



# EL OBSERVADOR

## Farm Workers Face Challenges 30 Years Later

By Arturo S. Rodriguez  
for THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Thirty years ago, Cesar Chavez and the farm workers did the impossible: They overcame the awesome power of California agribusiness.

In the 1960s, Cesar and the United Farm Workers (UFW) were struggling against history. During the preceding 80 years, every organizing attempt had been defeated. Every strike had been crushed.

Every union had been vanquished. But Cesar changed history's course 35 years ago when he helped lead a five-year strike and boycott against Delano-area grape growers in California's great Central Valley.

It was one of those little miracles of our time when, on July 29, 1970, 29 table-grape growers came to the UFW's Delano headquarters and signed their first-ever union con-

tracts. Much has changed since then, and much has remained the same. Organizing farm workers today is a difficult and, at times, daunting task. But it is nothing compared to the obstacles faced by Cesar and the UFW in our early days.

Unfortunately, there is still a lot of work to be done to secure a decent life for the people who are responsible for bringing food to our tables. Many farm workers labor long hours in the fields for poverty wages. According to a recent report by Human Rights Watch, nearly 800,000 children still work in agriculture. These young people can suffer even more than adults from exposure to potentially dangerous pesticides. Farm workers usually have no health benefits and often do not have access to toilets and fresh water.

But some things are improving. Since a new organizing drive began in 1994 — a year after Cesar's death — farm workers have voted for the UFW in 20 union elections and signed 24 new — or first-time — contracts with growers in a number of crops, including lettuce, roses and wine grapes. UFW membership has grown to more than 27,000 members, up from about

20,000 in 1994.

In addition to recent organizing gains, Cesar Chavez's movement continues to push for progress both in and out of the fields.

The National Farm Workers Ser-

vice Center, a tax-exempt organization Cesar founded in the 1960s, is now the largest non-profit home builder for farm workers and other poor people in the Southwest. In the last decade, it has built — and also

manages — more than 2,500 high-quality homes and apartments.

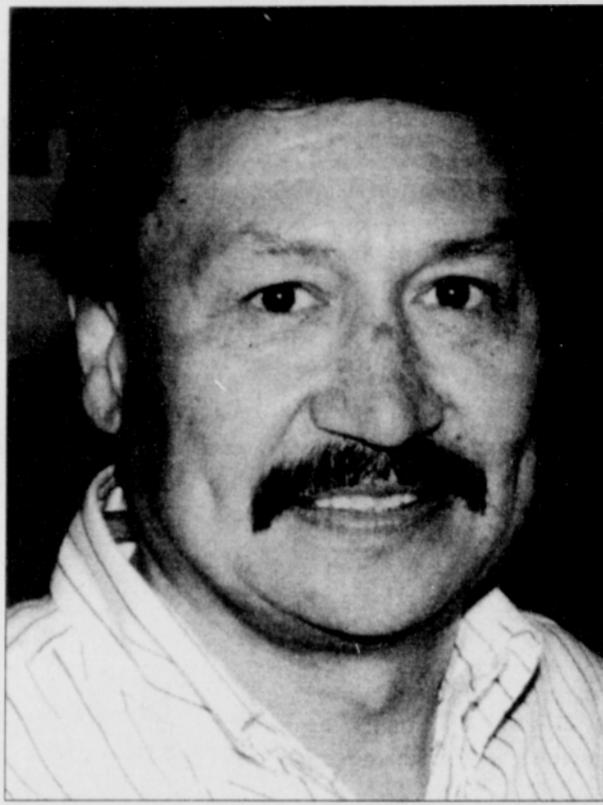
The Service Center also operates "Radio Campesina," the farm workers' radio network. With eight stations in three states, "Radio Campesina" boasts the largest listening audience of farm workers in the country. It's also the number-one Spanish-language radio station in the markets it serves, according to Arbitron ratings.

Today, there are many battles for farm workers to wage.

For example, the UFW is helping lead the battle for immigration reform. It has called on the government to grant amnesty to undocumented workers who are already in this country.

And the UFW is seeking badly needed legislation in California to curb daily abuses by farm labor contractors. Too often, growers hire these middle men who directly cheat and exploit farm workers. Then the growers absolve themselves of responsibility for the mistreatment.

Today's farm workers are indebted to Cesar and those brave strikers for their sacrifices. They were truly non-violent warriors on the long path to freedom.



Arturo S. Rodriguez is a veteran United Farm Workers (UFW) organizer. He became the UFW's second president upon the death of his mentor and father-in-law, Cesar Chavez, in 1993.

## State Farm Meets Needs of Spanish-Speaking Policyholders

State Farm is continuing efforts to meet the needs of its customers with the new bilingual customer response center. The El Paso site is another

extension of the agent and is now taking after-hours calls in Spanish or English from customers nationwide.

"With the El Paso CRC, we look

forward to better serving the needs of our Spanish-speaking customers and adding a new dimension of service for State Farm," said Deborah

Traskell, Vice President of Regional Services. According to the U.S. census in 1990, there were 17 million people who primarily spoke Spanish.

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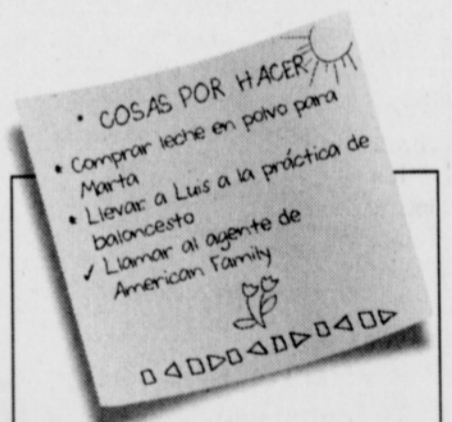
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## Mente Sana en Cuerpo Sano

Healthy Minds in Healthy Bodies

The Latina Empowerment Network is sponsoring the Mente Sana en Cuerpo Sano (Healthy Minds in Healthy Bodies) on Oct. 21 at Centro Cultural, 1110 N. Adair, Cornelius.

This is a free event for Latino families to come together for an afternoon of family activities, presentations and information, in order to foster an understanding of healthy family dynamics. The event is scheduled from 12:30 p.m. to 4 p.m.



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