

# Farm Union Clashes With Castle & Cooke

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Special to The New York Times

SAN FRANCISCO, Sept. 1 —A contract-negotiation dispute between the United Farm Workers and one of the nation's largest mushroom growers has been smoldering near here for weeks.

It has centered at West Foods Inc. in Ventura, a coastal city 300 miles south of San Francisco. The U.F.W. defeated the International Brotherhood of Teamsters in a representational election at West Foods almost a year ago.

The workers, without a contract since last Dec. 31, walked off the job Monday in the first strike under California's year-old Agricultural Labor Relations Act.

Although the strike involves only 200 workers, its symbolic importance could be considerable because Castle & Cooke Inc., West Foods corporate parent, is one of the largest companies the Cesar Chavez-led U.F.W. has taken on. Castle & Cooke, based in Honolulu, had 1975 revenues of \$843 million and earnings of \$38.2 million. West Foods markets its mushrooms under the Dole label, Castle & Cooke's "most prominent brand name," according to Emil Schneider, director of public relations for Castle & Cooke.

The strike and a decision by the union to have its members boycott Dole-labeled products are also important because they come at the be-

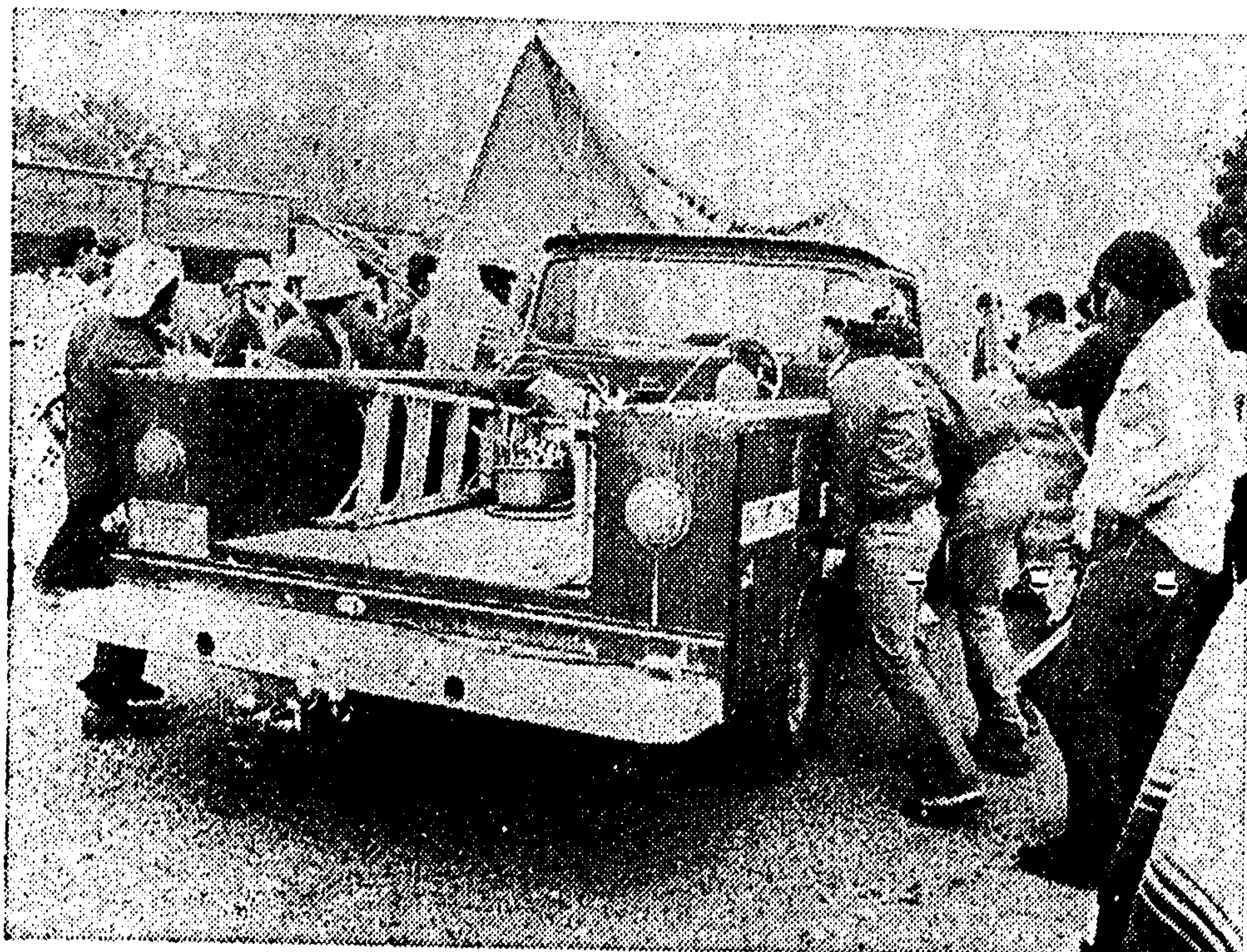
ginning of what promises to be a highly charged campaign over Proposition 14, a state ballot measure designed to assure the continuity of California's Agricultural Labor Relations Board. Its future has been in doubt because growers and conservative legislators have been unhappy about how it has operated.

A spokesman for the West Food workers said they voted to urge the U.F.W. to boycott Dole-labeled products on July 13 because the company "was not bargaining in good faith." Mr. Schneider maintains that the boycott, which began the following week, is "an unfair and improper use of misguided power."

Nick Jones, the U.F.W.'s

boycott director, said there were currently "35 chain stores across the United States not handling any fresh Dole mushrooms, bananas, pineapples or coconuts, but the boycott does not apply to canned goods." These chains have a total of 2,100 stores, he added.

Mr. Schneider said the



**Demonstrators at the West Foods Inc. plant in Ventura, Calif., halting a truck. West Foods is a subsidiary of Castle & Cooke, now a target of United Farm Workers protest.**

United Press International

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The New York Times

Published: September 2, 1976

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boycott had "been having some impact, principally on a regional basis in California," but he said he had "not heard of any" store's refusing to sell Dole-labeled products.

The U.F.W. also has been boycotting Gallo wine and most table grapes and iceberg lettuce since 1973. The union has 48 contracts with fruit, vegetable and wine grape growers, according to a union spokesman.

Labor observers say the current dispute is not surprising considering how bitterly the representational campaign at West Foods was fought. About a year ago there was a raid at West Foods by the Border Patrol, and 20 suspected illegal aliens were taken into custody two days after the U.F.W. had petitioned for an election at the company.

Eliseo Medina, the U.F.W.'s principal organizer in the area, charged at the time that several employees arrested in the raid had been identified for Border Patrol agents by company managers and Teamster agents because they were U.F.W. sympathizers. These charges were denied.

The U.F.W. defeated the Teamsters, 136 to 39, with 9 "no union" votes cast, on Sept. 8. The state certified the U.F.W. as the bargaining representative of the workers on Dec. 1.

Negotiators for the union and the company held 26 meetings, but no agreement was reached on a number of basic issues, according to both sides.

Laborers at West Foods earn from \$2.50 to \$2.95 an hour, according to George Horne, Castle & Cooke's chief negotiator. He added that the rates (which vary, depending on how long the laborers have worked at West) would have increased to a range of \$2.75 to \$3.20 in April under the old contract with the Teamsters.

Under California Law, if a contract is not signed within one year after a union has been certified as a bargaining agent, another election must be held. Mr. Schneider said the company "stands ready to negotiate." But Gilbert Tadilla, a union negotiator, said it had become "clear that the company was interested in running out the clock on the one-year certification period." No further talks are scheduled.

*The New York Times*

Published: September 2, 1976

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