

Fred Ross Dies at 82; Farm Union Organizer

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Fred Ross, a labor organizer who helped Cesar Chavez found the United Farm Workers union, died Sunday in San Rafael. He was 82 years old.

Mr. Ross pioneered many of the strategies now used by community leaders to organize labor, minority, social reform and antiwar groups.

"He discovered me, he inspired me," Mr. Chavez said. "He thought I had what it took to be an organizer. He gave me a chance, and that led to a lot of things."

Mr. Ross began his work in the late 1930's while managing the Arvin Migratory Labor Camp for the Farm Security Administration, a Federal agency. There he helped residents improve living conditions and protect themselves from exploitation through establishing self-governing councils.

Mr. Ross also helped Japanese-Americans interned in World War II find jobs and housing so they could be released from the camps.

In addition, Mr. Ross organized Hispanic Unity Leagues to help them fight segregation in Southern California, and worked in Arizona for better health care for Yaqui Indians.

"All my life, I've been looking to go to work with people who are in trouble of some kind," he said in an interview several years ago. "My goal was to help the people do away with fear -- fear to speak up and demand their rights."

Mr. Ross is survived by three children and three grandchildren.