During the early part of 1942 reiterated warnings in the press that there would be a serious farm labor shortage during the forthcoming summer turned the thoughts of many people to the possibility of reducing some of this labor deficit by recruiting young people of college and high school age from the cities. Some of us recalled the organized program carried out during the first World War by which New York City high school boys were released early in June and established in small camps with high school teachers as volunteer supervisors. Several such camps were maintained throughout the summer of 1918 on Long Island. At the same time a good many boys were placed as workers on individual farms.

During the past summer Brooklyn College furnished one hundred student volunteers to help alleviate the farm shortage. Some of these were scattered rather widely on individual farms but the majority were located in three work camps in the region of northern Dutchess County, N. Y. The preliminaries of investigation, recruiting, orientation, and placement by the College Placement Office, the Faculty Committee on Employment, and a Student Council committee form a separate story which is elsewhere reported by Mrs. Barbara K. O'Neill, Placement Associate. The following account is designed to present in outline a general picture of the work of these three camps with some commentary as to the possibilities of greater utilization of city student labor in the relief of what is probably the most acute labor shortage at the present time. For the sake of more graphic presentation, the report is supplemented by a number of captioned pictures (some most apologetically included).

HOUSING AND GENERAL ORGANIZATION

The three labor camps were located and housed as follows: (1) Calvert Camp; seven Brooklyn College girls under the leadership of Miss Gertrude Greig, now teaching at Wellesley College but formerly on the Economics staff of Brooklyn College, lived rent-free in the well-appointed country farmhouse of Dr. Robert Calvert, chemist, of Germantown and New York. (2) Kliers Rath Camp; fifteen boys from Brooklyn occupied a tenant house on the farm of Mr. James Kliers Rath, about a mile northwest of Red Hook, paying nominal rent, and doing their own housekeeping. Mr. Kliers Rath gave this group a general friendly oversight. Professor Charles Winslow, of the Faculty Employment Committee, made several weekend visits to Red Hook and gave special service to the Kliers Rath group. (3) Red Hook Camp; Sixty-four young people, forty girls and twenty-four boys, were installed on June 10th in the historic 18th century Van Ness Mansion (now known as the Shelley house). A little later, the boys were provided with separate dormitory quarters in the Swett house but the Van Ness Mansion continued to serve as general headquarters and social center. Both these buildings were in the corporate limits of the village of Red Hook. The great majority of the original sixty-four students had been recruited from Brooklyn College but there was also representation from the other three New York public colleges together with a very few from other institutions.

The Red Hook group, by arrangements which had been made by the local "agricultural defense" committee, had the use of the kitchen and cafeteria facilities of the Red Hook Central School. They also had the privileges of lockers and cold showers in the same building, and of the broad acreage of the athletic fields and elm-shaded campus of this school which were directly contiguous to the grounds of the Shelley house. The furnishings of the two Red Hook houses consisted of adequate bunks and blankets, and of living room furniture for one room, loaned by the N.Y.A. Supplemeting these, there were gradually added chairs, tables, benches, etc., contributed by cooperative Red Hook residents. After five weeks or so it was possible for nearly one half the group to have comfortable seating facilities, other than the floor, at the same time. Both houses lacked heating facilities, except fire
Their adaption for service was found in the kind of agriculture which predominates in parts of some of the Hudson River counties, that is, fruit and vegetable culture.

Bordering the river for more than fifty miles north from the Highlands are considerable tracts of relatively smooth farmland devoted largely to fruit crops. Thousands of acres are covered by apple orchards, vineyards, strawberry fields, and plantings of half a dozen other fruits. Interpersed with these are many acres devoted to snap beans, sweet corn, and tomatoes. From about June 1st in every year there is an almost continuous harvest period which demands an influx of many more workers than are needed for the care of these crops during the rest of the year. Night after night, hundreds of truckloads of this produce roll southward on the Albany Post Road and also down the west side of the river to supply New York City markets, and more distant destinations. From Red Hook on one night in early August, eighteen thousand carefully packed baskets of tomatoes started southward for Florida markets. About the same time two carloads of pears were sent northward to Canada, a "lend-lease" transaction.

In past years the labor for these harvests has been drawn from two main sources (1) local people of a wide range in age, who have been available and glad to help out for the ready cash return; (2) migrants, some of whom were accustomed to follow ripening crops northward from Florida, or some few who might come down from further north. But this year war industries in Poughkeepsie and further away, selective service, and the shortage of gasoline and tires combined to produce a serious shortage. Into this situation of labor stringency, our students came. While picking fruit is a task in which skill grows with experience and old hands may show the usual margin of superiority which "professionals" in any field manifest over tyros, the processes are not so intricate that beginners cannot make real contributions. Moreover, most types of fruit picking are paid for on a piece-work basis; it does not cost the grower more to use slower workers. Furthermore, experience adds chiefly to the number of baskets per unit worker, not necessarily at all to the salability of the product.

Starting by June 10th our students received their "basic training" in the strawberry fields. For the first two weeks the whole group in the three camps were concentrated on this crop with a collective harvest of about forty thousand quarts. Thereafter their work was more diversified as the successive ripening of later crops marked the advancing summer. Before the summer was over they were called upon to pick cherries, raspberries, wild blueberries, string beans, early apples, tomatoes. Some of the stronger boys worked day after day in the hay fields, pitching on and off in the old-fashioned way, or following the newest type of hay baler which turned out fifty to seventy-pound bales for them to load on trucks. The first two weeks in the strawberry fields probably served well as a hardening or conditioning period by which many were gradually adapted for heavier work later.

In addition to straight harvesting tasks, most of the group were used in the weeding and hoeing of the strawberry fields after the crop had been picked. Some were used in setting out new plantings of strawberries. One group which averaged ten in number most of the summer carried several plantings of lettuce through from the earliest sowing to the final cutting and packing. "Packing" and "grading" have definite meanings as distinctive operations, especially with tomatoes and apples. While the students were called upon to do some packing and grading these tasks in their most specialized forms were reserved for professionals who carried on the operations at unbelievable speeds.

The largest single crop in this whole Hudson River fruit region is the apple. While our students had a chance to help in harvesting some of early varieties, "Yellow Transparents", and "Dutchess", the peak of the harvest does not come until September, when "McIntosh" apples ripen, at a time when our group had to be getting back to the city to register for the fall semester. Many of them did have experience,
however, in "thinning" McIntosh and other later varieties of apples. This year the early set of most apple trees had been so heavy that thinning was needed to produce the best sized final fruit. In the apple orchards and with other tree crops, girls were at a definite disadvantage, especially in older orchards in which the trees had been allowed to grow relatively tall. Few if any of the girls were physically able to move tall ladders, so that either some male worker had to be assigned to work with a crew of girl pickers and thinners, or else they were given the job of working the lower limbs.

None of our students grew rich from their weeks or months in helping in the fields. Daily returns for strawberry picking at four cents a quart ranged from about $1.50 to $4.00, with $2.20 as an approximate average, (not counting rainy days.) For the bean harvest, a few students reached $2.70 and $2.80, at thirty to thirty-five cents per bushel hamper, but some picked beans a whole day for less than a dollar. Weeding, haying, and some other jobs were paid for at an hourly rate of thirty cents for eight or nine hour days. These jobs were the most prized because the income was on a steadier basis. While some earnings on a piece work basis were low because the workers either lacked manual dexterity or the drive to push themselves, in other cases, the yield in some fields was so low that the most experienced pickers could make little.

So far the work of these students has been discussed without reference to individual variations. Obviously these existed, but so far as this general report is concerned, they are not too significant. Such differences did pose considerable problems, however, both in the group-living of dormitory life, and in the operation of the Red Hook group as a source of labor for the surrounding region. Even more acute problems were raised by the variation among the clientele of employing farmers, whether sympathetic and tolerant, understanding, or ...otherwise in various respects.

To complete this outline description of the general labor experiences of the group, the schedule of a typical working day may be given. The first call of "Rise and shine" or some substitute came at 5:30 for the 'lettuce squad' which had breakfast by 6:00 and travel twenty miles northward to its muck field. The rest of the group had to get up in time for a last breakfast call at 6:45. From 7:00 onward, a succession of farmers' vehicles called for their squads. At times as many as fifteen or twenty rode off in one truck. During one period in July, a group was taken twenty-six miles to the southeast, to Amenia, to pick wild blueberries at ten cents a quart; and later to harvest the beans. By 8:00, the whole squad, in days of full employment, had disappeared, except for one girl "on maintenance", a housekeeping job assigned in rotation. (Incidentally, some these girls were even less experienced in sweeping, etc., than in farming, if that is possible.)

Breakfasts were simple, too light for heavy work on farms, although the breakfasts were perhaps the most generally acceptable of the day's meals. Lunches consisted of two or three sandwiches, made up the night before, plus an orange.... Dinners served at 6:00 P.M. had their limitations, imposed in part by the low per capita cost to which this group cooperatively held itself, (and that in turn enforced by the high overhead), and also by the limitations of the school cafeteria cookstove which was too small to permit a wide repertoire in the culinary way. Milk was available in good supply for breakfast and dinner.

In one important respect a distinctive quality of these farm workers has not been touched upon at all; the personal elements of motivation which lead them in the first instance to enlist for hard, laborious, and unknown work under strange surroundings, and later to persist after it had become obvious that earnings would not at any time be large and after the first interest in novel surroundings and work had become worn down. A few did not endure but returned to the city in short order with harrowing tales of unsatisfactory work, living conditions, and food. For the rest
a prime factor which lead them to enlist had been a patriotic desire to serve on this defence front. Supporting this as the weeks wore on, was a growing enjoyment of the group-living features, an experience which despite obvious drawbacks of the particular situation carried an appeal compoundd of many different psychological factors. Some whose parents pleaded with them to return to the comforts of home stayed because of a feeling of interest and responsibility for the success of the venture. Some who went home for a couple of days returned after one night; they couldn't stand the city. Not a few of them could have earned much more in the city.

Generalized statements like the above are like averages and curves, not precise in their application to any particular individual. However, it does appear that groups of city students, responsive to altruistic aims and to adventure, can be drawn upon for real contributions toward the agricultural labor deficit.

GENERAL ANALYSIS AND COMMENTARY

Current discussions (October 3, 1942) in legislatures, in the press, and over the radio present a picture of ever-increasing stringency in the farm labor supply, but at the same time of an inescapable need of increased agricultural production for the forthcoming war years and for postwar conditions. Farmers are being forced to restrict their production to operations they can carry on themselves, or even, by the thousands, to sell their farms because they cannot get help, but food shortages impend or are already far advanced. We must raise ever larger food supplies for our armies and for our allies while the draft and industry drain away the labor on which increased farm production depends. Federal statistics show that farm wages have increased as much as fifty percent but the shortage increases. Farming is one of the "small businesses", the dire fate of which is common knowledge. That its labor needs cannot be met from the same source as 'big business' find confirmation in the incidents cited in the two succeeding paragraphs.

Recent headlined, front-page news told of the recruiting of some thousands of New York City unemployed men through a federal agency to work in new Pacific coast shipyards under Henry Kaiser's management. Special trains carried the first installments of these workers. Their employer was reported as saying that 'if they knew one end of a monkey wrench from the other' they could do the work, and maybe even that would not be necessary. For this amount of skill, eighty-five cents per hour would be paid, of course with usual overtime over forty hours per week.

It so happened that just about two months earlier, through this same agency, a group of N.Y. City unemployed, (not improbably a few of the 'shipbuilders') was interviewed for possible employment on the farm defence front-apple picking in Dutchess County, the peak crisis of which would come by mid-September. While the interviewing committee from Dutchess County had not come away very optimistic regarding this labor source, the exigencies of the apple harvest lead in early September to the installation of three camps comprising nearly three hundred young men from the metropolitan region. How well they might have solved the apple-picking problem will never be known because within the first week, disorder broke out which resulted in property damage, knifing, and shooting so that the State Police had to be called in, two jail sentences were imposed, and the whole group had to be sent back to the city.

Viewed from the angles offered in the preceding paragraphs, the future demands for harvest labor deserve emergency consideration. Three possible measures suggest themselves as offering lines of solutions. (1) The Federal Government may have to draft labor as it does soldiers and distribute the drafted workers, women and men, to the posts where they are needed. The overhead organization necessary for such a project staggered the imagination. Obviously it could not be applied only to farm labor. (2) Farm wages might be raised to a point where they would compete on even
terms with the pay in defense manufacturing. At the same time it would necessary to arrange the release of skilled farm hands from the armed forces and from industrial work. Someone may be bold enough to estimate the inflationary effect of such an increase in farm wages on the cost of living. If the question is raised whether further mechanization of farm processes may not offer some hope of aid in this problem, the answer must be in the negative. While such mechanical advances in the past have reduced the amount of individual labor manyfold, progress has to be measured over long periods, and there are many essential farm tasks for which mechanical substitute for human labor are scarcely conceivable. Fruit and vegetable picking are obvious examples of such processes. (3) Instead of the incentives of high wages or of government direction, some other means must be found to enlist the needed 'land army' for the task which is fully as essential for the final outcome of the war as the manufacturing of tanks, guns, planes, and ships. From the Red Hook experience, I am convinced that the ranks of college and older high school youth offer an immense reservoir of potential farm labor which only requires a proper presentation of the problem and a moderate financial return to volunteer in large numbers. That this opinion is shared by others is evidenced by a number of recent magazine articles. Indeed, proof of the possibility of enlisting large numbers of volunteer harvesters is carried in a recent Saturday Evening Post article, "Rode Harvest" by Frank J. Taylor (Oct. 3, 1942). When the Pacific coast states lost 100,000 residents of Japanese ancestry by forcible deportation, an urgent demand for harvest labor was created beyond that of any other part of the country. City people were mobilized. High school boys were established in Y.M.C.A. camps. School teachers and Y directors served as camp supervisors. U.S. Employment Service assigned special staff members to act as liaison agents to place workers, make allotments to fruit and vegetable growers. Special busses were utilized to collect older city volunteers each day and distribute them to the regions of employment.

In general, an acute labor shortage in the Pacific fruit and vegetable regions was met by the concerted action of the local farming communities where the need existed, of state and federal agencies which served as intermediaries, and of public-spirited city dwellers who responded to the appeal of patriotism and went into the fields and orchards.

Mention may be made here of another recent article (Dorothy Thompson, Ladies Home Journal, September, 1942) which is concerned with the placement of college students in farming communities of a different sort. The Volunteer Land Corps in which Miss Thompson is interested, placed this year several hundred students on individual farms, mostly dairy, in Vermont and New Hampshire. In this movement both the contribution which such workers can make to the farm labor situation and the educational values which the worker gains from a completely new experience are objectives. The movement is not designed purely and primarily as an emergency measure but as part of a long-term educational project. Miss Thompson expresses considerable disappointment that out of the hundreds who were placed on farms there were many, despite careful advance selection and orientation, who could not stand the solitude and lack of vicarious entertainment to which city life had accustomed them. They lacked the resources within themselves for adjustment and enjoyment.

That the development by education of increased capacity for self-direction and entertainment is an important objective is not to be denied. That a high capacity for such development has an almost universal existence among the millions of students in our colleges and high schools appears to be a widely-held assumption upon which have been predicated many lofty but impractical programs. Miss Thompson ascribes the deficiencies among the Volunteer Land Corps which she so deeply deplores to the lack of the old-time 'disciplinary' education of languages and mathematics. In disagreement the opinion is here expressed that that kind of education was 'good' in those days, forty or more years ago, because colleges and high schools enrolled few who were not qualified by native endowment to develop with any kind of rigorous,
formal schooling; that that kind of curriculum was progressively eliminated after 1900 not because the schoolmen lost their vision and practical intelligence but because our secondary and higher institutions of learning were in process of becoming less aristocratic in the educational sense. Since then the many-times multiplied school population has received all too slowly new and more appropriate kinds of curricula and teaching. Parenthetically, it may also be added that many people who have never had any kind of a classical education still grow up today to manifest to a high degree resources for independent and self-sustaining activity.

These somewhat digressive paragraphs are by way of leading to a conclusion and a proposal relative to summer farm labor camps through which many city boys and girls may receive educational stimulation of a kind that their present schoolrooms can never give them. By all means, send individuals in expanding numbers to live and work by themselves on farms so that they may grow in their capacity to enjoy life as self-sustained individuals who can appreciate Emerson's mood in "Self-Reliance" and Thoreau's in Walden. At the same time provide for our young people through private and public ventures the values of country work-camp experience where those who are more hard-conditioned may also gain insight and experience in conditions outside of cities.

The present war emergency affords an exceptional opportunity to launch such a program under conditions calculated to provide a most effective motivation for the young people, that of defense service, and at the same time to make an urgently needed contribution to farm labor front. It seems certain that many city dwellers will engage in increasing numbers during forthcoming years in harvesting activities. In these engagements, they will harvest many crops, and may, incidentally, acquire new viewpoints. The suggestion is made here that public authorities seize the present opportunity to build a constructive program which shall both channel large numbers of our young people into the agricultural labor front and also make this experience consciously constructive to a high degree from the educational point of view.

There is a considerable body of experience on the basis of which the architecture of such an educational program can be formulated. The experience of the Volunteer Land Corps in the enlistment of young people to work on individual farms would be most valuable; as also that of the International Student Service which has had several work camps in operation. The Federal Government, through the N.Y.A. and C.C.C. has gained a most extensive knowledge of the problems involved in educational measures as well as in those of housing, group management, and useful work. During the past summer, Washington agencies took a new step to help meet the farm labor shortage by instituting "migratory labor camps", in which housing for as many as three hundred and fifty workers and families was planned, with supervisory staffs covering business administration, recreation, nurse and medical service, and general direction. Because such camps were designed to provide living quarters for Southern labor to be imported, more than one community, according to the public press, hesitated to accept this means of relieving their labor shortage.

The three camps near Red Hook in which Brooklyn College was involved during the past summer may be thought of an experimental approach not only to the possibilities of using New York City young people of college and high school institutions to relieve the farm labor deficit, but also, at the same time, of setting up an educational program to be accomplished concurrently with their labor activities. Toward this end, it is here suggested that the Board of Higher Education study the feasibility of setting up work-study summer school camps in some fruit growing area not far from New York City. The possibility of adapting the Antioch College program of alternating weeks of work and classroom for such a venture has much to commend it. Or the formal teaching program could be worked out to provide a full schedule of meetings fitted into days of bad weather, or into evenings.
Students could be enrolled in smaller or larger groups according to the specific residence conditions available. Small units like Miss Greig's, with not more than ten in a group, could be enrolled from lower classmen or subfreshmen and given one of the standard prescribed units of the curriculum for which a regular teacher of the personality qualified to make such a camp class successful may be available. The Mark Hopkins's type of college work would offer few difficulties for courses which do not require special laboratory facilities; for English, foreign language, mathematics, et al. Adequate enrollment could almost certainly be obtained for such classes; from women of freshman and sophomore years, and from men of freshman and subfreshman grades. The larger the variety of courses considered, the greater the chance of finding a suitable leader and teacher.

It is intriguing, also, to envision the possibilities which such a country environment would afford for certain more specialized and correlated courses. From our regular curriculum, courses in field botany and field zoology could have their syllabi adapted without undue distortion for presentation; the tasks of harvesting and hoeing and weeding would constitute a most thorough phase of the laboratory part of the courses. Special courses in agricultural economics, rural sociology, cost production statistics could be devised which would complement and enrich the daily experiences of living and working. And what a sequence of laboratory exercises could be formulated in progressive order by a qualified teacher in home economics for a group of girls (or boys) who were cooperatively carrying out the daily tasks involved in marketing, cooking, and housekeeping! Perhaps an English teacher could be found who could make living the nature literature from the Bible, Lucretius, Shakespeare, Milton, to Audubon and more recent exponents like Maeterlinck and Peattie? Would not the right art teacher find the countryside a most rewarding setting for landscape study? Even courses with a special war-training value would not be impossible; e.g., meteorology, military topography.

For the inauguration of such a work camp summer school on any large scale, careful planning and advance negotiation to ensure a suitable setting would be necessary. That the Federal Government might subsidize housing facilities is suggested by its present program for farm labor camps, and the large amount of equipment held over from past experiments in work camp projects. Some Federal or state agency would be desirable for much of the preliminary liaison work needed in the selection of the neighborhood and in getting the farmers of a locality organized into a group which would be committed to provide an adequate continuity and variety of farm work experience at a reasonably adequate financial return. Through whatever agency, provision should be made for liability insurance, for individual health and accident insurance, for medical service as might be needed. The housing should include adequate kitchen and dining facilities and a good cook would be a most essential part of the administrative staff. In addition to furnishing a carefully selected staff for teaching and personnel management, the college authorities should make sure that the student clientele for such a summer school program had been fully informed, carefully selected, and so far as possible given some advance training.

Finally, while there would seem to be offered in the present emergency a need for locating such a camp school in an agriculturally concentrated region, postwar conditions may very likely make unnecessary special crop-harvesting camps. Local and regular migratory labor may again become entirely adequate. For such future eventuality, colleges could still provide for their students the value of combined work-camp, summer school training by installations in regions where conservation measures are necessary. A large subsistence garden would contribute the basis for agricultural and home economics experience. Incidentally, a home economics course ought to be included to contribute accredited service toward a very useful end.

(signed) Ralph C. Benedict
Summary of Findings and Recommendations on Brooklyn College Labor Camp Experiment

Taken together the following suggestions outline a broad program designed to accomplish two objectives: (a) An immediate contribution toward relief of the farm labor deficit by the use of young people from town and city educational institutions; (b) Provisions for making such labor experiences of the greatest possible educational value. The latter would represent long term plan.

(1) The college and older high school students of the cities constitute an immense reservoir of labor from which the farm labor deficit can be considerably reduced during the next few years. In much of the country, their vacation periods correspond to the seasons when labor demand is most acute on farms. As beginners they can render valuable help in many farm operations and over a period of years in successive summers, they would become progressively more valuable. Supporting data for the truth of these statements is available from a diversity of sources.

(2) Motivated by patriotic reasons, such student labor would be obtainable at wages commensurate with farm income. In general steadiness and character they would be superior to much of the transient labor which has been utilized up to the present.

(3) Placement should include selection for individual farm experience (Volunteer Land Corps Program) and for labor camp projects of varying sizes.

(4) Federal, state, and local agencies should take definite responsibilities, 1st, in making known to farms at large the potential value of city youth as a source of labor, 2nd, in securing and subsidizing adequate housing, furnishings, sanitation, recreational space, together with guaranteed continuity of working opportunity, and of minimal pay for satisfactory work.

(5) Colleges and school systems should take the lead in the preliminary enlistment, orientation, and training. This cannot be left to general agencies which have no college responsibilities. Through some agency or plan, provision should be made for medical service, health, accident, and liability insurance.

(6) So far as possible, the educational authorities should make certain that with the work experiences there would be opportunity for correlated supplementary educational programs. If small and large camps are staffed in part by regular members of the teaching force, it would not be too difficult to arrange part time programs of standard and specially related credit courses. (E.G., in the Calvert Camp, with Miss Greig, the work was not so demanding but that a course in agricultural economics could have been taken.)

(7) Given adequate preliminary organizational measures, college and high school summer school programs could be instituted in many parts of the country, possibly on the plan of alternating work and study (Antioch, Univ. of Cincinnati plans). By making possible the residence of college students through a four month period, June-September, needed workers could be made available from the early June peak labor demand with strawberries through the crisis labor demand in September, the McIntosh apple harvest. Within short distance of N.Y. City, several fruit and vegetable-growing areas offer regions where the summer farm labor demand is extremely large. It is suggested that the Board of Higher Education study the feasibility of pioneering in such a country summer school.