

City University of New York (CUNY)

CUNY Academic Works

Dissertations, Theses, and Capstone Projects

CUNY Graduate Center

2-2023

Examining Past, Present, and Future of Agricultural Labor: From the Bracero Program to the Coalition of Immokalee Workers

Francesca Paradiso

The Graduate Center, City University of New York

[How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!](#)

More information about this work at: https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etds/5221

Discover additional works at: <https://academicworks.cuny.edu>

This work is made publicly available by the City University of New York (CUNY).

Contact: AcademicWorks@cuny.edu

EXAMINING PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE OF AGRICULTURAL LABOR:
FROM THE BRACERO PROGRAM TO THE COALITION OF IMMOKALEE WORKERS

by

FRANCESCA PARADISO

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts,
The City University of New York

2023

© 2023

FRANCESCA PARADISO

All Rights Reserved

APPROVAL

Examining Past, Present, and Future of Agricultural Labor:
From the Bracero Program to the Coalition of Immokalee Workers

by

Francesca Paradiso

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in
Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the thesis requirement
for the degree of Master of Arts.

Approved: February 2023

Dr. Karen Miller, Advisor

Dr. David Humphries, Acting Executive Officer

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

ABSTRACT

Examining Past, Present, and Future of Agricultural Labor:
From the Bracero Program to the Coalition of Immokalee Workers

by

Francesca Paradiso

Advisor: Karen Miller

This thesis is a comparative study that examines the Bracero Program and the work of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW). The Bracero Program brought Mexican workers into the United States on temporary work visas from 1942-1964. The CIW is an organization of Mexican workers that was founded in 1992 as a response to the horrible working conditions that Mexican tomato pickers faced in Immokalee, Florida. In this thesis, I show that by putting these programs side by side, we can see the exploitation of Mexican farmworkers has relied on changing government tools—different forms of visas, different immigration regimes, different modes of regulating labor and capital. However, examining these two moments in history reveals that while these tools shift over time, there is a long history of Mexican farmworker exploitation in the United States. We can also see that the CIW is a continuation of the kinds of activism that braceros engaged in. Scholars of the CIW attribute contemporary working conditions and forms of exploitation to the current globalized and neoliberal economies that we live with. But the Bracero Program shows that these formations are far longer than this presentist sensibility would have us believe.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A huge thank you for the Alliance of Fair Food, an ally organization of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers. Thank you to Natalia Naranjo, a National Co-coordinator of the Alliance of Fair Food, for helping me with the interview, translating, and aiding me with finding someone to interview. A huge thank you to Silvia Sabanilla, a CIW staff member who was a farmworker in the United States, I would not have been able to write my thesis without your story. Gracias Silvia por todo, no hubiera podido escribir mi tesis sin tu historia.

To Karen Miller, I thank you for guiding me and supplying the support I needed through the entire process. For giving me confidence, and absolute kindness through everything. Thank you again.

To Justin Rogers-Cooper, your guidance throughout your teaching of the Thesis Writing Workshop. Thank you for your kindness through the writing journey that is a master's thesis.

To all my professors in my master's academic journey, it was an honor learning from each and every one of you. My sincere gratitude to the CUNY (City University of New York) Graduate Center.

A huge thank you to my parents for always being by my side.

Lastly, to Ameer for always supporting me, and being my confidant.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Coalition of Immokalee Workers: The Program that Ends Farm Labor Abuse?	3
Literature	6
Chapter 1: Exploitation under a Legalizing Immigration Regime: Mexican Farm Laborers, Temporary Work Visas, and the Failed Promise of Bracero Protection	9
What do the interviews offer?	12
Bracero Program: The Ones in the Farm and the Ones Behind	15
Lucas Edmundo Benitez Cardenas	15
Jose Tello	18
Jose Mata Alvarez	20
Exploitation Through Capital: How Recruiters for the Bracero Program and Administrators of that Program Chose to be Part of that Exploitation	22
Ray Reeves (Bracero Recruiter)	23
Fay Terrazas (Clerk Typist)	28
Chapter 2: What Has Changed since the Bracero Program? The Coalition of Immokalee Workers Resistance to Exploitation Rooted in Collective Power	31
Silvia: The Story of One	31
Conclusion: What is the Future of Agricultural Labor?	49
Bibliography	52

Introduction

The Bracero Program was an agreement between Mexico and the United States that would allow Mexican men to work in the U.S on a short term, agricultural labor contract.¹ The program was a way to deal with the “supposed” labor shortages during WWII, and while this agreement was only “supposedly” made to last for a few years during war time, it went from 1942 to 1964. The Mexican Farm Labor Agreement was in effect August 4, 1942, and in the agreement, it stated that it would provide adequate shelter, food and sanitation, with a minimum wage of thirty cents an hour. The program would prove to have a negative effect on both the farmworkers in Mexico and the United States, for which both countries would have to sign the Migrant Labor Agreement of 1951. The agreement enacted the Agricultural Act of 1949 or Public Law 78 by Congress, in which it would extend the program until it ended in 1964.

Public Law 78 was approved in 1951 by both the Senate and the House of Representatives.² The law outlined guarantees for agricultural workers. In this amended agreement made by both the United States and Mexico it stated “to provide transportation for such workers from recruitment center...to provide such workers with such subsistence, emergency medical care, and burial expenses...to assist such workers and employees in negotiating contracts for agricultural employment...to guarantee the performance by employers of provisions of such contracts relating to the payment of wages.”³ The manipulation of language is present in these government documents making it seem that the agricultural workers were protected. Words were used such as provide, establish, assist, guarantee, however the

¹Deborah Cohen, *Braceros Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico* (Chapel Hill N.C: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 146.

² “65 Stat.] 119 - Govinfo.” *Public Law 78-July 12, 1951*.

³ *Ibid.*

stories of braceros and everything that is told beyond the surface speaks of manipulation, and varying degrees of human rights violations. This twenty-two-year program would bring in about five million contracts and an estimated 1.5 to 2 million braceros to work in the agricultural sector spanning twenty-six states.

The Bracero Program came with detrimental issues that are still present today. It includes inadequate living space, inadequate wages, food shortage, maltreatment, and discrimination by both farm owners (growers) and American people alike. Both the United States and Mexico exploited these bracero workers for their own gain. Even though many laws were being amended during this time to protect agricultural workers, both governments prioritized the interests of growers and owners of agricultural industries over braceros' needs. This meant that in practice the states were not willing to work to implement these supportive laws. Scholars described how growers' main concern during the program "...pertained to the terms of bracero contracts." Growers complained that workers' "wages were set too high and that it cost too much to bring them to and from the border."⁴ The Bracero Program supplied a template for grower-worker relations that continues to shape agricultural laborers' working and living conditions to this day. Rather than protecting agricultural workers, we can see that the United States and Mexican governments have worked hand in hand to ease their gross exploitation in the hands of owners of agriculture. Scholars and people alike might say that this period speaks of neoliberalism and globalization, however the shift from liberalism to neoliberalism did not change the fact that the agricultural workers were seen as capital to both Mexico and the United

⁴ Mario Jimenez Sifuentez, *Of Forests and Fields: Mexican Labor in the Pacific Northwest* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2016),13.

States. Farm workers either unauthorized or on an H2-A visa have been treated in horrid conditions, made to work hours without any pay.⁵

Coalition of Immokalee Workers: The Program that ends Farm Labor Abuse?

The Coalition of Immokalee Workers is a worker based human rights organization which is recognized for fighting human trafficking and gender-based violence as a community-based program to enforce protection of human rights among tomato pickers in Immokalee, Florida, an unincorporated community in Collier County, Florida in 1993. The organization was later reinforced in 2000, with the creation of a national consumer network that encompassed The Fair Food Program and the Anti-Slavery Campaign.⁶ The CIW started as Southwest Florida Farmworker Program, with their main points of combatting price gouging by local merchants. From 1995 to 2000, the CIW created several major protests for the declining wages of tomato harvesters, as well as protesting for the violence of supervisors directed towards farm workers. In 2011, the CIW created The Fair Food Program which was a “Worker-driven Social Responsibility (WSR) based on a unique partnership among farmworkers, Florida tomato growers, and participating retail buyers, including Subway, Whole Foods, and Walmart.”⁷

The Fair Food Program was a national campaign to educate consumers on the issue of farm labor exploitation, both its causes and solutions that would create a relationship between the farmworkers and the consumer. CIW enlisted major corporate buyers to press on the issue of farm labor exploitation. Major food companies included Yum! Brands (sister company for Taco

⁵ Mary Bauer and Perales Maria Sanchez, *Ripe for Reform*, Centro de Los Derechos Del Migrante, 18-19.

⁶ *The Fair Food Program*, <https://fairfoodprogram.org/about/>.

⁷*Ibid.*

Bell), McDonalds, Compass Group (foodservice company based in England), Walmart, Whole Foods, and Subway.⁸ The Fair Food Program created an agreement between the CIW and the Florida Tomato Growers Exchange that implemented the Fair Food Code of Conduct for ninety percent of Florida's tomato farms. The participation of corporate companies such as Walmart, and Taco Bell may be seen as a façade to many. This facade would show consumers that they cared for the workers in the farms across the United States, however the workers working in Walmart's across the U.S would show that caring was not something that these corporate companies held in high regard. The participation of these corporations speaks of hypocrisy more than being genuinely concerned for workers in all the sectors of the company.

The CIW created the Anti-Slavery Campaign as a program for a “worker-based approach to eliminating modern-day slavery in the agricultural industry.”⁹ The program was able to uncover, investigate and aid on the prosecution of countless states, operations spanning the Southeastern United States. Since the beginning of the campaign, it helped over 1,200 farm laborers who were held against their will. The keyword “slavery” is being used in a context to describe the worst abuse a human being can face. The CIW defines slavery by stating “Men and women are held against their will by their employers through the use of violence-including beatings, shootings, and pistol-whippings-threats of violence, and coercion.”¹⁰

The use of language is important to note when reviewing the cases, in cases investigated by the CIW it included U.S vs Flores case in 1997, Miguel Flores and Sebastian Gomez were sentenced to fifteen years in federal prison on “slavery, extortion, and firearms changes”, both

⁸ Grace Ann Rosile et al., "The Coalition of Immokalee Workers Uses Ensemble Storytelling Processes to Overcome Enslavement in Corporate Supply Chains," *Business & Society* 60, no. 2 (2021), 390-394. doi:10.1177/0007650320930416.

⁹ “Anti-Slavery Program.” *Coalition of Immokalee Workers*, 11 Mar. 2022, <https://ciw-online.org/slavery/>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

individuals had a total of four hundred men and women farm workers, mostly Indigenous Mexican and Guatemalan. The agricultural laborers were forced to “work 10-12 days, 6 days per week, for as little as \$20 per week, under the watch of armed guards”, if the workers tried to escape, they were “assaulted, pistol-whipped, and even shot.”¹¹ In the U.S vs. Lee case in 2001, Michael Lee was sentenced to four years in federal prison, and three years on supervised release on slavery conspiracy charges. Lee was found guilty of using crack cocaine, threats, and violence to enslave the farm workers. He would recruit homeless U.S citizens and would in turn indebted (peonage) them through “loans for rent, food, cigarettes, and cocaine.” The 2008 case of U.S vs. Navarrete, Cesar and Geovanni Navarrete were sentenced to twelve years in federal prison on charges of “conspiracy, holding workers in involuntary servitude, and peonage.”¹² The Navarrete’s pleaded guilty to “beating, threatening, restraining, and locking workers in trucks to force them to work” as agricultural workers, while also being accused of paying small wages and driving the workers to be indebted to them. The efforts made by the CIW provide effective methods for improvement on a geographic level, spanning different industries, and many forms of workplace human rights abuses, with enslavement being the key issue.

Literature

Scholars have been interested in the Bracero Program and the Coalition of Immokalee Workers as it has offered important insights about the exploitation of Mexican workers and how that worked and continued to work through the Bracero Program, and through undocumented immigration. However, they have not considered these two moments in history, and this thesis

¹¹ “Anti-Slavery Program.” *Coalition of Immokalee Workers*.

¹² CIW. “Fresh Allegations of ‘Human Slavery’ Emerge from the Tomato Fields of Immokalee.” *Coalition of Immokalee Workers*, 15 Oct. 2020, https://ciw-online.org/blog/2007/12/no_slave_labor/.

considers these programs together. There has been much scholarly attention on the Bracero Program; including issues such as the birth of the program, how it was implemented, the connection of the program between Mexico and the United States. Along with discussion and critical analysis of how the workers came to the U.S and what that entailed for the braceros, and the laws leading to the end of the program in 1964.

However, most of the scholarly attention focuses on what the United States and Mexican governments did to create the program, and what these two nations did to implement it. For instance, in Deborah Cohen's work *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico*, Cohen discusses how the Bracero Program created different spaces of agriculture in the U.S, and how the development of the U.S pertaining to agriculture created "spaces of opportunity" to navigate what that meant for farmworkers.¹³ Cohen looks at the U.S and Mexico as a marker for what agriculture and alliances signified for both countries. Cohen dives into issues of how that space for Mexican farmworkers, such as how the workers saw themselves in a space in which they were neither a citizen nor authorized. It was as if the braceros were in limbo, not sure what they were. It brought opportunity for the program and provided income for millions of Mexican farmworkers to support their family back home, however Mexican Farmworkers were being treated as people just taking up space.

In Mario Jimenez Sifuentez *Of Forests and Fields: Mexican Labor in the Pacific Northwest*, Sifuentez writes on the impact of the Bracero Program in the Pacific Northwest. In his work, he writes about the tension between the braceros and the growers and the immense power they held against them. Growers held huge political power as they would lobby congress to continue having cheap labor after WWII ended in 1945. The program had a lasting effect even

¹³ Cohen, *Bracero Migrant, or Transnational Subjects*, 46.

after it was terminated in 1964, as growers would continue to use cheap labor, mostly undocumented Mexican farmworkers from Texas and California to work in farms around the Northwest, such as in Oregon and around the U.S. Sifuentes highlights that the end of the Bracero Program did not mean the end of cheap farm labor. What it did and continues to do is facilitates grower's agenda to have complete control of undocumented farmworkers.

Don Mitchell's *They Saved the Crops: Labor, Landscape, and the Struggle over Industrial Farming in Bracero-Era California*, Mitchell argues that the presence of braceros as a mode of cheap labor source for growers, especially in California, for the agricultural business in the U.S remained unchanged after WWII ended in 1945. Mitchell also states that "the power of corporate farming and especially of financial capital in agriculture deepened."¹⁴ Mitchell's analysis of the Bracero Program delves into the impact of agribusiness since the program, and how it impacts the agricultural business and the people working in the farms.

Scholars have also been interested in the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW), as the CIW shows what it has done to create activism for the exploitation and manipulation of farmworkers. In Laura-Anne Minkoff-Zern's book *The New Food Activism*, Minkoff-Zern writes on the labor movement of farmworkers across the United States and discusses how the CIW came to be founded and the work they have done since 1993, when it was first established in Collier County, Florida. The CIW has major impacts on tomato farm workers in Florida when Taco Bell and McDonalds agreed to form an agreement between the company and the tomato pickers. Minkoff-Zern shows that the CIW grew as it continued the fight for farmworkers spanning from Florida to California. The group pushes to get farmworkers voices heard and for

¹⁴ Don Mitchell, *They Saved the Crops Labor, Landscape, and the Struggle Over Industrial Farming in Bracero-Era California*, 1st ed. (Athens, Ga: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 6-8.

an improved quality of life that farm workers deserve. Minkoff-Zern describes the strides the CIW goes through from protesting, boycotting, petitions, campaigns, and other forms that apply pressure to these big companies. The author describes how the CIW allows there to be no hierarchy in which the farmworkers are directly advocating for their rights “farmworkers ensure that consumer and activist energies are utilized to directly support their daily struggles.”¹⁵ The main point of these quotes and the work of Minkoff-Zern is allowing there to be recognition and influence that provides discussion and dialogue for farmworkers to be heard and acknowledged in the U.S regardless of immigration status.

¹⁵ Laura Minkoff-Zern, "Farmworker-Led Food Movements then and Now: United Farm Workers, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, and the Potential for Farm Labor Justice." In *The New Food Activism*, eds. Alison Hope Alkon and Julie Guthman, 1st ed. University of California Press, 2017), 173.

CHAPTER ONE

Exploitation under a Legalizing Immigration Regime: Mexican Farm Laborers, Temporary Work Visas, and the Failed Promise of Bracero Protection

I would like you the reader to picture a scenario in which you are a farmworker from Mexico, and you are told that if you paid a small fee to a broker you could come to the United States and have a more prosperous life. You would be given a higher wage, you would be treated fairly, given a place to stay with you and your family, and you would be treated with respect. That is what the United States does best right? The United States offers jobs, security, safety, and a promise for a future for you and your children. The United States allows you to become a citizen, it may not be instant, but eventually you are able to be part of the American way of life. The United States respects all and believes everyone worthy of being an American. The United States does not judge, or discriminate, and holds everyone with high regard. It allows anyone from any background to move up in life, it may not be easy at first, but anyone can achieve it if they work hard and diligently enough. The “American Dream” is just that, a false promise, because for millions of farmworkers experience the opposite of that. Now, imagine a different scenario: you come to the United States as a farmworker, and you are unauthorized worker, and you are told that you and your family will be placed on a small farm in North Carolina. Immediately you do not receive full pay, and when you try to discuss your concern for higher pay you are shot down. You are told that you either accept the wage you are given or risk having your papers taken away. You are given over twelve-hour shifts, with only a quick break for lunch, with no bathroom close to the field, and having to endure grueling temperatures with

barely any breaks in between. This story is one of millions who come to the United States to have a better life, and to prosper with their family, however the second scenario is the reality of many farmworkers who come to have the “American Dream.”

Agricultural laborers' stories have a profound meaning of showing the experience of farm workers. As storytelling allows people that are not in power to show moments in their life that define them. Both in a positive and negative way. The voices of laborers in all sectors of the United States have been silenced in one way or another. Throughout history we see labor strikes, and workers protesting and pleading for a fairer wage, better working conditions, and being treated in a respectful and humane way. Labor protests and strikes occur for many reasons; however, laborers are not being treated fairly, not being paid the fair amount for the backbreaking work they do every day. The silencing of laborers' voices is a direct result of employers not listening to the basic needs of the workers, and that results in strikes, and protests.

Throughout the Bracero Program, it was the farm workers who fought for equal pay and held multiple strikes within the twenty-two years of the program. As Mario Sifuentez demonstrates, braceros responded to growers' violations “with strikes and slowdowns and by skipping out.”¹ There have been several notable braceros strikes to gain more labor rights, one example was in January of 1943 in Burlington, Washington where braceros went on strike for farmers paying a higher wage to “Anglos” for doing the same work. In July of 1944, braceros went on strike in Rupert and Wilder, Idaho over not being paid the minimum wage that was stated in their contract under the Mexican Farm Labor Agreement. In May of 1945, braceros went on strike in Walla Walla, Washington for only having earned a total wage between \$4.16 to \$8.33. Cesar Chavez banded together with Filipino American farm laborers to strike against

¹ Sifuentez, *Of Forests and Fields*, 23.

grape growers in Delano, California in 1965. A study done by the Workers Force Administration (WFA) in Portland, Oregon estimated that about “20 percent of braceros had abandoned their contracts in 1945.”² In 1966, the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) along with the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC) came together to create the United Farm Workers (UFW). Chavez was one of the many advocates to stop the Bracero Program, as growers were taking advantage of low-wage migrant labor. There was an argument that would go around whenever growers felt threatened by union activity or strikes being done by the braceros “blamed this renewed union activity on communists posing as Mexican peasants, who they argued had infiltrated the program and were sowing seeds of subversive ideology in the nations fields”³ The stories of laborers exemplify both what the United States has done to become a superpower and shows the implications of capitalism, neoliberalism, and collectivism between Mexico and the United States. This program would solidify the forced relationship between the Mexican migration and the United States agricultural industry.

Memories allow individuals to speak their truth and share with others and the world on how they have been mistreated, abused, and been to the point of death in many scenarios. While I cannot tell the stories of all laborers and how their voices produce storytelling. I have decided that the agricultural sector is one area of labor that needs to be discussed and solved in many areas. I decided on agricultural laborers because it is a form of employment that is rarely mentioned in the media. A huge percentage of workers that are agricultural laborers are unauthorized workers in the United States. According to the United States Department of Agriculture, from the year 2014 to 2016 “the remaining 48 percent held no work

² Sifuentez, *Of Forests and Fields*, 24.

³ Cohen, *Migrant Citizens, or, Transnational Subjects*, 42.

authorization.”⁴ Agricultural workers' voices are less prominent in the grand scheme of labor in the United States, and society only sees the result of the labor in our supermarkets, but we are never shown the blood, sweat and tears that farm workers endure. That is why I wanted to author my thesis on agricultural workers because it is an issue where farm workers are treated poorly and disrespected entirely. It has been an ongoing issue even before the Bracero Program that started when there were labor strikes that farmworkers launched as early as the 1910's.

What Do the Interviews Offer?

The bracero interviews is an oral history project that was done through The University of Texas at El Pasos' The Institute of Oral History, and collaborated with Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media, George Mason University, the Smithsonian National Museum of American History, and Brown University. The purpose for the interviews was conducted through these institutions as a way to record and archive bracero's life throughout the program and was later archived through Scholar Works at The University of Texas at El Paso. The interviews offer a glimpse of a braceros life and how they came to be braceros, for every single individual farmworker has their own story to tell. To talk about their upbringing, the struggles they faced when they were young and how it shaped them as adults, to going through the process of being a bracero and their life in the United States. These interviews offer perspective and not just generalized statistics about farm labor, but they provide a face and a name to these stories and a more complex way of showing what happened to all these braceros, before, during and after the

⁴ "Size and Composition of the U.S. Agricultural Workforce," <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/farm-economy/farm-labor/>.

program. By looking at individual stories we can understand a deeper, and complex story of farm labor that not only involved and existed in the United States but expanded across borders. We as scholars and as a society are able to understand what really happened during the Bracero Program, and the ways it has affected farm workers' lives even after the program ended.

These interviews play a key role in my paper because these struggles and exploitation that was persistent from the early 1900's that went through the Bracero Program, and in the present moment, allows me to expand on the idea the ways in which exploitation of farm workers living in the United States both authorized and unauthorized have had marginal changes. By providing actual spoken dialogue of braceros, it makes it more impactful and gains more notoriety, it gives a voice rather than just giving facts. Anyone would think that these programs and the various laws implemented to protect farm workers offered a way forward into improving the braceros lives. By allowing braceros to speak and offer their point of view it shows what really happened during the program. It shows how these promises that the United States and Mexico spoke highly of were not or made in partly false hopes. It shows how two countries in many ways already knew the outcome, and the result was to exploit poor families and communities and promise them a better financial situation. Listening and reading about individual struggle and exploitation makes it quite apparent that the stories have not changed when it came to stories of farm workers from the Coalition of Immokalee Workers. The same issues with being exploited are still persistent and very much present.

There is this idea that usually is quite present when there is an issue when people come together to present how they have been exploited; the exploited should be thankful, that at least they were able to be given whatever opportunity that was presented to them. They should not complain or protest. It would be like giving someone a bowl of rice and telling them at least you

are getting something, and that bowl is enough for you to survive. These decisions are decided by the upper class, the highest level of government and usually nothing affects them because they have everything they desire and more, but when a poor person or a group of people demanding a certain human right; it always seems like they are asking for too much, and what they are asking for would be more of a burden than listening to their struggle and their poverty, and how they live every single day of their lives. Someone listening to a farm worker can see how they try to look at the positive side or explain the struggle where it may not seem as bad, and that of itself is saddening. Thinking that someone does not want to listen to descriptions of struggle, but more often just small summaries of it. They are shutting themselves down because they were made to think their exploitation was in some ways not that bad, and that at least they were getting something rather than nothing at all. It is in many ways the same feelings of when you are being emotionally abused by a loved one, that you accept what they give you because at least they are giving you something.

Through all the steps that the braceros had to go through, and all the steps that every worker that partook in this program, it shows a reality that is cut into pieces to form something that was supposed to be a good thing, however in reality it was corrupt, cynical, and drenched in this idea of helping others when it was just the production of capitalism. The infrastructure was getting made by Mexicans who see their interests as being closer in line with American growers than with Mexican agricultural workers that they are recruiting. Braceros bought into the idea that the program was about providing jobs for these individual workers and for the nation. As well as this nationalist sensibility about the program that it would help pull Mexico out from under the United States. The braceros themselves were also embracing this mainstream ideology, as they also saw themselves as national heroes.

Working for themselves as well as for the nation, in their imaginations even though they were also being mistreated and dehumanized. What was this infrastructure and how did it get made and by whom? This is about capitalism and people interested in political and economic powers across the borderlands, and not just done by white U.S Americans. It is about stories of national inequalities both between the United States and Mexico. Exploitation functioned through the established U.S state, while also showing how Mexican and Mexican Americans contributed to these inequalities by becoming recruiters and other members of the workforce. Both consciously and subconsciously contributing to the abuse of farm laborers. National inequality produced inequality on the ground and that was only possible with the participation of the Mexican government and Mexican brokers.

Bracero Program: The Ones in the Farm and the Ones Behind

Lucas Edmundo Benitez Cardenas

Lucas Edmundo Benitez Cardenas was born on October 18, 1918. His father was a miner from Real del Oro, State of Mexico. His mother was from Tlalpujahua, Michoacán, Central Mexico where she sold various goods from a stand. Lucas and his family lived in Pachuca, State of Mexico. Lucas recounts his childhood as poor, in which he bought his first pair of shoes when he was eighteen. He received education until he was twelve years old, where he would work in the mines with his father to support the family as it was customary for children to start work early in their lives.

In 1931 Lucas and his mother went to see relatives where he would work in an orange juice stand. He would eventually work in a clothing store called El Bruja de Sampario. It was in

1942 where he found out that there was a contractor from the United States that was asking for farm workers to work in the United States. Lucas, having minimal work experience as a farm worker, knew already about the regulations to be accepted as a bracero. To be accepted into a contract at the time you had to dress like a farm worker as the contractor would check the clothing, along with the individual's hands. Lucas discusses that the contractor was looking for calluses that showed they worked in the field. However, Lucas was not a farm worker; he would work out for a while to get calluses in his hands to get a contract as a bracero. The contractor asked for nothing else, just how they were dressed and calluses in their hands. No other requirement was needed.

The process of going to the United States after receiving a bracero contract was that the farm workers needed to receive a medical exam. After the medical exam was approved, Lucas was bathed in a liquid where no one provided information of what that substance was and why it was necessary to spray everyone before entering the United States. There was a second medical exam administered to check for diseases, then they were put in trucks called greyhounds. The greyhounds would stop in certain checkpoints to allow groups of braceros to work in specific fields. Lucas recounts being the last group where he was placed on a beet and lettuce farm in Salinas, California. He described the work as being hard, as he did not have much experience working on a ranch. He would eventually leave that farm because the work became too unbearable.

In the second re-enlistment, Lucas worked in the railroads in St. Louis, Missouri for twenty dollars a day. The money that Lucas made in the railway he would send back to his family in Mexico. When he was working in St. Louis, Missouri, the Mexican government signed a new treaty in place saying that the Mexican government would take care of all the braceros.

Years later after Lucas received his American citizenship and received a college degree was when he learned more about the bracero program. In a statement he said, “I learned the Mexican government was never interested in any bracero, whether he died or lived, it didn't matter either way.”⁵

Lucas went on to write letters to the United States congress, and the United States senators and asked, “What combination was there between Mexico and the United States?” No one answered any of Lucas' letters. He also wrote to many banks in Mexico; the Bank of Mexico and Ejjidal Bank. The agreement was made between Mexico and the United States in which the ranchers in the U.S would deduct 15% of the braceros pay for which it would be returned to the braceros when they returned to Mexico. Lucas said that was a lie for which he never received anything himself when he went back to Mexico. Lucas was asked at the time he was a bracero if he knew anything about the agreement and the money. He said “I did not know anything. There was a time when I was almost dead or deprived when I finished the groove. They left me there. If I was going to die or live, the rancher was not interested, nor were the other braceros.”⁶ Lucas stated later in the interview that Mexican Americans and Mexicans were one of the groups of people that were the “most humiliated and discriminated against in the world.”⁷

Jose Tello

Jose Tello was born on March 19, 1923, in Coahuila, Mexico on a cattle ranch. Jose would eventually drop out of getting an education after completing second grade. Both parents of Jose would sow cattle on the ranch. Jose mentioned he had many siblings who would also assist

⁵ Lucas Edmundo Benitez Cardenas, *Interview no. 1335*, 2008) 19.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

on the ranch. The Tello family were also farmers where they planted corn, beans, and wheat mostly. Jose learned about the bracero program when it was announced that people from the United States were hiring braceros in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, Mexico. Jose was asked if there were any requirements, any documentation necessary to become a bracero. Jose answered no to all the questions. He was not expected to do anything to become a bracero. There was not even a physical exam in Jose's case. He was also not given any reassurance of any kind. No expectations about the job of a bracero either. "No, they just brought us here, and we did what they wanted me to do."⁸ They told the braceros absolutely nothing regarding the process of becoming a bracero, or what would happen once they entered the United States.

Jose and fellow braceros were brought to Laredo, Texas, a city on the Mexican border in southern Texas by truck. Jose was also asked if he was given a work permit. Jose responded "Work permit when you were working as a bracero? No, no, they just brought us out to work there in the field, planting, and everything there."⁹ Jose had no choice where to work and was not allowed to bring any personal belongings of any kind to the ranch. Jose came to work in the United States as a bracero for many years. He worked in fields in California, Arkansas, and Texas. He recalls working six days a week, with Sunday having the day off. He did not remember how many hours he would work per day. They were not provided with any food as they had to buy it themselves. For living accommodations, the braceros were put in a warehouse, and they were given bathrooms for everyone to share. When it came to supplies such as soap or towels, the ranch supplied only living quarters.

⁸ Jose Tello, *Interview no. 1471*, 2010) 8.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

Jose was asked if he was paid in cash or check. He responded that the braceros were always paid with cash every week. However, “we barely got enough to eat, we didn't earn much.”¹⁰ Throughout the interview Jose did not seem too enthusiastic about answering questions pertaining to his role as a bracero. He seemed neutral about certain aspects about how he was treated in the United States. Jose said that everything was fine when it came to his overall experience as a bracero. He stated no to feelings or encounters where he was discriminated against. He did not participate or know anyone that organized a protest. One important part of the interview that stuck out to me was when Jose was asked “What did you do on your days off?” Jose responded “Nothing, well, we were just there, it wasn't a town, it was a ranch, they had us there.”¹¹ It stuck out because in Jose's case and many other braceros that worked alongside him there was nowhere to go, nowhere to relax or have fun. It felt desolate and sad. The ranchers provided the braceros with a roof over their head and a pay that was barely enough to buy food every week. Jose was eventually given amnesty and became an American citizen. He said that the word bracero meant nothing to him.

Jose Mata Alvarez

Jose Mata Alvarez was born March 20, 1938, in Guanacevi, Durango, Mexico where he lived most of his childhood with his grandparents who were ranchers. Both his grandmother and grandfather were ranchers for horse farmers and cow farmers. While both of Jose's parents left to work in other parts of Mexico. Jose would eventually live with his father again after his grandfather passed away when he was nine years old. Jose recounts only having a few years of

¹⁰ Jose Tello, *Interview no. 1471*, 2010) 17.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

education, and then transitioning full time to working on the farm as an adolescent. His first job as a kid working in a ranch in Mexico was picking cotton, his tasks consisted of uprooting the cotton, cleaning, and cutting wheat. Jose said his father pushed him to study and become a professional, but he never found it interesting and was not particularly fond of his dad.

Alvarez was informed that there was a processing station for braceros in Reynosa, Tamaulipas, Mexico, however he was not able to get a contract the first year. The second year he went to another bracero hiring center in Tijuca, Mexico where Alvarez was able to reach a three-month contract. He would receive another agricultural contract in California where he was hired in Splice, Sonora, Mexico. Alvarez explains that the requirement of when he received a bracero contract was to pay for a permit, for which he did not have, and a voting card as well. He needed to provide a permit, voting card and a birth certificate. He was given a physical exam before entering the U.S. Alvarez in his first contract was told that he was going to pull cotton and be paid about \$1.55 for every pound of cotton, and \$2.10 for cleaning the cotton. Alvarez describes the first year as barely receiving an income because his contract was for forty-five days, and it rained for three weeks, in which that time he was not able to receive a salary due to weather and misinformation in part of the growers and overseers.

Alvarez remembers being fumigated with DDT, and they would fumigate the B braceros with their clothes on. The processing center also checked for internal diseases that included if the braceros lungs were okay. Alvarez states that every bracero that would enter the U.S would have to be checked for internal diseases, and that included having their blood drawn. Also remembering signing the contract and not knowing what farm he was going to; nothing was really told to him. When he was a bracero, he went in 1960 to Texas, 1961 to California, 1962 and 1963 to California, and 1964 to Denver, Colorado. Alvarez did various agricultural farms

when he was working with a bracero contract, it included grapes, and lemons. Alvarez also said that no one in the farms were illegals, and called them “pure bracero,”¹² he worked six days a week with eight-hour shifts in the grape farms, for the farm in Denver, Colorado it was six days as well, however he had to uproot beets from dawn to dusk.

Alvarez remembers for amenities such as food everyday there was a kitchen that was provided for the braceros, he does not explain what kitchen means, but I am guessing it is like a cafeteria that was provided for the braceros where Alvarez worked in California, as well as Colorado. Texas did not provide such basic necessities for Alvarez that he remembers because you had to buy it yourself. For the living situation Alvarez was placed in a “sissy camp,”¹³ which were fields that were made for soldiers during WWII, but it would be later made into a field for the bracero workers. They were barracks where the braceros lived for the allotted time during their contract period. The barracks consisted of nine beds on each side, and a corridor in the middle. There were people hired to clean the barracks every day, from the sheets, blankets, pillowcases, and anything else in the barracks. He was supplied many bathrooms in the barracks and included television, pool table, basketball court, and a boxing ring. The braceros had to wash their own clothes and were not provided with necessities such as soap or towels, the braceros had to buy that on their own.

In the grape farms Alvarez was paid for every full box of grapes that was fully done, he worked in fields where he had to wear heavy boots. Alvarez recounts being paid every two weeks by check “When the braceros almost never saved money.”¹⁴ There were protests in matters of communication where Alvarez was told he was going to pick cotton, but instead when

¹² Jose Mata Alvarez, *Interview no. 1469*, 2010) 9.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁴ Jose Mata Alvarez, *Interview no. 1469*, 2010) 16.

he got to the farm, he and fellow braceros were told they were going to clean cotton. If any of the braceros wanted to do something in the town, about four or five miles away, transportation was provided by taking them on trucks. Braceros mostly did not celebrate holidays; I am not sure what that means because it is not clearly elaborated. Alvarez worked as a bracero until 1964, he returned in 1968 unauthorized. Alvarez states that in the 1950's and 1960's many companies made a lot of money by using braceros for the labor, especially in places like Texas, where truckers became extremely rich by using illegal people to work the farms. Alvarez states "Then the work is done, and they don't want us anymore."¹⁵

Exploitation Through Capital: How Recruiters for the Bracero Program and Administrators of that Program Chose to be Part of the Exploitation

Both individuals interviewed below were employees who worked for the program in the recruiting centers across the United States in the border between Mexico and the U.S. Ray Reaves; a bracero recruiter and Fay Terrazas; a clerk typist in the main recruiting center. Both interviews show they were not critical of the program, they both rather profited from the program, and other employees as well having been Mexican themselves. While national differences and the border helped produce the inequalities that capital was exploiting, Mexicans could still benefit from the program if they positioned themselves on the side of capital.

¹⁵ Ibid., 22.

Ray Reaves (Bracero Recruiter)

Ray Reaves' story illustrates how one of thousands who worked to facilitate the Bracero Program knew about the harsh conditions that braceros faced. No recruiters or others who worked for the program voiced opposition to the exploitative and coercive conditions that braceros endured, as they did not care about their vulnerabilities. They believed that the class relations that allowed for exploitation were just and fair. Ignoring the suffering of vulnerable farm workers. It resulted in many ways how the history of the bracero's could not get recognition they deserve even now, even from people that worked with them face to face.

Ray grew up on a farm with his stepmother and father in Alpine, Texas his mother died when he was four years old as she was also a Border Patrol Agent. It was in 1945 he was hired on a temporary basis as a Border Patrol agent, where he patrolled specific areas in west Texas, and he was eventually permanently hired in 1951. Reaves later began working with the Trans Pecos Cotton Association and the Bracero Program; it was his responsibility to ensure that the farmers' contracts were fulfilled with the correct number of workers; in addition, he describes how he would travel to various recruiting centers in Texas and Chihuahua, Mexico, to process the braceros.

Ray recounts what he did for the recruiting centers, he would go to farmers, and they would say that they wanted about forty braceros, Ray was the person to get forty braceros. Ray worked for the Trans Pecos Cotton Association, "they had this scattered on up and down the country."¹⁶ Ray also stated, "if here's the farmer and you wanted a fifty, say October or November for cotton, start picking, and you come into my office, place your order, and I'll have

¹⁶ Ray Reaves, *Interview no. 1567, 2003*) 20.

your people ready for you.”¹⁷ Ray said that an agricultural worker would go to one of the processing centers, and they would be processed and then they would be taken to whichever farm best fit. The main training centers were in Chihuahua, Hermosillo, and Monterrey.

Ray was stationed at the Chihuahua, Mexico processing center. The process as Ray recounts would interview the workers and look at their background, and if they would make a good agricultural worker in the US. The hands of the workers were thoroughly checked to make sure that they were agricultural workers. Fingerprints were done to identify the individual trying to become a bracero. Ray said that the interview was more like an interrogation than anything else.¹⁸ The time of the year that farm owners asked for braceros “a little bit before the fall,”¹⁹ which he called cotton picking time. In Chihuahua, Mexico braceros was supplied to Colorado, New Mexico, Western Texas, Nebraska, Oregon, and Washington. Hermosillo supplied for California, and Monterey for South Texas. Ray said when he was asked if the braceros knew where they were going and he said no, but he also said “We did not tell them. We did not know, you know, we kept a supply of them for this center, in Rio Vista.”²⁰ The interview process would usually start with the worker having to go through Mexican immigration first, and then they would go to the processing center to be interviewed. It was Ray’s job to interview the agricultural worker to get a bracero contract. Ray said that if he had doubts, he would examine the hands and fingers of the agricultural worker, where he could tell by just the hands alone if they were an agricultural worker. Ray had to ask a series of questions to the worker:” Where do you live, how long have you lived there, where is your family, what kind of work did you used to

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ray Reaves, *Interview no. 1567, 2003*) 22.

¹⁹ Ibid., 24.

²⁰ Ibid., 25.

do, what are you doing now, why aren't you working, you do not have a job now, why? How long do you intend to stay if you are accepted and pass? And does your family know you are up here? Does your family know that you are going into the states, but you do not know where?”²¹

Throughout the interview, Ray said they could catch someone who was not an agricultural worker through the series of questions presented to them. He said that sometimes the worker would be too confident and mess up the questions they were being asked. Also stated, “that no one with any criminal record was accepted into a bracero contract.”²² If Ray sensed that the worker was lying or had a criminal record, then it becomes more of an interrogation. Ray stated, “They got onto the fact that that was one of the reasons they'd been turned down and they'd lie about it and uh, you just keep digging, nudge a little here, nudge a little there... a lot of the times we could tell.”²³ Some processing centers would have upwards of seven to eight thousand agricultural workers to be interviewed and processed if accepted to go to the United States.

There is a quote that the recruiter states about the Rio Vista processing center “I know how they processed them and what they did.”²⁴ There seems to be a bit of a mystery or actions that was suspicious from the way Reaves was mentioning it. Ray states the transportation of moving braceros was through buses, an issue that the recruiter states are the departure back to Mexico, the bracero would pay the drivers off so they would be dropped off before the border, and some braceros would marry a US citizen to get the documents before the contract expired.

²¹ Ibid., 28.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ray Reaves, *Interview no. 1567*, 2003) 29.

²⁴ Ibid., 30.

“My position in those kinds of cases have always been legal. If this is legal, fine with me. If it is not legal, it is not fine with me I will get 'em.”²⁵

When looking at the recruiters interview it was clear to see the way his language was used signifies the way agricultural workers were portrayed as capital, while also dehumanizing them in the process. Ray was a border patrol agent while he started working for the recruiting center in Chihuahua, Mexico processing center. The way that he would interrogate/talk about it seemed like he got the tools from the border patrol and used them in his recruiting work. The interrogation approach came from his border patrol experience in which he was still working through the Bracero Program until he retired in 1984. He would interview farmworkers and see if they were “qualified” to join the program.

Throughout the interview, Ray said they could catch someone who was not an agricultural worker through the series of questions presented to them. He said that sometimes the worker would be too confident and mess up the questions they were being asked. Shows there is something devious about the production of this process that was always shaded in mystery. Capital thinks of labor as one of many inputs into its production process. Deliberately adopts this dehumanizing language to talk about workers. The interview was more of an interrogation than an actual interview, which was exactly what the recruiter worded the interviews. If Ray sensed that the worker was lying or had a criminal record, then it becomes more of an interrogation. Ray stated, “They got onto the fact that that was one of the reasons they'd been turned down and they'd lie about it and uh, you just keep digging, nudge a little here, nudge a little there... a lot of the times we could tell.”²⁶ Recruiters approached with suspicion, imagining that they were

²⁵ Ibid., 31.

²⁶ Ibid., 29.

criminals unless proven otherwise. An important thing was to make sure workers did not have a criminal background, it showed perfectly how they were trying to entrap applicants into admitting that they had convictions.

The interview process was a way for the recruiter to see if the agricultural worker was “qualified” to join the program. The recruiter said that they did not tell the bracero where they were going to work at, and other information was not offered like pay, as much was omitted from the knowledge of the braceros. The recruiter said that they did not tell the workers where they were going. Ray said when he was asked if the braceros knew where they were going and he said no, but he also said “We did not tell them. We did not know, you know, we kept a supply of them for this center, in Rio Vista.”²⁷ Maybe Ray did not have the information to provide for the braceros, or he did, the matter of fact was how little information the braceros were given in general. The braceros that came through the processing center were on a contract; they had papers that allowed them to get a job in the United States, but the process was demeaning to how the braceros were viewed.

Braceros just like any other worker in the United States should have been given as it was their right, to be provided with all the necessary information before they started their contract in a farm in the U.S. It shows through the words of the recruiter how information was selective, only the growers had the information when it came to pay and living accommodations, not even the clerk typist if she was telling the truth or not seemed to only know a few things that occurred in the Rio Vista Center, and she had worked there for years. Ray also mentioned the process of when a bracero would finish the contract, they “they can be extended, this I100 with a card and, of course, as an immigration officer in the border patrol, if they got it and it is valid, do not

²⁷ Ray Reaves, *Interview no. 1567, 2003*) 25.

bother ‘em. Just check it. And, but suppose they were gone for six months and that is all he wants to do. He is ready to go home.”²⁸ The way Ray mentions the process seems like the workers dehumanized them. It was as if they were like material that growers needed to profit from. Looking at specific words that Ray uses “it is valid, do not bother ‘em,” “He is ready to go home,” these few words and sentences even throughout the interview gives a small glimpse of how the whole Bracero Program was viewed and how it worked.

Faye Terrazas (Clerk Typist)

Faye Terrazas was born in El Paso, Texas on August 6, 1930. Terrazas has a high school degree from Bowie High School. Both of her parents are Mexican nationals that immigrated to the United States when they were children. The mother was a stay-at-home parent, and the father was a delivery man for Prices Dairy, a milk company. Terrazas had three brothers and two sisters, one sister also worked in the Rio Vista processing center. Terrazas worked seasonally at the Rio Vista center in 1954-1957 to be exact, where her job was to type contracts for the braceros. She was a clerk typist and it entailed filling in the name of where the bracero came from, age, next to kin and their family and what it consisted of. The employers of the Rio Vista center were required to speak Spanish, but the contracts were in English, also showing the insurance information in case of an accident how much compensation they would receive. The contract did not specify the salary and how much, also the minimum wage was not specified, “Not that I know of the living arrangements, how they would live, where they would live, what they would be fed, that was once they got to the farm.”²⁹ The screening process consisted of a

²⁸ Ray Reaves, *Interview no. 1567*, 2003) 25.

²⁹ Terrazas Faye, *Interview no. 1571*, 2003) 5.

medical test, X-Ray, and they would get sprayed with the disinfectant that Terrazas did not have knowledge of, but it was DDT. They would be sprayed with DDT with their clothes on, and it was sprayed all over their body as well. Faye states that most of them did not have any belongings, and just the clothes they came in. Faye describes the clothes they came in with “They were dressed in cotton, big baggy pants and huaraches and, ah, straw hats and the baggy cotton shirts that they would wear.”³⁰

There did not seem to be any limitation as there were agricultural workers coming to the processing centers in their twenties, thirties, forties, and fifties, with as young as fourteen able to enter the Bracero Program. Faye stated she did not hear any reports of discrimination, however the living conditions from which the braceros had to live on the farms were brought up very often according to the braceros in a negative way.³¹ By the time the agricultural workers would come to Rio Vista Center it was already pre-determined where the braceros would go, and how long their contracts were. Faye and what her task was which was typing the contracts up was the last step before the braceros would go to their assigned work, and the farm they would stay at for an allotted amount of time. The entire process of being interrogated, to being sprayed with chemicals that the braceros were not aware of, to the last step of getting their contracts which consist of them waiting in life for sometimes hours or even through the night in blistering hot weather surrounded by a chain link fence just showed how the complete process of itself was so dehumanizing. There are better solutions of how the braceros should have been treated, there always is a better choice, however the United States chose the cruelest way, and Mexico was absent in this entire process.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 6.

While Faye may or may not have been intentionally saying her experience of working in the Rio Vista Center, she used language and description showing no awareness of how these braceros were being treated. It was extremely apparent in the way she was describing the whole process that it was a very dehumanizing and quite simply disgusting that the braceros or anyone should be treated like this. The fact that there was no documents showing proof the bracero worked in the United States already seems unprofessional and shows a lack of organization on both countries. It shows abuse on both countries, taking advantage of individuals and their families who are hoping to have even a smidge of a better life.³²

³² Ibid., 10-11.

CHAPTER TWO

What Has Changed since the Bracero Program? The Coalition of Immokalee Workers

Resistance to Exploitation Rooted in Collective Power

Silvia: The Story of One

I will start with the story of Silvia Sabanilla and how her being exploited as an agricultural worker has defined so many parts of her life. I was able to come in contact with Silvia and interview her by connecting with The Coalition of Immokalee Workers through email, and I was connected to Natalia Naranjo, a National Co-coordinator of the Alliance of Fair Food that is an ally organization with CIW, and from there I was able to interview Silvia, a CIW staff member who was a tomato picker in the United States for sixteen years. Silvia was interviewed through Zoom, and so the italicized areas of the paper are her direct quotes of her experiences. As you the reader navigate the paper it is important to not only read my interpretation of her life, but also her words and her truth when it came to her experience as a farmworker. I asked her questions in which the reader could see her answers italicized; Silvia answered them the best she could and would often describe stories which her experience affected her negatively. I decided to put the questions in the beginning, so the reader can get a general idea of what questions were asked of Silvia.

Interview questions for Silvia

1. Introduction

2. Were you the first tomato farm labor in the United States and in your family?
3. Through your experience as a farm worker did you ever experience any form of exploitation, or do you know someone close to you or an acquaintance that was exploited in some way as a farm worker?
4. Was there any help if you were abused?
5. How many times did you feel like you were being abused by your employer?
6. Was there a time where you felt you were in extreme danger from one of the supervisors or growers?
7. How many farms did you work at during your entire time as a farmworker?
8. How were the men treated as farm laborers compared to the women and how was the experience of abuse different for women compared to men?
9. Did the companies give proper living conditions for the farmworkers, or did you have to live outside of the farm? Did the companies provide equipment for the farmworkers?
10. What was your schedule like day-to-day? Was it different on every farm?
11. Were you able to have breaks throughout the day or was it one break just in the morning and then in the evening?
12. Was the schedule different for men and women or did they have the same schedule?
13. Throughout the years was your experience better or was it the same?
14. Did you see any change at all, or did you feel like you were still being abused in some form?
15. When was the Coalition of Immokalee workers formed?
16. Did your quality-of-life change after the CIW and did you get your family and friends to join as well? Do you recommend the program to other farm workers across the United States?

Silvia is originally from Mexico City and has been an agricultural laborer ever since she was a teenager in Mexico. She is from a family of farmworkers where in Mexico they would harvest beans, rice, and cucumbers. In her hopes for a better and prosperous future she along with her partner decided to move to the United States in 1999. When asked about her life in Mexico she did not elaborate much on her life before coming to the United States, she told her name and the sixteen years she was working as a tomato picker. Throughout the interview I sensed that she wanted to use her storytelling of her life as a tomato picker in the United States and was less open on talking about her life in Mexico. When asked about exploitation and abuse she would always state “That's a good question.” Signifying that exploitation and abuse were the lenses through which she saw her experiences and understood the lives of all farmworkers. The

abuse she had to endure was more important in her memories than anything else, and it is something that I want to discuss at length through my thesis. The way Silvia uses language to share her life is of immense importance in the way she wants to home in on specific areas of what she considers important. The language used in her storytelling speaks of abuse, poverty, and sacrifice.

Yes, for us as workers we do what we can to be able to feed and provide for our families and those types of abuses are things that we see. For me and for us in the field it was common to be verbally harassed at or be yelled at in the field. For other of our coworkers and other people in the field we were stuck, we commonly experienced other types of abuses as well.

Silvia described persistent yelling—a deeply disrespectful and demeaning way to treat workers—as the backdrop to her farmworker experiences. This yelling helped set the tone for persistent abuse that reached well beyond verbal assault. Silvia mentions how she was stuck like many of her fellow coworkers. It is like that feeling of like you are drowning, and no matter how much you try to swim to the surface you are suffocating to the point of giving up. This was the feeling that Silvia felt through so many years working as a farm laborer in the United States before she joined the CIW in 2010. Many immigrant farm workers that sought employment in the United States dreamed of a better future, a better life for their family and to experience the “American Dream.” The “American Dream” states that if you work diligently enough you can have a prosperous life. Isn’t that what the Statue of Liberty is supposed to symbolize? But that is a false promise, a promise that is only for the select few. Silvia along with her co-workers were abused, they were mistreated so much through their life as agricultural laborers that it became the new normal especially for women.

For us women specifically we face something else, you'll see the crew leaders who are kind of like the managers and the overseers in the fields and you'll see that they took advantage of their power.

Silvia described a work regime that was shot through with sexual harassment for women. Managers and overseers would regularly proposition women to either bribe them with money, better living conditions, or even a better partner in some cases in return for sexual favors. The situations that Silvia and other women in the agricultural sector faced created an environment of coercion, manipulation, and an uncomfortable work environment. Sexual harassment was even more prominent when it was a younger woman, or a single woman because had no safe space or a person that was close to them. When Silvia spoke of women in the field it gave way to how much sexual harassment they faced, and how much abuse they had to endure. Silvia spoke at length on her experience as a woman in the ranches, and the abuse she encountered by the crew leaders along with other women in the field.

In Silvia's case she was told to follow a specific crew leader to another farm, and Silvia had to join them. The crew leader tried to isolate Silvia away from everyone else, and sexually harass her. In the beginning of the interview Silvia was told that she did not have to answer any question she was not comfortable with, however Silvia wanted to speak on her part as a woman. Silvia wanted to explain the struggles as a woman in the fields because it is often overlooked, or no one believes them because there was no evidence that someone saw the crew leader or grower sexually harassing a worker. The struggles that women face when it comes to being sexually harassed is not a new experience for women, either in the field or in an office women face being sexually harassed and assaulted in their own workplace.

Oftentimes we might think of only men as agricultural workers, however there is a substantial number of women in the fields who get exploited. Our image of a farm worker is not

entirely true, there are both men and women that wake up at dawn and start work until there is no light anymore to harvest. The changing shift of experience of how women are treated as agricultural workers in the United States changes our perception of how we view women's experience as agricultural laborers. It is important to analyze individual struggles both from women and men and see the way labor treats gender differently because women's experience in agricultural work is both similar and different compared to men. It is evident from Silvia's story as a farm worker and other women in the field that this experience felt isolating and dangerous. The men are silenced through their struggles and the women are invisible.

It was difficult to know where to go with these complaints or to even be able to talk to anybody about what is happening to you in the field as women, and so that was very difficult for us and for many of the people that I worked with to be able to combat.

When it came to Silvia's complaints about the harassment, she faced from the crew leaders or growers, there was nowhere to express the abuse she had to endure. Silvia felt that there was not anyone she could talk to about anything she felt, or any form of mistreatment she faced on the ranch. Before Silvia joined the CIW, there was not much help for unauthorized agricultural labor workers. These conditions were the same as the ones faced by workers who came to the United States with Bracero Program. Even though laws were in place to protect braceros, such as Public Law 78, they faced massive exploitation. It is not the fact that the braceros were powerless, but the Bracero Program had made laws into place to protect the braceros and the growers kept denying those rights to the braceros. Workers were not protected from the manipulations of their bosses or supervisors. The daunting realization that if you did not follow the crew leader's order and go with them there would be repercussions or the fear of repercussions. An outcome between the tensions of the growers and the farmworkers that would create tensions that would last decades and spill over into the twenty-first century. Because

growers preferred braceros, it created an unnecessary tension between the braceros and domestic farmworkers.

Most of the time this are huge ranches, huge farms where they have different types of the farms or one farm owns various harvests and so they'll split us up into different groups and crew leaders will say oh I have a different type of job I need this many men to come with me I need this many women to come with me or sometimes I just pick one person most of the time it's just one woman to come with them on their trucks very isolated and you're traveling with them. When they will say we have another job in another field let us go and when they take you right that's when they start kind of touching you inappropriately, they're trying to touch your legs and then they're trying to make these very inappropriate moves.

The crew leaders would often isolate the women and take them either to another area of the farm or drive them somewhere else and tell them they had to come with them to do another job on another farm. During that point they would take one single woman and sexually harass her or assault her, including inappropriate and unwelcome touching. The use of the word rape was never used in her description of abuse though she suggested that women felt threatened when the crew leaders isolated them. Silvia speaks of how hard it was to combat the abuse she faced, while also the uncertain future she had because there were always threats looming, always afraid of repercussions for now allowing the crew leaders to take advantage of the women in the field.

In a report done by the Human Rights Watch, 52 farmworkers were asked if they had experienced any maltreatment, including anything to do with sexual harassment or sexual violence “yet nearly all of the 52 workers we interviewed, including many not specifically identified in advance as having been victims of such abuses, said they had experienced sexual violence or harassment or knew other workers who had.”¹ The power dynamic between the

¹ "Cultivating Fear: The Vulnerability of Immigrant Farmworkers in the US to Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment ." (May 15, 2012). <https://www.hrw.org/report/2012/05/15/cultivating-fear/vulnerability-immigrant-farmworkers-us-sexual-violence-and>.

farmworkers and the supervisors/growers creates a work environment that allows systemic abuse to occur without repercussions for the supervisors. This abuse system faced by the farmworkers creates barriers in which it is impossible to get help or report it to the supervisors or growers.

And so, kind of as you're going in and as you're seeing the difficulty there's also a lot of threats, right it's not just kind of convincing people to kind of come in and be with you but there's a fear of losing your job, losing your livelihood and then even threatening your families, your children and threatening you with that the idea of possibly even being deported.

The specific use of language is prominent in the way women were abused in the ranches, there was the use of threats such as losing your job, losing your livelihood, as well as threatening the farm workers families, children, and the possibility that they would be deported along with their families by the crew leaders and other workers in the farm that would instill fear in the women, men and families of the farm workers. The threats are a point made in Silvia's storytelling that really speaks to how critical it was that the farm laborers had to follow every rule, and everything that the crew leaders said. The threat of losing your family and being taken away from your livelihood is a universal fear, it is not just a fear by the farm laborers, but a fear that everyone fears at least once in their lives, and for Silvia she felt that fear constantly. The crew leaders worked to manipulate women into having sex with them by creating a situation where if women complained about harassment they may, themselves, be accused of infidelity or promiscuousness.

So, there is a lot of different methods and a lot of different ways the crew leaders abused their power. This is just such a big problem in the industry and so for us we have been able to see the difference between then and how things were in the early nineties.

Silvia recounts of the endless abuse she faced as an agricultural worker and as a woman. It was clear through her story that the crew leaders would use their position and leverage over the farm workers simply because there were no repercussions for causing any maltreatment to the

farm laborers. Silvia discusses the big differences of how farm workers were treated before she joined the organization to after she joined the CIW. The CIW was already creating a platform in the early 1990's about the abuse that farm workers faced in Florida. Especially when the CIW was having an open dialogue on the abuse of women in the agricultural sector. Silvia uses languages such as "fear," "losing," "threatening," and "difficulty" to explain her stories of injustice, and these specific words that were continually used by Silvia through the interview show the verbal use of her trauma. It was the verbiage she was using to describe the pain she felt, the injustice that made her feel like there was no way to change her situation. She said that she felt that her safety was always in jeopardy.

You see these instances and you see these times where you feel unsafe in one place and so you're constantly looking for work, you're like ok I'm not feeling safe at this farm or this field I'm going to go work somewhere else, but no matter what you always have this fear like I may leave this place, but this next place might have some of the same issues, the same abuse. It's something that you're constantly thinking about as you're working and as you're possibly switching from farm to farm as well.

Silvia identifies that feeling of being unsafe and always trying to find another farm for employment. The fear that Silvia highlights as she recounts her story was something that caused her grief, she never felt safe in the place she worked at and was always afraid that the next place would have the same abuse, the same conditions in which it would make it unbearable. This was a constant fear for Silvia to never feel peace of where she sought employment as a tomato picker in the state of Florida. Through her testimony, the same words are used throughout the CIW organization, including fear, abuse, and enslavement. I hear through Silvia's story how much she was afraid of getting assaulted, how much she wished for something to change, but she could never get out of it. She does go back many times to what the CIW did for her to transform her

life in so many ways. It gave her a life where she felt safe, heard, and understood, and was not silenced through her struggles and abuse as an agricultural worker.

The answer for this question showed how voiceless both the men and women were as agricultural laborers, partly because the men would not believe the women when they expressed the abuse, they faced from the hands of the crew leaders. But also, what could the men do? Of course, they could bring it forward to the grower, however they were also in the same circumstances. Silvia recounts her memories; she had seen how the men would get beaten and abused in front of everyone for trying to say anything at all. Of course, it is extremely unfair that the men did not believe the women, as they were jeopardizing a lot of their own lives, they knew they could not get any help and the fear of getting deported was in many ways stronger than trying to fight for their rights as agricultural workers. Scholars have outlined the threat alone of evicting migrant workers from their home, or their land being taken away if they do not pay the loan by working for the grower. This coercive treatment allows for powerful manipulation in which it becomes a cycle of debt for the farm laborer and low-wage migrant work for the growers.

The United States did not provide help to illegal agricultural workers under Public Law 78 that was amended in 1951, so for many farm workers they turned to union organizing to make their voice heard, but that alone was not enough the McCarran-Walter Immigration of 1952 made it illegal to import and harbor unauthorized workers into the United States, it also made it illegal to harbor suspected “communists” or anyone else they suspected of doing illegal activities. This act also allowed growers to deport farm workers and braceros easily and it created multiple restrictions on union organizing. Scholarly work based on the experience of braceros showed how “growers in the Northwest consistently violated the clause of the contract

because it saved them time and money.”² Juan Contreras: a bracero that worked in the fields in the Northwest described how the growers would come up with one excuse after another, in order not to pay him for his work he did that day, such as the way it was packed wrong, or not fast enough, or not packed during the ripening period. Another issue that was brought up as growers manipulating the braceros “growers sought to divert the braceros attention from their working conditions and wages by occasionally bringing in entertainment.”³ They were trapped in a system that provided no care, no help, and no acknowledgement.

An issue that former braceros is still fighting for fifty years later is the agreement that Mexico made in 1943, in which the Mexican government forced the braceros to save ten percent of their salaries in American banks (Wells Fargo), which would be then transferred to the National Bank of Agricultural Credit in Mexico that was taken into effect 1943 until 1949. This forced agreement that Mexico made in the beginning of the Bracero Program would result in many bracero laborers never recuperating the salaries that were deposited in the National Bank of Agricultural Credit in Mexico. Scholars have said that in “1943, 11.6 million dollars was collected and only 2.6 million dollars” was never given back. In “1944, 18.4 million was collected and only 10.7 million was paid back .”⁴ It points to the fact that at least during the Bracero era, there was a way to reach an agreement, and file a complaint, however that did not change the fact that bracero workers needed to go on strike to be heard and taken seriously, they needed to go to extreme lengths to voice their concern and ask for change, and would go on for days protesting for something that was clearly stated in a contract, and not just by word of

² Sifuentez, *Of Forests and Fields*, 17.

³ Sifuentez, *Of Forests and Fields*, 22.

⁴ Mireya Loza, *Defiant Braceros: How Migrant Workers Fought for Racial, Sexual, and Political Freedom* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 137-139.

mouth. This included the exploitation that the Mexican government forced from the braceros with no solution in sight to give back the money they owed to these agricultural laborers.

Specifically, just because when you come here right, you're trying to provide for your family, you come here to work and you have this clear plan and to be able to do that and so no one is thinking about this situation, so when someone comes across these moments where they are danger, and where you're put in an uncomfortable situation like being harassed. It's just difficult to have those moments while you're still trying to work, still trying to provide and not have any idea on how to make a complaint without being fired or facing possible violent repercussions or anything. You've come here to work and not being able to do it is something that's difficult.

The story of Silvia is one of millions of stories of immigrant agricultural workers and what they face working in the United States. I see an expectation of wanting a better life for yourself, of a promise that the United States would constantly express, but the reality of that promise is vastly different. Her expectations and her reality are starkly different, she could not go back to her life in Mexico, she had to struggle for a promise that was not meant for her, or for any immigrant who sought work for a better life in a country where we were supposed to welcome immigrants with open arms. The belief that you have this plan to come and work in the United States just like Silvia had, and experience all this mistreatment she faced and people she knew makes me feel disgusted about how agricultural laborers are treated in the United States. Hearing stories of the braceros during the Bracero Program showed that their stories of an agricultural laborer had similar experiences to farm workers in the present moment. It is a hard realization to learn that the experience that braceros experienced over fifty years ago is the same exploitation that happens to agricultural workers now. What has the United States really done to improve the lives of agricultural workers when the ones who benefited were the growers?

The United States laws pertaining to bettering the lives of agricultural workers does not provide sufficient safety nets for both workers that arrive with a H-2A or unauthorized agricultural workers. California's agricultural business relies on the migration of low wage labor

from South America, specifically Mexico. According to other scholarly works, the conditions migrant agricultural workers face is the same as those on an H2-A visa. A report came out in 2020 where the migrant workers with an H2-A experienced discrimination, sexual harassment, wage loss, along with health and safety violations.⁵ The CIW themselves found that H2-A temporary visa programs were being exploited in Florida, Kentucky, Indiana, Georgia, and North Carolina, which the growers were being indicted on for forced labor of Mexican agricultural immigrants. The growers would confiscate migrant workers' passports, visas, provide them with poor living conditions, and use verbal abuse to force them to work for hundreds of hours without pay for weeks at a time.

We learn of the injustice through non-profit organizations instead of learning it through the government. Private citizens must create organizations to show the maltreatment of farmworkers when the government should do better. They need to put more laws in place to protect the immigrant farm workers that are either on an H-2A visa or unauthorized. Through other scholarly work there have been multiple findings of the process that migrant workers must go through to find work. The process of a migrant worker crossing the border already creates debt for the worker in which they must go through a labor broker, or also known as a farm labor contractor. In scholarly work on labor trafficking in the United States, Siddharth Kara describes “the threat of having their families evicted from their homes or land if the loans were not repaid was a powerful force of coercion that kept the victims working year after year in the hope, they would one day be free of the debt .”⁶ Kara’s work on labor trafficking is evidence of what is happening in the current moment, and the work being done by the CIW shows how there is so

⁵ Mary Bauer and Perales Maria Sanchez, *Ripe for Reform*, Centro de Los Derechos del Migrante, 9.

⁶ Siddharth Kara, *Modern Slavery: A Global Perspective* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 84. doi:10.7312/kara15846.

much work to still be done when it comes to labor in the United States, being both authorized and unauthorized no one deserves to be treated in an inhumane way. Profit dictates someone's life here in the United States. The debt that the farm labor accrues is through fees charged by the labor broker, and fees arranged by the coyote which arranges the border crossing. The migrant worker is already in debt when they enter the United States because of the system in place through the Foreign Labor Certification (FLC).

Farm labor contractors deviate from unions and will often practice a variety of schemes by taking huge sums from workers' wages, such as deducting for rent, equipment, and food. As a result, the farm workers are constantly indebted to the farm labor contractors. In the National Farm Worker Ministry, they found that the H2-A Guest Worker Program had various forms of discrimination that included that employers did not need to follow the guidelines for the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as well as the Age Discrimination Employment of 1967 because the employment process occurred outside the United States. The exploitation that farm workers face is not solely temporary foreign immigrant farm workers, it includes children and homeless U.S citizens, who are then baited and taken in and made to work by either enduring slave like conditions, indebted to either farm owners or farm labor contractors or both.

The United States calls themselves caring, and accepting, but they are the opposite of that. We need to protect our agricultural workers, who suffer daily, live in deplorable situations where they make only a few dollars a day. We are the bad guys. The United States calls themselves a superpower, educated, accepting, and influential. No, we are not! The United States government and all these big corporations lobby the government, so they have a say in everything. Scholars have stated that the treatment of braceros is like the treatment that migrant workers on an H2-A visa experienced today. The same issues of long extended hours, poor living

conditions to the point of unlivable, underpaid, and under the wages that the farm workers were promised, including both physical and mental abuse, debt bondage, using the threat of deportation to coerce the laborers to work long hours, and many other abuses. The growers had a say during the Bracero Program and they have a say now. They are too powerful, and they control too much.

Abuses were a bit different for men as they would get more of the front load of the abuses, there was a lot more verbal abuse, like they would get yelled at a lot more, it was a lot easier for them to get beatings in the field. They would be physically abused for trying to take a break or trying to stand up for themselves. You would see a lot more of that verbal assault from the crew leaders and from people, specifically the crew leaders that would tell them that they would say oh you are not working hard enough, or you're lazy, and so you would see a lot more of these cases for the men.

The women were silenced and physically abused in secret, while the men were abused in public and verbally attacked. The power of the crew leaders is being repeated through Silvia's storytelling. The repetition of how much the crew leaders abused both the men and women in the ranches shows how little protection the agricultural laborers had in general.

In the first years when I first came here there was definitely some where we were working in fields where they were providing us with housing, and the housing at the time was okay, but I just remember the work itself right, we were working in with sweet chili peppers and cucumbers, the work was just so hard because it was in the summertime for me I just wasn't able to like complete the same work that people were doing and I even remember like physically just crying and breaking down from working in those fields as well. So, around those years it was just difficult.

Silvia tells of the first years working as a farm worker in the United States. She first started picking sweet chili peppers, and then cucumbers. When she draws on her experiences in the first few years her living situation was okay in her words, but the work she had to go through in the farm was physically demanding on her body, she went through times where she wanted to break down and crying from how physically straining the work was on the fields. When you hear her express so much grief it is painful and a reality for how she was treated and how she felt

working as a farm worker. It makes anyone want to cry from the pain and abuse that she faced, and no one should ever feel this way.

It was up to you to get your own food, your own supplies, and your own needs and they would rent you the little houses. They would be really close to the property and they would rent them out to you, but most of the time it was just these mobile homes, like trailer homes where you would have to share the housing with 2-3 other couples. Sometimes you would have to be in there like if you were a couple and if you were a single couple you would have to share with eight other men. So, we were also expected to pay the same right around that time until it was maybe \$40 a week. This house wouldn't be furnished, they would kind of like give you an empty home and you must either furnish yourself or figure out how to get that.

Silvia describes her living situation in which the farm workers were on their own to supply themselves with food, and other necessities as the farm laborers were still given small living areas. The living areas were either small house, but from what Silvia said it was mostly trailer homes close to the ranch in which they would have to pay rent to the growers every month. Oftentimes these trailer homes would have two to three couples living in the same trailer, or if it were one single couple then there would be an average of eight other men living in the same trailer home. Silvia stated that most of the time the trailers would not be furnished, and it would be up to the farm laborer to buy the furniture. Just hearing about how the living situation was, it was quite clear that the growers wanted the farm workers to be in even more debt because usually the farm worker was already indebted to the farm labor contractor, coyote, and the growers that hired them. On top of that they had to pay for everything out of their own pocket while barely making a few dollars a day, and on top of that they had to pay for any necessities like a mattress.

You could see how the quality of life for Silvia and other farm workers around her was struggle and pain. The living conditions that the growers provided for Silvia and other workers around her was set up in a way that was clearly demeaning, small spaces and often crowded.

Tying these living conditions to the way the braceros were living were in the same system, the braceros were placed in these huge rooms with twenty to thirty men at a time living in these cramped conditions not suitable for anyone to live in that environment. Silvia's experience and how she was made to feel small and obedient is seen through the way she lived. In small trailer homes where workers packed inside a small room like cattle

Silvia tells of how her schedule where she had no breaks throughout the day, she would wake up every day from three in the morning until seven at night. She would work twelve hours a day, with only a lunch break of thirty minutes from twelve to twelve-thirty. Through her re-telling of her day-to-day life, it is clear to see how little leisure time was given to the farm workers. At one point in her interview, she described how the crew leaders would not allow the workers to get water, and if they did, they would get physically beaten for doing so. Silvia witnessed many times the farm workers trying to take a small break or trying to get water, and the crew leaders would come by and start verbally insulting the worker and beating the worker with their hands.

For me it's easy for me to want to recommend the program to others, especially my friends and my family. Right now, I have siblings that are outside of the program they're here on the visas, the H-2A visas that people come and work in and unfortunately right now they're outside of the program. But anytime that I'm able to suggest or talk to people about it I'm suggesting for them to be in under a fair food farm and so for me it's just like this clear obvious way to be able to change the way that the people are harvesting in and in people are working with in the industry.

We see that clear difference in and out of the program especially in the cases of abuse, for example we see in the past you CIW has worked very closely with these cases of modern day slavery where we see these cases and outside of the program they've taken anywhere from 5 to 10 years to be able to be resolved, and so that's really difficult to be able to work with people in and let them know like hey we're going to work on this but there's no set time there's not enough capacity with another agencies in and other places to be able to work on those but within the program anytime any of these more extreme cases, any cases of sexual violence or cases of modern day slavery that come up in the program it's within months. Some of the cases typically within a year some of them have been 8 to 9 months where they have been resolved and there have been solutions for them as well.

There was a major change after Silvia joins the CIW, she felt her quality of life was so much better. There were people listening to her, understanding her, and helping her through much of the abuse she faced in the past. The CIW started organizing in the early 90's, where they would create forums, and talk about the abuses and issues that were being faced and the strategies to combat that abuse, the CIW took inspiration of what they their goal was as a nonprofit by drawing "members experience with cooperatives in rural parts of Latin America in the 1970's and 80's."⁷ Silvia joined the CIW in 2010 and found change blossoming. She remembers herself among many other farm workers saving enough money to buy a radio so she and her friends and family could listen to the local radio where the CIW would broadcast the changes, they were trying to create for tomato pickers in Florida. The CIW started with tomato pickers and through the years were able to have enough influence and money to combat abuse in other states in the east coast, and even have major corporations listen to the grievances that the farmworkers in their own farms were having. The CIW influenced various other organizations, such as the U.S Food Sovereignty Alliance, Restaurant Opportunities Center United, Student Farmworker Alliance, and the Food Chain Workers Alliance. We can understand the Bracero Program better when we can see contemporary struggles of farm workers, and we can understand the CIW better in the context of the complexities of the Bracero Program. There have been major changes since the CIW grew to be a program that many farm workers across the United States can find a sanctuary for the abuse they faced. The United Farm Workers Association (UFW) in

⁷ Minkoff-Zern, "Farmworker-Led Food Movements then and Now, 166.

2016 passed AB 1066 in California, requiring farmworkers to be paid overtime wages, and this law came into effect by the end of 2022.⁸

This abuse is not over, but this is a step forward into the right path for the change we need to see across the United States. Labor inequality is not a new idea, it is a generational fight for people who are trying to make a living. The United States and Mexican government only brought to light interest groups that were looking for profit and forgetting the human. The work that has been done by the Coalition of the Immokalee workers with their Anti-Slavery campaign only goes to show the major changes that has been done and still need to be done. Minkoff-Zern provides evidence of how farmworkers who are in the CIW feel about the program, Max Perez, a former farmworker that worked as a tomato picker in Immokalee, Florida highlights the importance of the activism work that the CIW is doing *“The coalition is more than just an organization working towards farmworker rights and higher wages. It’s an organization that is trying to fundamentally change things. We are changing things ourselves, showing that there is a different way. And it’s working.”*⁹

⁸ "AB 1066: Additional Overtime Pay Rules for the Agricultural Industry — how to Protect Your Business while Ensuring Compliance," last modified Dec 22, <https://properdefenselaw.com/ab-1066-additional-overtime-pay-rules-for-the-agricultural-industry-how-to-protect-your-business-while-ensuring-compliance/>.

⁹ Minkoff-Zern, "Farmworker-Led Food Movements then and Now," 170-171.

Conclusion

What is the Future of Agricultural Labor?

The history of agricultural labor in the United States is complex, frustrating, and unfair in many ways. If someone is not working as an agricultural worker, then for the most part farm labor is mostly off the radar. I would not have been able to do the research of the bracero's if it were not for the research conducted by the Institute of Oral History by The University of Texas at El Paso and archived through Scholar Work at The University of Texas at El Paso. The three braceros I chose to be put into my paper was Lucas Edmundo Benitez Cardenas, Jose Mata Alvarez, and Jose Tello. All three individuals bring firsthand accounts of what the process of the Bracero Program was like. For instance, what the braceros went through before arriving at the U.S, along with the whole process of coming to the U.S and being able through a contract to work as an agricultural worker. The accounts of the braceros themselves give a voice, a face to what a farmworker, specifically an immigrant farm laborer has to go through. There are so many worries, roadblocks, and abuse that immigrant farm laborers endure. The Bracero Program in many ways is not remembered, or even talked about, however it so clearly how it has impacted agricultural labor today.

The work being done by the Coalition of Immokalee Workers speaks of that continuous abuse that exist during the Bracero Program, and even before the program was founded in 1942. The same struggles, same roadblocks, and the same abuse is almost identical to what the braceros had to face. In my interview with Silvia Sabanilla, she experiences being exploited, abused, and talks about the daily struggles of being a woman working in the field. The work that Silvia is doing today working with the CIW is being an advocate for better working conditions,

higher wages, non-discriminatory work environment, and just humane treatment overall. Her story sheds present day struggles of what farm labor is actually like in the United States.

The stories highlighted in the research paper allows for more discussion, more openness on the discourse surrounding agricultural labor. The individual is coming to work in the U.S with or without an H2-A visa. The H2-A visa is something that allows for exploitation to occur to some degree, as there is exploitation with the visa, and complete control of the farm workers without the visa. All of this is to say that reform needs to happen. There needs to be a better understanding of how agricultural workers are being treated. The corruption that is occurring in the field needs to be more put out into the open. The more we understand and open our eyes to what is happening in the agricultural sector, the more we can see that there needs to be major reform, major changes.

The Coalition of Immokalee Workers is providing a dialogue, a demonstration through the work they do and the stories they tell to shed the truth on how these major struggles have been going on for decades already, since the beginning. These issues have been around and still are since the agricultural sector began to explode and became bigger when the Bracero Program was established. Exploitation of workers happens to some degree in all sectors of work in the past, present and will to some degree occur in the future as well, however people who are making those decisions to exploit need to be held accountable, and there needs to be change through laws. Law makers and corporate companies need to be held accountable for the wrongdoings, the complete and utter exploitation that they are doing with their own hands or hiring someone else to do the dirty work. They have blood, sweat and tears on their hands. This paper shows my anger and the unfairness of it all, however I hope that my research also offers insight and a positive outlook into agricultural labor. The Coalition of Immokalee Workers and

its alliance groups have already achieved and continue to make strides for a better future for agricultural workers. There is hope and change is happening, and so I leave with a saying that shows light and the great strides that the CIW has done already.

Together, we have not only rooted out the worst actors in U.S. agriculture – those who for years sexually harassed and beat workers, stole wages, and forced men and women in the fields to work under the threat of violence – but we have forged an entirely new industry, one that ensures dignity and respect for those who harvest the nation's food.¹

¹ https://secure.everyaction.com/-b2D_eUh_kKKKFU0rqfE1Q2?ms=EOY22CIW.

Bibliography

“65 Stat.] 119 - Govinfo.” Accessed January 6, 2023.

<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-65/pdf/STATUTE-65-Pg119.pdf>.

"Size and Composition of the U.S. Agricultural

Workforce." <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/farm-economy/farm-labor/>.

Alkon, A. H. and J. Guthman. "The New Food Activism: Opposition, Cooperation, and

Collective Action." *University of California*

Press. (2017). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1pv88qh>.

Alvarez, Jose Mata. "Interview no. 1469." ScholarWorks@UTEP. Accessed January 6, 2023.

<https://scholarworks.utep.edu/interviews/1469/>.

Bauer, Mary and Perales Maria Sanchez. *Ripe for Reform* Centro de Los Derechos del Migrante.

“Campaign for Fair Food.” Coalition of Immokalee Workers, October 24, 2018. [https://ciw-](https://ciw-online.org/campaign-for-fair-food/)

[online.org/campaign-for-fair-food/](https://ciw-online.org/campaign-for-fair-food/).

Cárdenas, Lucas Edmundo Benítez. "Interview No. 1335." ScholarWorks@UTEP. Accessed

January 6, 2023. <https://scholarworks.utep.edu/interviews/1335/>.

Ciw. “Fresh Allegations of ‘Human Slavery’ Emerge from the Tomato Fields of Immokalee.”

Coalition of Immokalee Workers, October 15, 2020. [https://ciw-](https://ciw-online.org/blog/2007/12/no_slave_labor/)

[online.org/blog/2007/12/no_slave_labor/](https://ciw-online.org/blog/2007/12/no_slave_labor/).

- Cohen, Deborah. *Braceros Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico*. Chapel Hill N.C: University of North Carolina Press, 2011.
- Creagan, James F. "Public Law 78: A Tangle of Domestic and International Relations." *Journal of Inter-American Studies* 7, no. 4 (1965): 541-556.
doi:10.2307/165274. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/article/public-law-78-a-tangle-of-domestic-and-international-relations/F512357365D03CCAD02B7E31306AAD38>.
- "Cultivating Fear: The Vulnerability of Immigrant Farmworkers in the US to Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment ." (May 15, 2012). <https://www.hrw.org/report/2012/05/15/cultivating-fear/vulnerability-immigrant-farmworkers-us-sexual-violence-and>.
- Enciso, Fernando Saúl Alanís and Russ Davidson. *They should Stay there; the Story of Mexican Migration and Repatriation during the Great Depression* University of North Carolina Press, 2017. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469634272_alansenciso.
- Gordillo, Luz María. *Mexican Women and the Other Side of Immigration Engendering Transnational Ties*. 1st ed. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010.
- Gouge, Melissa C. "Human Rights in Play, Transnational Solidarity at Work: Creative Playfulness and Subversive Storytelling among the Coalition of Immokalee Workers." *Critical Sociology* 42, no. 6 (2016): 861-875. doi:10.1177/0896920515603110.
- Kara, Siddharth. *Modern Slavery: A Global Perspective*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2017. doi:10.7312/kara15846.

- Kibbe, Pauline R. 1909. *Latin Americans in Texas*. New Mexico: The University of New Mexico Press, 1946, 1946.
- Loza, Mireya. *Defiant Braceros: How Migrant Workers Fought for Racial, Sexual, and Political Freedom*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016.
- Marinari, Maddalena, Madeline Hsu, and Maria Cristina Garcia. *A Nation of Immigrants Reconsidered: US Society in an Age of Restriction, 1924-1965*. Vol. 21. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2018. doi: 10.5406/j.ctv9b2wjb.
- Marquis, Susan L. *I Am Not a Tractor! How Florida Farmworkers Took on the Fast Food Giants and Won*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017. doi:10.7591/9781501714313.
- MIERES, Fabiola and Siobhán MCGRATH. "Ripe to be Heard: Worker Voice in the Fair Food Program." *International Labour Review* 160, no. 4 (2021): 631-647. doi:10.1111/ilr.12204.
- Minkoff-Zern, Laura. "Farmworker-Led Food Movements then and Now: United Farm Workers, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, and the Potential for Farm Labor Justice." In *The New Food Activism*, edited by Alkon, Alison Hope and Julie Guthman. 1st ed., 157-178: University of California Press, 2017. <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1pv88qh.10>.
- Mitchell, Don. *They Saved the Crops Labor, Landscape, and the Struggle Over Industrial Farming in Bracero-Era California*. 1st ed. Athens, Ga: University of Georgia Press, 2012.
- Mize, Ronald L. and Alicia C. S. Swords. *Consuming Mexican Labor: From the Bracero Program to NAFTA*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press Higher Education, 2011. doi:10.3138/9781442601598.

Reaves, Ray. "Interview no. 1567." ScholarWorks@UTEP. Accessed January 6, 2023.

<https://scholarworks.utep.edu/interviews/1567/>.

"Regulations for Seasonal Farm Labor." Department of Labor & Industry. Accessed January 6, 2023. <https://www.dli.pa.gov/Individuals/Labor-Management-Relations/lmc/Pages/Regulations-for-Seasonal-Farm-Labor.aspx>.

"Research Guides: A Latinx Resource Guide: Civil Rights Cases and Events in the United States: 1942: Bracero Program." 1942: Bracero Program - A Latinx Resource Guide: Civil Rights Cases and Events in the United States - Research Guides at Library of Congress. Accessed January 6, 2023. <https://guides.loc.gov/latinx-civil-rights/bracero-program>.

Robinson, Robert S. "Taking the Fair Deal to the Fields: Truman's Commission on Migratory Labor, Public Law 78, and the Bracero Program, 1950-1952." *Agricultural History* 84, no. 3 (2010): 381-402. doi:10.1215/00021482-84.3.381.

Rosile, Grace Ann, David M. Boje, Richard A. Herder, and Mabel Sanchez. "The Coalition of Immokalee Workers Uses Ensemble Storytelling Processes to Overcome Enslavement in Corporate Supply Chains." *Business & Society* 60, no. 2 (2021): 376-414. doi:10.1177/0007650320930416.

Sifuentez, Mario Jimenez. *Of Forests and Fields: Mexican Labor in the Pacific Northwest*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2016. doi:10.36019/9780813576923.

Tello, Jose. "Interview no. 1471." ScholarWorks@UTEP. Accessed January 6, 2023.

<https://scholarworks.utep.edu/interviews/1471/>.

Terrazas, Faye. "Interview No. 1571." ScholarWorks@UTEP. Accessed January 6, 2023.

<https://scholarworks.utep.edu/interviews/1571/>.

The Fair Food Program. Accessed January 6, 2023. <https://fairfoodprogram.org/about/>.

Vecchiarelli, Justin. "AB 1066: Additional Overtime Pay Rules for the Agricultural Industry — How to Protect Your Business while Ensuring Compliance."

<https://properdefenselaw.com/ab-1066-additional-overtime-pay-rules-for-the-agricultural-industry-how-to-protect-your-business-while-ensuring-compliance/>.