

President's Newsletter



September 11, 1978
Vol. 1 No. 45

Office of the President
United Farm Workers of America, AFL-CIO
La Paz, Keene, California 93531



PRESIDENT'S OFFICE Vegetable Workers Attend Bargaining Conference in La Paz

On August 26, La Paz hosted 143 delegates from 29 ranch committees in the California-Arizona vegetable industry who gathered for the Preparatory Conference for Vegetable Industry Negotiations. This was the first meeting of its kind where Union members from different ranches in one industry came together in one meeting to discuss demands and bargaining strategies, rather than meeting by individual ranches.

The workers convened in response to a letter that we sent from our office to vegetable industry ranch committee presidents on August 12, inviting them to attend the La Paz conference. In the letter we reminded them that the majority of vegetable industry contracts expire at the end of 1978 and the beginning of 1979.

We know that collective bargaining is the best way to express our hopes and aspirations. At the negotiation table we can serve the interests of all farm workers and their families. Through collective bargaining we can assure for farm workers the recognition and complete fulfillment of their rights. We can realize a higher standard of living and working conditions. We can obtain security for all our people and permit the farm workers and their families to live with dignity and security. Collective bargaining also helps the growers by stabilizing the farm work force and bringing peace and security to agriculture.

This meeting was a great opportunity to plan out how we will negotiate our new contracts with growers later this year. At the meeting the delegates helped formulate tentative negotiation demands which will be discussed later this month by the ranch community members. They also decided about the

structure of the Union's negotiating committee and agreed on negotiating strategy for the upcoming bargaining.

In our opening remarks to the delegates we explained that this conference is a very important initial step in preparing for negotiating a master contract for the vegetable industry. It is necessary that the workers representing the vegetable industry come together so we can become better prepared to face the growers and bargain more effectively for farm workers' rights with management.

We also discussed various contract issues and items that should be addressed in our negotiations in 1978 including wages, hours of work and working conditions.

We presented to the workers at the meeting a tentative negotiations structure which was approved by the delegates. The workers elected a 10 member Negotiation Committee to coordinate demands and keep everyone informed of what's going on with negotiations. The Committee will be presenting proposals reflecting the interests and desires of the membership and seeing that demands from all segments of the work force are represented.

In addition to this committee, there will be set up a Negotiations Council made up of representatives from each vegetable ranch under contract. The Council's main responsibilities are to obtain specific recommendations from lettuce, celery, broccoli, thinning and cauliflower workers, steadies and packing shed workers and then advise the Negotiating Committee on the workers demands.

Workers then broke into five smaller groups to discuss different issues in the expiring contracts and make recommendations for new ones. The groups reported back to us during the afternoon session on recommendations that each group had made.

Nominations and elections were then held for a 10 member Negotiating Committee. The members of the committee who were elected by the workers are Brothers *Armando Ruiz* (Sun Harvest), *Salvador Bustamonte* (Cal Costal Farms, Inc.), *Sabino Lopez* (Sun Harvest), Sister *Eloisa Serrato* (Bruce Church), *Rigoberto Perez* (Mann Packing), *Rafael Jacinto* (Bruce Church), *Armando Delgado* (Harden Farms), *Raul Ramirez* (Sun Harvest), *Humberto Arroyo* (Veg-Pak, Inc.) and *Teodomiro Ibarra* (Sun Harvest). Alternates were also elected to serve if a committee member for some reason cannot meet their responsibilities. They are Brothers *Manuel Hernandez* (Sun Harvest), Sister *Rosa Briseño* (Abatti), *Aristeo Zambrino* (Associated Produce Distributors), *George Moses* (Sun Harvest) and *Pedro Gonzalez* (West Coast).



Photo by Susan Schumacher

Workers give input on ways to improve contracts during a small group session led by UFW Secretary-Treasurer *Gilbert Padilla*.

We then spoke with the delegates about a problem that many of them have been facing. This problem deals with people who are coming to the Union from the outside and are trying to disrupt Union business. We must look on these infiltrators as elements which will hurt our Union and fight them as such.

We are not concerned with people who give constructive criticism—that is good and needed. The problem we are having is with outside people who try to convince the workers that the Union is no good and do not respect the authority of the Ranch Committee. The Ranch Committee must have respect, for they are the elected officials of the ranch. When a member does not respect the Ranch Committee, then we don't have a Union. This is not because Ranch Committee members are perfect, but it is because they are the elected authority of the ranch and must be respected. If a member of the Ranch Committee is not doing his job, it's up to the workers to get rid of that member and replace him with another member who will do the job. But it is not right to abuse and threaten Ranch Committee members because then the structure of the Union begins to fall apart. What we are troubled with and will fight against are people who come



Photo by Susan Schumacher

Vegetable industry workers listen to UFW president *Cesar Chavez* at the Preparatory Conference for Vegetable Industry Negotiations in La Paz.

in to our movement from the outside and do not offer any constructive criticism or help, but attack the Union and abuse the Ranch Committee. We will not have this. We are going to deal directly with these people and the problems they are causing.

We also spoke of the many gains we have made politically, especially the Agricultural Labor Relations Act, and the necessity to protect our gains. We do this primarily through Citizenship Participation Department funds, the Union's separate and segregated funds for political action. We know that the growers spend money to elect officials who will be favorable to them. To balance their political power, it is necessary for us to do the same.

We use collective bargaining to protect our interests as farm workers in the fields, but we also need to use our political power to protect our legislative gains and prevent the passage of laws that will hurt us. We have to do this in order to keep our Union strong and functioning. We have contracts in the ranches and we also need contracts—civic contracts—with the people who are supposed to represent our interests and our rights in the legislature.

CPD funds is one of the most important contributions workers can make because it goes to insure that the gains we have made will not be destroyed. This could very easily happen since the growers are able to support candidates

who will be favorable to them. They contribute a lot of money all the time and while we can't compete with them in terms of the amount of money, through our CPD contributions and through our work we can balance it a little.

We asked the presidents of each ranch committee to name a person on the committee to be the CPD representative for the ranch. These representatives will be in charge of the political life on the ranch, notifying members about which candidates support the farm workers, and keeping in touch with the Union's CPD central office. This is new work for us, but it is work that has to be done very efficiently and effectively.

At mid-day the workers, many of whom had never visited UFW headquarters, were taken on a tour of four La Paz offices — Financial Management, Word Management, the National Farm Workers Service Center's Communications Department and the Robert F. Kennedy Medical Plan office. First they inspected Financial Management's computer facilities for membership and financial records. Their computers will file and store work, medical, pension and other records for every Union member under contract. It will eliminate much delay and red tape in providing benefits for workers in the fields.

Word management computers enable the Union to print contracts,

materials for workers and Union correspondence quickly and effectively. The NFWSC's communication facilities and microwave project will make it possible to link La Paz by phone to all movement offices and operations in California and parts of Arizona. The workers also visited the RFK Medical Plan's Headquarters and saw for themselves how claims are processed.

At the end of the conference, the workers were guests at a special dinner in one of the large halls at the Fred W. Ross Educational Center, where the conference was held.

It was a great honor and pleasure to be hosts to the farm worker delegates at the conference. Their practical recommendation for negotiations, as well as their enthusiasm and spirit of unity was a great inspiration to all of us.

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Settlements

Coachella

The ranch committee at the E and A Ranch in Coachella settled a grievance with the company recently. The grievance arose when the company laid off Brother *Gumecindo Reynozo* without any regard for his seniority rights. The company agreed to pay \$115.59 to Brother *Reynozo* to reimburse him for the four days of work that he lost. The company also agreed to recognize his full seniority rights.

The settlement was reached as a result of the quick action taken by the ranch committee and by Brother *Simon Cruz*, ranch steward. Members of the ranch committee are Brothers *Guillermo Ambriz*, president; *Juan Salazar*, vice-president; *Juan Alvarado*, secretary, *Ruben Trujillo*, first vocal; and *Anselmo Gamez*, second vocal.

OFFICIAL NOTICES

New Contracts

West Foods, Inc./ Ventura/ mushrooms/ Sept. 5, 1978.

Gonzalez Packing/ Gonzalez/ tomatoes.



Photo by Susan Schumacher

Vegetable industry Negotiating Committee front row (left to right sitting) *Raul Ramirez*, UFW President *Cesar Chavez*, *Humberto Arroyo*, and *Rigoberto Perez*. Back row (left to right) *Rafael Jacinto*, *Teodomiro Ibarra*, *Salvador Bustamonte*, *Elosia Serrato*, UFW Secretary-Treasurer *Gilbert Padilla*, *Armando Ruiz*, *Sabino Lopez*, and *Armando Delgado*.

President's Newsletter

Office of the President
United Farm Workers of America, AFL-CIO
La Paz, Keene, California 93531

Non-Profit Organization
BULK RATE
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Keene, Calif. 93531
Permit No. 1