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PROCEEDINGS

of the

WESTERN FARM ECONOMICS ASSOCIATION

Fourteenth Annual Meeting

June 25, 26 and 27, 1941

Hotel Utah  
Salt Lake City, Utah

THE COMMUNITY STATUS OF FARM LABOR

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This paper is in the nature of an interpretation of some of the already done in Arizona as it applies to problems of farm labor, well as a sort of rough sketch of some of the things that it would be desirable to undertake some time in the future, as soon as energy means will permit. The writer, as you well know, does not consider himself a special student of labor problems, but has, like many of you, picked certain farm labor studies because of urgent need for information, the better to perform certain advisory duties which were thrust upon him by the pressure of circumstances.

It is axiomatic for rural sociologists to insist that special problems are better understood if studied in their group setting. We are just beginning to realize that we would have had a better understanding of the migrations of the 30's had we paid as much attention to their local settings including the community and county functioning and certain governmental programs as we paid to contour listing and tree planting on the high plains, valuable as these measures may prove to be.

For purposes of this discussion it may be well, first, to bring to mind some of the problems which have created a considerable degree of public interest both in farm labor itself and its community aspects; second, to make suggestions for projects dealing with those phases of these problems which seem to lend themselves to investigation; and, third, to give some attention to certain possible outcomes.

Three large problems have been much in the public eye: First, the problem of getting farm labor, especially seasonal, when and where needed and in sufficient quantities; second, the problem of an adequate living and of satisfactory living conditions for the farm laborer population; and, third, the problem of the farm laborer's place in the system of things.

While the first problem is associated in the popular mind with rather beaten people rattling along transcontinental highways lined with signs that point to the land of golden dreams, the western farmer's need for help in unbelievable quantities, just at the right time, is merely a matter of individual concern. It is a matter that concerns the entire community. The druggist, the ticket agent, the delivery boy, and the school teacher make it their problem. The impact is community wide.

Likewise the problem of living and of living conditions for the farm laborer population is a question which sooner or later focuses the

tion of the community. Obviously, this comes about in part as a result of self interest, as in case of controlling or preventing the spread of disagreeable looking Hoovervilles on the edge of town. But it also develops as a consequence of the community's function as a working unit in the public administration of health and sanitation. If the county serves as the unit of administration in the control of communicable disease, the community is the working unit through which health examinations are made and medical and social controls applied. As to the housing of migratory laborers, the community's idea of the problem is more realistic than that of the general public. The community knows that clean, decent camps are costly but that under good management they serve to sift out the slovenly workers and trouble-makers and attract desirable workers who want to earn as much as possible during the season lasts. The people speak well of those farmers whose camps are clean and well managed and they often characterize operators who allow their workers to congregate along ditch banks as "shoe string" farmers. The general public thinks of ragged tents and tin and cardboard huts on the one hand as contrasted with well-equipped government camps on the other.

The problem of the farm laborer's place in the system of things is the most basic of the three. While this problem has arisen concurrently with the problems of getting labor and feeding and housing the laborer population, it has received belated attention. Of recent years the community as well as the labor student have asked: Is the cultural laborer part of a system in which he may rise as high as his abilities and energy will take him? Does he want to get ahead, or does he fear a rap in the knuckles if he reaches for the next rung on the ladder? Is he anxious to get land of his own or does he want to work on a government farm? Is he playing with some ideology which denies a place for him when "the people" take over, or is he basically loyal to the American system? And nowhere are questions such as these so pertinent as in communities based on irrigation, communities in which the road upward is not impassable, but it is steep and narrow and the drop over the edge is sudden and far.

What segments or parts of these problems, may it now be asked, lend themselves to formulation as problems for experiment station research? Certainly no one in this conference who is an experiment station worker will fail to appreciate the need for modesty in conceiving planning projects in view of the limitations of funds and workers in rural sociology in the greater numbers of the western states. Nevertheless it is hoped that the suggestions which are to follow may be useful even though appearing in part a bit beyond immediate reach. It is, too, hoped that workers in the various departments and agencies of the federal government may find points which may well be hooked together in large scale research projects, or even suggestions for action programs if they concern the community and the farm laborer. However, it must be remembered that sociologists and economists as well as other specialists may well exchange work to their mutual advantage.

Let us begin with a project which, right off the griddle, would ordinarily belong in the farm management field. I refer to a study of hired labor requirements. We begin with it because it is a project which should be done early and the rural sociologist, as a matter of convenience, may have to do it.

The care with which such a project should be carried through is exemplified by Professor R. L. Adams' study the results of which are published under the bulletin title: Seasonal Labor Requirements for California Crops. Professor Adams goes into questions of seasonal requirements for specific crops, for different operations in specific crop production and harvesting, into requirements by counties, and total requirements by seasons of the year.

There is an opportunity in a study of hired labor requirements to develop a method of delineating areas according to characteristic requirements which, for convenience sake, may be called labor-use areas. The basic information showing the number of man days of regular and seasonal labor required per acre by crops and farms may be organized and used in marking off these areas according to their labor-use characteristics.

The intensity of labor requirements may be measured by calculating the total number of man days of hired labor required per acre of crop land per year. With the use of maps and cross-hatching, local areas may thus be defined and compared. Seasonality may be indicated by comparing the percentages of man days of seasonal labor with those of regular farm labor and defining areas accordingly. Diversity of requirements may be measured by calculating the numbers of man days of seasonal labor required month by month throughout the year. This shows whether or not the requirements for seasonal labor change abruptly and greatly from month to month or, conversely, whether or not they are along more or less evenly. An area producing a number of special crops thus may register a fairly even demand for seasonal labor throughout the greater part of the year.

Labor use areas may thus serve as a working concept in determining space patterns of labor requirements. They are useful also in the study of community areas especially in making analysis of factors which tend to delay or accelerate community integration.

A complementary project or a part of the main project should deal with hired labor requirements in the community in non-farm enterprises and industries, with especial reference to requirements which are directly competitive with local agricultural requirements in time and to degree of skill. Thus, a fairly complete picture would include all community requirements.

A second project immediately suggests itself. It should receive only brief mention since rural sociologists make wide use of this sort of study. In relation to labor requirements this project should set

forth the amount and nature of the labor supply. Studies by Landis, Brooks, and Reuss have accomplished the results desired in this sort of project in a very commendable manner. The object of this kind of project is to show the numbers, composition, characteristics, and location of the agricultural laborers' population, to compare numbers of workers with requirements and to show deficiencies and surpluses in the total picture of requirements and available man power. This type of study may well be expanded to include the entire population of given communities or areas thus making it possible to mobilize the necessary information for a total community-wide appraisal of man power potentially available in times of extraordinary requirement some of which, under ordinary circumstances, would not be available for employment. Dr. Benedict has drawn attention to the need for this sort of community exploration. His point is even more pertinent now than it was when made some three years ago, in view of the changing employment conditions throughout the nation. He referred especially to high school and college help and members of city families who do not plan to work throughout the year. Another reason for including the entire population of the community is the need to locate and enumerate the town dwelling laborers, who are to be found in great numbers in communities in which special crops are important.

A comparison by communities of the location of farm laborers and the areas of high intensity in labor demand, especially if the requirements are highly seasonal, shows a rather striking lack of correspondence. To do this the laborer population is spotted on a map as of March 15 or April 1, a time of low ebb in labor requirements. It is believed that an approximation of more or less permanent residence is thus obtained for purposes of comparison with labor-use areas. Other factors than labor requirements apparently have much to do with the location of the laborer population. This point is sufficiently important to justify considerable study.

Another project which seems like an important segment of the general problem of getting agricultural labor when and where needed would be planned as a study of employment as social participation. A basic assumption in such a study would be that fact gathering and experimentation are necessary to this kind of an investigation and that they should proceed concurrently. Beginnings may be made on individual farming units but, eventually, community participation will be needed in order to obtain more or less relationships. It is believed that because of the distinctive conditions of farm employment, experimental studies carefully made might yield valuable practical results. Students of primitive societies and investigators of urban social pathology have used the concept of social participation to some advantage. Considerable work has been done in the measurement of participation in organized groups, schooling, use of radio, etc. But use of this concept as a frame of reference for the study of farm employment has been totally neglected, notwithstanding the evident need for some such attack upon this problem.

We now turn to another major problem, namely, that of the living conditions of farm laborers. Many investigators have worked in this general field and farm laborers have received some small attention; but the major emphasis was upon the living of non-agricultural laborers. American students of labor have for some time given occasional attention to the laborer's living but Leschoier, Folsom, and Paul Taylor, among these, would be the first to insist upon our need to know more about the subject.

It seems apparent that we need both large extensive studies and individual specialized projects looking into the subject of resources and earnings which are used and spent in the family living of laborers' households. Experiment Station projects may well be largely devoted to individual studies with particular attention to different culture groups among the laborers. Studies of the resources and earnings available for living of Yaqui Indians, Papago Indians, Mexicans who do not speak English, Mexicans who speak English, younger Mexican households in which one or both parents have attended high school, white migratory laborers, town dwelling white resident laborers, farm dwelling white resident laborers, etc., are badly needed.

In making such studies one must be prepared for results which greatly differ from the going stereotypes on the subject. For example, Spicer says of the Yaquis in Pascua village:

"Cotton-picking stands apart from the other occupations not only in its seasonal character but also in wages and the conditions of labor. It has been said that the whole family engages in the work. A family of six makes from \$15 to \$30 weekly, depending upon the condition of the cotton and on the regularity with which they work. It is thus the most remunerative of all the occupations. -- Sometimes a family lives during the whole season in a small house or tent on the ranch (farm) house, ----more frequently a group of two or three families from Pascua occupy adjoining houses on the ranch (farm) at a distance from the ranch house."

Obviously, these results are at variance with popular notions, and farm operators know that they are substantially true of Mexican laborers and of many white American families who take advantage of the opportunity for total group employment, as well as of Yaquis. Farm operators also know that in general the rate per 100 pounds for picking is more important in determining the wage as the worker's notion of how much he wants to earn by the day or for the week. This applies in the latter part of the season when picking is at its best. Later, when cleaning up the last bolls, the rate affects the daily and weekly earnings. It takes a lot of picking then to go beyond 150 pounds short staple, for a man. Earlier, in good cotton, 300 pounds is not unusual. The wage is apparently set by current levels of living plus some degree of anticipation of future needs, and is easily reached in the middle of the season, but not later on.

Another project would examine the use made of resources and earnings in living. Here again the groups to be studied should be carefully differentiated. The use of garden plots, milk cows, and poultry would be included, as well as the utilization of personal skills in the house and out-of-doors. This project would lead the investigator to the border of the Farm Security Administration's program and comparable studies among their clients might well be made.

Still another project in this connection would trace the relations between the family's ways of living and the organized life and activities of the community. This type of project is not intended to be only a counting of membership, etc., useful as that sort of information may be. It is rather intended that the study should bring to light those variations in family community behavior which are associated with social factors. For example, the hypothesis that families take part in the organized life of the community on different planes or levels according to occupational or economic classifications may well constitute the frame of reference for the organization and execution of a project. From this it may be seen that the extent of institutional participation of the families of a given laborer population will more nearly approximate the participation of operators' families as the proportion of laborers' families in the community is reduced. Conversely, as the proportion of laborers is increased, the extent of institutional participation will be reduced for individual families although earnings remain the same and even exceed those of families in the low labor community. If made with care, these comparisons between family community relations on different occupational and tenure levels will most likely yield significant results which indicate the operation of factors which are essentially social.

It is strongly urged that this sort of study be focused, in its beginning at least, on family relations to elementary and high school work and activities.

It is not unreasonable to anticipate that the gaps in the relationship between family and school may be comparable to the widening of eroded runs, originating in some more personal or primary deficiencies, and cutting even wider and deeper gullies in human behavior, sapping and draining the vitality of the community.

We now come, in conclusion, to the problem of how the farm laborer fits into the system. Certainly, at once, it may be seen that studies of community systems may well be made under this heading. Around what ideas are different communities organized and how does the laborer fit into the picture? Spicer describes Leon Valencia's place in the village of Pasqua and in the Tucson community. In the village of Pasqua his standing is doubtful because of his neglect to fulfill certain duties as member of a ceremonial society. This is true regardless of the fact that he owns the best house in the village and that he is a regular donor of food and money for fiestas and for the



eady. Valencia's relation to the Tucson community economy explains  
difficulty. He is a hard, regular, dependable worker on a dairy  
farm, reputed in the Tucson community to be the best Yaqui in the vil-  
lage because "he works steady and doesn't even quit for Easter."

So the Mexican and the Okie "communities" may be part of the  
larger California or Arizona community, but account must be taken of  
the differences in organization of ideas as between these "communities".

Another project with some promise of fruitful outcome might be  
built up around the study of the organization of human effort in the  
community as determined by the principles of personal competition and  
status. Some years ago Cooley made the significant observation that  
the only alternative to competition is status. The popular coupling  
of the terms competition and cooperation, as opposing terms, rather  
than competition and status, illustrates our carelessness in the use of  
concepts. Cooley's point was that a person does a great deal of ex-  
perimenting with different jobs and positions in order to find his  
place in the scheme of things and that his only alternative is to ac-  
cept a place in a scheme which operates according to the principle of  
status. Status gives order and continuity to social relationships and  
serves to economize the energies of those who are responsible for keep-  
ing things going, but it tends to undermine initiative and personal  
ambition.

Ross has insisted that these principles should operate in rela-  
tion to one another, that competition should not be allowed to always  
keep a man on tenderhooks, that after a period of testing he should be  
given the advantages of status as a sort of vantage point from which  
to launch further efforts in competition for the next grade.

May not a workable project be organized in which the farm la-  
borer's position in the scheme of things on the farm and in various  
community situations will be studied, as determined by competition and  
status? Certain aspects of this proposal may well be included as  
part of a project on employment as social participation, suggested  
above. However, there are so many aspects of the community's life in  
regard to which these principles operate that a separate project will  
probably seem advisable.

Another project might profitably examine the relation between  
persons and institutions with respect to the operation of competition  
and status. It would seem reasonable that in an economy characterized  
by a great deal of personal freedom, institutions would change in ac-  
cordance with the character of the persons connected with them to a  
greater extent than in an economy more or less frozen according  
to the workings of the principle of status. Institution might be com-  
pared with institution and community with community. Such a project  
might throw much light upon certain conditions of stultification and  
pathy in our communities which give thoughtful people genuine cause  
for alarm and concern.

Time will permit no further discussion of feasible projects.

As to possible outcomes I should mention first and most important:

An increase in understanding of problems of mutual concern as between the employer and employee on the one hand and the general public and the agricultural community on the other; second,

The accumulation of data which is very much needed if practical programs for the improvement of laborers' living conditions is to be worked out, programs of sufficient importance to make noteworthy changes in the rural community scene; and, third,

A beginning, made by the rural community, of sincere appraisal of the basic traits of the American social system as they mould the work-a-day life of the farm worker and as he, in turn, puts the stamp of his behavior and ideals upon the community and upon the system itself.