

Victory to the campesinos!

- **United Farm Workers (West)**
- **Farm Labor Organizing Committee
(Midwest)**
- **Comité Organizador de
Trabajadores Agrícolas
(COTA - Northeast)**

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HUELGA



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¡VIVA LA HUELGA!

Looking back over 25
years of the United Farm
Workers Union

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the United Farm Workers union (UFW). Born in 1962 in the fields of Delano in California's rich San Joaquin Valley, the UFW was built out of the suffering and sacrifices of farm workers and the massive support that it built up throughout the country, especially among Chicanos.

The union and its leadership, especially César Chávez and Dolores Huerta, became the heroes of the Chicano Movement and inspired the rise of the Chicano Movement in the urban areas, as Chicanos joined the picket lines and became organizers in the grape boycott.

The UFW is a treasure of the Chicano people and of the labor movement; it serves as an inspiration to working people throughout the country as to how workers can build and control their own union. It is my hope that this brief

In 1975, over 15,000 UFW members and supporters marched in Modesto, California, for legislation guaranteeing collective bargaining rights for farm workers.

history will inspire support for the UFW in its continuing battle against the growers and for workers' rights.

Attack from the right

The growers hate the UFW and are determined to try to destroy it. They recognize that its existence inspires farm workers all over the country to rise up against agribusiness and continue their fight for decent working conditions, forming their own unions like the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC) in the Midwest, COTA (Farmworkers Organizing Committee) on the East Coast and farm workers' unions in Arizona and Texas.

Because of the attacks from the growers and the right wing, UFW membership has declined from 100,000 members in the early 1970s to only 30,000 today. UFW membership would be 70,000, but growers have refused to sign contracts even after UFW victories. The growers are bolstered by support from right-wing California Governor George Deukmejian, who has used the power of his office to weaken the once-supportive Agricultural Labor Relations Board (ALRB), cutting its staff and appointing pro-grower members to the ALRB.

In January of this year, the UFW was hit by a California Superior Court ruling that ordered the UFW to pay Maggio Inc. a staggering \$1.7 million dollars because of violence during a 1979 strike. The union will have to post \$3.3 million in bond to pursue appeals. The case is a typical example of pro-grower justice. The wife of the judge, William E. Lehnhardt, was a scab during the Maggio strike, and it was the farm workers, not the grower, who were victims of violence during the strike. In fact, striker Rufino Contreras was murdered on the picket line during the strike.

Neither the court ruling nor the pro-grower stance of Deukmejian has deterred the UFW. The union has launched a grape boycott and is determined to mobilize its broad support to force the growers to recognize union elections. The new grape boycott, like previous boycott efforts, can be a powerful weapon for the workers and a key tool of the union to once again organize national support.

Long hours, short lives

The UFW was born out of the suffering and miserable conditions faced by the Mexicano, Chicano and Filipino farm workers in the fertile San Joaquin Valley. In the early 1960s, California farm workers were supposedly the “best paid in the nation,” yet they earned only \$2,400 a year. To survive, farm laborers had to follow crops from valley to valley, town to town and state to state. Whole families worked in the fields to avoid starvation.

Forced to stoop long hours with short-handled hoes, often sprayed with deadly pesticides, farm workers slaved under the hot sun, many times without water or restroom facilities. They slept in crowded, make-shift labor camps that in many cases were nothing more than converted chicken shacks. The average life expectancy of a farm worker in 1965 was only 49 years. These were the conditions that gave birth to the UFW and to the union movement in the fields.

In the early 1960s, the growers seemed unbeatable. They had amassed a billion dollar industry that combined the large farms with packing, canning and distribution of agricultural goods. They held absolute power in the small towns that dot the San Joaquin Valley, controlling local politicians and the courts.

This was the atmosphere that César Chávez and Dolores Huerta found in the San Joaquin Valley when they formed the National Farm Workers Association (the NFWA) back in 1962. Still, the fledgling union would soon take on the giants of agribusiness.

Huelga in Delano

In September 1965 the famous Delano strike put that city on the map and skyrocketed the UFW into national prominence. The strike began when Filipino farm laborers who were members of the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC) voted to strike grape growers. On September 16th (Mexican Independence Day), members of the NFWA voted to join the strike and 1,100 Mexicano and Chicano workers joined the picket lines. The shouts of “¡Huelga!” (“Strike”) filled the air and rocked the entire valley.



In 1965, the National Farm Workers Association, led by César Chávez, joined Filipino strikers to launch the grape strike in Delano.

The growers responded ferociously. Police routinely stopped strikers and supporters to issue tickets for defects found in their old, run-down cars, at one point surrounding the union headquarters with barricades. Company goons and security dogs attacked the strikers, often as the police watched, sometimes laughing.

Roving picket lines and car caravans carried the NFWA message to farm laborers scattered through 80 farms and 38,000 acres of vineyards. Union organizers called on the workers to join the strike: "Don't scab! You want to be a slave all of your life? Doesn't your family deserve better? Join us! *¡Viva la Huelga!*"

To break the strike, the growers resorted to every trick in the book. Local politicians and ministers condemned the strike leaders as "outside agitators" and "communists" who were stirring up "our happy Mexicans." Food stores and banks cut off credit to strikers. Local doctors refused to provide medical care to union members. Even the Catholic Church's Our Lady of Guadalupe buckled under grower pressure, denying the NFWA use of the parish hall for strike

meetings.

The growers called in *la Migra* (the Immigration and Naturalization Service) to deport strikers, while at the same time the *Migra* turned its back as growers shipped in undocumented workers from Mexico as scabs. The pro-grower courts hit the union with an injunction limiting the number of picketers and forcing the union to keep its picket line 50 feet from the fields (out of earshot of the scabs).

Still, the union and strikers held firm. They found a new tactic in the grape boycott, a tactic that filled the growers with terror.

The power of the boycott

The NFWA had resorted to limited boycotts during the 1965-66 strike. But in 1968, when the newly formed United Farm Worker Organizing Committee (that brought together the NFWA and AWOC) was fighting the Giumarra Corporation, Giumarra resorted to shipping their grapes in crates with over a hundred different labels and brands.

To fight Giumarra and the other companies supporting it, the union launched a boycott of all table grapes and called for boycotts of large stores selling grapes, such as Safeway and A&P. Secondary boycotts (boycotts of firms selling products) were illegal under the National Labor Relations Act. But farm workers were not covered under the NLRB, and Chávez turned that problem to their advantage.

The boycott of table grapes was an assault on all grape growers — and in fact, on all of agribusiness. Refusing to eat grapes became a political statement. In the late 1960s, to consider yourself progressive, you had to oppose the war in Viet Nam, support the Civil Rights Movement AND YOU HAD TO BOYCOTT GRAPES.

Like many Chicanos and progressives during the period, I first became involved in the movement on the picket lines in front of Safeway. I joined “*¡La Huelga!*” and organized other students to go out each week to build support for the boycott.

I remember how impressed I was to see farm workers, some of whom had been members of the union for only a short while, become citywide organizers for the UFW.

They traveled all over the country setting up boycott offices, often leaving with only enough money for gas and food to get them to their destination. They contacted churches and labor unions to house them as they began to build the organizing efforts.

César Chávez toured the college campuses to recruit volunteers for the UFW, who earned \$5 a week as union organizers. The grape boycott found support from every nationality, from people of all walks of life. It is estimated that 17 million people in this country joined the grape boycott at its height, in this way giving concrete support to the UFW.

The boycott forced the growers to the bargaining table. Grapes rotted in the fields. The raisin and wine market was glutted with the flood of unsold grapes. Then, in 1970, several major grocery chains, including Safeway, bowed to the boycott and withdrew non-union grapes from their shelves. The growers reluctantly signed agreements with the UFW in July 1970, negotiating wages, medical benefits, a union hiring hall, some protection from pesticides and a retirement plan. The union had beaten the power of the growers.

An Inspiration to the Chicano people

There are no greater heroes to the Chicano people than César Chávez and Dolores Huerta, and nothing has inspired the masses of the Chicano people like the victory of the UFW. The modern Chicano Movement in the 1960s grew up side by side with the UFW, savored its victories and agonized over its defeats.

The majority of the Chicano people, even those living in the cities, have roots in *el campo* — in the fields. Our parents or grandparents came from Mexico to the United States, working in the fields and canneries for a portion of their lives.

For Chicanos the struggle of farm workers represents, too, the struggle of the Chicano people for self-respect, for equality, for political power and for self-determination. The desire to once again control the lands which our ancestors have made rich for the growers makes the slogan “*¡Tierra y Libertad!*” (“Land and Liberty!”) a powerful reminder that the lands of the Southwest were stolen from the Chicano

people.

When the UFW formed, Chicanos from all walks of life took up *La Causa* (the cause) as their own, adopting the symbols of the UFW for our movement. The union's insignia, *El Águila Negra* (the Black Eagle), became synonymous with the Chicano Movement. Chicano student organizations on campuses all over the country took up the fight to get grapes off of their campuses, waving the UFW flag in their marches and protests.

The UFW produced powerful posters that gave political direction to the Chicano Movement, such as their "*¡Viva La Revolución!*" ("Long Live the Revolution!") that showed Mexican revolutionary Emiliano Zapata, who fought for land and justice in Mexico. The union's *teatro* (theater), originally made up of farm workers, El Teatro Campesino, took the union's message all over the country in satire and song and spawned the growth of a revolutionary Chicano cultural movement as similar *teatros* developed in cities all over the Southwest. The popular *corrido* (ballad) "*La Huelga en General*" ("The General Strike") gave the movement the term "*La Causa*."

Throughout the Southwest, Chicanos were filled with pride that a Mexicano union, led by Chicanos, had stood up to the power of agribusiness and had won. It was a lesson to the entire movement that Chicanos could win great victories, as the slogan for our movement became "*¡Sí Se Puede!*" ("It Can Be Done!").

Launching the new boycott

The years since 1970 have been hard ones for the UFW. The Teamsters rushed into the fields, backed by the growers, to sign sweetheart (pro-company) contracts that offered little to the workers and meant new sources of union dues for the Teamster leadership.

The Teamster raids on UFW farms led to the 1970 Salinas lettuce strike that involved nearly 15,000 farm workers. In 1973, the UFW fought off the Teamsters in the strike in Coachella Valley and later in other areas. In 1975 Gallo winery's contract with the Teamsters sparked the UFW-led boycott of Gallo wines.

The tenacious resistance of the farm workers forced the Teamsters to sign a "peace treaty" in 1977 to stop raids on the UFW, at least temporarily. Meanwhile, the growers stepped up their own attacks on the union with the anti-union Proposition 22 that was placed on the California ballot in the fall of 1972. Farm workers and their supporters went to the major cities of California, taking their case door-to-door. They defeated Prop. 22 by a resounding 2-1 margin.

After years of pushing for protective legislation, in 1975 the UFW convinced the California legislature to adopt the Agricultural Labor Relations Act, which for the first time in history protected the right of farm workers to organize.

But the election of Republican George Deukmejian (who was heavily backed by the growers) as governor of California in 1982 led to an open attack on the ALRB and increased violence by growers against farm workers. In 1983, for example, union organizer Rene Lopez was shot to death in Fresno during a union election, but, as in the case of three other farm workers murdered during the past decade, no one was prosecuted.

The UFW has also taken up the battle against the use of pesticides. Nationally, 300,000 farm workers and their families are exposed to the deadly toxins as agribusiness pumps one billion pounds of pesticides annually into the crops and waterways that feed this country.

Protections for the farm workers under California law have not been enforced by Deukmejian, prompting the UFW to once again turn to the grape boycott to force the growers to honor union elections and to put an end to the use of the deadly pesticides.

Growing support

The new boycott is picking up steam. It has been endorsed by Detroit Mayor Coleman Young and by the mayor and City Council in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. It has been picked up by church groups and labor unions all over the country. Student groups, particularly Chicano student organizations like MEChA, have joined the grape boycott, calling for campuses to stop buying grapes.

As the UFW celebrates its 25th anniversary, it continues to need the support of all progressive people. The capitalists that own the farms of agribusiness realize that the union is a powerful symbol to the Chicano Movement and fuels the struggle of the Chicano people for self-determination. They realize that the UFW is an inspiration to all working people throughout this country.

The existence of the UFW is a powerful testimony to the power of the working class and the gains that can be won against the most formidable of enemies. Let us all join in celebrating the UFW's 25th anniversary by rekindling our fervor and commitment to *La Causa*.

¡VIVA LA HUELGA!

¡VIVA LA UNIÓN CAMPESINA!

BOYCOTT GRAPES!

Send donations, or for more information on how you can help the boycott efforts, write to: United Farm Workers of America, P.O. Box 62, La Paz, CA 93570.

Unity interviews Baldemar Velásquez

On February 19, the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC) won an historic contract with Campbell's Soup and the tomato and cucumber farmers of Ohio and Michigan. Coming off a seven-year boycott of Campbell's Soup, the contract is a major breakthrough for the farm workers' movement nationally.

Unity spoke with FLOC President Baldemar Velásquez.

Q FLOC has won a tremendous victory. What has been your basic strategy?

A What we're saying is that we now have the first step in laying the cornerstone of a major new agricultural policy in this country. When we went out on strike in 1978, we decided we not only wanted to negotiate with that grower, we wanted to negotiate with the company who buys those tomatoes and cucumbers exclusively. When we made that demand, you remember, everybody thought we were absolutely nuts. They said how can you get Campbell to

negotiate with you when they're not even your employer.

In fact, Campbell's Soup has made a commitment to pay for the cost of these contracts. It's not coming out of the small family farmer's pocket. I think that's most significant because when we talk about the agricultural industry in the Midwest, you're going to be facing a lot of these small family farmers.

Q What is the next campaign?

A Our next target is Heinz. Then we can move on to Green Giant, Del Monte and Stokely, and the rest of them, so we'll never have to go begging to anyone again. We want a fair day's pay for a fair day of work, and this is one way to get it.

Campbell went through the whole shebang, every argument they can conceivably imagine, so nobody's going to come up with anything new. Heinz is our key target because they're second to Campbell. Getting Campbell and Heinz will give us over 70% of the entire work force in the state of Ohio.

On February 22, Heinz made a press release out of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, their national headquarters, that they can see that it's an issue that has to be addressed, that they're willing to talk to FLOC. So already, with Heinz, we're five years ahead than when we started with Campbell. I'm convinced that what took us seven years with Campbell we can do in seven months with Heinz.

What we're going to do this summer is set the fields afire with militant organizing of the farm workers because now's the time and now's the chance.

Q In organizing, FLOC has faced many obstacles. Can you tell us about some of the racism you've faced during your campaign?

A A lot of these small family farmers don't want anything to change because they have a good thing going for themselves. On top of that, a lot of them are racist. Dealing with the ones in northwest Ohio is like dealing with the Ku Klux Klan. And I'm not exaggerating.



Baldemar
Velásquez.

These guys, they're a bunch of anarchists who think they're Republicans. But when we started our strike out there, they pressed the sheriff of that county to say we didn't have a right to do picketing on public property. They arrested us just for picketing. They arrested us for no charges at all. They even beat up our lawyer.

When the sheriff couldn't break the strike, the Ku Klux Klan started burning crosses in front of our field headquarters. They'd come in with their midnight tactics of smashing the windows of our field headquarters with shotguns and taking the entrails and guts and organs of farm animals and staking the bloody messes to our front door and the doors of people who supported us in that county to intimidate them from coming to union meetings.

Q With the companies threatening to take production outside of the U.S. and pit workers in the U.S. with those, say, in Mexico, what is FLOC's strategy to deal with this?

A Well, they've got another think coming. We would want to have some dialogue with workers in Mexico to see if we can coordinate our efforts. After all, we speak the same language. They try to use us against those poor folk out there to see who can work for the cheapest, and that's really the formula these guys use.

Heinz, Van Camp, Del Monte, Green Giant — we have to go after them immediately. They all have to pay the same amount. If they're going to save money somewhere, let them take it out of their own pockets, let them take it out of the banker's pocket, but don't take it out of the worker's pocket in Ohio, in California, or in Mexico, or anywhere else, and that's really our strategy.

Q FLOC and the United Farm Workers (UFW) have had a strong, mutually supportive relationship for some time. Could you describe your present views on this?

A It's been because of César's (Chávez) generous support, opening doors for us, that we were able to get into some of these people's offices and get the support we needed that brought Campbell's Soup to the negotiating table.

I look at César as one of the leading progressive organizers in the country as far as labor is concerned. Like I said, it's been because of his network and resources that we've been able to achieve this victory. We're a concrete and legitimate workers' movement, and he's supported us wholeheartedly. And we're not part of his union. At this point, we very much desire to be.

So I think that the future holds some very bright prospects as the more we get settled nationally as a movement, the more we'll be able to impact other sectors in the labor movement by example.

Midwest farm workers take on Heinz company

FLOC builds on historic union victory against Campbell Soup

Peter Shapiro

Following the historic signing of its first union contract with the giant Campbell Soup Company last February, Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC) President Baldemar Velásquez told *Unity*, “What we accomplished in seven years at Campbell, we expect to accomplish in seven months at Heinz.”

FLOC is now on the threshold of winning a contract with the H.J. Heinz Company. Heinz has already agreed in principle to recognize FLOC as bargaining agent for the farm workers, and contract talks begin this month.

Asked if FLOC will seek the same contract from Heinz that it got at Campbell, FLOC Vice President María Sánchez told *Unity*, “We’re going for a better one. Heinz does not want to go through the same thing as Campbell.” FLOC led a farm workers’ strike and a seven-year nationwide boycott of Campbell’s products, which helped to force Campbell to sign with the union — a breakthrough for the mostly Mexicano migrant farm workers who work the Midwestern tomato and cucumber fields.

At the same time, FLOC is putting priority on winning contracts with Vlasic pickles, a Campbell subsidiary which



FLOC march and rally in Leipsic, Ohio. August, 1979.

buys cucumbers from growers in Michigan and Ohio.

What workers have won

For Midwestern farm workers, unionization is long overdue — it took a total of 17 years to win FLOC's first union contract!

For years, the mostly Latino farm workers from Texas and Florida have had to pack up their children, pull them out of school and move to Ohio or Michigan four months a year to harvest growers' tomato and cucumber crops. The growers in turn sign contracts to sell their crops to big food processing companies like Campbell and Heinz. This arrangement has forced farm workers to live in overcrowded, unsanitary labor camps and to work with virtually no rights.

But for workers covered by the Campbell contract, pay has risen as much as \$1 an hour, and they now have some medical coverage and enforcement of laws requiring portable toilets in the fields. Workers have also won the right to file grievances. In Michigan, four cu-

cucumber growers under contract to Vlastic pickles have renovated old labor camps and rebuilt them with bigger rooms, more showers and privacy for workers' families.

The Campbell agreement is being administered by the Dunlop Commission, a private body of representatives of FLOC, Campbell, the growers and independent forces. This unusual arrangement was necessary because farm workers are not covered by federal labor laws.

Maria Sánchez told *Unity* that the arrangement has worked well so far — a testament to FLOC's strength. Campbell has been cooperative, and while many grievances have been filed, the union has been able to resolve all of them on the spot without having to take them before the Dunlop Commission.

Vlastic holdouts in Ohio

Most growers under contract to Campbell agreed to the union contract, whose terms gave them a stable market for their crops and put the burden on Campbell to bear the cost of paying union wages and benefits. However, some 62 Ohio cucumber farmers who sell to Vlastic are still trying to keep FLOC out. Backed by California union-busting consultant Mark Robers, these growers have harassed and fired workers sympathetic to FLOC.

FLOC has fought back with a continuous presence in the cucumber fields throughout the season. They have held meetings in the labor camps to hear workers' input on what they think should be in their contract. And by publicizing FLOC's gains at the Campbell tomato farms and Vlastic cucumber farms in Michigan, they have given workers confidence that they can win.

Signing up the Ohio Vlastic farms is the union's top priority. With the harvest season over, some FLOC organizers have gone to Florida, where Vlastic workers return each year to work the winter crops. This way, FLOC continues building ties with cucumber workers during the off-season. FLOC may resume its boycott of Vlastic's parent company, Campbell, if the talks, which begin this month, do not produce a signed contract.

FLOC's work expands

Besides organizing for new contracts with Vlastic and Heinz, FLOC is training workers on farms already under contract to know their rights and to enforce the contract.

FLOC is also encouraging workers to join the committees set up by the Dunlop Commission to develop contract proposals around issues not covered by the existing agreement. These issues would include protection against exposure to toxic pesticides, and day care for workers' children, who often play by the roadsides while their parents work in nearby fields.

The rapid expansion of FLOC's work has severely taxed its 16-person staff. And on September 23, three top organizers — Rudy Moreno, David Blythe and Patricia McCarthy — were seriously injured by a drunk driver. Especially now, the union badly needs people with experience or training in union contract administration. If you can help, contact FLOC at 714½ S. St. Clair Street, Toledo, Ohio 43609. Contributions for the injured organizers can be sent to the same address.

Puerto Rican and Mexicano farm workers make gains

Nancy López and Alex Hing

GLASSBORO, N.J. — CATA (El Comité de Apoyo a los Trabajadores Agrícolas, Farmworkers Support Committee) held its seventh Organizational Assembly on the campus of Glassboro State College here September 14. Four hundred Puerto Rican and Mexicano migrant farm workers and their supporters from New Jersey, Pennsylvania, New York, Florida, North Carolina and Puerto Rico participated.

The assembly marked a year of great progress in the East Coast farm workers' movement. The union organizing arm of CATA, COTA (Comité Organizador de Trabajadores Agrícolas, Farmworkers Organizing Committee), won its first union contract at Levin Farms in south Jersey in May. Other important advances made over the year included a second union election victory at Molinelli Farm in south Jersey and successful lawsuits concerning minimum wage and housing rights and pesticide use.

CATA President Ángel Domínguez underscored the great struggles and sacrifices made by the farm workers of CATA in making these advances. They have shown, Domínguez declared to the assembly, that “CATA is effective, CATA raises consciousness, CATA fights abuses, CATA is for the union!”

One farm worker from Puerto Rico who attended the assembly with several Mexicano co-workers told *Unity*, “CATA has a message that farm workers of any nationality can hear.”

Fighting for basic rights

CATA has grown since it was formed in 1979 by 29 migrant farm workers, who banded together to fight mass firings and low wages. Today, CATA has over 2,000 members, who seasonally labor in the vegetable fields of southern New Jersey and the mushroom factories in southeastern Pennsylvania. The thousands of migrant farm workers in this area lack rights considered basic to most other workers, since farm labor is excluded from federal and state labor laws that offer minimum protection to workers. Most farm workers do not have the right to collective bargaining, for example. The Occupational Safety and Health Act does not apply to farm labor, making migrant and seasonal farm work the second most dangerous occupation in the country.

Puerto Rican and Mexicano farm workers suffer from terrible conditions in the squalid “camps” that provide barracks-type shacks for the migrant labor force. Wages are extremely low, child labor is often exploited, and workers are abused by racist crew leaders.

One mushroom worker told *Unity*, “During the season we are worked so hard that we have no time to even wash our clothes, not even to have clean socks. We don’t get clean sheets in the camps.”

Service and organizing

As a service and advocacy organization, CATA works to improve the conditions of farm workers and fights for their rights. This summer, for example, as a result of both

grass-roots organizing and legal action, CATA forced the owners of the Rosedale Mushroom Company to improve housing conditions at its labor camp.

CATA also conducts literacy and labor education classes, holds seminars on health, safety and legal rights, and organizes workers to fight abusive crew leaders and managers. It is active in the immigrant rights struggle and has won changes in the New Jersey state unemployment compensation laws and in regulations governing the use of pesticides. CATA also organizes in Puerto Rico during the off-season. Last year it held a series of seminars there to train farm workers in organizing.

Perhaps the most difficult task facing the farm workers' movement is unionization. Last year, COTA won a landmark victory when a New Jersey state court ordered the owners of Levin Farms to recognize COTA as the collective bargaining agent for the workers there. On May 22, after many months of difficult struggle, Levin and COTA signed the first union contract in the history of New Jersey agriculture — something Levin swore would only happen over his dead body.

The contract guarantees a \$3.80 hourly wage, a paid medical plan, air fare between New Jersey and Puerto Rico (since many of the workers live in Puerto Rico), and a wage increase this fall, making the Levin workers the highest paid farm workers in the state. A grievance procedure and job security through October 15 are also firsts for New Jersey farm workers.

In the upcoming year, CATA plans to help secure a union contract at Molinelli Farm, where COTA won an election earlier this year, as well as step up its organizing work in the Pennsylvania mushroom industry. It also plans to conduct a campaign against the use of pesticides.

* * *

With the demands of the coming year, COTA and CATA need funds. All contributions are greatly appreciated. Write to CATA, P.O. Box 458, Glassboro, New Jersey 08028.

Latino workers beat soup king

FLOC's 7-year Campbell's
boycott pays off

Peter Shapiro

“ “ *t's a move toward self-determination, a chance for a group of poor people to have control over the conditions of their lives. ”*

So said Victor Amram-Odriazola, organizer for the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC), following FLOC's historic three-way union contract with Campbell's Soup and the tomato and cucumber farmers of Michigan and Ohio.

The contract, signed February 19, is the product of 20 years of organizing in the Midwest fields, capped by a nationwide seven-year boycott of Campbell's and Libby's products. It is the biggest breakthrough for the farm workers movement since the United Farm Workers' (UFW) successful organizing drives in California in the late 1960's and early 1970's.

Midwest farm workers are heavily exploited migrant workers, overwhelmingly Mexicano and Latino, who travel each year from as far as Florida and Texas. There has never been a farm workers union in the Midwest, but now FLOC,



led by its president, Baldemar Velásquez, has finally won the democratic right of formal union recognition.

Already the repercussions are being felt. Heinz Foods, named by FLOC as a future target, has announced that it is ready to negotiate, too.

A victory for migrant farm workers

The lives of the estimated 70,000 Midwest farm workers bear witness to the way capitalists profit from the oppression of Mexicano and Latino peoples.

The growers house the farm workers in labor camps where whole families are crowded into one-room shacks without running water, and a single outhouse serves as many as 20 families.

Field work pays less than minimum wage and means constant exposure to deadly pesticides. The work is not covered by federal labor laws. Because they must constantly travel in search of jobs, Latino and Mexicano workers lack even the most minimal political rights. Organized labor has largely ignored them.

But farm workers across the country are organizing against conditions like these — the UFW in California and Texas, COTA (Farmworkers Organizing Committee) in New Jersey, the Arizona Farm Workers. All gain strength from FLOC's victory. At some point the basis may exist for one nationwide farm workers union.

The terms of the FLOC contract are modest. Covering 600 workers for now, it grants \$4.50 an hour, union representation and health benefits. Other issues like housing, child care and pesticide protection have yet to be worked out. But as FLOC staffer Maria Sanchez told *Unity*, it is significant that the growers have been forced "to realize . . . that the union is here and they have to live with it." Besides laying the groundwork for future economic gains, FLOC's contract is a weapon in the hands of all Latino people fighting for equality and power.

Campbell targeted

FLOC was born in 1967, when Baldemar Velásquez began organizing farm workers for fair pay and better living and working conditions in the tomato fields around Lucas County, Ohio. By 1978, FLOC was strong enough to launch a strike which reduced the tomato crop by 30-40%.

But FLOC soon realized it needed a strategy tailored to conditions in Ohio and Michigan. Most of the growers there are small and medium-size farmers at the mercy of the big food processors like Campbell. By dictating what farmers are paid for their crops, the big processors control workers' wages as well.

To attack the problem at its source, FLOC launched the Campbell's boycott in 1979, demanding a three-way agreement between the union, the growers and the processors. This strategy gave the growers a stake in a signed contract by insisting they get a fair price and a guarantee that Campbell would buy the crops from a fixed number of acres each year.

The boycott built steadily. Support committees were set up in several major cities. Parents and school children helped force Campbell's Soup out of their school cafeterias. Hundreds of local labor unions and even some internationals

gave support. In scores of plants and offices Campbell's Soup and V-8 juice were banished till a settlement could be reached.

Critical support came from the Chicano community, where many people know firsthand what work in the fields is all about and see the farm workers movement as the embodiment of their struggle for equality. Catholic churches, Chicano student and community groups rallied behind FLOC.

Finally, when the National Council of Churches threatened on February 21 to join the boycott if negotiations remained stalled, Campbell caved in. The boycott has been suspended, but FLOC will renew it if Campbell fails to live up to the agreement.

Looking to the future

Despite the magnitude of the victory, FLOC has taken little time to celebrate. They have too much to do to build for the future.

Since farm workers are not covered under the National Labor Relations Act, enforcement of the contract falls on the private body which oversaw the representation elections and contract talks. It is also charged with settling outstanding contract issues. Headed by former U.S. Labor Secretary John Dunlop, the body includes representatives of Campbell, the union and the growers. It remains to be seen how the Dunlop commission will carry out these tasks.

In the meantime, workers on seven pickle farms in north-west Ohio have voted for representation. FLOC must work to bring them under the new contract. Workers on 64 other farms have asked for representation elections. FLOC is focusing on approximately 1,000 workers in the immediate period to bring under the agreement.

The long-term impact on the Chicano and Latino movements will be far more profound. These movements have always been tied to the farm workers' struggle, and that struggle has just taken a big step forward.

Organizing victories for UFW

Chicano/Mexicano farm
workers force nursery
to sign

J. Valdez

SANTA BARBARA, CALIF. — Recently, the Veterans Memorial Hall in Carpinteria (15 miles south of Santa Barbara) was filled to overflowing with supporters and United Farm Workers (UFW) members. They were celebrating their victory in forcing Sandyland Nursery to the bargaining table.

For over eight months, the workers had been locked in a unionization struggle with Sandyland, a company that grows flowers.

The mostly Chicana/Mexicana workers had gone on strike because Sandyland had refused to negotiate in good faith after the UFW was chosen as the bargaining agent.

Conditions at Sandyland included being exposed to dangerous pesticides and chemicals, working long hours on their feet and wages of only \$3.50 per hour.

Faced with these bad conditions, workers began their drive to unionize the nursery, when they were met with harassment and firings. One worker at the Carpinteria celebration recounted how one woman worker was "brought to tears by the owner after he yelled at her and snatched one of the organizing leaflets from her hand." But worker unity and community support forced Sandyland to back down.

At the dinner to celebrate the victory, the Sandyland workers



Strikers received their benefits at Sandyland victory celebration, Carpinteria, California. April 27, 1986.

honored the community support they received during the strike. Supporters Raquel Mendoza, Rogelio Pulido and an older man known affectionately as El General (The General) were given "*cartas del águila*" (letters of the eagle) signed by United Farm Workers President César Chávez.

Workers who had gotten other jobs and were not returning to Sandyland were given honorary membership in the UFW.

The UFW is now negotiating a final settlement. The preliminary settlement with Sandyland called for the hiring of all workers fired during the strike, pay back of all wages lost, which total \$15,700, and an immediate pay raise.

The Sandyland workers have proven that even during this era of union-busting, with determination, unity and community support, organizing victories can be won.

Egg City

Even as farm workers were celebrating their victory at Sandyland Nursery, UFW members were staging a 90% effective walkout of workers at Egg City on April 25.

Egg City, with over 300 workers, is one of the world's largest egg producers. It is located in Moorpark, California, a

small town 40 miles north of Los Angeles.

The company has demanded a two-year wage freeze and a two-tier wage for newly hired workers. UFW members fear the two-tier wage will be used to eliminate older workers who now earn \$6 an hour. Then all employees would be making minimum wage. The company also wants UFW members to give up their union-sponsored health plan.

Egg City upped the ante on May 9 by filing for bankruptcy. It says it will ask the bankruptcy court to void the union contract altogether if the workers don't agree to the givebacks. The UFW is considering its response.

Boycott Egg City!

J. Valdez

M OORPARK, CALIF. — *This small city, 45 miles north of Los Angeles, is the scene of a growing boycott of the world's largest chicken ranch. Egg City's three million hens produce more than two million eggs daily. Last year its new owner sought pay cuts from its 250 workers, represented by the United Farm Workers (UFW).*

Incredibly, the new owners fired several of the mostly Chicana and Mexicana workers for using the rest rooms more than four times a month.

Failing to get wage cuts from the UFW, Egg City sought bankruptcy protection in May. Management openly admits this was done to pressure the UFW. The workers walked out June 24 after the company unilaterally imposed \$2-an-hour wage cuts and canceled their medical and pension benefits.

The UFW hopes that a boycott will force the company to sign a decent contract. Already, some stores like Q's and Ralph's have stopped buying Egg City eggs. So has MacDonal'd's, which bought about 30% of its eggs from Egg City. UFW members and supporters are picketing Lucky and Gemco stores in Los Angeles, Oxnard, Santa Maria and Bakersfield.

Boycott Lucky! Send donations to United Farm Workers, 631 Moorpark Ave., Moorpark, CA 93021.

COTA wins another victory for Mexicano workers

Pennsylvania mushroom workers win new agreement

Alex Hing

They come from Mexico to Kennett Square in southeastern Pennsylvania to work in the mushroom factories, really sweatshops, every year.

They are young, some only 12 or 14 years old; the average age is 18. Many have no papers. Now, after struggling for 18 months, 25 Mexicano migrant workers have a contract agreement with the Rosedale Mushroom Company that gives them a wage increase, a grievance procedure and a right to their job each season.

The agreement was secured by the Farm Workers Organizing Committee (Comité Organizador de Trabajadores Agrícolas — COTA), the unionizing arm of the Farm Workers Support Committee (Comité de Apoyo a los Trabajadores Agrícolas — CATA), a group made up of Puerto Rican and Mexicano farm workers in southern New Jersey and southeastern Pennsylvania.

The struggle started over filthy and degrading housing units that the migrant mushroom workers were forced

to live in. Earlier this year CATA-COTA won a historic lawsuit which forced the owners to provide decent living conditions for the workers. The concessions won from the owners around housing led to further negotiations over wages and working conditions. Realizing that the workers would continue to stand up, the owners finally agreed to a settlement in October.

CATA President Ángel Domínguez told *Unity*, "We are making small steps of progress in improving the conditions of Mexican and Puerto Rican farm workers in this area." CATA is also beginning to organize Black and Latino women workers in the frozen food canneries in Pennsylvania.

With its work expanding and a number of settlements under its belt, CATA continues to grow as a force among field and cannery workers in the Northeast.

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