

Migrant Farm Families Follow Seasons; Might Earn Up To \$1,000 With Good Year

Editor's Note: "The most underprivileged people in America." That's what the government calls the 1,000,000 migrant farm workers who roam the nation in battle with old works, cars and buses, harvesting fruits and vegetables. For a first-hand look at migrant life, United Press International sent reporter Louis Cassels on a tour of labor camps in the truck farming regions of Delaware, Maryland and Virginia. This is the first of four dispatches in which Cassels reports what he found.

By LOUIS CASSELS
United Press International
Louis Lindsay is 40 years old. He has a pregnant wife, six small children, a 1948 car and an aching back.

The aching back came from picking beans and tomatoes, a job at which Lonnie earns "about \$7 a day on good days."

When I visited them, Lonnie and his family lived in a one-room wooden shack in a migrant labor camp on the eastern shore of Maryland. In a few weeks, they planned to load up their bedding and cookpots and move on to another camp in upstate New York.

Lonnie Lindsay Jr. is six years old. He has never fired a cap pistol nor ridden a tricycle. He spends his days in the fields, picking beans into his father's basket. If you ask him, "Where is your home, little boy?" he looks at you with a puzzled stare and shrugs his shoulders.

"Follow the seasons!" There are about one million migrant farm workers in the United States who live like the Lindsays. Year after year, they "follow the sea-

sons" from state to state, harvesting fruits and vegetables. Their home is where the crops are ripe.

Winter finds them in Florida, Texas or Arizona. In spring, they move north in three great streams. One goes up the west coast through California's rich central valley and into Oregon and Washington. Another fans out through the midwest. The third comes up the east coast through the Carolinas, and into the middle Atlantic states.

Some of the migrants, like the Lindsays, are Negroes. Some are Puerto Ricans. A few are white share-croppers from the deep south, driven off the land by mechanization. Many are Spanish-speaking "Texas-Mexicans" whose hot tempers flare if you call them wetbacks.

Despite their racial diversity, the migrants have one common denominator: the lowest living standard in America.

Visited Labor Camp

To see how they live, I visited migrant labor camps in one of the nation's greatest truck farming regions, the Delmarvo Peninsula. This is the long spit of land between Chesapeake and Delaware Bays where Delaware adjoins the eastern shore of Maryland and Virginia. More than 20,000 migrant workers come to this area each summer to harvest beans, tomatoes, melons, cucumbers, potatoes, corn and berries.

Most of the migrants to whom I talked had spent the past winter in Florida. They had grim memories of the January freeze that destroyed many of Florida's winter crops and left the migrants stranded for weeks with no work and no income. Emergency food shipments, organized by state agencies and church groups, saved thousands of families from starvation. Fortunately the eastern

shore produced bumper crops this summer. The migrants had plenty of work. They got 50 cents a hamper for picking string beans (a rate that has been unchanged for the past 10 years) and 10 cents a bushel for tomatoes. An adult worker of average skill can pick from 12 to 15 hampers of beans a day. Some unusually fast pickers can fill 20 hampers.

Picking Hard Work

As every home gardener knows, picking beans is hard work. The migrants have a system. "You go on your knees until they get sore," explained 60-year-old Katie Abrams. "Then you stand up and bend over to pick. When your back starts aching, you go to your knees again."

Everybody picks beans except the smallest children and women who are eight months or more pregnant. I found

many boys and girls in the fields who claimed they were six but looked younger. I saw grizzled old women who must have been well beyond 70.

Sometimes migrant babies are left in camp with a pregnant woman or an older child to "mind" them. Often, however, you find them lying on burlap bags between the bean rows, or on the edge of the field with large cardboard boxes for playpens.

How much does a migrant family earn in a year? "There's my wife and me and three girls," said Alfred Fields. "With everybody working, we cumulated about \$800 last year."

But last year was a bad year for winter crops. In a good year, government figures show, the average migrant family may earn as much as \$1,000.

(Next: What they live in.)

What Is The Law?

This column is prepared as a public service by the College of Law, Willamette University, Salem, to explain basic legal principles, not to provide legal advice. The reader is cautioned not to apply these cases to his own problems without an attorney's advice, for differing facts may change the outcome.

When the Injured Person Cannot Sue for Damages

In West Virginia an elderly woman sought damages from a hotel for injuries sustained when she fell down a set of hotel steps. She had lived in the hotel for many years and was quite familiar with the several exits available.

New rubber matting was being glued down on the steps on which she fell, and a loose board had been placed on each step to hold the matting in place until the glue dried. She had noticed this a few hours before her fall. Therefore the court refused to award her damages, because it felt she was fully aware that certain risks were involved in using the stairs. With this

knowledge she voluntarily chose to use them though she knew that other exits were available where such risks were not involved.

Not Always Entitled

Thus, a person is not always entitled to compensation for injury or damage caused by another's sub-standard or negligent conduct. Under certain circumstances the courts may well decide that the injured person "assumed the risk" of receiving the injury or damage to property of which he complains.

The element of free choice takes a different slant in a case involving several passengers in a car. The driver drove wildly along icy, country roads. He stopped once to scrape ice from the windshield and the passengers told him, as they had earlier, that they were frightened of his driving. They wanted to leave the car and walk to a light they saw in the distance.

The driver told them it was too cold for such a walk. He also assured them he would get them to their destination safely if they would "just stop the back seat driving." But the driver was even wilder and wrecked the car and injured the passengers.

Risk Claimed

When they sued for damages the driver claimed they had assumed the risk because when they got back in the car they did so with full knowledge of the way he drove. The court, however, decided that the passengers had not assumed the risk. They were strangers in the area, the weather was so bad that they could not get out and walk, and the driver reassured them that he would get them to their destination safely after they had pointed out to him their fear of his driving.

The law is pretty uniform throughout the country insofar as the doctrine of assumption of risk is concerned. If the person had full knowledge of the risks involved and still voluntarily entered upon the course of conduct, he cannot later complain if injured because of one of the risks known and assumed by him.

Students Building Atom Smasher

Benton Harbor, Mich. — (UPI) — Fledgling physicists at Benton Harbor High School are building an atom-smashing cyclotron.

Physics students at the school have been busy on the cyclotron since 1955 and have completed about three-fourths of the work.

Hugh Kahler, physics instructor, estimates the value of the atom-smasher at between \$10,000 and \$15,000 but said students have spent only about \$100 on the project.

Three students who have graduated designed the cyclotron. Since then other students — now about 15 — have carried on their work.

Each phase of the cyclotron's construction has been submitted to University of Chicago scientists for scrutiny and approval.

Benton Harbor industries have contributed their share to construction of the cyclotron. One firm supplied 400-pound castings for the machine, and another manufacturer machined the castings to the students' specifications.

The country's first agricultural experiment station was founded in Savannah, Ga., in 1735.

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