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Vegetable Grower



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What's Going on in Delano?

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WHAT'S GOING ON IN DELANO? *And What Does It Mean to You?*

Concerned about the grape boycott's portent for other growers, AMERICAN VEGETABLE GROWER has been studying the situation and attempting to assess the developments. Here is the picture as we see it

DELANO is an inconspicuous town of about 12,000 people, located in an area of vineyards and cotton fields on the flat floor of California's San Joaquin Valley, about 30 miles north of Bakersfield. It resembles hundreds of country towns all over the nation—towns where activity is geared to farm operations and nothing much else ever happens. But Delano is different because within the past four years it has become a national symbol of union efforts to organize farm workers.

The story of the campaign of the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee (AFL-CIO), led by Cesar Chavez, has been frequently told. For review, we need go back only to the fall of 1967. UFWOC then had contracts with several firms that were

mostly or entirely wine producers, but they represented only a small portion of vineyard employment. The union had chosen as its next target, Giumarra Vineyards, the state's largest grower and shipper of fresh table grapes. The boycott—or the threat of boycott—had been the union's most effective weapon against the vintners, so Chavez called for a national consumer boycott of Giumarra grapes.

There is an obvious disadvantage in boycotting an individual grower. Grapes, unlike wine bottles, do not usually carry a label on the display counter. Chavez got a lot of publicity and caused some problems, but the Giumarras still got their grapes picked and sold.

As the 1968 harvest approached,

UFWOC took a more drastic step—a boycott of *all* California table grapes—and plunged into the campaign with energy and a flood of publicity. Other unions and a variety of organizations concerned with social causes rallied to the boycott. Union workers were dispatched to major markets to organize chain-store picket lines, manned primarily by students, clergy, and other sympathizers. Other harassing tactics were used, like "shop-ins," where people loaded shopping carts with perishables and left them in the aisles.

Mayors of a number of cities, under heavy union pressure, halted purchases of grapes by city institutions. Vice-president Hubert Humphrey and the late Sen. Robert Kennedy supported the boycott, as did many other public

figures. Church publications and college newspapers gave it featured treatment. A volunteer even carried the campaign to Sweden, a major export market. Anyone who didn't hear of the grape boycott could only have been hiding in a hole.

The frequently-stated purpose of the boycott was to force growers to sign union contracts, but UFWOC's earlier strike call had revealed that Chavez cannot command the active support of more than a small minority of workers. Although the union has claimed as many as 17,000 members, an official statement of dues income, required under federal law, provides basis for an estimate of only 1500 to 2000 current members—about the number employed by wine companies with union contracts. Peak grape harvest employment in California is 50,000 to 60,000 workers, and the state's total farm labor force is about 360,000.

Union Not Succeeding

None of the wine companies shipped any table grapes in 1968, although several had formerly done so. Growers believe this is because the union has been unable to supply workers skilled in picking for the fresh market. Di-Giorgio, the first vintner to sign a contract, has sold all its vineyards. At one point the union had a contract with a shipping firm that was formed specifically to handle grapes from the Schenley (Roma wine) vineyards, but this firm has gone out of business, reportedly after suffering a heavy financial loss.

As of January, the union still had no contract with any table grape grower, and industry leaders were confident of maintaining a solid front. And grapes had been picked by essentially the same crews who have been picking them for years.

Grape growers are bluntly irritated—sometimes to the point of blasphemy—by the number of clergymen of all faiths who have taken up the UFWOC cause. They have formed a sizable part of the picket lines and provided a major source of support for the boycott. Acknowledging the sincerity of the clergy's interest, growers argue vigorously that few of them have even attempted to inform themselves of the real facts of the situation.

Exploding the Myths

Let's examine several of the propaganda myths that have been widely spread by Chavez and his group.

Exploitation of migrants is one accusation, but migrants are no longer a substantial element in the labor supply. Payroll records of Delano growers show that about 90% of the workers live within 25 miles of their work. In fact, there is reason to think that the high percentage of local labor was an

attraction to UFWOC; migrants are too mobile to be effective union members.

UFWOC claims that growers have recruited "green card" Mexicans as "strikebreakers." The local labor force does have a high percentage of green card workers who have been there for years, and the few remaining migrants include a number of green card holders who come regularly from Arizona and Texas. Actually, the green card is a permanent immigration visa that permits the holder to work in the U. S. In principle, permanent immigrants are expected to become naturalized citizens after the five-year waiting period, but they are not required to do so and many do not. They pay taxes, can be drafted, and enjoy all citizenship rights except voting and holding public office.

Wage rates are high in Delano, compared to those in other places. California has an effective minimum wage (for women and children) of \$1.65 an hour. Growers say that grape pickers, on piece rates, average better than \$2 an hour. Chavez claims credit for wage increases in recent years, but most other areas of the country have had comparable increases.

Growers point out that their workers are covered by workmen's compensation, disability insurance, and a variety of regulations relating to labor camps, contractors, transportation, child labor, and wage collection. Many would welcome unemployment compensation if a way could be found to finance it without imposing a crushing burden on employers.

Grape production in the Delano district is not dominated by the large, heartless corporate farms which are so often pictured. Of about 70 grape operations in the area, all but two are family owned and operated. Holdings range in size from 40 to 2500 acres, and the larger ones normally involve several members of a family.

PACC Supports Growers

Grape men have not stood alone against the attacks of the union. California agricultural leaders some years ago recognized the dangers of irresponsible labor activity, and many organizations were prepared to help. A number of groups co-operated at the state level, but the principal channel of action has been the Perishable Agricultural Commodities Corp., which represents a wide range of farm interests. The PACC board collected a sizable amount of money and met weekly through the summer to direct a program that included newspaper advertising, radio and television appearances by growers, publicity releases, and legal action.

The co-ordinating group in the Delano area has been the South Central

Farmers Committee, which was formed in 1960 to serve as an information center on a variety of agricultural matters.

When AMERICAN VEGETABLE GROWER visited Delano in mid-January, everything was quiet. Heavy rains had interrupted pruning, but there was still plenty of time to get the work done. Growers discussed their situation in a relaxed sort of way, without visible evidence of irritations and pressures, and even found it possible to laugh at some incidents of the past year or so. But they know they have been in a fight, and they expect it to continue.

Growers Concerned

Among their grave concerns has been the peculiar character of UFWOC, which frequently displays an interest in social reform that goes far beyond the usual economic concerns of labor unions. Chavez, undoubtedly a sincere and energetic man, often speaks in terms of social revolution.

His staff includes some types who would be out of place in a well-established conservative union headquarters, but they are dedicated and hardworking. Their homes and cars are adequate but modest—many of the workers' homes are larger and better cared for. It seems fair to assume that immediate monetary gain was not among the motives that led Chavez' followers to march under his "Huelga" banner. And they seem to be digging in for a long stay; new staff members are regularly looking for homes to rent or buy in Delano.

Chavez, himself, is seldom seen in town; apparently, most of his time is devoted to speeches and meetings in other places. There is considerable speculation that the UFWOC campaign is under the direct and active supervision of William Kircher, national director of organization for AFL-CIO, who is a frequent visitor.

Martin Zaninovich, president of the South Central Farmers Committee, and two of his board members, Louis Caratan and Jack Bree, confirmed their organization's support of the principle of collective bargaining.

"We have repeatedly stated," Zaninovich said, "that we are prepared to bargain with any responsible union that represents our workers. In fact, we would have no choice but to bargain. But our workers do not want to be represented by the Chavez union. They have shown that by picking our grapes in spite of picket lines and all sorts of harassment and intimidation."

But there was almost no field picketing around Delano at harvesttime last fall. "In fact," Caratan remarked, "any time you saw a picket around, you
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could be pretty sure the union had a V.I.P. in town."

Evidently, union personnel was concentrating on the boycott. And now they are moving beyond store picket lines to pressure top chain management with such tactics as sit-ins and mass delegations.

The Delano men label the consumers boycott an unfair and potentially destructive weapon, and point out that it has been used rarely and with caution in industries covered by the National Labor Relations Act.

"It's a blackmail tactic," said Zaninovich, "designed to force us to accept a bargaining agent which is not supported by our workers, and to require them to join a union which will not provide them any real benefit."

Most of the union's contracts with the wineries were negotiated without an election or any other effort to determine whether a majority of workers either belonged to the union or wanted to join the union. The few elections actually held were under terms which, according to growers, gave the union the privilege of stuffing the ballot box. (Ironically, one of these elections was won by the Teamsters, who have sometimes demonstrated a selective interest in farm workers but have never mounted an active campaign. Their bargaining unit has since been conceded to UFWOC, under "heavy pressure from the churches," according to Einar Mohn, head of the Teamsters' Western Conference.)

Union Sympathizers

Growers have also been under pressure from the U. S. Department of Labor. Former Secretary of Labor Willard Wirtz was frankly sympathetic to the union cause, and the department certified a number of "labor disputes" against growers, some on grounds so flimsy as to appear capricious. There is also a widespread belief that Wirtz pressured the Justice Department into harassing tactics by the Border Patrol, which became very active in checking camps, crews, and highway travelers.

Growers have bitter comments, too, about California Rural Legal Assistance, an agency financed largely by tax funds from the Office of Economic Opportunity. CRLA has filed a number of complaints for individual workers for causes which, growers believe, are mostly trivial or fictitious. A current favorite is the charge that workers are being poisoned by indiscriminate use of pesticides. A former head of CRLA is now UFWOC's attorney.

One of UFWOC's most recent legal actions is a suit against several grow-

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ers, alleging that they are financing the efforts of Jose Mendoza and Gilbert Rubio, a couple of one-time Chavez supporters who are now leaders of an anti-UFWOC movement, the Agricultural Workers Freedom to Work Association. Many well-publicized UFWOC court actions, however, are either never filed or are not pressed.

For their own part, the growers scored one notable legal victory. Early in the boycott, several union locals involved in distribution of grapes attempted to take direct action in support of UFWOC. The NLRB, on action of growers' attorneys, ruled that this was illegal participation in a secondary boycott.

Legislation Needed

Growers feel considerable urgency about getting legislation introduced in Congress which will set up desirable procedures for collective bargaining in agriculture.

"Our position now—the position of the whole industry—is that we need legislation to prevent coercion and restore reasonable order to our labor market," Zaninovich explains. "We believe that federal legislation would be better than state legislation. But we do not want to be included under NLRB; their machinery doesn't fit the situation. In particular, we must have some protection against strikes and harassment at harvesttime."

This support for legislation does not arise from immediate concern over loss of markets. Actually, the boycott last year had only limited effects. Marketing was done in a fairly orderly manner, and storage stocks now are in a normal range. Direct comparisons with previous years are difficult because of variations in crop size and seasonal conditions, but final unload figures undoubtedly will show that some markets took less and some more than usual. Generally, shippers say that the boycott was clearly felt in relatively few markets, and mostly for limited periods of time.

As Zaninovich put it, "We've been through tough years before, and we think we can do better next year. You'd be surprised how many people don't like union coercion, and we've sold a lot of grapes to those people. But we've spent a lot of time and effort fighting the boycott, and we'd rather concentrate on growing and selling grapes."

A formal, legal procedure for dealing with union recognition claims and other disputes would not solve the most crucial problem of the farm labor market—the high peak, seasonal demand which results in low annual incomes for many workers. The effective solution for this is mechanization of harvest, so

that a smaller total labor force can be employed the year around. Ironically, union pressure is accelerating the push toward mechanization, and the result will be that many farm workers, now employed only part of the year, will have no work at all unless they can move into industrial employment.

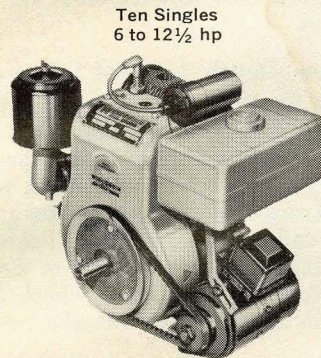
Unions Have Patience and Money

The AFL-CIO has been trying to organize California farm workers for more than a decade. Organized labor has invested many millions in UFWOC and its predecessor, AWOC (Agricul-

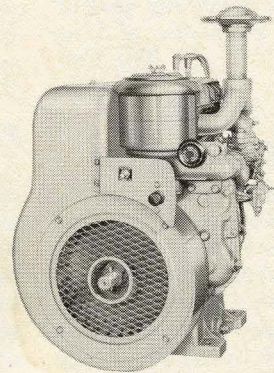
tural Workers Organizing Committee), and has very little to show for the effort and money. The AFL-CIO leaders are patient men, but they must be feeling the pressure for some kind of victory.

There are good reasons why California grape growers are the primary target. AWOC's first director frankly said, "California is the biggest; if we can get the biggest, the rest will fall in line." Grape growers are the state's largest employers of farm labor, now that tomatoes are becoming more mechanized.

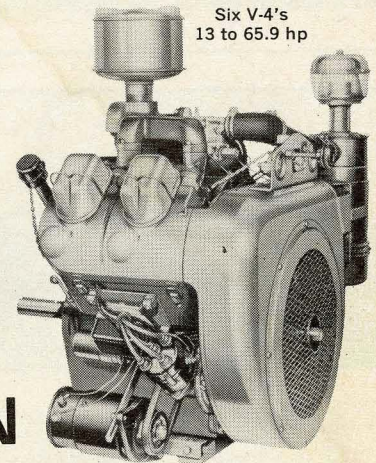
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dent. Delano's growers are no different in their attitudes than any others. Workers there are better off than in many other places. As a grape-growing center, Delano is no more important than several other towns. It's a dot on the map that came into the spotlight of national interest because Chavez' wife's family lived there, and it became UFWOC's headquarters.

To be in the spotlight under such conditions is not a position any farmer would seek. The Delano growers may have felt, at times, like the man being ridden out of town on a rail, in Lincoln's famous story, who said, "If it weren't for the honor, I'd rather walk." In this position of dubious honor, the Delano growers have shown skill and energy in defending agriculture's interests in the matter of farm labor unions. THE END.

SEED TAPE GOING COMMERCIAL

SEED tape planting is now moving into commercial use under the trade name Rhotec. This system originated in the research laboratories of Keystone Seed Company, Hollister, Calif. It is being developed in conjunction with Union Carbide Corp., which supplies a special readily dissolvable poly-

mer plastic tape; Creative Agricultural Systems of Salinas, Calif., a Union Carbide subsidiary, which places the seed in the tape; and Marvin Landplane Company, Woodland, Calif., which supplies the seed tape drill.

Major crops planted in this manner so far are lettuce and tomatoes, with 3000 acres of each slated for seed tape planting this spring. Trial plantings of celery, asparagus, broccoli, cauliflower, onions, carrots, peppers, and sugar beets have proved successful. Further research and more testing will be done.

Seed is encapsulated in dissolvable plastic tape at any desired interval. Most applications require exact spacing of single seeds; however, clump spacing is easily accomplished and has proven successful with tomatoes, where four to six seeds per clump is the general rule, and the clumps are not thinned.

Precise Depth Control

The Rhotec seed tape seeding method adds a third dimension to the precision sowing of seed. This is precise depth control, which is difficult when raw or coated seed is dropped on or between soil granules. The tape holds the seed in place as the soil is firmed around it by the packer wheel. This asset is particularly valuable where

uniform maturity is required for once-over or mechanical harvest operations, since seedling emergence and stand establishment is uniform.

The precision spacing of seed is accomplished in a factory under controlled conditions including humidity and temperature. The taping machine operators endeavor to keep errors (skips and doubles) to a total of 2% or less, through automatic scanning devices.

The Rhotec seed tape system is a link in the whole chain of precision mechanical production of crops. Soil preparation is the beginning of this chain. Its texture and surface uniformity must be somewhat more exacting for seeding and for harvest. Seed tape will not correct poor farming techniques and careless timing.

The big advantage of this Rhotec system is uniformity of plant emergence and development, leading to higher yields of desirable uniform quality. Root crops and production of transplants, where seeding is done to a stand in tape, produce a significantly higher percentage of uniform marketable plants per acre.

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Is Legislation the Answer? We Think It Is

MANY attempts have been made, at various times and places, to organize farm workers into labor unions for collective bargaining. In the long run, what has been happening in Delano, Calif., probably will be important only because of its relation to a major issue that faces agriculture today.

The issue in Delano was a simple question of fact: Did UFWOC represent the vineyard workers?

The growers' answer was "No."

With great determination the growers stood fast against the pressures of a substantial segment of public opinion and the combined coercion of organized labor, government officials, clergymen, and various groups concerned with large social causes.

Many people were misled about the real issue; they thought the growers were refusing to recognize a union that the workers supported. But the workers picked the grapes. They "voted with their feet," as labor leaders are fond of saying, when they chose to work instead of strike.

Growers are confident that in a fair election, conducted by an impartial body, the workers would have rejected UFWOC as their bargaining agent. Such an election would have focused attention on the real issue and lessened the union's public support.

But there was no machinery for an absolutely fair election.

So, for agriculture, the larger question raised at Delano is: Do we need some formal, legal procedure for settling agricultural labor disputes?

We say the answer is "Yes."

Traditionally, we in agriculture have argued that it is impractical and unnecessary to have any kind of legislation covering agricultural labor relations. And we have said that the machinery of the National Labor Relations Act, as administered by NLRB, is totally unsuited to agriculture.

While we hold firmly to the second statement, we think the time has come for the first to be discarded.

During the past year or so, more and more growers and farm group leaders have been discussing ways in which legislation might help resolve some important and long-standing problems in agricultural labor relations. It now seems certain that a bill will be introduced in this Congress that will be specifically written to cover collective bargaining between farm workers and their employers.

Two general provisions must be included in any such bill if it is to maintain a balance of bargaining power. One is some kind of machinery for preventing strikes at harvesttime; the other is a carefully written set of rules about the eligibility of workers to vote on the question of union recognition.

Many growers will undoubtedly object to legislation simply because they do not want to deal with unions under any circumstances. And no one wants to help build a bureaucratic structure in which labor lawyers are much more at home than growers are likely to be.

These objections are well understood in Delano. But growers there, like many others, have decided they would rather have some legal ground rules than the unrestricted warfare they have been fighting. And when rules are being written, it is better to be on the committee that writes them than to try to change them later.

Agriculture is already dealing indirectly with unions, as part of an intricate industrial economy in which unions have substantial power, and a more direct relationship is inevitable. It's time now to determine the ground rules for that relationship.

The editors of AMERICAN VEGETABLE GROWER believe that the best place for these ground rules is in federal legislation, which would establish common procedures for all growers and all workers across the country.

The rules may be imperfect and even costly, but the alternative is a struggle in which no holds are barred and no weapons outlawed.

We believe legislation will be *less* expensive, and in the long run will better serve the public interest.