A PROGRESS REPORT ON
THE BROOKLYN COLLEGE FARM LABOR PROJECT
May 1, 1943

After a developmental period of over thirteen months, Brooklyn College has come to the stage of having an official "Farm Labor Project", designed to be carried on as an off-campus annex or annexes during the regular Summer Session. From time to time various steps in the incubation process have been brought to the attention of the staff. Now with plans practically ready to be put into effect, it seems appropriate to present a unified summary report of the processes by which the present status has been achieved.

The report is made in a two-fold capacity: for the Committee on Employment with which the project had its genesis; and in an administrative capacity, designated by President Gideonsen to implement the program beyond its purely policy-forming and exploratory phases. It is not always possible to draw a line of demarcation between these two aspects.

The project had its inception about April 1st, 1942, in fact-finding enquiries made by Mrs. O'Neil and by the Committee on Employment. At that time it was patent to any newspaper reader that there was developing a serious shortage of agricultural labor, for reasons with which everyone is familiar. Following preliminary enquiry, there was set in motion here at Brooklyn a series of procedures by which information was made available to students as to possibilities of enlisting for summer farm work through one of three public or quasi-public agencies.

By late May, 1942 had registered for such outside placement but almost none of the registrants had been placed. Mrs. O'Neil
stepped into the breach and negotiated arrangements by which three farm labor camps were started in northern Dutchess County. As a result, 100 city boys and girls, 70 from Brooklyn, were located in these camps. From these they went forth to work in food production. An account of these camps has been presented under the title, "A Farm Labor Camp Experiment"; in October to President Gideonse and to the Committee on Employment; in November to the Faculty Council; and in December to the Board of Higher Education as an appendix to the President's report for 1942.

From one suggestion in that report have come the later developments of Brooklyn College planning for 1943. "Toward this end, it is here suggested that the Board of Higher Education study the feasibility of setting up work-study summer school camps in some fruit growing areas not far from New York City." This suggestion was expanded in succeeding pages of the report in a form of a "sketch" of the possibilities of such a venture, both as a contribution to relieve the shortage of farm labor, and as an educational project with far-reaching potentialities. Members of the Board informally expressed keen interest in the suggestion. Interested response also came from representatives of the Extension Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, of the Federal Office of Education, and from others to whom copies of the report were sent. Within the College, the Employment Committee was joined by an ever-growing number of Faculty members until a group of "associates in planning" of nearly forty could have been listed. The present "farm labor project" is the product of this whole group.

From general considerations, it was obvious last fall that 1943 would find the farmers, so far as labor supply was concerned,
in an even worse plight than 1942. From our own camp experience, and that of other organizations, it was clear that to make city young people of any extensive value on the food production front required far more than merely transporting them to regions of labor shortage. There were crude, inadequately planned projects of this sort and they resulted unfortunately, as might have been expected. Those labor camps had the greatest success into which the greatest amount of planning had gone, and for which competent organizations had taken responsibility. Since the great majority of young people available for emergency harvesting are students of city high schools or colleges, these educational institutions have come to be recognized in state and federal planning as the sources from which competent, supervisory leadership must be drawn.

It is the essence of our planning here in Brooklyn that, as an institution, we should do more than merely afford our students and staff the opportunity to enlist for summer food production. Students who volunteer will be sacrificing many things: opportunities for earning more than they can hope to earn by farm work; the ease and comfort of familiar home surroundings; the acceleration of the college education in the College Summer Session. At the present time, our students, especially the young men, are under extra-heavy pressure to complete as much college work as possible in the shortest possible time. As a partial balance for the loss of educational opportunity, our program for college credit classes for these student farm workers has sufficient justification. Beyond that, we have thought to design a curriculum and to select a corps of instructors capable of conducting a country summer session so as to make an important educational contribution to the work
and living experiences of the student farm workers. It should be emphasized, however, that the prime purpose of this Brooklyn College Farm Labor Project is not to utilize the farm labor emergency to promote an educational experiment; it is exactly the reverse.

Sequence of Developmental Steps

From the earliest planning until the present, the Committee has had to carry on two lines of enquiry and reference: (a) with public agencies, farmers' groups, and other general external sources of information; (b) with appropriate internal college agencies. It has been made clear repeatedly to outside official agencies that our first interest was to work with them in the study of the farm labor problem, and to fit our planning into any general program.

We offered our work-study plan as a possibly effective method which might have fairly wide application. Through conferences and correspondence with representatives of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the War Manpower Commission, the Office of Education, we were encouraged to carry our planning forward, even though we early discovered that public planning had not reached a stage that permitted any definitive answers as to the possible use of our program. As it turned out, N.Y. State achieved a workable program early in February of this year, when the Legislature passed a measure authorizing the appointment of a Farm Manpower Director, together with appropriations to make recruiting and placement of city student workers effective. A definite Federal program is still waiting for Congressional approval.

Within College circles, as the Employment Committee's planning has advanced from the status of preliminary sketches toward the
blueprinting stage, parts of it have been presented from time to time before appropriate College agencies; to the Committee on Student Personnel in December and in January; to the War Service Committee; to the Curriculum Committee; - January for the approval of a special "correlation" course, Farm Biology (approved); in February for the approval of "blanket credits (not approved); and in March and April, for another "correlation course", Rural Sociology (adjusted). At the same time, a general outline of the proposed course of study was also presented. To Deans Cosenza, Bildersee, and Bridgman, and to others, there was reported in January a tabulation of eighteen items of agenda, involving the steps then necessary in the planning.

On January 12, Farm Mobilization Day, by proclamation of President Roosevelt, a twelve-minute oral presentation was made to students and faculty of the general plans. Most recently, in March, the project has been presented to all departmental chairmen in the form of a request for data regarding courses which might be suitable for country summer session.

While these in-college procedures were going on, the offering of the program for actual use in farm regions had to be accomplished.

The experiences of 1942 had shown that one of the stiffest barriers to be surmounted in putting city youth into actual food production was the belief, widespread among farmers, that city boys and girls could be of little use in the country. For that reason, with the plans well along in the blueprinting stages, occasions were taken in January and February to spread news of our planning through the press and radio. A spirited broadcast by a panel of five Faculty members, a director, three professors, and
an instructor over WNYC late in January brought us one response; telephoned before the quivering of the ether waves had stopped: "Tell those people talking about farm work that city girls are no good for picking raspberries. If they want to help, let them take the place of the farmers' wives in the kitchen." News releases and letters to the daily press during February were more successful. One of these, a letter to the N.Y. Sun, was given editorial discussion. This has since been distributed to the entire staff, together with a resolution of the Board of Higher Education endorsing our planning. Another consequence was a letter, received late in February from W.J. Weaver, of the State Education Department. This contained an offer of the buildings and other facilities of the State Agricultural and Technical Institute, at Morrisville, N.Y., as a center for our proposed work-study summer session, and as headquarters from which two hundred of our students could go forth to help in the harvest of the large vegetable crops of the region.

A visit of inspection was made on March 26 by a committee which included five faculty members. This committee found everything about the location, the Institute plant and staff, the building and living quarters superlatively fine. A meeting had been called for the same evening which included local farmers, county agricultural agents, Institute staff, agents of Federal services, and State representatives. While no contracts were closed that day, assurance of demand for three hundred students workers for the Morrisville set-up has since come in. In addition, information has come in that our students would be welcome again as farm workers in the Red Hook region. In all these negotiations not only for the
Morrisville project, but also for any other labor camp site, and with respect to terms of agreement signed by farmers as employers, we are able to count on the services of the State agencies as our representatives.

Present status of the Farm Labor Project

Until about April 1st, all the plans had been made on the assumption that both students as the actual farm workers, and the faculty members as possible leaders and instructors would have to serve without assurance of much more than expenses. While for the students, it was hoped that the work would bring a fair return above expenses, for teachers, the only prospect was for a State grant that would be enough to cover board and room, with something over for gasoline for any supervisory travelling. On two bases, this latter arrangement had a fair degree of practicability. Not a few prospective staff members had expressed their readiness to take part under these conditions. Moreover, there had been pending for about a year the possibility that war conditions might bring about a general teaching service reorganization, with perhaps four three-month college terms to which all would be assignable.

With the first of April, however, came the announcement that the Brooklyn College Summer Session was to have a definite appropriation from the City budget. From this total, an allotment was set aside for the Morrisville program, approximately proportionate to the expected ratio of student registration. On this revised basis further planning for staff and curriculum has been carried out. It will still be necessary to enlist a staff of instructors who will be prepared to contribute much more in service than would
be asked of them under regular camp teaching. While the scheduling of hours, the keeping of student records, etc., will in general conform to the usual standards of the Summer Session in Brooklyn, the Morrisville session will demand of its staff an interest and participation in extra-classroom activities beyond what is familiar to many of the Faculty.

At the present time the project has reached the following state of planning and organization:

(a) The establishment of a special, off-campus annex of Brooklyn College Summer Session at Morrisville, N.Y., with headquarters at the N.Y. Agricultural and Technical Institute located there. The use of the plant of this Institute and the services of its regular staff are afforded us through the State Department of Education (Mr. W.J. Weaver), with the collaboration of the N.Y. State Farm Manpower Director, Mr. T.N. Ford. Morrisville is in a three-county area in which thousands of acres are devoted to vegetable growing for which large additions of harvesting labor are required.

(b) Preliminary registration of interested students, chiefly to afford a basis for planning a program of studies and enlisting the appropriate staff.

(c) The preliminary registration and indications of preferences have furnished the basis for the following, still somewhat provisional groups of courses. It is provisional because of contingencies relating to staffing, and to correlation with the Summer Session course of study here in Brooklyn.

1. Required courses: Mathematics, Political Science, English, Sociology

2. Correlation courses: Geology, Farm Biology. (Sociology 5 can be counted here.)
3. War Service Courses: Navigation, Cryptanalysis

4. Elective Courses: The possibilities of including English 11 (Advanced Composition) and Sociology 15 (Folk and Rural Societies) are being explored.

Note: The above list is probably more extensive than can be put into actual effect.

(d) The enlistment of the needed staff, and the organization for instruction and for the extra-curricular duties which will be entailed.

(e) The orientation and selection of students on the basis of interviews, records, etc., with instructions as to formal enrollment, registration, payment of College fees, health examinations, and other necessary preparatory steps.

(f) The completion of the program for curricular and extra-curricular schedules. The planned class schedule allows each student to take one credit course (3-4 points), plus hygiene activities (1/2 point). The possibility of permitting some to take two courses is under consideration.

(g) Teaching schedules are set for Monday and Wednesday, or for Tuesday and Thursday evenings, with some instructors teaching two sections. Laboratory sessions will be set for a third evening, with provision for utilizing free days for special field trips. Class sessions will be programmed to provide a total of hours called for by College requirements. Our Library Department is cooperating in assuring needed reference titles, either from the College shelves or on loan from the State Department.

(h) Friday evenings are reserved for a series of ten "assemblies"
with programs designed to cover aspects of agriculture, economics, literature, sociology, government, history, etc., appropriate to the locale and region. For this, the leadership and services of Dr. Malcolm Galbreath, Director of the Institute, of the Institute staff, of our own staff are available. Participation of the student-worker body will certainly be utilized. Further contributions from the general locality, ministers, teachers, physicians, farmers, U.S. Extension agents, as well as from the State Education and Health Departments will be sought. The enlistment of speakers from nearby universities (Colgate, Hamilton, Syracuse) is in the field of desiderata. These Friday programs are counted on, not only for their educational possibilities, but even more for their stimulating and morale-building potentialities. At Morrisville it will be possible to attempt a type of college program which the lack of an auditorium does not permit in Brooklyn.

(i). Saturday and Sunday evenings are reserved for recreation, with programs to be in part planned, in part, unplanned. The Institute will provide a weekly movie schedule for a nominal admission charge. A good athletic field is available. Our Hygiene Departments will provide playing equipment. Social rooms, a good stage and auditorium, will furnish supply the settings for parties and dramas. Here again the cooperation of the Institute staff is counted on.

(j). In addition to the general administrative set-up to take care of necessary College records, a "tutorial" system is planned, to begin in preliminary associations here in Brooklyn, and to continue in informal association and guidance at Morrisville. The transplanting of two hundred city boys and girls to a completely new and strange environment with daily, hard, and monotonous work
is a problem not to be taken lightly, nor to be accomplished without the most careful planning and devoted service on the part of the teachers. With these assured, and with a corresponding response in attitude and effort from our student body, the Brooklyn College Farm Labor Project can become "a program in planned, democratic education on a practical and patriotic basis". (Vanguard editorial, April 30, 1943.)

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