

# Union Fights to Help Oregon Farm Workers

By LORRAINE-MICHELLE FAUST  
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER  
Who is responsible for making the food on your dinner table available? If it was grown on an Oregon

farm it was likely picked by one of 100,000 Mexican farm workers in the state. These farm workers live in substandard, over-crowded work camps, are underpaid and are ex-

posed to dangerous pesticides. Pineros y Campesino Unidos del Noroeste (PCUN) or Northwest Treeplanters and Farmworkers United, is the union that helps put pressure on growers to improve these conditions.

Paine Farms and Nature's Fountain Farms have agreed to pay their farm workers minimum wage, pay them overtime and holiday pay, allow them sick days and breaks, and

"It is going to take a long time to give farm workers the same rights that all other workers in this country have enjoyed for years," said Ramirez.

no longer buy food products from NORPAC. NORPAC continues to refuse to negotiate with PCUN. Erick Nickelson, who has worked at PCUN since 1990, says that many

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**"WE DON'T WANT TO CONDEMN OUR CHILDREN TO CONTINUE LIVING A LIFE OF MISERY," — PCUN PRESIDENT RAMON RAMIREZ.**

"PCUN came about because we said, '¡Ya basta! (That's enough!)' to the living and working conditions," said PCUN President Ramon Ramirez. "We had to do it now, because we don't want to condemn our children to continue living a life of misery."

Ramirez, who was one of the original founders of PCUN, has been involved in fighting for farm worker rights since he was a teenager. When he was 17 years old, Cesar Chavez spoke at his high school. The visit so inspired him that he has been working full time to help farm workers ever since.

Since 1985, PCUN has worked to improve conditions for farm workers through "Collective Bargaining Agreements." These agreements serve as contracts between the workers and the growers.

Moon Ridge Farms, Thomas



Oregon farm workers hold up flags displaying the symbol of their union.

give just cause when they fire workers. But many other growers still refuse to enter into the contracts.

Some growers are violently opposed to farm workers organizing with the union. Farm workers have suffered threats, attack and have lost their jobs for just talking with PCUN organizers.

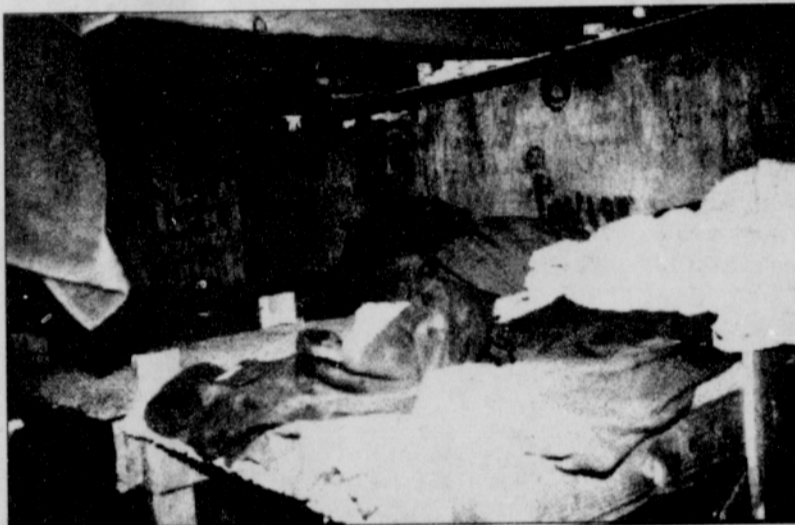
"The only way to get growers to negotiate is through pressure," said Ramirez.

Typically this "pressure" comes in the form of a boycott. PCUN has taken the lead in a boycott of NORPAC foods for nine years. Many universities nationwide, along with Sodexo-Marriot and the Canadian Labour Congress, have joined the boycott and

growers do all in their power to keep from negotiating.

"The irony is the growers are organizing to keep workers from having an organization to defend their interests," he said.

PCUN also has a service center at their office. They provide translation services, notarize documents, help with immigration cases, workers comp cases, make referrals, and provide English as a Second Language classes. In addition, PCUN founded the Farmworker Housing Development Corporation that provides over 100, award-winning housing units. "I saw that even though we had moved out of poverty and farm work, other people were just inheriting the same conditions," said Rebecca Saldaña. This she says, was what compelled her to work at PCUN; she wanted to "break the cycle."



The living quarters are disgraceful at the labor camps.

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## Study Says Florida Vote Penalized Minorities

By ROBERT E. PIERRE AND PETER SLEVIN

THE WASHINGTON POST

Florida's conduct of the 2000 presidential election was marked by "injustice, ineptitude and inefficiency" that unfairly penalized minority voters, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights has concluded in a report that criticizes top state officials — particularly Gov. Jeb Bush and Secretary of State Katherine Harris — for allowing disparate treatment of voters.

Unequal access to modern voting equipment and "overzealous efforts" to purge state voter lists most harshly affected African Americans in the state that decided the November election for President Bush, the commission declared in a 167-page final draft report obtained by The Washington Post. The inquiry found no "conclusive evidence" that officials "conspired" to disenfranchise minority and disabled voters.

Fifty-four percent of votes rejected during the Florida election were cast by black voters, according to the report, scheduled for a commission vote Friday. African Americans accounted for 11 percent of voters statewide.

"The disenfranchisement was not isolated or episodic. State officials failed to fulfill their duties in a manner that would prevent this disenfranchisement," said the report, the product of a six-month investigation. "Despite the closeness of the election, it was widespread voter disenfranchisement and not the dead-heat contest that was the extraordi-

nary feature in the Florida election." The commission — composed of four Democrats, three independents and one Republican — is poised to ask the U.S. Department of Justice and the Florida attorney general's office to investigate whether federal or state civil rights laws were violated.

The commission is charged with investigating possible violations — intentional or unintentional — of the federal Voting Rights Act and other civil rights protections. Advisers to Gov. Bush and Harris were angered Tuesday by the report's early release. Harris's spokesman, David Host, called the leak "both fraudulent and shameful" because Harris's response is not due until later this week. Florida's election problems have been scrutinized since Election Day. A bipartisan task force appointed by Gov. Bush concluded that the November election was marred by systemic inconsistencies. That report cited unreliable voting machines, improper counting of absentee ballots and inaccurate databases that allowed unregistered voters to vote while preventing legal voters from casting ballots.

A computer analysis by The Post showed that the more black and Democratic a precinct, the more likely it was to suffer high rates of invalidated votes.

No inquiry so far has been as broad as that conducted by the commission — or as specifically focused on the rights of minorities. The commission held three days of hearings, interviewed 100 witnesses and reviewed 118,000 documents.

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Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Type of Performance: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Daytime Phone#: \_\_\_\_\_

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