

Migrant labor
(1951)

Colorado Tale...



A Colorado Mountain . . . of Sugar Beets

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published by

THE NATIONAL CHILD LABOR COMMITTEE
419 FOURTH AVENUE NEW YORK 16, N. Y.

Colorado has 47,000 farms on 36,000,000
acres, valued at more than \$564,000,000.



COLORADO TALE

The National Child Labor Committee, in the summer of 1950, was requested by Walter F. Johnson, then Governor of Colorado, to undertake a comprehensive field study of migrant farm labor in the State. A factual report embodying the findings of the study, including 56 tables and several pages of recommendations, has been submitted to Governor Thornton.

Realizing that few people would read a thirty thousand word research document, the Committee dramatized the facts in this short pamphlet, *Colorado Tale*, which could more appropriately be used as educational material by civic groups in Colorado interested in improving migrant conditions.

Colorado Tale is based on the field study and every statement was checked with the factual material in the full report.

Most of the photographs of living and working conditions were taken in Colorado and include illustrations of good facilities occasionally provided for migrants. Of the Colorado photographs, six were taken by the field staff during the study, two were secured from the University of Denver, and one from the United States Department of Agriculture (photos on pages 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14 and 16, lower right).

Of the remaining photographs, four deal with the transportation of interstate migrant workers. A few are obviously symbolic. All were carefully checked as to their validity as a portrayal of conditions found during the study.

Additional copies of *Colorado Tale* will be sent without cost to anyone in Colorado. The full report, *Migrant Farm Labor in Colorado*, is available at \$1.25 a copy.

NATIONAL CHILD LABOR COMMITTEE

419 Fourth Avenue

New York 16, New York

Colorado Tale...

Σ New York, 1951?]

A million migratory farm laborers roam over the rich acres of America to help cultivate the soil and harvest the crops which feed and clothe us.

Drifting restlessly from one state to another in search of work and a better life for themselves and their children, they enrich each community by their labor—but remain impoverished themselves.

They eat less, wear worse clothing, live in more wretched housing, and have less education, less medical care, and less legal protection than any other group of American workers.

They are first sought after—and then rejected. As crops mature, farmers anxiously await their arrival; after the crops are harvested there is equal anxiety for their

departure. On their journey, they belong to no community and no community claims them as its own.

One million migratory farm laborers in the Nation working on a quarter of a million farms . . . from 15,000 to 20,000 migrants in the State of Colorado . . .

At the invitation of the Governor of Colorado, the National Child Labor Committee investigated conditions in the State's four principal farming areas in the summer and fall of 1950, to see how its army of migrants live and work . . . More than 1500 men, women and children in 260 families were interviewed and observed.

Here is the Colorado Tale . . .

The full, documented report of this investigation has been presented to the Governor of Colorado.



THE STATE OF COLORADO
EXECUTIVE CHAMBERS
DENVER

WALTER W. JOHNSON
GOVERNOR

June 1, 1950

Mrs. Gertrude Folks Zimand
General Secretary
National Child Labor Committee
419 - 4th Avenue
New York 16, New York

Dear Mrs. Zimand:

As you probably know, the State of Colorado has a Governor's Survey Committee on Migrant Labor to study the tremendous and current problem of the migratory agricultural workers.

The members of this Committee are extremely enthusiastic in studying this problem, and I am sure that they will arrive at sincere and effective recommendations.

When this Committee met with me last month, I was asked to write the National Child Labor Committee to do a field study in Colorado as soon as possible, to assist our local group. I am writing this letter to inquire if it will be possible for your National Committee to gather and tabulate up-to-date information on migratory workers in Colorado.

Your assistance in this study will be very advantageous to the State of Colorado, and I would appreciate hearing from you as soon as possible.

Sincerely yours,

Walter W. Johnson
GOVERNOR



We the people... ♦ ♦ ♦

We are migrants . . .

We are 1500 adults and children.

Our faces may seem to you to be the faces of strangers, different from your own in complexion and appearance. But most of us are Americans, Spanish-speaking Americans. A few are Negro, a few Indian . . .

We have come from Texas and New Mexico and Missouri and Oklahoma and from other places to work in the fields of Colorado. Many of us were here last year and the year before and even longer ago than that, but for a quarter of us, this is our first season here.

We have come here by car and by truck. Some of us were told by government agents that there was plenty of work for us in your fields. And others of us were driven here in the trucks of labor contractors who promised us good wages and nice homes to live in.

Many of us have taken along what furniture we have, for we make our home wherever we work. And we have taken along our wives and our children, three fourths of whom are not yet 15 years. Many are too young to travel long distances, but where would we leave them otherwise? And it is not good, is it, for a family to be separated for very long?

. . . even if we are migrants.

We have come here to weed your onions, hoe your beets, harvest your potatoes and tomatoes and peaches. We work at a crop for a short time—sometimes only a week or two and then move on to another place and another man's crop. This is the way it is with us. What else can we do when we finish our work in one place?

Right now one out of every six of our adults has no work to do. We would like to work more often and

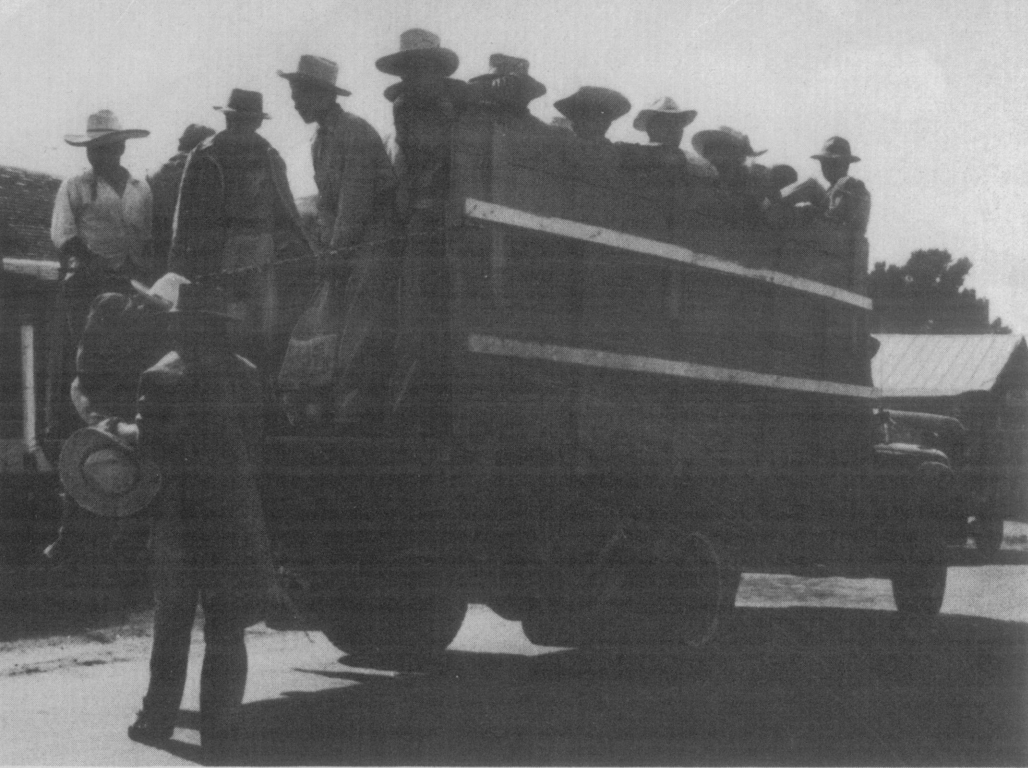
more regularly. But the weather does not always favor us and always there is a delay of several days—weeks perhaps—between the time we finish with one crop and the time we find another which is ready for us.

Nor are these our only troubles. The houses we live in are not as nice as they promised us. Sometimes we do not receive as much pay as we were told we'd get, and often your stores charge us higher prices than other people pay.

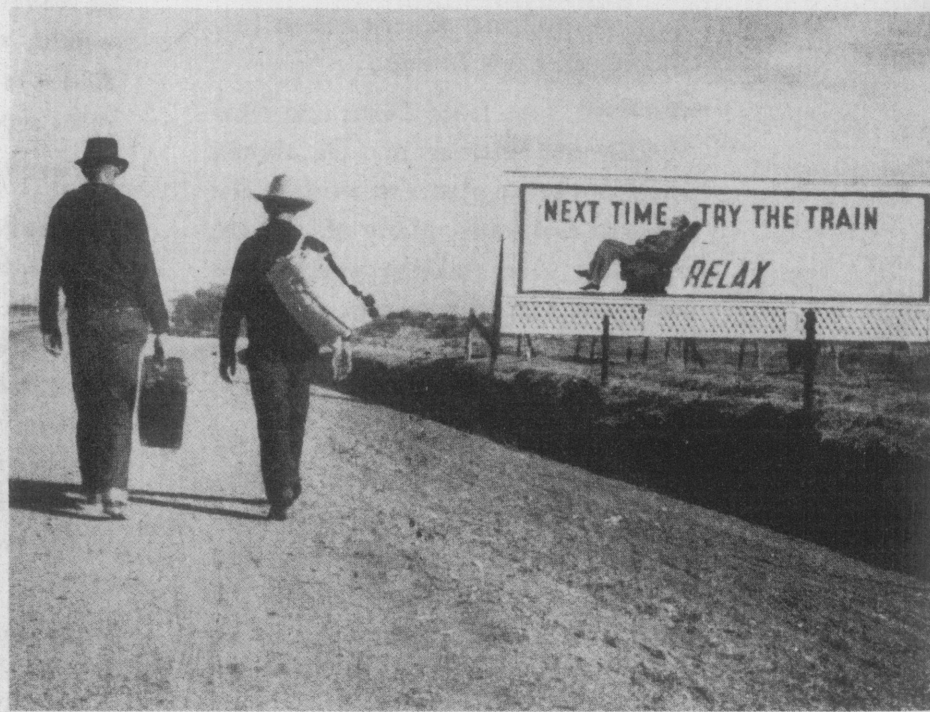
Would it have been better if we had gone elsewhere? Is it better for migrants anywhere? We have heard it is not. And anyway, how can we leave now? It is not easy to leave when the farmers for whom we work keep part of our wages until we have done all the work that they want.

In cash, each of our workers earns about \$530 a year.

It is not enough.



On Our Way



Oh Give Me A Home

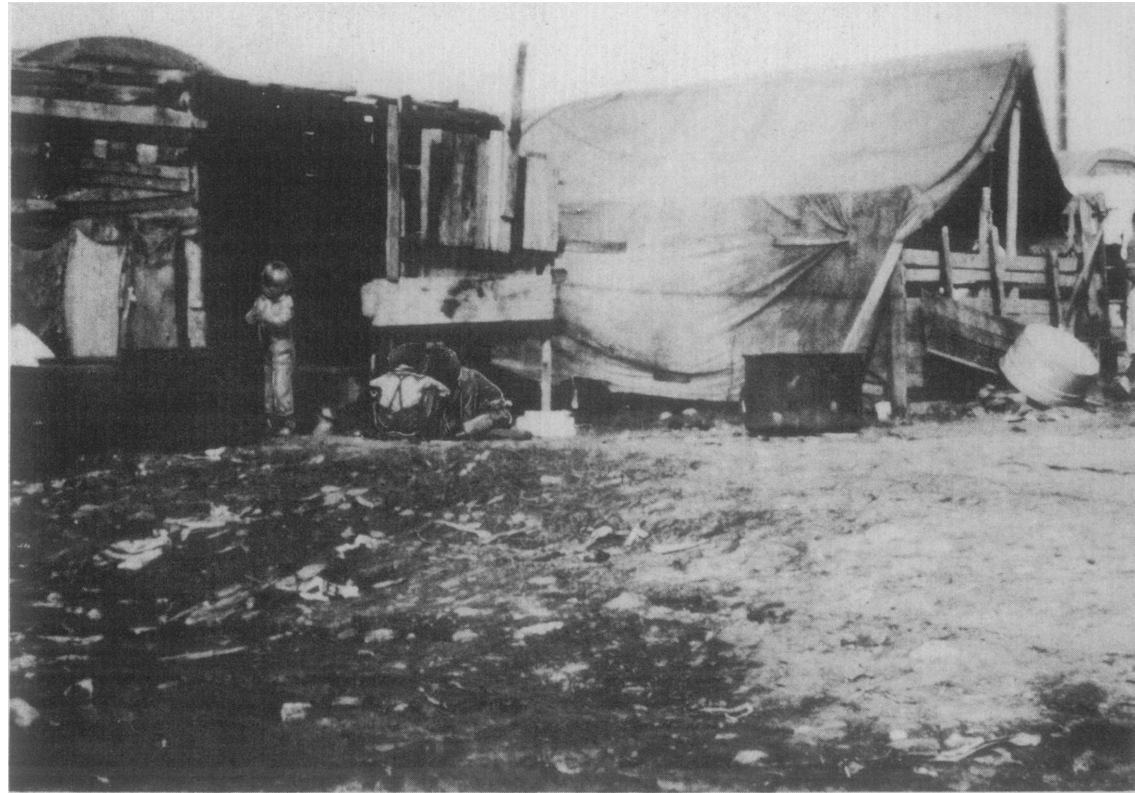
This is home for many of us.

Some of us live in nicer places, but too many of us live in tents and in houses patched together with tin and cardboard.

Half of us live in places where there is only one room for an entire family. It is nice for a family to be close and to keep together, but it is not good when men, women, and children all must sleep together in one room.

In many of our houses the roofs leak and we have little protection against the rain. Windows are broken and unscreened. The water we use is often right next door to ditches and toilets.

Some of us sleep on the floor. There are too many bugs in the beds.



Migrant home . . . exterior view



Inside Migrant home

Migrant Miss





Your table

People like us who move around so much cannot take along all the pots and dishes and cooking equipment needed to prepare and serve food which is pleasing to the eye and wholesome for the body.

Our children seldom get milk or butter. It is not money alone that makes it hard for us to buy better food. We have no ice boxes and so we use foods that will keep like beans and potatoes.

And our women do not have too much time to spend in cooking. There is work to be done in the fields . . .



. . . Ours

... and while our women work side by side with the men, our little ones are left alone around the camps to play with whatever things children find to play with ...





... or we take them out into the fields with us ...

... or we leave them with an "older" brother or sister
while we work ...



A s t h e T w i g i s B e n t . . .

We are not healthy people.

It is not surprising.

Can anyone be healthy living in crowded and dirty places, eating poor food, and drinking unsafe water?

Our people suffer from tuberculosis, dysentery, enteritis, small pox, and typhoid more than others.

When we are sick we sometimes cannot get free medical and hospital care because we are told that we have not lived in the district long enough.

Some of your doctors have even refused to deliver our pregnant women. About a third of our children were brought into the world by mid-wives, friends and members of their own families—once even by a 15 year old daughter.

And even if we had the money to pay, we would not know where to go for we are strangers everywhere.

Do not think that these things leave our young people untouched. Deaths among our children are twice as high as they are among other children in America. These are more than statistics. These are our children whose laughter we will never hear again.

. . . And we are not an educated people. Many of us do not know how to read or write the language we speak and the written or printed word is a thing of mystery. Two thirds of us, we are ashamed to say, have not gone beyond the fourth grade in school.

Will it be any different for our children? Many of them—even the older ones—have not finished more than one or two grades.

When mothers and fathers do not earn much money it is hard to keep children in school. We need them in the fields to help us earn a living, or we need them to take care of their younger brothers and sisters while we work. And often they do not like to go to so many different schools. It makes them unhappy.

But even those of us who want to keep our children in school find that your schools do not always want them. They may be overcrowded and may have no room. Or they do not make our children feel that they are wanted.

Many times our children return from school crying that they do not want to return.

Why?

Because the other children make them feel that they are different. Their clothes may not be clean. Sometimes their shoes are too big or worn out and the other children laugh at them. Our food is not the same and that makes the other children laugh at what our children eat.

And everybody laughs at them because they speak so funny.

And because they do not always understand your language they are sometimes told they are stupid. This hurts and they cry.

So after all, what is the use? Can a child really learn much when he doesn't stay long anywhere? Will a child learn when he is not happy?



About one third of our children begin to work between the ages of 8 and 10 years.

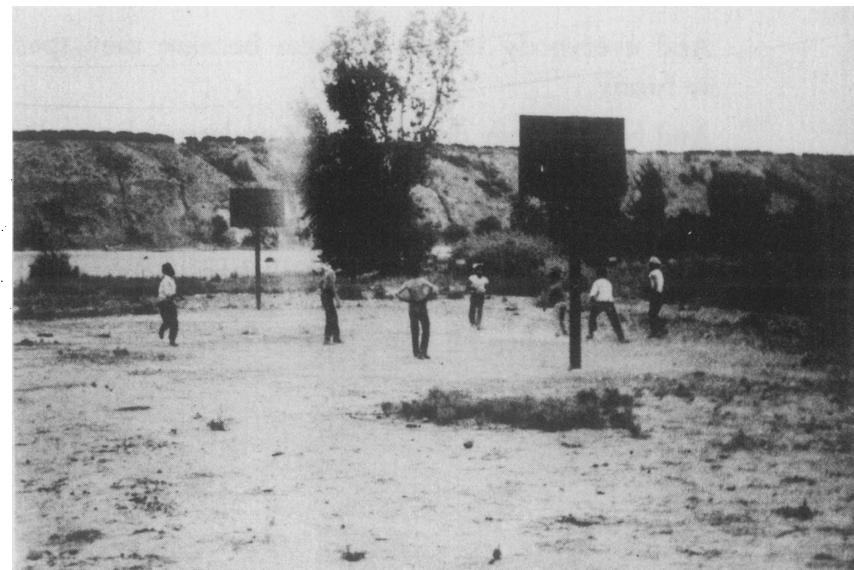
Nearly 3 out of every 4 of our children start to work for wages before they are 12 years old.

Many of them work long hours—11 or 12 hours a day.

**All of us need
What few of us have**

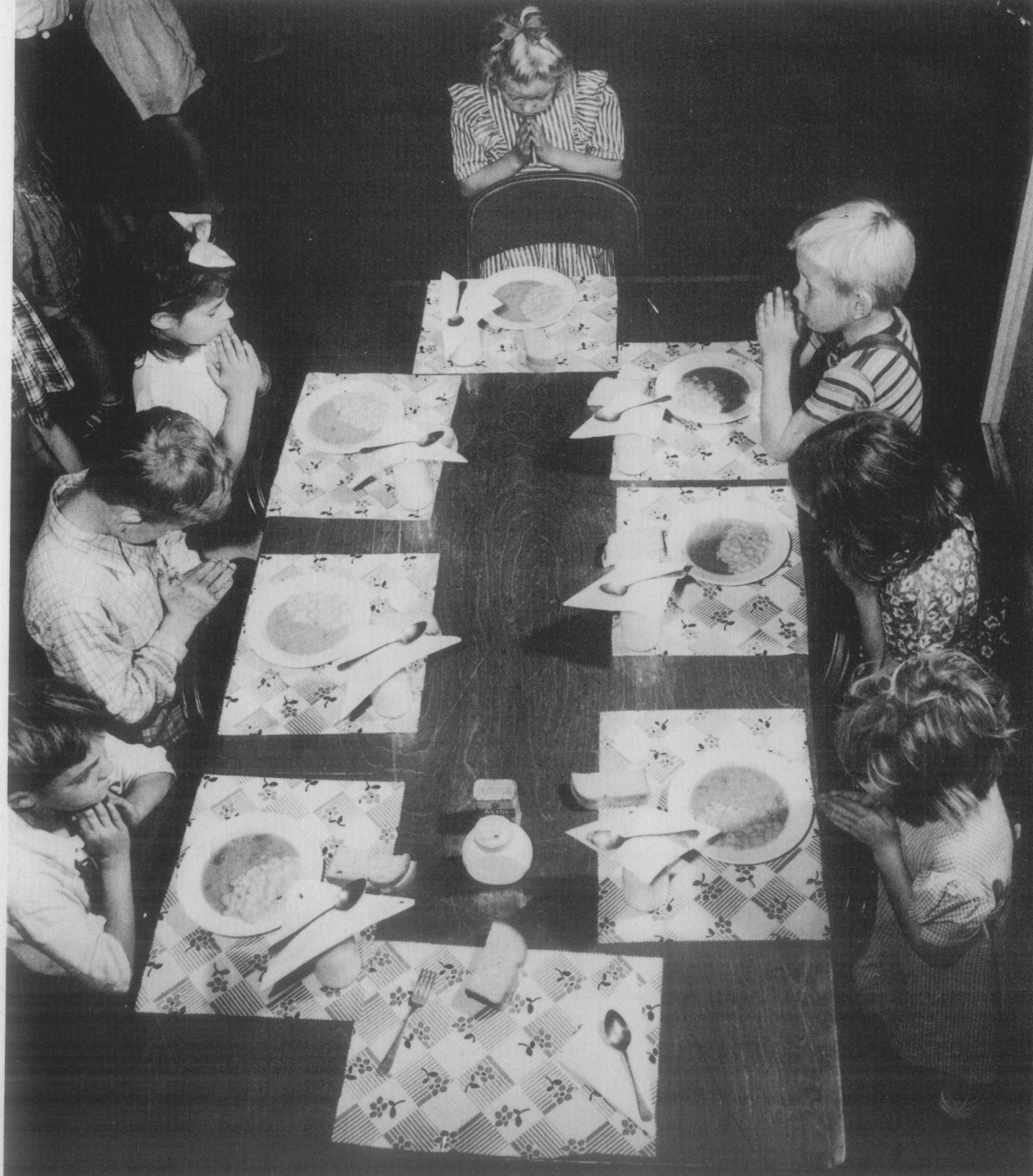


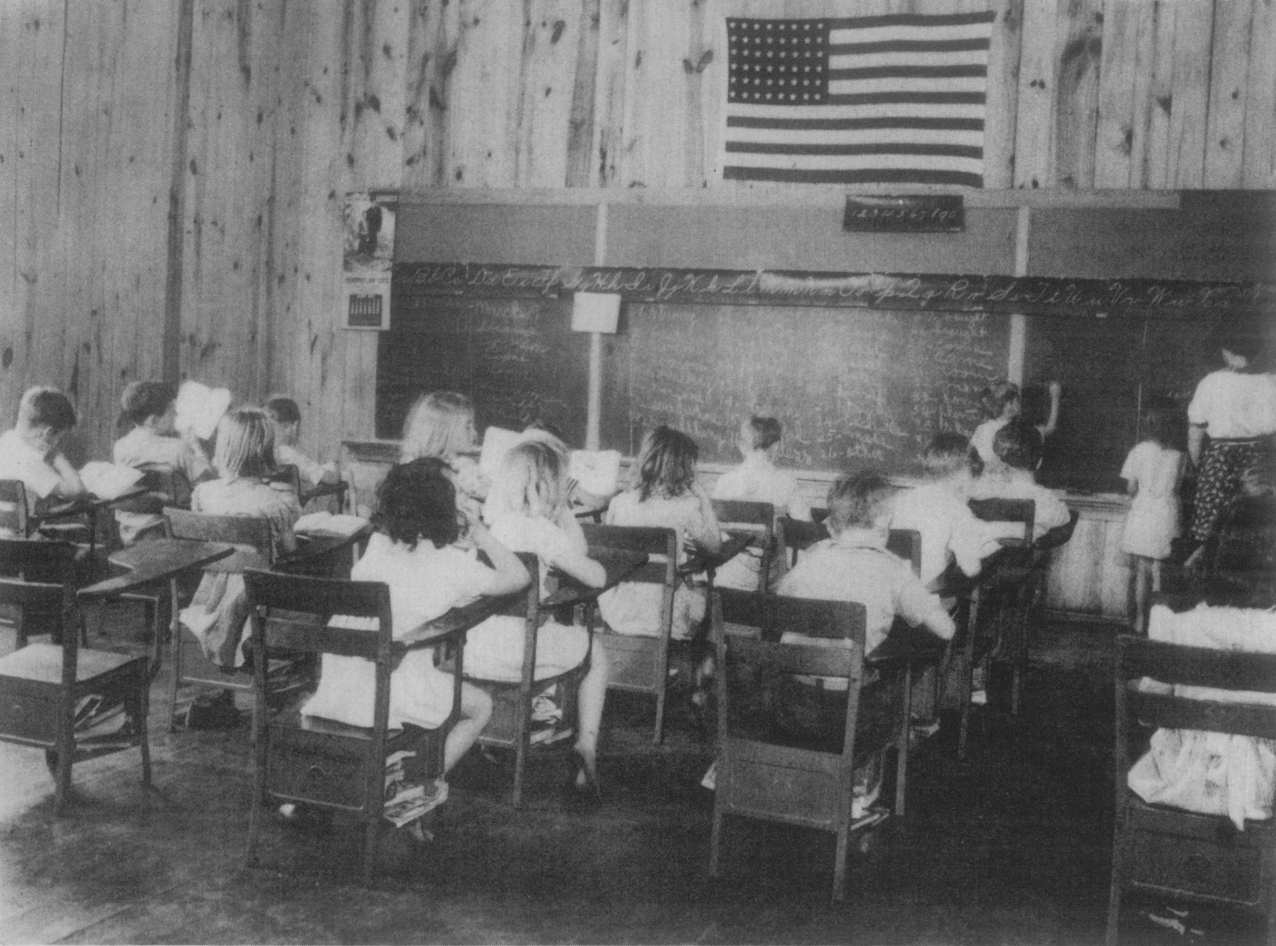
A nicer home



A place to play

Nurseries for the young
when we go to work

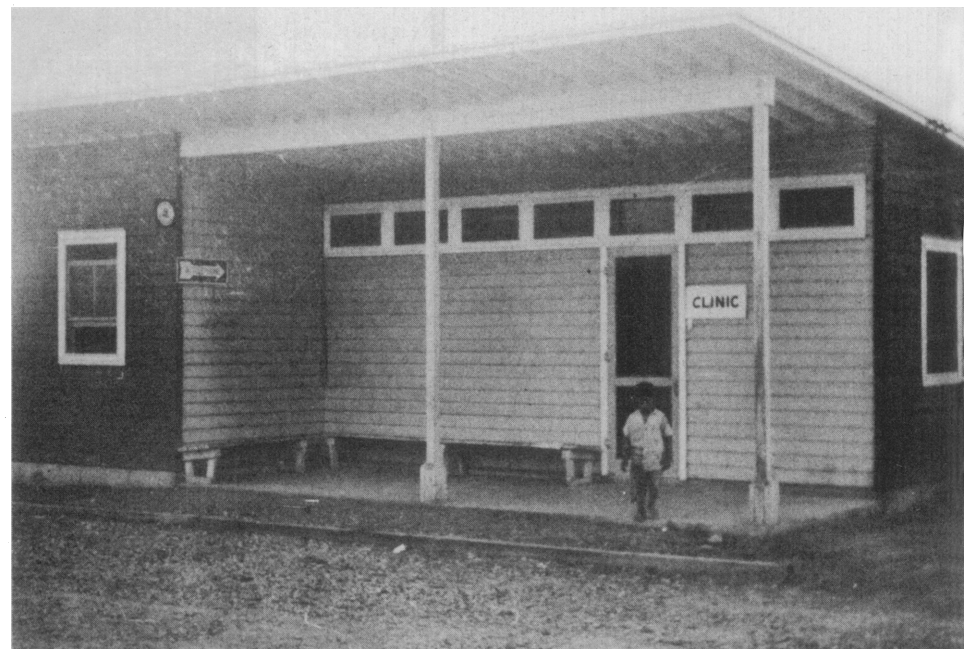




Schools for our children

*Medical care
when we need it.*

... and if we had these things ... these cleaner homes, places to play, care for our children, doctors for our sick, we would be less troubled, would we not? We might be eager to return again next year, might enjoy our work a little more, might work a little harder and a little better ... Would this not be better for you, as well as us?



1,000,000 Migrants

The Colorado Tale is the story of migratory farm workers and their children in one state only.

These workers are only a fraction of the total. We have 1,000,000 migrant farm workers in the Nation whose lives and conditions of work are substantially similar. Add to this number the children and non-working members of families who accompany them and our migrant population is swelled even more.

Migrants and the community

If you are smoking a cigarette, if you are wearing a cotton shirt or a dress of cotton, if you use sugar in your coffee, eat lettuce or peaches or other fruits or vegetables, you are at the end of a process which begins with the migrant or share cropper in the field as he tills the soil and harvests the crop which you use.

The public is dimly aware of the existence of migrants and other farm laborers, but by and large, has declined to accept responsibility for them.

On top of that many migrants are discriminated against in direct and subtle ways. They may be denied service in restaurants or denied access to places of amusement and recreation. Merchants may charge

them higher prices than those paid by others. They may even be discouraged from attending services in a local church.

"Residents tend to separate migrants from themselves in domicile and law, in thought and feeling. They assign special places to migrants seeking shelter, or leave them to go where their condition and poverty forces them. Professional gamblers, prostitutes and peddlers of dope follow their work routes to obtain, each in his own way, a share of the migrants' money.

State by state, county by county, township by township, nearly every unit of government seeks to evade responsibility for these migratory workers."

Report of President's Commission on Migratory Labor.

Who are the migrants?

By and large, the migrants come from disadvantaged groups—those who because of their race, nationality, lack of education, and lack of occupational skill, find it more difficult than others to obtain regular employment.

Mexicans and Americans of Mexican descent make up a large part of our migrant farm population, and are found largely in the Southwest and on the Pacific Coast. Southern Negroes who harvest crops along the Atlantic Seaboard and in the Middle Atlantic states, form a large part of the total number of farm migrants.

Native white workers, too, are in the migrant farm labor force. On the West Coast, in the Midwest and along the Atlantic Seaboard states, large numbers of them swell the ranks of migratory workers.

Why migratory labor?

During short periods of the year when crops are being cultivated or harvested in many farm communities, there is a demand for more workers than are needed during the rest of the year.

The number required may be so large and the period of employment so short, that it is difficult, if not impossible, to recruit the necessary numbers from the local labor supply. Moreover, the arduous nature of the work, together with the irregularity of employment and the poor living conditions which accompany it, are so unattractive that the local resident population ordinarily will not accept such employment.

Without migrants who follow the crops from one state to another, it would not be possible to cultivate and harvest a large part of our fruits, vegetables, cotton, sugar beets, hops and other farm products.

Why people migrate?

People in our land have always moved in search of better opportunities. Migrants like our pioneer forefathers are searching for a better life for themselves and their families. They travel from one community to another because in no one place are they able to find opportunities for regular employment and sufficient income to live as they would like to.

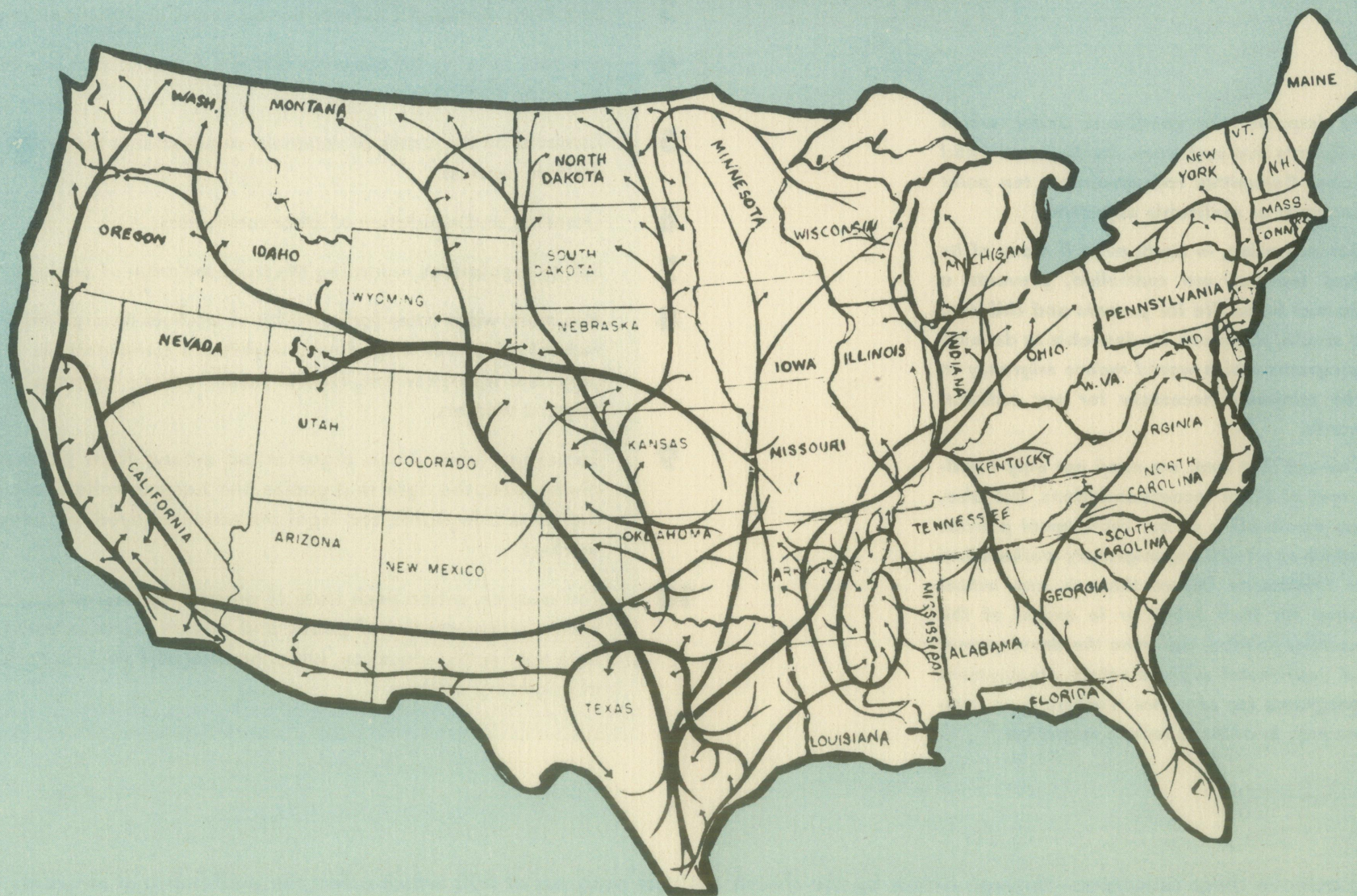
Nor do they find these opportunities through their migrant work. On the average they find work on farms and other places for about 100 days a year. And their earnings? Somewhat less than \$10 in cash per week on the average for the whole year, including wages from farm work as well as all other kinds of work.

Are there no laws?

Migrant farm workers, like other agricultural workers, are usually excluded from the benefits of social and labor legislation. They are not protected by wage and hour standards; their right to join a union is not guaranteed by state and federal laws; they are not ordinarily eligible for unemployment compensation, workmen's compensation or old age insurance. Residence laws often make them ineligible for health and welfare services.

Their children are usually exempted from state child labor laws and little effort is made to encourage their attendance at school.

TRAVEL PATTERNS Migratory Agricultural Workers



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Extension Service

And So?

To improve the conditions under which migrants live and work, the National Child Labor Committee recommends a ten point program of realizable objectives.

But migration, in itself, even if many of its bad features are controlled, prevents a normal home life for parents and children. It would, therefore, be desirable to develop programs which would reduce migrancy to the minimum necessary for our national needs.

Toward that end, we need not only fulfillment of these recommendations, but also, an overhauling of our recruitment policies which so often bring migratory workers into a community before there is any actual need for their labor or in excess of the number needed; and also the development of year-round supplementary employment programs for seasonal workers in a community, in order to reduce migration.

You can help achieve these objectives—through action by the church or civic organization to which you may belong. Keep yourself informed about migrants in your community and in the Nation. Follow

- 1** Effective child labor and school attendance laws.
- 2** Child care centers for migrant children.
- 3** Education of migrant parents on child care, nutrition and health.
- 4** Sanitary housing for migrants and the licensing and regulation of migrant labor camps.
- 5** Removal by the states of residence requirements for health and welfare services.
- 6** Licensing and regulation of labor contractors.
- 7** Safety regulations regarding the transportation of workers.
- 8** Minimum wage rates for agricultural workers through state and federal minimum wage laws; workmen's compensation, unemployment insurance and federal social security coverage for all migrant workers.
- 9** Encourage labor union organization among farm workers by giving them the right to organize and bargain collectively with the same safeguards and legal protection enjoyed by industrial workers.
- 10** The creation within each state of an inter-agency migrant committee representative of public and private agencies concerned with the health, education, labor, housing and welfare problems of migratory workers.

the progress of bills which affect the well-being of migrants. Let your representatives in the State Legislature and in Congress know how you feel about these bills.

Have you Read?

REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT'S COMMISSION ON MIGRATORY LABOR

Superintendent of Documents, U. S. Government
Printing Office, Washington, D. C. (75¢)

SELECTED ARTICLES ON MIGRANT LABOR

The American Child, National Child Labor
Committee, 419 Fourth Avenue, New York, N. Y.
(free)

MIGRATORY FARM WORKERS IN 1949

Louis J. Ducoff, U. S. Department of Agriculture,
Washington, D. C., Bulletin No. 25 (free)

OUR ROBBERY OF AMERICAN MIGRANTS

Council for Social Action of the Congregational
Christian Churches, 289 Fourth Avenue,
New York, N. Y. (15¢)

AGAIN . . . PIONEERS (*film and discussion guide*)

National Council of Churches, Home Missions
Council, 297 Fourth Avenue, New York, N. Y.
(rental \$12.00)

SELECTED AGRICULTURAL LABOR BULLETINS

National Council on Agricultural Life and Labor
1751 N. Street, N.W., Washington, D. C. (free)

For further information about migrants in your community and in the Nation,
write to the National Child Labor Committee, 419 Fourth Avenue, New York 16, N. Y.

THE NATIONAL CHILD LABOR COMMITTEE

419 FOURTH AVENUE • NEW YORK 16, N. Y.

A Voluntary Agency Chartered by Congress in 1907

- To eliminate harmful child labor and improve the conditions under which young people are employed.
- To keep more children in school and promote better preparation of young people for work as part of life.
- To raise the standards of living of families so that children need not work at the expense of health, education and recreation.

Written by SOL MARKOFF

Photos: Cover, inside cover, pages 6 and 11 by FSA; pages 2 and 7 by Russell Lee; page 4 (upper left) and 13 by Roland Giduz, National Council of Churches; page 4 (lower right) from "Harvest Nomads," U.S. Department of Labor Bulletin No. 73; pages 5, 9 and 10 by Howard E. Thomas; page 8 by University of Denver; pages 14 and 16 (lower right) by Sheldon Lowry; pages 15 and 16 (upper left) by Madeleine Osborne, U.S.D.A.; and map on page 19 by U.S.D.A. Extension Service. Photographs illustrate typical conditions found by field workers, but were not all taken in Colorado.

PUBLICATION NO. 406

NOVEMBER, 1951

A free copy of this publication will be sent upon request to any person in Colorado. Elsewhere, price 50¢.



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