

House Action Still Pending on Mexican Farm Labor Legislation

By RICHARD P. O'MARSH
Washington — (UPI) — The Senate recently voted a one-year extension of the Mexican Farm Labor act, a law which permits Mexican farm hands, or braceros, to work in the United States. House action is pending.

Just who is the bracero and what effect does he have on farm life in the United States? And why is he allowed to work the American farms in face of domestic unemployment?

Importation of the bracero has come under fire in recent years by organized labor and liberals in Congress who contend the system aggravates the domestic job picture. This resistance has already brought House defeat to an attempt to extend the law for two years instead of one.

The bracero represents the largest single bloc of foreign workers entering this country annually. Smaller groups include Canadians, Jamaicans, Bahamians and even some Japanese.

The braceros were first brought in to meet a wartime manpower shortage in 1943. More than 52,000 entered that year. By 1949 the number had reached 100,000 and by 1954 had climbed to more than 300,000. Yet, this was long after the acute manpower shortage had ended.

Tapered Off
After 1954 the influx tapered off. Last year 195,000 braceros worked in American fields. In the first six months of this year 82,018 made legal entry. These statistics, gathered by the Bureau of Employment Security of the Department of Labor, include only those Mexicans who enter legally. Others, known traditionally as "wetbacks," ford the Rio Grande each year in considerable numbers.

In theory, the law proclaims that the bracero must not be used unless the domestic labor supply is exhausted, and cer-

tainly not in competition with the American farm worker. Yet, unemployment remains high and the bracero is still hired.

Opponents of the system argue that the bracero, even before entering the country, is assured certain minimum amounts of work, free housing, insurance and transportation. But under the present law none of these benefits goes to the American migrant. An amendment to the Senate-passed extension would provide such advantages but it is questioned whether things would be equal between the migrant and the bracero even if the hostile House passes the measure.

The bracero is regarded as premium labor. All males, they are screened for health and fitness at receiving stations before entering the country. Thus their effectiveness as a work force is assured.

By contrast, the American migrant generally travels with his family. As a group they often represent an underfed, travel-weary little band.

Labor department officials describe the American migrant as a social accident, caused by the very technological developments which have produced huge food surpluses in this country.

Modern farm machinery brought increased production and opened the era of crop specialization they say—thus eliminating the need for the old-fashioned year-around hired hand.

Resident Nowhere
As a consequence, what the corn fields of the midwest and bean fields of the south and far west need are large labor supplies for short seasons of cultivation or harvest. The American migrant came about to fill this need and while tied to the land is a resident of nowhere.

The migrant army trucks from the apple orchards of Washington state and Oregon to the cotton fields of Southern California. It picks beets in Colorado, then swings east to the Michigan cucumber fields. Ethnically, the group consists mainly of Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Texas-Americans and poor whites, but all are American citizens.

In principle an American employer can get foreign workers only after requesting state agencies to supply help. The agencies are the arms of the Bureau of Employment Security which oversees the system of importing foreign help.

Last year the braceros worked fields in 21 states, ranging as far east as Indiana. In 1949 a four-man committee appointed by the then secretary of labor, James P. Mitchell, concluded that the bracero deprived American citizens of job opportunities, shortened their working season, and held down wages and earning power.

Later, in an effort to combat these conditions, another secretary, Arthur J. Goldberg, put into effect what were called "adverse effect rates." These rates were to be paid all farm help, both foreign and domestic. But that standard was still low, ranging from 60 cents an hour

in Arkansas to no higher than a dollar an hour in most other states.

Since the early part of the Kennedy administration, when the adverse rates were put into effect, the Bureau of Employment Security has reported no significant improvements, but it looks to the Senate-approved amendment to put the domestic workers on a par with the bracero.

Also in the legislative mill, but only in the investigative stage, is a movement by the bureau to raise again the farm worker's minimum wage. This will be up to the House which as yet has shown no disposition to go along with the Senate.



EAT BY ROADSIDE — The Senate recently voted a one-year extension of the Mexican Farm Labor act, a law which permits Mexican farm hands or braceros, to work in the U. S. House action is pending. In this picture, taken in June this year, braceros are shown eating lunch by a roadside. (UPI)

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Failure of States To Provide Money For Program Eyed

Washington (UPI)—Failure of many state legislatures to provide matching funds became a rallying point today for Senate Republicans opposing a bill to increase the federal outlay for President Kennedy's manpower retraining program.

Senate GOP Leader Everett M. Dirksen (Ill.) said he or other Republicans would try either to send the measure back to the Senate Labor Committee or amend it to provide federal loans instead of direct grants to help the unemployed qualify for other jobs.

Senate leaders hoped for a final vote soon on the bill, part of President Kennedy's overall civil rights program. The measure was brought up Tuesday but action was postponed because relatively few senators were in town.

The bill, as approved by the Senate Labor Committee, calls for the Treasury to supply an additional \$161 million for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 1964, because only four state legislatures have voted matching funds for the program.

The original law was intended to provide retraining for 400,000 unemployed during the three years ending June 30, 1965. The Treasury was authorized to pay out \$87 million the first year and \$161 million the second for the entire cost. But the states were supposed to put up \$161 million in matching funds for the third year.

The labor committee, in approving the bill, reported that only Connecticut, Kansas, Montana and Tennessee had voted to provide the necessary matching money for the third year.

The committee recommended that the federal government provide the entire amount on grounds the deadline for action was too early for many state legislatures to act.

Dirksen Disagrees
Dirksen did not agree. He told newsmen that some 25 legislatures had met and adjourned this year without providing the funds.

He said he would be willing to provide the extra \$161 million on a loan basis to the states but not as grants. Otherwise, he said, the bill should go back to the labor committee.

Two committee members, Sens. Barry M. Goldwater (R-Ariz.) and John G. Tower (R-Tex.) voiced similar views in a minority report accompanying the bill. They said there had

Victim Refuses Blood Transfusion

Los Angeles—(UPI)—A Jehovah's Witness, following his interpretation of his faith, turned down a blood transfusion Wednesday before dying from injuries suffered when he was run down by a former mental patient.

Harold Mather, 38, Roseburg, Ore., was rushed to the hospital late Tuesday night after police said he was intentionally struck by a car in a downtown street. He died early Wednesday morning.

Hospital attendants said Mather's wife, Neva, also a Jehovah's Witness, told him before he died not to accept a blood transfusion that was offered. Authorities said the couple's 9-year-old son pleaded with his father to sign a release for the transfusion, but he refused.

One Jehovah's Witness official explained later that the Mathers' position was "in harmony with the law of God" in regard to the use of blood—outside of which a person possesses within his own body.

been "an overwhelming lack of response" from state legislatures.

A House labor subcommittee has completed public hearings on a similar bill and will begin closed-door consideration next week.

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