

UNITED FARM WORKERS OF AMERICA, AFL-CIO
1300 South Wabash
Chicago, Illinois 60605
Telephone: 312-939-5120

For additional information
contact Kathleen Devine
or Steve Pittman.

MAY 1976

FACT SHEET

INTRODUCTION

The United Farm Workers of America, AFL-CIO (UFW) is a national farm workers union with headquarters in La Paz, Keene, California 93531. President is Cesar Chavez; Vice President is Dolores Huerta. UFW policies are adopted by a bi-annual farm worker convention and carried out by a 9-member elected executive board. Membership reflects the racial and ethnic diversity of farm workers: Mexican-American, Black, Filipino, Puerto Rican, and White.

The UFW, or "LA CAUSA" as it is frequently called, is a movement designed to build an organization which democratically represents the needs and aspirations of farm workers throughout the United States. Those needs and aspirations are reflected in the many efforts of the union to change the economic, social, and political conditions which have kept most of America's 3 million farm workers in poverty.

The union has a local organization in Illinois for the purpose of promoting UFW-sponsored boycotts and the farm workers movement. Twenty staff organizers and numerous volunteer committees work on boycott efforts throughout the city of Chicago, the suburbs, and downstate. In Illinois, the UFW has enlisted the support of hundreds of local unions, churches, civic organizations, and public officials. The Illinois office of the UFW is part of an international UFW boycott organization with staff in over 50 cities, and volunteer committees in hundreds of other cities in the U.S., Canada, and Europe.

UFW field offices and service centers provide assistance to farm workers in California, Florida, Arizona, and Texas. Field operations include many legal clinics, 5 health clinics, a credit union, hiring halls, and a retirement village. A new health clinic will be opened in Avon Park, Florida in summer 1976. All UFW field and boycott staff receive the same allowance: \$5.00 per week, plus room, board and gas expenses.

PART I. THE CALIFORNIA AGRICULTURAL LABOR RELATIONS ACT

On June 5, 1975, the State of California enacted a farm labor law, the first legislation protecting the right of seasonal farm workers to unionize. Some of its provisions include: 1) the right to union recognition elections during peak season, 2) definitions of unfair labor practices by unions and employers, 3) access to workers by union organizers, under established guidelines, and 4) requirement that employers and unions bargain in good faith.

The farm labor law reaffirms the right to primary consumer boycotts ("Don't buy such-and-such a product."). It reaffirms the right to secondary consumer boycotts ("Don't shop at such-and-such store because it carries boycotted products."), except under specified circumstances. The law does not restrict the right to strike.

During the first 5 months of elections (September 1975 through January 1976), workers at 380 ranches requested elections. As of February, when elections were abruptly stopped due to lack of state funding, election results stood as follows: UFW--205 elections representing 31,051 workers; Teamsters--109, representing 12,800 workers; no-union--22, representing 3,028 workers. 44 elections representing 12,574 workers are undecided.

Most of the 380 elections are yet to be officially certified by the farm labor board. The UFW filed more than 300 unfair labor practice charges against growers and Teamsters for firings, threats and use of violence, and harrassment and intimidation of workers. The now defunct labor board concurred in some of those charges, but did not rule on most of the charges. The UFW strongly supports the California farm labor law, but severely criticized its lack of enforcement during the first few months of elections.

Since February 1976, the California legislature has failed, by a few votes short of the two-thirds majority needed, to grant operating funds to the farm labor board to enforce the new law. As a result, the UFW began an initiative petition drive to bring the issue to a vote of the California electorate. On April 30, only thirty days after it began, the UFW submitted 729,000 signatures to place the farm labor law on the November ballot in California. Signatures of 312,400 registered voters are required by law.

PART II. THE FARM WORKERS BOYCOTT

Since 1973, the UFW has promoted a primary consumer boycott to encourage consumers not to buy non-UFW head lettuce, table grapes, and Gallo wines (all wines made in Modesto, California). Purpose of the boycott is 1) to guarantee free and democratic elections for farm workers, and 2) to ensure that employers negotiate in good faith and sign contracts with their workers guaranteeing improved working conditions.

The consumer boycott has been the UFW's most effective means of winning contracts, legislation, and improved working conditions, against the opposition of California's largest industry, agribusiness. The UFW's major opposition has come from the large corporate giants of the agribusiness industry in California and other agribusiness states. The economic and social pressure of the boycott has forced changes of century-old agricultural traditions which have kept farm workers uprooted and poor.

The UFW believes that winning elections and gaining recognition under the law are meaningless unless the end results bring about negotiated contracts to improve working conditions. The UFW will continue its boycott activities until farm workers win contracts.

PART III. UFW CONTRACTS

Contracts are negotiated by democratically-elected worker committees at each ranch. They include provisions on wages, hiring halls, health and safety, ban on child labor, mechanization, pesticide protection, toilets and water in the fields, pension plans and others.

The UFW's determination to replace the labor contractor system with hiring halls has met with strong opposition from growers. (Teamster contracts allowed the return of contractors in the grape fields in 1973.) Farm labor history, as documented through dozens of official investigations and trials resulting in convictions, is full of abuses stemming from the contractor system. The labor contractor, acting as the grower's agent, hires and fires workers, pays wages, often provides transportation, and deducts fees from wages for his/her services. Examples of abuses stemming from the contractor system include: exorbitant fees (sometimes more than 50% of the worker's wages), unsafe transportation, use of child labor, lack of job security, and massive discrimination.

United Farm Worker contracts replace labor contractors with hiring halls, operated by the union at no cost to the workers. Halls are based on specific provisions of seniority, job security, and ban on child labor. They are a long established concept in labor-management relations in seasonal work situations. The labor contractor system remains one of the most difficult negotiating issues between farm workers and growers.

Some of the UFW's present contracts include: Almaden, Paul Masson, Christian Brothers, Italian Swiss Colony, and Perelli-Minetti winers; Minute Maid Division of Coca Cola (Florida); Interharvest Lettuce Company (largest U.S. lettuce grower); and other contracts for vegetable and fruit workers.

PART IV. BRIEF HISTORY OF THE UNION

In 1962, Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta began going door to door visiting farm workers in California's San Joaquin Valley, where six of the nation's top ten farm counties are located. They talked of workers uniting to improve working and living conditions.

By 1965, 1200 families, under Chavez leadership, had joined together in the National Farm Worker Association (NFWA). Because there had been many unsuccessful farm worker strikes and organizational drives in recent decades, the NFWA worked cautiously to organize farm workers, knowing that previous attempts had been brutally crushed.

AFL-CIO MERGER

In 1965, a fledgling AFL-CIO union, the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC), decided to go on strike in Delano, California. Chavez' union voted to join the strike, and the well-known Delano grape strike began.

NFWA, mostly Mexican-American, and AWOC, mostly Filipino, merged in 1966 and came under the AFL-CIO banner. The new union, the United Farm Workers, carried on an extended campaign for union recognition and contracts. In 1966, UFW won its first contract. But it was not until 1970, after a 3-year international grape boycott and prolonged strikes in the fields, that most grape growers (85%) signed contracts with the UFW.

ENTER THE TEAMSTERS

The Teamsters Union for decades has negotiated contracts with agribusiness companies, covering truck drivers, canners, and packers, but did not take the opportunity to unionize farm workers. Teamsters had made brief and unsuccessful overtures to organize field workers, but basically ignored the lowest paid of the workers in the agribusiness industry.

In mid-1970, however, when the UFW was beginning to organize lettuce workers, the Teamsters union and lettuce growers suddenly announced the signing of an agreement whereby lettuce field workers would come under Teamster pacts. What followed was the largest strike in agricultural history.

There is ample proof of charges that lettuce contracts were a "sweetheart" deal. The California Supreme Court, in a decision relating to the lettuce contracts, concluded: "...an employer's grant of exclusive bargaining status to a non representative [Teamsters] union must be considered the ultimate form of favoritism, completely substituting the employer's choice of unions for his employee's desires." Englund v. Chavez, December 29, 1972 (emphasis added). Growers and Teamsters admitted in Court testimony that workers' views were not considered when their contract agreement was signed.

The California Court denied growers the right to stop UFW strikes, but grower-Teamster contracts remained in effect because no law to the contrary protected farm workers from "sweetheart" contracts. Furthermore, the Court did not stop the use of restrictive injunctions issued by local judges limiting UFW organizing and strike activities.

When the 1970 UFW grape contracts came up for renewal in 1973, grape growers announced they also had signed with the Teamsters. Workers struck in opposition to the Teamster-grower deal. UFW strikers were confronted with opposition from growers and their armed guards, local police and courts, and \$65-a-day Teamster hired guards. It was a bloody summer as attested to by the dozens of newspaper reporters who covered it.

BOYCOTT RENEWED

In late summer of 1973, after 2 UFW workers were killed, hundreds injured, and nearly 4,000 arrested on picketlines, the UFW halted its strikes and began an international boycott of grapes, head lettuce, and Gallo Winery (which also switched to the Teamsters). Hundreds of farm worker strikers travelled to cities across the country to ask support of their boycott. UFW dues-paying membership of 60,000 was drastically reduced.

The grape and lettuce boycott won the endorsements and support of the National Council of Churches, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, and hundreds of Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish denominations and groups. It won the full backing of the AFL-CIO and most affiliate unions, United Auto Workers, and National Farmers Organization. The endorsements remain in effect today.

LEGISLATION

Rural-dominated legislatures traditionally denied farm workers coverage under state and national labor laws. In 1962, when the UFW began, workers were denied almost all protective legislation won by other American workers (minimum wage, collective bargaining, workman's and unemployment compensation, etc.). For a decade, the UFW has fought for legislation to protect the rights of farm workers.

Collective bargaining legislation for farm workers is a primary concern for the UFW. Seeking such legislation, the UFW has fought to include: 1) guarantees to ensure the right of seasonal workers to vote in union elections, 2) the right to strike, 3) protection against crippling injunctions that mandate "a cooling off" period or otherwise would, in effect preclude harvest time strikes; and 4) freedom from crippling restrictions on consumer boycotts. Not until 1975 was the first law protecting the right to bargain collectively passed.

The union has won other legislative battles, including a ban on the short-handled hoe, unemployment compensation, and defeat of Governor Ronald Reagan's farm labor referendum, all three in California. It defeated a bill to ban hiring halls in Florida.