

Fast by Chavez Over Pesticides Passes 29th Day

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Completing the 29th day of his water-only fast, he was too weak to appear at a rally today in this small town 200 miles northeast of Los Angeles, where 3,000 farm workers and their families were praying for his health.

While he has refused to talk to the press, he issued a statement last month saying that his action was aimed at ending the use of five pesticides commonly used in the growing of table grapes, the state's largest fruit crop.

Mr. Chavez called his fast a personal purification, a "declaration of non-cooperation" with stores that sell table grapes and "an act of penance" for "those who could do more" to help the cause.

The labor leader's action comes after more than three years of an unsuccessful attempt at a consumer boycott of table grapes called by the union in 1984. Grape growers say they have enjoyed record shipments and sales. And, although the \$190 million-a-year industry is the largest employer of agricultural workers in the state, the union has not succeeded in winning a single contract for workers with the growers. Others Wait to Fast

Growers have accused Mr. Chavez of using the fast for publicity because the grape boycott has failed to materialize. The union itself has been foundering in recent years. According to data compiled by the University of California at Davis, the U.F.W. has only 31 active contracts, down from about 100 a decade ago.

Doctors who have examined him said today that Mr. Chavez has lost 30 pounds, and they strongly urged him to end his fast. The doctors said he "has reached a critical point where he could arrive at a life-threatening point in the next 24 hours."

After a meeting with Mr. Chavez in his room here today, the Rev. Jesse Jackson announced that he had agreed to be the first in a human "chain of suffering" in which others would continue the fast for three-day periods as soon as Mr. Chavez began to take food again.

"We the people must help bear the cross," Mr. Jackson said. He said he would be followed by the actors Martin Sheen and Robert Blake, who have picketed in support of the grape boycott.

Mr. Jackson also announced that the union would ask three supermarket chains, Safeway, A & P and Ralph's, to stop selling table grapes and would picket them if they continued to do so. He stopped short of calling for a consumer boycott of stores selling grapes. Birth Defects Are Cited

The actions against table grapes have been aimed at five chemicals used on the grapes and in preparing the soil for planting. They are: Captan, a fungicide now under review as a suspected carcinogen by the Environmental Protection Agency; dinoseb, a herbicide and insecticide that had been temporarily banned by the agency after it was found to cause birth defects in laboratory animals and is now allowed only until growers can find a feasible alternative; methyl bromide, a fumigant the union claims is responsible for more occupationally related deaths than any other pesticide in the state, and parathion and phosdrin, which are organophosphates that attack insects' nervous systems.

Of special concern, the union said, has been a cluster of cancers and birth defects discovered in children born to women living in farming communities throughout the San Joaquin Valley, particularly in the small town of McFarland a few miles south of here, where six children have died. The state is investigating whether chemicals in drinking water may be involved.

Last week spokesmen for the table grape industry held their own news conference to announce that food safety officials in California, Ohio and Canada had reported that testing of California grapes for chemical residue had shown that the samples met safety standards.

Tests by the California Department of Food and Agriculture found no residue of four of the chemicals protested by the union. The fifth, Captan, was found at 0.46 parts per million, well below the 50 parts per million level allowed by the E.P.A. Grower Discounts Threat

The growers also took issue with the union's claim that methyl bromide had been used in the fields. "There is no case where this material was used in a bearing table grape vineyard or posed a threat to the vineyard, employees or the consumers," said Richard Ethridge, a grower.

Occupationally related deaths attributed to methyl bromide have been accidental and took place in the construction industry, not in agriculture, according to James Wells, a pesticide expert with the State food and Agriculture Department.

Some union supporters remain concerned that Mr. Chavez, who fasted in 1968 for 25 days and in 1972 for 24 days over labor issues, will continue his fast despite the doctors' advice.

The fast "is directed at myself," Mr. Chavez said in a statement last month. "Do we carry in our hearts the sufferings of farm workers and their children?" he asked. "Do we feel their pain deeply enough? I know I don't - and I am ashamed."