

The Farm
Frank Miyamoto
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5 p'

Harno came over today at lunchtime to invite me to the farm with his technical staff. We left shortly after 1:00 p.m. on a small truck. There were eleven men including the driver; some were entomologists, other soil specialists, a couple just visiting like myself. Frank Taniguchi, who used to barber up in Seattle, but also lived on the farm at Kent, Wash., was along and I picked up conversation with him. He's not working at the barber shop at present, but is cutting hair at home for his friends. He let out a sigh as of relief just as we drove out the gate. "Feels good to get out doesn't it?" He said this~~to~~ to everyone in general, but there was no response from those who have been travelling this course frequently. However, the tech. staff, mostly young fellows, were standing up on the truck, looking around the countryside. There is unquestionably a feeling of freedom in leaving the cantonnement. Some of the technical staff drove beyond limits which they should have gone, not so long ago; a sneak probably caused by the urgency to get beyond the control of their present restrictions.

The farm is some seven miles down the highway, and then a mile into the countryside by a dirt road. Some of the fellows told of a few farmers getting off at a certain farm by this country road and asking for some strawberries growing on a plot there. The woman became frightened and phoned the local constable, but the next time the farmers just went in and took the strawberries. This was the story.

As we entered the gateway of the farm, where a sign stands indicating that this is a government game preserve, we immediately came in sight of the ramshackle messhall where we once had a recreation group picnic for Chie Aoki. About ten men were sitting around there chatting, and they looked up and stared at us as we drove slowly by. The technical staff is an object of resentment because of their white collar position in the office, and yet their failure to

come out and work with the farmers. They seem to present a superior status, but in the farmer's eyes, these 'kids' don't know anything. We went straight out to the fields.

By contrast with the small farms that we saw dotting the countryside as we came out, this project is an enormous one. Hundreds of acres of potatoes, barley, turnips, cabbages, and other green vegetables stretch out across the flat valley. Harno tells me there are some 600 acres of potatoes, about as much of barley, and the remainder of some 2500 acres in other green vegetables. Out on the potato farm, a group of ten men were irrigating. The technical staff jumped out to measure the depth of moisture where irrigation had already been finished for the day. Harno and I took to our feet, and started a trek of some half mile across the soft loamy soil on the edge of the potato field. Irrigation ditches ran the length of these fields, and we walked through one of the dry ones because of its firmer footing. Farm workers stopped to stare at us as we walked by where they were irrigating or weeding. Knowing the feeling which existed a week ago at the time of the strike among the farm workers, I wondered what their thoughts about us at this moment were as we walked along seemingly without anything better to do than to observe what they were or were not doing. A gang of men were lying in the shade of a field truck, resting at the end of a row which they had been weeding. They, too gave us cold stares.

Harno and I joined two foremen of a weeding crew, Mizutani and Kato, the latter being the Issei chairman of the mass meeting during the week end of the strike.

Harno: "You goin' to start harvesting pretty soon?"

Mizutani (A Nisei): "Yeh, we'll be getting at the turnips pretty soon. They're getting to be a nice size. You ought to see them, they're this big. (Indicates size of a large turnip with his hands) Don't want to get them too big. Young ones are better." Kato agreed to this. The conversation is a mixture of English and Japanese, for Kato is an Issei. Mizutani mixes his lang-

uages so that one hardly knows which one he's speaking.

Kato: "Have you heard anything in the office about how their going to market these crops?" Harno indicated ignorance about the matter. Hudson is working with Tomita on the problem, and hasn't spoken to Harno about it. Harno is the office contact man for some of these foremen, it seems. There seems to exist a certain lack of control by these foremen over their own situation due to their lack of contact with the office. This is indicated in the way they pump Harno on office policies and action. Harno on his part pumps the foremen for information about the farm since he otherwise would have little ~~with~~ contact with it.

Mizutani; You know what kind of crates their going to get us? I hope it's the kind with four slabs on the bottom instead of three. The ones with only three aren't any good, except for shipping. The boards are too wide apart and damages the vegetables when they stick out. We had trouble with them on our farm." (These men draw constantly on their past experience to improve, or try to improve their work situation here. Comparisons are constantly being made in terms of what they used to have, or didn't have.) "When we start harvesting, we ought to have trailers with rubber tires. If the axles just wide enough so the tires fit between three rows, a Fordson can pull it because they just fit these rows." (He goes into a detailed analysis of how the thing used to be done at home, and could be done here.) "It works darn good, and they you trip the cart at the end of the row and trucks can pick them up. When you harvest cauliflowers, you have to raise the platform on the trailer because it damages the tall plants otherwise. A sled wouldn't work, it damages the crops." There is apparent interest in methods of handling the crop to get the best results--much discussion of it among old hands who have farmed their own tract for many years--and there is pride in doing the thing properly.

Harno: "How are the workers feeling now."

Mizutani: "Well, they're all right. They were kicking about gloves the

other day. I kept asking Fred to get me some, but he never did anything about it. Finally, I saw Callam out in the field one day so I asked him for gloves because the men were kicking about it, and he got it for me in two days. But the thing came back on me, everything has to go through Fred now. You know how Fred is, he's afraid to ask for anything."

Harno: "Aki's better in that respect. When he wants something, he'll go out after it."

Mizutani: "Well, I wouldn't ask for something if I thought it was too much to ask. But gloves don't cost much, and the men need it. Some things you can't get even if you raised hell about it, but they ought to be willing to give us gloves. They only cost a little."

Kato: "I guess we'll find out what's going to happen with the farm trouble when Shirrell gets back. But I don't believe in strikes here on this farm. I talked to some of the men in the field after the trouble, and they agreed with me, at least 90% of them agreed with me. I think it's better to negotiate for what you want while working. Many of the agitators last week were those not working on the farm here. They're the type that just go around making trouble. That's why I say that we ought to have our farm meetings here instead of in the camp where every other trouble maker shows up. We can get things settled much more suitably here. This is wartime, and lots of people outside aren't getting things we're asking for. I was in the last war, and I'm a citizen by that right. But I understand how the Japanese feel. Still, I don't think the Issei should make unreasonable demands."

We followed Kato and Mizutani around looking at the crops. They took considerable pride in the fine radishes and turnips that were coming up. They were already thinking of next year, of the crops that could be grown here, and those that would not grow. They offered us some to take home.

We walked back to the messhall. Water cans were scattered about wherever men were at work. The workers didn't show that vigor with which they used

to work on their own farms. They were more like the cannery workers I'd seen in Alaska in the pre-canning season before they were at their assigned work, cleaning up warehouses and getting equipment ready. These men took things easy, rested much, and worked in crews much larger than was efficient.

Harno wanted the technical staff to stay out until about 3:45 when the farm workers would quit also, but the staff wanted to go home. Harno doesn't seem to like driving them, so he took them at their wish. We took a different route home driving along the irrigation ditch. This route gave us an even more vivid picture of the enormity of the project. We stopped at a pumping station in the ditch to observe little fish which ran in large schools near one of the water outlets. The boys fooled around as if they were back in their schoolboy days, trying to fish up the minnows with nets. All along the way home, one of the bug specialists rode on the front fender with his net in one hand, trying to catch a few varieties of grasshoppers. We derided him for his laziness in trying to catch the bugs from an automobile, and shouted encouragement as he nabbed a few and missed others.

As we came out on the main highway, some of the boys shouted for a halt at the wayside grocery. We all piled out and ordered pop. We looked around at things we might want but couldn't get at the canteen. Some white workers came driving up at the moment also to get pop. They looked at us askance. I wondered what they were thinking of us.