



**AgEcon** SEARCH  
RESEARCH IN AGRICULTURAL & APPLIED ECONOMICS

*The World's Largest Open Access Agricultural & Applied Economics Digital Library*

**This document is discoverable and free to researchers across the globe due to the work of AgEcon Search.**

**Help ensure our sustainability.**

Give to AgEcon Search

AgEcon Search  
<http://ageconsearch.umn.edu>  
[aesearch@umn.edu](mailto:aesearch@umn.edu)

*Papers downloaded from **AgEcon Search** may be used for non-commercial purposes and personal study only. No other use, including posting to another Internet site, is permitted without permission from the copyright owner (not AgEcon Search), or as allowed under the provisions of Fair Use, U.S. Copyright Act, Title 17 U.S.C.*

## **Historic, Archive Document**

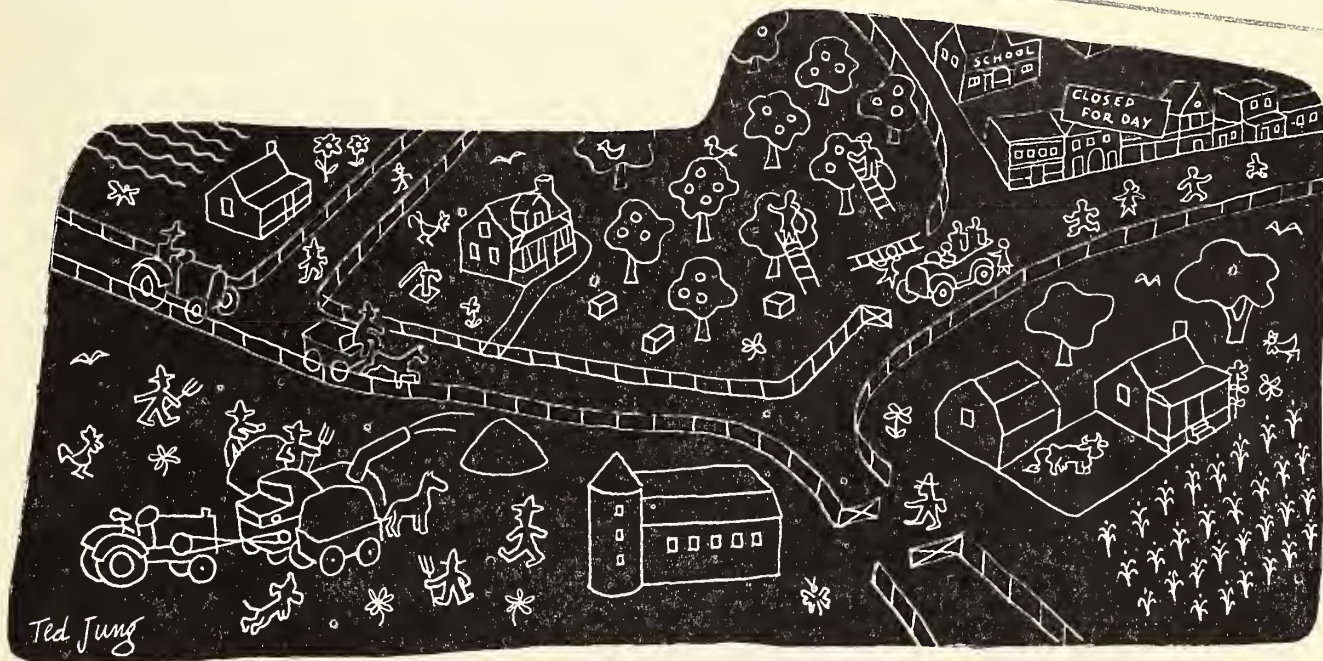
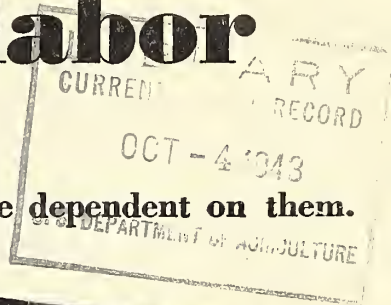
Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.



Ag 86 Ds  
Cap. 6

# Let's talk about farm labor for the wartime job

A discussion guide for farm people and for those who are dependent on them.  
From the U. S. Department of Agriculture.



**Producing** more food—that's our number one job on the farm this year. Labor is one of our major problems in doing it.

We set out to deliver 8 percent more food in 1943 than in 1942, and more still will be needed in 1944. Besides the usual food crops, we have set our sights high for soybeans, peanuts, hemp, long-staple cotton, tobacco, and other farm production, too. Yet farmers faced the 1943-44 job with labor supply considerably reduced by the claims of war industry and of the armed forces. And even though in the spring of 1943 we had almost as many farm workers *on the job* as in 1942, yet the shortage of skilled, experienced, and physically able workers was pinching farmers sharply in some parts of the country.

How can we reach our goals? Where does the farmer's need for labor fit into the picture of the Nation's total need? How can we do the most with the manpower we've got? How can community and county best mobilize their own labor force to meet the need? Where can we turn for more farm workers?

We need to think out loud about these questions—chart a course in community gatherings for the months and years ahead. Our own plans are in the making. National policy is in the making. Study and discussion of both are good. Here are some questions to consider, plus a few facts and practical suggestions that relate to them.

## **Whose problem is farm labor?**

If you are a farmer or a farm worker, or member of a farm family, you say, "Yes, that's *our* problem all right."

But if you are a businessman, or a housewife, or a factory worker, or a high-school boy or girl living in town, how about it? Do *you* have a stake in the farm-labor problem? Does it deserve *your* study and discussion?

This guide is designed mainly for farm people. But wartime food shortages and rationing, and the rising cost of living, make farm labor everybody's business to some extent. Besides, farmers look to you people in the city, young and old, men and women, for help this year. They need it.

Many people in town can use this guide from their *own* angle—in school and church, in service club and women's club, in scout meeting and community gathering.

Take, for instance, some of these questions of national policy: What kind of Government farm-labor programs would make for the greatest possible production? Help for the small farmers? Higher farm prices? Better distribution of the available farm workers? Freeze farm workers on their present jobs? Others? Do these questions make a difference in what shows up on the dinner table in city homes? Does it make a difference whether farm and town plan together?



## What does our problem look like?

### What is the total labor picture?

What's back of the labor problem? First, the need for food—all that we can produce—to provide top strength for our fighting men and for every man, woman, and child on the home front; food for our fighting allies and for other friendly nations, for people in occupied countries, and for starving millions after the war. It's our job because we *can* produce it and we *can* deliver it. It's all "food for freedom."

But food is just *one* vital need in the war. There is a fighting job to be done, and before 1943 is over 1 out of 4 male workers will be in uniform. Besides that, we aim to produce 23 percent more in industry this year than in 1942. Here is what we're up against altogether.



**Problem for 1943.—To find enough fighters and workers for munitions, agriculture, and other essential industries.**

What does all this mean to the farmer?

*Some estimates.*—During 1942 the farms of the Nation lost from their on-farm labor supply about 7 workers or persons who *could* do farm work out of every 100 persons of working age, a bit over half of them to the armed forces, the rest to industry. (Before 1942, losses had been much heavier to industry than to the armed forces.) In the first

half of 1943, we had a farm worker force only 1 percent less, in mere numbers, than a year before, but only because more than a million farm boys and girls and older men and women had put their shoulders to the wheel.

As we entered 1943, about one-half million men from the farm population were in the armed forces by draft, another one-quarter million by enlistment. But new draft regulations called for deferment of every man growing essential farm products on a scale "necessary to the war effort," for whom a replacement is not available. In all States that meant at least eight war units, measured by the table on page 3, and more than this in most States. On this basis, 1943 would see several hundred thousand farm workers deferred who otherwise would have been drafted.

Where are we to get the additional necessary workers for agriculture and industry? Some 700,000 persons will join the labor forces by reaching working age in 1943. We may be able to recruit several million workers from nonessential jobs and from the thin ranks of the unemployed. And a longer workweek is adding the equal of about one-half million workers. For the rest, we will have to look to those who have not worked before.

What does this mean in terms of a training job to be done?

### Where does your community fit into the picture?

How would you grade your community in farm production? Are you raising all you can for the war with the resources at hand? With other resources, could you raise more?

The table on page 3 will help you size up the output of your farm. One war-unit credit goes to a farmer for every war-essential farm job requiring as much work per year as one milk cow. Thus, for an acre of spinach you get one war-unit credit; for an acre of field corn only .2 of a war unit because it calls for less labor.

This table gives you only a rough *rule of thumb*. In some areas, you work just as hard on 3 acres of corn as in caring for a milk cow, in others, not as hard on 6 acres. But the table will give you a basis for sizing up, in a rough way, the effectiveness of labor on your farm.

*How to use the table.*—Under "My Stock," write the number of head or hundreds of head (according to the indication) of cows, pigs, chickens, etc., on your farm this year. Multiply these figures in each case by the number in the column to the left and write the answer to the right under "My War Units." Thus, if you plan for 9 litters of pigs this year, your credit is 9 times .33 war units, or a total of 3 units.

If you keep 300 layers, your credit will be 3 times 1.3, or 3.9 war units.

Figure your war-unit credits for "Field Crops" in the same way. Same with "Other Crops." Now add up these three war-unit columns, and, in the lower right corner, figure the war-unit value of your whole farm job. Assign credits to each worker according to his part in production.

How many war units should be required in your area to rank a producer as "necessary to the war effort"?

It is estimated that over the Nation, generally, farms producing less than 8 war units are not yielding much more than is necessary to keep up farm and family. For a real contribution to the war effort, something more is called for. Is 16 war units for every worker a reasonable goal?

In some States, two-thirds of the farms produce 16 or more war units per farm. In one State, farms average 30

war units, individual workers 23 units. On the other hand, in some areas where soil is thin and poor and farm units small, only one-fifth of the farms are yielding as much as 8 war units.

What things stand mainly in the way of still larger production in your neighborhood? Poor land? Too small farm units? Not enough equipment? Not enough livestock? Inadequate credit? Poor health? Malnutrition? Lack of ambition? Inefficiency in management?

### Table of war unit values for sizing up farm enterprises

(The values noted are for one head or one acre unless it says otherwise)

LIVESTOCK					FIELD CROPS					OTHER CROPS					
	The stock listed below are worth so many WAR UNITS		My Stock	My War Units		The stock listed below are worth so many WAR UNITS		My Crops	My War Units		The stock listed below are worth so many WAR UNITS		My Crops	My War Units	
D A I R Y	Milk cows, per head	1.			C O R N	Field corn, per acre	.2			T R U C K	All vegetables except* Vegetable plants and seed	1. 1.5			
	Heifers, calves, and huls	.1				Sweet corn for fresh market	.33				R O O T S	All potatoes	.5		
H O G S	Litters of pigs	.33				Sweet corn for processing	.2					Sugar beets and seed	.5		
	Feeder pigs, per head	.03				Hybrid seed corn	.33								
C A T T L E	Farm herds, per head	.1				H A Y	Wild hay, per acre	.1				N U T S	Bearing orchards: Almonds, filberts, and walnuts	.5	
	Feedlot	.05					Tame hay or seed, nonirrigated	.2					Tame pecans and tung	.2	
	Range	.07			Alfalfa hay, irrigated		.03				Nonbearing orchards		.07		
	Stockers	.01			Cover crop seed		.1								
S H E E P & G O A T S	Farm flocks, per head	.03			F I B E R & O I L S	Cotton, $\frac{1}{8}$ inch and over	.67			F O R E S T	Logs delivered per 1000	.1			
	Milk goats	.33				Cotton, under $\frac{1}{8}$ inch	.33					Logs sawed, bd. ft.	.2		
	Range	.02				Hemp, per acre	.2					100 hewn railroad ties	.5		
	Feedlot, per 100 head	.62				Soybeans and flaxseed	.08					100 fence posts	.2		
	Stockers, per 100 head	1.				Peanuts	.5					Fuel wood and bolt wood, per cord	.07		
P O U L T R Y	100 broilers and ducks	.17			C R A I N	Wheat, per acre	.05			F R U I T S	Bearing orchards, irrigated	1.			
	100 layers	1.3				Barley, oats, and rye	.07					Nonirrigated, per acre	.5		
	100 turkeys	2.5				Rice	.2					Nonbearing orchards	.2		
	100 geese	2.5				Grain sorghum	.1					Berries, grapes, and currants	1.5		
	100 flock replacements	.33				Sorghum for sirup	.5					Plants and tree replacements	.1		
O T H E R S	Bees, per colony	.04			O T H E R S	Dry field peas, per acre	.07			O T H E R S	Tobacco, per acre	2.			
	Horses	0				Green peas for processing	.2					Sugarcane	1.		
	Mules	0				Dry edible beans	.2					Rubber, medicinal, etc.**	2.5		
My total war units of livestock.....					My total war units of field crops.....					My total war units of other crops.....					
*No war unit credit for:										My total war units of livestock.....					
Artichokes					Iceberg lettuce					Pumpkins					
Bleached celery					Okra					Cucumbers					
Rhubarb					Kohlrabi					Eggplant					
										Radishes					
										Leeks					
										Squash					
										Horseradish					
**This credit includes:										My total war units of field crops.....					
Guayule, Kok-saghyz, Aconite, Belladonna, Digitalis, Henbane, and Pyrethrum.										WAR UNIT VALUE OF MY FARM JOB.....					



## **How can we produce more per worker?**

### ***How about simplifying farm jobs?***

What can farmers in your neighborhood learn from each other about ways of saving time and labor?

Some farmers find they can save from one-third to one-half on time and energy by watching out for practical ways of making farm jobs easier. Here are a few key questions you might ask yourselves: In each case, the first question carries the main point; the suggestions which follow are for illustration only and need to be *adapted* to particular conditions. From local experience what additional illustrations can members of the group suggest?

1. *Can you arrange things more conveniently around the place?* Is every feed bin and water trough, hay chute, harness hook, gate, and path to the barn in the handiest place? Or do they stay where they are because they've always been there? How about arrangement and size of fields?

2. *Are there other ways you can save steps?* Can you rig up a feed cart for dealing out grain and silage—one trip for each? How about throwing down at one time enough hay for the day's feeding? Do you back-track or go empty-handed when you could be carrying things?

3. *Any ways to cut down on heavy lifting?* Are you carrying loads that you could more easily roll, slide, drag, truck, or pipe? How about using levers and skids, team and wagon, block and tackle, hooks, ropes, and counter-balances—taking advantage of hillsides? Can you put wheels under the load? How about a hay feeder on wheels? In lifting loads, keep your back straight. Squat, don't stoop. Put the load on your heavy leg muscles, the strongest in your body.

4. *Are working surfaces at the easiest height?* Fix things so that you can just place the palms of your hands flat on the table when you stand up straight. Have a stool handy. Arrange materials within easy reach. Plenty of light. Adjust machine seats to suit you.

5. *Do you use both hands equally?* In picking fruit, do you have a holder for your container—to free your two hands? In all hand jobs, plan for movements as short as possible. Aim at natural timing, with right hand moving to the right as the left moves to the left, when the job permits, just as in milking one hand moves up as the other pulls down.

6. *Is your machinery being used to the best advantage?* We'll be short of farm machinery in 1943 and 1944, but we can usually get repair parts. Do you size up your needs for equipment and materials in advance and order early? Do you share machinery with neighbors who will use it carefully? Do you keep it in good working condition yourself—repair it in slack seasons?

7. *Can you combine several jobs into one?* Spread limestone with manure? Hitch a spiketooth harrow behind your disk harrow? Grade snap beans as you pick them? When you haul hogs to town, do you arrange to haul coal back?

8. *Could you increase your efficiency by more careful planning for the whole job?* How about using rainy days

to think plans through for the days ahead? Is it worth while to rethink every step of the job as you work? "Is it necessary? Could I do without it? Could it be arranged more easily and simply?"

Can you spread out the busy seasons and reduce the labor load at peak seasons in 1944 by special care in selecting crops and in choice of seedtime? By using different varieties?

What other points of management make a difference in worker efficiency? Use of improved varieties of seed? Best practices in cultivation and fertilization? In breeding and feeding of livestock? Safeguards for health? Better housing and sanitation for workers? Plenty of good food? Enough rest? Accident precautions? What else?

### ***How about Government loans to underemployed farmers?***

Are some farmers in your neighborhood underemployed? Not able to produce as much as they could, due to poor equipment, or stock, or not enough of it? Were any of them helped to increase production in 1942 by Government loans?

*Some national figures.*—Given Government loans and some help on farm-management problems, just short of half a million small farmers were able in 1942 to increase their production of milk 20 percent over 1941. This increase, by less than one-thirteenth of the farmers of the Nation, amounted to more than one-third of the Nation's total increase. The same group also contributed more than their share of the Nation's increase in production of pork, eggs, beef, chickens, peanuts, soybeans, dry beans, and sugar beets.

Should we have more of this kind of national farm program?

Some students estimate that there are 1½ million small farmers in the Nation who could increase their production on this basis: "You find underemployed manpower mainly on small farms, labor shortage mostly on higher-income farms. The latter have increased their production greatly since 1940, but they have already reached peak production." Some others think the bigger farms offer the best chance of increased production by greater skill in management. What do you think?

### ***Opportunities on other farms for low producers?***

Are there farmers in your county who *can't* produce 8 war units, no matter how hard or how well they work, because of poor land or not enough of it? Would they move to other farms, with better opportunities, if they had a chance?

*Some estimates.*—About 1½ million families are living on farms so small or so poor that they can neither produce efficiently nor maintain a fair level of living. Of these, well over half could do more for the war effort if they were to leave their farms and take jobs on other farms or in industry. And they could raise their own level of living considerably. In most cases, the vacated farm could be bought or rented







by a neighboring farmer who, with enlarged farm unit, could produce at least as much as the two together did before.

To reliable farm operators and workers in crowded low-producing areas, the Government offers free transportation to places where they are needed most, plus a contract for work there, and free training for the new job if needed.

Are too many trying to make a living from farming in your county? Does the war offer a chance to reduce the number?

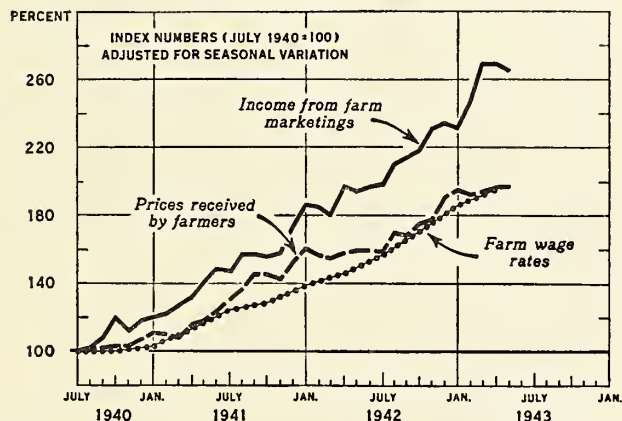
## What would keep workers on the farm? How about higher farm wages?

Has your community lost many farm workers due to higher wages in industry? Have farm wages around there gone up as much as factory wages? More?

*The national picture.*—From the start of the defense program in July 1940 to spring of 1943, farm wages increased around 95 percent, factory wages only 73 percent, to match a rise of 20 percent in cost of living. But on the farm this meant a rise from an average \$31 a month without board to only \$60 in April 1943, while in industry it meant an increase from \$101 a month to \$175 in March 1943. It is hard for farmers to compete with \$175 a month, even though in industrial areas farmers pay much higher than this \$60 average.

In comparing the pay of farm and factory workers in your neighborhood, what else counts besides cash wages? Have farm hands been underpaid? Can farmers afford to pay more?

*The picture shows how farm wages, prices, and income have behaved since this country went on a war footing.*



U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

NEG. 43138

BUREAU OF AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS

Has farm income gone up this much in your area? Farm wages? If wages were increased as much as income, would workers stay on the farm? Should farm wages change in proportion to income? Are still higher farm prices justified in order to help farmers meet high labor costs? Would that mean inflation? What does the farmer stand to lose from inflation? Are lower prices for what farmers buy in order? How much have operating costs gone up in your territory?

On an average, operating expenses took 58 percent of the farmer's gross income in 1940, 47 percent in 1943.

Does it help in holding workers on the farm if they are paid a bonus for staying with the job?

One west-coast farmer found he could reduce labor turnover to 5 percent by paying a bonus of 3 cents an hour to workers who stay through the season. Some farmers hold their help by higher pay during the peak season. Do you think these are fair practices?

Would a Government program of old-age and unemployment insurance for farm workers help? How about better tenancy laws, providing, for instance, for some kind of compensation to tenants for improvements on buildings and land?

## How about national measures?

Two sets of Government rulings were working in mid-1943 to keep farm workers on the farm: (1) Those providing for supervised loans to small farmers; (2) selective-service rulings deferring "necessary" farm producers, which not only cut down the movement into armed forces and industry, but further attract some industrial workers back to the farm.

Would it be a good thing for all farm workers to be prevented by law from leaving farm work? From moving from one job to another? Should workers here, as in England, be assigned by the Government to jobs wherever they are most needed in war production? If so, should farm operators and other employers be similarly brought under Government assignment?

## Where are more workers going to come from?

### How about community cooperation?

*Farmer neighbors working together?* In what new ways can farmers in your community get after their labor problem by pooling their labor? Skills? Farm machinery? Trucks? Automobiles?

*A few cases from the national record.*—Seventy-seven Idaho farmers handled 600 acres of sweet corn by exchanging family labor and using their canning cooperative organization to route hired hands where they were needed most.

Six California potato growers made out by pooling their equipment and by jointly hiring a 23-man labor crew. Sixty-five tomato growers from the same State steadied their labor supply by building a good labor camp cooperatively.

Thirty Oklahoma farmers formed a co-op and each one put up \$11 for payment on a used tractor, a peanut thresher, and a hay baler. Then they swapped labor. Many counties over the country registered and card-indexed all equipment available for lending, exchanging, renting, custom work, or sale. When and on what conditions available? Any extra repair parts?

*Farm and town working together.*—How can farmers and townspeople in your community best cooperate on the farm labor job? How much joint planning is desirable? When should the two groups first meet together for planning?

*More case records.*—In one California county, producers, canners, packers, school boards, draft boards, every inter-

ested organization and agency, got together months in advance. The schools recruited 7,000 students, lent 65 busses, gave over 11 school buildings for placement centers, day nurseries, and worker housing; 2,000 older townspeople, men and women, volunteered. Everyone tried to get local help first, called on the county office only if they had to.

During the harvest season in one town area in Washington, every business firm except restaurants closed its doors all day Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. *Everybody* helped. Schools, colleges, and business groups held apple-picking contests.

For town worker transportation in one Oregon berry community, they hired school busses with drivers at cost. A paid bus dispatcher located secondary dispatchers at several "pick-up" corners in town. Drivers recorded the number of pickers carried to each farmer. Then each paid his share.

Several Nebraska farmers employed town girls for the housework to free more experienced farm women for field work. In one Oklahoma community, they organized town high-school boys and some girls in groups of six, a teacher with each group, to shock the feed crops. Half a day at a time gave best results; only 2 half days a week for younger children.

*Some questions for people from town who are willing to help out with the harvest or other farm work.*—How should you make ready? What training and supervision are available for boys and girls, from town, helping out on the farms? For women from town? How much can you find out about conditions of farm employment in advance. What things should you guard against?

Get together with county farm leaders and talk these questions through.

### ***Workers from outside the community?***

Are you going to have to go outside your own farm and town community for part of your labor force this year?

The Government will help farmers get workers from a distance—from other countries as well as from other parts of this country. Agreements have been made with the Governments of Mexico, the Bahama Islands, and Jamaica for importing up to 65,000 workers in 1943.

*Some other groups that will be available.*—Two thousand three hundred conscientious objectors with farm background; ex-farmers deferred from military service; some of the 20,000 Japanese-Americans in War Relocation Centers who have farm experience; possibly some prisoners of war; men over 38 in the Army to be released for farm work on request; and men over 38 in nonessential jobs who have had dairy or general farm experience. Men under 45 in this last class who do not accept dairy farm jobs, when called by local war boards, may be reclassified and drafted for at least limited military service.

---

*United States Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Agricultural Economics in cooperation with the Extension Service, July 1943.*

What are reasonable conditions in agreements with workers brought from a distance, from the viewpoint of farmer and farm hand? What does a farmer owe his workers beyond what's in the agreement? What does a worker owe his employer?

For more information, ask your county agent, Farm Security supervisor, local agriculture teacher, or some member of the county war board. Or in town, inquire at schools, at the U. S. Employment Service, or at the Office of Civilian Defense.

All of these agencies and others unite under the leadership of the Extension Service in organizing and training a U. S. Crop Corps of 3,500,000 farm workers to turn out the "farmunitions" for victory in war and peace.

### ***To get somewhere in discussion***

*As sponsor of the meeting.*—Send this Guide to group members beforehand. Select one of the neighbors to serve as discussion leader. Notify him well in advance. Invite specialists and ex-farm workers from the factory to join in. Make everyone comfortable. Chairs in a circle. Introduce everybody.

*As member of the group.*—Enter into the discussion freely. Tell what you know and think. Speak briefly and to the point. Listen well. Reach for the truth. Check your prejudices. Everyone stay seated. Keep it one discussion.

*As leader of discussion.*—Study the Guide in advance. Ask others to study special parts. Prepare your own discussion plan, timely questions that matter most locally. *On every question get local experience and judgment into the open first.* Draw on material in the Guide whenever it is helpful.

Put questions to all or part of group as a rule, not to individuals. Keep your own view out of it mainly. Aim at 100-percent participation. Sum up discussion now and then. Keep it on the track. You want it to get somewhere. If you need another session to finish the job, plan one. Plan for action.

### **Background materials**

Ask your county agent for reading materials on farm labor. Particularly helpful are two of the Food Information—Farm Labor Campaign circulars:

No. 1. *Government's Farm Labor Program.*

No. 4. *Thumbnail Sketch of the U. S. Crop Corps.*

These are issued by the United States Department of Agriculture, Office of Information, Washington, D. C.

Your county agent can also tell you how to obtain motion pictures on farm labor.

### ***All out with the U. S. Crop Corps!***



Additional copies of this pamphlet may be obtained from your State Extension Service or the Office of Information, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.