

Bitter Harvest

Meetings Will Try To Reduce Farm Labor Strife

PALM SPRINGS (AP) — Sheriffs and district attorneys are seeking ways to increase dialogue and reduce discord with feuding forces in California's farm labor struggle.

They've begun a series of meetings aimed at avoiding a repeat of last summer's bitter harvest when 3,500 United Farm Workers of America pickets were arrested and one was shot to death.

"If we do have problems this year, we'll try to create

more of an atmosphere of understanding with these people if possible," said Kern County Sheriff Charles Dodge in an interview. "We'll get together and talk things out rather than have war in the fields, which didn't accomplish much."

Kern deputies and their colleagues in neighboring Tulare County were charged by UFW President Cesar Chavez last year with brutality and failing to protect the rights of his members and supporters to

picket ranches struck for refusing to renew field worker contracts.

Officers responded that they were neutral and were only trying to stop the violence that erupted sporadically in rock throwing, fires and shootings.

Officials of the UFW, the rival Teamsters Union and growers may be invited to a future law enforcement session, Fresno County Dist. Atty. William Smith said. "I think there's a lot to be gained, a little more rapport in solving problems when they come up," he said. "I'm going to be encouraging more dialogue and that more sides be heard. At least they'll know what we should do and are going to do. Talking to them may keep it calmer."

Lessons from last year's mass arrests, mostly for violating court restrictions on picketing, dominated the first meeting last week in Palm Springs, located in Coachella Valley where California's table grape

harvest and accompanying strife began in 1973.

Deputies may issue more civil citations this year instead of criminal arrest procedures, Dodge said. However, UFW pickets demanded to be arrested at times last year, particularly in Fresno County, in an avowed effort to clog the jails and courts. Most cases were settled later without trials.

"If the UFW attitude is such that citations are possible, it sure would save a lot of housing problems," Smith said. "But if an arrest is needed to prevent injuries, I'm sure the sheriff would do so."

Two or three more meetings will be held before the 1974 harvest with the next tentatively planned here in February for captains in charge of field operations, Smith said.

Attending the initial meeting were representatives of Tulare, Merced, Kings, Riverside, Monterey, San Luis Obispo, Kern and Fresno counties.

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3 In Farm Strife Plead No Contest

Roberto P. Garcia, Jesus E. Solano and Gustavo D. Romero all pleaded no contest in Fresno Municipal Court to trespassing charges stemming from a July 20 United Farm Workers union demonstration near Five Points.

Judge Ralph Moradian placed them on one year bench probation and suspended 30-day sentences.

The cases were transferred to Fresno from the Riverdale Justice Court. The District Attorney's office said the three were among a group arrested when an estimated 150 UFW pickets invaded cantaloupe fields on the Harris Farms Inc. ranch.

Bench warrants were ordered issued for Javier R. Amechiga, Jesus Alvarez, Jose A. Candray and Francisco Morales-Alvarez who failed to appear in court for trial.