



## IX. Farm Workers



Migrant workers are key to America's food and agriculture labor force.

**Commission Recommendations:** The Commission's report noted that if independent, family-sized farmers are to be able to pay themselves a middle-class income for their labor, they cannot compete fairly with large farms that rely on hired farm workers at government-sanctioned low wage levels. The Commission States that farm workers should be treated fairly and should be provided just compensation for their labor and the same protections afforded all working people under existing labor laws and regulations.

Recommendations of the Commission reinforced many of those put forward by USDA's 1997 Civil Rights Action Team report. The Commission suggested a Federal task force to examine existing laws and enforcement of regulations affecting farm workers.

The Commission also called for increased funding for farm workers' housing and greater effort on outreach.

### AGENCY HIGHLIGHTS

#### USDA National Office of Outreach

- In FY 1999, USDA's National Office of Outreach initiated a number of collaborative efforts to address farm worker, especially migrant farm worker, issues.
- In FY 2000, OR efforts included:
  - Working with USDA's Rural Development mission area to identify a grantee to receive the \$5 million appropriated to assist farm workers who have been affected by natural disasters;
  - Assisting in FY 2001 budget requests resulting in CSREES receiving \$500,000 to assist the children of farm workers (citizens and noncitizens) through their farm safety programs; and
  - Organizing and hosting two meetings at USDA for the Interagency Migrant Counsel. This included arranging for the USDA's Deputy Secretary to welcome the group at the first meeting and for the Assistant Secretary to provide the welcome for the second meeting.



- In FY 2001, USDA's Office of Civil Rights assisted CSREES in a \$3 million grant program titled "Rural Communities in Transition." The program's emphasis was to assist those rural communities with new farm workers and immigrant populations.

A representative from the Office of Civil Rights was the keynote speaker at the National Association of Large Animal Veterinarians National Conference and the National Conference on Agriculture Employer and Employees.

- The OR web site has incorporated the major farm worker web site that identifies the National and State programs and staff. An electronic system has been created by the Farm Worker Coordinator to keep both employers and employees informed of relevant programs or policies.

The Farm Worker Coordinator conducted a one-day working group with NASS. This working group consisted of University faculty with outreach and research expertise in rural areas. Their focus was farm workers who were purchasing farms and planning to become today's new small farmers.



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