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FARM LABOR AVAILABLE
IN AN URBAN CENTER:
WASHINGTON, NORTH CAROLINA

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Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this report is to indicate the number and characteristics of Negro persons available for farm employment in the town of Washington, North Carolina; also, on the basis of the data obtained, to suggest ways and means of recruiting and utilizing the available urban Negro workers to the fullest extent on the farms in the immediate area, especially in emergency seasons.

Source of Information

The data upon which this report is based were obtained from a house-to-house survey of a ten percent sample of the Negro households in Washington, N. C. Five local Negro public school teachers visited the sample houses and obtained the desired information. The data were recorded on schedules prepared for this purpose. A sample of the schedule used in this study is shown in the section on method.

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Availability for Farm Work

This survey reveals that there are approximately, 2,380 Negroes, 10 or more years of age in Washington, North Carolina. Of this number:

- 1,570, 66%, are now working.
- 1,480, 62%, have had some farm experience.
- 1,220, 51%, ARE AVAILABLE FOR FARM WORK.
 - 720, 30%, worked on a farm during the past year.
 - 280, 12%, are now doing farm work.

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³If a person answered "yes" to this question: "Are you willing to do farm work now?", he was classed as available.

From the above facts, it follows, that:

- 1200, 50%, persons with farm experience are not now working on a farm.
- 440, 18%, persons who worked on a farm last year are not now working on a farm. 4
- 810, 34%, persons are not now employed at any paying jobs.
- 500, 21%, more persons are available for farm work than worked on a farm last year.
- 260, 11%, less people are available for farm work than have had farm experience.

The above facts show that there are a large number of Negroes in Washington experienced in farm work and available for farm work, but for some reason, are not working on farms. Why does this situation prevail? Is it low wages, lack of transportation, housing, or what? Before attempting to answer these questions let us see what some of the characteristics of these people are:

Characteristics of Available Workers

Of the 1220 persons who are classed as available for farm work:

- 990, 81%, have had farm experience.
- 610, 50%, worked on a farm last year.
- 520, 43%, are now working at some nonagricultural job.
- 420, 34%, are not working at any paying job.
- 800, 66%, are females above 10 years of age.
- 210, 17%, are youth 10-13 years of age, but 150 of these are female youth.
- 100, 8%, are males of draft age (18-37) but many of these have dependents.
- 40, 3%, are above 65 years of age.

The most important fact shown above is that females predominate in the group of available farm workers. Figure 1 shows that this is true in all age groups except 14-17.

Since agricultural work is more suitable for males than females, and since farmers prefer males, the high proportion of females among the available

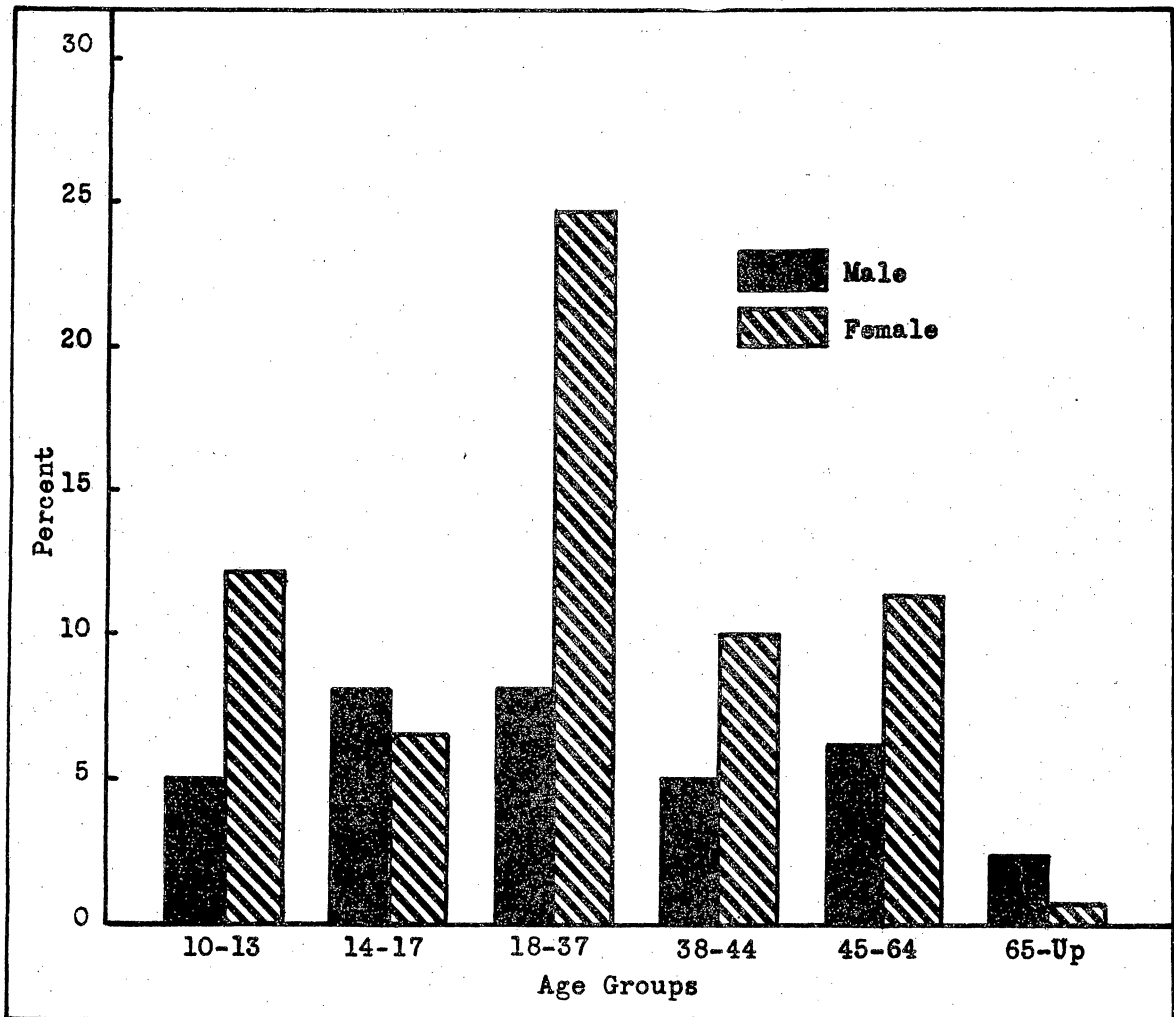


Figure 1. Percentage Distribution of Available Negro Workers by Age and Sex, Washington, N.C., 1943.

Females comprise approximately 66 percent of the total Negro laborers reported as available for farm work. One-fourth of the available labor force is made up of females of 18-37 years of age. Only 13 percent of the available workers are men of 18-44 years of age... Eight percent are males of 14-17 years of age, and 5 percent are boys of 10-13 years.

group is perhaps one reason why more of them are not working on farms. This conclusion is borne out by the fact that males predominate in the group of 280 persons now doing farm work--150 of them being males.

Another important characteristic revealed by the above data, is the large number of persons already employed in nonagricultural work. How can these people be available for agricultural work? Obviously, they would have to give up their nonagricultural jobs, at least temporarily. Many of them might be induced to shift to agriculture if the seriousness of the situation were made known and the proper appeal made.

Another important group among those classed as available is the unemployed. Whether or not they would meet the needs of the farmer depends to some extent on their characteristics which are shown below:

The Unemployed

Of the 810 Negroes 10 or more years of age in Washington, N. C. classed as unemployed, the following characteristics were observed:

- 420, 52%, are available for farm work.
- 420, 52%, have had farm experience.
- 160, 20%, worked on a farm last year.
- 700, 86%, are females.
- None, 0%, are males 14-44 years of age.
- 410, 51%, are housewives, but only one-third of these have no dependent children under 10.

Obviously, women, (mostly housewives) children, and old people make up the bulk of the unemployed who might be used on the farm in emergencies. However, many of these are not only willing to work on farms but have had farm experience. Many housewives with dependent children are willing to make arrangements so that they might do their part in harvesting important food and feed crops. Farmers, however, will find it more difficult to tap this source of labor because of problems of transportation and housing. Wages for such labor might constitute a problem, particularly if paid on a time basis; but not so, if on a piece basis--

as is most frequently done in the case of truck crops.

Domestic Servants as a Source of Farm Labor

Since many domestic servants shift to farm work during harvest seasons, let us consider some of their characteristics as revealed by this study.

Of the 570 persons employed in domestic service in Washington, the following facts were observed:

230, 40%, are available for farm work now.
340, 60%, have had farm experience.
150, 26%, worked on a farm last year.

It should also be pointed out that domestic servants make up 24 percent of the total Negro population above ten years of age in Washington, but 36 percent of all gainfully employed persons.

Many domestic servants might find farm work temporarily more remunerative than domestic work--and more interesting and recreational as well. However, their employers in the town might not wish to release them, unless it could be clearly demonstrated that such a sacrifice would be to the best interest of the country while at war.

Other Sources of Farm Labor

In addition to those who say that they are definitely available for farm labor, there are, no doubt, many others who could be persuaded to aid farmers in critical seasons. First we might consider the unemployed, the domestic servants, and those working at "odd jobs." If all of these people, instead of part of them, were available, the number of potential workers might be increased from 1220 to 1780.

Second, we might consider a large number of other persons either drawing relatively low wages or employed in jobs from which they could be given short vacations. If the situation were sufficiently serious, no doubt ways and means

could be found to shift many of these nonagricultural workers into agriculture.

Why Available Labor is Not Used

The most significant finding of this survey is that a very large percentage of experienced and available labor in Washington is not being used on farms even in a time of need. Of the 1220 Negroes willing to do farm work, only 280, 22 percent, were working on farms. Why does this condition prevail? Many factors are involved and the more important of these are discussed below.

1. Characteristics and incomes of available workers.

Most of the available workers are females, many have dependents to care for at home, and many are employed at other jobs. Some of these persons no doubt have relatives drawing higher than usual wages and consequently do not need the additional earnings from farm work. Other worker preferences enter into the picture; such as: the reluctance to be away from home overnight and the desire to work in groups with members of their families or with friends. All of this means simply that availability is a relative matter, depending not only on the conditions mentioned above but also on other factors mentioned below.

2. Transportation problems.

Many town workers prefer to commute each day to farms rather than to camp out or to sleep in crowded shacks, barns, and other temporary quarters. Farmers knowing this have provided trucks for transportation. However, there is an economic limit to transporting town workers. Also, in a few cases the type of trucks provided by farmers has been unsafe for public transportation. Some workers have refused to accept transportation to fields in trucks having no side or end boards of any kind. Shortage of gas and tires has prevented some workers from using their own cars--where they had any cars at all.

3. Wages and working relationships.

Although farm wages have risen during the war period other competitive

wages have risen also, frequently much more than have farm wages. In this war period also much nonfarm work is more regular and working conditions more satisfactory. Where farm prices permit, farm wages should rise enough to draw workers from nonessential work to farms. There are other angles to this question which are frequently overlooked. Many farmers, of course, justly hesitate about paying prevailing daily or hourly rates to inexperienced workers, or to experienced workers not capable of doing as much work as a regular farm hand. Yet in recruiting workers, the recruiter must quote prevailing wages for experienced and capable workers. This leads young and inexperienced workers to expect more than farmers are willing to pay. The result is misunderstanding on the part of both workers and employers--and labor shortage where there should be none. Where farm labor is performed on a piece rate basis, this problem does not exist; but, it is not possible to reduce many farm operations to a piece basis.

4. Recruiting methods.

The Extension Service has appointed, in a number of counties, persons whose principal job is that of recruiting town labor. In Washington the Negro recruiter has had some success in recruiting Negro labor. However, his difficulties emphasize the size and nature of the recruiting problem. In previous years several influential Negroes have received from farmers a fee of from 10 to 15 cents per head per day for recruiting the desired number of workers. Now since the labor recruiter is an official employee of the Agricultural Extension Service no recruiting fee is paid to the former recruiters. Consequently, these local Negro recruiters are not giving their full support to the present recruiting program. It has also been suggested that a male recruiter is not as effective in recruiting women as a female recruiter would be. Since over two-thirds of the available workers not working on farms are females, it would seem that a female recruiter should be on the job.

5. Housing and conveniences.

Urban residents have become accustomed to higher standards of housing and conveniences than are usually provided for transient seasonal workers. Even if we disregard labor preference, adequate housing and sanitary conveniences are necessary from the standpoint of both health and efficiency. It has also been pointed out that young Negroes hesitate about accepting temporary housing away from home as individuals and that they would feel more secure and would work better if housed in groups. Inadequate facilities for feeding Negro workers, particularly groups of Negro youth, is thought to deter some from accepting farm employment.

6. Dependents in Negro families.

Many Negro mothers experienced in farm work and willing to work on the farm, hesitate because they cannot always find some qualified person to take care of their children.

7. Lack of interest and understanding on the part of town people.

Local leaders, white and colored, have not been sufficiently impressed by the demand for workers on farms at critical seasons. These leaders should be given the facts and they should give their wholehearted support to movements helping the farmers meet his needs for labor during critical periods.

Summary of Recommendations

Some recommendations have been suggested above. These and others that seem practicable are summarized below:

1. A female farm labor recruiter should be tried. She should have farm experience and should be acquainted with problems and points of view of town people.
2. Nursing or child caring services should be provided for town mothers doing or willing to do farm work. Churches and civic organizations have an oppor-

tunity to render service here. Civilian Defense organizations should also give consideration to the problem.

3. Groups of farmers needing town labor should get together and work out satisfactory housing and transportation standards and arrangements. Housing units for groups of workers set up on a neighborhood and community basis might be considered in some areas where individual farmers cannot afford to provide separate houses. Ways and means of providing satisfactory food for temporary workers might also be considered by these same groups. Laborers will be much more efficient if comfortably housed and adequately fed.

4. A more concerted attempt should be made to inform town leaders, white and Negro, as to the need for farm labor in critical seasons. If stronger appeals were made to these leaders and to the rank and file as well, and if adequate transportation and housing were provided, a much larger percentage of town people could be induced to do farm work in emergencies. If these things were done, there is a good reason to believe that not only 1220 "available" workers would go to the farms but possibly many others who are more or less irregularly employed in town.

5. Accurate estimates of labor needs in rural areas around towns should be provided. Extravagant unofficial estimates of labor needs in the long run do more harm than good. Town people soon learn to discount the exaggerated estimates of labor needs made by over anxious farmers or their well meaning friends.

APPENDIX

A Note on Method

The Sample: The decision to include only Negroes in the sample for this study was reached because of the following three reasons: (1) Negroes make up a very large proportion of the seasonal labor in the area; (2) the known characteristics of an urban Negro population as related to the farm labor problem in the area made it seem feasible; and (3) this was to be, in every sense of the word, an exploratory study and it was desired to keep it as simple as possible and, at the same time, to get results.

A large map of the town was obtained and several local people, both white and Negro, were asked to indicate the sections of the town in which Negroes lived. The results obtained in this manner were checked against the latest city directory. Thus, by this procedure, the Negro residential areas were located on the map. This total area was then cut up into smaller areas for the purpose of facilitating enumeration. The enumerators were then instructed to get the desired information from every tenth family in each section. This procedure yielded a total of 82 family records.

Enumeration: This job was greatly simplified for the enumerators since the Negro families are well concentrated in the town. The enumeration for this study was done by five Negro women who live in town and who teach in the public schools during the regular term. The enumerators visited every tenth family during June 22, 23, and 24 and obtained the desired data as per the schedule shown below.

TOWN AND CITY FARM LABOR CENSUS

County-----Town-----Address-----

Head of household----- Number of persons in household under
10 years of age-----.

List below all persons in household who are 10 years of age or over:

Given Name or Initial	Sex	Age	Working Now		Experience on Farm		Worked on Farm Past Year		Available Farm Work		
			No	Yes-Specify Job	No	Yes-Specify Type	No	Yes	No	Yes	

Estimation: The 82 family records obtained for this study contained 342 persons--238 of these were 10 years of age and over and the remaining 104 were under 10 years of age. By multiplying the total population in the sample by 10--our sample was supposedly 10 percent--then according to our estimate the Negro population in Washington would be 3,420. In 1940, according to the census figures, the Negro population was 3,565. Several checks indicate that there has been no significant movement of Negroes out of r into the town since 1940. It is believed, therefore, that there is sufficient justification for expanding the sample into estimates for the entire Negro population as has been done in the body of this report.

SUPPLEMENTARY TABLES

Table 1. Number and Percentage Distribution of 238 Negroes, by Age and Sex, Washington, N. C., 1943

Age Group	Number			Percentage Distribution			Percentage Distribution		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
All Age Groups	238	94	144	100	39.5	60.5	100	100	100
10 - 13	29	11	18	12.2	4.6	7.6	12.2	11.7	12.5
14 - 17	30	16	14	12.6	6.7	5.9	12.6	17.0	9.7
18 - 37	83	25	58	34.9	10.5	24.4	34.9	26.6	40.3
38 - 44	29	12	17	12.1	5.0	7.1	12.2	12.8	11.8
45 - 64	53	22	31	22.3	9.3	13.0	22.3	23.4	21.5
65 and over	12	7	5	5.1	3.0	2.1	5.0	7.4	3.5
Not reported	2	1	1	0.8	0.4	0.4	0.8	1.1	0.7

Table 2. Distribution of 122 Negroes Available for Farm Work, by Age and Sex, Washington, N. C., 1943.

Age Group	Available			Now Working on Farm			Available Not Working on Farm		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
All Age Groups	122	42	80	28	15	13	94	27	67
10 - 13	21	6	15	4	2	2	17	4	13
14 - 17	18	10	8	8	6	2	10	4	6
18 - 37	40	10	30	6	2	4	34	8	26
38 - 44	18	6	12	1	0	1	17	6	11
45 - 64	21	7	14	8	4	4	13	3	10
65 and over	4	3	1	1	1	0	3	2	1

Table 3. Distribution of 81 Negroes Not Working,
by Age and Sex, Washington, N. C., 1943.

Age Group	Total	Male	Female
All Age Groups	81	11	70
10 - 13	20	7	13
14 - 17	5	0	5
18 - 37	26	0	26
38 - 44	8	0	8
45 - 64	15	2	13
65 and over	7	2	5

Table 4. Occupational Distribution of
238 Negroes by Sex, Washington, N. C., 1943.

Occupation	Total	Male	Female
All occupations	238	94	144
Not working*	81	11	70
Domestic service**	57	3	54
Farm labor	28	15	13
Factory***	24	19	5
Defense****	14	12	2
Odd jobs	12	12	0
Delivery boy	6	6	0
Truck driver	3	3	0
City employees (laborers)	3	3	0
All other*****	10	10	0

* Includes housewives.

** Includes all laundry work, cook, waitresses, maids.

*** Includes crab, pickle, fertilizer, lumber operations of all types.

**** Includes all persons working at any type of work at Military Service Bases.

***** Includes minister, painter, barber, janitor, auto mechanic, railroad porter, pool room helper, carpenter, plumbers' helper, and shoe repairer.

IMPORTANCE OF EXPERIENCED LABOR*

"The farmer, one of the most individualistic employers in the United States, likes to have workers who can do the job without instruction or help. If the worker proves to be less efficient than the one he is used to hiring, he is inclined to dismiss him rather than to try to correct or train him. Farmers have been accustomed to an unlimited source of supply and to picking over the group until they get one that fits. Now it is necessary that they put up with less skilled workers who must be trained or at least directed until they master the essentials.

"There is a good deal to be said for the farmer's position on the use of unseasoned labor. Many people who want to get farm jobs nowadays, especially city people, are just too green ever to be worth anything on a general farm. It would take them half a lifetime to learn the things that any good farm worker takes for granted. One can scarcely let every greenhorn practice on a good herd of milk cows--he would soon dry them up--or handle a young team on an expensive, irreplaceable machine. One cannot blame the farmer too much for his hardheadedness in dealing with inexperienced labor."

*Paul H. Landis, "Men for the Farm," Survey Graphic, Volume XXXII, No. 6, June, 1943, p.259.

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