

This Week's Gleanings on Farm Labor-June 7, 2008

Here is some of the news of the week in migrant labor and H-2A from all over the country. First, from Florida and the *BradentonHerald.com*:

"Migrant workers aren't flocking to Manatee County during peak seasons as they've done for decades - possibly the start of a national trend in the wake of beefed-up immigration enforcement, a sluggish economy and dwindling farmlands.

These factors and others have depleted a once-thriving migrant community that relied primarily on agriculture work.

... "The overall population of migrants in Florida . . . is certainly shrinking," said Walter Kates, Florida Fruit and Vegetable director of the Labor Relations Division. "The number of people at least working in agriculture of migrant background seems to be decreasing every year."¹

And, from the *South Florida Times*, this, from the article:
"U.N. PROBES RACISM IN AMERICA"

"MIAMI — Local activists in the fight against racism tag-teamed with an international expert who's expected to shed light on a social ill plaguing South Florida — racism.

On June 1 and 2, United Nations Special Rapporteur Doudou Diène headed south to Miami for a fact-finding mission on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance.

The invitation, extended by the U.S. government, was met with open arms by scores of agencies excited that their mission has been moved to the top of this country's agenda.

...organizations included the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) Foundation of Florida, American Muslim Association of North America (AMANA), Fanm Ayisyen Nan Miyami (FANM) / Haitian Women of Miami, Farmworkers Association of Florida, Florida ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now), Florida Immigration Advocacy Coalition (FIAC), the Florida State Conference NAACP-Miami-Dade Branch, Haitian American Grassroots Coalition (HAGC), Housing Opportunities Project for Excellence, Inc. (H.O.P.E., Inc.), the Miami-Dade County Office of the Public Defender, the Miami Coalition for the Homeless, the Miami Workers Center, Power U, and South Florida Jobs with Justice."²

Note that many of these cited organizations are anti-farm interest groups located in Florida. They would dearly love any pretense at an investigation in agricultural interests, fault-finding on the part of them and associated monetary claims that would result of the United Nations poking about in what should be the sovereign business of the United States.

Moving on to New York and *The News-Review*:

"When Bob Nolan, president of the Long Island Farm Bureau, addressed a listening session of the state's new Council on Food Policy Friday morning at Riverhead Town Hall, it wasn't the high cost of diesel fuel and fertilizer he focused on. Instead, he devoted his entire remarks to the urgent need for immigration reform... Citing what he called "a conservative estimate" by the Farm Credit Associations of New York, he said this state alone could lose in excess of 900 farms and 200,000 acres of agricultural production over the next 24 months if immigration policy is not changed. "Americans simply do not want to work on farms due to the type of work and the seasonal nature of many farm jobs," Mr. Nolan told the panel, which included the state's commissioner of Agriculture and Markets, Patrick Hooker, and his deputy, Jerry Cosgrove.

"Even if we paid \$15 an hour, no one would work," he said. "Without immigration reform, agriculture faces an uncertain future, where farms will go out of business, food prices will continue to increase and we will import the majority of our food from foreign countries."³

From the East Coast, we turn our attention westward and to Colorado's *Rocky Mountain News*: The snippets below are from the article, "*New law to speed visas for farm workers.*"

"Gov. Bill Ritter signed a bill this week aimed at expediting visas for seasonal farm workers who help pick the state's fruit and vegetable crops each year.

The new law, signed Thursday, creates a five-year test program that will allow the state to work with a private company to cut through the red tape involved in obtaining so-called H2A visas for foreign agricultural workers.

"Many operators - whether they're farmers or peach growers - are having a tremendous problem getting workers to work in their fields," said Rep. Marsha Loper, R-Calhan, the bill's main sponsor. "The farmers have been crying for help."

The program starts in January and initially affects 1,000 workers.

It will allow for 1,000 more workers each year until it reaches 5,000. Farmers say finding enough workers has become more difficult since the state passed laws cracking down on employers who hire undocumented workers. Each year, agricultural businesses require about 10,000 seasonal workers."⁴

Then, there is always California to hear from.

"Two foremen for an Imperial Valley farm-labor contractor were charged yesterday in federal court in El Centro with fraudulently misusing Social Security numbers in order to employ undocumented workers.

Carlos Ramos Galdamez, 49, and Jouanni Francisco Perez Tinoco, 31, employees of Boss 4 Packing in Heber, were arrested Wednesday. Ramos, a legal U.S. resident from El Salvador, was arrested near his home in Brawley; Perez, an illegal immigrant from Honduras, was arrested while working in the fields.

In addition, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents arrested 32 undocumented workers on administrative immigration violations at various locations in the Brawley area."⁵

Guess they had not heard about the crackdown on illegals? Huh?

¹ Maura Possley, "*Manatee migrant numbers down*," June 01, 2008. Website at: <http://www.bradenton.com/local/story/644299.html> (accessed 6-7-08)

² T.V. Floyd, "*U.N. Probes Racism in America*," June 07, 2008. Website at: http://www.sftimes.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1509&Itemid=42 (accessed 6-7-08)

³ John Stefans, "*Urgent call for immigration reform*," 6/5/2008. Website at: http://www2.timesreview.com/NR/stories/R060508_immigration_stef. (accessed 6-7-08)

⁴ Joanne Kelley, "*New law to speed visas for farm workers*," June 6, 2008. <http://www.rockymountainnews.com/news/2008/jun/06/new-law-to-speed-visas-for-farm-workers/> (accessed 6-7-08)

⁵ L-B (Union-Tribune) reprinted on website: SignonSanDiego.com website. "*2 farm-labor contractor foremen accused of fraud*," June 6, 2008. Website at: <http://www.signonsandiego.com/news/metro/20080606-0725-1bo06fraud.html> (accessed 6-7-08)