

MEXICAN NATIONALS

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Intermountain Agricultural Improvement Association

Late in the spring of 1943 it became apparent that the supply of domestic migratory agricultural workers was not sufficient to meet the requirements for beet workers in the intermountain area. To meet this emergency the Intermountain Agricultural Improvement Association was incorporated as a non-profit corporation in the state of Colorado for the purpose of contracting with the Farm Security Administration for the delivery of Mexican Nationals. The original members of the Intermountain Agricultural Improvement Association were the American Crystal Sugar Company, The Holly Sugar Corporation, The Utah-Idaho Sugar Company, the Great Western Sugar Company, and The National Sugar Manufacturing Company. Later in the summer The Garden City Company became a member. One contract was signed by the Intermountain Agricultural Improvement Association with the Farm Security Administration which required the employment of these workers from the day after date of arrival until November 15, or approximately May 21 to November 15.

The first train arrived May 19 in Denver during a heavy snow storm which extended to Canada. Approximately 15% of the workers arrived with no shoes and few were clothed sufficiently well to protect them against our unusual weather. All workers were male between the ages of 18 and 50; all had undergone a physical examination and all had been required to give proof that they were agricultural workers.

The distribution was accomplished by pro-rating the workers on the basis of the number of workers originally ordered by each respective processor. Due to a decrease in planted acreage and weather conditions it became necessary to completely cancel one train of 800 workers. Approximately 45% of the workers were first assigned to areas where it was impossible to provide work in the fields on account of snow, with the result that these workers lost the first week of work. For the spring operation 3,079 Nationals were delivered. The total delivered for both spring and fall operations was approximately 4,900 who were employed in 28 factory districts. The total wages paid these men was in excess of \$1,750,000.00.

Farm Security Administration Policy and Personnel

As all new emergency measures must start, this program was inaugurated by the government without the benefit of either trained or experienced personnel. The lack of proper preparation resulted in a loosely knit governmental agency whose functions were neither clearly defined, nor, in many cases, practical and

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realistic. The problem which caused most concern to the processors was the inability of the government field representatives to intelligently define and explain the contractual obligations of the workers to the government and the employer. This resulted in a repatriation loss of 11% by August 1. Following this date a sterner policy was inaugurated which nearly eliminated this serious loss of manpower.

#### Classification - Wage Rates - Payrolls

The classification of the Nationals varied from average to premium, and varied in direct ratio to the type of supervision offered by the governmental supervisors. The health of the men was better than expected and, with one exception, all deaths were accidental. There were no epidemics and loss of time from contagious diseases was negligible.

County wage hearings had been conducted previous to the arrival of the worker for the purpose of establishing wage rates. Later in the season the Nationals had a stabilizing effect on the rates inasmuch as the labor could be controlled.

The introduction of large numbers of Nationals in an area tended to decrease the number of migrants voluntarily coming into the territory. The domestic workers in a community often endeavored to cause unrest among the Nationals with the hope that their removal would permit wages to rise. This unrest usually took the form of strikes, requests for repatriation, and discrimination. Strikes were infrequent but when occurring were settled through disciplinary action of the leaders who were either transferred or repatriated. Discrimination occurred in only two areas and was quickly controlled by appeals to the Chamber of Commerce and farmer associations. In both of these cases the Mexican government threatened to withdraw the workers unless the practice was stopped.

Two distinct periods of lassitude or low production occurred in most areas - when the individual National had accumulated the sum of money deemed necessary by him to purchase an acre of land plus some stock, (this usually amounted to about 500 pesos, or about 105 American dollars), and again when he entered the last stretch before the completion of harvest.

The payrolls provided by the government were nearly as difficult to understand and complete as a 1944 income tax form. The methods of completing and submitting these forms varied by areas. The detail requested in the payrolls was necessary in order for the government to insure wage compliance, the payment of a subsistence wage of \$3.00 per day when 75 percent employment was not given, and in order to retain and remit 10 percent of the workers wages to the Agricultural Credit Bank in Mexico City where it was deposited to the account of each worker. On return to Mexico this 10 percent money could be drawn by the worker and used for the purchase of any article which was necessary to his farming operations or would raise his standard of living.

The cost of supervision in the field and the cost of payroll bookkeeping at the factory are difficult to determine inasmuch as this work fell entirely on the shoulders of the fieldmen and cashiers who did a splendid job with a minimum of complaints.

#### Housing and Food

Fully 98% of the Nationals in 1943 were housed on farms and did their own cooking. In all probability the men did not know how to prepare or did not eat the type of food to which they were accustomed. This batching resulted in loss of time in the fields, some illness, and a certain amount of dissatisfaction due to their inability to buy Mexican food or to spend their ration points wisely.

Theoretically, all housing had to be inspected by government engineers before occupancy by Nationals, but only two cases of rejected housing were brought to my attention during the season by these engineers. Owing to housing and feeding problems peculiar to our area, the government did not at any time advise concerning menus or centralized housing of Nationals.

#### Transportation

One of the most expensive and most objectionable aspects of the Mexican National program was the insistence that the contracting party was responsible for the movement of the workers in intra and inter-state shipments. In a majority of the cases it must be remembered this transportation cost was paid by the sub-contracting employer.

#### Sub-Contracting

Early in the employment of these Nationals it became apparent that in order to give at least 75% work it would be necessary to go to other employers to gain this end. 55% of these workers were then sub-contracted to 22 responsible employers from whom we required a performance bond at the rate of from \$50.00 to \$100.00 per worker, plus the round-trip transportation costs. The total liability to these employers for failure to provide 75% employment will not exceed approximately \$400.00, which is at the rate of about 35¢ per worker. Additional hundreds could have been contracted had the transportation expense been omitted.

#### Summary of 1943 Program

Without the benefit of statistics I would venture to say that the average Mexican National did from 25 to 33% more work per man than the average worker in the beets. Even though he came as an unskilled beet worker he was tractable, anxious to earn and learn, and the control which could be exercised

over his employment made him an indispensable worker in 1943.

The first year of this program has been difficult and experimental, with many errors apparent, yet this experience should be of great value in making the 1944 program of Nationals more successful and practical.

#### 1944 Program

Congress has not as yet indicated what governmental agency, or agencies, will handle Mexican Nationals in 1944. Until this program is clearly defined, positive statements concerning the use of this labor cannot be made.

The State Department in Washington has released the Notice that in 1944 75,000 agricultural workers will be maintained in the United States. The number of workers shipped in 1943 was approximately 50,000; however, those of this number who were returned to Mexico were not replaced as will be possible this year.

It is believed at this time that it will be possible in 1944 to contract for Mexican Nationals under conditions similar to those in 1943. A desire has been expressed by the Extension Service and War Food Administration that county committees be formed for the purpose of contracting this labor; however, if such a plan is impractical in an area then any responsible contractor may secure these workers. The plan of organization of these County Labor Associations has been explained in papers just read. In the area of the Intermountain Agricultural Improvement Association, the first County organizations have just been completed in the Arkansas Valley where one county is completely organized and the remaining four counties will be completed within two or three weeks. The procedure followed in these organizations follow closely those of Idaho. The results obtained from these associations will not be proved positively until next fall. It has been observed by one man who stands sufficiently far away from the picture to see it in an unprejudiced light that he believed county associations would stimulate beet contracting.

Where County organizations are not practical it will be possible to make two contracts for this labor. The minimum time of contracting will be 30 calendar days and labor may be imported for thinning and again for harvesting. During the interim period the workers will be transferred to other employment within the state if possible or transferred to another state if necessary. At the present time it is believed that all intra-state transportation costs will be paid by the Extension Service of the respective states and the inter-state costs will be absorbed by the War Food Administration when it is necessary to transfer workers under the same or another contract.

The bill pending in Congress at the present time may contain sufficient money so that housing can be made available in any area where such facilities are lacking. Where centralized housing is resorted to it appears probable that camps of 50 workers will be established at government expense, and the feeding of these men will be done by the government who will charge the workers. The advisability of centralized housing is debatable for Mexican Nationals. It is justifiably contended that centralized housing is conducive to unrest and that the direct association of the employer and employee, which is mutually advantageous for better working relations, is lost. On the other hand the provision of food and proper diet is gained, which directly results in less illness and the availability of the workers for longer hours of work. The farmers who lack labor houses are those who will undoubtedly gain the greatest benefits from centralized housing.

The class of labor available from Mexico in 1944 will be identical with that of last year; however, the individual worker may be returning to this country for the second time or will have intimate knowledge of existing conditions. This problem will become apparent and will have to be solved at the first indication of a misunderstanding.

From present indications the contract for the use of these workers will be virtually identical with that of 1943 except food must be furnished free by the contractor to the labor for any day employment is not offered during the remaining 25% of the period of employment.

The problem of summer employment of these Nationals should be given very close attention and consideration. When the workers are transferred from the average beet area they should, if possible, be placed in employment where the wage rate is comparable and where housing and working conditions are similar, in order that a transfer back into beets at harvesting time will not present a difficult problem. This condition was apparent in October when workers returned to demand hourly rates for topping and living conditions such as were furnished them during summer employment.

In summary, the 1944 program should be a much more realistic and practical program as a result of one year of experience by the contractors and governmental supervisors,