

TWO FARM UNIONS AGREE ON MERGER

Chavez Joins With Puerto Rican Group in East

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SAN FRANCISCO, June 20—

The United Farm Workers of America has announced that the union has merged with an independent Puerto Rican farm workers union based in Hartford.

The 20,000-member U.F.W. said that agreement last week on the merger with the 6,000-member Asociacion da Trabajadores Agricolas (Association of Agricultural Workers) was reached after one and one-half years of negotiations. Members of both unions must ratify the merger, which is expected within a month.

Dolores Huerta, Farm Workers vice president, said that the merger meant "quite a bit in terms of progress towards a national union" of agricultural workers.

Until now, the U.F.W. has been based primarily in California, with some organizing and legislative activity in Florida. The union's activities in other parts of the country have been largely focused on boycotts of table grapes, iceberg lettuce and Gallo wines.

Now "we have a firm organizing base on the United States East Coast," said Mark Grossman, administrative assistant to the union's president, Cesar Chavez.

The Hartford-based association has members in New York, Connecticut, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Delaware and Pennsylvania.

Organize One Movement

The merger is also considered significant ethnically. The bulk of the U.F.W.'s members are Mexican-Americans, with a number of Filipinos and the rest blacks and Caucasians. Ninety percent of the association's membership is Puerto Rican. Juan Irizarry, founder of the association, said, "Now we can organize one movement of every single farm worker, no matter what nationality."

Many of the migrant farm workers who work on the East Coast are recruited in Puerto Rico by United States concerns and come into this country under Public Law 87, which was passed in 1962. Under this statute, contracts are negotiated between growers and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, with the approval of the Secretary of Labor.

Mr. Irizarry said that the association was opposed to this setup because the workers had no say in the formulation of the contracts and "they lack good fringe benefits."

Mr. Irizarry said that the association was founded in 1973 "on behalf of workers coming into this country under Public Law 87," with the goal of the union, not the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, "negotiating contracts with growers."

No Contracts as Yet

Mr. Irizarry, 28 years old, said he first picked crops in the United States in 1971 in the Delaware asparagus fields. "I was fired for organizing activities," he added. At present the association has no contracts with any growers, although it has been organizing on the tobacco farms in Connecticut and Massachusetts, the mushroom fields of Pennsylvania, the potato growing region of upstate New York, and in blueberry and tomato growing areas in New Jersey, in addition to its Delaware asparagus activities.

There are no field workers on the East Coast working under union contracts. Farm workers were specifically excluded from the National Labor Relations Act when it was passed in 1935 and California is the only state that has a law giving farm workers the right to vote for a union and bargain collectively.

At present, however, the law is not in force because funds for the Agricultural Labor Relations Board, which administers the law, passed year ran out in February. Since then, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, which has been battling the U.F.W. to represent farm workers, and growers have joined forces to prevent any further appropriations from passing the State Legislature in Sacramento.

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