

# PENTAGON DENIES CHAVEZ'S CHARGE

Says Lettuce Buying Is Not  
Related to Union Dispute

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 20—The Defense Department has denied new charges by the United Farm Workers' Organizing Committee that it used its purchasing power to thwart farm workers seeking union recognition from California growers.

The farm union, led by Cesar Chavez, has charged that the Defense Department is deliberately increasing the amount of its business going to Bud Antle, Inc., a major lettuce producer in California's Salinas Valley, which does not recognize the union.

Two years ago the union accused the Pentagon of "radically increasing" its purchases of nonunion grapes during efforts to organize workers in the grape industry.

Charges similar to those of the union were also made recently on the lettuce issue by Representative William F. Ryan, Democrat of Manhattan. A Defense Department spokesman, said it had always been Pentagon policy "to refrain from taking a position on the merits of any labor dispute" and that its position in the current lettuce controversy was "completely neutral."

## Company Called Loser

The union also maintained that the Interharvest Company, the nation's largest shipper of lettuce, had experienced "a very dramatic withering away of military sales" since the end of August. Interharvest signed a labor agreement with the union on Aug. 30 of last year. Shortly afterward, Mr. Chavez announced plans for a nationwide boycott of lettuce sold by concerns that had not recognized his union.

Mr. Ryan has introduced legislation in the House that would prohibit the Defense Department from increasing its purchases of lettuce from any supplier in the current fiscal year, which ends on June 30, beyond the amount purchased from the same supplier in the last fiscal year.

In responding to the new charges, the Defense Department acknowledged that nearly 30 per cent of the lettuce it purchased in the first quarter of the 1971 fiscal year—the quarter that ended last Sept. 30—came from the Antle concern. This compared with a total of 8.3 per cent for the entire fiscal year of 1970.

But the department said that these figures, which had been used by the union to support its claim of antiunion bias, were misleading because the majority of the department's purchases from Antle were typically made in the first quarter of each year.

The department submitted first-quarter figures for the last three years showing that in the first quarter of 1969, two years before the lettuce boycott began, 28.3 per cent of its lettuce was purchased from Antle. In the first quarter last year the figure dropped to 15.8 per cent. It increased to 28.8 per cent in the first quarter of the present fiscal year.

## 'Only Source Of Supply'

The Pentagon explained that "the first quarter of fiscal 1971 was marked with union jurisdictional disputes and picketing, which hampered the normal flow of lettuce shipments to the Department of Defense," and said that "Antle, who is fully unionized, was generally able to continue normal operations and was often the only source of supply."

The farm workers employed by Antle are working under a Teamsters' Union contract that was negotiated shortly before Mr. Chavez made public his plans to organize workers in the lettuce industry. Mr. Chavez has called the teamsters' agreement a "sweetheart" contract and said it was signed without consulting the workers, who he says are represented by his union.

Officials at the United Fruit Company in Boston, which owns Interharvest, confirmed that its sales of lettuce on the military had declined, from about 10 per cent of the Pentagon's total business in the first quarter of 1970 to about 3 per cent in the first quarter of this year. But they said the drop was chiefly the result of the smaller number of bids made by the company for department contracts and not related to the Interharvest agreement with the farm union.

Defense Department figures for the second quarter, which ended in December, show that of 160 bids received for lettuce sales from six California concerns, only 15 came from Interharvest. During the same period, Antle offered 91 bids for lettuce, 51 of which were unopposed by any other company.

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