the High School District to request an extension of schooling for those trainees who could show cause and needed extra training. The Superintendent agreed to pursue the matter and eventually obtained approval to offer extended schooling for forty of the trainees in the program. This event was seen as a highlight by many of the staff of the Project for they witnessed a change in men whom they had originally seen as timid workers who were seemingly satisfied with whatever was tossed in their direction, to proud workers demanding a fair deal for their fellow farm laborers.

(c) Fiestas, community meetings

During the early portion of the training program the staff of the Farm Workers Opportunity Project organized two community based meetings each month. Community meetings were open to both trainees and their families and the public from the farm worker communities. These meetings concentrated on a discussion and presentation of problems affecting seasonal and migrant farm workers. One evening meeting was held on Medicare and Social Security problems. Another meeting concentrated on the legal rights of farm workers.

At a later date the farm worker trainees were instrumental in the organization and implementation of fiestas and graduation banquets. Each graduating class (there were six in all) held a graduation fiesta or banquets. These fiestas were held in

nearby public parks or private restaurants in Oxnard. They were open to trainees, their families and friends as well as teachers and project staff. The fiesta would often last for five or six hours and include dancing to the music of the trainees' "mariachi" bands. These fiestas were fine community events that stimulated good morale and community pride.

(d) Alumni Association

Seven leading project graduates met February 1, 1967, determined to establish an alumni association. Much enthusiasm was displayed as the group elected three temporary officers and set up a committee to draw up a constitution for the Farm Workers Opportunity Project Alumni Association. A dinner-dance held on the following Friday financed the initial organization. This organizational effort was putting into practice what had been learned in the classroom and observed on field trips.

(e) Santa Paula Crusade Against Poverty Inc.

The most successful community development experience has taken place in Santa Paula, where fifteen FWOP graduates came together to form a grass roots organization called the Santa Paula Crusade Against Poverty. Working with numerous seasonal and migrant farm workers and under the guidance of Ernest Jenkins, former FWOP counselor, the group is seeking to establish a credit union for farm workers, a mechanic co-op to cushion car maintenance costs, and to offer part-time training for aspiring mechanics. This group hopes to organize the farm worker community in the Santa Clara Valley of Ventura County to the point where this community will become a civic and social force. After graduation from FWOP, this group of crusaders informally started their own English class at the Santa Paula High School under the guidance of a volunteer teacher. This class of seven grew to forty-seven in exactly one year. The high school has since agreed to continue the program.

This Crusade Against Poverty group has recently instituted an adult basic education program for farm workers in cooperation with the California Lutheran College of Thousand Oaks. Large numbers of volunteer student teachers came out from the college

to teach classes in Santa Paula and in the farm labor camps. In April, 1967, this grass roots anti-poverty group was awarded a \$68,000 grant by the Office of Economic Opportunity to provide adult basic education and automobile vocational education to 900 farm workers in Ventura County. The Board of Directors of the Santa Paula Crusade Against Poverty is now composed of poor persons only, the majority of whom were trainees in the Farm Workers Opportunity Project.

More than with earlier community organization activities, the Santa Paula Crusade Against Poverty members have demonstrated the value of community development both to individual farm workers and their communities. Through an organization of their own making the ex-trainees of the Farm Workers Opportunity Project were able to organize an incorporation that became eligible for anti-poverty funds that would reach hundreds and eventually thousands of fellow seasonal farm workers. These Mexican American farm workers are now building up their own community through their own efforts with whatever help they can obtain from all quarters. Most important, these once "voiceless poor" are beginning to control the destiny of their own community.

(f) Ventura County Community Action Commission

The Ventura County Community Action Commission, the local community action agency which coordinates War on Poverty programs in the County, has provided the opportunity for another form of leadership. Early in the life of the Commission, Antonio del Buono, a FWOP counselor, led a drive to win appointment of poor persons on the Commission membership roll. Del Buono himself was appointed as a commissioner and while in this position continued to hammer away with the important request that persons from the poverty group be named as representatives on the Commission. Eventually the Commission agreed to allow poor persons on the Commission after the Office of Economic Opportunity representatives demanded such action.

Two other counselors of the Farm Workers Opportunity Project, Armando Lopez, a Mexican American native of Oxnard, and Ernest Jenkins became representatives on the Community Action Commission. These counselors became articulate and forceful members of the Commission, working to establish solid and meaningful

anti-poverty programs. To a great degree these counselors formed a countervailing force on the commission to the representatives of the established agencies, which included appointees by each of the five County supervisors, and two commission members who were supervisors.

(g) Continuing development of community organizations

Even after classroom instruction had terminated, the office staff continued to motivate organizational leadership and cooperate with the organizations they fostered. Individuals from many of the poverty pockets of the county continued to find their way to the office. Many of these people brought their problems, others came looking for a place to hold group meetings. The staff of the Santa Paula Crusade Against Poverty often consulted with the FWOP staff. This Santa Paula group, led by Ernest Jenkins, Thomas Williams and an executive board composed of poor people only, often found itself at odds with powerful vested agricultural interests. These agricultural groups represent a highly organized and articulate industry--the richest segment of Ventura County society. For the seasonal farm worker to obtain a voice in our society he must also organize himself into vocal and articulate organizations. The foundations for such organization have been laid in the area. It appears that the numerous ex-trainees and ex-staff of the Farm Workers Opportunity Project will continue to offer leadership to the farm worker community in the months and years ahead.

VI - Counseling as Community Development - Some Observations

The Project Director and staff members of the Farm Workers Opportunity Project, along with members of the American Friends Service Rural Affairs Committee, are in general agreement that the counseling program was very successful. The most impressive feature of the program was the trust between the farm worker community and the counseling staff. From the inception of the project, the staff was insistent that if the program were to have any measured success, it would have to enlist the support and cooperation of the farm worker leaders. This was accomplished by hiring leaders and persons who demonstrated potential as staff members. A recognized ally of the farm workers, the Emergency Committee to Aid Farm Workers, was the initial sponsor of the project, which also made the task much easier. Generally this practice of using semi-professionals as full-fledged counselors is a departure from established social work procedures. Involvement of leadership from the target community proved important, according to staff members who felt that:

1. Trust was created and maintained between the community and the project.
2. Being bi-lingual, these leaders were able to communicate the purposes of the project to the people. They were also in a good position to report the needs and desires of the community to the project.
3. Because of this kind of communication, no expensive news media was needed.
4. By being a working part of the project, the semi-professionals were in a position to keep the project close to the needs of the people.
5. This leadership proved extremely effective in conducting community-based meetings (drawing the crowds) and in group counseling sessions.

Trust also grew because of the availability of the staff to assist the trainee and the community in solving whatever problem they felt to be important. The proximity of the staff to the problems created a sense of immediacy and relevance which a more structured agency could not offer. This closeness was achieved by locating the office where the people lived. There were no office hours in the bureaucratic tradition. It was a fifteen-

hour day seven day a week operation which is a considerable departure from the schedules of most governmental agencies which offer counseling services. By being free of institutional restraints, project staff could concentrate on problems as they arose. This community development approach (working without preconceptions about techniques or even goals) is not possible in a structured public agency. Where the agency sees its purpose as the achievement of a goal, the community development process, itself, becomes the goal. While the agency offers a single type of solution, the community development process is nearly unlimited in its resources. Where the agency stresses the achievement of a predetermined goal, the community development approach can accept failure if a learning experience results out of failure.

Too much emphasis was placed on individual counseling during the early stages of the program. Consequently, counselees became very dependent on staff members. This emphasis was soon corrected and group counseling, the community development approach, was stressed. During the group sessions, everyone was treated as equals. Most learned from the experiences of others. Because of an economic dilemma and the nature of his work, the farm worker is encouraged to act as an individual, to face and solve problems alone. His wage is usually based on the production rate of the fastest worker--the piece-rate. The rate is rarely determined by what the average worker can produce; it is never based on what the group can produce. Because he is paid very little compared to workers in other industries, the farm worker's lot is one of constant struggle for existence. All of his time is taken up with just providing the basic needs of life; he can hardly have time to concern himself with the problems of his community or of his neighbor. By discussing problems in a group, workers were able to see that their individual problems were in many instances common to all. By forming organizations and working together, workers found that there were solutions to their common problems.

It would be difficult to conclude that the farm workers in Ventura County are earning more money and thus are living better because of the impact of the Farm Workers Opportunity Project. But it can safely be assumed that the counseling phase of the program has been effective in creating farm worker organizations in the county such as the Santa Paula Crusade Against Poverty which in turn may spawn other community development organizations.

Although at times some of the organizations created out of the project seemed elementary, an organizational structure was built, a seed germinated. The farm workers have proven that they can identify basic causes of their poverty and organize around those problems. They have also demonstrated that they can work together as a group in their search for solutions. Through its financial assistance, the U. S. Department of Labor has also demonstrated that the government can effectively assist farm workers to organize in much the way the Smith-Lever Act assisted the farmer to organize through the Agricultural Extension Service and the Farm Bureau.



Local farm workers helped in the early organization of the Farm Workers Opportunity Project, including the painting and organizing of the project office. Oxnard, Spring, 1965.

VII - The Use of Public Funds to Develop and Support Counseling and Community Organization Activities

The use of public funds to assist and generate the development of independent community organizations has often come under fire as being unnecessary or undesirable. In the experience of the Farm Workers Opportunity Project, those persons and groups in Ventura County who opposed the use of public funds for independent community organization among the poor, are the very groups (and their representatives) most highly organized themselves. The Farm Workers Opportunity Project came under attack on numerous occasions for organizing activities among farm workers that were usually labelled as being "union activities." (see appendix) Organizations that attacked the Project for its community development work included the Republican Associates of Los Angeles, the Ventura County Farm Bureau, the Ventura County Taxpayers Association, and the Oxnard Press Courier newspaper. It therefore appears appropriate to briefly discuss the merits of the use of public funds for the development of community organizations, based on the experience of the project.

To further an understanding of the extent of assistance given to community organizing among farm workers, this section of the report outlines the nature and degree of assistance given by staff members, the limitations of this assistance, and some observations concerning the source of funds.

(1) Nature and degree of staff assistance

The Farm Workers Opportunity Project was first sponsored by the Emergency Committee to Aid Farm Workers Inc. a non-profit citizens group with its headquarters in Los Angeles. The Emergency Committee hired a staff of administrators and counselors for the FWOP between March 1965 and July 1966. Between September 1966 and August 1967 the American Friends Service Committee sponsored the project and hired a smaller staff to implement the program. The Project therefore had staff members available to work among farm workers for approximately two and a half years. The number of staff fluctuated from a high of nine counselors to a low of three counselors with an average of five counselors over the two years and four months. The Emergency Committee to Aid Farm Work-

ers had a budget of \$140,000 for a sixteen month period to hire staff and administer the program, while the American Friends Service Committee had a \$65,000 budget for an eleven month period to run its portion of the project.

The staff counselors of FWOP were assigned many tasks in conjunction with the overall program. These tasks included the recruitment, selection and screening of trainees, the writing of reports and records, interviewing of potential trainees and completion of follow up studies. However, the counselor's main function and that which took most of his time was to give group and individual counseling to the trainees in the project and other seasonal farm workers in the area. The counseling would take place at the school (during recess) at the FWOP office in the Colonia, in community halls or in private homes. The type of counseling given has been discussed in an earlier section of this report (see Section IV) It is important to recall that counselors always worked towards minimizing their own role in group and community organization activities. They did, however, discuss possible activities, make suggestions and give advice to those workers who themselves established organizations or gave leadership to groups. The key function (which is educational) was that of giving advice and counsel.

(2) Limitations of staff assistance

The staff of the Farm Workers Opportunity Project found themselves limited and restricted in the role that they could play in the development of community organization among farm workers. In the first place, it is important to support the independence of the organizations that emerge from community organization efforts. The farm workers must be in control of their own associations under the guidance of their own chosen leadership. This precludes a "membership" type of participation by counselors who avoided a share in decision making. It would have been false, and in the end useless, for counselors to be leaders in the organizations and associations that developed. No organization will survive long if it is a "front" for somebody's selfish ambitions or goals. Such "front organizations" last only as long as the "key person" stays with the group. The minute the "key person" leaves, the organization collapses. This occurs because

the very raison d'être of the group has been removed--namely to front for one person's selfish ends. The counselors with the Farm Workers Opportunity Project encouraged indigenous leadership to control organizations of their own choosing.

Seasonal farm workers are in need of viable self-interest organizations that will survive any single member of those groups. Personality disputes invariably occur. They should not be allowed to break up or seriously weaken the farm worker community organizations. Counselors in the Farm Workers Opportunity Project were often reminded of their own dependence on the paycheck that came their way due to a contract that had a clear termination date. They therefore worked on the premise that whatever community organization took place would soon have to prove the ability for self-survival. Activities were therefore encouraged that cost little or no money. Support in the way of money obtained from the Project was not possible for direct subsidies. Materials or supplies that might have assisted the community organizations were minimal or insignificant. Human support was always far more important than financial support.

The skills, knowledge and outside contacts of counselors were important assets that the farm workers used for their organizational work. What money was needed for a fiesta or the preparation of a printed proposal could always be found through on the spot fund raising.

Staff counselors also had to learn the value of "group decision making." It was important for counselors to empathize with the seasonal farm workers at whatever level the workers were moving. For genuine growth, the decisions and opinions reached by the group had to be respected. If mistakes were made, they were the group's own mistakes and the group would learn from their own errors and omissions. By so respecting the wishes and desires of the group, the counselors were supporting group action and were able to maintain good communications with members of the group. Limited by their positions as paid staff, the counselors could advise and suggest action to the seasonal and migrant farm workers but they could not act in the place of the workers.

(3) Source of Funds

Critics might conclude that the source of funds for counseling and community organization activities would dictate the nature of those community organizing activities. This was not found to be a relevant factor in the experience of the Farm Workers Opportunity Project. The U.S. Department of Labor in no way attempted to interfere with or prevent the implementation of the type of counseling or community development described in this report.

The job of organizing the un-organized farm workers remains. Who will organize seasonal and migrant farm workers is secondary to the question of whether or not farm workers are to be organized at all. Even the question of how farm workers are to be organized takes precedence over the question of who are the organizers. Questions concerning the source of monies for the hiring of organizers are not as important as considerations regarding the freedom and actions of the organizers. Should the source of funds attempt to restrict or condition the use of the funds or the organizer's activities, then the question as to who gives the money becomes relevant. In the experience of the Farm Workers Opportunity Project the U.S. Department of Labor never attempted to dictate or condition the daily activities of the project staff. It is to the credit of the Department of Labor that it did not attempt to use its fiscal power to control or manipulate the project. In the opinion of the Project staff this is the way in which public funds should be granted to legitimate non-profit organizations. There are numerous examples of how non-profit groups have used public funds in a responsible and sensible manner.

VIII - The Need for Public Support of the Organization of Farm Workers

The staff and leadership of the Farm Workers Opportunity Project has consistently felt that it is in the best interests of the public and the nation that seasonal and migrant farm workers be given all possible public assistance in their efforts to organize. The case for the organization of farm workers with public funds has been very convincingly set out by Fred Schmidt of the Institute of Industrial Relations at the University of California at Los Angeles. We feel that it is appropriate to quote extensively from Fred Schmidt's A New Policy on Farm Labor which he issued in mid-1965.

The Department of Labor should take the initiative in creating conditions under which farm workers can bargain collectively with agricultural interests. This proposal is premised on the belief that collective bargaining is a valuable ingredient of a free society, because it decentralizes the processes of decision making, actively involves large numbers of persons in these processes, and is essentially a non-governmental method by which employers and employees can jointly formulate rules governing all aspects of wages, hours, and working conditions. Further this proposal is defensible on the grounds that it was the federal government that made it possible for farmers to organize effectively and to take collective actions in their own behalf. It now needs to duplicate these actions for farm workers...

...The answer that suggests itself is that the organizers who did the leg-work (of organizing farmers) must have come from the farmers themselves, operating through the Grange, the Farm Bureau Federation, of the National Farmers Union. Yet, the nature of these organizations suggests that they were not in themselves sufficient to the task that has been accomplished. First, it was not the discipline of these organizations that the farmers accepted when they adapted to all manner of restrictions on the free, almost planless, conduct of their business. And, second, although these organizations have been to varying degrees fraternal, educational, and economic in their nature, essentially they have been political organizations expressing the ideological orthodoxies of groups of farmers and seeking legislation in their behalf.

It is my view that the federal government was the effective organizer, that it actually put organizers in the field and induced farmers to learn the advantages of corporate actions. The traditional farmer organizations were but instruments in this process that schooled and prepared farmers for their present

day participation in the wide variety of marketing and commodity organizations which they now use to regulate their affairs within the large economy. The steps can be historically traced...

Once there is a resolution on the part of the Secretary's office to explore these new objectives and ways to make them suit the political palate of the country, the question arises on how to begin. I suggest that the next step should be to draw together a group of informed and imaginative persons to serve as a development team to round out the details of these concepts, to invent new ones, and to suggest the nature of the required enabling legislation. This is how agricultural legislation was shaped in the 1920's.

The mission of this team should be to visualize the most effective ways for government to place farm workers in a position to bargain collectively for themselves in the economy, and how this can be done without creating a plethora of new governmental bureaus or damaging important freedoms. It is important that the organizations of farm workers should have maximum independence from government, even to the point of being free to oppose those governmental policies that are not required to regulate honesty and democracy in their own affairs. There are ample precedents for government launching such independently orbiting organizations. They range in nature from the Federal Reserve Board, Tennessee Valley Authority, and the Space Communication Satellite Corporation to the Congressionally-chartered veterans organizations or the completely membership-controlled Soil Conservation Districts?..

Finally, we also feel that the remarks of Dr. Paul O'Rourke regarding the organization of the poor are relevant quotes to be associated with this report:

The idea of organizing the poor to speak on their own behalf is the most controversial element in the war on poverty. The poverty program will fund efforts by poor people to get together and discuss the problems which affect them. It will help them form "interest blocks" set priorities for themselves, and petition established authorities for redress and improvements. There has been a great deal of uncertainty about this, and yet, why do people fear organizations of the poor? The middle class is well-organized. They have their Rotary Clubs, their interest groups, and business organizations. What is there about organized poor people that is so frightening?

Curiously, or perhaps not curiously at all, when poor people are organized, when they do get a chance

to participate in the making of decisions which affect them, they begin to exhibit those characteristics that are peculiarly middle class. They desire to express themselves, not to be told. They desire to make decisions for themselves, to have freedom of choice about their fate and, more than anything, they desire to be self-sufficient. One of the greatest lies told repeatedly in our society is that the poor are lazy, that they are bums, that all they want is a hand out, and that they don't care about employment. This is a vicious lie, for it is very clear that the degree of the poor's anxiety to be self-sufficient is perhaps the very characteristic that gives rise to their anger and frustration.³

It is the opinion of the leadership and staff of the American Friends Service Committee's Farm Workers Opportunity Project that the experiences of the Oxnard Project clearly indicate that public funds can be utilized in a responsible, effective and efficient manner to help farm workers develop their own organizations. It is their hope and desire to see an expansion, through the use of public funds, of the community development efforts of seasonal and migrant farm workers, throughout the United States.

3. Dr. Paul O'Rourke, from a speech: The Hub of the Wheel, made in Santa Barbara, June 20, 1966, during a Conference on Poverty organized by the University of California Extension.

THE PRESS-COURIER

OXNARD, CALIFORNIA, WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 19, 1966

GOP hits poverty 'unionists'

Charges have been hurled at workers in California." two Oxnard War On Poverty projects, accusing them of using Federal War On Poverty funds to organize farm workers unions.

The Republican Associates of Los Angeles County, in their monthly newsletter, made the charges against the Farm Workers Opportunity Project (FWOP) and Operation Buenaventura, both of which are federally funded and sponsored by the Emergency Committee To Aid Farm Workers.

The newsletter charged that the leaders of the two projects are labor organizers. Named specifically was Mrs. Katherine Peake, Montecito, director of Operation Buenaventura. She was tabbed as "long associated with efforts to unionize farm

Mrs. Peake, who along with Peter Lauwers, FWOP director, is attending a War on Poverty conference in Washington, has previously denied that Operation Buenaventura is a cover-up for the unionization of farm workers with the help of government funds.

"Operation Buenaventura," Mrs. Peake has said "is not intended nor authorized to organize farm workers into unions . . . that is a job which belongs to the American labor movement.

"Our operation is designed to provide farm workers with knowledge and techniques to enable them to conduct their lives with greater efficiency and intelligent self-interest. Principles of group formation and

concerted action toward the achievement of common goals are a part of the program."

"After all," she said, "the more miserable, poverty ridden and ignorant the farm worker is, and the more unstable, fragmented, isolated and disenfranchised the community in which he lives, the less apt he is to find himself able to form the kind of stable associations that might lead to unionization."

"This is not unionization but it will most certainly make the workers affected by the program more organizable," Mrs. Peake said.

HELP OTHERS

Under the \$100,000 Operation Buenaventura, 12 farm workers are trained as indigenous case workers to help others to "learn to become first class citizens."

The Republican newsletter also charged that one of the aides, John Soria, is "long active in California as a union organizer." (Soria is no longer with Operation Buenaventura but is now a counselor in the FWOP.)

In regard to the FWOP, the newsletter said "inquiries in the neighborhood brought the response that the project office is a union office. The project employs organizers to visit em-

ployed farm workers to induce them to join the union."

Lauwers, in an interview earlier this week, also said that though neither project had anything to do with organizing unions, the effect of educating the farm workers may well lead to their becoming "more organizable."

"Whenever a farm laborer asks us about organizing a union," said Lauwers, "we tell them that that is not our function and we refer them to those organizations whose business is the labor movement."

A number of the employees in both Operation Buenaventura and the FWOP have been active, on their own time, as "farm labor sympathizers," but none have acted as "union organizers" while working on the federally funded project, Lauwers said.

RECRUITMENT

The FWOP recruits unemployed farm workers for a basic education program financed through the Manpower Training and Development Act by the Department of Labor.

Lauwers said his project is aimed at creating a more skillful resident farm labor force and eliminating the need for migrant farm labor.