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Summary Report on Labor Conditions in  
Strawberry Harvesting in Western Kentucky  
with  
Brief Notes on the Migratory  
Labor Situation  
in  
Western Tennessee  
and  
North Central Arkansas

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## INTRODUCTION

The "Summary Report on Labor Conditions in Strawberry Harvesting in Western Kentucky" presented herewith is based on a field survey conducted by the author for the Labor Division of the Farm Security Administration during the ten-day period May 27 through June 5, 1940. A total of 273 workers schedules and 52 farm operators schedules were filled out by the five enumerators who were employed for this work. A similar survey was conducted in Western Tennessee immediately prior to the one in Kentucky - also for ten days, May 14 through May 23. In fact, the same crew of enumerators were employed for both the studies. A total of 271 workers schedules and 68 farm operators schedules were completed in Tennessee.

At this time no summary report is submitted on the findings in Tennessee because no acute migratory problem was found to exist there, although the strawberry area visited was not devoid of migrants. However, a brief account under the heading "Notes on the Migratory Labor Situation in Strawberry Harvesting in Western Tennessee" is attached in lieu, for the present, of a fuller summary. Similarly, a short resume of the migratory labor situation in the strawberry area of White County, Arkansas is also submitted under the heading of "Notes on the Migratory Labor Situation in Strawberry Harvesting in Central (White County) Arkansas". The latter account is based on a brief reconnaissance made by the author on May 5, 1940.

Practically all of the workers and farm operators whose records were obtained were found or located within a radius of about 15 miles from the city of Paducah, in the case of Kentucky, or from the town of Humboldt, in the case of Tennessee. In general, the subjects who were interviewed were intelligent and cooperative. The enumerators, all of whom had a farm or rural background, were very effective in winning the confidence of the interviewees largely because they spoke their language and because of approximate mutuality of experience. The records obtained, therefore, could be accepted with reliance respecting accuracy and completeness.

From a mechanical and operating point of view, the surveys were conducted and completed without any difficulties or obstructions. Excellent cooperation was received from the farmers, the county agricultural agents, the manager of the State Employment Service in Paducah, the laral Rehabilitation supervisors of the Farm Security Administration in the various counties, the president of the McCracken County Growers' Association in Paducah, the secretary of the Manufacturers and Wholesalers Association in Paducah, and the chiefs of police in Humboldt and Padueah, county health officers and other local officials and influential citizens of the communities which were visited.

## PART ONE - WESTERN KENTUCKY

### Summary Report on Labor Conditions in Strawberry Harvesting in West Kentucky

#### The Background

##### A. Location of area.

That portion of the State of Kentucky, referred to in this summary report as West Kentucky, is bounded on the east by the Tennessee River, on the west by the Mississippi River, on the north by the Ohio River, and on the south by the State of Tennessee. The distance east-west across the middle of this part of Kentucky is about 65 miles and that from the Tennessee State line to the city of Paducah on the Ohio River is about 40 miles. This area of about 3,000 square miles is divided into eight counties: Fulton, Hickman, Graves, Calloway, Carlisle, Ballard, McCracken and Marshall. For the purpose of this survey, Livingston county located just across the Tennessee River may be considered also to be included in West Kentucky.

##### B. Agricultural production in the area.

Farming in West Kentucky is, for the most part, self-sufficing. Land is worked by farmers operating small acreages which produce a variety of crops: tobacco, corn, hay, wheat, beans, cabbage, tomatoes, turnips and other vegetables, a number of different cover crops and strawberries. Tobacco and strawberries are the two major cash crops.

The commercial production of strawberries in West Kentucky began in about 1913. They were introduced in order to provide another cash crop for the farmers of the region. Prior to that time, the only major source of cash income was tobacco. Today this part of the State constitutes the



major strawberry producing area of Kentucky.

West Kentucky is well suited for raising strawberries commercially. The crop is well adapted to small farms on which intensive farming is desirable, and necessary labor requirements for strawberries, although urgent at times, does not seriously conflict with those for tobacco and corn. Moreover, berries may be grown profitably on some farms which cannot produce tobacco to advantage. The chief incentive for their production in West Kentucky, however, is that they add cash to the farm income in May and June when few other crops are ready for sale.

Kentucky is also well situated geographically for commercial raising of strawberries. The ripening season follows that of Florida, Louisiana, Tennessee, Arkansas and North Carolina and coincides with that of southern Illinois. Improved transportation by refrigerated express and pre-cooling the berries in the cars at the loading point make it possible to deliver Kentucky berries in perfect condition to distant northern and eastern markets, including Canada.

The Aroma is the outstanding commercial variety in West Kentucky. Over 90 per cent of the strawberry acreage in this area is of this variety. Kentucky Aronas top the terminal markets of the north during their season. The Blakemore is the next best market berry and ripens about a week earlier than the Aroma. A comparatively small acreage is devoted to Catskills and Premiers.

#### C. The Strawberry Region in West Kentucky.

Of the nine counties which comprise West Kentucky, seven (Marshall, McCracken, Calloway, Ballard, Carlisle, Graves and Livingston) raise straw-

berries on a sufficiently large commercial scale to require an appreciable amount of labor to harvest the crop. The estimated number of acres of strawberries harvested in each of these seven counties in the years 1935 through 1940 are shown below.

Number of Acres of Strawberries Harvested in the  
Major Producing Counties of West Kentucky, 1935-1940.

<u>County</u>	<u>1935</u>	<u>1936</u>	<u>1937</u>	<u>1938</u>	<u>1939</u>	<u>1940</u>
Marshall	2100	2300	2500	2600	2800	2500
McCracken	1400	1300	1500	1350	1500	1400
Calloway	500	400	350	300	400	450
Ballard	450	450	425	400	350	375
Carlisle	300	300	400	400	285	235
Graves	185	220	300	365	285	295
Livingston	75	50	100	175	200	225
Total	5010	5020	5575	5590	5820	5480

Compared with the total strawberry acreage of the entire State, which in 1934 was slightly over 10,000 acres, these seven counties combined had under cultivation 50 per cent of it devoted to this crop. Since then the land in strawberries in West Kentucky had increased materially and the proportion in 1940 was probably nearer to 60 per cent of the total State acreage. It will be observed, also, that since 1935, at least, the acreage devoted to strawberry production in two of the counties, Marshall and McCracken, has represented between 70 and 75 per cent of the total in this area. Almost 50 per cent of the acreage harvested in 1939 was concentrated in Marshall county alone.<sup>1/</sup> Compared with the other counties in this part

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<sup>1/</sup> The 1940 acreages in strawberries are not used as a basis of comparison because abnormal cold weather that year materially reduced the number of acres harvested.

of the State, Marshall county has made the most consistent as well as the largest total and relative gain in strawberry production since 1935. Assuming no radical changes in agricultural trends, it is probable that strawberry production in West Kentucky will become increasingly concentrated in the McCracken-Marshall area and with it a corresponding increase in the demand for labor at harvesting time. In this connection, it may be noted that practically all of the strawberry patches in Ballard and Livingston counties, and a substantial number of those in Graves County, are at or near the McCracken or Marshall county lines and may therefore be said to lie in the McCracken-Marshall strawberry production area.

The great majority of the strawberry farms in this area are small. Any one of the seven counties in this region may be taken as an example to demonstrate this fact. In McCracken county, (where a complete list of strawberry farmers and their acreages were obtained) more than three out of every four patches were less than five acres in size; one out of every five was between five and nine acres; and only one out of every 40 farms measured 10 acres or more. The largest strawberry farm in the area, (Livingston county) was 140 acres, broken down into three separate tracts of about equal size. The acreage of this farm alone represented over 70 per cent of the total land in strawberries in the county.

#### D. Marketing.

The perishable nature of strawberries make it imperative that they be sold or placed in transit within a few hours after picking. For this reason commercial producers in West Kentucky have banded together into an association which insures adequate marketing facilities for their crop. About 95 per cent of the strawberry growers in this region representing nearly 90 per cent of the acreage ship through the McCracken County Growers

Association, Inc., located in Paducah, the major shipping center in the area. The Association, founded in 1914, is controlled by a Board of Directors, chosen from among the berry growers. The Board employs two sales agents, Barger and Golightly, whose duty it is to sell all the berries in a daily or weekly pool. Any new growers within trucking distance of the loading and shipping platforms maintained and operated by the Association may become members by growing and packing the standard varieties which it handles. The Association also sells to the members at cost standard uniform berry crates.

In addition to its major loading and shipping platform at Paducah (McCracken county), the Association operates platforms at Kevil, (Ballard county), Mayfield (Graves county), and at Calvert City and Benton (Marshall county). The majority of the members of the Association are located in two counties - Marshall and McCracken, but they are also found in Ballard, Graves, Livingston, Carlisle and Calloway counties. A number of growers from Massac county across the Ohio River in Illinois also ship with the Association from Paducah.

Herbert Hawkins, the largest grower of strawberries in West Kentucky, is not affiliated with the association but operates his own loading and shipping platform at Paducah under the name of the Hawkins Fruit and Vegetable Company. This man markets not only his own berries but those of other growers in the McCracken-Marshall area. The Lowes Fruit Company located at Lowes also conducts marketing operations for strawberry growers in Graves county. Both the Hawkins and the Lowes Companies market considerably less than the McCracken County Growers Association. The number of carloads <sup>1/</sup> of straw-

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<sup>1/</sup> A full carload contains 420 crates or slightly more than 10,000 quarts of strawberries.



berries shipped by the Association from its various loading platforms in the years 1937 through 1940 were as follows:

<u>Shipping Point</u>	<u>1937</u>	<u>1938</u>	<u>1939</u>	<u>1940</u>
Paducah	170	252	240	210
Kevil	44	70	90	63
Mayfield	none	21	25	34
Calvert City	11	38	40	24
Benton	71	155	114	70
Total	296	536	509	401

In addition to the volume of strawberries shipped from Paducah by the Association, the Hawkins Fruit and Vegetable Company marketed 75 carloads in 1938, 90 carloads in 1939 and about 40 carloads in 1940. Thus, about 50 per cent of the volume of strawberries shipped out of West Kentucky in the past three years has been handled through the marketing facilities at Paducah.

#### E. Employment Pattern.

With few exceptions, farmers in West Kentucky employ very few regular wage workers during the year. The records of our survey (farm-operators schedules) show that only 15 of the 52 farmers interviewed reported that they used any regular hired laborers for at least six months out of the year. Such workers usually were engaged to harvest hay and corn, to cut, cure and haul tobacco or to perform general farm work. For the most part, however, members of the farmer's family provide the labor force needed for the entire or for the greater part of the year.

The singular exception to this employment pattern is evident during the strawberry season. April, May and June are months when there is considerable seasonal employment of wage laborers in setting or harvesting berries. Practically all farmers who raise strawberries in this region depend either partly or wholly on hired help. Local white labor is usually

available in sufficient numbers to perform the planting and cultivating operations, but harvesting requires non-resident labor in addition to the local resident supply.

The harvesting of strawberries is the only farm operation which utilizes the labor of non-local workers to any material extent. Only an insignificant number of them are employed during hay and corn harvesting and in setting strawberry plants. In general, there are no crops in this area, either before or after strawberries which require any substantial number of non-local agricultural wage workers.

The great majority of the farmers in West Kentucky employ only white workers. So strong is their preference that many of them stated that they would not have a Negro on their farm. This was particularly true of the farmers in Marshall County, the major strawberry producing county in the State. One farmer in that county stated that he never had an opportunity to employ Negro laborers because practically none lived there nor passed through the county. Our study of 273 unattached and family strawberry pickers showed that about four out of five were white with respect to all the cases and the same proportion with respect to the migratory workers only.

#### The Strawberry Harvest

##### A. The Labor Demand and Labor Supply.

Harvesting commences with the ripening of the first fruit and continues as and when the berries mature. The average duration of a normal strawberry season in West Kentucky is about three weeks - from about May 15 to June 6. There may, however, be significant variations from year to

year. The peak of the harvesting occurs about the second week of picking - May 22 to May 29. These dates prevailed during 1940, when the season was somewhat late because of the spring freeze.

The principal marketing center of the strawberry region of West Kentucky is the city of Paducah located on the Ohio River and about thirty miles northeast of the Mississippi River. Taking Paducah as a point of reference, the Employment Office at Paducah has estimated that the number of persons employed in a normal year picking strawberries at the peak of the season within a twenty mile radius of the city is about 20,000. This number represents about 40 per cent of all labor engaged in strawberry harvesting in the entire State of Kentucky. Further estimates indicate that of the total number of strawberry pickers employed at the height of the season in the Paducah area from 30 to 40 per cent represent non-local labor. These are estimates obtained from public officials and competent and prominent private individuals in the city of Paducah. It is interesting, however, to compare this ratio with that which our investigation of 273 single and family strawberry harvesters disclosed. Our survey revealed that about 65 per cent of those interviewed were non-residents of the area in which they were found picking strawberries, and about 60 per cent of this number were out--of--State migrants. Assuming that our sample was not entirely representative of the field, it would seem that an estimate of at least 50 per cent constituting non-local labor in this area at harvesting time would more accurately portray the situation. But even if, in the interest of conservatism, we adopt the

lower estimates of 30 to 40 per cent, it would appear that there would still be a minimum of 6,000 to 8,000 migrant pickers employed in harvesting the crop in the Paducah region in a normal season. In the short season of 1940 about 15,000 pickers were probably used, and of these probably no less than 5,000 were migrants.

The proportion of migrant pickers in the major strawberry producing county of West Kentucky, Marshall county, was materially larger than in the region as a whole. A rough computation showed that as high as 95 per cent of the pickers interviewed were unattached persons or families who had come either from out of the state or from outside the county to work in strawberries. About 80 per cent of these were out-of-State migrants. Of the five counties investigated, (Ballard, Graves, McCracken, Marshall and Livingston), only in Graves were local pickers in the majority.

While no reliable basis exists for forecasting the future trend in the employment of migrant laborers in strawberries in this part of the State, at the same time there are no indications that the use of large numbers of migrants will be discontinued in the near future to any appreciable extent. In fact, all signs point to a necessary continuation of this practice. For example, it is not likely that strawberry acreages will shrink or output be reduced. In all of the counties in the region, but particularly in Marshall county, the trend in production in the last few years has been consistently upward. In Marshall county, strawberry acreages have increased at the expense of land in tobacco, and labor requirements for the construction of the Gilbertsville Dam on the Tennessee River has and will continue to absorb many local workers who, in the past, have constituted a reservoir of strawberry pickers. The effective local labor supply



in the last few years has been both insufficient and qualitatively inadequate for the work entailed in harvesting strawberries in the region. Not infrequently one hears such comments as "no local labor supply available for picking". Recent efforts of the Paducah Employment Office in cooperation with the local WPA office to draw more upon the local labor supply for harvesting has been only moderately successful, although encouraging and commendable. For the first time an informal agreement was arrived at between the Employment Office and the local WPA office for the latter to refer to the Employment Office qualified strawberry pickers on WPA or those on relief and certified for WPA work. It was agreed also that extra measures would be taken to expedite the return of such workers to WPA work or to relief rolls immediately after the harvesting was completed. Of the 1,200 workers certified for WPA employment whose names were submitted in this manner only about 500 were referred by the Employment Office for jobs in the strawberry harvest. It is not known how many of these were actually placed or for how long they were employed after being placed.

Even the heightened activities of the Paducah Office in 1940 as compared with 1939 fell short of meeting the labor requirements of the strawberry growers. Compared with the 600 to 700 strawberry placements in 1939, the Office succeeded in making about 1,400 placements during the months of May and June, 1940. This, however, was not sufficient to fill the orders for 3,000 pickers received by the Employment Office. Since the 1,400 placements represented both local and non-local labor, the approximate extent of the local labor shortage is quite evident.

B. Recruiting and Placement Operations.

Strawberry growers who were interviewed stated, with few exceptions, that they obtained their workers who "came to them looking for work". Personal search on their part was a poor second in this respect. In such cases the individual grower would drive his truck to a nearby town or to the railroad loading platform for pickers. In a few instances he would leave word with a local merchant or garage operator to route pickers to his farm. Only two or three farmers who were interviewed said that they used the U. S. Employment Office in Paducah. One grower in Marshall County stated that he didn't use the Employment Office because many "hands" were sent out who never picked berries before. Another grower in the same locality said the Employment Office "was no good for berry growers because one day it would send a large group and the next day it couldn't fill his order."

As already indicated, however, the intensified recruiting and placement activities of the U. S. Employment Office at Paducah with respect to the 1940 strawberry harvest resulted in doubling the 1939 number of placements. A few hundred letters were mailed to growers and about 5,000 letters to pickers in and around Paducah informing them of the service they could receive from the Employment Office during the strawberry harvest. All roads leading to Paducah were posted with signs directing pickers to the Employment Office. The radio (Station WPAD) was used at periodic intervals during the day and night informing persons interested in berry picking to contact the Paducah Employment Office.

Advertisements were also inserted in newspapers for this purpose. Finally, the Office arranged for trucks to be ready at the Office at 6 o'clock each morning to transport pickers to the strawberry fields and back to the city at the end of the day's work if there was a demand for it. In this manner workers were transported to McCracken, Calloway, Livingston and Graves counties. Apparently none were carried to Marshall or Ballard counties. The Employment Office did not hire these trucks, but simply arranged for them to be present at the Office. The truckers and pickers agreed on the transportation charges.

The comparatively little effect which these noteworthy efforts had in 1940 is demonstrated further by the fact that about 70 per cent of the migrants and about 20 per cent of the local pickers who were interviewed stated that they found their jobs through a personal effort on their part (usually contacting the growers directly), and another 20 per cent of the migrants and of the local harvesters got located through previous contact with the employer. An additional nine per cent of the non-resident workers contacted a friend to obtain work and almost 60 per cent of the resident pickers obtained jobs either through a friend or by meeting the farmer on the street. Not one of the local pickers and only a handful of the migrants reported that they registered or secured work through the Paducah Employment Office.

Since 1940 was the first season during which the Employment Office made serious efforts to organize the labor market in strawberries in West Kentucky, and in view of the progress made that year, it is likely

that the Office will receive greater cooperation from both the growers and pickers in 1941. It is doubtful, however, that the results achieved in this direction in the next few years will eliminate to any great extent the aimless migration of strawberry harvesters who have manifested strong tendencies to exercise their individual initiative in locating work. Moreover, the large number of migrants who each year take to the road for the first time presents a problem of directing new streams of migrants for whom the services of a government employment office is an entirely new experience.

C. Field Operations, Pattern of Employment and Labor Productivity.

Each strawberry patch usually has a shed to which the berries are brought by the pickers to be inspected. Pickers are supplied with a picking tray, commonly called a "handy", which holds six quart berry boxes. Payment is received usually in the form of redeemable tickets, but sometimes cash is paid. One large grower in Livingston county arranged with the general merchandise store in the small town of Ledbetter to have the strawberry tickets redeemed in cash or in kind. Occasionally, large growers with fields located a considerable distance from the shed employ supervisors or "straw bosses" to inspect the berries in the field, pay the pickers on the spot and carry the trays to the shed.

Shed workers are usually local individuals and very frequently friends or relatives of the grower. Their function is to inspect and grade the berries, separate the culls from the graded berries and eliminate the bruised or otherwise imperfect or damaged fruit. These workers

are paid usually 15 cents an hour. Graded berries are placed in crates, the lid hammered on and delivered by the farmer to the railroad loading platform where they are bought and shipped by individual buyers or handled by a local growers' marketing association.

Picking, however, is the most important detail of the farmer who grows strawberries. All other details of production and marketing may be done properly, but damage to the berries from careless picking may reduce the profit considerably. To pick properly, the fruit stem should be grasped and bent with a quick motion causing it to break without bruising the berry. Berries may be damaged in picking by crushing, by pulling off the cap or by pulling out the core thus leaving an open cavity that will mold and rot before reaching the market. Moreover, all berries to be shipped should be in prime ripe condition. For this reason the farmer must see that they are not picked too early or too late. Berries picked too early will have green tips and those picked too late will become soft in transit.

All of these precautions have their effect on patterns of employment. Farmers frequently order the picking to be done every other day, specially during the first week of harvesting when not all berries are ripe. Most farmers, also, harvest only in the mornings, usually until about one o'clock in the afternoon. This is to avoid exposing the harvested berries to the scorching sun. The result for the picker in either case is a layoff during which time nothing is earned. But intermittent employment and exceptionally low weekly earnings are not the only consequences of these production patterns. They also lead to



long daily hours of work when the market is favorable and especially toward the end of the season when growers are anxious to harvest as much of their crop as possible. A number of migrant pickers also complained of "too many 'hands' for this patch." The economic compulsion to harvest in the shortest possible time exists in strawberries as it does in other crops at the peak of the season. The employment of large numbers of strawberry pickers in relation to the size of the field has curtailed employment and materially reduced total seasonal earnings.

The daily earnings of a picker depends upon three basic factors; the rate paid per unit of work, the output per hour and the number of hours worked per day. The rate of pay for harvesting strawberries in West Kentucky is uniformly  $2\frac{1}{2}$  cents per quart. This rate, it was discovered, is fixed by the McCracken County Growers' Association, and all farmers, including non-members of the association, adhere strictly to it. The number of quarts of berries which an average picker can harvest in one hour is governed by a number of variables: a) age and experience of the picker; b) type of picker, local or non-local; c) distance of the journey to the shed; d) condition of the field, whether clean or woody; and e) geographic organization of the berry patches, whether contiguous or scattered. The total volume harvested per day depends not only on the hourly output but also on the number of hours worked per day. The latter is controlled by: a) daily maturity of the crop; b) decision of the farmer to harvest mornings only, or the whole day; c) marketing conditions; d) time lost in waiting for work to begin; e) and type of picker, whether man, woman or child. Women and children,

especially in cases where the male head of the agricultural wage family is also picking, usually work fewer hours. Women must often prepare meals for the family or attend to their small children.

Our survey showed that the average picker (including men, women and children and irrespective of whether they were local or non-local persons) harvested about eight quarts an hour; the average adult male, about nine quarts; and the average single male migrant, about 10 quarts. On the basis of this hourly production and assuming a six hour day which our survey disclosed as a typical work-day, the average picker (including men, women and children and irrespective of whether they were local or non-local persons) harvested about 48 quarts, or two crates; the average adult male, about 54 quarts; and the average single male migrant, about 60 quarts, or  $2\frac{1}{2}$  crates. Accordingly the daily earnings of an average picker would be about \$1.20 and for a family of 3.5 persons, about \$4.20. Daily earnings of single male migrants and of a migrant family of this size would be slightly higher.

Labor requirements for harvesting strawberries vary according to yield per acre and the type of labor employed. One student of the subject has estimated that six to eight pickers are necessary to harvest a strawberry acre of average yield.<sup>1/</sup> This estimate, however, does not disclose how much time these pickers will need for such an operation.

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<sup>1/</sup> W. T. Magill, "Commercial Strawberry Growing in Kentucky," University of Kentucky, College of Agriculture, Circular No. 295, April 1937, p. 11.

If we assume, for example, that a strawberry grower will hire eight pickers per acre each of which yields 72 crates of fruit and if we apply our findings that an average picker (including men, women and children) harvests about two crates of strawberries in a six-hour day, this farmer will have to employ his "hands"  $4\frac{1}{2}$  days, or 36 man-days, to complete the harvesting of each acre of his crop. If, on the other hand, this farmer employs adult single migrants only, who according to our findings harvested  $2\frac{1}{2}$  crates in a six-hour day, he can complete the operation in about  $3\frac{1}{2}$  days or with 29 man-days of labor per acre of strawberries. Obviously with a longer work-day, say 10 hours, the same farmer could reduce the number of harvesters or the labor time needed to harvest his acre of berries of the stated yield.

D. Growers' Attitudes Toward Migratory Labor.

Although the sample of operators schedules which we collected in West Kentucky was too small to reach any final conclusions, it is noteworthy nevertheless, that 32 of the 52 strawberry growers interviewed, or slightly over 60 per cent, reported that they employed migratory workers for their harvesting operations in 1939. The proportion of farmers who employed non-local pickers was considerably higher in Marshall county where 22 of the 27 farmers interviewed, or about 80 per cent, stated that they used such labor. None of these strawberry growers employed migratory pickers to the exclusion of local labor, but all of them found it necessary to supplement their local labor supply with migrant workers. With the exception of one large farmer who raised 140



acres of strawberries in Livingston County and who employed about 150 migrant pickers at the peak in 1939 and over 200 such pickers in 1940, the great majority of the farmers who used non-local labor employed anywhere from five to twenty-five non-local persons. Not one of the farmers interviewed stated that he employed Negro migrants, although, it may be noted, our survey shows that slightly over 20 per cent of the migratory workers whose records we obtained were Negroes.

In general, it may be said that the great majority of strawberry growers in West Kentucky either preferred migratory pickers or were forced to employ them because of necessity.

The largest grower in this region (Livingston County) to whom reference has already been made, stated that he preferred migrant laborers to local pickers because the former were "professionals" and expert at harvesting berries. It is interesting to note that he took exception to the term "fruit tramps" by which designation one of the enumerators referred to the migrants. He had no use for local pickers as a whole because they couldn't be depended upon to stay longer than a few days, quitting as soon as they earned a few dollars. Migrants, he said, are more reliable and "know they must keep working in order to save enough money to get to the next place." Some migrants have been with him for several seasons. The only disadvantage in using the "professionals", he added, is that "most of them pick up and leave as soon as the berries thin out." This grower, when interviewed again at the tail-end of the season, complained that he still could harvest 1,000 to 1,500 crates of berries if he could find the "hands" with which to do it.

Another grower in the adjoining county (Marshall County) stated that the migrants "make the best pickers and besides they are the only pickers available." Some of them, he said, had written letters to him asking to come back the next season. His one complaint, which we later found to be general, is that migrants pick the best part of the crop and move on. A few growers stated that their migrant workers came in a few days or a week before the berries were ripe and had to be supplied with groceries. Such experiences led them to seek local labor even though they admitted that the migrants were better pickers.

Growers who expressed a preference for local labor for seasonal farm work stated that none was available, having been absorbed by the construction of the Gilbertsville Dam on the Tennessee River. WPA work as a factor in the scarcity of local labor was frequently voiced. "These fellows don't want to work for \$1.25 a day (in strawberries) when they make \$2.40 a day on WPA," was the way one of the growers "analyzed" the situation.

Illustrations could be multiplied to demonstrate that migrants were either generally preferred in the strawberry harvest or had to be employed because of the shortage of local labor. Practically all farmers were in agreement that migrants were honest, efficient, earnest and hard working. The universal complaint was that most of them stayed only for the cream of the crop. This, however, has not been a serious deterrent for hiring them. A few farmers expressed the thought that the members of the Growers' Marketing Association ought to get together and make a rule which would hold back part of the migrants' pay until harvesting

was completely finished. How widely this plan is being circulated among the strawberry growers is not known, but it is significant to point out that at least one large grower volunteered the information that he was going to adopt this method of control next year.

### Type of Migrants in West Kentucky Strawberries

#### A. Local

The majority of the local pickers had an agricultural-industrial occupational background and were unemployed when strawberry harvesting began. A number of these subjects interviewed were discovered to have been sharecroppers and farm tenants before they found employment in quarries, spar mines, hosiery mills, button, box and shoe factories. Owners of small self-sufficing farms, farm tenants, sharecroppers and regular farm wage laborers were also among those found picking berries. A number of sharecroppers were found so employed for their landlords as one of the conditions of their crop contract. Mothers and young children and older children without their parents numbered among the berry harvesters. Unemployed road laborers, store clerks, fishermen, dredge boat operators, former CCC boys and dismissed or released WPA workers added to this army of strawberry pickers.

#### B. Migrant.

The hard core of the composition of this partial Mississippi Valley stream of "Joads" was found to be agricultural. The majority of the migrants had a sharecropper or a farm laborer background. A number

of these persons had been sharecroppers only a year or two back and had taken to the road because they had been unable to obtain any suitable land to farm or to get sufficient employment as day laborers in their communities. Others were renters or owners of farms too small on which to make a decent livelihood and insufficient in size to absorb all their working time. These individuals had made the journey to Kentucky "to pick up a few dollars" in strawberries. A large number of the migrants, both Negro and white, were general farm laborers from Missouri and Arkansas who made the trip to Kentucky annually for the strawberry harvest and then returned home to chop and pick cotton in the summer and early fall and find odd jobs during the winter. With reference to Kentucky these persons were one crop migrants. Finally, an appreciable number of the agricultural migrants was of the constant and professional variety who spent the major portion of the year following chiefly the fruit and berry season but also working in other crops. Some of these reported migratory histories running back to at least 1927. The major bulk of the agricultural migrants, however, were not of this type. On the contrary, most of them were casual and first-year migrants who comparatively recently had become economically disadvantaged and were unable to find any or steady employment at home. Unemployment or underemployment had driven them to seek a radical solution in agricultural migration as a means of economic adjustment. Some of these first-year migrants will probably become constant or professional itinerant farm wage workers, but the majority of them will drop out, either permanently or temporarily, after the first year on the road and be replaced by



others of their kind the following year. For the most part, the first-year migrants were depression migrants the majority of whom would disappear from the road were full use made of our economic resources and capacities in both urban and rural communities. Others of this type resembled the "Grapes of Wrath" migrants, without the dust bowl factor. These were the uprooted and dispossessed farmers, tenants and sharecroppers whose chances of returning to independent farming had been made slim by the tractor and by the consolidation of land ownership and control.

The non-agricultural migrants were those unable to find regular work in their chosen occupation. Among them were coal and metal miners, carpenters, railroad workers, saw-mill "hands", truck drivers, quarry workers, timber cutters, steel workers, concrete mixers, grocery clerks, auto-mechanics and many unskilled workers in other trades. A few of the migrants had failed in small businesses and a fewer number were on the road for their health. Other types ranged from boys discharged from CCC camps to men between 50 and 65 years of age who formerly had remunerative jobs in industry.

One of the significant findings was that the majority of all the migrants who were interviewed were on the road for the first time. For more than one out of every two migrants, the trip to Kentucky was their first effort at seeking farm work away from home. The great majority of these first-year migrants came from the three States of Missouri, Arkansas, and Louisiana. They represented not only dispossessed or economically disadvantaged Negro and white sharecropper families and unemployed farm laborers from the Mississippi Valley counties of Craighead, Crittenden, Mississippi, Pemiscott and Scott, but a considerable number of them were

young boys under 21 years of age with no work experience behind them and no opportunities for employment at home, The latter were the victims of a restricted labor market unable to absorb them and who, out of desperation mingled somewhat with a spirit of adventure, abandoned their homes and struck out for the "open road".

An appreciable number of the intra-state migrants came from the coal mining sections of Kentucky, mostly from Muhlenburg county near Central City and from Johnson county near the town of Van Lear. Other points of origin were Hickman, Crittenden, Webster, Ohio, Grayson and Harlan counties. Whole or partial families were found among these migrants. A frequent case was that of a coal miner's family whose chief breadwinner remained at home if he were working or had expectations of work and the wife and children had migrated to the strawberry fields of West Kentucky. Older children of such families were also found picking berries unaccompanied by their parents.

#### Origin and Routes of the Migrants

The migrants who were interviewed reported 18 different States as their permanent residence. Almost one-third of them came from Arkansas, another one-third, from Missouri and Louisiana and about 25 per cent from Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi and Illinois. Thus, nearly 90 per cent of the migrants reported these eight States where they usually made their permanent home. Arkansas was the immediate point of origin for about 40 per cent of the migrants and Louisiana, for about 20 per cent. Over 10 per cent came directly to Kentucky from Missouri and another 10 per cent from Tennessee and Florida.

#### A. Arkansas Migrants

By far the most frequent route taken by the fruit and berry migrant harvesters who came from Arkansas was the one which led them to West Kentucky, then to Michigan and from there back home. A comparatively few moved on to Indiana after Michigan before returning to Arkansas; more of them, after leaving Michigan, made the trek to Missouri where they picked cotton. A very small number of them stopped in Illinois (around Paris) after leaving the berry fields of West Kentucky and before pushing on to Berrien County in Michigan. It was found also, that some Arkansas migrants did not pick strawberries in their home State but chose to work in Louisiana where the berry season starts earlier than it does in Arkansas. From Louisiana they continued to Kentucky and Michigan before returning home.

#### B. Missouri Migrants

The most popular route of the regular fruit and berry migrants who came from Missouri is the one which led to Arkansas, then to Kentucky and from there to Michigan before returning to their home State. Not all of these pushed on to Michigan after Kentucky, and some worked in Louisiana instead of Arkansas before moving to Kentucky. Very few stopped in Tennessee before pushing on to Kentucky and Michigan and a similar small number of the Missouri migrants stopped in Indiana after leaving Michigan and before going home.

#### C. Tennessee Migrants

Tennessee migrants usually made their first move to either of four States: Florida, Louisiana, Arkansas or Kentucky. A number of those that travelled to either of the first three States usually continued their migration to Kentucky and then to Michigan before returning home. Not

many of these migrants worked in berries in their own State. Those that did, usually made only one move, namely, to Kentucky and then returned to Tennessee.

#### D. Louisiana Migrants

Berry migrants from Louisiana usually made two moves up the Mississippi Valley after harvesting the strawberry crop in their home State: either to Kentucky and then to Michigan or to Arkansas and then to Kentucky before returning home. The first route was found to be more popular. There were also a few who made only one move - to Kentucky and back.

#### E. Mississippi Migrants

The constant full-season migrants from Mississippi usually stopped to harvest berries in Louisiana, Tennessee or Arkansas, Kentucky and Michigan before returning home. Many, however, went only as far north as Kentucky before turning back.

#### F. Alabama Migrants

Most of the berry migrants from Alabama made the first move to Louisiana, then to Kentucky and from there to Michigan before returning home. A few did not stop in Louisiana but struck out first for Kentucky, then to Michigan and from there to Illinois or Indiana before returning to Alabama.

#### G. Florida Migrants

The majority of the Florida migrants, it was found, were not permanent residents of this State, but had migrated there for the winter harvest from a number of states of which Missouri, Arkansas, Alabama and Mississippi were the outstanding. The full fruit and berry circuit from Florida to Michigan usually included such intermediate stopping areas as Tangipahoa Parish in Louisiana, White County, Arkansas and McCracken or Marshall



counties in Kentucky. A comparatively few migrants, however, planned their migratory sequence to cover all these stops. It was found that those who worked the crops in Florida for the entire season missed out on the berry harvests in Louisiana and Arkansas but were able to "make" the one in Kentucky from where they had ample time to arrive in Michigan for the fruit and berry harvest. Only those migrants who left Florida before the season was completely ended were able to work in each or most of the major strawberry areas of the Mississippi Valley. A few of the Florida migrants chose to stop in the Chadbourne strawberry area of North Carolina before coming to Kentucky. Moreover, not all of these migrants pushed on to Michigan after Kentucky.

#### Composition of the Migrants

More than one-half of the migrant cases represented unattached persons who were single and had no dependents, while another 10 per cent were either married or single but reported having dependents, some or all of whom were left at home. That is, almost two out of every three migrant cases either had no dependents at all or had no dependents with them in the area in which they were harvesting strawberries. Less than 25 per cent of the migrants represented families who had all or some of their children along with them and another 10 per cent constituted married couples who were childless.

Children between 10 and 12 years of age were frequently found picking berries alongside their parents. Not many children under ten years of age were found in the fields. Since many of the migrants were one-crop migrants making only one move a year and for comparatively short distances

(from 100 to 150 miles), many of the very young children were left at home either with friends, relatives, older children or with their mother.

Children too young to work were taken usually with their parents to the fields or sometimes left with an older child in another part of the field or in a near-by shelter occupied by the family. Frequently the mother would pick only part of the day (usually mornings) and devote the rest of the time to her younger children or prepare meals for the family.

It is significant, also, that many older children, 17 to 25 years of age, were found with their parents harvesting berries. Under more favorable economic conditions these boys and girls would probably be employed on farms in their community or in mills and factories in nearby towns. Lack of work opportunities kept them tied to their parents instead of striking out for themselves.

Migrant children of school age generally were behind in their schooling, attending school whenever the family was in a locality long enough for them to register for at least part of the school term. In great part, however, such backwardness was probably due to lack of school facilities in the immediate locality from which they came. At the time of the survey (during the month of May), elementary grade school was out both in West Tennessee and West Kentucky, and probably in the surrounding States, and consequently none of the children of the families interviewed were attending school. In those States, the school year for elementary grades is about eight months. The end of the spring term usually comes in late April or beginning of May to coincide with the strawberry harvest. Classes then start again in August and again let out for the cotton harvest in the middle of September to about the middle of October.

### Housing and Other Living Conditions

The great majority of the farmers in the strawberry growing regions of West Kentucky have no or inadequate housing facilities for their seasonal workers who are compelled to live at the place of their employment. This is not surprising in view of the fact that farmers in this part of the State are semi-self-sufficing or small commercial producers of agricultural commodities and for the most part employ few or no wage workers for the greater part of the year. Practically the only time that they use any considerable number of workers, outside of the members of the family, is during the strawberry harvesting season, and even then the great majority of the farmers require only a few hands for about a week or ten days. But at that time of the year altho strawberry growers depend chiefly on migratory fruit harvesters for their source of labor supply they have shown no practical concern for housing them. Almost without exception farmers make no effort to provide special quarters for the housing of migratory labor, leaving to the workers themselves to furnish their shelter. Not only do the farmers in this region feel that housing for seasonal workers is unimportant, and unnecessary, but even if they thought differently and were able to afford it, they probably wouldn't give this matter serious thought because migratory labor is plentiful and no economic compulsion exists to provide better housing for it.

We found only one strawberry grower, the largest in Western Kentucky, who had gone to the trouble of providing quarters for his pickers. This farmer had 10 shacks, all without windows, located in a grove near a 30 acre berry patch, put together with odds and ends either of scrap wood or corrugated tin. Only one out-door pump and two unsanitary open-pit privies

were provided for over 100 persons. Cooking was done either on an open fire or on a wood stove which in all cases was outside of the living quarters because of the cramped conditions and fire hazard. Migrants who were without tents slept either in the open or in the shacks for which, it may be added, they were charged one dollar a week.

The great majority of the migrants who were interviewed lived and slept in barns, mostly tobacco barns. The number of occupants varied not with the size of the barn but with the number of migrant pickers employed by the farmer. In some barns as many as 25 persons were found, although 10 to 15 persons to a barn was the more usual number. Most of the migrant families had some bedding or at least blankets, but the single and unattached persons usually slept on hay or straw. Cooking, for the most part, was done over an open fire or on a wood stove, and the usual source of water supply was an out-door pump, well or spring frequently located from 50 to 100 yards from the barn. A number of migrants owned or were provided with kerosene lamps or lanterns but a considerable number were completely without lights. The great majority of these workers in barns had no access to toilet facilities and were compelled to use the woods.

Next to hay and tobacco barns, the most frequent type of shelter provided for migrants were crude one-room cabins and other delapidated outbuildings which during most of the year were not occupied. Anywhere from 3 to 10 persons were found in such shelters. For the most part, growers furnished nothing except these rudimentary cabins or houses. A



few furnished wood stoves. Migrant families usually carried with them some bedding, cooking utensils and a stove, but the single migrants travelled extremely light, having, perhaps, a blanket and a few eating utensils. Toilet facilities consisted of an open-pit privy which, in a number of cases, had been abandoned by the farmer for a new one and the old privy served all the migrants on the job.

Other places in which migrants were found quartered were those not meant for habitation such as automobile garages, tool sheds, wagon sheds, smoke houses, sawmill sheds and abandoned churches or school houses. Inadequate as these and other mentioned housing accommodations are in themselves, they had been made even more wretched by the 1937 flood in the Paducah region which had left them in extremely poor physical shape.

A considerable number of migrants were not provided with even a roof over their heads. Such workers slept either in the open or in their cars. Toilet and water facilities, in a number of cases, were either absent or located too distant from camping places to be used conveniently or regularly. Less than one migrant in five had his own tent and only a handful of the 185 migratory cases investigated had trailers. The small number of migrants having these facilities can probably be explained by the fact that, among other reasons, a relatively large proportion of them were newcomers or first-year migrants and of these many had made only one move and were planning to return home after the berry harvest in Western Kentucky.

In view of the extremely inadequate housing and living conditions which our survey revealed and the factors governing them, it is difficult to understand the opinion of the Paducah Employment Office that "there

has been no demonstration for a need of Government assistance with respect to housing migrants who come into the Paducah area." "This opinion", it was explained, "is based upon the fact that migrants visiting the Employment Office have their own equipment, some funds and know their way around. In other words, they are professionals who follow one season after another, and who only go to places offering more or less certain employment." It is quite possible that this opinion, although made in good faith, is not based on any thorough investigation of the facts of the situation. Certainly the extremely well and probably unrepresentative sample of the migrants who usually patronize the Employment Office during the strawberry season cannot be accepted as a sound basis for such a conclusion. It is also clear that without a field survey of the working and living conditions of the migrant, even competent students of the subject are apt to hold misleading views with respect to the needs of migratory labor employed in a region. Migrant or non-resident strawberry pickers in Western Kentucky, at least, usually organize their economic and social life on or near the premises of the farm on which they are employed. Very few of them go into the nearby town or city except for groceries and other provisions. An insignificant few pass through Paducah on the way to jobs or to look for work. In other cities or towns of the region, Calvert City, Benton, Kevil or Mayfield, they are almost conspicuous by their absence. One would never detect on the surface that there are thousands of migratory workers employed in the region. For these reasons, they present no health, housing or police problem to the municipal officials in the towns and cities of Western Kentucky.

### Transportation

Over 50 per cent of the migrant strawberry pickers interviewed arrived in Kentucky in passenger automobiles, busses, trucks and other motor vehicles which they hired jointly with others. About one-third came in their own cars, most of them, of course, of old vintage, wornout and crowded jallopies. Slightly more than 10 per cent reported that they had hitched-hiked or caught rides on freight trains, and only a few stated that they paid fares on trains or busses to come here.

With the exception of a very few, migrant pickers generally walked short distances to work in the berry patches. Others used their personal car, employer's truck, or a fellow worker's car as a means of transportation.

### Character and Attitudes of the Migrants

The great majority of the migrants were industrious, independent, self-respecting and determined to make the best of their situation. A considerable number of the heads of families regretted that they couldn't give their children better opportunities in life but few felt bitter against those who were in better circumstances. Almost all expressed a hope that conditions would improve so they could settle down at steady work. Few, however, saw such improvement in the near future.

The chief complaints of the all-year or professional migrants were: a) too many migrants on the road; b) employer hiring too many pickers for the size of their patches and as a result no one earned very much; c) poor housing accommodations. "The worst part of this work", said one of the migrants, "is not the small earnings which we make, but the lack of a good bed and a clean place to sleep at night". The farmers, he added, "do as well as they can, but it's mighty hard on us."

Many of the first-year migrants reported earning very little, some of them just barely covering expenses of gas, oil and repairs. Some of these were handicapped because they hadn't found a good field and did not have a car to look for another job; others without a car lost too many days between jobs; a number were not experienced berry pickers and hadn't "caught on" yet. A good many of these migrants felt discouraged and regretted that they had started in the first place. A number who took to the road as an adventure were disillusioned and were going back home as soon as they made enough to pay expenses.

One experienced migrant stated that there "isn't much to be made on the road because it costs too much to travel from place to place", and that "90 per cent of the fruit tramps would settle down if they could find steady work." He believed that no one who had followed the fruit harvest this year (1940) had made very much and that many, in certain places, had not even made expenses. He thought the great need for professional migrants was decent housing accommodations.

Another one stated that migrants "make just enough money to keep going." Some, he said, make good wages when they work but the periods of employment are short and work too intermittent to make enough during the entire year to be able to save enough to tide one over the winter months. He also thought that the migratory labor market "was getting too crowded for anyone to make a decent living."

Most of the professional migrants stated that they usually visited the same areas on their routes, but not the same employers. Michigan and Indiana were the two favorite places where the professional Mississippi Valley migrants stopped. Michigan, a number of them stated, provided



three to four months of work in berries, cherries, peaches, pears and apples, among other fruits. In Indiana, in addition to tomato harvesting, work was found in peaches, raspberries, strawberries and dewberries.

Biographical Sketches of a Few of the Migratory  
Strawberry Pickers Interviewed in Western Kentucky  
May-June, 1940.

Arkansas Migrant (White) - interviewed near  
Kevil in McCracken County

This man, 60 years of age, had come, in his 1929 Ford roadster, from Lake City (Craighead County), Arkansas and found work picking strawberries. Stated he found no difficulty getting a job because he knew where to go. At the time of the interview, he was living in a tobacco barn with four other persons. No toilet facilities were provided and drinking water was available from a well 100 yards from the barn. He had with him some bedding, cooking utensils and a portable oil stove. During the past week he had worked 15 hours picking strawberries and earned only \$1.50.

Being unable to make a living off his small farm in Arkansas, he decided to follow the crops. He has been a migrant for the past four years. His seasonal work on the road usually starts in the strawberry fields near Hammond, Louisiana where he spends about a month and a half. From there, he moves to Benton Harbor, Michigan where he finds work setting strawberry plants. From Michigan, he usually pushes on to Indiana (near Fortville) for the tomato harvest. Employment in Michigan and Indiana lasts about three months. He returns to his home in Arkansas in November of the year and works at odd jobs during the winter. In early Spring, he again starts out for Louisiana. This

year he also stopped in Kentucky and intends to move on to Michigan.

His favorite stop on his migratory route is Indiana because he earns more there than elsewhere and also because the housing which he gets in Indiana is better than in other places. Stated that he usually earns about \$5 a day in tomatoes in Indiana and about \$2.50 a day picking fruit in Michigan. The largest sum he has come home with has been \$100. More often the amount he clears is considerably less.

One of his important problems as a migratory farm worker, he stated, was difficulty in finding a sanitary place to live while on the job. Housing conditions of migrants should be investigated, he thought. He felt, also, that the Government should buy a small farm for those migrants willing and able to farm. On the whole, people have been friendly to him, and as far as he has observed, to migrants in general.

Missouri Migrant (White) - interviewed near Calvert  
City in Marshall County

This migrant was from Crittenden County, Missouri. He was 28 years old, single, and a butcher by occupation. Until 1934, he was employed at his occupation at which he earned 75 cents an hour. He lost his job during a strike and ever since he has been unable to get steady work. For this reason he has been a migrant fruit harvester since 1935.

Last year, he made the following moves: in March, he went to Florida, (near Hillsborough) and worked as a picker of strawberries, beans and peas until the end of April; from Florida, he moved to Louisiana (Tangipahoa Parish) where he harvested strawberries until the middle of May when he left for Arkansas (White County). In Arkansas he picked strawberries for about three weeks, almost to the end of May, before he went to Kentucky (Marshall County) still following strawberries.

He remained in Kentucky until the second week in June, or about ten days, and then pushed on to Michigan where he found work for almost two months in strawberries, dewberries and cherries. About the middle of August, he departed for Danbury, Ohio, where he packed fruit for a packing shed until October 1. From Ohio he returned home to Missouri where he was unemployed until the end of March of the next year. His total cash earnings during last year's migration was \$310.

Having no car of his own, he hitched-hiked to Florida, caught a ride in another worker's car to Louisiana, Arkansas and Kentucky, rode the freights to Michigan, got a lift in another worker's car to Ohio and hitched-hiked back to Missouri.

When interviewed, he was living in a barn with five other berry pickers all of whom slept on pallets made of straw provided by the farmer. There were no beds, no toilet facilities and the cooking was done over an open fire. Water was obtained from a near-by well. The only things which this migrant carried with him were a few cooking and eating utensils.

He reported earning \$4.25 last week for 36 hours of picking. Stated that he planned to go to Michigan where he made about \$50 last year picking berries and cherries. During the five years that he has been on the road he stated that he never has left a place with much money to spare, but just enough to get him to the next place and tide him over for a few days before he got his next job. Stated that he's just about given up hope of ever finding steady work. He thought that perhaps the war may open up jobs so that he could abandon his migratory work.

Louisiana Migrant (White) - interviewed near Ledbetter  
in Livingston County

For the past three years this young man of 19 had been working on his father's farm. A short time ago he left the farm to accept a job in a local sawmill which he left shortly thereafter because wages were extremely low. This Spring he decided to join his father-in-law who followed the fruit harvest every year. He and his wife, who came along with him, are from Tangipahoa Parish living near the town of Ponchatoula. They have no children nor other dependents. They found their present job through a friend and had made the trip to Kentucky in the car owned by his father-in-law.

When interviewed, this migrant and his wife were living in a one room shack with a dirt floor which hastily had been constructed by the farmer for the use of his migrant strawberry pickers. The shack rented for \$1.50 a week. The couple furnished their own bedding, wood stove and cooking utensils. The farmer supplied a kerosene lamp. Water was obtainable from a well located about one-half mile from the shack.

Their combined earnings from strawberry picking during the past week were \$12.50 for 96 hours of work. Last year's total earnings amounted to \$220 of which \$100 represented the gross proceeds from the strawberry patch on the farm owned by the husband's father in Louisiana.

He stated that he planned to move on to Michigan after the Kentucky harvest because he had heard that there was more work there than in Kentucky and that more money could be made. He thought that even though this was his first year on the road, it would also be his last. Migratory life was too difficult and earnings very uncertain, he stated.



He said that he would rather live home no matter how small his crop was and no matter how low his cash income. He would manage somehow.

Arkansas Migrants (White) - interviewed near Lone  
OAK in McCracken County

This family of six came from Clearborn County, Arkansas. The male head of the family was 36 years of age, his wife 34, and the ages of their three sons and daughter ranged from 4 to 14. The family head considered himself a "professional" migratory farm worker. He and his family have been following the crops since 1938. Last year he and his family harvested strawberries in White County Arkansas, and in McCracken County, Kentucky, strawberries and other small fruits in Berrien County, Michigan, and picked cotton in Craighead County, Arkansas. During the off season, he was employed as an unskilled worker on a railroad and in a saw-mill in Arkansas.

Until 1930, the family head had been a share tenant growing rice, principally. He lost his farm because of drought conditions, and for the next seven years worked as an unskilled laborer on a railroad and in a saw-mill. Wages on both jobs were insufficient on which to live and he decided to follow seasonal agricultural work on the road for his chief source of income.

Through previous contact with his farm employer, he was able to get his present job. When interviewed, the family was living in a tent pitched in the fields of the employer. Beside the tent, they owned a complete set of camping equipment which included bedding, oil stove and cooking and eating utensils. They also owned a 1934 Ford. A well for drinking water was situated about 100 yards away, as was a community open-pit toilet. They had to walk about one mile to the strawberry patch in which they were working.



All the members of the family, with the exception of a four-year old girl, had picked berries the previous week. Their small daughter, however, was taken to the fields with the other members of the family. Their total earnings last week amounted to \$30. Last year they earned about \$1350.

All the children of school age were behind in their grades, even though the head of the family stated he usually returned to Arkansas in time for his children to get some schooling in the winter. At the time of the interview (May 28) school was out.

Head of migrant family stated that he preferred to work in Michigan because they usually made about \$700 during three months - middle of June to middle of September - of the year.

West Virginia Migrants (White) - interviewed near Paducah in McCracken County

This family of six came from the coal mining region of West Virginia, Logan County. The four children ranged from a one-year old baby to a 14-year old daughter. This was their first time on the road.

The head of the family had been a coal miner for most of his adult life, but in 1933 he quit mining because his health would not permit him to stand the hard work. He then got a job as a fireman in a saw-mill and worked there for six years before the mill went out of business. Unable to find another job, he applied to a charity organization for financial assistance to pay the family's transportation expenses to Corinth, Mississippi where they decided to go to join relatives. The charity organization bought transportation tickets for them, but while stopping in Nashville en route they decided to go to Kentucky where they heard strawberries were being harvested and work was available for pickers.

When interviewed, this family was living in a tobacco barn. They had practically nothing in the way of furnishings. Their sole possessions were the clothes on their backs. The farm employer furnished them with a wood heater, bedding, cooking utensils and food. Water was obtained from a well located about 100 yards from the barn, as was the open-pit toilet which was used by all the migrants on the farm.

The total earnings of the family last week picking strawberries amounted to \$7.50. Two of the children who picked berries were under six and under nine years of age, respectively. School was out at this time, but it is very unlikely they would have been in school had it been open.

Their total cash earnings last year amounted to \$240. Despite his health, the head of the family stated that he was ready to go back to the mines if he could find a job.

Mississippi Migrants (Negroes) - interviewed near  
Future City in McCracken County

This migrant family was composed of man, wife and their three children whose ages were three, five and seven, respectively. Their home was near Biggersville in Alcorn County.

Before 1934, the head of the family had been a regular hired hand on a farm but was let go when he was no longer needed. Between 1934 and 1938, he found work as an unskilled laborer on road construction jobs and worked intermittently as a farm laborer near his home. In 1939 the family decided to follow the harvest in order to increase their meager income.

That year, they picked strawberries in Arkansas and in Kentucky, and strawberries, raspberries and peaches in Michigan. When they returned home, the head of the family found work as a helper on a truck hauling brick. Their total income last year was about \$400. Of this sum, \$35 was earned in Arkansas, \$25 in Kentucky, \$275 in Michigan and the rest at odd jobs.

When interviewed, they were living, together with another couple, in an old farmhouse which ordinarily was not occupied for most of the year. They cooked over an open fire and secured water from a well located about 100 yards away. An old dilapidated and unsanitary open-pit toilet some 50 yards away was at their disposal.

Before coming to Kentucky to work for the same employer who engaged them the year before, they had picked berries in White County, Arkansas. They travelled in a 1929 Chevrolet, which they owned. Last week the head of the family and his wife earned \$9 picking berries for 70 hours. None of the children worked, but were taken along to the fields.

Indiana Migrant (White) - interviewed near  
Kevil in McCracken County

This migrant has been on the road since 1931. He was 51 years of age, single and came from Evansville in Vanderburgh County. He arrived in Kentucky from Louisiana where he also had picked strawberries. Last year, he picked berries in Louisiana and in Kentucky, pruned fruit trees in Michigan and worked at odd jobs in Indiana. He follows approximately the same routes each year, although he seeks work from different employers on these routes. Stated that he made more money at odd non-agricultural jobs in Indiana than anywhere else on his agricultural

migrations. He never stops in Tennessee for the strawberries because, he stated, it is even difficult to make expenses there.

In 1927 and 1928 he operated his own lumber business in Indiana, but the business depression wiped him out. For two years thereafter he was a sharecropper in his home State, but gave it up because he couldn't make a living at it. In 1931 he decided to follow the fruit harvests as they occurred up and down the Mississippi Valley.

When interviewed, he was living in a hay barn with eight other migrants. No toilet facilities were provided by the farmer, and water was available from a well located about 150 yards from the barn. All the cooking was done over an open fire. He furnished his own bedding and cooking utensils. He usually travelled with other workers who have cars. Last week he worked 15 hours picking strawberries and earned \$5. His total earnings last year amounted to \$425.

Tennessee Migrant (white) - interviewer near Calvert  
City in Marshall County

This berry picker, 68 years of age, has been on the road since 1930, usually hitch-hiking to get from place to place. He was single and had no dependents. His wife was dead, but he had two grown up sons in Louisiana whom he visits every year. Stated that he had no permanent residence but was raised in Knoxville, Tennessee.

Before becoming a migrant agricultural worker, he was a sign painting contractor but could not make a living at this trade. For the past 10 years, he has been following the fruit harvests. Last year he picked strawberries in Louisiana and in Kentucky and apples in Michigan. He usually starts the season in Louisiana where he stays for about four or five months, then goes to Kentucky for about three weeks,



then moves on to Michigan for about five to six months. Stated that when he gets to a place and does not find harvesting work or when he harvests for only part of the day, he tries to find work painting signs on business houses or windows. Estimated that he earns from \$600 to \$700 a year. Last year he made about \$625.

In Michigan, he said, he receives better housing than anywhere else on his travels. He usually works for the same employer and earns the bulk of his earnings there. He felt sorry for the migrants who had to travel with their families, especially the first year migrants who didn't know where to go and where to get the picking which pays. A considerable number of them, he stated, waste a lot of motion and time travelling aimlessly and don't make even their expenses.

When interviewed, he was living in an old farm house provided by the employer free of charge. He carried his own bedding, a few clothes and a number of paint brushes. He received his cooking utensils and cooked over an open fire. Last week he earned \$7.50 for 36 hours of strawberry picking. He likes his migratory work and expects to continue as long as his age will permit him.

Alabama Migrant (white) - interviewed near  
Sharpe in Marshall County

Migrant was 32 years of age, single, no dependents and came from Jefferson County near Birmingham, Alabama.

Until 1930, he worked as a carpenter and painter but gave them up because the work was not steady and he earned very little. He decided to follow the harvests and has been on the road almost continually for the past ten years. Last year he worked in strawberries in Kentucky, picked various fruits in Michigan, and peaches in Illinois. Other years he worked



in tomatoes in Indiana instead of going to Illinois for the peaches. In the fall, he returned to Alabama where he found some work as a carpenter, but for most of the winter he was unemployed. He never goes to Tennessee for the strawberry season because the crop there is comparatively small and most of the picking is done by the local people.

He usually follows the same routes each year because he is familiar with the harvesting seasons and usually works for the same farmers. His major handicap is lack of a car which forces him to ride the freights and lose much time. Most of his jobs are of short duration - a week or less. The only exception is Michigan where he usually finds work in the berry and fruit harvest for two months and sometimes longer.

When interviewed, he was living in a garage with three other migrants, all of whom slept on the dirt floor with straw and blankets for bedding. Together with the other migrants he cooked over an open fire and obtained water from a near-by well. No toilet facilities were available, the woods being used for the purpose.

He stated that nobody who has followed the fruit and berry crops this year made very much, and many will be lucky to cover expenses. His own earnings on the present job last week amounted to \$7 for 30 hours of harvesting. His total earnings last year totaled \$145.

Ninety per cent of the fruit migrants, he said, would settle down if they could find steady employment. He believed that the irresponsible fruit tramp has ruined the work for those who really want to work and are dependent on migratory seasonal farm work for their living.

Stated that some of the best people in the country, some with good education, are on the road because they cannot find steady employment

at home.

Migrants from West Central Kentucky (White) - interviewed  
near Sharpe, Marshall County

This migrant group was composed of a mother (50 years of age), her 7-year old son and 5-year old daughter. Her husband and 20-year old son were at home where they worked in a coal mine. Their home was near Central City in Muhlenburg County.

This woman has been compelled to supplement the earnings of her husband and son who, in the past few years, have found work in the mines for only one or two days a week. Beside doing house work and sewing for others, she and her children have been coming to Western Kentucky to pick strawberries every year. Stated that this year the crop has been short and didn't expect to make very much. Last week, she and her children earned about \$18.

The family has received commodity relief and has been forced to borrow money from the mine company where her husband and son are employed. Stated that for every dollar they borrowed from the company, they have had to repay \$1.50. She has tried to get her elder son into a CCC camp, but has not been successful.

When interviewed, they were living in a double garage with about 15 other migrants. A wood stove and kerosene lamp were provided by the farmer. They had their own cooking utensils. Water was obtained from a near-by well, but no toilet facilities were available. They were transported with others to this place in a school bus for which this migrant group paid \$1.50.

Eastern Kentucky Migrants (white) - interviewed  
near Palma in Marshall County

These migrants represented part of a family which had come from their small farm of six acres near Van Lear in Johnson County. Only the father and his three sons, ages 23, 25 and 27, respectively had made the trip, in their 1934 Chevrolet, to Western Kentucky for the strawberry harvest. The mother and her four daughters, ages ranging from 15 to 19, were left at home because, as the head of the family stated, he didn't want them to face the rigors and uncertainty of life on the road.

Unable to make a living for his family on his small farm and on another which he farmed on a share basis, his sons failing to find any employment, last year he decided to take his entire family to Florida where he heard there was work to be secured in the fruit and vegetable harvests around Hillsborough. The freeze in Florida killed a material portion of the harvest and he and his family were out of work for the greater part of the season. Were it not for the relief grant of \$50 which they received from the Farm Security Administration they would have been completely destitute. That year the whole family had cash earnings amounting to about \$375. This amount represented their earnings in Florida and those made by the head of the family who worked about three months as a salesman for a flavoring products firm in Van Lear, Kentucky.

This year only the father and sons took to the road, but this time they made the trip to the western part of their State for the berry harvest. When interviewed, they were camping in the woods near the berry patch in which they were working. They slept in the open and cooked their meals over an open fire. They had some bedding and a few cooking

utensils. Their combined earnings for last week's work of 120 hours totaled \$12.

They would all gladly settle down, he stated, if they could get regular work at home.

PART TWO  
WESTERN TENNESSEE AND NORTH CENTRAL ARKANSAS

I Notes on the Migratory Labor Situation in  
Strawberry Harvesting in Western Tennessee

The most important crops in Tennessee, from the standpoint of area, are corn, cotton and hay, which together occupy about 85 per cent of the six million acres of crop land. Corn and hay are not so important as direct sources of cash income, but are the principal feed crops. The major cash crops are cotton and tobacco, providing about three-fourths of the cash income from all crops.

In certain parts of the State, however, strawberries, vegetables and Irish and sweet potatoes are important cash crops, even though they contribute only a relatively small amount to the total farm income of the State. Thus, in the western part of Tennessee, and particularly in the Humboldt area in which our survey was conducted, strawberries and tomatoes are the principal cash crops. Both of these crops require considerable hired field labor during the harvest, and, in the case of tomatoes, hundreds of hired workers are used also in packing operations. For the most parts however, farming in this part of the State is self-sufficing and is carried on with family labor.

The Humboldt area, which includes parts of Gibson, Madison, Crockett, and Weakley counties, is the most concentrated commercial strawberry producing region of the State. The other two major commercial strawberry districts are in Rhea and Sumner counties. In terms of acreage, the counties comprising the Humboldt area are the four leading producers of this crop. Together, they grow about 40 per cent of the strawberries produced in the State. Humboldt in Gibson County, is the leading marketing center of this region. Other shipping points are



Jackson, in Madison County, Milan and Gibson, in Gibson County, and Greenfield, in Weakley County.

Strawberry harvesting in the Humboldt area commences about the last of April or the beginning of May, depending upon climatic conditions, and continues for about three weeks. In 1940, when the season was about two weeks late, picking started during the week of May 6. The peak of operations occurs in the second week of harvesting and lasts seven to ten days. Short as the season is, it provides the biggest opportunity for agricultural employment in this region during the year. Tomatoes, which is the heaviest crop in the region, requires fewer harvesters.

Harvesting operations, both in strawberries and tomatoes, are conducted, almost exclusively, with local labor. Farmers are usually able to tap the reservoir of the unemployed or of the partially employed in the near-by towns or rural regions. Wives and children of neighboring farmers, tenants and sharecroppers, as well as those living in the surrounding towns, are recruited annually for the strawberry harvest. Indeed, strawberry picking has become an accepted institution for many of the local residents in the community who eagerly anticipate this seasonal work as a source of a few needed or extra dollars. School, for example, is let out at a time coincident with the strawberry harvest in order to permit the employment of children. Moreover, the great majority of the strawberry patches are small and can and are harvested both by family labor and exchange labor.

It is not surprising, therefore, that our survey revealed only a comparatively small number of migrant strawberry pickers in the Humboldt area. A cautiously selected random sample of 271 workers revealed

only 35 subjects who were not residents in the area in which they were found picking berries. This was less than 15 per cent of the total number of migrants interviewed. Of this small number, three came from a reasonably distant county of Tennessee, and the other 32 migrants came from out of the State. Half of the out-of-State migrants came from the three States of Louisiana, Mississippi and Missouri; the others, from Texas, Arkansas, Florida, Alabama, Michigan, Oklahoma, Kentucky, Illinois and Connecticut. The immediate points of origin for the majority of the out-of-State migrants were Hammond, Louisiana and Plant City, Florida, where they also had picked berries.

It is significant that 22 of the 35 migrants interviewed, or about 70 per cent, were on the road for the first time. Had they had more experience in migratory agricultural-seasonal work and knew the routes better, they probably would not have gone to Tennessee for the strawberry harvest. On the other hand, the majority of the regular-seasonal migrants had been in Tennessee before, and returned here only because they were assured of finding work with the farm employer for whom they had worked previously. Moreover, the majority of the migrants interviewed were single or otherwise unattached.

The conclusion is obvious. There is no migratory problem in this region, and according to well-informed persons, there never has been one. Estimates show that in the very good harvest year of 1938, only about 500 migrants were employed in picking strawberries in the Humboldt area. In the next two years their numbers were materially smaller: in 1939, about 250, and in 1940, about 200. Nor, it appears, is there any other part of Tennessee where migrants are employed in numbers sufficiently large to create a problem. At Kingsport, for example, there are peach

orchards which attract migrants if there is an excessively large crop. The numbers of such migrants are not known, but it is believed that the influx is not very large. These peach pickers probably come from Georgia and South Carolina. Also, along the eastern section of the State, farms are visited by a limited number of migrants passing through to Illinois, Indiana and Michigan. It seems, therefore, that while migrants pass through the State by the hundreds and in passage may constitute a transit problem, there is no evidence anywhere of a sufficiently large influx leading to the belief that the problem is one of congestion from which other collateral problems of housing, sanitation and health may result.

Again, with reference to the strawberry area which we surveyed, our observations are: 1) agricultural-seasonal migrants come through western Tennessee, but a comparatively small number work in the strawberry harvest; 2) those that do find employment remain for only a week or ten days at the most; 3) the effective supply of local labor is sufficient to meet the seasonal needs of the farmers; 4) only a heavy harvest, effectively publicized, would attract an appreciable number of outside workers; 5) the farmers are wholly unprepared to offer any adequate housing facilities for this eventuality, for even at the present time, light as is the migrant stream, this situation obtains.

In concluding this brief statement, tomato packing deserves mention. Tomatoes are the heaviest crop in this region, and although harvested by local labor, they are packed, for the most part, by migrant workers who are professional at the "game" and who are brought in by labor contractors from Florida and Texas. These professional tomato packers follow the season in Florida, Texas, Mississippi, Louisiana,

Tennessee, Virginia, Maryland and New York. It is estimated that between 500 and 600 graders, wrappers and packers are brought each year to Humboldt and to other shipping points in the locality. They represent about 50 per cent of the total number which is engaged in this operation in the region. These migrants are in demand by shippers because of their skill and speed, and it has been said that they average four to five dollars a day when they work. No housing problem accompanies their migration to the Humboldt area where the town people readily rent them rooms, and, in fact, look forward to their arrival as a source of a little additional income.

## II Notes on the Migratory Labor Situation in Strawberry Harvesting in North Central (White County) Arkansas

The harvesting of strawberries is the major farm operation in White County which requires the labor of appreciable numbers of hired workers. The actual growing area in this county stretches from the southern end of the county line, (near Ward, across the line), to Bradford - a distance of about 40 miles. Between 5,000 and 6,000 acres are devoted to strawberries in this area. About 75 per cent of the output, however, is concentrated in the comparatively small region lying between the Little Red River and the town of Bradford - a distance of only about 15 miles. This is the densest strawberry area in the State. The bulk of the strawberry patches, the majority of which range from four to ten acres, is located in the vicinity of the following towns: McRae, Garner, Higgenson, Searcy, Judsonia, Bald Knob, Russell and Bradford. All of these towns lie along the route of the Missouri Pacific Railroad.

The major shipping points are Judsonia, Bald Knob and Russell, with Bald Knob by far the leading one of the three. More strawberries are



shipped from Bald Knob than from all the other marketing points in White County combined, and more of them are shipped from this county than from any other in the State. In 1939, for example, as many as 33 railroad carloads were shipped from Bald Knob in one day during the peak of the harvest. This excludes the volume which was trucked out. That year, 445 carloads were shipped out of White County as a whole, excluding the quantity shipped out by truck.

The strawberry harvest in this region lasts usually from four to six weeks, starting about April 10 and closing about May 20. In 1940, when the season was late and short, harvesting commenced on about April 29 and was completed by the first of June. The big majority of the migratory pickers who come for the harvest, however, do not stay the full season, but remain only for the cream of the crop which is usually harvested in a bout three weeks. There is no seasonal activity after the strawberry harvest which requires any substantial numbers of agricultural workers in White County. Dewberries, which follow the strawberries, are harvested mostly by local labor. Consequently, after the strawberry work, large numbers of the migrants push on to Washington and Benton counties in the northwestern part of the State for the berry, fruit and vegetable harvests, to western Kentucky for the strawberries or back to their home States of Missouri or Mississippi for cotton chopping. In northwest Kansas, particularly around Springdale, Fayetteville, Lowell and Tontitown, the work in strawberries starts about May 1, reaches a peak about the middle of the month and comes to close about June 1. However, other crops in that region mature soon thereafter providing employment in beans,



grapes, peaches, apples, tomatoes and potatoes until the middle of September.

The harvesting of strawberries in White County is accomplished, for the most part, with migratory labor. Only a small proportion of the berry pickers in this country represents local workers who generally are sharecroppers or day laborers employed more or less the year around. According to the State Farm Placement Service, a farmer with four acres of strawberries usually hires about 20 pickers during the two or three weeks of heavy picking. Fewer are employed by him at the start and finish of the season. The rate of pay for picking is uniformly two cents a quart-basket of strawberries, and an average picker earns from 75 cents to one dollar a day on the average for the entire season. However, pickers have been known to make as high as two or more dollars a day during the height of the season.

That migratory workers are the chief source of labor supply at strawberry harvesting time in White County is clearly evident by the large numbers of these laborers who are found in this comparatively small agricultural region during the Spring of the year. Estimates show that between 4,000 and 5,000 migrant pickers are employed at the peak of the season, with an average of about 2,000 workers over the entire season. In 1939, for example, the Arkansas State Employment Service alone assigned almost 700 families or groups of single persons, representing about 3,200 workers, during the strawberry harvest in White County. An analysis of the registration records of these families or groups of single persons who were thus assigned disclosed that over one-third, or nearly 1,200 workers, of the total number came from out of the

State. In addition to these out-of-State migrants, the large majority of the 450 families or groups of single persons, representing over 2,000 workers, who reported residence in the State of Arkansas, came from the outside into White County for the strawberry harvest. Thus, probably a minimum of 75 per cent of the strawberry harvesters who were assigned in White County by the State Employment Service came from outside this county.

The Employment Service registration records also showed that that year, the harvest drew the migrants from 29 different States. Two out of every three of these migrants came from either Missouri, Tennessee or Mississippi. An appreciable number of the intra-state migrants came from the coal mining region of Arkansas and were recruited at and transported from North Little Rock. It was observed that many more women and children than men came from this region that year, largely because, it is believed, the unemployed coal miners received more unemployment insurance benefits than they would have earned picking strawberries. Other migrants from within the State came from the Mississippi River East Bottoms prior to cotton chopping time at home. The number

of strawberry pickers who were assigned to White County by the State Employment Service in 1939, and their place of origin, are shown below:

Families or Groups of Persons and Total Number of Strawberry Pickers Assigned in White County, Arkansas, 1939.

State	No. of Families or Groups of Persons	No. of Pickers	State	No. of Families or Groups of Persons	No. of Pickers
Arkansas	450	2041	Pennsylvania	2	8
Missouri	89	452	Iowa	4	7
Tennessee	42	222	D. C.	2	6
Mississippi	18	106	Kansas	2	6
Louisiana	16	69	California	1	7
Texas	16	65	Kentucky	2	6
Oklahoma	14	50	New Mexico	1	5
Florida	9	39	West Virginia	3	4
Illinois	6	35	Nebraska	1	4
Michigan	4	24	South Carolina	1	4
New York	3	12	Ohio	1	3
Minnesota	2	12	Arizona	2	3
Alabama	2	11	Indiana	1	1
Wisconsin	1	10	Massachusetts	1	1
Georgia	2	8			
Grand Total . . . . .				698	3221
Out-of-State . . . . .				248	1180

The migrants who come to White County for the strawberry harvest are practically 100 per cent white. The majority of them are families or single and otherwise unattached persons travelling in groups. Very few "stags" are found. Farmers in this region prefer families with competent pickers because it simplifies their housing problem. A whole family can be put up in a single shelter, whereas it is often impractical to do so with a group of strangers, especially when the sexes are mixed. Single girls are also preferred because they often can be given accommodation in the farmer's own house.

In view of the fact that farmers in this region require hired help in substantial numbers only during the short strawberry season, it is not surprising that very few of them provide adequate housing or shelter facilities for their seasonal workers. Consequently, migrant berry pickers are sheltered, if at all, in almost any possible place which provides rudimentary sleeping quarters: hay barns, garages, tool sheds, cellars, delapidated vacant houses and similar out-buildings. In fact, the shortage of adequate housing facilities, it has been observed, is deterring the farmers from expanding more rapidly their acreage in strawberries and also accounts for their periodic shortages of workers even at the present level of production.

In 1938, at least 200 persons were camped in tents and other makeshift shelters of one kind or another on the railroad right-of-way in Bald Knob. Although in the past year or two, a number of farmers have built temporary shacks for their migrant pickers, it has hardly made a dent in the acute shortage of shelter facilities required to accommodate the several thousand non-resident workers needed during the strawberry harvest. When it is realized that almost 60 per cent of the migrants assigned to jobs in 1939 brought no tents with them and about 20 per cent brought no camping equipment of any character, the conditions under which these workers are forced to live can be more fully appreciated. To alleviate, in part, some of these conditions, a church group in Bald Knob established during the 1940 season a nursery in a gymnasium of the local school for children whose mothers were out picking berries. The services of a trained nurse was secured to examine the children and a few local young



women supervised their recreational activities. In addition, a kitchen was set up and meals prepared for the children. A maximum of 40 with a minimum of about 20 children were thus taken care of effectively throughout the season.

The Arkansas State Employment Service has a fairly well-developed farm placement program for and in White County. Recruiting operations are conducted at Fort Smith, near the Oklahoma State line, and at Little Rock. At Memphis, Tennessee, the Employment Service has established connections with about 150 truckers to transport seasonal workers for employment on farms in Arkansas. Advertising over the radio and in newspapers is an established practice before and during the strawberry harvest. The office has a mailing list of about 1,000 names of workers to whom letters are sent concerning the availability of work in strawberries and in other crops. In 1940, the numbers on this list were augmented by about 500 applicants who answered its radio and newspaper advertisements for strawberry pickers. In White County, placement activities are conducted in the field during the strawberry harvest. The Service has stationed interviewers at McRae and Russell where tents serve as headquarters for the purpose. At Bald Knob, where about 90 per cent of the strawberry placements are made in White County, the farm placement interviewer conducts his work from a personally-owned trailer.

In view of the fact that this is a short-season area, a Farm Security Administration camp program in White County is conceivable only in terms of a mobile set-up. But even a portable camp here would be justified only if it could be moved to serve another short-season area not too distantly located. In this connection, two such areas suggest themselves:



Northwest Arkansas and Western Kentucky. The season in White County dovetails better with Western Kentucky than it does with the season in Northwest Arkansas. In fact, there is almost a perfect seasonal sequence as between the end of the strawberry harvest in White County, Arkansas and the beginning of the one in Western Kentucky. In White County, the peak of the picking is over usually by the middle of May and commences in Western Kentucky in the third week of May. Moreover, after the close of the season in Western Kentucky, which occurs in the first week of June, it would be possible for a mobile camp to service the harvest in Northwest Arkansas where the season lasts until the middle of September. A possible deterrent factor for the latter arrangement is the comparatively long distance which the camp will be compelled to move from Western Kentucky to Northwest Arkansas. Another area which should be considered in any plans for a mobile camp program in the Mississippi Valley is the Hammond area in Tangipahoa Parish, Louisiana. The strawberry season here precedes that of Arkansas and, in fact, comes to a close just about the time when the harvest gets under way in White County.

In the event a mobile camp is established in White County to service the strawberry harvest, there is very little doubt that its logical location would be Bald Knob. A camp in this location would serve a radius of 15 miles in the most concentrated strawberry area of the leading strawberry producing county in Arkansas. However, because of the divided opinion regarding the need of a camp in this area, it is advisable that before any action is taken, a more thorough survey be made of the available shelter facilities for seasonal workers during the strawberry harvest in this region.

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