

## Topic: What was it like to work tobacco?

### Activity 3

Students will read Elissa Papirno's "Migrants' Dissatisfaction Growing toward 'Tough' Tobacco Camps," Hartford Courant, Aug. 13, 1973. While they read, they should list the complaints of workers (that is, what their dissatisfactions are) and who are their allies and enemies?

Worker Dissatisfaction	Growers' Answer
Dissatisfactions:	
Allies:	
Enemies:	

Their charts might include:

<b>Migrants' Dissatisfaction Growing Toward "Tough" Tobacco Camps, Aug. 13, 1973</b>	<b>Growers' Answer</b>
Dissatisfactions: Wages in Puerto Rico Work hard Food bad Poor health care -No Spanish speakers in health facility; Dirty, crowded Living quarter squished - 4 men to a room, open bathrooms	

<b>Migrants' Dissatisfaction Growing Toward "Tough" Tobacco Camps, Aug. 13, 1973</b>	<b>Growers' Answer</b>
<p>Nothing to do in free time but sleep or drink</p> <p>No freedom</p> <p>Trouble caused by younger workers</p> <p>Workers arrested for drinking, disorderly conduct, political activity - thrown out of camps</p> <p>Want worker representation in yearly negotiation of the contract between the growers and the Puerto Rican labor department</p>	
<p>Allies:</p> <p>Springfield based New England Farmworkers council, funded by US Office of Economic Opportunity and the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare</p> <p>META - Ecumenical Ministry for Puerto Rican Farmworkers - church-funded group with specific goal of unionizing the workers.</p>	
<p>Enemies:</p> <p>Shade Growers Agricultural Association - barred</p> <p>META organizers from Camp Windsor</p> <p>Workers afraid they will get fired</p> <p>Puerto Rican Department of Labor supposed to be overseeing the camps</p>	

Have a discussion with the following questions:

- Do you think the workers are telling the truth?
- Is this article believable?
- This is an article that has been read by an editor. What would the editor require of Papirno, the writer?
- How does this information fit with what you thought in looking at the headlines in Activity 1?

## Topic: What was it like to work tobacco?

### Activity 4

Students will read "The Truth about Shade Tobacco Workers." This 1973, full-page ad was written by the Shade Growers Association to answer the dissatisfaction of the tobacco workers. The organization was made up of the owners of the three biggest tobacco companies and several smaller ones in the Tobacco Valley. Everyone should read the introduction. Then split the 9 sections among the class, take notes, and share your information.

Section	Key Points Addressing Dissatisfaction
1. Intro	
2. Living Quarters and Campus	
3. Puerto Rican Seasonal Workers	
4. Wage is One of Highest in Agriculture	
5. Recreation, Education, Religious Services	
6. Food	
7. Workers Enjoy Complete Freedom of Association	
8. Outside Efforts Resented by Workers	
9. Health Program is Nation's Finest	
10. The Association's Commitment	

After students have filled in the chart, they should go back to the first chart they filled out and share the information to see how the growers addressed each issue.

Class Discussion:

- After reading both pieces, what is believable in each?
- What do you not believe and why?
- What else might you do to find out what these camps and this work was like?
- Would you want to be a tobacco worker in the 1970s? Why or why not? Would you like to be a grower in the 1970s? Why or why not?

Below you will find a collection of articles about the tobacco workers and growers. The first two articles are included in the lesson. The others will give context and more information on the situation in the camps. Look at the dates of the articles to put them in chronological order.

## Migrants' Dissatisfaction Growing Toward 'Tough' Tobacco Camps

PAPIRNO, ELISSA

*The Hartford Courant* (1923-1991); Aug 13, 1973; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Hartford Courant

pg. 1

# Migrants' Dissatisfaction Growing Toward 'Tough' Tobacco Camps

By ELISSA PAPIRNO  
When Juan Maldonado was living in Puerto Rico, he earned \$1 an hour as a street sweeper. The \$37 he took home a week was not enough to support his wife and infant daughter so Maldonado came to work the tobacco fields of the Connecticut Valley.

Maldonado is one of 4,500 migrant workers who come to Connecticut and Massachusetts every year, under a contract signed by the Puerto Rican government and the Shade Tobacco Growers Agricultural Association and smaller growers. Reasons Vary

The men come for various reasons, but mostly they want to save some money to support their families in Puerto Rico—and perhaps to be able to buy a plot of land or a small house in their island homeland.

Adalberto Gomez, 23, is the sixth of seven children. His fa-

ther can't work, so he and his brother try to support the family. When Gomez couldn't find work in Puerto Rico, he went to the tobacco camps.

But, says Gomez, unless conditions improve, he doesn't intend to come back next year.

Another worker, Euclides Rodriguez, was out of work for four months in Puerto Rico. Before that, he had a job paying \$1.10 an hour, which wasn't enough to support his wife and two children.

**Life Is Tough**

Life in the camps is tough he says: the work is hard and the food is bad. But like many others who find themselves in camps in place like Windsor, Simsbury and Enfield, Rodriguez felt he had no choice.

Without a high school diploma, he could find no job. Factories require four years of high school. And work in agriculture, once the mainstay of the Puerto Rican economy and the job market for the unskilled, has now become scarce.

In just one five-year period in the late 1960s, as Puerto Rico developed industrially, land being used for tobacco cultivation was reduced to a sixth of

what it was previously. Sugar-cane land was cut back by more than 90,000 acres and coffee cultivation dropped drastically.

**Unemployment High**

As a result, Puerto Rico's official unemployment rate ranges between 11 and 15 per cent. And unofficial estimates go as high as 30 per cent of the island's working force.

So a job in Connecticut's tobacco fields paying \$1.90 an hour with free plane fare if the worker completes his contract, becomes an enticement.

That attraction soon disappears, though, when the worker reaches his Connecticut or Massachusetts destination.

**Pays Extra**

There he finds he's paying \$17.50 a week to the group for meals which many workers complain are poorly prepared and not sufficient to sustain them through an eight or nine-hour working day.

He pays 35 cents a week for medical insurance for care in a hospital with few Spanish-speaking persons on the staff and the same medication for every ailment, workers claim.

And he finds a living situation



**Euclides Rodriguez**

'Four months out of work' . . . 'Too much trouble in camps'



**Victor Rivera**

with four men crowded in a room and open bathrooms. The worker also finds very little to do in his free time after work except sleep or drink.

"It's deadly," says Gomez,

who says he won't return to the camps next year unless the food, living conditions and salaries improve.

"There's no freedom. It's dirty. The food is no good for a

working man," complains Angel Manuel Avilez, who said he would take any job anywhere—if it would pay \$3 an hour.

**Fear Trouble**

Many older workers, like Victor Rivera, can't stand the crowded conditions and the "trouble" they feel the younger workers make in the camps.

But the worst part is leaving a family behind for three, four, five, even six months. And for those who can't make it either physically or emotionally, there's a loss of that free passage back to Puerto Rico.

Tales abound of workers arrested unjustifiably—for drinking, disorderly conduct, political activity. These workers are promptly thrown out of the camps, with no place to go, and no ticket home.

Other complaints center on the growers' hospital. Manuel Hernandez had to stay in the hospital a week. While he was there, his pay was reduced to \$4 a day, hardly enough to support his mother and 10 brothers and sisters in Puerto Rico.

He said he and other workers had to leave the hospital to get their meals in the regular cafet-

eria. And those who were too sick to leave had to depend on friends to carry their food from the mess hall.

In an attempt to better conditions for the workers, two organizations have been working in the camps for the last two years.

One group is the Springfield-based New England Farmworkers Council, an agency funded by the U.S. Office of Economic Opportunity and the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. It attempts to provide basic health, social and educational services to the workers in the camps.

The other organization is META, or Ecumenical Ministry for Puerto Rican Farmworkers, a private, church-funded group with more specific unionizing aims.

Both have met with opposition from the Shade Tobacco Growers Agricultural Association, which recruits most of the workers to the area and oversees Camp Windsor, the largest

migrant camp in the state.

The growers earlier in the season barred META organizers from Camp Windsor, where they have been concentrating their organizing activities.

Farmworkers council medical personnel were also barred from most of the Connecticut camps.

But those prohibitions were struck down last week, when META agreed with attorneys for the growers on a settlement opening the camps to all persons visiting there for lawful purposes.

The agreement lasts until testimony is heard in September on a META case against the growers.

Some of the greatest resistance to the organizers, though, has come from the workers themselves. Many see their jobs at the camps as their last chance and are afraid to become involved with organizing groups.

See **DESPERATE**, Pg. 5, Col. 1

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**Display Ad 106 -- No Title**

The Hartford Courant (1923-1991); Aug 26, 1973; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Hartford Courant  
pg. 44A

# THE TRUTH ABOUT SHADE TOBACCO WORKERS

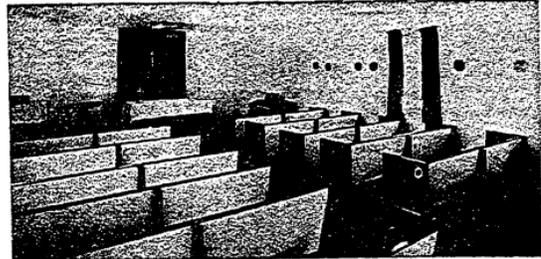
The Shade Tobacco Growers Agricultural Association and its members are currently the victims of what we believe to be a series of false and unsubstantiated attacks in the press and on radio and television distorting labor conditions of their workers. These charges have emanated from a small self-appointed and self-proclaimed "defender" of farm workers, the so-called Ecumenical Ministry to Puerto Rican Farmworkers (META). Although it represents itself as wanting to "organize" and "unionize" the workers, META is not a labor union and has no substantial support among the workers. Its leaders lack sufficient background or familiarity with the actual conditions in the labor camps to qualify as their spokesmen. Nevertheless, META's reckless, untrue and self-serving statements have been widely disseminated by local news media without adequate checking into either their accuracy or the group's background and true purposes and without an opportunity to the growers to fully respond to these unwarranted attacks.



**LIVING QUARTERS & CAMPUS**

The many distortions and misrepresentations of facts are causing community concern and threaten the stability of the shade tobacco industry and the employment opportunities extended to the thousands of workers who annually receive wages aggregating more than \$25 million. Not only is the payment of these wages a vital contribution to the economic welfare of Connecticut and Western Massachusetts, but the shade tobacco growers also make a total capital investment in the area of more than \$35 million annually in order to carry on their operations. The purchases of materials, supplies, and other items used by the shade tobacco industry are a major source of income to many local business concerns, all of which support jobs for many workers in this area.

One of the victims of this series of attacks upon the shade tobacco industry may be the Association's summer youth program. This model



**CHAPEL**

program is the largest single employer of 14, 15 and 16 year old students in the nation and has made possible the continuing education of hundreds of thousands in high school and college. The youth program has won high praise by educators and by members of Congress who have had occasion to review it. It is particularly important of this time, when jobs for teenagers are scarce and the federal government is spending hundreds of millions of dollars annually to provide summer work, to keep idle youth off city streets. Many of these teenagers are being discouraged from working on the shade tobacco farms because of the strife created by META's representatives.

There are many business and professional residents of the Connecticut River Valley who have in the past worked their way through school with the help of income earned during summer employment in shade tobacco. It would be most unfortunate if the present youth are denied the same opportunity as a result of META's misrepresentations.

## 'PUERTO RICAN SEASONAL WORKERS

The seasonal workers from Puerto Rico voluntarily come to this area to work in the shade tobacco fields. They select this employment, although other types of agricultural work in other areas of the United States are offered to them. Their presence here is in no way compulsory and is entirely a matter of their own choice. Many return here year after year.

These seasonal workers from Puerto Rico represent of the peak less than one tenth of the total labor force in shade tobacco. They are hired under regulations strictly enforced by the U.S. Department of Labor, the Massachusetts and Connecticut Departments of Labor and Agriculture and the Puerto Rican Government. They are hired only when acute shortages of local adult labor exists. They receive many advantages not accorded to other farm workers in the United States, including a minimum work guarantee of 120 hours every three weeks, employer subsidized meals, comprehensive health care, free housing, bonuses, their entire transportation cost from and to Puerto Rico are

compensation of their contract, and other benefits which the growers are required to guarantee by the Government of Puerto Rico.

These Puerto Rican workers are not exploited. They are actually high cost labor — enjoying earnings and benefits not accorded to most other farm laborers in the United States. Members of this group all work under an agreement negotiated on their behalf by the Puerto Rican Government. They have added protection by having available at all times the services of a representative of the Government of Puerto Rico who visits the camps regularly and to whom they bring complaints for prompt adjustment. These workers also democratically elect their own representatives to the New England Agricultural Workers Health Council, on which they are the majority, and they meet regularly with officials of the Association to discuss any matters of employment requiring adjustment. Attempts have been made to disrupt and prevent these elections, which are completely open and free.

## WAGE IS ONE OF HIGHEST IN AGRICULTURE

The present guaranteed minimum wage of these workers is \$1.90 an hour — far above the present federal minimum agricultural wage of \$1.30 an hour. The shade tobacco industry has always been far in advance of other segments of agriculture in wage standards and other labor conditions. The growers are paying one of the highest agricultural wages in the entire United States to all of their workers. The

\$1.90 hourly wage paid by the shade tobacco growers is higher than that paid to Puerto Rican agricultural workers in other states, including New Jersey, where the largest number are employed. It is much higher than these individuals could earn in Puerto Rico.

## RECREATION-EDUCATION-RELIGIOUS SERVICES

The Association provides many recreational facilities — all ignored in these attacks which have been directed primarily against Camp Windsor. These facilities include a recreation building, a baseball diamond and a basketball court. The Association furnishes sport equipment and uniforms for softball teams in competition with teams of other camps. Indoor and outdoor television is provided. Free movies, with feature films, are shown three evenings a week. There are educational programs, including the teaching of English and health education.

Spanish language programs are transmitted from F.M. broadcasting radio stations throughout the camp.

A chapel provided by the Association at Camp Windsor is attended by the workers of all religious faiths. Bilingual services are conducted by ministers of the various faiths on Sundays and various secular days of the week.

All workers are encouraged to participate in and enjoy these activities.



**DINING HALL**

The Shade Tobacco Growers Agricultural Association years ago pioneered in establishing a high standard of food in consultation with experts from the U.S. Department of Labor and dietitians from the University of Puerto Rico. Menus meeting these standards and furnishing in excess of 2500 calories are served daily. There are no restrictions on the quantity each worker may eat in the Association's dining room. The menus are regularly submitted to the Puerto Rican government for their approval. The kitchen and the dining room facilities are sub-



**HOSPITAL**

ject to unannounced inspections by the Connecticut Health Department. The workers are charged \$2.50 for three well-balanced meals a day, well below the cost of these meals to the growers. Officials and the staff of the Association daily eat the same food from the same kitchens as that prepared for the workers. The Association will continue to meet the high standards it has set with respect to the quality and quantity of the food.

## FOOD

## WORKERS ENJOY COMPLETE FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

The workers enjoy complete freedom of movement and association. They take pride in their freedom, independence, dignity and their own ability to enjoy their rights as U.S. citizens. All workers are free to leave and return to the camp at will and they do so regularly, on residents and businessmen in the area are well aware from the workers' frequent visits and shopping in Windsor, Hartford, Springfield and other nearby communities. There are absolutely no restrictions on the workers' freedom of movement or association. However, to prevent visits to the camp by dope pushers, gamblers and similar undesirable, and to maintain order at night when the workers want to rest

and sleep, the Association has required visitors in the camp to first identify themselves and ordinarily to make such visits during regular visiting hours. Reasonable exceptions have always been made when necessary. A fence around the camp, except at the entrance thereof, helps to protect the privacy of the workers and their right not to be constantly annoyed against their wishes by outsiders. There is no gate at the main entrance to Camp Windsor and there never has been.

## OUTSIDE EFFORTS RESENTED BY WORKERS

The vast majority of Puerto Rican workers protest the activities of outside organizers which have infringed upon the workers' right to privacy, prevented many of them from going to work when they wanted to do so, and created disruptions that have caused serious concern to local law enforcement officials.

With such a large community interest at stake, it is difficult to understand why the local press, radio and television stations have given such prominent attention to misrepresentations and distortions of fact relating to the shade tobacco industry that have come from an organization of a political character that has denounced the United States as "imperialistic" and seeks to embarrass the democratic govern-

ment of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico by attacking the farm labor program. This organization has openly announced that its intention is to halt the hiring of all Puerto Rican farm workers in the United States and destroy the migrant farm worker program, although this program provides these workers for better wages and working conditions — and many more jobs — than are available in Puerto Rico, where the unemployment rate recently dropped to a low of 12.5 percent. Instead of trying to protect the workers and improve their working conditions, this organization has urged the workers to "tear up their contracts," which are their legal guarantee of work and fair working conditions. Its only real goal for the workers is to send them home without a job or savings.

## HEALTH PROGRAM IS NATION'S FINEST

The Association for many years has had in operation what is undoubtedly the best and most comprehensive program of health care for agricultural workers that exists in the country, under which efforts are made to seek out and control all contagious diseases, including tuberculosis. This program has been carried on with the full cooperation of the Connecticut State Health Department for more than 20 years, and it includes chest X-rays, which doctors and health authorities recognize as the best and only reliable test for tuberculosis. When the Council of Connecticut discontinued its free chest X-rays for the workers a year ago, the Association, instead of shifting to the less costly but

available time test, purchased its own X-ray equipment in order to provide the best possible protection to the workers. More than a million dollars has been invested by the shade tobacco growers in the Association's health care program. The new Agricultural Workers Hospital in Windsor, Connecticut, which cost the growers more than \$350,000, was opened in 1971 and is the only state-financed hospital for farm workers in the entire nation. With the help of a grant under the Migrant Health Act, the Association last year began providing the workers a complete medical program of both outpatient and hospital health care, which even includes free dental treatments.

August 26, 1973

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE-LaborAndWorkingClassHistory>

# Desperate Migrant Workers See Camps as Only Way Out

(Continued From Page 1)

Relations between META and the farmworkers council have not been the best either, as the groups have differing ideologies and often compete for the support of the same workers.

But, despite the differences and the workers' fears of involvement, most workers interviewed agreed that the food in the camps is poor.

Medical services, they said, are inadequate and the living

conditions leave much to be desired.

There also is a feeling that the migration division of the Puerto Rican Department of Labor, which is supposed to oversee the camps, has actually done very little to protect the rights of the workers.

The department maintains a mainland office in New York and a field office in Hartford.

Other activists insist on the inclusion of worker representatives in the yearly negotiation of the contract between the grow-

ers and the Puerto Rican labor department.

In this way, they say, the workers' rights will be better protected.

As a result of much of the focus of political activity now is being shifted to the Puerto Rican government.

It is the island's economy and persistent unemployment that force the workers to come to the Connecticut Valley to work. So the big push to improve conditions for the workers here can be better made in Puerto Rico.

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## Tobacco Workers Struggle Against Poverty, Despair

SARAH POLLOCK Courant Staff Writer

*The Hartford Courant* (1923-1991); Aug 3, 1981; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Hartford Courant  
pg. B1

# Tobacco Workers Struggle Against Poverty, Despair

By SARAH POLLOCK  
Courant Staff Writer

Two dozen men ranging from late teens to mid-50s crowded the sweltering offices of the New England Farm Workers Council on a recent Monday morning, sitting with chins in hands, leaning against walls, lounging on a stairway.

Outside it was raining, a minor inconvenience for most Hartford residents. However, the rain meant the loss of a day's pay for these Hispanic farm workers who were waiting for assistance.

"I need another job, but I can't find it," said Juan Marciano, 20, speaking through a translator.

For the past four years, since he arrived on the mainland from Puerto Rico, Marciano has worked from March to December in the fields of a Windsor Locks nursery. During those months, he said, he starts at 7 a.m. and works until 4 p.m., earning \$3.45 an hour.

What does he do during the winter months? "Collect," he said with a bitter smile.

Marciano said he finds it difficult to support his wife and year-old boy on his income. Today he has come

for help in paying the \$130 rent due on his four-room flat.

When even the help isn't enough, he said, he panhandles.

Nancy Melendez, director of the New England Farm Workers Council, said the council had 1,000 clients in the last year. She believes there are several thousand more people working in the fields who haven't used her office's services.

A decade ago, men like Marciano came to Connecticut in droves, lured by the promise of jobs in the tobacco fields of the Connecticut River Valley. For the chance to earn more than they could on the island, they seemed willing to work the long, hot hours that local laborers shunned.

Then came a short-lived rebellion.

In the mid-70s the workers began to talk union and formed the Puerto Rican Farm Workers Association — *Asociacion de Trabajadores Agricolas*. They joined forces with Cesar Chavez's United Farm Workers, but they had no protection under state law and the tobacco grow-

See Workers, Page B3



A worker on a tobacco farm in Glastonbury chops tobacco plants on a summer day. Social workers say that as

the tobacco industry has declined in Connecticut, citizens have lost interest in the plight of tobacco workers.

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**Continued from Page B1**

ers refused to recognize the association as a bargaining agent for the workers.

Almost simultaneously, the Connecticut Valley tobacco industry began its decline and in 1975 started to depend primarily on local labor. The Shade Tobacco Growers Association stopped bringing in Puerto Ricans from the island to do the hot stoop-work. The movement to better their working conditions receded into the background.

Now, advocates for the farmworkers say, many of the conditions that prompted the public concern of the 1970s still exist, but the farm workers' cause is no longer in vogue.

In the mid-1960s and early '70s, "a lot of the abuses were brought out for the first time," said Luis Quintana, a lawyer for Neighborhood Legal Services' farm workers project.

In response, a number of laws were passed, which afforded the farm workers rights to unemployment compensation and the minimum wage. Other new laws mandated outreach and job-training programs to help farm workers gain skills and move into better-paying and less-taxing jobs.

"The problem is whether those (laws) were actually carried out," Quintana said. "The answer is no, at least in Connecticut. . . . I think once those were passed, everybody let it die."

"The conditions are not better. They still work long hours and are subject to abuse by individual foremen," Quintana said. "This is almost a feudal, Middle Ages type of thing."

Officials in the state Department of Labor, who are in charge of the mandated programs, believe the laws have been complied with, but concede the overall picture has improved only slightly.

The biggest problem now, Labor Department officials say, is that the number of agricultural jobs is rapidly diminishing with the decline of the tobacco industry and the loss of farmland to developers. With that in mind, they say, one of the most important tasks ahead is to move the workers into other occupations.

The main aims of the union movement were to end the mass shipping of workers to and from Puerto Rico and to negotiate an agreement to benefit the workers, said Alan Rom, a lawyer for the short-lived farm workers' association.

It worked in the sense that the migration stopped, but the economic thrust of the union's effort never materialized, Rom says.

One improvement is that the migrant camps of previous decades are almost gone. The few remaining camps are used almost exclusively for teenagers who come to work in Connecticut during the summer.

The main goal of the Neighborhood Legal Services legal project is to iden-

tify where farm workers are, inform them of their rights, and try to ensure that the gains that have been made for them are enforced, Quintana said.

Labor Department officials say there is a follow-up system — but it depends upon the workers coming to the department, for the most part. Funding is inadequate and there is only one man to go out to the fields statewide to encourage laborers to use assistance programs.

Currently, fewer than 100 workers are registered in a program designed to move them out of farm work and into other jobs, department officials said.

The problems faced by farm workers are manifold. Aside from their working conditions, their major problem is housing, Melendez said.

Moreover, the working season for farm workers is, at most, seven months — from May to December — and often shorter. During the rest of the year the workers have trouble finding other jobs because they often speak no English and have no other skills, Melendez said.

Even when the workers have acquired other skills, she said, employers are reluctant to hire them. A government-funded work training program for the farm workers has floundered since it began because the council can't find jobs in which to place the workers, she said.

Under the program, the council pays 50 percent to 100 percent of the workers' salaries while private employers train them as welders, computer programmers, machinists, clerical workers and secretaries.

At the end of a six-month training period, the employers are expected to hire the workers. But the council's goal of finding jobs for 127 people through the program between October 1980 and October 1981 appears now to be impossible — so far, only 60 have been placed, Melendez said.

When the season ends, most of the workers have no alternative but to collect the \$46-a-week unemployment to which they are entitled and take the rest from city welfare, he said.

**Local Labor Aim Of Tobacco Union**

PAPIRNO, ELISSA

*The Hartford Courant (1923-1991)*; Mar 13, 1976; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Hartford Courant  
pg. 4

# Local Labor Aim Of Tobacco Union

**By ELISSA PAPIRNO**

The head of a group seeking to unionize tobacco workers Friday said his group will shift its organizing efforts this year to local workers.

The Puerto Rican Farmworkers Association in the past had aimed to organize migrant workers living in tobacco camps.

But tobacco growers have said they don't intend to hire any migrant workers this year and will depend primarily on local help.

**To Open Centers**

Juan Irizarry, president of the association, said the

group will open service and organizing centers in the cities that provide most of the tobacco work force, including Hartford.

The tobacco union also hopes to recruit local organizers from Cesar Chavez's United Farm Workers Union to help in their organizing effort, Irizarry said. The association has been trying to merge with the UFW since last summer.

Irizarry's Farmworkers Association two years ago threatened a tobacco strike during the peak harvest period to obtain recognition as the sole bargaining agent for migrants, but worker support was lacking.

The association now is seeking official recognition as a union in Puerto Rico.

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**Farmer Groups, Labor Unions Girding for Power Struggle**

Martin, Ovid A

*The Hartford Courant* (1923-1991); Oct 16, 1966; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Hartford Courant pg. 52A**Battle of 1967****Farmer Groups, Labor Unions Girding for Power Struggle**By OVID A. MARTIN  
AP Farm Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The big news in agriculture next year is likely to be on the farm labor front.

Labor unions are laying the groundwork for an all-out drive to get a foothold in agriculture for the eventual organization of the great bulk of farm workers, especially seasonal workers engaged by larger farm operators.

Organized farm groups are getting set to battle the unionization campaign. In the forefront of opposition will be the American Farm Bureau Federation, the largest general farm organization. It is particularly strong in states which grow crops needing large numbers of seasonal workers.

The impending battle may be three-cornered, with labor divided. Both the AFL-CIO and the Teamsters are expected to campaign to set up their own local farm labor unions. They have come into strong, and sometimes bitter, opposition in organizational efforts in California.

**State Situation**

The 1967 farm labor unionization efforts are expected to expand from California and Texas into Florida, New Jersey, Michigan and other states using a high percentage of transient labor. If they gain footholds in

these states, the labor organizations would reach into other states in 1968 and following years.

No efforts have been made to organize Connecticut's farm workers, the Connecticut State Labor Council said this week.

The only agricultural business employing a significant number of workers is tobacco growing. Many of the workers who harvest tobacco, the council said, are high school students who would not be organized.)

The AFL-CIO has set up a new national United Farm Workers organization committee and is preparing to provide it with large funds and skilled manpower. Cesar Chavez, a colorful California farm labor leader, heads the new committee.

Most farm operators oppose unionization of farm workers and compulsory bargaining in agriculture because they believe farming is unduly vulnerable to strikes.

The Farm Bureau, for example, has stated repeatedly in resolutions that "farmers are far more vulnerable to work interruptions than any other employers because their crops must be harvested when ready." A strike, they say, could bar harvesting and result in the loss of a farmer's complete year's effort.

No such vulnerability exists, they say, in industry.

Farm operators also argue that harvests lost as a result of strikes could adversely affect consumer supplies and prices of food.

"Compulsory collective bargaining by unions for farm workers," the Farm Bureau says, "would not result in equalization of bargaining power, but rather the submission of farmers to labor union leaders."

The impending efforts to organize farm workers will be primarily in states which pay the highest wages.

California, for example, has been paying the highest farm wages in the country — an average of \$1.49 an hour this summer. This, of course, is far above the farm minimum wage of \$1 which will go into effect on Feb. 1 next year. It is even above the minimum of \$1.30 which becomes effective Feb. 1, 1969, under minimum wage legislation passed by Congress this year.

In New Jersey, a state already encountering agitation for unionization of agricultural workers, the wage had been averaging \$1.41 an hour. In only 15 states have this summer's farm wages averaged less than the \$1 minimum. These states are mostly in the South.

Efforts at unionization will be

made in states where the farm labor supply is the tightest, primarily those which must depend on outside workers. Union leaders figure it will be easier to organize in such areas because of the short workers supply.

The impending farm unionization campaign is expected to be a top problem to be discussed at fall and winter conventions of farm organizations.

## 6 Tobacco Workers Join META Group

Pappas, Nancy

*The Hartford Courant* (1923-1991); Jul 24, 1973; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Hartford Courant  
pg. 16

# 6 Tobacco Workers Join META Group

By NANCY PAPPAS

Six tobacco workers at a migrant camp in Windsor signed up Monday to work with a Hartford-based group which has been trying to organize there.

The men—all Puerto Rican laborers brought up for the summer to work out of Camp Windsor—will remain at their jobs while organizing on behalf of the Ecumenical Ministry to Puerto Rican Farmworkers.

"They will carry on now that we're not allowed to enter the camp," said the Rev. Wilfredo Velez of Bridgeport, a worker for the organization, whose Spanish initials are META.

Camp officials have barred the Rev. Mr. Velez and another META worker from Camp Windsor since the pair were arrested last Wednesday after allegedly disobeying an order to leave.

The Rev. Mr. Velez said the six volunteers approached him at a demonstration outside the camp entrance Sunday afternoon.

The Rev. Mr. Velez and two other META workers were back at the camp gates Monday night, talking with workers.

Anthony F. Amenta, executive director of the Shade Tobacco Growers Agricultural Association which runs the camp, said early Monday he would allow Sister Betsy Flynn, a META worker, into the camp to give her regular English lessons.

But later in the day, according to camp director Edward Talbot, Amenta rescinded the ruling and told him not to let Sister Betsy inside.

Amenta said he didn't think

META had much support among the 600 workers at the camp.

"The workers are very concerned this will hurt their opportunity to work," said Amenta.

He said he believed META was connected with the Puerto Rican liberation movement, which is seeking an end to the island's status as a United States commonwealth.

"We're not tied to any political party, but we feel the result of migration and exploitation is connected with the colonial status of Puerto Rico," said the Rev. Mr. Velez.

"The empire usually exploits the resources of the colony, and in this case it's human resources," he asserted.

He said the tobacco workers are exploited by low wages and unfair contract conditions. The men work under a contract negotiated by the growers association and the Puerto Rican government.

The contract guarantees workers at least 120 hours of work every three weeks, at \$1.90 per hour. Deductions from an average week's salary of \$90 include \$17.50 for board, 65 cents for insurance, and a percentage for Social Security, said Amenta. An average week's work amounts to about 50 hours, he said.

The air fare from San Juan to New York—ranging from \$60 to \$80 depending on the time of year—is also deducted from the salaries.

If a worker completes his contract, he receives a free ticket back to Puerto Rico, said

Amenta.

But if he leaves early, or gets fired, "he's on his own" after receiving wages due him, he added.

Last year, about 35 per cent of the 3,500 association contract laborers completed the full contract, Amenta said.

The META organizers painted a different salary picture.

One of the six new organizers said his last week's gross pay of \$83.50 was reduced to \$25.92 after deductions.

Another said he cleared \$35 out of \$100 earnings.

A worker at the camp, not connected with META, said he cleared from \$55 to \$79 weekly, depending on the hours worked.

But out of that sum, he said, he was supporting a wife and two children in Puerto Rico. He could find no work on the island, he added.

Talbot said no reprisals would be taken against workers who talked with the META organizers.

"I don't even know who they are, and I don't care," he said.

In a related development, Mayor Athanson—who also attended the Sunday demonstration—said Monday he had asked two members of the New England Farmworkers Council to prepare a report on camp working conditions and pay.

As chairman of the Hartford Area Manpower Planning Council, Athanson said he felt he should "ascertain the nature and extent of the problems. Yesterday I got some conflicting facts and opinions."

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**Conflict Spurs Camp Protest**

Kreig, Andrew

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# Conflict Spurs Camp Protest

By **ANDREW KREIG**

Controversy about visiting rights to a migrant workers camp in Windsor prompted a vigorous demonstration outside the camp gates late Sunday afternoon.

At least 80 persons from Hartford, including Mayor Athanson, mingled with several hundred workers from Camp Windsor at the demonstration. Athanson was initially prevented by authorities from going inside the camp.

Among those from Hartford were more than a dozen placard-waving chanting members of the Spanish-speaking community and 50 choir singers from Mt. Olive Baptist Church.

The demonstration was called

to protest the expulsion from the camp of three workers of the Ecumenical Ministry to Puerto Rican Farmworkers, a Hartford organization based at 1373 Main St.

The Rev. Wilfredo Velez of Bridgeport and Juan Irizarry Valentin of Springfield were arrested by Windsor police Wednesday on the complaint of camp authorities. They were charged with first-degree criminal trespass after they allegedly refused camp authorities' orders to leave.

On Friday Sister Betsy Flynn of the Sisters of Notre Dame in Hartford was ordered to leave the camp, and she did.

All three are members of the organization, whose initials are META in Spanish. META is supported by seven Hartford

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# Conflict Sparks Camp Protest

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area churches, a spokesman said.

Besides an English language teaching program, META has been urging the tobacco workers to organize themselves to better their working conditions.

Sister Betsy said META has collected about 135 signatures from the tobacco workers asking that access to the camp, which is on private property, not be restricted from META workers or anyone else. Hartford's Mayor Athanson said he came to the camp to see what the conditions were, and to see how hard it was for outsiders to enter.

Athanson said he was interested in the matter in his capacity as Chairman of the Hartford Area Manpower Planning Council.

He said he was also concerned about the camp's workers as they affect the employment situation in Hartford, and they come into the city for recreation.

Athanson was denied entrance to the camp at the gate for about half an hour, while Camp Windsor officials conferred.

Camp Director Edward C. Talbot said only Executive Director of the Shade-Tobacco Association, Anthony F. Amenta, could make the decision to let the mayor inside.

After Amenta was contacted Athanson was given permission to enter the camp, along with a Courant reporter and photographer, and a camera crew for the WTIC-TV "What's Happening" show.

Brañ Davis, cohost of the show, said he was barred from coming into the camp with a camera last Thursday.

Others outside the gates except for workers were not given permission to enter at the time although later camp spokesmen said only META workers would be banned from the camp during regular visiting hours.

Visiting hours run from 6 to 9 p.m. on weekdays and from about 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. Sundays, Talbot said.

The Rev. Richard A. Battles of the Mt. Olive Baptist Church said his 55-member choir came to the camp to show their concern for the workers after questions about access to the camp arose. Battles, who is former chairman of the Hartford Board of Education, noted that about 150 tobacco workers from the camp are bused into his church for Sunday services.

Athanson said he wanted to talk with the tobacco workers, but said without Sister Betsy to act as his interpreter there would be little point in his walking through the camp.

He stayed for more than an hour, however, talking to the nun, the Rev. Mr. Velez, camp authorities and Windsor police, including Chief Julian P. Darman.

Athanson expressed great interest in a statement by the Rev. Mr. Velez that a former government official of Puerto Rico would come to a 2 p.m. rally at the camp next Sunday.

The mayor was shown a news clipping saying that the speaker, Marco Rigau, was fired from his job as labor director of the Migratory Labor Bureau of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico because of his "firm hand" with U.S. labor contractors.

After the group from the Mt. Olive Church and the mayor left, the tone of the demonstration gradually changed.

Some of the camp workers began loudly jeering at some of the demonstrators from Hartford, although not at any of the clergymen.

To the obvious delight of camp officials and some of the police, the shouting workers yelled "go home" and insults to the placard-holders.

As a car of Spanish-speaking demonstrators, including several women, was leaving the scene, two tobacco workers threw soda cans at the car while dozens of others cheered.

The Rev. Mr. Velez said that some of this attitude was motivated by the workers' fear for their jobs. He and Sister Betsy said they know of several men who have been fired for expressing attitudes about their rights

offensive to the management.

William A. Donahue, placement director of the camp, denied that anyone has been fired for their political attitudes. He also said only one tobacco worker was active in the demonstration, and that no action would be taken against him.

Donahue said there are about 600 workers presently in the camp. They earn a minimum of \$1.90 an hour and work an average of a 50 hours a week, he said.

Donahue said the META workers were barred from the camp because they violated visiting hour rules.

Sister Betsy denied this, and said she was expelled from the camp on Friday at 6:30 p.m. Atty. David M. Shehan, general counsel for the group, said he is preparing legal briefs to fight the bans and the arrests of the META workers.