

Region IX  
California  
Arizona  
Utah  
Nevada

R9-5-FRS

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
FARM SECURITY ADMINISTRATION  
DIVISION OF INFORMATION

85 Second Street  
San Francisco California

- -0- -

Statement of Paul S. Taylor  
University of California  
before the  
Special Senate Committee to  
Investigate Unemployment and Relief, March 14, 1938.

More agricultural laborers fall on relief than farmers. In 1935 they numbered more than half a million. Not only do they outnumber farm operators on relief, but their exposure to the hazard of relief is about twice as great as that of the farmer. It is clear, therefore, that the measures so far taken to improve the status of agriculture have not sufficed to make secure the livelihood of its wage-earners. Rural poverty and relief are not alone problems of obtaining fair prices for farmers.

The earnings of farm laborers are low, even of those who escape relief. An approximate average annual cash income of only \$265 was reported by a recent nation-wide study of farm laborers in eleven representative counties. In three of these counties, cash income was less than \$200, and in one of them it fell as low as \$127. These laborers were not indigents, for less than two percent of their average income came from relief. As might be expected, dependence on relief was greatest in the county where cash income was lowest. In that county, because of the inadequacy of earnings, twenty percent of the farm laborers received relief.

Severe underemployment, coupled with low wage rates, is the major cause of the farm laborers' low income and high dependence on relief. Demand by employing farmers for the services of laborers fluctuates greatly. In Florida, to cite an extreme example, carlot shipments of fruits and vegetables vary from twenty-six in August to 18,000 in March, and demand for agricultural workers rose and fell accordingly. In the Yakima Valley of Washington, demand for full-time hired workers fluctuates from less than 500 in December and January to more than 32,000 during the second week of September. In Arizona, peak labor demand is six times the slack. In California, it is about four times the slack.

Under these conditions, which are more widespread than generally is realized, anything approaching full-time employment for even a majority of the workers is obviously impossible. Only about forty percent of the laborers in the nation-wide study cited earlier received as much as 240 days, or approximately nine months' work within a year. And thirty-seven percent, or more than one-third, failed to receive as much as 120 days, which is well under five months' employment.