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Growers of Kern County

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ORAL HISTORY OF THE SOUTHERN SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY PROJECT
CALIFORNIA STATE COLLEGE, BAKERSFIELD
FARM LABOR PROJECT

GROWERS OF KERN COUNTY

Martin Zaninovich

Interviewed

by

Susan McColgan

on

July 7, 1976, Delano, California

Transcriber: Sue Glenn

Editor: Dr. Gerald Stanley

Typist: Barbara Lewy

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M: To start out with, how did your family get started in farming?

Z: Well, our family were farmers in Yugoslavia where my father immigrated back in the early 1900's. In fact, I think it was 1914. After he spent some time working at odd jobs in the San Francisco area, he and his brother and their cousins, two cousins, wanted to get back to the farm. They moved to Dinuba and bought a vineyard; that's how we got started in the grape business in California.

M: Dinuba?

Z: Dinuba, California, which is about sixty miles north of here. It's in northern Tulare County.

M: Could a man going into farming today expect to be as successful as your family was; or are things a little different today?

Z: Things are a lot different today than they were then. It takes a lot more money to get involved in agriculture now of course, any business, but agriculture particularly because it takes land and it takes a lot of equipment. So it's much more difficult to get into agriculture today than it was then. My father and uncle and their cousins saved some money and probably got in on a limited amount of capital, but they did a lot of the work themselves, in fact, all the work themselves. That's how they were able to start.

Today, you have to have quite a bit of capital. [That] means that either a financial institution or some friend has to underwrite you or back you to get you started. But there is opportunity yet today, and if you can get the right kind of start, agricultural business is still a good business. I think it has a great future. The world is getting more heavily populated, and everybody's looking to agriculture to produce more food. So I think the outlook for agriculture is very good, especially California agriculture.

M: Traditionally, farming has always been a family-type operation. Is it still that way today?

Z: Basically, yes. We hear a lot about conglomerates in agriculture and corporations, but that's an insignificant part of the total agricultural ownership picture. Basically, agriculture is still family farms. They may be incorporated, and they're a lot larger than they used to be; but that's

by necessity. To gain efficiency, to be able to buy more and better equipment, you have to have larger operations.

I think basically, if you read the statistics, you'll find that agriculture is still run by family enterprises. I don't know what the exact percentages are, but it is still the very predominant method of operating farms in the United States.

M: Aside from mechanization, what would you say have been the biggest changes in agriculture in your lifetime?

Z: Well, there have been all kinds of technological advances, you know. Our practices of farming have changed. The use of chemicals in farming has certainly increased. Fertilizers and insecticide material, irrigation practices and methods--a lot of changes have taken place, and it's almost a different kind of business than it used to be. But, it still comes right down to the basic requirements of land and seed, water and labor, and, you know, how you apply it is different; but it's basically the same.

M: How much of the labor force in 1976 actually migrates?

Z: I think that the figure on that is less than ten percent. I don't remember the exact figure, but in California I think we have something like probably eight or nine percent of the labor force that's considered migrant. People have pretty much settled down to a community that they live in and work in, and we have a lot more diversification in agriculture in each community than we used to have. This community is well

diversified with a lot of different kinds of agriculture that keeps a resident work force busy in agriculture practically the entire year.

And those that do move I wouldn't classify really as migrants; they have specific jobs that they go to, to a specific area. For example, in the grape business you'll find a certain number of people that will always go to the Coachilla Valley and work in the grapes in that area. Then there are always those that will travel to the Arvin area, which is only fifty or sixty miles from here; and they will actually commute daily. We have people that live in that area who commute up here to work during our harvest season. So the work force has settled down. The term migrant farm worker is a thing of past; it really doesn't apply anymore, not in this area, not basically in California agriculture.

M: What does an average farm worker make today?

Z: There again I don't have statistics, but it certainly has increased dramatically over the last few years with increased cost of living and inflationary pressures that everybody is living with. Of course, the rates in all industries have made dramatic increases in the last ten years and so they have in agriculture. A farm worker who resides in this area should have no trouble earning eight to ten thousand dollars in a year. There are many that go beyond that. Of course, where there are family units that work, they are able to earn more. Entire

families are sometimes employed during harvest seasons or during certain high employment periods like thinning and table grapes. This is very advantageous to farm workers and their families because it isn't in every industry that you can take the whole family and go to work.

Now, I'm not talking about children. I'm talking about adults out of school and some who are in school but get work permits. Many women now work part-time in agriculture, and so sometimes we have as many as three, four, and five people out of the same family working and making a lot of money. This, of course, is very helpful to them. As I say, this is not possible in almost any other industry. If, for example, you work in some sort of assembly plant, or a factory of some nature, you just can't say to your employer, "gee, I'd like to bring my wife and two sons to work with me next week." It just isn't done that way. But in agriculture it is.

M: Is any housing provided for those farm workers who do move around? Do they still do that?

Z: There is housing provided, dormitory type housing for single workers and family type housing for families. But because of the increased cost of housing, the regulations concerning housing, and upkeep of dormitory type housing, it is becoming less and less prevalent. Workers themselves are now, as we said a while ago, more closely tied to a community, reside there; and so they either own their own homes or they rent a home.

They find it more advantageous to live away from the ranch than on the ranch. Thus, we do have housing, but there isn't as much of it as there used to be.

M: And the grower provides for it?

Z: When it is provided, the grower provides housing, normally at no cost. The housing itself is at no cost in this area for the grape growers; but the board, the cost of feeding, is done on a cost basis. And that's usually handled themselves through their own crew leaders. It is not something that, in most cases, the company provides. Family housing is provided, usually on a no-cost basis, or, if there is a cost, it is for utilities, water, [etc.]. Here again, a cost factor is added.

M: What does a farm worker who is laid off do for an income?

Z: Well, farm workers today, of course, are covered by unemployment insurance in California. Those of us that had Teamster Union contracts dating back to 1973 voluntarily covered our workers with unemployment insurance under the terms of that agreement. So, some of us have been under unemployment insurance since 1973. The rest of agriculture in California, of course, became covered this year by law in California. Everyone is now covered by unemployment insurance; and when they're laid off they can then draw unemployment insurance benefits.

M: A lot of critics have said that California agriculture has done so well because they paid their workers so poorly. You have the Steinbeck image of the grower who uses the farm worker when he needs him and then

Z: Right. Well, the only way I can answer those kinds of charges, you know, is to say everybody in this country is free to move around as he wishes. We don't have any methods of chaining people or holding people on the job. And I'm sure if we were not paying comparable wages, wages that they could earn someplace else, they wouldn't work for us. Now, you know, you've got to remember this, that farm workers generally, totally lack any training; we give them whatever training they have on the job. Many of them have very little education, so the work class that we have is normally on the bottom rung. Thus, you're not going to expect the farm workers are going to be the highest paid workers because they don't have skills. They have certain skills that they acquire and with those skills, through piece-rate incentive and so forth, many of them earn wages that would make any factory envious. There is no way in the world we could maintain the large work force we have in agriculture if we were not paying competitive wages.

M: Was it ever true?

Z: Well, it was true in industry, I guess. Yes, there was advantage taken of workers, and I won't deny that there probably was advantage taken of workers in agriculture too. But not to any great degree because, you know, farmers are like any other people or any other employer. There're good and bad, and they're not all bad. In fact, I think I would have to say that agricultural people are probably, as a whole, on the average,

better than most people because they're workers themselves. Most of them have come up as workers on their own farm, and many of them do a lot of farm work themselves today. They understand what it is to work. They appreciate a worker. I don't think that you'll find them totally without feeling for their worker and his well-being. There always has been some of that and there always will be; but it is far exaggerated.

M: Many people seem to think that the organized farm labor movement started in 1965 in Delano, but there were other movements prior to that, prior to the 1960's. Do you remember any strikes that were successful before 1965?

Z: No. There were none that were ever successful. I think probably the earliest attempt to organize farm workers that I'm aware of goes back to the 1930's; that was in the cotton fields. I think that probably the greatest center of that activity might have been right here in Tulare County, just north of us in the Earlimart, Pixley, Tipton, Tulare area and up in there. There was quite a lot of disturbance at that time. Ah, it was not successful. I think that following that there was some attempt to organize workers at the DiGiorgio ranch in the Arvin area into the late 1930's or 1940's that was not successful.

Then, of course, when the organizing attempt here in Delano started, the forerunner to that was the AFL-CIO Agricultural Worker Organizing Committee that was based in Stockton. I believe the man's name that headed that organizing drive was Bill Green. Larry Itliong was associated with him. Larry Itliong

came into the Delano area and developed a following amongst the Philippino workers in grapes here, and it was Larry Itliong who actually led the walk-out of grape workers in 1965. Chavez's National Farm Workers, National Farm Workers Association, was in the area and had an office here but was not active. They actually joined the AWOOC walk-out about two weeks after it started. Of course, eventually the National Farm Workers Association merged with the old AWOOC, and they formed the United Farm Workers; I presume the UFW was formed at that time with AFL-CIO sponsorship.

M: Why weren't the earlier unions able to succeed like the UFW?

Z: Well, I guess it wasn't the time or the place. I think the Delano situation came at a time when there was a great uprising in the country for people's civil rights and the underdog's rights. This thing just kind of caught fire in the press, you know, and got a lot of attention. And another thing, too, the civil rights movement was going in the South and it was petering down on the low ebb and petering out. I know that a lot of those individuals who were connected with the civil rights movement in the South moved out here and really became the motivating and the moving force behind the Chavez movement. They gave them the organization. They gave them the know-how. They gave them the individuals to make it go. They had the press relations all set up. It was just the time and it

caught on. The news people loved to write it, and they just continued to write it and repeat it. There was no way that we could counteract that. We were just trying to run our business and trying to be farmers and nobody would let us do that. You see, we really didn't have a dramatic story to tell, you know. The success of farming, you know, is a tremendous story in America. If you take the success of farming in America, it's a tremendous story; but how many people know about it? How many people know how that food gets to the supermarket? Not very many people really do. They just take it for granted. But that is a tremendous success story in America, but nobody has ballyhooed that and made it a romanticized story. Agricultural people have done a tremendous job, a tremendous job in feeding this country at figures that are far lower than any other country in the world today. The part of [the] American people's earnings that go for food is relatively minor compared to some of the rest of the world.

M: So the media is prejudiced probably because they saw the labor movement as a civil rights movement as well as a labor movement?

Z: That's right, and an underdog. The story of the underdog, you know.

M: Do you think the situation was misunderstood?

Z: I think that the situation was misunderstood and is even today misunderstood by a majority of the people. We hope that someday they will understand; but right at the moment I don't

think that they do. We talked to some of our friends in the city and they still don't understand. As much as we tried to explain it, they still believe all of the false propagandizing about us. You know, and table grape growers are no different than blueberry growers, for example, on the East coast, as a group. Yet, you know, the table grape grower has been depicted, as I said, as some sort of a monster. [It has been said] that we use poisons and that we do things that [make] our product unsafe. All that stuff is just plain hogwash. That's just propaganda. That's just put out to win people over.

M: So you feel the country has more or less a false image of Chavez and his group?

Z: You bet. You bet.

M: Do you think he's represented as being more of a leader than he really is? How do you feel about him?

Z: I think that Chavez is an opportunist, a political opportunist, who is trying to gain a foothold, a political foothold, a power base. I think that the farm worker issue is just a vehicle to gain the greater end, which is, as I said, a political power base representing the brown or Chicano element. If he gains that stature as being the Chicano leader, he [will have] a very powerful position in politics. That's his aim. I don't think very many people understand that. I think that they look at the UFW situation as a labor union.

They are a labor union, yes. They do sign labor contracts, collective bargaining agreements; but they still maintain the image, the drive of a cause, and they readily admit that and that their basic motivation is their cause and they're seeking political power.

M: Do you feel that Chavez uses the cultural factor to his advantage? Do you feel the public would react differently if the majority of the workers weren't Mexican-American?

Z: I think it would, but of course we have predominantly Mexicans in the farm workers union, in the farm worker class. There are many others, of course. We have many Caucasians who are farm workers. We have a lot of Philipinos. We have Puerto Ricans who are farm workers. We have Arabians who are farm workers. You know, we have all elements. But the big group is, of course, the Mexican because of our proximity to Mexico and the Southwest. [We have] large numbers of Mexican immigrants here and, of course, always have had; but now we seem to have an even greater number of illegals, which is another problem. I don't know how that one is going to get solved.

M: Have you ever had Teamsters or UFW members work for you?

Z: Oh, yes, we've had both contracts. In 1970 we were one of the groups of table grape growers that signed a United Farm Workers contract, which expired in July of 1973. At that time we couldn't come to terms on a new agreement, and our workers showed preference for another union. I think the reason they

did is because they were fearful, fearful of reprisal from the UFW. They wanted representation by some union, and they turned to the Teamsters. Then we signed another contract with the Teamsters, which is still in effect.

M: Would you rather deal with the Teamsters? Are they more reasonable?

Z: Our experience with the Teamsters has been much more reasonable. They conduct [their affairs] in a businesslike manner. They don't harass or interfere. With the UFW we were constantly having problems with little issues and things that came from the hiring hall. The hiring hall is a great source of trouble. That's where a lot of our problems came from. But there were always other problems. It was just a constant harassing on the part of the UFW leadership. Our experience with the Teamsters has been much, much nicer because, like I say, we have a contract. They abide by it. We abide by it. They don't hassle us. They don't bother us. We're not bothered.

Now, recently there has been some Teamster activity in the Coachilla valley trying to reopen contracts with new wage considerations, which the contract doesn't call for. But they've asked for that, and they've tried to put some pressure on to get that. Of course, the employers have stood up to that pressure and have not yielded to it. Now, how long that'll go on, or whether there will be a continuation of pressure on the part of the Teamsters, I don't know. I think that there might be because

they're trying to get probably equal treatment or equal wage rates. That might be considered, and probably would be considered, as an unfair labor practice enticing workers away from UFW membership or UFW preference. I am sure that they would file an unfair labor practice charge against us. We are really bound by the law not to recognize those kinds of demands. It's a dilemma.

M: Yes, what do you do? When did the Teamsters get involved in organizing farm workers and why did they get involved?

Z: They got involved in 1973 and they got involved because the workers, by and large, became disillusioned with the UFW and that hiring hall practice of theirs and all the harassing and all the pressure that was put on by the UFW leadership.

M: How do the demands differ between the UFW and the Teamster union?

Z: You mean wage demands, contract language demands? The Teamsters are probably tougher on wage demands than the UFW, or certainly as tough. They want the money. Contract language, the Teamsters will stick closer to language that is recognized and is being used in other collective bargaining agreements in other industries. The UFW wants special arrangements and language and procedures under the contract that are very, very restrictive, that impose a lot of additional cost and obligation on the part of companies. So there's a great resistance on the part of companies to sign those contracts.

M: Has either union struck in time of harvest?

Z: Oh, yes. It's always been the time of harvest. The UFW, the old AWOC national farm workers, walk-out originally in 1965, was in September in the middle of harvest. In 1970, and then, of course, all through the struggle years, the picketing activity was always during harvest, and other times too, but certainly during the harvest, and in 1973, of course, when we ran out of the contract with the UFW. That was in July in the middle of the harvest. So we've always been struck in the harvest period.

M: Okay. As you mentioned before, a major difference between the Teamsters and the UFW is their hiring practices, using the hiring hall and the labor contractors. The UFW charges, has always charged, that the labor contractors are very corrupt.

Z: Yes, yes, that's true. I think that there are some improvements that can be made with labor contractors concerning financial responsibility, insurance, and other regulations. All those things have been tightened up, and labor contractors have a place in agriculture.

I think it is an erroneous belief that the UFW would try to eliminate them labor contractors completely for this reason: there are many operations in agriculture that by the very nature of the crop calls for only one or two or three weeks harvest. It requires substantial people, and it would be rather ridiculous for a grower, for example, of olives to go out alone and try to recruit that labor work force. It

is better for the workers themselves to be hired by a labor contractor who can then give them fuller employment, more employment, by taking them from place to place. Then they're not concerned about each individual grower. They're just working in different fields, which makes no difference. That way they have continuity of employment and they know where to look for their employment. This is a very successful situation, and there's nothing wrong with it.

The UFW see this as a challenge to their authority or control of workers. That is their great objection to labor contractors, but labor contractors perform a service in agriculture. They shouldn't be eliminated. They need to be controlled and any, any, any, any irregular practices certainly should be eliminated. The employer, the ranch owner, certainly should be held accountable and responsible for things that labor contractors might do wrong; and he is by law, which is okay. There's no complaint about that, but to eliminate labor contractor is wrong.

The Teamsters take a different attitude. They recognize the labor contractor as an employer. Now, they do want the ranch to be responsible, but there's no problem there. The UFW in effect wants to control the jobs by people coming to the hiring hall; so, in other words, the worker is beholden to the hiring hall and the union, not to the ranch or whoever is responsible to hire for that ranch, whether it be a crew leader

or a labor contractor. That's where the rub comes, and that's where the difference is, you see.

When you're operating in open areas, like vineyards, orchards, or whatever, it takes good management to handle people under those contentions. It takes experienced people. The hiring hall, sitting over here, ten and twenty and sometimes thirty miles away from where the job actually is going to take place, is bad for the workers. They just run them around and in some places they break up family units, transportation units where they've traveled together. There're all kinds of problems that have arisen from that, and it's proven to be really not very efficient. But the UFW insists on it. I think in some of their more recent contract negotiations they have relented and have allowed seniority people to be recalled by the company without going through the hiring hall. I understand that may even be their position today, although I have no first-hand knowledge of that.

M: The UFW also charges the police with police brutality and breaking strikes.

Z: Well, here again, I consider that just some more of their propoganda to get the sympathy of the public. The police, basically the county sheriff's departments of Kern and Tulare counties, [] and the [] Delano city police have been responsible. I think the police have done an outstanding job. I don't think that they have denied anybody his rights. They have bent over backwards to allow strikers, or picketers, or sympathizers, or

whomever to come out and do their things along the roadways. They have tried to maintain order, and they've stayed there to prevent violence. I think that they've done a good job.

I think that if you really want this verified, there was a group of religious people in Kern County that formed a kind of ad hoc committee to survey picketing activities. They would follow these pickets around. If you were to ask any one of those people involved, they would tell you that the police did an admirable job in keeping order. That's all they were trying to do. They did a good job of it.

M: Do you think that the unions actually achieved anything?

Z: Yes. Yes, they have. They have achieved a breakthrough in organizing in agriculture. That is a major step. There has been a law enacted in California that covers union organizing in agriculture. That is a major step. There are some other states that have laws on the books, but they're not given any attention because the action is here. The other laws probably aren't even being put to use, but the California law has been put to use.

M: I know. Traditionally, agricultural labor has not been considered under the same laws as other labor groups.

Z: They were exempt from the coverage of the National Labor Relations Act from the very beginning. You were going to ask?

M: Do you think that they still should be?

Z: No, we believe that the time has come when agricultural workers should be included under the same regulations that pertain to all other workers. I think that we've been involved enough

now with the union activity and the union contracts that we probably look at this thing a lot differently than agricultural people maybe in other sections of the country. But we believe that there needs to be uniformity. I mean the only way to give this thing uniformity is to bring this coverage under national law. Although we would probably like to see a special board established to supervise and conduct the law's activities in agriculture, we see nothing wrong with just taking away the agricultural exemption and bringing agricultural workers under the present national statute.

M: When the ALRB was refused refunding recently, critics said that that was because of opposition of growers like yourself. Do you feel the ALRB did any good in the seven months that it was operating?

Z: Well, they conducted a lot of elections, and so they did a lot of good. But first of all, in my opinion, the law should never have been enacted as an emergency measure and put into effect in ninety days. That was too little time to set up, crank up, to hire people, and to get involved in the middle of a harvest season all over the state of California. As events unfolded, the fallacy of that move proved itself out. It was an unwise move on the governor's part and the leadership in Sacramento to have done that, and that's where I ran into trouble. There were a lot of lies and a lot of confusion. It just was not operated right.

The UFW was prepared to try to swamp agriculture with election petitions, with all kinds of gimmicks that they were prepared to handle -- the big master list, for example, of ten thousand names, or whatever it was, that the Fresno Regional Board used as the basis for determining if a petition was valid or not by checking across. The law didn't say that they could do that, but somebody chose that as a proper procedure. After three or four months of operation under this law, and particularly to those of us that had been subject to the elections--and we here in this area all had elections in a period of six or eight weeks--we really learned how this thing operated. We had a lot of trouble. But we saw that there was some, well, originally. We knew that there were parts of this law that were bad. We knew that the board had a lot of discretionary power. And we, of course, were fearful that that discretionary power would be abused, and it was. The access rule is one such abuse, I think, of the law that this board passed, made into a regulation.

And so we went to Sacramento on January 1 of this year with the thought of amending the law. We talked with other agricultural people and we decided that we'd better be reasonable. We had better come up with those points that were most important, knowing full well that we couldn't get everything that we thought we would like to have. We settled on eight amendments, and at the time we made those, that proposal for

eight amendments, we had no idea that the assembly and senate of the state of California would deny funding, emergency appropriations. We weren't even aware that there was going to be an emergency appropriation at the time those amendments were formulated. We put a lot of work into those.

But as it turned out, the legislators got to thinking about this and although agriculture is being blamed as being the ones that blacked it all, it was really the state of California and its legislature that did it. We didn't write the rules about [the] two-thirds requirement for emergency funding or appropriations for money. That was somebody else that established that procedure, you know. But the fact that it's established and it's worked in other areas [means] it should work here too. The fact that it was denied funding indicated the seriousness of the abuses this board, this law had imposed upon agriculture and agricultural workers. And so we think that people learned a lot from this contest. Although the board is now funded again and can go back into operation, I venture to say that they will be a lot more careful in how they hire and whom they hire and how they conduct themselves in the future. I also think that the board is going to appear, on the surface at least, to be much better qualified [with] the three new members and the three that have gone. We would expect that board decisions and rulings would have, well, a lot more thought put behind them and be more fair in their application.

M: So it is refunded now?

Z: Yes, it was funded with the general budget. As of July 1, it has funding; but I'm not aware of just what their timetable is as to when they expect to get back into operation. They've got a backlog of a lot of hearings hanging over from old elections. There are something like over twenty elections in the Delano area alone that have not been determined; there have been no certifications of winners in those elections. That's all been waiting for determination of the funding area.

How long it's going to take to get that backlog taken care of, I don't know. But the UFW challenged in the Delano area [when] the Teamsters were the predominant winners. They had the contracts here and most of the workers were Teamster members, and so the Teamsters were predominant winners. Every one of those elections has been challenged by the UFW with unfair labor practice charges, with a petition to set aside the elections. The board has seen fit on the first investigation to allow those charges practically to stand so now that you have to go through formal hearings to bring out the testimony. Then it goes before for the board to make a determination. That's going to take a while in itself.

M: What do you think the long-term effects would be on the growers if the UFW did win control of California labor force?

Z: Well (long pause), the way I'd like to answer that is to say that normally in American labor management relation problems

where a union has become strong in an industry, they have certainly tended to increase wages and fringe benefits and by and large have increased the cost of doing business for those people. But they have been able to pass that on to the consumer, to the customer. Agriculture, of course, does not sell in the same way that Detroit auto makers do. We don't know where we could pass on our costs, and if we did, what kind of a cut-back we would have to have in production to raise costs. Our experience has been that every time you raise our unit cost in the retail level to cover our costs, we lose a certain amount of customers. We lose volume of business, especially with our specialty crops. So it's really not clear in my mind just what would happen if there were to be predominance of a union in agriculture.

But further than that, I'd like to say that the United Farm Workers of America are going to have to change their attitude in dealing with employers if there is going to be any long-term peace and stability to this whole thing. Their attitude of constant harassing and being at odds with employers in making demands that are beyond what other unions demand of companies, and having contract language that is very unusual and very extreme is not going to bring about peace in the industry that would be for the benefit of all, long-term. Until such time as the UFW changes its attitude and changes its procedures, and I don't know whether it'll take a change of leadership to

acquire that, but until that is done there're going to be problems. There'll be a continual fight against those kinds of restrictions on the part of agriculture. They've got to restrict them, otherwise they would be, in effect, turning over the control of their businesses to unions and to a union that it considers to be pretty far-out and quite unorthodox.

M: How much more can we expect our food costs to go up?

Z: I think the American public is going to have to expect continual increase in food costs, just like they're going to have to expect an increase in all other items that deal with cost of living. We cannot absorb these additional costs. We have, I think, become very efficient through the use of chemicals, fertilizers, improved methods of breeding plants and seed, and increased production. But there is a limit to how much we can do ourselves.

Now I think from here on out the American public has got to expect that we will have increased costs, food costs. But that doesn't necessarily have to mean that it's bad, because I think that the same thing is going to happen all over the world. In fact, we are in a better competitive situation today with other world agriculture producers than we were before. And so our manufacturers, the American manufacturer today, is competing very favorably with his counterpart in Japan and Germany and other industrial nations because we have improved our methods and are taking some of the fat out. You know, this is a

recessionary period, so it really didn't help or hurt because management has had to squeeze. They become more efficient and they become better producers. We're doing the same thing in agriculture. We have to. But the limit, I think, has been reached; additional costs have to be passed on.

M: How powerful do you think this labor movement could become nationwide? The UFW?

Z: The UFW? I think it could become quite powerful. If it follows the right methods and procedures, I don't see why it couldn't take a page out of the book of other unions that have started, expanded, and grown. It could. They certainly have every opportunity and could; but there are places in the country that traditionally, you know, have been poor places for unions to gain footholds. And there have been places where they have gained better footholds. I think the same thing holds true with agriculture.

M: Do you think the people that work for you really want a union?

Z: I won't say most of them because I really don't know. But many of them don't. They have not become union oriented yet, although our workers have been paying dues to unions and have received certain fringe benefits. I don't think that they have really become indoctrinated with unionization. I think that given a choice, naturally they might want to vote for a union, thinking that it's for the long-range interest; but I think that there have been enough things happening in the past few years

that have soured a lot of them on unions, both unions, all unions. In the Delano area we certainly had a souring on the UFW union back in 1973. How many of them feel kindly toward the Teamsters today is a little hard for me to determine. At the last election, last year when we had an election, I would say that they indicated a preference for the Teamsters.

M: I know some people say that in ten years the farm worker as we know him today is going to be obsolete because of all the mechanization that's been developed. What do you think about that?

Z: Oh yes, there's no question about it. The position of farm worker is going to be operated. There will still be some pretty dirty jobs, difficult jobs, too; but by and large there will be improvement made because of mechanization and equipment that can bring about comfort that we couldn't give anybody a few years ago. So, through technological advances and improvements, the position of the farm worker and his earning capacity, no question, will be improved.

M: What do you think is going to happen to the farm workers who will be out of a job because of this? Or, do you think that'll happen?

Z: I think it's going to happen in a manner. Attrition will probably take care of quite a bit. I don't think that there's going to be suddenly a lot of displaced farm workers because I don't think that the mechanization or the changes are going

to be that drastic, that fast. These things I think will come about over a period of time, just as they have in the past. So I don't see that that really should hold a problem. It's going to mean, though, that probably we will have to see an improvement in the education of farm workers, especially those coming out of places like Mexico, who have had very little formal education. I think that in the future they're going to have to be able to read and to write. There's going to have to be a general up-grading all the way along because the demands are going to be higher on the farm workers. They're going to have to be better prepared. But I think that too will take place. You know, farm worker families stabilize, stay in one community more. As all this develops, there should be an improvement in the educational level. I think all of that will kind of dovetail and take care of itself so to speak.

M: Okay. Is there anything else you'd like to add that we may have left out?

Z: No, I think we've covered it pretty thoroughly. I think the important thing to always keep in mind is that the table grape industry and the vegetable industry in California have been the targets in union organizing, and we've had the experience. Much of agriculture hasn't got the least idea of what union organizing is all about, and so the surface has just been scratched in this whole thing. I think that those of us in these two industries, the grape industry and the vegetable industry, have been

reasonable in the way we've tried to conduct ourselves in all this; and it's unfortunate that we have had to take the abuse which we really resent. I mean, I for one resent the things that have been said about us. I resent the UFW having plastered those things all over this country and all over the world. I think that it's a great disservice they've done to the whole country and certainly to this industry, the one that they hope to be a part of by representing the workers. I think that their methods have been bad. But it has gotten success, notoriety, and attention; so I guess from their standpoint they've gained their end. As I mentioned, however, there's going to have to be a very decided change in attitude as time goes on or the battle will never end. That is unfortunate, but there's where the change has got to come--in the attitude of that union in meeting the needs of the worker and industry so they can live together.

M: Okay, thank you very much.

Z: You're welcome. I'll never forget the time I went back east to a U. S. Chamber of Commerce Agri-Business Committee meeting. I think it was in St. Louis, if I remember. I went back there with the idea of soliciting the support of the U. S. Chamber in an anti-boycott program and support of a national farm workers labor relations law, which of course didn't get anywhere because nobody else was interested.

But, anyway, while I was back there, I met a fellow from Tennessee and he started asking me questions about what was

going on out here in California. They'd heard something about it, and so I told him and explained how it was happening. He kept nodding his head and I said, "Well, why are you nodding your head ? You seem to understand." He said, "I understand perfectly what you're going through. Those of us in the South went through the same thing. All the things they said about us and our treatment of the Negroes and the black people, et cetera, you know, are not all true. We went through the same problem of trying to get our story across and we never did." And I said, "Well, how do you finally get your story told? How do you get it heard?" He said, "When you get enough people involved then you will get your story across." I understand that so well because of what happened in the civil rights movement, you know. It worked. It moved then up to the northeast of the United States, in the northern part in the industrial areas and, of course, that relieved the pressure from the South. Then people began to understand a little bit better about what it was all about.

Here in California, you know, the table grape industry and the vegetable industry were standing alone for how many years? Five years. The rest of agriculture was sympathetic. Nobody would help us in our struggle, but now we've got a law and it covers everybody. I don't care if you're an agricultural employer in a dairy farm or the grape industry--it's the same thing. Well, everybody's covered now and some people are

becoming touched that were never touched before. Now they're beginning to understand what it's all about. That's how you get it off your back, you see. You have to transfer it to some other people. And then, and then, of course, finally, eventually, people get to understand. I think that when the story is written, maybe in history, you know, whenever it's written, ten or twenty years from now, I would imagine that there will be a balanced story told about all of the propaganda and how much of it was not true. But, by that time, you see, the damage will have been done to the grower and the union will have gained what it wanted. It'll be over. We'll have our day in court, but it'll come too late. There are people that are bitter about some of the stuff. I think that those of us in this industry have learned to accept that these are the facts of life and you have to meet these challenges and these problems and deal with them. We've tried to. We are still a viable and, I think, prosperous industry. We have our problems. We've had our bad years. But we are still producers.



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